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Author: F. Marion Crawford

Illustrator: James Montgomery Flagg

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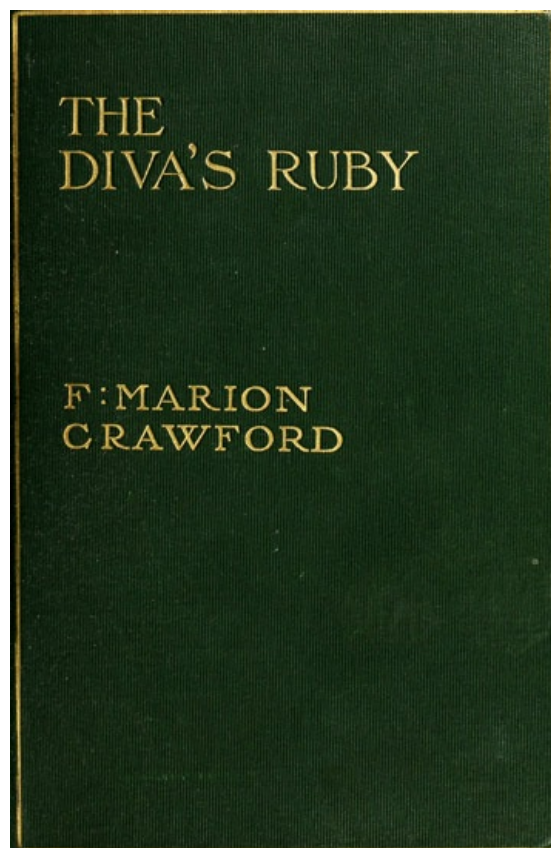
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DIVA'S RUBY ***

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Obvious typographical errors have been corrected. Inconsistent spelling and hyphenation in the original document have been preserved.



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY J. MONTGOMERY FLAGG

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THE DIVA'S RUBY

CHAPTER 1

There is a ruby mine hidden in the heart of the mountains near a remote little city of Central Asia, unknown to European travellers; and the secret of the treasure belongs to the two chief families of the place, and has been carefully guarded for many generations, handed down through the men from father to son; and often the children of these two families have married, yet none of the women ever learned the way to the mine from their fathers, or their brothers, or their husbands, none excepting one only, and her name was Baraka, which may perhaps mean 'Blessed'; but no blessing came to her when she was born. She was much whiter and much more beautiful than the other girls of the little Tartar city; her face was oval like an ostrich egg, her skin was as the cream that rises on sheep's milk at evening, and her eyes were like the Pools of Peace in the Valley of Dark Moons; her waist also was a slender pillar of ivory, and round her ankle she could make her thumb meet her second finger; as for her feet, they were small and quick and silent as young mice. But she was not blessed.

When she was in her seventeenth year a traveller came to the little city, who was not like her own people; he was goodly to see, and her eyes were troubled by the sight of him, as the Pools of Peace are darkened when the clouds lie on the mountain-tops and sleep all day; for the stranger

was tall and very fair, and his beard was like spun gold, and he feared neither man nor evil spirit, going about alone by day and night. Furthermore, he was a great physician, and possessed a small book, about the size of a man's hand, in which was contained all the knowledge of the world. By means of this book, and three small buttons that tasted of mingled salt and sugar, he cured Baraka's father of a mighty pain in the midriff which had tormented him a whole week. He brought with him also a written letter from a holy man to the chiefs of the town; therefore they did not kill him, though he had a good Mauser revolver with ammunition, worth much money, and other things useful to believers.

Satan entered the heart of Baraka, and she loved the traveller who dwelt in her father's house, for she was not blessed; and she stood before him in the way when he went out, and when he returned she was sitting at the door watching, and she took care to show her cream-white arm, and her slender ankle, and even her beautiful face when neither her father nor her mother was near. But he saw little and cared less, and was as grave as her father and the other greybeards of the town.

When she perceived that he was not moved by the sight of her, she watched him more closely; for she said in her girl's heart that the eyes that are blind to a beautiful woman see one of three things: gold, or power, or heaven; but her sight was fixed only on him. Then her throat was dry, her heart fluttered in her maiden breast like a frightened bird, and sometimes, when she would have tried to speak, she felt as if her tongue were broken and useless; the fire ran lightly along her delicate body, her eyes saw nothing clearly, and a strange rushing sound filled her ears; and then, all at once, a fine dew wet her forehead and cooled it, and she trembled all over and was as pale as death—like Sappho, when a certain god-like man was near. Yet the stranger saw nothing, and his look was bright and cold as a winter's morning in the mountains.

Almost every day he went out and climbed the foot-hills alone, and when the sun was lowering he came back bringing herbs and flowers, which he dried carefully and spread between leaves of grey paper in a large book; and he wrote spells beside them in an unknown tongue, so that no one dared to touch the book when he went out, lest the genii should wake and come out from between the pages, to blind the curious and strike the gossips dumb, and cast a leprosy on the thief.

At night he lay on the roof of the fore-house beside the gate of the court, because it was cool there. Baraka came to him, before midnight, when her mother was in a deep sleep; she knelt at his side while he slept in the starlight, and she laid her head beside his, on the sack that was his pillow, and for a little while she was happy, being near him, though he did not know she was there. But presently she remembered that her mother might wake and call her, and she spoke very softly, close to his ear, fearing greatly lest he should start from his sleep and cry out.

'The ruby mine is not far off,' she said. 'I know the secret place. Rubies! Rubies! Rubies! You shall have as many as you can carry of the blood-red rubies!'

He opened his eyes, and even in the starlight they were bright and cold. She stroked his hand softly and then pressed it a little.

'Come with me and you shall know the great secret,' she whispered. 'You shall fill this sack that is under your head, and then you shall take me with you to Egypt, and we will live in a marble palace and have many slaves, and be always together. For you will always remember that it was Baraka who showed you where the rubies were, and even when you are tired of her you will treat her kindly and feed her with fig paste and fat quails, such as I hear they have in the south all winter, and Frank rice, and coffee that has been picked over, bean by bean, for the great men.'

She said all this in a whisper, stroking his hand; and while she whispered he smiled in his great golden beard that seemed as silvery in the starlight as her father's.

'That is women's talk,' he answered. 'Who has seen mines of rubies? and if you know where they are, why should you show them to me? You are betrothed. If you had knowledge of hidden treasures you would keep it for your husband. This is some trick to destroy me.'

'May these hands wither to the wrists if a hair of your head be harmed through me,' she answered; and as she knelt beside him, the two little hands held his face towards her very tenderly, and then one of them smoothed the thick hair back from his forehead.

'You are betrothed,' he repeated, 'and I am your father's guest. Shall I betray him?'

'I care nothing, neither for father, nor mother, nor brothers, nor betrothed,' Baraka answered. 'I will give you the riches of Solomon if you will take me, for I will have no other man.'

'There are no rubies,' said the stranger. 'Show them to me and I will believe.'

The girl laughed very low.

'Did I not know you for a man of little faith?' she asked. 'I have shown you my arm from the wrist to the shoulder. Is it not like the tusk of a young elephant? Yet you have not believed. I have shown you my ankles, and you have seen me span them with my fingers as I sat at the door, yet you believed not. I have unveiled my face, which it is a shame to do, but you could not believe. I have come to you in the starlight when you were asleep, and still you have no faith that I love you, though I shall be cast out to perish if I am found here. But I will give you a little handful of rubies, and you will believe, and take me, when I have shown you where you may get thousands

like them.'

She took from her neck a bag of antelope skin, no larger than her closed hand, and gave it to him with the thin thong by which it had hung.

'When you have seen them in the sun you will want others,' she said. 'I will take you to the place, and when you have filled your sack with them you will love me enough to take me away. It is not far to the place. In two hours we can go and come. To-morrow night, about this time, I will wake you again. It will not be safe to unbar the door, so you must let me down from this roof by a camel rope, and then follow me.'

When Baraka was gone the stranger sat up on his carpet and opened the small bag to feel the stones, for he knew that he could hardly see them in the starlight; but even the touch and the weight told him something, and he guessed that the girl had not tried to deceive him childishly with bits of glass. Though the bag had been in her bosom, and the weather was hot, the stones were as cold as jade; and moreover he felt their shape and knew at once that they might really be rough rubies, for he was well versed in the knowledge of precious stones.

When the day began to dawn he went down from the roof to the common room of the fore-house, where guests were quartered, yet although there was no other stranger there he would not take the bag from his neck to examine the stones, lest some one should be watching him from a place of hiding; but afterwards, when he was alone in the foot-hills and out of sight of the town, searching as usual for new plants and herbs, he crept into a low cave at noon, and sat down just inside the entrance, so that he could see any one coming while still a long way off, and there he emptied the contents of the little leathern wallet into his hand, and saw that Baraka had not deceived him; and as he looked closely at the stones in the strong light at the entrance of the cave, the red of the rubies was reflected in the blue of his bright eyes, and made a little purple glare in them that would have frightened Baraka; and he smiled behind his great yellow beard.

He took from an inner pocket a folded sheet on which a map was traced in black and green ink, much corrected and extended in pencil; and he studied the map thoughtfully in the cave while the great heat of the day lasted; but the lines that his eye followed did not lead towards Persia, Palestine, and Egypt, where Baraka wished to live with him in a marble palace and eat fat quails and fig paste.

She came to him again that night on the roof, bringing with her a small bundle, tightly rolled and well tied up. He wrapped his blanket round her body, and brought it up under her arms so that the rope should not hurt her when her weight came upon it, and so he let her down over the edge of the roof to the ground, and threw the rope after her; and he let himself over, holding by his hands, so that when he was hanging at the full length of his long arms he had only a few feet to drop, for he was very tall and the fore-house was not high, and he wished to take the rope with him.

Baraka's house was at the head of the town, towards the foot-hills; every one was sleeping, and there was no moon. She followed the stony sheep-track that struck into the hills only a few hundred paces from the last houses, and the stranger followed her closely. He had his sack on his shoulder, his book of plants and herbs was slung behind him by a strap, and in his pockets he had all the money he carried for his travels and his letters to the chiefs, and a weapon; but he had left all his other belongings, judging them to be of no value compared with a camel-bag full of rubies, and only a hindrance, since he would have to travel far on foot before daylight, by dangerous paths.

The girl trod lightly and walked fast, and as the man followed in her footsteps he marked the way, turn by turn, and often looked up at the stars overhead as men do who are accustomed to journeying alone in desert places. For some time Baraka led him through little valleys he had often traversed, and along hillsides familiar to him, and at last she entered a narrow ravine which he had once followed to its head, where he had found that it ended abruptly in a high wall of rock, at the foot of which there was a clear pool that did not overflow. It was darker in the gorge, but the rocks were almost white, so that it was quite possible to see the way by the faint light.

The man and the girl stood before the pool; the still water reflected the stars.

'This is the place,' Baraka said. 'Do you see anything?'

'I see water and a wall of rock,' the man answered. 'I have been here alone by day. I know this place. There is nothing here, and there is no way up the wall.'

Baraka laughed softly.

'The secret could not have been kept by my fathers for fourteen generations if it were so easy to find out,' she said. 'The way is not easy, but I know it.'

'Lead,' replied the traveller. 'I will follow.'

'No,' returned the girl. 'I will go a little way down the gorge and watch, while you go in.'

The man did not trust her. How could he tell but that she had brought him to an ambush where he was to be murdered for the sake of his money and his good weapon? The rubies were real, so far as he could tell, but they might be only a bait. He shook his head.

'Listen,' said Baraka. 'At the other side of the pool there is a place where the water from this

spring flows away under the rock. That is the passage.'

'I have seen the entrance,' answered the traveller. 'It is so small that a dog could not swim through it.'

'It looks so. But it is so deep that one can walk through it easily, with one's head above water. It is not more than fifty steps long. That is how I found it, for one day I wandered here alone in the morning for shade, when the air was like fire; and being alone I bathed in the clear pool to cool myself, and I found the way and brought back the stones, which I have hidden ever since. For if my father and brothers know that I have seen the treasure they will surely kill me, because the women must never learn the secret. You see,' she laughed a little, 'I am the first of us who has known it, since many generations, and I have already betrayed it to you! They are quite right to kill us when we find it out!'

'This is an idle tale,' said the traveller. 'Go into the pool before me and I will believe and follow you under the rock. I will not go and leave you here.'

'You are not very brave, though you are so handsome! If they come and find me here, they will kill me first.'

'You say it, but I do not believe it. I think there is a deep hole in the passage and that I shall slip into it and be drowned, for no man could swim in such a place. I have but one life, and I do not care to lose it in a water-rat's trap. You must go in and lead the way if you wish me to trust you.'

Baraka hesitated and looked at him.

'How can I do this before you?' she asked.

'I will not go alone,' the man answered, for he suspected foul play. 'Do as you will.'

The girl took from her head the large cotton cloth with which she veiled herself, and folded it and laid it down on the rock by the pool; then she let her outer tunic of thin white woollen fall to the ground round her feet and stepped out of it, and folded it also, and laid it beside her veil, and she stood up tall and straight as a young Egyptian goddess in the starlight, clothed only in the plain shirt without sleeves which the women of her country wear night and day; and the traveller saw her cream-white arms near him in the soft gloom, and heard her slip off her light shoes.

'I will go before you,' she said; and she stepped into the pool and walked slowly through the water.

The traveller followed her as he was, for he was unwilling to leave behind him anything he valued, and what he had was mostly in the pockets of his coat, and could not be much hurt by water. Even his pressed herbs and flowers would dry again, his cartridges were quite waterproof, his letters were in an impervious case, and his money was in coin. When he entered the pool he took his revolver from its place and he held it above the water in front of him as he went on. With his other hand he carried the sack he had brought, which was one of those that are made of Bokhara carpet and are meant to sling on a camel.

Baraka was almost up to her neck in the water when she reached the other side of the pool; a moment later she disappeared under the rock, and the traveller bent his knees to shorten himself, for there was only room for his head above the surface, and he held up his revolver before his face to keep the weapon dry, and also to feel his way, lest he should strike against any jutting projection of the stone and hurt himself. He counted the steps he took, and made them as nearly as possible of equal length. He felt that he was walking on perfectly smooth sand, into which his heavily shod feet sank a very little. There was plenty of air, for the gentle draught followed him from the entrance and chilled the back of his neck, which had got wet; yet it seemed hard to breathe, and as he made his way forward his imagination pictured the death he must die if the rock should fall in behind him. He was glad that the faint odour of Baraka's wet hair came to his nostrils in the thick darkness, and it was very pleasant to hear her voice when she spoke at last.

'It is not far,' she said quietly. 'I begin to see the starlight on the water.'

The passage did not widen or grow higher as it went on. If it had been dry, it would have been a commodious cave, open at each end, wide at the bottom and narrowing to a sharp angle above. But the pool was fed by a spring that never failed nor even ebbed, though it must sometimes have overflowed down the ravine through which the two had reached the pool.

They came out from under the rock at last, and were in the refreshing outer air. The still water widened almost to a circle, a tiny lake at the bottom of a sort of crater of white stone that collected and concentrated the dim light. On two sides there were little crescent beaches of snow-white sand, that gleamed like silver. The traveller looked about him and upward to see if there were any way of climbing up; but as far as he could make out in the half-darkness the steep rock was as smooth as if it had been cut with tools, and it sloped away at a sharp angle like the sides of a funnel.

Baraka went up towards the right, and the bottom shelved, so that presently the water was down to her waist, and then she stood still and pointed to a dark hollow just above the little beach. Her wet garment clung to her, and with her left hand she began to wring the water from her hair behind her head.

'The rubies are there,' she said, 'thousands upon thousands of them. Fill the sack quickly, but do not take more than you can carry, for they are very heavy.'

The traveller waded out upon the beach, and the water from his clothes ran down in small rivulets and made little round holes in the white sand. He put down his revolver in a dry place, and both his hands felt for the precious stones in the shadowy hollow, loosening small fragments of a sort of brittle crust in which they seemed to be clustered.

'You cannot choose,' Baraka said, 'for you cannot see, but I have been here by daylight and have seen. The largest are on the left side of the hollow, near the top.'

By the stars the traveller could see the pieces a little, as he brought them out, for the white rocks collected the light; he could see many dark crystals, but as to what they were he had to trust the girl.

'Do not take more than you can carry,' she repeated, 'for you must not throw them away to lighten the burden.'

'You can carry some of them,' answered the traveller.

He broke up the crust of crystals with a small geologist's hammer and tore them out like a madman, and his hands were bleeding, for though he was a philosopher the thirst for wealth had come upon him when he felt the riches of empires in his grasp, and the time was short; and although he knew that he might some day come back with armed men to protect him, and workmen to help him, he knew also that to do this he must share the secret with the over-lord of that wild country, and that his portion might be the loss of his head. So he tore at the ruby crust with all his might, and as he was very strong, he broke out great pieces at once.

'We cannot carry more than that, both of us together,' said Baraka, though she judged more by the sound of his work than by what she could see.

He lifted the sack with both his hands, and he knew by its weight that she was right. Under the water it would be easy enough to carry, but it would be a heavy load for a man to shoulder.

'Come,' Baraka said, 'I will go back first.'

She moved down into the deeper water again, till it was up to her neck; and feeling the way with her hands she went in once more under the rock. The traveller followed her cautiously, carrying the heavy sack under water with one hand and holding up his revolver with the other, to keep it dry.

'I begin to see the starlight on the water,' Baraka said, just as before, when they had been going in.

When she had spoken, she heard a heavy splash not far off, and the water in the subterranean channel rose suddenly and ran past her in short waves, three of which covered her mouth in quick succession and reached to her eyes, and almost to the top of her head, but sank again instantly; and they passed her companion in the same way, wetting his weapon.

'Go back,' Baraka said, when she could speak; 'the rock is falling.'

The traveller turned as quickly as he could, and she came after him, gaining on him because he carried the heavy sack and could not move as fast as she. He felt his damp hair rising with fear, for he believed that, after all, she had brought him into a trap. They reached the opening and came out into the pool again.

'You have brought me here to die,' he said. 'Your father and your brothers have shut up the entrance with great stones, and they will go up the mountain and let themselves down from above with ropes and shoot me like a wolf in a pit-fall. But you shall die first, because you have betrayed me.'

So he cocked his revolver and set the muzzle against her head, to kill her, holding her by her slender throat with his other hand; for they were in shallow water and he had dropped the sack in the pool.

Baraka did not struggle or cry out.

'I would rather die by your hand than be alive in another man's arms,' she said, quite quietly.

He let her go, merely because she was so very brave; for he did not love her at all. She knew it, but that made no difference to her, since no other woman was near; if they could get out alive with the rubies she was sure that he would love her for the sake of the great wealth she had brought him. If they were to starve to death at the bottom of the great rock wall in the mountains, she would probably die first, because he was so strong; and then nothing would matter. It was all very simple.

The traveller fished up the sack and waded out upon the tiny beach, and again the water ran down from his clothes in rivulets and made round holes in the white sand. He looked up rather anxiously, though he could not have seen a head looking down from above if there had been any one there. There was not light enough. He understood also that if the men were going to shoot at him from the height they would wait till it was daylight. Baraka stood still in the water, which was up to her waist, and he paid no attention to her, but sat down to think what he should do.

The night was warm, and his clothes would dry on him by degrees. He would have taken them off and spread them out, for he thought no more of Baraka's presence than if she had been a harmless young animal, standing there in the pool, but he could not tell what might happen at any moment, and so long as he was dressed and had all his few belongings about him, he felt ready to meet fate.

Baraka saw that he did not heed her, and was thinking. She came up out of the water very slowly, and she modestly loosened her wet garment from her, so that it hung straight when she stood at the end of the beach, as far from the traveller as possible. She, also, sat down to dry herself: and there was silence for a long time.

After half-an-hour the traveller rose and began to examine the rock, feeling it with his hands wherever there was the least shadow, as high as he could reach, to find if there was any foothold, though he was already sure that there was not.

'There is no way out,' Baraka said at last. 'I have been here by day. I have seen.'

'They will let themselves down from above with ropes, till they are near enough to shoot,' the traveller answered.

'No,' replied Baraka. 'They know that you have a good weapon, and they will not risk their lives. They will leave us here to starve. That is what they will do. It is our portion, and we shall die. It will be easy, for there is water, and when we are hungry we can drink our fill.'

The traveller knew the people amongst whom he had wandered, and he did not marvel at the girl's quiet tone; but it chilled his blood, for he understood that she was in earnest; and, moreover, she knew the place, and that there was no way out.

'You said well that I had brought you here to die,' she said presently, 'but I did not know it, therefore I must lose my life also. It is my portion. God be praised.'

He was shamed by her courage, for he loved life well, and he held his head down and said nothing as he thought of what was to come. He knew that with plenty of good water a man may live for two or three weeks without food. He looked at the black pool in which he could not even see the reflections of the stars as he sat, because the opening above was not very wide, and he was low down, a good way from the water's edge. It seemed a good way, but perhaps it was not more than three yards.

'You will die first,' Baraka said dreamily. 'You are not as we are, you cannot live so long without food.'

The traveller wondered if she were right, but he said nothing.

'If we had got out with the treasure,' continued Baraka, 'you would have loved me for it, because you would have been the greatest man in the world through me. But now, because we must die, you hate me. I understand. If you do not kill me you will die first; and when you are dead I shall kiss you many times, till I die also. It will be very easy. I am not afraid.'

The man sat quite still and looked at the dark streak by the edge of the pool where the water had wet it when the falling boulder outside had sent in little waves. He could see it distinctly. Again there was silence for a long time. Now and then Baraka loosened her only garment about her as she sat, so that it might dry more quickly; and she quietly wrung out her thick black hair and shook it over her shoulders to dry it too, and stuck her two silver pins into the sand beside her.

Still the traveller sat with bent head, gazing at the edge of the pool. His hands were quite dry now, and he slowly rubbed the clinging moisture from his revolver. Some men would have been thinking, in such a plight, that if starving were too hard to bear, a bullet would shorten their sufferings in the end; but this man was very full of life, and the love of life, and while he lived he would hope.

He still watched the same dark streak where the sand was wet; he had not realised that he had been so far from it till then, but by looking at it a long time in the starlight his sight had probably grown tired, so that he no longer saw it distinctly. He raised himself a little on his hands and pushed himself down till it was quite clearly visible again, and he looked at the rock opposite and up to the stars again, to rest his eyes. He was not more than a yard from the water now.

The place was very quiet. From far above a slight draught of air descended, warm from the rocks that had been heated all day in the sun. But there was no sound except when Baraka moved a little.

Presently she did not move any more, and when the traveller looked he saw that she was curled up on the sand, as Eastern women lie when they sleep, and her head rested on her hand; for her garment was dry now, and she was drowsy after the walk and the effort she had made. Besides, since there was no escape from death, and as the man did not love her, she might as well sleep if she could. He knew those people and understood; and he did not care, or perhaps he also was glad. He was a man who could only have one thought at a time. When he had left the house of Baraka's father he had been thinking only of the rubies, but now that he was in danger of his life he could think only of saving it, if there were any way. A woman could never be anything but a toy to him, and he could not play with toys while death was looking over his shoulder. He was either too big for that, or too little; every man will decide which it was according to his own

measure. But Baraka, who had not been taught to think of her soul nor to fear death, went quietly to sleep now that she was quite sure that the traveller would not love her.

He had been certain of the distance between his feet and the water's edge as he sat; it had been a yard at the most. But now it was more; he was sure that it was a yard and a half at the least. He rubbed his eyes and looked hard at the dark belt of wet sand, and it was twice as wide as it had been. The water was still running out somewhere, but it was no longer running in, and in an hour or two the pool would be dry. The traveller was something of an engineer, and understood sooner than an ordinary man could have done, that his enemies had intentionally stopped up the narrow entrance through which he had to come, both to make his escape impossible, and to hasten his end by depriving him of water. The fallen boulder alone could not have kept out the overflow of the spring effectually. They must have shovelled down masses of earth, with the plants that grew in it abundantly and filled it with twining threadlike roots, and they must have skilfully forced quantities of the stuff into the openings all round the big stone, making a regular dam against the spring, which would soon run down in the opposite direction. They knew, of course, that Baraka had led him to the place and had gone in with him, for she had left all her outer garments outside, and they meant that she should die also, with her secret. In a week, or a fortnight, or a month, they would come and dig away the dam and pry the boulder aside, and would get in and find the white bones of the two on the sand, after the vultures had picked them clean; and they would take the traveller's good revolver, and his money.

He thought of all these things as he sat there in the dim light, and watched the slow receding of the water-line, and listened to the girl's soft and regular breathing. There was no death in her dream, as she slept away the last hours of the night, though there might not be many more nights for her. He heard her breath, but he did not heed her, for the water was sinking before him, sinking away into the sand, now that it was no longer fed from the opening.

He sat motionless, and his thoughts ran madly from hope to despair and back again to hope. The water was going down, beyond question; if it was merely draining itself through the sand to some subterranean channel, he was lost, but if it was flowing away through any passage like the one by which he had entered, there was still a chance of escape,—a very small chance. When death is at the gate the tiniest loophole looks wide enough to crawl through.

The surface of the pool subsided, but there was no loophole; and as the traveller watched, hope sank in his heart, like the water in the hollow of the sand; but Baraka slept on peacefully, curled up on her side like a little wild animal. When the pool was almost dry the traveller crept down to the edge and drank his fill, that he might not begin to thirst sooner than need be; and just then day dawned suddenly and the warm darkness gave way to a cold light in a few moments.

Immediately, because it was day, Baraka stretched herself on the sand and then sat up; and when she saw what the traveller was doing she also went and drank as much as she could swallow, for she had understood why he was drinking as soon as she saw that the pool was nearly dry. When she could drink no more she looked up at the rocks high overhead, and they were already white and red and yellow in the light of the risen sun; for in that country there is no very long time between dark night and broad day.

Baraka sat down again, on the spot where she had slept, but she said nothing. The man was trying to dig a little hole in the wet sand with his hands, beyond the water that was still left, for perhaps he thought that if he could make a pit on one side, some water would stay in it; but the sand ran together as soon as he moved it; and presently, as he bent over, he felt that he was sinking into it himself, and understood that it was a sort of quicksand that would suck him down. He therefore threw himself flat on his back, stretching out his arms and legs, and, making movements as if he were swimming, he worked his way from the dangerous place till he was safe on the firm white beach again. He sat up then, and bent his head till his forehead pressed on his hands, and he shut his eyes to keep out the light of day. He had not slept, as Baraka had, but he was not sleepy; perhaps he would not be able to sleep again before the end came. Baraka watched him quietly, for she understood that he despaired of life, and she wondered what he would do; and, besides, he seemed to her the most beautiful man in the world, and she loved him, and she was going to die with him.

It comforted her to think that no other woman could get him now. It was almost worth while to die for that alone; for she could not have borne that another woman should have him since he despised her, and if it had come to pass she would have tried to kill that other. But there was no danger of such a thing now; and he would die first, and she would kiss him many times when he was dead, and then she would die also.

The pool was all gone by this time, leaving a funnel-shaped hollow in the sand where it had been. If any water still leaked through from without it lost itself under the sand, and the man and the girl were at the bottom of a great natural well that was quite dry. Baraka looked up, and she saw a vulture sitting in the sun on a pinnacle, three hundred feet above her head. He would sit there till she was dead, for he knew what was coming; then he would spread his wings a little and let himself down awkwardly, half-flying and half-scrambling. When he had finished, he would sit and look at her bones and doze, till he was able to fly away.

Baraka thought of all this, but her face did not change, and when she had once seen the vulture she did not look at him again, but kept her eyes fixed, without blinking, on her companion's bent head. To her he seemed the most handsome man that had ever lived. There, beside him, lay his camel bag, and in it there were rubies worth a kingdom; and Baraka was very young and was

considered beautiful too, among the wild people to whom she belonged. But her father had chosen her name in an evil hour, for she was indeed not blessed, since she was to die so young; and the man with the beard of spun gold and the very white skin did not love her, and would not even make pretence of loving, though for what was left of life she would have been almost satisfied with that.

The hours passed, and the sun rose higher in the sky and struck deeper into the shady well, till he was almost overhead, and there was scarcely any shadow left. It became very hot and stifling, because the passage through which the air had entered with the water was shut up. Then the traveller took off his loose jacket, and opened his flannel shirt at the neck, and turned up his sleeves for coolness, and he crept backwards into the hollow where the ruby mine was, to shelter himself from the sun. But Baraka edged away to the very foot of the cliff, where there remained a belt of shade, even at noon; and as she sat there she took the hem of her one garment in her hands and slowly fanned her little feet. Neither he nor she had spoken for many hours, and she could see that in the recess of the rock he was sitting as before, with his forehead against his hands that were clasped on his knees, in the attitude and bearing of despair.

He began to be athirst now, in the heat. If he had not known that there was no water he could easily have done without it through a long day, but the knowledge that there was none, and that he was never to drink again, parched his life and his throat and his tongue till it felt like a dried fig in his mouth. He did not feel hunger, and indeed he had a little food in a wallet he carried; but he could not have eaten without water, and it did not occur to him that Baraka might be hungry. Perhaps, even if he had known that she was, he would not have given her of what he had; he would have kept it for himself. What was the life of a wild hill-girl compared with his? But the vulture was watching him, as well as Baraka, and would not move from its pinnacle till the end, though days might pass.

The fever began to burn the traveller, the fever of thirst which surely ends in raving madness, as he knew, for he had wandered much in deserts, and had seen men go mad for lack of water. His hands felt red hot, the pulses were hammering at his temples, and his tongue became as hot as baked clay; he would have borne great pain for a time if it could have brought sleep, for this was much worse than pain, and it made sleep impossible. He tried to take account of what he felt, for he was strong, and he was conscious that the heat of the fever, and the throbbing in his arteries, and the choking dryness in his mouth and throat, were not really his main sensations, but only accessories to it or consequences of it. The real suffering was the craving for the sight, the touch, and the taste of water; to see it alone would be a relief, even if he were not allowed to drink, and to dip his hands into a stream would be heaven though he were not permitted to taste a drop. He understood, in a strangely clear way, that what suffered now was not, in the ordinary sense, his own self, that is, his nerves, but the physical composition of his body, which was being by degrees deprived of the one prime ingredient more necessary than all others. He knew that his body was eight-tenths water, or thereabouts, but that this proportion was fast decreasing by the process of thirst, and that what tormented him was the unsettling of the hydrostatic balance which nature requires and maintains where there is any sort of life in animals, plants, or stones; for stones live and are not even temporarily dead till they are calcined to the state of quicklime, or hydraulic cement, or plaster of Paris; and they come to life again with furious violence and boiling heat if they are brought into contact with water suddenly; or they regain the living state by slow degrees if they are merely exposed to dampness. The man knew that what hurt him was the battle between forces of nature which was being fought in his flesh, and it was as much more terrible than the mere pain his fleshly nerves actually suffered from it, as real death is more awful than the most tremendous representation of it that ever was shown in a play. Yet a stage tragedy may draw real burning tears of sorrow and sympathy from them that look on.

The traveller was a modern man of science, and understood these things, but the knowledge of them did not make it easier to bear thirst or to die of hunger.

Baraka was not thirsty yet, because she had drunk her fill in the morning, and was not used to drink often; it was enough that she could look at the man she loved, for the end would come soon enough without thinking about it. All day long the traveller crouched in the hollow of the ruby cave, and Baraka watched him from her place; when it grew dark the vulture on the pinnacle of rock thrust its ugly head under its wing. As soon as Baraka could not see any more she curled herself up on the white sand like a little wild animal and went to sleep, though she was thirsty.

It was dawn when she awoke, and her linen garment was damp with the dew, so that the touch of it refreshed her. The traveller had come out and was lying prone on the sand, his face buried against his arm, as soldiers sleep in a bivouac. She could not tell whether he was asleep or not, but she knew that he could not see her, and she cautiously sucked the dew from her garment, drawing it up to her mouth and squeezing it between her lips.

It was little enough refreshment, but it was something, and she was not afraid, which made a difference. Just as she had drawn the edge of her shift down and round her ankles again, the man turned on his side suddenly, and then rose to his feet. For an instant he glared at her, and she saw that his blue eyes were bloodshot and burning; then he picked up the heavy camel bag, and began to make his way round what had been the beach of the pool, towards the passage through which they had entered, and which was now a dry cave, wide below, narrow at the top, and between six or seven feet high. He trod carefully and tried his way, for he feared the quicksand, but he knew that there was none in the passage, since he had walked through the water and had felt the way hard under his feet. In a few moments he disappeared under the rock.

Baraka knew what he meant to do; he was going to try to dig through the dam at the entrance to let the water in, even if he could not get out. But she was sure that this would be impossible, for by this time her father and brothers had, no doubt, completely filled the spring with earth and stones, and had turned the water in the other direction. The traveller must have been almost sure of this too, else he would have made the attempt much sooner. It was the despotism of thirst that was driving him to it now, and he had no tool with which to dig—it would be hopeless work with his hands.

The girl did not move, for in that narrow place and in the dark she could not have helped him. She sat and waited. By and by he would come out, drenched with sweat and yet parching with thirst, and he would glare at her horribly again; perhaps he would be mad when he came out and would kill her because she had brought him there.

After some time she heard a very faint sound overhead, and when she looked up the vulture was gone from his pinnacle. She wondered at this, and her eyes searched every point and crevice of the rock as far as she could see, for she knew that the evil bird could only have been frightened away; and though it fears neither bird nor beast, but only man, she could not believe that any human being could find a foothold near to where it had perched.

But now she started, and held her breath and steadied herself with one hand on the sand beside her as she leaned back to look up. Something white had flashed in the high sun, far up the precipice, and the sensation the sight left was that of having seen sunshine on a moving white garment.

For some seconds, perhaps for a whole minute, she saw nothing more, though she gazed up steadily, then there was another flash and a small patch of snowy white was moving slowly on the face of the cliff, at some distance above the place where the vulture had been. She bent her brows in the effort to see more by straining her sight, and meanwhile the patch descended faster than it seemed possible that a man could climb down that perilous steep. Yet it was a man, she knew from the first, and soon she saw him plainly, in his loose shirt and white turban. Baraka thought of a big white moth crawling on a flat wall. She was light of foot and sure of hold herself, and could step securely where few living things could move at all without instant danger, but she held her breath as she watched the climber's descent towards her. She saw him plainly now, a brown-legged, brown-armed man in a white shirt and a fur cap, and he had a long gun slung across his back. Nearer still, and he was down to the jutting pinnacle where the vulture had sat, and she saw his black beard; still nearer by a few feet and she knew him, and then her glance darted to the mouth of the cave, at the other end of which the man she loved was toiling desperately alone in the dark to pierce the dam of earth and stones. It was only a glance, in a second of time, but when she looked up the black-bearded man had already made another step downwards. Baraka measured the distance. If he spoke loud now she could understand him, and he could hear her answer. He paused and looked down, and he saw her as plainly as she saw him. She knew him well, and she knew why he had come, with his long gun. He was her father's brother's son, to whom she was betrothed; he was Saäd, and he was risking his life to come down and kill her and the man whom she had led to the ruby mines for love's sake.

He would come down till he was within easy range, and then he would wait till he had a fair chance at them, when they were standing still, and she knew that he was a dead shot. The traveller's revolver could never carry as far as the long gun, Baraka was sure, and Saäd could come quite near with safety, since he seemed able to climb down the face of a flat rock where there was not foothold for a cat. He was still descending, he was getting very near; if the traveller were not warned he might come out of the cave unsuspectingly and Saäd would shoot him. Saäd would wish to shoot him first, because of his revolver, and then he would kill Baraka at his leisure. If he fired at her first the traveller would have a chance at him while he was reloading his old gun. She understood why he had not killed her yet, if indeed he wanted to, for it was barely possible that he loved her enough to take her alive.

After hesitating for a few moments, not from fear but in doubt, she gathered herself to spring, and made a dash like an antelope along the sand for the mouth of the cave, for she knew that Saäd would not risk wasting his shot on her while she was running. She stopped just under the shelter of the rock and called inward.

'Saäd is coming down the rock with his gun!' she cried. 'Load your weapon!'

When she had given this warning she went out again and stood before the mouth of the cave with her back to it. Saäd was on the rock, not fifty feet above the ground, at the other side of the natural wall, but looked as if even he could get no farther down. He was standing with both his heels on a ledge so narrow that more than half the length of his brown feet stood over it; he was leaning back, flat against the sloping cliff, and he had his gun before him, for he was just able to use both his hands without falling. He pointed the gun at her and spoke.

'Where is the man?'

'He is dead,' Baraka answered without hesitation.

'Dead? Already?'

'I killed him in his sleep,' she said, 'and I dragged his body into the cave for fear of the vulture, and buried it in the sand. Be not angry, Saäd, though he was my father's guest. Come down hither and I will tell all. Then you shall shoot me or take me home to be your wife, as you will, for

I am quite innocent.'

She meant to entice him within range of the stranger's weapon.

'There is no foothold whereby to get lower,' he answered, but he rested the stock of his gun on the narrow ledge behind him.

'Drag out the man's body, that I may see it.'

'I tell you I buried it. I killed him the night before last; I cannot dig him up now.'

'Why did you run to the mouth of the cave when you saw me, if the man is dead?'

'Because at first I was afraid you would shoot me from above, therefore I took shelter.'

'Why did you come out again, if you were in fear?'

'After I had run in I was ashamed, for I felt sure that you would not kill me without hearing the truth. So I came out to speak with you. Get down, and I will show you the man's grave.'

'Have I wings? I cannot come down. It is impossible.'

Baraka felt a puff of hot air pass her, just above her right ankle, and at the same instant she heard a sharp report, not very loud, and more like the snapping of a strong but very dry stick than the explosion of firearms. She instinctively sprang to the left, keeping her eyes on Saäd.

For a moment he did not move. But he was already dead as he slowly bent forward from the rock, making a deep obeisance with both arms hanging down before him, so that his body shot down perpendicularly to the sand, where it struck head first, rolled over and lay motionless in a heap. The traveller's was a Mauser pistol that would have killed as surely at five hundred yards as fifty; and the bullet had gone through the Tartar's brain.

Baraka sprang up the sandy slope and ran along the narrow beach to the body. In an instant she had detached the large brown water-gourd from the thong by which it had hung over Saäd's shoulder, and she felt that it was full. Without a thought for herself she hastened back to the mouth of the cave where the traveller was now standing. His face was dripping with perspiration that ran down into his matted golden beard, his eyes were wild, his hands were bleeding.

'Drink!' cried Baraka joyfully, and she gave him the gourd.

He gripped it as a greedy dog snaps at a bit of meat, and pulling out the wooden plug he set the gourd to his lips, with an expression of beatitude. But he was an old traveller and only drank a little, knowing that his life might depend on making the small supply last. A gourd of water was worth more than many rubies just then.

'Are you very thirsty yet?' he asked in a harsh voice.

'No,' answered Baraka bravely; 'keep it for yourself.'

His hand closed round the neck of the gourd and he looked up towards the rocks above. The vulture had come back and was circling slowly down.

'You had better bury the body, while I go on working,' said the traveller, turning back into the cave and taking the gourd with him.

Baraka had marked the place where he had tried to dig for water and had almost disappeared in the quicksand. She took from the body the wallet, in which were dates and some half-dry bread, and then dragged and pushed, and rolled the dead man from the place where he had fallen. The vulture sat on the lowest ledge where his claws could find a hold, and though he watched her with horrible red eyes while she robbed him of his prey, he did not dare go nearer.

The body sank into the moving sand, and Baraka had to roll herself back to firmer ground in haste to escape being swallowed up with the dead man. The last she saw of him was one brown foot sticking up. It sank slowly out of sight, and then she went to the hollow where the ruby mine was and took up a piece of the broken crust, full of precious stones, and threw it at the vulture as hard as she could. It did not hit him, but he at once tumbled off the ledge into the air, opened his queer, bedraggled wings and struck upwards.

Then Baraka sat down in the shade and slowly brushed away the dry sand that had got into the folds of her linen garment, and looked steadily at the mouth of the cave and tried not to realise that her throat was parched and her lips almost cracking with thirst, and that the traveller had a gourd almost full of water with him. For she loved him, and was willing to die that he might live a little longer; besides, if he succeeded in digging his way out, there would be plenty to drink, and when he was free she was sure that he would love her because she had made him so rich.

The sun rose higher and at last shone down to the bottom of the chasm, and she sat in the narrow strip of shade, where she had passed most of the previous day. She was very thirsty and feverish, and felt tired, and wished she could sleep, but could not. Still the traveller toiled in the darkness, and from time to time she heard sounds from far away as of stones and loose earth falling. He was still working hard, for he was very strong and he was desperate.

Baraka thought that if he was able to dig through the dam the water would run in again, and she watched the sand for hours, but it was drier than ever. The shadow broadened again, and crept

up the rock quickly as the afternoon passed.

It was a long time since she had heard any sound from the cave; she went to the entrance and listened, but all was quite still. Perhaps the traveller had fallen asleep from exhaustion, too tired even to drag himself out into the air when he could work no longer. She sat down in the entrance and waited.

An hour passed. Perhaps he was dead. At the mere inward suggestion Baraka sprang to her feet, and her heart beat frantically, and stood still an instant, and then beat again as if it would burst, and she could hardly breathe. She steadied herself against the rock, and then went in to know the truth, feeling her way, and instinctively shading her eyes as many people do in the dark.

A breath of cool air made her open them, and to her amazement there was light before her. She thought she must have turned quite round while she was walking, and that she was going back to the entrance, so she turned again. But in a few seconds there was light before her once more, and soon she saw the dry sand, full of her footprints and the traveller's, and then the hollow where the mine was came in sight.

She retraced her steps a second time, saw the light as before, ran forward on the smooth sand and stumbled upon a heap of earth and stones, just as she saw the sky through an irregular opening on the level of her face. Scarcely believing her senses she thrust out her hand towards the hole. It was real, and she was not dreaming; the traveller had got out and was gone, recking little of what might happen to her, since he was free with his treasure.

Baraka crept up the slope of earth as quickly as she could and got out; if she had hoped to find him waiting for her she was disappointed, for he was nowhere to be seen. He had got clear away, with his camel-bag full of rubies. A moment later she was lying on the ground, with her face in the little stream, drinking her fill, and forgetful even of the man she loved. In order to deprive them of water the men had dug a channel by which it ran down directly from the spring to the ravine on that side; then they had blocked up the entrance with stones and earth, believing that one man's strength could never suffice to break through, and they had gone away. They had probably buried or burnt Baraka's clothes, for she did not see them anywhere.

She ate some of the dates from the dead man's wallet, and a bit of the dry black bread, and felt revived, since her greatest need had been for water, and that was satisfied. But when she had eaten and drunk, and had washed herself in the stream and twisted up her hair, she sat down upon a rock; and she felt so tired that she would have fallen asleep if the pain in her heart had not kept her awake. She clasped her hands together on her knees and bent over them, rocking herself.

When nearly an hour had passed she looked up and saw that the sun was sinking, for the shadows were turning purple in the deep gorge, and there was a golden light on the peaks above. She listened then, holding her breath; but there was no sound except the tinkling of the tiny stream as it fell over a ledge at some distance below her, following its new way down into the valley.

She rose at last, looked upward, and seemed about to go away when a thought occurred to her, which afterwards led to very singular consequences. Instead of going down the valley or climbing up out of it, she went back to the entrance of the cave, taking the wallet with her, dragged herself in once more over the loose stones and earth, reached the secret hollow where the pool had been, and made straight for the little mine of precious stones. The traveller had broken out many more than he had been able to carry, but she did not try to collect them all. She was not altogether ignorant of the trade carried on by the men of her family for generations, and though she had not the least idea of the real value of the finest of the rubies, she knew very well that it would be wise to take many small ones which she could exchange for clothing and necessaries with the first women she met in the hills, while hiding the rest of the supply she would be able to carry in the wallet.

When she had made her wise selection, she looked once more towards the quicksand, and left the place for ever. Once outside she began to climb the rocks as fast as she could, for very soon it would be night and she would have to lie down and wait many hours for the day, since there was no moon, and the way was very dangerous, even for a Tartar girl who could almost tread on air.

High up on the mountain, over the dry well where Baraka and the stranger had been imprisoned, the vulture perched alone with empty craw and drooping wings. But it was of no use for him to wait; the living, who might have died of hunger and thirst, were gone, and the body of dead Saäd lay fathoms deep in the quicksand, in the very maw of the mountain.

CHAPTER II

There was good copy for the newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic in the news that the famous lyric soprano, Margarita da Cordova, whose real name was Miss Margaret Donne, was engaged to Monsieur Konstantin Logotheti, a Greek financier of large fortune established in Paris, and almost as well known to art-collectors as to needy governments, would-be promoters, and mothers of marriageable daughters. The mothers experienced a momentary depression such as Logotheti himself felt when an historical Van Dyck which he wanted was secretly sold out of a palace in Genoa to a rival collector and millionaire for a price which he would willingly have

given; the people he knew shrugged their shoulders at the news that he was to marry a singer, or shook their heads wisely, or smiled politely, according to the scale of the manners they had inherited or acquired; the shopkeepers sent him thousands of insinuating invitations to inspect and buy all the things which a rich man is supposed to give to his bride, from diamonds and lace and eighty horse-power motor-cars to dressing-cases, stationery and silver saucepans; and the newspapers were generously jubilant, and rioted for a few days in a perfect carnival of adjectives.

The people who made the least fuss about the marriage were Cordova and Logotheti themselves. They were both so well used to perpetual publicity that they did not resent being written and talked about for a time as if they were a treaty, a revolution, a divorce, or a fraudulent trust. But they did not encourage the noise, nor go about side by side in an offensively happy way, nor accept all the two hundred and eighty-seven invitations to dine out together which they received from their friends during three weeks. It was as much as their overworked secretaries could do to answer all these within a reasonable and decent time.

The engagement was made known during the height of the London season, not long after they had both been at a week-end party at Craythrew, Lord Creedmore's place in Derbyshire, where they had apparently come to a final understanding after knowing each other more than two years. Margaret was engaged to sing at Covent Garden that summer, and the first mention of the match was coupled with the information that she intended to cancel all her engagements and never appear in public again. The result was that the next time she came down the stage to sing the Waltz Song in *Romeo and Juliet* she received a tremendous ovation before she opened her handsome lips, and another when she had finished the air; and she spent one of the happiest evenings she remembered.

Though she was at heart a nice English girl, not much over twenty-four years of age, the orphan daughter of an Oxford don who had married an American, she had developed, or fallen, to the point at which very popular and successful artists cannot live at all without applause, and are not happy unless they receive a certain amount of adulation. Even the envy they excite in their rivals is delicious, if not almost necessary to them.

Margaret's real nature had not been changed by a success that had been altogether phenomenal and had probably not been approached by any soprano since Madame Bonanni; but a second nature had grown upon it and threatened to hide it from all but those who knew her very well indeed. The inward Margaret was honest and brave, rather sensitive, and still generous; the outward woman, the primadonna whom most people saw, was self-possessed to a fault, imperious when contradicted, and coolly ruthless when her artistic fame was at stake. The two natures did not agree well together, and made her wretched when they quarrelled, but Logotheti, who was going to take her for better, for worse, professed to like them both, and was the only man she had ever known who did. That was one reason why she was going to marry him, after having refused him about a dozen times.

She had loved another man as much as she was capable of loving, and at one time he had loved her, but a misunderstanding and her devotion to her art had temporarily separated them; and later, when she had almost told him that she would have him if he asked her, he had answered her quite frankly that she was no longer the girl he had cared for, and he had suddenly disappeared from her life altogether. So Logotheti, brilliant, very rich, gifted, gay, and rather exotic in appearance and manner, but tenacious as a bloodhound, had won the prize after a struggle that had lasted two years. She had accepted him without much enthusiasm at the last, and without any great show of feeling.

'Let's try it,' she had said, and he had been more than satisfied.

After a time, therefore, they told their friends that they were going to 'try it.'

The only woman with whom the great singer was at all intimate was the Countess Leven, Lord Creedmore's daughter, generally called 'Lady Maud,' whose husband had been in the diplomacy, and, after vainly trying to divorce her, had been killed in St. Petersburg by a bomb meant for a Minister. The explosion had been so terrific that the dead man's identity had only been established by means of his pocket-book, which somehow escaped destruction. So Lady Maud was a childless widow of eight-and-twenty. Her father, when he had no prospect of ever succeeding to the title, had been a successful barrister, and then a hard-working Member of Parliament, and he had been from boyhood the close friend of Margaret's father. Hence the intimacy that grew up quickly between the two women when they at last met, though they had not known each other as children, because the lawyer had lived in town and his friend in Oxford.

'So you're going to try it, my dear!' said Lady Maud, when she heard the news.

She had a sweet low voice, and when she spoke now it was a little sad; for she had 'tried it,' and it had failed miserably. But she knew that the trial had not been a fair one; the only man she had ever cared for had been killed in South Africa, and as she had not even the excuse of having been engaged to him, she had married with indifference the first handsome man with a good name and a fair fortune who offered himself. He chanced to be a Russian diplomatist, and he turned out a spendthrift and an unfaithful husband. She was too kind-hearted to be glad that he had been blown to atoms by dynamite, but she was much too natural not to enjoy the liberty restored to her by his destruction; and she had not the least intention of ever 'trying it' again.

'You don't sound very enthusiastic,' laughed Margaret, who had no misgivings to speak of, and was generally a cheerful person. 'If you don't encourage me I may not go on.'

'There are two kinds of ruined gamblers,' answered Lady Maud; 'there are those that still like to watch other people play, and those who cannot bear the sight of a roulette table. I'm one of the second kind, but I'll come to the wedding all the same, and cheer like mad, if you ask me.'

'That's nice of you. I really think I mean to marry him, and I wish you would help me with my wedding-gown, dear. It would be dreadful if I looked like Juliet, or Elsa, or Lucia! Everybody would laugh, especially as Konstantin is rather of the Romeo type, with his almond-shaped eyes and his little black moustache! I suppose he really is, isn't he?'

'Perhaps—just a little. But he is a very handsome fellow.'

Lady Maud's lips quivered, but Margaret did not see.

'Oh, I know!' she cried, laughing and shaking her head. 'You once called him "exotic," and he is—but I'm awfully fond of him all the same. Isn't that enough to marry on when there's everything else? You really will help me with my gown, won't you? You're such an angel!'

'Oh, yes, I'll do anything you like. Are you going to have a regular knock-down-and-drag-out smash at St. George's? The usual thing?'

Lady Maud did not despise slang, but she made it sound like music.

'No,' answered Margaret, rather regretfully. 'We cannot possibly be married till the season's quite over, or perhaps in the autumn, and then there will be nobody here. I'm not sure when I shall feel like it! Besides, Konstantin hates that sort of thing.'

'Do you mean to say that you would like a show wedding in Hanover Square?' inquired Lady Maud.

'I've never done anything in a church,' said the Primadonna, rather enigmatically, but as if she would like to.

'Anything in a church,' repeated her friend, vaguely thoughtful, and with the slightest possible interrogation. 'That's a funny way of looking at it!'

Margaret was a little ashamed of what she had said so naturally.

'I think Konstantin would like to have it in a chapel-of-ease in the Old Kent Road!' she said, laughing. 'He sometimes talks of being married in tweeds and driving off in a hansom! Then he suggests going to Constantinople and getting it done by the Patriarch, who is his uncle. Really, that would be rather smart, wouldn't it?'

