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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SON OF THE SAHARA ***



With Annette limp across his saddle, Casim Ammeh sped away.

A SON OF THE SAHARA

BY

LOUISE GERARD

With Illustrations from the Photo-Play
"A FIRST NATIONAL ATTRACTION"

Produced by EDWIN CAREWE,
Featuring BERT LYTELL AND CLAIRE WINDSOR

NEW YORK

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TO
MY FRIEND

DOROTHEA THORNTON CLARKE

WITHOUT WHOSE HELP AND CONSTANT ENCOURAGEMENT
NEITHER THIS NOR ANY OF MY BOOKS
WOULD HAVE BEEN WRITTEN

PREFACE

A beach of white sand, the whisper of palms answering the murmuring moonlit sea, the fragrance of orange blossoms, the perfume of roses and syringa,—that is Grand Canary, a bit of

Heaven dropped into the Atlantic; overlooked by writers and painters in general. Surely one can be pardoned a bit of praise and promise for this story, laid, as it is in part, in that magic island.

The Canaries properly belong to the African continent. That is best proven by their original inhabitants who were of pure Berber stock. The islands are the stepping stone between Europe and the Sahara. Mysterious Arabs and a continual stream of those silent men who come and go from the great desert tarry there for a while, giving color and romance to the big hotels.

The petty gossip, the real news of the Sahara "breaks" there.—Weird, passionate tales; believable or not, they carry an undercurrent of reality that thrills.

From such a source came this story. Unaltered in fact, it is given to you, the life story of a man and a woman who turned their backs on worldly conventions that they might find happiness. If it is frank, forgive it. Life near the Equator is not a milk and water affair.

THE PUBLISHERS.

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PART I

A Son of the Sahara

CHAPTER I

In the days when France was pursuing a vigorous forward policy in Africa, a policy started by General Faidherbe and carried on by subsequent governors, one of the bravest among her pioneer soldiers was Colonel Raoul Le Breton.

He was a big, handsome man with a swarthy complexion, coal-black hair and dark, fiery eyes, by nature impetuous and reckless. With a trio of white sergeants and a hundred Senegalese soldiers, he would attempt—and accomplish—things that no man with ten times his following would have attempted.

But there came a day when even his luck failed.

He left St. Louis, in Senegal, and went upwards to the north-east, intending to pierce the heart of the Sahara. From that expedition, however, he never returned. The Government at St. Louis assumed that he and his little pioneer force had been wiped out by some hostile negro king or Arab chief. It was but one of the tragedies attached to extending a nation's territory.

When Raoul Le Breton went on that ill-fated expedition, he did what no man should have done who attempts to explore the Back of Beyond with an indifferent force.

He took his wife with him.

There was some excuse for this piece of folly. He was newly married. He adored his wife, and she worshipped him, and refused to let him go unless she went also.

She was barely half his age; a girl just fresh from a convent school, whom he had met and married in Paris during his last leave.

Colonel Le Breton journeyed for weeks through an arid country, an almost trackless expanse of poor grass and stunted scrub, until he reached the edge of the Sahara.

Annette Le Breton enjoyed her travels. She did not mind the life in tents, the rough jolting of her camel, the poor food, the heat, the flies; she minded nothing so long as she was with her husband. He was a man of rare fascination, as many women had found to their cost; a light lover until Annette had come into his life and captured his straying heart once and for all.

On the edge of the Sahara Le Breton met a man who, on the surface at least, appeared to see even more quickly than the majority of negro kings and Arab chiefs he had come in contact with, the advantages attached to being under the shadow of the French flag.

It would be difficult to say where the Sultan Casim Ammeh came from. He appeared one afternoon riding like a madman out of the blazing distance; a picturesque figure in his flowing white burnoose, sitting his black stallion like a centaur.

He was a young man, perhaps about twenty-four, of medium height, lean and lithe and brown, with fierce black eyes and a cruel mouth: the hereditary ruler of that portion of the Sahara. His capital was a walled city that, so far, had not been visited by any European. In his way he was a man of great wealth, and he added to that wealth by frequent marauding expeditions and slave-dealing.

With a slight smile he listened to all the Frenchman had to say. Already he had heard of France—a great Power, creeping slowly onwards—and he wondered whether he was strong enough to oppose it, or whether the wiser plan might not be just to rest secure under the shadow of its distant wing, and under its protection continue his wild, marauding life as usual.

As he sat with Colonel Le Breton in the latter's tent, something happened which caused the Sultan Casim Ammeh to make up his mind very quickly.

It was late afternoon. From the open flap of the tent an endless, rolling expanse of sand showed, with here and there a knot of coarse, twisted grass, a dwarfed shrub, or a flare of red-flowered, distorted cacti. The French officer's camp was pitched by an oasis; a little group of date palms, where a spring bubbled among brown rocks, bringing an abundance of grass and herbs where horses and camels browsed.

As the two men sat talking, a soft voice said unexpectedly:

"Oh, Raoul, I'd no idea you had a visitor!"

All at once a girl had appeared in the entrance of the tent. She was small and slim, with two thick plaits of golden-brown hair reaching to her knees; a beautiful girl of about eighteen, with wide grey eyes and a creamy white skin.

Her voice brought Le Breton to his feet.

"What is it, Annette?" he asked.

"I thought—I'll come later," she said; the blushes mounting to her cheeks.

The Sultan Casim Ammeh got to his feet also. Not out of any sense of deference; he had none where women were concerned, but drawn there by the beauty of the girl.

"You needn't mind what you say in front of this man," her husband remarked. "He doesn't understand a word of French.

"I'll tell you later, Raoul, when there's nobody here." She would have gone, but Le Breton called her forward and, in Arabic, introduced her to his visitor.

Annette bowed to the lean, lithe, brown man in the white burnoose, and her eyes dropped

under the fierce admiration in his.

The Sultan looked at her, all the time wondering why the white man was such a fool as to let this priceless pearl, this jewel among women, go unveiled, and allow the eyes of strange men to rest upon her with desire and longing.

Annette said she was pleased to meet him: a message her husband translated, and which brought a fierce smile to the young Sultan's face and made the wild desire in his savage heart suddenly blossom into plans.

So she, this houri from Paradise, was pleased to meet him! This fair flower from a far land! But not so pleased as he was to meet *her*.

And her husband let her say such things to strange men! What a fool the man was! Not worthy of this houri! He could not appreciate the treasure he possessed. Not as he, the Sultan, would, were she his.

Casim Ammeh despised Colonel Le Breton utterly.

As soon as the introduction was over, Annette would have gone.

"Don't run away, my pet," her husband said fondly. "I shall soon have finished."

But the girl went, anxious to get away from the Arab chief who watched her with such covetous desire and smouldering passion in his fierce black eyes.

When she had gone, the two men seated themselves again. But the Sultan gave no thought to the business in hand. He only wanted one thing now—the girl who had just gone from the tent.

Soon after Annette's departure he left, promising to visit Le Breton again within the course of a few days.

He kept his word.

Five days later he swept out of the desert with a horde of wild horsemen. And in less than half an hour there was only one of Raoul Le Breton's ill-fated expedition left alive.

The next day, with Annette limp across his saddle, the Sultan Casim Ammeh set off with his following to his desert stronghold.

CHAPTER II

The city of El-Ammeh lies about a hundred miles within the Sahara proper. It is a walled town of Moorish aspect, built of brown rock and baked mud. Within the walls is a tangle of narrow, twisted, squalid lanes—a jumble of flat-roofed houses, practically devoid of windows on the sides overlooking the streets. Here and there a minaret towers, and glimpses of strange trees can be seen peeping over walled gardens.

Along one side stands a domed palace; a straggling place, with horse-shoe arches, stone galleries and terraces. In front of it a blue lake spreads, surrounded by fertile gardens and groves of fruit trees. And the whole is encircled by the desert.

Annette Le Breton remembered nothing of her journey to El-Ammeh. Her life was a nightmare of horror that held nothing but her husband's murderer, whom she could not escape from. She was taken to the palace, and placed in the apartment reserved for the Sultan's favourite. A big room with walls and floor of gold mosaic, furnished with ottomans, rugs and cushions, and little tables and stools of carved sandalwood inlaid with ivory and silver.

On one side of the apartment a series of archways opened on a screened and fretted gallery, at the end of which a flight of wide, shallow steps led down into a walled garden, a dream of roses.

But it was weeks before Annette knew anything of this.

All day long she lay, broken and suffering, on one of the ottomans, and dark-faced women fawned upon her, saying words she could not understand; women who looked at her queerly, jealously, and talked about her among themselves.

A strange girl, this new fancy of the Sultan's! Who wanted none of the things he piled upon her—not even his love. A girl who looked as though life were a mirage; as if she moved in bad dreams,—a listless girl, beautiful beyond any yet seen in the harem, who seemed to have neither idea nor appreciation of the honour that was hers; who lay all day in silence, her only language

tears. Tears that even the Sultan could not charm away.

In fact they seemed to fall more quickly and hopelessly when he came to see her.

Yet he did everything that mortal man could do to comfort her.

Jewels were showered upon her; jewels she refused to wear, to look at even; casting them from her with weak, angry hands, when her women would have decked her with them for her master's coming.

And never before were so many musicians, singers, dancers, and conjurors sent to the women's apartments. Hardly a day passed without bringing some such form of diversion; or merchants with rare silks, perfumes and ostrich feathers. The harem had never had such a perpetual round of amusements.

All for this new slave-girl. And she refused to be either amused or interested. She would look neither at the goods nor the entertainers. She just stayed with her face turned towards the wall and wept.

One day when the Sultan came to the harem to visit his new favourite, some of the older women drew him aside and whispered with him.

They suspected they had found a reason for the girl's strange behaviour.

Their words sent the Sultan from the big hall of the harem to the gilded chamber set aside for Annette, with hope in his savage heart, and left him looking down at her with a touch of tenderness on his cruel face.

He laid a dark hand on the girl, caressing her fondly.

"Give me a son, my pearl," he whispered. "Then my cup will be full indeed."

Annette shuddered at his touch.

She had no idea what he said. He and his language were beyond her.

As the long weeks ground out their slow and dreary course, Annette grew to suspect what her attendants now knew.

The weeks became months and Annette languished in her captor's palace; her only respite the times he was away on some marauding expedition. He loved rapine and murder, and was never happy unless dabbling in blood. Sometimes he was away for weeks together, killing and stealing, bringing slaves for the slave-market of his city, and fresh women for his harem.

During one of his absences Annette's baby arrived.

The child came a week or so before the women had expected it.

"The girl has wept so much," they said, "that her son has come before his time, to see what his mother's tears are about. And now, if Allah is kind, let us hope the child will dry them."

For a fortnight Annette was too ill to know even that she had a son.

When the baby was brought to her, she hardly dared look at it, not knowing what horror might have come from those ghastly nights spent with the Sultan Casim Ammeh.

But when she looked, it was not his face, dark and cruel, that looked back at her.

In miniature, she saw the face of Raoul Le Breton!

This son of hers did not owe his life to the Sultan. He was a legacy from her murdered husband. Something that belonged to her lost life.

With a wild sob of joy, Annette held out weak arms for her baby. Weeping she strained the mite to her breast, baptizing it with her tears. Tears of happiness this time.

Light and love had come into her life again. For Raoul was not dead. He had come back to her. Weak and tiny he lay upon her heart, hers to love and cherish.

She was lying on her couch one day, too absorbed in tracing out each one of her dead lover's features in the tiny face pillowed on her breast, to notice what was happening, when the voice she dreaded said in a fierce, fond manner:

"So, Pearl of my Heart, you love my son, even if you hate me."

Annette did not know what the Sultan said. But she held her child closer, watching its father's murderer with fear and loathing; afraid that he might put his dark, defiling hands upon her treasure.

But he did not attempt to touch either her or the child.

Seating himself at her side, he stayed watching her, tenderness on his cruel face, for the first time having pity on her weakness. The weakness of the woman who had given him the one thing his savage heart craved for, and which, until now, had been denied him—a son.

CHAPTER III

By the time Annette knew enough Arabic to make herself understood, and to understand what was said around her, she realized that if the Sultan learnt her boy was not his, this one joy of her tragic life would be taken from her. He would murder the son as he had murdered the father.

As the baby grew, her one idea was to keep its true parentage from her savage captor. If she could have done so, she would have kept his dark, blood-stained hands from touching her son. But this was impossible. When in El-Ammeh, the Sultan came every day to see the child, often sitting with it in his arms, watching it with an air of proud possession.

And fearsomely Annette would watch him, wondering why he never suspected. But he was too eaten up with his own desire for a son ever to give a thought to her dead husband.

The baby was given the name of Casim Ammeh. But Annette always called her boy by another name, "Raoul Le Breton."

And at the age of five he said to her:

"Why do you always call me 'Raoul,' not 'Casim,' as my father does?"

His father!

Annette's heart ached. His father had been dead these long years, murdered by the man her son now called by that name.

"The Sultan and myself are of different races," she said. "He calls you by his name. I, by one of my own choosing, Raoul Le Breton."

"Why do you always say 'the Sultan,' and never 'your father'?"

Sadly she smiled at her small questioner.

"Some day, my son, I'll tell you. When you are a man and understand things."

At five, Raoul Le Breton was a big, handsome boy, spoilt and pampered by the whole harem, and spoilt most of all by the man he proudly called "Father."

The Sultan in his flowing white robes, with his half-tamed horses, his horde of wild followers and barbaric splendour, was a picturesque figure, one to capture any brave boy's heart.

Annette did all she could to counteract her captor's influence, but, as the child grew, he was more with the Sultan than with her. What was more, he craved for men's company.

He soon tired of the amusements the harem could offer. He much preferred to be on his own horse, galloping with the Sultan or some of his men along the desert tracks about the city. And knowing Annette loved her son, and hated him, despite their years together, the Sultan did all he could to win the boy's affection and wean him from his mother.

He might have succeeded, except for one thing. The boy loved learning, and to hear of the great world that his mother came from; a world that seemed as remote from El-Ammeh as the paradise his Moslem teachers spoke of.

The Sultan was not averse to the mother teaching her son. He was a shrewd man, if savage and cruel. And that France from where the girl came was growing ever more powerful. It would be to the boy's advantage to learn all the arts and cunning of his mother's people.

The Sultan Casim gave Annette but one present that she took from him willingly; a sandalwood bureau with shelves and drawers and little sliding panels, an elaborately carved and handsome piece of furniture; stocked with slate and pencil, paper, quills and ink—such as the priests at the mosques used themselves. For this strange girl who hated him had more learning than all the priests put together.

But, for all that, the youngster had to sit at their feet at appointed times, and be taught all the Sultan had ever been taught, to read and write, and recite scraps from the Koran, and to be a

true Moslem.

Annette hated this wild, profligate religion, and into her son she tried to instil her own Roman Catholic faith.

But at eight years, although he learnt with avidity all her other teachings, he laughed at her religion.

"Yours is a woman's religion, little mother," he said one day. "It's all right for you—a religion that prays to a woman, but it is not suitable for men. Give me my father's religion. A religion where men rule. In that, one does not bow the knee to a woman. A good religion, my father's, fierce and strong, of love and fighting, not a puling thing where one prays to a woman and a babe. No, little mother, keep your religion, and be happy with it. I prefer my father's and my own."

"Raoul, my son, you mustn't forget the white side when you are with the Sultan," she said gently, a touch of chiding in her sad voice.

The boy looked at her speculatively, knowing already that his mother had no affection for the man he called "father."

"You should be proud, not sorry, to be the Sultan's wife," he remarked. "It is an honour for any woman to be loved by the Sultan. Even a woman as lovely and learned as you, little mother."

At twenty-seven Annette was even more beautiful than on the day the Sultan Casim Ammeh first saw her; but more fragile and ethereal. Although her captor's fancy often strayed to other women, he never lost his passion for her.

"Oh, my boy, you don't understand," she said sadly. "When you are a man I'll tell you, and then perhaps you'll think differently."

"When I am a man, I shall be like my father, but richer and more powerful, because I shall have more knowledge, thanks to you, my mother."

"I hope you will be like your father, Raoul, I ask for nothing better."

When her boy reached manhood Annette intended to tell him the truth, and to leave him to deal with the situation as he would.

At ten years, her son had as much general knowledge as the average French boy of his age, thanks to his mother's teachings. And he knew, too, a great deal more than she taught him.

He was a big lad for his years, handsome and quick-tempered, the Sultan's acknowledged heir. On every side there were people anxious to spoil him and curry favour with him. In the scented, sensual atmosphere of the harem, he learnt things his mother would have kept from him. But she was powerless among so many, all ready to flatter her boy and gain his good graces.

"When I grow up," he said to her one day, "I shall have a hundred wives, like my father."

"In the France I come from a man has but one. You must always remember that, Raoul."

"Only one! Then, mother, I call that a poor country. How can a man be satisfied with one woman? My father has promised me wives of my own when I am sixteen."

It seemed to Annette that in this profligate atmosphere her boy was drifting further and further away from her and his own nation; becoming daily more akin to the barbaric people around him.

Every day she felt she must tell him the truth. Yet every day she put it off. For her boy was only a child still, and in his anger and rage he would not be able to keep his knowledge from the Sultan; then evil would befall him.

It was written that many years were to pass before Raoul Le Breton learnt the truth about himself.

Soon after this episode the Sultan took the boy with him on some thieving expedition.

Whilst they were away, one of the deadly epidemics that occasionally visited El-Ammeh swept through the city, claiming among its many victims Annette Le Breton.

CHAPTER IV

With the passing years, the Sultan Casim Ammeh increased in wealth and power. He gave very little thought to France now. It was a vague power, too far away to trouble him, and only once had it really sent a feeler in his direction; that ill-fated expedition headed by Colonel Le Breton.

Emboldened by his success, he had extended his marauding. But, if he heard nothing more of France, France occasionally heard of him, in the form of complaints from various parts of the Protectorate, from other chiefs whose territory he had raided. The Government knew his name but it had no idea where he came from.

On one occasion the Sultan and his robber horde swept down to within a hundred miles of St. Louis. But there he met with a severe defeat. He retired to his desert stronghold, deciding not to adventure in that direction again. And he owed his defeat to strange guns such as had not come into his life before. Guns that fired not a couple of shots, but a whole volley; an endless fusillade that even his wild warriors could not face.

He went back to El-Ammeh determined to get hold of some of those wonderful guns.

Obviously it was out of the question to attack St. Louis where they came from. If they were to be obtained, they must be searched for in some other direction.

Sore with defeat, he brooded on the strange guns. And very often he talked of them to the boy he called his son.

Raoul Le Breton was about thirteen when the Sultan met with his first rebuff at the hands of France. And he had the welfare and prestige of the desert kingdom at heart, and was as anxious as the Sultan to possess this new weapon.

Far away in the south was the outpost of another European power; just a handful of white men struggling to keep a hold on a country an indifferent and short-sighted government was inclined to let slip.

Round and about the River Gambia the British had a footing. Among the men most determined to keep a hold on this strip of territory was Captain George Barclay.

He was a man of about twenty-eight, of medium height and wiry make, with a thin face and steady grey eyes where tragedy lurked. His confrères said that Barclay had no interests outside of his work. But they were wrong.

He had one thing that was more to him than his own life; a tiny, velvety-eyed, golden-haired daughter.

He had come out to North-West Africa in quest of forgetfulness.

At twenty-three, although he was only a penniless lieutenant, the beauty of the London season, the prospective heiress of millions, had thought well to marry him. It was a runaway match. For his sake Pansy Carrington had risked losing both wealth and position. She was only nineteen, and her guardian and godfather, whose acknowledged heiress she was, had disapproved of George Barclay; gossip said because he was madly in love with her himself, although he was nearly thirty years her senior.

However, whether this was so or not, Henry Langham had forgiven the girl. He had taken her back into his good graces, and, in due course, had become godfather to the second Pansy. "Grand-godfather," the child called him as soon as she could talk.

It had seemed to George Barclay that no man's life could be happier than his. Then, without any warning, tragedy came upon him after five years of bliss. For one day his girl-wife was brought back to him dead, the result of an accident in the hunting-field.

With her death all light had gone out of his life. To escape from himself he had gone out to Gambia; and his tiny daughter now lived, as her mother had lived before her, with her godfather, Henry Langham.

But it was not of his daughter Barclay was thinking at that moment; other matters occupied his mind.

He stood on the roof of a little stone fort, gazing at the landscape in a speculative manner.

The building itself consisted of four rooms, set on a platform of rock some three feet from the ground. All the windows were small, and high up and barred. One room had no communication with the others: it was a sort of guardroom entered by a heavy wooden door. To the other three rooms one solid door gave entry, and from one of them a ladder and trap-door led up to the roof which had battlements around it.

Below was a large compound, rudely stockaded, in which half a dozen native huts were built.

In that part of Gambia Captain Barclay represented the British Government. He had to administer justice and keep the peace, and in this task he was aided by a white subaltern, twenty

Hausa soldiers, and a couple of maxim guns.

On three sides of the little British outpost an endless expanse of forest showed, with white mist curling like smoke about it. On the fourth was a wide shallow valley, with dwarf cliffs on either side, alive with dog-faced baboons. The valley was patched with swamps and lakes, and through it a river wended an erratic course, its banks heavily fringed with reeds and mimosa trees; a valley from which, with approaching evening, a stream of miasma rose.

Barclay's gaze, however, never strayed in the direction of the shallow valley.

He looked to the north.

A week or so ago word had come through that a notorious raider was on the move; a man whom the French Government had been endeavouring to catch for the last five years or more. What he was doing so far south as Gambia, the district officer did not know. But he knew he was there.

Only the previous day news had come that one of the villages within his, Barclay's, jurisdiction had been practically wiped out. A similar fate might easily fall to the lot of the British outpost, considering that the Arab chief's force outnumbered Barclay's ten to one.

From the roof of his quarters the Englishman saw the sun set. It seemed to sink and drown in a lake of orange that lay like a blazing furnace on the horizon; a lake that spread and scattered when the sun disappeared, drifting off in islands of clouds, gold, rose, mauve and vivid red, sailing slowly across a tense blue sky, getting ever thinner and more ragged, until night came suddenly and swallowed up their tattered remains.

A dense, purple darkness fell upon the land, soft and velvety, that reminded Barclay of his little daughter's eyes. And in a vault as darkly purple, a host of great stars flashed. Away in the forest an owl hooted. From the wide valley came the coughing roar of a leopard. Every now and again some night bird passed, a vague shadow in the darkness. In silver showers the fireflies danced in the thick, hot air. Down in the compound glow-worms showed, looking like a lot of smouldering cigarette ends cast carelessly aside.

Upon the roof, with gaze fixed on the misty, baffling darkness that soughed and hissed around him, Barclay stayed, until the gong took him down to dinner.

There his junior waited, a round-faced youngster of about nineteen.

The meal was a poor repast of tinned soup, hashed tinned beef, yams and coffee, all badly cooked and indifferently served.

During the course of the meal the youngster remarked:

"What a joke if we nabbed the Sultan Casim Ammeh, or whatever he calls himself, and went one better than the French johnnies."

"It would be more than a joke. It would be a jolly good riddance," Barclay responded.

"It's queer nobody knowing where he really comes from."

"You may be sure he doesn't play his tricks anywhere near his own headquarters. More likely than not, he and his cut-throat lot start out disguised as peaceful merchants, in separate bands, and join up when they reach the seat of operations. There are vast tracts of Senegal practically unexplored. They would give endless cover to one of his kidney."

"If you had the luck to bag him, what should you do?"

"Shoot him straight off, knowing the earth was well rid of a villain."

"But what's his idea in coming as far south as this? He's never been heard of on this side of the Senegal River before."

"Plunder. Guns, most likely. He's heard we're none too welcome, and hardly settled here, and thinks we shall prove an easy prey."

However, the little English force was not to prove quite the easy prey the Sultan had imagined when he came south in quest of new weapons.

The next night, without any warning, he attacked Barclay's headquarters.

He struck at an hour when all was darkest; not with his usual swoop of wild horsemen, but stealthily.

Unchallenged and unmolested, he and his following scaled the stockade and crept towards the tiny fort, vague shadows moving silently in the purple darkness.

But each night Barclay had laid a trap for his expected foe.

He knew the enemy force outnumbered his, and that his little handful could be starved out within a week, if the Arab chief wanted to make a siege of it.

Barclay had no intention of letting this come to pass.

He did a bold thing.

Each night, after dark, the little British garrison divided into three units. A Hausa sergeant and fifteen men were left on the roof of the fort. Barclay, two soldiers and one maxim gun, his junior, with two more soldiers and the other gun, crept out from the place, and hid in the dense undergrowth, at different points outside of the stockade; first removing a plank here and there in the enclosure to enable them to work their guns through.

Barclay's ruse succeeded.

Whilst the Sultan and his followers were busy trying to scale the fort and get at the handful of men peppering at them from its roof, without any warning there came an unexpected fusillade from the rear. He turned and attacked in that direction, only to find a further fusillade pouring in on him from another point.

The Sultan sensed that he had fallen into a trap; that he was surrounded on all sides. Sore and furious he turned to go, more quickly than he had come. But before he had reached the stockade, the world slipped from him suddenly.

CHAPTER V

When the skirmish was over, Barclay and his junior, with half a dozen Hausas and a lantern or two, made a round of the compound, counting the dead and attending to the wounded.

His own garrison was practically unscathed, but his guns had played grim havoc with the attacking party; fully fifty dead and wounded lay within the stockade.

Barclay went about his task cautiously. He knew Arabs and their little ways. Giving no quarter themselves, they expected none, and would sham death and then stab those who came to succour them.

Among the prisoners was a lean, lithe man of about forty, who appeared more stunned than hurt from a bullet that had grazed his forehead. Barclay came across the wounded man just when the latter was coming back to consciousness. Although in dress he differed in no way from the rest of his following, the knives in his belt were heavily jewelled, and gems flashed on his brown fingers.

By the light of a lantern the Englishman scanned him, noting his array of jewels and his cruel, arrogant, commanding face, the face of a savage leader.

"My son," he said to the subaltern, "I believe your joke has come to pass."

"My joke!" the youngster repeated blankly.

Then the light of understanding came to his face.

"You don't mean to say this cruel-looking cuss is the Sultan Casim Ammeh!"

"I'd be surprised to hear he wasn't," Barclay responded.

Suspicious of his man, and knowing him to be no more than stunned, the captain had him handcuffed and locked up in one of the inner rooms of the fort.

When the wounded had been attended to they were left in the guardroom, and the little garrison retired once more within the fort.

The enemy had had such a thorough beating that Barclay did not expect another attack. For all that, he was taking no risks.

Just before daybreak, when the world was a place of curling white mist and greyness, there came a stampede of horses. And, above the thunder of hoofs, the wild Mohammedan war-cry.

"Deen! Deen Muhammed!"

That wild swoop and yell was the Sultan's usual way of attacking.

"It seems we didn't get our man last night," Barclay remarked, as the guns were trained in

the direction of the sound. "According to report, this is his usual method of attack."

Out of the greyness of approaching morning a mêlée of wild horsemen appeared. Their leader was hardly the man Barclay had pictured to himself as the blood-stained Arab chief, but a smooth-faced youth in white burnoose, mounted on a huge black stallion.

More than this Barclay did not wait to see. He opened fire on the massed horsemen, his guns playing deadly havoc. Within a few minutes their ranks broke. In wild disorder they turned and stampeded back, soon to be lost in the screening mist.

"I don't think they'll face another dose," the junior remarked.

However, he was wrong.

Presently from out of the fog came the same wild war-cry and the thunder of hoofs. There was another charge with sadly depleted numbers.

For reckless courage Barclay had never seen anything to equal their youthful leader. Again and again he rallied his men and brought them on, until finally, with only about a dozen men, he swept through the deadly zone and on towards the fort.

In the very teeth of the Maxims his black horse literally flew over the high stockade. But the youngster was the only one who faced the guns. His following broke up and turned back under the fierce fusillade.

Although the leader got over the stockade alive, his horse did not. It crashed and fell dead beneath him. With a quick side spring—a marvellous piece of horsemanship—he avoided injury and, with drawn sword, rushed on towards the little fort.

The Hausas would have shot down the reckless youngster, but Barclay stopped them.

"We don't make war on children," he said in their dialect.

A closer inspection showed the leader of the Arab horde to be hardly more than a child; a handsome boy of about fourteen who, suddenly, realising that his followers had deserted him, now stood gazing round in a fierce, thwarted fashion.

On finding he was alone he did not retreat, although Barclay gave him every opportunity. Instead, he stood his ground and hurled a challenge in Arabic at the men clustered on the top of the fort.

Since there was no reply to that, he shouted again, this time in French.

"Who and what is the youngster?" Barclay asked. "He doesn't look any more Arabian than I do. And now he's yelling at us in pure Parisian French."

However, nobody could find any reply. So Barclay descended alone to interview the one remaining member of the Sultan Casim's forces.

He was hardly out in the compound before he wished he had not gone.

He had just time to draw his sword when the boy fell upon him.

Barclay was a skilled duellist, but in this wild youth from the desert he met his match.

For all his finesse and superior height and weight, the Englishman had his cheek laid open and his arm ripped up in the course of a minute. Things would have gone badly with him, except that a shot from his junior put the boy's sword arm out of action.

With a rattle his weapon fell to the ground, his arm useless at his side.

But, even then, there was no plea for mercy. With a proud gesture he threw up his head, facing his enemy in arrogant fashion.

"Kill me," he said in French, "but let my father live."

"Who is your father?" Barclay asked, as with a handkerchief he tried to stop the blood gushing from his cheek.

"The Sultan Casim Ammeh," the boy answered proudly.

The reply told Barclay that the man he had under lock and key really was the marauding Arab chief.

He scanned the boy closely.

Except for his coal-black hair and eyes and fierce, arrogant expression, there was no resemblance between father and son. If he had not heard to the contrary, he would have said the boy was as French as the language he spoke.

"I've no intention of killing *you*," Barclay remarked. "On the contrary, young man, I'm going to have your arm set and bound up before you bleed to death."

The blood was dripping from the boy's fingers, making a pool on the ground. But he paid no heed to his own hurt. All his thoughts were for the Sultan Casim.

"I'm not asking mercy for myself, but for my father," he said haughtily.

"I'm afraid that's useless, considering two Governments have condemned him."

"You will dare to kill him?"

Barclay said nothing. But his very silence was ominous.

A dazed, incredulous look crossed the boy's face.

As the Englishman watched him it seemed that, blood-stained murderer as the Sultan was, at least this big, handsome son of his loved him.

Like one stunned, the youngster submitted to being led into the fort, where his arm was set and his wounds bound up.

When this was done he said to Barclay:

"I'll give you wealth in jewels that will amount to three hundred thousand francs in French money if you will let my father go free and take my life instead."

Barclay made no reply.

"You will murder my father?" the boy went on, dreading the worst from Barclay's silence.

The word made the Englishman wince. For it did seem like murder with this fierce, handsome boy pleading desperately for his father's life.

Again he said nothing.

To escape from the sight of the pain and anguish his silent verdict had aroused, Barclay went from the room, leaving the youngster in the charge of a couple of soldiers.

About noon that day, at the hands of the British Government, the Sultan Casim Ammeh met a well-deserved end. He met it bravely, (refusing to be blindfolded), with a slight, cruel smile facing the guns levelled at him.

It was evening before Barclay summoned up enough courage to meet his youthful prisoner. And when he did, it seemed he had never seen so much concentrated hatred on any face.

"So, you shot my father?" the boy said in a slow, savage manner.

Barclay had not come to discuss the dead malefactor. He wanted to learn more about the son—where he had learnt his excellent French; how he came to differ so in appearance from the Arab chief and his wild following.

"Your father has paid the penalty of his crimes," he said quietly.

"And you shall pay the penalty of yours!" the boy cried passionately; "for I shall kill you as you have killed my father. Your daughters I shall sell as slaves. Your sons shall toil in chains in my city. Your wives shall become the bondswomen of my servants. Remember, white man, for I do not speak lightly. I will be avenged. I, Casim Ammeh, whose father you have thought well to murder!"

The savage threats of a wild, heart-broken boy did not trouble George Barclay much. But his mind did go to his tiny four-year-old daughter, and he was glad she was safe in England and not within reach of this savage lad.

At that moment he was more worried about his youthful captive than the latter's wild threats.

He did not want to make a criminal of the boy; for, obviously, whatever wrong he had done was done under the influence of his savage father. And there looked to be the makings of a fine man in him, if only he had good guidance.

Barclay decided to put the case before the French Government, together with a suggestion of his own—that the youngster should be sent somewhere where he could be brought up to be of use to the country, not a constant thorn in its flesh, as his father had been.

But Captain Barclay need not have troubled himself with making plans for the future of the youthful Sultan of El-Ammeh, for that night the boy escaped, and his future was left in his own hands.

CHAPTER VI

After some two years out in Gambia, George Barclay returned to England. He returned with a scar across his right cheek.

That scar was the first thing his little daughter remarked upon when the excitement of reunion had died down.

Perched on his knee, she touched it with gentle little fingers and kissed it with soft lips.

"Who has hurt my nice new Daddy?" she asked distressfully.

Then there followed the story of the youthful Sultan Casim Ammeh.

"Oh, what a wicked boy!" she exclaimed.

Then she glanced across at her godfather who was sitting near.

"Isn't he a bad, naughty boy, Grand-godfather, to want to kill my Daddy and sell me as a slave?"

Henry Langham had listened to the story with interest, and very heartily he agreed with her.

"I shall tell Bobby," the little girl went on indignantly, "and he'll go and kill the Sultan Casim Ammeh."

"Who's Bobby?" her father asked.

"My sweetheart. Master Robert Cameron."

"So in my absence I've been cut out, have I?" her father said teasingly. "I'm dreadfully jealous."

But Pansy snuggled closer to him, and her arms went round his neck in a tight hug.

"There'll never be anyone as nice as my Daddy," she whispered.

George Barclay held the tiny girl closer, kissing the golden head.

Often during his months in England, Pansy would scramble on his knee and say:

"Daddy, tell me the story of Casim Ammeh. That naughty boy who hurt your poor face."

To Pansy it was some new Arabian Nights, vastly interesting because her father was one of the principal characters. Although she had heard it quite fifty times, she was ready to hear it quite fifty times more.

"But, my darling, you've heard it scores of times," Barclay said one day.

For all that he told the story again.

Quietly she listened until the end was reached. Then she said:

"I don't like him. Not one little bit. Do you like him, Daddy?"

"To tell you the truth, Pansy, I did like him. He was a very brave boy."

"I shall never like him, because he hurt you," she said firmly, her little flower-like face set and determined.

"Well, my girlie, you're never likely to meet him, so it won't make much difference to him whether you like him or not."

But—in the Book of Fate it was written otherwise.

CHAPTER VII

Somewhere off the Boulevard St. Michel there is a cabaret. The big dancing hall has red walls painted with yellow shooting stars, and, overhead, electric lights blaze under red and

yellow shades. There is a bar at one end, and several little tables for the patrons' use when they tire of dancing. In the evenings a band, in seedy, red uniforms with brass buttons, fills, with a crash of sound, an atmosphere laden with patchouli and cigarette smoke, and waiters, in still more seedy dress-suits, attend to the tables. Never at any time is the gathering select, and generally there are quite a few foreigners of all colours present.

One night, the most noticeable among the patrons was an Englishman, well-groomed and tailored, and a big youth of about eighteen in a flowing white burnoose.

They were in no way connected with each other, but chance, in the shape of their female companions, had brought them to adjacent tables.

The girl with the youngster was very pretty in a hard, metallic way, with the white face and vivid red lips of the Parisienne, and brown eyes, bright and polished-looking, that were about as expressionless as pebbles. She was attired in a cheap, black evening dress, cut very low, and about her plump throat was a coral necklace. Her hair was elaborately dressed, and her shoes, although well worn, were tidy.

By day, Marie Hamon earned a meagre living for herself in a florist's shop. At night, she added to her earnings in the recognized way of quite a few of the working girls of Paris. And this particular cabaret was one of her hunting grounds.

As Marie sat there "making eyes" at the youth in the white burnoose, the man at the next table remarked in French, in an audible and disgusted tone:

"Look at that girl there making up to that young nigger. A beastly spectacle, I call it."

Before his companion had time to reply the youth was up, his black eyes flashing, and he grasped the Englishman's shoulder in an angry, indignant fashion.

"I am no nigger!" he cried. "I'm the Sultan Casim Ammeh."

"I don't care a damn who you are so long as you keep your black paws off me!"

The youth's hands were not black, but deeply bronzed like his face, which looked darker than it really was against the whiteness of his hood.

"Take back that word," he said savagely, "or, by Allah, it shall be wiped out in blood!"

He drew his knife. The girls screamed. Excited waiters rushed towards the table. The mixed company stopped dancing and pressed forward to watch what looked like the beginning of a royal row. Such incidents were by no means unusual in the cabaret.

Only the Englishman remained calm. He grasped his opponent's wrist quickly.

"No, you don't," he said. "You damned niggers seem to think you own the world nowadays."

There was a brief scuffle. But the Englishman was big and heavy, and half a dozen waiters were hanging on to the enraged and insulted youth. His knife was wrested from his hand. He was hustled this way and that; and, finally, worsted and smouldering, he retired, to be led to another and more distant table by his female companion.

The episode was over in a couple of minutes. Disappointed at the lack of bloodshed, the spectators returned to their dancing. Relieved, the waiters went back to their various spheres. The Englishman seated himself again as if nothing had happened. At a distant table the youth sat and glowered at him.

"Who is that man?" he asked presently, pointing a lean forefinger at his late opponent.

Marie shrugged her plump shoulders.

"I've never seen him here before. He looks to me like an Englishman."

With renewed interest the youth studied the distant figure, hate smouldering in his black eyes.

So he was one of the nation who had murdered his father! This man who had insulted him.

But, for all his hatred of the Englishman, reluctantly he admired his coolness and his clothes.

The world had enlarged for Annette Le Breton's son since his first experience with the English.

On escaping from Barclay, with the remaining handful of the defunct Sultan's following, he had returned to El-Ammeh, at the age of fourteen its recognised ruler.

The boy was not lacking in sense. Defeat at the hands of both British and French made him decide to give up what had been the late Sultan's chief source of income—marauding. With a wisdom beyond his years, Casim Ammeh, as he was now always called, decided to go in for

trading; and before many years had passed he saw it was a better paying game than marauding, despite its lack of excitement.

Then he extended his operations.

There were always caravans coming to his desert city, and a great demand for articles that came from the Europe his mother had told him of.

With one or two of his principal merchants he went down to St. Louis, but he did not go as the Sultan Casim Ammeh; that name was too well known to the French Government. Instead, he went under the name his mother used to call him, Raoul Le Breton. And under that name he opened a store in St. Louis.

There was a new generation in the town since his real father's day, and the name roused no comment. It was an ordinary French one. In St. Louis there were quite a few half-breed French-Arabs, as the youth supposed himself to be, living and trading under European names.

His business ventures were so successful that he opened several more stores at various points between St. Louis and his own capital; but the whereabouts of his own city he did not divulge to strangers.

At sixteen it had seemed to the boy that St. Louis was the hub of the universe; but at eighteen a craving that amounted to nostalgia drove him further afield—to Paris.

And he went in Arabian garments, for he was intensely proud of his sultanship and the desert kingdom he ruled with undisputed sway.

To his surprise, he felt wonderfully at home in his mother's city. It did not feel as strange as St. Louis had felt, but more as if he had once lived there and had forgotten about it.

He had been a couple of days in Paris, wandering at will, when on the second evening his wanderings had brought him in contact with Marie Hamon. She was by no means the first of her sort to accost him, but she was the first he had condescended to take any notice of. She had smiled at him as, aloof and haughty, he had stalked along the Boulevard St. Michel, and had fallen into step beside him. He had looked at her in a peculiar manner that was half amusement, half contempt, but he had not shaken her off.

She had suggested they should have dinner together, and he had fallen in with her suggestion; not exactly with alacrity, but as if he wanted to study the girl further. For all her plump prettiness and profession, there was a shrewd, sensible air about her. Afterwards, at her instigation, they had repaired to the cabaret.

As the youth continued to scowl at the distant Englishman, with the idea of preventing further trouble, Marie tried to get his mind on other matters.

"Casim, let's have a dance?" she suggested.

"I can afford to pay for hired dancers, so why should I posture for the benefit of others?" he asked scornfully.

She tittered.

"Well, get me another drink instead, then."

He beckoned a waiter and gave a curt order. However, he did not touch the cheap champagne himself. Instead, he kept strictly to coffee.

"Have a drop of cognac in it to cheer you up a bit," Marie said. "You make me feel as if I were at a funeral."

"I'm a Mohammedan, and strong drink is forbidden."

"You are the limit! I shouldn't quarrel with the good things of this life even if I were a Mohammedan."

"By my religion women have no souls," he replied in a voice that spoke volumes.

But Marie was not easily abashed.

"The lack of a soul doesn't trouble me in the least," she responded lightly. "A pretty body is of greater use to a woman any day. Do you think I'm pretty, Casim?" she finished coquettishly.

"I shouldn't be with you unless you were," he replied, as if her question were an insult to his taste.

For some minutes there was silence. As the girl sipped her champagne she watched her escort in a calculating manner.

"You've got lots of money, haven't you?" she said presently.

"Not as much as I intend to have," he replied.

"But enough to buy me a new frock?" she questioned.

"Fifty, if you want them."

Marie threw her arms around his neck.

"You nice boy!" she cried, kissing him soundly.

He resented her attentions, removing her arms in a none too gentle manner.

"I object to such displays of affection in public," he said, with an air of ruffled dignity.

"Come home with me, then," she suggested.

"Home" to Marie was an attic in a poor street. There Casim Ammeh went, not as a victim to her charms, as she imagined, but seeing in her a means to his own end.

The next morning as he sat at breakfast with the girl—a meagre repast of black coffee and rolls—from somewhere out of his voluminous robes he produced a string of pearls and dangled it before his hostess. Marie looked at them, her mouth round with surprise, for they were real and worth at least ten thousand francs.

"If I give you these, Marie, will you teach me to become a Frenchman?" he asked.

"Won't I just!" she cried enthusiastically, and without hesitation continued: "First of all we must get an apartment. And, *mon Dieu!* yes, you must cut your hair short."

The youth wore his hair long, knotted under his hood in the Arab fashion.

It was three months before Casim Ammeh left Paris. And he left it in a correctly cut English suit and with his smooth, black hair brushed back over his head. In the spick-and-span young man it would have been difficult to recognise the barbaric youth who had come there knowing nothing of civilised life except what his mother had told him and what he had seen in St. Louis; and, what was more, he felt at ease in his new garments, in spite of having worn burnoose and hood all his life.

The day before he left, Marie sat with him in the *salon* of the pretty flat they had occupied since the day they struck their bargain. And she looked very different, too.

Her evening frock was no longer of shabby black. It was one of the several elaborate gowns she now possessed, thanks to the young man. And she no longer wore a string of coral beads about her pretty throat, but the pearl necklace.

Although Marie had taken on the youth as a business speculation, within a few days she loved him passionately. She was loath to let her benefactor go, but all her wiles failed to keep him.

"When you're back in Africa you won't quite forget your little Marie who taught you to be a man, will you?" she whispered tearfully.

Her remarks made him laugh.

"I've had women of my own for at least a year before I met you," he replied.

It seemed to Marie she had never really known the youth who had come to her a savage and was leaving her looking a finished man of the world. He never talked to her of himself or his affairs. Although kind and generous, he demanded swift obedience, and he treated her always as something infinitely inferior to himself.

"Say you love me," she pleaded. "That you'll think of me sometimes."

"Love!" he said contemptuously. "I don't love women. I have them for my pleasure. I'm not one of your white men who spend their days whining at some one woman's feet pleading for favours. Women to me are only toys. Good to look upon, if beautiful, but not so good as horses."

"Oh, you are cruel!" she said, weeping. "And I thought you loved me."

"It is the woman's place to love. There are other things in a man's life."

Marie realised she had never had any hold on her protégé. She had been of use to him, and he had paid her well for it, and there, as far as he was concerned, the matter ended.

Being sensible, she sat up and dried her tears, gathering consolation from the fact that he had been a good speculation. There would be no immediate need to return to the florist's shop when he had gone. In fact, if she liked to sell the necklace, she could buy a business of her own.

"Shall you come to Paris again, Casim?" she asked.

"Oh yes, often. It's a good city, full of beautiful women who are easy to buy."

But he made a reservation to himself.

When he came again he would come under the name his mother used to call him—Raoul Le Breton, and he would come in European clothes. Then the English he hated would not be able to hurl that detestable word "nigger" at him.

CHAPTER VIII

In a select French boarding-school a girl sat reading a letter. She was about fifteen years old, a slender, lovely child, light and graceful, with a cascade of golden curls reaching to her waist, and wide, purple eyes. Her complexion was perfect. She had a vivid little red mouth, impulsive and generous, and a pink rose on each cheek.

On reading the letter, sorrow clouded her face. For it ran:—

"My Dear Little Pansy,

When you get this letter I shall be with your mother. I am leaving you the money she would not have. And it was worth having, you will agree, for it will bring you in about £60,000 a year. The only condition I make is that you take the name your mother refused, your own second name. And my one hope is that you will be more successful in love than I was.

Your affectionate 'grand-godfather,'
Henry Langham."

For some minutes Pansy sat brooding on her godfather's end. The poor old boy had been awfully ill for a long time, and now he was dead.

