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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A TRANSIENT GUEST, AND OTHER
EPISODES ***

A TRANSIENT GUEST, AND OTHER EPISODES.

BY EDGAR SALTUS

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**TO
K. J. M.**

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CONTENTS.

[A TRANSIENT GUEST.](#)

[I.](#)

[II.](#)

[III.](#)

[IV.](#)

[V.](#)

[THE GRAND DUKE'S RUBIES.](#)

[A MAID OF MODERN ATHENS.](#)

[FAUSTA.](#)

[BY THE SAME AUTHOR.](#)

A TRANSIENT GUEST.

I.

Since the *Koenig Wilhelm*, of the Dutch East India Service, left Batavia, the sky had been torpidly blue, that suffocating indigo which seems so neighborly that the traveller fancies were he a trifle taller he could touch it with the ferule of his stick. When night came, the stars would issue from their ambush and stab it through and through, but the glittering cicatrices which they made left it bluer even, more persistent than before. And now, as the ship entered the harbor, there was a cruelty about it that exulted and defied. The sun, too, seemed to menace; on every bit of brass it placed a threat, and in the lap of the waters there was an understanding and a pact. Beyond, to the right, was one long level stretch of sand on which the breakers fawned with recurrent surge and swoon. Behind it were the green ramparts of a forest; to the left were the bungalows and booths of Siak; while in the distance, among the hills and intervalles, where but a few years before natives lurked beneath the monstrous lilies and clutched their kriss in fierce surmise, a locomotive had left a trail of smoke.

"Sumatra, too, has gone the way of the world," thought one who lounged on deck.

He was a good-looking young fellow, browner far than he had been when he left New York, and he was garbed in a fashion which would have attracted the notice of the most apathetic *habitué* of Narragansett Pier. Save for a waistband of yellow silk, he was clad wholly in that dead white which is known as *fromage à la crème*. Had his cork hat been decorated with a canary bird's feather, you would have said a prince stepped from a fairy tale. At his heels was a fox terrier, which he had christened Zut. When he wished to be emphatic, however, Zut was elongated into Zut Alors.

"The general's compliments, sir, and are you ready?"

It was the polyglot steward addressing him, with that deference which is born of tips.

Tancred Ennever—the only son of Furman Ennever, who, as every one knows, is head and front of the steadiest house in Wall Street—turned and nodded. "Got my traps up?" he asked, and without waiting for a reply sauntered across the deck. He had met the general—Petrus van Lier, Consul of the Netherlands to Siak—at the Government House at Batavia, and although the trip which he had outlined for himself consisted, for the moment at least, in making direct for that sultry hole which is known as Singapore, yet the general had so represented the charms and pleasures of Sumatra that he had consented to become his guest. In extending the invitation the general may have had an ulterior motive, but in that case he let no inkling of it escape.

And now, as Tancred crossed the deck, the general stretched his hand. He was a man whose fiftieth birthday would never be fêted again. He had the dormant eyes of his race, those eyes in which apathy is a screen to vigilance, and his chin had the tenacity of a rock. His upper lip was furnished with a cavalry moustache of indistinctest gray, the ends upturned and fierce. In stature he was short and slim. It should be added that he was bald.

Though the ship had barely halted, already it was surrounded by prahus and sampans, the indigenous varieties of skiff, and among them one there was so trim it might have come from a man-of-war. In the bow a fluttering pennon proclaimed it a belonging of the Dutch. The coxswain had already saluted, and sat awaiting the orders of his chief.

The general motioned with a finger, the coxswain touched his forehead, and in a moment the boat was at the slanting ladder. Tancred and the general descended, there was a sullen command, and the oarsmen headed for the shore.

"We are so late my people will be worried," confided the consul, as the landing was reached. "Usually—" and, as he ran on dilating on the unpunctuality of the service, Tancred remembered to have heard that his host was about to be married to an English widow, who, with her brother, was then stopping at the consul's bungalow.

"Be still, Zut," ordered Tancred, for the dog was yelping like mad at a fawn-colored butterfly that floated, tantalizingly, just out of reach. It was as big as a bird, and its eyes were ruby. "Be still."

On the wharf a crowd of Malays and Chinese impeded the way, the Celestials garbed in baggy breeches and black vests, the Malays, nakeder, wickeder, darker, and more compact. Beyond was an open square, a collection of whitewashed booths, roofed with tiles of mottled red, and cottages of thatched palm. In the air was the odor of spices and cachous.

Guided by his host, Tancred entered an open vehicle that waited there. Then, after a brisk drive through the town, a long sweep through a quiet lane that was bordered now by rice-fields, now by giant trees festooned by lianas and rattans, and again by orchards of fruit and betel-nut, at last, in a grove of palms, a house was reached, a one-story dwelling, quaint, roomy, oblong, and still. An hour later the general and his guest were waiting dinner in the balé-balé of the bungalow.

Presently from the panoplied steps came the tinkle of moving feet. The general rose from his

chair.

"My future wife," he announced, in an aside. "Mrs. Lyeth," he continued, "this is Mr. Ennever."

She was a woman such as the midland counties alone produce, one whom it would be proper to describe as queenly, were it not that queens are dowds. She just lacked being tall. Her hair was of that hue of citron which is noticeable in very young children, and it was arranged in the fashion we have copied from the Greeks, but her features were wholly English, features that the years would remold with coarser thumb, but which as yet preserved the freshness and the suavity of a pastel. One divined that her limbs were strong and supple. She held herself with a grace of her own, on her cheeks was a flush, her mouth seemed to promise more than any mortal mouth could give; in short, she was beautiful, a northern splendor in a tropic frame.

Tancred, who had risen with the general, stared for a second and bowed.

"Muhammad's prophecy is realized," he murmured; and as Mrs. Lyeth eyed him inquiringly, "At sunset," he added, "I behold a rising sun."

And moving forward he took her wrist and brushed it with his lips.

"One might fancy one's self at Versailles," Mrs. Lyeth replied, and sank into a wicker chair.

"Olympus, rather," Tancred corrected, and found a seat at her side.

"H'm," mused the lady; but evidently nothing pertinent could have occurred to her, for she hesitated a moment and then graciously enough remarked, "The general tells me he knows your father."

"Yes, it may even be that we are connected; there was a Sosinje van Lier who married an Ennever, oh, ages ago. The general, however, thinks she was not a relative of his."

"I have forgotten," the general interjected, and glanced at his future bride. "Is Liance never coming?"

From without came the hum of insects, a hum so insistent, so enervating, and yet so Wagnerian in intensity that you would have said a nation of them celebrating a feast of love. Presently the murmurs were punctuated by the beat of a wooden gong, and as the reverberations faded in the night, a young girl appeared.

The general left his chair again.

"My daughter," he announced; and as Tancred bowed he remembered that the general had been a widower before he became engaged to the divinity that sat at his side.

"You're an American, aren't you?" the girl asked.

There was nothing forward in her manner: on the contrary, it was languid and restrained, as though the equatorial sky had warped her nerves. But her eyes had in them the flicker of smoldering fire; they seemed to project interior flames. Her complexion was without color, unless indeed olive may be accounted one. Her abundant hair was so dark it seemed nearly blue. At the corners of her upper lip was the faintest trace of down. Her frock was like the night, brilliant yet subdued; it was black, but glittering with little sparks; about her bare arms were coils of silver, and from her waist hung cords of plaited steel. She looked as barbaric as Mrs. Lyeth looked divine.

"Yes," Tancred answered, smilingly; but before he could engage in further speech, the general's "boy" announced that dinner was served.

"What do you think of it there?" asked Mrs. Lyeth, whose arm he found within his own.

And as they passed from the balé-balé, as an uninclosed pavilion is called, to the dining-room beyond, Tancred answered:

"What does one think of the Arabian Nights?"

But there was nothing Arabesque about the meal of which he was then called upon to partake. It began with oysters, rather brackish but good, and ended with cheese. Save for some green pigeons with their plumage undisturbed, and a particularly fiery karri, it was just such a dinner as the average diner-out enjoys on six nights out of seven. There were three kinds of French wine and a variety of Dutch liqueurs. During its service the general held forth, as generals will, on the subject of nothing at all. And when the meal was done, for several hours the little group, reunited in the balé-balé, exchanged the usual commonplace views. During that interchange Tancred kept himself as near as he could to Mrs. Lyeth, and when at last the party broke up and he found himself alone in his room he drew a breath which might have been almost accounted one of relief.

Through the open windows came a heaviness, subtle as the atmosphere of a seraglio. Beyond, some palms masked a cluster of stars, but from above rained down the light and messages of other worlds. In the distance was the surge of the sea, sounding afar the approach and retreat of the waves. Beneath, in the underbrush, fire-flies glittered, avoiding each other in abrupt ziz-zags and sudden loops of flame. The moon had not yet risen, but the sky still was visibly blue.

And as Tancred dropped on a seat he loosened his neck-cloth with a thrust of the thumb. "That

claret was heady," he told himself, and with a bit of cambric he mopped his brow. But was it the claret? For a little space he sat gazing at the invitations of the equator. In his ears the hum of insects still sounded, and to his unheeding eyes the stars danced their saraband. The sea seemed to beckon and the night to wait.

Thus far his life had been precisely like that of any other well-nurtured lad of twenty-two. He had been educated at Concord, he was a graduate of Harvard; but during his school and college days the refinement of his own home had accompanied him afar. He was one of those young men, more common now than a few years since, who find it awkward to utter one word that could not be said aloud in a ball-room. And in this he was guided less perhaps by good breeding—for breeding, like every varnish, may cloak the coarsest fibre—than by native comeliness of thought. He shrank from the distasteful as other men shrink from the base. His parents had had the forethought to provide him with two sisters, one a year older than himself, one a year his junior; and these girls, who at the present hour suggest in our metropolitan assemblies the charm and allurements of a politer age, had taken their brother in hand. They had taught him what is best left undone, the grace of self-effacement, and they had given him some breath of the aroma which they themselves exhaled. To this his parents had added a smile of singular beauty, and features clear-cut and sure. In short, his people had done their best for him. And now that he was seeing the world in that easiest way, which consists in travelling around it, his letter of credit was not only in his pocket, but in his face and manner as well.

"I must go to-morrow," he continued. And as he tried to map his departure, the tinkle of a footfall across the hall routed and disturbed his thoughts. Unsummoned there visited him a melody, heard long since, the accompaniment of a song of love. With a gesture he forced it back. Had he not understood—? No; he remembered now there was no boat from Siak for several days. He might engage a prahu, though, and in it effect a crossing to Perang; he could even take the train and journey to another place. Indeed, he reflected, he might readily do that. And as he told himself this, from across the hall a tinkle fainter than before reached his ear. He heard a whispering voice, a door closed, and some one beat upon a gong of wood. It was midnight, he knew.

He threw his coat aside and stared at the stars. They were taciturn still, yet more communicative than ever before. One in particular, that shone sheer above the balé-balé, seemed instinct with lessons and sayings of sooth. And to the precepts it uttered, its companions acquiesced, and smiled. Everything, even to the immaterial, the surge of the sea, the trail of the fire-flies, and the glint of a moonbeam, now aslant at his feet, conspired to coerce his will. The very air was alive with caresses, redolent with the balm and the odors of bamboo.

Slowly he undid the lachets of a shoe.

"It is wrong," he muttered, and a breeze that loitered answered, "It is right." "I will go," he continued, and the great stars chorused, "You will stay."

Meditatively still he continued to disrobe; but in spite of the stars and the moonbeams the light must have been insufficient, for presently he lit a candle, monologuing to himself the while. And as he monologued he was aware of that fettering, overmastering force which visits youth but once—the abnegation of self before that which is.

In that struggle in which we lay our arguments down and rejoice in defeat he had wrestled with all the weakness of his years. And now, as he flung himself on the bed, he clasped a pillow in his arms and sighed. He hoped for nothing, he expected nothing; but it was bliss to be conquered and enchained. The contest was done. During the coming week his captor would move before him, a luring melody, a clear accord sounded for his own delight, and then he would go, leaving the melody undisturbed, yet bearing a strain of it to feed on, a memory of enduring joy.

From without the hum of insects still persisted, and the waves were noisier than before. His eyes closed, and he smiled. For a moment that may have outlasted an hour he dreamed of the fabulous days in which goatherds dared to fall in love with goddesses. And such is the advantage of a classical education, that he mumbled a line from a Greek pedant, another from a Roman bore. In the dactyls and the spondees he caught the rhythm of tinkling feet; and as the measures sank him into deeper sleep a monstrous beetle shot through the casement and put the candle out.

The whirl of wings disturbed him ever so little. For an instant he was bending over sandals, caressing a peplum's hem. Then all was blank.

"Tuan! Tuan!"

It was a Malay servant, hailing the foreign lord, admonishing him to rise.

The room was filled with sunlight, and on a palm tree opposite Tancred caught a glimpse of a red monkey scratching his knee, chattering and grimacing at a paroquet.

II.

At tiffin, that noon, the general was absent. It was usually so, his daughter explained; the duties of the consulate at Siak claimed the clearer hours of the day, and it was only now and then, on

high days and festivals, that he permitted himself the surcease of a siesta at home.

"He is indefatigable," she added, and shook her peerless head.

During the morning Tancred had explored the grounds; he had idled on the red-road and lost himself among the invitations of a green ravine. A grove of tamarinds had called to him, a stretch of aroids had entreated him that way, the sky had imprisoned him beneath a palm, a brook had murmured to him, a lake had coaxed him to its cool embrace. And then, Zut sniffing at his heels, he had returned in time for luncheon at the bungalow.

In pauses of the stroll he had promised himself that during the afternoon he would endeavor to find an opportunity in which to say something of that which was on his mind. This, however, an accident prevented. Miss Van Lier announced that she and her future step-mother were obliged to attend the funeral of a neighbor, a function at which of course it were idle for him to assist. He watched their departure without a protest, and gave a few more hours to the wonders of the woods. When the sun went down his forbearance was rewarded. The general was detained at Siak. Tancred and the ladies dined as they had lunched—alone.

That evening Mrs. Lyeth seemed even more magnificent than the night before. And beside her the sultry insouciance of the maiden heightened the matron's charm. They were sheerly dissimilar, daughters of antipodal climes and race—the one loquacious and at ease, the other taciturn and absorbed. But it was in eyes they differed most. Those of the general's bride-elect were moist as some blue flower plucked at dawn; the dew seemed still upon them. Those of the general's daughter were sidereal, not white nor cobalt, but something that combined the two. To a lapidary they would have suggested gems.