'Distinctly,' assented Lady Maud. 'But if you do that, I'm afraid I cannot help you with the wedding-gown. I don't know anything about the dress of a Fanariote bride.'

'Konstantin says they dress very well,' Margaret said. 'But of course it is out of the question to do anything so ridiculous. It will end in the chapel-of-ease, I'm sure. He always has his own way. That's probably why I'm going to marry him, just because he insists on it. I don't see any other very convincing reason.'

Lady Maud could not think of anything to say in answer to this; but as she really liked the singer she thought it was a pity.

Paul Griggs, the veteran man of letters, smiled rather sadly when she met him shopping in New Bond Street, and told him of Margaret's engagement. He said that most great singers married because the only way to the divorce court led up the steps of the altar. Though he knew the world he was not a cynic, and Lady Maud herself wondered how long it would be before Logotheti and his wife separated.

'But they are not married yet,' Griggs added, looking at her with the quietly ready expression of a man who is willing that his indifferent words should be taken to have a special meaning if the person to whom he has spoken chooses, or is able, to understand them as they may be understood, but who is quite safe from being suspected of suggesting anything if there is no answering word or glance.

Lady Maud returned his look, but her handsome face grew rather cold.

'Do you know of any reason why the marriage should not take place?' she inquired after a moment.

'If I don't give any reason, am I ever afterwards to hold my peace?' asked Griggs, with a faint smile on his weather-beaten face. 'Are you publishing the bans? or are we thinking of the same thing?'

'I suppose we are. Good-morning.'

She nodded gravely and passed on, gathering up her black skirt a little, for there had been a shower. He stood still a moment before the shop window and looked after her, gravely admiring her figure and her walk, as he might have admired a very valuable thoroughbred. She was wearing mourning for her husband, not because any one would have blamed her if she had not done so, considering how he had treated her, but out of natural self-respect.

Griggs also looked after her as she went away because he felt that she was not quite pleased with

him for having suggested that he and she had both been thinking of the same thing.

The thought concerned a third person, and one who rarely allowed himself to be overlooked; no less a man, in fact, than Mr. Rufus Van Torp, the American potentate of the great Nickel Trust, who was Lady Maud's most intimate friend, and who had long desired to make the Primadonna his wife. He had bought a place adjoining Lord Creedmore's, and there had lately been a good deal of quite groundless gossip about him and Lady Maud, which had very nearly become a scandal. The truth was that they were the best friends in the world, and nothing more; the millionaire had for some time been interested in an unusual sort of charity which almost filled the lonely woman's life, and he had given considerable sums of money to help it. During the months preceding the beginning of this tale, he had also been the object of one of those dastardly attacks to which very rich and important financiers are more exposed than other men, and he had actually been accused of having done away with his partner's daughter, who had come to her end mysteriously during a panic in a New York theatre. But, as I have told elsewhere, his innocence had been proved in the clearest possible manner, and he had returned to the United States to look after the interests of the Trust.

When Griggs heard the news of Margaret's engagement to Logotheti, he immediately began to wonder how Mr. Van Torp would receive the intelligence; and if it had not already occurred to Lady Maud that the millionaire might make a final effort to rout his rival and marry the Primadonna himself, the old author's observation suggested such a possibility. Van Torp was a man who had fought up to success and fortune with little regard for the obstacles he found in his way; he had worked as a cowboy in his early youth, and was apt to look on his adversaries and rivals in life either as refractory cattle or as dangerous wild beasts; and though he had some of the old-fashioned ranchero's sense of fair-play in a fight, he had much of the reckless daring and ruthless savagery that characterise the fast-disappearing Western desperado.

Logotheti, on the other hand, was in many respects a true Oriental, supremely astute and superlatively calm, but imbued, at heart, with a truly Eastern contempt for any law that chanced to oppose his wish.

Both men had practically inexhaustible resources at their command, and both were determined to marry the Primadonna. It occurred to Paul Griggs that a real struggle between such a pair of adversaries would be worth watching. There was unlimited money on both sides, and equal courage and determination. The Greek was the more cunning of the two, by great odds, and had now the considerable advantage of having been accepted by the lady; but the American was far more regardless of consequences to himself or to others in the pursuit of what he wanted, and, short of committing a crime, would put at least as broad an interpretation on the law. Logotheti had always lived in a highly civilised society, even in Constantinople, for it is the greatest mistake to imagine that the upper classes of Greeks, in Greece or Turkey, are at all deficient in cultivation. Van Torp, on the contrary, had run away from civilisation when a half-educated boy, he had grown to manhood in a community of men who had little respect for anything and feared nothing at all, and he had won success in a field where those who compete for it buy it at any price, from a lie to a life.

Lady Maud was thinking of these things as she disappeared from Griggs's sight, and not at all of him. It might have surprised her to know that his eyes had followed her with sincere admiration, and perhaps she would have been pleased. There is a sort of admiration which acknowledged beauties take for granted, and to which they attach no value unless it is refused them; but there is another kind that brings them rare delight when they receive it, for it is always given spontaneously, whether it be the wondering exclamation of a street boy who has never seen anything so beautiful in his life, or a quiet look and a short phrase from an elderly man who has seen what is worth seeing for thirty or forty years, and who has given up making compliments.

The young widow was quite unconscious of Griggs's look and was very busy with her thoughts, for she was a little afraid that she had made trouble. Ten days had passed since she had last written to Rufus Van Torp, and she had told him, amongst other things, that Madame da Cordova and Logotheti were engaged to be married, adding that it seemed to her one of the most ill-assorted matches of the season, and that her friend the singer was sure to be miserable herself and to make her husband perfectly wretched, though he was a very good sort in his way and she liked him. There had been no reason why she should not write the news to Mr. Van Torp, even though it was not public property yet, for he was her intimate friend, and she knew him to be as reticent as all doctors ought to be and as some solicitors' clerks are. She had asked him not to tell any one till he heard of the engagement from some one else.

He had not spoken of it, but something else had happened. He had cabled to Lady Maud that he was coming back to England by the next steamer. He often came out and went back suddenly two or three times at short intervals, and then stayed away for many months, but Lady Maud thought there could not be much doubt as to his reason for coming now. She knew well enough that he had tried to persuade the Primadonna to marry him during the previous winter, and that if his passion for her had not shown itself much of late, this was due to other causes, chiefly to the persecution of which he had rid himself just before he went to America, but to some extent also to the fact that Margaret had not seemed inclined to accept any one else.

Lady Maud, who knew the man better than he knew himself, inwardly compared him to a volcano, quiescent just now, so far as Margaret was concerned, but ready to break out at any moment with unexpected and destructive energy.

Margaret herself, who had known Logotheti for years, and had seen him in his most dangerous moods as well as in his very best moments, would have thought a similar comparison with an elemental force quite as truly descriptive of him, if it had occurred to her. The enterprising Greek had really attempted to carry her off by force on the night of the final rehearsal before her first appearance on the stage, and had only been thwarted because a royal rival had caused him to be locked up, as if by mistake, in order to carry her off himself; in which he also had failed most ridiculously, thanks to the young singer's friend, the celebrated Madame Bonanni. That was a very amusing story. But on another occasion Margaret had found herself shut up with her Oriental adorer in a room from which she could not escape, and he had quite lost his head; and if she had not been the woman she was, she would have fared ill. After that he had behaved more like an ordinary human being, and she had allowed the natural attraction he had for her to draw her gradually to a promise of marriage; and now she talked to Lady Maud about her gown, but she still put off naming a day for the wedding, in spite of Logotheti's growing impatience.

This was the situation when the London season broke up and Mr. Van Torp landed at Southampton from an ocean greyhound that had covered the distance from New York in five days twelve hours and thirty-seven minutes, which will doubtless seem very slow travelling if any one takes the trouble to read this tale twenty years hence, though the passengers were pleased because it was not much under the record time for steamers coming east.

Five hours after he landed Van Torp entered Lady Maud's drawing-room in the little house in Charles Street, Berkeley Square, where she had lived with the departed Leven from the time when he had been attached to the Russian Embassy till he had last gone away. She was giving it up now, and it was already half dismantled. It was to see Van Torp that she was in town in the middle of August, instead of with her father at Craythew or with friends in Scotland.

London was as hot as it could be, which means that a New Yorker would have found it chilly and an Italian delightfully cool; but the Londoners were sweltering when Van Torp arrived, and were talking of the oppressive atmosphere and the smell of the pavement, not at all realising how blessed they were.

The American entered and stood still a moment to have a good look at Lady Maud. He was a middle-sized, rather thick-set man, with rude hands, sandy hair, an over-developed jaw, and sharp blue eyes, that sometimes fixed themselves in a disagreeable way when he was speaking—eyes that had looked into the barrel of another man's revolver once or twice without wavering, hands that had caught and saddled and bridled many an unriden colt in the plains, a mouth like a carpet-bag when it opened, like a closed vice when it was shut. He was not a handsome man, Mr. Rufus Van Torp, nor one with whom any one short of a prize-fighter would meddle, nor one to haunt the dreams of sweet sixteen. It was not for his face that Lady Maud, good and beautiful, liked him better than any one in the world, except her own father, and believed in him and trusted him, and it was assuredly not for his money. The beggar did not live who would dare to ask him for a penny after one look at his face, and there were not many men on either side of the Atlantic who would have looked forward to any sort of contest with him without grave misgivings.

'Well,' he said, advancing the last step after that momentary pause, and taking the white hand in both his own, 'how have you been? Fair to middling? About that? Well—I'm glad to see you, gladder than a sitting hen at sunrise!'

Lady Maud laid her left hand affectionately on the man's right, which was uppermost on hers, and her voice rippled with happiness.

'If you had only said a lark instead of a hen, Rufus!' she laughed.

'We could get along a great sight better without larks than without hens,' answered her friend philosophically. 'But I'll make it a nightingale next time, if I can remember, or a bald eagle, or any bird that strikes you as cheerful.'

The terrible mouth had relaxed almost to gentleness, and the fierce blue eyes were suddenly kind as they looked into the woman's face. She led him to an old-fashioned sofa, their hands parted, and they sat down side by side.

'Cheerful,' he said, in a tone of reflection. 'Yes, I'm feeling pretty cheerful, and it's all over and settled.'

'Do you mean the trouble you were in last spring?'

'N—no—not that, though it wasn't as funny as a Sunday School treat while it lasted, and I was thankful when it was through. It's another matter altogether that I'm cheerful about—besides seeing you, my dear. I've done it, Maud. I've done it at last.'

'What?'

'I've sold my interest in the Trust. It won't be made known for some time, so don't talk about it, please. But it's settled and done, and I've got the money.'

'You have sold the Nickel Trust?'

Lady Maud's lips remained parted in surprise.

'And I've bought you a little present with the proceeds,' he answered, putting his large thumb and finger into the pocket of his white waistcoat. 'It's only a funny little bit of glass I picked up,' he

continued, producing a small twist of stiff writing-paper. 'You needn't think it's so very fine! But it's a pretty colour, and when you're out of mourning I daresay you'll make a hat-pin of it. I like handsome hat-pins myself, you know.'

He had untwisted the paper while speaking, it lay open in the palm of his hand, and Lady Maud saw a stone of the size of an ordinary hazel-nut, very perfectly cut, and of that wonderful transparent red colour which is known as 'pigeon's blood,' and which it is almost impossible to describe. Sunlight shining through Persian rose-leaf sherbet upon white silk makes a little patch of colour that is perhaps more like it than any other shade of red, but not many Europeans have ever seen that, and it is a good deal easier to go and look at a pigeon's blood ruby in a jeweller's window.

'What a beautiful colour!' exclaimed Lady Maud innocently, after a moment. 'I didn't know they imitated rubies so well, though, of course, I know nothing about it. If it were not an impossibility, I should take it for a real one.'

'So should I,' assented Mr. Van Torp quietly. 'It'll make a pretty hat-pin anyway. Shall I have it mounted for you?'

'Thanks, awfully, but I think I should like to keep it as it is for a little while. It's such a lovely colour, just as it is. Thank you so much! Do tell me where you got it.'

'Oh, well, there was a sort of a traveller came to New York the other day selling them what they call privately. I guess he must be a Russian or something, for he has a kind of an off-look of your husband, only he wears a beard and an eyeglass. It must be about the eyes. Maybe the forehead too. He'll most likely turn up in London one of these days to sell this invention, or whatever it is.'

Lady Maud said nothing to this, but she took the stone from his hand, looked at it some time with evident admiration, and then set it down on its bit of paper, upon a little table by the end of the sofa.

'If I were you, I wouldn't leave it around much,' observed Mr. Van Torp carelessly. 'Somebody might take a fancy to it. The colour's attractive, you see, and it looks like real.'

'Oh, I'll be very careful of it, never fear! I can't tell you how much I like it!' She twisted it up tightly in its bit of paper, rose to her feet, and put it away in her writing-table.

'It'll be a sort of souvenir of the old Nickel Trust,' said her friend, watching her with satisfaction.

'Have you really sold out all your interest in it?' she asked, sitting down again; and now that she returned to the question her tone showed that she had not yet recovered from her astonishment.

'That's what I've done. I always told you I would, when I was ready. Why do you look so surprised? Would you rather I hadn't?'

Lady Maud shook her head and her voice rippled deliciously as she answered.

'I can hardly imagine you without the Nickel Trust, that's all! What in the world shall you do with yourself?'

'Oh, various kinds of things. I think I'll get married, for one. Then I'll take a rest and sort of look around. Maybe something will turn up. I've concluded to win the Derby next year—that's something anyway.'

'Rather! Have you thought of anything else?'

She laughed a little, but was grave the next moment, for she knew him much too well to believe that he had taken such a step out of caprice, or a mere fancy for change; his announcement that he meant to marry agreed too well with what she herself had suddenly foreseen when she had parted with Griggs in Bond Street a few days earlier. If Margaret had not at last made up her mind to accept Logotheti—supposing that her decision was really final—Rufus Van Torp would not suddenly have felt sure that he himself must marry her if she married at all. His English friend could not have put into words what she felt had taken place in his heart, but she understood him as no one else could, and was certain that he had reached one of the great cross-roads of his life.

A woman who has been married for years to such a man as Leven, and who tries to do good to those fallen and cast-out ones who laugh and cry and suffer out their lives, and are found dead behind the Virtue-Curtain, is not ignorant of the human animal's instincts and ways, and Lady Maud was not at all inclined to believe her friend a Galahad. In the clean kingdom of her dreams men could be chaste, and grown women could be as sweetly ignorant of harm as little children; but when she opened her eyes and looked about her she saw, and she understood, and did not shiver with delicate disgust, nor turn away with prim disapproval, nor fancy that she would like to be a mediæval nun and induce the beatific state by merciless mortification of the body. She knew very well what the Virtue-Curtain was trying to hide; she lifted it quietly, went behind it without fear, and did all she could to help the unhappy ones she found there. She did not believe in other people's theories at all, and had none herself; she did not even put much faith in all the modern scientific talk about vicious inheritance and degeneration; much more than half of the dwellers behind the scenes had been lured there in ignorance, a good many had been dragged there by force, a very considerable number had been deliberately sold into slavery, and nine out of ten of them stayed there because no one really tried to get them out. Perhaps no one who did

try was rich enough; for it is not to be expected that every human sinner should learn in a day to prefer starving virtue to well-fed vice, or, as Van Torp facetiously expressed it, a large capital locked up in heavenly stocks to a handsome income accruing from the bonds of sin. If Lady Maud succeeded, as she sometimes did, the good done was partly due to the means he gave her for doing it.

'Come and be bad and you shall have a good time while you are young,' the devil had said, assuming the appearance, dress, and manner of fashion, without any particular regard for age.

'Give it up and I'll make you so comfortable that you'll really like not being bad,' said Lady Maud, and the invitation was sometimes accepted.

Evidently, a woman who occupied herself with this form of charity could not help knowing and hearing a good deal about men which would have surprised and even shocked her social sisters, and she was not in danger of taking Rufus Van Torp for an ascetic in disguise.

On the contrary, she was quite able to understand that the tremendous attraction the handsome singer had for him might be of the most earthly kind, such as she herself would not care to call love, and that, if she was right, it would not be partially dignified by any of that true artistic appreciation which brought Logotheti such rare delight, and disguised a passion not at all more ethereal than Van Torp's might be. In refinement of taste, no comparison was possible between the Western-bred millionaire and the cultivated Greek, who knew every unfamiliar by-way and little hidden treasure of his country's literature and art, besides very much of what other nations had done and written. Yet Lady Maud, influenced, no doubt, by the honest friendship of her American friend, believed that Van Torp would be a better and more faithful husband, even to a primadonna, than his Oriental rival.

Notwithstanding her opinion of him, however, she was not prepared for his next move. He had noticed the grave look that had followed her laughter, and he turned away and was silent for a few moments.

'The Derby's a side show,' he said at last. 'I've come over to get married, and I want you to help me. Will you?'

'Can I?' asked Lady Maud, evasively.

'Yes, you can, and I believe there'll be trouble unless you do.'

'Who is she? Do I know her?' She was trying to put off the evil moment.

'Oh, yes, you know her quite well. It's Madame Cordova.'

'But she's engaged to Monsieur Logotheti——'

'I don't care. I mean to marry her if she marries any one. He shan't have her anyway.'

'But I cannot deliberately help you to break off her engagement! It's impossible!'

'See here,' answered Mr. Van Torp. 'You know that Greek, and you know me. Which of us will make the best husband for an English girl? That's what Madame Cordova is, after all. I put it to you. If you were forced to choose one of us yourself, which would you take? That's the way to look at it.'

'But Miss Donne is not "forced" to take one of you——'

'She's going to be. It's the same. Besides, I said "if." Won't you answer me?'

'She's in love with Monsieur Logotheti,' said Lady Maud, rather desperately.

'Is she, now? I wonder. I don't much think so myself. He's clever and he's obstinate, and he's just made her think she's in love, that's all. Anyhow, that's not an answer to my question. Other things being alike, if she had to choose, which of us would be the best husband for her?—the better, I mean. You taught me to say "better," didn't you?'

Lady Maud tried to smile.

'Of two, yes,' she answered. 'You are forcing my hand, my dear friend,' she went on very gravely. 'You know very well that I trust you with all my heart. If it were possible to imagine a case in which the safety of the world could depend on my choosing one of you for my husband, you know very well that I should take you, though I never was the least little bit in love with you, any more than you ever were with me.'

'Well, but if you would, she ought,' argued Mr. Van Torp. 'It's for her own good, and as you're a friend of hers, you ought to help her to do what's good for her. That's only fair. If she doesn't marry me, she's certain to marry that Greek, so it's a forced choice, it appears to me.'

'But I can't——'

'She's a nice girl, isn't she?'

'Yes, very.'

'And you like her, don't you?'

'Very much. Her father was my father's best friend.'

'I don't believe in atavism,' observed the American, 'but that's neither here nor there. You know what you wrote me. Do you believe she'll be miserable with Logotheti or not?'

'I think she will,' Lady Maud answered truthfully. 'But I may be wrong.'

'No; you're right. I know it. But marriage is a gamble anyway, as you know better than any one. Are you equally sure that she would be miserable with me? Dead sure, I mean.'

'No, I'm not sure. But that's not a reason——'

'It's a first-rate reason. I care for that lady, and I want her to be happy, and as you admit that she will have a better chance of happiness with me than with Logotheti, I'm going to marry her myself, not only because I want to, but because it will be a long sight better for her. See? No fault in that line of reasoning, is there?'

'So far as reasoning goes——' Lady Maud's tone was half an admission.

'That's all I wanted you to say,' interrupted the American. 'So that's settled, and you're going to help me.'

'No,' answered Lady Maud quietly; 'I won't help you to break off that engagement. But if it should come to nothing, without your interfering—that is, by the girl's own free will and choice and change of mind, I'd help you to marry her if I could.'

'But you admit that she's going to be miserable,' said Van Torp stubbornly.

'I'm sorry for her, but it's none of my business. It's not honourable to try and make trouble between engaged people, no matter how ill-matched they may be.'

'Funny idea of honour,' observed the American, 'that you're bound to let a friend of yours break her neck at the very gravel pit where you were nearly smashed yourself! In the hunting field you'd grab her bridle if she wouldn't listen to you, but in a matter of marriage—oh, no! "It's dishonourable to interfere," "She's made her choice and she must abide by it," and all that kind of stuff!'

Lady Maud's clear eyes met his angry blue ones calmly.

'I don't like you when you say such things,' she said, lowering her voice a little.

'I didn't mean to be rude,' answered the millionaire, almost humbly. 'You see I don't always know. I learnt things differently from what you did. I suppose you'd think it an insult if I said I'd give a large sum of money to your charity the day I married Madame Cordova, if you'd help me through.'



''Funny idea of honour,' observed the American.'

'Please stop.' Lady Maud's face darkened visibly. 'That's not like you.'

'I'll give a million pounds sterling,' said Mr. Van Torp slowly.

Lady Maud leaned back in her corner of the sofa, clasping her hands rather tightly together in her lap. Her white throat flushed as when the light of dawn kisses Parian marble, and the fresh tint in her cheeks deepened softly; her lips were tightly shut, her eyelids quivered a little, and she

looked straight before her across the room.

'You can do a pretty good deal with a million pounds,' said Mr. Van Torp, after the silence had lasted nearly half a minute.

'Don't!' cried Lady Maud, in an odd voice.

'Forty thousand pounds a year,' observed the millionaire thoughtfully. 'You could do quite a great deal of good with that, couldn't you?'

'Don't! Please don't!'

She pressed her hands to her ears and rose at the same instant. Perhaps it was she, after all, and not her friend who had been brought suddenly to a great cross-road in life. She stood still one moment by the sofa without looking down at her companion; then she left the room abruptly, and shut the door behind her.

Van Torp got up from his seat slowly when she was gone, and went to the window, softly blowing a queer tune between his closed teeth and his open lips, without quite whistling.

'Well——' he said aloud, in a tone of doubt, after a minute or two.

But he said no more, for he was much too reticent and sensible a person to talk to himself audibly even when he was alone, and much too cautious to be sure that a servant might not be within hearing, though the door was shut. He stood before the window nearly a quarter of an hour, thinking that Lady Maud might come back, but as no sound of any step broke the silence he understood that he was not to see her again that day, and he quietly let himself out of the house and went off, not altogether discontented with the extraordinary impression he had made.

Lady Maud sat alone upstairs, so absorbed in her thoughts that she did not hear the click of the lock as he opened and shut the front door.

She was much more amazed at herself than surprised by the offer he had made. Temptation, in any reasonable sense of the word, had passed by her in life, and she had never before understood what it could mean to her. Indeed, she had thought of herself very little of late, and had never had the least taste for self-examination or the analysis of her conscience. She had done much good, because she wanted to do it, and not at all as a duty, or with that idea of surprising the Deity by the amount of her good works, which actuates many excellent persons. As for doing anything seriously wrong, she had never wanted to, and it had not even occurred to her that the opportunity for a wicked deed could ever present itself to her together with the slightest desire to do it. Her labours had taken her to strange places, and she knew what real sin was, and even crime, and the most hideous vice, and its still more awful consequences; but one reason why she had wrought fearlessly was that she felt herself naturally invulnerable. She knew a good many people in her own set whom she thought quite as bad as the worst she had ever picked up on the dark side of the Virtue-Curtain; they were people who seemed to have no moral sense, men who betrayed their wives wantonly, young women who took money for themselves and old ones who cheated at bridge, men who would deliberately ruin a rival in politics, in finance, or in love, and ambitious women who had driven their competitors to despair and destruction by a scientific use of calumny. But she had never felt any inclination towards any of those things, which all seemed to her disgusting, or cowardly, or otherwise abominable. Her husband had gone astray after strange gods—and goddesses—but she had never wished to be revenged on them, or him, nor to say what was not true about any one, nor even what was true and could hurt, nor to win a few sovereigns at cards otherwise than fairly, nor to wish anybody dead who had a right to live.

She was eight-and-twenty years of age and a widow, when temptation came to her suddenly in a shape of tremendous strength, through her trusted friend, who had helped her for years to help others. It was real temptation. The man who offered her a million pounds to save miserable wretches from a life of unspeakable horror, could offer her twice as much, four, five, or ten millions perhaps. No one knew the vast extent of his wealth, and in an age of colossal fortunes she had often heard his spoken of with the half-dozen greatest.

The worst of it was that she felt able to do what he asked; for she was inwardly convinced that the great singer did not know her own mind and was not profoundly attached to the man she had accepted. Of the two women, Margaret was by far the weaker character; or, to be just, the whole strength of her nature had long been concentrated in the struggle for artistic supremacy, and could not easily be brought to exert itself in other directions. Lady Maud's influence over her was great, and Logotheti's had never been very strong. She was taken by his vitality, his daring, his constancy, or obstinacy, and a little by his good looks, as a mere girl might be, because the theatre had made looks seem so important to her. But apart from his handsome face, Logotheti was no match for Van Torp. Of that Lady Maud was sure. Besides, the Primadonna's antipathy for the American had greatly diminished of late, and had perhaps altogether given place to a friendly feeling. She had said openly that she had misjudged him, because he had pestered her with his attentions in New York, and that she even liked him since he had shown more tact. Uncouth as he was in some ways, Lady Maud knew that she herself might care for him more than as a friend, if her heart were not buried for ever in a soldier's grave on the Veldt.

That was the worst of it. She felt that it was probably not beyond her power to bring about what Van Torp desired, at least so far as to induce Margaret to break off the engagement which now blocked his way. Under cover of roughness, too, he had argued with a subtlety that frightened

her now that she was alone; and with a consummate knowledge of her nature he had offered her the only sort of bribe that could possibly tempt her, the means to make permanent the good work she had already carried so far.

He had placed her in such a dilemma as she had never dreamed of. To accept such an offer as he made, would mean that she must do something which she felt was dishonourable, if she gave 'honour' the meaning an honest gentleman attaches to it, and that was the one she had learned from her father, and which a good many women seem unable to understand. To refuse, was to deprive hundreds of wretched and suffering creatures of the only means of obtaining a hold on a decent existence which Lady Maud had ever found to be at all efficacious. She knew that she had not done much, compared with what was undone; it looked almost nothing. But where law-making had failed altogether, where religion was struggling bravely but almost in vain, where enlightened philanthropy found itself paralysed and bankrupt, she had accomplished something by merely using a little money in the right way.

'You can do quite a great deal of good with forty thousand pounds a year.'

Van Torp's rough-hewn speech rang through her head, and somehow its reckless grammar gave it strength and made it stick in her memory, word for word. In the drawer of the writing-table before which she was sitting there was a little file of letters that meant more to her than anything else in the world, except one dear memory. They were all from women, they all told much the same little story, and it was good to read. She had made many failures, and some terrible ones, which she could never forget; but there were real successes, too, there were over a dozen of them now, and she had only been at work for three years. If she had more money, she could do more; if she had much, she could do much; and she knew of one or two women who could help her. What might she not accomplish in a lifetime with the vast sum her friend offered her!—the price of hindering a marriage that was almost sure to turn out badly, perhaps as badly as her own!—the money value of a compromise with her conscience on a point of honour which many women would have thought very vague indeed, if not quite absurd in such a case. She knew what temptation meant, now, and she was to know even better before long. The Primadonna had said that she was going to marry Logotheti chiefly because he insisted on it.

The duel for Margaret's hand had begun; Van Torp had aimed a blow that might well give him the advantage if it went home; and Logotheti himself was quite unaware of the skilful attack that threatened his happiness.

CHAPTER III

A few days after she had talked with Lady Maud, and before Mr. Van Torp's arrival, Margaret had gone abroad, without waiting for the promised advice in the matter of the wedding-gown. With admirable regard for the proprieties she had quite declined to let Logotheti cross the Channel with her, but had promised to see him at Versailles, where she was going to stop a few days with her mother's old American friend, the excellent Mrs. Rushmore, with whom she meant to go to Bayreuth to hear *Parsifal* for the first time.

Mrs. Rushmore had disapproved profoundly of Margaret's career, from the first. After Mrs. Donne's death, she had taken the forlorn girl under her protection, and had encouraged her to go on with what she vaguely called her 'music lessons.' The good lady was one of those dear, old-fashioned, kind, delicate-minded and golden-hearted American women we may never see again, now that 'progress' has got civilisation by the throat and is squeezing the life out of it. She called Margaret her 'chickabiddy' and spread a motherly wing over her, without the least idea that she was rearing a valuable lyric nightingale that would not long be content to trill and quaver unheard.

Immense and deserved success had half reconciled the old lady to what had happened, and after all Margaret had not married an Italian tenor, a Russian prince, or a Parisian composer, the three shapes of man which seemed the most dreadfully immoral to Mrs. Rushmore. She would find it easier to put up with Logotheti than with one of those, though it was bad enough to think of her old friend's daughter marrying a Greek instead of a nice, clean Anglo-Saxon, like the learned Mr. Donne, the girl's father, or the good Mr. Rushmore, her lamented husband, who had been an upright pillar of the church in New York, and the president of a Trust Company that could be trusted.

After all, though she thought all Greeks must be what she called 'designing,' the name of Konstantin Logotheti was associated with everything that was most honourable in the financial world, and this impressed Mrs. Rushmore very much. Her harmless weakness had always been for lions, and none but the most genuine ones were allowed to roar at her garden-parties or at her dinner table. When the Greek financier had first got himself introduced to her more than two years earlier, she had made the most careful inquiries about him and had diligently searched the newspapers for every mention of him during a whole month. The very first paragraph she had found was about a new railway which he had taken under his protection, and the writer said that his name was a guarantee of good faith. This impressed her favourably, though the journalist might have had reasons for making precisely the same statement if he had known Logotheti to be a fraudulent promoter. One of the maxims she had learned in her youth, which had been passed in the Golden Age of old New York, was that 'business was a test of character.' Mr. Rushmore used to say that, so it must be true, she thought; and indeed the excellent man might have said

with equal wisdom that long-continued rain generally produces dampness. He would have turned in his well-kept grave if he could have heard a Wall Street cynic say that nowadays an honest man may get a bare living, and a drunkard has been known to get rich, but that integrity and whisky together will inevitably land anybody in the workhouse.

Logotheti was undoubtedly considered honest, however, and Mrs. Rushmore made quite sure of it, as well as of the fact that he had an immense fortune. So far as the cynic's observation goes, it may not be equally applicable everywhere, any more than it is true that all Greeks are blacklegs, as the Parisians are fond of saying, or that all Parisians are much worse, as their own novelists try to make out. If anything is more worthless than most men's opinion of themselves, it is their opinion of others, and it is unfortunately certain that the people who understand human nature best, and lead it whither they will, are not those that labour to save souls or to cure sickness, but demagogues, quacks, fashionable dressmakers, and money-lenders. Mrs. Rushmore was a judge of lions, but she knew nothing about humanity.

At Versailles, with its memories of her earlier youth, the Primadonna wished to be Margaret Donne again, and to forget for the time that she was the Cordova, whose name was always first on the opera posters in New York, London, and Vienna; who covered her face with grease-paint two or three times a week; who loved the indescribable mixed smell of boards, glue, scenery, Manila ropes and cotton-velvet-clad chorus, behind the scenes; who lived on applause, was made miserable now and then by a criticism which any other singer would have thought flattery, and who was, in fact, an extraordinary compound of genius and simplicity, generosity and tetchiness, tremendous energy in one direction and intellectual torpidity and total indifference in all others. If she could have gone directly from Covent Garden to another engagement, the other self would not have waked up just then; but she meant to take a long holiday, and in order not to miss the stage too much, it was indispensable to forget it for a while.

She travelled incognito. That is to say, she had sent her first maid and theatrical dresser Alphonsine to see her relations in Nancy for a month, and only brought the other with her; she had, moreover, caused the stateroom on the Channel boat to be taken in the name of Miss Donne, and she brought no more luggage to Versailles than could be piled on an ordinary cart, whereas when she had last come from New York her servants had seen eighty-seven pieces put on board the steamer, and a hat-box had been missing after all.

Mrs. Rushmore came out to meet her on the steps in the hot sunshine, portly and kind as ever, and she applied an embrace which was affectionate, yet imposing.

'My dearest child!' she cried. 'I was sure I had not quite lost you yet!'

'I hope you will never think you have,' Margaret answered, almost quite in her girlish voice of old.

She was very glad to come back. As soon as they were alone in the cool drawing-room, Mrs. Rushmore asked her about her engagement in a tone of profound concern, as though it were a grave bodily ailment which might turn out to be fatal.

'Don't take it so seriously,' Margaret answered with a little laugh; 'I'm not married yet!'

The elderly face brightened.

'Do you mean to say that—that there is any hope?' she asked eagerly.

Margaret laughed now, but in a gentle and affectionate sort of way.

'Perhaps, just a little! But don't ask me, please. I've come home—this is always home for me, isn't it?—I've come home to forget everything for a few weeks.'

'Thank heaven!' ejaculated Mrs. Rushmore in a tone of deep relief. 'Then if—if he should call this afternoon, or even to-morrow—may I tell them to say that you are out?'

She was losing no time; and Margaret laughed again, though she put her head a little on one side with an expression of doubt.

'I can't refuse to see him,' she said, 'though really I would much rather be alone with you for a day or two.'

'My darling child!' cried Mrs. Rushmore, applying another embrace, 'you shall! Leave it to me!'

Mrs. Rushmore's delight was touching, for she could almost feel that Margaret had come to see her quite for her own sake, whereas she had pictured the 'child,' as she still called the great artist, spending most of her time in carrying on inaudible conversations with Logotheti under the trees in the lawn, or in the most remote corners of the drawing-room; for that had been the accepted method of courtship in Mrs. Rushmore's young days, and she was quite ignorant of the changes that had taken place since then.

Half-an-hour later, Margaret was in her old room upstairs writing a letter, and Mrs. Rushmore had given strict orders that until further notice Miss Donne was 'not at home' for any one at all, no matter who might call.

When the letter already covered ten pages, Margaret laid down her pen and without the least pause or hesitation tore the sheets to tiny bits, inking her fingers in the process because the last one was not yet dry.

'What a wicked woman I am!' she exclaimed aloud, to the very great surprise of Potts, her English maid, who was still unpacking in the next room, the door being open.

'Beg pardon, ma'am?' the woman asked, putting in her head.

'I said I was a wicked woman,' Margaret answered, rising; 'and what's more, I believe I am. But I quite forgot you were there, Potts, or I probably should not have said it aloud.'

'Yes, ma'am,' answered Potts meekly, and she went back to her unpacking.

Margaret had two maids, who were oddly suited to her two natures. She had inherited Alphonsine from her friend the famous retired soprano, Madame Bonanni, and the cadaverous, clever, ill-tempered, garrulous dresser was as necessary to Cordova's theatrical existence as paint, limelight, wigs, and an orchestra. The English Potts, the meek, silent, busy, and intensely respectable maid, continually made it clear that her mistress was Miss Donne, an English lady, and that Madame Cordova, the celebrated singer, was what Mr. Van Torp would have called 'only a side-show.'

Potts was quite as much surprised when she heard Miss Donne calling herself a wicked woman as Alphonsine would have been if she had heard Madame Cordova say that she sang completely out of tune, a statement which would not have disturbed the English maid's equanimity in the very least. It might have pleased her, for she always secretly hoped that Margaret would give up the stage, marry an English gentleman with a nice name, and live in Hans Crescent or Cadogan Gardens, or some equally smart place, and send Alphonsine about her business for ever.

For the English maid and the French maid hated each other as whole-heartedly as if Cressy or Agincourt had been fought yesterday. Potts alluded to Alphonsine as 'that Frenchwoman,' and Alphonsine spoke of Potts as 'l'Anglaise,' with a tone and look of withering scorn, as if all English were nothing better than animals. Also she disdained to understand a word of their 'abominable jargon'; and Potts quietly called the French language 'frog-talk,' but spoke it quite intelligibly, though without the least attempt at an accent. Nevertheless, each of the two was devoted to Margaret, and they were both such excellent servants that they never quarrelled or even exchanged a rude word—to Margaret's knowledge. They treated each other with almost exaggerated politeness, calling each other respectively 'Meess' and 'Mamzell'; and if Alphonsine's black eyes glared at Potts now and then, the English maid put on such an air of sweetly serene unconsciousness as a woman of the world might have envied.

The letter that had been torn up before it was finished was to have gone to Lady Maud, but Margaret herself had been almost sure that she would not send it, even while she was writing. She had poured out her heart, now that she could do so with the consoling possibility of destroying the confession before any one read it. She had made an honest effort to get at the truth about herself by writing down all she knew to be quite true, as if it were to go to her best friend; but as soon as she realised that she had got to the end of her positive knowledge and was writing fiction—which is what might be true, but is not known to be—she had the weakness to tear up her letter, and to call herself names for not knowing her own mind, as if every woman did, or every man either.

She had written that she had done very wrong in engaging herself to Logotheti; that was the 'wickedness' she accused herself of, repeating the self-accusation to her astonished maid, because it was a sort of relief to say the words to somebody. She had written that she did not really care for him in that way; that when he was near she could not resist a sort of natural attraction he had for her, but that as soon as he was gone she felt it no longer and she wished he would not come back; that his presence disturbed her and made her uncomfortable, and, moreover, interfered with her art; but that she had not the courage to tell him so, and wished that some one else would do it for her; that he was not really the sort of man she could ever be happy with; that her ideal of a husband was so and so, and this and that—and here fiction had begun, and she had put a stop to it by destroying the whole letter instead of crossing out a few lines,—which was a pity; for if Lady Maud had received it, she would have told Mr. Van Torp that he needed no help from her since Margaret herself asked no better than to be freed from the engagement.

Logotheti did not come out to Versailles that afternoon, because he was plentifully endowed with tact where women were concerned, and he applied all the knowledge and skill he had to the single purpose of pleasing Margaret. But before dinner he telephoned and asked to speak with her, and this she could not possibly refuse. Besides, the day had seemed long, and though she did not wish for his presence she wanted something—that indescribable, mysterious something which disturbed her and made her feel uncomfortable when she felt it, but which she missed when she did not see him for a day or two.

'How are you?' asked his voice, and he ran on without waiting for an answer. 'I hope you are not very tired after crossing yesterday. I came by Boulogne—decent of me, wasn't it? You must be sick of seeing me all the time, so I shall give you a rest for a day or two. Telephone whenever you think you can bear the sight of me again, and I'll be with you in thirty-five minutes. I shall not stir from home in this baking weather. If you think I'm in mischief you're quite mistaken, dear lady, for I'm up to my chin in work!'

'I envy you,' Margaret said, when he paused at last. 'I've nothing on earth to do, and the piano here is out of tune. But you're quite right, I don't want to see you a little bit, and I'm not jealous, nor suspicious, nor anything disagreeable. So there!'

'How nice of you!'

'I'm very nice,' Margaret answered with laughing emphasis. 'I know it. What sort of work are you doing? It's only idle curiosity, so don't tell me if you would rather not! Have you got a new railway in Brazil, or an overland route to the other side of beyond?'

'Nothing so easy! I'm brushing up my Tartar.'

'Brushing up what? I didn't hear.'

'Tartar—the Tartar language—T-a-r—'he began to spell the word.

'Yes, I hear now,' interrupted Margaret. 'But what in the world is the use of knowing it? You must be awfully hard up for something to do!'

'You can be understood from Constantinople to the Pacific Ocean if you can speak Tartar,' Logotheti answered in a matter-of-fact tone.

'I daresay! But you're not going to travel from Constantinople to the Pacific Ocean——'

'I might. One never can tell what one may like to do.'

'Oh, if it's because Tartar is useful "against the bites of sharks,"' answered Margaret, quoting Alice, 'learn it by all means!'

'Besides, there are all sorts of people in Paris. I'm sure there must be some Tartars. I might meet one, and it would be amusing to be able to talk to him.'

'Nonsense! Why should you ever meet a Tartar? How absurd you are!'

'There's one with me now—close beside me, at my elbow.'

'Don't be silly, or I'll ring off.'

'If you don't believe me, listen!'

He said something in a language Margaret did not understand, and another voice answered him at once in the same tongue. Margaret started slightly and bent her brows with a puzzled and displeased look.

'Is that your teacher?' she asked with more interest in her tone than she had yet betrayed.

'Yes.'

'I begin to understand. Do you mind telling me how old she is?'

'It's not "she," it's a young man. I don't know how old he is. I'll ask him if you like.'

Again she heard him speak a few incomprehensible words, which were answered very briefly in the same tongue.

'He tells me he is twenty,' Logotheti said. 'He's a good-looking young fellow. How is Mrs. Rushmore? I forgot to ask.'

'She's quite well, thank you. But I should like to know——'

'Will you be so very kind as to remember me to her, and to say that I hope to find her at home the day after to-morrow?'

'Certainly. Come to-morrow if you like. But please tell me how you happened to pick up that young Tartar. It sounds so interesting! He has such a sweet voice.'

There was no reply to this question, and Margaret could not get another word from Logotheti. The communication was apparently cut off. She rang up the Central Office and asked for his number again, but the young woman soon said that she could get no answer to the call, and that something was probably wrong with the instrument of Number One-hundred-and-six-thirty-seven.

Margaret was not pleased, and she was silent and absent-minded at dinner and in the evening.

'It's the reaction after London,' she said with a smile, when Mrs. Rushmore asked if anything was the matter. 'I find I am more tired than I knew, now that it's all over.'

Mrs. Rushmore was quite of the same opinion, and it was still early when she declared that she herself was sleepy and that Margaret had much better go to bed and get a good night's rest.

But when the Primadonna was sitting before the glass and her maid was brushing out her soft brown hair, she was not at all drowsy, and though her eyes looked steadily at their own reflection in the mirror, she was not aware that she saw anything.

'Potts,' she said suddenly, and stopped.

'Yes, ma'am?' answered the maid with meek interrogation, and without checking the regular movement of the big brush.

But Margaret said no more for several moments. She enjoyed the sensation of having her hair brushed; it made her understand exactly how a cat feels when some one strokes its back steadily,

and she could almost have purred with pleasure as she held her handsome head back and moved it a little in real enjoyment under each soft stroke.

'Potts,' she began again at last, 'you are not very imaginative, are you?'

'No, ma'am,' the maid answered, because it seemed to be expected of her, though she had never thought of the matter.

'Do you think you could possibly be mistaken about a voice, if you didn't see the person who was speaking?'

'In what way, ma'am?'

'I mean, do you think you could take a man's voice for a woman's at a distance?'

'Oh, I see!' Potts exclaimed. 'As it might be, at the telephone?'

'Well—at the telephone, if you like, or anywhere else. Do you think you might?'

'It would depend on the voice, ma'am,' observed Potts, with caution.

'Of course it would,' assented Margaret rather impatiently.

'Well, ma'am, I'll say this, since you ask me. When I was last at home I was mistaken in that way about my own brother, for I heard him calling to me from downstairs, and I took him for my sister Milly.'

'Oh! That's interesting!' Margaret smiled. 'What sort of voice has your brother? How old is he?'

'He's eight-and-twenty, ma'am; and as for his voice, he has a sweet counter-tenor, and sings nicely. He's a song-man at the cathedral, ma'am.'

'Really! How nice! Have you a voice too? Do you sing at all?'

'Oh, no, ma'am!' answered Potts in a deprecating tone. 'One in the family is quite enough!'

Margaret vaguely wondered why, but did not inquire.

'You were quite sure that it was your brother who was speaking, I suppose,' she said.

'Oh, yes, ma'am! I looked down over the banisters, and there he was!'

Margaret had the solid health of a great singer, and it would have been a serious trouble indeed that could have interfered with her unbroken and dreamless sleep during at least eight hours; but when she closed her eyes that night she was quite sure that she could not have slept at all but for Potts's comforting little story about the brother with the 'counter-tenor' voice. Yet even so, at the moment before waking in the morning, she dreamt that she was at the telephone again, and that words in a strange language came to her along the wire in a soft and caressing tone that could only be a woman's, and that for the first time in all her life she knew what it was to be jealous. The sensation was not an agreeable one.

The dream-voice was silent as soon as she opened her eyes, but she had not been awake long without realising that she wished very much to see Logotheti at once, and was profoundly thankful that she had torn up her letter to Lady Maud. She was not prepared to admit, even now, that Konstantin was the ideal she should have chosen for a husband, and whom she had been describing from imagination when she had suddenly stopped writing. But, on the other hand, the mere thought that he had perhaps been amusing himself in the society of another woman all yesterday afternoon made her so angry that she took refuge in trying to believe that he had spoken the truth and that she had really been mistaken about the voice.

It was all very well to talk about learning Tartar! How could she be sure that it was not modern Greek, or Turkish? She could not have known the difference. Was it so very unlikely that some charming compatriot of his should have come from Constantinople to spend a few weeks in Paris? She remembered the mysterious house in the Boulevard Péreire where he lived, the beautiful upper hall where the statue of Aphrodite stood, the doors that would not open like other doors, the strangely-disturbing encaustic painting of Cleopatra in the drawing-room—many things which she distrusted.

Besides, supposing that the language was really Tartar—were there not Russians who spoke it? She thought there must be, because she had a vague idea that all Russians were more or less Tartars. There was a proverb about it. Moreover, to the English as well as to the French, Russians represent romance and wickedness.

She would not go to the telephone herself, but she sent a message to Logotheti, and he came out in the cool time of the afternoon. She thought he had never looked so handsome and so little exotic since she had known him. To please her he had altogether given up the terrific ties, the lightning-struck waistcoats, the sunrise socks, and the overpowering jewellery he had formerly affected, and had resigned himself to the dictation of a London tailor, who told him what he might, could, should, and must wear for each circumstance and hour of daily life, in fine gradations, from deer-stalking to a royal garden-party. The tailor, who dressed kings and made a specialty of emperors, was a man of taste, and when he had worked on the Greek financier for a few weeks the result was satisfactory; excepting for his almond-shaped eyes no one could have told Logotheti from an Englishman by his appearance, a fact which even Potts, who disapproved

of Margaret's choice, was obliged to admit.

Mrs. Rushmore was amazed and pleased.

'My dear,' she said afterwards to Margaret, 'what a perfectly wonderful change! Think how he used to look! And now you might almost take him for an American gentleman!'

He was received by Mrs. Rushmore and Margaret together, and he took noticeable pains to make himself agreeable to the mistress of the house. At first Margaret was pleased at this; but when she saw that he was doing his best to keep Mrs. Rushmore from leaving the room, as she probably would have done, Margaret did not like it. She was dying to ask him questions about his lessons in Tartar, and especially about his teacher, and she probably meant to cast her inquiries in such a form as would make it preferable to examine him alone rather than before Mrs. Rushmore; but he talked on and on, only pausing an instant for the good lady's expressions of interest or approval. With diabolical knowledge of her weakness he led the conversation to the subject of political and diplomatic lions, and of lions of other varieties, and made plans for bringing some noble specimens to tea with her. She was not a snob; she distrusted foreign princes, marquises, and counts, and could keep her head well in the presence of an English peer; but lions were irresistible, and Logotheti offered her a whole menagerie of them, and described their habits with minuteness, if not with veracity.

He was telling her what a Prime Minister had told an Ambassador about the Pope, when Margaret rose rather abruptly.

'I'm awfully sorry,' she said to Mrs. Rushmore, by way of apology, 'but I really must have a little air. I've not been out of the house all day.'

Mrs. Rushmore understood, and was not hurt, though she was sorry not to hear more. The 'dear child' should go out, by all means. Would Monsieur Logotheti stay to dinner? No? She was sorry. She had forgotten that she had a letter to write in time for the afternoon post. So she went off and left the two together.

Margaret led the way out upon the lawn, and they sat down on garden chairs under a big elm-tree. She said nothing while she settled herself very deliberately, avoiding her companion's eyes till she was quite ready, and then she suddenly looked at him with a sort of blank stare that would have disconcerted any one less superlatively self-possessed than he was. It was most distinctly Madame de Cordova, the offended Primadonna, that spoke at last, and not Miss Margaret Donne, the 'nice English girl.'

'What in the world has got into you?' she inquired in a chilly tone.

He opened his almond-shaped eyes a little wider, with an excellent affectation of astonishment at her words and manner.

'Have I done anything you don't like?' he asked in a tone of anxiety and concern. 'Was I rude to Mrs. Rushmore?'

Margaret looked at him a moment longer, and then turned her head away in silence, as if scorning to answer such a silly question. The look of surprise disappeared from his face, and he became very gloomy and thoughtful but said nothing more. Possibly he had brought about exactly what he wished, and was satisfied to await the inevitable result. It came before long.

'I don't understand you at all,' Margaret said less icily, but with the sad little air of a woman who believes herself misunderstood. 'It was very odd yesterday, at the telephone, you know—very odd indeed. I suppose you didn't realise it. And now, this afternoon, you have evidently been doing your best to keep Mrs. Rushmore from leaving us together. You would still be telling her stories about people if I hadn't obliged you to come out!'

'Yes,' Logotheti asserted with exasperating calm and meekness, 'we should still be there.'

'You did not want to be alone with me, I suppose. There's no other explanation, and it's not a very flattering one, is it?'

'I never flatter you, dear lady,' said Logotheti gravely.

'But you do! How can you deny it? You often tell me that I make you think of the Victory in the Louvre——'

'It's quite true. If the statue had a head it would be a portrait of you.'

'Nonsense! And in your moments of enthusiasm you say that I sing better than Madame Bonanni in her best days——'

'Yes. You know quite as much as she ever did, you are a much better musician, and you began with a better voice. Therefore you sing better. I maintain it.'

'You often maintain things you don't believe,' Margaret retorted, though her manner momentarily relaxed a little.

'Only in matters of business,' answered the Greek with imperturbable calm.

'Pray, is "learning Tartar" a matter of business?' Her eyes sparkled angrily as she asked the question.

Logotheti smiled; she had reached the point to which he knew she must come before long.

'Oh, yes!' he replied with alacrity. 'Of course it is.'

'That accounts for everything, since you are admitting that I need not even try to believe it was a man whom I heard speaking.'

'To tell the truth, I have some suspicions about that myself,' answered Logotheti.

'I have a great many.' Margaret laughed rather harshly. 'And you behave as if you wanted me to have more. Who is this Eastern woman? Come, be frank. She is some one from Constantinople, isn't she? A Fanariote like yourself, I daresay—an old friend who is in Paris for a few days, and would not pass through without seeing you. Say so, for heaven's sake, and don't make such a mystery about it!'

'How very ingenious women are!' observed the Greek. 'If I had thought of it I might have told you that story through the telephone yesterday. But I didn't.'

Margaret was rapidly becoming exasperated, her eyes flashed, her firm young cheeks reddened handsomely, and her generous lips made scornful curves.

'Are you trying to quarrel with me?'

The words had a fierce ring; he glanced at her quickly and saw how well her look agreed with her tone. She was very angry.

'If I were not afraid of boring you,' he said with quiet gravity, 'I would tell you the whole story, but——' he pretended to hesitate.

He heard her harsh little laugh at once.

'Your worst enemy could not accuse you of being a bore!' she retorted. 'Oh, no! It's something quite different from boredom that I feel, I assure you!'

'I wish I thought that you cared for me enough to be jealous,' Logotheti said earnestly.

'Jealous!'