She blinked back a couple of tears. Then her thoughts went to the fortune she had inherited.

Presently she crossed to the mirror and looked at herself.

"No, old girl," she said to her reflection, "your head isn't turned."

Then she slipped the letter into her pocket and made straight for her great friend and confidante.

To the average eye there was nothing about Miss Grainger to attract a vivid, beautiful girl like Pansy Barclay—Pansy Langham as she would be now. Miss Grainger was middle-aged, grey-haired, thin and depressed-looking: the down-trodden English mistress, with no qualifications except good breeding.

She was poor and friendless, and life had gone hard with her, but these facts were sufficient to fill Pansy's heart with a warmth of generous affection and sympathy.

The girl's principal thought as she went along was not so much of the millions she had just inherited, but that she had always wanted to do something for Miss Grainger, and now she saw a way of doing it.

She entered the room that served the English mistress as bedroom, study and sitting-room, disturbing the latter in the midst of correcting an accumulated pile of exercise books.

"What is it, Pansy?" she asked, smiling at her favourite.

"Miss Grainger, you'll be pleased to hear I'm a millionaire."

The English mistress put down her pen carefully, and then sat staring at the child.

"Really, my dear," she said in a bewildered tone, "you have a way of saying the most surprising things in the most matter-of-fact manner. But, since you're saying it, it must be true."

"That's a character in itself," Pansy remarked, smiling, a smile that brought to view several bewitching dimples.

She produced the letter and handed it to her friend.

The English mistress read it through.

"Sixty thousand pounds a year!" she exclaimed. "It makes my head reel."

"Then yours can't be so firmly screwed on as mine. Mine isn't turned one little bit. I looked at myself in a glass to see."

"But what are you going to do with it all?" the governess asked helplessly.

"Spend it, of course. I take after my father and never shirk an unpleasant duty," she went on, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "To begin with, you, Miss Grainger, are going to be my companion, and we'll have a yacht and go all round the world together, and see and do everything that can be seen and done."

"You'll get married, Pansy," the governess said, looking lovingly at the beautiful flower-like, little face.

"Not much! You dear old antiquated thing. I'm not going to be tied by the leg in that fashion."

"As the English mistress, I must remind you that 'tied by the leg' is slang."

"When you're my companion you'll be talking slang yourself. I'm not so sure I won't make that one of the stipulations," the child went on teasingly. "It'll be such a change for you after thirty years of correcting stupid exercises."

"It will be rather," Miss Grainger said wistfully.

"And I shall come out at seventeen," Pansy went on. "I must start as early as possible if I'm to spend all that money. I shall write and ask my father if I may come out at seventeen. Do you think he'll refuse?"

"No man will ever refuse you anything, Pansy. You're too sweet and good and beautiful."

"And rich. Don't forget the rich. That'll be a tremendous draw."

Miss Grainger smiled at her favourite.

"I hope the man who marries you will pick you for your good heart and generous nature, not your looks and money," she remarked.

"Still harping on that old string, Mrs. Noah. Women don't get married nowadays if they can afford to stay single."

Then the school dinner-bell ringing sent Pansy from the room, but not before she had given an impetuous hug and kiss to her friend.

CHAPTER IX

Paris always has a welcome for millionaires. And it always had a specially warm welcome for Raoul Le Breton, the African merchant-prince. Not only was he fabulously rich, but he was young and remarkably good-looking. It was whispered that he had Arab blood in his veins, but he was wealthy enough for the majority to overlook this drawback.

Like many modern Frenchmen, he dabbled in "le sport." He was a brilliant tennis player, a worthy opponent at billiards, and he kept a stud of race-horses. There was hardly an actress of any repute and with any pretence to youth and beauty who had not had his patronage at one time or the other. Match-making mothers with marriageable daughters laid snares about his feet. With surprising agility he avoided their traps. None of the daughters proved sufficiently tempting to turn him from the broad, smooth way of gay Parisian bachelorhood to the steep and jagged path of matrimony.

Raoul Le Breton was about twenty-five when he paid his sixth visit to Paris. He came now for about three months every year. And he always came in style, with a whole retinue of Arab servants—silent, discreet men who never gossiped about their master. It was whispered also that out in Africa he had a whole harem of his own; moreover, that he was some big chief or the other. In fact, many things were whispered about him, for, on the whole, Paris knew very little except that he was wealthy and wild.

His French acquaintances tried to learn more of his doings through the medium of his own private doctor, a stout Frenchman who accompanied the young millionaire to and fro. But Dr. Edouard refused to gossip about his friend and patron.

In spite of his success, the young Sultan of El-Ammeh had not forgotten George Barclay.

On getting more in touch with civilisation and its ways he had tried to find out the name of the man who was responsible for the death of his supposed father. It was not an easy task. George Barclay had left Gambia five years before Raoul Le Breton set about his investigations. There had been a succession of men since Barclay's time, and the shooting of a native malefactor was not a matter of great note in the annals of a Government.

However, eventually Le Breton managed to establish the identity of the man he looked upon as his father's murderer.

But to trace George Barclay in England proved an even more difficult task than tracing him in Africa.

The Englishman had not stopped long in his country. In search of forgetfulness, he had gone from one place to another, holding posts in various parts of the Empire.

The Sultan Casim Ammeh was twenty-five when he heard that Barclay was in the Malay Straits.

The news came to him in Paris just when he was setting out for an evening's amusement in company with Dr. Edouard. The letter was brought to him as he stood in dress-suit, opera hat in hand, in his own private sitting-room at the palatial hotel he always patronised when in Paris.

On perusing it he turned to his companion, and said, with an air of savage triumph:

"Well, Edouard, I've managed to trace my man at last."

The doctor knew who the man in question was, for he, Edouard, was the Sultan Casim's one confidant. Rather uneasily he glanced at his patron. He wished the young man would be content with money and the many joys and pleasures it could buy—for Casim Ammeh was no longer a strict Mohammedan—and would not be always hankering after vengeance, a vengeance that might embroil him with England and bring his wild and brilliant career to an abrupt close.

"Where is George Barclay?" Edouard asked uneasily.

"In the Straits Settlements."

The doctor experienced a feeling of intense pleasure on hearing Barclay was in so remote a spot.

"It'll be difficult for you to get hold of him there," he remarked, trying to keep out of his voice the relief he was feeling.

"He won't stay there for ever. I've waited eleven years for my vengeance. I can go on waiting a little longer, until Fate thinks well to place him in a more accessible position."

With a savage expression Le Breton turned to a desk. Sitting down, he wrote to his agents telling them to keep him informed of George Barclay's movements.

PART II

CHAPTER I

The harem in the palace of El-Ammeh led into a large hall with carved doors and tiny arabesque windows, fretted and scrolled, with no one spot big enough to squeeze more than a hand through.

Generally speaking, the women of the harem preferred the large hall, where they could gossip among themselves and with their attendant women, to the little rooms that were their own private quarters.

But there was one special apartment that they all in turn had striven after and, in turn, had failed to attain. No one in the harem had seen the room except old Sara, and she had plenty of tales to tell about its magnificence. It was a big gilded chamber, with a ceiling like the sky on a desert night, and great golden, jewelled lamps. There was a wonderful bathroom, a fretted gallery that gave a wide view of the desert, a walled garden full of roses, and, above all, a door that led into the Sultan's private suite. The room had had no occupant since the days of the Sultan's mother, the Lady Annette, the first wife and favourite of his father. And Sara had been

her special slave and attendant.

It could be reached from the harem. At one point behind the silken curtains a narrow stairway led upwards, and ended in a scented, sandalwood door. But the door was always locked, and only the Sultan had the key. It was common harem gossip that in that room he would place the one among his slaves whom he deigned to make his first wife.

Although the law allowed him four, and as many slaves as he fancied, so far he had no legal wife. It was strange, considering he was nearly thirty. But, in many ways, he differed from all the previous Sultans. According to old Sara, it was because his mother belonged to quite another race, and had come from a land as remote from El-Ammeh as Paradise, where the women were all white, a land that the Sultan now visited yearly.

For that land he was starting to-morrow.

He had just been to the harem to say farewell to the half-dozen girls there, departing with promises of new jewels and novelties to please and amuse these toys of his on his return. And now he lingered with his newest slave and favourite, Rayma, the Arab girl he had bought but six weeks ago.



He had come to the harem to say farewell

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Envious glances were cast towards the door behind which the Sultan Casim Ammeh and his new slave, Rayma, took farewell of one another.

One girl more than the others watched the door with hurt, angry, jealous eyes.

She was about twenty-three, with a full figure, a creamy skin, a profusion of long black curls, and great soft, languid eyes—a half-breed Spanish-Moorish girl of the true odalesque type.

Her attire was scanty. A red silk slip draped her from shoulder to knee, held on by ribbon straps; and on her hands and wrists and neck a quantity of barbaric jewelery flashed.

"I pray to Allah that on his travels our Sultan will find some woman he loves better than Rayma," she said, spite and jealousy in her soft voice.

"No, I don't pray that, Leonora," one of her companions remarked. "For *you* took him from *me*, and what am I now? Like you, a scent that has lost its savour; for it is but a shred of love that the Lord Casim has now for me. No; I pray may *he* know what it is to love and be denied, for too easily do women's hearts go to him. And no man values what comes to him cheaply. Our day is done, mine and yours, Leonora, as Rayma's will be when another woman takes his fancy. No, pray as I do, that he may love a woman who has no desire for him, who spurns his love—a woman whose people will not sell her, who is no slave put up for auction, as we were. May his heart ache, as mine has ached. May passion keep him sleepless, with empty arms and craving desire. May love prove to him a mirage that he can see yet never grasp!"

Unconscious of these wishes, the Sultan Casim Ammeh and the slave girl Rayma lingered together behind closed doors.

The moon shone into the little apartment, showing a big man in a white burnoose, and at his side a girl lay, looking at him with tearful, love-laden eyes.

She was about seventeen, with an amber skin and a cloud of straight black hair that reached to her heels. A cloud out from which looked a little oval face, with great black eyes and a small red mouth, a perfect type of Arab beauty.

"My Lord Casim, beloved, my heart breaks at the thought of your going," she said tearfully.

Smilingly he watched her, caressing her in an indulgent fashion.

"But, my desert flower, I shall come back again."

"But it is so far. And in that Paris there are so many women. I know, because Sara has told me. And all their arms will be stretched out to keep you there."

"No arms have kept me there for longer than three months," he replied.

"And mine! Mine are not strong enough to keep you here?" she sobbed.

He drew the sobbing little beauty into his embrace, and kissed her tear-stained face.

"Tell me, my jewel, what favour can I grant you before I go?"

"I want nothing but just to rest upon your heart for ever."

With a tender hand he stroked her long black hair, and tried to soothe away the tears; flattering tears, resulting from his coming departure.

"Don't go to Paris, Casim, beloved," she whispered. "Stay in El-Ammeh. Paris is so far, and I am so ignorant of all outside of the desert. Ignorant of everything except love and you. Think, my lord, only six weeks have we been together, and now you would go! Only six weeks since my father brought me from the desert to sell me to the Sultan Casim Ammeh. How afraid I was until I saw you. And then I was afraid I might not find favour in your sight. For my heart was yours the moment our eyes met. Only six weeks ago! Casim, don't go," she implored. "Stay with me, for my heart is breaking."

"Little one, there is business as well as love," he said gently.

"I think of nothing but love."

"Love is quite enough for any girl to think of."

"And those women in Paris, do they think only of love?"

"No; they think of money as well. That's why I prefer you."

She slipped her slim arms about his neck, pressing, her slight form against him, kissing him passionately.

"Let me live in the gilded chamber until you come back," she whispered, "and then I should feel the most honoured among your slaves."

However, he avoided this suggestion.

"We'll see about that when I return," he answered with an amused, indulgent air.

Then he held the girl closer.

"Now, before I go, Rayma, is there nothing you want? Nothing I can do for you?"

"There is one thing, my Sultan. Sell Leonora. I hate her. She's a great fat toad, always plotting and planning to steal your heart from me."

"I couldn't do that. I'm not quite like your desert men, remember. I can't sell a woman who has once pleased me. But, on my return, I'll find her a nice husband, if that will satisfy you."

There was a note in his voice that brooked no argument; and the girl, reared for the harem, was quick to notice it.

She gave a sharp glance at her owner. It seemed that a man she did not know stood behind her Sultan, indulgent master as he had proved. A man she had no hold over.

CHAPTER II

In one of the hotels in the Island of Grand Canary dinner had just been served. Around the door of the large dining-hall the manager, the head waiter and several underlings hovered, with an air of awaiting the arrival of some important personage.

Presently two people appeared in the doorway.

One was a middle-aged woman with grey hair and a prim expression. She was wearing a plain black silk evening dress, and she had the look of a retired governess. Her companion was of quite another type. She was a slender, graceful girl of medium height, with a mop of short, golden curls dancing round a small, frank face, that gave her the look of some lovely, delicate schoolboy. She wore a simple white silk frock, and her only mark of wealth was a large diamond hanging from a thin platinum chain about her slender neck; a gem in itself worth a fortune.

Evidently she was the personage expected. As she appeared the manager went forward to meet her. She smiled at him in a friendly, affable manner. With him at her side, she and her companion went up the big room, towards a specially reserved table, the head-waiter and a little group of others following behind.

As she came up the room, a man seated at one of the tables in the center of the room said to his neighbour:

"Who is that girl? The whole hotel is falling over itself to wait on her."

The speaker was a short, thick-set man, with a red face and fishy eyes.

"That's Pansy Langham, the millionairess," his neighbour replied. "She came over in her yacht from Teneriffe this afternoon. Barclay her name was before she came into her money."

"A millionaire, is she? That's the second one of the species in Grand Canary then. For there's a French millionaire staying in a villa at the back here. Le Breton, his name is. But what's brought the girl to these parts? There's not much here to attract a woman with money."

"She's here for her health, I believe."

"Not lungs, surely! She looks healthy enough."

"No, she had an accident about a couple of months ago. Some half-mad horse mauled her horribly, all but killed her. I remember reading about the case in the papers. They say she's a very decent sort, in spite of her millions. Gives an awful lot away in charity."

As the girl approached the table, the red-faced man screwed an eyeglass into one fishy eye and surveyed her from head to foot.

"She's not bad looking," he said in a condescending manner, as if it were his prerogative to criticise every woman who crossed his horizon. "But she's not a patch on the red-haired woman in the villa at the back here. Now, she's what I call a beauty."

He did not trouble to lower his voice, and his words reached Pansy.

She glanced in his direction and wrinkled her pretty nose, as if she were smelling a bad smell. And with no more notice than that, she passed on to her own table.

CHAPTER III

Just off the main road between the Port and the city of Las Palmas, Grand Canary, a villa stood. It was situated on a hill; a white, flat-roofed building, set in a pleasant garden. Long windows opened on a lawn surrounded by trees.

Out from one of the windows a flood of light streamed and mingled with the silver of the night. The apartment it came from was elaborately furnished, in an ornate French style, with gilded furniture, bevelled mirrors, and satin-covered chairs and lounges.

On one of the latter a woman lolled back amongst an array of soft cushions. She was big and voluptuous-looking, with a dead-white skin, a mass of flaming red hair, and eyes green as the emerald necklace she wore.

She had on an extremely low-cut, black satin dress, that suited her style and colouring. And she made a striking, if somewhat bizarre, picture.

But attractive and unique as she looked, the man sitting with her appeared more interested in the view from the window than in his companion.

From there, a glint of moonlit sea showed between the vaguely moving trees; a peaceful stretch that spread away to the purple, misty horizon.

He was a big man of about thirty, well groomed and handsome, with smooth black hair, close-clipped moustache, and dark, smouldering eyes that had a latent searching look at the back of them. He was in evening attire, with black pearl studs in his pleated dress shirt.

For some time the two had been sitting in silence; the man's gaze on the sea; the woman's on the man, in a hungry, anxious manner.

"You've got one of your restless moods on to-night, Raoul," she said presently.

"I get them frequently nowadays. Nothing ever satisfies me for long."

She smiled at him, a soft, slow smile.

"Yet I have satisfied you longer than most, for you are still here with me."

"It's not you so much, Lucille, as business that keeps me here."

"I believe you have no heart at all," she cried, a catch of pain in her voice. "You look upon all women as animals."

"You are a most handsome animal, you must agree," he replied.

"You talk as if you'd bought me."

"I don't know that I ever put it quite so crudely as that."

"Put it as crudely as you like," she cried in a sudden gust of temper. "You have taken all from me and given me nothing in return."

He made no reply. In a slightly amused manner his glance rested on her emerald necklace.

"You may look," she went on passionately. "But I want more than gifts. I want love, not just to be the creature of your passions."

"Then you want too much. There's no such thing as love between men and women. There's only passion."

"You are cruel," she moaned.

"Cruel! Merely because I refuse to be enslaved by any one woman, eaten up in mind and body and soul, as some of the men I know are? I wasn't brought up to look upon women as superior beings, and I've never met one yet to make me want to change my sentiments. They are here for my convenience and pleasure, and nothing more."

There was silence again.

Lucille sighed.

She knew she had no hold over him other than her sex, and never had had. Heroics, temper and entreaties had no effect on him whatsoever; he remained always unmoved and indifferent.

With a shrug she picked out a chocolate from a large box at her side. Then she changed the conversation.

"What's the business, Raoul? I'd no idea you had any here. I thought ours was a pleasure trip, purely—or impurely."

"The business is strictly private," he replied, a savage note in his voice.

A month before, on leaving Paris, when Le Breton had asked Lucille Lemesurier, the actress, to accompany him on his yacht and spend a week or so in Grand Canary, it had been for pleasure solely.

But a few days ago a letter had reached him.

A letter to the effect that his enemy, now Sir George Barclay, had been appointed governor of Gambia. The Sultan Casim Ammeh was waiting in Grand Canary until certain that his man was *en route* for his new post.

CHAPTER IV

On the balcony of her bedroom Pansy Langham stood, slim and boyish-looking in a suit of silk pyjamas.

Beneath, the hotel grounds spread, running down to the shore. Beyond, the sea stretched, a silver mirror, away to the sparkling, frosty mist of the horizon. In the milky sky the moon soared, a molten globe, touching the drooping palms and making their quivering fronds look like silver fountains. A little line of waves lapped murmuringly on the shore, in a running ridge of white fire. The stone wall edging the garden was turned into marble. Here and there across the beach the taller trees threw thick, ebony shadows.

On the whole expanse of silvered sea, only one mark showed like a black dot in the distance.

Pansy had seen the mark when it had been much nearer the shore; a man's dark head. He had swum out and out, away into the mist and moonlight.

It was long after midnight. In the whole white world there was no sign of life except that dark head and the girl on the balcony who was watching the swimmer.

The black dot grew bigger, as, with powerful overhand strokes, the man made his way shorewards.

When about two hundred yards away from the beach the strong ease of his limbs altered suddenly. They grew contorted. He threw up his arms, and a moment later vanished completely.

Pansy gave a quick gasp of alarm.

But the man appeared again, trying to float, as a level-headed swimmer does when cramps seize him, in order to get air between the spasms that send him writhing under water; a hopeless task usually, unless aid is quickly forthcoming.

For just one second Pansy watched with horror and distress on her face. Then she turned sharply and vanished into her bedroom. A moment or so later she was out of the hotel and running swiftly through the silent garden towards the shore.

To Le Breton out there with the water choking his powerful lungs, gasping and fighting for his life against a death that only his own nerve and wit kept at bay, that struggle seemed an eternity.

All at once, he was caught and held from behind, just on the surface of the water; a slight support, but sufficient to keep him from going under when the spasms were on.

Unlike the average swimmer in difficulties, he did not snatch at his unseen rescuer. For all his dire straits he had the presence of mind to let his preserver alone.

For another ten minutes or more the attack lasted. Then his muscles unknotted and strength came back to his limbs.

He turned himself over to see who had come to his aid.

Out of the misty moonlit sea a young face looked at him from under a mop of short curls.

"You didn't come a moment too soon, my boy," he said.

There was a tired look about Pansy, but that did not prevent her dimpling in an effort not to smile. And to hide her mirth she dived suddenly and struck out towards the land.

Le Breton struck out too. He reached the shore first.

Pansy, however, did not go in his direction. She turned off and landed where the shadows were the thickest.

From where the man stood, he saw what looked to be a slim, fragile boy of about fourteen, who staggered slightly with fatigue as he made towards the most shadowed pair of steps leading into the hotel grounds.

Quickly Le Breton went towards his rescuer, with the idea of lending a hand, for it looked as if the boy were thoroughly worn out.

By the time he reached her Pansy was leaning against the wall under cover of the thickest shadows.

"I'm afraid you've over-exerted yourself on my account," he said in a solicitous way.

"I don't usually get knocked out so quickly," she replied. "But I had a nasty accident some

weeks ago, and I've not quite recovered yet."

The answer was in French, as fluent and Parisian as his own.

"You must let me help you back to the hotel," he said.

"Oh no, it's not necessary. I shall be all right in a moment."

"What you need, my boy, is a dose of brandy," he remarked. "That would soon put you right."

Pansy put her hand to her mouth to hide her smiles. Her short hair, pyjamas, and the shadows had deceived him completely.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea," she replied; "but I don't happen to have any."

"Ring for some, then, when you get back to the hotel."

"I wouldn't dream of disturbing people at this hour of the night," she said in an indignant tone of voice.

"What else are the servants there for?" he asked in a surprised and peremptory way.

"They're not there for me to root out of bed at two o'clock in the morning."

He laughed in an amused manner.

"I'm not so considerate of menials as you appear to be. But tell me the number of your room and I'll bring you some."

There was a brief pause.

Out from the shadows Pansy scanned the man. She could not see much, except that he was big and of splendid proportions. But he had a well-bred air, and his deep voice, if imperious, was pleasant and cultured.

Then her eyes started to sparkle with mischief.

"My room is number three on the first floor," she said. "Don't knock; come straight in. I'll leave the door ajar. I don't want to disturb my neighbours with my midnight prowls."

"Very well. I'll be there in ten minutes or so,"

They parted company, Le Breton going along the shore, Pansy up the shadowed steps.

On reaching her own room she switched on the light.

Slipping off her sodden garments, she dried herself quickly and put on a low-necked, short-sleeved, silk nightgown embroidered with purple pansies. Giving a quick, vigorous rub to her curls, she opened the door an inch or so. Then she skipped into bed and sat there, bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked, delighted with the surprise she had prepared for the man.

Unaware of what was in store for him, Le Breton returned to the hotel. Knowing the place well, he made his way noiselessly along the dim, deserted corridor towards a door that stood slightly ajar, letting out a sharp knife of light. He was in shirt and trousers, and in his hand he carried a small jewelled flask.

Without any preamble he went into the room.

The apartment he entered was a sumptuous one to average eyes, the best the hotel boasted.

On the wide dressing-table was a litter of silver toilet appointments, each with a pansy in purple enamel on it.

Le Breton did not give the room a glance.

He had eyes for nothing but the figure sitting up in bed. A figure no longer in pyjamas—they lay in a wet heap in the middle of the floor—but in a pretty nightgown; and from beneath a flood of golden curls wide, purple eyes looked at him, sparkling with innocent mischief.

It was no boy who had come to his assistance, but a girl! A lovely girl with a full, perfect mouth, vividly red, a milk-white skin and cheeks where roses bloomed.

He backed slightly and locked the door, as if the situation were one he was quite accustomed to and equal to dealing with.

"There's no need to lock the door," Pansy said.

"It's on your account, not mine. A little incident of this sort won't damage my reputation."

"I'd forgotten about my reputation," she said, a note of concern in her voice. "I only thought about giving you a surprise."

"It is. A most delightful one, too. In fact, I don't think I've ever experienced anything quite so delightful and unexpected," he responded drily.

He crossed to the bed, and stood looking at the girl with a critical, appreciative air. And Pansy looked at him with candid, friendly gaze, taking stock of him equally.

He struck her as being remarkably good-looking, but his expression was too arrogant, his mouth too hard; it even had a suspicion of cruelty. He had an air, too, of having ridden roughshod over people all his days. In spite of his well-groomed, well-bred appearance, there was a suggestion of the wild about him, as if he had never been properly broken in.

There was a brief silence as the two surveyed one another.

Le Breton was the first to speak, and his remark was of a critical nature.

"Why do you wear your hair short? It would suit you far better long, as a woman's hair ought to be."

"I like it short. It's less trouble."

There was a note in her voice as if his or any man's opinion about her appearance did not worry her in the least; an air of thorough independence, out of keeping with her years, that he was quick to notice.

"Do you always do as you like?" he asked.

"Always. It's an excellent habit to cultivate, and one you've cultivated to the fullest by the look of you, since criticism is the order of the day," she replied.

Le Breton thought of the desert kingdom he had ruled with undisputed sway for sixteen years.

"I dare say I do as I like more than most people you've come across," he answered with emphasis.

Pansy dimpled.

There was an air about her visitor as if he expected and were accustomed to people standing in awe of him. However, he did not inspire her with this feeling, only with a desire to tease and plague him; he was so big and masterful looking, as if he thought himself "monarch of all he surveyed," even herself, at that moment.

"Are you in the habit of asking strange men to your bedroom?" he asked suddenly.

"If I remember rightly, you volunteered to come."

"And now I'm here, what am I supposed to do?"

"To be *most* surprised. To give me a drink of brandy; and then go, nicely and quietly, like a good 'boy.'"

An amused look crossed Le Breton's face. Innocent mischief had not come into his life before.

"I am most surprised," he said. "I flattered myself I could tell a woman anywhere."

"I'm not a woman, not until next year. So that must account for your deplorable mistake."

"You look even younger than twenty. Are you English or American?"

"Why can't I have a choice of being either French or Russian or Italian or Spanish or German?"

"Only an English or an American girl would play this sort of a trick. Not that I've had any dealings with either. I'd like to hear you were American."

"What's wrong with being English?"

"I dislike and despise the English," he replied, a latent note of savagery in his deep voice.

"Then you'll have to dislike and despise me, because I'm one of them."

Pansy stretched out her hand. The action brought into view a network of disfiguring red ridges and scars on her upper arm, marring an otherwise perfect limb.

"Please give me a drink," she finished.

The excitement of the surprise she had prepared was dying down, leaving her looking what she really was—worn out with the exertion of saving him.

Crossing to the wash-stand, Le Breton picked up a glass. Pouring a small dose of brandy into it, he added the requisite water and brought it back to the girl.

Then he seated himself on the bedside, watching her as she drank it.

"What a nasty scar you have on your arm," he remarked, is if any flaw on such perfection annoyed him.

"I've worse scars here and here," she replied, touching her side and thigh; "and they don't look at all pretty. 'The Sultan' did them."

He started slightly.

"The Sultan! What Sultan?"

"A brown Sultan. A very nice Sultan, but we understand one another now."

Le Breton took the girl's arm into his grip with the light, firm, careful touch of a man who is used to handling women.

"They're the marks of a horse's teeth," he remarked after a brief survey.

With an air of relief, Pansy held the empty glass towards him.

"Thank goodness that's finished. Now, with your permission, I'll go to sleep."

He took the glass, placing it on a table near; but he did not move from his seat on the bedside.

"You must tell me your name," he said.

"You'll find out quite soon enough without my telling you. It's not at all necessary for me to advertise myself nowadays."

"Won't you tell me?" he asked in a cajoling tone.

Pansy shook her head.

"Then I must find a name for you," he said. "A flower name would suit you admirably. Let me see, what do you call the flower in English?"

He hesitated.

"Pansy," he finished, after a moment's thought.

"But why 'Pansy' specially?" she asked, smiling at him. "Why not Lily or Rose or May, since I'm to be given a stupid flower name?"

"There are pansies in your eyes, on your nightgown, on the appointments of your dressing-table, on your handkerchief here."

With a deeply bronzed hand he touched a scrap of embroidered muslin that peeped out from beneath her pillow and which had a pansy worked on it in one corner.

Pansy laughed, amused at his perception.

"Now, I'm too tired to entertain you any longer," she said. "Good night, and thank you for bringing the brandy."

Le Breton was not accustomed to being dismissed when he was prepared to stay.'

"Are you really anxious to get rid of me?" he asked.

"Most anxious. I'm dying to go to sleep."

In a reluctant manner he got to his feet.

Stooping over the bed, he gave a caressing pat to the tired, small face.

"Good night, Pansy, little flower," he said softly. "I'll go if you really want me to, but I'm not in the habit of going unless *I* want to."

"What an autocrat you sound! And please—don't forget my reputation. I can't afford to lose it so early in life."

There was anxiety in the girl's voice, for all her light tone.

"Your reputation will be quite safe with me," he said.

He stood for a moment watching her, an amused expression lurking in his dark, fiery eyes. Then he turned and, switching off the light, went noiselessly from the room.

It was not until he had gone that Pansy recollected that he had touched her twice and she had not minded or reproved him, and usually she very strongly resented being touched by men. And it was not until Le Breton reached his villa that he remembered the girl had not even troubled to ask his name. In fact, once the trick had been played, her only desire had been to get him out of the room.

CHAPTER V

In one of the private sitting-rooms of the hotel, Miss Grainger was lolling back in a comfortable wicker chair reading a newspaper.

The door opening made her look round.

A slim, boyish figure entered the room, clad in a well-cut white riding suit, the neatest of brown boots and leggings, and a white felt hat pulled well on to a mop of curls.

"You're late starting this morning, Pansy."

"I am. But—last night I saved a man's life."

"Saved a man's life! Really, my dear, what a way you have of springing surprises on one."

Teasingly Pansy glanced at her old governess.

"Miss Grainger, I must remind you that 'springing surprises' is slang."

Miss Grainger ignored the reprimand.

"But what man did you save, and how did you save him?" she asked in a slightly bewildered manner.

"I forgot to ask his name. I fished him out of the sea. He had cramps."

"But he might have dragged you under!" her companion said in a horrified voice. "I should have thought that last experience of yours with that awful horse would have taught you not to go diving headlong into danger."

"The Sultan' isn't awful. You know it was all a mistake on his part. Besides, nothing will keep me from 'diving headlong into danger,' as you call it, when I see things being hurt. It's all part of my silly, impetuous nature."

"Well, I hope the man was grateful."

"He never even thanked me."

Such gross ingratitude left Miss Grainger aghast.

"My dear!" she exclaimed.

"He thought I was a boy, and when he found I was a girl he was too astonished to remember his manners," Pansy explained. "But don't say anything about it to anybody. You know I hate a fuss."

"What was he like?"

"Big and dark and awfully good-looking, with an arrogant, high-handed manner. He badly needed taking down a peg or two."

"Quite different from Captain Cameron," Miss Grainger suggested.

"Oh, quite. Bob's a kid beside him."

There was a brief pause.

Miss Grainger glanced at the girl.

"Do you know, Pansy, I'm sorry for Captain Cameron."

"So am I," the girl replied, a touch of distress in her voice. "But my sorrow refuses to blossom into love."

"He's a very good sort."

"I know; but then I'm not given to falling in love."

"Some day you'll find yourself in love before you know it."

Pansy smiled at her old governess in a merry, whole-hearted fashion.

"What a persistent bird of ill-omen you are!" she said.

Then she glanced at the clock.

"Now I'm off. I shan't be back for lunch. So-long," she finished.

She went, leaving Miss Grainger with the feeling of a fresh, sweet breeze having been wafted through the room.

CHAPTER VI

In the large palm-decked patio of the hotel, Le Breton sat sipping coffee as he went through the newspapers solicitous waiters had placed on a table at his elbow. It was not often he came to the hotel, but when he did the whole staff was at his disposal, for he scattered largess with a liberal hand. He had lunched there, his gaze wandering over the crowded dining-room as if in search of someone; and afterwards he had stayed on.

It was now about three in the afternoon, an hour when the patio was practically deserted.

As he sat there reading, Pansy entered the big hall, still in breeches and leggings, just as she had returned from her ride. She would have passed through the patio without coming within his vision, except that something about the smooth black head was familiar.

So she changed her route and went in Le Breton's direction instead.

"Have you gotten over your disappointment?" she asked.

In an unperturbed manner he looked round. Then he got to his feet leisurely, surveying the slim, boyish figure with disapproval.

Pansy stood with her hands deep in her pockets, smiling at him, a smile that deepened under his lack of appreciation of her attire.

"What disappointment?" he asked.

"Of finding I was a girl you had to be polite to instead of a boy you could bully."

"I'm inclined to go back to my first impression," he said.

"Don't you like my get-up?"

"Decidedly I do not. Why don't you wear something feminine? Not go about masquerading as a man."

Adverse criticism rarely came Pansy's way.

She laughed.

"What a back number you are! All women ride in breeches nowadays. But, since you don't approve of me, come along and see if you like 'The Sultan' any better. You were most interested in his mark and seal."

There was an air about her as if she never expected to be gainsaid if she felt like favouring a man, for she turned at once and led the way towards the main entrance.

Picking up his hat, Le Breton followed.

Once outside, he said:

"I've not yet thanked you for saving my life."

"I couldn't do less than lend a hand," she replied with a casual air.

"It was a risky thing to do. I might have dragged you under."

"Well, you didn't. And we're neither of us any the worse for the little adventure."

"I hope we shall be all the better. That we shall be excellent friends," he replied.

Then he drew a leather case from his pocket and held it towards her.

"I've brought you a little memento," he finished.

With inquisitive hands Pansy took the case and snapped it open. Inside was a string of pearls worth at least £500. He watched the girl as she opened the case, but none of the coos of delight and surprise at his generosity, that he expected and was accustomed to under such circumstances, were forthcoming. Instead, she closed the case and handed it back to him.

"It's very pretty, and very kind of you to think of it," she said. "But I couldn't keep it."

To have his gift thrust back on him was the last thing Le Breton was prepared for or desired.

"Why not?" he asked abruptly.

"I never take presents from men, but I appreciate your kindness all the same."

He glanced at her, a peculiar look at the back of his eyes.

To get off the topic Pansy hurried forward.

From a building close at hand there came a gentle whinny.

"That's 'The Sultan,'" she remarked. "He hears me coming."

When the stables came into view, over the open door of a box a long brown head and neck were seen stretched towards the approaching girl.

"I'm going to let him out," she said; "but you mustn't come too close. He hates strangers; and so should I if I'd been through the hell he's been through."

Le Breton laughed, as if anyone, more especially the slim girl with him, telling him to be careful of anything in the shape of a horse had its intensely funny side.

As Pansy opened the door his glance ran swiftly over the animal.

It was a huge, gaunt beast, a chestnut, with wild, roving eyes; a great, vicious-looking creature, well on in years and undoubtedly an old race-horse, for speed was written all over it. And on it, too, were scars and weals that spoke of past ill-treatment.

Pansy kissed its soft nose, and patted and stroked it and pulled its ears; and the great animal fawned on her.

Then she led it out, keeping a tight grip on its mane. For it bared its teeth at Le Breton, and stood shivering and expectant, as if suspecting every man's hand to be against it.

He, however, ignored its attentions and came closer. But it swung round and lashed at him with iron heels.

"Oh, do be careful! Don't come so close," Pansy cried.

In spite of its snarls and the iron hoofs, she kept her grip on its mane. But neither teeth nor hoofs, were in her direction.

Ignoring her entreaties, Le Breton came closer, all the time talking to the horse gently in a strange language.

The animal seemed to recognize a friend. It quietened down suddenly, and stretched a long neck in his direction. Still talking, he patted and stroked it. The horse submitted to his attentions, and before many moments had passed was rubbing its nose against him.

All interest, Pansy watched the two make friends.

"What are you saying to him?" she asked. "Usually he won't let a stranger near him."

"I was talking to him in the language all race-horses understand—Arabic," he replied. "But how did you come by such a brute?"

The animal was of the type only the most hardened of stable-men could handle; the very last horse for a girl to ride.

"I dropped across him quite by accident."

Le Breton thought of the scars he had seen on the girl's arm, and he had heard there were others and worse beyond his view.

"I should say it was 'by accident,'" he remarked drily. "I'd like to hear the story."

Pansy patted the big horse fondly.

"We met in a London slum," she said. "I happened to be passing a stable yard when I heard a noise like a horse being hurt or frightened, and men laughing. So I opened the gate and went in. There was poor old Sultan tied up in one corner and half a dozen roughs baiting him, all the time taking good care not to get within his reach, for he was almost mad with terror and rage and ill-treatment. I told them what I thought, and in the telling I got too close to 'The Sultan,' and he grabbed me by the arm. In ten minutes he had made such a mess of me that it took a month to patch me up. And the men were such cowards that they never tried to rescue me. It was 'The Sultan' himself who seemed to realise he'd set on his best friend, for he stopped chewing me, and stood sniffing at me, and let me crawl away. And I didn't remember anything more until I found myself back home. Then I remembered the poor horse left to the mercy of those cruel wretches; and I sent someone along to buy him and take him away from his awful surroundings. It was so obvious he had known better days, although he had sunk right down to dragging some East End coal higgler's cart. The first time I was allowed out I went to his paddock and had a look at him. And I'm sure he knew me. He stretched his long neck over the gate and sniffed and snuffed at me and seemed quite conscience-stricken. At the end of a fortnight I was on his back, and now I take him everywhere I go, as he gets worried if he doesn't see me about. He can't believe his awful days are over unless I'm here to reassure him."

As Pansy told the tale she leant against the big horse; and she told it as if her own hurts were nothing.

"And you took him into your favour after he had treated you so abominably!" Le Breton said.

"I couldn't be hard on him for what was the result of his awful surroundings."

"You are very magnanimous."

Pansy smiled.

"You'll forgive me for not accepting that pretty necklace, won't you?" she asked.

"Some day, when we know each other better, you'll honour me by accepting it," he said.

He spoke to the girl now as if she were his equal, not just some pretty toy he happened to have fancied.

"I never take anything from men—except perhaps a few flowers."

There was a subtle contempt for his sex in her voice which Le Breton was quick to note.

"So you despise men?"

"Not that exactly, but I've had rather an overdose of them. Since I've been here, Sultan and I go off early every morning usually, and are miles away before there are any men about to bother us."

With this Pansy turned and led the horse back to its box.

"Now," she said, when this was done, "I mustn't keep you. Good-bye, and I'm glad you're none the worse for last night."

Again Le Breton was dismissed when he would have lingered. And on this second meeting she still had not troubled to ask his name.

There was a curious glint in his eyes as they rested on the slim, white, indifferent figure of the girl who was making her way back to the hotel without a further glance in his direction.

CHAPTER VII

At six o'clock in the morning the road that joins the port and the city of Las Palmas shows very little sign of the peaceful English invasion. It is given over to the Islanders. To peasant women with baskets of produce on their heads; to men driving donkeys laden with fruit and vegetables, and creaking bullock carts.

The early morning was Pansy's favourite time; the world was a place of dew and brightness

with the sun glinting gold on sandy hills and air that sparkled like champagne.

She trotted along on her big horse towards the white city, its flat roofs, low houses and palms giving it an oriental aspect. Biding through the town, she crossed a wide bridge and went upwards through a grove of palms, past banana gardens, into a deserted world, with a blue sky overhead and an endless stretch of sea behind.

As she mounted higher, the hill grew vine-clad, and great ragged eucalyptus trees stood in tatters by the roadside. Here and there was a stunted pine, the deep green of a walnut tree, a clump of bamboo, a palm and occasionally, a great patch of prickly cacti, whose flaming flowers stood out red against a dazzling day.

She rode without spurs or whip, when necessary urging her horse with hand and voice only.

A village was reached, where black-browed men in slouch hats and blanket cloaks lounged in groups, smoking and gossiping, and swarthy women with bright handkerchiefs around their heads stared at the girl astride the big horse.

In the dust of the road a little group of half-clad, bare-footed children dragged a trio of unfortunate lizards along by strings around their necks, and screamed with delight at the writhings of the tortured reptiles.

The sight brought a look of distress to Pansy's face.

Reining in her horse, she slipped off and went towards the group.

In indifferent Spanish she gave a brief lecture on cruelty. There was a sprinkling of small coins, and the lizards changed owners.

Pansy stooped. Loosening the strings from their soft throats, she picked them out of the dust. They were pretty, harmless little things, each about eighteen inches long and bright green in colour, that hung limp in her gentle hands, and looked at her with tortured eyes. Holding them carefully, she went back to her horse, and with the reins over her arm, made her way through the village.

Once well out of sight of the place, she seated herself on a bank at the side of the road, and laid the three limp little forms on a warm, flat, sunny rock. Then she tried to coax them back to life and their normal state of bright friskiness.

As she sat rubbing, with a gentle forefinger, their soft, panting throats, crooning over them with pitying words, too intent on her task to notice what was going on around her, a deep voice said with an unexpectedness that made her jump:

"They'll do exactly the same with the next lizards they catch."

She looked round quickly.

In the middle of the road, mounted on a huge black horse, was the man whose life she had saved.

Pansy's gaze rested on him for a moment before she replied. He made such a picture on the black horse, with his strong, sunburnt face and well-cut khaki riding suit; the most perfect combination of horse and man she had ever seen.

"I know they will," she said. "But still, I've done my best for these three."

"Do you always try to do your best for everything that comes your way, Pansy?" he asked tenderly.

"Only a few privileged people are allowed to call me 'Pansy,'" she said tartly.

"What else can I call you, since you refuse to tell me your name?"

"You mean to say you haven't found out yet?" she exclaimed.

"I never gossip," he replied in a haughty tone.

"I don't know yours," she answered, "so we're what is called in English 'quits.'"

"What exactly does 'quits' mean? I don't know much English."

As Pansy petted the lizards she explained the meaning of the word. During the explanation one of her protégés recovered, and darted off in a most thankless manner into a crevice in the rocks.

"My name is Le Breton," he said when he had grasped her meaning. "Raoul Le Breton."

Pansy stared at him.

She had surprised him on the occasion of their first meeting, but he had turned the tables on her.

During her stay in Teneriffe she had heard of Raoul Le Breton. He was a French millionaire, an African merchant prince, so rumour said.

She had had a feeling that he had followed her that morning, and she was inclined to be angry about it. Now she saw that if he sought her out, it was not from mercenary motives, since he was quite as wealthy as she was. What was more he had no idea who she was.

"I'm always interested in millionaires," she said, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"All women are," he responded grimly.

"But you're not the only millionaire in the islands," she remarked.

"So I've gathered. There is, or was, one here quite recently. An Englishwoman of the name of Langham. I detest women with money. They are invariably ugly and conceited."

Pansy laughed—a ripple of sheer enjoyment.

"Perhaps their independence annoys you," she suggested. "I believe you're what is known as the 'masterful' type."

With that, her attention went back to the lizards.

Dismounting, Le Breton came to her side.

"You speak French remarkably well," he commented, as the moments passed and no notice was taken of him.

"I was educated in Paris."

She glanced at him, her eyes brimming with mischief, and, as she glanced, another of her protégés frisked thanklessly away.

"Wouldn't you like to know my name?" she asked.

"At present it's sufficient that you are 'Pansy.' 'Heart's Ease,' don't you say in English?"

"I wish I could ease this one poor little beast," she said, touching the remaining lizard. "But I fear it's hurt beyond redemption."

Stooping he picked up the little reptile and examined it. It hung limp in his grasp; a hopeless case.

"The best thing to do with it is to kill it," he commented.

"Oh, I couldn't," she said quickly.

But it appeared he could. He went some distance away from the girl and placed the lizard on a flat rock. In a moment he had ground all tortured life out of it with his heel.

"Thank you," she said gratefully. "I knew it was suffering, but I couldn't have done that to save my life. As a reward, will you come and have breakfast with me?"

"There's nothing I should like better," he answered.

Pansy got to her feet.

He helped her to mount. Then he rode at her side up the hill.

"I love the clear heights," she remarked presently.

"I don't know much about them. The miry depths are more in my line," he replied.

Critically she surveyed him.

"You don't look so specially muddy."

"No? What do I look like—to you?" he asked, a caressing note in his voice.

"Very proud, very passionate, very strong, and as if you could be cruel."

"Then I can't look very attractive," he said, smiling slightly.

"Being proud is all right, so long as it makes you too proud to do mean things."

"And what about the passionate?" he asked, "since you're making excuses for me."

"I don't know anything about it."

"Well, what about my being strong then?"

"I don't like men unless they are."

"And the cruelty?"

"I hate it."

"Life sometimes combines to make people cruel who otherwise might not be," he remarked, as if unaccustomed to finding excuses for himself. "You can't judge a person fairly until you know all that has gone to form their character."

Pansy patted her gaunt steed.

"I know that," she said, "that's why I stuck to 'The Sultan' when my friends tried to persuade me to have him shot. There's a lot in his life that I don't know. These marks tell me that."

She pointed to the various old scars on the animal.

"Now you shall see what 'The Sultan' can do," she went on. "I'll race you to the farm over there, where breakfast is waiting," she finished, pointing to a green patch away in the distance.

A touch of her spurless heel sent the gaunt beast flying along the dusty, deserted road, in a long, loping gallop that grew more and more rapid, egged on by the sound of another horse persistently at his heels.

Pansy had not expected that her escort would be able to keep up with her. No horse she had met could keep pace with her protégé. At the end of half a mile she had been prepared to rein up and wait for Le Breton.

But at the end of a mile he was a length behind her. And at the end of two he was there just the same.

Pansy tired before either the man or the horses.

"Oh!" she panted, as Le Breton drew up beside her. "I wasn't trained as a jockey."