As Tancred's attention wavered between the charm of the one and the beauty of the other, Mrs. Lyeth had been describing some of the surprises in which Sumatra abounds; but her speech had been lost to him, and it was only the rising inflection with which she terminated a phrase that prompted him to reply.

"In the States, I fancy, you have nothing like it?"

"In the States, no; but in Mexico I believe—"

And Tancred was about to draw on his imagination when a servant offered him some sweets. He would have let them pass, but this Mrs. Lyeth prevented.

"You should try one," she said. "Liance"—and at this she glanced at the girl—"Liance is the inventor; she will be offended if you—"

And, as she again glanced, Liance arched her brows. At the moment it occurred to Tancred that the relations between Mrs. Lyeth and her future step-child might be a trifle strained.

With the aid of a silver prong Tancred helped himself to a confection. It was yellow of hue, and, he presently discovered, agreeable to the mouth. It had the flavor of honey and of meal, but it was slightly acid, as though the rind of a lemon had been mixed therewith.

"I will give one to Zut, if I may," he said, and thereat he tossed one, which the dog caught on the fly and swallowed with the discreetest blink. And then, with the appreciation of a gourmet, Tancred added:

"It is excellent; may I have another?"

The dish again was passed to him. Before he rose from the table the majority of the sweets had disappeared. It was evident that both master and dog had a taste for just such comestibles as these. As he devoured one and then another, he noticed that Liance was watching him.

"The general was in Mexico some years ago," Mrs. Lyeth added, inconsequently. "I have heard him speak of the beauty of the women. But in New York they are more beautiful still, are they not?"

"Yes, they are pretty enough," Tancred answered.

"I hear they propose to the men," Liance interjected.

"Ah, that is a libel. In leap-year, perhaps, and in jest, such a thing may occur, but—"

"They are well behaved, then?"

"Yes, indeed. I remember, though, one girl—her name was—there, I have forgotten it. However, a young fellow was evidently taken with her, and she, as evidently, was taken with him. But for some reason or other he never seemed to get to the point. One afternoon, when he was drinking tea with her, the heat of the room—our houses, you know, are fearfully hot—must have affected her. She went off like that! The young fellow was at his wits' end. It may be that he had never seen anyone faint before. 'What shall I do? what shall I do?' he exclaimed, and he was about to scream for assistance, when the girl in her swoon murmured: 'Kiss me.' He did so and she recovered at once. H'm—they were married last spring."

During the telling of this anecdote Tancred noticed that the girl's eyes were still on his. But as the ultimate phrase dropped from him she rose and left the room.

"She is exquisite," Tancred confided in a whisper to Mrs. Lyeth. To this that lady assented. "But

you—" he added, and then stopped short.

"Let us go to the pavilion, it is cooler there." Mrs. Lyeth had risen, and Tancred, hesitant still, followed as she led the way.

"But you," he added at last, "you are perfect."

She had found a seat and he another. A fan which she held she unfurled and shut again with a sudden click. For a moment she toyed with a fold of her frock, but presently her hand fell to her side. He caught it up and kissed the finger-tips. At once she drew it from him.

"It is the climate that has affected you," she said, "not I."

"It is you," he muttered, "it is you."

"Even so, there let it rest."

"I cannot," he insisted; "I love you." As he spoke he started, startled at his own temerity. And as her eyelids drooped he tried to catch her hand again.

"Then, if you love me, say nothing." She had straightened herself and looked him now in the face. "If the general should even imagine—" A gesture completed the sentence.

Tancred nodded. He seemed confident and assured. Evidently the general had aroused no fear in him.

"It was in Mexico," she continued. "Liance was in the cradle. Her mother"—and Mrs. Lyeth turned her head and looked cautiously around—"her mother was younger than I am now. She was beautiful, I have understood; more so even than her daughter. The general suspected that she was flirting with the Austrian attaché. He had him out and shot him. His wife he drove to suicide. It is only recently I learned this. And yet it is not for that reason that I fear. I have no intention of flirting with you; you know that. It is because—because—"

"Don't hunt for a reason. I am willing to be shot."

Mrs. Lyeth hastened to laugh, but her laugh was troubled. It sounded thin, as forced laughter ever does. She unfurled her fan again, and agitated it with sudden vigor.

"It may not be," she murmured.

Her voice was so low that even the breeze did not catch it. And now, as she turned to her companion, it seemed to him that her eyes were compassionate, sympathetic even, awake to possibilities yet careless of result.

At the moment there came to Tancred that annoyance which visits us in dream. Before him was a flower more radiant than any parterre had ever produced. With a reach of the arm it could be his, but his arm had lost its cunning. Do what he might, it refused to move. And still the flower glowed, and still the arm hung pendent and quasi-paralyzed at his side. It may be—such things have happened—it may be that of the inward effort Mrs. Lyeth marked some sign. She shut her fan again, and made as though to rise. But this movement of hers, like the clock in the fable, must have dissolved the spell. Abruptly Tancred was on his feet.

"One instant," he said. "There, you can give me that. Nay, see, if you wish to—go."

And at this he stood aside, as though to let her pass. The magnetism, however, which youth possesses, may have coerced her. In any event she made no further effort to leave; she sat, her eyes a trifle dilated, a whiteness quivering beneath the lace-work at her neck.

"That is good of you," he added; "I have but a word to say. Listen to it, will you? I was sure you would. Last night—or was it last night?—it seems a year ago. H'm, there are people whom we meet—you must have experienced the same thing—people that disturb us with suggestions of something that has gone before. When I saw you last evening—no, not that; but when I heard your voice, there came with it a reminiscence of earlier and forgotten days. It was not of the present I thought, but of a past I remembered I had dreamed. It was like a tangled skein. One after another the threads unloosed, and as they separated from each parting knot a memory returned. You were not a stranger, you were a friend I had lost. I could have sat with you, and from yesterday I could have led you back from one horizon to another until that posting-house was reached where our destiny changed its horses and our hands were first unclasped."

This fine speech delivered, he looked down and plucked at his cuff. And presently, as he was about to speak again, Mrs. Lyeth raised her fan.

"After that I have either to thank you or to go!" Her voice was less severe than pained, and she seemed to retreat yet further in her chair. "And I thank you," she added, after a pause, "but it is you that must go."

To this Tancred answered nothing. He contented himself with looking insubordinate and cross.

"My poor boy!" she murmured, and sighed—or was it a sigh?—a sound that seemed to come less from the heart than the spirit. "My poor boy! But don't you know that you are absurd? I have three brothers—one of them, by the way, is here now; he went down the coast on Tuesday with some friends; he will be back, though, to-morrow or the day after. However, each of my brothers has fallen in love with a woman older than himself, and each of them has fallen in love again and

again. I am, believe me, grateful for your homage. What you have said is enough to make any woman pleased. And were I younger—well, then, since you will have it so—were I free, I would ask to hear it until I knew the words by heart. It would be pleasant, that. Oh, there might be so very many pleasant things; yet that is one that may not be. To-morrow, the next day, no matter, presently you will go; a week later you will find some beauty in Madras, and, if you think of me then, it will be but with a smile."

She had risen at last, and stood now smiling too. For the life of him Tancred could not imagine anything fairer, more debonair, nor yet more just than she.

"If I vex you," he said, "I will hold my tongue. But at least you might stay. I will promise this—"

But whatever the intended promise may have been it remained unformulated. In the entrance of the balé-balé Liance had suddenly appeared.

"It is late, is it not?" Mrs. Lyeth, for countenance sake, inquired.

The girl shrugged her shoulders. A gong in the distance answered in her stead.

"It *is* late," Mrs. Lyeth announced. "We had better go in."

She moved from the pavilion, and presently all three reached the house. The hallway was unlighted, a flicker from the dining-room beyond serving only to make the darkness more opaque.

"Where is Atcheh?" she asked, and called the "boy" by name.

"There," said Tancred, "let me try to find a match."

He groped down the corridor to his room and in a moment or two returned. On the way back he passed some one he took to be Liance.

"I could not find one," he exclaimed.

So well as he was able to make out, Mrs. Lyeth had not moved. To his speech she answered nothing. He advanced a little nearer and tried to take her hand again, but it eluded him. And in an effort to possess himself of it he approached nearer still. Her face seemed to be in the way; for one fleeting second his lips rested on it, then a noise of hoofs must have alarmed him, for he wheeled like a rat surprised. And presently, after he had reached his room again, he heard Mrs. Lyeth welcoming her future husband on the porch.

III.

From his window the next morning Tancred caught a glimpse of Mrs. Lyeth entering the pavilion beyond. He left the house at once and hastened to join her; but Liance must have preceded him. When he reached the pavilion she was already there. On her head was a hat unribboned and broad of brim, in her hand a basket. She struck Tancred as being more restless than usual, but the widow was thoroughly at ease. Apparently the episode in the hallway had not disturbed her in the least. For a few moments there was a common indulgence in those amiable platitudes of which the morning hours are prolific, and then Liance stood up.

"If you are going to the coppice, take Mr. Ennever," Mrs. Lyeth suggested. "He looks bored to death."

"Certainly I will," the girl answered.

Her voice was cordial and her eyes and mouth seemed to invite. Tancred, however, did not on that account experience any notable desire to accompany her. On the contrary, he infinitely preferred to remain where he was. But there was no help for him, not even an excuse. He had his choice between going and being downright rude. Accordingly he smiled, but inwardly he swore.

"Show him the rafflesia," Mrs. Lyeth added.

"The what?"

"You shall see it; come."

Liance turned and led the way, and as Tancred followed he marvelled at the widow's attitude. If he had not kissed her at all she could not have appeared more unconcerned.

To the left was a grove of betel-nut palms, to the right a patch of aroids, broad and leathery of leaf. Save for a whir of pheasants in the distance, and the hum of insects, the hour was still. Even the sea was silent; and had it not been for the odors of strange plants Tancred could have closed his eyes and fancied himself in some New England interval, loitering through a summer noon. It needed but the toll of a bell to make it seem a Sabbath. A mosquito alighted on his hand, and he slaughtered it with a slap. Presently he found himself in a part of the plantation which he had not yet visited, a strip of turf, the background defended by trees. And there, in the centre, was an object such as he had never seen before. He turned inquiringly to Liance; her eyes were on his own.

"The rafflesia," she lisped, and nodded.

And as he moved to get a nearer view she caught him by the arm.

"Be careful," she added, and warned him with a glance.

But Tancred was not one to fear the immobile; he moved yet nearer to it, the girl hovering at his side. And as he moved there came to greet him a heavy, sullen odor, a smell like to that of an acid burning and blent with rose.

"The heart is poisonous," the girl continued; "don't touch it without gloves."

The admonition, however, was unnecessary. Tancred was motionless with surprise. Before him was a flower, its petals of such consistency and of such unpleasant hue that they resembled huge slabs of uncooked veal. The chalice was deep enough to hold two gallons of liquid, the pistil was red, and the supporting stem was gnarled and irruptive with excrescences. In appearance it suggested an obese and giant lily, grown in a nightmare and watered with blood. It was hideous yet fascinating, as monstrosity ever is. And as Tancred stared, a page of forgotten botany turned in his mind, and he remembered that he had read of this plant, which Sumatra alone produces, and in whose pistil lurks a poison swifter than the cantarella of the Borgias, deadlier than the essences of Locuste.

The odor, more pungent now, drove him back a step. At the moment it seemed to carry with it a whiff of that atmosphere of creosote and tooth-wash which is peculiar to the dentist's chair. And slaughtering another mosquito, he moved yet further away.

"What do you think of it?" asked Liance.

"It would hardly do for the button-hole, would it?" he answered.

The girl nodded appreciatively. Evidently she was of the same mind as he.

"There are few of them here," she continued. "This is the only one in Siak, but back there," and she pointed to the mountains, "they are plentiful. When a Malay prepares for war he slashes the pistil with his kriss. The wound that that kriss makes is death."

"H'm," mused Tancred, with an uncomfortable shrug, "if I happened to fall out with a Malay—"

"Don't."

The monosyllable fell from her like a stone.

"I will do my best," he said.

She turned again and led him back through the coppice. The air was sultrier than ever, heavy with fragrance and enervating with forebodings of a storm. And now, as the girl preceded him, her step seemed more listless than before. She is tired, he reflected. These noons are fierce.

"You are to be with us some time, are you not?" Liance asked.

"No, a day or two at the most. When the next steamer goes, so must I."

"Could you not stay longer?" She stopped and looked at him, the little basket swaying to and fro.

"I should like to, really I should like to very much," he replied. The episode with Mrs. Lyeth was still oppressing him, and in answer to the oppression he added aloud, "But perhaps it is better I should not."

Liance lowered her eyes, and with the point of her shoe tormented a tuft of grass.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because—well, because I feel an intruder."

The girl raised her eyes at once, her lips quivered.

"You are wrong, so wrong."

And then, curiously enough, as such things happen, Tancred—who was not a bit stupider than the rest of us—felt an oracle within him. It was more than probable, he told himself, that widow and maid, being nearly of an age, had, in their Sumatran idleness, become the fastest friends; and at once, with that logic which is peculiar to those that love, he decided that, being friends, they must be confidantes as well, and he concluded that two fair heads had come together and determined he should remain. That woman is variable, was a song he knew by heart, and he also knew that woman is apt to do one thing and mean another—to dismiss, for instance, the very man whom she wishes most at her feet.

These ruminations, however long in the telling, did not in reality outlast a moment's space. It was all very clear to him now, and his blood pulsed quickly.

"If *you* tell me so, I must indeed be wrong," he answered. "And let me add," he continued, impetuously, "it is a boon to know it."

To his face a flush had come, and his eyes were eager. He had never been accounted anything else than good-looking, but now he was attractive as well.

"You will not be in haste to go, then?"

"In haste to go—" His face completed the sentence. "Tell her from me," he was about to say, when from the girl's loosening fingers the basket fell; she drooped like a flower, her eyes half closed, and he had but the time to hold out his arm when she sank unconscious on it.

The grass seemed an inviting couch, and very gently he let her from him. "It is the heat," he reflected, and kneeling at her side he took her small hand and beat it with his own. "What shall I do?" he wondered. Her cheeks were colorless, though her lips were red, and as, in his perplexity, he gazed at them, he saw them move. "Kiss me," they seemed to say. Her eyes opened and she smiled.

And still he stared. "Merciful heaven!" he thought; "she thinks I am in love with *her*;" and feigning that the invitation had passed unheard he sprang to his feet.

"Help me," she murmured, smiling still; and as he bent again to aid her, before him in the coppice stood Mrs. Lyeth. Already the girl was on her feet. Whether she had been aware of Mrs. Lyeth's approach, who shall say? She patted out a rumpled fold of her frock, and picking the basket up, glanced over at her father's choice.