No one can describe the tone of indignant contempt in which a thoroughly jealous woman disclaims the least thought of jealousy with a single word; a man must have heard it to remember what it is like, and most men have. Logotheti knew it well, and at the sound he put on an expression of meek innocence which would have done credit to a cat that had just eaten a canary.

'I'm so sorry,' he cried in a voice like a child's. 'I didn't mean to make you angry, I was only wishing aloud. Please forgive me!'

'If your idea of caring for a woman is to make her jealous——'

This was such an obvious misinterpretation of his words that she stopped short and bit her lip. He sighed audibly, as if he were very sorry that he could do nothing to appease her, but this only made her feel more injured. She made an effort to speak coldly.

'You seem to forget that so long as we are supposed to be engaged I have some little claim to know how you spend your time!'

'I make no secret of what I do. That is why you were angry just now. Nothing could have been easier than for me to say that I was busy with one of the matters you suggested.'

'Oh, of course! Nothing could be easier than to tell me an untruth!'

This certainly looked like the feminine retort-triumphant, and Margaret delivered it in a cutting tone.

'That is precisely what you seem to imply that I did,' Logotheti objected. 'But if what I told you was untrue your argument goes to pieces. There was no Tartar lesson, there was no Tartar teacher, and it was all a fabrication of my own!'

'Just what I think!' returned Margaret. 'It was not Tartar you spoke, and there was no teacher!'

'You have me there,' answered the Greek mildly, 'unless you would like me to produce my young friend and talk to him before you in the presence of witnesses who know his language.'

'I wish you would! I should like to see "him"! I should like to see the colour of "his" eyes and hair!'

'Black as ink,' said Logotheti.

'And you'll tell me that "his" complexion is black too, no doubt!'

'Not at all; a sort of creamy complexion, I think, though I did not pay much attention to his skin. He is a smallish chap, good-looking, with hands and feet like a woman's. I noticed that. As I told you, a doubt occurred to me at once, and I will not positively swear that it is not a girl after all. He, or she, is really a Tartar from Central Asia, and I know enough of the language to say what was necessary.'

'Necessary!'

'Yes. He—or she—came on a matter of business. What I said about a teacher was mere nonsense. Now you know the whole thing.'

'Excepting what the business was,' Margaret said incredulously.

'The business was an uncut stone,' answered Logotheti with indifference. 'He had one to sell, and I bought it. He was recommended to me by a man in Constantinople. He came to Marseilles on a French steamer with two Greek merchants who were coming to Paris, and they brought him to my door. That is the whole story. And here is the ruby. I bought it for you, because you like those things. Will you take it?'

He held out what looked like a little ball of white tissue-paper, but Margaret turned her face from him.

'You treat me like a child!' she said.

To her own great surprise and indignation, her voice was unsteady and she felt something burning in her eyes. She was almost frightened at the thought that she might be going to cry, out of sheer mortification.

Logotheti said nothing for a moment. He began to unroll the paper from the precious stone, but changed his mind, wrapped it up again, and put it back into his watch-pocket before he spoke.

'I did not mean it as you think,' he said softly.

She turned her eyes without moving her head, till she could just see that he was leaning forward, resting his wrists on his knees, bending his head, and apparently looking down at his loosely hanging hands. His attitude expressed dejection and disappointment. She was glad of it. He had no right to think that he could make her as angry as she still was, angry even to tears, and then bribe her to smile again when he was tired of teasing her. Her eyes turned away again, and she did not answer him.

'I make mistakes sometimes,' he said, speaking still lower, 'I know I do. When I am with you I cannot be always thinking of what I say. It's too much to ask, when a man is as far gone as I am!'

'I should like to believe that,' Margaret said, without looking at him.

'Is it so hard to believe?' he asked so gently that she only just heard the words.

'You don't make it easy, you know,' said she with a little defiance, for she felt that she was going to yield before long.

'I don't quite know how to. You're not in the least capricious—and yet——'

'You're mistaken,' Margaret answered, turning to him suddenly. 'I'm the most capricious woman in the world! Yesterday I wrote a long letter to a friend, and then I suddenly tore it up—there were ever so many pages! I daresay that if I had written just the same letter this morning, I should have sent it. If that is not caprice, what is it?'

'It may have been wisdom to tear it up,' Logotheti suggested.

'I'm not sure. I never ask myself questions about what I do. I hate people who are always measuring their wretched little souls and then tinkering their consciences to make them fit! I don't believe I wish to do anything really wrong, and so I do exactly what I like, always!'

Possibly she had forgotten that she had called herself a wicked woman only yesterday; but that had been before the conversation at the telephone.

'If you will only go on doing what you like,' Logotheti answered, 'it will give me the greatest pleasure in the world to help you. I only ask one kindness.'

'You have no right to ask me anything to-day. You've been quite the most disagreeable person this afternoon that I ever met in my life.'

'I know I have,' Logotheti answered with admirable contrition. 'I'll wait a day or two before I ask anything; perhaps you will have forgiven me by that time.'

'I'm not sure. What was the thing you were going to ask?'

He was silent now that she wished to know his thought.

'Have you forgotten it already?' she inquired with a little laugh that was encouraging rather than contemptuous, for her curiosity was roused.

They looked at each other at last, and all at once she felt the deeply disturbing sense of his near presence which she had missed for three days, though she was secretly a little afraid and ashamed of it; and to-day it had not come while her anger had lasted. But now it was stronger than ever before, perhaps because it came so unexpectedly, and it drew her to him, under the deep shadow of the elm-tree that made strange reflections in their eyes—moving reflections of fire when the lowering sun struck in between the leaves, and sudden, still depths when the foliage stirred in the breeze and screened the glancing ray.

He had played upon her moods for an hour, as a musician touches a delicate and responsive instrument, and she had taken all for earnest and had been angry and hurt, and was reconciled

again at his will. Yet he had not done it all to try his power over her, and surely not in any careless contempt of her weaknesses. He cared for her in his way, as he was able, and his love was great, if not of the most noble sort. He was strong, and she waked his strength with fire; he worshipped life, and her vital beauty thrilled the inner stronghold of his being; when she moved, his passionate intuition felt and followed the lines of her moving grace; if she rested, motionless and near him, his waking dream enfolded her in a deep caress. He felt no high and mystic emotion when he thought of her; he had never read of St. Clement's celestial kingdom, where man and woman are to be one for ever, and together neither woman nor man, for such a world could never seem heavenly to him, whose love was altogether earthly. Yet it was Greek love, not Roman; its deity was beauty, not lust; the tutelary goddess of its temple was not Venus the deadly, the heavy-limbed, with a mouth like a red wound and slumbrous, sombre eyes, but Cyprian Aphrodite, immortal and golden, the very life of the sparkling sky itself sown in the foam of the sea.

Between the two lies all the distance that separates gross idolatry from the veneration of the symbol; the gulf that divides the animal materialism of a twentieth-century rake from the half-divine dreams of genius; the revolting coarseness of Catullus at his worst from himself at his best, or from an epigram of Meleager or Antipater of Sidon; a witty Greek comedy adapted by Plautus to the brutal humour of Rome from Swinburne's immortal *Atalanta in Calydon*. Twenty-five centuries of history, Hellenic, Byzantine and modern, have gone to make the small band of cultivated Greeks of to-day what they are, two thousand and five hundred years of astounding vicissitudes, of aristocracy, democracy and despotism, of domination and subjection, mastery, slavery and revolution, ending in freedom more than half regained. We need not wonder why they are not like us, whose forefathers of a few centuries ago were still fighting the elements for their existence, and living and thinking like barbarians.

The eyes of the Greek and the great artist met, and they looked long at one another in the shade of the elm-tree on the lawn, as the sun was going down. Only a few minutes had passed since Margaret had been very angry, and had almost believed that she was going to quarrel finally, and break her engagement, and be free; and now she could not even turn her face away, and when her hand felt his upon it, she let him draw it slowly to him; and half unconsciously she followed her hand, bending towards him sideways from her seat, nearer and nearer, and very near.

And as she put up her lips to his, he would that she might drink his soul from him at one deep draught—even as one of his people's poets wished, in the world's spring-time, long ago.

It had been a strange love-making. They had been engaged during more than two months, they were young, vital, passionate; yet they had never kissed before that evening hour under the elm-tree at Versailles. Perhaps it was for this that Konstantin had played, or at least, for the certainty it meant to him, if he had doubted that she was sincere.

CHAPTER IV

Without offending Mr. Van Torp, Lady Maud managed not to see him again for some time, and when he understood, as he soon did, that this was her wish, he made no attempt to force himself upon her. She was probably thinking over what he had said, and in the end she would exert her influence as he had begged her to do. He was thoroughly persuaded that there was nothing unfair in his proposal and that, when she was convinced that he was right, she would help him. In a chequered career that had led to vast success, he had known people who called themselves honest and respectable but who had done unpardonable things for a hundredth part of what he offered. Like all real financiers, he knew money as a force, not as a want, very much as any strong working man knows approximately how much he can lift or carry, and reckons with approximate certainty on his average strength. To speak in his own language, Mr. Van Torp knew about how many horse-power could be got out of any sum of money, from ten cents to more millions than he chose to speak of in his own case.

And once more, before I go on with this tale, let me say that his friendship for Lady Maud was so honest that he would never have asked her to do anything he thought 'low down.' To paraphrase a wise saying of Abraham Lincoln's, some millionaires mean to be bad all the time, but are not, and some are bad all the time but do not mean to be, but no millionaires mean to be bad all the time and really are. Rufus Van Torp certainly did not mean to be, according to his lights, though in his life he had done several things which he did not care to remember; and the righteous had judged him with the ferocious integrity of men who never take a penny unjustly nor give one away under any circumstances.

But when he had taken the first step towards accomplishing his purpose, he was very much at a loss as to the next, and he saw that he had never undertaken anything so difficult since he had reorganised the Nickel Trust, trebled the stock, cleared a profit of thirty millions and ruined nobody but the small-fry, who of course deserved it on the principle that people who cannot keep money ought not to have any. Some unkind newspaper man had then nicknamed it the Brass Trust, and had called him Brassy Van Torp; but it is of no use to throw mud at the Golden Calf, for the dirt soon dries to dust and falls off, leaving the animal as beautifully shiny as ever.

Mr. Van Torp did not quite see how he could immediately apply the force of money to further his plans with effect. He knew his adversary's financial position in Europe much too well to think of trying to attack him on that ground; and besides, in his rough code it would not be fair play to do

that. It was 'all right' to ruin a hostile millionaire in order to get his money. That was 'business.' But to ruin him for the sake of a woman was 'low down.' It would be much more 'all right' to shoot him, after fair and due warning, and to carry off the lady. That was impossible in a civilised country, of course; but as it occurred to him, while he was thinking, that he might find it convenient to go somewhere in a hurry by sea, he bought a perfectly new yacht that was for sale because the owner had died of heart disease the week after she was quite ready to take him to the Mediterranean. The vessel was at least as big as one of the ocean liners of fifty years ago, and had done twenty-two and one-tenth knots on her trial. Mr. Van Torp took her over as she was, with her officers, crew, cook and stores, and rechristened her. She had been launched as the *Alwayn*; he called her the *Lancashire Lass*—a bit of sentiment on his part, for that was the name of a mare belonging to Lady Maud's father, which he had once ridden bareback when he was in an amazing hurry.

He had one interview with the Captain.

'See here, Captain,' he said, 'I may not want to take a trip this season. I'm that sort of a man. I may or I may not. But if I do want you, I'll want you quick. See?'

With the last word, he looked up suddenly, and the Captain 'saw,' for he met a pair of eyes that astonished him.

'Yes, I see,' he answered mechanically.

'And if you're in one place with your boat, and I wire that I want you in another, I'd like you to get there right away,' said Mr. Van Torp.

'Yes, sir.'

'They say she'll do twenty-two and a tenth,' continued the owner, 'but when I wire I want you I'd like her to do as much more as she can without bursting a lung. If you don't think you've got the kind of engineer who'll keep her red-hot, tell me right off and we'll get another. And don't you fuss about burning coal, Captain. And see that the crew get all they can eat and not a drop of drink but tea and coffee, and if you let 'em go on shore once in a way, see that they come home right side up with care, Captain, and make each of 'em say "truly rural" and "British Constitution" before he goes to bed, and if he can't, you just unship him, or whatever you call it on a boat. Understand, Captain?'

The Captain understood and kept his countenance.

'Now, I want to know one thing,' continued the new owner. 'What's the nearest sea-port to Bayreuth, Bavaria?'

'Venice,' answered the Captain without the least hesitation, and so quickly that Mr. Van Torp was immediately suspicious.

'If that's so, you're pretty smart,' he observed.

'You can telephone to Cook's office, sir, and ask them,' said the Captain quietly.

The instrument was on the table at Mr. Van Torp's elbow. He looked sharply at the Captain, as he unhooked the receiver and set it to his ear. In a few seconds communication was given.

'Cook's office? Yes. Yes. This is Mr. Van Torp, Rufus Van Torp of New York. Yes. I want to know what's the nearest sea-port to Bayreuth, Bavaria. Yes. Yes. That's just what I want to know. Yes. I'll hold the wire while you look it up.'

He was not kept waiting long.

'Venice, you say? You're sure you're right, I suppose? Yes. Yes. I was only asking. No thank you. If I want a ticket I'll look in myself. Much obliged. Good-bye.'

He hung the receiver in its place again, and turned to his Captain with a different expression, in which admiration and satisfaction were quite apparent.

'Well,' he said, 'you're right. It's Venice. I must say that, for an Englishman, you're quite smart.'

The Captain smiled quietly, but did not think it worth while to explain that the last owner with whom he had sailed had been Wagner-mad and had gone to Bayreuth regularly. Moreover, he had judged his man already.

'Am I to proceed to Venice at once, sir?' he asked.

'As quick as you can, Captain.'

The Englishman looked at his watch deliberately, and made a short mental calculation before he said anything. It was eleven in the morning.

'I can get to sea by five o'clock this afternoon, sir. Will that do?'

Mr. Van Torp was careful not to betray the least surprise.

'Yes,' he said, as if he were not more than fairly satisfied, 'that'll do nicely.'

'Very well, sir, then I'll be off. It's about three thousand miles, and she's supposed to do that at

eighteen knots with her own coal. Say eight days. But as this is her maiden trip we must make allowance for having to stop the engines once or twice. Good-morning, sir.'

'Good-day, Captain. Get in some coal and provisions as soon as you arrive in Venice. I may want to go to Timbuctoo, or to Andaman Islands or something. I'm that sort of a man. I'm not sure where I'll go. Good-bye.'

The Captain stopped at the first telegraph office on his way to the Waterloo Station and telegraphed both to his chief engineer, Mr. M'Cosh, and his chief mate, Mr. Johnson, for he thought it barely possible that one or the other might be ashore.

'Must have steam by 4 P.M. to-day to sail at once long voyage. Coming next train. Owner in hurry. Send ashore for my wash. Brown, Captain.'

When the clocks struck five on shore that afternoon, and the man at the wheel struck two bells from the wheel-house, and the look-out forward repeated them on the ship's bell, all according to the most approved modern fashion on large steamers, the beautiful *Lancashire Lass* was steaming out upon Southampton Water.

Out of the merest curiosity Mr. Van Torp telegraphed to Cowes to be informed of the exact moment at which his yacht was under way, and before six o'clock he had a message.

'Yacht sailed at four thirty-nine.'

The new owner was so much pleased that he actually smiled, for Captain Brown had been twenty-one minutes better than his word.

'I guess he'll do,' thought Mr. Van Torp. 'I only hope I may need him.'

He was not at all sure that he should need the *Lancashire Lass* and Captain Brown; but it has often been noticed that in the lives of born financiers even their caprices often turn out to their advantage, and that their least logical impulses in business matters are worth more than the sober judgment of ordinary men.

As for Captain Brown, he was a quiet little person with a rather pink face and sparkling blue eyes, and he knew his business. In fact he had passed as Extra Master. He knew that he was in the service of one of the richest men in the world, and that he commanded a vessel likely to turn out one of the finest yachts afloat, and he did not mean to lose such a berth either by piling up his ship, or by being slow to do whatever his owner wished done, within the boundaries of the possible; but it had not occurred to him that his owner might order him to exceed the limits of anything but mere possibility, such, for instance, as those of the law, civil, criminal, national, or international.

Mr. Van Torp had solid nerves, but when he had sent his yacht to the only place where he thought he might possibly make use of it, he realised that he was wasting valuable time while Logotheti was making all the running, and his uncommon natural energy, finding nothing to work upon as yet, made him furiously impatient. It seemed to hum and sing in his head, like the steam in an express engine when it is waiting to start.

He had come over to England on an impulse, as soon as he had heard of Cordova's engagement. Until then he had not believed that she would ever accept the Greek, and when he learned from Lady Maud's letter that the fact was announced, he 'saw red,' and his resolution to prevent the marriage was made then and there. He had no idea how he should carry it out, but he knew that he must either succeed or come to grief in the attempt, for as long as he had any money left, or any strength, he would spend both lavishly for that one purpose.

Yet he did not know how to begin, and his lack of imagination exasperated him beyond measure. He was sleepless and lost his appetite, which had never happened to him before; he stayed on in London instead of going down to his place in Derbyshire, because he was always sure that he meant to start for the Continent in a few hours, with an infallible plan for success; but he did not go.

The most absurd schemes suggested themselves. He was disgusted with what he took for his own stupidity, and he tried to laugh at the sentimental vein that ran through all his thoughts as the thread through a string of beads. He grew hot and cold as he recalled the time when he had asked Margaret to marry him, and he had frightened her and she had fled and locked herself into her own room; his heart beat faster when he thought of certain kindly words she had said to him since then, and on which he built up a great hope now, though they had meant nothing more to her than a general forgiveness, where she really had very little to forgive. A genuine offer of marriage from a millionaire is not usually considered an insult, but since she had chosen to look at it in that light, he was humble enough to be grateful for her pardon. If he had not been so miserably in love he would have been even more amazed and alarmed at his own humility, for he had not shown signs of such weakness before. In a life which had been full of experience, though it was not yet long, he had convinced himself that the 'softening' which comes with years, and of which kind people often speak with so much feeling, generally begins in the brain; and the thought that he himself was growing less hard than he had been, already filled him with apprehension. He asked himself why he had withdrawn from the Nickel Trust, unless it was because his faculties were failing prematurely. At the mere thought, he craved the long-familiar excitement of making money, and risking it, and he wished he had a railway or a line of steamers to play with; since he could not hit upon the scheme for which he was racking his brains. For

once in his life, too, he felt lonely, and to make it worse he had not received a line from his friend Lady Maud since she had abruptly left him in her own drawing-room. He wondered whether she had yet made up her mind to help him.

He was living in a hotel in London, though he did not like it. Americans, as a rule, would a little rather live in hotels than in houses of their own, perhaps because it is less trouble and no dearer, at least not in American cities. Housekeeping in New York can be done with less risk by a company than by an individual, for companies do not succumb to nervous prostration, whatever may happen to their employees.

But Mr. Van Torp was an exception to the rule, for he liked privacy, and even solitude, and though few men were better able to face a newspaper reporter in fair fight, he very much preferred not to be perpetually on the look-out lest he should be obliged to escape by back stairs and side doors, like a hunted thief. He felt safer from such visits in London than in New York or Paris, but only relatively so.

He was meditating on the future one morning, over an almost untouched breakfast, between nine and ten o'clock, when his man Stemp brought a visiting card.

'Reporter?' he inquired, without looking up, as he leaned far back in his chair, his gaze riveted on the cold buttered toast.

'No, sir. It's some sort of a foreigner, and he talks a heathen language.'

'Oh, he does, does he?' The question was asked in a tone of far-away indifference.

'Yes, sir.'

A long silence followed. Mr. Van Torp still stared at the buttered toast and appeared to have forgotten all about the card. Stemp endeavoured very tactfully to rouse him from his reverie.

'Shall I get you some more hot toast, sir?' he inquired very gently.

'Toast? No. No toast.'

He did not move; his steady gaze did not waver. Stemp waited a long time, motionless, with his little salver in his hand. At last Van Torp changed his position, threw his head so far back that it rested on the top of the chair, thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his trousers and stared at the ceiling as intently as he had gazed at the plate. Then he spoke to his man again.

'Stemp.'

'Yes, sir.'

'What do you suppose that fellow wants, now, Stemp? Do you suppose he thinks I speak his heathen language? What does he come bothering me for? What's the good?'

'Well, sir,' answered Stemp, 'I can't quite say, but I believe there's something written on the card if you care to look at it, sir, and he has a person with him that speaks a little English. Shall I throw him out, sir?'

Stemp asked the question with such perfect gravity that, being an Englishman, he might very well have been thought to mean the words literally. But he did not. He merely adopted Mr. Van Torp's usual way of expressing that the master was not at home.

'I'll look at the card, anyway.'

He stretched out one hand without turning his eyes towards it; the careful Stemp promptly brought the little salver into contact with the large fingers, which picked up the card and raised it deliberately to the line of vision. By this means Mr. Van Torp saved himself the trouble of turning his head.

It was a rather large card, bearing in the middle two or three odd-looking signs which meant nothing to him, but underneath them he read in plain characters the single word 'Barak.'

'Barrack!' grumbled the American. 'Rubbish! Why not "teapot," or "rocking-horse," or anything else that's appropriate?'

As he paused for an answer, Stemp ventured to speak.

'Can't say, sir. P'rhaps it's the only word he knows, sir, so he's had it printed.'

Van Torp turned his head at last, and his eyes glared unpleasantly as he examined his valet's face. But the Englishman's features were utterly impassive; if they expressed anything it was contempt for the heathen person outside, who only knew one word of English.

Mr. Van Torp seemed satisfied and glanced at the card again.

'I guess you didn't mean to be funny,' he said, as if acknowledging that he had made a mistake.

'Certainly not, sir,' answered Stemp, drawing himself up with an air of injured pride, for he felt that his professional manners were suspected, if not actually criticised.

'That's all right,' observed Mr. Van Torp, turning the card over. 'Oh, the writing's on the back, I see. Yes. Now, that's very curious, I must say,' he said, after reading the words. 'That's very

curious,' he repeated, laying strong and equal emphasis on the last two words. 'Ask him to walk in, Stemp.'

'Yes, sir. With the man who speaks English for him, I suppose, sir?'

'No. He can wait outside till I want him, and you can go away too. I'll see the man alone.'

'Very good, sir.'

As the valet went out Mr. Van Torp turned his chair half round without getting up, so that he sat facing the door. A moment later Stemp had ushered in the visitor, and was gone.

A slim youth came forward without boldness, but without the least timidity, as if he were approaching an equal. He had an oval face, no moustache, a complexion like cream, short and thick black hair and very clear dark eyes that met the American's fearlessly. He was under the average height, and he wore rather thin, loose grey clothes that had been made by a good tailor. His hands and feet were smaller than a European's.

'So you're Mr. Barrack,' Mr. Van Torp said, nodding pleasantly.

The young face smiled, and the parted lips showed quite perfect teeth.

'Barak,' answered the young man, giving the name the right sound.

'Yes, I understand, but I can't pronounce it like you. Take a chair, Mr. Barrack, and draw up to the table.'

The young man understood the gesture that explained the speech and sat down.

'So you're a friend of Mr. Logotheti's, and he advised you to come to me? Understand? Logotheti of Paris.'

Barak smiled again, and nodded quickly as he recognised the name. The American watched his face attentively.

'All right,' he continued. 'You can trot out your things now, right on the table-cloth here.'

He had seen enough of Indians and Mexicans in his youth to learn the simple art of using signs, and he easily made his meaning clear to his visitor. Barak produced a little leathern bag, not much bigger than an ordinary purse, and fastened with thin thongs, which he slowly untied. Mr. Van Torp watched the movements of the delicate fingers with great interest, for he was an observant man.

'With those hands,' he silently reflected, 'it's either a lady or a thief, or both.'

Barak took several little twists of tissue paper from the bag, laid them in a row on the table-cloth, and then began to open them one by one. Each tiny parcel contained a ruby, and when the young man counted them there were five in all, and they were fine stones if they were genuine; but Mr. Van Torp was neither credulous nor easily surprised. When Barak looked to see what impression he had produced on such a desirable buyer, he was disappointed.

'Nice,' said the American carelessly; 'nice rubies, but I've seen better. I wonder if they're real, anyway. They've found out how to make them by chemistry now, you know.'

But Barak understood nothing, of course, beyond the fact that Mr. Van Torp seemed indifferent, which was a common trick of wily customers; but there was something about this one's manner that was not assumed. Barak took the finest of the stones with the tips of his slender young fingers, laid it in the palm of his other hand, and held it under Mr. Van Torp's eyes, looking at him with an inquiring expression. But the American shook his head.

'No rubies to-day, thank you,' he said.

Barak nodded quietly, and at once began to wrap up the stones, each in its own bit of paper, putting the twists back into the bag one by one. Then he drew the thongs together and tied them in a neat sort of knot which Mr. Van Torp had never seen. The young man then rose to go, but the millionaire stopped him.

'Say, don't go just yet. I'll show you a ruby that'll make you sit up.'

He rose as he spoke, and Barak understood his smile and question, and waited. Mr. Van Torp went into the next room, and came back almost immediately, bringing a small black morocco case, which he set on the table and unlocked with a little key that hung on his watch-chain. He was not fond of wearing jewellery, and the box held all his possessions of that sort, and was not full. There were three or four sets of plain studs and links; there were half a dozen very big gold collar-studs; there was a bit of an old gold chain, apparently cut off at each end, and having one cheap little diamond set in each link; and there was a thin old wedding-ring that must have been a woman's; besides a few other valueless trinkets, all lying loose and in confusion. Mr. Van Torp shook the box a little, poked the contents about with one large finger, and soon found an uncut red stone about the size of a hazel-nut, which he took out and placed on the white cloth before his visitor.

'Now that's what I call a ruby,' he said, with a smile of satisfaction. 'Got any like that, young man? Because if you have I'll talk to you, maybe. Yes,' he continued, watching the Oriental's face, 'I told

you I'd make you sit up. But I didn't mean to scare you bald-headed. What's the matter with you, anyway? Your eyes are popping out of your head. Do you feel as if you were going to have a fit? I say! Stemp!

Barak was indeed violently affected by the sight of the uncut ruby, and his face had changed in a startling way; a great vein like a whipcord suddenly showed itself on his smooth forehead straight up and down; his lids had opened so wide that they uncovered the white of the eye almost all round the iris; he was biting his lower lip so that it was swollen and blood-red against the little white teeth; and a moment before Mr. Van Torp had called out to his servant, the young man had reeled visibly, and would perhaps have collapsed if the American had not caught the slender waist and supported the small head against his shoulder with his other hand.

Stemp was not within hearing. He had been told to go away, and he had gone, and meant to be rung for when he was wanted, for he had suffered a distinct slight in being suspected of a joke. Therefore Mr. Van Torp called to him in vain, and meanwhile stood where he was with his arm round Barak, and Barak's head on his shoulder; but as no one came at his call, he lifted the slim figure gently and carried it towards the sofa, and while he was crossing the large room with his burden the palpable truth was forced upon him that his visitor's slimness was more apparent than real, and an affair of shape rather than of pounds. Before he had quite reached the lounge, however, Barak stirred, wriggled in his arms, and sprang to the floor and stood upright, blinking a little, like a person waking from a dream, but quite steady, and trying to smile in an apologetic sort of way, though evidently still deeply disturbed. Mr. Van Torp smiled, too, as if to offer his congratulations on the quick recovery.

'Feel better now?' he inquired in a kindly tone, and nodded. 'I wonder what on earth you're up to, young lady?' he soliloquised, watching Barak's movements.

He was much too cautious and wise to like being left alone for many minutes with a girl, and a good-looking one, who went about London dressed in men's clothes and passed herself for a ruby merchant. Mr. Van Torp was well aware that he was not a safe judge of precious stones, that the rubies he had seen might very well be imitation, and that the girl's emotion at the sight of the rough stone might be only a piece of clever acting, the whole scene having been planned by a gang of thieves for the purpose of robbing him of that very ruby, which was worth a large sum, even in his estimation; for it was nearly the counterpart of the one he had given Lady Maud, though still uncut.

Therefore he returned to the table and slipped the gem into his pocket before going to the door to see whether Stemp was within hail.

But Barak now understood what he was going to do, and ran before him, and stood before the door in an attitude which expressed entreaty so clearly that Mr. Van Torp was puzzled.

'Well,' he said, standing still and looking into the beautiful imploring eyes, 'what on earth do you want now, Miss Barrack? Try and explain yourself.'

A very singular conversation by signs now began.

Barak pointed to the waistcoat-pocket into which he had put the stone. The matter concerned that, of course, and Van Torp nodded. Next, though after considerable difficulty, she made him understand that she was asking how he had got it, and when this was clear, he answered by pretending to count out coins with his right hand on the palm of his left to explain that he had bought it. There was no mistaking this, and Barak nodded quickly and went on to her next question. She wanted to know what kind of man had sold him the ruby. She improvised a pretty little dumb show in which she represented the seller and Mr. Van Torp the buyer of the ruby, and then by gestures she asked if the man who sold it was tall.

Van Torp raised his hand several inches higher than his own head. He had bought the ruby from a very tall man. Putting both hands to her chin and then drawing them down as if stroking a long beard, she inquired if the man had one, and again the answer was affirmative. She nodded excitedly and pointed first to Van Torp's sandy hair and then to her own short black locks. The American pointed to his own, and then touched his watch-chain and smiled. The man's hair was fair, and even golden. By a similar process she ascertained that his eyes were blue and not black, and her excitement grew. Last of all she tried to ask where the man was, but it was some time before she could make Mr. Van Torp understand what she meant. As if to help her out of her difficulty, the sun shone through the clouds at that moment and streamed into the room; she pointed to it at once, turned her back to it, and then held out her right hand to indicate the east, and her left to the west.

'Oh, yes,' said Van Torp, who had seen Indians do the same thing, 'it was west of here that I bought it of him, a good way west.'

He pointed in that direction, and thrust out his arm as if he would make it reach much further if he could. At this Barak looked deeply disappointed. Several times, to show that she meant London, or at least England, she pointed to the floor at her feet and looked inquiringly at Van Torp, but he shook his head and pointed to the west again, and made a gesture that meant crossing something. He spoke to her as if she could understand.

'I've got your meaning,' he said. 'You're after the big man with the yellow beard, who is selling rubies from the same place, and has very likely gone off with yours. He looked like a bad egg in

spite of his handsome face.'

He turned his eyes thoughtfully to the window. Barak plucked gently at his sleeve and pretended to write in the palm of her left hand, and then went through all the descriptive gestures again, and then once more pretended to write, and coaxingly pushed him towards a little table on which she saw writing materials.

'You'd like to have his address, would you, Miss Barrack? I wonder why you don't call in your interpreter and tell me so. It would be much simpler than all this dumb crambo.'

Once more he made a step towards the door, but she caught at his sleeve, and entreated him in her own language not to call any one; and her voice was so deliciously soft and beseeching that he yielded, and sat down at the small table and wrote out an address from memory. He handed her the half-sheet of paper when he had dried the writing and had looked over it carefully.

'Poor little thing!' he said in a tone of pity. 'If you ever find him he'll eat you.'



"You want my blessing, do you, Miss Barrack?"

Barak again showed signs of great emotion when she put the address into an inside pocket of her man's coat, but it was not of the same kind as before. She took Van Torp's big hand in both her own, and, bending down, she laid it on her head, meaning that he might dispose of her life ever afterwards. But he did not understand.

'You want my blessing, do you, Miss Barrack? Some people don't think Brassy Van Torp's blessing worth much, young lady, but you're welcome to it, such as it is.'

He patted her thick hair and smiled as she looked up, and her eyes were dewy with tears.

'That's all right, my dear,' he said. 'Don't cry!'

She smiled too, because his tone was kind, and, standing up, she took out her little leathern bag again quickly, emptied the twists of paper into her hand, selected one by touch, and slipped the rest back. She unwrapped a large stone and held it up to the light, turning it a little as she did so. Van Torp watched her with curiosity, and with an amused suspicion that she had perhaps played the whole scene in order to mollify him and induce him to buy something. So many people had played much more elaborate tricks in the hope of getting money from him, and the stones might be imitations after all, in spite of Logotheti's pencilled line of recommendation.

But Barak's next action took Van Torp by surprise. To his amazement, she pressed the ruby lightly to her heart, then to her lips, and last of all to her forehead, and before he knew what she was doing she had placed it in his right hand and closed his fingers upon it. It was a thank-offering.

'Nonsense!' objected the millionaire, smiling, but holding out the stone to her. 'It's very sweet of

you, but you don't mean it, and I don't take presents like that. Why, it's worth a thousand pounds in Bond Street any day!

But she put her hands behind her back and shook her head, to show that she would not take it back. Then with her empty hand she again touched her heart, her lips, and forehead, and turned towards the door.

'Here, stop!' said Mr. Van Torp, going after her. 'I can't take this thing! See here, I say! Put it back into your pocket!'

She turned and met him, and made a gesture of protest and entreaty, as if earnestly begging him to keep the gem. He looked at her keenly, and he was a judge of humanity, and saw that she was hurt by his refusal. As a last resource, he took out his pocket-book and showed her a quantity of folded bank-notes.

'Well,' he said, 'since you insist, Miss Barrack, I'll buy the stone of you, but I'll be everlastingly jiggered if I'll take it for nothing.'

Barak's eyes suddenly flashed in a most surprising way, her lower lip pouted, and her cheek faintly changed colour, as a drop of scarlet pomegranate juice will tinge a bowl of cream.

She made one step forwards, plucked the stone from his fingers, rather than took it, and with a quick, but girlishly awkward movement, threw it towards the window as hard as she could, stamping angrily with her little foot at the same moment. Mr. Van Torp was extremely disconcerted, as he sometimes was by the sudden actions of the sex he did not understand. Fortunately the stone hit the wall instead of going out of the window.

'I'm really very sorry, Miss Barrack,' he said in a tone of humble apology, and he went quickly and picked up the gem. 'I hadn't quite understood, you see.'

She watched him, and drew back instinctively towards the door, as if expecting that he would again try to give it back to her. But he shook his head now, bowed with all the grace he could affect, which was little, and by way of making her feel that he accepted the gift, he pressed it to his heart, as she had done, and to his lips, but not to his forehead, because he was afraid that might cause some new mistake, as he did not know what the gesture meant.

Barak's face changed instantly; she smiled, nodded, and waved her hand to him, to say that it was all right, and that she was quite satisfied. Then she made a sort of salute that he thought very graceful indeed, as if she were taking something from near the floor and laying it on her forehead, and she laughed softly and was out of the room and had shut the door before he could call her back again.

He stood still in the middle of the room, looking at the gem in his hand with an expression of grave doubt.

'Well,' he said to himself, and his lips formed the words, though no sound articulated them, 'that's a queer sort of a morning's work, anyway.'

He reflected that the very last thing he had ever expected was a present of a fine ruby from a pretty heathen girl in man's clothes, recommended to him by Logotheti. Though he almost laughed at the thought when it occurred to him, he did not like the idea of keeping the stone; yet he did not know what to do with it, for it was more than probable that he was never to see Barak again, and if he ever did, it was at least likely that she would refuse to take back her gift, and as energetically as on the first occasion.

At that moment it occurred to him that he might sell it to a dealer and give the proceeds to Lady Maud for her good work. His recollections of Sunday School were very misty, poor man, but a story came back to him about some one who had observed that something valuable might have been sold and the money given to the poor. If he had remembered the rest, and especially that the person who made the suggestion had been Judas Iscariot, he would certainly have hesitated, for he would have been sure that there was something wrong with any advice that came from that quarter. But, happily for the poor, the name of Judas had dropped out of his memory in connexion with the incident.

'At least it will do some good to somebody, and I shall not be keeping what I've no right to.'

A mere acquaintance, judging him by his hard face and his extraordinary financial past, would not have believed that such a simple and highly moral reflexion could occur to him. But Lady Maud, who knew him, would have given him credit for this and much more, even though she felt that he had lately tempted her to do something which her father would call dishonourable, and that the temptation had not yet quite taken itself off to the bottomless pit, where temptations are kept in pickle by the devil's housekeeper.

Mr. Van Torp took his hat and gloves, but as he was really a good American, he had no stick to take; and he went out without even telling Stemp that he was going. In spite of what Londoners were calling the heat, he walked, and did not even feel warm; for in the first place he had lately come from Washington and New York, where a Hottentot would be very uncomfortable in July, and, moreover, he had never been at all sensitive to heat or cold, and lived as soberly as an Arab in the desert. Therefore London seemed as pleasantly cool to him with the thermometer at eighty as it seems to a newly landed Anglo-Indian who has lately seen the mercury at a hundred and

thirty-five on the shady side of the verandah.

He walked up at a leisurely pace from his hotel by the river to Piccadilly and Bond Street, and he entered a jeweller's shop of modest appearance but ancient reputation, which had been in the same place for nearly a century, and had previously been on the other side of the street.

Outside, two well-dressed men were looking at the things in the window; within, a broad-shouldered, smart-looking man with black hair and dressed in perfectly new blue serge was sitting by the counter with his back to the door, talking with the old jeweller himself. He turned on the chair when he heard the newcomer's step, and Mr. Van Torp found himself face to face with Konstantin Logotheti, whom he had supposed to be in Paris.

'Well,' he said, without betraying the surprise he felt, 'this is what I call a very pleasant accident, Mr. Logotheti.'

The Greek rose and shook hands, and the American did not fail to observe on the counter a small piece of tissue paper on which lay an uncut stone, much larger than the one he had in his pocket.

'If you are in any hurry,' said Logotheti politely, 'I don't mind waiting in the least. Mr. Pinney and I are in the midst of a discussion that may never end, and I believe neither of us has anything in the world to do.'

Mr. Pinney smiled benignly and put in a word in the mercantile plural, which differs from that of royalty in being used every day.

'The truth is, we are not very busy just at this time of the year,' he said.

'That's very kind of you, Mr. Logotheti,' said Van Torp, answering the latter, 'but I'm not really in a hurry, thank you.'

The stress he laid on the word 'really' might have led one to the conclusion that he was pretending to be, but was not. He sat down deliberately at a little distance, took off his hat, and looked at the gem on the counter.

'I don't know anything about such things, of course,' he said in a tone of reflexion, 'but I should think that was quite a nice ruby.'

Again Mr. Pinney smiled benignly, for Mr. Van Torp had dealt with him for years.

'It's a very fine stone indeed, sir,' he said, and then turned to Logotheti again. 'I think we can undertake to cut it for you in London,' he said. 'I will weigh it and give you a careful estimate.'

As a matter of fact, before Van Torp entered, Logotheti had got so far as the question of setting the gem for a lady's ring, but Mr. Pinney, like all the great jewellers, was as discreet and tactful as a professional diplomatist. How could he be sure that one customer might like another to know about a ring ordered for a lady? If Logotheti preferred secrecy, he would only have to assent and go away, as if leaving the ruby to be cut, and he could look in again when it was convenient; and this was what he at once decided to do.

'I think you're right, Mr. Pinney,' he said. 'I shall leave it in your hands. That's really all,' he added, turning to Mr. Van Torp.

'Really? My business won't take long either, and we'll go together, if you like, and have a little chat. I only came to get another of those extra large collar-studs you make for me, Mr. Pinney. Have you got another?'

'We always keep them in stock for your convenience, sir,' answered the famous jeweller, opening a special little drawer behind the counter and producing a very small morocco case.

Mr. Van Torp did not even open it, and had already laid down the money, for he knew precisely what it cost.

'Thanks,' he said. 'You're always so obliging about little things, Mr. Pinney.'

'Thank you, sir. We do our best. Good-morning, sir, good morning.'

The two millionaires went out together. Two well-dressed men stood aside to let them pass and then entered the shop.

'Which way?' asked Logotheti.

'Your way,' answered the American. 'I've nothing to do.'

'Nor have I,' laughed the Greek. 'Nothing in the world! What can anybody find to do in London at this time of year?'

'I'm sure I don't know,' echoed Van Torp, pleasantly. 'I supposed you were on the Continent somewhere.'

'And I thought you were in America, and so, of course, we meet at old Pinney's in London!'

'Really! Did you think I was in America? Your friend, the heathen girl in boy's clothes, brought me your card this morning. I supposed you knew I was here.'

'No, but I thought you might be, within six months, and I gave her several cards for people I

know. So she found you out! She's a born ferret—she would find anything. Did you buy anything of her?'

'No. I'm not buying rubies to-day. Much obliged for sending her, all the same. You take an interest in her, I suppose, Mr. Logotheti? Is that so?'

'I?' Logotheti laughed a little. 'No, indeed! Those days were over long ago. I'm engaged to be married.'

'By the bye, yes. I'd heard that, and I meant to congratulate you. I do now, anyway. When is it to be? Settled that yet?'

'Some time in October, I think. So you guessed that Barak is a girl.'

'Yes, that's right. I guessed she was. Do you know anything about her?'

'What she told me. But it may not be true.'

'Told you? Do you mean to say you understand her language?'

'Oh, yes. Tartar is spoken all over the East, you know. It's only a sort of simplified Turkish, and I picked it up in the Crimea and the Caucasus when I was travelling there some years ago. She comes from some place in Central Asia within a possible distance of Samarkand and the Transcaucasian railway, for that was the way she ultimately got to the Caspian and to Tiflis, and then to Constantinople and Paris. How a mere girl, brought up in a Tartar village, could have made such a journey safely, carrying a small fortune with her in precious stones, is something nobody can understand who has not lived in the East, where anything is possible. A woman is practically sacred in a Mohammedan country. Any man who molests her stands a good chance of being torn to ribands by the other men.'

'It used to be something like that in the West, when I punched cattle,' observed Mr. Van Torp, quietly. 'A man who interfered with a lady there was liable to get into trouble. Progress works both ways, up and down, doesn't it? Bears at one end and rots at the other. Isn't that so?'

'It's just as true of civilisation,' answered the Greek.

'They're the same thing, I should say,' objected Mr. Van Torp.

'Oh, not quite, I think!'

Logotheti smiled at his own thoughts. To his thinking, civilisation meant an epigram of Meleager, or Simonides' epitaph on the Spartans who fell at Thermopylæ, or a Tragedy of Sophocles, or the Aphrodite of Syracuse, or the Victory of the Louvre. Progress meant railways, the Paris Bourse, the Nickel Trust, and Mr. Van Torp.

'Well,' said the latter, 'you were telling me about Miss Barrack.'

'Is that what you call her?' Logotheti laughed lightly.

He seemed to be in very good humour. Men often are, just before marriage; and sometimes, it is said, when they are on the eve of great misfortunes which they cannot possibly foresee. Fate loves unexpected contrasts. Logotheti told his companion the story of the ruby mine, substantially as it was narrated at the beginning of this tale, not dreaming that Van Torp had perhaps met and talked with the man who had played so large a part in it, and to find whom Baraka had traversed many dangers and overcome many difficulties.

'It sounds like the *Arabian Nights*,' said Mr. Van Torp, as if he found it hard to believe.

'Exactly,' assented Logotheti. 'And, oddly enough, the first of these stories is about Samarkand, which is not so very far from Baraka's native village. It seems to have taken the girl about a year to find her way to Constantinople, and when she got there she naturally supposed that it was the capital of the world, and that her man, being very great and very rich, thanks to her, must of course live there. So she searched Stamboul and Pera for him, during seven or eight months. She lived in the house of a good old Persian merchant, under the protection of his wife, and learned that there was a world called Europe where her man might be living, and cities called Paris and London, where people pay fabulous prices for precious stones. Persian merchants are generally well-educated men, you know. At last she made up her mind to dress like a man, she picked up an honest Turkish man-servant who had been all over Europe with a diplomatist and could speak some French and English as well as Tartar, she got a letter of recommendation to me from a Greek banker, through the Persian who did business with him, joined some Greeks who were coming to Marseilles by sea, and here she is. Now you know as much as I do. She is perfectly fearless, and as much more sure of herself than any man ever was, as some young women can be in this queer world. Of course, she'll never find the brute who thought he was leaving her to be murdered by her relations, but if she ever did, she would either marry him or cut his throat.'

'Nice, amiable kind of girl,' remarked Mr. Van Torp, who remembered her behaviour when he had refused her proffered gift. 'That's very interesting, Mr. Logotheti. How long do you count on being in London this time? Three or four days, maybe?'

'I daresay. No longer, I fancy.'

'Why don't you come and take dinner with me some night?' asked the American. 'Day after to-

morrow, perhaps. I'd be pleased to have you.'

'Thank you very much,' Logotheti answered. 'Since you ask me, I see no reason why I should not dine with you, if you want me.'

They agreed upon the place and hour, and each suddenly remembered an engagement.

'By the way,' said Mr. Van Torp without apparent interest, 'I hope Madame Cordova is quite well? Where's she hiding from you?'

'Just now the hiding-place is Bayreuth. She's gone there with Mrs. Rushmore to hear *Parsifal*. I believe I'm not musical enough for that, so I'm roving till it's over. That's my personal history at this moment! And Miss Donne is quite well, I believe, thank you.'

'I notice you call her "Miss Donne" when you speak of her,' said Van Torp. 'Excuse me if I made a mistake just now. I've always called her Madame Cordova.'

'It doesn't matter at all,' answered Logotheti carelessly, 'but I believe she prefers to be called by her own name amongst friends. Good-bye till day after to-morrow, then.'

'At half after eight.'

'All right—half-past—I shall remember.'

But at two o'clock, on the next day but one, Logotheti received a note, brought by hand, in which Mr. Van Torp said that to his very great regret he had been called away suddenly, and hoped that Logotheti would forgive him, as the matter was of such urgent importance that he would have already left London when the note was received.

This was more than true, if possible, for the writer had left town two days earlier, very soon after he had parted from Logotheti in Pall Mall, although the note had not been delivered till forty-eight hours later.

CHAPTER V

Mr. Van Torp knew no more about Bayreuth than about Samarkand, beyond the fact that at certain stated times performances of Wagner's operas were given there with as much solemnity as great religious festivals, and that musical people spoke of the Bayreuth season in a curiously reverent manner. He would have been much surprised if any one had told him that he often whistled fragments of *Parsifal* to himself and liked the sound of them; for he had a natural ear and a good memory, and had whistled remarkably well when he was a boy.

The truth about this seemingly impossible circumstance was really very simple. In what he called his cow-punching days, he had been for six months in company with two young men who used to whistle softly together by the hour beside the camp fire, and none of the other 'boys' had ever heard the strange tunes they seemed to like best, but Van Torp had caught and remembered many fragments, almost unconsciously, and he whistled them to himself because they gave him a sensation which no 'real music' ever did. Extraordinary natures, like his, are often endowed with unnoticed gifts and tastes quite unlike those of most people. No one knew anything about the young men who whistled Wagner; the 'Lost Legion' hides many secrets, and the two were not popular with the rest, though they knew their business and did their work fairly well. One of them was afterwards said to have been killed in a shooting affray and the other had disappeared about the same time, no one knew how, or cared, though Mr. Van Torp thought he had recognised him once many years later. They were neither Americans nor Englishmen, though they both spoke English well, and never were heard to use any other language. But that is common enough with emigrants to the United States and elsewhere. Every one who has been to sea in an American vessel knows how the Scandinavian sailors insist on speaking English amongst themselves, instead of their own language.

Mr. Van Torp was fond of music, quite apart from his admiration for the greatest living lyric soprano, and since it was his fancy to go to Bayreuth in the hope of seeing her, he meant to hear Wagner's masterpiece, and supposed that there would not be any difficulty about such a simple matter, nor about obtaining the sort of rooms he was accustomed to, in the sort of hotel he expected to find where so many rich people went every other year. Any one who has been to the holy place of the Wagnerians can imagine his surprise when, after infinite difficulty, he found himself, his belongings and his man deposited in one small attic room of a Bavarian tanner's house, with one feather-bed, one basin and one towel for furniture.

'Stemp,' said Mr. Van Torp, 'this is a heathen town.'

'Yes, sir.'

'I suppose I'm thought close about money,' continued the millionaire, thinking aloud, 'but I call five dollars a day dear, for this room, don't you?'

'Yes, sir, I do indeed! I call it downright robbery. That's what I call it, sir.'

'Well, I suppose they call it business here, and quite a good business too. But I'd like to buy the whole thing and show 'em how to run it. They'd make more in the end.'

'Yes, sir. I hope you will, sir. Beg pardon, sir, but do you think it would cost a great deal?'

'They'd ask a great deal, anyway,' answered the millionaire thoughtfully. 'Stemp, suppose you get me out some things and then take a look around, while I try to get a wash in that—that tea-service there.'

Mr. Van Torp eyed the exiguous basin and jug with some curiosity and much contempt. Stemp, impassive and correct under all circumstances, unstrapped a valise, laid out on the bed what his master might need, and inquired if he wished anything else.

'There isn't anything else,' answered Mr. Van Torp, gloomily.

'When shall I come back, sir?'

'In twenty-five minutes. There isn't half an hour's wash in that soup-plate, anyway.'

He eyed the wretched basin with a glance that might almost have cracked it. When his man had gone, he proceeded to his toilet, such as it was, and solaced himself by softly whistling as much of the 'Good Friday' music as he remembered, little dreaming what it was, or that his performance was followed with nervous and almost feverish interest by the occupant of the next room in the attic, a poor musician who had saved and scraped for years to sit at the musical feast during three days.

'E sharp!' cried an agonised voice on the other side of the closed door, in a strong German accent. 'I know it is E sharp! I know it!'

Mr. Van Torp stopped whistling at once, lowered his razor, and turned a mask of soapsuds in the direction whence the sound came.

'Do you mean me?' he inquired in a displeased tone.

'I mean who whistles the "Good Friday" music,' answered the voice. 'I tell you, I know it is E sharp in that place. I have the score. I shall show you if you believe not.'

'He's mad,' observed Mr. Van Torp, beginning to shave again. 'Are you a lunatic?' he asked, pausing after a moment. 'What's the matter with you anyhow?'

'I am a musician, I tell you! I am a pianist!'

'It's the same thing,' said Mr. Van Torp, working carefully on his upper lip, under his right nostril.

'I shall tell you that you are a barbarian!' retorted the voice.

'Well, that doesn't hurt,' answered Mr. Van Torp.

He heard a sort of snort of scorn on the other side and there was silence again. But before long, as he got away from his upper lip with the razor, he unconsciously began to whistle again, and he must have made the same mistake as before, for he was interrupted by a deep groan of pain from the next room.

'Not feeling very well?' he inquired in a tone of dry jocularly. 'Stomach upset?'

'E sharp!' screamed the wretched pianist.

Van Torp could hear him dancing with rage, or pain.

'See here, whoever you are, don't call names! I don't like it. See? I've paid for this room and I'm going on whistling if I like, and just as long as I like.'

'You say you make noises you like?' cried the infuriated musician. 'Oh, no! You shall not! There are rules! We are not in London, sir, we are in Bayreuth! If you make noises, you shall be thrown out of the house.'

'Shall I? Well, now, that's a funny sort of a rule for a hotel, isn't it?'

'I go complain of you,' retorted the other, and Mr. Van Torp heard a door opened and shut again.

In a few minutes he had done all that the conditions would permit in the way of making himself presentable, and just as he left the room he was met by Stemp, the twenty-five minutes being just over.