"You didn't get away from me quite so easily as you expected," he remarked with curious emphasis.

"I didn't know there was a horse in the Islands to touch 'The Sultan,' in spite of his years."

"This horse I'm on has won several races in Paris. And you challenged me, Pansy, without pausing to consider what you might be let in for," he said, watching her in a fierce, fond manner.

"I always leap before I look. It's my besetting sin," she replied.

Then she pointed to a side track, leading to a low building, half white-washed mud, half timber.

"That's the way to my farm," she said. "But I don't know that my breakfast will appeal to millionaires."

"Don't thrust that down my throat just now," he answered. "I want to see life from your point of view."

The farm they were approaching was a tiny place, with a spreading garden where orange and fig trees grew. In one corner a little summer-house stood, wreathed with red roses, that gave a wide view of the island and a glimpse of the sea.

Evidently Pansy was expected. A coarse white cloth was spread on the table in the summer-house, and it was set with thick crockery and leaden-looking forks and spoons.

Leaving Le Breton to attend to the horses, she made her way to the tiny homestead, to announce her presence and the fact of a guest.

Then she passed on towards the summer-house.

Tossing her hat on a seat, she sat with the light glinting on her golden curls, her elbows on the table, watching the scene dreamily, in a frame of red roses.

This vision of her greeted Le Breton as he turned the corner, bringing a hungry glint to his eyes.

Breakfast proved a simple repast.

There was a thick jug full of coffee, another of milk, a large omelet, a dish of fruit, rolls,

butter and honey.

"Now," she said when it was set before them, "how do you like your coffee?"

"As it should be according to the orientals—black as sin, hot as hell, sweet as—love," he finished, lingering over the word.

She poured his out, and handed it to him, black as he desired.

"I can get on very well without either the sin or the love," she remarked as she helped herself to a cup that was mostly milk, and with no sugar in it.

"I thought all girls liked sweet things and lived for love," he said as he set about serving the omelet.

"There's a lot more in life for women nowadays than love."

"Being in love is a woman's normal condition," he said in a forcible, dogmatic manner.

Pansy smiled.

"I always thought you had come out of the Ark, and now I'm sure of it. You've got such antiquated, early Victorian ideas about women. They mustn't wear knickers. They must always be yearning after some mere male. Very flattering to him, I'm sure," she finished, wrinkling a disdainful nose.

Le Breton's gaze rested on the vivid, beautiful little face, with the full, perfect, generous mouth, telling of an unselfish, disinterested nature that would love swiftly and deeply.

"Some day you'll find yourself in love before you know it," he commented.

"So other people have said. And it makes me horribly nervous at times. Like a blind man walking on the edge of a precipice."

"So long as you fell in love with a man who could appreciate you, it would be all right,—a man sufficiently versed in women to know you have qualities beyond your beauty to recommend you."

With some surprise Pansy glanced at him.

A soft heart lay beneath her light manner. Quite half her income was spent for the benefit of others. She wondered how he knew about these "qualities," considering their brief acquaintance. And she wondered, too, why she was sitting there discussing love with him; a subject she never would let any man approach, if it could be avoided. She put it down to the fact that her identity was unknown to him, and she could talk to him freely, knowing her millions were no temptation.

"One thing," she said mischievously, "money will never attract me. I've no expensive tastes. I like views and flowers and sunsets. Moons and stars and seas and sago pudding. Horses and chocolates and—my own way. All things that don't require a tremendous income."

There was a brief silence.

In a calculating manner Le Breton watched her. She was a new type to him; a girl who could not be approached in the way most women could be—by the easy route of costly presents.

The air was heavy with the scent of roses. In the distance a guitar was playing; a throb of melody, faint and seductive, that fed the craving in the man's heart.

Pansy glanced at him.

"How quiet you are all at once. What are you thinking about?"

"Ways and means," he replied, smiling slightly.

"I thought only hard-up people were troubled in that way."

"The trouble with me now is that I want something which I fear can't be bought with money."

"What an unpleasant position for a millionaire to be in. Still, it makes you 'realise your limitations,' as an old governess of mine used to say."

She paused for a moment, watching him with an air of subtle mockery.

"And, Mr. Le Breton, it won't do you any harm to have to go without a few of the things you want. There's a look about you as if you always had things too much your own way."

"I'm not so sure yet that I'm going to do without it. Fortunately I have two other courses left open to me—persuasion and power," he replied.

"Power! I thought that was the prerogative of kings."

Le Breton said nothing. He knew if this English girl had any idea who he was, she would not be sitting there talking to him so freely. Although he was the Sultan of El-Ammeh, in the eyes of her nation he was a "nigger."

There was a further silence which Pansy broke.

"What made you swim out all those miles the other night?" she asked.

"I get moods when I want to lose the earth and find a heaven to my own liking."

"What sort of heaven would that be?"

"Where there would be only one houri, and she all-sufficing."

"A houri? Why that's a sort of Mohammedan angel-woman."

Evidently Le Breton was in a confessional mood, for he said:

"Nowadays I often wonder what use my life is. There's no pleasure in it except, perhaps—women."

"So long as it's 'women,' it's all right. The trouble starts when it comes to—'woman.'"

These words from the innocent girl's lips made him laugh.

"Who told you that?" he asked.

"Captain Cameron. He likes to pose as an authority on such subjects."

"And who is Captain Cameron?"

There was a suspicion of jealousy in Le Breton's voice.

"At present he's possessed with a demon of tennis. But when the devil has been cast out, he's my father's secretary."

"And how can the devil be cast out?"

"There's no really permanent cure, but it can be assuaged *pro tem*, if he meets someone who can beat him. In Teneriffe, he carried all before him. And he's coming over here to-morrow to beat all the local champions. He's one of the few people I really like. I've known him all my life."

These remarks of hers had the effect of reducing Le Breton to silence again.

CHAPTER VIII

In the library of the villa, Le Breton sat alone. The hour was late, getting on to midnight. He was stretched in a deep chair smoking, his gaze fixed on a desk close by, on which was a wide, shallow, crystal bowl full of water where half a dozen purple pansies floated.

As he sat there indulging in some dream of his own, a door opened and he looked round sharply, by no means pleased at being roused from his reverie. The room was his special sanctum; no one was supposed to enter without his permission.

In the doorway Lucille stood, in a foamy white dressing-gown, her wealth of red hair in two thick ropes down her back.

On seeing her, a look of suppressed annoyance crossed his face.

"What is it?" he asked in a none too cordial tone.

She crossed to his side, and stood looking down at him anxiously.

"What has happened to you the last two days?" she asked.

"Happened to me! What do you mean?"

"You've been so very indifferent."

"Was I ever particularly effusive?"

She laid her hand on his sleeve with a lingering, caressing touch.

"I see nothing of you now except at meals," she said.

With an impatient gesture he drew his arm away.

"I'm not always in the mood for women," he said coldly.

"Perhaps it would be nearer the truth if you said some other woman has taken your fancy," she suggested.

There was no reply.

Le Breton got to his feet and crossed to the desk, standing there with his back to her as if he resented her presence.

It was most obvious to Lucille that she was not welcome.

"What is this new fancy of yours like?" she asked in a hurt, jealous tone.

He made no answer, but his very back oozed annoyance.

"What's her price, Raoul?" she asked in a wild manner. "Is it emeralds or pearls or diamonds? Or is she one whose price is above rubies?"

He faced round suddenly, anger flashing in his eyes.

"Be quiet, woman!" he said savagely.

She laughed hysterically.

"So she's something too good for me to talk about, is she? Does she know of all your gay doings in Paris?"

"Oh, you women!" he ejaculated contemptuously. "Can you never learn the virtue of silence?"

In an angry manner he went from the room, leaving Lucille in possession. She watched him until the door closed. Then she sank down into the chair he had vacated and stayed there with bowed head, weeping bitterly.

CHAPTER IX

At a spot about ten miles away from Las Palmas there are some well-known orange groves. Stretch upon stretch of scented trees, they made a lattice-work of smooth boughs and shiny leaves overhead, with a glint of blue sky here and there. The ground was strewn with white petals, and clusters of white blossoms made fragrant the gilded greenness. A glimpse of the sea could be had, and the waves filled the air with a constant, soft, distant murmur.

At one spot in the scented grove preparations had been made for an elaborate picnic. Piles of soft silk cushions were set upon the ground. On a cloth of finest linen was spread an array of frail china and heavy silver, with here and there some golden dish holding dainties.

Two impassive men with lean, brown faces, clad in flowing white robes, stood near. Beyond all view of the feast came a faint rattle of pots and pans, and a little wavering column of smoke rose from a fire where breakfast was being prepared.

When Pansy had come down the hotel steps for her usual early morning ride she had not been very surprised to find Le Breton there waiting for her.

She had had a wide experience of men and their ways, and she knew what she called "the symptoms." Generally "the symptoms" annoyed her; she felt they had more to do with her money than herself. But Le Breton's case was different. She knew who he was, but he had no idea of her identity.

"I'm going to take you out for breakfast this time," he said on seeing her.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"To the orange groves beyond Telde."

They had ridden through the white city, and then on, skirting the coast, past banana plantations, cindery-looking cliffs and a lava bed where the poisonous euphorbia grew, ten to twelve feet high, stiff and straight, like gigantic candelabras.

"I was thinking about you last night," Pansy remarked once, between their canters. "What you

said about the miry depths. And I remember having read somewhere that water can always reach to the level it rises from. When people get into the depths they should remember that; it'll help them to scramble out."

The miry depths of dissipation into which he occasionally plunged had never troubled Le Breton in the least. He was not actively aware that they did now, although he hoped that Pansy would not get to hear of them. But it was all part of the girl's nature to have ready the helpful hand.

"So, Pansy," he said, "having saved my body, you're now after my soul."

"Oh no, I'm not a missionary! But if you like people, there's no harm in giving them a word in season."

He brought his horse closer, and bent towards the girl.

"So you like me?" he said in a caressing tone.

"I shouldn't be here if I didn't," she answered candidly.

"And what if I say I like *you*?" he asked, laughing softly.

"I should say it's very nice of you, considering you know nothing at all about me."

"I can see you are beautiful. I know your heart is kind. Circumstances have shown me you are not mercenary. What more could I wish to know about you? Isn't the combination enough to attract any man?"

"Considering you are French, you've missed the vital point," she said demurely. "You haven't said anything about a *dot*."

"No man in his senses would want a *dot* with you."

"He wouldn't get much money out of my father, anyhow," she said. "He's a poor man who has to work hard for his living; and I love him better than anyone in the whole wide world."

"I'd like to meet him," Le Breton remarked.

"So you will, if you behave yourself. He's coming out here very soon."

"What constitutes behaving myself?" he asked. "People have never complained of my behaviour so far."

Pansy knew he was arrogant and overbearing. By his own telling, she guessed he was inclined to be wild. She suspected him of having little or no respect for women, although he had been unfailingly courteous to her.

"I might complain if I had much to do with you, though," she said.

"It would be refreshing, to say the least," he remarked, with a slight smile hovering on his lips. "And what would you complain of especially?"

"You need a lot of reforming in quite a few ways."

"Tell me, and I'll endeavour to mould myself according to your ideals," he said with laughter.

"You know you're very well pleased with yourself as you are."

"But I'm even better pleased with you, Pansy," he answered, watching her with glowing gaze.

This Pansy knew quite well. To get off the topic, she touched her horse lightly and broke into a canter. For it seemed to her "the symptoms" were coming to a head even more rapidly than she had expected.

When the edge of the orange grove was reached, a couple of white-robed men came forward to take their horses—dark men, with hawk-like faces, lean and sun-scorched, who bowed low before her escort with the utmost servility.

"They look like Arabs," Pansy said.

"They are Arabs; some of my servants from Africa. I generally have half a dozen with me."

It seemed to Pansy the whole half-dozen were in the grove, ready to wait on her.

No sooner was she settled among the cushions than one of the servants placed a little box before her, about six inches long and four wide: a costly trifle made of beaten gold, inlaid with flat emeralds and rubies.

"Is it Pandora's box?" she asked, picking it up and examining it with curiosity.

"It and the contents are for you," Le Breton replied.

She turned the tiny golden key. Inside, three purple pansies reposed on a nest of green moss, smiling up at her with velvety eyes.

"I'll have the contents," she said. "The box you can keep for another time."

With slim white fingers she picked out the pansies and tucked them into her coat.

"Still only a few flowers, Pansy?" he said, annoyed, yet pleased that her friendship was disinterested. "Suggest something else that you would accept."

"Breakfast," she said promptly. "I'm dying of hunger."

A sumptuous feast was spread for her benefit, served in gold and jewel-encrusted dishes; an array of the most expensive luxuries. If Le Breton's idea had been to impress her with his wealth and magnificence, he failed. It seemed to pass her by unnoticed; for Pansy was much more interested in his Arab servants, the grove, the distant view of the sea, than any of the regal extravagance immediately before her.

When the meal was over she sat, wistful and dreamy-looking, listening to the sigh of the sea.

For some moments Le Breton watched her. Just then her mood appeared very out of keeping with her boyish attire.

"I'd like to see you dressed in something really feminine," he remarked presently.

"What's your idea of something 'really feminine?'" she inquired.

"Just one garment, a robe that would come from your shoulders to your knees, loose and clinging, soft and white, with a strap of pearls to hold it on."

"It sounds draughty," she commented; "and it might show my horrid scars."

"It would suit you admirably."

"And, I suppose, it would suit you admirably, too, to be lying about on cushions with me so attired waiting on you," she said quickly. "Bringing you sherbet and hubble-bubbles, or whatever you call those big pipe things that men smoke in Eastern pictures and on cigar-box lids. And I shouldn't dare call my soul my own. I should tremble at your look. That one garment would place me at a terrible disadvantage."

"I might not be a severe task-master. I might only ask you to do one thing."

"And what would that be?"

"In English, I could say it in two words; spell it in six letters."

Pansy darted a quick look at him, and a little mocking smile came and hovered on her mouth.

She was too accustomed to men and their ways not to guess what the two words that could be spelt in six letters were.

She sat quiet for a moment or two, an impish look on her face. Then she rattled off a riddle in English:—

"My first is in apple, but not in pie,
My second is in do, but not in die,
My third is in veal, but not in ham,
My fourth is in sheep, but not in lamb,
My fifth is in morning, but not in night,
My sixth is in darkness, but not in light,
My whole is just a word or two,
Which is known to me as well as to you."

Le Breton knew more English than he pretended, but riddles did not often come his way.

"Say it again slowly," he requested.

Pansy repeated her composition.

He stored it up in his mind, deciding to go into the matter later on when there was no lovely little face, dimpled with mischief, looking at him teasingly from beneath a halo of golden curls.

Soon after this Pansy glanced at her wrist watch.

"I mustn't stay any longer," she said, getting to her feet.

"It's not nine o'clock yet," he remarked. "I didn't hurry away from you so quickly yesterday."

This Pansy knew quite well.

He had sat on, and on, with her in the summer-house with the red roses, and she had been pleased to let him stay. In fact, it had been afternoon before they had come down to earth again.

"Captain Cameron is coming this morning," she said. "And I promised to be on the quay to meet him."

So saying, she turned towards the spot where the horses were waiting, leaving him to follow or not as he liked.

Pansy wanted to linger in the grove with Raoul Le Breton as she had been pleased to stay with him among the red roses on the previous day; but she decided the mood was not one to be encouraged, especially considering his desire for the two words, containing in all six letters, and her own desire for untrammelled liberty.

CHAPTER X

Under the trees that shadowed one corner of the tennis-courts of the hotel a couple stood. One was a young man of about twenty-four, in white flannel trousers and shirt-sleeves, who held a tennis racket in one hand and a couple of balls in the other. He was of medium height, fresh and fair and boyish looking.

At his side Pansy stood, in short skirt and blouse and Panama hat.

"Well, old pal, is there anything doing yet?" he was asking cheerfully.

"There's nothing doing, Bob, much as I try."

"Anyhow, it's a standing order," he said.

"I know; and I'm doing my best," she said. "I try to go to bed every night with your name on my lips, but more frequently I go with a yawn. All for the sake of the 'dear dead days beyond recall.'"

"Which ones especially?" Cameron inquired.

"When I was five and you were nine, and we were all the world to one another."

"In the days of my 'dim and distant' youth I learnt a rotten poem, from dire necessity, not choice, you bet. About some bore of a Scotch king and a spider, and the chorus or the moral, I've forgotten which, ran, 'If at first you don't succeed, try again.' Perseverance, Pansy. It's a wonderful thing. You'll find yourself there in the end."

Pansy smiled a trifle wistfully at the boy she had known all her life, who always gave her nonsense for nonsense, and, incidentally, his heart.

"Bob, I wish I could love you," she said, suddenly grave.

Smiling at her, he started juggling with the two balls.

"So the spirit is willing, etc.?" he responded. "Well, I shall go on hoping for a triumph of mind over matter."

For some reason Pansy felt intensely sorry for her old playmate.

She caught herself making comparisons, and something within her suddenly whispered that they would never be more than friends, something she did not quite realise—some change that had taken place within herself since they had parted in Teneriffe only a week before.

CHAPTER XI

Raoul Le Breton took Pansy's riddle home to solve. He went about it in his own private sanctum. Seating himself at the desk, he wrote out the verse, with a French-English dictionary,

making sure his spelling was correct. Then he set out to find the solution.

He was not long in doing so.

Afterwards he sat on, gazing at the pansies in the crystal bowl on the desk, a tender look on his arrogant face.

A daring little creature, that beautiful English girl, frank as the boy she looked in her riding suit, with attractions beyond those of her sex and beauty; a courage that roused his admiration; a kindness that moved his heart; a disinterestedness sweet as it was novel; an ability to touch parts of his being no woman had touched before, and with a subtle something about her that brought him an ease of spirit he rarely experienced. "Heart's Ease," truly!

As he brooded on Pansy he forgot his vengeance—that he was only waiting in Grand Canary until quite certain Sir George Barclay was on his way to Gambia.

He thought only of the velvety-eyed girl who had answered him so deftly and laughingly.

The riddle had told him the one thing he would ask her to do; his two words, spelt with six letters:

"Love me."

The fact sent Le Breton to the hotel that evening for an interview with the verse-maker.

The place was a blaze of light and a crash of music. In the big patio the usual bi-weekly dance was taking place, and a crowd of people disported themselves to the strains of a ragtime band.

Le Breton made a striking figure in evening clothes, and more than one woman glanced at him with invitation. He took no notice of them. All he wanted was a slim girl with a mop of short, dancing, golden curls. The room was so crowded that he could get no glimpse of his quarry, although he altered his point of view several times.

At the end of half an hour he decided to take a turn round the grounds.

The garden was soft with moonlight, filled with a misty brightness, and the palms hung limp and sighing. From beyond the wall came the murmur of the sea. Syringa and roses filled the night with perfume. At one spot a fountain sang sweetly to itself.

There Le Breton lingered with the moonlight and the ebony shadows, the tropical trees sighing languorously around him.

As he waited there, deep in some reverie of his own, the sound of footsteps reached him. Then, from an adjacent path, voices talking in English—a man's thick, low, and protesting, then a girl's clear and indignant.

"When did I encourage you?" she asked, her voice raised in righteous anger. "Once you brought me a cup of tea I didn't want. Twice you mixed my books and papers with somebody else's. I was three times your partner at Bridge, and that wasn't any fault of mine. I defy you to mention more encouragement than that. Go to your woman with red hair, and don't talk nonsense to me."

The man's voice came again. Then there was a little cry of anger and the sound of a struggle.

The girl's voice brought Le Breton out of his reverie. He knew it, although he could not follow a quarter of what was said. But the little cry and the subsequent scuffle sent him quickly in that direction.

He saw Pansy struggling vainly to get away from a short, thick-set man with a red face and fishy eyes, who held her by one bare arm.

Le Breton was not long in covering the distance that lay between himself and the couple. His coming made Pansy's persecutor let go quickly, and make off. The girl had been struggling with all her might to escape from his coarse, hot grip. And she was too intent on getting out of an undesirable situation even to notice that someone's approach was responsible for her sudden freedom.

The force of her struggles sent her staggering backwards, right on Le Breton. His arm went round her. He held her pressed against him, his hand on her heart.

It seemed to Pansy, she had gotten out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Quivering with indignation she looked up. Then she laughed in a tremulous manner.

"Oh, it's you, is it? I wondered who else was on my trail."

"You ought not to be out at night alone," he said severely. "A beautiful girl is a temptation to any man."

"I'm no temptation. It's my money. He likes women with red hair."

Le Breton scanned Pansy more closely.

He had noticed she was dressed in white, but with her unexpectedly in his arms he had not troubled to look further.

She was wearing a dress of chiffon, light as air, vague as moonlight, that clung about her like a mist, caught up here and there with tiny diamond buckles which made the garment look as if studded with dewdrops. And on a thin platinum chain about her neck was hung one great sparkling drop of light.

Le Breton knew real gems when he saw them, and that one diamond alone was worth a fortune.

He bent his proud head, until his lips just touched the fluff of golden curls.

"Who are you really, Pansy?" he asked softly.

"You despise and dislike me already, so why should I get further into your black books?"

"I, despise and dislike you?"

"You said you disliked all the English."

"I'm quite willing to make an exception in your favour."

"When you learn the truth you'll 'detest' me."

"Never!" he said emphatically.

"Well then, I'm 'that woman of the name of Langham.'"

"You!" he exclaimed.

Then he laughed.

"Pansy, you're a little creature of rare surprises."

The surprise held him silent for some moments. Or else it was sufficient to have the girl there, unresisting against his heart.

Up till now Pansy had avoided all male arms as far as it was possible for a girl who was beautiful, wealthy and light-hearted. Whenever caught she had wriggled out indignantly.

From the arm that held her now she made no attempt to escape. A fearsome fascination lay within its embrace. It seemed that he would have but to close the hand that rested on her bosom, and her heart would be in his grip, snatched out of her keeping before she knew it.

Suddenly it dawned on Pansy that if she stayed there much longer she would want to stay for ever.

One by one she lifted the sinewy, brown fingers from her dress, holding them in one hand as she went about her task with the other.

With a slight smile Le Breton watched her. But when the last of his fingers was removed, she was still a prisoner, held secure within his arm.

Then Pansy descended to strategy.

"Mr. Le Breton, will you lend me your handkerchief?" she asked in a mild tone.

"Why do you want it?" the voice of the master demanded.

"To dip it in the fountain there and wash my arm. It feels all horrid and nasty and clammy where that odious man touched it," she said meekly.

The sentiment was one Le Breton approved of and sympathised with.

Letting her go, he drew out his handkerchief.

Taking it, Pansy turned towards the fountain. He followed and stood beside her, obviously waiting until her task was finished before carrying the situation further.

As Pansy scrubbed away at her arm, she kept a rather nervous eye on him.

When the task was completed, she screwed the handkerchief up into a loose, wet ball. But she did not throw it on the ground as Le Breton expected and was waiting for her to do, before taking her into his arms again.

Instead, she threw it into his face.

It took him by surprise; an indignity that had not come his way hitherto. People were not in the habit of throwing wet handkerchiefs with stinging force into the face of the Sultan Casim Ammeh.

The force and wetness temporarily blinded him. He was perhaps ten seconds in recovering his sight and his dignity.

Then he looked for the girl.

She was running as fast as she could away from him, down a misty, moonlit path, in her chiffon and diamonds looking a shimmer of moonlight and sparkling dew herself.

Pansy's only desire just then was to get out of the white, romantic moonlit world with its scents and sighs and seductive murmurs, back to one of electric light and ragtime, where there was no Raoul Le Breton looking at her gravely, with glowing eyes.

He had suddenly become a startling menace to her cherished liberty, this big, dark man with his masterful air and high-handed ways.

Whatever he said she would have to listen to. Perhaps even—agree with!

CHAPTER XII

Le Breton did not run after the girl. He watched her go, with a feeling that he could afford to bide his time. But at six o'clock the next morning he was round at the hotel waiting for Pansy to come for her usual ride.

However, there was no sign of her either that morning or the following. In fact, it was not until the afternoon of the second day that he saw anything of her.

A tennis tournament was taking place at the hotel. Le Breton went feeling sure Pansy would be there, and incidentally, to find out what Captain Cameron, the local tennis champion, was like.

He saw a fresh-faced youngster, decidedly better-looking than the rest of the men there, but too much like the girl herself ever to be able to hold her.

Then he looked for Pansy.

She was seated with a group of acquaintances, awaiting her turn on the courts.

On seeing Le Breton, she vouchsafed him a smile and a nod, but no further attention.

After a three days' tournament, Cameron emerged victor, but Le Breton had managed to get no word with Pansy. Whenever he came within speaking distance she edged away, taking cover behind someone. To catch her was like setting a trap to catch a moonbeam.

At the end of the tournament word went round that a rank outsider had challenged the victor.

"Who is it, Bob?" Pansy asked when the news reached her.

Cameron pointed with his racket across the court, to where Le Breton stood, in panama hat and grey flannels.

"That big chap over there," he said. "He's got a nerve, hasn't he?"

"And did you accept?" Pansy asked.

"Of course I did. I couldn't let that sort of cheek pass."

Other people had heard what was happening. An interested crowd collected around the court. For word had gone round that the man who had challenged the English champion was Raoul Le Breton, the French millionaire.

Captain Cameron had not been long on the court before he discovered he had met his equal, if not his superior.

With a long, lithe movement Le Breton was all over the ground, seemingly unhurried, but always there at the right moment, making his opponent's play look like a heated scramble. But Le Breton's serving was his great point; a lightning stroke that gave no hint as to where the ball would land; sometimes it was just over the net; sometimes just within the furthestmost limits of

the court.

Cameron was beaten; a beating he took with a boyish smile, as he congratulated the winner.

Others crowded round Le Breton, anxious to add their quota to the praise.

When the crowd dispersed Pansy approached him, as he stood cool and dignified, despite the strenuous game.

"You never told me you could play tennis," she remarked.

"There are lots of things about myself I haven't told you," he replied drily.

"What are they?" she asked. "You mustn't rouse my curiosity and then not satisfy it."

"You needn't worry. I shall tell you some day," he answered.

As Pansy talked to him she played battledore and shuttlecock with her racket and ball.

"When will that day be?" she asked. "The sooner, the better. It's bad for my health to be kept in a state of inquisitive suspense."

"The sooner the better will suit me admirably," he said. "For I shall tell you when we are—married."

Pansy just stared at him.

"Then I shall never hear," she said, when she had recovered her breath. "For I shall never get married. Never. At least, not before I'm forty."

There was a brief pause.

"Why are you avoiding me?" he asked presently.

"What a stupid thing to say! Aren't I here talking to you now?"

"With a whole crowd of people round, yes."

She tapped the tennis ball from her racket to his chest, hitting it back and back again, as if he were a wall. For some minutes Le Breton watched her in an amused manner, as if she were something so favoured that she could do what she liked with him. Then he caught the ball and stopped the game.

"I've a challenge for you, too, Pansy," he said. "Will you meet me to-night, after dinner, near the fountain?"

"It wouldn't require a great amount of courage to do that."

"Will you come then?"

"You said I wasn't to wander about in the grounds alone at night."

"I'll come for you then, since you're so anxious to comply with my desires."

"Comply with my desires," she repeated mockingly. "That's a nice useful phrase to hurl about."

There was an air of unusual and unaccustomed patience about Le Breton, as he argued with his moonbeam. Curious glances were cast in the direction of the couple. Miss Langham had never been seen to favour a man as she was favouring the French millionaire.

"Birds of a feather," someone remarked.

With some surprise young Cameron watched her. Another watched her too. The red-faced, fishy-eyed man from whose undesired attentions Le Breton had rescued her a few nights before.

"If you don't come I shall know what to think," Le Breton said. "That you dare not."

A suspicion of a blush deepened the pink in the girl's cheeks.

"And if I do come, what shall you think then?" she asked him with a nonchalant air.

"It'll be quite time enough to tell you when that comes to pass," he answered.

Pansy had no intention that it should come to pass. Raoul Le Breton might keep the tryst if he liked, but she would not be there.

Not if she could help it—a little voice within her added.

CHAPTER XIII

When night came Pansy tried not to think of Le Breton, but the idea of him out there in the moonlight haunted her. She wondered how long he would wait; patience did not look to be one of his virtues.

There was a dance at the hotel again that evening. As she whirled round and round, slim and light, looking in her chiffon and diamonds a creature of mist and dew, her thoughts were with none of her partners. They were out in the garden with the big, masterful man who was so different from all others of his sex who had come into her life.

By midnight the gaieties were over. Pansy went up to her room. But she did not go to bed. Dismissing her maid, she went out on the balcony, and stood there watching the sea, as she had watched it barely a week before, when Le Breton had come into her life.

The world was as white and peaceful as then; the sea a stretch of murmurous silver; the garden vaguely sighing; the little, moist, cool puffs of wind laden with the scent of roses and the fragrance of foreign flowers.

As she watched the scene, an overpowering desire to go and see if Le Breton were still there seized her; a desire that rapidly became an obsession.

Of course he would not stay from nine o'clock until after midnight!

For all that Pansy felt she must go. That she must linger for a moment in the spot where he had lingered.

She turned quickly into her room; then out into the corridor; down the stairs and on towards a door that led out into the grounds.

Once there, the moonlight drew her on towards the fountain.

On reaching the trysting-place there was no sign of anybody there.

With a feeling of intense disappointment Pansy turned towards the sea-wall, and stood there with the soft light shimmering on her, her face wistful as she watched the molten sea.

Now that she had come, to find Le Breton gone hurt her.

If he really liked her, he would have stayed all night on the chance of her coming. She would, if she were really fond of anybody.

A tear came and sparkled on her long, dark lashes.

He could not love her very much, or he would not have left.

A slight movement in the shadows behind made her face round quickly, her heart giving a sudden bound.

"Well, Pansy," the voice she knew so well said in a caressing tone.

She laughed tremulously.

"I thought you'd gone hours ago," she said.

Le Breton came to her side, a mocking look in his dark, smouldering eyes as he watched her.

"There are two things a man will always wait for if they cut deeply enough," he replied. "Love and revenge."

"How dramatic you sound! Which has kept you on the prowl to-night?" she asked lightly, edging away from him.

But his arm went round her quickly, and she was drawn back to his side.

"No, my little girl, not this time," he whispered.

She tried to free herself from his embrace.

"I didn't mean to come. I really didn't," she said breathlessly.

He laughed in a tender, masterful fashion.

"Possibly not, but since you're here I intend that you shall stay."

"No, no," she said quickly. "Let me go."

Pansy struggled after a liberty that she saw rapidly vanishing. But he just held her, firmly, strongly, watching her with an amused air.

"I shall spoil my dress if I have to wrestle with you like this," she panted presently.

"Don't wrestle then," he said coolly. "Stay where you are, little moonbeam, and no harm will come to the dress."

It was fatal to be in his arms again. She stopped struggling and stayed passive within his embrace.

With easy strength Le Breton lifted her. Going to a bench, he sat down with her on his knee.

"Why did you run away from me the other night?" he asked.

A slim finger played rather nervously with a black pearl stud in the front of his dress shirt.

"I don't know," she said, her eyes avoiding his.

Then she laughed.

"Oh, yes, I do," she went on. "Because I couldn't do as I liked if I stayed with you."

"I could never be a hard taskmaster. Not with you," he said softly.

"Are you with some people?" she asked.

Le Breton thought of the desert kingdom he ruled alone, and he laughed. Then he kissed the little mouth so temptingly close to his own; a long, passionate caress that seemed to take all strength from the girl. Her head fell on his shoulder, and she lay limp within his arms, watching him in a vague, dreamy manner.

For a time there was silence. Le Breton sat with her pressed against his heart, as if to have her there were all-sufficient.

"I feel like Jonah," Pansy said presently. "All swallowed up. There seems to be nothing in the whole wide world now but you."

With a loving hand he caressed her silky curls.

"And I, Heart's Ease, want nothing but you, henceforth and forever."

Pansy snuggled closer to him.

"To think I'm sitting here on your knee," she whispered. "A week ago I didn't know there was any you. And now I only know your name and——"

She broke off, a blush deepening the roses on her cheeks.

"And what, my darling?" he asked tenderly.

"Put your ear quite close. It's not a matter that can be shouted from the house-tops."

He bent his proud head down, close to the girl's lips.

"And that I love you," she whispered.

Then she kissed the ear the confession had been made into.

"And that you will marry me," he added.

"Perhaps, some day, twenty years hence," she said airily. "When I've had my fling."

Le Breton had never had to wait for any woman he fancied, and he had no intention of waiting now.

"No, Pansy, you must marry me now, at once," he said firmly.

"What a hustler you are, Raoul. You must have American blood in you."

She said his name as if she loved it: on her lips it was a caress.

With a touch of savagery his arms tightened round the girl. Even with her in his embrace he guessed that if she knew of the Sultan Casim Ammeh there would be no chance for him. His dark blood would be an efficient barrier; one she would never cross willingly.

"Say you will marry me next week, my little English flower," he said in a fierce, insistent tone.

"I couldn't dream of getting married for ages and ages."

He held her closer, kissing the vivid lips that refused him.

"Say next week, my darling," he whispered passionately. "I shall keep you here until you say next week."

Pansy looked at him with love and teasing in her eyes. "It's midnight now, or perhaps it's one, or even two in the morning. Time flies so when I'm with you. But at six o'clock the gardeners will be here with rakes and brooms, and they'll scratch and sweep us out of our corner. Six hours at most you can keep me, but the gardeners won't let you keep me longer than that. Good-night, Raoul, I'll go to sleep in the meantime."

In a pretence of slumber Pansy closed her eyes.

With a tender smile he watched the little face that looked so peacefully asleep on his shoulder.

"Wake up, my flower, and say things are to be as I wish," he said presently.

One eye opened and looked at him full of love and mischief.

"In ten years' time then, Raoul. That's a great concession."

"In a fortnight. That would seem eternity enough," he replied.

"Well, five years then," Pansy answered, suddenly wide awake. "I could see and do a lot in five years, if I worked hard at it. Especially with the thought of you looming ominously in the background."

"In three weeks, little girl. I've been waiting for you all my life."

Pansy stroked his face with a mocking, caressing hand.

"Poor boy, you don't look like a waiter."

He took the small, teasing hand into his own.

"Never mind what I look like just now," he said. "Say in three weeks' time, my darling."

"Two years. Give me two years to get used to the cramped idea of matrimony."

"A month. Not a day longer, Heart's Ease, unless you want to drive me quite mad," he said, a note of desperate entreaty in his voice.

Suddenly Pansy could not meet the eyes that watched her with such love and passion in their smouldering depths.

This big, dark man who had come into her life so strangely, seemed to leave her nothing but a desire for himself. At that moment she could refuse him nothing.

"In a month then, Raoul. But it's very weak-minded of me giving in to you this way."

He laughed in a tender and triumphant manner.

"My darling, I promise you'll never regret it," he said, a slight catch in his strong voice.

Then he sat on, with Pansy pressed close against him. And the latent searching look had gone from his eyes, as if the girl lying on his heart had brought him ease and peace.

And Pansy was content to stay.

Just then it was sufficient to be with him; to feel the tender strength of his arms; to listen to the music of his deep, caressing voice; to have his long, passionate kisses. Nothing else mattered. Even liberty was forgotten.

CHAPTER XIV

The next morning the sun streaming into Pansy's bedroom roused her. She awoke with the feeling of having indulged in some delightful dream, which, like all dreams, must melt with the morning.

She thought of the episode with Le Breton in the garden. A gentle look lingered on her face.

He was a darling, the nicest man she had ever met; the only one she had ever liked enough to let kiss her; the only one in whose arms she had been content to stay. But about marrying?

A frown came and rested on her white brow.

Marrying was quite another matter. In a month's time, *impossible*. A thing not to be contemplated.

Pansy sat up suddenly, hugging her knees as she gazed thoughtfully at the brilliant expanse of dancing, shimmering sea that sparkled at her through the open bedroom window.

She, engaged to be married! She who had vowed never to fall in love until forty!

It was love Pansy had wanted in the moonlit garden with Le Breton's arms about her. But it was liberty she wanted now, as she sat hugging her knees, amazed at herself and her own behaviour.

She had bartered her liberty for a man's arms and a few kisses!

Pansy could hardly believe herself capable of such folly.

She had been swept off her feet—over her depth before she knew it.

By daylight her freedom and independence were as sweet to her as Le Breton's love had been by the romantic light of the moon. In the sober light of morning she tried to struggle back to where she had been before the hot flood of love he had poured over her had made her promise more than she was now prepared to fulfill.

"It's a woman's privilege to change her mind."

Pansy grasped at the old adage; but to her a promise was a promise, not lightly given or lightly snatched away. So she did not derive much comfort from dwelling on the old saw.

She was sitting up in bed, hugging her knees and frowning in dire perplexity when her maid came in with the early morning tea. And the frown was there when the woman came to say her bath was ready.

A thoughtful mood enveloped her during her dressing. And out of her musing this note was born:—

"My Dearest Raoul,

I can call you that because you are dearer to me than any one on this earth, dearest beyond all things except my liberty. Do not be horrid and cross when I say I cannot marry you, in spite of all I promised last night. Not for ten years at least. And even then I cannot bind myself in any way, for I might be still hankering after freedom. I do love you really, more than anything in the whole wide world except my independence.

You must not be too hard on me, Raoul. I am not quite the same as other women. It is not every girl of twenty who is her own mistress, with £60,000 a year to do what she likes with. It has made life seem so vast, matrimony such a cramped, everyday affair. And I do not want to handicap myself in any way.

This letter sounds awfully selfish, I know. I am not selfish really. Only I love my liberty. It is the one thing that is dearer to me than you.

Always your loving
PANSY."

When the letter was written, Pansy suddenly remembered she did not know his address.

Once satisfied that he was disinterested, she had bothered about nothing else. And after that one day spent among the red roses he had become something quite apart from the rest of the world, not to be gossiped about to mere people.

However, she knew that twenty pesetas given to the hall-porter would ensure the note reaching its destination. The hotel staff would know where he was staying, even if she did not.

Because the note was to Le Breton, Pansy took it down herself and gave it to the hall-porter. When this was done she wandered as far as the spot where she had made her fleeting vows, to see how it looked by daylight.

She lingered there for some minutes, and then returned to her suite.

In the interval a message had come from Le Breton.

It stood on one of the little tables of her sitting-room—a huge gilded wicker basket full of half-blown, red roses. In the midst of the flowers a packet reposed, tied with red ribbon.

Pansy opened the package.

Inside was the gold casket she had once refused. It was filled with purple pansies, still wet with dew. On them a ring reposed, with one huge sapphire, deeply blue as her own eyes.

There was a note in with the flowers, written in a strong masculine hand.

With a flutter about her heart, Pansy picked it out and read it:—

"Heart's Ease, My Own Dear Little Girl,

This little gift comes to you with all my love, my heart, my soul, my very life indeed, given forever into your keeping.

A week ago, if anyone had told me I should write such words to a woman, I should have laughed at them. Until meeting you I did not know what love was. I had no idea one woman could be so satisfying. In you I have found the heaven I have been searching for all my life. My one hour, and she all-sufficing—my little English flower, so sweet and winsome, so kind and wayward, so teasing and yet so tender, who has brought a new fragrance into my life, a peace my soul has never known till now, a love and gratitude into my heart that will keep me hers for ever.

Your devoted lover now and through all eternity.

RAOUL LE BRETON."

As Pansy read the note her lips trembled.

She wished she had never tasted of the sweets of liberty and independence; that the grand-godfather had not left her his millions. She wished she was Pansy Barclay again, a mere girl, not one with enormous riches luring her towards all sorts of goals where love was not. Just Pansy Barclay, who could have met his love with kisses and not a cruel counter note.

CHAPTER XV

Considering it was nearly two in the morning before Le Breton would let Pansy out of his arms, he did not expect her to be out and about at six o'clock for her usual ride. Nevertheless, he looked in at the hotel at that hour and then rode on, indulging in blissful daydreams.

He knew Pansy had no idea who he really was. He was prepared to marry her according to her creed, for her sake to put aside the fierce profligate religion the late Sultan Casim Ammeh had instilled into him.

And he was prepared to do very much more than this.

In spite of his colossal pride in his sultanhip and his desert kingdom, he knew that if Pansy got an inkling of that side of his life his case would be hopeless. His one idea was to keep all knowledge of the supposed Arab strain in him from her. The sultanhip could go, his kingdom be but a source of income. He would buy a house in Paris. They would settle down there, and he would become wholly the European she imagined him to be.

Full of a future that held nothing but the English girl to whom; he was betrothed, and a desire to keep from her all knowledge of his dark, savage heritage, at least until it would be too late for her to draw back, Le Breton rode on, rejoicing in the early morning freshness that reminded him of the girl he loved.

On returning to the villa he interviewed the head gardener. Then he went to the library to write a note and tie up the package he was sending to Pansy; and from there down to breakfast, a solitary meal with no companion save a few purple pansies smiling at him from a crystal vase.

As he sat at his light repast one of his Arab servants entered with a note on a beaten-gold salver.

Le Breton took it.

On the envelope was just his name, written in a pretty, girlish hand. Although he had never seen Pansy's writing before, he guessed it was hers. A tender smile hovered about his hard

mouth as he opened it.

What had she to say to him, this slim, winsome girl, who held his fierce heart in her small white hands? Some fond reply, no doubt, in return for his gifts and flowers. Thanks and words of love that she could not keep until he went round to see her.

There were many things Le Breton expected of Pansy, but certainly not the news the note contained.

He read it through, unable to believe what he saw written before him. And as he read his face lost all its tender, caressing look and took on, instead, a savage, incredulous expression.

Women had always come to him easily, as easily as Pansy herself had come. But they had not withdrawn themselves again: he had done the withdrawing.

For some moments he just stared at the note.

He, flouted and scorned and played with by a girl! He, to whom all women were but toys! He, the Sultan of El-Amme!h!

Le Breton was like one plunged suddenly into an icy cold bath.

The unexpectedness of it all left him numb. Then a surge of hot rage went through him, finally leaving him cold, collected, and furious.

She had dared to scorn him, this English girl! Dared to hurl his love and protestations back into his teeth. Protestations such as he had made to no other woman.

It was the greatest shock and surprise Le Breton had had during the course of his wild life of unquestioned power and limitless money.

He was in no mood to see the love her note breathed. He saw only one fact—that he had been cast aside.

A woman had dared to act towards him as he had often acted towards women.

As he brooded on the note, trying to grasp the almost incredible truth, the cruel look about his mouth deepened.

Putting the note into his pocket, he poured himself another cup of coffee. Then he sat on, staring at the purple pansies, no longer lost in dreams of love and delight, where his one aim was to be all the girl imagined him to be; but in a savage reverie that had love in it, perhaps, but of quite another quality than that which he had already offered.

Full of anger and injured pride as Le Breton was, it did not prevent him going over to the hotel and inquiring for Miss Langham.

He learnt that she was out, on board her yacht. And it seemed to him that she had fled from his wrath.

But he was wrong.

Pansy had gone there knowing he would be sure to come and inquire into the meaning of her note. On board her yacht there was more privacy; a privacy she wanted for Le Breton's sake, not her own. Considering his fiery Latin temperament, he might not take his *congé* in the manner of her more stolid nation. There might be a scene.

She never imagined he would take her decree calmly. There was an air about him as if he had never been thwarted in any way. She was prepared for some unpleasant minutes—minutes, nevertheless, that she had no intention of shirking, which she knew she had brought upon herself by her impetuous promises.

She was sitting alone in her own special sanctum on the yacht.

It was a large saloon—boudoir, music-room, and study combined; white and gold and purple, like herself, with a grand piano in one corner, deep chairs upholstered in yellow with purple cushions, a yellow carpet and white walls and ceiling.

In the midst of it she sat cool and collected, in a simple white yachting suit.

As Le Breton entered she rose, scanning him quickly. She had never seen him so proud and aloof-looking, his face so set and hard. But there was a look of suppressed suffering in his eyes that cut her to the quick.

Neither said a word until the door closed behind the steward.

Then Le Breton crossed to the girl's side.

"What nonsense is this?" he asked in a cold, angry voice, holding her note towards her. "You

promised to marry me, and you must carry out your promise. I'm not going to be put lightly to one side in this manner."

"I haven't put you lightly to one side," she answered. "I think I explained exactly how things were in my note."

"Explanations! I'm not here for explanations," he said, with cold impatience; "but to insist that you fulfill your promise."

"I couldn't do that," she replied quietly.

With the air of still moving in the midst of some incredible truth, he stared at her.

"You've been flirting with me," he said presently, a note of savagery and scorn in his voice. "You are a true English *demievierge*. You rouse a man without the least intention of satisfying him."

Pansy flushed under his contempt. She hated being called "a flirt"; she was not one. She did not know why she had acted as she had done the previous night. But once in his arms, she had wanted to stay. And once he had started talking of love, she wanted to listen. With him she had forgotten all about her own scheme of life and her cherished liberty.

She knew she had not played the game with Le Breton. From the bottom of her heart she was sorry. She did not blame him, but herself.

"I'm not a flirt," she said quietly. "I've never let any man kiss me before. I'm very sorry for all that happened last night."

He laughed in a harsh, grating manner.

"Good God, Pansy! there are a hundred women and more plotting and scheming to try and make me feel for them what I feel for you. And you say you're sorry!"

He broke off, his proud face twisted with pain and chagrin.

Pansy knew his was no idle boast. An army of women must lie in wait for a man of his wealth combined with good looks and such powers of fascination.