"I almost fell," she announced. "Mr. Ennever was gallant enough to prevent me."

In single file all three then returned to tiffin at the bungalow.

IV.

The afternoon slipped by like a chapter in a fairy tale. It promised but it did not fulfil, and at dinner the champagne sparkled, but the conversation was flat. When the cloth was removed the general manifested a desire to look over some papers, and Tancred and the ladies retreated to the pavilion beyond. Yet even there the wheels of talk were clogged. Mrs. Lyeth indeed discoursed amiably enough on the subject of nothing at all, and now and then Liance interjected an apposite sally; but Tancred was taciturn. He divided his time between biting his moustache and bidding Zut be still. And when at last through some channel of thought Mrs. Lyeth anchored herself in the shallows of Anglo-Saxon verse, for a moment the young man fancied that the girl was about to go. Liance made a movement, but whether some signal from her future step-mother detained her, or whether of her own accord she reconsidered her purpose, Tancred was unable to decide. The girl resumed her seat, and, one arm extended on the woodwork, the other pendent at her side, her feet crossed, her head thrown back, she sat staring at the stars in that abstracted attitude which powder and shot are alone qualified to disturb.

There is much in an opportunity that might be and is not. In recollection it appears more fecund in possibilities than any other opportunity ever enjoyed. And later on, when Tancred, without having had the opportunity to exchange in private so much as a word with Mrs. Lyeth, found himself in his room, he ravened at fate and at his own ill-luck. Nothing that he could imagine would have been sweeter to him than to have sat the evening through alone with that human flower. There would have been no need of speech; the languors of the night, the caress of the stars, the scent of palms and of orchids, the accent of the waves beyond, these things would have spoken for him more subtly than words could do. Through their silence the breeze would have whispered, and who does not know what a breeze can say? Though they sat apart, the stars that the old gods used as go-betweens were there to join their hands. They might be timid, but is not the surge of the sea a call that stirs the pulse? And the palms had their secrets to tell, and they would have told them, too; nay, the very fire-flies would have conspired together and made the night more dark. And, instead of a communion such as that, there had been an aimless chit-chat, an awkwardness that was sentient, and an embarrassment terminated only by a chill "Good-night." Truly Zut, who had treed a hedgehog, was to be envied. His evening at least had not been squandered and misspent.

The morrow differed from the day preceding merely in this, that not for one instant during it did Tancred have an opportunity of seeing either Mrs. Lyeth or Liance alone. After tiffin they were inseparate. And Tancred, who had made plans for the afternoon, then made plans for the evening. But the hope which buoyed him was idle. The evening which followed was a counterpart of the one that had gone before, save in this, the general, having no papers to look over, held forth as generals will, and Zut searched for a hedgehog in vain. That night, for the first time, Tancred entered fully into the feelings of Tantalus and those of Sisyphus too. He was dumbly exasperated, the more so perhaps in that he divined that to one cleverer than he no obstacle would exist. If a woman has an ear, and as a rule women have, there is always a way to get at it. Unfortunately for Tancred, the way in this case was by no means clear, and what helped to confuse him was the fact that he was impatient to find it at once, no, but there and then, and without delay. And as in his exasperation he dashed his head against the pillow, he told himself that he had been abrupt, that he had unmasked his batteries too soon, that he had frightened where he had meant to charm. Of Liance he gave no thought whatever, except to decide that she was a nuisance. And such is the selfishness of man, that he wished she would topple over again and sprain a joint; in short, that anything might happen which would keep her to her room and out of the way of Mrs. Lyeth. The idea that the general's bride-elect might be keeping her

purposely at her side was one that never occurred to him. She is a nuisance, he decided, and dismissed her from his thoughts.

Before he fell asleep his mind was clear as to one thing; to wit, that in a small household it is more difficult to be alone with one particular person than in a household where there are many. Whether he was correct or not is a matter of the smallest possible importance. The next morning, when Atcheh appeared with coffee and fruit, he was aware that he had wandered through an assortment of dreams in which the rafflesia and the general were confusedly connected; at one moment the general had changed into that unhallowed flower, at another the rafflesia had bristled with the moustaches of his host. And as he rose from these fancies to his coffee he encountered a scheme which he detained and examined. It was not particularly shrewd, yet at the moment it seemed luminous to him. It was to the effect that if he were inhibited from private speech with Mrs. Lyeth, there was no reason in the world why he should not write. And as he mused, from the porch beyond rose the sound of her voice.

He was too far away to hear what she was saying, and, parenthetically, had he been nearer he would not have listened. But now the intonation, the trailing accent of her speech affected him as a balm. The irritation faded, as irritation ever does; he found some paper, and as, to the accompaniment of her voice, he prepared to write one of those letters in which punctuation is disregarded and sequence of idea forgot, he heard her waving inflection cut by a harsher note. It was the general, he knew. For the moment he wondered why he had not already gone to the consulate, but presently the noise of hoofs, the creak of wheels, a shrill cry, and the hiss of a whip seemed to announce that the conveyance which took the consul each morning to Siak was at the door.

Tancred's window did not give on the road, but on the coppice and the pavilion, yet when again he caught the creak of wheels it demanded little imagination on his part to picture the general sitting bolt upright in a gharry, driving to the sun-smitten town beyond. And as the clatter of hoofs faded in the distance, Tancred took up the pen again. The letter which he then succeeded in producing was one similar to what we have all of us written and all of us received—a clear call of love, in which the words are less jotted than shaken from the end of the pen. Its transcription here is needless.

A love-letter which can pleasure anyone save the recipient proceeds not from the heart but the head. Moreover, when Tancred began it he had not the faintest idea what he intended to say, and when it was finished he did not remember what he had written. Oh, sweethearts and swains! mind ye of this: when a love-letter differs from that, it emanates from a poet or a fraud. Tancred was neither. He was simply a young man suddenly enthralled by the charm of a woman older than himself. He intended no wrong, and if you or I or any other implacable moralist had happened that way and told him, as would have been our duty, that he was betraying the sacredest of trusts, the confidence of a host, he would have exhibited the surprise of a child frowned at for innocent prattle. Bear with him then; of wrong he intended none. It is the essence of crime that it be committed with malice aforethought, that the intention to commit it be clear. In the present case the intention was wholly lacking. Tancred was carried along by one of those unreasoning impulses which the psychologist recognizes and cannot explain. And that impulse, after throwing him at Mrs. Lyeth's feet and dictating a letter to her, left his conscience unruffled and at peace.

His pulse, however, still was stirred. And, the letter completed, he was not in a greater hurry to do anything else than to get it safely in her hand. The manner in which this was to be accomplished was another matter. He might offer it to her in person, or he might leave it in her room. He might even watch his opportunity and slip it into her hand; but, for that, he immediately reflected he would have to wait the opportunity—a tedious operation at best; and, moreover, was he not in haste? And as he mused he remembered that Dugald Maule, a New Yorker like himself, finding himself in similar strait, had, under the very nose of a duenna, deliberately abstracted a handkerchief from his innamorata's pocket, and, wrapping a letter up in it, handed it back with the civilest inquiry as to whether she had not just let the handkerchief fall? That was a remarkably neat trick, Tancred told himself, but somehow it seemed to demand a degree of assurance of which he felt unpossessed. Besides, it was a trick, and as such distasteful to him. And as he twirled his moustache, vaguely perplexed, undecided in what way to act, determining that it were better perhaps to leave it all to chance, he caught a glimpse of Mrs. Lyeth entering the pavilion alone. She was in white from head to foot, alluring as spring, and doubtless every whit as fragrant; she moved easily, her body erect and unswayed, and as Tancred caught sight of her he would have taken his chances then and there, but almost simultaneously he saw Liance following behind. In the annoyance he filled forefinger and thumb together, and tried to possess his soul with patience. It was not impossible that in a moment the girl might go, and then his time would come. Meanwhile it behooved him to be careful and to remain unseen. But no, Liance must have seated herself at the other side of the pavilion, for he could hear Mrs. Lyeth address her, and the murmurs of the girl's replies. Presumably they would remain together until tiffin, and if before tiffin the note was not delivered, another afternoon, the evening too, perhaps, would be wasted and lost.

And as he thought of this, behind him he divined rather than heard Atcheh's noiseless tread. He turned at once. Another idea had come to him, one on which he determined to act at once. The "boy" was already retreating, a tray in his hand.

"Dja keno," Tancred called.

On shipboard he had not been altogether idle. The Malay tongue is as easy to speak badly as Italian, and Tancred had found slight difficulty in acquiring enough mouthfuls for ordinary needs. "Dja keno—come here." The sultry savage wheeled and obeyed.

"Ba gnio inong—take this to the lady." And as Tancred spoke he pointed through the lattice to Mrs. Lyeth.

The Malay took the note and bowed.

"Baë, Tuan," he answered. "Your lordship, it is well."

In a moment the man had gone, and in another moment Tancred saw him approach Mrs. Lyeth and place the letter in her hand. He could see that she was eying it, wonderingly no doubt, for now she turned her head, but already the Malay had disappeared. And as she still looked about her, holding the letter unopened before her, Tancred felt as though something were clutching at his throat. From out the coppice, not a dozen yards distant, the general had suddenly emerged.

In a state similar to that mental paralysis which visits us in dream, Tancred marked his advance. It seemed perfectly natural that he should be there; without an effort he recalled the fact, forgotten albeit until now, yet still the unaccountable fact that it was Sunday; and presently, as the general halted, his thin figure erect, a bamboo switch in his hand, his cavalry moustache more bristling than ever, and proprietor-fashion surveyed the grounds, it was to Tancred as though he had been there for all of time. Then at once the cerebral swoon departed, in a confusion of visions, with that thing still clutching at his throat and his heart beating like mad, he saw on one side Mrs. Lyeth open the letter, and on the other the general decapitate a poppy with his switch.

Already Mrs. Lyeth had turned the initial page; she had read the second and was beginning at the last, when the general, to whose presence behind her she was obviously oblivious, advanced on tiptoe to where she sat. Tancred saw him raise a warning finger to his lips, beneath the moustache he divined a smile, invisible to him, yet apparent, doubtless, to Liance, at whom the warning gesture must have been made, and then, bending over his *fiancée's* shoulder, he peered at the letter which she held. Yet before he could have deciphered so much as a line of it, Mrs. Lyeth started, as we all do when taken unaware. In an instant, however, she recovered her self-possession. She turned to the general, her mouth compressed into a pout.

"Do you know," she said, from the tips of her lips, "you are as bad as Atchek. A cat would make more noise."

At this reproof the general laughed aloud, and, as though in sheer excess of glee, beat his leg with the switch. Tancred could see it was, indeed, a merry jest to him.

"My bonny Kate!" he gurgled. "I frightened her, did I not?" And again he beat his leg and laughed. "And whom is the missive from?" he asked. "I heard the gharry's wheels an hour ago. Will you pay me if I wager and I win? Will you pay me? I wager it is from—h'm—let me see. I wager it is from that coffee planter's wife you met at Singapore."

And Mrs. Lyeth, with her bravest smile, answered:

"You have lost."

"From whom is it then? There is no European mail to-day." He eyed her, laughing still. "From whom is it?" he repeated. And as he spoke he bent again and looked down at the letter, which still lay open in her hand. "Tancred Ennever!" he exclaimed. "Why, what has he to write to you about?"

"Don't ask me," she answered, airily; and then, presumably, she must have understood the uselessness of further parry, for she added, carelessly enough, "It is to Liance, not to me."

From the window Tancred could see the general turn to where his daughter sat. And as he watched he saw the girl issue from the shadow, take the letter from Mrs. Lyeth, and escape with it to the house. During the entire scene she had not uttered a word. She had been a witness, not an actor, and now as she crossed the lawn, the letter rumbled in her hold, there was an alertness in her step and such expectance in her face that you would have thought her hastening to a rendez-vous. It was evident that she, too, had taken the fib for truth.

Tancred moved back. When he again peered out, the general and his bride-elect had disappeared.

V.

Over the luncheon to which Tancred was presently summoned a foreboding hovered, ambient in the air. Mrs. Lyeth was not present, confined by a headache, Liance explained, to her room. The girl herself preserved her every-day attitude, and Tancred did his best to engage her in speech; but she did not second his endeavors. When he addressed her she answered, if at all, with her eyes, and in them she put something that resembled a monition. Save for the reference to her future step-mother, she broke bread in silence. As for the general, Cruikshank would have taken

him to his heart; he was both jocose and irritable; he feigned a glutton interest in his plate; he loaded the soft Malay tongue with curious oaths, which he exploded at the servant; he alternately praised and reviled the food, and from beneath his bushy eyebrows he glanced in the kindest fashion now at his daughter and now at his guest. And so well did he succeed in heightening the enervation of the latter that it was not until the acrid caramels were passed that Tancred even pretended to eat. Then, remembering that it was Liance that made them, he ventured to compliment the girl, and, as she answered nothing, acknowledging the tribute only by an inclination of the head, he saw in the expression of her face that she was even more emotionalized than he. Presently a burning coal and some cigars were brought. Liance rose from the table, and Tancred, rising too, accompanied her to the door. There, it may be, she had some message to impart; her lips moved, yet before Tancred could grasp its import the general called him, and he was obliged to turn. The girl wandered out on the veranda, and Tancred resumed his seat.

"Will you smoke?" the general asked. His tone was so friendly that Tancred felt more miserable than before. "Take one," he continued. "Sumatran tobacco ranks nearly with the Havanese."

For a fraction of time which seemed immeasurable the two men smoked in silence. But in a moment the general gave a poke at the coal, and looked up at his guest.

"Mrs. Lyeth tells me that you have done us the honor to ask for my daughter's hand."

Tancred glanced at the point of his cigar, and discovered that it was out.

"May I trouble you?" he murmured.

The general shoved the brasier toward him, and watched the relighting with evident solicitude.

"It's the dampness," he announced. "H'm. Am I correctly informed?"

Tancred gave a puff or two, and then, withdrawing the weed, he held it contemplatively between forefinger and thumb; but he answered not a word.

The general knocked the ashes from his own cigar and eyed the burning coal.

"H'm, let me ask you, did you write to my daughter this morning?"

And Tancred, with that long-drawn breath we take when we prepare for the worst, answered shortly:

"I did."

To this avowal the general nodded encouragingly. Tancred, however, seemed averse to further confidences; he kept looking at his cigar as though it were some strange and uncanny thing.

"H'm, well—er—did you, did you begin the letter with a term of endearment?"

"Yes, general."

Tancred had tossed his cigar—a cigar that ranked nearly with a Havanese—into the finger-bowl. He straightened himself and looked his host in the face.