'Very good, sir. I'll do what I can, sir,' said the excellent man, as Mr. Van Torp pointed to the things that lay about.

As he went out, he recognised the voice of his neighbour, who was talking excitedly in voluble German, somewhere at the back of the house.

'He's complaining now,' thought Mr. Van Torp, with something like a smile.

He had already been to the best hotel, in the hope of obtaining rooms, and he had no difficulty in finding it again. He asked for Madame da Cordova. She was at home, for it was an off-day; he sent in his card, and was presently led to her sitting-room. Times had changed. Six months earlier he would have been told that there had been a mistake and that she had gone out.

She was alone; a letter she had been writing lay unfinished on the queer little desk near the

shaded window, and her pen had fallen across the paper. On the round table in the middle of the small bare room there stood a plain white vase full of corn-flowers and poppies, and Margaret was standing there, rearranging them, or pretending to do so.

She was looking her very best, and as she raised her eyes and greeted him with a friendly smile, Mr. Van Torp thought she had never been so handsome before. It had not yet occurred to him to compare her with Lady Maud, because for some mysterious natural cause the beautiful Englishwoman who was his best friend had never exerted even the slightest feminine influence on his being; he would have carried her in his arms, if need had been, as he had carried the Tartar girl, and not a thrill of his nerves nor one faster beat of his heart would have disturbed his placidity; she knew it, as women know such things, and the knowledge made her quite sure that he was not really the coarse-grained and rather animal son of nature that many people said he was, the sort of man to whom any one good-looking woman is much the same as another, a little more amusing than good food, a little less satisfactory than good wine.

But the handsome singer stirred his blood, the touch of her hand electrified him, and the mere thought that any other man should ever make her his own was unbearable. After he had first met her he had pursued her with such pertinacity and such utter ignorance of women's ways that he had frightened her, and she had frankly detested him for a time; but he had learned a lesson and he profited by it with that astounding adaptability which makes American men and women just what they are.

Margaret held out her hand and he took it; and though its touch and her friendly smile were like a taste of heaven just then, he pressed her fingers neither too much nor too little, and his face betrayed no emotion.

'It's very kind of you to receive me, Miss Donne,' he said quietly.

'I think it's very kind of you to come and see me,' Margaret answered. 'Come and sit down and tell me how you got here—and why!'

'Well,' he answered slowly, as they seated themselves side by side on the hard green sofa, 'I don't suppose I can explain, so that you'll understand, but I'll try. Different kinds of things brought me. I heard you were here from Lady Maud, and I thought perhaps I might have an opportunity for a little talk. And then—oh, I don't know. I've seen everything worth seeing except a battle and *Parsifal*, and as it seemed so easy, and you were here, I thought I'd have a look at the opera, since I can't see the fight.'

Margaret laughed a little.

'I hope you will like it,' she said. 'Have you a good seat?'

'I haven't got a ticket yet,' answered Mr. Van Torp, in blissful ignorance.

'No seat!' The Primadonna's surprise was almost dramatic. 'But how in the world do you expect to get one now? Don't you know that the seats for *Parsifal* are all taken months beforehand?'

'Are they really?' He was very calm about it. 'Then I suppose I shall have to get a ticket from a speculator. I don't see anything hard about that.'

'My dear friend, there are no speculators here, and there are no tickets to be had. You might as well ask for the moon!'

'I can stand, then. I'm not afraid of getting tired.'

'There are no standing places at all! No one is allowed to go in who has not a seat. A week ago you might possibly have picked up one in Munich, given up by some one at the last moment, but such chances are jumped at! I wonder that you even got a place to sleep!'

'Well, it's not much of a place,' said Mr. Van Torp, thoughtfully. 'There's one room the size of a horsebox, one bed, one basin, one pitcher and one towel, and I've brought my valet with me. I've concluded to let him sleep while I'm at the opera, and he'll sit up when I want to go to bed. Box and Cox. I don't know what he'll sit on, for there's no chair, but he's got to sit.'

Margaret laughed, for he amused her.

'I suppose you're exaggerating a little bit,' she said. 'It's not really quite so bad as that, is it?'

'It's worse. There's a lunatic in the next room who calls me E. Sharp through the door, and has lodged a complaint already because I whistled while I was shaving. It's not a very good hotel. Who is E. Sharp, anyway? Maybe that was the name of the last man who occupied that room. I don't know, but I don't like the idea of having a mad German pianist for a neighbour. He may get in while I'm asleep and think I'm the piano, and hammer the life out of me, the way they do. I've seen a perfectly new piano wrecked in a single concert by a fellow who didn't look as if he had the strength to kick a mosquito. They're so deceptive, pianists! Nervous men are often like that, and most pianists are nothing but nerves and hair.'

He amused her, for she had never seen him in his present mood.

'E sharp is a note,' she said. 'On the piano it's the same as F natural. You must have been whistling something your neighbour knew, and you made a mistake, and nervous musicians really suffer if one does that. But it must have been something rather complicated, to have an E sharp

in it! It wasn't "Suwanee River," nor the "Washington Post" either! Indeed I should rather like to know what it was.'

'Old tunes I picked up when I was cow-punching, years ago,' answered Mr. Van Torp. 'I don't know where they came from, for I never asked, but they're not like other tunes, that's certain, and I like them. They remind me of the old days out West, when I had no money and nothing to worry about.'

'I'm very fond of whistling, too,' Margaret said. 'I study all my parts by whistling them, so as to save my voice.'

'Really! I had no idea that was possible.'

'Quite. Perhaps you whistle very well. Won't you let me hear the tune that irritated your neighbour the pianist? Perhaps I know it, too.'

'Well,' said Mr. Van Torp, 'I suppose I could. I should be a little shy before you,' he added, quite naturally. 'If you'll excuse me, I'll just go and stand before the window so that I can't see you. Perhaps I can manage it that way.'

Margaret, who was bored to the verge of collapse on the off-days, thought him much nicer than he had formerly been, and she liked his perfect simplicity.

'Stand anywhere you like,' she said, 'but let me hear the tune.'

Van Torp rose and went to the window and she looked quietly at his square figure and his massive, sandy head and his strong neck. Presently he began to whistle, very softly and perfectly in tune. Many a street-boy could do as well, no doubt, and Mrs. Rushmore would have called it a vulgar accomplishment, but the magnificent Primadonna was too true a musician, as well as a singer, not to take pleasure in a sweet sound, even if it were produced by a street-boy.

But as Mr. Van Torp went on, she opened her eyes very wide and held her breath. There was no mistake about it; he was whistling long pieces from *Parsifal*, as far as it was possible to convey an idea of such music by such means. Margaret had studied it before coming to Bayreuth, in order to understand it better; she had now already heard it once, and had felt the greatest musical emotion of her life—one that had stirred other emotions, too, strange ones quite new to her.

She held her breath and listened, and her eyes that had been wide open in astonishment, slowly closed again in pleasure, and presently, when he reached the 'Good Friday' music, her own matchless voice floated out with her unconscious breath, in such perfect octaves with his high whistling that at first he did not understand; but when he did, the rough hard man shivered suddenly and steadied himself against the window-sill, and Margaret's voice went on alone, with faintly breathed words and then without them, following the instrumentation to the end of the scene, beyond what he had ever heard.

Then there was silence in the room, and neither of the two moved for some moments, but at last Van Torp turned, and came back.

'Thank you,' he said, in a low voice.

Margaret smiled and passed her hand over her eyes quickly, as if to dispel a vision she had seen. Then she spoke.

'Do you really not know what that music is?' she asked. 'Really, really?'

'Oh, quite honestly I don't!'

'You're not joking? You're not laughing at me?'

'I?' He could not understand. 'I shouldn't dare!' he said.

'You've been whistling some of *Parsifal*, some of the most beautiful music that ever was written—and you whistle marvellously, for it's anything but easy! Where in the world did you learn it? Don't tell me that those are "old tunes" you picked up on a Californian ranch!'

'It's true, all the same,' Van Torp answered.

He told her of the two foreigners who used to whistle together in the evenings, and how one was supposed to have been shot and the other had disappeared, no one had known whither, nor had cared.

'All sorts of young fellows used to drift out there,' he said, 'and one couldn't tell where they came from, though I can give a guess at where some of them must have been, since I've seen the world. There were younger sons of English gentlemen, fellows whose fathers were genuine lords, maybe, who had not brains enough to get into the army or the Church. There were cashiered Prussian officers, and Frenchmen who had most likely killed women out of jealousy, and Sicilian bandits, and broken Society men from New York. There were all sorts. And there was me. And we all spoke different kinds of English and had different kinds of tastes, good and bad—mostly bad. There was only one thing we could all do alike, and that was to ride.'

'I never thought of you as riding,' Margaret said.

'Well, why should you? But I can, because I was just a common cow-boy and had to, for a living.'

'It's intensely interesting—what a strange life you have had! Tell me more about yourself, won't you?'

'There's not much to tell, it seems to me,' said Van Torp. 'From being a cow-boy I turned into a miner, and struck a little silver, and I sold that and got into nickel, and I made the Nickel Trust what it is, more by financing it than anything else, and I got almost all of it. And now I've sold the whole thing.'

'Sold the Nickel Trust?' Margaret was quite as much surprised as Lady Maud had been.

'Yes. I wasn't made to do one thing long, I suppose. If I were, I should still be a cow-boy. Just now, I'm here to go to *Parsifal*, and since you say those tunes are out of that opera, I daresay I'm going to like it very much.'

'It's all very uncanny,' Margaret said thoughtfully. 'I wonder who those two men were, and what became of the one who disappeared.'

'I've a strong impression that I saw him in New York the other day,' Van Torp answered. 'If I'm right, he's made money—doing quite well, I should think. It wouldn't surprise me to hear he'd got together a million or so.'

'Really? What is he doing? Your stories grow more and more interesting!'

'If he's the fellow we used to call Levi Longlegs on the ranch, he's a Russian now. I'm not perfectly sure, for he had no hair on his face then, and now he has a beard like a French sapper. But the eyes and the nose and the voice and the accent are the same, and the age would about correspond. Handsome man, I suppose you'd call him. His name is Kralinsky just at present, and he's found a whole mine of rubies somewhere.'

'Really? I love rubies. They are my favourite stones.'

'Are they? That's funny. I've got an uncut one in my pocket now, if you'd like to see it. I believe it comes from Kralinsky's mine, too, though I got it through a friend of yours, two or three days ago.'

'A friend of mine?'

He was poking his large fingers into one of the pockets of his waistcoat in search of the stone.

'Mr. Logotheti,' he said, just as he found it. 'He's discovered a handsome young woman from Tartary or somewhere, who has a few rubies to sell that look very much like Kralinsky's. This is one of them.'

He had unwrapped the stone now and he offered it to her, holding it out in the palm of his hand. She took it delicately and laid it in her own, which was so white that the gem shed a delicate pomegranate-coloured light on the skin all round it. She admired it, turned it over with one finger, held it up towards the window, and laid it in her palm again.

But Van Torp had set her thinking about Logotheti and the Tartar girl. She put out her hand to give back the ruby.

'I should like you to keep it, if you will,' he said. 'I shan't forget the pleasure I've had in seeing you like this, but you'll forget all about our meeting here—the stone may just make you remember it sometimes.'

He spoke so quietly, so gently, that she was taken off her guard, and was touched, and very much surprised to feel that she was. She looked into his eyes rather cautiously, remembering well how she had formerly seen something terrifying in them if she looked an instant too long; but now they made her think of the eyes of a large affectionate bulldog.

'You're very kind to want to give it to me,' she answered after a moment's hesitation, 'but I don't like to accept anything so valuable, now that I'm engaged to be married. Konstantin might not like it. But you're so kind; give me any little thing of no value that you have in your pocket, for I mean to remember this day, indeed I do!'

'I gave nothing for the ruby,' said Van Torp, still not taking it from her, 'so it has no value for me. I wouldn't offer you anything that cost me money, now, unless it was a theatre for your own. Perhaps the thing's glass, after all; I've not shown it to any jeweller. The girl made me take it, because I helped her in a sort of way. When I wanted to pay for it she tried to throw it out of the window. So I had to accept it to calm her down, and she went off and left no address, and I thought I'd like you to have it, if you would.'

'Are you quite, quite sure you did not pay for it?' Margaret asked. 'If we are going to be friends, you must please always be very accurate.'

'I've told you exactly what happened,' said Van Torp. 'Won't you take it now?'

'Yes, I will, and thank you very much indeed. I love rubies, and this is a beauty, and not preposterously big. I think I shall have it set as it is, uncut, and only polished, so that it will always be itself, just as you gave it to me. I shall think of the "Good Friday" music and the Chimes, and this hideous little room, and your clever whistling, whenever I look at it.'

'You're kind to-day,' said Mr. Van Torp, after a moment's debate as to whether he should say

anything at all.

'Am I? You mean that I used to be very disagreeable, don't you?' She smiled as she glanced at him. 'I must have been, I'm sure, for you used to frighten me ever so much. But I'm not in the least afraid of you now!'

'Why should any one be afraid of me?' asked Van Torp, whose mere smile had been known to terrify Wall Street when a 'drop' was expected.

Margaret laughed a little, without looking at him.

'Tell me all about the Tartar girl,' she said, instead of answering his question.

She would not have been the thoroughly feminine woman she was—far more feminine, in the simple human sense, than Lady Maud—if she had not felt satisfaction in having tamed the formidable money-wolf so that he fawned at her feet; but perhaps she was even more pleased, or amused, than she thought she could be by any such success. The man was so very much stronger and rougher than any other man with whom she had ever been acquainted, and she had once believed him to be such a thorough brute, that this final conquest flattered her vanity. The more dangerous the character of the wild beast, the greater the merit of the lion-tamer who subdues him.

'Tell me about this handsome Tartar girl,' she said again.

Van Torp told her Baraka's history, as far as he knew it from Logotheti.

'I never heard such an amusing set of stories as you are telling me to-day,' she said.

'That particular one is Logotheti's,' he answered, 'and he can probably tell you much more about the girl.'

'Is she really very pretty?' Margaret asked.

'Well,' said Van Torp, quoting a saying of his favourite great man, 'for people who like that kind of thing, I should think that would be the kind of thing they'd like.'

The Primadonna smiled.

'Can you describe her?' she asked.

'Did you ever read a fairy story about a mouse that could turn into a tiger when it liked?' inquired the American in a tone of profound meditation, as if he were contemplating a vision which Margaret could not see.

'No,' said she, 'I never did.'

'I don't think I ever did, either. But there might be a fairy story about that, mightn't there?' Margaret nodded, with an expression of displeased interest, and he went on: 'Well, it describes Miss Barrack to a T. Yes, that's what I call her. She's put "Barak" on her business card, whatever that means in a Christian language; but when I found out it was a girl, I christened her Miss Barrack. People have to have names of some kind if you're going to talk about them. But that's a digression. Pardon me. You'd like a description of the young person. I'm just thinking.'

'How did you find out she was a girl?' Margaret asked, and her tone was suddenly hard.

Mr. Van Torp was not prepared for the question, and felt very uncomfortable for a moment. In his conversation with women he was almost morbidly prudish about everything which had the remotest connexion with sex. He wondered how he could convey to Margaret the information that when he had been obliged to carry the pretended boy across the room, he had been instantly and palpably convinced that he was carrying a girl.

'It was a question of form, you see,' he said awkwardly.

'Form? Formality? I don't understand.' Margaret was really puzzled.

'No, no!' Mr. Van Torp was actually blushing. 'I mean his form—or her form——'

'Oh, her figure? You merely guessed it was a girl in boy's clothes?'

'Certainly. Yes. Only, you see, he had a kind of fit—the boy did—and I thought he was going to faint, so I picked him up and carried him to a sofa, and—well, you understand, Miss Donne. I knew I hadn't got a boy in my arms, that's all.'

'I should think so!' assented the Englishwoman—'I'm sure I should! When you found out she was a girl, how did she strike you?'

'Very attractive, I should say; very attractive,' he repeated with more emphasis. 'People who admire brunettes might think her quite fascinating. She has really extraordinary eyes, to begin with, those long fruity Eastern eyes, you know, that can look so far to the right and left through their eyelashes. Do you know what I mean?'

'Perfectly. You make it very clear. Go on, please.'

'Her eyes—yes.' Mr. Van Torp appeared to be thinking again. 'Well, there was her complexion, too. It's first-rate for a dark girl. Ever been in a first-class dairy? Do you know the colour of

Alderney cream when it's ready to be skimmed? Her complexion's just like that, and when she's angry, it's as if you squeezed the juice of about one red currant into the whole pan of cream. Not more than one, I should think. See what I mean?'

'Yes. She must be awfully pretty. Tell me more. Has she nice hair? Even teeth?'

'I should think she had!' answered Mr. Van Torp, with even more enthusiasm than he had shown yet. 'They're as small and even and white as if somebody had gone to work and carved them all around half a new billiard ball, not separate, you understand, but all in one piece. Very pretty mouth they make, with those rather broiled-salmon-coloured lips she has, and a little chin that points up, as if she could hold her own. She can, too. Her hair? Well, you see, she's cut it short, to be a boy, but it's as thick as a beaver's fur, I should say, and pretty black. It's a silky kind of hair, that looks alive. You know what I mean, I daresay. Some brunettes' hair looks coarse and dusky, like horsehair, but hers isn't that kind, and it makes a sort of reflection in the sun, the way a young raven's wing-feathers do, if you understand.'

'You're describing a raving beauty, it seems to me.'

'Oh, no,' said the American innocently. 'Now if our friend Griggs, the novelist, were here, he'd find all the right words and things, but I can only tell you just what I saw.'

'You tell it uncommonly well!' Margaret's face expressed anything but pleasure. 'Is she tall?'

'It's hard to tell, in men's clothes. Three inches shorter than I am, maybe. I'm a middle-sized man, I suppose. I used to be five feet ten in my shoes. She may be five feet seven, not more.'

'But that's tall for a woman!'

'Is it?' Mr. Van Torp's tone expressed an innocent indifference.

'Yes. Has she nice hands?'

'I didn't notice her hands. Oh, yes, I remember!' he exclaimed, suddenly correcting himself. 'I did notice them. She held up that ruby to the light and I happened to look at her fingers. Small, well-shaped fingers, tapering nicely, but with a sort of firm look about them that you don't often see in a woman's hands. You've got it, too.'

'Have I?' Margaret looked down at her right hand. 'But, of course, hers are smaller than mine,' she said.

'Well, you see, Orientals almost all have very small hands and feet—too small, I call them—little tiny feet like mice.'

Margaret's own were well-shaped, but by no means small.

'The girl is in London, you say?' Her tone made a question of the statement.

'She was there two days ago, when I left. At least, she had been to see me that very morning. Almost as soon as she was gone I went out, and in the first shop I looked into I met Logotheti. It was Pinney's, the jeweller's, I remember, for I bought a collar stud. We came away together and walked some time, and he told me the Tartar girl's story. I asked him to dine to-day, but I was obliged to leave town suddenly, and so I had to put him off with a note. I daresay he's still in London.'

'I daresay he is,' Margaret repeated, and rising suddenly she went to the window.

Mr. Van Torp rose too, and thought of what he should say in taking his leave of her, for he felt that he had stayed long enough. Strange to say, too, he was examining his not very sensitive conscience to ascertain whether he had said anything not strictly true, but he easily satisfied himself that he had not. If all was fair in love and war, as the proverb said, it was certainly permissible to make use of the plain truth.

The Primadonna was still looking out of the window when the door opened and her English maid appeared on the threshold. Margaret turned at the sound.

'What is it?' she asked quietly.

'There's Mr. Van Torp's man, ma'am,' answered Potts. 'He wants to speak to his master at once.'

'You had better tell him to come up,' Margaret answered. 'You may just as well see him here without going all the way downstairs,' she said, speaking to Van Torp.

'You're very kind, I'm sure,' he replied; 'but I think I'd better be going anyway.'

'No, don't go yet, please! There's something else I want to say. See your man here while I go and speak to Mrs. Rushmore. Send Mr. Van Torp's man up, Potts,' she added, and left the room.

The American walked up and down alone for a few moments. Then the impassive Stemp was ushered in by the maid, and the door was shut again.

'Well?' inquired Mr. Van Torp. 'Has anything happened?'

'Yes, sir,' Stemp answered. 'They have turned us out of the house, sir, and your luggage is in the street. Where shall I have it taken, sir?'

'Oh, they've turned us out, have they? Why?'

'Well, sir, I'm afraid it's partly my fault, but there must be some misunderstanding, for I'm quite sure I didn't whistle in your room, sir.'

'So am I, Stemp. Quite sure. Go on. What happened?'

'Well, sir, you hadn't been gone more than ten minutes when somebody knocked, and there was the landlord, if that's what he calls himself, and a strange German gentleman with him, who spoke English. Rather shabby-looking, sir, I thought him. He spoke most uncivilly, and said I was driving him half crazy with my whistling. I said I hadn't whistled, and he said I had, and the landlord talked German at me, as it were, sir. I said again I hadn't whistled, and he said I had, the shabby gentleman, I mean, speaking most uncivilly, sir, I assure you. So when I saw that they doubted my word, I put them out and fastened the door, thinking this was what you would have ordered, sir, if you'd been there yourself, but I'm afraid I did wrong.'

'No, Stemp. You didn't do wrong.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'I suppose, though, that when you put them out they didn't exactly want to go, did they?'

'No, sir, but I had no trouble with them.'

'Any heads broken?'

'No, sir, I was careful of that. I sent the landlord downstairs first, as he was a fat man and not likely to hurt himself, and the shabby gentleman went down on top of him quite comfortably, so he did not hurt himself either. I was very careful, sir, being in a foreign country.'

'What happened next? They didn't come upstairs again and throw you out, I suppose.'

'No, sir. They went and got two of these German policemen with swords, and broke into the room, and told me we must move at once. I didn't like to resist the police, sir. It's sometimes serious. The German gentleman wanted them to arrest me, so I offered to pay any fine there was for having been hasty, and we settled for two sovereigns, which I thought dear, sir, and I'd have gone to the police station rather than pay it, only I knew you'd need my services in this heathen town, sir. I'm highly relieved to know that you approve of that, sir. But they said we must turn out directly, just the same, so I re-packed your things and got a porter, and he's standing over the luggage in the street, waiting for orders.'

'Stemp,' said Mr. Van Torp, 'I'd been whistling myself, before you came in, and the lunatic in the next room had already been fussing about it. It's my fault.'

'Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.'

'And it will be my fault if we have to sleep in a cab to-night.'

The door opened while he was speaking, and Margaret heard the last words as she entered the room.

'I'm sorry,' she said, 'I thought you had finished. I could not help hearing what you said about sleeping in a cab. That's nonsense, you know.'

'Well,' said Mr. Van Torp, 'they've just turned us out of the one room we had because I whistled *Parsifal* out of tune.'

'You didn't whistle it out of tune,' Margaret answered, to Stemp's great but well-concealed astonishment. 'I know better. Please have your things brought here at once.'

'Here?' repeated Mr. Van Torp, surprised in his turn.

'Yes,' she answered, in a tone that forestalled contradiction. 'If nothing else can be had you shall have this room. I can do without it.'

'You're kindness itself, but I couldn't do that,' said Mr. Van Torp. 'Bring our things to this hotel, anyway, Stemp, and we'll see what happens.'

'Yes, sir.'

Stemp disappeared at once, and his master turned to Margaret again.

'Nothing will induce me to put you to such inconvenience,' he said, and his tone was quite as decided as hers had been.

She smiled.

'Nothing will induce me to let a friend of mine be driven from pillar to post for a lodging while I have plenty of room to spare!'

'You're very, very kind, but——'

'But the mouse may turn into a tiger if you contradict it,' she said with a light laugh that thrilled him with delight. 'I remember your description of the Tartar girl!'

'Well, then, I suppose the hyæna will have to turn into a small woolly lamb if you tell him to,' answered Mr. Van Torp.

'Yes,' laughed Margaret. 'Be a small, woolly lamb at once, please, a very small one!'

'Knee-high to a kitten; certainly,' replied the millionaire submissively.

'Very well. I'll take you with me to hear *Parsifal* to-morrow, if you obey. I've just asked Mrs. Rushmore if it makes any difference to her, and she has confessed that she would rather not go again, for it tires her dreadfully and gives her a headache. You shall have her seat. What is it? Don't you want to go with me?'



"Margaret gazed at him in surprise while she might have counted ten."

Mr. Van Torp's face had hardened till it looked like a mask, he stared firmly at the wall, and his lips were set tightly together. Margaret gazed at him in surprise while she might have counted ten. Then he spoke slowly, with evident effort, and in an odd voice.

'Excuse me, Miss Donne,' he said, snapping his words out. 'I'm so grateful that I can't speak, that's all. It'll be all right in a second.'

A huge emotion had got hold of him. She saw the red flush rise suddenly above his collar, and then sink back before it reached his cheeks, and all at once he was very pale. But not a muscle of his face moved, not a line was drawn; only his sandy eyelashes quivered a little. His hands were thrust deep into the pockets of his jacket, but the fingers were motionless.

Margaret remembered how he had told her more than once that she was the only woman the world held for him, and she had thought it was nonsense, rather vulgarly and clumsily expressed by a man who was not much better than an animal where women were concerned.

It flashed upon her at last that what he had said was literally true, that she had misjudged an extraordinary man altogether, as many people did, and that she was indeed the only woman in the whole world who could master and dominate one whom many feared and hated, and whom she had herself once detested beyond words.

He was unchanging, too, whatever else he might be, and, as she admitted the fact, she saw clearly how fickle she had been in her own likes and dislikes, except where her art was concerned. But even as to that, she had passed through phases in which she had been foolish enough to think of giving up the stage in the first flush of her vast success.

While these thoughts were disturbing her a little, Mr. Van Torp recovered himself; his features relaxed, his hands came out of his pockets, and he slowly turned towards her.

'I hope you don't think me rude,' he said awkwardly. 'I feel things a good deal sometimes, though

people mightn't believe it.'

They were still standing near together, and not far from the door through which Margaret had entered.

'It's never rude to be grateful, even for small things,' she answered gently.

She left his side, and went again to the window, where she stood and turned from him, looking out. He waited where he was, glad of the moments of silence. As for her, she was struggling against a generous impulse, because she was afraid that he might misunderstand her if she gave way to it. But, to do her justice, she had never had much strength to resist her own instinctive generosity when it moved her.

'Lady Maud told me long ago that I was mistaken about you,' she said at last, without looking at him. 'She was right and I was quite wrong. I'm sorry. Don't bear me any grudge. You won't, will you?'

She turned now, rather suddenly, and found him looking at her with a sort of hunger in his eyes that disappeared almost as soon as hers met them.

'No,' he answered, 'I don't bear you any grudge, I never did, and I don't see how I ever could. I could tell you why, but I won't, because you probably know, and it's no use to repeat what once displeased you.'

'Thank you,' said Margaret, she scarcely knew why.

Her handsome head was a little bent, and her eyes were turned to the floor as she passed him going to the door.

'I'm going to see the manager of the hotel,' she said. 'I'll be back directly.'

'No, no! Please let me——'

But she was gone, the door was shut again, and Mr. Van Torp was left to his own very happy reflections for a while.

Not for long, however. He was still standing before the table staring at the corn-flowers and poppies without consciously seeing them when he was aware of the imposing presence of Mrs. Rushmore, who had entered softly during his reverie and was almost at his elbow.

'This is Mr. Van Torp, I presume,' she said gravely, inclining her head. 'I am Mrs. Rushmore. You have perhaps heard Miss Donne speak of me.'

'I'm very pleased to meet you, Mrs. Rushmore,' said the American, bowing low. 'I've often heard Miss Donne speak of you with the greatest gratitude and affection.'

'Certainly,' Mrs. Rushmore answered with gravity, and as she established herself on the sofa she indicated a chair not far from her.

It was only proper that Margaret should always speak of her with affection and gratitude. Mr. Van Torp sat down on the chair to which she had directed rather than invited him; and he prepared to be bored to the full extent of the bearable. He had known the late Mr. Rushmore in business; Mr. Rushmore had been a 'pillar' of various things, including honesty, society, and the church he went to, and he had always bored Mr. Van Torp extremely. The least that could be expected was that the widow of such an estimable man should carry on the traditions of her deeply lamented husband. In order to help her politely to what seemed the inevitable, Mr. Van Torp mentioned him.

'I had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Rushmore,' he said in the proper tone of mournfully retrospective admiration. 'He was sincerely lamented by all our business men.'

'He was,' assented the widow, as she would have said Amen in church, in the right place, and with much the same solemn intonation.

There was a moment's pause, during which the millionaire was trying to think of something else she might like to hear, for she was Margaret's friend, and he wished to make a good impression. He was therefore not prepared to hear her speak again before he did, much less for the subject of conversation she introduced at once.

'You know our friend Monsieur Logotheti, I believe?' she inquired suddenly.

'Why, certainly,' answered Van Torp, brightening at once at the mention of his rival, and at once also putting on his moral armour of caution. 'I know him quite well.'

'Indeed? Have you known many Greeks, may I ask?'

'I've met one or two in business, Mrs. Rushmore, but I can't say I've known any as well as Mr. Logotheti.'

'You may think it strange that I should ask you about him at our first meeting,' said the good lady, 'but I'm an American, and I cannot help feeling that a fellow-countryman's opinion of a foreigner is very valuable. You are, I understand, an old friend of Miss Donne's, though I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before, and you have probably heard that she has made up her mind to

marry Monsieur Logotheti. I am bound to confess, as her dear mother's oldest friend, that I am very apprehensive of the consequences. I have the gravest apprehensions, Mr. Van Torp.'

'Have you really?' asked the millionaire with caution, but sympathetically. 'I wonder why!'

'A Greek!' said Mrs. Rushmore sadly. 'Think of a Greek!'

Mr. Van Torp, who was not without a sense of humour, was inclined to answer that, in fact, he was thinking of a Greek at that very moment. But he abstained.

'There are Greeks and Greeks, Mrs. Rushmore,' he answered wisely.

'That is true,' answered the lady, 'but I should like your opinion, as one of our most prominent men of business—as one who, if I may say so, has of late triumphantly established his claim to respect.' Mr. Van Torp bowed and waved his hand in acknowledgment of this high praise. 'I should like your opinion about this—er—this Greek gentleman whom my young friend insists upon marrying.'

'Really, Mrs. Rushmore——'

'Because if I thought there was unhappiness in store for her I would save her, if I had to marry the man myself!'

Mr. Van Torp wondered how she would accomplish such a feat.

'Indeed?' he said very gravely.

'I mean it,' answered Mrs. Rushmore.

There was a moment's silence, during which Mr. Van Torp revolved something in his always active brain, while Mrs. Rushmore looked at him as if she expected that he would doubt her determination to drag Logotheti to the matrimonial altar and marry him by sheer strength, rather than let Margaret be his unhappy bride. But Mr. Van Torp said something quite different.

'May I speak quite frankly, though we hardly know each other?' he asked.

'We are both Americans,' answered the good lady, with a grand national air. 'I should not expect anything but perfect frankness of you.'

'The truth is, Mrs. Rushmore, that ever since I had the pleasure of knowing Miss Donne, I have wanted to marry her myself.'

'You!' cried the lady, surprised beyond measure, but greatly pleased.

'Yes,' said Mr. Van Torp quietly, 'and therefore, in my position, I can't give you an unbiassed opinion about Mr. Logotheti. I really can't.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Rushmore, 'I am surprised!'

While she was still surprised Mr. Van Torp tried to make some running, and asked an important question.

'May I ask whether, as Miss Donne's oldest friend, you would look favourably on my proposal, supposing she were free?'

Before Mrs. Rushmore could answer, the door opened suddenly, and she could only answer by an energetic nod and a look which meant that she wished Mr. Van Torp success with all her excellent heart.

'It's quite settled!' Margaret cried as she entered. 'I've brought the director to his senses, and you are to have the rooms they were keeping for a Russian prince who has not turned up!'

CHAPTER VI

In the sanctuary of Wagnerians the famous lyric Diva was a somewhat less important personage than in any of those other places which are called 'musical centres.' Before the glories of the great Brunhilde, or the supreme Kundry of the day, the fame of the 'nightingale soprano' paled a little, at least in the eyes of more than half the people who filled the Bayreuth theatre. But she did not pass unnoticed by any means. There were distinguished conductors of Wagner's music who led the orchestra for other operas too; there were Kundrys and Brunhildes who condescended to be Toscas sometimes, as a pure matter of business and livelihood, and there were numberless people in the audience who preferred *Cavalleria Rusticana* to the *Meistersinger* or the *Götterdämmerung*, but would not dare to say so till they were at a safe distance; and all these admired the celebrated Cordova, except the few that were envious of her, and who were not many. Indeed, for once it was the other way. When Margaret had come back to her own room after hearing *Parsifal* the first time, she had sat down and hidden her face in her hands for a few moments, asking herself what all her parts were worth in the end compared with Kundry, and what comparison was possible between the most beautiful of Italian or French operas and that one immortal masterpiece; for she thought, and rightly perhaps, that all the rest of Wagner's work had been but a preparation for that, and that *Parsifal*, and *Parsifal* alone, had set the genius of music beside the genius of poetry, an equal, at last, upon a throne as high. On that night the

sound of her own voice would have given her no pleasure, for she longed for another tone in it; if by some impossible circumstance she had been engaged to sing as Juliet that night, she would have broken down and burst into tears. She knew it, and the knowledge made her angry with herself, yet for nothing she could think of would she have foregone the second hearing of *Parsifal*, and the third after that; for she was a musician first, and then a great singer, and, like all true musicians, she was swayed by music that touched her, and never merely pleased by it. For her no intermediate condition of the musical sense was possible between criticism and delight; but beyond that she had found rapture now, and ever afterwards she would long to feel it again. Whether, if her voice had made it possible to sing the part of Kundry, she could have lifted herself to that seventh heaven by her own singing, only the great Kundrys and Parsifals can tell. In lyric opera she knew the keen joy of being both the instrument and the enthralled listener; perhaps a still higher state beyond that was out of any one's reach, but she could at least dream of it.

She took Van Torp with her to the performance the next day, after impressing upon him that he was not to speak, not to whisper, not to applaud, not to make any sound, from the moment he entered the theatre till he left it for the dinner interval. He was far too happy with her to question anything she said, and he obeyed her most scrupulously. Twenty-four hours earlier she would have laughed at the idea that his presence beside her at such a time could be not only bearable, but sympathetic, yet that seemed natural now. The Diva and the ex-cowboy, the accomplished musician and the Californian miner, the sensitive, gifted, capricious woman and the iron-jawed money-wolf had found that they had something in common. Wagner's last music affected them in the same way.

Such things are not to be explained, and could not be believed if they did not happen again and again before the eyes of those who know how to see, which is quite a different thing from merely seeing. Margaret's sudden liking for the man she had once so thoroughly disliked had begun when he had whistled to her. It grew while he sat beside her in the darkened theatre. She was absorbed by the music, the action, and the scene, and at this second hearing she could follow the noble poem itself; but she was subconscious of what her neighbour felt. He was not so motionless merely because she had told him that he must sit very still; he was not so intent on what he heard and saw, merely to please her; it was not mere interest that held him, still less was it curiosity. The spell was upon him; he was entranced, and Margaret knew it.

Even when they left the theatre and drove back to the hotel, he was silent, and she was the first to speak. Margaret hated the noise and confusion of the restaurant near the Festival Theatre.

'You have enjoyed it,' she said. 'I'm glad I brought you.'

'I've felt something I don't understand,' Van Torp answered gravely.

She liked the reply for its simplicity. She had perhaps expected that he would summon up his most picturesque language to tell her how much pleasure the music had given him, or that he would perhaps laugh at himself for having been moved; but instead, he only told her that he did not understand what he had felt; and they walked on without another word.

'Go and get something to eat,' she said when they reached the hotel, 'and I'll meet you here in half an hour. I don't care to talk either.'

He only nodded, and lifted his hat as she went up the steps; but instead of going to eat, he sat down on a bench outside, and waited for her there, reflecting on the nature of his new experience.

Like most successful men, he looked on all theories as trash, good enough to amuse clever idlers, but never to be taken into consideration in real life. He never asked about the principle on which any invention was founded; his first and only question was, 'Will it work?'

Considering himself as the raw material, and the theatre he had just left as the mill, he was forced to admit that *Parsifal* 'worked.'

'It works all right,' he inwardly soliloquised. 'If that's what it claims to do, it does it.'

When he had reached this business-like conclusion, his large lips parted a little, and as his breath passed between his closed teeth, it made soft little hissing sounds that had a suggestion of music in them, though they were not really whistled notes; his sandy lashes half veiled his eyes and he saw again what he had lately seen: the King borne down to the bath that would never heal his wound, and the dead swan, and the wondering Maiden-Man brought to answer for his bow-shot, the wild Witch-Girl crouching by the giant trees, and the long way that led upward through the forest, and upward ever, to the Hall of the Knights, and last of all, the mysterious Sangreal itself, glowing divinely in the midst.

He did not really understand what he had seen and saw again as he half closed his eyes. That was the reason why he accepted it passively, as he accepted elemental things. If he could by any means have told himself what illusion it was all intended to produce upon his sight and hearing, he would have pulled the trick to pieces, mentally, in a moment, and what remained would have been the merely pleasant recollection of something very well done, but not in itself different from other operas or plays he had heard and seen elsewhere, nothing more than an 'improvement on *Lohengrin*,' as he would probably have called it.

But this was something not 'more,' but quite of another kind, and it affected him as the play of

nature's forces sometimes did; it was like the brooding of the sea, the rising gale, the fury of the storm, like the leaden stillness before the earthquake, the awful heave of the earth, the stupendous crash of the doomed city, the long rolling rumble of falling walls and tumbling houses, big with sudden death; or again, it was like sad gleams of autumn sunshine, and the cold cathedral light of primeval forests in winter, and then it was the spring stirring in all things, the rising pulse of mating nature, the burst of May-bloom, the huge glow of the earth basking in the full summer sun.

He did not know, and no one knew, what nature meant by those things. How could nature's meaning be put into words? And so he did not understand what he had felt, nor could he see that it might have significance. What was the 'interpretation' of a storm, of an earthquake, or of winter and summer? God, perhaps; perhaps just 'nature.' He did not know. Margaret had told him the story of the opera in the evening; he had followed it easily enough and could not forget it. It was a sort of religious fairy-tale, he thought, and he was ready to believe that Wagner had made a good poem of it, even a great poem. But it was not the story that could be told, which had moved him; it was nothing so easily defined as a poem, or a drama, or a piece of music. A far more cultivated man than he could ever become might sit through the performance and feel little or nothing, of that he was sure; just as he could have carried beautiful Lady Maud in his arms without feeling that she was a woman for him, whereas the slightest touch of Margaret Donne, the mere fact of being near her, made the blood beat in his throat.

That was only a way of putting it, for there was no sex in the music he had just heard. He had sat so close to Margaret that their arms constantly touched, yet he had forgotten that she was there. If the music had been *Tristan and Isolde* he could not have been unaware of her, for a moment, for that is the supreme sex-music of Wagner's art. But this was different, altogether different, though it was even stronger than that.

He forgot to look at his watch. Margaret came out of the hotel, expecting to find him waiting for her within the hall, and prepared to be annoyed with him for taking so long over a meal. She stood on the step and looked about, and saw him sitting on the bench at a little distance. He raised his eyes as she came towards him and then rose quickly.

'Is it time?' he asked.

'Yes,' she said. 'Did you get anything decent to eat?'

'Yes,' he answered vaguely. 'That is, now I think of it, I forgot about dinner. It doesn't matter.'

She looked at his hard face curiously and saw a dead blank, the blank that had sometimes frightened her by its possibilities, when the eyes alone came suddenly to life.

'Won't you go in and get a biscuit, or a sandwich?' she asked after a moment.

'Oh, no, thanks. I'm used to skipping meals when I'm interested in things. Let's go, if you're ready.'

'I believe you are one of nature's Wagnerites,' Margaret said, as they drove up the hill again, and she smiled at the idea.

'Well,' he answered slowly, 'there's one thing, if you don't mind my telling you. It's rather personal. Perhaps I'd better not.'

The Primadonna was silent for a few moments, and did not look at him.

'Tell me,' she said suddenly.

'It's this. I don't know how long the performance lasted, but while it was going on I forgot you were close beside me. You might just as well not have been there. It's the first time since I ever knew you that I've been near you without thinking about you all the time, and I hadn't realised it till I was sitting here by myself. I hope you don't mind my telling you?'

'It only makes me more glad that I brought you,' Margaret said quietly.

'Thank you,' he answered; but he was quite sure that the same thing could not happen again during the Second Part.

Nevertheless, it happened. For a little while, they were man and woman, sitting side by side and very near, two in a silent multitude of other men and women; but before long he was quite motionless, his eyes were fixed again and he had forgotten her. She saw it and wondered, for she knew how her presence moved him, and as his hands lay folded on his knee, a mischievous girlish impulse almost made her, the great artist, forget that she was listening to the greatest music in the world and nearly made her lay her hand on his, just to see what he would do. She was ashamed of it, and a little disgusted with herself. The part of her that was Margaret Donne felt the disgust; the part that was Cordova felt the shame, and each side of her nature was restrained at a critical moment. Yet when the 'Good Friday' music began, she was thinking of Van Torp and he was unconscious of her presence.

It could not last, and soon she, too, was taken up into the artificial paradise of the master-musician and borne along in the gale of golden wings, and there was no passing of time till the very end; and the people rose in silence and went out under the summer stars; and all those whom nature had gifted to hear rightly, took with them memories that years would scarcely dim.

The two walked slowly back to the town as the crowd scattered on foot and in carriages. It was warm, and there was no moon, and one could smell the dust, for many people were moving in the same direction, though some stopped at almost every house and went in, and most of them were beginning to talk in quiet tones.

Margaret stepped aside from the road and entered a narrow lane, and Van Torp followed her in silence.

'This leads out to the fields,' she said. 'I must breathe the fresh air. Do you mind?'

'On the contrary.'



"She was aware of his slight change of position without turning her eyes."

He said nothing more, and she did not speak, but walked on without haste, dilating her nostrils to the sweet smell of grass that reached her already. In a little while they had left the houses behind them, and they came to a gate that led into a field.

Van Torp was going to undo the fastening, for there was no lock.

'No,' she said, 'we won't go through. I love to lean on a gate.'

She rested her crossed arms on the upper rail and Van Torp did the same, careful that his elbow should not touch hers, and they both stared into the dim, sweet-scented meadow. He felt her presence now and it almost hurt him; he could hear his slow pulse in his ears, hard and regular. She did not speak, but the night was so still that he could hear her breathing, and at last he could not bear the warm silence any longer.

'What are you thinking about?' he asked, trying to speak lightly.

She waited, or hesitated, before she answered him.

'You,' she said, after a time.

He moved involuntarily, and then drew a little further away from her, as he might have withdrawn a foot from the edge of a precipice, out of common caution. She was aware of his slight change of position without turning her eyes.

'What made you say what you did to Mrs. Rushmore yesterday afternoon?' she asked.

'About you?'

'Yes.'

'She asked me, point-blank, what I thought of Logotheti,' Van Torp answered. 'I told her that I couldn't give her an unbiassed opinion of the man you meant to marry, because I had always

hoped to marry you myself.'

'Oh—was that the way it happened?'

'Mrs. Rushmore could hardly have misunderstood me,' said Van Torp, gathering the reins of himself, so to say, for anything that might happen.

'No. But it sounds differently when you say it yourself.'

'That was just what I said, anyhow,' answered Van Torp. 'I didn't think she'd go and tell you right away, but since she has, I don't regret having said that much.'

'It was straightforward, at all events—if it was all true!' There was the faintest laugh in her tone as she spoke the last words.

'It's true, right enough, though I didn't expect that I should be talking to you about this sort of thing to-night.'

'The effect on Mrs. Rushmore was extraordinary, positively fulminating,' Margaret said more lightly. 'She says I ought to break off my engagement at once, and marry you! Fancy!'

'That's very kind of her, I'm sure,' observed Mr. Van Torp.

'I don't think so. I like it less and less, the more I think of it.'

'Well, I'm sorry, but I suppose it's natural, since you've concluded to marry him, and it can't be helped. I wasn't going to say anything against him, and I wouldn't say anything for him, so there was nothing to do but to explain, which I did. I'm sorry you think I did wrong, but I should give the same answer again.'

'Mrs. Rushmore thinks that Konstantin is a designing foreigner because he's a Greek man of business, and that you are perfection because you are an American business man.'

'If I'm perfection, that's not the real reason,' said Van Torp, snatching at his first chance to steer out of the serious current; but Margaret did not laugh.

'You are not perfection, nor I either,' she answered gravely. 'You are famous in your way, and people call me celebrated in mine; but so far as the rest is concerned we are just two ordinary human beings, and if we are going to be friends we must understand each other from the first, as far as we can.'

'I'll try to do my share,' said Van Torp, taking her tone.

'Very well. I'll do mine. I began by thinking you were amusing, when I first met you. Then you frightened me last winter, and I hated you. Not only that, I loathed you—there's no word strong enough for what I felt. When I saw you in the audience, you almost paralysed my voice.'

'I didn't know it had been as bad as that,' said Mr. Van Torp quietly.

'Yes. It was worse than I can make you understand. And last spring, when you were in so much trouble, I believed every word that was said against you, even that you had murdered your partner's daughter in cold blood to get rid of her, though that looked as incredible to sensible people as it really was. It was only when I saw how Lady Maud believed in you that I began to waver, and then I understood.'

'I'm glad you did.'

'So am I. But she is such a good woman herself that nobody can be really bad in whom she believes. And now I'm changed still more. I like you, and I'm sure that we shall be friends, if you will make me one promise and keep it.'

'What is it?'

'That you will give up all idea of ever marrying me, no matter what happens, even if I broke——'

'It's no use to go on,' interrupted Van Torp, 'for I can't promise anything like that. Maybe you don't realise what you're asking, but it's the impossible. That's all.'

'Oh, nonsense!' Margaret tried to laugh lightly, but it was a failure.

'No, it's very far from nonsense,' he replied, almost sternly. 'Since you've spoken first, I'm going to tell you several things. One is, that I accepted the syndicate's offer for the Nickel Trust so as to be free to take any chance that might turn up. It had been open some time, but I accepted it on the day I heard of your engagement. That's a big thing. Another is, that I played a regular trick on Logotheti so as to come and see you here. I deliberately asked him to dine with me last night in London. I went right home, wrote a note to him, antedated for yesterday afternoon, to put him off, and I left it to be sent at the right hour. Then I drove to the station, and here I am. You may call that pretty sharp practice, but I believe all's fair in love and war, and I want you to understand that I think so. There's one thing more. I won't give up the hope of making you marry me while you're alive and I am, not if you're an old woman, and I'll put up all I have in the game, including my own life and other people's, if it comes to that. Amen.'

Margaret bent her head a little and was silent.

'Now you know why I won't promise what you asked,' said Van Torp in conclusion.

He had not raised his voice; he had not laid a heavy stress on half his words, as he often did in common conversation; there had been nothing dramatic in his tone; but Margaret had understood well enough that it was the plain statement of a man who meant to succeed, and whose strength and resources were far beyond those of ordinary suitors. She was not exactly frightened; indeed, since her dislike for him had melted away, it was impossible not to feel a womanly satisfaction in the magnitude of her conquest; but she also felt instinctively that serious trouble and danger were not far off.

'You have no right to speak like that,' she said rather weakly, after a moment.

'Perhaps not. I don't know. But I consider that you have a right to know the truth, and that's enough for me. It's not as if I'd made up my mind to steal your ewe-lamb from you and put myself in its place. Logotheti is not any sort of a ewe-lamb. He's a man, he's got plenty of strength and determination, he's got plenty of money—even what I choose to call plenty. He says he cares for you. All right. So do I. He says he'll marry you. I say that I will. All right again. You're the prize put up for the best of two fighting men. You're not the first woman in history who's been fought for, but, by all that's holy, there never was one better worth it, not Helen of Troy herself!'

The last few words came with a sort of stormy rush, and he turned round suddenly, and stood with his back against the gate, thrusting his hands deep into his coat-pockets, perhaps with the idea of keeping them quiet; but he did not come any nearer to her, and she felt she was perfectly safe, and that a much deeper and more lasting power had hold of him than any mere passionate longing to take her in his arms and press his iron lips on hers against her will. She began to understand why he was what he was, at an age when many successful men are still fighting for final success. He was a crown-grasper, like John the Smith. Beside him Logotheti was but a gifted favourite of fortune. He spoke of Helen, but if he was comparing his rival with Paris he himself was more like an Ajax than like good King Menelaus.

Margaret was not angry; she was hardly displeased, but she was really at a loss what to say, and she said the first sensible thing that suggested itself and that was approximately true.

'I'm sorry you have told me all this. We might have spent these next two days very pleasantly together. Oh, I'm not pretending what I don't feel! It's impossible for a woman like me, who can still be free, not to be flattered when such a man as you cares for her in earnest, and says the things you have. But, on the other hand, I'm engaged to be married to another man, and it would not be loyal of me to let you make love to me.'

'I don't mean to,' said Van Torp stoutly. 'It won't be necessary. If I never spoke again you wouldn't forget what I've told you—ever! Why should I say it again? I don't want to, until you can say as much to me. If it's time to go, hitch the lead to my collar and take me home! I'll follow you as quietly as a spaniel, anywhere!'

'And what would happen if I told you not to follow me, but to go home and lie down in your kennel?' She laughed low as she moved away from the gate.

'I'm not sure,' answered Van Torp. 'Don't.'

The last word was not spoken at all with an accent of warning, but it was not said in a begging tone either. Margaret's short laugh followed it instantly. He took the cue she offered, and went on speaking in his ordinary manner.

'I'm not a bad dog if you don't bully me, and if you feed me at regular hours and take me for a walk now and then. I don't pretend I'm cut out for a French pet, because I'm not. I'm too big for a lap-dog, and too fond of sport for the drawing-room, I suppose. A good useful dog generally is, isn't he? Maybe I'm a little quarrelsome with other dogs, but then, they needn't come bothering around!'

Margaret was amused, or pretended to be, but she was also thinking very seriously of the future, and asking herself whether she ought to send for Logotheti at once, or not. Van Torp would certainly not leave Bayreuth at a moment's notice, at her bidding, and if he stayed she could not now refuse to see him, with any show of justice. She thought of a compromise, and suddenly stood still in the lane.

'You said just now that you would not say over again any of those things you have told me to-night. Do you mean that?'

'Yes, I mean it.'

'Then please promise that you won't. That's all I ask if you are going to spend the next two days here, and if I am to let you see me.'

'I promise,' Van Torp answered, without hesitation.

She allowed herself the illusion that she had both done the right thing and also taken the position of command; and he, standing beside her, allowed himself to smile at the futility of what she was requiring of him with so much earnestness, for little as he knew of women's ways he was more than sure that the words he had spoken that night would come back to her again and again; and more than that he could not hope at present. But she could not see his face clearly.

'Thank you,' she said. 'That shall be our compact.'

To his surprise, she held out her hand. He took it with wonderful calmness, considering what the touch meant to him, and he returned discreetly what was meant for a friendly pressure. She was so well satisfied now that she did not think it necessary to telegraph to Logotheti that he might start at once, though even if she had done so immediately he could hardly have reached Bayreuth till the afternoon of the next day but one, when the last performance of *Parsifal* would be already going on; and she herself intended to leave on the morning after that.