"I'm only sorry you picked on me," she said, a note of distress in her voice. "More sorry than I can say. You know I hate giving pain."

Like one dazed, the Sultan Casim Ammeh listened to a woman saying she was sorry he had favoured her as he had no other of her sex—To an extent he had never imagined he would favour any woman, so that he was ready to change his religion, his whole mode of life, for her sake.

"But I couldn't give up my liberty," her voice was saying. "I couldn't get married. And I've a perfect right to change my mind."

"It's not a privilege I intend to allow you," he said in a strangled voice.

"Well, it's one I intend to assert," she answered, suddenly goaded by his imperious attitude.

"You've deliberately fooled me," he said savagely.

"No, I haven't really," she replied, patient again under the pain in the fierce, restless eyes watching her. "I like you immensely, but not enough to marry you."

"I suppose I ought to feel flattered," he said cuttingly.

Pansy laid a hand on his sleeve with a little soothing, conciliatory gesture.

"Don't be so horrid, Raoul. Do try and see things as I see them. I didn't mean to say 'yes' last night; but when you held me in your arms and kissed me there was nothing else I could do."

His name on her lips, her touch on his arm, broke through his seethe of cold anger.

"And if I held and kissed you again, what then?" he asked, suddenly melting.

"Here in the 'garish light of day' it wouldn't alter my intention in the least," she said. "There are so many things that call me in the daytime. But last night, Raoul, there was only you."

He bent over her, dark and handsome, looking the king the Sultan Casim Ammeh had made him.

"Give me the nights, Pansy," he whispered, "and the days I'll leave to you."

"Oh no, I couldn't. Before so long you'd have swallowed up my days too. For there's an air about you as if you wouldn't be satisfied until you had the whole of me. But I shall often think of last night," she went on, a touch of longing in her voice. "In days to come, when we're thousands

of miles apart, in the midst of my schemes, when the lights are brightest and the bands their loudest and the fun at its highest, I shall stop all at once with a little pain in my heart and wonder where the nice man is who kissed me under the palms in the Grand Canary. And I shall say to myself, 'Now, if I'd been a marrying sort, I'd have married him.' And twenty years hence, when pleasure palls, I shall wish I had married him; because there'll never be any man I shall like half as much as I like you."

As she talked Le Breton watched her, wild schemes budding and blossoming in his head.

"And I? What shall I be thinking?" he asked.

"You! Oh, you'll have forgotten all about me by next year—Perhaps next month, even," she replied, smiling at him rather sadly. "One girl is much the same to you as the next, provided she's equally pretty. And you'll be thinking, 'What an idiotic fuss I made over that girl I met in Grand Canary. Let me see, what was her name? Violet or Daisy, or some stupid flower name. Who said yes in the moonlight, and no in the cool, calm light of day. Good Lord! but for her sense I should be married now. Married! Phew, what an escape! For if she'd roped me in there'd have been no gallivanting with other women!'"

Le Breton laughed.

"Now I'm forgiven," she said quickly.

"Forgiven, Heart's Ease, yes. But whilst there's life in me you'll never be forgotten."

He paused, looking at her speculatively.

"So far as I see, there's nothing between us except that you're too fond of your own way to get married," he remarked presently.

"Yes. I suppose that's it really."

"If I were a king in Babylon and you were a Christian slave," he quoted, "or, to get down to more modern times, if I were a barbaric Sultan somewhere in Africa and you a girl I'd fancied and caught and carried off, I'd just take you into my harem and nothing more would be said."

"I should fight like a wildcat. You'd get horribly scratched and bitten."

"Possibly, but—I should win in the end."

Pansy's face went suddenly crimson under the glowing eyes that watched her with such love and desire in their dark depths.

"I think we're talking a lot of nonsense," she remarked.

"What is it you English say? 'There's many a true word spoken in jest,'" he replied with curious emphasis.

It was not jest to him.

Even as he stood talking to Pansy he was cogitating on how he could best get her into his power, should persuasion fail to bring her back to his arms within a week or two.

His yacht was in the harbour. She was in the habit of wandering about alone. He had half a dozen Arab servants with him, men who would do without question anything their Sultan told them. To abduct her would be an easy matter. Once she was in his power, he would take her to El-Ammeah and keep her there. As his wife, if she would marry him; as his slave, if she would not.

Le Breton had no desire to do any such thing except as a last resource, but he had no intention of letting Pansy go.

Her voice broke into his broodings.

"Since you've been so nice about everything, I'm going to keep you and take you for a cruise round the island. I want to have just one day alone with you, so that in years to come I shall know exactly how much I've missed."

He smiled in a slightly savage manner. It amused him to hear the girl talking as if he were but a pleasant incident in her life, when he intended to be the biggest fact that had ever been there.

"In your way of doing things, Pansy, you remind me rather of myself," he remarked. "You're carrying me off, willy nilly, as I might be tempted to carry you."

"It must be because we're both millionaires," she replied. "Little facts of the sort are apt to make one a trifle high-handed."

She touched a bell.

When a steward appeared she put Le Breton into his care. Leaving the saloon, she went herself to interview the captain about her plans.

She was leaning against the yacht's rail, slim and white, with the breeze blowing her curls when Le Breton joined her. And she smiled at him in a frank, boyish fashion, as if their little difference of opinion had never been.

"What can I do to amuse you?" she asked.

"I don't need any amusing when I'm with you," he said. "You're all-sufficing."

"You mustn't say things like that, Raoul," she replied; "they're apt to make one's decisions wobble."

For Pansy the morning sped quickly. For Le Breton it was part of the dream he had dreamt before her note had come and upset his calculations, making him rearrange his plans in a manner that, although it would give him a certain amount of satisfaction, might not be so pleasing to the girl.

The vessel skirted the rounded island, bringing glimpses of quiet bays where white houses nestled, rocky cliffs, stony barrancos cut deep into the hill-side, and pine-clad heights.

There was a lunch *à deux*, with attentive stewards hovering in the background. Afterwards they had coffee and liqueurs and cigarettes on deck. An hour or so was dawdled away there, then Pansy took her guest back to her own special sanctum.

He went over to the piano, touching a note here and there.

"Play me something," she said, for he touched the instrument with the hand of a music lover.

"I was brought up in the backwoods," he replied, "and I never saw a piano until I was nearly nineteen. After that I was too busy making money and doing what I thought was enjoying myself to have time to go in for anything of the sort. But I'd like to listen to you," he finished.

Willingly Pansy seated herself at the piano. Le Breton likewise sat himself in a deep chair close by, and gave himself up to the delight of her playing. She wandered from one song to another, quick to see she had an appreciative audience.

In the end she paused and glanced at him as he sat quiet, all his restless look gone, as if at peace with himself and the world.

"Does music 'soothe your savage breast'?" she asked.

"It could never be savage where you're concerned, Pansy,"

"You talk as if I were quite different from other people."

"So you are. The only woman I've ever loved."

"When you talk like that, the wobbling comes on," she remarked.

To avoid his reply, she started playing again.

Getting to his feet, Le Breton went to the piano. Standing behind her, his arms encircling her, he lifted the small, music-making hands from the keys, and holding them, drew her back until her head rested against him.

"Pansy, suppose I consent to a six months' engagement? The waiting would be purgatory; but I could do it with paradise beyond."

"I'm not taking on any engagements. Not for the next ten years, at least."

He laughed softly and put the slim hands back on the piano with a lingering, careful touch, letting them pursue their way. Whether she liked it or not, this lovely, wayward girl would be his before many weeks had passed.

Then he returned to his chair and sat there deep in some reverie, this time not planning the sort of home he would make for her in Paris, but how he would have certain rooms in his palace at El-Ammeah furnished for her reception.

A steward announcing tea brought him out of his meditations.

Tea was served on deck, with the sun glinting on the blue water and running in golden cascades down the hill-side.

Together they watched the sun set and saw night barely shadow the world when the moon rose, filling the scene with silver glory.

Its white light led them back into harbour, and in its flood the two walked to the hotel

together.

In the garden Le Breton paused to take leave of his hostess.

"Just one kiss, Heart's Ease, for the sake of last night," he whispered.

Willingly Pansy lifted her flower-like face to his.

"Just one then, Raoul, you darling, since you've been so nice about everything."

As Le Breton stooped to kiss her it seemed to him that he would not have to resort to force in order to get the girl. Only a little patience and persuasion were needed, and he would win her in her own, white, English way.

CHAPTER XVI

Along the deserted corridor of the big hotel Pansy was hurrying. Her outing with Le Breton had made her late. By the time she was dressed and ready dinner was well started. She went along quickly, still thinking over the events of the day.

Everything had turned out exactly as she had hoped. She wanted to keep Le Breton's love, and yet not be tied in any way—to have him in the background to marry if, or when, she felt so disposed.

In the full glare of the electric light, going down the wide stairs, she entered the large patio, looking a picture.

She was wearing a dress of some yellow, gauzy material that matched her hair, a garment that clung around her like a sunbeam, bright and shimmering. There were gold shoes on her feet, and around her neck a long chain of yellow amber beads.

As she crossed the big, empty hall, making towards the dining-room, a man rose from his chair—the short, red-faced man from whom Le Breton had rescued her a few nights before.

There was an air about him as if he had been waiting there to waylay her.

Pansy saw him and she swerved slightly, but beyond that she gave him no attention.

However, he was not so easily avoided.

He took up his stand immediately before her, leering at her in a malicious, disagreeable fashion.

"You're fond of chucking red-haired women in my teeth," he said. "Go and chuck 'em at the fellow you were spooning with outside just now."

Annoyed that the man should have witnessed her parting with Le Breton, Pansy would have passed without a word; but he dodged, and was in front of her again.

"At least, she isn't my fancy woman," he went on. "I don't run a villa for her, even if I do admire her looks."

The weight of insinuation in his voice brought the girl to a halt.

"What is it? What do you want to say?" she asked coldly.

"You mean to tell me you don't know Le Breton runs that French actress, Lucille Lemesurier?"

Pansy did not know. Nor did she believe a word the man said.

"How dare you say such things about Mr. Le Breton?" she flashed.

"Hoity-toity! How dare I indeed!"

He laughed coarsely.

"It isn't only me that's talking about it. Everybody knows," he went on.

Everybody did *not* know. Pansy among the number.

"I don't believe a word you say," she said in an angry manner.

"Don't you? All right. Trot along then, and ask the manager. Ask anybody. They're all talking about it. You would be, too, except that you're so conceited that you never come and gossip with the crowd. Ask who is running that villa for Lucille Lemesurier, and they'll tell you it's that high and mighty French millionaire chap, Le Breton, the same as I do."

For a moment Pansy just stared at him, horror and disbelief on her face; then she turned quickly away. She did not go towards the dining-room, but towards the main entrance of the hotel.

She had never troubled to make any inquiries about Le Breton. She had liked him, and that was enough.

Pansy could not believe what the man said.

For all that, she was going to the fountain-head—to Le Breton—to hear what he had to say on the subject.

CHAPTER XVII

A flood of light poured out from Le Breton's villa, from wide-open French windows on to a moonlit lawn. Around the house, palms drooped and bamboos whispered. The night was laden with the scent of roses and syringa, and about the fragrant shrubs fireflies glinted like showers of silver sparks.

In one of the apartments opening on the lawn Le Breton sat at dinner with Lucille, over a little round table, sparkling with crystal and gold, where pink-shaded electric lights glowed among banks of flowers.

It was a large room, lavishly furnished, with priceless rugs, and furniture that might have come out of some Paris museum. There were three Arab servants in attendance, deft-handed, silent men, well trained, and observant, who waited upon their master as if their lives held nothing but his wishes and desires.

Opposite to him Lucille sat, in a white satin gown that left none of her charms to the imagination, with the emerald necklace flashing against her dead-white skin.

She was talking in a soft, languid voice, sometimes witty, often suggestive, but never at a loss for a subject, as women do talk who are paid well to interest and amuse their masters.

Le Breton did not look either particularly interested or amused. In fact, he looked bored and indifferent, answering her in monosyllables, as if her perpetual chatter interrupted some pleasant reverie of his own.

As he sat, intent on his own thoughts, one of the servants came to his side. Stooping, he said in a deferential voice in Arabic:

"There is the English lady your Highness deigned to breakfast with in the orange groves of Telde."

Le Breton started. He glanced round, his gaze following the Arab's to one of the wide French windows opening on the lawn.

Standing there, light and slight, a graceful, golden reed, was the girl who was now all the world to him.

But Pansy was not looking in his direction, but at Lucille, as if she could not believe what she saw before her.

The sight brought Le Breton quickly to his feet.

"Pansy!" he exclaimed.

His voice and action made Lucille glance towards the window.

She looked at the girl standing there; then she smiled lazily, a trifle maliciously.

Lucille saw before her the rival she had suspected, who had changed Le Breton's lukewarm liking into cutting indifference. With the perception of her kind she realised that Pansy was something quite different from herself and the women Le Breton usually amused himself with. That slim girl with her wide, purple eyes and vivid, flower-like face was no courtesan, no toy; but a woman with a spirit and a soul that could hold and draw a man, apart from her physical attractions; the sort of woman, in fact, that a man like Raoul Le Breton might be tempted to

marry.

At sound of his voice Pansy came into the room, her eyes blazing, her breast heaving, her two hands clutching the long amber chain in an effort to keep herself calm and collected.

So it was true! He was living here with that red-haired creature, this man who had come to her vowing she was the only woman he had ever loved! This man whom she had kissed and whom she had allowed to kiss and fondle her!

Pansy looked at Lucille in her white satin and emeralds—Lucille, big and voluptuous, her profession written on her face.

"Who is that woman?" she demanded.

Lucille did not wait for Le Breton to answer.

One glance at him told her everything. On his face were concern, love, and annoyance; the look that comes to a man's face when the girl he would make his wife and the woman who is his mistress by some unfortunate circumstance chance to meet.

Her star, never particularly bright, had waned and set within a week, all thanks to this slim girl in the yellow dress. Any day she, Lucille, might be shipped back to France, with only the emerald necklace to soothe her sore heart.

As things were she could lose nothing, and she might have the pleasure of parting Le Breton from the woman he really loved. The girl looked one who would countenance no backslidings.

Before he could say anything she said in a languid voice:

"My name is Lucille Lemesurier. I'm an actress. At Mr. Le Breton's invitation I came here with him from Paris, to stay until he tires of me or I of him. *Comme vous voulez*," she finished, with a shrug.

For a moment Pansy just stared at the truth confronting her: the truth, lazy, languid, and smiling, in white satin and emeralds.

There was a little noise, hard and sharp, like a shower of frozen tears rattling down on the table. The hands clinging to the string of amber beads clung just a thought too hard, for the necklace snapped suddenly. The beads poured down like tears—the tears Pansy herself was past shedding. The knowledge of Le Breton's treachery and deceit had turned her into ice.

She cast one look at him of utter contempt and scorn.

Then, silently as she had come, she turned and went from the room.

She did not get far, however, before Le Breton was at her side.

Ignoring him, she hurried across the moonlit lawn, her only desire to escape from his presence.

"Pansy——" he began.

Like a whirlwind she turned on him. With a hand that shook with rage, she pointed to the open dining-room window.

"Go! Go back to that red-haired creature," she said in a voice that trembled with anger. "I never want to see or speak to you again. Never!"

At her words Le Breton's hands clenched and his swarthy face went white.

"Do you think I'm going to be dismissed in this manner?" he asked in a strangled voice.

Without a further word Pansy would have hurried on; but, before she knew what was happening, he had taken her into his arms.

"How dare you touch me! How dare you touch me!" she gasped, struggling furiously after freedom, amazed at his audacity.

But he laughed and, crushing her against him, kissed her fiercely.

Le Breton knew his case was hopeless. No amount of persuasion would bring the girl back to his arms. He was no longer a polished man of the world, but the Sultan of El-Ammeh, a barbaric ruler who knew no law save his own desire.

Pansy was too furious to be afraid. With all her might she struggled to get away from his arms and the deluge of hot, passionate kisses, not because of the danger oozing from the man, but because she knew he had held and kissed that other woman.

But all her struggles were in vain. She was helpless against his strength; crushed within his

arms; almost breathless under the force and passion of the kisses she could not escape from.

"If you go on behaving in this brutal manner I shall scream," she panted presently.

Her words sobered him.

The road lay not twenty yards away, and her screams might bring a dozen people to her rescue. He remembered that he was in Grand Canary, where even *he* had to conform with rules, not in El-Ammeah, where none would dare question his doings.

He let Pansy out of his arms.

"Look what a state you've put me in!" she flashed the moment she was free, as she endeavoured to tidy her torn and crumpled dress with hands that shook with anger. "You're a brute. A savage. I hate you!" she finished.

But Le Breton just stood and laughed.

To-night she might go; but to-morrow—!

To-morrow she would be on his yacht, where she might scream to her heart's content without a soul coming to her rescue.

His laughter, fierce and fond, followed Pansy from the garden.

CHAPTER XVIII

The hotel patio was full of people just out from dinner. In the midst of a crowd of acquaintances Captain Cameron stood, laughing and talking with those around him.

All at once a voice at his elbow said tensely:

"Bob, I want to speak to you alone for a moment."

He turned quickly. Then he stood surveying the speaker with surprise, for the girl beside him looked very different from the Pansy he knew. There was an almost tortured air about her. Her face was set and white; there were deep, dark rings under eyes that were limpid pools of pain.

"Hello, old pal, what has happened?" he asked, with concern.

Pansy did not stop to answer him. With impatient hands she led him away from the crowd of listening, staring people into a quiet corner.

"I'm going back to England at once. To-night! Help me to get off, please," she said.

With blank amazement Cameron stared at her.

"What's got hold of you now?" he managed to ask.

"I'm going home," she said, "at once."

"But I thought you were staying here until Sir George came out?"

"Well, I've changed my mind," she snapped. "And I'm going back, even if you aren't."

All Pansy wanted now was to get to the one other man she loved, her father. To get to him as quickly as possible with her bruised and wounded heart.

"Of course I'll come with you, old girl," Cameron said, a trifle helplessly. "I wouldn't dream of leaving you in the lurch. But you have a way of springing surprises on people. I'll send along and tell the captain to get steam up."

"Yes, do, Bob, please," she said gratefully. "And ask Miss Grainger to see about the packing. And find out where Jenkins is, and send him along to the stables. I—I'm past doing anything."

Cameron scanned the girl quickly, suddenly aware that something more than a whim was at the bottom of her hurried departure.

"What is it, Pansy?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered bravely. "But I get moods when I just feel I must see my old dad."

She turned away quickly to avoid any further questions, leaving Cameron staring at her

receding back.

CHAPTER XIX

The next morning Le Breton set about his scheme for trapping Pansy.

The task appeared easy. He would get one of his men to note when she left the hotel and mark which route she took. There were not many roads in the place, and it would not be difficult to guess where she was going. He and his men would follow, and waylay and capture her at some lonely spot. They would take her across the island to a little port on the far side, where his yacht would be waiting. Once he had her safely on board, he would start for Africa.

As he sat at breakfast, savage and brooding, craving for the girl who had flouted him, one of his servants entered.

"Well?" he asked, glaring at the man.

The Arab made a deep obeisance.

"Your Highness, the English lady has gone."

"Gone!" the Sultan repeated in an incredulous tone. "Gone! Where?"

"She left the island last night, in her yacht, about two hours after she was here."

Like one thunderstruck, Le Breton stared at the Arab. This unexpected move of Pansy's had upset his calculations altogether.

Without a word he rose from the table. There and then he went over to the hotel to see the manager, his only idea to find out where the girl had gone. He could not believe that she had escaped him; yet the mere thought that she might have done so filled him with a seething passion.

By the time he reached the hotel he had recovered himself in some degree, sufficiently to inquire in a normal tone for the manager.

He was taken to the latter's office.

"You had an English lady staying here, a Miss Langham," Le Breton said the moment he was ushered in. "I wanted to see her rather particularly, but I hear she has left. Can you tell me where she's gone?"

On seeing who the visitor was, the manager was anxious to give all possible assistance, but he knew little more about Pansy than Le Breton did.

"She left rather hurriedly," he said; "and, as far as I could gather, she was going back to England."

"Do you know her address there?" Le Breton asked.

"No, I don't," the manager said regretfully. "Miss Langham did not talk much about herself."

This was all Le Breton was able to learn. But he knew one thing—that the girl his fierce heart hungered for had escaped him.

That morning his black horse had a hard time, for Le Breton rode like a madman in a vain endeavour to get away from the whirl of wild love and thwarted hopes that raged within him—the Sultan Casim Ammeh for the first time deprived of the woman he wanted; wanted as he had never wanted any other.

He went to the rose-wreathed summer-house where Pansy had been pleased to linger with him; to the orange groves at Telde where they had breakfasted together. Night found him in the hotel gardens, near the fountain where they had met and plighted their troth.

His hands clenched at the thought of all she had promised there. Phantom-like, she haunted him. Her ghost was in his arms, kissing and teasing him, a recollection that was torture. The one real love of his life had proved but Dead Sea fruit.

He would have given his kingdom, all his riches, to have Pansy back in his arms as he had had her that night, unresisting, watching him with eyes full of love, wanting him as much as he had wanted her. The one woman who had ever scorned him!

CHAPTER XX

In his study Sir George Barclay sat alone. Sixteen years had passed since, in far-away Gambia, he had had to condemn to death the marauding Arab chief. In a few weeks' time he would be returning to the country, not in any minor capacity, but as its Governor.

Although his thoughts just then were in Gambia, the incident of the shooting of the Sultan Casim Ammeh had long since gone from his mind. And he never gave a thought nowadays to the boy who, unavailingly, had come to the Arab chief's rescue. But he still carried the mark of the youngster's sword upon his cheek.

The passing years had changed Barclay very little. His hair was grey, his face thinner, and a studious look now lurked in the grey eyes where tragedy had once been. For, in his profession, Barclay had found some of the forgetfulness he had set out in search of.

As he sat at his desk the door opened suddenly. The manner of opening told him that the daughter he imagined to be a thousand or more miles away was home again. For no one, save this cherished legacy from his lost love, would enter his study with such lack of ceremony.

He looked round quickly, as a slim girl in ermine and purple velvet entered.

"Why, Pansy, my darling, I thought you were in Grand Canary," he said, rising quickly to greet her.

"So I was, father, five days ago. And then ... and then——!"

She paused, and laughing in a rather forced manner, kissed him affectionately.

"Father, will you take me out to Gambia with you?" she finished.

There was very little George Barclay ever refused his daughter. On this occasion, he did make some sort of stand.

"Gambia is no place for you, my darling. There's nothing there to amuse and interest a young girl."

"Perhaps not," Pansy said as she took off her hat and gloves, watching him with a rather set smile. "But I don't care where I go so long as I can be with you and get away from myself."

Her words made Barclay look at her sharply.

To want to get away from one's self was a feeling he could understand and sympathise with, only too well. But to hear such a sentiment on his daughter's lips surprised and hurt him.

"My little girl, what has happened?" he asked gently.

Pansy laughed again, but there was a sharp catch of pain in her mirth.

"I think my heart is broken, that's all," she said with a would-be casual air.

Barclay did not wait to hear any more at that moment. He drew her down on to a couch and sat there with his arm about her.

"My poor little girl," he whispered. "Tell me all about it."

Pansy laid her head on his shoulder, and smiled at him with lips that trembled woefully.

"It's nobody's fault but my own, Daddy," she said. "I brought it on myself with my silly, impetuous ways. And it serves me right for hankering after strange men, and not being content with my old father."

For all her light talk Barclay knew something serious had happened. To him his daughter was but a new edition of a well-read book; the girl was her mother over again.

There was a brief pause as Sir George sat watching his child, stroking her curls with a thin, affectionate hand, wondering what tragedy had come into this bright, young life.

"Hearts are silly things, aren't they?" Pansy said suddenly. "Soft, flabby, squashy sort of things that get hurt easily if you don't keep a sharp eye on them. And I'd so many things to keep an eye on that I forgot all about mine. Hearts ought not to be left without protection. They should have iron rails put round them to keep all trespassers off, like the rails we put round the trees in the park to keep the cattle from hurting them."

There was a further pause, and a little sniff. Then Pansy said:

"Father, lend me your handkerchief, I know it's a nice big one. I believe I'm going to cry. For the first time since it happened. It must be seeing you again. And I shall cry a lot on your coat, and perhaps spoil it. But, since it's me, I know you won't mind."

Sir George drew out a handkerchief.

"I was walking along in heaven with my head up and my nose in the air," the sweet, hurt voice explained, "blissfully happy because he was there. There was a hole in the floor of heaven and I never saw it. And I fell right through, crash, bang, right down to earth again. A rotten old earth with all the fun gone out of it. And I'm awfully sore and bruised, and the shock has injured my heart. It has never been the same since and will never be the same again, because ... because, I did love him, awfully."

As she talked Sir George watched her with affection and concern, his heart aching for this slim, beautiful daughter of his, to whom love had come as a tragedy.

"Oh, Daddy," she said, tears choking her voice, "why is life so hard?"

Then the storm broke.

Sir George listened to her sobs, as with a gentle hand he stroked the golden curls. All the time he wondered who was responsible for her tears, who had broken the heart of his cherished daughter.

He went over the multitude of men she knew. But he never gave one thought to the savage boy who, sixteen years before, had scarred his face—the Sultan Casim Ammeh.

CHAPTER XXI

In a fashionable London hotel a little party of three sat at dinner. The dining-room was a large place, full of well-dressed people. It was bright with electric light, and under a cover of greenery a band played not too loudly.

Among the crowd of diners none seemed better known than the girl with the short, golden curls who sat with the thin, studious-looking man and the fresh-faced, fair-haired boy. Very often lorgnettes were turned in her direction; for, when in town, no girl was more sought after than Pansy Langham.

As Pansy sat with her father and Captain Cameron a man who had been sitting at the far end of the room came to their table, greeting all three with the air of an old acquaintance.

Afterwards he turned to Cameron.

"Well, and how's tennis? Are you still champion in your own little way?" he asked.

"To tell you the truth, Dennis," Cameron answered, "in Grand Canary one man gave me a thorough licking. And he was a rank outsider too!"

"How pleased you must have felt. Who was your executioner?"

"A man of the name of Le Breton. A French millionaire."

Dennis laughed in a disparaging manner.

"French he calls himself, does he? That's like his cheek. I met him once in Paris, a haughty sort of customer who thinks the whole world is run for him. He's a half-breed really, for all his money and his high-handed ways."

The conversation had taken a turn that held a fearsome interest for Pansy. But to hear Raoul Le Breton described as a half-breed was a shock and surprise to her.

"Mr. Le Breton a half-caste!" she exclaimed.

Dennis glanced at her.

"Where did you drop across him?" he asked sharply.

"In Grand Canary also."

"Well, the less you have to do with 'sich' the better," he said in a brotherly way. "He's a hot

lot. The very devil. No sort of a pal for a girl like you."

"I thought he was French," Pansy said in a strained voice.

"He poses as such, but he isn't. He's a nigger cross, French-Arab. And what's more he's a Mohammedan."

"You're a trifle sweeping, Dennis," Sir George interposed. "If you'd dealt with coloured people as much as I have, you'd know there was a great difference between a nigger and an Arab. An Arab in his own way is a gentleman. And his religion has a great resemblance to our own. He is not a naked devil-worshipper like the negro."

Pansy welcomed her father's intervention. At that moment her world was crashing into even greater ruins around her.

Raoul Le Breton a half-caste! The man she loved "a nigger"!

Pansy did not hide from herself the fact that she still loved Le Breton, but this last piece of news about him put him quite beyond the pale.

Also it put a new light on the affair of Lucille Lemesurier.

He was of a different race, a different religion, a different colour, with a wholly different outlook.

After the first gust of temper was over, Pansy had wanted to find some excuse for Le Breton over the affair of the French actress.

It is easy to find excuses for a person when one is anxious to find them. And now it seemed she had one.

He was a Mohammedan. His religion allowed him four wives, and as many other women as he pleased. No wonder he had been angry at the fuss she had made over Lucille Lemesurier! According to his code he had done no wrong.

Now Pansy wanted to apologise for her rudeness in invading his villa; for her temper, and the scene that followed.

The fault was all hers. She ought to have found out more about him before letting things go so far. She had liked him, and she had troubled about nothing else.

She ought never to have encouraged him. For when they had breakfasted together that morning among the red roses, she knew he was in love with her.

"There are lots of things about myself I haven't told you."

Le Breton's remark came back to her mind.

No wonder he had wanted to marry her at once! Before she found out anything about him.

Pansy tried to feel angry with her erstwhile lover. But, phantom-like, the strength of his arms was around her, his handsome, sunburnt face was close to her own, his voice was whispering words of love and longing, his lips on hers in those passionate kisses that made her forget everything but himself.

Her eyes went round the room, a brave, tortured look in them.

Were there other women there, suffering as she was suffering? Suffering, and who yet had to go on smiling? The world demanded her smiles, and it should have them, although her heart was bleeding at the tragedy of her own making.

Not only her heart, but Raoul's. Because she had encouraged him.

She must not blame him. For the odds were all against him. She must try and see things from his point of view—the point of view of a polygamist.

That night when Pansy got back home, she wrote the following note:—

"Dear Mr. Le Breton,

I owe you an apology. Only to-night I have learnt that you are of another race, another religion than mine. It makes things look quite different. You see things from the point of view of your race, I, of mine. I am sorry I did not know all this sooner; I should have acted very differently. I should not have come to your villa that night and made a stupid fuss, for one thing. About such matters men of your race and religion are quite different from men of my own. I am sorry for all that occurred. For my own bad temper and the annoyance I must have caused you. But I did not know anything about you then.

Yours regretfully,
Pansy Langham.

P.S.—I shall be calling at Grand Canary in about ten days' time with my father, Sir George Barclay. I am going out to Africa with him. If you care to come on board during the evening I should like to see you and say how sorry I am.

P. L."

CHAPTER XXII

One day when Le Breton returned from one of the mad rides he frequently indulged in, in a vain effort to assuage the pain and chagrin that raged within him, he found among a pile of letters put aside for his inspection, one with an English stamp.

Letters from that country rarely came his way. But it was not the novelty that attracted him, making him pick it out from the others, but the writing.

He had seen it once before, on a note that had turned his heaven into hell, when for the first time he had learnt what it was to be rejected by a woman.

He tore the envelope open, eager for the contents.

What had the girl to say to him? Why had she written?

With a wild throb of hope, he drew out the message.

Once he had called Pansy a little creature of rare surprises. But none equalled the surprise in store for him now.

It was not the apologies in the note he saw; nor a girl's desire to try and see things from his point of view; nor the fact that, despite everything, she was unable to break away from him.

He saw only one thing.

She was Sir George Barclay's daughter! The girl he loved to distraction was the child of his father's murderer!

Astounded he stared at the note. He could not believe it. Yet it was there, written in Pansy's own hand.

"With my father, Sir George Barclay."

Pansy, the child of the man he hated! That brave, kind, slim, teasing girl, who for one brief week had filled him with a happiness and love and contentment such as he had once deemed impossible.

As he brooded on the note a variety of emotions raged within him.

A vengeance that had rankled for sixteen years fought with a love that had grown up in a week.

Then he pulled himself together, as if amazed at his own indecision.

He took the note, with its pathos and pleading; a girl's endeavour to meet the view of the man she loved, whose outlook was quite beyond her. Deliberately he tore it across and across, into shreds, slowly and with a cruel look on his face, as if it were something alive that he was torturing, and that gave him pleasure to torture.

For Le Breton had decided what his course was to be. The vengeance he had promised long years ago should be carried out, with slight alterations. He had a way now of torturing Sir George Barclay that would be punishment beyond any death. And Pansy was the tool he intended to use. What was more, she was to pay the penalty of her father's crime. For he would mete out to her the measure he had promised sixteen years ago.

However, this decision did not prevent Le Breton from going to Pansy's yacht the evening of its arrival in Grand Canary.

After dinner he made his way along the quay towards the white vessel with its flare of light that stood out against the dark night.

Evidently he was expected. On inquiring for Miss Langham, he was shown into the cabin

where he had had his previous interview with her; and with the feeling that things would go his way, if he had but a little patience: a virtue he had never been called upon to exercise where a woman was concerned.

Le Breton's feelings as he stayed on in the pretty cabin would be difficult to describe. Everything was redolent of the girl, touching his heart with fairy fingers; a heart he had hardened against her.

But, as he waited there, he despised himself for even having momentarily contemplated letting a woman come between him and his cherished vengeance.

Once in Africa Sir George Barclay would prove an easy and unsuspecting prey. According to custom, the Governor should tour his province. That tour would bring him within six hundred miles of Le Breton's desert kingdom. The latter intended to keep himself well posted in his enemy's movements. And he knew exactly the spot where he would wait for the Governor and his suite—the spot where sixteen years before the Sultan Casim Ammeh had been shot.

He, Le Breton, would wait near there with a troop of his Arab soldiers. Unsuspecting, the Governor would walk into the trap. The whole party would be captured with a completeness and unexpectedness that would leave no trace of what had happened. With his prisoners he would sweep back to the desert.

Once in El-Ammeh, the daughter should be sold as a slave in the public market, to become the property of any Arab or negro chief who fancied her. And her father should see her sold. But he should not be killed afterwards. He should live on to brood over his child's fate—a torture worse than any death.

"Put your ear quite close. It's not a matter that can be shouted from the house-tops."

Like a sign from the sea, the echo of Pansy's voice whispered in his ear, a breath from his one night in heaven.

But he would not listen. Vengeance had stifled love—vengeance he had waited sixteen years for.

He glanced round with set, cold face.

It seemed to him no other woman could look so lovely and desirable as the girl entering.

Pansy was wearing a flounced dress of some soft pink silky material that spread around her like the petals of a flower. The one great diamond sparkled on her breast—a dewdrop in the heart of a half-blown rose.

On seeing her Le Breton caught his breath sharply. This girl the daughter of his father's murderer! This lovely half-blown English rose! What a trick Fate had played him!

Then, ashamed of his momentary craving, he faced her, a cruel smile on his lips.

There was a brief silence.

Pansy looked at him, thinking she had never seen him so handsome, so proud, so aloof, so hard as now. He stood watching her coldly with no word of welcome, no greeting on his lips.

He was the first to speak. And he said none of the things Pansy was expecting and was prepared for.

"Why did you tell me your name was Langham?" he asked in a peremptory manner.

"It is Langham," she answered, with some surprise.

"How is it, then, that you say Sir George Barclay is your father?"

"He is my father. Langham was my godfather's name, my own second name. I had to take it when I inherited his money. That was his one stipulation."

Another pause ensued.

There was a hurt look in Pansy's soft eyes as she watched Le Breton. As he looked back at her a hungry gleam came to his hard ones.

"What have you learnt about me?" he demanded presently.

"That you're half Arab."

He had almost expected her to say she had discovered he was the Sultan Casim Ammeh, her own and her father's sworn enemy.

"Is that all?" he asked, with a savage laugh.

"It's quite enough to account for everything," Pansy replied.

"Even for your coming into my arms and letting me kiss and caress you," he said, with biting sarcasm.

Pansy flushed.

"I didn't know anything about you then. And you know I didn't," she said with indignation.

"Or you wouldn't have listened to a word of love from me."

Much as he tried to hate the girl, now that he was with her he could not keep the word "love" off his lips.

Pansy felt she was not shining. She wanted to apologise, but he seemed determined to be disagreeable. What was more, she had a feeling she was dealing with quite a different man from the Raoul Le Breton who had won and broken her heart within a week. She put it down to her own treatment of him and it made her all the more anxious for an understanding. She could not bear to see him looking at her in that hard, cruel way, as if she were his mortal enemy—someone who had injured him past all forgiveness.

"It's not that I want to talk about at all," she said desperately.

"What do you want to talk about, then?" he asked, his cruel smile deepening.

"I want to say how sorry I am that I was angry with you that night. But I ... I didn't know you were ... are——"

Pansy stopped before she got deeper into the mire.

She was going to say "a coloured man," but with him standing before her, her lips refused to form the words.

However, Le Breton finished the sentence for her.

"'A nigger.' Don't spare my feelings. I've had it cast up at me before by you English."

"You know I wouldn't say anything so cruel and untrue."

Again there was silence.

Le Breton watched her, torturing himself with the thought of what might have been.

"If you'd kept your word, you'd be my wife now. The wife of 'a nigger,'" he said presently.

"Don't be so cruel. I never thought you'd be like this," she cried, her voice full of pain.

"And I never thought you would break your word."

"In any case, I couldn't have married you, considering you're a Mohammedan," she said, goaded out of all patience by his unfriendly attitude.

"Religion is nothing to me nowadays. I was quite prepared to change to yours."

"You couldn't have done that. There would be your ... your wives to consider."

"I have no wife by my religion or yours."

"But that woman at your villa, wasn't she——" Pansy began.

"I've half a dozen women in one of my—houses; but none of them are my wives. You're the only woman I've ever asked for in marriage. You!"

He laughed in a cruel, hard way, as if at some devil's joke.

Pansy's hand went to her head—a weary, hopeless gesture.

He was beyond her comprehension, this man who calmly confessed to having a half a dozen women in one of his houses, to a woman he would have made his wife.

"I'm sorry," she said in a dreary tone, "but I can't understand you. I'd no idea there were men who seemed just like other men and yet behaved in this ... this extraordinary fashion."

"I'm not aware that my behaviour is extraordinary. Every man in my country has a harem if he can afford it."

Deliberately he put these facts before the girl in his desire to hurt and hate her as he hated her father. But the look of suffering on her face hurt him as much as he was hurting her. And he hated himself more than he hated her, because uprooting the love he had for her out of his heart

was proving such a difficult task.

"It's a harem, is it?" Pansy said distastefully. "Now I'm beginning to understand. But I don't want to hear anything more about it. I see now it was a mistake my asking you here. But I wanted you to know—to know—"

She floundered and stopped and started again, anxious to be fair with him in spite of everything.

"I wanted you to understand that the fact of your religion and race made your behaviour seem quite different from what it would have been were you a ... a European. I want you to see that I know you have your point of view, that I can't in all fairness blame you for doing what is not wrong according to your standpoint, even if it is according to mine."

With his cold, cruel smile deepening, he watched her floundering after excuses for him, endeavouring to see his point of view, to be just and fair.

"You're very magnanimous," he said, with biting scorn.

"And you are very unkind," she flashed, suddenly out of patience. "You're making everything as hard for me as you possibly can. You're doing it deliberately; and you look as if you enjoyed hurting me. I never thought you'd be like this, Raoul. I would have liked to part as friends since ... since anything else is impossible."

His name on her lips made a spasm cross Le Breton's face.

As he stood there fighting against himself he knew he was still madly in love with the girl he was determined to hate, and he despised himself for his own weakness.

Pansy watched him, a look of suppressed suffering shadowing her eyes.

She would have given all she possessed—her cherished freedom, her vast riches, her life—to have had him as she once thought him, a man of her own colour, not with this dreadful black barrier between them; a tragedy so ghastly that the fact of Lucille Lemesurier now seemed a laughing matter. He was lost to her for ever. No amount of love or understanding could pull down that barrier.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand. "I'm sorry we ever dropped across one another."

Le Breton made no reply. Cold and unsmiling, he watched her.

There was a brief silence.

Outside, the sea sobbed and splashed like tears against the vessel's side. But all the tears in the world could not wash the black stain from him.

As they stood looking at one another, a verse came and sang like a dirge in Pansy's head:

What are we waiting for? Oh, my heart,
Kiss me straight on the brow and part:
Again! Again, my heart, my heart
What are we waiting for, you and I?
A pleading look—a stifled cry—
Good-bye for ever. Good-bye, good-bye.

"Good-bye," she said again.

Then he smiled his cold, cruel smile.

"No, Pansy. I say—au revoir."

Ignoring her outstretched hand, he bowed. Then, after one long look at her, he turned and was gone.

As the door closed behind him Pansy blinked back two tears.

It had hurt her horribly to see him so set and cold, with that cruel look in his eyes where love once had been.

She wished that "The Sultan" had killed her that day in the East End of London; or that Raoul Le Breton had been drowned that night in the sea. Anything rather than that they should have met to make each other suffer.

PART III

CHAPTER I

Over El-Ammeh great stars flashed, like silver lamps in the purple dome above the desert city. Their light gave a faint, misty white tinge to the scented blueness of the harem garden. There, trees sighed softly, moving vague and shadow-like as a warm breeze stirred them. The walled pleasance was filled with the scent of flowers, of roses, magnolia, heliotrope, mimosa and a hundred other blossoms, for night lay heavy upon the garden.

In sunken ponds the stars were mirrored, rocking gently on the surface of the ruffled water. Close by one of the silvered pools, a man's figure showed, big and white, in flowing garments. Against him a slender girl leant.

Rayma's eyes rivalled the stars as she gazed up at her sultan and owner. Yet in their dark depths a touch of anxiety lurked.

A fortnight ago, the Sultan had returned to El-Ammeh. The first week had been one of blissful happiness for the Arab girl. For her master had returned more her lover than ever. But, as the days went on, doubts crept into her heart, vague and haunting. At times it seemed to her he was not quite the same man who left her for Paris. For he had a habit now that he had not had before he went away—a disconcerting habit of looking at her with unseeing eyes, as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

This mood was on him now.

Although the night called for nothing but love and caresses, none had fallen to her lot. Although she rested against him, she might not have been there for all the notice he took. He appeared to have forgotten her, as he gazed in a brooding, longing manner at the soft, velvety depths of the purple sky—sky as deeply, softly purple as pansies.

Rayma pressed closer to her lord and sultan, looking at him with love-laden, anxious eyes.

"Beloved," she whispered softly, "are your thoughts with some woman in Paris?"

With a start, his attention came back to her. In the starlight he scanned her little face in a fierce, hungry, disappointed manner. For the slight golden girl who now rested upon his heart brought him none of the contentment he had known when Pansy had been there.

"No, little one," he said gently. "I prefer you to all the women I met in Paris."

Her slim arms went round his neck in a clinging passionate embrace.

"Oh, my lord," she whispered, "such words are my life. At times I think you do not love me as you once did. You seem not quite the same. For, often, although your arms are around me, you forget that I am there!"

A bitter expression crossed his face.

He did not forget that she was there. Although he had come back to the desert girl he had once loved, it was not her he wanted, but the girl who had scorned and flouted him, his enemy's daughter. And he tried to forget her in the slim, golden arms that held him, with such desire and passion.

"No, Rayma, I'm not quite the same," he said, stroking the little face that watched him with such love and longing. "For sixteen years and more I have waited to avenge my father's death. And now——"

He broke off, and laughed savagely.

"And now—my father's murderer is almost within my grip. Next week I start out with my men to capture him."

Revenge was a sentiment the Arab girl could understand.

"Oh, my lord," she whispered, "little wonder that your mind wanders from me, even though I am within your arms. I wept when you went to Paris. But I would speed you on this quest for vengeance."

The Sultan made no reply.

Deep down in his own heart he knew his excuse was a false one. It was not vengeance that

came between him and Rayma—but Pansy.

And now he hated the English girl, for she had robbed all other women of their sweetness.

CHAPTER II

Over the old fort near the river the British flag drooped limply. Many years had passed since it had last hung there. Nowadays, the place was not used. The country was too peaceful to need forts, and the district officer lived in a corrugated iron bungalow just beyond the remains of the stockade.

It was getting on towards evening. The mist still rose from forest and shadow valley, as it had risen sixteen years before when Barclay first came to these parts. And in the stunted cliffs another generation of baboons swarmed.

On the roof of the old fort Pansy stood with her father, watching as she had often watched during her months in Africa, the sunset that each night painted the world with glory.

A golden mist draped the horizon, its edge gilded sharply and clearly. Across the golden curtain swept great fan-like rays of rose and green and glowing carmine, all radiating from a blurred mass of orange hung on the world's edge where the sun sank slowly behind the veil of gold.

The mist rolled up from the wide shallow valley, in banks and tattered ribbons, rainbow tinted. And the lakes that, in the dry season, marked the course of the shrunken river, gleamed like jewels in the flood of light poured out from the heavens.

The constant change and variety of the last few months had eased Pansy's pain a little.

With her father she had toured the colony. She had slept under canvas, in native huts, and iron bungalows. And there were half-a-dozen officers on the governor's staff, all anxious to entertain his daughter.

But for the nights, Pansy would have enjoyed herself immensely.

"Give me the nights, Pansy, and the days I'll leave to you."

Very often Raoul Le Breton's words came back to her, as she lay sleepless. It seemed that he had her nights now, that man she loved yet could not marry. Often her heart ached with a violence that kept her awake until the morning.

Pansy tried to make her nights as short as possible. She was always the last to bed and the first to rise, often up and dressed before Alice—her plump, pretty, mulatto maid, a Mission girl Pansy had engaged for her stay in Africa—appeared with the early morning tea. And whenever it was possible, she was out and away on her old racehorse, with some member of her father's staff.

And the day that followed was generally full of novelty and interest. There were new people to see; a wild country to travel through; some negro chief to interview; a native village to visit.

As the journey continued, the Europeans grew fewer. Until that day, it was nearly a week since Pansy had seen a white face, except those of her father's suite.

Only that afternoon the furthestmost point of the tour had been reached. A mile or so beyond was French territory.