"Yes, general, and I am sorry for it. I have no excuse, not one. It was a piece of unpardonable ill-breeding. I had no right to send the note; I had no encouragement to write it. The only amend in my power is an apology. I make one now to you; let me beg that you will convey another to your daughter."

The general half rose from his seat and hit the table with his fist. His face was convulsed. He was hideous.

"But, bandit that you are," he cried, "she loves you."

"No, general, you are wrong."

"Ah, I am wrong, am I? Not an hour ago she told me so of her own accord."

"General, it was a jest."

"A jest! You call it a jest to surprise a girl in the dark"—

"To what?" gasped Tancred. "To what?"

"There, you know well enough what I mean. I refer to the other evening."

"Merciful heaven!" groaned Tancred, "it was she then that I kissed."

"It is a jest to do a thing like that, to write impassioned letters, and to win a heart. Is it a jest you call it, sir, or did I misunderstand your words?"

"No general, not that. What I meant was that it was impossible for Miss Van Lier to have confessed to any love for me—"

The lattice at the window was thrust aside. For a second the girl's sidereal eyes blazed into the room.

"He is right, father: I do not love; I hate."

The lattice fell again. She had gone.

During the moment that followed you could have heard a lizard move. Tancred fumbled at his collar, and General Van Lier sank back in his chair.

"Mr. Ennever," he said, at last, "you are my guest."

The tone in which he spoke was low and self-restrained, but in it there was an accent that was tantamount to a slap in the face.

Tancred was on his feet at once.

"If you permit me, I will leave to-day."

General Van Lier moved to the door.

"There is a boat from Siak at five," he answered.

"General," Tancred hesitated; he was humiliated as he had never been, and rightly humiliated, he knew. He was trying to say something that would express his sense of abasement, and a fitting speech was on the end of his tongue.

"General—"

"After you, sir." The general was pointing to the door.

"General—"

"Nay, sir, after you. I insist."

Tancred bowed and passed out. A moment later he was in his room.

In a corner was a trunk. In another a shirt-box. Tancred gathered his traps together, and tossed some into the one, some into the other, a proceeding at which Zut yelped and fawned with delight. Evidently on him at least the attractions of the bungalow had begun to pall.

"Yes, Zut, we are going."

And at this the dog yelped again and curveted sheer across the room.

"But you must be quiet," Tancred added. "There, be still."

He was thinking of Mrs. Lyeth, and wondering whether he should see her before he went. If he could exchange but one word with her, surely, he told himself, she would understand. He lounged to the window and leaned on the sill.

It was one of those afternoons, brutal and terrible in beauty, which only the equator provides. The sky was like the curtain of an alcove, the sun a vomiter of living glare. Beyond was a riot of color such as Delacroix never dreamed, a combination more insolent than the Quetzal possesses, all the primaries interstriated, a rainbow of insolent hues. And there, in white, a parasol over her head, a basket dangling from her wrist, Liance appeared, emerging, as her father had, from the coppice beyond.

Instinctively he drew back: he had no wish to see her eyes charged with hate again. She was not one to forgive, he knew; the beauty of the equator was in her, and its pitilessness as well. And yet, he reflected, if I could but tell her not alone how she and I have erred, but how sorry I am for it all. But no; manifestly an explanation was impossible. Did he attempt one it might inculpate another. He was not alone solely to blame, he was blockaded in his own disgrace. He told himself this; he repeated it even in varying keys; but beneath it all he felt that some redress should be. The idea that the house he had entered as an honored guest would see him depart in shame had already brought the blood to his cheeks. And that blood now was leaving a stain that years would not efface. "I must write," he decided; "I must write some word." And he was about to seat himself at the table, when Atcheh appeared.

"Tuan," he murmured, in the soft vocables of his tongue. "The gharry waits your lordship."

At this Zut, who was surprisingly polyglot of ear, yelped with renewed delight. Tancred pointed to his effects, and waited until they had been removed. It was possible, he reflected, that he might meet Liance or Mrs. Lyeth in the hall. Yet should he not do so, then, he told himself, he would write from Singapore.

But when he reached the veranda, only the general was there. Beyond, the gharry stood in readiness, and by it was Atcheh, the trunk and shirt-box already strapped in place. Tancred stretched his hand.

"General—"

"I wish you a pleasant journey, sir," that gentleman answered, and lifted his hat.

Mechanically Tancred raised his own.

"I thank you," he said. And with a backward glance he called to Zut and entered the conveyance.

A whip cracked, the gharry started; in a moment it was on the road. Tancred turned to take another and a parting look. Already the general had disappeared, but from a window he caught a

glimpse of some one robed in white. A curve was rounded and the bungalow disappeared.

For an hour over a road beside which the Corniche is commonplace indeed, the gharry rolled on. To Tancred, however, its beauties were remote and undiscerned. If he noticed them at all it was only as accessories. He was wholly absorbed in his own discomfiture, and the gharry drew up and halted at the wharf before he was aware that Siak had been reached and the journey was done.

About him was the same assortment of fat-faced Celestials and gaunt Malays that he had noticed before. Apparently nothing had happened to them; they had contented themselves with continuing to be. Before him was a glistening sea, a limitless horizon. To the left the shore extended, fairer and more brilliant than the courtyard of a royal domain. Just beyond, one of the ships of the Dutch East India service was moored, her funnels lengthening and fading in spirals of smoke. And when Tancred had attended to the transfer of his luggage, and was about to step into the sampan that was to convey him to the steamer, there came a clatter of horse's hoofs, and on a black and panting pony Atcheh suddenly appeared.

"Tuan," he cried, and waved something in the air. "Tuan, a moment more."

In that moment he had sprung from the pony and run to where Tancred stood.

"From the little lady, Lord," he said, and, handing a basket to his master's guest, bowed to the ground.

Tancred found a bit of gold.

"For you," he said, and the Malay bowed again. "To the lady, give my thanks."

And at once his heart gave an exultant throb; his departure was regretted. As he lowered himself into the boat his excess of joy was so acute he nearly fell. Truly, if it be pleasant to appreciate, it is also pleasant to be appreciated. He still clutched at the basket, his hands moist with excitement, his face aglow, and it was not until the ship was reached that he noticed that Zut was sniffing at it.

"Behave," he ordered. But his voice was so kindly that the little fellow only sniffed the more. It was easy to see that he was jubilating too.

On deck Tancred experienced some difficulty in securing a cabin. But for what were rupees coined and tips invented? The steward consulted the purser, the purser consulted the first officer, and in five minutes the cabin of the latter functionary was at Tancred's disposal. It was roomy and cool; or perhaps it would be more exact to say that it was fully as large as a closet and that the thermometer did not mark one degree above ninety. In short, Tancred had every reason to consider himself in luck. He shut the door and throwing himself on a wicker settee he opened the basket, which until now he had kept tight clasped in his hand.

It was, he saw, filled with sweetmeats such as he had eaten at the bungalow. On top, pinned to the interior of the basket, was a slip of paper that contained a single line—*Souvenir et bon voyage*—and for signature, *Liance*. He read the message twice, and, it may be, he would have repeated the message aloud, but Zut kept bothering him with little hungry yelps. To quiet the dog he tossed him a sweet and put the basket down.

In some mysterious manner his joy had taken itself away. It was not from *Liance* he had expected a remembrance. When Atcheh placed the basket in his hand, he had told himself that, whatever it might contain, it was at least a gift from Mrs. Lyeth, a token expressive of her regret at his departure. And instead of that there was a handful of bonbons that might have been sent to a child, and a meaningless message from one to whose solicitude he was indifferent. The disappointment, indeed, was great. For a while he let it intensify within him. But presently he stood up: it was getting dark; long since the sob of water displaced had told him that the ship had started; a turn on deck might do him good, he thought; and as he moved to the door he called to his dog.

"Zut!"

And as the dog did not immediately appear, Tancred wondered could he have got out. But no, the door was closed.

"What the dickens can have become of him?" he muttered, and turning again he caught sight of Zut stretched on the floor. "Hello!" he exclaimed, "there you are. Why don't you come when you're called?"

Even at this, however, the dog did not move. Tancred bent over and touched him, and then suddenly knelt down. "Why, what is the matter with him? A moment ago he was right enough; it is impossible that—Zut! Zut Alors!"

And raising the dog's head up he stared at it. The eyes were convulsed, the tongue was swollen and distorted. "He is dead," he murmured. "He is dead. But how?"

To this question no answer was vouchsafed. In his bewilderment he stood up again and leaned at the port-hole. Already Siak had faded. Above was a splatter of callous stars, beneath was the sea, black now and almost chill.

"But how?" he repeated. Then at once he clutched at the woodwork; his eyes had fallen on the basket; he remembered the sweet he had tossed to the dog. The cabin seemed to be turning

round.

At his side the door opened, and the steward looked in. "Supper is ready, sir; will you come?"

"The rafflesia!" Tancred gasped at him. But what he meant by that absurd reply the steward did not think it necessary to ask.

"Very good, sir," he answered, and shut the door.

THE GRAND DUKE'S RUBIES.

There is in New York a club called the Balmoral, which has two peculiarities—no one ever goes there much before midnight, and it is the only place in town where you can get anything fit to eat at four o'clock in the morning. The members are politicians of the higher grade, men about town, and a sprinkle of nondescripts. In the unhallowed inspiration of a moment, Alphabet Jones, the novelist,—in polite society Mr. A. B. Fenwick Chisholm-Jones,—baptized it the Smallpox, a name which has stuck tenaciously, the before-mentioned members being usually pitted—against each other. Of the many rooms of the club, one, it should be explained, is the most enticing. It is situated on an upper floor, and the siren that presides therein is a long table dressed in green. Her name is Baccarat.

One night last February, Alphabet Jones rattled up to the door in a vagabond hansom. He was thirsty, impecunious, and a trifle tired. He had been to a cotillon, where he had partaken of champagne, and he wanted to get the taste of it out of his throat. He needed five hundred dollars, and in his card-case there were only two hundred and fifty. The bar of the Athenæum Club he knew at that hour was closed, possible money-lenders were in bed, and it was with the idea of killing the two birds of the legend that he sought the Balmoral.

He encountered there no difficulty in slaking his thirst; and when, in one draught, which brought to his tonsils a suggestion of art, science, and Wagner combined, he swallowed a brandy-and-soda, he felt better, and looked about to see who might be present. The room which he had entered was on what is called the parlor floor. It was long, high-ceiled, comfortably furnished, and somewhat dim. At the furthest end three men were seated, two of whom he recognized, the one as Sumpter Leigh, the other as Colonel Barker; but the third he did not remember to have seen before. Some Westerner, he thought; for Jones prided himself on knowing every one worth knowing in New York, and, it may be added, in several other cities as well.

He took out his card-case and thumbed the roll of bills reflectively. If he went upstairs, he told himself, he might double the amount in two minutes. But then, again, he might lose it. Yet, if he did, might not five hundred be as easily borrowed as two hundred and fifty?

"It's brutal to be so hard up," he mused. "Literature doesn't pay. I might better set up as publisher, open a drug-shop, turn grocer, do anything, in fact, which is brainless and remunerative, than attempt to earn a living by the sweat of my pen. There's that *Interstate Magazine*: the editor sent me a note by a messenger this morning, asking for a story, adding that the messenger would wait *while I wrote it*. Evidently he thinks me three parts stenographer and the rest kaleidoscope. What is a good synonym for an editor, anyway?"

And as Jones asked himself this question he glared fiercely in a mirror that extended from cornice to floor. Then, mollified, possibly, by his own appearance, for he was a handsome man, tall, fair, and clear of skin, he threw himself on a sofa, and fell to thinking about the incidents of the ball.

For some time past he had been as discreetly attentive as circumstances permitted to a young girl, the only child of a potent financier, and on that particular evening he had sat out the cotillon with her at an assembly. She was very pretty and, unusual as it may seem in a *débutante*, rather coy. But when, a half-hour before, he had wished her sweet dreams in that seductive manner for which he was famous, she had allowed the tips of her fingers to rest in his own just one fleeting second longer than was necessary, and, what is more to the point, had looked into his eyes something which now, under the influence of the brandy-and-soda, seemed almost a promise. "Dear little soul!" he muttered; "if she marries me I will refuse her nothing. It will be the devil's own job, though, to get her any sort of an engagement ring. Tiffany, perhaps, might give me one on credit, but it will have to be something very handsome, something new; not that tiresome solitaire. Those stones I saw the other day—H'm! I wonder what that fellow is staring at me for?"

He lounged forward to where the men were seated, and, being asked to draw a chair, graciously accepted the invitation and another brandy-and-soda as well.

"It was this way," the stranger exclaimed, excitedly, when he and Jones had been introduced. "I was telling these gentlemen when you came in that you looked like the Grand Duke Sergius—"

"Thank you," the novelist answered, affably. "The same to you."

"I never saw him though," the stranger continued.

"No more have I."

"Only his picture."

"Your remark, then, was doubly flattering."

"But the picture to which I allude was that of a chimerical grand duke."

"Really, sir, really you are overwhelming."

"But wait a minute, do wait a minute. Mr. Jones, I don't know whether you caught my name: it is Fairbanks—David Fairbanks."

"Delighted! I remember it perfectly. My old friend, Nicholas Manhattan, bought a ruby of you once, and a beauty it was. I heard at the time that you made a specialty of them."

"So did the grand duke. He came here, you know, on that man-of-war."

"Yes, I know. Mrs. Wainwaring gave him a reception. It was just my luck: I was down with the measles at the time."

"Oh, you were, were you? You were down with the measles, eh? Well, I wish I had been. Gentlemen, listen to this; you must listen. I was in my office in Maiden Lane one day, when a young man came in. He wore the most magnificent fur coat I have ever seen in my life. No, that coat was something that only Russia could have produced. He handed me a card on which was engraved

P[^]{CE} MICHEL ZAROGUINE,

Aide-de-camp de S. A. I. le grand-duc Serge de Russie.

"And then, of all things in the world, he offered me a pinch of snuff, and when I refused he helped himself out of a beautiful box and flicked the grains which had fallen on his lapel with a nimbleness of finger such as it was a pleasure to behold. I ought to tell you that he spoke English with great precision, though his accent was not pleasant—sort of grizzled, as it were. Well, gentlemen, he said that *his* prince, as he called him, the grand duke, wanted some rubies; they were intended for a present; and, though my visitor did not imply anything either by word or gesture, I suspected at once that they were for a lady. The grand duke at that time had been here a fortnight, and it was said—However, there is no use in going into that. So I showed him a few; but, if you will believe me, he wanted enough to make a tiara. I told him that a tiara of stones of that quality would come anywhere from sixty to eighty thousand dollars. If I had said a peck of groats he could not have appeared more indifferent. 'It is a great deal of money,' I said. He smiled a little at that, as though he were thinking, 'Poor devil of an American, it may seem a great deal of money to you, but to a grand duke—!' Then I brought out all I had. He looked them over with the pincers very carefully, and asked how much I valued them at. I told him a hundred and ten thousand dollars. He didn't turn a hair."