She walked forward in silence for a few moments, and the lights of the town grew quickly brighter.

'You will come in and have some supper with us, of course,' she said presently.

'Why, certainly, since you're so kind,' answered Van Torp.

'I feel responsible for your having forgotten to dine,' she laughed. 'I must make it up to you. By this time Mrs. Rushmore is probably wondering where I am.'

'Well,' said the American, 'if she thinks I'm perfection, she knows that you're safe with me, I suppose, even if you do come home a little late.'

'I shall say that we walked home very slowly, in order to breathe the air.'

'Yes. We've walked home very slowly.'

'I mean,' said Margaret quickly, 'that I shall not say we have been out towards the fields, as far as the gate.'

'I don't see any harm if we have,' observed Mr Van Torp indifferently.

'Harm? No! Don't you understand? Mrs. Rushmore is quite capable of thinking that I have already—how shall I say?—' she stopped.

'Taken note of her good advice,' he said, completing the sentence for her.

'Exactly! Whereas nothing could be further from my intention, as you know. I'm very fond of Mrs. Rushmore,' Margaret continued quickly, in order to get away from the dangerous subject she had felt obliged to approach; 'she has been a mother to me, and heaven knows I needed one, and she has the best and kindest heart in the world. But she is so anxious for my happiness that, whenever she thinks it is at stake, she rushes at conclusions without the slightest reason, and then it's very hard to get them out of her dear old head!'

'I see. If that's why she thinks me perfection, I'll try not to disappoint her.'

They reached the hotel, went upstairs, and separated on the landing to get ready for supper. Margaret went to her own room, and before joining Mrs. Rushmore she wrote a message to Alphonsine, her theatre maid, who was visiting her family in Alsatia. Margaret generally telegraphed her instructions, because it was much less trouble than to write. She inquired whether Alphonsine would be ready to join her in Paris on a certain day, and she asked for the address of a wig-maker which she had forgotten.

On his side of the landing, Mr. Van Torp found Stemp waiting to dress him, and the valet handed him a telegram. It was from Captain Brown, and had been re-telegraphed from London.

'Anchored off Saint Mark's Square to-day, 3.30 P.M. Quick passage. No stop. Coaling to-morrow. Ready for sea next morning.'

Mr. Van Torp laid the message open on the table in order to save Stemp the trouble of looking for it afterwards.

'Stemp,' he asked, as he threw off his coat and kicked off his dusty shoes, 'were you ever sea-sick?'

'Yes, sir,' answered the admirable valet, but he offered no more information on the subject.

During the silence that followed, neither wasted a second. It is no joke to wash and get into evening dress in six minutes, even with the help of a body-servant trained to do his work at high speed.

'I mean,' said Van Torp, when he was already fastening his collar, 'are you sea-sick nowadays?'

'No, sir,' replied Stemp, in precisely the same tone as before.

'I don't mean on a twenty-thousand-ton liner. Black cravat. Yes. I mean on a yacht. Fix it behind. Right. Would you be sea-sick on a steam yacht?'

'No, sir.'

'Sure?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then I'll take you. Tuxedo.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Stemp held up the dinner-jacket; Mr. Van Torp's solid arms slipped into the sleeves, he shook his sturdy shoulders, and pulled the jacket down in front while the valet 'settled' the back. Then he faced round suddenly, like a soldier at drill.

'All right?' he inquired.

Stemp looked him over carefully from head to foot in the glare of the electric light.

'Yes, sir.'

Van Torp left the room at once. He found Mrs. Rushmore slowly moving about the supper-table, more imposing than ever in a perfectly new black tea-gown and an extremely smart widow's cap. Mr. Van Torp thought she was a very fine old lady indeed. Margaret had not entered yet; a waiter with smooth yellow hair stood by a portable sideboard on which there were covered dishes. There were poppies and corn-flowers in a plain white jar on the table. Mrs. Rushmore smiled at the financier; it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that she beamed upon him. They had not met alone since his first visit on the previous afternoon.

'Miss Donne is a little late,' she said, as if the fact were very pleasing. 'You brought her back, of course.'

'Why, certainly,' said Mr. Van Torp with an amiable smile.

'You can hardly have come straight from the theatre,' continued the lady, 'for I heard the other people in the hotel coming in fully twenty minutes before you did.'

'We walked home very slowly,' said Mr. Van Torp, still smiling amiably.

'Ah, I see! You went for a little walk to get some air!' She seemed delighted.

'We walked home very slowly in order to breathe the air,' said Mr. Van Torp—'to breathe the air, as you say. I have to thank you very much for giving me your seat, Mrs. Rushmore.'

'To tell the truth,' replied the good lady, 'I was very glad to let you take my place. I cannot say I enjoy that sort of music myself. It gives me a headache.'

Margaret entered at this point in a marvellous 'creation' of Chinese crape, of the most delicate shade of heliotrope. Her dressmaker called it also a tea-gown, but Mr. Van Torp would have thought it 'quite appropriate' for a 'dinner-dance' at Bar Harbor.

'My dear child,' said Mrs. Rushmore, 'how long you were in getting back from the theatre! I began to fear that something had happened!'

'We walked home very slowly,' said Margaret, with a pleasant smile.

'Ah? You went for a little walk to get some air?'

'We just walked home very slowly, in order to breathe the air,' Margaret answered innocently.

It dawned on Mr. Van Torp that the dignified Mrs. Rushmore was not quite devoid of a sense of humour. It also occurred to him that her repetition of the question to Margaret, and the latter's answer, must have revealed to her the fact that the two had agreed upon what they should say, since they used identically the same words, and that they therefore had an understanding about something they preferred to conceal from her. Nothing could have given Mrs. Rushmore such profound satisfaction as this, and it revealed itself in her bright smiles and her anxiety that both Margaret and Van Torp should, if possible, over-eat themselves with the excellent things she had been at pains to provide for them and for herself. For she was something of an epicure and her dinners in Versailles were of good fame, even in Paris.

Great appetites are generally silent, like the sincerest affections. Margaret was very hungry, and Mr. Van Torp was both hungry and very much in love. Mrs. Rushmore was neither, and she talked pleasantly while tasting each delicacy with critical satisfaction.

'By the bye,' she said at last, when she saw that the millionaire was backing his foretopsail to come to anchor, as Captain Brown might have expressed it, 'I hope you have not had any further trouble about your rooms, Mr. Van Torp.'

'None at all, that I know of,' answered the latter. 'My man told me nothing.'

'The Russian prince arrived this evening while you were at the theatre, and threatened the director with all sorts of legal consequences because the rooms he had ordered were occupied. He turns out to be only a count after all.'

'You don't say so,' observed Mr. Van Torp, in an encouraging tone.

'What became of him?' Margaret asked, without much interest.

'Did Potts not tell you, my dear? Why, Justine assisted at the whole interview and came and told me at once.'

Justine was Mrs. Rushmore's Parisian maid, who always knew everything.

'What happened?' inquired Margaret, still not much interested.

'He arrived in an automobile,' answered Mrs. Rushmore, and she paused.

'What old Griggs calls a sudden-death-cart,' Mr. Van Torp put in.

'What a shocking name for it!' cried Mrs. Rushmore. 'And you are always in them, my dear child!' She looked at Margaret. 'A sudden-death-cart! It quite makes me shiver.'

'Griggs says that all his friends either kill or get killed in them,' explained the American.

'My throat-doctor says motoring is very bad for the voice, so I've given it up,' Margaret said.

'Really? Thank goodness your profession has been of some use to you at last, my dear!'

Margaret laughed.

'Tell us about the Russian count,' she said. 'Has he found lodgings, or is he going to sleep in his motor?'

'My dear, he's the most original man you ever heard of! First he wanted to buy the hotel and turn us all out, and offered any price for it, but the director said it was owned by a company in Munich. Then he sent his secretary about trying to buy a house, while he dined, but that didn't succeed either. He must be very wealthy, or else quite mad.'

'Mad, I should say,' observed Mr. Van Torp, slowly peeling a peach. 'Did you happen to catch his name, Mrs. Rushmore?'

'Oh, yes! We heard nothing else all the afternoon. His name is Kralinsky—Count Kralinsky.'

Mr. Van Torp continued to peel his peach scientifically and economically, though he was aware that Margaret was looking at him with sudden curiosity.

'Kralinsky,' he said slowly, keeping his eyes on the silver blade of the knife as he finished what he was doing. 'It's not an uncommon name, I believe. I've heard it before. Sounds Polish, doesn't it?'

He looked up suddenly and showed Margaret the peeled peach on his fork. He smiled as he met her eyes, and she nodded so slightly that Mrs. Rushmore did not notice the movement.

'Did you ever see that done better?' he asked with an air of triumph.

'Ripping!' Margaret answered. 'You're a dandy dab at it!'

'My dear child, what terrible slang!'

'I'm sorry,' said Margaret. 'I'm catching all sorts of American expressions from Mr. Van Torp, and when they get mixed up with my English ones the result is Babel, I suppose!'

'I've not heard Mr. Van Torp use any slang expressions yet, my dear,' said Mrs. Rushmore, almost severely.

'You will,' Margaret retorted with a laugh. 'What became of Count Kralinsky? I didn't mean to spoil your story.'

'My dear, he's got the Pastor to give up his house, by offering him a hundred pounds for the poor here.'

'It's cheap,' observed Mr. Van Torp. 'The poor always are.'

'You two are saying the most dreadful things to-night!' cried Mrs. Rushmore.

'Nothing dreadful in that, Mrs. Rushmore,' objected the millionaire. 'There's no investment on earth like charity.'

'We are taught that by charity we lay up treasures in heaven,' said the good lady.

'Provided it's not mentioned in the newspapers,' retorted Mr. Van Torp. 'When it is, we lay up treasures on earth. I don't like to mention other men in that connexion, especially as I've done the same thing myself now and then, just to quiet things down; but I suppose some names will occur to you right away, don't they? Where is the Pastor going to sleep, now that the philanthropist has bought him out?'

'I really don't know,' answered Mrs. Rushmore.

'Then he's the real philanthropist,' said Van Torp. 'If he understood the power of advertisement, and wanted it, he'd let it be known that he was going to sleep on the church steps without enough blankets, for the good of the poor who are to have the money, and he'd get everybody to come and look at him in his sleep, and notice how good he was. Instead of that, he's probably turned in under the back stairs, in the coal-hole, without saying anything about it. I don't know how it strikes you, Mrs. Rushmore, but it does seem to me that the clergyman's the real philanthropist after all!'

'Indeed he is, poor man,' said Margaret, a good deal surprised at Van Torp's sermon on charity, and wondering vaguely whether he was talking for effect or merely saying what he really thought.

An effect certainly followed.

'You put it very sensibly, I'm sure,' said Mrs. Rushmore, 'though of course I should not have looked for anything else from a fellow-countryman I respect. You startled me a little at first, when you said that the poor are always cheap! Only that, I assure you.'

'Well,' answered the American, 'I never was very good at expressing myself, but I'm glad we think alike, for I must say I value your opinion very highly, Mrs. Rushmore, as I had learned to value the opinion of your late husband.'

'You're very kind,' she said, in a grateful tone.

Margaret was not sure that she was pleased as she realised how easily Van Torp played upon her old friend's feelings and convictions, and she wondered whether he had not already played on her own that night, in much the same way. But with the mere thought his words and his voice came back to her, with his talk about the uselessness of ever repeating what he had said that once, because he knew she could never forget it. And her young instinct told her that he dealt with the elderly woman precisely as if she were a man, with all the ease that proceeded from his great knowledge of men and their weaknesses; but that with herself, in his ignorance of feminine ways, he could only be quite natural.

He left them soon after supper, and gave himself up to Stemp, pondering over what he had accomplished in two days, and also about another question which had lately presented itself. When he was ready to send his valet to bed he sat down at his table and wrote a telegram:

'If you can find Barak, please explain that I was mistaken. Kralinsky is not in New York, but here in Bayreuth for some days, lodging at the Pastor's house.'

This message was addressed to Logotheti at his lodgings in London, and Van Torp signed it and gave it to Stemp to be sent at once. Logotheti never went to bed before two o'clock, as he knew, and might very possibly get the telegram the same night.

When his man was gone, Van Torp drew his chair to the open window and sat up a long time thinking about what he had just done; for though he held that all was fair in such a contest, he did not mean to do anything which he himself thought 'low-down.' One proof of this odd sort of integrity was that the telegram itself was a fair warning of his presence in Bayreuth, where Logotheti knew that Margaret was still stopping.

As for the rest, he was quite convinced that it was Kralinsky himself, the ruby merchant, who had suddenly appeared at Bayreuth, and that this man was no other than the youth he had met long ago as a cow-boy in the West, who used to whistle *Parsifal* with his companion in exile, and who, having grown rich, had lost no time in coming to Europe for the very purpose of hearing the music he had always loved so well. And that this man had robbed the poor Tartar girl, Mr. Van Torp had no manner of doubt; and he believed that he had probably promised her marriage and abandoned her; and if this were true, to help her to find Kralinsky was in itself a good action.

CHAPTER VII

When Van Torp and Logotheti left Mr. Pinney's shop, the old jeweller meant to have a good look at the ruby the Greek had brought him, and was going to weigh it, not merely as a matter of business, for he weighed every stone that passed through his hands from crown diamonds to sparks, but with genuine curiosity, because in a long experience he had not seen very many rubies of such a size, which were also of such fine quality, and he wondered where this one had been found.

Just then, however, two well-dressed young men entered the shop and came up to him. He had never seen either of them before, but their looks inspired him with confidence; and when they spoke, their tone was that of English gentlemen, which all other Englishmen find it practically impossible to imitate, and which had been extremely familiar to Mr. Pinney from his youth. Though he was the great jeweller himself, the wealthy descendant of five of his name in succession, and much better off than half his customers, he was alone in his shop that morning. The truth was that his only son, the sixth Pinney and the apple of his eye, had just been married and was gone abroad for a honeymoon trip, and the head shopman, who was Scotch, was having his month's holiday in Ayrshire, and the second man had been sent for, to clean and restring the Duchess of Barchester's pearls at her Grace's house in Cadogan Gardens, as was always done after the season, and a couple of skilled workmen for whom Mr. Pinney found occupation all the year round were in the workshop at their tables; wherefore, out of four responsible and worthy men who usually were about, only the great Mr. Pinney himself was at his post.

One of the two well-dressed customers asked to see some pins, and the other gave his advice. The first bought a pin with a small sapphire set in sparks for ten guineas, and gave only ten pounds for it because he paid cash. Mr. Pinney put the pin into its little morocco case, wrapped it up neatly and handed it to the purchaser. The latter and his friend said good-morning in a civil and leisurely manner, sauntered out, took a hansom a few steps farther down the street, and drove away.

The little paper twist containing Logotheti's ruby was still exactly where Mr. Pinney had placed it on the counter, and he was going to examine the stone and weigh it at last, when two more customers entered the shop, evidently foreigners, and moreover of a sort unfamiliar to the good

jeweller, and especially suspicious.

The two were Baraka and her interpreter and servant, whom Logotheti had called a Turk, and who was really a Turkish subject and a Mohammedan, though as to race, he was a half-bred Greek and Dalmatian. Now Dalmatians are generally honest, truthful, and trustworthy, and the low-class Greek of Constantinople is usually extremely sharp, if he is nothing more definitely reprehensible; and Baraka's man was a cross between the two, as I have said, and had been brought up as a Musulman in a rich Turkish family, and recommended to Baraka by the Persian merchant in whose house she had lived. He had been originally baptized a Christian under the name of Spiro, and had been subsequently renamed Selim when he was made a real Moslem at twelve years old; so he used whichever name suited the circumstances in which he was placed. At present he was Spiro. He was neatly dressed in grey clothes made by a French tailor, and he wore a French hat, which always made a bad impression on Mr. Pinney. He had brown hair, brown eyes, a brown moustache, and a brown face; he looked as active as a cat, and Mr. Pinney at once put him down in his mind as a 'Froggy.' But the jeweller was less sure about Baraka, who was dressed like any young Englishman, but looked like no European he had ever seen. On the whole, he took the newcomer for the son of an Indian rajah sent to England to be educated.

The interpreter spoke broken but intelligible English. He called Baraka his master, and explained that the latter wished to see some rubies, if Mr. Pinney had any, cut or uncut. The young gentleman, he said, did not speak English, but was a good judge of stones.

For one moment the jeweller forgot the little paper twist as he turned towards his safe, pulling out his keys at the same time. To reach the safe he had to walk the whole length of the shop, behind the counter, and before he had gone half way he remembered the stone, turned, came back, and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket. Then he went and got the little japanned strong-box with a patent lock, in which he kept loose stones, some wrapped up in little pieces of paper, and some in pill-boxes. He brought it to his customers, and opened it before them.

They stayed a long time, and Spiro asked many questions for Baraka, chiefly relating to the sliding-scale of prices which is regulated by the weight of the stones where their quality is equally good, and Baraka made notes of some sort in a little English memorandum-book, as if she had done it all her life; but Mr. Pinney could not see what she wrote. He was very careful, and watched the stones, when she took them in her fingers and held them up against the light, or laid them on a sheet of white paper to look at them critically.

She bought nothing; and when she had seen all he had to show her, she thanked him very much through Spiro, said she would come back another day, and went out with a leisurely, Oriental gait, as if nothing in the world could hurry her. Mr. Pinney counted the stones again, and was going to lock the box, when his second man came in, having finished stringing the Duchess's pearls. At the same moment, it occurred to Mr. Pinney that he might as well go to luncheon, and that he had better put Logotheti's ruby into the little strong-box and lock it up in the safe until he at last had a chance to weigh it. He accordingly took the screw of paper from his waistcoat pocket, and as a matter of formality he undid it once more.

'Merciful Providence!' cried Mr. Pinney, for he was a religious man.

The screw of paper contained a bit of broken green glass. He threw his keys to his shopman without another word, and rushed out into the street without his hat, his keen old face deadly pale, and his beautiful frock-coat flying in his wake.

He almost hurled himself upon a quiet policeman.

'Thief!' he cried. 'Two foreigners in grey clothes—ruby worth ten thousand pounds just gone—I'm Pinney the jeweller!'

You cannot astonish a London policeman. The one Pinney had caught looked quietly up and down the street, and then glanced at his interlocutor to be sure that it was he, for he knew him by sight.

'All right,' he said quickly, but very quietly. 'I'll have them in a minute, sir, for they're in sight still. Better go in while I take them, sir.'

He caught them in less than a minute without the slightest difficulty, and by some odd coincidence two other policemen suddenly appeared quite close to him. There was a little stir in the street, but Baraka and Spiro were too sensible and too sure of themselves to offer any useless resistance, and supposing there was some misunderstanding they walked back quietly to Mr. Pinney's shop between two of the policemen, while the third went for a four-wheeler at the nearest stand, which happened to be the corner of Brook Street and New Bond Street.

Mr. Pinney recognised his late customers without hesitation, and went with them to the police station, where he told his story and showed the piece of green glass. Spiro tried to speak, but was ordered to hold his tongue, and as no rubies were found in their pockets he and Baraka were led away to be more thoroughly searched.

But now, at last, Baraka resisted, and with such tremendous energy that there would have been serious trouble if Spiro had not called out something which at once changed the aspect of matters.

'Master is lady!' he yelled. 'Lady, man clothes!'

'That makes a pretty bad case,' observed the sergeant who was superintending. 'Send for Mrs. Mowle.'

Baraka did not resist when she saw the matron, and went quietly with her to a cell at the back of the station. In less than ten minutes Mrs. Mowle came out and locked the door after her. She was a cheery little person, very neatly dressed, and she had restless bright eyes like a ferret. She brought a little bag of soft deerskin in her hand, and a steel bodkin with a wrought silver handle, such as southern Italian women used to wear in their hair before such weapons were prohibited. Mrs. Mowle gave both objects to the officer without comment.

'Any scars or tattoo-marks, Mrs. Mowle?' he inquired in his business-like way.

'Not a one,' answered Mrs. Mowle, who had formerly taken in washing at home and was the widow of a brave policeman, killed in doing his duty.

In the bag there were several screws of paper, which were found to contain uncut rubies of different sizes to a large value. But there was one, much larger than the others, which Mr. Van Torp had not seen that morning. Mr. Pinney looked at it very carefully, held it to the light, laid it on a sheet of paper, and examined it long in every aspect. He was a conscientious man.

'To the best of my belief,' he deposed, 'this is the stone that was on my counter half an hour ago, and for which this piece of green glass was substituted. It is the property of a customer of mine, Monsieur Konstantin Logotheti of Paris, who brought it to me this morning to be cut. I think it may be worth between nine and ten thousand pounds. I can say nothing as to the identity of the paper, for tissue paper is very much alike everywhere.'

'The woman,' observed the officer in charge of the station, 'appears to steal nothing but rubies. It looks like a queer case. We'll lock up the two, Mr. Pinney, and if you will be kind enough to look in to-morrow morning, I'm sure the Magistrate won't keep you waiting for the case.'

Vastly relieved and comforted, Mr. Pinney returned to his shop. Formality required that the ruby itself, with the others in the bag, should remain in the keeping of the police till the Magistrate ordered it to be returned to its rightful owner, the next morning; but Mr. Pinney felt quite as sure of its safety as if it were in the japanned strong-box in his own safe, and possibly even a little more sure, for nobody could steal it from the police station.

But after he was gone, Spiro was heard calling loudly, though not rudely or violently, from his place of confinement.

'Mr. Policeman! Mr. Policeman! Please come speak!'

The man on duty went to the door and asked what he wanted. In his broken English he explained very clearly that Baraka had a friend in London who was one of the great of the earth, and who would certainly prove her innocence, vouch for her character, and cause her to be set at large without delay, if he knew of her trouble.

'What is the gentleman's name?' inquired the policeman.

The name of Baraka's friend was Konstantin Logotheti, and Spiro knew the address of the lodgings he always kept in St. James's Place.

'Very well,' said the policeman. 'I'll speak to the officer at once.'

'I thank very much, sir,' Spiro answered, and he made no more noise.

The sergeant looked surprised when the message was given to him.

'Queer case this,' he observed. 'Here's the thief appealing to the owner of the stolen property for help; and the owner is one of those millionaire financiers; and the thief is a lovely girl in man's clothes. By the bye, Sampson, tell Mrs. Mowle to get out some women's slops and dress her decently, while I see if I can find Mr. Logotheti by telephone. They'll be likely to know something about him at the Bank if he's not at home, and he may come to find out what's the matter. If Mrs. Foxwell should look in and want to see the girl, let her in, of course, without asking me. If she's in town, she'll be here before long, for I've telephoned to her house, as usual when there's a girl in trouble.'

There was a sort of standing, unofficial order that in any case of a girl or a young woman being locked up, Mrs. Foxwell was to know of it, and she had a way of remembering a great many sergeants' names, and doing kind things for their wives at Christmas-time, which further disposed them to help her in her work. But the London police are by nature the kindest set of men who keep order anywhere in the world, and they will readily help a man or woman who tries to do good in a sensible, practical way; and if they are sometimes a little prejudiced in favour of their own perspicuity in getting up a case, let that policeman, of any other country, who is quite without fault, throw the first stone at their brave, good natured heads.

Logotheti was not at his lodgings in St. James's Place, and from each of two clubs to which the officer telephoned rather at random, the only answer was that he was a member but not in the house. The officer wrote a line to his rooms and sent it by a messenger, to be given to him as soon as he came in.



"She grasped Lady Maud's hand."

It was late in the hot afternoon when Mrs. Foxwell answered the message by coming to the police station herself. She was at once admitted to Baraka's cell and the door was closed after her.

The girl was lying on the pallet bed, dressed in a poor calico skirt and a loose white cotton jacket, which Mrs. Mowle had brought and had insisted that she must put on; and her man's clothes had been taken from her with all her other belongings. She sat up, forlorn, pale and lovely, as the kind visitor entered and stood beside her.

'Poor child!' exclaimed the lady, touched by her sad eyes. 'What can I do to help you?'

Baraka shook her head, for she did not understand. Then she looked up into eyes almost as beautiful as her own, and pronounced a name, slowly and so distinctly that it was impossible not to hear each syllable.

'Konstantin Logotheti.'

The lady started, as well she might; for she was no other than Lady Maud, who called herself by her own family name, 'Mrs. Foxwell,' in her work amongst the poor women of London.

Baraka saw the quick movement and understood that Logotheti was well known to her visitor. She grasped Lady Maud's arm with both her small hands, and looked up to her face with a beseeching look that could not be misunderstood. She wished Logotheti to be informed of her captivity, and was absolutely confident that he would help her out of her trouble. Lady Maud was less sure of that, however, and said so, but it was soon clear that Baraka did not speak a word of any language known to Lady Maud, who was no great linguist at best. Under these circumstances it looked as if there were nothing to be done for the poor girl, who made all sorts of signs of distress, when she saw that the English woman was about to leave her, in sheer despair of being of any use. Just then, however, the sergeant came to the door, and informed the visitor that the girl had an accomplice who spoke her language and knew some English, and that by stretching a point he would bring the man, if Mrs. Foxwell wished to talk with him.

The result was that in less than half an hour, Lady Maud heard from Spiro a most extraordinary tale, of which she did not believe a single word. To her plain English mind, it all seemed perfectly mad at first, and on reflection she thought it an outrageous attempt to play upon her credulity; whereas she was thoroughly convinced that the girl had come to grief in some way through Logotheti and had followed him from Constantinople, probably supporting herself and her companion by stealing on the way. Lady Maud's husband had been a brute, but he knew the East tolerably well, having done some military duty in the Caucasus before he entered the diplomatic service; his stories had chiefly illustrated the profound duplicity of all Asiatics, and she had not seen any reason to disbelieve them.

When Spiro had nothing more to say, therefore, she rose from the only seat there was and shook her head with an air of utter incredulity, mingled with the sort of pitying contempt she felt for all lying in general. She could easily follow the case, by the help of the sergeant and the Police Court reports, and she might be able to help Baraka hereafter when the girl had served the sentence she would certainly get for such an important and cleverly managed theft. The poor girl implored and wept in vain; Lady Maud could do nothing, and would not stay to be told any more inane stories about ruby mines in Tartary. She called the sergeant, freed herself from Baraka's despairing hold on her hand and went out. Spiro was then marched back to his cell on the men's side.

Though it was hot, Lady Maud walked home, as Mr. Van Torp had done that same morning when he had left Mr. Pinney's shop. She always walked when she was in any distress or difficulty, for

the motion helped her to think, since she was strong and healthy, and only in her twenty-ninth year. Just now, too, she was a good deal disturbed by what had happened, besides being annoyed by the attempt that had been made to play on her credulity in such a gross way.

She was really fond of Margaret Donne, quite apart from any admiration she felt for the Primadonna's genius, by which she might have been influenced. In her opinion, the Tartar girl's appeal for help to reach Logotheti could only mean one thing, and that was very far from being to his credit. If the girl had not been positively proved to be a thief and if she had not attempted to impose upon her by what seemed the most absurd falsehoods, Lady Maud would very probably have taken her under her own protection, as far as the law would allow. But her especial charity was not for criminals or cheats, though she had sometimes helped and comforted women accused of far worse crimes than stealing. In this instance she could do nothing, and she did not even wish to do anything. It was a flagrant case, and the law would deal with it in the right way. The girl had come to grief, no doubt, by trusting Logotheti blindly, and he had thrown her off; if she had sunk into the dismal depths of woe behind the Virtue-Curtain, as most of her kind did, Lady Maud would have gone in and tried to drag her out, as she had saved others. But Logotheti's victim had taken a different turn, had turned thief and had got into the hands of justice. Her sin would be on his head, no doubt, but no power could avert from her the just consequences of a misdeed that had no necessary connexion with her fall.

Thus argued Lady Maud, while Baraka lay on her pallet bed in her calico skirt and white cotton jacket, neither weeping, nor despairing by any means, nor otherwise yielding to girlish weakness, but already devising means for carrying on her pursuit of the man she would still seek, even throughout the whole world, though she was just now a penniless girl locked up as a thief in a London police station. It was not one of the down-hearted, crying sort that could have got so far already, against such portentous odds.

She guessed well enough that she would be tried the next morning in the Police Court; for Spiro, who knew much about Europe, and England in particular, had told her a great deal during their travels. She had learned that England was a land of justice, and she would probably get it in the end; for the rest, she was a good Musulman girl and looked on whatsoever befell her as being her portion, for good or evil, to be accepted without murmuring.

Lady Maud could not know anything of this and took Baraka for a common delinquent, so far as her present situation was concerned. But when the Englishwoman thought of what must have gone before, and of the part Logotheti had almost certainly played in the girl's life, her anger was roused, and she sat down and wrote to Margaret on the impulse of the moment. She gave a detailed account of her experience at the police station, including especially a description of the way Baraka had behaved in trying to send a message to Logotheti.

'I tell you quite frankly,' Lady Maud wrote in conclusion, 'that my friend Mr. Van Torp has begged me very urgently to use any friendly influence I may possess, to induce you to reconsider your engagement, because he hopes that you will accept him instead. You will not think any less well of him for that. A man may ask his best friend to help him to marry the girl he is in love with, I am sure! I told him that I would not do anything to make trouble between you and Logo. If I am making trouble now, by writing all this, it is therefore not to help Mr. Van Torp, but because the impression I have had about Logo has really frightened me, for you. I made such a wretched failure of my own married life that I have some right to warn a friend who seems to be on the point of doing just the same thing. I don't forget that in spite of all your celebrity—and its glories—you are nothing but a young girl still, under twenty-five; but you are not a schoolgirl, my dear, and you do not expect to find that a man like Logo, who is well on towards forty now, is a perfect Galahad. Even I didn't flatter myself that Leven had never cared for any one else, when I married him, and I had not half your knowledge of the world, I fancy. But you have a right to be sure that the man you marry is quite free, and that you won't suddenly meet a lovely Eastern girl of twenty who claims him after you think he is yours; and your friend has a right to warn you, if she feels sure that he is mixed up in some affair that isn't over yet. I'm not sure that I should be a good friend to you if I held my tongue. Our fathers were very close friends before us, Margaret, and there is really a sort of inheritance in their friendship, between you and me, isn't there? Besides, if you think I'm doing wrong, or that I'm making trouble out of nothing, just to help Mr. Van Torp, you can tell me so and we shall part I suppose, and that will be the end of it! Except that I shall be very, very sorry to lose you.

'I don't know where Logo is, but if he were near enough I should go to him and tell him what I think. Of course he is not in town now—nobody is, and I've only stayed on to clear everything out of my house, now that I'm giving it up. I suppose he is with you, though you said you did not want him at Bayreuth! Show him this letter if you like, for I'm quite ready to face him if he's angry at my interference. I would even join you in Paris, if you wanted me, for I have nothing to do and strange to say I have a little money! I've sold almost all my furniture, you know, so I'm not such a total pauper as usual. But in any case answer this, please, and tell me that I have done right, or wrong, just as you feel about it—and then we will go on being friends, or say good-bye, whichever you decide.'

Lady Maud signed this long letter and addressed it to Miss Margaret Donne, at Bayreuth, feeling sure that it would be delivered, even without the name of the hotel, which she did not know. But the Bayreuth post-office was overworked during the limited time of the performances, and it happened that the extra assistant through whose hands the letter passed for distribution either did not know that Miss Donne was the famous Cordova, or did not happen to remember the hotel

at which she was stopping, or both, and it got pigeonholed under D, to be called for. The consequence was that Margaret did not receive it until the morning after the performance of *Parsifal* to which she had taken Van Torp, though it had left London only six hours after him; for such things will happen even in extremely well-managed countries when people send letters insufficiently addressed.

Furthermore, it also happened that Logotheti was cooling himself on the deck of his yacht in the neighbourhood of Penzance, while poor Baraka was half-stifled in the Police Station. For the yacht, which was a very comfortable one, though no longer new, and not very fast according to modern ideas, was at Cowes, waiting to be wanted, and when her owner parted from Van Torp after promising to dine on the next day but one, it occurred to him that the smell of the wood pavements was particularly nasty, that it would make no real difference whether he returned to Pinney's at once or in two days, or two weeks, since the ruby he had left must be cut before it was mounted, and that he might just as well take the fast train to Southampton and get out to sea for thirty-six hours. This he did, after telegraphing to his sailing-master to have steam as soon as possible; and as he had only just time to reach the Waterloo Station he did not even take the trouble to stop at his lodgings. He needed no luggage, for he had everything he wanted on board, and his man was far too well used to his ways to be surprised at his absence.

The consequence of this was that when Baraka's case came up the next morning there was no one to say a word for her and Spiro. Mr. Pinney identified the ruby 'to the best of his belief' as the one stolen from his counter, the fact that Baraka had been disguised in man's clothes was treated as additional evidence, and she and Spiro were sent to Brixton Gaol accordingly, Spiro protesting their innocence all the while in eloquent but disjointed English, until he was told to hold his tongue.

Further, Lady Maud read the Police Court report in an evening paper, cut it out and sent it to Margaret as a document confirming the letter she had posted on the previous evening; and owing to the same insufficiency in the address, the two missives were delivered together.

Lastly, Mr. Pinney took the big ruby back to his shop and locked it up in his safe with a satisfaction and a sense of profound relief such as he had rarely felt in a long and honourable life; and he would have been horrified and distressed beyond words if he could have even guessed that he had been the means of sending an innocent and helpless girl to prison. The mere possibility of such a mistake would have sent him at the greatest attainable speed to Scotland Yard, and if necessary in pursuit of the Home Secretary himself. The latter was in the north of Scotland, on a friend's moor, particularly preoccupied about his bag and deeply interested in the education of a young retriever that behaved like an idiot during each drive instead of lying quiet behind the butts, though it promised to turn out a treasure in respect of having the nose and eye of a vulture and the mouth of a sucking-dove. The comparisons are those of the dog's owner, including the 'nose' of the bird of prey, and no novelist can be held responsible for a Cabinet Minister's English.

One thing more which concerns this tale happened on that same day. Two well-dressed young men drove up to the door of a quiet and very respectable hotel in the West End; and they asked for their bill, and packed their belongings, which were sufficient though not numerous; and when they had paid what they owed and given the usual tips, they told the porter to call two hansoms, and each had his things put on one of them; and they nodded to each other and parted; and one hansom drove to Euston and the other to Charing Cross; and whether they ever met again, I do not know, and it does not matter; but in order to clear Baraka's character at once and to avoid a useless and perfectly transparent mystery, it is as well to say directly that it was the young man who drove to Euston, on his way to Liverpool and New York, who had Logotheti's ruby sewn up in his waistcoat pocket; and that the ruby really belonged to Margaret, since Logotheti had already given it to her, before he had brought it to Mr. Pinney to be cut and set. But the knowledge of what is here imparted to the reader, who has already guessed this much of the truth, would not help Baraka out of Brixton Gaol, where the poor girl found herself in very bad company indeed; even worse, perhaps, than that in which Spiro was obliged to spend his time.

CHAPTER VIII

Margaret received her friend's letter and the account of Baraka's trial by the same post on the morning after she and Mr. Van Torp had been to hear *Parsifal* together, and she opened the two envelopes before reading her other letters, though after assuring herself that there was nothing from Logotheti. He did not write every day, by any means, for he was a man of the world and he knew that although most women demand worship at fixed hours, few can receive it so regularly without being bored to the verge of exasperation. It was far better, Logotheti knew, to let Margaret find fault with him for writing too little than to spoil her into indifference by writing too much. Women are often like doctors, who order their patients to do ten things and are uncommonly glad if the patient does one.

So Margaret had no letter from Logotheti that morning, and she read Lady Maud's and the enclosure before going on to the unpaid bills, religious tracts, appeals for alms, advertisements of patent medicines, 'confidential' communications from manufacturers of motor cars, requests to sing for nothing at charity concerts, anonymous letters of abuse, real business letters from real business men, and occasional attempts at blackmail, which are the usual contents of a celebrity's

post-bag, and are generally but thinly salted with anything like news from friends.

The Primadonna, in her professional travels, had grown cautious of reading her letters in a room where there were other people; she had once surprised a colleague who was toying with an opera-glass quite absently, ten paces away, as if trying its range and focus, but who frequently directed it towards a letter she was perusing; and short-sighted people had dropped a glove or a handkerchief at her very feet in order to stoop down and bring their noses almost against a note she held in her hand. The world is full of curious people; curiosity is said, indeed, to be the prime cause of study and therefore of knowledge itself. Margaret assuredly did not distrust Mrs. Rushmore, and she did not fear Potts, but her experience had given her the habit of reading her important letters alone in her own room, and sometimes with the door locked. Similarly, if any one came near her when she was writing, even about the most indifferent matters, she instinctively covered the page with her hand, or with a piece of blotting-paper, sometimes so hastily as to lead a person to believe that she was ashamed of what she had written. Natural habits of behaviour remind us how we were brought up; acquired ones recall to us the people with whom we have lived.

Margaret read the newspaper cutting first, supposing that it contained something flattering about herself, for she had been a little short of public admiration for nearly a fortnight. Baraka's case was reported with the rather brutal simplicity which characterises such accounts in the English papers, and Logotheti's name appeared in Mr. Pinney's evidence. There had been the usual 'laughter,' duly noted by the stenographer, when the poor girl's smart man's clothes were produced before the magistrate by the policeman who had arrested her. The magistrate had made a few stern remarks when ordering the delinquents to prison, and had called Baraka 'hardened' because she did not burst into tears. That was all, and there were barely five-and-twenty lines of small print.

But the Primadonna bit her handsome lip and her eyes sparkled with anger, as she put the cutting back into the first envelope, and took the folded letter out of the other. The girl had not only stolen a ruby, but it was Margaret's ruby, her very own, the one Logotheti had given her for her engagement, and which she had insisted upon having set as a ring though it would cover more than half the space between her knuckle and the joint of her third finger. Further, it had been stolen by the very girl from whom Logotheti had pretended that he had bought it, a fact which cast the high light of absurdity on his unlikely story! It was natural enough that she should have seen it, and should have known that he was taking it to Pinney's, and that she should have been able to prepare a little screw of paper with a bit of glass inside, to substitute for it. The improbabilities of such an explanation did not occur to Lady Maud, who saw only the glaring fact that the handsome Tartar girl had accompanied Logotheti, between London and Paris, disguised as a man, and had ultimately robbed him, as he richly deserved. She had imposed upon Van Torp too, and had probably tried to sell him the very stone she had stolen from Logotheti, and the one she had made him take as a gift was nothing but a bit of glass, as he said it might be, for all he knew.

She devoured Lady Maud's letter in a few moments, and then read it twice again, which took so long that Mrs. Rushmore sent Justine to tell Potts to ask if Miss Donne did not mean to go out that morning, though the weather was so fine.

Great singers generally develop a capacity for flying into rages, even if they have not been born with hot tempers. It is very bad for the voice, but it seems to be a part of the life. Margaret was very angry, and Potts became as meek and mild as a little lamb when she saw the storm signals in her mistress's face. She delivered her message in a pathetic and oppressed tone, like a child reciting the collect for the day at a Sunday school.

The Primadonna, imposing as a young lioness, walked slowly backwards and forwards between her window and the foot of the iron bedstead. There was an angry light in her eyes and instead of flushing, as her cheeks did for any ordinary fit of temper, they were as white as wax. Potts, who was a small woman, seemed to shrink and become visibly smaller as she stood waiting for an answer. Suddenly the lioness stood still and surveyed the poor little jackal that served her.

'Ask Mrs. Rushmore if she can wait half an hour,' she said. 'I'm very angry, Potts, and it's not your fault, so keep out of the way.'

She was generous at all events, but she looked dangerous, and Potts seemed positively to shrivel through the crack of the door as she disappeared. She was so extremely glad to keep out of the way! There were legends already about the great singer's temper, as there are about all her fellow-artists. It was said, without the slightest foundation, that she had once tossed a maid out of the window like a feather, that on another occasion she had severely beaten a coachman, and that she had thrown two wretched lap-dogs into a raging fire in a stove and fastened the door, because they had barked while she was studying a new part. As a matter of fact, she loved animals to weakness, and was kindness itself to her servants, and she was generally justified in her anger, though it sometimes made her say things she regretted. Œdipus found the right answer to the Sphinx's riddle in a moment, but the ingenious one about truth propounded by Pontius Pilate has puzzled more than sixty generations of Christians. If the Sphinx had thought of it, Œdipus would never have got to Thebes and some disgustingly unpleasant family complications would have been prevented by his premature demise.

Margaret's wrath did not subside quickly, and as it could not spend itself on any immediate object, it made her feel as if she were in a raging fever. She had never been ill in her life, it was

true, and therefore did not know what the sensation was. Her only experience of medical treatment had been at the hands of a very famous specialist for the throat, in New York, to whom she went because all her fellow-artists did, and whose mere existence is said by grateful singers to effectually counteract the effects of the bad climate during the opera season. He photographed her vocal chords, and the diagrams produced by her best notes, made her breathe pleasant-smelling sprays and told her to keep her feet dry in rainy weather. That was the sum of her experience with doctors, and it was not at all disagreeable.

Now, her temples throbbed, her hands trembled and were as hot as fire, her lips were drawn and parched, and when she caught sight of herself in the looking-glass she saw that she was quite white and that her eyes were bloodshot.

But she was really a sensible English girl, although she was so very angry.

'This is ridiculous!' she said aloud, with emphasis. 'I won't be so silly!' And she sat down to try and think quietly.

It was not so easy. A Tartar girl indeed! More probably a handsome Greek. How could they know the difference in a London Police Court? She was not aware that in London and other great cities the police disposes of interpreters for every known language, from the Malay dialects to Icelandic. Besides, it did not matter! She would have been angry if Logotheti had made love to the Duchess of Barchester, or to Lady Dick Savory, the smartest woman in London, or to Mrs. Smythe-Hockaday, the handsomest woman in England; she would have been angry of course, but not so furious as she was now, not in a white rage that made her teeth chatter, and her eyes burn as if they were red-hot in her head. An ignorant Eastern girl! A creature that followed him about in man's clothes! A thief! Pah! Disgusting!

Each detail that occurred to her made it more unbearable. She remembered her conversation with him through the telephone when she was at Versailles, his explanation the next day, which she had so foolishly accepted, his kiss! Her blood raged in her eyes, and her hands shook together. On that evening he had refused to stay to dinner; no doubt he had gone back to his house in Paris, and had dined with the girl—in the hall of the Aphrodite! It was not to be believed, and after that memorable moment under the elm-tree, too, when the sun was going down—after an honest girl's first kiss, the first she had given any man since she had been a child and her lips had timidly touched her dead father's forehead! People would not believe it, perhaps, because she was an artist and an opera-singer; but it was true.

It was no wonder that they had succeeded in deceiving her for a while, the two Orientals together! They had actually made Rufus Van Torp believe their story, which must have been a very different matter from lying to a credulous young woman who had let herself fall in love! But for her friend Lady Maud she would still be their victim. Her heart went out to the woman who had saved her from her fate, and with the thought came the impulse to send a message of gratitude; and the first fury of her anger subsided with the impulse to do so. By and by it would cool and harden to a lasting resentment that would not soften again.

Her hand still shook so that she could hardly hold the pen steady while she wrote the telegram.

'Unspeakably grateful. If can join me here will gladly wait for you. Must see you at once. Do come.'

She felt better as she rose from the table, and when she looked at herself in the mirror she saw that her face had changed again and that her natural colour was returning. She rang for Potts, remembering that the half-hour must be almost up.

The maid appeared at once, still looking very small and mild; but one glance told her that the worst was past. She raised her head, threw back her shoulders and stood up straight, apparently growing visibly till she regained her ordinary size.

'Potts,' Margaret said, facing round upon her, 'I've been in a rage, but I'm only angry now. Do I look like a human being again?'

'Yes, ma'am,' answered the maid, inspecting her gravely. 'You are still a bit pale, ma'am, and your eye is a trifle wild, I may say. A motor veil, perhaps, if you are thinking of going out, ma'am.'

'I haven't got such a thing, have I? I never motor now.'

Potts smiled the smile of the very superior maid, and moved towards a perfectly new leather hat-box that stood in the corner.

'I always put in two for sea, ma'am,' she said. 'You wore one when we crossed the Channel the last time, if you remember.'

'Potts, you're a treasure!'

'Yes, ma'am,' Potts answered vaguely in her meek voice, as she dived into one of the curious secret pockets of the hat-box. 'That is, ma'am,' she said, correcting herself, 'I mean, it's very kind of you to say so.'

Without further consulting Margaret, who had seated herself before the dressing-table, Potts proceeded to fasten a broad-brimmed black straw hat on the thick brown hair; she then spread an immense white veil over it, drew it under her mistress's chin and knotted in a way that would

have amazed a seaman.

When Margaret was putting on her gloves, Mrs. Rushmore herself came to the door, knocked and opened discreetly before there was any answer.

'My dear child,' she asked, 'what in the world is the matter? Nothing serious, I trust?'

'Oh, nothing,' Margaret answered, going forward to meet her, and finding her natural voice. 'I'm sorry if I've kept you waiting.'

'It's so unlike you, my dear,' Mrs. Rushmore said, with emphasis; 'and Potts looked quite grave when she brought me your message half an hour ago.'

'You would have been more surprised if she had burst out laughing,' Margaret said viciously.

'My dear,' Mrs. Rushmore answered, 'I'm astonished at you! I know something has happened. I know it. You are not yourself this morning.'

This was a statement so evidently absurd that it could not be answered except by a flat contradiction; so Margaret said nothing, and went on working her hand into a perfectly new glove.

'I see that you have not even opened your letters,' Mrs. Rushmore continued severely. 'Except that,' she added, noticing the loose sheets of Lady Maud's letter on the toilet-table.

Margaret gathered them up hastily, folded them into a crumpled package and thrust them into the empty envelope. For once, she had forgotten her caution, but she retrieved herself by pushing the thick letter into her long glove, much to Potts' distress, for it made an ugly lump. She made it worse by forcing in the second envelope, which contained the newspaper cutting.

'I'm ready now,' she said.

Mrs. Rushmore turned and led the way with stately steps; she was always imposing, but when she was offended she was monumental. The two went out in silence, opened their parasols, the one black, the other scarlet, and walked slowly down the straight, dull street side by side. Mrs. Rushmore spoke first, after they had gone some distance.

'I know,' she said, 'that something has happened. It was in that letter. You cannot deny it, Margaret. It was in the letter you folded in that hurried manner.'

'The news was,' answered the Primadonna, still vicious.

'I told you so. My dear child, it's not of the slightest use to try to deceive me. I've known you since you were a child.'

'I'm not trying to deceive you.'

'When I asked what had happened, you answered, "Nothing." I do not call that very frank, do you?'

'Potts was there, to begin with,' explained Margaret rather crossly.

But Mrs. Rushmore no longer heard. Her head was up, her parasol lay back upon her shoulder, her faded eyes were brighter than before, and the beginning of a social smile wreathed her hitherto grave lips. There was game about, and she was pointing; there were lions to windward.

'There's Mr. Van Torp, my dear,' she said in quite another tone, and very low, 'and unless I'm much mistaken—yes, I knew it! He's with Count Kralinsky. I saw the Count from the window yesterday when he arrived. I hope our friend will present him.'

'I daresay,' Margaret answered indifferently, but surveying the two men through the white mist of her thick veil.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Rushmore with delight, and almost whispering in her excitement. 'He has seen us, and now he's telling the Count who we are.'

Margaret was used to her excellent old friend's ways on such occasions, and gave no more heed to them than she would have given to a kitten scampering after a ball of string. The kitten would certainly catch the ball in the end, and Mrs. Rushmore would as surely capture the lion.

Mr. Van Torp raised his hat when he was within four or five paces of the ladies, and his companion, who was a head and shoulders taller than he, slackened his pace and stopped a little way behind him as Mrs. Rushmore shook hands and Margaret nodded pleasantly.

'May I present Count Kralinsky?' asked the American. 'I've met him before, and we've just renewed our acquaintance.'

Mr. Van Torp looked from Mrs. Rushmore to Margaret, and tried to see her expression through her veil. She answered his look by a very slight inclination of the head.

'We shall be delighted,' said the elder lady, speaking for both.

Mr. Van Torp introduced the Count to Mrs. Rushmore and then to Margaret, calling her 'Miss Donne,' and she saw that the man was handsome as well as tall and strong. He had a magnificent golden beard, a clear complexion, and rather uncertain blue eyes, in one of which he wore a

single eyeglass without a string. He was quietly dressed and wore no jewellery, excepting one ring, in which blazed a large 'tallow-topped' ruby. He had the unmistakable air of a man of the world, and was perfectly at his ease. When he raised his straw hat he disclosed a very white forehead, and short, thick fair hair. There was no sign of approaching middle age in his face or figure, but Margaret felt, or guessed, that he was older than he looked.

In her stiffly correct French, Mrs. Rushmore said that she was enchanted to make his acquaintance, and Margaret murmured sweetly but unintelligibly.

'The Count speaks English perfectly,' observed Mr. Van Torp.

He ranged himself beside Margaret, leaving the foreigner to Mrs. Rushmore, much to her gratification.

'We were going to walk,' she said. 'Will you join us?' And she moved on.

'It is a great pleasure to meet you,' Kralinsky said by way of opening the conversation. 'I have often heard of you from friends in Paris. Your little dinners at Versailles are famous all over Europe. I am sure we have many mutual friends, though you may never have heard my name.'

Mrs. Rushmore was visibly pleased, and as the way was not very wide, Margaret and Van Torp dropped behind. They soon heard the other two enumerating their acquaintances. Kralinsky was surprised at the number of Mrs. Rushmore's friends, but the Count seemed to know everybody, from all the Grand Dukes and Archdukes in Russia, Germany, and Austria, to the author of the latest successful play in Paris, and the man of science who had discovered how to cure gout by radium. Kralinsky had done the cure, seen the play, and dined with the royalties within the last few weeks. Mrs. Rushmore thought him one of the most charming men she had ever met.

In the rear Mr. Van Torp and the Primadonna were not talking; but he looked at her, she looked at him, they both looked at Kralinsky's back, and then they once more looked at each other and nodded; which meant that Van Torp had recognised the man he had met selling rubies in New York, and that Margaret understood this.

'I'll tell you something else that's quite funny, if you don't mind dropping a little further behind,' he said.

Margaret walked still more slowly till a dozen paces separated them from the other two.

'What is it?' she asked in a low tone.

'I believe he's my old friend from whom I learned to whistle *Parsifal*,' answered the American. 'I'm pretty sure of it, in spite of a good many years and a beard—two things that change a man. See his walk? See how he turns his toes in? Most cow-boys walk like that.'

'How very odd that you should meet again!' Margaret was surprised, but not deeply interested by this new development.

'Well,' said Van Torp thoughtfully, 'if I'd known I was going to meet him somewhere, I'd have said this was as likely a place as any to find him in, now that I know what it was he whistled. But I admit that the other matter has more in it. I wonder what would happen if I asked him about Miss Barrack?'

'Nothing,' Margaret answered confidently. 'Nothing would happen. He has never heard of her.'

Van Torp's sharp eyes tried in vain to penetrate the veil.

'That's not quite clear,' he observed. 'Or else this isn't my good day.'