With her father Pansy often went over the maps of the district and the country that lay around it. She knew that beyond the British possessions lay a sparsely populated and but little known district; vast areas, scarcely explored, of scrub and poor grass, that led on to the Back of Beyond, the limitless expanse of the burning Sahara.

But, interested as Pansy always was in all connected with her father's province, and all that lay about it, she was not thinking of any of these things as she stood on the roof with him, but of her old playmate, Captain Cameron.

The Governor, his staff, and the district officer were going the next day to visit some rather important negro chief. Pansy was to have been one of the party, but on reaching their journey's end, Cameron had suddenly developed a bad attack of malaria.

"I don't think I'll go to-morrow, father," she was saying. "I don't like leaving Bob. I know his orderly can look after him all right. But he says he feels better when I'm about, so I promised to stay and hold his hand."

"Just as you like," Sir George answered. "In any case the pow-pow will be very similar to a dozen others you've seen. And Bob needs keeping cheerful."

"He takes it very philosophically," Pansy answered.

"It's the only way to take life," her father answered, a trifle sadly.

Pansy rubbed a soft cheek against his in silent sympathy.

She loved and understood her quiet, indulgent father more than ever. But the dead girl he still grieved for was only a misty memory to his child.

"Yes, Daddy, I've learnt that too," she said. "It's no use grousing about things. It's far better to laugh in the teeth of Fate."

George Barclay's arm went round his daughter.

She had followed out her own precepts, this brave, bright girl of his.

As she went about his camp, no one would have guessed her life was a tragedy. And even he knew no more than she had told him on her unexpected return from Grand Canary.

She was fighting her battle alone, as he in past years had fought his, in her own unselfish way, refusing to let her shadows fall on those about her.

CHAPTER III

About five miles away from the old fort, deep in the forest, there was a large grassy glade, an unfrequented spot.

Within it now were encamped what looked to be a large party of Arab merchants. There were about a hundred of them, and they had come early that morning, with horses, and camels, and mules, and bales of merchandise. And they outnumbered Barclay's party by nearly three to one. His following were not more than forty, including thirty Hausa soldiers.

Immediately on arriving in the glade, two of the Arabs, with curios, had been dispatched to the English camp, outwardly to sell their goods, but, in reality, as spies.

They had hardly gone, before the rest of the party put aside its peaceful air. Out of their bales weapons were produced; guns of the latest pattern and vicious-looking knives.

In his tent the Sultan Casim Ammeh sat, in white burnoose, awaiting the return of his spies. With him was Edouard, his French doctor, who was watching his royal master with an air of concern.

"I shall be glad when this thing is through and done with," he remarked presently, his voice heavy with anxiety. "And all I hope is that the English don't get hold of you. There'll be short shrift for you, if you're caught meddling with their officials."

"They'd shoot me, as Barclay shot my father," the Sultan replied grimly. "But I'm willing to risk that in order to get hold of him."

"I wish we were safely back in El-Ammeh," the doctor said.

"You've never experienced either a deep love or a deep hate, Edouard. The surface of things has always satisfied you. You're to be envied."

"Well I hope that love will never run you into the dangers that this revenge of yours is likely to," Edouard replied, getting up.

He went from the tent, leaving the Sultan alone, awaiting the return of his spies.

It was nearly midday when they got back to the glade. At once they were taken into the royal presence.

"What have you learnt?" the Sultan demanded.

The Arabs bowed low before their ruler.

"Your Highness, the English party has broken up," one replied. "The chief and his officers, with half the soldiers, have gone to a village that lies about half way between here and the fort. And the white lady, his daughter, is left behind, with but fifteen men to guard her."

As Le Breton listened, the task he had set himself appeared even easier than he had imagined.

At the head of his men he would waylay and capture the governor and his party on their return from the village. When this was accomplished he would send off a contingent to seize Pansy.

With this idea in view, he summoned a couple of native officers into his presence.

When they appeared, he gave them various instructions about the matter on hand, and, finally, his plans concerning Pansy.

"No shot must be fired in the presence of the English lady," he finished. "At all costs she must be captured without injury."

With deference the Arab officers listened to his instructions, then they bowed and left the royal presence.

Not long afterwards the glade was practically empty save for the tents and camels and mules.

At the head of his men the Sultan Casim Ammeh had gone in quest of the vengeance he had waited quite sixteen years for.

CHAPTER IV

In the guard-house of the old fort where George Barclay had once housed his wounded Arab prisoners, Captain Cameron sat propped up with pillows in a camp bed. It was a cool, dim, white-washed room with thick stone walls, tiny windows high up near the ceiling, and a strong wooden door, that was barred from the inside.

Beside him Pansy sat, pouring out the tea that his orderly had just brought in, and trying to coax an appetite that malaria had left capricious.

Cameron's fever had burnt itself out in twenty-four hours as such fevers will, but it had left the young man very weak and washed out, scarcely able to stand on his legs.

As Pansy sat talking and coaxing, trying to make a sick man forget his sickness, into the stillness of the drowsy afternoon there came a sound that neither of them expected. The thunder of horses' hoofs, like a regiment sweeping towards them.

As far as Cameron knew there were no horses in the district except their own, and they numbered only about half a dozen, not enough to produce anything like that amount of sound.

"What on earth can that be?" he asked, suddenly alert.

Almost as he spoke there was a further sound. A sound of firing. Not a single shot, but a volley. It was followed immediately by cries and screams, and a hubbub of native voices.

Cameron had seen active service. That sound made him forget all about his fever. He knew it for a surprise attack. But who had attacked them, and why, he could not imagine; for the district was peaceful.

Barefooted and in pyjamas, he scrambled out of bed. Swaying, he fumbled under his pillow, and producing a revolver, slipped it into his pocket. Then he staggered across to the door, Pansy at his heels.

When they looked out, it appeared that the stockade was filled with white-robed figures on horseback, lean, brown, hawk-faced men whom Pansy immediately recognised for Arabs. The surprised Hausa soldiers had been driven into one corner of the compound, and back to back were fighting valiantly against overwhelming odds.

Cameron did not wait to see any more. Already a score or more of the wild horsemen were sweeping on towards the old fort where the two stood.

Quick as thought he shut the guardroom door. With hands that shook with fever, he stooped and picked up one of the two iron bars that held it in position.

"Lend me a hand, Pansy," he said sharply.

But Pansy did not need any telling. Already she had seized the other end of the heavy bar. It was in position just as the horde outside reached the guard-house. There was a rattle of arms, the sound of horses being brought sharply to a halt. Then orders shouted in a wild, barbaric

language.

There followed a shower of heavy blows upon the door.

When the second iron bar was in position, the boy and the girl stood for a moment and looked at one another.

Pansy was the first to speak.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"It looks like a desert tribe out on some marauding expedition," he replied in as cool a voice as he could muster. "But I'm sure I don't know what they're doing down as far as here."

"My father?" Pansy said quickly.

Cameron made no reply. He hoped the Governor's party had not fallen foul of the marauders. But the fate of Sir George and his staff was not the one that troubled him now. All his thoughts were for the girl he loved, to keep her from falling into the hands of that barbaric horde. And fall she must, dead or alive, before so very long. Strong as the door was, it would not be able to withstand the assaults the Arabs could put upon it.

With a casual air Cameron examined his revolver, to make sure that the five cartridges were complete.

Then he glanced at the girl.

She caught his eye, and smiled bravely. She had grasped the situation also.

"We all have to die sooner or later," she remarked. "I hope it'll be sooner in my case."

Cameron's young face grew even whiter and more drawn; this time with something more than fever—the thought of the task before him.

"Four shots for them, Pansy, and the fifth for you," he answered hoarsely.

"Yes, Bob, whatever you do, don't forget the fifth."

As they talked, thundering blows were falling on the door, filling the room with constantly recurring echoes. But the wood and iron withstood the assault. The noise stopped suddenly. From outside, voices could be heard, evidently discussing what had better be done next.

Pansy and Cameron crossed to the far side of the room, and stood there side by side, their backs against the wall, waiting.

When the blows came again they were different; one heavy, ponderous thud that made the door creak and groan, with a pause between each blow.

"They've got a battering-ram to work now, a tree trunk or something," Cameron remarked. "That good old door won't be able to stand the strain much longer."

Then he glanced at the girl, longing in his eyes.

"Let me give you one kiss, Pansy. A good-bye kiss," he whispered. "It's years since I've kissed you. You're such a one for keeping a fellow at arm's length nowadays."

With death knocking at the door Pansy could not refuse him; this nice boy she had always liked, yet never loved.

She thought of the man who had feasted so freely on her lips that night in the moonlit garden in Grand Canary. She wanted no man's kisses but his, no man's love but his, and his race and colour barred him out from her for ever.

"Kiss me if you like, Bob, for old time's sake. But——"

She broke off, listening to the noises from outside, the heavy, regular thud on the iron-bound door, that had now set the stone walls trembling.

"Now, I shall die a young maid instead of an old one, that's all," she said suddenly.

Cameron watched her, pain on his face; this girl who could face death with a courage that equalled his own.

Then he kissed her tenderly.

"Good-bye, Pansy, little pal," he said hoarsely.

Afterwards there was silence in the room. Between the heavy blows flies droned. Droned as if all were well with the world. As if nothing untoward were happening.

Pansy listened to them, a strained look on her face.

So they would go on droning after she was dead.

How painful the thought would once have been. But the world had grown so tragic since she had met and parted with Raoul Le Breton. Life had become so dreary. There was a constant gnawing pain at her heart now, a pain that Pansy hoped would not follow her from this world into another.

There was a crash of falling timber.

The door gave way suddenly, letting in a flood of wild, white-clad men.

If Cameron thought of anything beyond getting his four shots home among the swarming crowd, it was to wonder why they did not fire, instead of rushing towards him and the girl.

But he did not give much time to the problem.

Within four seconds, four shots had been fired at the onrushing Arabs. And with ruthless joy Cameron noted that four of them fell.

Then he turned his weapon on the girl beside him. Now that her turn had come, Pansy smiled at him bravely with white lips.

But, as Cameron turned, a shot grazed his hand, fired by the leader of the Arabs, who appeared to have grasped what the Englishman was about to do.

The bullet did not reach Pansy's brain as Cameron intended. For the pain of his wound sent his hand slightly downwards just as he pulled the trigger.

His bullet found a resting-place in her heart, it seemed. With a faint gasp she fell as if dead at his feet, a red stain on the front of her white dress.

This contretemps left the onrushing horde aghast. They halted abruptly. In silence they stood staring at the limp form of the prostrate girl, the fear of death upon their swarthy faces.

CHAPTER V

In his tent the Sultan Casim Ammeh was waiting for the return of the party sent on to the old fort to capture Pansy.

So far there had been no hitch in his schemes. Sir George and his staff had proved an easy prey. Already one portion of his Arab following, with Barclay's officers, had set out on the long journey back to El-Ammeh.

Sir George and Pansy, the Sultan had arranged to take up himself, as soon as the girl was in his hands. For he had no desire to linger in British territory.

But it was not the punishment England would dole out to him if he were caught that filled Le Breton's mind as he sat cross-legged among the cushions, with the cruel lines about his mouth very much in evidence. His thoughts were all with Sir George Barclay's daughter.

What desert harem would be her future home? What wild chief would call that golden-haired girl his chattel?

Casim Ammeh had determined to carry out his vengeance to the letter, where Pansy was concerned. To sell her in the slave-market of his capital; and keep her father alive, tortured by the knowledge of his daughter's fate.

What would the girl say when she saw him? When she recognised him for the Sultan of El-Ammeh, the man her father had wronged past all forgiveness. Would that sweet, brave face go white at the knowledge of the fate before her? Would she try to plead with him or herself and her father? Would—!

Le Breton pulled his straying thoughts up sharply, lest they should go wandering down forbidden ways—ways that led to where love was.

He had determined to hate Pansy; a hatred he had to keep continually before him, lest he should forget it.

The afternoon wore on, bringing long shadows creeping into the glade. And the Sultan sat waiting for the full fruit of his vengeance. There might be peace in his heart once the wrong done

to his father was righted. Peace in the restless heart that throbbed within him, that seemed always searching for a life other than the one he lived; a peace he had known just once or twice when a girl's slight form had rested upon it. His enemy's daughter!

The sound of approaching hoofs broke into his thoughts. He knew what they were. Those of the party sent on to capture Pansy.

When the cavalcade halted, his eyes went to the open flap of the big tent, a savage expression in them. He could not see the returned party from there; only the guards posted outside of the royal quarters.

Presently a couple of men in flowing white robes came into view; the two officers who had headed the expedition. They were challenged by the sentries, then they passed on towards the tent where their Sultan was waiting.

There was concern upon their faces, that deepened to resignation and despair when the royal gaze rested upon them.

"Where is the English lady?" their Sultan demanded coldly.

"Your Highness, there was a man of her colour with her, and——" one of the officers began.

Le Breton made an impatient gesture.

"Bring me the girl," he commanded.

The officers glanced at one another. Then one knelt before the Sultan.

"The instructions were carried out," he said. "But the English lady is dead."

There was a moment of tense silence. A feeling of someone fighting against an incredible truth.

Pansy dead! Impossible!

The Sultan sat as if turned into stone. The contretemps was one he had never anticipated.

"Dead," the echoes whispered at him mockingly through the silk-draped tent. "Dead," they sighed unto themselves as if in dire pain.

And that one tragic word stripped love of its garment of hate, and set it before him, alive and vital.

The tent suddenly became charged with suffering, and the feeling of a fierce, proud heart breaking.

"Dead!" the Sultan repeated in a hoarse, incredulous voice. "Then Allah have pity on the man who killed her, for I shall have none."

"Your Highness, there was a white man with her. He shot her," the kneeling officer explained.

Le Breton hardly heard him. For the first time in his wild, arrogant life he felt regret; regret for a deed of his own doing. The regret that is the forerunner of conscience, as conscience precedes the birth of a soul—the soul he had once laughingly accused Pansy of trying to save.

His schemes had brought her to her death. Morally his was the hand that had killed her. His hand!

The thought staggered him.

He got to his feet suddenly, reeling slightly, as if in dire agony. The officer kneeling before him bowed his head submissively. He expected the fate of all who bring bad news to a Sultan—the Sultan's sword upon his neck.

But Le Breton hardly noticed the man. He only saw his own deed before him. Love had leapt out of its scabbard of hate. The one fact he had tried to keep hidden from himself was shouting, loud-voiced, at him.

In spite of who and what Pansy was, he still loved her, madly, ragingly, hopelessly. But it had taken her death to bring the truth home to him.

"Where is the girl?" he asked, in a stiff, harsh voice.

"We brought her so that your Highness could see we spoke the truth," the officer replied.

"Let her be brought in to me then, and laid there," the Sultan said, indicating a wide couch full of cushions.

Glad to escape with their lives the officers hurried out to do the royal bidding.

There were no cruel lines about the Sultan's mouth as he waited their return, but deep gashes of pain instead.

A silent cavalcade entered the tent some minutes later: as silent as the Sultan who stood awaiting them; as silent as the girl with the red stain on her breast and the red blood on her lips.

A look from the Sultan dismissed the men.

When they had gone, he crossed to Pansy's side, and stood gazing down at her.

She lay limp and white, a broken lily before him,

His enemy's daughter! This still, white, lovely girl. This pearl among women, whom he had tried to hate. And now—!

Pain twisted his face.

He thought of Pansy as he had last seen her, that night on her yacht.

She had wanted to bring about an understanding between them. She had tried to see things from his point of view. She was prepared to make allowances, to find excuses for him. And he had treated her with harshness; wilfully set her at a disadvantage; purposely had misunderstood her; deliberately had said all he could to wound her.

He had done his best to hate her. He had put vengeance before love. Now he had his reward. His wild lust for revenge had stilled that kind heart that had lived to do its best for all.

A stifled groan came to his lips.

What a trick Fate had played upon him!

Leaning over the couch he took one of her limp, white hands into his strong brown one. The little hand whose touch could always soothe his restless spirit, that had once teased and caressed him, opening out visions of a Paradise that his own deeds had now shut out from him for ever.

The Fruit of the Tree of Vengeance is bitter. And this Le Breton realized to the fullest as he gazed at the silent girl.

"Pansy, don't mock me from beyond the Styx," he whispered. "For you know now that my heart is broken. There's nothing but grief for me here and hereafter."

Then it seemed to the tortured man that a miracle happened.

The girl's eyes opened.

For a brief second she gazed at him in a dazed, bewildered manner. Then her lids dropped weakly, as if even that slight effort were too much for her.

CHAPTER VI

Blue-black night surrounded the Arab encampment. Here and there a red watch-fire punctuated the darkness.

Although well past midnight, a light burnt in the Sultan's tent. It came from a heavy silver lamp slung from the bar joining the two main supporting poles.

The light flickered on the couch where Pansy still lay, limp and white among the silken cushions, her curls making a halo about her pain-drawn face. She was no longer clad in her muslin frock, but in a silk nightgown with her namesakes embroidered upon it. A light silk rug covered her up to her waist; on it her hands lay, weak and helpless.

On discovering there was a spark of life left in his prisoner, the Sultan had sent post-haste to an adjacent tent for Edouard.

When the doctor arrived, Le Breton stood silent whilst the patient was examined, in an agony of tortured love awaiting the verdict.

"There's no hope unless I can get the bullet out," the doctor had remarked at the end of the examination. "It escaped her heart by about half an inch; but it means constant haemorrhage if it's left in the lungs."

"And if it's removed?" the Sultan asked hoarsely.

Edouard shrugged his shoulders in a non-committal manner.

"It'll be touch and go, even then. But she might pull through with care and attention. She's young and healthy. But if she survives, she'll feel the effects of that bullet for some time to come."

With that Edouard left to fetch his instruments, leaving the Sultan gazing down at the result of his own mad desire for vengeance—a red, oozing wound on a girl's white breast.

When the doctor returned, whilst he probed after the bullet Le Breton held Pansy with firm, careful strength, lest, in pain, she should move and send the instrument into the heart Cameron's shot had just missed. But she was unconscious through it all. Although the probing brought a further gush of blood, Edouard managed to locate the bullet and extract it.

After the wound was dressed, and Pansy bound and bandaged up, the doctor left.

With his departure the Sultan sent for Pansy's belongings, which his soldiers had brought up as plunder from the raid.

There was no woman among his following, so he sent one of the guards to inquire if there was one among the captives.

Presently Pansy's mulatto maid was brought to him.

Alice was a pretty brown girl of about seventeen, clad in a blue cotton slip, and she wore a yellow silk handkerchief tied around her black curls. With awe she gazed about the sumptuous tent; with admiration at her handsome, kingly captor.

He, however, had nothing to say to her, beyond giving her instructions to serve her mistress and warning her to use the utmost care.

When Alice set about her task he went from the tent to interview Edouard.

Pansy's condition had upset his plans. Even if the girl recovered, she could not be moved for a week at least, no matter how carefully her litter was carried. And a force as large as his could not stay a week in the neighbourhood without the fact becoming known.

When Le Breton returned he dismissed Alice, and he seated himself by the couch and stayed there watching the unconscious girl.

Evening shadows crept into the tent, bringing a deft-handed, silent servant, who lighted the heavy silver lamp and withdrew as silently as he had come. Dinner appeared; a sumptuous meal that the Sultan waved aside impatiently.

Then Edouard came again, to see how the patient was faring; to give an injection and go, after a curious glance at the big, impassive figure of his patron sitting silent and brooding at his captive's side.

Gradually the noises of the camp died down, until outside there was only the sough of the forest, the whisper of the wind in the tree-tops, the occasional stamp of a horse's hoof, the hoot of an owl in the glade, and, every now and again in the distance, the mocking laugh of hyenas. Mocking at him, it seemed to Le Breton; at a man whose own doings had brought his beloved to death's door.

Within the tent there was no longer silence. Faint little moans whispered through it occasionally, mingling with the rustle of silken curtains and the sparking of the lamp. And every now and again there were weak bouts of coughing; coughs that brought an ominous red stain to Pansy's lips; stains the Sultan dabbed off carefully with a handkerchief, his strong hand shaking slightly, his arrogant face working strangely, for he knew he was responsible for the life-blood upon her lips.

Every hour Edouard came to give the injection which held the soul back from the grim, bony hands of death that groped after it. Once or twice Pansy's eyes opened, but they closed almost instantly, as if she had not strength enough to hold them open.

But before daybreak her coughs had ceased. An hour passed, then two, without that ominous red stain coming to her lips. Edouard nodded to himself in a satisfied way as he left the tent. A little of the strained look left the Sultan's face.

The haemorrhage had stopped; youth and health were winning the battle.

Just as the first pink streak of dawn entered the tent Pansy's eyes opened again and stayed open, purple wells of pain that rested on the Sultan's with a puzzled expression.

Into the misty world of suffering and weakness in which she moved it seemed to her that Raoul Le Breton had come, looking at her as he had once looked, with love and tenderness in his glowing eyes.

She could not make out where she was or how he came to be there. She had no recollection

of the horde who had broken into the guardroom where she and Cameron had been. She was too full of suffering to give any thought to the problem. Raoul Le Breton was with her, that was enough.

A wan smile of recognition trembled for a moment on her lips.

"Raoul," she said faintly.

It was more a sigh than a word. But his name whispered so feebly brought him kneeling beside her couch, bending over her eagerly.

"My darling, forgive me," he whispered passionately.

He bent his head still lower, with infinite tenderness kissing the white lips that had breathed his name so faintly.

Pansy's eyes closed again. A look of contentment came to mingle with the suffering on her face.

Outside the hyenas still laughed mockingly: derisive echoes from a distance. But Le Breton did not hear them. Despite his treatment of her, Pansy had smiled upon him. For the first time in his wild life he felt humility and gratitude, both new sensations.

When Edouard came again he pronounced the girl sleeping, not unconscious.

"With care and attention she'll pull through," he said.

"Thank God!" his patron exclaimed, with unfeigned relief and joy.

Edouard glanced at his master speculatively.

He had heard nothing about Pansy's existence until he had been hurriedly summoned to attend her, and he wondered why his friend and patron had made no mention of the girl.

"You never told me Barclay had a daughter," he commented.

"I did not know myself until quite recently," the Sultan replied.

"Is she to share her father's fate?" the doctor asked drily.

Tenderly the Sultan gazed at the small white face on the cushions.

"She's not my enemy," he said in a caressing tone.

With a feeling of relief, Edouard left the tent.

It was most evident that the Sultan had fallen in love with his beautiful captive. If the girl played her cards well, she would be able to save her father, and prevent his patron doling out death to a British official, thus embroiling himself still further with the English Government.

After the doctor had left, Le Breton sat on Pansy's couch. Yet he had not learnt his lesson.

Although he loved the daughter, he hated the father as intensely as ever. Now he was making other plans; plans that would enable him to keep both love and vengeance. Plans, too, that might make the girl forget his colour and give him the love he now craved for so wildly.

CHAPTER VII

In one of the tents in the glade Sir George Barclay sat, an Arab guard on either side of him. There was an almost stupefied air about him; of a man whose world has suddenly got beyond his control.

The previous afternoon, without any warning, his party had been set upon and captured; but by whom, and why, he did not know. There was no rebellious chief in the district; no discontent. Yet he was a prisoner in the hands of some wild tribe; captured so suddenly that not one of his men had escaped to take word to the next British outpost and bring up a force to his assistance.

There was but one streak of consolation in his broodings—the knowledge that his daughter had not fallen alive into the hands of the barbaric soldiery.

Some little time after he had been brought a prisoner to the glade he had seen Cameron come in, white and shaking with fever.

On seeing his chief, the young man had shouted across the space:

"Thank God! the niggers haven't got Pansy alive."

They were given no time for further conversation, for one was hustled this way and one that.

As Barclay sat brooding on the fate that had overtaken his party and trying to find a reason for it, someone entered the tent.

In the newcomer he recognised the leader of the force that had waylaid and captured him and his party.

"So, George Barclay, we meet for a second time," a deep voice said savagely in French.

Barclay scanned the big man in the white burnoose who stood looking at him with hatred in his dark, fiery eyes.

To his knowledge he had never seen him before.

"Where did we first meet?" he asked quietly.

"Sixteen years ago, when you murdered my father, the Sultan Casim Ammeh."

Sir George started violently and scanned the man anew. He had a reason now for the untoward happenings.

"Do you remember all I promised for you and yours that day you refused to listen to my pleadings?" the savage voice asked.

Barclay remembered only too well. And as he looked at the ruthless face before him he was more than ever thankful for one thing.

"Thank God; my daughter is dead!" he said.

The Sultan smiled, coldly, cruelly.

"Your daughter is not dead," he replied. "She is alive; just alive. And you may rest assured that she'll have every care and attention."

The news left Barclay staring in a stricken manner at his captor.

"My doctor assures me that she will live," the Sultan went on. "And you will live, too, to see her sold as a slave in the public market of my city."

Sir George said nothing. The thought of Pansy's ghastly fate placed him beyond speech. At that moment he could only pray that she might die.

CHAPTER VIII

Three days elapsed before Pansy returned to full consciousness, and even then the world was a very hazy place. One morning she woke up, almost too weak to move, with a feeling that she must have had a bad attack of fever. She tried to sit up, but Alice, her mulatto maid, bent over her quickly, pressing her back gently on the pillows.

"No, Missy Pansy," that familiar, crooning voice said with an air of authority. "De doctor say you stay dere and no move."

Pansy was not at all anxious to move after that one attempt. The effort had brought knife-like pains cutting through her chest, and she had had to bite her lip to keep herself from crying out in agony.

All day she lay in silence, sleeping most of the time, when awake, thankful just to lie still, for even to talk hurt her; grateful when Alice fed her, because she would rather have gone hungry than have faced the pain that sitting up entailed.

Sometimes, from outside, came the rattle of harness, the stamp of a hoof, men's voices talking in a strange language. But Pansy was used to such sounds now, and thought nothing of them; they had been around her all the time she had been on tour with her father.

The next day the mist had cleared considerably. Pansy realised she was in a big tent, not an affair of plain green canvas, such as she had lived in quite a lot during her expedition into the wilds, but a place of barbaric splendour. Silk hangings draped the canvas walls; rich curtains

heavily embroidered with gold. The very poles that held the structure up were of silver, and a heavy silver lamp was suspended from the central bar. Priceless rugs covered the ground, and here and there were piles of soft, silk cushions. There were one or two little ebony tables and stools inlaid with silver and ivory. Her bed was a low couch of soft silk and down cushions. And on the floor beside her was a beaten gold tray where jewelled cups reposed, and dishes with coloured sherbets and other tempting dainties.

Pansy's gaze stayed on Alice in a puzzling manner.

Alice looked much the same, as plump and pretty as ever, but with an even more "pleased with herself" expression than usual upon her round smiling face.

From her maid Pansy glanced towards the entrance of the tent. The flap was fastened back, letting in a flood of fresh, gold-tinged morning air. Just outside, two dark-faced, white-robed men were stationed, and, beyond, were others, and a glimpse of trees.

Pansy's eyes stayed on the Arabs guarding her quarters.

In a vague way they were familiar.

With a rush came back the happenings of the afternoon when she had been having tea with Cameron in the old guardroom.

Men such as those outside had burst in upon them when the brave old door had given way.

A wave of sickly fear swept over the girl.

Was she a prisoner in the hands of that wild horde?

But, if so, what was she doing in the midst of all this splendour, this riot of luxury, with the softest of cushions to lie on, the choicest of silk rugs to cover her, and Alice sitting contentedly at her side?

Perhaps Bob could give her the key to the situation.

"Alice," she said weakly, "run and tell Captain Cameron I want to speak to him."

"He no be here, Miss Pansy," the girl replied. "He go to de Sultan Casim Ammeh's city."

Alice pronounced the Sultan's name with gusto. The desert ruler with his barbaric splendour and troop of wild horsemen had impressed her far more than the English governor and his retinue. She did not at all mind being his prisoner. Moreover she was a privileged person, told off specially by the Sultan to nurse her mistress.

For some moments Pansy pondered on what her maid had said.

"The Sultan Casim Ammeh," Pansy repeated presently, with an air of bewilderment.

"Dat be him," Alice assured her. "A great big, fine man, awful good-looking. I see him. An' my heart go all soft. He so rich and proud and grand. But he no look at me, only at you, Miss Pansy," she finished, sighing.

Pansy hardly heard this rhapsody over her captor.

His name was familiar but half forgotten, like the fairy tales of her childhood.

Then she suddenly remembered who and what he was.

The youthful Sultan who, long years ago, had sworn to kill her father and sell her as a slave!

The man Alice mentioned must be the boy grown up! It must have been his hordes who had swept down on her and Bob that afternoon.

But it was not of herself that Pansy thought when the truth dawned on her with vivid, sickening force. In anxiety for her father she forgot the fate promised for herself.

"My father! What has happened to him?" she asked in quick alarm.

"De Sultan, he catch Sir George too," Alice answered coolly.

Pansy's heart stood still.

"Is he still alive?" she asked breathlessly, horror clutching at her.

"Sir George he go also to the city of El-Ammeh, de Sultan's city."

A feeling of overwhelming relief swept over Pansy on hearing her father was still alive.

For some minutes she lay brooding on the horrible situation and how she could best cope

with it, all the time feeling as if she were in some wild nightmare. Then she remembered her own vast riches.

All these Arab chiefs knew the value of money. She might be able to ransom her father, herself, the whole party.

"Where is the Sultan? Tell him I want to see him," she said suddenly in a weak, excited way.

"He no be here. He go back to El-Ammeh. You go, too, Miss Pansy, an' I go wid you, when Doctor Edouard say you be fit to move."

Pansy clutched at the name of Edouard. After that of the Sultan Casim Ammeh it had a welcome European sound.

"Where is Doctor Edouard? Can I speak to him?" she asked quickly.

She hardly noticed the pain within herself now, torn as she was with anxiety for her father and friends.

Alice rose, ready to oblige.

"I go fetch him," she said.

Leaving the tent, she interviewed one of the guards. Then she passed on beyond Pansy's view.

She reappeared some few moments later accompanied by a short, stoutish man with a pointed, black beard, unmistakably of French nationality, who was dressed in a neat white drill suit and a sun helmet.

Anxiously Pansy watched him approach, with no room in her mind to think how he came to be there, a person as European as herself, in this savage Sultan's following.

"Do tell me what has happened!" she said, without any preliminaries, the moment he halted at her bedside.

However, Edouard did not tell Pansy much more than she had already culled for herself. But she learnt that the whole of her father's party were prisoners in the hands of this desert chief and were now on their way back to his capital.

"But can't you do something?" she asked in despair.

"I'm virtually a prisoner, like yourself," Edouard replied in a non-committal tone.

He was not a prisoner, but he was paid a good price for his services and his silence; and he had no intention of playing an excellent friend and patron false.

"But is there nothing I can do?" Pansy asked, aghast at her own utter helplessness.

Edouard smiled, remembering the Sultan's concern for the beautiful captive girl.

"Yes; there's one thing," he replied in a soothing tone. "Don't worry about the matter just at present. But when you get to El-Ammeh use all your personal influence with the Sultan. In the meantime you can rest assured that no harm will happen to Sir George and his staff. Afterwards I rather fancy everything depends on you."

With this Pansy had to be content.

CHAPTER IX

In Bathhurst, the deputy Governor awaited news of Sir George Barclay. More than a month had passed since he had left the town, and during most of the time letters had come through regularly to official headquarters. The deputy knew that the furthestmost point of the tour must now be about reached; but nearly a week had passed without any communication, official or otherwise, coming from the party. The fact was not alarming; the part Sir George must now be in was the wildest in the colony, and a week might easily pass without any message coming through.

But when another day or so passed without bringing any news, the deputy began to wonder what had happened.

"The letters must have gone astray," one of the officers remarked.

"Or some leopard has gobbled up the postman," another suggested.

For a couple of days longer the deputy and military officers waited, hourly expecting some message from the Governor's party, but none came. There was no reason to think that harm had befallen them, for the colony was in perfect order.

Then they sent up for news to the next town of any importance, only to hear that nothing had been heard there either.

The answer astounded them.

An expedition was sent off post-haste to find out what had happened to the party.

They were nearly a fortnight in reaching the old fort, the last spot where any message had come from. And there they found the British flag still flying over the official headquarters, but both the bungalow and the fortress were deserted. In the old guardroom and the compound were a few gnawed human bones; but there was no other trace of the missing expedition, although there was every sign that disaster had overtaken it.

The officials were aghast. Sir George and his staff had completely disappeared. That there had been fighting was evident. The bones in the guardroom and compound told them that much, but all trace of their identity had been gnawed off by prowling hyenas.

The country around was scoured, but it brought no clue. The French Government was communicated with, but it could throw no light on the affair.

When the news reached England it caused a sensation, for Society culled that Sir George Barclay's daughter, the lovely twenty-year-old heiress, Pansy Langham, was among those missing—dead now, or perhaps worse; the chattel of one of the wild marauders who had fallen so swiftly and silently upon her father's party.

And in a pleasant English country house Miss Grainger wept for the bright, brave girl who had always been such a generous friend and considerate mistress.

CHAPTER X

By the time the news of the disappearance of Sir George Barclay's party reached England, Pansy was well on her way to El-Ammeh.

She arrived there one night after dark, a darkness out from which high walls loomed and over them strange sounds came; the thin wail of stringed instruments; a tom-tom throbbing through the blue night; the plaintive song of some itinerant musician, and the shuffle of crowded human life.

She was not given much time to dwell upon those things. Her escort skirted the high walls. A big horse-shoe arch loomed up, with heavy iron gates; gates that clanged back as they approached. And the flare of torches showed a long passage leading into darkness.

Into the passage her litter was carried with a swaying, somnolent movement. Then the gates closed with a clang behind her, leaving the escort outside; and she and Alice were alone with the flaming torches, the black, engulfing passage, and half a dozen huge negroes in gorgeous raiment.

With a sickly feeling, Pansy slipped from her litter.

Her journey's end!

The journey had lasted over six weeks. Under other circumstances Pansy would have enjoyed it. It could not have been more comfortable. She had travelled in the cool of the morning and in the cool of the evening. Always for the long midday halt the same sumptuous tent was up, awaiting her reception, taken down again after she had departed, and up again before she arrived at the next halting place.

The country she travelled through was an interesting one, park-like and grassy at first, as the weeks passed becoming ever more sandy and arid, with occasional patches that were wonderfully fertile. Until, finally, like a glowing, yellow sea before her, she had her first glimpse of the Sahara on its southern side—billow upon billow of flaming sand, stretching away to a tensely blue sky, with here and there a stunted bush, a twist of coarse grass, or a clump of distorted cacti with red flowers blazing against the heated, shimmering air—a vast solitude where nothing moved.

For a week they had journeyed through the desert. Late one evening a lake came into view, with fruitful gardens growing around it, where date palms, olives, and clustering vines flourished.

On the far side a walled city showed.

It lay golden in the misty glow of evening, its minarets standing out against a shadowed sky. Even as she approached it had been swallowed by darkness. Softly the lake lapped as they skirted it, and the world was filled with a constant hissing sigh, the sound of shifting sand when the wind roamed over it—the voice of the desert.

Much as Pansy dreaded her journey's end, she welcomed it.

She lived for nothing now but to see the Sultan; to plead with him for her father, her friends, herself. And she buoyed herself up with the hope that her own riches would enable her to ransom them all.

But if she failed!

She grew sick at the thought. And the thought was with her as she stood in the stone passage, her strained eyes on the gigantic negro guards who had come to escort her to her new quarters. They were attired from head to foot in rich, brightly coloured silks, and they literally blazed with jewels.

The man who was their master might have so much money that he would prefer revenge.

This thought was in Pansy's mind some minutes later when she sat alone with her maid in one of the many apartments in the palace of El-Ammeh.

It was a big room with walls and floor of gold mosaic, and a domed ceiling of sapphire-blue where cut rock-crystals flashed like stars. Five golden lamps hung from it, suspended by golden chains; lamps set with flat emeralds and rubies and sapphires.

It was furnished very much as her tent had been, except that there were wide ottomans against the gilded walls, and the tables and stools were of sandalwood. In one corner stood a large bureau of the same sweet-scented wood, beautifully carved. Three heavy, pointed doors of sandalwood led into the apartment. The place was heavy with its sensuous odour.

In a little alcove draped with curtains of gold tissue the negroes deposited Pansy's belongings. Then they withdrew, leaving the girl and her maid alone; Pansy with the depressing feeling that money might not have much influence with the Sultan Casim Ammeh.

Two of the doors of her gilded prison were locked, Pansy quickly discovered. Outside of the one she had entered by a couple of negro guards were stationed, who refused to let her pass.

On learning this, she went out into the fretted gallery. Below a garden lay. She stood at the head of the steps leading into it, anxious to get away from the dim scented silence of the great room, in touch with the trees and stars and the cool, rose-scented breath of night that she understood.

She tried to argue that all the splendour and luxury placed at her disposal boded well for the future, that her captor might not be going to carry out his threats.

Her gaze turned towards the room, with its wealth and luxury—a fit setting for a Sultan's favourite.

Pansy shivered.

What price might she not have to pay for her father's life?

Then she thought of Raoul Le Breton. The dark blood in him seemed nothing now, compared with the thought of having to become the chattel of this wild, desert chief.

Slight sounds in the big room roused her from her reverie.

She started violently, expecting to see the Sultan coming to make his bargain.

But only a couple of white-robed servants were there.

The biggest of the inlaid tables was set for dinner; a dinner for one, set in a European way. And the meal that followed was the work of a skilled French *chef*.

But the sumptuous repast had no charm for a girl worried to death at the thought of her own fate and her father's. To please Alice she made some pretence of eating.

Leaving her maid to revel in the neglected dainties, Pansy went back to her vigil in the arches.

In course of time, the lamps burning low, Alice's prodigious yawns drove her to lie wakeful among the soft cushions of one of the ottomans.

From fitful slumbers Alice's voice roused her the next morning. Alice with the usual early morning tea, a tray of choice fruit, and a basket full of rare and beautiful flowers.

Distastefully Pansy looked at the choice blossoms. She felt they were from the Sultan to his unwilling visitor; a silent message of admiration; of homage, perhaps.

"Take them away, Alice," she said quickly. "And put them where I can't see them."

With a curious glance at her mistress, the girl obeyed.

Pansy drank her tea, all the time pondering on her future.

If she had to go under, she would go under fighting. If this wild chief were prepared to give her her father's life in exchange for herself, she would see that he got as little pleasure as possible out of his bargain. If he were infatuated with her as Alice and Dr. Edouard seemed to think, so much the better. All the more keenly he would feel the lashes her tongue would be able to give.

Pansy knew he spoke French, for this fact had come into the story her father had told her in years gone by.

In thinking of the cutting things she would be able to lay to her captor, Pansy tried to keep at bay the dread she felt. Since he was not there to hit at in person, she hit at him with sneers at his race to Alice.

"I don't suppose there's anywhere I can have a bath," she remarked when her tea was finished. "Cleanliness isn't one of the virtues of these Arabs."

"Dere be one," Alice assured her. "De most beautifullest one you eber saw."

Pansy agreed with her maid some minutes later when she was splashing about in its cool waters.

Alice had pointed out the place to her. In dressing-gown and slippers, Pansy had passed through the wide gallery, a lacy prison of stone it seemed to the girl, for although it gave a wide view of the desert, there was not one spot in its carved side that she could have put her hand through.

Immediately beneath lay a garden, surrounded by a high wall.

Pansy had seen many gardens, but none to equal the one before her in peace and beauty. It was a dream of roses. In the middle was a sunken pond where water-lilies floated and carp swam and gaped at her with greedy mouths when her shadow fell across them, as if expecting to be fed. Vivid green velvety turf surrounded the pond, a rarity in that arid country. There was nothing else in the garden but roses, of every shade and colour. They streamed in cascades over the high walls. They grew in banks by the pond, in trellised alleys and single bushes. The garden was a gem of cool greenness, scent and silence, and over it brooded the shadows of gigantic cypresses.

The bath-room lay beneath the stone gallery, with fretted and columned arches where more roses clung and climbed, opening directly on the scented quiet of the garden. It was a huge basin of white marble, about thirty feet across and deep enough to swim in, with a carved edge, delicate as lace.

Pansy was in no mood to appreciate her fairy-like surroundings. And the beauty of her prison in no way softened her heart towards her captor.

As she splashed about in the bath, over the high walls came the sound of bells, like church chimes wrangling in the distance on an English Sunday.

Wistfully Pansy stopped and listened to them. She was travelled enough to recognize them as camel bells; some train coming to this barbaric city.

When she returned to the dim, gilded room, breakfast was awaiting her; an ordinary Continental breakfast.

She pecked at it, too sick at heart to eat. Then she sat on, awaiting Edouard's appearance. He had parted with her the previous night, promising to come and see her when she was installed in the Sultan's palace.

It was evening before he came. Pansy greeted him eagerly. All day she had dreaded that her captor might appear. But she wanted to see him, to satisfy herself about her father.

Edouard's visits to her were purely professional, and brief. Always his idea was to get away, for his conscience pricked him where Pansy was concerned. He was used to his patron's wild ways, and he knew the girl's position was not of her own choosing.

"Will you tell the Sultan I want to see him?" she said when he rose to go.

"Hasn't he paid you a visit yet?" the doctor asked with surprise.

"No, and I'm so worried about my father."

Edouard left, promising to deliver her message. But he came the next day, saying the Sultan had refused to grant her an interview.

"I wonder why he won't see me," she said drearily.

Edouard wondered also.

That evening he dined with his friend and patron, not in a gorgeous Eastern apartment like Pansy's, but in one that was decidedly Western in its fittings and appointments. And the Sultan was attired as Pansy had seen him several times in Grand Canary, in black dress-suit, white pleated shirt and the black pearl studs.

Dinner was over before Edouard approached the subject of the girl-prisoner.

"If I were you I'd see Miss Barclay," he said. "This suspense won't do her any good. She frets all day about her father."

"It's not in my plans to see her just yet," the Sultan replied.

Edouard glanced at him.

Then he did what for him was a bold thing, fat and comfortable and fond of his easy berth as he was. He challenged his royal master concerning his intentions towards the captive girl.

"What are your plans with regard to Miss Barclay?" he ventured. "She's not one of the sort who can be bought with a string of pearls or a diamond bracelet."

"I'm going to marry her," the Sultan said easily.

Edouard experienced a feeling of relief, on his own account as much as Pansy's.

The doctor studied her with renewed interest the next day when he paid her his usual visit.

"If I sent a note to the Sultan, do you think it would be any use?" Pansy asked him anxiously, the moment he had done with professional matters.

"It would do no harm at any rate," he replied.

Pansy got to her feet quickly.

She knew Edouard was in touch with her captor—a prisoner like herself she imagined, but free to come and go because of his calling. She did not know he was a man so faithful to his master that the latter's smallest wish was carried out to the letter.

Going into the alcove where her belongings were, Pansy seated herself on the edge of a couch, with a writing-pad on her knee. For some minutes she stayed frowning at a blank piece of paper. It was so difficult to know what to say to this savage chief who held the lives of her father and friends in his hands.

After some minutes thinking she wrote:

"To the Sultan Casim Ammeh.

Perhaps you do not know that I am very rich. Any price you may ask I am prepared to give for my father's life and freedom, for the lives and freedom of my English friends who are also your prisoners, and for my own. The ransom will be paid to you in gold. All you will have to do will be to mention the sum you want, and allow me to send a message through to my bank in England.

Pansy Langham Barclay."

The note was put into an envelope, sealed, addressed and taken out to Edouard.

On handing it over, however, Pansy suddenly recollected that the Sultan, for all his wealth and power, might be ignorant of the arts of reading and writing.

"Can he read French?" she asked.

An amused look came to the doctor's face.

"If he can't make it out, I'll read it to him," he replied.

It was evening before Le Breton got the note. Le Breton again as Pansy knew him, in khaki riding-suit, just as he had returned from a ride on her old race-horse, that had been brought to

his camp the day of her capture, and was now in the palace stables.

The note was lying on his desk, with the name that Pansy now hated—the Sultan Casim Ammeh—written on the envelope in her pretty hand.

A tender look hovered about his mouth as he picked up the letter and read it. Again the girl was "doing her best" for some helpless creatures—his prisoners. Although the fact filled him with an even greater admiration for Pansy, it did not lessen his hatred for her father.

He sat down and dashed off a brief reply in an assumed hand.

"All the gold in Africa will not buy my vengeance from me.

Casim Ammeh."

His answer reached Pansy with her dinner, reducing her to despair.

It seemed that nothing she could do would have any influence with this savage ruler.

Hopeless days followed; days that brought her nothing but a series of elaborate meals. Yet she knew that life went on around her; a life quite different from any she had been accustomed to.

Morning and night she heard faint voices wailing from unseen minarets. Over the high walls of her garden came the hum of a crowded city. From her screened gallery she saw camel trains loom out of the haze of distance to El-Ammeh, with a wrangle of sweet bells; camels that came from some vast unknown.

And there was another sound that Pansy heard; a sound that hailed from somewhere within the Palace; that always came about bedtime, and always set her shivering; the sound of a girl screaming.

Each morning with her early tea there was a basket of rare flowers, flowers she did not trouble to tell Alice to move now; she put them down to some palace custom, nothing that had any bearing on the Sultan. She never thought of Le Breton's words:

"Still only a few flowers, Pansy?"

And each evening she sat in the dim, scented room and waited for those muffled screams. She knew where they came from now; from somewhere behind one of the locked doors leading into her room.