"Was he bald?" Jones asked.

"No, sir, he was not; and your jest is ill-timed. Gentlemen, I appeal to you. I insist on Mr. Jones's attention—"

"Why, the man is crazy," Jones mused. "What does he mean by saying that my jest is ill-timed? But why does he insist on my attention? He's drunk—that's what he is; he's drunk and quarrelsome. Well, let him be. What do I care?" And Alphabet Jones looked complacently at his white waistcoat and then over at his excitable *vis-à-vis*. Mr. Fairbanks was a little man of the Cruikshank pattern, very red and rotund, and as he talked he gesticulated.

"So I said to him, 'There's been a corner in rubies, but it broke, and that is the reason why I can give them at that price.' He didn't know what a corner was, and when I explained he took a notebook out of his pocket and wrote something in it. 'I am making a collection of Americanisms for the Czarina,' he said. 'By the way,' he added, 'what is a Sam Ward!' I told him. He laughed, and put it down—"

"His throat?"

Mr. Fairbanks glanced at Jones with unconcealed irritation: "Dr. Hammond, sir, says that punning is a form of paresis."

"Be careful about that epsilon; it's short."

"Well, Mr. Jones, you ought to know how to pronounce the word better than I, for you have the disease and I haven't. Gentlemen, I insist—"

But Jones had begun to muse again. "That fat little brute is a type," he told himself. "I must work him in somewhere. I wonder, though, if I had not better leave him and go up to the baccarat. It might be more remunerative. It would be amusing," and Alphabet smiled at the fantasy of his own thought, "it would be amusing indeed if he tried to prevent me." He put his hand over his eyes and let Mr. Fairbanks ramble on.

"You see," he heard him say, in connection with something that had gone before, "a man in my business has to be careful. Now, there are rubies and rubies. I only handle the Oriental stones, which are a variety of the hyaline corindus. They are found in Ceylon, in Thibet, and in Burmah among the crumbings of primordial rock. But I have seen beauties that were picked from waste lands in China from which the granite had presumably disappeared. They are the most brilliant and largest of all. There is another kind, which looks like a burned topaz: it is found in Brazil and

Massachusetts. Then there is the Bohemian ruby, which is nothing but quartz reddened by the action of manganese; and there are also imitations so well made that only an expert can tell them from the real. I keep a few of the latter on hand so as to be able to gauge a customer. Well, gentlemen, the Russian picked up two of them, which I placed before him, and put them to one side. He knew the false article at a glance. Your friend, Jones, that simpleton Nicholas Manhattan, would have taken one of the imitation if I had not prevented him, but this fellow was so clever about it that he won my immediate respect."

"Jones, indeed!" Alphabet muttered. "Why, the brute is as familiar as a haberdasher's advertisement!" He looked at him again: his face was like a brandied peach that had fallen into the fire, and his head was set on his shoulders like an obus on a cannon. "Bah!" he continued, "what is the use in being irritated at a beggar who is as ugly as a high hat at the seashore?"—"When you do me the honor to address me, sir," he said, aloud, "I shall be obliged if you will call me *Mr. Jones*."

"Tut, tut!" the little man answered, and then, without further attention to Alphabet, he continued his tiresome tale:

"When the Russian had examined the rubies very carefully a second time, he said, half to me and half to himself, 'I think they will do.' Then, looking up at me, he added, 'Mr. Fairbanks, you do not make a hundred-thousand-dollar sale every day, do you?' 'No, your Excellency,' I answered,—you see, I made a dash at Excellency; Prince seemed sort of abrupt, don't you think?'—'No, your Excellency, it does not happen over once a week.' He smiled at that, and well he might, for the biggest sale I had previously made amounted to but nine thousand dollars. 'Mr. Fairbanks,' he continued, 'the grand duke is rich, as you well know. I am not. You will understand me the better when I tell you that at present, unless cholera has visited Russia since I left (and I hope it has), there are exactly twenty-nine people in Petersburg who bear the same name and title as myself. Now, if the grand duke purchases these rubies, what will my commission be?' 'That is squarely put, your Excellency,' I answered—'squarely put. Will his Imperial Highness pay cash for the rubies?'"

"You might have asked him if his Imperial Highness would pay *rubis sur l'ongle*. But I remember you don't approve of wit."

This interjection came, of course, from Jones. Mr. Fairbanks, however, let it pass unnoticed. It may be that he did not understand.

"'Necessarily,' he replied. 'A recent ukase of the Czar's inhibits any member of the Imperial family from purchasing so much as a brass samovar on credit.' I bowed. 'A very proper and wise ukase that is, your Excellency. Under such circumstances I think I see my way to giving you one per cent.' He laughed at that, as though I had made a remark of great brilliance."

"I like that," Jones exclaimed, in spite of himself. "Why, you wouldn't be brilliant in a calcium light."

But this remark, like the former, passed unheeded. For the first time since his memory ran not to the contrary it seemed to Jones that he was being ignored; and to ignore Jones! *Allons donc!*

"'Look at me,' said the Russian," Mr. Fairbanks continued. "'The grand duke will not buy these rubies except on my recommendation, and I value that recommendation at not a kopeck less than ten thousand dollars. It is to take or to leave. Choose, sir, choose.' And with that he picked up his hat. 'I cannot, your Excellency, I cannot.' He turned away and made for the door. 'Excellency,' I cried, 'I will give you five.' He wheeled about. 'If,' he said, 'you offer one per cent when you can give five and three-fifths, you are just as well able to give nine and two-thirds.'"

"He was a lightning calculator, wasn't he?"

"'On my conscience,' I answered, 'I cannot give more than seven.' 'Ah!' he replied, 'I do not know how to haggle.' He reflected a moment. 'It is well,' he said; 'I accept.' Gentlemen, when he said that, I felt that I had done a good day's work. Apart from the commission I had a clean profit of eighteen thousand dollars; and eighteen thousand dollars is a tidy sum—not to you, gentlemen, nor to Jones there, but to me."

"Ged, the little cad is getting sarcastic." And Jones laughed quietly to himself and finished his brandy-and-soda.

Mr. Fairbanks waved his arms and pounded the table so excitedly that he roused a waiter from a nap.

"Yes, bring the same," he cried. "Now, gentlemen, I am coming to the point. I insist on your attention. *Mr. Jones*, I will thank *you* not to interrupt—unless it happens that you care to aid me with the details. Yes, sir, I said details,—d-e-t-a-i-l-s. Now wait a minute, will you? Gentlemen, I appeal to you. He shall wait. Beat it into his head—can't you?—that I am coming to the point, and very interesting, I promise, you will all find it to be."

"*Tu te vantes, mon bonhomme, tu te vantes*. Here's to you."

"Here's to you. Well, gentlemen, it was then one o'clock. I always lunch at that hour, and I asked the Russian if he would let me offer him a bite. 'I would very much like to try a Sam Ward,' he said, 'and I might take some tea and a bit of toast.' 'That,' I replied, 'would be tasty with a little

caviare.' I wanted to show him that, though a dealer in precious stones, I was first and foremost a man of the world."

Alphabet Jones rolled over in spasms of delight. "Divinities of Pindar," he shouted, "listen to that!"

"Gentlemen, gag that man—gag him: I will be listened to. There, now, *will* you be quiet? You make me lose the thread. Where was I? Oh, yes: the Russian seemed to reflect a moment, and looked at his watch. 'I think,' he said, 'it would be better to go straight to the Brevoort House.' (The grand duke, I knew, was stopping there.) 'My prince is to go out this afternoon between two and three, and if you do not see him to-day it may be hard to manage it to-morrow.' 'I am at your orders, Excellency,' I answered; 'business before pleasure.' 'Good, then,' he returned; 'we will take a droschky, or, better even, your railway that is in the air.' 'The elevated, you mean,' I said—'the elevated. Yes, of course.' Inwardly I was well pleased that the suggestion should have come from him, for I am not over-fond of riding in a cab with a hundred and ten thousand dollars' worth of rubies in my pocket and a stranger for sole companion. For he was a stranger—wasn't he?—and, by his own account, not well-to-do. But that Russian had a knack of disarming suspicion. And, besides, how was it possible for me to have any doubts about a man who fought as he had over the percentage? It would have been nonsensical. So I did the rubies up in cotton, put them in a box, and off we went. On the way to the elevated you ought to have seen how the people stared at that coat. All the time he kept up a delightful flow of conversation. He told me any number of interesting things about his country, and when I asked if he had read 'The Journey Due North' he told me that he had, and that when Sala was in Russia his father had entertained him at his country-house a few versts from Moscow. Think of that, now! Altogether, he made himself most agreeable. I asked him on the way if he thought that inasmuch as I was to have the honor of seeing the grand duke it would not be more in accordance with etiquette for me to put on a dress-coat. But he laughed, and said, no, the grand duke would never notice. Then he told me some very curious anecdotes about him—how, for instance, he fainted dead away at the sight of an apple, and yet kept a balloon and an aeronaut, just as Jones there might keep a dogcart and a groom. He told me, among other things, that at Petersburg the grand duke had a pet tiger, which would accept food from no one but him, and on my asking how the tiger got along when the grand duke was away, he said that the grand duke had him stuffed. Oh, he was very entertaining, and spoke English better than you would have imagined. We walked over from Eighth Street to the hotel, and when we reached it he took me straight upstairs to his own room. 'If you will sit a minute,' he said, 'I will see if his Highness can receive you.' He went away, and I looked about me. The room into which I had been shown was a sitting-room with a bedroom opening from it. There was a writing-table standing against the door which led to the adjoining apartment, and while I was waiting I just glanced at the things with which the table was littered. There were a number of foreign newspapers, but in what language they were printed I could not make out; there was a package of official-looking documents tied with a string, a great blue envelope addressed in French to the Prince Michel Zarogine and post-marked Washington, and back of all, in a frame, the photograph of a man."

For some minutes previous Mr. Fairbanks had been speaking quite composedly, though Jones, with the observant eye of his class, had noticed that near the ears his cheeks and his forehead as well were wet with perspiration. But now abruptly he grew unaccountably excited, and his speech displayed a feverish animation. His face had lost its scarlet; it had grown very white; and it seemed to the novelist that in some manner which he could not explain to himself it had taken on a not unfamiliar aspect. "H'm!" he reflected, "it's odd. I know I never saw the man before, and I am sure that I do not particularly care ever to see him again. Leigh ought to have more sense than to bring an orang-outang even into such a club as the Smallpox. Besides, what does he mean by boring every one to death? By gad, I believe he has put Leigh to sleep. It's worse than a play." But still he made no effort to move. In spite of himself, he felt vaguely fascinated, and, though he declined to admit it, a trifle ill at ease.

"I took up the photograph," Mr. Fairbanks continued, "and while I was examining it, the Russian came back. In his hand he held a check-book. 'That's the grand duke himself,' he said. 'He will stop in here presently on his way out. There will be two or three members of the suite with him; and, that you may recognize his Highness at once, take a good look at the picture. When he comes in you must do this way: button your coat, please; thanks: now stand anywhere you like and make a low bow. Let me see you make one. Bravo! that is splendid. Only—how shall I say?—do not let your arms hang in that fashion. The grand duke might think you had dropped something and were stooping to pick it up. However, that is a minor matter. It may be that he won't see you at all. But of all things remember this: under no circumstances must you speak to him unless he first addresses you, and then you must merely answer his question. In other words, do not, I pray you, try to engage him in conversation.' 'Does he speak English?' I asked. I couldn't help it. I was getting nervous. 'Now let us have the rubies,' he said. I took the box out of my breast-pocket and handed it to him. He opened it, drew the cotton aside, and ran his fingers lovingly over the gems. 'Yes,' he said, 'they will do.' Then he closed the box again, and put it in the drawer of the table at which he had taken a seat. 'If,' he continued, 'his Highness is satisfied, I will draw a draft for you, and Count Béziatnikoff will sign it. The count,' he went on to say, 'is the keeper of the Privy Purse. The draft itself is on the London Rothschilds, but they will cash it at Belmont's.' I did not quite like that arrangement: it did not seem entirely business-like. 'Your Excellency,' I said, 'it is the custom here to have checks for large amounts certified before they are offered in payment.' But I had to explain what certification meant before he understood me. 'That is nothing,' he said, 'that is nothing. If his Highness is pleased, we will go to Belmont's

together, or, if you prefer, we will sit here over a Sam Ward and let one of the hotel-clerks go to the bank in our stead.' There seemed to me nothing objectionable in that suggestion; for, after all, I could not exact of any one, however grand-ducal he might be, to go about with a hundred and ten thousand dollars in his waistcoat."

"Or in his trousers either."

"Or in his trousers either, as you very properly put it. Now, *Mr. Jones*—*Mr. Leigh*, look at me; Colonel Barker—colonel—I am coming to the point. Where's that waiter? Gentlemen, see here; watch that man there—watch Jones. Don't take your eyes off *Mr. Jones*, but listen, all of you, to what I say. *Mr. Leigh*, you are looking at me: look at your friend, colonel, I insist. *Mr. Jones*, *you*, if you care to, can look at me. Now, gentlemen, now—"

"Have you got a camera concealed about your person?"

"No, I have not, but I have something that came from one. You wait a minute, and I'll show it to you. I'll show it to you all. Where did I leave off?"

"In his waistcoat-pocket."