'The girl fooled you,' said Margaret in a low voice. 'Did she mention his name to you?'

'Well, no——'

'She never saw him in her life, or if she ever did, it was she who robbed him of rubies; and it was not the other way, as you supposed. Men are generally inclined to believe what a nice-looking girl tells them!'

'That's true,' Van Torp admitted. 'But all the same, I don't quite understand you. There's a meaning in your voice that's not in the words. Excuse me if I'm not quick enough this morning, please. I'm doing my best.'

'Your friend Baraka has been arrested and sent to prison in London for stealing a very valuable ruby from the counter in Pinney's,' Margaret explained. 'The stone had just been taken there by Monsieur Logotheti to be cut. The girl must have followed him without his knowing it, and watched her chance, though how old Pinney can have left such a thing lying on the counter where any one could take it is simply incomprehensible. That's what you heard in my voice when I said that men are credulous.'

Mr. Van Torp thought he had heard even more in her accent when she had pronounced Logotheti's name. Besides, she generally called him 'Logo,' as all his friends did. The American said nothing for a moment, but he glanced repeatedly at the white veil, through which he saw her handsome features without their expression.

'Well,' he said at last, almost to himself, for he hardly expected her to understand the language of

his surprise, 'that beats the band!'

'It really is rather odd, you know,' responded Margaret, who understood perfectly. 'If you think I've adorned the truth I'll give you the Police Court report. I have it in my glove. Lady Maud sent it to me with a letter.' She added, after an instant's hesitation, 'I'm not sure that I shall not give you that to read too, for there's something about you in it, and she is your best friend, isn't she?'

'Out and out. I daresay you'd smile if I told you that I asked her to help me to get you to change your mind.'

'No,' Margaret answered, turning slowly to look at him. 'She tells me so in this letter.'

'Does she really?' Van Torp had guessed as much, and had wished to undermine the surprise he supposed that Margaret had in store for him. 'That's just like her straightforward way of doing things. She told me frankly that she wouldn't lift a finger to influence you. However, it can't be helped, I suppose.'

The conclusion of the speech seemed to be out of the logical sequence.

'She has done more than lift a finger now,' Margaret said.

'Has she offended you?' Van Torp ventured to ask, for he did not understand the constant subtone of anger he heard in her voice. 'I know she would not mean to do that.'

'No. You don't understand. I've telegraphed to ask her to join us here.'

Van Torp was really surprised now, and his face showed it.

'I wish we were somewhere alone,' Margaret continued. 'I mean, out of the way of Mrs. Rushmore. She knows nothing about all this, but she saw me cramming the letters into my glove, and I cannot possibly let her see me giving them to you.'

'Oh, well, let me think,' said the millionaire. 'I guess I want to buy some photographs of Bayreuth and the *Parsifal* characters in that shop, there on the right. Suppose you wait outside the door, so that Mrs. Rushmore can see you if she turns around. She'll understand that I'm inside. If you drop your parasol towards her you can get the letters out, can't you? Then as I come out you can just pass them to me behind the parasol, and we'll go on. How's that? It won't take one second, anyhow. You can make-believe your glove's uncomfortable, and you're fixing it, if anybody you know comes out of the shop. Will that do? Here we are. Shall I go in?'

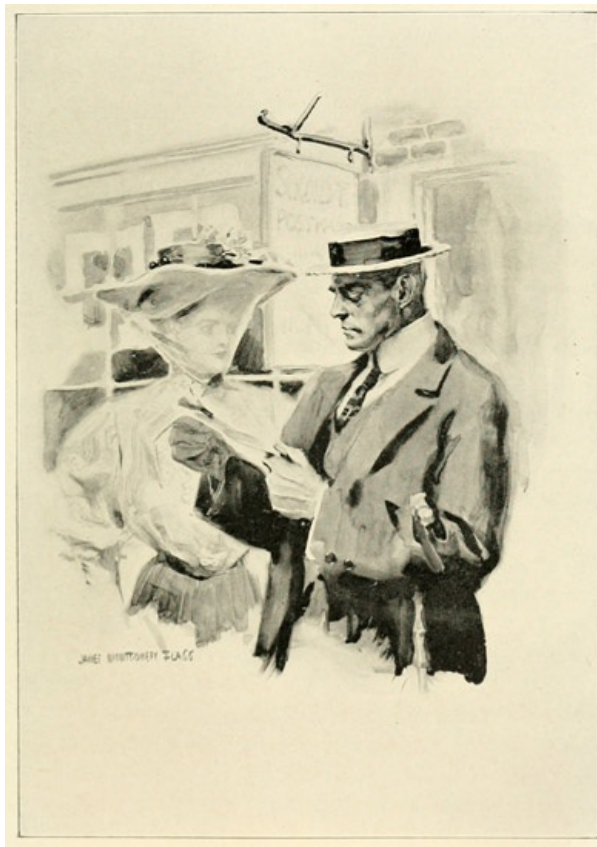
'Yes. Don't be long! I'll cough when I'm ready.'

The operation succeeded, and the more easily as Mrs. Rushmore went quietly on without turning her head, being absorbed and charmed by Kralinsky's conversation.

'You may as well read the newspaper cutting now,' Margaret said when they had begun to walk again. 'That cannot attract attention, even if she does look round, and it explains a good many things. It's in the thinner envelope, of course.'

Van Torp fumbled in the pocket of his jacket, and brought out the slip of newspaper without the envelope, a precaution which Margaret noticed and approved. If she had been able to forget for a moment her anger against Logotheti she would have been amazed at the strides her intimacy with Van Torp was making. He himself was astounded, and did not yet understand, but he had played the great game for fortune against adversaries of vast strength and skill, and had won by his qualities rather than his luck, and they did not desert him at the most important crisis of his life. The main difference between his present state of mind and his mental view, when he had been fighting men for money, was that he now felt scruples wholly new to him. Things that had looked square enough when millions were at stake appeared to him 'low down' where Margaret was the prize.

She watched him intently while he read the printed report, but his face did not change in the least. At that short distance she could see every shade of his expression through the white veiling, though he could not see hers at all. He finished reading, folded the slip carefully, and put it into his pocket-book instead of returning it to the envelope.



"She watched him intently while he read the printed report."

'It does look queer,' he said slowly. 'Now let me ask you one thing, but don't answer me unless you like. It's not mere inquisitiveness on my part.' As Margaret said nothing, though he waited a moment for her answer, he went on. 'That ruby, now—I suppose it's to be cut for you, isn't it?'

'Yes. He gave it to me in Versailles, and I kept it some days. Then he asked me to let him have it to take to London when I came here.'

'Just so. Thank you. One more question, if I may. That stone I gave you, I swear I don't know that it's not glass—anyhow, that stone, does it look at all like the one that was stolen?'

'Oh, no! It's quite another shape and size. Why do you ask? I don't quite see.'

'What I mean is, if these people are around selling rubies, there may be two very much alike, that's all.'

'Well, if there were? What of it?'

'Suppose—I'm only supposing, mind, that the girl really had another stone about her a good deal like the one that was stolen, and that somebody else was the thief. Queer things like that have happened before.'

'Yes. But old Pinney is one of the first experts in the world, and he swore to the ruby.'

'That's so,' said Van Torp thoughtfully. 'I forgot that.'

'And if she had the other stone, she had stolen it from Monsieur Logotheti, I have not the least doubt.'

'I daresay,' replied the millionaire. 'I'm not her attorney. I'm not trying to defend her. I was only thinking.'

'She was at his house in Paris,' Margaret said, quite unable to keep her own counsel now. 'It was when I was at Versailles.'

'You don't say so! Are you sure of that?'

'He admitted it when I was talking to him through the telephone, and I heard her speaking to him in a language I did not understand.'

'Did you really? Well, well!' Mr. Van Torp was beginning to be puzzled again. 'Nice voice, hasn't she?'

'Yes. He tried to make me think he wasn't sure whether the creature was a boy or a girl.'

'Maybe he wasn't sure himself,' suggested the American, but the tone in which she had spoken the word 'creature' had not escaped him.

He was really trying to put the case in a fair light, and was not at all manœuvring to ascertain her

state of mind. That was clear enough now. How far she might go he could not tell, but what she had just said, coupled with the way in which she spoke of the man to whom she was engaged as 'Monsieur Logotheti,' made it quite evident that she was profoundly incensed against him, and Van Torp became more than ever anxious not to do anything underhand.

'Look here,' he said, 'I'm going to tell you something. I took a sort of interest in that Tartar girl the only time I saw her. I don't know why. I daresay I was taken in by her—just ordinary "taken in," like a tenderfoot. I gave her that fellow's address in New York.' He nodded towards Kralinsky. 'When I found he was here, I wired Logotheti to tell her, since she's after him. I suppose I thought Logotheti would go right away and find her, and get more mixed up with her than ever. It was mean of me, wasn't it? That's why I've told you. You see, I didn't know anything about all this, and that makes it meaner still, doesn't it?'

Possibly if he had told her these facts forty-eight hours earlier she might have been annoyed, but at present they seemed to be rather in his favour. At all events he was frank, she thought. He declared war on his rival, and meant fight according to the law of nations. Lady Maud would not be his friend if he were playing any double game, but she had stuck to him throughout his trouble in the spring, he had emerged victorious and reinstated in public opinion, and she had been right. Lady Maud knew him better than any one else, and she was a good woman, if there ever was one.

Yet he had accused himself of having acted 'meanly.' Margaret did not like the word, and threw up her head as a horse does when a beginner holds on by the curb.

'You need not make yourself out worse than you are,' she answered.

'I want to start fair,' said the millionaire, 'and I'd rather your impression should improve than get worse. The only real trouble with Lucifer was he started too high up.'

This singular statement was made with perfect gravity, and without the slightest humorous intention, but Margaret laughed for the first time that day, in spite of the storm that was still raging in the near distance of her thoughts.

'Why do you laugh?' asked Van Torp. 'It's quite true. I don't want to start too high up in your estimation and then be turned down as unfit for the position at the end of the first week. Put me where I belong and I won't disappoint you. Say I was doing something that wasn't exactly low-down, considering the object, but that mightn't pass muster at an honour-parade, anyhow. And then say that I've admitted the fact, if you like, and that the better I know you the less I want to do anything mean. It won't be hard for you to look at it in that light, will it? And it'll give me the position of starting from the line. Is that right?'

'Yes,' Margaret answered, smiling. 'Slang "right" and English "right"! You ask for a fair field and no favour, and you shall have it.'

'I'll go straight,' Van Torp answered.

He was conscious that he was hourly improving his knowledge of women's little ways, and that what he had said, and had purposely expressed in his most colloquial manner, had touched a chord which would not have responded to a fine speech. For though he often spoke a sort of picturesque dialect, and though he was very far from being highly educated, he could speak English well enough when he chose. It probably seemed to him that good grammar and well-selected words belonged to formal occasions and not to everyday life, and that it was priggish to be particular in avoiding slang and cowardly to sacrifice an hereditary freedom from the bonds of the subjunctive mood.

'I suppose Lady Maud will come, won't she?' he asked suddenly, after a short silence.

'I hope so,' Margaret said. 'If not, she will meet me in Paris, for she offers to do that in her letter.'

'I'm staying on in this place because you said you didn't mind,' observed Van Torp. 'Do you want me to go away if she arrives?'

'Why should I? Why shouldn't you stay?'

'Oh, I don't know. I was only thinking. Much obliged anyway, and I'll certainly stay if you don't object. We shall be quite a party, shan't we? What with us three, and Lady Maud and Kralinsky there—'

'Surely you don't call him one of our "party"! ' objected Margaret. 'He's only just been introduced to us. I daresay Mrs. Rushmore will ask him to dinner or luncheon, but that will be all.'

'Oh, yes! I suppose that will be all.'

But his tone roused her curiosity by its vagueness.

'You knew him long ago,' she said. 'If he's not a decent sort of person to have about, you ought to tell us—indeed you should not have introduced him at all if he's a bad lot.'

Mr. Van Torp did not answer at once, and seemed to be consulting his recollections.

'I don't know anything against him,' he said at last. 'All foreigners who drift over to the States and go West haven't left their country for the same reasons. I suppose most of them come because they've got no money at home and want some. I haven't any right to take it for granted

that a foreign gentleman who turns cow-boy for a year or two has cheated at cards, or anything of that sort, have I? There were all kinds of men on that ranch, as there are on every other and in every mining camp in the West, and most of 'em have no particular names. They get called something when they turn up, and they're known as that while they stay, and if they die with their boots on, they get buried as that, and if not, they clear out when they've had enough of it; and some of 'em strike something and get rich, as I did, and some of 'em settle down to occupations, as I've known many do. But they all turn into themselves again, or turn themselves into somebody else after they go back. While they're punching cattle they're generally just "Dandy Jim" or "Levi Longlegs," as that fellow was, or something of that sort.'

'What were you called?' asked Margaret.

'I?' Van Torp smiled faintly at the recollection of his nickname. 'I was always Fanny Cook.'

Margaret laughed.

'Of all the inappropriate names!'

'Well,' said the millionaire, still smiling, 'I guess it must have been because I was always sort of gentle and confiding and sweet, you know. So they concluded to give me a girl's name as soon as they saw me, and I turned out a better cook than the others, so they tacked that on, too. I didn't mind.'

Margaret smiled too, as she glanced at his jaw and his flat, hard cheeks, and thought of his having been called 'Fanny.'

'Did you ever kill anybody, Miss Fanny?' she asked, with a little laugh.

A great change came over his face at once.

'Yes,' he answered very gravely. 'Twice, in fair self-defence. If I had hesitated, I should not be here.'

'I beg your pardon,' Margaret said quietly. 'I should not have asked you. I ought to have known.'

'Why?' he asked. 'One gets that kind of question asked one now and then by people one doesn't care to answer. But I'd rather have you know something about my life than not. Not that it's much to be proud of,' he added, rather sadly.

'Some day you shall tell me all you will,' Margaret answered. 'I daresay you did much better than you think, when you look back.'

'Lady Maud knows all about me now,' he said, 'and no one else alive does. Perhaps you'll be the second that will, and that'll be all for the present. They want us to come up with them, do you see?'

Mrs. Rushmore and Kralinsky had stopped in their walk and were waiting for them. They quickened their pace.

'I thought perhaps this was far enough,' said Mrs. Rushmore. 'Of course I could go on further, and it's not your usual walk, my dear, but unless you mind—'

Margaret did not mind, and said so readily; whereupon Mrs. Rushmore deliberately took Van Torp for her companion on the way back.

'I'm sure you won't object to walking slowly,' she said to him, 'and Miss Donne and the Count can go as fast as they like, for they are both good walkers. I am sure you must be a great walker,' she added, turning to the Russian.

He smiled blandly and bent his head a little, as if he were acknowledging a compliment. Van Torp looked at him quietly.

'I should have thought you were more used to riding,' said the American.

'Ah, yes!' The indifferent answer came in a peculiarly oily tone, though the pronunciation was perfect. 'I was in the cavalry before I began to travel. But I walked over two thousand miles in Central Asia, and was none the worst for it.'

Margaret was sure that she was not going to like him, as she moved on with him by her side; and Van Torp, walking with Mrs. Rushmore, was quite certain that he was Levi Longlegs, who had herded cattle with him for six months very long ago.

CHAPTER IX

Logotheti reached his lodgings in St. James's Place at six o'clock in the evening of the day on which he had promised to dine with Van Torp, and the latter's note of excuse was given to him at once. He read it, looked out of the window, glanced at it again, and threw it into the waste-paper basket without another thought. He did not care in the least about dining with the American millionaire. In fact, he had looked forward to it rather as a bore than a pleasure. He saw on his table, with his letters, a flat and almost square parcel, which the addressed label told him contained the Archæological Report of the Egyptian Exploration Fund, and he had heard that the

new number would contain an account of a papyrus recently discovered at Oxyrrhynchus, on which some new fragments of Pindar had been found. No dinner that could be devised, and no company that could be asked to meet him at it, could be half as delightful as that to the man who so deeply loved the ancient literature of his country, and he made up his mind at once that he would not even take the trouble to go to a club, but would have a bird and a salad in his rooms.

Unhappily for his peace and his anticipated feast of poetry, he looked through his letters to see if there were one from Margaret, and there was only a coloured postcard from Bayreuth, with the word 'greetings' scrawled beside the address in her large hand. Next to the card, however, there was a thick letter addressed in a commercial writing he remembered but could not at once identify; and though it was apparently a business communication, and could therefore have waited till the next morning, when his secretary would come as usual, he opened it out of mere curiosity to know whence it came.

It was from Mr. Pinney the jeweller, and it contained a full and conscientious account of the whole affair of the theft, from the moment when Logotheti and Van Torp had gone out together until Mr. Pinney had locked up the stone in his safe again, and Baraka and Spiro had been lodged in Brixton Gaol. The envelope contained also a cutting from the newspaper similar to the one Margaret had received from Lady Maud.

Logotheti laid the letter on the table and looked at his watch. It was now a quarter-past six, and old-fashioned shops like Pinney's close rather early in the dull season, when few customers are to be expected and the days are not so long as they have been. In the latter part of August, in London, the sun sets soon after seven o'clock, and Logotheti realised that he had no time to lose.

As he drove quickly up towards Bond Street, he ran over the circumstances in his mind, and came to the conclusion that Baraka had probably been the victim of a trick, though he did not exclude the bare possibility that she might be guilty. With all her cleverness and native sense, she might be little more than a savage who had picked up European manners in Constantinople, where you can pick up any manners you like, Eastern or Western. The merchant who had given her a letter for Logotheti only knew what she had chosen to tell him, and connived in her deception by speaking of her as a man; and she might have told him anything to account for having some valuable precious stones to dispose of. But, on the other hand, she might not be a Tartar at all. Any one, from the Bosphorus to the Amur, may speak Tartar, and pretend not to understand anything else. She might be nothing but a clever half-bred Levantine from Smyrna, who had fooled them all, and really knew French and even English. The merchant had not vouched for the bearer's character beyond saying that 'he' had some good rubies to sell, called himself a Tartar, and was apparently an honest young fellow. All the rest was Baraka's own story, and Logotheti really knew of nothing in her favour beyond his intimate conviction that she was innocent. Against that stood the fact that the stolen ruby had been found secreted on her person within little more than half an hour of her having had a chance to take it from Pinney's shop.

From quite another point of view, Logotheti himself argued as Margaret had done. Baraka knew that he possessed the ruby, since she had sold it to him. She knew that he meant to have it cut in London. She might easily have been watching him and following him for several days in the hope of getting it back, carrying the bit of bottle glass of the same size about with her, carefully prepared and wrapped in tissue-paper, ready to be substituted for the gem at any moment. She had watched him go into Pinney's, knowing very well what he was going for; she had waited till he came out, and had then entered and asked to see any rubies Mr. Pinney had, trusting to the chance that he might choose to show her Logotheti's, as a curiosity. Chance had favoured her, that was all. She had doubtless recognised the twist on the counter, and the rest had been easy enough. Was not the affair of the Ascot Cup, a much more difficult and dangerous theft, still fresh in every one's memory?

Logotheti found Mr. Pinney himself in the act of turning the discs of the safe before going home and leaving his shopman to shut up the place. He smiled with grave satisfaction when Logotheti entered.

'I was hoping to see you, sir,' he said. 'I presume that you had my letter? I wrote out the account with great care, as you may imagine, but I shall be happy to go over the story with you if there is any point that is not clear.'

Logotheti did not care to hear it; he wished to see the ruby. Mr. Pinney turned the discs again to their places, stuck the little key into the secret keyhole which then revealed itself, turned it three times to the left and five times to the right, and opened the heavy iron door. The safe was an old-fashioned one that had belonged to his father before him. He got out the japanned tin box, opened that, and produced the stone, still in its paper, for it was too thick to be put into one of Mr. Pinney's favourite pill-boxes.

Logotheti undid the paper, took out the big uncut ruby, laid it in the palm of his hand, and looked at it critically, turning it over with one finger from time to time. He took it to the door of the shop, where the evening light was stronger, and examined it with the greatest care. Still he did not seem satisfied.

'Let me have your lens, Mr. Pinney,' he said, 'and some electric light and a sheet of white paper.'

Mr. Pinney turned up a strong drop light that stood on the counter, and produced the paper and a magnifier.

'It's a grand ruby,' he said.

'I see it is,' Logotheti answered rather curtly.

'Do you mean to say,' asked the surprised jeweller, 'that you had bought it without thoroughly examining it, sir—you who are an expert?'

'No, that's not what I mean,' answered the Greek, bending over the ruby and scrutinising it through the strong magnifier.

Mr. Pinney felt himself snubbed, which had not happened to him for a long time, and he drew himself up with dignity. A minute passed, and Logotheti did not look up; another, and Mr. Pinney grew nervous; a few seconds more, and he received a shock that took away his breath.

'This is not my ruby,' said Logotheti, looking up, and speaking with perfect confidence.

'Not—your—ruby!' Mr. Pinney's jaw dropped. 'But——' He could get no further.

'I'm sorry,' Logotheti said calmly. 'I'm very sorry, for several reasons. But it's not the stone I brought you, though it's just as large, and most extraordinarily like it.'

'But how do you know, sir?' gasped the jeweller.

'Because I'm an expert, as you were good enough to say just now.'

'Yes, sir. But I am an expert too, and to the best of my expert belief this is the stone you left with me to be cut, the day before yesterday. I've examined it most thoroughly.'

'No doubt,' answered the Greek. 'But you hadn't examined mine thoroughly before it was stolen, had you? You had only looked at it with me, on the counter here.'

'That is correct, sir,' said Mr. Pinney nervously. 'That is quite true.'

'Very well. But I did more than merely look at it through a lens or weigh it. I did not care so much about the weight, but I cared very much for the water, and I tried the ruby point on it in the usual way, but it was too hard, and then I scratched it in two places with the diamond, more out of curiosity than for any other reason.'

'You marked it, sir? There's not a single scratch on this one! Merciful Providence! Merciful Providence!'

'Yes,' Logotheti said gravely. 'The girl spoke the truth. She had two stones much larger than the rest when she first came to me in Paris, this one and another. They were almost exactly alike, and she wanted me to buy both, but I did not want them, and I took the one I thought a little better in colour. This is the other, for she still had it; and, so far as I know, it is her legal property, and mine is gone. The thief was one of those two young fellows who came in just when Mr. Van Torp and I went out. I remember thinking what nice-looking boys they were!'

He laughed rather harshly, for he was more annoyed than his consideration for Mr. Pinney made him care to show. He had looked forward to giving Margaret the ruby, mounted just as she wished it; and the ruby was gone, and he did not know where he was to find another, except the one that was now in Pinney's hands, but really belonged to poor Baraka, who could certainly not sell it at present. A much larger sum of money was gone, too, than any financier could lose with equanimity by such a peculiarly disagreeable mishap as being robbed. There were several reasons why Logotheti was not pleased.

So far as the money went, he was not sure about the law in such a case, and he did not know whether he could claim it of Pinney, who had really been guilty of gross carelessness after a lifetime of scrupulous caution. Pinney was certainly very well off, and would not suffer nearly as much by the loss of a few thousand pounds as from the shame of having been robbed in such an impudent fashion of a gem that was not even his, but had been entrusted to his keeping.

'I am deeply humiliated,' said the worthy old jeweller. 'I have not only been tricked and plundered, but I have been the means of sending innocent people to prison.'

'You had better be the means of getting them out again as soon as possible,' said Logotheti. 'You know what to do here in England far better than I. In my country a stroke of the pen would free Baraka, and perhaps another would exile you to Bagdad, Mr. Pinney!'

He spoke lightly, to cheer the old man, but Mr. Pinney shook his head.

'This is no jesting matter, sir,' he said. 'I feel deeply humiliated.'

He really did, and it was evidently a sort of relief to him to repeat the words.

'I suppose,' said Logotheti, 'that we shall have to make some kind of sworn deposition, or whatever you call it, together, and we will go and do it at once, if you please. Lock up the ruby in the safe again, Mr. Pinney, and we will start directly. I shall not go back to my lodgings till we have done everything we can possibly do to-night.'

'But you will dine, sir?' Mr. Pinney put that point as only a well-regulated Englishman of his class can.

'I shall not dine, and you will not dine,' answered Logotheti calmly, 'if our dinner is at all likely to

keep those people in prison an hour longer than is inevitable.'

Mr. Pinney looked graver than ever. He was in the habit of dining early, and it is said that an Englishman does not fight on an empty stomach, and will eat an excellent breakfast before being hanged.

'You can eat sandwiches in the hansom,' said the Greek coldly.

'I was thinking of you, sir,' Mr. Pinney answered gloomily, as he finished the operation of shutting the safe; he did not like sandwiches, for his teeth were not strong.

'You must also make an effort to trace those two young men who stole the ruby,' said Logotheti.

'I most certainly shall,' replied the jeweller, 'and if it is not found we will make it good to you, sir, whatever price you set upon it. I am deeply humiliated, but nobody shall say that Pinney and Son do not make good any loss their customers sustain through them.'

'Don't worry about that, Mr. Pinney,' said Logotheti, who saw how much distressed the old jeweller really was.

So they went out and hailed a hansom, and drove away.

It would be tiresome to give a detailed account of what they did. Mr. Pinney had not been one of the principal jewellers in London for forty years without having been sometimes in need of the law; and occasionally, also, the law had been in need of him as an expert in very grave cases, some of which required the utmost secrecy as well as the greatest possible tact. He knew his way about in places where Logotheti had never been; and having once abandoned the idea of dinner, he lost no time; for the vision of dinner after all was over rose softly, as the full moon rises on a belated traveller, very pleasant and companionable by the way.

Moreover, as the fact that Baraka and Spiro were really innocent has been kept in view, the manner in which they were proved so is of little importance, nor the circumstances of their being let out of Brixton Gaol, with a vague expression of regret on the part of the law for having placed faith in what Mr. Pinney had testified 'to the best of his belief,' instead of accepting a fairy story which a Tartar girl, caught going about in man's clothes, told through the broken English of a Stamboul interpreter. The law, being good English law, did not make a fuss about owning that it had been mistaken; though it reprimanded Mr. Pinney openly for his haste, and he continued to feel deeply humiliated. It was also quite ready to help him to find the real thieves, though that looked rather difficult.

For law and order, in their private study, with no one looking on, had felt that there was something very odd about the case. It was strange, for instance, that the committed person should have a large bank account in Paris in his, or her, own name, and should have made no attempt to conceal the latter when arrested. It was queer that 'Barak' should be known to a number of honourable Paris jewellers as having sold them rubies of excellent quality, but that there should never have been the least suspicion that he, or she, took any that belonged to other people. It was still more extraordinary that 'Barak' should have offered an enormous ruby, of which the description corresponded remarkably well with the one that had appeared in evidence at the Police Court, to two French dealers in precious stones, who had not bought it, but were bearing it in mind for possible customers, and were informed of Barak's London address, in case they could find a buyer. In the short time since Baraka had been in prison, yards of ciphered telegrams had been exchanged between the London and Paris police; for the Frenchmen maintained that if the Englishmen had not made a mistake, there must have been a big robbery of precious stones somewhere, to account for those that Baraka was selling; but that, as no such robbery, or robberies, had been heard of anywhere in Europe, America, India, or Australia, the Englishmen were probably wrong and had locked up the wrong person. For the French jewellers who had bought the stones all went to the Paris Chief of Police and laid the matter before him, being much afraid that they had purchased stolen goods which had certainly not been offered for sale in 'market overt.' The result was that the English police had begun to feel rather nervous about it all, and were extremely glad to have matters cleared up, and to say so, and to see about the requisite order to set the prisoners at large.

Also, Mr. Pinney restored the ruby to her, and all her other belongings were given back to her, even including the smart grey suit of men's clothes in which she had been arrested; and her luggage and other things which the manager of the hotel where she had been stopping had handed over to the police were all returned; and when Spiro appeared at the hotel to pay the small bill that had been left owing, he held his head as high as an Oriental can when he has got the better of any one, and that is pretty high indeed. Furthermore, Mr. Pinney insisted on giving Logotheti a formal document by which Messrs. Pinney and Son bound themselves to make good to him, his heirs, or assigns, the loss of a ruby, approximately of a certain weight and quality, which he had lost through their carelessness.

All these things were arranged with as little fuss and noise as might be; but it was not possible to keep the singular circumstances out of the newspapers; nor was it desirable, except from Mr. Pinney's point of view, for Baraka had a right to be cleared from all suspicion in the most public manner, and Logotheti insisted that this should be done. It was done, and generously too; and the girl's story was so wonderfully romantic that the reporters went into paroxysms of adjectivitis in every edition of their papers, and scurried about town like mad between the attacks to find out where she was and to interview her. But in this they failed; and the only person they could lay

hands on was Logotheti's private secretary, who was a middle-aged Swiss with a vast face that was as perfectly expressionless as a portrait of George the Fourth on the signboard of an English country inn, or a wooden Indian before the door of an American tobacconist's shop. He had been everywhere and spoke most known languages, for he had once set up a little business in Constantinople that had failed; and his power of knowing nothing, when he had a secret to keep for his employer, was as the combined stupidity of ten born idiots.

He knew nothing. No, he did not know where Baraka was; he did not know what had become of her servant Spiro; he did not know where Logotheti was; he did not know anything; if the reporters had asked him his own name, he would very likely have answered that he did not know that either. The number of things he did not know was perfectly overwhelming. The reporters came to the conclusion that Logotheti had spirited away the beautiful Tartar; and they made some deductions, but abstained from printing them yet, though they worked them out on paper, because they were well aware that Logotheti was engaged to marry the celebrated Cordova, and was too important a personage to be trifled with, unless he had a fall, which sometimes happens to financiers.

On the day following Baraka's liberation, Lady Maud received Margaret's pressing telegram begging her to go to Bayreuth. The message reached her before noon, about the time when Margaret and her companions had come back from their morning walk, and after hesitating for half-an-hour, she telegraphed that she would come with pleasure, and would start at once, which meant that evening.

She had just read the official account of the ruby case in its new aspect, and she did not believe a word of the story. To her mind it was quite clear that Logotheti was still infatuated with the girl, that he had come to London as fast as he could, and that he had deliberately sworn that the ruby was not his, but another one, in order to get her out of trouble. If it was not his it had not been stolen from Pinney's, and the whole case fell through at once. If she was declared innocent the stone must be given back to her; he would take it from her as soon as they were alone and return it to his own pocket; and being an Oriental, he would probably beat her for robbing him, but would not let her out of his sight again till he was tired of her. Lady Maud had heard from her late husband how all Turks believed that women had no souls and should be kept under lock and key, and well fed, and soundly beaten now and then for the good of their tempers. This view was exaggerated, but Lady Maud was in a humour to recall it and accept it without criticism, and she made up her mind that before leaving town to join Margaret she would make sure of the facts. No friend of hers should marry a man capable of such outrageous deeds.

If she had not been an impulsive woman she could never have done so much good in the world; and she had really done so much that she believed in her impulses, and acted on them without taking into consideration the possibility that she might be doing harm. But the damage which very actively good people sometimes do quite unintentionally is often greater and more lasting than that done by bad people, because the good ones carry with them the whole resistless weight of real goodness and of real good works already accomplished.

Perhaps that is why honestly convinced reformers sometimes bring about more ruin in a few months than ten years of bribery and corruption have wrought before them.

Lady Maud was a reformer, in a sense, and she was afraid of nothing when she thought she was doing right. She went to Logotheti's lodgings and asked to see him, as regardless of what any one should think of her, if she were recognised, as she had been in the old days when she used to go to Van Torp's chambers in the Temple in the evening.

She was told that Logotheti was out of town. Where? The servant did not know that. The lady could see the secretary, who might, perhaps, tell her. He received every one who had business with Monsieur Logotheti.

She went up one flight and was admitted to a very airy sitting-room, simply furnished. There were several large easy-chairs of different shapes, all covered with dark wine-coloured leather, and each furnished with a different appliance for holding a book or writing materials. There was a long bookcase full of books behind glass. There was a writing-table, on which were half-a-dozen monstrously big implements of an expensive kind, but handsome in their way: a paper-cutter hewn from at least a third of an elephant's tusk, and heavy enough to fell a man at a blow; an enormous inkstand, apparently made of a solid brick of silver, without ornament, brightly polished, and having a plain round hole in the middle for ink; a blotting-case of the larger folio size, with a Greek inscription on it in raised letters of gold; a trough of imperial jade, two feet long, in which lay a couple of gold penholders fitted with new pens, and the thickest piece of scarlet sealing-wax Lady Maud had ever seen. They were objects of the sort that many rich men receive as presents, or order without looking at them when they are furnishing a place that is to be a mere convenience for a few days in the year. There was nothing personal in what Lady Maud saw, except the books, and she could not have examined them if she had wished to.

The one thing that struck her was a delicate suggestion of sweetness in the fresh air of the room, something that was certainly not a scent, and yet was not that of the perfumes or gums which some Orientals like to burn where they live. She liked it, and wondered what it was, as she glanced about for some one of the unmistakable signs of a woman's presence.

The Swiss secretary had risen ponderously to receive her, and as she did not sit down he remained standing. His vast face was fringed with a beard of no particular colour, and his eyes

were fixed and blue in his head, like turquoises set in pale sole leather.

'I am Countess Leven,' she said, 'and I have known Monsieur Logotheti some time. Will you kindly tell me where he is?'

'I do not know, madam,' was the answer.

'He is not in London?'

'At present I do not know, madam.'

'Has he left no address? Do you not forward his letters to him?'

'No, madam. I do not forward his letters to him.'

'Then I suppose he is on his yacht,' suggested Lady Maud.

'Madam, I do not know whether he is on his yacht.'

'You don't seem to know anything!'

'Pardon me, madam, I think I know my business. That is all I know.'

Lady Maud held her beautiful head a little higher and her lids drooped slightly as she looked down at him, for he was shorter than she. But the huge leathern face was perfectly impassive, and the still, turquoise eyes surveyed her without winking. She had never seen such stolidity in a human being. It reminded her of those big Chinese pottery dogs with vacant blue eyes that some people keep beside a fireplace or a hall door, for no explicable reason.

There was clearly nothing to be done, and she thought the secretary distinctly rude; but as that was no reason why she should be, she bade him good-morning civilly and turned to go. Somewhat to her surprise, he followed her quickly across the room, opened the door for her and went on into the little hall to let her out. There was a small table there, on which lay some of Logotheti's hats, and several pairs of gloves were laid out neatly before them. There was one pair, of a light grey, very much smaller than all the rest, so small indeed that they might have fitted a boy of seven, except that they looked too narrow for any boy. They were men's gloves as to length and buttons, but only a child could have worn them.

Lady Maud saw them instantly, and remembered Baraka's disguise; and as she passed the big umbrella jar to go out, she saw that with two of Logotheti's sticks there was a third, fully four inches shorter; just a plain crook-handled stick with a silver ring. That was enough. Baraka had certainly been in the lodgings and had probably left in them everything that belonged to her disguise. The fact that the gloves and the stick were in the hall, looked very much as if she had come in dressed as a man and had left them there when she had gone away in woman's attire. That she was with Logotheti, most probably on his yacht, Lady Maud had not the least doubt, as she went down the stairs.

The Swiss secretary stood at the open door on the landing till she was out of sight below, and then went in again, and returned to work over a heap of business papers and letters. When he had worked half an hour, he leaned back in his leathern chair to rest, and stared fixedly at the bookcase. Presently he spoke aloud in English, as if Lady Maud were still in the room, in the same dull, matter-of-fact tone, but more forcibly as to expression.

'It is perfectly true, though you do not believe me, madam. I do not know anything. How the dickens should I know where they are, madam? But I know my business. That is all.'

CHAPTER X

The *Erinna* was steaming quietly down the Channel in a flat calm, at the lazy rate of twelve knots an hour, presumably in order to save her coal, for she could run sixteen when her owner liked, and he was not usually fond of going slow. Though September was at hand, and Guernsey was already on the port quarter, the sea was motionless and not so much as a cat's-paw stirred the still blue water; but the steamer's own way made a pleasant draught that fanned the faces of Logotheti and Baraka as they lay in their long chairs under the double awning outside the deck-house.

The Tartar girl wore a skirt and jacket of dark blue yachting serge, which did not fit badly considering that they had been bought ready-made by Logotheti's man. She had little white tennis shoes on her feet, which were crossed one over the other on the deck-chair, but instead of wearing a hat she had bound a dove-coloured motor-veil on her head by a single thick gold cord, in the Asiatic way, and the thin folds hung down on each side, and lay on her shoulders, shading her face, and the breeze stirred them. Logotheti's valet had been sent out in a taximeter, provided with a few measurements and plenty of cash, and commissioned to buy everything that a girl who had nothing at all to wear, visible or invisible, could possibly need. He was also instructed to find a maid who could speak Tartar, or at least a little Turkish.

After five hours he had come back with a heavy load of boxes of all shapes and sizes and the required maid. You can find anything in a great city, if you know how to look for it, and he had discovered through an agency a girl from Trebizonde who had been caught at twelve years old by

missionaries, brought to England and educated to go into service; she spoke English very prettily, and had not altogether forgotten the *lingua franca* of Asia. It was her first place, outside of the retired missionary's house, where she had been brought up and taught by a good old lady who had much to say about the heathen, and gave her to understand that all her deceased forefathers and relatives were frying. As she could not quite believe this, and had not a grateful disposition, and was of an exceedingly inquiring turn of mind, she was very glad to get away, and when she learned from the valet that her mistress was a Tartar lady and a Musulman, and could not speak English, her delight was quite boundless; she even said a few unintelligible words, in a thoughtful tone, which did not sound at all like any Christian prayer or thanksgiving she had learned from the missionaries.

Moreover, while Logotheti and Baraka were lying in their chairs by the deck-house, she was telling the story of her life and explaining things generally to the good-looking young second mate on the other side of the ship.

The consequence of her presence, however, was that Baraka was dressed with great neatness and care, and looked very presentable, though her clothes were only ready-made things, bought by a man-servant, who had only her height and the size of her waist to guide him. Logotheti watched her delicate, energetic profile, admiring the curves of her closed lips, and the wilful turning up of her little chin. She was more than very pretty now, he thought, and he was quietly amused at his own audacity in taking her to sea alone with him, almost on the eve of his marriage. It was especially diverting to think of what the proper people would say if they knew it, and to contrast the intentions they would certainly attribute to him with the perfectly honourable ones he entertained.

As for Baraka, it never occurred to her that she was not as safe with him as she had been in her father's house in the little white town far away, nearly three years ago; and besides, her steel bodkin with the silver handle had been given back to her, and she could feel it in its place when she pressed her left hand to her side. But the little maid who had been brought up by the missionaries took quite another point of view, though this was not among the things she was explaining so fluently in her pretty English to the second mate.

Logotheti had been first of all preoccupied about getting Baraka out of England without attracting attention, and then for her comfort and recovery from the strain and suffering of the last few days. As for that, she was like a healthy young animal, and as soon as she had a chance she had fallen so sound asleep that she had not waked for twelve hours. Logotheti's intention was to take her to Paris by a roundabout way, and establish her under some proper sort of protection. Margaret was still in Germany, but would soon return to France, and he had almost made up his mind to ask her advice, not dreaming that in such a case she could really deem anything he did an unpardonable offence. He had always laughed at the conventionalities of European life, and had paid very little heed to them when they stood in his way.

He had been on deck a long time that day, but Baraka had only been established in her chair a few minutes. As yet he had hardly talked with her of anything but the necessary preparations for the journey, and she had trusted him entirely, being so worn out with fatigue and bodily discomfort, that she was already half asleep when he had at last brought her on board, late on the previous night. Before the yacht had sailed he had received Van Torp's telegram informing him that Kralinsky was at Bayreuth; for his secretary had sat up till two in the morning to telegraph him the latest news and forward any message that came, and Van Torp's had been amongst the number.

Baraka turned her head a little towards him and smiled.

'Kafar the Persian said well that you are a great man,' she said in her own language. 'Perhaps you are one of the greatest in the world. I think so. He told me you were very rich, and so did the Greek merchants who came with me to France. When you would not buy the other ruby I thought they were mistaken, but now I see they were right. Where you are, there is gold, and men bow before you. You say: "Set Baraka free," and I am free. Also, you say: "Give her the ruby that is hers," and they give it, and her belongings, too, all clean and in good order and nothing stolen. You are a king. Like a king, you have a new fire-ship of your own and an army of young men to do your bidding. They are cleaner and better dressed than the sailors on the Sultan's fire-ships that lie in the Golden Horn, for I have seen them. They are as clean as the young effendis in London, in Paris! It is wonderful! You have not many on your ship, but you could have ten ships, all with sailors like these, and they would be all well washed. I like clean people. Yes, you are a great man.'

She turned her eyes away from him and gazed lazily at the still blue sea, having apparently said all she had to say. Logotheti was well used to Asiatics and understood that her speech was partly conventional and intended to convey that sort of flattery which is dear to the Oriental soul. Baraka knew perfectly well what a real king was, and the difference between a yacht and a man-of-war, and many other things which she had learned in Constantinople. Primitive people, when they come from Asia, are not at all simple people, though they are often very direct in pursuing what they want.

'I have something of importance to tell you,' Logotheti said after a pause.

Baraka prepared herself against betraying surprise by letting her lids droop a little, but that was all.

'Speak,' she answered. 'I desire knowledge more than gold.'

'You are wise,' said the Greek gravely. 'No doubt you remember the rich man Van Torp, for whom I gave you a letter, and whom you had seen on the day you were arrested.'

'Van Torp.' Baraka pronounced the name distinctly, and nodded. 'Yes, I remember him well. He knows where the man is whom I seek, and he wrote the address for me. I have it. You will take me there in your ship, and I shall find him.'

'If you find him, what shall you say to him?' Logotheti asked.

'Few words. These perhaps: "You left me to die, but I am not dead, I am here. Through me you are a rich, great man. The rubies are my marriage portion, which you have taken. Now you must be my husband." That is all. Few words.'

'It is your right,' Logotheti answered. 'But he will not marry you.'

'Then he shall die,' replied Baraka, as quietly as if she were saying that he should go for a walk.

'If you kill him, the laws of that country may take your life,' objected the Greek.

'That will be my portion,' the girl answered, with profound indifference.

'You only have one life,' Logotheti observed. 'It is yours to throw away. But the man you seek is not in that country. Van Torp has telegraphed me that he is much nearer. Nevertheless, if you mean to kill him, I will not take you to him, as I intended to do.'

Baraka's face had changed, though she had been determined not to betray surprise at anything he said; she turned to him, and fixed her eyes on his, and he saw her lashes quiver.

'You will tell me where he is,' she said anxiously. 'If you will not take me I will go alone with Spiro. I have been in many countries with no other help. I can go there also, where he is. You will tell me.'

'Not if you mean to murder him,' said Logotheti, and she saw that he was in earnest.

'But if he will not be my husband, what can I do, if I do not kill him?' She asked the question in evident good faith.

'If I were you, I should make him share the rubies and the money with you, and then I would leave him to himself.'

'But you do not understand,' Baraka protested. 'He is young, he is beautiful, he is rich. He will take some other woman for his wife, if I leave him. You see, he must die, there is no other way. If he will not marry me, it is his portion. Why do you talk? Have I not come across the world from the Altai, by Samarkand and Tiflis, as far as England, to find him and marry him? Is it nothing that I have done, a Tartar girl alone, with no friend but a bag of precious stones that any strong thief might have taken from me? Is the danger nothing? The travel nothing? Is it nothing that I have gone about like a shameless one, with my face uncovered, dressed in a man's clothes? That I have cut my hair, my beautiful black hair, is that as nothing too? That I have been in an English prison? That I have been called a thief? I have suffered all these things to find him, and if I come to him at last, and he will not be my husband, shall he live and take another woman? You are a great man, it is true. But you do not understand. You are only a Frank, after all! That little maid you have brought for me would understand me better, though she has been taught for six years by Christians. She is a good girl. She says that in all that time she has never once forgotten to say the *Fatiheh* three times a day, and to say "*el hamdu illah*" to herself after she has eaten! She would understand. I know she would. But you, never!'

The exquisite little aquiline features wore a look of unutterable contempt.

'If I were you,' said Logotheti, smiling, 'I would not tell her what you are going to do.'

'You see!' cried Baraka, almost angrily. 'You do not understand. A servant! Shall I tell my heart to my handmaid, and my secret thoughts to a hired man? I tell you, because you are a friend, though you have no understanding of us. My father feeds many flocks, and has many bondmen and bondwomen, whom he beats when it pleases him, and can put to death if he likes. He also knows the mine of rubies, as his father did before him, and when he desires gold he takes one to Tashkent, or even to Samarkand, a long journey, and sells it to the Russians. He is a great man. If he would bring a camel bag full of precious stones to Europe he could be one of the greatest men in the world. And you think that my father's daughter would open her heart's treasure to one of her servants? I said well that you do not understand!'

Logotheti looked quietly at the slim young thing in a ready-made blue serge frock, who said such things as a Lady Clara Vere de Vere would scarcely dare to say above her breath in these democratic days; and he watched the noble little features, and the small white hands, that had come down to her through generations of chieftains, since the days when the primeval shepherds of the world counted the stars in the plains of Káf.

He himself, with his long Greek descent, was an aristocrat to the marrow, and smiled at the claims of men who traced their families back to Crusaders. With the help of a legend or two and half a myth, he could almost make himself a far descendant of the Tyndaridæ. But what was that compared with the pedigree of the little thing in a blue serge frock? Her race went back to a time

before Hesiod, before Homer, to a date that might be found in the annals of Egypt, but nowhere else in all the dim traditions of human history.

'No,' he said, after a long pause. 'I begin to understand. You had not told me that your father was a great man, and that his sires before him had joined hand to hand, from the hand of Adam himself.'

This polite speech, delivered in his best Tartar, though with sundry Turkish terminations and accents, somewhat mollified Baraka, and she pushed her little head backwards and upwards against the top of the deck chair, as if she were drawing herself up with pride. Also, not being used to European skirts, she stuck out one tiny foot a little further across the other, as she stretched herself, and she indiscreetly showed a pale-yellow silk ankle, round which she could have easily made her thumb meet her second finger. Logotheti glanced at it.

'You will never understand,' she said, but her tone had relented, and she made a concession. 'If you will take me to him, and if he will not be my husband, I will let Spiro kill him.'

'That might be better,' Logotheti answered with extreme gravity, for he was quite sure that Spiro would never kill anybody. 'If you will take an oath which I shall dictate, and swear to let Spiro do it, I will take you to the man you seek.'

'What must be, must be,' Baraka said in a tone of resignation. 'When he is dead, Spiro can also kill me and take the rubies and the money.'

'That would be a pity,' observed the Greek, thoughtfully.

'Why a pity? It will be my portion. I will not kill myself because then I should go to hell-fire, but Spiro can do it very well. Why should I still live, then?'

'Because you are young and beautiful and rich enough to be very happy. Do you never look at your face in the mirror? The eyes of Baraka are like the pools of paradise, when the moon rose upon them the first time, her waist is as slender as a young willow sapling that bends to the breath of a spring breeze, her mouth is a dark rose from Gulistán——'

But Baraka interrupted him with a faint smile.

'You speak emptiness,' she said quietly. 'What is the oath, that I may swear it? Shall I take Allah, and the Prophet, and the Angel Israfil to witness that I will keep my word? Shall I prick my hand and let the drops fall into your two hands that you may drink them? What shall I do and say? I am ready.'

'You must swear an oath that my fathers swore before there were Christians or Musulmans in the world, when the old gods were still great.'

'Speak. I will repeat any words you like. Is it a very solemn oath?'

'It is the most solemn that ever was sworn, for it is the oath of the gods themselves. I shall give it to you slowly, and you must try to pronounce it right, word by word, holding out your hands, like this, with the palms downwards.'

'I am ready,' said Baraka, doing as he bade her.

He quoted in Greek the oath that Hypnos dictates to Hera in the *Iliad*, and Baraka repeated each word, pronouncing as well as she could.

'I swear by the inviolable water of the Styx, and I lay one hand upon the all-nourishing earth, the other on the sparkling sea, that all the gods below may be our witnesses, even they that stand round about Kronos. Thus I swear!'

As he had anticipated, Baraka was much more impressed by the importance of the words she did not understand than if she had bound herself by any oath familiar to her.

'I am sorry,' she said, 'but what is done is done, and you would have it so.'

She pressed her hand gently to her left side and felt the long steel bodkin, and sighed regretfully.

'You have sworn an oath that no man would dare to break,' said Logotheti solemnly. 'A man would rather kill pigs on the graves of his father and his mother than break it.'

'I shall keep my word. Only take me quickly where I would be.'

Logotheti produced a whistle from his pocket and blew on it, and a quartermaster answered the call, and was sent for the captain, who came in a few moments.

'Head her about for Jersey and Carterets, Captain,' said the owner. 'The sea is as flat as a board, and we will land there. You can go on to the Mediterranean without coaling, can you not?'

The captain said he could coal at Gibraltar, if necessary.

'Then take her to Naples, please, and wait for instructions.'

Baraka understood nothing, but within two minutes she saw that the yacht was changing her course, for the afternoon sun was all at once pouring in on the deck, just beyond the end of her chair. She was satisfied, and nodded her approval.

But she did not speak for a long time, paying no more attention to Logotheti's gaze than if he had not existed. No people in the world can remain perfectly motionless so long as Asiatics, perfectly absorbed in their own thoughts.

To the Greek's art-loving nature it was pure delight to watch her. Never, since he had first met Margaret Donne, had he seen any woman or young girl who appealed to his sense of beauty as Baraka did, though the impression she made on him was wholly different from that he received when Margaret was near.

The Primadonna was on a large scale, robust, magnificently vital, a Niké, even a young Hera; and sometimes, especially on the stage, she was almost insolently handsome, rather than beautiful like Lady Maud. Baraka was an Artemis, virginal, high-bred; delicately modelled for grace and speed rather than for reposeful beauty, for motion rather than for rest. It was true that the singer's walk was something to dream of and write verses about, but Baraka's swift-gliding step was that of the Maiden Huntress in the chase, her attitude in rest was the pose of a watchful Diana, ready to spring up at a sound or a breath, a figure almost boyish in its elastic vigour, and yet deeply feminine in meaning.

Baraka once more turned her head without lifting it from the back of the deck-chair.

'I am hungry and thirsty again,' she said gravely. 'I do not understand.'

'What will you eat, and what will you drink?' Logotheti asked.

She smiled and shook her head.

'Anything that is good,' she said; 'but what I desire you have not in your ship. I long for fat quails with Italian rice, and for fig-paste, and I desire a sherbet made with rose leaves, such as the merchant's wife and I used to drink at the Kaffedji's by the Galata Bridge, and sometimes when we went up the Sweet Waters in a caïque on Friday. But you have not such things on your ship.'

Logotheti smiled.

'You forget that I am myself from Constantinople,' he said. 'It is now the season for fat quails in Italy, and they are sent alive to London and Paris, and there are many in my ship, waiting to be eaten. There is also fig-paste from the Stamboul confectioner near the end of the Galata Bridge, and preserved rose leaves with which to make a sherbet, and much ice; and you shall eat and drink the things you like best. Moreover, if there is anything else you long for, speak.'

'You are scoffing at Baraka!' answered the slim thing in blue serge, with the air of a displeased fairy princess.