Limp and listless, she dragged through the hot, monotonous days, brooding on her own fate and her father's, envying the ragged black crows that flew, free, like bits of burnt paper, high in the scorching sky.

Pansy had been about a fortnight in El-Ammeh, when something happened.

One morning, as she stood by the sunken pond, feeding the greedy carp with rolls she was too miserable to eat, Alice came to her round-eyed and startled-looking.

"Oh, Miss Pansy, dey hab come for you," she gasped

"Who?" Pansy asked quickly.

"De Sultan's soldiers."

"Are they going to take me to him?" she asked, feeling the interview she desired and dreaded was now at hand.

"Dey take you to de slave market. To be sold. Oh, oh!" the girl wailed.

Alice's hysterical sobs followed Pansy down the dim passage some minutes later, when, with strained face and tortured eyes, she went with a guard of eight Arab soldiers to meet the fate the Sultan Casim Ammeh had promised for her more than sixteen years before.

CHAPTER XI

Sir George Barclay and most of his staff had a knowledge of Eastern prisons from the outside. They knew them to be abodes of misery; dark, insanitary dens, alive with vermin, squalid and filthy, filled with a gaunt, ragged crowd who, all day long, held piteous hands through iron bars, begging for food from the passers-by, the only food they were given.

The Governor's staff did not look forward to a sojourn in El-Ammeh. As for Sir George himself, he had other matters than his own personal comfort to dwell on.

His thoughts were always with Pansy, and always in his heart was the prayer that she would succumb to the effects of Cameron's bullet, and not have to meet the fate his enemy had in store for her.

After the one interview the Sultan had ignored Barclay. But during the long journey, Sir George often saw his enemy, and if he thought of anything outside of his daughter's fate, it was to wonder why Casim Ammeh looked so different from the wild hordes he ruled. Exactly like a man of the well-bred, darker, Latin type, certainly not the son of the savage marauder whom he, Barclay, had had to condemn to death.

On reaching El-Ammeh, the Europeans found the quarters awaiting them very different from what experience had led them to expect.

They were ushered into a large courtyard dotted with trees and surrounded by high walls. Into it a dozen little cells opened. Within the enclosure they were free to wander as they pleased; a glance around the place showed them why. The walls were twenty feet high, and as smooth as glass, and there were always a dozen Arabs stationed by the gate, watching all they did. At night they were each locked in separate cells.

It was impossible to bribe the guards, as Cameron and his fellow officers discovered before a week had passed.

For the imprisoned Englishmen the time passed slowly. Often they speculated on their own ultimate fate. Whether death would be their portion, or whether they would be left there to stew for years, after the manner of more than one European who had had the misfortune to fall into the clutches of some desert chief.

They all knew the reason of their capture—merely because they happened to be on the Governor's staff. He had told them the story of Casim Ammeh, and the promised revenge. They never thought of blaming Barclay. What the present Sultan of El-Ammeh called "murder" was the sort of thing any one of them might be called upon to do.

A day came when it seemed to Barclay that the fate that wild youth had promised him long years ago was at hand.

One morning an escort came for him.

In their company he was led out of prison, to his execution, he expected. His staff thought so too; for they took a brief, unemotional farewell of him. They expected the same fate themselves at any moment.

However, Barclay was not led to his death. The escort took him through a twist of narrow streets, into a house and up a flight of dark stairs. He was left alone in an upper room, with a heavily barred window, through which came a hum of wild voices, with an occasional loud, guttural, excited call.

He crossed to the window, and stood there, riveted.

There was a big square beneath, seething with dark-faced, white-robed men, all gazing in one direction—in the direction of a raised platform where a girl stood. A slim, white girl.

It would have been much easier for Sir George to have faced death than the sight before him.

Pansy was on the platform. His daughter! Standing there in full view of the wild crowd. Being sold as a slave in the market of this desert city. To become the property of one of those savages.

Barclay's hand went across his anguished face, to try and shut out the horrible sight.

It could not be true! It must be some hideous nightmare.

Yet there she was, with white face and strained eyes, meeting her fate bravely, as his daughter would. Pansy, as he had often seen her, in a simple white muslin dress, and a wide white, drooping hat with a long, blue, floating veil. Garbed as she had gone about his camp during his fatal tour.

Even as Sir George looked, Pansy's tortured eyes met his, and she tried to smile.

The sight broke him utterly, bringing a groan to his lips.

At the sound a voice said in French, with a note of savage triumph:

"Now perhaps *you* understand what *I* suffered when you shot my father?"

Standing behind him was a big man in a khaki riding-suit, a European, he looked. For the moment Barclay did not know him for his enemy, the Sultan Casim Ammeh.

When he recognised him he did for Pansy what he would never have done for himself—he begged for mercy.

"For God's sake, for the sake of the civilisation you know, don't condemn my child to such a fate!" he entreated in a voice hoarse with agony.

"You showed my father no mercy. Why should I show you any now?" the Sultan asked coldly.

"At least have pity on the girl. Do what you like with me, but spare my daughter."

"Did you show me any pity when I begged for my father's life? 'As ye sow, so shall ye reap.' Isn't that what you Christians say? There is your harvest. A pleasing sight for me, when I think of my father."

The Sultan's gaze went to the window, but there was more tenderness than anything else in his eyes as they rested on the slim girl who faced the crowd with such white courage.

Now one figure stood out from the surge, that of a big, lean man in turban and loin-cloth, with long matted hair and beard, the latter foam-flecked. He stood at the foot of the platform, and his eyes never left the girl as he bid up and up against the other competitors; cursing everyone who bid against him, yet always going higher.

"Look at that wild man from the desert," the Sultan said. "I know him. He is a feather merchant. A miser. His home is a squalid tent, yet he has more money than any man who comes to El-Ammeh. Love has unlocked his heart. He will give all his hoarded wealth to possess that pretty slave on the platform there. He will be a fitting mate for your daughter. Think of her in his arms, and remember the man you murdered—my father, the Sultan Casim Ammeh, whom I have now avenged."

At the taunts, despite the difference in their years and physique, George Barclay turned on his tormentor.

"You brute! You devil!" he cried, springing at him.

With easy strength the Sultan caught and held him.

"You misjudge me," he said; "it's justice—merely 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'"

Then he pushed the older man from him and, turning on his heel, went from the room.

CHAPTER XII

The market of El-Ammeh was situated in the centre of the city. It was surrounded by a huddle of whitewashed houses, of varying heights and shapes, leaning one against the other, with here and there, over some high wall, a glimpse of greenery—the feathery head of a palm, the shiny leaves of a camphor tree, a pomegranate, an orange or a fig tree. On the side overlooking the square the houses were practically without windows, and the few there were were small and iron-barred.

Under most of the buildings were dim, cave-like shops hung with rare silks and ostrich feathers, or littered with articles in beaten silver, copper, and iron. There was quaint leatherwork and coarse pottery and a good sprinkling of European goods.

Several narrow, passage-like streets led into the square, entering it, in some cases, under dark archways. Sometimes these ways were barred to the mere public—the poorer people who daily sold produce in the square—and only those with special permits were allowed to enter: men of wealth and substance.

Every month a sale of slaves was held in the market, generally of Arab and negro girls; but occasionally something very different figured there—perhaps some black-haired, black-eyed, creamy beauty brought right across the Sahara from the Barbary States, a thousand miles away; or some half-caste girl from the Soudan, even further afield.

When this happened there were always plenty of buyers. Men of wealth flocked in from hundreds of miles around, for any skin lighter than brown was a rarity.

Within the last few weeks word had gone round the district, blown hither and thither in the desert, that a girl even more beautiful than those creamy beauties from the Barbary States was to be on sale at the next auction—a girl hailing from, Allah alone knew, what far land—Paradise, if her description were a true one. A girl with a skin white as milk, hair golden as the sunshine, and eyes of a blue deep as desert night; a maid, moreover, not another man's discarded fancy.

For days before the sale, as flies are drawn towards a honey-pot, the caravans of wealthy merchants came trickling in from the desert.

When the day itself arrived they hurried with their retinues to the square; some to buy, if possible; others, less wealthy, to see if the maid were as beautiful as report said.

On one side of the market square was a raised platform. From the house behind a room opened on it, a big, shadowy room, whitewashed and stone-flagged, with a barred window high up near the ceiling.

Into that room Pansy was taken by her escort in a curtained litter.

During the journey to the market she had had the sensation of moving in some ghastly nightmare from which she could not wake herself, much as she tried.

It could not be possible that she, Pansy Langham, the fêted and much-courted heiress, was to be sold as one might sell a horse or a cow.

She had the horrible feeling of having lost her own identity and taken on someone else's, yet all the time remembering what had happened when she was Pansy Langham. She felt she must have slipped back hundreds of years to some previous existence, when girls were sold as slaves; for surely this appalling fate could not be happening to her in the twentieth century?

A riot of thought ran through the girl's head during the journey from the palace to the market; a riot of numb, sickly terror, the outstanding feature of which was an inability to credit the fate before her.

When Pansy reached the room she gave up all hope. She knew she was awake—painfully, horribly wide awake, with a future before her that made her shudder to contemplate.

There were a dozen or more girls in the room, but they were railed off from Pansy by a thick wooden trellis, like sheep in a pen; brown and black girls, the majority attired in nothing more than a cloth reaching from waist to knee. They had been chattering shrilly among themselves at her entry, apparently in no way appalled at the fate before them; but they broke off when she came in, and crowded to the lattice to get a closer view, gazing at the newcomer and giving vent to little exclamations of awe and envy and admiration.

Pansy's arrival brought a stout, bearded man in white burnoose in from the house behind.

His glance ran over the English girl, but he made no attempt to touch her. Then he looked at her escort, who had stationed themselves on either side of her.

"By Allah!" he exclaimed. "This is a houri straight from Paradise you have brought me. Never have I sold such loveliness. There will be high bidding in the market of El-Ammeh this morning."

"I, for one, can't understand why the Sultan has not kept this pearl for himself," the leader of the escort said.

The auctioneer smiled in a peculiar, knowing fashion.

"Our Sultan has been in lands where there are many such," he replied. "Now he gives his subjects a chance to revel in delights that have been his."

Other men appeared from behind, negroes.

At a word from their master they opened the door leading out on the platform. Then they stood on either side whilst he passed through.

Through the open door came a blaze of sunshine, the buzz of a multitude, and presently a long declamation in Arabic as the auctioneer enlarged upon the quality of his wares.

The girls behind the trellis craned their necks to see what was going on, chattering shrilly among themselves.

From where Pansy stood she could see nothing. She did not want to see anything. The horror would be upon her quite soon enough.

One of the negro assistants opened a gate in the trellis and motioned to a girl. As she appeared on the platform, from outside there came a sigh of disappointment, then guttural voices bidding.

Another and another of the girls passed out, all apparently indifferent to the ordeal before them.

Then the auctioneer appeared on the threshold.

On seeing him Pansy felt her turn had come, and the world started reeling around her.

She knew she passed from shadow into sunshine, that dead silence greeted her appearance

on the dais—a silence that was followed by a din of wild, excited shouting.

It seemed to her that the world was nothing but eyes: the eyes of a surging crowd of dark-faced men, watching her with desire and admiration.

To Pansy, high-bred and fastidious, it was a vision of hell, this swarm of wild men looking at her with covetous desire. The Pit gaped at her feet, peopled with demons, any one of which might spring upon her.

Then the din died down to a subdued hum as men whispered one to another, their eyes still on the golden-haired girl on the dais. There was a horrible sort of despair on the faces of some as they thought of their more wealthy neighbours; lustful triumph on the faces of others as they thought of their own hoarded gold.



For sale as a common slave at the Taureg auction block

For sale as a common slave at the Taureg auction block....

Then out from the crowd a voice made an offer.

The sum staggered the auctioneer. It equalled nearly five hundred pounds of English money. No girl, even the creamy Barbary beauties, had ever fetched that amount.

Wild commotion followed. But the price went up and up, doubling itself in ten minutes.

To escape for a moment from the sea of covetous eyes, Pansy raised her own.

There was someone watching her from a window, someone who looked as tortured as herself—another soul condemned to hell.

It was a moment before she recognised that drawn, haggard face as her father's; it looked an old man's. He was there, the father she loved, condemned by his enemy to see her sold.

She tried to smile. It was a woeful effort. And when the blur of tears that seeing him brought to her eyes had passed he was gone.

It seemed to Pansy that for an eternity she stood on the edge of the Pit, waiting until one of the devils, more powerful than the rest, should drag her in.

The din died down as the sale proceeded, lost in tense excitement. Of the twenty or more who had started bidding for her, only three were left now. One of them, mad with lust and excitement, had forced his way up to the edge of the dais and was clinging to it with grimy hands—a lean man in turban and loin-cloth only, with long matted hair and beard, who, foaming at the mouth, was cursing his competitors, yet always bidding higher as he stared at Pansy with the glare of a maddened beast.

Pansy tried not to see him, but he was always there, horrible beyond comprehension, the

worst of the demons in the hell surrounding her.

Presently, over the murmur of the crowd, came the thunder of a horse's hoofs; of someone riding at breakneck speed through one of the resounding arches leading into the market.

Pansy did not notice this. She realised nothing now but the half-naked, foaming horror at her feet.

Suddenly another cry rang through the market-place.

Fortunately for Le Breton's plans Pansy knew no Arabic or she would have recognised that cry as:

"The Sultan! The Sultan!"

For Casim Ammeh had had his vengeance, and now had come in pursuit of love.

The cry grew to such a roar of sound that it penetrated the world of dumb terror in which Pansy moved, and made her raise her eyes.

The crowd in the square had opened up, giving way to a khaki-clad man on a huge, prancing black stallion.

Across the market-place tortured blue eyes met fiery black ones.

Then it seemed to Pansy that she must be dreaming—a vision of heaven beyond this hell.

For Raoul Le Breton was there, a god among these demons. Some figment of her own creating that must vanish as she gazed.

But he did not vanish.

He came closer, straight towards her, the crowd receding like a wave before him. Raoul Le Breton, looking more handsome, more arrogant, more of a king than ever; sitting his black horse like a centaur.

Pansy's hands went to her heart, and the world started spinning around her.

Like a knight of old, he had come to her rescue.

How he could have got there she was in no condition to consider. It was enough that he was there, in time to save her from the Pit of Hell gaping at her feet.

He rode up to the dais, reining in at her side.

With outstretched arms, he went towards her.

"Come, Heart's Ease, my own brave little girl, there's nothing to fear now," he said.

Swaying slightly, Pansy looked at him again as if he were some vision.

Then, for the first time in her life, she fainted.

With a little laugh of tender triumph, he caught her and lifted her on his horse.

As he turned to go, grimy, covetous hands clutched Pansy's skirts—the hands of the miser feather merchant.

With a savage oath, the Sultan raised his heavy riding whip and felled the defiler.

Then he rode off with Pansy.

But before this happened Sir George Barclay had been taken from the room overlooking the slave market. He did not see the Sultan Casim Ammeh come in person to save the girl. He did not know that, in Pansy's case, at any rate, the auction had been but a pretence.

CHAPTER XIII

When Pansy returned to consciousness she felt she had awakened from some nightmare and was back in her own world, a civilized world; her capture by the Sultan Casim Ammeh and all the subsequent happenings some wild dream, terrifying in its reality as dreams can be.

She was lying on a big bed in a shady room, among sheets and pillows of finest linen; a solid

brass bedstead such as might have come from any good shop in London, not among silken cushions and rugs on an ottoman. And there was a bedroom suite of some choice grey wood with a litter of gold toilet appointments on the wide dressing-table.

An elderly woman, brown skinned and black eyed, dressed in a swathing of white muslin, was seated by the bedside, fanning herself with a gentle, regular movement, and the air was fresh with the scent of eau-de-Cologne.

Beyond the woman—all down one side of the room—ran a series of arches, over which were drawn blinds of split bamboo.

With the feeling of fragments of her nightmare still clinging about her, Pansy sat up.

Then, with a rush, came back the scene in the slave market.

"Where is Mr. Le Breton?" she asked in a dazed manner.

She expected the woman to disclaim all knowledge of any such person.

However, she rose immediately.

"I'll fetch him," she said in French.

She made towards a curtained doorway.

Pansy watched her go. And her gaze stayed anxiously on the spot where the woman had disappeared.

A few moments passed and the curtains were drawn aside again. The woman entered. In her wake was a big man in white drill, with sleek, black hair and a close-clipped, black moustache.

On seeing him Pansy gave a little hysterical cry.

"Oh, Raoul, I was so afraid you were just a dream!"

"No, I'm not a dream, but a solid fact," he replied, going towards her.

"Come quite close. I want to touch you to make sure."

Nothing loath, he seated himself on the bed.

Pansy took one of his hands, holding it in a tight, nervous grip.

"Yes, it is really you," she said. "In the whole wide world there's no one who feels quite the same as you."

She had forgotten his coldness and harshness on the occasion of their last meeting in Grand Canary—his colour, his religion, everything except that he was there and she was safe.

He laughed tenderly and put the loose curls back from her face with a lingering, caressing touch.

It was Pansy as he had never known her, frightened and clinging to him. Pansy as he would have her, looking at him with eyes full of love.

"So, little girl, you're quite pleased to see me?"

"Did you buy me?" she asked in a bewildered voice.

"How else could I get you?" he asked, smiling slightly. His voice and touch calmed her a little.

"But *you!* How did *you* get here?" she asked.

"You know I'm an African merchant, don't you?" he said easily. "This is my special province. I do most of the trading in this part. And El-Ammeh is my headquarters."

"But how did you know *I* was here?" she asked in a dazed tone.

"You told me you were coming out to Africa. I heard the Governor of the adjacent English colony was on tour, his ultimate point a spot some six hundred miles or so from here. Some weeks ago the Sultan went out on a foray, returning with some English prisoners, a girl among them. There are not many blue-eyed, golden-haired girls in these parts, Pansy, so I guessed who she was."

It all sounded very feasible. And Pansy was in no mood to dispute with miracles.

"He hates my father; that's why he did it," she began in a weak, wild way.

"Never mind about that just now," he replied. "Fortunately I was there to save you."

She clung tighter to the strong, sinewy hand that had snatched her back from the brink of hell.

"Oh, Raoul, what would have happened if you hadn't come?" she whispered.

"Well, I did come, so there's nothing more for you to worry about," he said tenderly.

"There's my father. The Sultan has threatened to kill him," she began hysterically.

"You mustn't worry about your father, either. Leave things to me. You may be sure I'll do my best for him, too."

Under the tension of the last few weeks and the final reaction Pansy broke down completely. In a weak, wild manner she started sobbing, almost as if her brain had snapped under the strain and relief.

Evidently Le Breton had expected something of the sort.

Going to a table, he poured some water into a glass and dropped a couple of cachets into it.

When they had melted he came back to the distraught girl.

Seating himself on the edge of the bed, he slipped an arm around her.

"Come, drink this up," he said authoritatively; "then, when you've had a good sleep, you can tell me all your adventures."

"I daren't go to sleep," she sobbed, "for fear I should wake up in hell!"

He drew the golden head on his shoulder with a soothing, protective touch.

"I'll stay with you and see that doesn't happen," he said tenderly.

At the promise, Pansy drank the proffered draught. Then she lay back among the pillows.

He held the empty glass towards the Arab woman. She took it, and would have gone from the room, as she was accustomed to going when the Sultan pleased to linger with any one of his slave girls; but his voice stopped her.

"There's no need to go, Sara," he said.

Then he stayed, smiling down at the worn little face on the pillows, until the wild blue eyes closed in drugged slumber.

Afterwards he sat watching Pansy in a calculating manner.

Just then it seemed to Le Breton that his plans had succeeded; that he was going to have all he wanted. Revenge he had had; love now seemed within his grip.

A sense of gratitude for her supposed rescue, in conjunction with the love Pansy still had for him, would be a strong enough combination to make her forget his colour and bring her into his arms in the way he wanted—of her own free will.

Yet he was not wholly satisfied, for the method he had used to attain his ends was not one a civilised person would approve of.

A huddled heap against one of the fluted columns, old Sara sat and watched him. From time to time she muttered to herself and cracked her knuckles for luck and to keep off the "evil eye."

She had seen another Sultan bewitched by one of these lovely white girls; and she hoped that this girl would prove kinder to the son than the Lady Annette had been to the father.

CHAPTER XIV

Great stars flashed in a desert sky, a sky deep and soft, like purple velvet. They looked down on a sea of sand over which the wind roamed; and always and ever in its train there followed a sighing hiss, sometimes loud, sometimes soft, but always there, a constant, stealthy menace in the night.

In the dark depths, one great curling billow of sand showed, the coarse grass that fringed its crest looking like spray lashing through the night. Beneath, a little yellow fire glowed. In the glimmer a few ragged tents stood, patched and squalid dwellings. Among them mangy camels lay and groaned and gurgled and snored, with their long necks stretched along the sand, looking like

prehistoric beasts.

Here and there half-naked men and boys slept and gaunt dogs prowled—slinking, furtive shadows through the encampment, nosing about for scraps of the evening meal.

There had been no meal for the owner of the caravan that night. A hunger that could not be assuaged with food, and a thirst that no drink could quench, raged within him. Now a burning lust kept sleep at bay and sent him prowling like some wild beast into the desert, hoping that there relief might be found.

But for him none was to be had there.

The blue of the sky was like the eyes of the girl he had lost. Her skin had rivalled the stars in its purity. The very fire that burnt outside of his squalid home mocked him. It was golden as her hair.

But for the Sultan that girl would be his. Now! This night. His, to hold within his arms—that milk-white maid!

He flung his arms out to the night, then strained them across his chest.

But for the Sultan all that maddening beauty would lie within his grip. His to crush and caress. His!

The thought was torture.

"Curse him! Curse him! Curse him!" he cried aloud to the mocking night.

Then he stretched grimy paws towards a voiceless heaven.

"Allah, give him into my hands, the Sultan Casim Ammeh, who has robbed me of the flower of my desire. That milk-white maid—a houri of thy sending. Guide my step to those who are his enemies. To those who would break him, as he has broken me. Surely a man so mighty has others as mighty who hate him. There are always kings ready to make war on other kings. Allah, most high, let me find them. Allah, most merciful, grant my prayer. Like the wind in the desert I will roam—to the east, the west, the north, the south—until I find them.—His enemies. Then I will deliver him unto their hands."

The mad prayer of a wandering feather merchant against his Sultan; the prayer of a man whom, in his wealth and power and arrogance, Casim Ammeh had not considered.

But one which was to bear fruit.

CHAPTER XV

Giving no thought to the grimy wretch out there in the desert, the Sultan was seated in one of the deep, open galleries of his palace. Some ten feet below a garden sighed, and the soft wind that wandered in and out of the fretted arches was laden with the scent of a thousand flowers. Close at hand a fountain whispered, and from the distance came the gentle lap of the lake.

However, he noticed none of these things. There was something of far greater interest close beside him.

Among the cushions of a wicker lounge Pansy lay, her head pillowed on silk and down, a worn look still on her face.

Night had fallen before she awoke from her drugged slumber. She had found Le Breton still beside her, and the room full of the soft glow of shaded lamps.

Once she was fully awake he had left, promising to come again after dinner.

She had dined in the gallery. The roofed terrace was lighted by the glow coming from the two rooms behind. One was her bedroom; the other a gorgeously appointed *salon*. But at the end of these two rooms an iron grille went across the gallery, stopping all further investigations.

When Le Breton came he found Pansy on the terrace. Once he was seated, she told him what had happened to her father's party. Then she went back to the beginning, sixteen years before, with the story of the youthful Sultan; but she did not mention that she had been wounded and ill, for fear of having to meet a host of anxious enquiries.

Without comment he listened.

When she finished, all he said was:

"Well, I suppose the Sultan has his point of view, since it appears your father was responsible for the death of his."

"But it was my father's duty to condemn him. He would hate doing it, for he can't bear to hurt people. It was not 'murder,' as the present Sultan seems to think."

To this Le Breton had nothing to say.

"You must let the French Government know my father is a prisoner here," she went on. "Then they'll send an expedition and rescue him and his officers."

"I couldn't do that, Pansy. You forget I'm half Arab. I can't go back on my father's people."

Pansy had forgotten this fact about him; and it seemed her father's freedom was not quite so close at hand as she had imagined.

"Could I send my father a note?" she asked anxiously. "That cruel Sultan sent him to see me sold. It must have been torture for him; for I'm all he's got, and he's awfully fond of me. I want to say I'm safe here with you. I can't bear to think of him in torment."

"Write a note if you like, and I'll see what I can do," he replied.

At once she got up and went into the *salon* where she had noticed a writing-table. The place was more like a hall than a room; a spreading columned apartment, with walls and floor and ceiling of white marble, where fountains played into fern-grown basins and palms stood in huge, gilded tubs. There were deep, soft, silk-covered chairs and lounges, a sprinkling of gilded tables, and a large grand piano.

Some minutes later Pansy returned to her host with a letter in her hand.

He took it, and then rose to go.

"You mustn't sit up too late," he said, looking down at her with an air of possession; "you've had a trying day, and don't worry any more about anything or anybody."

So saying, he left her.

Full of gratitude, Pansy watched him go. And her conscience smote her.

On the whole she had treated him rather badly. She had promised to marry him, and then had gone back on her word. She did not deserve his kindness and consideration.

He had been so cold and harsh that night on her yacht in Grand Canary. He was none of these things now. He was just as he had been during their one brief week of friendship, but even nicer.

Pansy sighed, and her face grew wistful.

Why wasn't he just like other men? Why had Fate been so unkind? Giving her love, but in such a form that pride revolted from taking it.

Then Pansy went to bed, to lie awake for some time, brooding on the miracle the day had brought forth and the black barrier that stood between her and her lover.

She was about early the next morning and wandering in the garden.

It was a long stretch of shady walks and sunken ponds and splashing fountains, full of tropical trees, scented shrubs, and rare blossoms—a tangle of delights. In one spot she found a tennis court, walled with pink roses. The grounds went on, ending in a wide, flagged terrace, with stone seats and shallow steps leading down to the blue waters of the lake.

High walls ran down either side of the spreading garden. Behind, a huge building rose in domes and turrets and terraces—the palace of El-Ammeh had Pansy but known it, of which her new quarters were but a further portion.

Blissfully ignorant of this fact, she turned her steps from the rippling lake and wandered along a flower-decked path that twisted under shady trees and creeper-grown arches, coming presently to a locked iron gate let into the massive walls.

It gave a view of a scorched paddock where a dozen or more horses were browsing.

Pansy paused and scanned the animals.

One was strangely familiar.

That gaunt chestnut browsing there could only be "The Sultan"!

Amazed at her discovery, she called the horse by name.

At once the brown head was up, and the beast came galloping in her direction.

Even in the days of her illness and during her imprisonment in the palace, Pansy had spared a thought for her protégé. She imagined he had become the property of one of the Arab raiders, and she hoped his new master would be kind to him and understand him as she did.

Through the iron bars Pansy caressed her pet.

"I never expected to see you again, Sultan, old boy," she said. "Raoul must have bought you, too."

She was standing there talking to and petting the animal when Le Breton's step roused her.

"Are you pleased to see him again?" he asked, after greeting her.

"Pleased isn't the word for it. But how did you manage to get hold of him?"

"He was really the cause of my getting hold of you," he replied without hesitation. "I saw him in the possession of one of the soldiers who had come back from that foray. That made me doubly certain who the white girl was whom the Sultan was going to put up for sale."

"Raoul, you must let me give you back all you had to pay for me," she said.

"Why should you?" he asked, a slight smile hovering about his lips. "You saved my life. Now we're 'quits.' Isn't that what you called it?"

Pansy did not argue the point. Nevertheless, she determined to repay him once she and her father were back in civilisation.

"How long will it take to get my father free?" she asked.

"It all depends on the sort of mood I catch the Sultan in. With the best of luck, it'll be some weeks."

"Has he got my note yet, do you think?" she asked anxiously. "He'll go grey with worrying over me. I can't bear to think of the look on his face when he saw me in that ... that awful slave market."

Le Breton had destroyed her message the moment he had reached his own rooms. Now he could not meet the beautiful eyes that looked at him with such perfect trust.

"I expect the message will get through before the day is out," he answered. "It's merely a matter of 'baksheesh.'"

At his words the world became quite a nice place again for Pansy, the only shadow in it now the dark blood in her lover.

CHAPTER XVI

Night filled the harem with shadows and scent. The silver lamps cast a soft glow through the huge hall, glinting on wide ottomans and piles of cushions, on little tables set with coffee and sherbet, sweets and fruit and cigarettes.

There were perhaps thirty women in the great room, but the majority of them were the attendants of the half-dozen girls lolling on couches and cushions around the splashing fountain.

Full length on a wide ottoman Leonora was stretched, her dark eyes fixed spitefully on an adjacent lounge where the Arab girl lay, her face hidden in the cushions, her golden form almost buried in her wealth of black hair.

"See, Rayma, it's night again," Leonora said, malice in her soft, drawling voice. "Night! And still our lord Casim has not come to visit you."

There was a sob from the other girl, but no reply.

"How you jeered at me, Rayma, when you stole his heart from me," Leonora went on. "But now it seems another has stolen his heart from you, since he no longer comes to see you. Another whom I shall welcome as a sister."

At the taunt Rayma sat up suddenly, with a wild gesture pushing the mass of black hair back

from her face.

"For weeks and weeks he has not been here," she wailed. "Oh, my heart it breaks for love of him."

Leonora laughed, but an elderly woman sitting near laid a soothing hand on the distraught girl.

"Hush, Rayma, my pearl," she said. "Haven't I often told you our Sultan has had thoughts for nothing but vengeance of late?"

"Would vengeance keep him away from me all these weeks? It's more than vengeance. It's love. Love for some other girl."

Rayma clutched at the woman with slim, jewelled hands.

"Tell me, Sara, you come and go at will through the palace. Is there one?"

"My pearl, if there was one, wouldn't she be here in the harem?" Sara answered diplomatically.

"Yes, and so she would," Rayma replied more quietly. "And I could measure my beauty against hers."

Then she started rocking herself to and fro, in an agony of grief.

"Did he but come, my love, my Lord Casim, his heart would be mine again," she sobbed.

Then she stopped wailing suddenly, and faced the old woman anxiously.

"Sara, tell me quickly, have these weeks of weeping made me less beautiful?"

However, she did not wait for any reply.

Her gaze went to the arches, where night looked in at her mockingly.

"Look. It is night," she cried. "And my heart is hungry for love. For the love of my Lord Casim. For his arms. His kisses. Again it is night. And he has not come."

Then through the vaulted room piercing shriek after piercing shriek rang—the shrieks of a lovesick girl in the throes of hysteria.

As Sara sat patting Rayma's hands and trying to soothe her, she thought of the milk-white maid with the wide blue eyes and the golden curls, whom the Sultan himself had brought unconscious to his palace, and who was lodged—as no other slave girl had ever been—in his own private suite. And who treated her master—as no other slave had ever treated him—as if she were his equal, even his superior, making him wait on her. A task the Sultan seemed to find pleasure in!

CHAPTER XVII

On the terrace of her quarters, Pansy sat at dinner with her host. Three days had passed since her rescue from the slave-market; three delightful days for the girl, assured of her own safety, her father's coming freedom and the welfare of her friends. During the time, Le Breton had been with her almost constantly. From breakfast time until after dinner always at her disposal, ready to fall in with her wishes so long as they did not entail too much exertion on her part.

She was anxious to be on "The Sultan," and off for a long gallop, but this he vetoed firmly.

"It would cause too much of a sensation," he had said. "In this country women don't ride about on horseback. We should have the whole city at our heels."

Pansy had no desire for this to happen, lest the Sultan Casim should learn she had fallen into the hands of a friend, and snatch her away from her rescuer, so she did not urge further. But it was on account of her health, and not the idea of a crowd of his own subjects, that made Le Breton refuse this indulgence; for fear she should not be strong enough to stand the shaking.

He was quite willing to take her rowing on the lake, to play croquet with her, or a game of billiards; but most of all willing to sit at her side in the peaceful, scented garden, or in the cool gallery, or the *salon*, watching her; an occupation that Pansy, with an extensive knowledge of men and their ways, knew the ultimate end of. An end she was doing her best to keep at bay.

But, in spite of everything, she had the feeling of being a prisoner. The iron grilles at either end of the long gallery were never unlocked; nor was the gate into the paddock.

There was never a boat at the foot of the steps leading to the lake except when Le Breton was with her.

She had explored her quarters further. Beyond the *salon* there was a combined billiard-room and library, and its one exit led into a sort of big alcove dressing-room. Beyond that was her host's bedroom, as to her dismay she had discovered on opening the door. For she had found him there in shirt sleeves and trousers with a dark-faced valet, who, on seeing her, had melted away discreetly.

Pansy would have melted away also, but it was too late. In a perfectly unperturbed manner, Le Breton had crossed to her side.

"So, Pansy, you've come to pay me a visit?" he said teasingly. "That's hardly the sort of thing I'd expected of you."

"I'd no idea——" she began in a confused manner.

"There's no need to make excuses. You'll find all the roads here lead to Mecca. And I'm always pleased to see you," he broke in, in the same teasing strain. "If you'd kept your promise, we should be quite a staid married couple by now. And you'd be free to come and go in my apartments. Think of it, Pansy."

Pansy thought of it, and her face went crimson.

Her blushes made him laugh.

To the sound of his laughter, soft and mocking, she retreated, and she did not explore in that direction again.

She explored by way of her own bedroom instead, only to find that led into his study. And after that she did no more exploring. For it seemed that all roads did lead to Mecca. Whichever way she turned, Raoul Le Breton was there, coming between her and the man she feared and hated—the Sultan Casim Ammeh.

"I feel like a prisoner," she remarked on one occasion.

They were sitting by the lake, under the shade of fragrant trees, with the blue water lapping the marble steps and the sun setting over the desert. A gilded world, where a golden sunset edged the golden sand, one flaming yellow sea above another.

"You're a novelty here," he replied. "A pearl of great price. If I didn't keep you well guarded, there would be a hundred ready to steal you. And I flatter myself that, on the whole, you'd rather be with me."

He paused, watching her with dark, smouldering eyes.

"Am I right, Heart's Ease?" he finished tenderly.

Pansy coloured slightly under the ardour of his gaze.

Had he been as other men were, she would not have hesitated in her reply. She would have said in her own impulsive, truthful way:

"I'd rather be with you than anyone in the whole wide world."

But now his colour and religion were constantly before her. And pride kept any such confession from her lips.

So instead she said:

"No one could have been kinder than you, Raoul. I can never be grateful enough."

His kindness had been before her that night when she dressed for dinner. Pansy had no clothes except the ones in which he had brought her. But, within three days, there was an elaborate wardrobe at her disposal; the frocks fashioned like those she had worn in Grand Canary.

In one of these dresses she now sat at dinner with him; a misty robe of chiffon, but there were no diamonds sparkling like dew upon it. All her jewels had been left behind in the dim, gilded room in the palace of El-Ammeh.

When dinner was over, as they sat together in the *salon*, Le Breton remarked on the fact.

"They've stolen all your pretty jewels, Pansy," he said. "You must let me give you some others."

"You've done quite enough for me already," she replied promptly. "I can manage without jewels until I get back to England."

At her words his eyes narrowed.

"Couldn't you be content to stay here?" he asked in a rather abrupt manner.

"For a few weeks, perhaps, then I should be craving change and variety. 'The Light of the Harem' act isn't one that would satisfy me for long."

Then Pansy was sorry she had spoken. She remembered that he had admitted to having a harem, probably somewhere in this very house. But she had spoken with the idea of letting him see his case was hopeless; of saving him the pain of refusal.

"Considering how ill you've been, the 'Light of the Harem act,' as you call it, would be the best sort of life for you for some time to come."

"How do you know I've been ill?" she asked quickly.

Le Breton saw he had made a slip, but he covered it up smartly.

"Gossip told me," he said coolly.

There was silence for a time, during which he sat with his gaze on her.

"Why don't you smoke?" Pansy asked suddenly, anxious to get something between herself and him.

"When you're about I don't need any soothing syrups," he replied.

He was approaching dangerous ground again. To ward him off Pansy rose and went to the piano. Seating herself there, she wandered from one item to another, with scarcely a pause between.

But the feeling of his eyes never off her made her stop all at once and laugh hysterically.

A crisis had to be faced sooner or later. Things might as well come to a head now as tomorrow or next week.

At that moment Pansy remembered the man who had held her with such fierce strength and passion in the moon-lit garden of the villa. And she wondered, not without a touch of alarm, how he would take her refusal.

She got up and went to his side.

"I must give you something else to do than just watching me. It makes me nervous," she said.

From a box on a table near she took a cigarette and placed it between his lips. Then she struck a match and held it towards him.

In a lazy, contented manner, he let her do it. But when the cigarette was lighted, he did not give her time to draw her hand away.

He caught her wrist, and drawing her hand a little closer, blew out the match. When this was done, he did not let her hand go. Instead, he took one or two puffs at the cigarette, all the time watching her closely.

"I didn't give you my hand 'for keeps,'" she said. "I want it back again, please."

It was hint enough for any man, but Le Breton did not take it.

In a deliberate manner, and with her still a prisoner, he got to his feet, and put the cigarette on the table.

Pansy did not try to free herself. The situation had to be faced.

When the cigarette was laid down, he took the other delicate wrist into his keeping. Then he drew the girl right up to him, until her hands were resting on his chest.

"Pansy, suppose I ask you to redeem your promise?" he said.

"Oh no, I couldn't," she answered, a trifle breathlessly.

"Why not? I'm exactly the same man now that I was when you promised to marry me. A much better man, if you only knew it. Thanks to meeting you."

"I didn't know anything about you then."

"But you knew you loved me."

"I do now, Raoul," she said.

"Does the fact of my Arab blood make marriage between us impossible?"

There was no reply.

In her silence Le Breton read his answer.

His hands tightened on her wrists, and a baulked look crossed his face.

So the black barrier was one that neither love nor gratitude would make her cross willingly.

There were some bitter moments for him, as he realised this. For all his wealth and power, for all his scheming, despite the fact that Pansy confessed to loving him, she refused to be his wife. It seemed that nothing he could do would bring her into his arms in the willing way he wanted.

Pansy was the first to speak.

In that crushing grip on her wrists, she read an agony of pain and disappointment, that her one desire now was to soothe.

"It's not you, Raoul. It's the idea," she said in a low voice.

"So the idea of marrying me is repugnant. And yet you love me?"

She nodded.

Loosing her wrists he turned to the table, and took another cigarette. This, however, he lighted for himself.

Pansy watched him, marvelling at the cool way he had taken her refusal.

Considering the fire and temper in the man and his air of never having been thwarted in any way, it was hardly what she had expected. She put it down to the fact that she was completely at his mercy, alone and helpless in this barbaric city. Her heart ached at the thought that through no fault of his own she could only give him pain in return for all his kindness.

Going to his side, she laid a slim hand on his sleeve.

"Raoul, I hope you know you're awful nice about things," she said.

He glanced at her. At the beautiful eyes raised to his with infinite gentleness in their velvety depths.

And he laughed.

"Am I?" he said.

Then he laughed again. And his mirth was a mingling of bitterness and savagery.

CHAPTER XVIII

Pansy saw nothing of her host until the following afternoon. Almost immediately after his declaration Le Breton left her. Most of his time had been spent in contemplating the truth now before him. His scheming had failed. A sense of gratitude had not made the girl forget his colour.

After a sleepless night, he was up and away, riding madly along one of the sandy tracks that served his kingdom as roads, in a vain endeavour to escape from his chagrin and disappointment, and trying to decide on his next move.

He was surprised at his own hesitation. Having failed to attain his object, he was astonished that he should pause before doing what was obviously the only course left open to him. Just take the girl, whether she liked it or not.

But he knew why he hesitated.

Pansy loved him in her own way, as she might love a man of her own nationality. If he took her in his high-handed fashion, that love might be swept from him. And the idea was one that he could not bear to contemplate.

He returned from his wild ride still undecided on the next move.

In this frame of mind he came upon Pansy, in the midst of a solitary afternoon tea, set in a shady corner of the tennis court.

She greeted him as if the episode of the previous afternoon had never been.

"What have you been doing with yourself all day?" she asked, as she handed him a cup of tea.

"I've been trying to ride off my disappointment," he replied.

Pansy, too, had been fighting a battle of her own. Most of her night had been spent in arguing with temptation.

She was rich and independent. Why shouldn't she marry the man she loved, even if it were going against all the canons of her society? She was wealthy enough to defy society. She owed more than her life to him. Gratitude as well as love urged her towards him. Why should she make him suffer through no fault of his own? Why should she suffer herself? Why should she shut herself up from the man she loved because he happened to be a—a—

"A nigger."

The echo of Dennis's voice shouted the word at her, as it had seemed to shout that night in the London hotel, when Le Breton's name had been mentioned.

Pansy looked at her host as he lolled beside her; a picture of strength and handsomeness.

She wished his dark blood were more in evidence. That he did not look exactly like some of the big French, Spanish, and Italian men she had seen occasionally in various places on the continent. So absolutely European was he that it was impossible to think he was half-Arab.

"I wish you weren't so nice and handsome, Raoul," she said impulsively.

He cast a quick, speculative glance at her.

Perhaps, after all, a little more patience was all that was needed—patience combined with his own presence.

When tea was over, Pansy got up in a restless way.

"I feel I must do something active, or else go mad," she remarked.

The feeling was one he could sympathise with.

"We'll have a game of tennis then, if you promise to go easy."

Pansy remembered the way he had played that afternoon in Grand Canary.

"You'll simply mop the floor with me," she said.

"I'll play you left-handed."

Only too anxious to get away from her own thoughts and the temptation they brought, Pansy turned towards the court.

When the game started he handled his opponent carefully, putting the balls where she could get them without any effort.

At the end of the first set Pansy objected to his methods.

"You're not really trying, you're only playing with me," she said.

"It wouldn't be fair for me to pit all my strength against yours, would it now?" he asked.

"Well, do make a game of it. If you go on like this, I could sit down comfortably in the middle of the court and win. You needn't put the balls on my racket. I can stretch an inch or so around without fatal results."

The next game was more strenuous. But, as it went on, Pansy, getting excited, forgot caution. A long stretch and an upward spring to intercept one of her opponent's balls, brought cutting, knife-like pains tearing at her chest.

The racket dropped from her grip. She stood, white and swaying, her hand on her heart.

In a moment he had vaulted the net, and was at her side, his arm about her, concern on his face.

"It's nothing," she gasped.

"It's that accursed bullet," he said, conscience-stricken. "When Edouard extracted it, he warned me you'd feel the effects for some time."

He spoke without thinking, the sight of her suffering making him forget his double rôle.

At the moment Pansy was too full of pain to grasp what he had said.

Half leading, half carrying her, he took her to the nearest chair, settling her there with a cushion at her head.

With white lips she smiled at him; her only desire to allay his concern.

"There's nothing to worry about," she said faintly. "I'm a long way from being dead."

"It's all my fault," he said hoarsely.

"Oh no, you always said I mustn't be too strenuous," she contradicted.

Le Breton let it stay at that, aware that he had said more than he intended to say, and hoping the girl had not grasped all that lay within his comment.

For some minutes Pansy sat quiet, and, as her pain receded, her companion's sentence came more to the fore.

"It's that accursed bullet. When Edouard extracted it he warned me you'd feel the effects for some time."

From Alice, Pansy had learnt that the bullet had been extracted on the day she was brought into her enemy's camp.

Then Raoul must have been there! With the Sultan's forces!

But why hadn't he told her? Why had he pretended that he only had *guessed* she was the girl captured? Why had he never mentioned Dr. Edouard before? Why had Dr. Edouard never mentioned him?

It looked as if he had not wanted her to know.

But why hadn't he wanted her to know?

As Pansy pondered on the problem, mingled with the sweetness of the roses came another scent she knew—one that had greeted her every morning during her stay in the palace.

Above the screening trellis of roses, a tree grew, covered with great bunches of pink flowers, like apple blossom but more vivid, filling the air with fragrance.

Pansy had seen the flower before; among the blossoms that used to come to her every morning in the dim, gilded chamber.

"Still only a few flowers, Pansy?"

Le Breton's remark in the orange groves at Telde suddenly flashed across her mind. She remembered also his array of Arab servants, how obsequious they had been to their master on that occasion; and his wealth and magnificence; a splendour that was almost regal.

Close to where she sat, the tea-table stood.

Among the assortment of cakes were one or two of a kind she had seen previous to her rescue. Tiny, diamond-shaped dainties, made from layers of sponge cake and marzipan with chocolate icing on the top.

Often, in those long, hopeless days in the gilded prison, a similar morsel was all she had been able to eat for her tea.

Sixteen years ago a boy of about fourteen had sworn to kill her father. He would be thirty now. The same age as——! And the Sultan spoke French too!

They were little things, but they all pointed in one and the same direction. And, as Pansy brooded on them, an incredulous expression came to her eyes, and, with it, a look as if she were fighting to keep some horrible, impossible truth at bay.

Her gaze went to Le Breton.

"A great, big, fine man, awful good-looking."

Alice's description of the Sultan Casim Ammeh came back to her. Words that fitted her host exactly.

As she looked at him, from the paddock came the stamp of a horse's hoof.

She was here. Her favourite horse was here. Raoul Le Breton was here. All of them in this desert city hundreds of miles from civilisation. Such a combination could not be unless——

"If I were a king in Babylon and you were a Christian slave. Or to get down to more modern times. If I were a barbaric Sultan somewhere in Africa and you a girl I'd fancied and caught and carried off..."