"Thank you: so I did. Well, gentlemen, we sat there talking as pleasantly as you please. The Russian joked a bit, and said that he wanted a certified check from me,—the check for his commission, you remember,—and presently he got up and said he would see what was delaying his Highness. So I sat awhile, twirling my thumbs. Five minutes passed, ten minutes passed. I looked at my watch: it was almost half-past two. That draft, I told myself, won't be cashed to-day. I went to the window and looked out. I went to the door: there was no one in the hall but a chambermaid. I went back to my seat, and then, moved by my own uneasiness, I opened the drawer of the table. The box was gone! I took the drawer out. It was one that extended the entire width of the table: the further end of it had been cut off. I looked down and in through the place from which I had taken it. I could see into the next room! I pulled the table to one side, and there, just where the drawer had touched the door against which it had stood, was an oblong opening cut through the woodwork of the door itself. I was down-stairs in an instant. Gentlemen, the grand duke had gone to Philadelphia that very morning. No such person as Prince Zaroguiné lodged in the hotel. The clerk came upstairs with me. 'That room,' he said, 'is occupied by a Frenchman, and the adjoining room belongs to a man who registered from Boston. Why, that's his picture there!' he exclaimed, pointing to the picture of the grand duke. 'I did not even know that they were acquainted. But they will be back; they have left their things; they haven't even paid their bills.' I did not wait for their return: if I had I might be waiting still. But I took the photograph, and down to Inspector Byrnes I posted. 'That,' said he, 'that is the picture of one of the 'cutest rogues in the land. He has as many names as the Czar of Russia himself.' And the original of that picture—Gentlemen, here,—*Mr. Leigh*, here,—colonel, here is the picture itself. I have kept it with me ever since. The original of that picture sits before you. Hold on to him, colonel. Jones, if you move I'll put a bullet through you. *Mr. Leigh*, do you ring for the police. Hold him, colonel. Disgorge, you scoundrel, disgorge! I have got you at last!" And then, before the astonished gaze of Alphabet Jones, Colonel Barker faded in a mist, *Mr. Fairbanks* lost his rotundity, his black coat changed to a blue swallow-tail with brass buttons, he grew twenty years younger, and, so far from being violent, he seemed rather apologetic than otherwise.

"It's six o'clock, sir," he said. "Will you order anything before the bar closes?"

Alphabet blinked his eyes. He was lying in a cramped position on the sofa. He was uncomfortable and very hot. He pulled himself together and looked around. Save for the waiter and himself, the room was deserted.

"Is there any baccarat going on upstairs?" he asked.

"No, sir; the gentlemen are just going away."

"Well, well," he mused, "that was vivid. H'm! I'll work it up as an actual occurrence and send it on to the *Interstate*: it will be good for the two hundred and fifty which I meant to make at baccarat.—I say, waiter, get me a Remsen cooler, please."

A MAID OF MODERN ATHENS.

"It was this way," she said, and as she spoke she stooped and flicked a speck of dust from her habit. "It was this way: The existence which I lead in the minds of other people is absolutely of no importance whatever. Now wait: I care a great deal whether school keeps or not, but in caring I try chiefly to be true to myself. I may stumble; I may not. In any event I seek the best. As for the scandal of which you speak, that is nonsense. There is no criterion. That which is permissible here is inhibited yonder, and what is permissible yonder is inhibited here. Scandal, indeed!"

There was something about her that stirred the pulse. She was fair; the sort of girl whose photograph is an abomination, and yet in whose face and being a charm resides, a charm intangible and coercive, inciting to better things. A Joan of Arc in a tailor-made gown.

"You remember how it was when we were younger—You—well, there is no use in going into that.

You had a mother to think for you; I had no one. I had to solve problems unassisted. The weightiest of all was marriage, and that, in my quality of heiress, I found perplexing to a degree. But how is it possible, I asked myself, how can a girl pledge her life to a man of whom she knows absolutely nothing? For, practically speaking, what does the average girl know of the man whose name she takes? It may be different in the country, but in town! Listen to me; a girl 'comes out,' as the saying is; she meets a number of men, the majority of whom are more or less agreeable and well-bred—when she is present. But what are they when she is not? At dinners and routs, or when she receives them in her own house, they are at their best; if they are not they stay away. It is not so difficult to be agreeable once in awhile, but to be so always is a question not of mask but of nature. It seems to me that when an intelligent woman admires her brother it is because that brother is really an admirable man. Has she not every opportunity of judging? But what opportunity is given to the girl whom a man happens to take in and out at dinner, or whom she sees for an hour or two now and then? You must admit that her facilities are slight. That was the way it was with me, and that was the way I fancied it would continue to be, and I determined that it was better to remain spinster forever than to take a man on trust and find that trust misplaced. Suspicious? No, I am not suspicious. When your husband bought this property did you think him suspicious because he had the title searched? Very good; then perhaps you will tell me that the marriage contract is less important than the conveyance of real estate? Besides, my doubts on the subject of love would have defied a catalogue. When I read of the follies and transports of which it was reported to be the prime factor, I was puzzled. It seemed to me that I had either a fibre more or a fibre less than other girls, I could not comprehend. No man I had ever met—and certainly I had met many—had ever caused me so much as a fleeting emotion. There were men with whom I found speech agreeable and argument a pleasure, but, had they worn frocks instead of trousers, such enjoyment as I experienced would have been unimpaired. You see, it was purely mental. And when—there, I remember one man in particular. As Stella said of Swift, he could talk beautifully about a broomstick. He knew the reason of things; he was up in cuneiform inscriptions and at home with meteorites; he was not prosy, and, what is more to the point, he never treated a subject as though it were a matter of life and death. He was not bad-looking, either, and he was the only man of my acquaintance who both understood Kant and got his coats from Poole. That man I liked very much. He was better than a book. I could ask him questions, a thing you can't do even of an encyclopædia. One fine day the personal pronoun cropped out. We had been discussing Herbert Spencer's theory of conceivability, and abruptly, with an inappositeness which, now I think of it, would have been admirable on the stage, but which in the drawing-room was certainly misplaced, he asked me to take a walk with him down the aisle of the swellest church in the commonwealth. I mourned his loss, as we say. But wasn't it stupid of him? But what does get into men? Why should they think that, because a girl is liberal with odd evenings, she is pining for the marriage covenant?"

With the whip she held she gave the hem of her habit a sudden lash.

"That episode gave me food for thought. H'm. By-and-by the scene was occupied by a young man who was an authority on orchids, and wrote sonnets for the *Interstate*. My dear, a more guileful little wretch never breathed. When my previous young man disappeared, I felt that I had been hasty. I desired nothing so much as an increase in my store of knowledge, and I determined that if another opportunity occurred I would not be in such a hurry to shut the door on entertaining developments. Consequently, when my poet turned up, I was as demure as you please. He was a fox, that man. He began with the fixed purpose of irritating me into liking him. The tactics he displayed were unique. He never came when I expected him, and when he did come he was careful to go just when he thought he had scored a point. If any other man happened in, he first eclipsed him and then left him to me. I saw through that game at once. He understood perfectly that if I preferred the other man I was all the more obliged to him for going, and if I preferred him to the other man I was the sorrier to see him leave. In addition to this, whatever subject I broached, he led it by tangential flights to Love. That Machiavelli *en herbe* knew that to talk love is to make love. And talk of love he did, no, but in the most impersonal manner. To hear him discant you would have thought his wings were sprouting. Love, as he expressed it, was a sentiment which ennobled every other; a purifying and exalting light. It was the most gracious of despots. It banished the material; it beckoned to the ideal. It turned satiety into a vagabond that had not where to lay its head. It was the reduction of the world, creation, and all the universe to a single being. It was an enchanted upland, inhibited to the herd. It was a chimera to the vulgar, a crown to the refined. 'A perfect lover,' he said, 'must needs be an aristocrat.' And if you will believe me, I actually thought he meant what he said. In spite of myself, I was becoming interested. There were new horizons before me. I seemed to discern something hitherto unseen. My dear, for the moment I felt myself going. I was at the foot of his enchanted upland. I was almost willing to take him for guide. At first I had been merely amused. Once, even, when he quoted the 'Two souls with but a single thought,' I suggested that that must mean but half a thought apiece. The quiet dignity which he then displayed almost fetched me. He had the air of a prelate in whose presence an oaf has trampled on a crucifix. He kept up that sort of thing for two months. To me his sincerity was beyond peradventure. Not once did he speak in a personal way. I was beginning to wonder when he would stop beating about the bush, and I not only wondered, I believe I even wished that he would be a little more enterprising and a trifle less immaterial. Presently I detected a symptom or two which told me that the end of the beginning was in sight. I suppose my manner was more encouraging. In any event, one evening he took my hand and kissed it. From nine-and-ninety men out of a hundred I should have thought nothing of such a thing. In Europe it is an empty homage, a pantomime expressive of thanks. As I say, then, in any other man I should not have given it a second thought, but he had never done it before.

"The next day I lunched with Mrs. Bunker Hill. I mentioned his name; I suppose it was running in my mind. And then, my dear, Fanny began. Well, the things she told me about that transcendental young man were of such a nature that when he next called I was not at home. He came again, of course. And again. He sent me a note which I returned unopened. That, I confess, was a foolish thing to do. It showed him that I was annoyed. I might better have left it unanswered. After all, there is nothing so impenetrable as silence. Finally, he got one of his friends to come and reconnoitre. Indeed, he did not desist until I had an opportunity of cutting him dead. I was angry, I admit it. And it was after that little experience that I determined, the next time I felt myself going, I would make sure beforehand where I was going to. H'm. I wonder what his sister thought of him? You see, it was not that I had fallen in love; the word was as unintelligible to me as before, but I had fancied that, through him, I might intercept some inkling of its meaning, and I was put out at having been tricked. *Ach! diese Männer!*"

Beneath descending night the sky was gold-barred and green. In the east the moon glittered like a sickle of tin. The air was warm and freighted with the odors of August. You could hear the crickets hum, and here and there was the spark of a fire-fly gyrating in loops of flame. From across the meadows came the slumbrous tinkle of a bell.

She raised a gloved hand to her brow and looked down at the yellow road. To one who loved her, the Helen for whom the war of the world was fought was not so fair as she. And presently the hand moved about the brow, and, resting a second's space on the coil just above the neck, fell again to her side.

"Well," she continued, "you can see how it was. Even before the illusion, disillusionment had come. That winter I went with the Bunker Hills to Monaco. Were it not for the riff-raff, that place would be a paradise in duodecimo. We had a villa, of course. One evening, shortly after our arrival, we went to the Casino. For the fun of the thing I put some money on the *Trente et Quarante*. I did nothing but win. It was tiresome; I would rather have lost; I had to speak to the dealer, and that, as you can fancy, was not to my liking. There was a great crowd. One little old woman put money wherever I did. She won a lot, too. But one man, whom I could not help noticing, backed red when I was on black, and vice versa. He did it persistently, intentionally, and he lost every time. Finally one of the croupiers told me that my stake was above the maximum, and asked how much I would risk. I was tired of answering his questions, and I turned away. A lackey followed me with a salver covered with gold and notes—the money I had won. I didn't want it; I had not even a pocket to put it in, and the purse which I held in my hand would not have held a fraction of it. It was a nuisance. I turned it over to Bunker, and presently we all went out on the terrace that overhangs the sea. It was a perfect night. In the air was a caress, and from the Mediterranean came a tonic. While I was enjoying it all, a beggar ambled up on a crutch and begged a franc. I took from Bunker the money I had won and gave him thirty thousand. You should have heard Bunker then. I actually believe that if I had been his wife instead of his guest he would have struck me. I suppose it was an absurd thing to do. But the next time you are in search of a new sensation do something of the same sort. The beggar became transfigured. He looked at the gold and notes, and then at me. I do not think I shall ever forget the expression in his face. Did you ever see a child asleep—a child to whom some wonderful dream has come? It was at once infantile and radiant. And all the while Bunker was abusing me like a pickpocket. The beggar gave me one look, dropped on his knees, caught the hem of my skirt, kissed it, threw away his crutch, and *ran*. I burst out laughing, and Bunker, in spite of his rage, burst out laughing too. Fanny called us a pair of idiots, and said that if I was as lavish as that it would be better and wiser, and far more Christian, to keep my money for indigent and deserving Bostonese, than to bestow it as a premium on Monacean vice and effrontery. Just as she was working herself into big words and short sentences, the man whom I had noticed at the tables came along. He had met her before, and now, as he expressed it, he precipitated himself to renew the expression of his homage. Fanny, after introducing him to me, began at once on the tale of my misconduct. He had a complexion of the cream-tint order, and a moustache blacker than hate. He was a Florentine, I discovered, a marquis with a name made up of v's, sonorous o's, and n's. We had found a table, and Bunker ordered some ices. The night was really so perfect, and the ice so good, that, like Mme. de Staël over her sherbet in moonlit Venice, I almost wished it were a sin to sit there. The marquis was in very good form and inclined to do the devoted on the slightest provocation.

"'Is mademoiselle,' he asked me, 'is mademoiselle as disdainful of the heart as she is of gold?'"

"'Absolutely,' I answered—a remark which may have sounded snobbish, but still was wholly true.

"'Ah!' he exclaimed, 'there are birds that do not sing untaught.'"

"'You are beginning well,' I thought.

"The next day he lunched with us, and came again in the evening. In addition to his marquise, he had a fluty tenorino voice; what they call a *voix de salon*. He sang all sorts of things for us, and he sang them very well. When the air was lively he looked at Fanny, when it was sentimental he looked at me. Thereafter I saw a great deal of him. One day we would make up a party for Nice, on another we would go to San Remo, or else back in the mountains, or to Grasse. Of course, as you know, customs over there are such that he had no opportunity of being alone with me, even for a second; but he had an art of making love in public which must have been the result of long practice. It was both open and discreet. It was not in words; it was in the inflection of the voice and in the paying of the thousand and one little attentions which foreigners perform so well. Now, to me, a tiara might be becoming, but it is an ornament for which I have never felt the

vaguest covetousness. Moreover, I had no intention of marrying an Italian, however fabulous the ancestry of that Italian might be. And, besides, the attentions of which I was the apparent object were, I knew, addressed less to me than to the blue eyes of my check-book. The Florentine nobleman who is disposed to marry a dowerless American is yet to be heard from. This by the way. However, I accepted the attentions with becoming grace, and marked the cunning of his tricks. One evening he did not put in an appearance, but at midnight, I heard, on the road before my window, the tinkle of a guitar. I did not need to peer through the curtains to know from whom it came. First he sang a song of Tosti's, and then the serenade from "Don Pasquale:"

'Com' è gentil, la notte in mezz' Aprile.

Poi quando sarò morto, tu piangerai
Ma ritornarmi in vita, tu non potrai.'