'Not I. You shall see. We will have a table set here between us, with all the things you desire.'

'Truly? And coffee too? Real coffee? Not the thin mud-broth of the Franks?'

'Real coffee, in a real fildjan.'

Baraka clapped her small white hands for pleasure.

'You are indeed a very great man!' she cried. 'You are one of the kings!'

At the sound of the clapping she had made, Logotheti's Greek steward appeared in a silver-laced blue jacket and a fez.

'He comes because you clapped your hands,' Logotheti said, with a smile.

Baraka laughed softly.

'We are not in your ship,' she said. 'We are in Constantinople! I am happy.' The smile faded quickly and her dark lashes drooped. 'It is a pity,' she added, very low, and her left hand felt the long steel bodkin through her dress.

The steward knew Turkish, but did not understand all she said in her own tongue; and besides, his master was already ordering an unusual luncheon, in Greek, which disturbed even his Eastern faculty of hearing separately with each ear things said in different languages.

Baraka was busy with her own thoughts again, and paid no more attention to her companion, until the steward came back after a few minutes bringing a low round table which he placed between the two chairs. He disappeared again and returned immediately with a salver on which there were two small cups of steaming Turkish coffee, each in its silver filigree stand, and two tall glasses of sherbet, of a beautiful pale rose colour.

Baraka turned on her chair with a look of pleasure, tasted the light hot foam of the coffee, and then began to drink slowly with enjoyment that increased visibly with every sip.

'It is real coffee,' she said, looking up at Logotheti. 'It is made with the beans of Arabia that are picked out one by one for the Sheikhs themselves before the coffee is sold to the Indian princes. The unripe and broken beans that are left are sold to the great Pashas in Constantinople! And that is all there is of it, for the Persian merchant explained all to me, and I know. But how you have got the coffee of the Sheikhs, I know not. You are a very great man.'

'The gates of the pleasant places of this world are all locked, and the keys are of gold,' observed

Logotheti, who could quote Asiatic proverbs by the dozen, when he liked. 'But the doors of Hades stand always open,' he added, suddenly following a Greek thought, 'and from wheresoever men are, the way that leads to them is but one.'

Baraka had tasted the sherbet, which interested her more than his philosophical reflexions.

'This also is delicious,' she said, 'but in Stamboul even a poor man may have it for a few paras.'

'And good water from the fountain for nothing,' returned Logotheti.

There was silence again as she leaned back, sufficiently satisfied to wait another hour for the fat quails, the Italian rice, and the fig-paste, to which she was looking forward. And the yacht moved on at her leisurely twelve-knot speed, through the flat calm of the late summer sea, while an atmosphere of bodily peace and comfort gathered round Baraka like a delicate mist that hid the future and softened the past.

By and by, when she had eaten the fat quail and the Italian rice, and then the fig-paste, and had drunk more sherbet of rose leaves, and more coffee, but none of these things in any excess, that perfect peace came upon her which none but Asiatics can feel, and which we cannot understand; and they call it Kêf, and desire it more than any other condition of their inner and outer selves; but there is no translating of that word.

It is the inexplicable state of the cat when it folds its fore-paw in, and is so quiet and happy that it can hardly purr, but only blinks mildly once in two or three minutes. Logotheti knew the signs of it, though he had never really felt it himself, and he knew very well that its presence has the power to deaden all purpose and active will in those who enjoy it. The sole object of taking opium is to produce it artificially, which is never quite possible, for with most opium-smokers or opium-eaters the state of peace turns into stupor at the very moment when it is about to become consciously beatific.

He understood that this wonderful barbarian girl, who had shown such courage, such irresistible energy, such unchanging determination in the search that had lasted more than two years, was temporarily paralysed for any purpose of action by the atmosphere with which he was surrounding her. She would come to herself again, and be as much awake, as determined, and as brave as ever, but she was quiescent now, and the mere thought of effort would be really painful. Perhaps no one who has not lived in Asia can quite understand that.

Logotheti took out his notebook, which had a small calendar with a few lines for each day in the year, and he began to count days and calculate dates; for when he had expected to go to Bayreuth with the Primadonna he had found out all about the performances, and he knew how long she meant to stay.

His calendar told him that this was the off-day, between the second and third representations of *Parsifal*, and that Margaret had her rooms at the hotel for another week. He would allow two days more for her to reach Versailles and rest from the journey before she would wish to see him; and as he thought she had treated him rather badly in not letting him go with her, because he was not enough of a Wagnerian, he intended to keep her waiting even a day or two longer, on the sometimes mistaken theory that it is better to make a woman impatient than to forestall her wishes before she has had time to change her mind.

Besides, Van Torp's telegram showed that he was in Bayreuth, and Logotheti flattered himself that the more Margaret saw of the American, the more anxious she would be to see her accepted adorer. It was her own fault, since Logotheti might have been with her instead.

The result of his calculations was that he had at least ten days before him, and that as he was not at all bored by the little Tartar lady in blue serge, it was quite useless to put her ashore at Carterets and take her to Paris by that way. The idea of spending eight or nine hours alone in a hot and dirty railway carriage, while she and her maid passed the night in another compartment, was extremely dreary; and besides, he had not at all made up his mind what to do with her, and it would probably end in his taking her to his own house. Margaret would have some right to resent that; but as for the trip in the yacht, she need never know anything about it. The girl was really as safe with him as any girl could be with her own brother, and so long as no one knew that she was with him, nothing else mattered. Furthermore, he was good enough to be convinced that if she were let loose in Europe by herself, with plenty of money, boundless courage, and such a clever courier as Spiro seemed to be, she would certainly find Kralinsky at last and murder him, regardless of having sworn by the inviolable water of the Styx. Lastly, he saw that she was at present in that state of Asiatic peace in which it was perfectly indifferent to her what happened, provided that she were not disturbed.

He rose quietly and went aft. Though she was awake she scarcely noticed that he had left her, and merely opened and shut her eyes twice, like the happy cat already spoken of. She was not aware that the yacht changed her course again, though it was pleasant not to have the reflexion from the sea in her eyes any longer; if Logotheti had told her that he was heading to seaward of Ushant instead of for Jersey and Carterets, she would not have understood, nor cared if she had, and would have been annoyed at being disturbed by the sound of his voice.

It was pure bliss to lie there without a want, a thought, or a memory. An imaginative European might fancy that she had waking dreams and visions in the summer air; that she saw again the small white town, the foot-hills, the broad pastures below, the vastness of Altai above, the

uncounted flocks, the distant moving herds, the evening sunlight on the walls of her father's house; or that she lived over again those mortal hours of imprisonment in the rocky hollow, and looked into the steel-bright eyes of the man who would not love her and saw the tall figure of Saäd already dead, bending forward from the ledge and pitching headlong to the sand.

Not at all. She saw none of these things. She was quiescently blissful; the mysterious Kéf was on her, and the world stood still in the lazy enchantment—the yacht was not moving, the sun was not sinking westwards, her pulse was not beating, she was scarcely breathing, in her own self she was the very self of peace, motionless in an immeasurable stillness.

When the sky reddened at evening Logotheti was again in his chair, reading. She heard six bells struck softly, the first sound she had noticed in four hours, and she did not know what they meant; perhaps it was six o'clock *alla Franca*, as she would have called it; no one could understand European time, which was one in Constantinople, another in Paris, and another in England. Besides, it made no difference what time it was; but Kéf was departing from her—was gone already, and the world was moving again—not at all in an unpleasant or disturbing way, but moving nevertheless.

'When shall we reach that place?' she asked lazily, and she turned her face to Logotheti.

'Allah knows,' he answered gravely, and he laid his book on his knees.

She had been so well used to hearing that answer to all sorts of questions since she had been a child that she thought nothing of it, and waited awhile before speaking again. Her eyes studied the man's face almost unconsciously. He now wore a fez instead of a yachting cap, and it changed his expression. He no longer looked in the least like a European. The handsome red felt glowed like blood in the evening light, and the long black silk tassel hung backwards with a dashing air. There was something about him that reminded Baraka of Saäd, and Saäd had been a handsome man, even in her eyes, until the traveller had come to her father's house with his blue eyes and golden beard. But Saäd had only seen her unveiled face once, and that was the last thing he saw when the ball from the Mauser went through his forehead.

'I mean,' she asked after some time, 'shall we be there to-morrow? or the next day? I see no land on this side; is there any on the other?'

'No,' Logotheti answered, 'there is no land near. Perhaps, far off, we might see a small island.'

'Is that the place?' Baraka began to be interested at last.

'The place is far away. You must have patience. All hurry comes from Satan.'

'I am not impatient,' the girl answered mildly. 'I am glad to rest in your ship, for I was very tired, more tired than I ever was when I was a child, and used to climb up the foot-hills to see Altai better. It is good to be in your ship for a while, and after that, what shall be, will be. It is Allah that knows.'

'That is the truth,' responded the Greek. 'Allah knows. I said so just now. But I will tell you what I have decided, if you will listen.'

'I listen.'

'It is better that you should rest several days after all your weariness, and the man you seek will not run away, for he does not know you are so near.'

'But he may take another woman,' Baraka objected, growing earnest at once. 'Perhaps he has already! Then there will be two instead of one.'

'Spiro,' said Logotheti, with perfect truth, 'would as soon kill two as one, I am sure, for he is a good servant. It will be the same to him. You call me a great man and a king; I am not a king, for I have no kingdom, though some kingdoms would like to have as much ready-money as I. But here, on the ship, I am the master, not only because it is mine, and because I choose to command, but because the men are bound by English law to obey me; and if they should refuse and overpower me, and take my ship where I did not wish to go, the laws of all nations would give me the right to put them all into prison at once, for a long time. Therefore when I say, "Go to a certain place," they take the ship there, according to their knowledge, for they are trained to that business and can guide the vessel towards any place in the world, though they cannot see land till they reach it. Do you understand all these things?'

'I understand,' Baraka answered, smiling. 'But I am not bound to obey you, and at least I can beg you to do what I ask, and I think you will do it.'

Her voice grew suddenly soft, and almost tender, for though she was only a Tartar girl, and very young and slim, she was a woman. Eve had not had long experience of talking when she explained to Adam the properties of apples.

Logotheti answered her smile and her tone.

'I shall do what you ask of me, but I shall do it slowly rather than quickly, because that will be better for you in the end. If we had gone on as we were going, we should have got to land to-night, but to a wretched little town from which we should have had to take a night train, hot and dirty and dusty, all the way to Paris. That would not help you to rest, would it?'

'Oh, no! I wish to sleep again in your ship, once, twice, till I cannot sleep any more. Then you will take me to the place.'

'That is what you shall do. To that end I gave orders this afternoon.'

'You are wise, as well as great,' Baraka said.

She let her feet slip down to the deck, and she sat on the side of the chair towards Logotheti, looking at her small white tennis-shoes, which had turned a golden pink in the evening reflexions, and she thoughtfully settled her serge skirt over her slim yellow silk ankles, almost as a good many European girls would always do if they did not so often forget it.

She rose at last, and went and looked over the rail at the violet sea. It is not often that the Atlantic Ocean is in such a heavenly temper so near the Bay of Biscay. Logotheti got out of his chair and came and stood beside her.

'Is this sea always so still?' she asked.

She was gazing at the melting colours, from the dark blue, spattered with white foam, under the yacht's side, to the deep violet beyond, and further to the wine-purple and the heliotrope and the horizon melting up to the eastern sky.

Logotheti told her that such days came very rarely, even in summer, and that Allah had doubtless sent this one for her especial benefit. But she only laughed.

'Allah is great, but he does nothing where there are English people,' she observed, and Logotheti laughed in his turn.

They left the rail and walked slowly forward, side by side, without speaking; and Logotheti told himself how utterly happy he should be if Baraka could turn into Margaret and be walking with him there; yet something answered him that since she was not by his side he was not to be pitied for the company of a lovely Tartar girl whose language he could understand and even speak tolerably; and when the first voice observed rather drily that Margaret would surely think that he ought to feel very miserable, the second voice told him to take the goods the gods sent him and be grateful; and this little antiphone of Ormuzd and Ahriman went on for some time, till it occurred to him to stop the duo by explaining to Baraka how a European girl would probably slip her arm, or at least her hand, through the arm of the man with whom she was walking on the deck of a yacht, because there was generally a little motion at sea, and she would like to steady herself; and when there was none, there ought to be, and she would do the same thing by force of habit. But Baraka looked at such behaviour quite differently.

'That would be a sort of dance,' she said. 'I am not a dancing girl! I have seen men and women dancing together, both Russians in Samarkand and other people in France. It is disgusting. I would rather go unveiled among my own people!'

'Which may Allah forbid!' answered Logotheti devoutly. 'But, as you say, where there are Englishmen, Allah does nothing; the women go without veils, and the boys and girls dance together.'

'I have done worse,' said Baraka, 'for I have dressed as a man, and if a woman did that among my people she would be stoned to death and not buried. My people will never know what I have done since I got away from them alive. But he thought he was leaving me there to die!'

'Surely. I cannot see why you wish to marry a man who robbed you and tried to compass your death! I can understand that you should dream of killing him, and he deserves to be burnt alive, but why you should wish to marry him is known to the wisdom of the blessed ones!'

'You never saw him,' Baraka answered with perfect simplicity. 'He is a beautiful man; his beard is like the rays of the morning sun on a ripe cornfield. His eyes are bright as an eagle's, but blue as sapphires. He is much taller and bigger and stronger than you are. Do you not see why I want him for a husband? Why did he not desire me for his wife? Am I crooked, am I blinded by the smallpox, or have I six fingers on both hands and a hump on my shoulder like the Witch of Altai? Was my portion a cotton shift, one brass bangle and a horn comb for my hair? I gave him the riches of the world to take me, and he would not! I do not understand. Am I an evil sight in a man's eyes? Tell me the truth, for you are a friend!'

'You are good to see,' Logotheti answered, stopping and pretending to examine her face critically as she stood still and faced him. 'I was telling you what I thought of you before luncheon, I think, but you said I spoke "emptiness," so I stopped.'

'I do not desire you to speak for yourself,' returned Baraka. 'I wish you to speak for any man, since I go about unveiled and any man may see me. What would they say in the street if they saw me now, as a woman? That is what I must know, for he is a Frank, and he will judge me as the Franks judge when he sees me! What will he say?'

'Shall I speak as a Frank? Or as they speak in Constantinople?'

'Speak as he would speak, I pray. But speak the truth.'

'I take Allah to witness that I speak the truth,' Logotheti answered. 'If I had never seen you, and if I were walking in the Great Garden in London and I met you by the bank of the river, I should say that you were the prettiest dark girl in England, but that I should like to see you in a beautiful

Feringhi hat and the best frock that could be made in Paris.'

Baraka's face was troubled, and she looked into his eyes anxiously.

'I understand,' she said. 'Before I meet him I must have more clothes, many beautiful new dresses. It was shameless, but it was easy to dress as a man, after I had learned, for it was always the same—the difference was three buttons—or four buttons, or a high hat or a little hat; not much. Also the Feringhi men button their garments as the Muslims do, the left over the right, but I often see their women's coats buttoned like a Hindu's. Why is this? Have the women another religion than the men? It is very strange!'

Logotheti laughed, for he had really never noticed the rather singular fact which had struck the born Asiatic at once.

'But this woman's dressing is very difficult to learn,' Baraka went on, leaning back upon the rail with both elbows, and sticking out her little white shoes close together. 'Without the girl Maggy whom you have found for me—but her real name is Gula, and she is a good Muslim—without her, Allah knows what I should do! I could not put on these things for myself; alone, I cannot take them off. When I was like a man, buttons! Two, three, four, twenty—what did it matter? All the same way and soon done! But now, I cannot tell what I am made of. Allah knows and sees what I am made of. Hooks, eyes, strings, little bits one way, little bits the other way, like the rigging of ships—those Turkish ships with many small sails that go up the Bosphorus, you remember? And it is all behind, as if one had no front! Gula knows how it is done. But if I were alone, without her help, Allah is my witness, I would tie the things all round me decently and sit very still for fear they should come off! That is what I should do!'

The Greek thought her extremely amusing. She punctuated her explanations with small gestures indicative of her ignorance and helplessness.

'You will soon grow used to it,' he said. 'But you must get some pretty things in Paris before you go to meet the man. It would also be better to let your hair grow long before meeting him, for it is hard to wear the hats of the Feringhi ladies without hair.'

'I cannot wait so long as that. Only to get pretty dresses, only so long! I will spend a thousand pounds or two—is that enough? I have much money in Paris; I can give more.'

'You can get a good many things for a thousand pounds, even in Paris,' Logotheti answered.

Baraka laughed.

'It will not be what I paid for the first clothes after I ran away,' she said. 'I did not know then what the stones were worth! A little ruby to one woman for a shift and an over-tunic, a little ruby to another for a pair of shoes, a little ruby for a veil and a head-blanket, all little rubies! For each thing one! I did not know; the women did not know. But at Samarkand I sold one for money to a good Persian merchant, and what he gave me was enough for the journey, for me and the old woman servant I hired there, till we got to Tiflis; for the Persian merchants everywhere gave me letters from one to another, and their wives took me in, or I should have been robbed. That is how I reached Stamboul after many, many months, more than a year. The Persian merchants are good men. All fear them, because they are wise in their dealings, but they are honest men. They do not lie, but they are silent and shake their heads, and you must guess what they mean; and if you do not guess right, that is your fault, not theirs. Why should they speak when they can hold their peace? But this is all emptiness! We must talk of the fine dresses I must buy in Paris, and of what I must put on my head. The barbers in Paris sell wigs. I have seen them in the windows, very well made, of all colours, even of the Khenna colour. I shall wear a wig, so that the beautiful Feringhi hat will stay on. I shall perhaps wear a Khenna-coloured wig.'

'I should not advise a wig,' said Logotheti gravely, 'certainly not one of that dye.'

'You know, and you are a friend. When I feel rested we will go to Paris, and you shall take me to all the richest shops and tell them in French what I want. Will you?'

'I shall do all I can to help you,' answered the Greek, wondering what would happen if his friends met him piloting a lovely barbarian about between the smartest linendraper's and the most fashionable dressmaker's establishment in the Rue de la Paix.

They had watched the sun set, and the clear twilight glow was in the cloudless sky and on the violet sea. Not a sound disturbed the stillness, except the smooth wash of the water along the yacht's side. At her leisurely three-quarters speed the engines ran noiselessly and the twin screws turned well below the water-line in the flat calm. The watch below was at supper, and the captain was just then working a sunset amplitude in the chart-room to make quite sure of his deviation on the new course; for he was a careful navigator, and had a proper contempt for any master who trusted another man's adjustment of his compasses.

Baraka drew one end of her veil round her throat and across her mouth and over to the other side of her face, so that her features were covered almost as by a real yashmak. The action was well-nigh unconscious, for until she had left Constantinople she had never gone with her face uncovered, except for a short time, of necessity, after she had begun her long journey, almost without clothes to cover her, not to speak of a veil. But the sensation of being screened from men's sight came back pleasantly as she stood there; for the Greek was much more like her own people than the French or English, and he spoke her language, and to be with him was not like

being with Mr. Van Torp, or walking in the streets of London and Paris.

The veil brought back suddenly the sense of real power that the Eastern woman has, and of real security in her perpetual disguise, which every man must respect on pain of being torn to pieces by his fellows. Reams of trash have been written about the inferior position of women in the East; but there, more than anywhere else in the world, they rule and have their will. Their domination there never had a parallel in Europe but once, and that was in the heyday of the Second French Empire, when a great nation was almost destroyed to please a score of smart women.

Veiled as she was, Baraka turned to Logotheti, who started slightly and then laughed; for he had not been watching her, and the effect of the improvised yashmak was sudden and striking. He made the Oriental salutation in three movements, touching his heart, his lips, and his forehead with his right hand.

'Peace be with you, Hanum Effendim!' he said, as if he were greeting a Turkish lady who had just appeared beside him.

'Peace, Effendim,' answered Baraka, with a light little laugh; but after a moment she went on, and her voice had changed. 'It is like Constantinople,' she said, 'and I am happy here—and it is a pity.'

Logotheti thought he heard her sigh softly behind her veil, and she drew it still more closely to her face with her little ungloved hand, and rested one elbow on the rail, gazing out at the twilight glow. In all his recollections of many seas, Logotheti did not remember such a clear and peaceful evening; there was a spell on the ocean, and it was not the sullen, disquieting calm that often comes before a West Indian cyclone or an ocean storm, but rather that fair sleep that sometimes falls upon the sea and lasts many days, making men wonder idly whether the weather will ever break again.

The two dined on deck, with shaded lights, but screened from the draught of the ship's way. The evening was cool, and the little maid had dressed Baraka in a way that much disturbed her, for her taper arms were bare to the elbows, and the pretty little ready-made French dress was open at her ivory neck, and the skirt fitted so closely that she almost fancied herself in man's clothes again. But on her head she would only wear the large veil, confined by a bit of gold cord, and she drew one fold under her chin, and threw it over the opposite shoulder, to be quite covered; and she was glad when she felt cold, and could wrap herself in the wide travelling cloak they had bought for her, and yet not seem to do anything contrary to the customs of a real Feringhi lady.



"The two dined on deck."

CHAPTER XI

Lady Maud found Mr. Van Torp waiting for her at the Bayreuth station.

'You don't mean to say you've come right through?' he inquired, looking at her with admiration as he grasped her hand. 'You're as fresh as paint!'

'That's rather a dangerous thing to say to a woman nowadays,' she answered in her rippling voice. 'But mine won't come off. How is Margaret?'

Her tone changed as she asked the question.

'She showed me your letter about Logo,' answered her friend without heeding the question, and

watching her face to see if she were surprised.

She got into the carriage he had brought, and he stood by the door waiting for the porter, who was getting her luggage. She had no maid with her.

'I'm glad you have told me,' she answered, 'though I wish she had not. You probably think that when I wrote that letter I remembered what you said to me in London about giving me money for my poor women.'

'No,' said Van Torp thoughtfully, 'I don't believe I do think so. It was like me to make the offer, Maud. It was like the sort of man I've been, and you've known me. But it wouldn't have been like you to accept it. It wasn't exactly low-down of me to say what I did, but it's so precious like low-down that I wouldn't say it again, and I suppose I'm sorry. That's all.'

His rough hand was on the side of the little open carriage. She touched it lightly with her gloved fingers and withdrew them instantly, for the porter was coming with her not very voluminous luggage.

'Thank you,' she said quickly. 'I understood, and I understand now.'

They drove slowly up the Bahnhofstrasse, through the dull little town, that looks so thoroughly conscious of its ancient respectability as having once been the 'Residenz' of a Duke of Würtemberg, and of its vast importance as the headquarters of Richard Wagner's representatives on earth.

'See here,' said Mr. Van Torp. 'I've almost persuaded them all to run down to Venice, and I want to know why you won't come too?'

'Venice?' Lady Maud was surprised. 'It's as hot as Tophet now, and full of mosquitoes. Why in the world do you want to take them there?'

'Well,' answered the American, taking plenty of time over the monosyllable, 'I didn't exactly mean to stay there more than a few minutes. I've bought a pretty nice yacht since I saw you, and she's there, eating her head off, and I thought you might all come along with me on her and go home that way, or somewhere.'

'I had no idea you had a yacht!' Lady Maud smiled. 'What it is to have the Bank of England in your pocket! Where did you get her, and what is her name? I love yachts!'

Van Torp explained.

'I forget what she was called,' he said in conclusion, 'but I changed her name. It's *Lancashire Lass* now.'

'The dear old mare you rode that night! How nice of you! It's a horse's name, of course, but that doesn't matter. I'm so glad you chose it. I shall never forget how you looked when you galloped off bareback in your evening clothes with no hat!'

'I don't know how I looked,' said Van Torp gravely. 'But I know quite well how I felt. I felt in a hurry. Now, what I want you to decide right away is whether you'll come, provided they will—for I don't suppose you and I could go mooning around in the yacht by ourselves.'

'And I don't suppose,' returned Lady Maud, mimicking him ever so little, 'that if "they" decide not to come, you will have time for a long cruise.'

'Now that's not fair,' objected the American. 'I didn't intend to put it in that way. Anyhow, will you come if they do? That's the point.'

'Really, it depends a little on who "they" are. Do you mean only Margaret and that nice old friend of hers—Mrs. Patmore, isn't she? I never met her.'

'Rushmore,' said Van Torp, correcting her.

'It's the same thing,' said Lady Maud vaguely, for she was trying to make up her mind quickly.

'You don't know her,' replied her friend. 'That's the reason why you say it's the same thing. Nothing's the same as Mrs. Rushmore.'

'Is she very dreadful?' asked Lady Maud, in some apprehension.

'Dreadful? No! She's very sweet, I think. One of those real, old-fashioned, well-educated New York ladies, and refined right down to the ground. There's only one thing——'

He stopped, trying to find words to express the one thing.

'What is it? All you say about her sounds very nice——'

'She's got the celebrity habit.'

'Lions?' suggested Lady Maud, who understood him.

'Yes,' he assented, 'she's a dandy after lions. She likes them for breakfast, dinner, and tea, with a sandwich thrown in between times. She likes them to talk to, and to look at, and to tell about. That's just a habit, I suppose, like chewing gum, but she'll never get over it at her age. She's got to have a party of some kind every other minute, even here, or she's uneasy at night. But I'm

bound to say, with all truth, she does it well. She's a perfect lady, and she always says the right thing and does the right thing. Besides, we're great friends, she and I. We get on beautifully.'

'You're a celebrity,' observed Lady Maud.

'So's Miss Donne, and a much bigger one. So's Logo, for that matter, but she doesn't think a great deal of Greeks. You're a sort of celebrity, too, and she's perfectly delighted you're coming, because you're "Lady" Maud, and a Russian countess into the bargain. Then there's that other Russian—not that you're one, but you understand—Kralinsky is his name, Count Kralinsky. Ever hear that name?'

'Never. It sounds Polish.'

'He might be anything. Sometimes I'm absolutely sure he's a man I used to know out West when I was on the ranch, and then again there's something quite different about him. Something about his legs or his eyes, I can't tell which. I don't quite make him out. There's one thing, though. He's the Kralinsky I bought your ruby from in New York a month ago, and he doesn't deny it, though I don't remember that he was a Count then. He seemed glad to see me again, but he doesn't seem to talk much about selling rubies now. Perhaps he's got through that, as the camel said to the eye of the needle.'

'Eh? What?' Lady Maud laughed.

'Oh, nothing. I guess it's out of the Bible, or something. I'll tell you all about him by and by. He's going away this afternoon, but he's promised to join us in Venice for a trip, because Mrs. Rushmore finds him so attractive. He seems to know everybody intimately, all over the world. I'd like you to see him. Here we are, and there's Miss Donne waiting for you on the steps. I wish we'd had a longer ride together.'

They reached the hotel, and Van Torp went off promptly, leaving Margaret to take Lady Maud upstairs and introduce her to Mrs. Rushmore.

An hour later the two young women were together in Margaret's room, while Potts was unpacking for Lady Maud in the one that had been secured for her in spite of all sorts of difficulties.

The Primadonna was sitting at her toilet-table, turned away from the glass, and Lady Maud occupied the only possible chair there was, a small, low easy-chair, apparently much too small for such a tall woman, but less uncomfortable than it looked.

They exchanged the usual banalities. It was awfully good of Margaret to ask Maud, it was awfully good of Maud to come. The journey had been tolerable, thank you, by taking the Orient Express as far as Stuttgart. Margaret did not compare Maud's complexion to fresh paint, as Van Torp had done, but to milk and roses; and Maud said with truth that she had never seen Margaret looking better. It was the rest, Margaret said, for she had worked hard.

'Are you going on Mr. Van Torp's yacht?' asked Lady Maud suddenly. 'He spoke to me about it on the way from the station, and asked me to come, in case you accept.'

'I don't know. Will you go if I do? That might make a difference.'

Lady Maud did not answer at once. She wished that she knew how matters had gone between Margaret and Van Torp during the last few days, for she sincerely wished to help him, now that she had made up her mind as to Logotheti's real character. Nevertheless, her love of fair-play made her feel that the Greek ought to be allowed a chance of retrieving himself.

'Yes,' she said at last, 'I'll go, on one condition. At least, it's not a condition, my dear, it's only a suggestion, though I hate to make one. Don't think me too awfully cheeky, will you?'

Margaret shook her head, but looked very grave.

'I feel as if I were getting into a bad scrape,' she said, 'and I shall be only too glad of any good advice. Tell me what I had better do.'

'I must tell you something else first as a continuation of my letter, for all sorts of things happened after I wrote it.'

She told Margaret all that has been already narrated, concerning the news that Baraka had been set at large on Logotheti's sworn statement that the ruby was not his, and that he had seen it in her possession in Paris; and she told how she had tried to find him at his lodgings, and had failed, and how strangely the leather-faced secretary's answers had struck her, and how she had seen Baraka's gloves and stick in Logotheti's hall; and finally she said she had taken it into her head that Logotheti had spirited away the Tartar girl on his yacht, which, as every one in town had known through the papers, was at Cowes and in commission. For Logotheti, in his evidence, had explained his absence from the Police Court by the fact that he had been off in the *Erinna* for two days, out of reach of news.

Margaret's face grew darker as she listened, for she knew Lady Maud too well to doubt but that every word was more than scrupulously true; and the deduction was at least a probable one. She bit her lip as she felt her anger rising again.

'What do you advise me to do?' she asked, in a sullen tone.

'Telegraph to Logo and prepay an answer of twenty words. Telegraph to his rooms in St. James's Place and at the same time to his house in Paris. Telegraph anything you like that really needs an immediate reply. That's the important thing. If he does not answer within twenty-four hours—say thirty-six at the most—he is either on his yacht or hiding. Excuse the ugly word, dear—I don't think of any other. If you are afraid of the servants, I'll take the message to the telegraph office and send it for you. I suppose you have some way of signing which the clerks don't recognise—if you sign at all.'

Margaret leaned back in her chair in silence. After a few seconds she turned towards the glass, rested her chin on her folded knuckles, and seemed to be consulting her own reflexion. It is a way some women have. Lady Maud glanced at her from time to time, but said nothing. At last the Primadonna rose with a sweep that upset the light chair behind her, one of those magnificent sweeps that look so well on the stage and are a little too large for a room. She got her blotter and pen from a shelf, brought it back to the toilet-table, picked up the chair in a very quiet and sensible way, as if she had never been on the stage in her life, and sat down to write.

'I shall take your advice, dear,' she said, opening the blotter and placing a large sheet of paper in the right position.

Lady Maud rose and went to the window, where she stood looking out while Margaret wrote her message.

'You needn't write it out twice,' she said, without turning round. 'Just put "duplicate message" and both addresses.'

'Yes. Thank you.'

Margaret was already writing. Her message said it was absolutely necessary that she should see Logotheti directly, and bade him answer at once, if he could come to Bayreuth; if important financial affairs hindered him, she herself would return immediately to Paris to see him.

She was careful to write 'financial' affairs, for she would not admit that any other consideration could delay his obedience. While she was busy she heard, but scarcely noticed, an unearthly hoot from a big motor car that was passing before the hotel. There must have been something in the way, for the thing hooted again almost at once, and then several times in quick succession, as if a gigantic brazen ass were beginning to bray just under the window. The noises ended in a sort of wild, triumphant howl, with a furious puffing, and the motor took itself off, just as Margaret finished.

She looked up and saw Lady Maud half bent, as if she had been struck; she was clinging with one hand to the flimsy chintz curtain, and her face was as white as a sheet. Margaret started in surprise, and rose to her feet so suddenly that she upset the chair again.

'What has happened?' she cried. 'Are you ill, dear?'

The delicate colour came slowly back to the smooth cheeks, the thoroughbred figure in black drew itself up with elastic dignity, and the hand let go of the curtain.

'I felt a little faint,' Lady Maud answered. 'Did I frighten you? It was nothing, and it's quite gone, I assure you.'

'You looked dreadfully ill for a moment,' Margaret said in a tone of concern. 'Won't you let me send for something? Tea? Or something iced? I'm sure you have had nothing to eat or drink for hours! How disgracefully thoughtless of me!'

She was just going to ring, but her friend stopped her.

'No—please!' she cried. 'I'm all right, indeed I am. The room is a little warm, I think, and I've been shut up in that stuffy train for thirty hours. Have you written your telegram? I'll put on my hat at once, and take it for you. The little walk will do me good. Where is the telegraph? But they can tell me downstairs. Don't bother! Walking always brings me round, no matter what has happened!'



"What has happened?' she cried. 'Are you ill, dear?'"

She spoke nervously, in disjointed phrases, in a way not like herself, for there was generally an air of easy calm in all she did, as if nothing really mattered in the least, save when she was deeply interested; and hardly anything interested her now except what she had made her work. In all that belonged to that, she was energetic, direct, and quick.

Margaret was sure that something was wrong, but let her go, since she insisted, and Lady Maud folded the written message and went to the door. Just as she was going to turn the handle Margaret spoke to her.

'If I have no answer to that by to-morrow afternoon I shall accept Mr. Van Torp's invitation.'

'I hope you will go,' Lady Maud said with sudden decision, 'for if you do, I can go with you, and I'm dying to see the new yacht!'

Margaret looked at her in surprise, for it was only a little while since she had seemed much less ready to join the party, and only willing to do so, if at all, in order to please her friend. She saw Margaret's expression.

'Yes,' she said, as if in explanation, 'I've been thinking it over in the last few minutes, and I want very much to go with you all. I shall be back in less than an hour.'

'An hour?'

'Say half an hour. I want a good walk.'

She opened the door quickly and passed out, shutting it almost noiselessly after her; she was a very graceful woman and moved easily, whether in small spaces or large. In all her life she had probably never overturned a chair with her skirt, as Margaret had done twice within ten minutes. She had not Baraka's gliding movement, the virginal step of the girl of primeval race; hers was rather the careless, swaying walk of a thoroughbred in good training, long-limbed and deep-breathed, and swift at need, but indolently easy when no call was made upon her strength. She and Baraka and the young Primadonna represented well three of the possible types of beauty, very different from each other; so widely different that perhaps no two of them would be likely to appeal to one man, as mere feminine beauty, at the same period of his life.

Straight and tall in her mourning, Lady Maud went down the stairs of the hotel. As she was going out the hall porter raised his cap, and she stopped a moment and asked him which was the nearest way to the telegraph office. He stood on the doorstep and pointed in the direction she was to follow as he answered her question.

'Can you tell me,' she asked, 'whose motor car it was that passed about ten minutes ago, and made so much noise?'

'Count Kralinsky's, my lady,' the porter answered; for he spoke good English, and had the true hotel porter's respect for the British aristocracy abroad.

'He was the gentleman with the big fair beard, I suppose? Yes, thank you.'

She went out into the dull street, with its monotonous houses, all two stories high, and she soon found the telegraph office and sent Margaret's duplicate message. She had not glanced at it, but the clerk asked her questions about words that were not quite clearly written, and she was obliged to read it through. It occurred to her that it was couched in extremely peremptory terms, even for an offended bride-elect; but that was none of her business.

When the clerk had understood, she walked up the hill to the Festival Theatre. It all looked very dull and heavy, being an off-day, and as she was not a Wagnerian it meant absolutely nothing to her. She was disappointed in the whole town, so far as she had expected anything of it, for she had pictured it as being either grand in its way, or picturesque, or at least charming; and it was not. Her British soul stuck up its nose in the general atmosphere of beer and sausage, which she instantly perceived rather than saw; and the Teutonism of everything, from the appearance of the Festival Theatre itself to the wooden faces of the policemen, and the round pink cheeks of the few children she met, roused antagonism in her from the first. She went on a little farther, and then turned back and descended the hill, always at the same even, easy pace, for she was rarely aware of any change of grade when she walked alone.

But by degrees her expression had altered since she had left the telegraph office, and she looked profoundly preoccupied, as if she were revolving a very complicated question in her mind, which disliked complications; and there was now and then a flash of displeased wonder in her face, when she opened her eyes quite wide and shut them, and opened them again, as if to make sure that she was quite awake.

She went on, not knowing whither and not caring, always at the same even pace, and hardly noticing the people who passed her, of whom a good many were in two-horse cabs, some in queer little German motors, and a few on foot; and still she thought, and wondered, and tried to understand, but could not. At all events, she was glad to be alone; she was glad not to have even Van Torp with her, who was by far the most congenial person she knew; for he had the rare good gift of silence, and used it very often, and when he talked she liked his odd speech, his unusual expressions, even his Western accent; she liked him for his simple, unswerving friendship, and for his kind heart—though the world would have screamed with laughter at the idea; and more than all, she liked him for himself, and because she knew certainly that neither he nor she could possibly, under any circumstances, grow to like each other in any other way.

But she did not wish that he were walking beside her now, and she was quite indifferent to the fact that time was passing, and that Margaret was beginning to wonder where in the world she was.

'My dear child,' Mrs. Rushmore said, when the Primadonna expressed her surprise, 'those English people are all alike, when they are once out on a road by themselves. They must take a long walk. I am quite sure that at this moment Countess Leven is miles from here—miles, Margaret. Do you understand me? I tell you she is walking mile upon mile. All English people do. You are only half English after all, my dear, but I have known you to walk a long distance alone, for no good reason that I could see.'

'It's good for the voice if you don't overdo it,' Margaret observed.

'Yes. But Countess Leven does not sing, my dear. You forget that. Why should she walk mile upon mile like that? And I know Mr. Van Torp is not with her, for Justine told me a quarter of an hour ago that she heard him tell his man to bring him some hot water. So he is at home, you see. Margaret, what do you suppose Mr. Van Torp wants hot water for at this extraordinary hour?'

'I really don't know,' Margaret answered, sipping her tea rather gloomily, for she was thinking of the telegram she had given Lady Maud to send.

'You don't think Mr. Van Torp drinks, do you, my dear?'

 inquired Mrs. Rushmore.

'Hot water? Some people do. It's good for the digestion.'

'No, you purposely misunderstand me. I mean that he makes use of it for—for the purpose of mixing alcoholic beverages alone in his room.'

Margaret laughed.

'Never! If there's a perfectly sober man living, it is he!'

'I am glad to hear you say so, my dear. Because, if I thought he had habits, nothing would induce me to go on board his yacht. Nothing, Margaret! Not all his millions! Do you understand me? Margaret, dear, if you do not mind very much, I think we had better not accept his invitation after all, though I am sure it is well meant.'

'You're very much mistaken if you think he drinks,' Margaret said, still inclined to laugh.

'Well, my dear,' returned Mrs. Rushmore, 'I don't know. Justine certainly heard him tell his man to bring him some hot water a quarter of an hour ago. Perhaps it may have been twenty minutes. It is a very extraordinary hour to ask for such a thing, I am sure.'

Margaret suggested that Mr. Van Torp might possibly have a fancy to wash his hands in hot water at that unusual time of day, and Mrs. Rushmore seemed temporarily satisfied, for

apparently she had not thought of this explanation.

'Margaret,' she said solemnly, 'if you feel that you can put your hand into the fire for Mr. Van Torp's habits, I will go with you on his yacht. Not otherwise, my dear.'

The Primadonna laughed, and at last Mrs. Rushmore herself smiled, for she was not without a sense of humour.

'I cannot help it, my dear,' she said. 'You must not laugh at me if I am nervous about such things; nervous, you understand, not unreasonable. But since you are prepared to take all the responsibility I will go with you, my child. I cannot even say it is a sacrifice on my part, for I am an excellent sailor, as you know, and very fond of the sea. In my young days my dear husband used to have a nice cat-boat at Newport, and he always took me with him. He used to say that I steered quite nicely.'

The vision of Mrs. Rushmore steering a Newport cat-boat was quite new to Margaret, and her lips parted in surprise.

'Oh, yes, my child, we were very fond of sailing in those days,' continued the elderly lady, pleased with her recollections. 'I often got quite wet, I assure you, but I remember catching cold only once. I think it rained that day. My dear husband, I recollect, asked me to name the boat when he bought it, and so I called it the *Sea-Mew*.'

'The *Sea-Mew*?' Margaret was mystified.

'Yes. It was a cat-boat, my dear. Cats often mew. You understand, of course. It was not very funny, perhaps, but I remember that my dear husband laughed, and liked the name.'

Margaret was laughing softly too.

'I think it's awfully good, you know,' she said. 'You needn't say it's not funny, for it's a very creditable little joke. Do you think you could steer a boat now? I'm sure I could never learn! Everything about sailing and ships is an utter mystery to me.'

'I daresay I could steer a cat-boat,' said Mrs. Rushmore calmly. 'I am sure I could keep a row-boat straight. Let me see—there's a thing you move—'

'The rudder?' suggested Margaret.

'No, my dear. It's not the rudder, nor the boom, nor the centre-board—how all the names come back to me! Yes, it is the tiller. That is the name. When you know which way to move the tiller, it is quite easy to steer.'

'I fancy so,' said Margaret gravely.

'Most people move it the wrong way when they begin,' continued the good lady. 'You see "port" means "left" and "starboard" means "right." But when you turn the tiller to the left the boat goes to the right. Do you understand?'

'It seems all wrong,' observed Margaret, 'but I suppose you know.'

'Yes. In the same way, when you turn the tiller to the right the boat goes to the left. The great thing is to remember that. It is the same way with "weather" and "lee." I could show you if we were in a boat.'

'I haven't a doubt of it,' Margaret said. 'You're perfectly amazing! I believe you are a regular sailor.'

'Oh, no,' protested Mrs. Rushmore modestly; 'but indeed I often took the cat-boat out alone, now that I think of it. I used to raise the sail alone—I mean, I hoisted it. "Hoist"—that is the proper word, I remember. I was quite strong in those days.'

'Really, you are most extraordinary!' Margaret was genuinely surprised. 'You'll astonish Mr. Van Torp when he hears your nautical language on the yacht! Fancy your knowing all about sailing! I knew you could swim, for we've often been in together at Biarritz—but sailing! Why did you never tell me?'

'Shall we keep some tea for Countess Leven?' asked Mrs. Rushmore, changing the subject. 'I fear it will get quite cold. Those English people never know when to stop walking. I cannot understand what they can see in it. Perhaps you will kindly touch the bell, my dear, and I will send the tea away. It can be brought fresh for her when she comes. Thank you, Margaret. But she will not come in till it is just time to dress for dinner. Mark my words, my child, the Countess will be late for dinner. All English people are. Have you heard from Monsieur Logotheti to-day?'

'Not to-day,' Margaret answered, repressing a little start, for she was as near to being nervous as she ever was, and she was thinking of him just then, and the question had come suddenly.

'I think it is time you heard from him,' said Mrs. Rushmore, her natural severity asserting itself. 'I should think that after those very strange stories in the papers he would write to you and explain, or come himself. By the bye, perhaps you will kindly pass me the *Herald*, my dear. What did you once tell me was the name of his yacht?'

'The *Erinna*,' Margaret answered, handing Mrs. Rushmore the sheet.

'Exactly! I think that means the "Fury."'

'He told me it was the name of a Greek poetess,' Margaret observed.

'On account of her temper, I suppose,' answered the good lady absently, for she was looking up and down the columns in search of something she had already seen. 'Here it is!' she said. 'It is under the yachting news. "Cape Finisterre. Passed at 4 P.M., going south, steam yacht *Erinna*, with owner and party on board. All well." My dear child, it is quite clear that if this is Monsieur Logotheti's yacht, he is going to Gibraltar.'

'I don't know anything about geography,' Margaret said, and her wrath, which had been smouldering sullenly for days, began to glow again.

'Margaret,' said Mrs. Rushmore, 'you surprise me! You were very well taught——'

But the Primadonna did not hear the long tirade of mild reproof that followed. She knew well enough where Gibraltar was, and that Logotheti was going all the way round to the Mediterranean on his yacht with some one for company, and that the voyage was a long one. After what Lady Maud had said, there was not the least doubt in her mind as to his companion, who could be no one but Baraka. He had been told that he was not wanted at Bayreuth, and he was celebrating the sunset of his bachelor life in his own way. That was clear. If he received the telegram that had just been sent to him, he would get it at Gibraltar, should he stop there, and as for answering it before Margaret left Bayreuth, she was inclined to make such a thing impossible by going away the next morning, if not that very night.

Her angry reflexions and Mrs. Rushmore's lecture on the importance of geography in education were interrupted by the discreet entrance of Mr. Van Torp, who was announced and ushered to the door by Justine in a grand French manner. On the threshold, however, he stood still and asked if he might come in; being pressed to do so, he yielded, advanced, and sat down between the two ladies.

'Mr. Van Torp,' said Mrs. Rushmore, 'I insist upon knowing what has become of Countess Leven.'

'I don't know, Mrs. Rushmore,' answered the millionaire, slowly rubbing his hands. 'I haven't spoken to her since I brought her from the station. I daresay she's all right. She's most probably gone to take a walk. She often does in the country, I know—her father's country seat is next to mine, Mrs. Rushmore. I hope you'll pay me a visit some day. Why, yes, Lady Maud sometimes goes off alone and walks miles and miles.'

'There, Margaret,' said Mrs. Rushmore triumphantly, 'what did I tell you? Mr. Van Torp says the Countess often walks for miles and miles.'

'Why, certainly,' said Mr. Van Torp, 'though I'm bound to say she's just as fond of horseback. Her friends generally call her Lady Maud, Mrs. Rushmore. Perhaps you won't mind my telling you, as she prefers it a good deal herself. You see, I've had the pleasure of knowing her several years, so I daresay you'll forgive me for mentioning it.'

'I think it is quite kind of you, on the contrary,' answered Mrs. Rushmore. 'Margaret, why did you never tell me of this? Had you any reason for not telling me?'

'I don't think I noticed what you called her,' Margaret answered patiently.

'Because if you had any reason,' said Mrs. Rushmore, following her own thoughts, 'I insist upon knowing what it was.'

'Well, now, I'll tell you,' rejoined Mr. Van Torp, to save Margaret the trouble of answering the futile little speech, 'her husband didn't treat her very well. There's not a purer woman in the six continents, Mrs. Rushmore, but he tried to divorce her, because he'd lost his money, if he ever had any, and she has none, and he wanted to marry an heiress. However, they automobilised him, or something, in St. Petersburg last June.'

'Auto—what did you say?' inquired Mrs. Rushmore.

'Killed by an automobile,' explained Mr. Van Torp gravely. 'But now I come to think, it wasn't that. He got blown up by a bomb meant for a better man. It was quite instantaneous, I recollect. His head disappeared suddenly, and the greater part of him was scattered around, but they found his pocket-book with his cards and things, so they knew who it was. It was driven through somebody else's hat on the other side of the street, wasn't it, Miss Donne? Things must have been quite lively just then, where it happened. I supposed you knew.'

Mrs. Rushmore explained that she had never heard any details.

'Besides,' said Mr. Van Torp, in answer, though not quite relevantly, 'everybody always calls her "Lady Maud" instead of "Countess Leven," which she has on her cards.'

'She would naturally use the higher title,' observed Mrs. Rushmore reverently.

'Well, now, about that,' objected Mr. Van Torp, 'I'm bound to say I think the daughter of an English earl as good as a Russian count, anywhere west of Siberia. I don't know how they figure those things out at courts when they have to balance 'em up for seats at a dinner-party, of course. It's just my impression, that's all, as a business man. He's dead anyway, and one needn't make personal remarks about dead men. All the same, it was a happy release for Lady Maud, and I

doubt if she sits up all night mourning for him. Have you been out this afternoon, Miss Donne?"

He changed the subject with extreme directness, and Mrs. Rushmore, who was used to the dictatorial ways of lions, took the hint submissively enough, though she would have been glad to discuss the relative and intrinsic values of the designations 'Lady Maud' and 'Countess Leven.' But it was much more important that the lion should be left alone with Margaret as much as possible, and the excellent lady therefore remembered that she had something to do and left them.

'I had a little talk with Kralinsky before he left,' said Van Torp, when she was gone. 'He says he'll meet us in Venice any time in the next few days. He's just going to run over to Vienna in his sudden-death-cart for twenty-four hours; then he'll go south, he says. He ran me up to the hotel and dropped me. I daresay you heard the toots. I thought I saw Lady Maud looking out of the window of your room as I got out.'

'Yes,' Margaret said. 'But how do you know that is my window?'

'In the first place, I've counted the windows. I felt a sort of interest in knowing which was yours. And then, I often see your maid opening the shutters in the morning.'

'Oh!' Margaret smiled. 'Did you notice anything unusual about Lady Maud when you saw her?' she asked, for she knew that he had good eyes.

'Since you mention it, I thought she looked as if she didn't feel quite up to the mark—pale, I thought she was.'

'Yes,' Margaret said. 'She felt ill for a moment, and I thought she was going to faint. But it passed almost directly, and she insisted on going for a walk.'

'Oh,' mused Mr. Van Torp, 'is that so? Well, I daresay it was the best thing she could do. I was telling you about Kralinsky. He's not Levi Longlegs after all, and I'm not sure he was ever in the West.'

'I thought it sounded unlikely,' Margaret said.

'I asked him, just like that, in a friendly way, and he thought a moment and made an effort to recollect, and then he seemed quite pleased to remember that I'd been "Fanny" and he'd been Levi Longlegs, and that he used to whistle things out of *Parsifal* by the fire of an evening.'

'Well—but in that case—' Margaret stopped with an inquiring look.

'Just so,' continued Van Torp, nodding. 'Did you ever attend a trial and hear a witness being cross-examined by a lawyer who wants him to remember something, and he wants to remember it himself, but can't, because he never heard of it before in his life? It's quite funny. The lawyer makes steps for him and puts his feet into them so that he gets along nicely, unless the judge happens to wake up and kick, and then the little game stops right there, and somebody laughs. Well, my talk with Kralinsky was like that, only there was no judge, so he went away happy; and we're old friends now, and punched cows on the same ranch, and he's coming on my yacht. I only wonder why he was so anxious to remember all that, and why he thought it would be kind of friendly if I called him Levi Longlegs again, and he called me Fanny Cook. I wonder! He says he's still very fond of *Parsifal*, and came on purpose to hear it, but that he's completely forgotten how to whistle. That's funny too. I just thought I'd tell you, because if you come on my yacht and he comes too, you're liable to see quite a good deal of one another.'

'Did you tell him that Mrs. Rushmore and I would come?' Margaret asked. 'And Lady Maud?'

'Why, no. You've not promised yet, any more than you did last night when he was there and we talked about it, so how could I? I forgot to mention Lady Maud to him, or else I thought I wouldn't—I forget which. It doesn't matter.'

'No.' Margaret smiled. 'Not a little bit!'

'You seem amused,' observed Mr. Van Torp.

'By your way of putting it, and your pretending to forget such a thing.'

'It wasn't quite true that I forgot, but I wanted to, so I didn't say anything about her. That's why I put it in that way. I don't choose to leave you any doubt about what I say, or mean, even in the smallest things. The moment you feel the least doubt about the perfect accuracy of anything I tell you, even if it's not at all a downright lie or anything resembling one, you won't trust me at all, in anything. Because, if you trust me, you'll end by liking me, and if you don't trust me you'll go back to thinking that I'm the Beast out of Revelations, or something, as you used to. I've forgotten the Beast's number.'