His own words came echoing through her head; condemning words.

Then she recollected with what unpleasant emphasis he had said "au revoir," on parting with her that night on her yacht.

All at once Pansy's miracle exploded.

She wondered how she could have been such a fool as not to have guessed sooner.

This was the Sultan Casim Ammeh! This man standing before her!

He caught her gaze and smiled; it seemed to the girl, mockingly.

"Well, Heart's Ease, are you feeling better?" he asked. "After this you'll agree with me that 'The Light of the Harem' act is the most suitable life for you just at present."

It seemed to Pansy that he was gibing her.—At her trust, her belief, her incredulous folly.

What a blind fool she had been! It was all as plain as daylight now. Raoul Le Breton was the Sultan Casim Ammeh. It was her father's enemy she had confessed to loving; had wept in front of, clung to, trusted, displaying a weakness that had fallen to no man's lot, save her father's.

At the thought Pansy's soul writhed within her.

How could she have been such a fool! How he must have laughed at her!

Raoul Le Breton had condemned her to the unspeakable ordeal of the slave market in order to torture her father.

He had done it! Raoul Le Breton! The man she loved.

Pansy did not love him now. She hated him.

For a moment she was too stunned by her discovery to say or do anything.

Then she said in a voice that wild anger stifled somewhat:

"So *you* are the Sultan Casim Ammeh."

As Pansy spoke she got to her feet, her eyes blazing.

There was no mistaking what was on her face. She had guessed the truth.

On realising this, he made no attempt at further deception.

"I am the Sultan Casim Ammeh," he said, smiling. "And, my little slave, *you* are my most cherished possession. More to me than my kingdom."

His cool confession staggered her.

As he stood there, unabashed and unrepentant, she looked round quickly, in search of something to strike him with. For the knowledge of his deceit and duplicity had made her beside herself with rage.

Since there was no weapon at hand, she set off rapidly across the lawn, heedless of where she went, her only desire to get away from him.

She had not gone very far, however, before he was at her side.

"Where are you going, Pansy?" he asked with a masterful air.

That he should dare to follow her; dare to call her by her name enraged her beyond all bounds. And his words added to her fury. They made her realise there was nowhere she could go to escape him.

Like a whirlwind she turned upon him.

"I wish ... I wish I could kill you," she gasped.

There was a tennis racket lying at her feet. As if to carry out this design, she stooped and picked it up; her only desire now to send it crashing into the mocking, masterful face.

But he guessed her intention. In a moment he had grasped the racket and wrested it away.

"No, Pansy," he said. "No one has ever struck me, and you're not going to. For I don't quite know what the consequences might be."

There was a brief, tense silence.

As he looked at the girl, it seemed that Fate had decided the next move for him.

"We may as well come to an understanding," he went on. "I hate your father, but I love you. And you've got to have me, whether you like it or not. I'd prefer to marry you in your English way. But if you won't consent to that, then—I shall take you, in mine. The choice is with you."

There was only one part of his ultimatum that Pansy thoroughly grasped. And there seemed no limit to his audacity.

"I'd rather die than marry you," she flamed. "For I hate you. Do you hear? I hate you more than anything on this earth."

He heard right enough, and his face blanched at her words.

Then, before he had recovered from this blow, Pansy struck him across the mouth, with all her strength, bringing blood to the lips that dared to talk of love to *her*.

CHAPTER XIX

There was a new slave in the Sultan's harem, a dazed girl who looked as if she moved in dreams. She was not reclining on a lounge or cushions, as the other girls around the fountain were. She half sat, half knelt upon her cushions, her slim bare legs beneath her, her hands lying listlessly on her knee, staring straight ahead as if in a trance.

Since that episode on the tennis court, Pansy felt as if she were living in the midst of some wild story, in which Raoul Le Breton and the Sultan Casim Ammeh had got mixed.

The Sultan wanted to marry her. And she had refused.

Then——!

Then, infuriated with the sense of her own helplessness and his complete power, she had struck him.

She could see him now, with the blood oozing on his lips, his face white with rage, his eyes flaming, looking as if he could kill her. And she had wished he would. Then there would have been an end of it all. She would have done with him, herself, her own folly, and the hatred that raged like a fire within her.

But he had not touched her.

White with passion he had just stood and looked at her. And she had looked back, waiting for the end that had not come.

Instead, three women had come. And she had been taken out of his presence. Through the big *salon* and along dim passages, past silk-clad, jewelled guards, and into a little room, with an ottoman and cushions and a tiny window, all fretted like lace, impossible to get out of.

Then the women had undressed her. They were three to one. It was useless to struggle: dignity seemed all that was left to her.

There was not much of that even when the women had done with her. They put her into a white silk slip that reached only to her knees, and with nothing more than a strap of pearls on either shoulder. They would have heaped more pearls upon her, string upon string about her neck. But she would not have that. She tore them off, so angrily that the slender threads snapped and they fell like frozen tears upon the marble floor, as her amber beads had fallen that night in his villa!

What a minor thing Lucille Lemesurier was now! Forgivable when she had learnt his race and religion. Not like this gigantic deception. A deception that had forced her into saying she loved the Sultan Casim Ammeh—the man who had tortured her father.

Leaving the women grovelling after the scattered pearls Pansy had rushed from the room, her only desire to seek some way of escape.

She had gone in her short slip and short curls, looking like some lovely, rebellious child.

Her steps had taken her into a big room like a hall, where a crowd of women were gathered; half a dozen of them, girls dressed in a similar style to herself.

Then Pansy's strength went from her suddenly.

She realized where she was. In the Sultan's harem! And she knew there would be no escape.

Sara had come to her, and had led her towards a pile of cushions set by a fountain where the other girls were. And the woman had said sharp words to the assembly, who had risen as if to crowd around her—words that had kept them at bay.

When she was seated they had stayed looking at her, most of them with curiosity and friendliness. But there was one face that Pansy, for all her numbness, saw was hostile; the face of a beautiful, golden-skinned girl.

There was one girl, too, who was more than specially friendly, who said to her in a soft, cooing voice:

"Where do you come from, sister, for your skin is whiter than mine?"

Pansy did not answer Leonora's question. She was wondering herself where she came from. From another world, it seemed.

It was incredible that she, Pansy Langham, could be a slave in a Sultan's harem, garbed as these other slave girls were. Incredible that only that afternoon she had been playing tennis with Raoul Le Breton, as she might have played with any man in her own place in England.

What ages ago it was! Yet perhaps it was only an hour. Like a beautiful dream that had vanished.

There was no Raoul Le Breton. No big, masterful man whom she had had to love, in spite of everything. There was only this barbaric Sultan who hated her father. Who, because she refused to marry him, had sent her to this strange room. His harem!

And she was his slave! She Pansy Langham, who had never obeyed any will except her own.

Her hands clenched.

How she hated him! He was so supremely master.

Any moment he might come to pick whichever of his slaves he fancied. And—he might pick her.

The ignominy of it! Just to be a man's chattel. And, hitherto, all men had been *her* abject and willing slaves.

Heedless alike of Leonora's cooing advances, and Rayma's dark scowls, Pansy sat down.

The shadows gathered. The lamps were lit. Then dinner time came. A conglomeration of sweets and fruit and dainties set out on silver trays, with only a spoon to eat with.

Again Leonora's voice broke into Pansy's broodings.

"Come, won't you eat, my sister?" she coaxed, pushing one of the trays closer.

But Pansy felt as if she could never eat a bite again.

Rayma ate nothing either.

With angry eyes, she studied the newcomer.

Pansy was very beautiful in her way, but no more beautiful than Rayma was in hers. And what was more, she was not perfect. There was an ugly red scar on one of her milk-white arms. And the Lord Casim hated flaw or blemish on a woman.

Would this new slave's presence bring him to the harem?

If he came——!

Rayma clenched her little white teeth.

Then there would be a battle royal between this white girl and herself for his favors. But she would not let his heart go lightly.

Stretched full length on her couch, her elbows on the soft cushions, her pointed chin in the cup of her hands, the Arab girl lay watching her rival and waiting.

The evening wore on. The lamps burnt low, and started to flare and crackle, without any sign of the Sultan coming.

Presently, shriek after shriek, echoing through the vaulted hall, roused Pansy from her broodings, making her look round in a quick, startled manner. The shrieks were familiar. Muffled

they had reached her every evening in that dim, gilded chamber.

"It's only Rayma," Leonora said indifferently. "She has hysterics every night because the Sultan does not come. He has not been to the harem now for three months or longer. Not since he left the city on some foray. She fears some other girl has stolen his heart from her."

Leonora paused, her great eyes on the new-comer.

"Is it you, my sister?" she finished inquisitively. "For, if so, I shall love you."

But Pansy had nothing to say.

At that moment she was wondering why Rayma shrieked because the Sultan had not come. There seemed to her more reason to shriek if he did come.

CHAPTER XX

On one of the terraces of his palace the Sultan sat and brooded, his face hard and savage, as he glowered at the scene ahead of him; a harmless scene where night shadows settled on a scented garden with the glint of a lake beyond.

Never in his life had such an indignity been put upon him. Never had anyone dared dispute his right to do what he pleased. Never! Until this English girl had come into his life.

And she had struck him. The Sultan! As if he were some erring menial whose ways had annoyed her.

Under the recollection the man's untamed soul writhed.

She had done as she liked all her life. All that money of hers had given her ideas no woman ought to have. Now she had to learn that he was her master.

She was in the harem now. And there she could stay. A spell there would cool her temper and make her more amenable to his wishes.

The trees in the garden sighed faintly. The soft wind brought the scent of roses and the splash of a fountain.

His mind went back to another garden, in far-away Grand Canary. The echoes of a girl's voice whispered:

"Put your ear quite close. It's not a matter that can be shouted from the house-tops."

She had shouted loud enough that she hated him. She had not whispered that fact.

A spasm of pain crossed his face.

Why did she fight against him? This slender, lovely, helpless girl, whom he could break with one hand. She fought bravely, with all the odds against her. And she had dared to do what no one else in the place dared do. What no one had ever done in the whole of his wild, unbridled life. She had dared to strike him, fair and square, with all her strength, across the mouth.

Then suddenly his anger melted. A smile came and played about his scarred lips.

Surely no man could be angry for long with a girl so brave and helpless.

He deserved it for his deception. Just as he had deserved her scorn and contempt over Lucille. She was always giving him what he deserved, this little English flower of his.

More than he deserved, a struggling conscience breathed.

For he had never deserved those three words she had once whispered in his ear:

"I love you."

CHAPTER XXI

All the following day Rayma waited for the Sultan's coming. Pansy waited, also. By now she realised more fully what she had done: struck and infuriated the man who held her father's life in his hand.

However, nothing was seen of the Sultan either that day or the next.

For Pansy the days were the longest she had ever spent in her life.

She could not doze away her time as the other girls did, with coffee and sherbet and cigarettes; their greatest exertion a bath, or making sweetmeats over a charcoal brazier, or doing intricate embroidery. She kept out of their way as much as possible, in her own room, or wandering aimlessly in the garden, looking at walls impossible for her to scale, wondering what had happened to her father and her friends, and what would happen to herself. But even the garden was barred to her except in the very early morning, and the brief space after sunset. If she tried to go at other times there were twenty women to stop her. The order was the Sultan's, she was told, lest to escape him she should wander in the tropic heat and make herself ill.

All her meals had to be taken in the harem, and for bathing there was only the harem bathroom. That was a vast underground tank, approached by marble steps, cool and still and dim, its silence only broken by the dip of water.

There the girls disported themselves several times a day. But Pansy was not used to company when she bathed.

And to avoid them, she rose very early, when she was sure of having the great marble tank to herself.

During the afternoon of the third day the Sultan came.

Pansy was not in the harem at the time, but lying on the lounge in her own room.

Sara's entrance roused her.

"My pearl, the Sultan is here," she said cajolingly. "And he desires to see you."

"I prefer to stay where I am," was the cold response.

The woman looked at her, speculating on the relations between this girl and the Sultan. They had once been so fond of one another, always together. And now the girl had been sent to the harem, and for three days the Sultan had not come near her.

"It's useless to resist, my pearl," Sara explained. "If you don't come when the Sultan commands, servants will be sent to fetch you."

Pansy had no wish to be dragged into her captor's presence.

Since she had to go, she might as well go with dignity.

However, she did not go very far. Only just beyond the door of her own quarters. Once there she sank down quickly on a pile of cushions, in her usual position, half sitting, half kneeling; a position that made the scantiness of her garment not quite so obvious.

At once she knew who the man in the white burnoose was, although she had never seen him in anything but civilised attire before. He was sitting on an ottoman near the fountain, with the girls clustered around him, fawning on him like dogs round a loved master.

Pansy turned a slender, disdainful shoulder on the scene.

But if she did not look in the direction of the group, there was one at least who kept a sharp suspicious eye on her.

By the Sultan's side Rayma sat, with her pointed chin resting upon his knee.

"Why haven't you come sooner to see that new slave of yours, Casim beloved?" she asked, pointing a slim finger at the distant girl.

"I've had other things than women to think about," he replied evasively.

A bitter reminiscent smile curved his lips as he spoke. Some words of Pansy's were in his mind.

"So long as it's 'women,' it's all right. The trouble starts when it comes to 'woman.'"

Certainly for him the trouble had started when it came to "woman"; when this slender, wayward, golden-haired girl came into his life. For she had robbed all other women of their sweetness.

With longing his gaze rested on Pansy.

What a fool he was not to take her.—To let her whim come between himself and his desires.

But there was something more than a girl's whim had he but realised it; a feeble new self that Pansy was responsible for: the man he might have been but for his profligate training.

Rayma saw where his gaze was. To get his eyes away from Pansy, she took one of his hands and pressed it on her bosom.

"When first I came here, my lord," she whispered, "there was nothing else you could think of."

His attention came back to her.

"You were very pretty, Rayma," he said a trifle absently.

"And am I not beautiful still?" she asked quickly.

"You're always a picture," he answered.

He talked as if to a spoiled child who bored him.

Rayma hitched herself closer, until her soft breast pressed against his knee. But he remained silent, without look or caress, his gaze still on the distant girl.

He was wondering whether he would take Pansy out of her present surroundings, or if a spell in the harem might not make her realise to the fullest her own helplessness and his complete supremacy.

Leonora watched her master, her dark eyes full of joy and malice.

"There are some people who never know when they're not wanted," she remarked *sotto voce*, and to no one in particular.

Rayma cast a venomous look at her. But Leonora only smiled at her dagger-like glances.

"Can she dance, this new slave of yours?" the Arab girl asked suddenly.

"She dances very nicely," he answered in an indifferent manner.

"As well as I do?" she asked jealously.

He thought of the snake-like writhing Rayma called "dancing."

"She dances quite differently from you."

"Let us both dance before you then, so that you may judge which is the better of us," she said quickly.



"Let us both dance for you, so that you may judge between us"

"Let us both dance for you, so that you may judge between us"

However, he vetoed this neat arrangement.

"The girl has been wounded. And she's still not strong enough for much exertion."

Rayma brooded on this fact, and the more she thought about it, the less she liked it.

"Did you capture her on that foray?" she asked presently.

"She was part of my booty," he said, a lingering tenderness in his voice.

Again Rayma was silent.

Very quickly she put two and two together.

The Sultan had not been near the harem since his return from that quest for vengeance. And this new slave had been captured during that foray.

So this was the girl who had stolen the Sultan's heart! Who had kept him away from the harem all these dreary weeks. The girl sitting there by the distant doorway. The girl who would not come near him; whom he watched, yet did not go to.

Rayma scowled at Pansy's back.

Then she turned to one of the women attendants sitting near.

"Fetch that girl to me," she said, pointing to Pansy.

The woman rose, ready and anxious to do a favourite's bidding.

But the Sultan motioned her down again.

"She comes at no one's bidding, except mine," he said firmly.

Pouting, Rayma wriggled closer to him.

"May I not even call her?" she asked softly.

"The rule applies to all here," he replied.

Somewhat impatiently he pushed Rayma aside. Then he got to his feet, and went towards Pansy.

His step behind her made the girl's heart start beating violently.

He was coming to issue some further ultimatum. Perhaps not an ultimatum even, but an

order.

Pansy had wanted to see her captor, to plead for her father. Now that he was there, the words refused to pass her lips. To have asked any favour of him would have choked her.

"Well, Pansy, are you going to marry me?" he asked.

He might not have been there, for all the notice she took of him.

"Come," he went on, in an authoritative manner, "you must realise that I'm supreme, and that you must obey me."

Pansy realised this to the fullest, and the sense of her own helplessness only infuriated her. Since she had no weapon she could turn on him except her tongue, she hit at him with that. And she hit her very hardest on the spot she knew would hurt the most.

"English women don't marry niggers," she said contemptuously.

The word cut deep into his proud spirit; all the deeper for coming from her lips. Although he whitened under the insult, the knowledge of his own complete supremacy held his fiery temper in check.

"The marrying is just as you like," he replied. "Forms and ceremonies are nothing to me, but I'd an idea you preferred them."

There was a brief silence.

With her face turned away Pansy sat ignoring him entirely, leaving him only a slender white neck, a small ear and part of a rose-tinted cheek to study.

And the Sultan studied them, amused that anything so helpless should dare to defy him.

"You've not only yourself to consider when you set me at defiance in this manner," he remarked presently. "There's your father, and your English friends."

His words brought Pansy's eyes to him, fear in their velvety depths.

At her look he laughed.

"Your kind heart has given me some hostages, Pansy," he said. "But nothing will happen to them for another week. I'll give you that much time to make up your mind. Not longer. For my patience is wearing very thin. And I've had a lot where you're concerned. More than I ever dreamt I was capable of. In the meantime, my little girl, try and remember I'm not quite the hopeless villain you think me, or you wouldn't have liked me, even for a day."

But just then it seemed to Pansy there was no greater villain on earth than the Sultan Casim Ammeh.

CHAPTER XXII

Early the next morning when Pansy was splashing about in the great underground tank, a voice made her look up in a startled fashion. So far no one had intruded on her ablutions.

It was a soft, purring, malicious little voice that said in lisping French:

"Now I see why you always come here early. Why you don't bathe with me and the other girls."

On the broad marble steps Rayma stood, looking down at her rival spitefully.

"I come early because I'm not used to bathing before people," Pansy replied, hoping the other would take the hint and go.

But Rayma did not go. She seated herself on the steps and stayed there, her black eyes fixed on the graceful girl in the water.

"Has the Sultan seen those scars?" she asked, pointing a slim disparaging finger at the network of red marks and ridges on Pansy's thigh and side.

Pansy flushed at the question.

"Of course not," she cried indignantly.

"When he bought me I stood before him with only my hair for a covering. And I stood gladly, for I knew I was perfect." Rayma finished, as if the fact gave her pleasure.

Pansy had no desire to discuss the Sultan's likes and dislikes. To avoid further conversation, she swam out to the far end of the great bath and stayed there until Rayma had gone.

All that day, whenever the Arab girl's eyes met hers, there was a look of malicious triumph in them. And when the two girls came within speaking distance that purring, little voice whispered spitefully:

"Only wait until the Sultan comes. I shall find a way of taking his love from you."

Despondently Pansy wished this would come to pass. She was between the upper and nether millstones, her father on one side, her captor on the other.

Several days passed without anything being seen of the Sultan. Then, one night, he came, when the girls were gathered in the harem, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes after dinner. Pansy, was in the group, and the sight of his big, white-clad figure brought her to her feet sharply, with a feeling of choking alarm. Then she stayed where she was, fully aware that escape was impossible.

He seated himself at her side.

She would have edged away, but his voice stopped her.

"No, Pansy, stay where you are," he said quickly. "And since I don't smoke 'bubble bubbles' like the men in 'Eastern pictures and on cigar-box lids' you once mentioned, you can give me a cigarette, and light it, if you like," he added, with a touch of teasing.

Pansy did not like. She stood slim and straight and defiant, ignoring his request, conscious that all eyes were upon them, all ears listening to what was said.

Since she refused to do the Sultan's bidding, and since he made no attempt to force obedience, there were half a dozen pairs of hands ready and eager to do the task Pansy scorned.

Rayma's gaze rested jealously on the English girl,

"Is it always what she likes, Casim, my Lord, and never what you wish?"

"She has been ill, and I humour her," he replied shortly.

"Ill or not she should be only too pleased to do your bidding. Are you not her Sultan and her master? *I have no will except your wishes. I have no secrets hidden from you.*"

There was a world of insinuation in Rayma's voice. And it made the Sultan glance at Pansy in a quick, suspicious manner.

The only thing he suspected her of doing was trying to escape. He failed to see how she could get out of her present quarters, but the mere idea of losing her sent a chill through him.

"What are you hiding from me, Pansy?" he asked presently.

His close scrutiny brought a flush to her face, not through any sense of guilt, but because of her unaccustomed and scanty attire.

He saw the flush and his suspicions deepened. She was capable of doing herself some injury in order to get away from him.

"What do you mean, Rayma?" he asked, as Pansy refused to answer.

The Arab girl sidled up to Pansy, malice and triumph in her eyes.

"Do you really want to know, my Lord?" she asked, smiling at him softly.

He nodded.

Before Pansy realised what was happening, there was a feeling of cold steel at her breast. Totally unprepared, it seemed that Rayma was going to stab her. She moved back quickly. As she moved there was the sharp snip of scissors, a rending sound, a quick jerk, and her one garment was dragged from her. The Arab girl retreated quickly, holding the silk slip behind her, leaving Pansy nothing but her curls to cover her; a covering that reached no further than the nape of her neck.

With a heart-broken cry she sank on the floor, and crouched there, her face hidden in her hands, flushed with shame from head to foot.

Laughing triumphantly Rayma pointed a scornful finger at her rival.

"Look, Casim, look, beloved," she cried, "that is the secret she would hide from you. Those

ugly scars. And she bathes early in the morning when none of us are there, so that we shall not see them and tell you. For she knows that you would not love a woman so flawed."

The other women looked at Pansy in an unconcerned manner. Clothing was of no great consequence to them. Moreover, it was just as well not to interfere when Rayma chose to play her tricks and amuse their master.

But he did not look at all amused. What was more, his gaze did not go to the slim bare girl crouched on the floor. He looked instead at Rayma.

"Give the girl back her garment," he said in an ominously quiet tone.

"Look, Casim. Look, my Lord. A girl so blemished is not worthy of *you*. Often you have said no woman has a form as perfect as mine. But look and compare. Then say which of us is more deserving of your favour."

She snatched off her own light garment, and stood before him, slim and perfect, a golden statue, a model for an artist.

The Sultan's eyes were fixed on her still. But there was no appreciation in them, only anger.

"Give the girl back her garment," he said again.

"When you have looked at her, and not before," Rayma cried, defiant in the surety of her own perfections.

"Give it back when I tell you," he said in a savage voice.

A tense silence followed.

The girls and women glanced at one another, and waited for what they had seen happen from time to time—the fall of a favourite.

Rayma's "coup" had fallen surprisingly, ominously flat. The Sultan refused to look at the girl whose blemishes had been unveiled for his inspection.

Rayma knew it too. And as she gazed at the cold, angry face of her master, she saw her star had set. She threw the silk slip at Pansy who still crouched on the floor, paralysed with shame. Beside herself with jealous rage the Arab girl then stooped and picking up a heavy silver goblet hurled it at her rival. Fortunately it missed its aim and went skimming and crashing along the marble floor.

This attempted assault was the last straw. A savage, merciless expression came to her master's face. At this look Rayma fell prostrate at his feet.

"Casim, love me a little, and I ask for nothing else," she wailed.

A gong stood at his side. Ignoring her, he struck it angrily. Its musical notes echoed through the room. A moment later a couple of negroes appeared in the doorway of the harem.

The Sultan gave a sharp order in Arabic.

What it was Pansy did not know. She was now the centre of a group of women who, with brooch and jewelled pin, were adjusting her silk slip. They were all anxious to gain her good graces, since there was no doubt now who was the Sultan's favourite.

In her ear Leonora was whispering:

"There's no need to be ashamed, my sister. Our Lord Casim never once glanced at you. His eyes and his anger were all for Rayma. Thanks to you, she now feels what I once felt. And her heart is breaking."

But if Pansy did not know what the Sultan said, the crowd around her did. They whispered affrightedly among themselves, and edged further away from their master. For the Sultan in a temper was a person to be avoided.

And Rayma knew what was going to happen. She started up with dilated eyes and screaming, then clung piteously to his feet.

"Casim, my Lord, beloved, not that," she cried, her little face frantic. "Not that, I entreat you, for the sake of the nights that have been."

There was no pity on his face, only savagery. All mercy had been swept out of him by her attempt to shame and injure Pansy.

The guards returned, bringing whips.

On seeing them Rayma's screams broke out afresh. Piteous little pleas for mercy, wild promises never to offend again, that he ignored completely. Then she fell a sobbing, golden

statue at the Sultan's feet.

Rayma's cries, terror-stricken and helpless, reached Pansy in the midst of her own dazed shame, making her glance in the direction of the man she hoped never to have to face again.

She saw the huge negroes with their whips, awaiting the Sultan's order. The sobbing, helpless girl at his feet, and on his face a look she had never seen before—the look of an angered and pitiless despot.

For a moment she stood aghast, not able to credit the scene before her. As she looked the Sultan nodded.

The guards raised their whips. And they fell with cruel, stinging force.

But they did not fall on Rayma.

There was one in the harem who dared come between the Sultan and his wrath.

The whips fell on white shoulders, not golden ones, bringing the blood oozing to satin-smooth skin.

The weight and pain brought Pansy to her knees before her captor.

"Raoul," she gasped, "I can't let you do this dreadful thing."

The whips fell from the negroes' hands. Aghast, they stared at the girl before them. It was not their fault the lashes had fallen on the new favourite and not on the culprit. But they would be held responsible, and doubtless beaten nevertheless. The women and girls started to scream and wail. Their master might turn on them for letting the new slave get within reach of the whips. But who was to know she would dare come between the Sultan and a girl he thought well to punish.

He paid no heed to the frightened stares of the guards, the wails of the scared women, to Rayma still sobbing, with fright, not pain. He had thoughts and eyes for nothing but the girl on her knees before him, with the red weals on her shoulders, horror and entreaty in her eyes—Pansy calling him once again by name.

With a fierce, possessive movement, he stooped and gathered her into his arms, crushing her against him, until she was almost lost in his voluminous robes.

"My little English flower, you can't quite hate me," he whispered passionately. "Or you wouldn't try to keep me what you once thought me. You wouldn't try to come between me and the man I am."

With the girl in his arms, he rose.

Scared eyes watched him as he crossed the big hall, and disappeared behind the silken curtains.

Then the girls started to whisper among themselves. For the Sultan had taken this new slave to the gilded chamber of their desires.

CHAPTER XXIII

Through the open arches of the gilded chamber the moonlight dripped, making silver ponds on the golden floor, filling the place with a vague shimmering glow.

One bar of moonlight fell on a couch where Pansy lay, her face buried in the cushions. By her side the Sultan knelt, one arm across her, watching her with glowing, passionate eyes.

The last few minutes had been a haze to the girl; a blur of great negroes with whips; of Rayma, sobbing and helpless; of Raoul Le Breton, cruel, as she had always felt he might be.

He had come back into her life suddenly, that lover with the strong arms and the deep, caressing voice, the big, half-tamed, arrogant man, whom from the first she had liked and had never been afraid of.

"What dare I hope? What dare I think?" his voice was saying. "Dare I think that you don't quite hate me? Look at me, my little slave, and let me see what is in your eyes."

But Pansy did not look at him. She was too full of shame and confusion, despite Leonora's assurance; a shame and confusion that the Sultan guessed at, for he stayed caressing her golden curls with a soothing touch.

For a time there was silence.

Through the room the wind strayed, its soft, rose-laden breath mingling with the subtle scent of sandalwood. Somewhere in the garden an owl hooted. A peevish wail in the night, came the cry of jackals prowling around the city walls.

Under that firm, strong, soothing hand, Pansy's shame subsided a little. For the girl there was always magic in his touch, except when anger raged within her. There was no anger now, only a sense of her own helplessness, and the knowledge of the lives he held in his power.

Under the silence and his soothing hand, a question trembled to her lips, born of her own helplessness and the dire straits of her father and friends.

"If ... if I marry you, will you send my father and friends safely back to Gambia?" she asked, in a low voice.

He laughed tenderly.

"If I were as big a villain as you think me, I'd say 'yes,' and then break faith with you, Pansy—as you broke faith with me. If I sent them back, my little flower, do you know what would happen? Your English friends would complain to the French Government. An expedition would be sent up here, and they would dole out to me the fate your father doled out to mine."

His words made Pansy realise for the first time that his summary abduction of his father's party had brought him foul of two Governments.

Horrified, she gazed at him; her father and friends all forgotten at the thought of the fate awaiting her captor.

They would shoot him, this big, fierce man. All fire would die out of those flashing eyes. That handsome face would be stiff and stark in death. Never again would that hard mouth curve into lines of tenderness when he smiled at her. There would be no strength left in his arms. No deep, passionate, caressing voice. No untamed, masterful man, using all his power to bend her to his will.

It was one thing for Pansy to want to kill him herself, but quite another for other people to set about it.

At that moment she realised that, in spite of everything, she did not hate the Sultan Casim Ammeh.

And what was more he knew it too. For he bent over her, laughing softly.

"So, Heart's Ease, you don't quite hate me," he said. "That fact will keep me patient for quite a little time. And you will be whispering 'yes' in my ear, as I would have you whisper it—of your own free will, as you whispered 'I love you,' on that sweet night six months ago."

He bent still lower, and kissed the little face that watched him with such strained anxiety.

"Good night, my darling," he said fondly.

Long after he had gone Pansy lay trying to crush the truth back into its hiding-place in her heart. And his voice, tender and triumphant, seemed to echo back mockingly from the jewelled ceiling.

For surely she could not love a man so cruel, so barbaric, so profligate as the Sultan Casim Ammeh.

CHAPTER XXIV

The next morning Pansy awoke to find herself back in her gilded prison, and Alice beside her with the customary morning tea, a dish of fruit and a basket of flowers, all as if the last ten days had never been. She knew now the flowers were from the Sultan. But she did not tell Alice to take them away. Instead, as she drank her tea and ate some fruit, she looked at them in a meditating manner.

And Alice looked at her mistress in an inquisitive way, wondering what had happened to her during the last few days.

"De Sultan, he no sell you den, Miss Pansy?"

"No," Pansy replied in an absent manner.

"Since you go I lib wid de oder servants in anoder part ob de palace. Dere be hundreds ob dem," the girl continued, her eyes round with awe at her captor's wealth and power.

She spoke, too, as if anxious for an exchange of confidences.

However, Pansy said nothing. She stayed with her gaze on the flowers, despising herself for having been so upset at the thought of the Sultan's demise.

That morning Alice dressed her in her usual civilised attire. In spite of this, Pansy found she was still a prisoner, still within the precincts of the harem. The rose garden was hers to wander in at will. But the guards were still stationed outside one of the sandalwood doors, as they had been on the day of her arrival at the palace. However, one of the two other doors was unlocked.

Pansy opened it, hoping some way of escape might lay beyond. A dim flight of stairs led downwards. She descended, only to find herself in the harem.

The girls and women greeted her with an awed and servile air. To them now she was the Sultan's first wife; the most envied and most honoured woman in the province of El-Ammeh.

Curious glances were cast at her attire. Leonora appeared most at her ease. For she fingered Pansy's garments with soft, slow, indolent hands.

"It's quite ten years since I've seen a woman dressed as you are," she remarked. "Not since I lived in Tangier, before my uncle sold me to an Arab merchant."

Pansy knew Leonora's history. It did not sound a pretty one to civilised ears.

Sold at the age of fourteen, she had been handed from one desert chief to another, until finally she had appeared in the slave market of El-Ammeh and had taken the Sultan's fancy.

"What an awful life you've had," Pansy said, pity in her voice.

Leonora's languid eyes opened with surprise.

"Me! Oh, no. I'm beautiful, and most of my masters have been kind. But none so kind and generous as the Sultan Casim. Besides, now my travels are at an end. When the Sultan tires of a slave, he does not sell her. She is given in marriage to one of his officers, with a good dowry. And she is then a woman with an established position. He is always generous to a woman who has pleased him. How lucky for you to be picked for his first wife! You'll find him almost always kind. I've been here more than a year and I know. He is never harsh without a reason. He is never hard and unjust like some of the masters I've known."

As Pansy listened to this eulogy on her captor, she was surprised and ashamed of herself for having a scrap of liking left for him. All her instincts revolted at his doings, but much as she tried she could not make them revolt at the man himself.

"He was hard enough last night," she remarked.

"But he had a reason. Rayma would have shamed and injured you. She could not see what I saw—that the Sultan has eyes and thoughts and heart for no one but you now. She is a stupid girl, that Rayma. Because he loved her for a month or two, she thought he would love her for ever. He was her first master. He bought her but a few weeks before he last went to Paris. And he is so angry now that he will sell her again, not give her in marriage to one of his officers, making her a woman of importance."

Leonora's remarks made Pansy glance sharply round the big hall, suddenly aware that Rayma was not present. Already she saw the Arab girl having to face that dreadful sea of eyes, as she, herself, had faced it.

"Where is Rayma?" she asked quickly.

"The guards took her away last night," Leonora answered indifferently. "She'll trouble you no more."

Hastily Pansy got to her feet, and went to the big door leading out of the harem. She knew what lay beyond; a large vestibule where, day and night, half a dozen eunuchs lounged.

Seeing Pansy on the threshold, brought them to their feet, barring her exit.

"I must see the Sultan," she said.

Although she made the request, she hardly expected to have it granted, for the Sultan came when he felt disposed.

"Lady, I'll inform the Sultan of your desires," one of the guards replied.

With that he left the vestibule.

Pansy waited, conscious of the servility and overwhelming desire to please that oozed from

these menials.

Before long the messenger returned.

It appeared that the girl's wish was to be granted. With a negro on either side of her Pansy was taken through an intricate maze of corridors, past closed doors, open arches and Arabesque windows, to a further door that her escort opened.

Pansy found herself in a room that looked more like a sumptuous office than anything else, with a balcony that jutted over the lake.

At a large desk a man was seated in a white drill suit with a black cummerbund, who rose at her entry and smiled at her, as if the last week had never been; as if he were still Raoul Le Breton and there had been no unveiling.

"Well, Pansy, it's flattering to think you want to see me," he remarked.

Pansy did not waste any time before stating the reason of her visit.

"Is it true you're going to sell Rayma?" she asked in a horror-stricken tone.

The mere mention of her name made a savage expression flit across his face.

"What I'm going to do with her is my own concern."

"How can you be such a brute, such a savage, so abominably cruel?" she cried, distress in her voice.

"Do you know, my little slave, that you're the only person in the place who dare take me to task about my doings?" he remarked.

Pansy did not know, or care; her only desire was to save him from himself.

"I shall stay here until you promise not to sell her," she said tensely.

"If you stay until Doomsday, it won't worry me," he replied. "You must find some other threat."

Pansy could have shaken him for daring to poke fun at her, when her only desire was to keep him from slave-dealing.

"How can you even contemplate such a ghastly thing," she gasped.

"As what?" he asked in an unconcerned manner.

"Don't you know that slave-dealing is an abomination?"

"It may be in your country, but it isn't in mine."

"I can't bear to think of you doing anything so dreadful," she said in a strained voice.

He glanced at her, a soft, mocking light in his eyes.

"Should you like me any better if I didn't sell Rayma?"

"I should hate you if you did."

"I couldn't run such a risk a second time," he replied. "I'll send her back to the harem, and keep her there until I can find a suitable husband, if that'll please you better."

Pansy experienced a feeling of relief. The victory was easier than she had expected.

There was a brief pause. Then he said:

"So you're still returning good for evil, Pansy. Your power of forgiveness is astonishing. Rayma deserved punishment for her treatment of you."

"If anyone deserves punishment it's you," Pansy retorted.

"How do you make that out?"

"For trifling with her."

For a moment he was too astonished to speak.

"If you call that trifling, then I must have trifled with at least a hundred women in my day," he remarked at length.

"How can you stand there and say such dreadful things?" she gasped.

"There's nothing dreadful about it from my point of view."

Pansy said nothing. She just stared at him, as if at some fascinating horror.

Under her gaze he began to find excuses and explanations for himself and his behaviour.

"Don't you remember telling me in that letter of yours that you were not quite the same as other girls, putting that forward as a sufficient reason for breaking faith with me? Well, Pansy, I'm not quite the same as the other men you've known. To begin with, my religion is different. In my own small way I'm a king. I rule absolutely within a radius of more than a hundred miles round here. Then, I'm a millionaire, and my trading extends far beyond my kingdom, as far as St. Louis, in fact. And millionaires, more especially if they're men and unmarried, are fêted and welcomed everywhere. And, like kings, millionaires can do no wrong. Then I'm half-Arab, half-French, which you must agree is a wild combination. Such a mixture doesn't tend to make a man exactly virtuous. I've done exactly what I liked, practically ever since I was born. Everybody, except my mother, did their best to spoil me. She was the only one who ever tried to keep me in order in any way, but she died when I was ten years old. At fourteen I was Sultan here in my own right. And no one ever dared, or troubled, to criticise my doings until you came along. And now you're expecting me to be a better man than ever Fate or nature intended me to be."

Pansy said nothing; she still looked at him, trying now to see his point of view.

"I call 'trifling' what you've done with me. Promising to marry me and then drawing back. I've never trifled with you. And if you can believe such a thing, and if you'll try and see it in my light, I've been faithful to you. I never had a thought for another woman since the night you came into my life, until I learnt you were Barclay's daughter. Then I tried to hate you, and went back to my old life. But when you were brought to me, dead, as I thought, I knew I didn't hate you. And since that day, Pansy, there's been no other woman but you. And you'll satisfy me for the rest of my life."

Pansy listened to him, trying to see things as he saw them, knowing she ought to be disgusted with him. Instead, she was intensely sorry because there had never been anyone at hand to check or train him, except a mother who had died twenty years ago.

But his speech brought her father's plight before her again. It seemed hardly feasible that the Sultan would have sent her letter to the man he desired to punish.

"Did you give that note of mine to my father?" she asked.

A trifle askance, he glanced at her.

"No, I didn't," he confessed.

Pansy was past being angry with him; she was just sorely wounded in soul and mind at his doings.

This must have showed on her face, for he went on quickly:

"You can send another and I promise it'll be delivered. Not only that, but that your father and friends will be well treated. Among other things, Pansy, you've taken the edge off my vengeance."

He paused, leaning over her he said:

"I'm granting you all these favours, but what are you going to do for me?"

Pansy wanted nothing now but to get away from him, right away, beyond his reach, but not because she hated him.

"Just for a moment, my little English flower, will you rest upon my heart?" he asked in a soft, caressing voice. "There's no savagery left in me when you're there of your own accord."

He held out his arms, waiting to complete the bargain. But she moved away quickly.

"Oh, no," she said, alarm in her voice.

He laughed.

"You've never been afraid of me before, why are you now, Pansy? Are you afraid you might love me?"

"How could I love anyone so depraved?" she asked.

But her voice was quavering, not scornful as she intended it to be.

"Depraved! So that's what I am now, is it? Well, it's all point of view, I suppose. And it's one degree better than saying you hate me."

He turned towards the desk, and drew out paper and envelopes.

"Write your letter, my little girl," he finished.

Pansy sat down.

As she wrote to her father, in her heart was a wish that she had been left undisturbed in her fool's paradise, that she had married Raoul Le Breton at the end of a month, knowing nothing about him except that she loved him.

Once he was her husband, if she had learnt the truth, she would not have had to fight against herself and him. There would have been only one course left open to her—to do her utmost to make a better man of him. And circumstances had shown her that in her hands the task would have been an easy one.

CHAPTER XXV

When Sir George Barclay returned to prison, he was a broken man. His officers were surprised to see him back alive, and anxious to hear what had occurred. But a day or two passed before he was able to talk about what had happened. And always before him was the bestial figure of the miser feather merchant, into whose hands he imagined his daughter had fallen.

When he told the story of her sale a strained silence fell on his officers. A silence that Cameron broke.

"The damned brute," he said in a wild, heart-broken way, "and he knew her in Grand Canary."

The fact of Pansy's acquaintance with the Sultan Casim Ammeh, Barclay had learnt from Cameron in the early days of their capture. The younger man immediately had recognised the Sultan as the Raoul Le Breton, who when out of Africa posed as a French millionaire.

"He's worse than a savage," one of the other officers put in, "since he knows better."

Sir George had nothing to say, once the story was told. Pansy's fate was always before him; an agony that chased him into dreams, compared with which his own death would have been as nothing.

One morning about ten days after the sale of slaves, one of the Arab guards brought him a letter.

To his amazement, he saw his daughter's writing on the envelope.

With trembling fingers he opened it, wondering how she had managed to get a message through to him, with a prayer in his heart that by some miracle she might have escaped her horrible fate.

"No one knows better than I how you must have suffered on my account. I tried to get a letter through to you before, but I have just heard it never reached you, so I am sending another.

I was not sold that day in the slave-market. The Sultan never intended to sell me. He only sent me there and made a pretence of selling me in order to hurt you.

I am in the palace here, and no one could be better treated than I am. I asked the Sultan to let you all go back to Gambia, but he will not consent to that. But he has promised that you all will be well treated.

You must not worry because of me. It is not as if the Sultan and I were strangers. I met him in Grand Canary, but I did not know who he really was then—he was passing under a French name.

It is very difficult to know what to say to cheer you up. I know you will worry whatever I say. I am quite safe here, and no harm will happen to me. I cannot bear to think of you worrying, and you must try not to do so for my sake.

Your loving daughter,
PANSY."

As George Barclay read through the letter, it seemed to him that he knew what had happened. The girl had bartered herself in exchange for his life and the lives of her friends.

He tried to gather what cold comfort he could by keeping the picture of the Sultan before him

as he had last seen him, big and handsome, in his khaki riding suit, looking thoroughly European. At least the man who had his daughter was a king, if a barbaric one, and civilised to a certain extent. She had not fallen into the clutches of that grimy, naked, foaming wretch, as he had imagined. And the knowledge eased his tortured spirit considerably.

CHAPTER XXVI

After that interview with her captor Pansy's life rapidly developed into one long struggle between inclination and upbringing.

She knew she loved the Sultan, but all her standards revolted against marrying him. She could not bear to think about the wild past that was his, but she equally could not bear to think that he might fall into sin again when hers was the power to prevent him.

What was more, she knew he had guessed her love for him, and was doing his best to make her succumb to his attractions.

After that one interview she was not allowed out of the sensual, scented precincts of the harem. She had no occupation, no amusements, no books even. Nothing to do all day except just think about her lover and fight her battle.

And he made the battle all the harder. Never a day passed but what he was there, big and handsome and fascinating. He would come upon her in the little walled garden, and linger with her among the roses. By the hour he would sit with her in the wide gallery overlooking the desert. Very often he dined with her in the gilded chamber, and stayed on afterwards in the dim light of the shaded lamps, watching her with soft, mocking eyes.

And very often he would say:

"Well, Pansy, have you made up your mind whether you are going to marry me or not?"

It seemed to the girl that the whole world was combining to drive her into the arms of a man she ought to turn from with contempt and disgust.

At the end of a fortnight he said:

"Pansy, you're the first woman who has ever fought against her love for me. It's an amusing sight, but I'm beginning to wish you weren't such a determined fighter."

At the end of a month some of the mockery had gone out of his eyes, giving place to a hungry gleam. For the girl had not succumbed to his fascinations, although her face was growing white and weary with close confinement and the ceaseless battle that went on within herself.

And the man who acknowledged no law except his own appetites, and who, up till now, had lived for nothing else, loved the girl all the more deeply because she did not succumb to his attractions, because she had a soul above her senses, and tried to live up to her own ideals, refusing to come down to his level. At times he felt he must try and grope his way up to the heights, and unconsciously he was rising from the depths.

"Water can always reach the level it rises from," Pansy had once said.

Although a wild craving for his girl-prisoner often kept him wakeful, although there was none to stop him, and only a short length of passage and a locked door, to which he alone had the key, lay between him and his desire, the passage was never crossed, the door never unlocked.

To escape his presence as much as possible, Pansy spent a lot of her time in the big hall of the harem with the other girls. But one by one they disappeared, to become the wives of various men of importance in the place, until only Rayma was left. A quiet, subdued Rayma who watched Pansy and the Sultan with longing, envious gaze.

"How happy you must be now you are his wife, and you know that he can't thrust you from him should another woman take his fancy," the Arab girl sighed one day to her rival.

Pansy was not his wife, and she had no intention of being. In her desire to escape from temptation she grew absolutely reckless.

"I should be much happier if I could get right away from him," she said in response to Rayma's remark.

"Don't you love him?" Rayma exclaimed.

"I hate him," Pansy said, lying to her heart. "I never want to see him again," she went on in a

hysterical way. "I only want to escape from him and this place, once and for ever."

Astonished, Rayma gazed at her supplanter. Then a look of hope darted into her dark eyes.

If only this strange girl were out of the way, the Sultan's heart might return to her.

CHAPTER XXVII

Outside a little French military settlement several ragged tents had been pitched. In the largest of them the miser feather merchant was sitting, cross-legged, on a pile of dirty cushions. As chance would have it, his caravan had gone to the south-west, and that night he had halted within three hundred miles of St. Louis.