"Sentimental? Yes, sentimental to the last degree. But on the Riviera, in spring, and at night, one's fancy turns to that sort of thing with astounding ease. I listened with unalloyed pleasure. It was like a Boccaccian echo. And as I listened I wondered whether I should ever learn what love might be. The idea of taking a course of lessons from a man who strummed on a guitar in front of my window never entered my head. The next day Fanny came to me in a state of great excitement. The guitarist, it appeared, had, with all proper and due formality, asked leave to place his coronet at my feet. *Ce que j'ai ri!*

"You can hear Fanny from here. She accused me of flirting with the man. 'You have no right,' she said, 'to treat him as though he were a college boy at Mt. Desert.' What he had done to make her so vicious I never discovered. It must have been the title, a title always went to her head. Poor Fanny! That evening, when he came, she declined to be present. I had to see him alone. My dear, he was too funny. He had prepared a little speech which he got off very well, only at the end of it he lapsed into English. 'We will loaf,' he said, 'we will be always loafers.' He meant, of course, to assert that we should love and be always lovers, but the intricacies of our pronunciation were too much for him. I could have died, it was so amusing. I managed, however, to keep a straight face. 'Marquis,' I said, 'I am deeply honored, but your invitation is one that I am unable to accept.' A more astounded man you never saw. He really thought that he had but to ask, and it would be given. He declined to take No for an answer. He said he would wait. Actually, he was so pertinacious that I had to drag Fanny up to Paris. He followed us in the next train. There was no getting rid of him at all. If he sent me one note he sent me a hundred, and notes ten pages each, at the very least. Finally, as you heard, he tried the dramatic. One afternoon, while I was out shopping, he bribed a waiter at the hotel where we lodged. When I returned, there he was, waiting for me. 'At last,' he cried, 'at last we are face to face. You think I do not love. Cruel one, behold me! I love as no mortal ever loved before. See, I die at your feet!' And there, before my very eyes, he whipped out a pistol, pulled the trigger, tumbled over and seemed fully disposed to carry out the programme to the end. He had shot himself; there was no doubt about that; but he had shot himself in such an intelligent manner, that, though there was blood enough to frighten a sensitive young person out of her wits, yet of danger there was none at all. Talk to me about comedians! When I discovered the farce which had been enacted with the sole object of stirring my sympathies into affection, I was flabbergasted at the wiles of man.

"It was after that episode that I returned to Beacon Street. It was there that what you are pleased to call the scandal began. Fanny, whose desire to marry me off was simply epic, one day caught an Englishman; young, so she said, and good-looking. And that Englishman, she made up her mind, I should ensnare. Fanny, as you know, was possessed with an ungratified desire to pay annual visits to swell country houses on the other side. Hence, I suppose, her efforts. Having caught the Englishman, the next step was to serve him up in becoming form. To that end she gave a tentative dinner. I got to it late; in fact, I was the last to arrive. Fanny, I could see, was in a state of feverish excitement. She presented to me one or two men, whose names I did not catch, and a moment later one of them gave me his arm. When we were seated at table, and while he was sticking a chrysanthemum in his button-hole, I glanced at the card on his plate. It bore for legend Lord Alfred Harrow. It was then I took my first look at him. My dear, he was the ugliest man I have ever seen; he was so ugly that he was positively attractive. His mouth was large enough to sing a duet, but his teeth were whiter than mine."

As she spoke she curled her lips.

"There was no hair on his face, and his features were those of a middle-aged wizard. But about him was the atmosphere of health, of strength, too, and his hands, though bronzed and sinewy, were perfect. I knew he was a thoroughbred at once. 'And how do you like the States?' I asked. He was squeezing some lemon on an oyster, and I noticed that when some white wine was offered him he turned the glass upside down. 'Very much,' he answered; 'and you?' There was more of that sort of thing, and finally I asked him if, like other Englishmen, he thought that Boston suggested one of his provincial towns. 'There seems to be some mistake,' he said. 'I was going into the Somerset five minutes ago when Hill coralled me. He told me that his wife was giving a dinner, and that at the last moment one of the bidden had wired to the effect that he was prevented from coming. Whereupon Mrs. Hill had packed him off to the club, with instructions to bring back the first man he met. I happened to be that man.' He took up the card. 'Lord Alfred is, I fancy, the delinquent. My name,' he added, 'is Mr. Stitt—Ferris Stitt,' he continued, as though apologizing for its inconsequence.

"After that we got on famously. In a day or two he came to the house. When he left the world was

larger. He knew nothing about poetry. He had never so much as heard of Fichte. Herbert Spencer was to him a name and nothing more. The only works of ornamental literature which he seemed to have read were the Arabian Nights, which he had forgotten, and something of Dickens, which had put him to sleep. He did not know one note of music from another. But he had hunted big game in Africa, in Bengal, and he had penetrated Thibet. He had been in Iceland and among the Caribs. No carpet knight was he.

"My dear, I had not seen him five times before I felt myself going. I think he knew it. But I had been cheated before, and so well that I held on with all my strength. While I was holding on, he disappeared. Not a word, not a line, not even so much as a p. p. c. In the course of time, through the merest accident, I learned that he was in Yucatan. Six months later I caught a glimpse of him in the street. Presently he called.

"At once, without so much as a preamble, he told me he had gone away that in absence he might learn whether I was as dear to him as he thought. He hesitated a moment. 'Will you let me love you?' he asked. 'You have been prudent,' I answered; 'let me be prudent, too.' Then I told him of my disenchantments. I told him how difficult I found it to discover what men really were. I told him, as I have told you, that it seemed to me, if an intelligent girl admired her brother, it was because that brother was assuredly an admirable man. And I added that I would accept no man until I had the same opportunities of judging him as a sister has of judging her brother. Besides, I said, I have yet to know what love may be. It was then that we made the agreement of which you disapprove. After all, it was my own suggestion, and, if unconventional, in what does the criterion consist? I was acting for the best. You do not imagine, do you, that I regret it?"

And to her lips came a smile.

"I took Mary, who, you must admit, is respectability personified, and whom I had long since elevated from nurse to sheep dog—I took Mary, and, together, all three of us, we went abroad. It is in travelling that you get to know a man. Each evening, when he said good-night, my admiration had increased. From England, as you know, we went straight to India. It was a long trip, I had heard, but to me it seemed needlessly brief. During the entire journey I studied him as one studies a new science. I watched him as a cat watches a mouse. Not once did he do the slightest thing that jarred. During the entire journey he did not so much as attempt to take my hand in his. He knew, I suppose, as I knew, that if the time ever came I would give it unasked.

"One evening, on going to my stateroom, I found I had left my vinaigrette on deck. Mary was asleep. I went back for it alone. It was very dark. On the way to where I had sat I heard his voice; he was talking to one of the passengers. In spite of myself I listened to what he was saying. I listened for nearly an hour. Not one word was there in it all that he could not have said to me. When I got back to my cabin I wondered whether it might not be that he knew I was standing there. Yes, I admit, I was suspicious; but circumstances had made me so. Oh! he has forgiven me since."

She smiled again complacently to herself, and, tucking the whip under her arm, she drew off a glove; on one finger was a narrow circle of gold. She looked at it and raised it to her lips.

"When we landed our journey had practically begun. You see, I was still unassured. Yet he was irreproachable and ever the same. Well, the details are unimportant. One day, at Benares, he heard that leopards had been seen in the neighborhood of a lake some fifteen or twenty miles out. At once he was for having a crack at them. I determined to accompany him. He was surprised at first, and objected a little, but I managed, as I usually do, to have my own way. It was night when we got there. We left the horses with the guide, and, noiselessly as ghosts, we stole through a coppice which hid the lake from view. Almost at the water's edge we crouched and waited. The stars were white as lilies and splendid as trembling gems. The silence was as absolute as might. How long we waited I cannot now recall. I think I dreamed a bit with open eyes. Then dimly I became conscious of something moving in the distance. The moon had risen like a balloon of gold, and in the air was the scent of sandal. Slowly, with an indolent grace of its own, that something neared the opposite shore. As it reached the water it stopped, arched its back, and turned. I saw then that it was a leopard. No, my dear, you can form no idea of the beauty of that beast. And then suddenly it threw its head back and called. It lapped the water, and then, with its tongue, gave its forepaw one long, lustrous lick, and called again; a call that was echoless, yet so resonant I felt it thrill my finger-tips. In a moment its mate sprang from the shadows. If the first comer was beautiful, then this one was the ideal. There they stood, caressing each other with amber, insatiate eyes. It was like a scene in fairyland. And as I watched them, I felt a movement at my side. I turned. He had taken aim and was about to fire, but, as I turned, he turned to me. Those beasts, I told myself, are far too fair for death; yet I said not a word. My dear, he read my unuttered wish, he lowered the gun, and then—then, for the first time, I knew what love might be.... There's the dogcart now. Come over and dine to-morrow. If you care to, Ferris will show you the gun."

FAUSTA.

There are many beautiful things in the world, and among them, near the head of the list, stands dawn in the tropics. It is sudden as love, and just as fair. Throughout the night the ship had been

sailing beneath larger stars than ours, in waters that were seamed and sentient with phosphorus; but now the ship was in the harbor, day had chased the stars, the water was iridescent as a syrup of opals, at the horizon was the tenderest pink, overhead was a compound of salmon and of blue; and beyond, within rifle range, was an amphitheatre of houses particolored as rainbows, surmounted by green hills, tiared with the pearl points of cathedral steeples, and for defensive girdle, the yellow walls of a crumbling fort.

"On this side," thought one who lounged on deck, "it seems bounded by beauty," and he might have added, "by ignorance on the other." He was a good-looking young fellow, dressed Piccadilly-fashion, and yet, despite the cut of his coat, the faint umber of his skin and the sultry un-Saxon eyes marked him as being of Latin blood. His name was Ruis Ixar. He was the son of a certain Don Jayme, who was then Governor of Puerto Principe, and in Castile, Count, Grandee of Spain, and Marquis, to boot. Don Jayme had emptied his coffers in discreet rivalry of his king, and his king, who admired prodigal fathers, had given him leave to replenish them in the New World. This permission Don Jayme had for some time past made the most of, now by exactions, now by fresh taxes, by peculations and speculations, and also by means of a sugar plantation a few leagues beyond Santiago de Cuba, in the harbor of which his son, that morning, was preparing to disembark.

Don Jayme had been domiciled in the neighborhood for five years, and the five years had been to him five Kalpas of time.

He felt desolate as a lighthouse. He had come expecting to make a rapid fortune, and in that expectation he had been wearisomely deceived. The province which he had intended to wring dry as an orange had been well squeezed by earlier comers, and as for his hacienda, he found it more profitable to let the cane rot uncut than to attempt to extract the sugar. He hated Cuba, as every true Spaniard does, and the portion of Cuba which he administered hated him. He longed for Madrid, for the pomp and ceremonial of court; and particularly did he desire that his son should enjoy an income suited to his rank. Though he had not as yet succeeded in replenishing more than one or two of the many emptied coffers, there was no valid reason why his sole descendant should be poor. And if his son were rich, the former splendor of the Ixars would blaze anew. Don Jayme was a selfish man, as men brought up in court circles are apt to be; he was not a good man, he was not even a good-looking man, but the bit of *lignum vitæ* which served him for heart was all in all for that son. It was for him he had come to Cuba, and if the coming had been a partial failure, that partial failure would be wholly retrieved did he succeed in supplying the heir to his title with a well dowered wife.

So argued Don Jayme. But he was careful to argue with no one save his most intimate friend, to-wit, himself. To his son he said nothing; he merely wrote him to take ship, and sail.

It so happened that when this communication was received, Ruis Ixar was as anxious for a trip to the New World as Don Jayme was for a return to the Old. He was tired of the Puerto del Sol; he was tired too of the usual young woman that lives over the way. He wanted a taste of adventure; and moreover obedience to his father's behests had been the groundwork of his education. He had therefore taken ship with alacrity, and on this melting morning of December, as he gazed for the first time at the multicolored vista before him, he was in great and expectant spirits. Concerning the town itself, had he been put on the rack he could have confessed to but two items of information: one was that his father was chief official; and the other that there was not a book-shop within its walls. To the latter fact he was utterly indifferent; he had learned it haphazard on the way over: but the former was not without its charm. The influence of that charm presently exerted itself. He was conveyed from the ship in a government boat, and two hours later, while his fellow-passengers were still engaged in feeing the supervisors of the custom-house, he had reached the hacienda behind the hills.

The hacienda, or ingenio as it is more properly called, was several miles of yellow striated with red, punctuated with palms and cut by paths that were shaded with the great glistening leaves of the banana, while here and there, Dantesque and unnatural in its grandeur, rose the ceiba, its giant arms outstretched as though to shield the toiler from the suffocation of the purple skies. And beneath, for contrast, the brilliance of convolvuli and granadillas opposed the tender green. At the southernmost end was Don Jayme's habitation, a one-story edifice, built quadrangularwise, tiled and steep of roof, and semi-circled by a veranda so veiled with vines that at a distance the house seemed a massive mound of pistache.

"Even in Andalusia," thought Ruis, as the volante brought him to the door, "there is nothing equal to this." Like all his race, he had a quick eye to the beautiful, and for the moment he was bewildered by the riot of color. And while the bewilderment still lingered, a gentleman, slim and tall, entirely in white, with face and hands of the shade of Turkish tobacco, kissed him on either cheek.

"God be praised, my son," he murmured, "you are here."

And with that he led him into the cool of the veranda. It had been years since they had met, there was much to be said, and in that grave unvociferous fashion which is peculiar to the Spaniard of Castile, in a language which nightingales might envy, father and son discussed topics of common and personal interest.

Thereafter for some little time, a fortnight to be exact, things went very well indeed. Ruis expressed himself enchanted with his new home. The plantation was a wonder to him, the half-

naked negroes and their wholly nude progeny a surprise, and the brutality with which they were treated caused him a transient emotion. In turtle fishing he found an agreeable novelty, and in the shooting of doves and the blue-headed partridge he became an immediate adept. But when a fortnight had come and gone he felt vaguely bored; he grew tired of strange and sticky fruits, the call of chromatic birds jarred, discordant, on his nerves, the turtles lost their allurements, the weight of purple days oppressed him. In brief, he thought he had quite enough of rural life in the tropics. Aside from his father, there was not, on the estate, a soul of his own race with whom he could exchange a word. And though he had nothing whatever to say, yet such is the nature of youth that he heartily wished himself back in Spain. The young girl that lived there over the way he would have hailed as life's full delight, and two or three of her scrappy letters, which through some oversight he had neglected to turn into cigarette-lighters, he set to work to decipher anew. The writer of them was an ethereal young person with a pretty taste for fine sentiments, and as Ruis possessed himself of the candors of her thought, he very much wished that he could kneel immediately at her feet.

From the early forenoon until the sun has begun to set it is not at all agreeable, or prudent either, for the unacclimated to be astir in that part of the planet in which Don Jayme's hacienda was situated. But the mornings are mellow indeed, the dusk is languorous in its beauty, and as for the nights, none others in all the world can compare with them. The stars are as lilies set in parterres of indigo. In the air is a perfume and a caress.

And Ruis, out of sheer laziness, made the most of the dusk and the early hours. At sunrise he was on horseback scouring the country, now over the red road in the direction of the town, and again across the savannas, past cool thin streams and ravines that were full of shadow, mystery, and green. And when the sun had lost its ardor he would be off again, and return in company with the moon. As a rule he met but few people, sometimes a man or two conveying garden produce to the sea-port, sometimes women with eggs and poultry, now and then a negro, and once a priest. But practically the roads were unfrequented, and without incident or surprise.

One morning, however, as his horse was bearing him homeward, he caught sight of an object moving in the distance. At first he fancied that it might be one of the men he was wont to meet, but soon he saw that it was a woman, and as he drew nearer he noticed that she was young, and, in a moment, that she was fair to see. By her side stood a horse. The saddle was on the ground, and she was busying herself with the girth. At his approach she turned her head. Her mouth was like a pomegranate filled with pearls; her face was without color, innocent of the powdered eggshells with which Cuban damsels and dames whiten their cheeks; and in her eyes was an Orient of dreams. She was lithe and graceful, not tall; perhaps sixteen. About her waist a crimson sash was wound many times, her gown was of gray Catalonian calico, and her sandalled feet were stockingless.

"A Creole," thought Ruis; and raising his right hand to the left side of his broad-brimmed hat, he made it describe a magnificent parabola through the air, and as he replaced it, bowed.

"Your servant, Señorita," he said.

"And yours, Don Ruis," she replied.

"You know my name, Señorita! May I ask how you are called?"

"I am called Fausta," she answered; and as she spoke Ruis caught in her voice an accent unknown to the Madrilenos of his acquaintance, the accent of the New World, abrupt, disdainful of sibilants, and resolute. He dismounted at once.

"You have had an accident, Doña Fausta; let me aid you."

But the girth was beyond aid; it was old and had worn itself in twain. And as he examined it he noticed that the saddle was not of the kind that women prefer.

"It is needless, Don Ruis. See, it is an easy matter." And with that she unwound her crimson girde, and in a moment, with dexterous skill, she removed the broken girth, replaced the saddle on the horse, and bound it to him with the sash. "But I thank you," she added, gravely.

Ruis was a little sceptical about the security of this arrangement, and that scepticism he ventured to express. But the girl was on the horse, unassisted, before he had finished the sentence.

"Have no fears, Don Ruis. Besides, our house is but a little bird's flight from here. I could have walked, if need were."

Ruis remounted. "May I not accompany you?" he asked.

"To-morrow," she answered; and for the first time she smiled. For to-morrow in a Cuban mouth means anything except what it expresses. And as she said it, Ruis smiled too.

"How do you know my name?" he inquired.

"We—my mother and I—we are your neighbors."

"Ah, Doña Fausta, in that case, I pray you make my duty to the lady your mother, and beg of her a permission that I may do so myself."

Again she smiled. "To-morrow," she lisped, and whipped her horse.

Ruis raised his hat as before, and bowed.

"God be with you, Doña Fausta."

"And with you, Don Ruis."

The next morning he was on the red road again, but no maiden in distress was discoverable that day. The sun chased him home, and as he lounged through high noon in the cool of the veranda, he marvelled at his earlier boredom. Later on he sent for one of the overseers and questioned him minutely. Whatever information he may have gleaned, it was presumably satisfactory. He watched the sun expire in throes of crimson and gamboge, and night unloose her leash of stars. Then he took horse again, and, aided by information received, in ten minutes he was at Doña Fausta's door. It was a shabby door, he noticed, the portal of a still shabbier abode, and even in the starlight he divined that if ever wealth had passed that way, it had long since taken flight. The noise of hoofs brought the girl to the porch.

"At your feet, Doña Fausta," he said, and raised his hat. "I am come to offer my homage to the lady your mother, and to you, if I may."

"Who is it?" called a voice from within; and then, for ampler satisfaction of the inquiry, a lean old woman, gray of hair, unkempt, wrinkled, and bent, appeared in the doorway and fastened on Ruis two glittering, inquisitorial eyes.

"The son of Don Jayme," the girl answered; "he wishes you well." With a perfectly perceptible shrug the woman turned and disappeared.

"She has suffered much," the girl explained. "Don Ruis, you are welcome."

Ruis dismounted and gave the horse a lash with his whip. "It will be pleasant to walk back," he said, as the horse started. "Mariquita can find her way home unguided." He smiled; he was pleased with himself: and the girl smiled too. "Tell me," he added, "do you live here always?"

"Always, Don Ruis."

"Ah, you should come to Spain. You would love Madrid, and more than Madrid would you love Grenada and Seville. Santiago is a little, a very little, like Seville. You go there often, do you not?"

"But seldom, Don Ruis."

"To the fiestas, surely."

"To go to the fiestas one needs a brave gown, and I have none."

"I," said Ruis, "I am tired of fiestas, and truly at Santiago they cannot be very grand. After all, you miss little. Ah, Doña Fausta, you should see them in Spain. And," he continued, in a tone that was almost a whisper, "you should let Spain see you."

In this wise the two young people talked together. And when the fractions of an hour had passed them by unmarked, the old woman appeared again on the porch, and Ruis withdrew. On reaching the hacienda he went to the room which he occupied, and tore into bits the scrappy letters of his Madridlene. "To the deuce," he muttered, as he stretched himself out beneath the mosquito netting, "to the deuce with thin women and the communion of souls."

The day following Ruis did not venture to make a second visit, but he loitered on the red road both in the clear forenoon and in the slumbering dusk; but he loitered in vain. On the morrow his success was not greater: yet on the succeeding day his heart gave an exultant throb; she was there. It was not necessary for him to be verbose. His manner was caressing as the air, and her eyes were eloquent, almost as eloquent as his own. Before they parted they had agreed upon a tryst, a spot wholly sheltered by cedars and tamarinds, through which a brook ran, and where tendrils with a thousand coils embraced the willing trees as would they smother them with flowers. And there each day they met. Love with them was like the sumptuous vegetation in which they moved—swift of growth. To Ruis, Fausta was the most perfect of playmates, a comrade that each day brought him some fresh surprise. She was at once naïve and imperious, docile and self-willed. He noticed that she was friends with the mimosa, for once, when she touched the sensitive leaves, they did not shrink, the timidity was gone. And once, when she spoke of her father, who had been shot as a conspirator, her anger was like a storm on the coast, glorious and terrible to behold. She was sweet indeed, yet heat sugar and abruptly it boils. To Fausta, Ruis was present and future besides. As for the past she had none save in so far as it had been a preparation for him. He had told her that she should be countess, though for that she cared nothing, except that in being countess she would be his wife as well. And so over constant meetings two months went by. In their Eden, Ruis at first was usually the earliest to arrive, and when he heard her footfall he would hasten to meet her and hold her in his arms.

"Speak to me, Fausta," he would say; "I love your voice: look at me; I love your eyes. How fair love is when we are together and alone! Is it not exquisite to speak of love when all else is still?"

And Fausta, waist-encircled, would answer, "Ruis, I love you; I need to see you, to see you again, and always. When you leave me it is as though I fell asleep, to reawake only at your return."

It was with this duo and its infinite variations that they charmed two months away. To Ruis, at first, no other months of all his life had been so fertile in delight. To Fausta they were not months, but dreams fulfilled.

Meanwhile, Don Jayme had not been idle. He had been much in Puerto Principe, and he had made two journeys to Havana. Now from Santiago to Havana the distance is 600 miles, and Don Jayme was not a man to undertake such a journey without due and sufficient cause. Be this as it may, it so happened that after his second visit to the capital he enjoyed a memorable interview with his son. To him he had as yet said nothing of his plans, but on this occasion he made no secret of them.

"Ruis," he said, leisurely, with the air of one engaging in conversation solely for conversation's sake, "you know the House of Sandoval?"

"Surely: we are more or less related. A hundred years ago an Ixar married a Sandoval—"

"Of the younger branch, however. We do not bear their arms."

"There was no bluer blood in all Castile."

"No, nor yet in Aragon. Don Jorge is in Havana."

"Don Jorge of Sandoval! I thought him dead."

"His credit was, but that has since revived. He came to Cuba the year before I came myself. I am little richer now than then, but he has garnered millions."

"Ah!"

"Yes, millions—three at least. In the Convent of Our Lady del Pilar is his daughter, Doña Clarisa. We have agreed that you and she should wed."

Ruis laughed. "To-morrow," he answered; "I am not in haste for matrimony;" and laughed again.

"Ruis, Don Jorge and I, we have agreed." There was something in the father's face that banished the merriment of the son. "This night we leave for Havana. See to it that you are in readiness."

In his perplexity Ruis twisted a cigarette.

"Have you understood me?" Don Jayme asked. "In a month we shall be in Spain. You will like to be back there, will you not?" he continued, in suaver tones. "You will like to be back there, rich, and—and the husband of a beautiful girl. Eh, my son? You will like that, will you not? Ruis, see, it is for you. You are all I have. It was for you I came here; it was for you I made this match. For myself, nothing matters. I have had my day. It is in you I live, in you only; and in our name to which this marriage will give a new and needed lustre."

"And you say we leave to-night?"

Don Jayme nodded.

"That will be difficult. H'm." He hesitated, and as he hesitated his father looked inquiringly at him. "It is this: there is one here who thinks that name is to be hers."

"Then does she flatter herself. Who is she?"

"A neighbor."

"Bah! the Fausta? The Fausta is it?" Had Fausta been a negress Don Jayme could not have displayed greater contempt. "Why, the Fausta is a Creole, the daughter of a highwayman."

"Father, she is a flower."

"Of which you have enjoyed the perfume. Doña Clarisa is a bouquet. The change should be pleasant. Come, Ruis, prepare yourself; in an hour we must start."

"I have given my word."

Don Jayme coughed and examined his tapering, yellow fingers. "Then get it back," he said at last.

"Ah yes, but how."

Don Jayme coughed again and shrugged his shoulders. Then suddenly he filliped his forefinger and thumb together as were he counting coin. "Send for your horse, Ruis. I will attend to that." When Ruis returned Don Jayme placed two small yet heavy bags before him. "Offer one," he said; "it is ample. But should she play the difficult, then give the other too. And Ruis, the road is not always safe; are you armed? At least take this dagger. There, I had forgotten; that there may be no complications, get a receipt."

Ruis stuck the dirk in his belt and placed the bags in the holster. His father stood watching him on the veranda. "I will wait for you here," he said, as Ruis mounted; "do not be long." And as the young man touched the horse with his heel, he called out, "I count on you, Ruis." He waved his hand to him lovingly. He was in great good spirits; the goal to which for five years he had striven was full in sight.

And Ruis from the saddle answered, "Count on your gold, Don Jayme."

In a moment he was out of sight, galloping down the road, with only stars and fire-flies to light the way. But of the road the horse knew every inch. And as Ruis galloped he thought of Madrid and its allurements, of the corrida and its emotions, of the Doña Clarisa that was to be his, and of

other doñas that he would meet. The future certainly was very bright. As for the present, it was not entirely to his liking. There was an awkward five minutes to pass, but once passed he would shake the red dust from him and never set foot on that road again. Fausta, truly, had been very sweet, and she had beguiled for him many and many an otherwise wearisome hour. But she was like the fruit, which on arriving he had relished. She had lost her savor. I will give her the gold, he thought, the gold and a kiss. The gold will serve for dower and the kiss for farewell.

So mused Don Ruis. He had reached her door, and, as before, at the noise of hoofs she came out with a welcome.

"Ah, Ruis," she murmured, "I have watched for you the entire day. This morning I went to our Eden, and again this afternoon. Where were you? Ruis, I caught a butterfly, it was like a winged acacia, and I gathered the jasmines you like, and waited, but you did not come. My Ruis, I thought you ill perhaps, yet everything was so fair and still I knew you could not be but well. And, Ruis, as I was leaving, a yellow-breast began to sing. He seemed to bring a message from you. I know it now, it was that you would come to-night. Ruis, forgive my foolish words, it is because my heart is full of love for you. But why do you not dismount? Come, we will stroll there beneath the stars. Do you know, Ruis, with you I am so happy there are moments when I could die of joy. But why do you not speak to me? Is it the night? My Ruis, your face seems changed."

"Fausta, I have come to say good-bye."

"Good-bye? Ruis, you jest."

"No, Fausta, it is not jest. Don Jayme and I return to Spain."

"To Spain! It cannot be! You said that when you went, we both should go; that I should be your wife."

"Don Jayme has found another for me."

"And what of your word, Don Ruis?"

"There, Fausta, it is painful enough. Were it not for Don Jayme, you know—naturally, you know—you know very well what I would do. But see, what would you? It is painful, indeed."

"Painful? Painful to whom? Not to Don Jayme, nor seemingly to you."

"Ah, but it is; and see, I have brought you this, and this too." He took the bags from the holster and held them to her. Yet she made no motion to take them. She stepped back a little, and to the midnight of her eyes came a sudden flash. "How much is in them," he continued, "I do not know, but it must be like St. Peter's pence; you can see"—and he affected a little laugh—"they are not light to hold. Truly they must represent a pretty dower, for Don Jayme said—for pleasantry, no doubt—'Ruis, you will do well to get an acknowledgment.'"

"Ruis! He called you Ruis! Your name is Judas." The girl's face was always white, but now it was whiter than the moon. The red had left her lips, and her voice, which had been melodious as the consonance of citherns and guitars, grew abruptly harsh and strident. She was trembling from head to foot.

"But will you not take them?" he asked, referring to the bags of money which, awkwardly enough, he still held out to her.

"Get back, Spaniard, into the night from which you came. I gave you love, you bring me gold. I gave my trust, you ask a receipt. You shall have it." She had moved forward near to him again, and glared in his face.

"But if you refuse the gold, what," he asked, almost piteously, "what can I give?"

"Nothing save this dirk."

And before the intention could have been divined, she tore the dagger from his belt and sheathed it in his heart.

"There is my receipt," she cried.

The bags fell heavily to the ground, and of one of them the canvas burst open and scattered the contents on the ground. Ruis would have fallen too, but with one steadying hand she held him on the saddle, and with the other unwound her scarlet sash. In a moment's time she had tied him fast; then she gave the affrighted horse a blow and stepped aside. And as she did so the horse veered and rushed up the road, bearing the lifeless Ruis, bound as Mazeppa was, with the dagger still in his heart, to the father who waited his return.

For a little space she listened to the sound of retreating hoofs. She was trembling still.

On the porch the old woman had tottered out. "What was it?" she asked.

"Death."

"*Ave Maria purissima!*" croned the hag.

And the girl, turning her back to the darkness in which the horse had vanished, answered, as is the custom, "Who conceived without sin."

Fausta re-entered the house, but her mother loitered on the porch. The next morning the gold had disappeared.

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