With him was an Arab friend, a nomad like himself, who chanced also to be encamped outside the little settlement. A year had passed since their last meeting. After the first exchange of compliments, as the two sat smoking together, the new-comer remarked to the miser:

"In your hunger for gold you grow ever thinner and more haggard."

A wild look came into the feather merchant's eyes.

"It is not hunger for gold that has robbed my bones of their flesh," he replied. "But another hunger, far more raging."

His friend puffed away in silence, and as he puffed, he had in mind an Arab proverb wherein it is said that a man can fall madly in love with the shadow of a woman's heel.

"Then it's the shadow of some woman's heel," he remarked.

"More than her shadow," the miser replied in a parched voice. "I saw her before me, as plainly as I see you. A houri from Paradise."

His friend made no reply. Considering a woman was under discussion it was bad manners to ask questions. He waited, knowing that silence on his part would be the most likely way of hearing the story.

The miser's bony hands clenched, and his tongue went round his bearded lips.

"There was a girl I desired," he began presently. "A milk-white maid, more beautiful than the morning, with hair golden as the sun, and eyes deep blue as desert night. She was a slave, and with my wealth I would have bought her. She was more to me than my gold. But there was another more rich and powerful. And he took her—may his soul perish in hell."

As the miser talked, an amazed look crossed his friend's face.

"And where did you see her, this milk-white maid, with the hair of gold, and deep blue eyes?" he asked quickly.

"In a desert city, a month's journey or more from here."

"And how did she come to be there?"

"She was captured by the Sultan who rules there. Allah curse him!"

"So!" his friend ejaculated.

Then he stayed for some moments ruminating on the matter.

"Such a maid was stolen three months or more ago, from a mighty white nation whose territory lies far beyond the Senegal," he began presently. "And that white nation has made great stir and commotion with our rulers, the French. For the maid is one of great wealth and importance in her own country, possessed of undreamt-of riches, a fortune in gold pieces more numerous than the grains of sand in the Sahara. A month ago I was in the town of St. Louis, and the people there talked of nothing else. The white officers here search for her in all directions. And great will be the reward of the man who can lead them to her abductor. And great also will be the punishment of that desert ruler—even death."

Tensely the feather merchant listened. Then he started up with a wild cry.

"Allah be praised!" he shouted. "For my prayer has been granted. I have found those who are the enemies of the Sultan Casim Ammeh. The nation most mighty of all on this earth. And they will break him, as he has broken me."

Then he darted from the tent, running like a madman in the direction of the French military quarters.

CHAPTER XXVIII

One day when Pansy was in the large hall of the harem, Rayma came to her, a look of feverish excitement in her eyes.

"Do you still wish to escape?" she asked, watching her supplanter as if she could not believe such a desire could lie in the heart of any woman the Sultan pleased to favour.

For Pansy her struggle became daily more difficult. It was an obsession now, her wish to escape from her captor.

"How can I? Whichever way I turn someone is there to stop me."

"There is one who will not stop you. Not if he is paid well enough," Rayma said, her voice dropping to a whisper.

"Who is that?" Pansy asked quickly.

"One of the eunuchs who guards your room at night. He loves jewels beyond all things on earth. And surely the Sultan has given you plenty, although you never wear them."

The Sultan had given Pansy none, because he knew she would not accept them. But she had jewels of her own; one that would be bribe enough for anybody—the great diamond that had aroused her lover's comments one night in the moonlit garden of Grand Canary.

Pansy clutched at the mere idea of escape. Where she would escape to, she did not pause to consider. To escape she forgot his colour, his religion, his wild life, his treatment of her father, everything, except her own love for him.

"How do you know he'll let himself be bribed?" she asked.

"One of the women told me. He is her brother. I've spent days in trying to help you get away."

"Oh, Rayma, I can never thank you enough," Pansy said, hysterically grateful.

The Arab girl cast a spiteful glance at her, wondering why the other could not guess that it was her, Rayma's, one desire to get rid of her rival.

"Each night after dark you must open your door," the Arab girl went on. "There will come a night when only one of the guards will be here. Then, if you bribe him enough, he will let you pass."

Rayma did not imagine that Pansy would escape. She expected and hoped that she would be caught in the attempt. Judging by her desert standards, death would be the portion of any slave-girl who dared attempt to fly from her owner.

After that, every night when she was alone, Pansy opened the sandalwood door leading into the long, dark passage by which she had first entered the palace.

Then, one evening, she found only one of the jewelled guards there.

On seeing this, she closed the door again, and going to her jewel case got out the one big diamond.

From the gallery of her sumptuous prison she had gathered that beyond the rose garden lay the grounds of the Sultan's own quarters, where she had spent those three days prior to his unveiling. During that brief time she had noticed that, at night and during the heat of the day, the horses that browsed in the sun-scorched paddock were stabled in a long, low building at the far end of the scanty field. And she knew, too, that the iron gates by which she had entered the palace could not lie so very far away from the paddock.

With trembling hands and almost sick with anxiety and excitement, Pansy opened the door of her prison. She said nothing to the guard there. She merely held the gem towards him.

On seeing it, his eyes glittered covetously.

Without a word he took the diamond.

Pansy passed down the dim passage. She hardly knew how her feet took her along its ill-lit

length. Every moment she expected to meet someone, or that one of the several doors leading into it would open, and her flight be brought to an abrupt end.

However, unchallenged she reached the iron gates.

A lamp flickering in a niche close by, showed her that one of the doors was slightly ajar. With shaking hands she pulled it further open and slipped out.

Outside all was silence and whiteness. Like a sea, the desert stretched away to a milky horizon. In a luminous vault the moon hung, a great round molten mass, that filled the world with a shimmer of silver.

Finding herself really beyond the palace precincts, took all strength from the girl. Hardly daring to breathe, she crept a few steps further, and leant against the city wall, to recover a little and get her bearings. Then, furtive as a shadow, she made her way towards a long, low building that showed up like a huge ebony block in the whiteness.

There were others as furtive as Pansy prowling round the city walls; jackals searching for offal, snarled at her as she passed along, slinking away and showing teeth that gleamed like ivory in the moonlight.

The first sound of them made her start violently, for she felt the Sultan's hand upon her, drawing her back to himself and captivity. But when she saw the prowlers were four-footed, she passed on, heedless of them, until the paddock fence was reached.

To climb over was a simple task. Then she ran swiftly across the grassy space; suddenly deadly afraid, not of the loneliness, but that the stable doors might be locked and she would not be able to carry out her project.

However, in El-Ammeh there were no thieves daring enough to steal the Sultan's horses, so the doors were never locked. They creaked ominously when Pansy opened them, filling the still night with harsh sounds—sounds that she felt must reach her captor's ears.

Inside, the stables were vaguely light with the rays of the moon that dripped in from high little windows. Fortunately for Pansy's plan it was the hour for the palace servants' evening meal, or there might have been half a dozen men in the building. As it was, there was only a long row of horses, each in separate stalls.

Pansy knew that if her protégé were there, he would answer to her call.

"Sultan," she said softly.

There was a whinny from a stall some twenty yards away. Guided by the sound she went in that direction.

It was the work of a few moments to unfasten the animal. But to Pansy it seemed an age. Her hands trembled as she fumbled at the halter, for she heard pursuit in every sound.

Then she led the animal out of the building, into the moonlight, and closed the door behind her.

She was an expert bare-back rider.

Leading the horse to the fence, she mounted. Then she trotted him back to the middle of the enclosure, and with voice and hand urged him towards the fence again.

In his old steeplechasing days, a hurdle the height of the rails had presented no difficulties to "The Sultan." And, even now, he took the fence at an easy bound.

Once over, it seemed to Pansy that the last obstacle between herself and freedom had been circumvented.

She leant forward, patting her horse encouragingly.

"Oh, Sultan," she said hysterically. "I don't mind where you take me, so long as I can get away from here."

Left to itself, after the manner of horses, the animal picked the route it knew the best; the sandy track along which the Sultan Casim generally took it for exercise.

For the first mile or so Pansy was conscious of nothing except that she had escaped—escaped from a love she could not conquer, a man she could not hate.

White and billowy the world lay around her, an undulating sea of sand with only one dark patch upon it, the city of El-Ammeh. The track the horse followed wound through tufted hillocks, mounds of silver in the moonlight. Here and there a stunted shrub cast black lines on the all-prevailing whiteness.

At the end of an hour Pansy discovered she was not the rider she once was. Her months of confinement had left her sadly "out of form." She was worn out with the exertion and the excitement of escape. It took all her skill to keep her seat on the horse. And the animal knew, for it slackened speed as a good horse will when conscious of a tired rider.

Others, also, seemed aware that something weak and helpless was abroad, and with the strange magnetism of the wild they were drawn towards the girl.

Here and there in the melting, misty distance, a dark form appeared, lopping along at a safe range, keeping pace with the old horse and its rider, every now and again glancing at the two with glaring green eyes, and calling one to another with shrieks of maniacal laughter.

Pansy hardly heard the hyenas. She was too intent on keeping her seat. But the horse heard them and he snorted with rage and fear.

As the miles sped by, the girl was aware of nothing except a desire to get further and further away from her lover, and to keep her seat on the horse.

Then she became aware of something else.

For the horse halted and she fell off, flat on the soft sand.

Shaken, but not hurt, she sat up and gazed around.

A little oasis had been reached, where date palms stood black against the all-prevailing silver, and a tiny spring bubbled with cheerful whisper.

When the Sultan took his namesake out for exercise, this was the extreme limit of their ride—the horse had been there once already that day—and in the shade of the date palms the man and the horse would rest awhile before returning to the city.

But Pansy knew none of these things. She only knew that valuable time was being lost sitting there on the ground. But it was such an effort to get up.

Green eyes had seen her fall as if dead. The hyenas crept stealthily forward to feast upon what lay helpless in the sand. But when she sat up they retreated, to squat on their haunches at a safe distance, and fill the night with demoniacal laughter.

The sound brought Pansy to her feet, swaying with fatigue. She had heard it before, around her father's camp in Gambia.

But it was one thing to hear the hyenas when there were thirty or more people between herself and them, and another now that she was quite alone in the desert, with no one to come to her aid.

The chorus of mad, mocking mirth brought fear clutching at her, a fear that the horse's wild snorts increased. She looked round sharply to find there were at least a dozen of the brutes on her trail.

It was not Pansy's nature to show fear, even though she felt it.

Going to the spring, she picked up several large stones, and threw them at the hyenas.

A note of fear crept into their hideous voices. They beat a swift retreat, melting away into distance. There was too much life left in the girl and horse for them to attack as yet.

Gathering her tired self together Pansy looked round for a rock high enough to enable her to mount by. As it happened there was none handy. Taking her horse by the mane, she led him from the oasis. Somewhat protestingly he went.

Pansy had to stagger on for nearly a mile on foot, in the deep, fatiguing sand, before she could find a tussock high enough to mount by.

Once on, she left the route to her horse.

To the uninitiated, one portion of the desert looks very similar to another. And the girl had no idea that the horse was retracing his steps, making his way slowly and laboriously back to El-Ammeah.

She had not the strength left even to look around her. The hot night, the long ride, the sickly excitement attached to escaping, the thirst that now raged within her, and the final tiring walk, after months of inactivity, had told upon her. Utterly worn out, she just managed to keep her seat, in a world that had become a place of aching weariness, through which there rang occasional wild shrieks of laughter.

Then it became impossible to cling on any longer.

All at once, she fell off and stayed in the sand, half stunned by her fall, conscious of nothing

except that she had escaped from the Sultan Casim Ammeh.

When she fell the horse stopped. He stretched a long neck and sniffed and sniffed at her. But since she did not get up, he did not leave her. He waited until she was ready to start off again, quite glad of the rest himself.

However, there was not to be much rest for him.

A shriek of diabolical laughter rang out at his very heels. With a snort of fear and rage, he lashed out. The laughter turned into a howl of pain, and one of the hyenas retreated on three legs, with a broken shoulder.

But there were twenty or more of them now, against one old horse and a girl too utterly exhausted to know even that her life was in danger. And each of the hyenas had a strength of jaw that could break the thigh of an ox, and a cowardice of heart equalled only by their strength.

For sometime they circled round, watching their prey with ravenous, glaring green eyes, and every now and again one or the other made a forward rush, only to find those iron heels between it and its meal. The horse understood being baited in this manner, by foes just beyond his reach. It had been part of the hell the girl he guarded had rescued him from.

As time went on, the hyenas grew bolder.

Once they rushed in a body. But they retreated. One with a broken jaw, one with a mouthful of live flesh torn from "The Sultan's" flank, and one did not retreat at all. It lay with its skull smashed in, its brains bespattering the horse's hoofs—hoofs over which now a red stream oozed, filling the hot night air with the smell of live blood.

A desperate battle raged in the lonely desert under the white light of the moon. A battle that filled the night with the mad mirth of hyenas, and the wild shrieks of a frightened, hurt, infuriated horse—"The Sultan"—fighting as he had fought that day in the East End of London when Pansy had first come across him. But fighting for her life as well as his own, against the cowards that beset him.

CHAPTER XXIX

The sound of that desperate conflict rang through the stillness of the night, reaching the ears of a man who was riding at break-neck speed along the sandy track leading in the direction of the oasis. Those diabolical shrieks of laughter filled him with a torture of mind almost past bearing. In them he heard the voices of hyenas mangling the girl he loved.

Le Breton had always known Pansy would run away if an opportunity occurred. But he had imagined that he had made escape impossible.

After dinner, he went to the gilded room, to pay an evening visit to his prisoner, since business affairs had kept him from dining with her.

However, she was not there.

Experience had taught him that it would be no use looking for her in the moonlit, rose-scented garden. She never went there after sunset, for fear he should come across her, and the beauty and romance of it all, combined with his presence, should force the surrender he was waiting for.

Not finding Pansy in her own private quarters, he went into the big hall of the harem, only to be told she had not been there since well before dinner.

On learning this he set the women searching in every corner of the harem. But Pansy was nowhere to be found.

Beyond a doubt, she had managed to escape. For a moment the news dazed him. He did not waste time in trying to discover how she had escaped, or who was responsible for her getting away. She had gone. That one fact glared at him. No one knew better than the Sultan himself the dangers awaiting the girl once she strayed beyond his care.

Within a few minutes all his servants and soldiers were out looking for the fugitive, scouring the city, with threats of the dire fate awaiting anyone who dared either hide or injure the Sultan's wife.

A hasty search brought no trace of the girl, but one of the search parties learnt that a horse was missing from the royal stables.

On hearing this the Sultan went at once to the stables, looking for a clue there. The missing horse was Pansy's. The discovery sent a sudden glow of hope coursing through him. It argued that somehow or other she had managed to reach the stables and had set out into the desert.

The Sultan understood horses, even better, it seemed to him now, than he understood women. Left to its own devices the old horse would go the way it knew the best; the way he generally took it. And left to itself it was almost certain to be, since its rider had no knowledge of any of the sandy tracks that lay around the city.

Within a few moments he was on the swiftest of his own horses, riding with all speed towards the oasis; but not before leaving orders with his officers to scour the desert in every direction.

He had ridden perhaps five miles when into the stealthy hiss of the sand another sound came. At first so far away that it was but a distant moan in the night. As he tore on rapidly it grew louder, developing into a chorus of hideous laughter, the cry of hyenas howling round their prey.

Desert reared, instinctively he knew there must be at least twenty of them.

When, above the mêlée he heard the terrorized screams of a horse, a deadly fear clutched him. Where the horse was, the girl was. And the sound told him the two had been attacked.

Around Pansy the ghastly conflict was raging. Around her mangled corpse, perhaps.

He suffered all the tortures of the damned, as with spur and crop he urged the great stallion onwards, until the animal was a lather of sweat and foam.

The hyenas heard the throb of those approaching hoofs, and fear gripped their cowardly hearts.

The disconcerting noise grew speedily louder. On the whiteness of the lonely desert a dark patch appeared; a patch that rapidly became bigger and headed straight towards them.

It was one thing to attack a tired old horse and a half-stunned girl, but another to face a huge black stallion and the big man in the white burnoose who rode it.

The hyenas did not face the combination. With a weird howl of disappointment, they turned tail suddenly and scuttled away into the desert, leaving the old horse shivering with relief and pain and exhaustion.

The feeling of someone touching her made Pansy open her eyes. Into her hazy world her captor's face intruded. He was half-kneeling on the sand beside her, examining her limbs, feeling her heart, to see if she were injured in any way.

For a moment Pansy could not believe her eyes.

Then she put out a weak hand to push him away. But a push did not remove him. He was still there, in white cloak and hood; a desert chief who wanted to marry her. Big and solid he knelt beside her, a fact not to be escaped from. And his hand was on her bosom as if to steal the heart she would not give him.

Satisfied Pansy was not hurt in any way, the Sultan got to his feet, and turned towards the horse. It needed more attention than the girl.

He petted and patted the worn-out shivering animal, talking to it in a deep, caressing voice, as he bound up its gaping wounds with lengths torn from his own white garments.

Then he lifted the girl on his own horse, and, mounting himself, set out on a slow walk towards his city.

Pansy made a feeble struggle when she found herself in his arms, her head resting against his shoulder, held in a tight, possessive grip.

"So, little flower, you would still try to escape from me," he said in a fierce, fond manner. "But I don't let love go so lightly."

He ignored her struggles as he talked to and encouraged the old horse that hobbled along by their side, with stiff, painful steps.

As the slow journey went on, Pansy fell asleep against the strength that held her.

The Sultan was quick to note this, and he smiled at the small tired face on his shoulder. He knew the nature of the girl he held. It would be impossible for her to go to sleep in any man's arms except those of the man she loved. She was very foolish to fight against him, but fight she would until he used his strength and ended the battle. An uneven contest the last round would be, with no doubt as to who would be the victor.

CHAPTER XXX

On a wide ottoman in her room Pansy lay. The golden lamps were burning low, casting black shadows on the gilded walls of her cage. Through the open arches the moonlight streamed, pouring in from a misty, mystic world where trees sighed vaguely in a silvered air.

Early that morning the Sultan had brought Pansy back to the palace. Since then she had seen nothing of him.

She brooded on her attempt to escape, which had only ended in her being more of a prisoner than ever. The guards about the entrance of her quarters had been doubled. The door leading into the harem was locked. Alice had been removed, her place taken by an Arab woman who would not or could not understand a word Pansy said to her.

Sleepless she lay among the silken cushions, brooding on the life that had once been hers; a life so remote from her present one that it might never have been.

It was impossible to believe that far beyond this desert city there lay a place called London, where she had been free as air, where she could come and go as she pleased, where she had dined and danced and lunched and visited. A world of dreams, remote, unreal, lost to her for ever, where she had been Pansy Langham, fêted and courted, with society at her feet. Now she was a sultan's slave, a chattel, her very life dependent on a barbaric ruler's whim.

On what punishment would be doled out to her for her attempt to get away, she next brooded. There had been such a set, determined expression on her captor's face when he brought her back to her prison.

The sound of someone coming towards her apartment broke in on her dreary reverie. It was close on midnight. She had never been disturbed at that hour before.

She looked up quickly.

The third door of her room was opening; one that had never opened before; a door the harem girls had told her led to the Sultan's private suite. And the Sultan, himself, was entering. The Sultan attired as she had never seen him before—in silk pyjamas.

Pansy started to her feet. She stood slight and white and silken-clad against the golden walls; her heart beating with a sickly force that almost choked her; her eyes wide with fear.

The end had come with a suddenness she was not prepared for.

He crossed to her side; tenderness and determination on his face; love and passion in his eyes.

For a moment there was silence.

"So, Pansy," he said at length. "You've tried to solve the problem your way. Now I'm going to solve it mine. You've fought against love quite long enough, against yourself and against me. I'm going to end the fight between us. To-night, my little slave, you sleep within my arms and learn all that love means."

At his words a flood of crimson swept over her strained face. She had but a vague idea of what was before her, but instinct told her it was something she must fight against.

Her gaze went to the arches, as if in search of some way of escape there. There was none. Only the white stars looked in coldly, and night breathed on her, soft and sensuous.

He knew where her thoughts were, and he laughed softly.

"There's no escape this time, Pansy," he said.

The fear in her eyes deepened. Wildly she searched round in her head for a way of getting rid of him for the time being. And only one course presented itself.

"I ... I'll marry you," she stammered.

"We'll be married by all means, if you wish, as soon as I can find a man to do the job. But you've been just a little too long in making up your mind. My patience is worn out."

In her determination to live up to her own standards—standards that had no value in this desert city:—Pansy saw she had tried this half-tamed man too far.

He came closer, and held out his arms.

"Come, my little flower," he whispered passionately.

Quickly she moved further away from the arms that would have held her.

"Won't you come willingly?" he asked, in soft, caressing tones. "Do you still refuse me the love I want, and which I know is mine?"

"I don't want you or your love," she cried wildly, frantic at the knowledge of her own helplessness.

He laughed with a touch of fierceness.

"What cruel words to throw at your lover! But since you won't come, my little slave, then—I must take you."

He would have taken her there and then, but with a swift movement she avoided him.

Then Pansy ran, as she had run from him once before, like a white wraith in the moonlight. But this time he followed.

There were no electric lights and ragtime band to run to now. Only a moonlit garden full of the scent of roses. There was no crowd of people to give her shelter, only the deep shadows of the cypresses.

In the darkness she paused, out of breath, hoping he would not see her. A vain hope. His eyes had learnt to pierce the gloom. She was in his arms almost before she knew it.

There was a brief, uneven struggle, as Pansy fought against a man who knew no law except his own desires.

Weak and weeping she collapsed against him, on a heart that leapt to meet her.

There was a stone seat near. On it the Sultan seated himself, the girl in his arms. And in the scented, sighing silence he tried to soothe the tears his methods had roused.

And trembling she lay against the passion and power that held her, refusing to be comforted.

"There's nothing to weep about, my darling," he whispered. "Sooner or later you have to learn that I'm your master. Just as you've taught me that all women are not ripe fruit, willing and anxious to fall into my hands. And I must have some closer tie between us since love alone won't keep you from running away from me."

Pansy's tears fell all the faster. For now it seemed her own doings were responsible for this crisis.

He sat on, waiting until the storm was over.

The tremors of the slight form that lay against his heart, so helpless yet so anxious not to do wrong, struck through the fire and passion in the man, to what lay beneath—true love and protection.

Presently he kissed the strained, tear-stained face pillowed against his shoulder.

"It's like old times to be sitting in the moonlight and among the roses, with you in my arms," he said, all at once.

"Do you remember, Pansy, that sweet night in Grand Canary? But you were not weeping then. Why are you now, my little slave? Because a Sultan loves you more than his life? More than anything that has been in his life. You're not very flattering. But then, you never were."

He paused for a moment, watching her tenderly.

"Yet you paid me the greatest compliment I ever had in my life. When you said you loved me. There could be no sweeter music than those words. And the choicest gift life has ever given me was a kiss from your lips, given willingly."

He bent his head.

"Won't you give me another, Pansy?"

But the girl's strained face was turned away from the proud, passionate one so close to her own.

"No, my little flower? Will you make a thief of your Sultan? Will you give him nothing willingly now? I know I don't deserve it. But still—I want it. And my wants have been my only law so far."

Again he paused, stroking her curls with a loving hand.

"Just now, as man and woman together, Pansy, I know I don't deserve you. I know I'm not

worthy of you. But I want my soul, although I've only a blackened body to offer it. And the soul will have to do the best it can with the grimy accommodation. For I must have you, my darling. You've taken everything out of my life, but a desire for you."

From a tangle of trees in an adjacent garden a nightingale burst into song, filling the night with liquid melody. At the sound the Sultan's arms tightened around the slender figure he held.

"No man appreciates virtue so much as the one who has had his fill of vice," he continued presently. "And I was born into it, steeped and sodden in it from my earliest recollection, until I didn't realise it was vice until I met you. And then it seemed to me I had run off the lines, and pretty badly."

As he sat talking and caressing her, Pansy's sobs died down. There was always magic in his touch, happiness within his arms. With throbbing heart she lay against him, watching him anxiously.

He smiled into the tired, purple eyes.

"No, perhaps, I won't be a thief," he said. "Perhaps I shall climb up and up with many a stumble to the clear heights where you are, my darling. What would you say if you saw me there? 'Here is a poor wretch who has climbed painfully upwards to touch the feet of his ideal,' you would say to yourself. And to me you would say, 'As a reward, will you come and have breakfast with me?' And I should come, like a shot. And I should want lunch and tea and dinner and—you. Just you, my soul, always and for ever."

After this outburst, he was quiet.

Passive within his arms Pansy waited for the last hopeless struggle for right against wrong.

He sat on, as if at peace with himself and the world. The restless look that always lurked in his eyes had gone; in its place was one of happiness and contentment.

Pansy's shivers roused him from his reverie. Not shivers of fear, but of chilliness. A heavy dew had started falling, bringing a sudden coolness into the night.

"Why, Heart's Ease," he said, full of concern. "I'm keeping you out here when you ought to be indoors. But with you in my arms, I forget everything but you."

Getting to his feet, he took her back to the gilded room. The lamps had burnt out. It was a place of deep shadows, and here and there the silver of the moon patched its golden richness.

Once within its dimness Pansy started struggling again.

He took the slim white hands into one of his own, and kissed them.

"There's no need for you to fight against me with weak little hands," he whispered. "There's another fighting for you, far stronger than you are. A new Raoul Le Breton of your making, Pansy. A man strong enough to wait until we're really married."

Laying his burden on a couch, he bent his head until his ear almost touched the girl's lips.

"Say 'Yes,' Pansy, and I'll go, 'nicely and quietly like a good boy,' still remembering 'your reputation,'" he said in a teasing tone.

Into his ear "Yes" trembled.

He kissed the lips that at last had consented to his wishes.

"Good night, my little girl, and if you go on at this rate you'll make a white man of me yet."

Long after he had gone Pansy stayed brooding on his words. The battle between them was over at last.

CHAPTER XXXI

On one of the terraces of his palace the Sultan sat at breakfast. As he lingered in the sweet cool air of early morning, he pondered on the happenings of the night before.

At last he had wrung a reluctant consent from his cherished prisoner.

There was a flaw in his victory that he tried not to see. That "Yes" would not have come except that the girl had been absolutely cornered. The word had not come from her lips

spontaneously as those three words, "I love you," had.

He tried to forget this fact, as he thought out the best means of bringing about a speedy wedding.

There was no minister of her faith in El-Ammeh. The nearest Christian Mission lay at least two hundred miles distant. It would be risky work bringing a white missionary to his city. The safest course would be to take her down to a mission station and marry her there. No one would know then where they had come from. And the journey back would make a delightful honeymoon.

On the delights of that honeymoon he pondered.

From his reverie he was rudely aroused by a sound which made marriage seem very remote, and death much more likely to be his portion.

There was a sudden shriek high above the city, followed by a deafening roar, as a shell exploded over El-Ammeh—a command for its surrender.

The Sultan started to his feet, his face reckless and savage. The cup was at his lips only to be dashed away.

He knew what had happened.

Somehow or other the French Government must have heard that he was responsible for the capture of the English Governor; and an expedition had been sent up to punish him for his marauding ways.

That same death-dealing sound startled Pansy as she stood by the sunken pond in the rose garden, feeding the carp. Wondering what had happened, she looked up at the smoke that lay like a little cloud between the city and the sky.

She did not wonder for very long.

Present another shell came shrieking out of the distance.

Then she guessed what had occurred, and her face blanched.

Swiftly she went to her room; her only idea to reach the Sultan and save him from his enemies.

But all the doors of her prison were locked, and neither knocks nor shouts produced any answer.

She went back to the fretted gallery, to see what could be seen from there.

A mile or so away, like a dark snake on the desert, she saw the relief party. As she watched, a white-robed force left El-Ammeh; an array of Arab soldiers. On recognising their leader, her soul went sick within her.

He was there. Her lover. The man she ought to hate. Going out to fight the men who had come to her rescue.

If the French officers heading the expeditionary force imagined the Sultan of El-Ammeh had come out to surrender, they quickly discovered their mistake.

He had come out to fight; and what was more, fight well and recklessly against a force that, if inferior in numbers, was vastly superior in arms.

Presently the shells no longer shrieked above El-Ammeh. They were aimed at it.

From her gallery Pansy saw the two forces meet.

Then she could look no longer. Men fell in the sand and rose no more. And any one of them might be her lover.

She went back to her room and crouched there in terror; her father and friends all forgotten at the thought of the man who might be lying dead in the sand.

As the morning wore on, the din of battle grew nearer. Every now and again a shell got home. There were screams of terrified people; the heavy fall of masonry; the moans and cries of the injured.

Once Pansy thought her end had come.

A shell struck the palace. The place rocked to its foundations. There was the thunder of falling masonry as if the four walls of her room were crashing down upon her.

She closed her eyes and waited.

A few moments later she opened them, and was surprised to find her gilded prison very little damaged. It was badly cracked, and several blocks of stone had crashed down from the ceiling, one on the sandalwood bureau near where she crouched, smashing it to splinters and scattering the contents about her feet.

More than once Pansy had rummaged in its scented recesses, until she knew its contents by heart. She had found nothing but a few quills, sheets of paper yellow with age, and quaint, cut-crystal bottles in which the coloured inks had dried. She knew the desk had belonged to the Sultan's mother. Just as she knew the gilded room had been the French girl's prison.

As she gazed at the debris at her feet, it seemed she could not have searched thoroughly. Among the splinters was something she had not seen before. A few sheets of paper folded flat and tied with a strand of silk, that must have been hidden behind one of the many drawers.

More to get her thoughts away from the battle raging round her than anything else, Pansy picked up the tiny packet. Untying the silk, she opened the faded, scented sheets and glanced at them.

After the first glance, she stayed riveted. And as she read on, she forgot everything except what the letter said.

It was in French, in a woman's hand, and the date was now more than twenty years old; a statement written by Annette Le Breton before she died, proclaiming her son's real identity, and left by her in the bureau. Some servant rummaging in the desk for trinkets, after her mistress's death, must have let it slip behind one of the numerous drawers.

Pansy read of Colonel Raoul Le Breton's ill-fated expedition to the north-east; how he and his little force had been murdered by the Sultan Casim Ammeh. She learnt of Annette Le Breton's fate at the hands of her savage captor. Of the son who had come nearly nine months after her husband's death—the son the Sultan Casim Ammeh imagined to be his.

"Raoul is not the son of the Sultan Casim Ammeh," the faint handwriting declared. "He is the son of my murdered husband, Colonel Raoul Le Breton. I know, for every day he grows more like his dear, dead father. Yet he imagines the Sultan to be his father. And I dare not tell him the truth. For if the Sultan learnt the boy was not his, he would kill him. For Raoul's sake I must let the deception go on. For the sake of my son who is all I have to live for. And my heart breaks, for daily my boy grows more and more to love that savage chief who murdered his real father."

Pansy read of Annette's dreary years in the harem of her captor.

"Years that have no light in them, save my son. Years that I should not have endured except for my child, my boy, the son of my brave Raoul."

It was a heart-breaking story of love and sacrifice, of a mother tortured to save her child from the fate that had befallen his father.

"The Sultan will make my boy like himself," the letter went on. "For there is no one at hand to stop him. Daily my influence grows less, and his stronger. The boy admires and copies the man he deems his father. He is too young to know the Sultan for what he really is. He sees only a man, bold and picturesque. And the Sultan spoils him utterly, he encourages him to be cruel and arrogant, he fosters all that is bad in the boy. It is useless for me to try and check him, for my own son laughs at me now."

The writing grew more feeble as the letter went on; the wild entreaty of a mother who had no life outside of her son, and who saw him being ruined by his own father's murderer.

"Whoever finds this be kind to my boy, my Raoul, for the sake of a woman who has suffered much, for the sake of his martyred father, Colonel Raoul Le Breton. Do not judge my son by what he is, but by what he might have been. In the Sultan Casim he has a bad example, a savage teacher, a wild, profligate, cruel man, who would make the boy as barbarous as he is himself."

The writing grew even more feeble, a faint scrawl on the yellow paper.

"I am dying, and my son is far away. I shall not live until my boy returns. And he will be left with no influence but the Sultan's. O Fate, deal kindly with my boy, my Raoul, left alone with savages in this barbaric city. I have only endured these dreadful years for the sake of my son. In the name of pity be kind to him. He will have no chance in the hands of his present teacher. Have mercy for the sake of his tortured mother, and his father, that brave soldier who gave his life for France.

ANNETTE LE BRETON."

Pansy read the sheets through without once raising her eyes. She was ravenous for the contents.

At that moment it seemed as if the dim, gilded room were full of tears and sorrows; the faint, sweet fragrance of the girl who had lived there long years ago, suffering and enduring for the sake of her boy.

It was not in Pansy's kind heart to refuse that tragic mother pleading for her son.

Then she remembered that Colonel Le Breton's son was out there fighting against his own people. If, indeed, he were still left alive to fight.

Her lips moved in silent prayer.

She kissed the faded, scented sheets and tucked them against her heart. She was not going to fail Annette. All she wanted now was to be at the side of the dead girl's son, to help him to build up a new character according to the best white codes and standards.

Then she sat on, listening to the battle that raged around the desert city.

If Raoul Le Breton were spared, there was another battle before her—a battle with two governments for his life. But she had not many qualms about the result, with Annette's letter, her own wealth, and her father on her side; as he would be, once she had explained the situation.

Morning dragged on into afternoon, and the sound of the conflict died down somewhat.

All at once, as if muffled by distance, she heard her lover's voice calling hoarsely:

"Pansy."

She started to her feet.

Before she could answer, there was a sound of fighting just beyond her quarters.

Then she heard her father's voice, strained and anxious:

"Pansy, are you in there?"

"Oh, father," she called back frantically. "Don't let them kill the Sultan."

There came more muffled voices. Then the sound of masonry being shifted, as the men outside her prison started clearing away the debris that blocked the door.

CHAPTER XXXII

Evening shadows were settling over El-Ammeh; deep, grey shadows that, for all their gloomy darkness, were not as dark and gloomy as the thoughts of a man who was a prisoner in one of the rooms of his own palace.

Against a fluted column the Sultan stood watching night settle on the lake; a night that would soon settle on him for ever.

The day had gone against him. Outmatched, he had been driven back to his city walls. Even then he could have escaped with a handful of his following, and have started life afresh as a desert marauder, but there was one treasure in his palace—the greatest treasure of his life—that he wanted to take with him. In a vain effort to secure Pansy before he fled, he had been captured.

With his enemies close at his heels, he had made a dash for the palace, to fetch the girl. On arriving outside of her prison, he found a fall of masonry had blocked the doorway. Before he

could retrace his steps and try another entrance, his pursuers were upon him.

The French were already in possession of that part of the city where the Englishmen had been imprisoned. Immediately they were released, Sir George Barclay and his officers, supplemented by a few Senegalese soldiers, had gone hot-foot to the palace, to Pansy's rescue.

There they had found the Sultan. A brief struggle against overpowering odds ensued, and once more the so-called Casim Ammeh was a prisoner in the hands of George Barclay.

With the shadows gathering round him, the Sultan stood, in white burnoose, a bitter expression on his arrogant face.

He had nothing now, neither wealth, nor power, nor his kingdom, nor the girl he had risked all for in a vain attempt to win. To-morrow he would have even less.

There was short shrift for such as he. To-morrow his life would have been taken from him. A life that had become empty as he had grown older and pleasures palled, until Pansy had come into it, filling it with freshness and innocence.

The battle between them was over at last. Death would end it. His death.

A European entered. A man he knew. George Barclay. The man he hated more than ever; the man responsible for his capture.

Barclay ordered one of the soldiers to light the lamp. Then he dismissed his escort.

There were half a dozen Senegalese soldiers mounting guard over the Sultan. The Englishman dismissed them also, leaving himself alone with the prisoner.

"You're doing a bold thing, Barclay, leaving the two of us together like this," the Sultan remarked. "It will give me great pleasure to wring your neck, before I'm sent the way of my father."

As if to carry out this design, he took a step towards the Governor.

From his pocket, Barclay drew out a few sheets of faded, scented paper.

"Read this," he said quietly, handing them to the prisoner.

With some surprise, the Sultan took them.

On opening the letter, he started, for he recognised his mother's writing.

As he read on, his bronzed face whitened, and a dazed look came to his eyes, like a man reeling under a tremendous blow.

In a critical, but not unfriendly manner, Barclay studied his companion. He knew now why the Sultan of El-Ammeh differed so in appearance from the wild people he ruled.

On reaching Pansy, he had had Annette Le Breton's letter thrust into his hands. His daughter had had no greeting for him, only wild entreaties for him to save the Sultan. When Barclay read the tragic confession he was quite ready to do his best.

Then Pansy had told him more.

How Raoul Le Breton was the man she loved. But she did not say that Lucille Lemesurier was responsible for their parting. She led her father to believe that the discovery of the supposed black blood in her lover had been her "hole in the floor of heaven."

Barclay did not trouble his daughter with many questions. It was enough that she was safe. What was more, he knew she would marry the man of her choice, no matter what obstacles were put in her way, as the first Pansy had married him—with the world against her.

All he wanted now was to save the man his daughter had set her heart on; that death should not blight her life as it had blighted his.

When the conflict was over, and the French and English officers met again, Barclay had shown the letter to the commander of the expeditionary force—the man who held the Sultan's life in his hand.

The officer had read Annette Le Breton's statement through in silence. Considering the contents, it did not need Pansy's lovely, anxious face or her father's pleadings to make him promise them life and liberty for Colonel Le Breton's son. More he could not promise. The two governments would want an indemnity that would swallow up most of the kingdom of El-Ammeh.

But his life was all Pansy wanted.

His life, and to be at his side when the blow fell. For a blow it was bound to be, to a man as proud and fierce as her lover. A shock and then a relief.

As Raoul Le Breton read the letter, his old world crashed in ruins about him.

Now he understood his dead mother's hatred of the Sultan Casim. Her endeavours to mould him on European lines. Her pleadings and entreaties for him not to forget the white side. That poor, frail, tortured little mother who had suffered so much for his sake!

His hand went across his anguished face.

He had not forgotten the white side. He had done worse. He had just ignored it. Knowing good, he had preferred evil. He had gone his way as barbaric and licentious as the savage who had murdered his father.

With tortured eyes he glanced at Barclay.

This man whom he had hated so bitterly for sixteen years and more was his best friend, not his enemy. For Barclay had shot the savage chief who had murdered his father and outraged his mother.

Like a whisper through the chaos surrounding him, Le Breton heard Barclay talking, telling him Pansy had found the letter. On account of its contents the French commander was not going to push the case against him. He would be given his life and freedom, but an indemnity would have to be paid, and the price would leave him only a shadow of his wealth.

Le Breton knew that again Pansy had saved his worthless life. For worthless it seemed, judging from his new standpoint.

"I owe you thanks, not hatred," he said to Barclay, his voice hoarse with suffering.

"And I owe you thanks too," the governor replied. "My daughter tells me you treated her with every kindness and consideration."

It seemed to Le Breton that he had been anything but kind and considerate; that no woman could forgive such dealings as his had been with her.

He had taken a girl used to a free and active life and had shut her up in a scented, sensual prison, trying to make her fall a victim to himself and her own senses; until she had grown morbid and hysterical, seeking death in preference to himself and the sort of life he had forced her to lead.

"I don't know that I should call myself exactly kind or considerate to your daughter," he remarked. "Not after reading this letter. Or to you either," he finished.

"I wouldn't worry too much about the past, if I were you," Barclay replied. "You've plenty of time ahead of you to 'make good' in."

Le Breton said nothing. He stayed brooding on the ruins around him, hating himself and the savage chief who had been his teacher.

All his old world had been swept away from him. Lost and alone, he would have to start afresh, according to new lights and new ideals, and without a hand to guide him.

He had nothing, neither wealth nor kingdom. Not his pride even. Unknowingly he had been a renegade, fighting against his own nation.

He was utterly broken. But he did not look it—only unutterably dreary.

As he pondered on his past life, he realised to the fullest what he must look like to Pansy. No wonder she had fought against her love for him! Any decent woman would.

He did not hear Barclay go, leaving him alone with his thoughts and the deepening shadows. He was aware of nothing except his own wild career, and how he had run foul of all white ideals.

The door opened, but he did not hear that either. He was too full of suffering and repentance.

Then another whisper penetrated the whirl in which he moved.

"Raoul," a girl's voice said gently.

He looked at Pansy as a man dying of thirst in a desert would look at a mirage of lakes and fountains—a vision of torturing desire that he knew was not for him.

No apologies could condone for his behaviour. Love he dared not mention; not with a past like his; not to this innocent, high-principled girl.

Pansy came to his side.

"Stoop down a bit, Raoul," she said. "I want to say something."

He bent his dark head.

Into his ear "I love you" was whispered shyly, as it had been that night months ago in a moonlit garden in Grand Canary.

At her whispered words his face started working strangely.

"I don't deserve such love, such forgiveness," he said in a broken voice.

She laughed—the laughter that kept tears at bay—and slipping her arms about his neck, tip-toed, and kissed the lips that dared not touch her now.

"And I want to marry you at once. I want to be with you always."

At her words his arms went round her in their old possessive manner.

Then he remembered that all his wealth had been swept from him; that now he had the girl, he had nothing left to give her.

"I've nothing to offer you," he said, his voice bitter, "except a love that's not worth having."

With soft, gentle hands Pansy stroked the lines of bitterness from the proud face that watched her with such love and longing.

"You can have all that's mine. I don't want anything but you."

He kissed the lips that were held up to his so willingly.

"My darling, help me to grope back to your white ways," he said, his voice hoarse with emotion.

"You won't have to grope. You got there last night when you 'remembered my reputation' and 'went nicely and quietly like a good boy.'"

He laughed, but there was a slight catch in his laughter, and pressed the girl closer to the heart she could always ease.

There were no shadows now, no ruins. For the greatest treasure of his life was left to him.

THE END.

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One Hour of Love

*Here are two pages selected at random, from
THE HAWK OF EGYPT
a love story without asterisks*

Damaris bowed her head so that the curls danced and glistened in the light, as the torrent of his words, in the Egyptian tongue, swept about her like a flood.

"Hast thou come to me in love, thou dove from the nest? Nay, what knowest thou of love? I ask it not of thee—yet—but the seed I shall plant within thee shall grow in the passing of the days and the nights and the months and the years, until it is as a grove of perfumed flowers which shall change to golden fruit ready to the plucking of my hand."

He pressed her little hands back against her breast so that the light fell full upon her face, and he held her thuswise, watching the colour rise and fade.

"Allah!" he whispered. "Allah! God of all, what have I done to deserve such signs of Thy great goodness? Wilt thou love me?" He laughed gently. "Canst thou look into mine eyes and shake thy golden head which shall be pillowed upon my heart—my wife—the mother of my children? Look at me! Look at me! Ah! thine eyes, which were as the pools of Lebanon at night, are as a sun-kissed sea of love. Thou know'st it not, but love is within thee—for me, thy master."

And was there not truth in what he said? May there not have been love in the heart of the girl?

Not, maybe, the love which stands sweet and sturdy like the stocky hyacinth, to bloom afresh, no matter how often the flowers be struck, or the leaves be bruised, from the humdrum bulb deep in the soil of quiet content. But the God-given, iridescent love of youth for youth, with its passion so swift, so sweet; a love like the rose-bud which hangs half-closed over the door in the dawn; which is wide-flung to the sun at noon; which scatters its petals at dusk.

The rose!

She has filled your days with the memory of her fragrance; her leaves still scent the night from out the sealed crystal vase which is your heart.

But an' you would attain the priceless boon of peace, see to it that a humdrum bulb be planted in the brown flower-pot which is your home.

And because of this God-given love of youth which was causing her heart to thud and the blood to race through her veins, she did not withdraw her hands when he held and kissed them and pressed his forehead upon them.

"Lotus-flower," he whispered so that she could scarcely hear. "Bud of innocence! ivory tower of womanhood! temple of love! Beloved, beloved, I am at thy feet." And he knelt and kissed the little feet in the heelless little slippers; then, rising, took both her hands and led her to the door; and his eyes were filled with a great sadness, in spite of the joy which sang in his heart as he took her into the shelter of his arms.

"I love thee too well," he said, as he bent and kissed the riotous curls so near his mouth. "Yes, I love thee too well to snatch thee even as a hungry dog snatches his food, though, verily, I be more near to starving than any hungry dog. What dost thou know of love, of life, in the strange countries of the East? For thy life will

They Were Alone....

The magic of the desert night had closed about them. Cairo, friends,—civilization as she knew it—were left far behind. She, an unbeliever, was in the heart of the trackless wastes with a man whose word was more than law.

And yet, he was her slave!

"I shall ask nothing of you until you shall love me," he promised. "You shall draw your curtains, and until you call, you shall go undisturbed."

And she believed him!

Do you want to see luxury beyond your imagination to conjure,—feel the softness of silks finer than the gossamer web of the spider—hear the night voices of the throbbing desert, or sway to the jolting of the clanking caravan?

Egypt, Arabia pass before your eyes. The impatient cursing of the camel men comes to your ears. Your nostrils quiver in the acrid smoke of the little fires of dung that flare in the darkness when the caravan halts. The night has shut off prying eyes. Yashmaks are lowered. White flesh gleams against burnished bands of gold. The children of Allah are at home.

And the promise he had given her? ... let Joan Conquest, who knows and loves the East, tell you in

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