Margaret smiled again, though she was continually conscious of her own sullenly smouldering anger against Logotheti. Van Torp was gaining influence over her in his own uncouth way. Logotheti had been able to play upon her moods, as on that day under the elm-tree at Versailles, and she blushed when she remembered that single kiss he had won from her. But the American had no idea of such tactics in love, for he had never learned them. He was making war on the modern scientific system of never losing a hair's-breadth of ground once gained, keeping his communications constantly open with the base from which he had started, bringing up fresh forces to the front without intermission, and playing his heavy artillery with judgment and

tenacity.

'The number doesn't matter,' Margaret said, 'for I've forgotten all about the Beast.'

'Thank you,' answered Mr. Van Torp. 'To change the subject—I've got a little scheme to propose. Maybe you'll think well of it. Anyhow, as it's a mere matter of business connected with your career, you won't mind my explaining it to you, will you?'

'No, indeed!' Margaret was interested at once. 'Do tell me!' she said, leaning forward a little.

'Well,' he began, 'I've looked around this place a good deal since I've been here, and I've come to the conclusion that it's not very well done, anyhow, except *Parsifal*. That's what most of the people really come for. I'm informed that they give all the other operas better in Munich, with the advantage of being in what you may call a Christian town, compared with this. Is that correct, do you think?'

'Yes, I believe so.'

'It is, you can depend upon it. Now, what I want to know is, why you and I shouldn't go into a little business partnership, and do this kind of thing brown, as it ought to be done.' Margaret opened her handsome eyes wide. 'Because,' continued Mr. Van Torp, as coolly as if he were explaining a new plan to a board of directors, 'we've got the capital and the ability between us, and there's a demand in New York for what I propose to do. It'll fill a want, I know, and that means success and money. Why don't we build a theatre together? When I say a theatre, I mean a first-class opera-house and not a barn. We'll employ the best architects to build it, and, of course, I'd leave everything about it to you. I've got a block in New York just about in the right place, and it won't take long to build. I'll give the land and put up the money for the building, if you'll undertake the management. You'll put in any money you like, of course, and we'll share the profits. Maybe they'll be quite handsome, for we'll lease the theatre to other people outside of the season. We'll have the best talent in Europe, and pay for it, and the public will pay us back. We'll call it the Cordova Opera, if you like, and you'll run it according to your own ideas, and sing or not, whenever you please.'

'Are you in earnest?'

Margaret had some difficulty in pronouncing the words clearly. He had brought up some very heavy artillery indeed, and at the right moment. Was there ever a great soprano who did not dream of having the most perfect theatre of her very own, and who could receive unmoved the offer to build one from a man who could build twenty if he chose? Very rarely in her life had she been aware of her bodily heart, but she could feel it now, beating like a hammer on the anvil.

'I'm in earnest,' Van Torp answered with perfect calm. 'I've thought the whole thing over in all its aspects, just as I would a railroad, or a canal, or a mine, and I've concluded to try it, if you'll help me, because it's going to be a safe investment. You see, Miss Donne,' he went on slowly, 'there's no artist on the Grand Opera stage now who's so well equipped for the business as you are. I'm not flattering you, either. In your own kind of parts you've simply got no rival. Everybody says so, and I suppose you won't play kitty and deny it. Let's start fair, now.'

'It would be silly to deny that I'm one of the first,' Margaret admitted.

'That'll do, thank you. One of the first, and the first is one of them, and you're it. Besides, you've got before you what's behind most of them. You're young. I'm not talking about your personal appearance, but that's just one more item in the assets. Another big one is that you're a first-class musician, whereas half these singers can only bang the box like great, thundering, overgrown schoolgirls. Allow that?'

'I suppose I must "allow" anything!' laughed the Primadonna.

'Well, now, I've told you. You've got the name I need, and you've got the voice, and the talent, and you've got the science and culture. I suppose you'll let me say that I've got the business ability, won't you?'

The iron mouth smiled a little grimly.

'Rather! I fancy some people have wished you had less!'

'And the money's here, for I always have a blank cheque in my pocket. If you like, I'll fill it in, and we'll deposit it wherever you say, in the name of the "Cordova Opera Company," or "Madame da Cordova, Rufus Van Torp and Co." We can make out our little agreement in duplicate right here, on the corner of the table, and sign it; and before we leave here you might go around and speak to the best singers about an engagement in New York for a Wagner festival, a year from next Christmas. That's business, and this is a purely business proposition. If you'd like to think it over, I'll go and take a little walk before dinner.'

'It sounds like a dream!' Margaret answered, in a wondering tone.

'Money's an awful reality,' Van Torp remarked. 'I'm talking business, and as I'm the one who's going to put up most of the capital, you'll do me the credit to believe that I'm quite wide awake.'

'Do you really, really, really mean it?' She spoke almost like a child.

It was not the first time in his life that the financier had seen the stunning effect of a big sum,

projected with precision, like a shell, at exactly the right moment. He was playing the great game again, but for a prize he thought worth more than any he had yet won, and the very magnitude of the risk steadied his naturally steady brain.

'Yes,' he said quietly, 'I do. Perhaps I've startled you a little, and I shouldn't like you to make a decision till you feel quite ready to. I'll just say again that I've thought the whole thing out as a genuine venture, and that I believe in it, or I wouldn't propose it. Maybe you've got some sensible lawyer you have confidence in, and would like to consult him first. If you feel that way, I'd rather you should. A business partnership's not a thing to go into with your eyes shut, and if we had any reason for distrusting one another, it would be better to make inquiries. But so far as that goes, it appears to me that we've got facts to go on, which would make any partnership succeed. You've certainly got the musical brains, besides a little money of your own, and I've certainly got the rest of the funds. I'd like you to put some money in, though, if you can spare it, because that's a guarantee that you're going to be in earnest, too, and do your share in the musical side. You see I'm talking to you just as I would to a man in the same position. Not because I doubt that if you put your name to a piece of paper you really will do your share as a partner, but because I'm used to working in that sort of way in business. How does that strike you? I hope you're not offended?'

'Offended!'

There was no mistaking the suppressed excitement and delight in her voice. If he had possessed the intelligence of Mephistopheles and the charm of Faust he could not have said anything more subtly pleasing to her dignity and her vanity.

'Of course,' he said, 'it needn't be a very large sum. Still it ought to be something that would make a difference to you.'

She hesitated a moment, and then spoke rather timidly.

'I think perhaps—if we did it—I could manage a hundred thousand pounds,' she said. 'Would that be too little, do you think?'

The large mouth twitched and then smiled pleasantly.

'That's too much,' he said, shaking his head. 'You mustn't put all your eggs in one basket. A hundred thousand dollars would be quite enough as your share of the capital, with option to buy stock of me at par, up to a million, or so, if it's a success.'

'Really? Would that be enough? And, please, what is "stock" in such a case?'

'Stock,' said the financier, 'is a little plant which, when well watered, will grow like the mustard seed, till all the birds of Wall Street make their nests in its branches. And if you don't water it too much, it'll be all right. In our case, the stock is going to be that share of the business which most people sell to raise money, and which we mean to keep for ourselves. I always do it that way, when circumstances allow. I once bought all the stock of a railroad for nothing, for instance, and sold all the bonds, and let it go bankrupt. Then I bought the road one day, and found all the stock was in my own pocket. That's only a little illustration. But I guess you can leave the financial side in my hands. You won't lose by it, I'm pretty sure.'

'I fancy not!' Margaret's eyes were wide open, her hands were clasped tightly on her knee, and she was leaning forward a little. 'Besides,' she went on, 'it would not be the money that I should care about! I can earn more money than I want, and I have a little fortune of my own—the hundred thousand I offered you. Oh, no! It would be the splendid power to have the most beautiful music in the world given as it could be given nowhere else! The joy of singing myself—the parts I can sing—in the most perfect surroundings! An orchestra picked from the whole world of orchestras, the greatest living leaders, the most faultless chorus! And the scenery, and the costumes—everything as everything could be, if it were really, really the best that can be had! Do you believe it is possible to have all that?'

'Oh, yes, and with your name to it, too. We'll have everything on earth that money can buy to make a perfect opera, and I'll guarantee it'll pay after the first two seasons. That is, if you'll work at it as hard as I will. But you've got to work, Miss Donne, you've got to work, or it's no use thinking of it. That's my opinion.'

'I'll work like a Trojan!' cried Margaret enthusiastically.

'Trojans,' mused Van Torp, who wanted to bring her back to her ordinary self before Mrs. Rushmore or Lady Maud came in. 'Let me see. They say that because the Trojans had to work so hard to get over the Alps coming down into Italy, don't they?'

Whether Mr. Van Torp made this monstrous assertion in ignorance, or for effect, no one will ever know. An effect certainly followed at once, for Margaret broke into an echoing laugh.

'I believe it was the Carthaginians,' she said presently. 'It's the same thing, as Lady Maud is so fond of saying!'

'All in the family, as Cain said when he killed Abel,' observed Van Torp without a smile.

Margaret looked at him and laughed again. She would have laughed at anything in the remotest degree amusing just then, for she found it hard to realise exactly what she was doing or saying. The possibility he had suddenly placed within her reach appealed to almost everything in her

nature at once, to her talent, her vanity, her real knowledge of her art, her love of power, even to her good sense, which was unusually practical in certain ways. She had enough experience in herself, and enough knowledge of the conditions to believe that her own hard work, combined with Van Torp's unlimited capital, could and certainly would produce such an opera-house, and bring to it such artists as had never been seen and heard, except perhaps in Bayreuth, during its first great days, now long past.

Then, too, he had put the matter before her so skilfully that she could look upon it honestly as a business partnership, in which her voice, her judgment, and her experience would bear no contemptible proportion to his money, and in which she herself was to invest money of her own, thereby sharing the risk according to her fortune as well as giving the greater part of the labour. She felt for some weak place in the scheme, groping as if she were dazzled, but she could find none.

'I don't think I shall need time to think this over,' she said, controlling her voice better, now that she had made up her mind. 'As I understand it, I am to put in what I can in the way of ready-money, and I am to give my time in all ways, as you need it, and my voice, when it is wanted. Is that it?'

'Except that, when you choose to sing, the Company will allow you your usual price for each appearance,' answered Van Torp in a business-like manner. 'You will pay yourself, or we both shall pay you, just as much as we should pay any other first-class soprano, or as much more as you would get in London or New York if you signed an engagement.'

'Is that fair?' Margaret asked.

'Why, certainly. But the Company, which is you and I, will probably rule that you mustn't sing in Grand Opera anywhere in the States east of the Rockies. They've got to come to New York to hear you. Naturally, you'll be free to do anything you like in Europe outside of our season, when you can spare the time.'

'Of course.'

'Well, now, I suppose we might as well note that down right away, as a preliminary agreement. What do you say?'

'I say that I simply cannot refuse such an offer!' Margaret answered.

'Your consent is all that's necessary,' he said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

He produced from an inner pocket a folded sheet of foolscap, which he spread on the corner of the table beside him. He took out a fountain pen and began to write quickly. The terms and forms were as familiar to him as the alphabet and he lost no time; besides, as he had told the Primadonna, he had thought out the whole matter beforehand.

'What if Mrs. Rushmore comes in just as we are signing it?' asked Margaret.

'We'll tell her, and ask her to witness our signatures,' replied Van Torp without looking up. 'I judge Mrs. Rushmore to have quite a knowledge of business.'

'You seem able to write and talk at the same time,' Margaret said, smiling.

'Business talk, yes.' The pen ran on swiftly. 'There. That's about all, I should say. Do you think you can read my writing? I don't suppose you've ever seen it.'

He turned the page round, and handed it to her. The writing was large and perfectly legible, but very different from the 'commercial' hand of most American business men. Any one word, taken at random, might have seemed unformed, at first sight, but the appearance of the whole was oddly strong and symmetrical. Margaret read the clauses carefully. She herself had already signed a good many legal papers in connexion with her engagements and her own small fortune, and the language was not so unfamiliar to her as it would have been to most women.

'Shall I sign first?' she asked, when she had finished. 'My own name? Or my stage name?'

'Your own name, please,' said Van Torp without hesitation. 'The others only binding in your profession, because you appear under it, and it's your "business style."'

She wrote 'Margaret Donne' at the foot of the page in her large and rather irregular hand, and passed the paper back to Van Torp, who signed it. He waved the sheet slowly to and fro, to dry the ink.

'It's only a preliminary agreement,' he said, 'but it's binding as far as it goes and I'll attend to the rest. You'll have to give me a power of attorney for my lawyer in New York. By the bye, if you decide to come, you can do that in Venice, where there's a real live consul. That's necessary. But for all matters of business herein set forth, we are now already "The Madame da Cordova and Rufus Van Torp Company, organised for the purpose of building an Opera-house in the City of New York and for giving public performances of musical works in the same, with a nominal capital hereafter to be agreed upon." That's what we are now.'

He folded the sheet, returned it to his inner pocket and held out his hand in a cheerful, business-like manner.

'Shall we shake hands on it?' he asked.

'By all means,' Margaret answered readily, and their eyes met; but she drew back her hand again before taking his. 'This is purely a matter of business between us,' she said, 'you understand that? It means nothing else?'

'Purely a matter of business,' answered Rufus Van Torp, slowly and gravely.

CHAPTER XII

'Stemp,' said Mr. Van Torp, 'we must have something to eat on that yacht.'

'Yes, sir. Quite so, sir.'

Stemp, who could do anything, was clipping the millionaire's thatch of sandy hair, on the morning after the transaction last described. Mr. Van Torp abhorred barbers and shaved himself, and in his less 'prominent' days he had been in the habit of cutting his own hair by using two looking-glasses. The result had rarely been artistic, and even Stemp was not what is described on some American signs as a tonsorial artist, but he managed to clip his master's rough mane with neatness and precision, if not in the 'Bond Street style.'

'I mean,' said Mr. Van Torp, explaining himself, 'we must have something good to eat.'

'Oh, I see, sir,' answered Stemp, as if this were quite a new idea.

'Well, now, do you suppose you can get anything to eat in Italy?'

'Salmon-trout is very good there, sir, and quails are in season at the end of August. They are just going back to Egypt at this time of the year, sir, and are very fat. There's Gorgonzola cheese, too, and figs and muscatel grapes are coming on. I think that's all, sir.'

'It's not bad. How about chickens?'

'Well, sir, the poultry in those parts is not much to boast of. An Italian fowl is mostly either a hawk or a butterfly. That's my experience, sir, when I travelled there with the late Duke of Barchester, a few years ago. His Grace was most particular, sir, having a poor stomach, and nothing to occupy his mind after the Duchess died in a fit of rage, having thrown her wig at him, sir, they do say, and then fallen down in a fit which was quite awful to see, and ended as we all know.'

'As far as I can see, you'd better go on to Venice, Stemp,' said Mr. Van Torp, not interested in his man's reminiscences. 'You'd better go off to-night and tell Captain Brown to hurry up and get ready, because I'm bringing a party of friends down the day after to-morrow. And then you just scratch round and find something to eat.'

'Yes, sir. I'll telegraph to the caterers, and I think you'll be satisfied, sir.'

'There's an American lady coming, who knows what's good to eat, and likes it, and wants it, and means to get it, and you've got to find it for her somehow. I can live on hog and hominy myself. And I shan't want you in the least. You'd better take most of my baggage with you anyway. Just leave my Tuxedo and a couple of suits, and some new flannel pants and a shirt-case, and take the rest. But don't waste time over that either if you've got to catch the train, for the main thing's to get there right away. You can go first-class, Stemp—you won't be so done up.'

'Thank you, sir.'

A silence followed, during which the valet's scissors made a succession of little chinking noises; from time to time he turned Mr. Van Torp's head very gingerly to a slightly different position.

'Stemp.'

'Yes, sir.'

'You take a good look around that yacht, and decide about the state-rooms, before I come. This way. You give the best room to Miss Donne, and have a large bouquet of carnations on the table. See?'

'Beg pardon, sir, but carnations are out of season.'

'You get them just the same.'

'Yes, sir.'

'And give the second-best room to her ladyship, Stemp, if there are not two alike, but be extra careful to see that everything's comfortable. Lady Maud likes wood violets, Stemp. You get a handsome bouquet of them, and don't tell me they're out of season too, because you've got to get them, anyway, so it's no use to talk.'

'Yes, sir. I see, sir.'

'And then you get the third-best room ready for Mrs. Rushmore, and you get some flowers for her too, out of your own head. Maybe she likes those roses with stems three feet long. Use your own

judgment, anyway.'

'Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.'

Another silence followed, and the hair-cutting was finished. Mr. Van Torp glanced at himself in the glass and then turned to his valet.

'Say, Stemp, I was thinking. Maybe that third bedroom's not quite so good as the others, and the lady might feel herself sort of overlooked.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, I was thinking. If that's the case, and it looks sort of second-class, you go out and get a man and have him gild it all around nicely so as to brighten it up. I guess she'll think it's all right if it's gilt and the others aren't. Some people are like that.'

'I see, sir. Yes, sir. I'll attend to it, sir. Will there be any more ladies and gentlemen, sir?'

'There's that Russian gentleman, Count Kralinsky. Put him at the other end of the ship, somewhere out of the way of the ladies. I suppose he'll bring his valet, and there'll be two or three maids. That's all. Now don't mind me any more, but just fly around, and don't forget anything. Understand? We aren't going to be in England or the States, where you can sit still and telephone for anything you've forgotten, from peanuts to a funeral. You'll have to go full speed ahead in all directions if you're going to wake things up.'

Thereupon Mr. Van Torp sat down by the window to read the paper.

His attention was arrested by a sensational 'scare-head' about a thief and a ruby worth fifty thousand dollars. Some disaffected colleague in London had known, or cleverly guessed, where the stone was that had been stolen from Mr. Pinney's, and had informed the police; the nice-looking young fellow who spoke like an English gentleman had walked directly into the arms of the plain-clothes man waiting for him on the pier in New York, the stone had been found sewn up in his waistcoat, and his pleasant career of liberty had ended abruptly in a cell.

Mr. Van Torp whistled softly as he read the account a second time. Then he neatly cut the column out of the paper, folded it with great precision, smoothed it with care and placed it in his pocket-book next to a cheap little photograph of Madame da Cordova as 'Juliet,' which he had bought in a music-shop in New York the day after he had heard her for the first time, and had carried in his pocket ever since. He looked up to see what Stemp was doing, and as the man was kneeling before a box on the floor, with his back turned, he took out the rather shabby photograph and gazed at it quietly for fully thirty seconds before he put it back again.

He took up the mutilated newspaper and looked up and down the columns, and among other information which he gathered in a few moments was the fact that Logotheti's yacht had 'passed Cape Saint Vincent, going east, owner and party on board.' The previous telegram had not escaped him, and if he had entertained any doubts as to the destination of the *Erinna*, they vanished now. She was certainly bound for the Mediterranean. He remembered having heard that many steam yachts coming from England put into Gibraltar for coal and fresh provisions, coal being cheaper there than in French and Italian ports, and he thought it very probable that the *Erinna* would do the same; he also made some deductions which need not be explained yet. The only one worth mentioning here was that Logotheti would be likely to hear in Gibraltar that the ruby had been found and was on its way back to England, and that as he would know that Margaret would be anxious about it, since he had already given it to her, he would hardly let the occasion of communicating with her go by. As for writing from Gibraltar to any place whatsoever in the hope that a letter will arrive in less than a week, it is sheer folly. Mr. Van Torp had never tried it, and supposed it possible, as it looks, but he was tolerably sure that Logotheti would telegraph first, and had perhaps done so already, for the news of his passing Cape Saint Vincent was already twenty-four hours old.

This was precisely what had happened. When Mr. Van Torp opened his door, he came upon Margaret and Mrs. Rushmore on the landing, on the point of going out for a walk, and a servant had just brought the Primadonna a telegram which she was reading aloud, so that the American could not help hearing her.

"'Cruising till wanted,'" she read quickly. "'Ruby found. Address, yacht *Erinna*, Naples.'"

She heard Van Torp close his door, though she had not heard him open it, and turning round she found herself face to face with him. Her eyes were sparkling with anger.

'Very sorry,' he said. 'I couldn't help hearing.'

'It's of no consequence, for I should have told you,' Margaret answered briefly.

He argued well for himself from her tone and manner, but he chose to show that he would not force his company upon her just then, when she was in a visible rage, and instead of stopping to exchange more words he passed the two ladies hat in hand, and bowing rather low, after his manner, he went quietly downstairs.

Margaret watched him till he disappeared.

'I like that man,' she said, as if to herself, but audibly. 'I cannot help it.'

Mrs. Rushmore was more than delighted, but had tact enough not to make any answer to a speech which had probably not been meant for her ears.

'Perhaps,' she said, 'you would rather not go out just yet, my dear?'

Margaret was grateful for the suggestion, and they turned back into their rooms.

Meanwhile Van Torp had reached the door of the hotel, and found Lady Maud standing there with her parasol up, for the sun was streaming in.

'I was waiting for you,' she said simply, as soon as he reached her side, and she stepped out into the street. 'I thought you would come down, and I wanted to speak to you, for I did not get a chance last night. They were both watching me, probably because they thought I was ill, and I had to chatter like a magpie to keep up appearances.'

'You did it very well,' Van Torp said. 'If I had not seen your face at the window when I got out of the automobile yesterday, I shouldn't have guessed there was anything wrong.'

'But there is—something very wrong—something I can hardly bear to think of, though I must, until I know the truth.'

They turned into the first deserted street they came to.

'I daresay I can give a guess at what it is,' Van Torp answered gravely. 'I went to see him alone yesterday on purpose, before he started, and I must say, if it wasn't for the beard I'd feel pretty sure.'

'He had a beard when I married him, and it was like that—just like that!'

Lady Maud's voice shook audibly, for she felt cold, even in the sunshine.

'I didn't know,' Van Torp answered. 'That alters the case. If we're not mistaken, what can I do to help you? Let's see. You only had that one look at him, through the window, is that so?'

'Yes. But the window was open, and it's not high above the ground, and my eyes are good. He took off his hat when he said good-bye to you, and I saw his face as distinctly as I see yours. When you've been married to a man'—she laughed harshly—'you cannot be easily mistaken about him, when you're as near as that! That is the man I married. I'm intimately convinced of it, but I must be quite sure. Do you understand?'

'Of course. If he's really Leven, he's even a better actor than I used to think he was. If he's not, the resemblance is just about the most extraordinary thing! It's true I only saw Leven three or four times in my life, but I saw him to look at him then, and the last time I did, when he made the row in Hare Court, he was doing most of the talking, so I remember his voice.'

'There's only one difficulty,' Lady Maud said. 'Some one else may have been killed last June. It may even have been the pickpocket who had stolen his pocket-book. Such things have happened, or do in books! But this is certainly the man you met in New York and who sold you the stone you gave me, is he not?'

'Oh, certainly. And that was at the end of July, and Leven was killed late in June.'

'Yes. That only leaves a month for him to have been to Asia—that's absurd.'

'Utterly, totally, and entirely impossible,' asseverated Mr. Van Torp. 'One of two things. Either this man is your husband, and if he is, he's not the man who found the rubies in Asia. Or else, if he is that man, he's not Leven. I wish that heathen girl had been here yesterday! She could have told in a minute. She'd better have been here anyway than cutting around the Mediterranean with that fellow Logotheti!'

'Yes,' Lady Maud answered gravely. 'But about myself—if Leven is alive, what is my position—I mean—I don't really quite know where I am, do I?'

'Anybody but you would have thought of marrying again already,' observed Mr. Van Torp, looking up sideways to her eyes, for she was taller than he. 'Then you'd really be in a bad fix, wouldn't you? The Enoch Arden thing, I suppose it would be. But as it is, I don't see that it makes much difference. The man's going under a false name, so he doesn't mean to claim you as his wife, nor to try and get a divorce again, as he did before. He's just going to be somebody else for his own good, and he'll get married that way, maybe. That's his business, not yours. I don't suppose you're going to get up in church and forbid the banns, are you?'

'I would, like a shot!' said Lady Maud. 'So would you, I'm sure! Think of the other woman!'

'That's so,' answered Van Torp without enthusiasm. 'However, we've got to think about you and the present, and decide what we'll do. I suppose the best thing is for me to put him off with some excuse, so that you can come on the yacht.'

'Please do nothing of the sort!' cried Lady Maud.

'But I want you to come,' objected her friend.

'I mean to come. Do you think I am afraid to meet him?'

Van Torp looked at her in some surprise, and not without admiration.

'There isn't anybody like you, anyway,' he said quietly. 'But there's going to be a circus on that ship if he's Leven,' he added. 'If he makes a fuss, I'll read the Riot Act and lock him up.'

'Oh, no,' answered Lady Maud, who was used to Mr. Van Torp's familiar vocabulary, 'why need there be any trouble? You've not told him I am coming, you say. Very well. If he sees me suddenly after he has been on board a little while, he'll certainly betray himself, and then I shall be sure. Leven is a man of the world—"was" or "is"—God knows which! But if it is he, and he doesn't want to be recognised, he'll behave as if nothing had happened, after the first moment of surprise. At least I shall be certain! You may wonder—I don't know myself, Rufus—I wish you could help me!'

'I will, as far as I can.'

'No, you don't know what I mean! There's something in my life that I never quite told you, I can't tell why not. There must be people who know it besides my mother—I don't think my father ever did. Margaret has an idea of it—I let fall a few words one day. In one way, you and I have been so intimate for years—and yet—'

She stopped short, and the soft colour rose in her cheeks like a dawn. Van Torp looked down at the pavement as he walked.

'See here,' he said in a low voice, 'you'd better not tell me. Maybe you'll be sorry some day if you do.'

'It would be the first time,' she answered softly, 'and I've often wished you knew everything. I mean to tell you now—just wait a moment.'

They walked on; they were already in the outskirts of the dull little town. Van Torp did not again raise his eyes to her face, for he knew she would speak when she was ready. When she did, her voice was a little muffled, and she looked straight before her as he was doing. They were quite alone in the road now.

'When I was very young—nearly eleven years ago, in my first season—I met a man I liked very much, and he liked me. We grew very, very fond of each other. He was not much older than I, and had just joined the army. We couldn't marry, because we had no money—my father had not come into the title then, you know—but we promised each other that we would wait. We waited, and no one knew, except, perhaps, my mother, and she kept us from seeing each other as much as she could. Then came the Boer war, and he was killed—killed in a wretched skirmish—not even in a battle—buried somewhere on the Veldt—if I only knew where! I read it in a despatch—just "killed"—nothing more. One doesn't die of things, I suppose, and years passed, and I went out just the same, and they wanted me to marry. You know how it is with a girl! I married to get rid of myself—I married Leven because he was good-looking and had money, and—I don't quite know why, but it seemed easier to marry a foreigner than an Englishman. I suppose you cannot understand that! It made all comparison impossible—perhaps that was it. When mine was dead, I could never have taken another who could possibly have known him, or who could be in the remotest degree like him.'

'I understand that quite well,' said Van Torp, as she paused.

'I'm glad, then, for it makes it easier to explain the rest. I don't think I always did my best to be nice to Leven. You see, he soon grew tired of me, and went astray after strange goddesses. Still, I might have tried harder to keep him if I had cared what he did, but I was faithful to him, in my own way, and it was much harder than you can guess, or any one. Oh, it was not any living man that made it hard—not that! It was the other. He came back—dead men do sometimes—and he told me I was his, and not Leven's wife; and I fought against that, just as if a man had made love to me in society. It didn't seem honest and true to my real husband, in my thoughts, you know, and in some things thoughts are everything. I fought with all my might against that one, that dear one. I think that was the beginning of my work—being sorry for other women who perhaps had tried to fight too, and wondering whether I should do much better if my dead man came back alive. Do you see? I'm telling you things I've hardly ever told myself, let alone any one else.'

'Yes, I see. I didn't know any one could be as good as that.'

'You can guess the rest,' Lady Maud went on, not heeding what he said. 'When I believed that Leven was dead the fight was over, and I took my dead man back, because I was really free. But now, if Leven is alive after all, it must begin again. I ought to be brave and fight against it; I must—but I can't, I can't! It's too hard, now! These two months have been the happiest in my life since the day he was killed! How can I go back again! And yet, if I cannot be an honest woman in my thoughts I'm not an honest woman at all—I'm no better than if I deserved to be divorced. I never believed in technical virtue.'

Van Torp had seen many sides of human nature, good and bad, but he had never dreamed of anything like this, even in the clear depths of this good woman's heart, and what he heard moved him. Men born with great natures often have a tender side which the world does not dream of; call it nervousness, call it degeneracy, call it hysterical who will; it is there. While Lady Maud was finishing her poor little story in broken phrases, with her heart quivering in her voice, Mr. Rufus Van Torp's eyes became suddenly so very moist that he had to pass his hand over them hastily lest a drop or two should run down upon his flat cheeks. He hoped she would not notice it.

But she did, for at that moment she turned and looked at his face, and her own eyes were dry, though they burned. She saw that his glistened, and she looked at him in surprise.

'I'm sorry,' he said, apologising as if he had done something rude. 'I can't help it.'

Their hands were hanging near together as they walked, and hers touched his affectionately and gratefully, but she said nothing, and they went on in silence for some time before she spoke again.

'You know everything now. I must be positively sure whether Leven is alive or dead, for what I have got back in these last two months is my whole life. A mere recognition at first sight and at ten yards is not enough. It may be only a marvellous resemblance, for they say every one has a "double" somewhere in the world.'

'They used to say, too, that if you met your "double" one of you would die,' observed Van Torp. 'Those things are all stuff and nonsense, of course. I was just thinking. Well,' he continued, dwelling on his favourite monosyllable, 'if you decide to come on the yacht, and if the man doesn't blow away, we shall know the truth in three or four days from now, and that's a comfort. And even if he turns out to be Leven, maybe we can manage something.'

Lady Maud chose not to ask what her friend thought he could 'manage'; for she had glanced at his face when he had spoken, and though it was half turned away from her, she saw his expression, and it would have scared a nervous person. She did not like him to be in that mood, and was sorry that she had brought him to it.

But Mr. Van Torp, who was a strong man, and had seen more than one affray in his ranching days, could not help thinking how uncommonly easy it would be to pick up Count Kralinsky and drop him overboard on a dark night next week, when the *Lancashire Lass* would be doing twenty-two knots, and there might be a little weather about to drown the splash.

CHAPTER XIII

The millionaire did things handsomely. He offered to motor his party to Venice, and as Margaret declined, because motoring was bad for her voice, he telegraphed for a comfortable special carriage, and took his friends down by railway, managing everything alone, in some unaccountable way, since the invaluable Stemp was already gone in search of something for Mrs. Rushmore to eat; and they were all very luxuriously comfortable.

Kralinsky was not on board the yacht when they came alongside at sunset in two gondolas, following the steam-launch, which carried a load of luggage and the two maids. The Primadonna's trunks and hat-boxes towered above Mrs. Rushmore's, and Mrs. Rushmore's above Lady Maud's modest belongings, as the Alps lift their heads above the lower mountains, and the mountains look down upon the Italian foot-hills; and Potts sat in one corner of the stern-sheets with Margaret's jewel-case on her knee, and Justine, with Mrs. Rushmore's, glared at her viciously from the other corner. For the fierce Justine knew that she was going to be sea-sick on the yacht, and the meek Potts never was, though she had crossed the ocean with the *Diva* in rough weather.

Stemp led the way, and Mr. Van Torp took the three ladies to their cabins: first, Mrs. Rushmore, who was surprised and delighted by the rich and gay appearance of hers, for it was entirely decorated in pink and gold, that combination being Stemp's favourite one. The brass bedstead had pink silk curtains held back by broad gold ribbands; there was a pink silk coverlet with a gold fringe; everything that could be gold was gilt, and everything that could be pink was rosy, including the carpet.

Mr. Van Torp looked at Stemp with approval, and Stemp acknowledged unspoken praise with silent modesty.

'Beg pardon, madam,' he said, addressing Mrs. Rushmore, 'this is not exactly the largest cabin on the yacht, but it is the one in which you will find the least motion.'

'It's very sweet,' said the American lady. 'Very dainty, I'm sure.'

On the writing-table stood a tall gilt vase full of immense pink roses, with stems nearer four feet long than three. Mrs. Rushmore admired them very much.

'How did you know that I love roses above all other flowers?' she asked. 'My dear Mr. Van Torp, you are a wizard, I'm sure!'

Lady Maud and Margaret had entered, and kept up a polite little chorus of admiration; but they both felt uneasy as to what they might find in their respective cabins, for Margaret hated pink, and Lady Maud detested gilding, and neither of them was especially fond of roses. They left Mrs. Rushmore very happy in her quarters and went on. Lady Maud's turn came next, and she began to understand, when she saw a quantity of sweet wood violets on her table, just loosened, in an old Murano glass beaker.

'Thank you,' she said, bending to smell them. 'How kind of you!'

There was not a trace of gilding or pink silk. The cabin was panelled and fitted in a rare natural wood of a creamy-white tint.

'Beg pardon, my lady,' said Stemp. 'This and Miss Donne's cabin communicate by this door, and

the door aft goes to the dressing-room. Each cabin has one quite independent, and this bell rings the pantry, my lady, and this one rings Miss Donne's maid's cabin, as I understand that your ladyship has not brought her own maid with her.'

'Very nice,' said Lady Maud, smelling the violets again.

Mr. Van Torp looked at Stemp as he would have looked at a horse that had turned out even better than he had expected. Stemp threw open the door of communication to the cabin he had prepared for the Primadonna. The two cabins occupied the whole beam of the vessel, excepting the six-foot gangway on each side, and as she was one of the largest yachts afloat at the time, there was no lack of room.

'Carnations, at this time of year!' cried Margaret, seeing half an armful of her favourite dark red ones, in a silver wine-cooler before the mirror. 'You really seem to know everything! Thank you so much!'

She buried her handsome face in the splendid flowers and drew in a deep, warm breath, full of their sensuous perfume, the spicy scent of a laden clove-tree under a tropical sun.

'Thank you again!' she said enthusiastically. 'Thank you for everything, the delightful journey, and this lovely room, and the carnations!'

She stood up suddenly to her height, in sheer pleasure, and held out her hand to him. He pressed it quietly, and smiled.

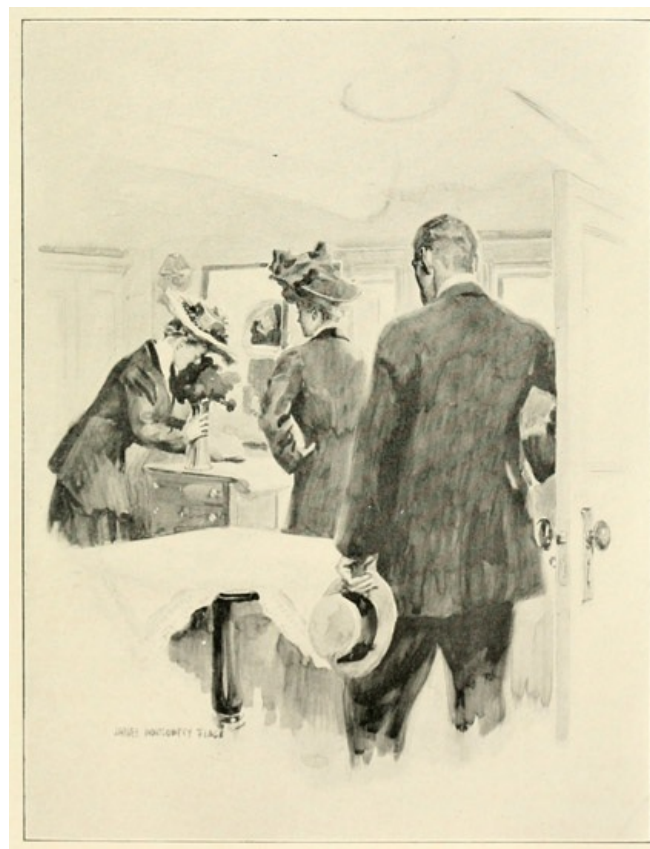
'Do as you would be done by,' he said. 'That's the Company's rule.'

She laughed at the allusion to their agreement, of which Lady Maud knew nothing, for they had determined to keep it secret for the present.

Mr. Van Torp had not found an opportunity of speaking to Lady Maud alone, but he wished her to know when Kralinsky might be expected.

'Stemp,' he said, before leaving the cabin, 'have you heard from the Count?'

'Yes, sir. He got here this morning from Vienna in his motor, sir, and sent his things with his man, and his compliments to you and the ladies, and he will come on board in time for dinner. That was all, I think, sir.'



"She buried her handsome face in the splendid flowers."

Lady Maud heard, and made a scarcely perceptible movement of the head by way of thanks to her friend, while listening to Margaret's enthusiastic praise of everything she saw. Mr. Van Torp and his man departed, just as Potts appeared, accompanied by a very neat-looking English stewardess in a smart white cap. Lady Maud was unusually silent, but she smiled pleasantly at what Margaret said, and the latter made up her mind to drown her anger against Logotheti, and

at the same time to be avenged on him, in an orgy of luxurious comfort, sea-air, and sunshine. The capacity of a perfectly healthy and successful singer for enjoying everything, from a halfpenny bun and a drive in a hansom to a millionaire's yacht and the most expensive fat of the land, or sea, has never been measured. And if they do have terrible fits of temper now and then, who shall blame them? They are always sorry for it, because it is bad for the voice.

Mr. Van Torp reached his quarters, and prepared to scrub and dress comfortably after a week at Bayreuth and a railway journey.

'Stemp.'

'Yes, sir.'

'That was quite nicely done. You must have had a lively time.'

'Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Hope everything is tolerably satisfactory to you, sir.'

'Yes. Find anything good to eat? Chickens don't take gilding well, you know—doesn't taste together. But I suppose you found something. Seen the cook?'

'Yes, sir. I think things will be tolerable, sir, though this is not London, I must say.'

Mr. Van Torp showed no surprise at the statement, and disappeared into his bath-room, well pleased with himself and his man. But a moment later he opened the door again and thrust out his square sandy head.

'Stemp, where have you put the Count? Far from here? I don't want him near me.'

'Last cabin forward on the port side, sir, next to the smoking-room. Very good cabin, sir.'

'Whereabouts is port, right or left?'

'Left-hand side of the vessel, sir,' answered Stemp, who had been on many yachts. 'There are ten more cabins empty, sir, between large and small, if you should think of asking any ladies and gentlemen to join at another point, sir.'

'May pick up a couple somewhere. Can't tell yet.' And Mr. Van Torp disappeared definitely.

Lady Maud did not begin to dress at once, as there was plenty of time before dinner; she left the stewardess to unpack her things, and came out upon the six-foot gangway outside her cabin door to breathe the air, for it was warm. The city lay half a mile away in the after-glow of the sunset. The water was very green that evening, as it sometimes is in the Lagoons, though not always, and it was shaded off through many opalescent tints to heliotrope; then it was suddenly black below the steps of the Piazzetta and the Ducal Palace. Within the mysterious canal to the right she could make out the Bridge of Sighs, and there was the Ponte della Paglia, and the long line of irregular buildings to the eastward of the Prisons, as far as the Public Gardens. To the left there was the wide mouth of the Grand Canal, the Salute and the Custom-House, and the broad opening of the Giudecca. It was familiar to her, for she had seen it several times. She missed the Campanile, which she had been made to climb by an energetic governess when she was twelve years old, but all the rest was there and unchanged, a dream of evening colour, an Eastern city rising out of an enchanted water, under an Italian sky.

At any other time she would have enjoyed the sight almost without a thought, as she enjoyed everything that seemed to her beautiful or even pretty, though she had no pretensions to cultivated artistic taste or knowledge. But now she felt none of that healthy pleasure which a lovely sight naturally gave her. She was at a crisis of her life, and the exquisite evening scene was the battlefield of a coming struggle, with herself, or with another, she hardly knew. In half an hour, or in an hour, at most, she was to sit at table with a man she fully believed to be the husband for whom she had been wearing mourning, out of mere decency, but with the profound inward satisfaction of being free.

She was brave, and could try to think of what was before her if it turned out that she was not mistaken, and she could attempt to understand what had happened. She had already come to the conclusion that if Kralinsky was really Leven, the latter had seized the opportunity offered him by his own supposed death to disappear from St. Petersburg, and had taken another name. Leven had been a ruined man when he had tried to divorce her; when he died, or disappeared, he left nothing but debts, which were extinguished with him, for no one attempted to make his widow responsible for them, since there was no estate and she had no fortune beyond the allowance her father made her. Lord Creedmore was far from being a rich peer, too, and what he gave her was not much, although it would more than suffice for her simple wants, now that she intended to live with him again.

But if Leven had not been killed and had turned into Kralinsky, he now had plenty of ready money, though it was not easy to guess how he had obtained possession of a quantity of valuable Asiatic rubies within the few weeks that had elapsed between his supposed destruction by the bomb and the date of Van Torp's transaction with him in New York. That was a mystery. So was his possible acquaintance, or connexion, with the Eastern girl who was looking for him, if there was a shadow of truth in Logotheti's story. Lady Maud did not believe there was, and she felt morally sure that the tale had evolved itself out of the Greek's fertile brain, as a fantastic explanation of his atrocious conduct.

While she was thinking over these matters and rehearsing in her thoughts the scene that was before her, she saw a gondola making straight for the yacht across the fast fading green of the lagoon that lay between the vessel and the Piazzetta. It came nearer, and she drew back from the rail against her cabin door, under the shadow of the promenade deck, which extended over the gangway and was supported by stanchions, as on an ocean liner. The *Lancashire Lass*, with her single huge yellow funnel, her one short signal mast, her turret-shaped wheel-house, and her generally business-like appearance, looked more like a cross between a fast modern cruiser and an ocean 'greyhound' than like a private yacht. She even had a couple of quick-firing guns mounted just above her rail.

Lady Maud looked at the gondola, and as it came still nearer, she saw that it brought only one passenger, and that he had a fair beard. She quietly opened her cabin door, and went in to dress for dinner.

Meanwhile Mr. Van Torp had completed his toilet, and was rather surprised to find himself magnificently arrayed in a dark-blue dinner-jacket, with perfectly new gilt buttons, and an unfamiliar feeling about the pockets. He had belonged to a yacht club for years, because it seemed to be expected of him, and Stemp and the tailor had thought fit that he should possess the proper things for a yachtsman.

'Stemp,' he said, 'is this the correct thing? I suppose you know.'

'Yes, sir. Very smart indeed, sir. White caps are usually worn by yachting gentlemen in the Mediterranean, sir.' Stemp offered him the cap in question, resplendent with a new enamelled badge. 'Beg pardon, sir, but as to caps, most gentlemen lift them to ladies, just like hats, sir, but the captain and the officers touch theirs. His Grace always lifted his cap, sir.'

'I guess that'll be all right,' answered Mr. Van Torp, trying on the cap. 'Send the captain to my study, Stemp, and find out about when the ladies will be ready for dinner.'

Stemp disappeared, and in a few moments pink-faced Captain Brown appeared, quiet, round, and smart.

'I suppose you're ready at any moment, Captain?' inquired the millionaire.

'Yes, sir. The pilot is on board, and the gentleman you expected is just coming alongside.'

'Oh, he is, is he?'

Mr. Van Torp evidently expected no answer to his favourite form of question when he was thinking over what had just been said; and the captain was silent.

'Then you can start now,' said the owner, after a moment's thought.

'Where are we bound, sir?'

'Oh, well, I don't know. I wanted to say a few words about that, Captain. Do you happen to know anything about a yacht called the *Erinna*, belonging to a Mr. Logotheti, a Greek gentleman who lives in Paris?'

'Yes, sir,' answered Captain Brown, for it was a part of his business to read the yachting news. 'She was at Cowes when we sailed. She was reported the other day from Gibraltar as having entered the Mediterranean after taking fresh provisions, owner and party on board. There is no further word of her.'

'Well,' said Mr. Van Torp, 'I have an idea she's gone to Naples, but I want you to find her right away wherever she is, owner and party on board. That's all, Captain. If you happen to see her anywhere, you just come and tell me if I'm alone, and if I'm not, why send one of your young men to say you want to know something,—anything you happen to think of, and I'll come to your room and tell you what to do. See? That's all, and now let's start, please.'

'All right, sir.'

So Captain Brown went off with his instructions, and in a few moments his owner heard the distant sound of the chain coming in over the most noiseless of modern patent steam capstans; and the side-lights and masthead and stern lights shone out as the anchor light went down, and the twin screws began to turn over slowly, well below the water; and the *Lancashire Lass* was under weigh, with the captain, the pilot, and the two junior officers all in a row on the bridge, while the chief mate was seeing the anchor got inboard and stowed. But while the captain was silently looking ahead into the warm dusk and listening to the orders the pilot gave for the wheel in good English, but with a marvellous Venetian accent, he was also considering how he might most quickly find the *Erinna*, and he reflected that it would be an easier task if he knew a little more definitely where she was. He was not at all disturbed by the orders he had received, however, and was only anxious to get all the speed he could out of his vessel as far as the Straits of Messina, through which the yacht he was to find would almost certainly pass, in preference to the Malta Channel, if she were going to Greece and the East. If she kept to the waters west of Italy, it would not be so very hard to hear of her, as the coast is dotted with excellent marine signal stations, and official information as to the movements of yachts is easily obtained.

When the party assembled in the deck saloon for dinner, Lady Maud was missing. Stemp, who did not intend that his master should dine without his personal attention, no matter how much the

chief steward might object to his presence, approached Mr. Van Torp and whispered something. Lady Maud begged that the party would sit down without her, and she would join them in a moment.

So they took their places, and the vacant one was on the owner's right, between him and the Primadonna.

'You see,' said Mr. Van Torp, explaining to Mrs. Rushmore, which was wholly unnecessary, 'we are Americans, and this ship is America, so the English guest goes first.'

But Mrs. Rushmore knew these things, for she was used to handling lions in numbers; and the little lions and the middle-sized ones are very particular about their places at table, but the great big ones do not care 'one dingle Sam,' as Mr. Van Torp would have elegantly expressed their indifference. For he was a great big lion himself.

'Did you ever meet Lady Maud?' he inquired, speaking to Kralinsky.

'Which Lady Maud?' asked the foreigner in his rather oily voice. 'There are several.'

'Countess Leven, who was Lady Maud Foxwell,' explained Mrs. Rushmore.

Kralinsky turned quietly to her, his single eyeglass fixed and glittering.

'No,' he answered. 'I knew poor Leven well, but I was never introduced to his wife. I have heard that she is very beautiful.'

'You say you knew the late Count Leven?' observed Mrs. Rushmore, with an encouraging and interrogatory smile.

'Intimately,' answered Kralinsky with perfect self-possession. 'We were in the same regiment in the Caucasus. I daresay you remember that he began life as a cavalry officer and then entered the diplomacy. Gifted man, very,' the Russian added in a thoughtful tone, 'but no balance! It seems to me that I have heard he did not treat his wife very well.'



"Their eyes met."

Mr. Van Torp had met several very cool characters in his interesting and profitable career, but he thought that if the man before him was Leven himself, as he seemed to be, he beat them all for calm effrontery.

'Were you ever told that you looked like him?' asked Mr. Van Torp carelessly.

Even at this question Kralinsky showed no embarrassment.

'To tell the truth,' he replied, 'I remember that one or two in the regiment saw a slight resemblance, and we were of nearly the same height, I should say. But when I last saw Leven he

did not wear a beard.'

At this point Lady Maud came in quietly and made directly for the vacant place. The two men rose as soon as she appeared, and she found herself face to face with Kralinsky, with the table between them. Their eyes met, but Lady Maud could not detect the slightest look of recognition in his. Van Torp introduced him, and also watched his face narrowly, but there was not the least change of expression, nor any quick glance of surprise.

Yet Kralinsky possibly did not know that Lady Maud was on the yacht, for he had not been told previously that she was to be of the party, and in the short conversation which had preceded her appearance, no one had actually mentioned the fact. She herself had come to dinner late with the express purpose of presenting herself before him suddenly, but she had to admit that the intended surprise did not take place.

She was not astonished, however, for she had more than once seen her husband placed in very difficult situations, from which he had generally extricated himself by his amazing power of concealing the truth. Being seated nearly opposite to him, it was not easy to study his features without seeming either to stare at him rudely or to be bestowing more attention on him than on any of the others. Her eyes were very good, and her memory for details was fair, and if she did not look often at his face, she watched his hands and listened to the intonations of his voice, and her conviction that he was Leven grew during dinner. Yet there was still a shadow of doubt, though she could not have told exactly where it lay.

She longed to lead him into a trap by asking some question to which, if he were Leven, he would know the answer, though not if he were any one else, a question to which he would not hesitate to reply unsuspectingly if the answer were known to him. But Lady Maud was not ingenious in such conversational tricks, and could not think of anything that would do.

The outward difference of appearance between him and the man she had married was so small that she could assuredly not have sworn in evidence that Kralinsky was not her husband. There was the beard, and she had not seen Leven with a beard since the first months of her marriage four years ago, when he had cut it off for some reason known only to himself. Of course a recollection, already four years old, could not be trusted like one that dated only as far back as three months; for he had left her not long before his supposed death.

There were the hands, and there was the left hand especially. That might be the seat of the doubt. Possibly she had never noticed that Leven had a way of keeping his left little finger almost constantly crooked and turned inward as if it were lame. But she was not sure even of that, for she was not one of those people who study the hands of every one they know, and can recognise them at a glance. She had certainly never watched her husband's as closely as she was watching Kralinsky's now.

Margaret was in the best of spirits, and talked more than usual, not stopping to think how Van Torp's mere presence would have chilled and silenced her three or four months earlier. If Lady Maud had time to spare from her own affairs, it probably occurred to her that the Primadonna's head was slightly turned by the devotion of a financier considerably bigger and more serious than Logotheti; but if she had known of the 'business agreement' between the two, she would have smiled at Van Torp's wisdom in offering a woman who seemed to have everything just the one thing in the world which she desired and had not. Yet for all that, he might be far from his goal. It was possible that Margaret might look upon him as Lady Maud herself did, and wish to make him her best friend. Lady Maud would not be jealous if she succeeded.

On the whole it was a gay dinner, and Mrs. Rushmore and Kralinsky knew that it was a very good one, and told each other so afterwards as they walked slowly up and down the great promenade deck in the starlight. For people who are very fond of good eating can chatter pleasantly about their food for hours, recalling the recent delights of a perfect chaud-froid or a faultless sauce; and it was soon evident that there was nothing connected with such subjects which Kralinsky did not understand and appreciate, from a Chinese bird's-nest soup to the rules of the great Marie-Antoine Carême and Brillat-Savarin's Physiology of Taste. Kralinsky also knew everybody. Between gastronomy and society, he appeared to Mrs. Rushmore to know everything there was to be known.

Lady Maud caught snatches of the conversation as the two came near her, and then turned back; and she remembered that Leven used to talk on the same subjects with elderly women on whom he wished to make a pleasant impression. The voice was his to the very least intonation, and the walk was his, too, and yet she knew she had a doubt somewhere, a very small doubt, which it was a sort of slow torture to feel was still unsatisfied.

Mr. Van Torp sat between her and Lady Margaret, while the two others walked. The deep-cushioned straw chairs stood round a low fixed table on which there had been coffee, and at Margaret's request the light had been put out, though it was only a small opalescent one, placed under the awning abaft the wheel-house and bridge.

'We must be going very fast,' said Lady Maud, 'for the sea is flat as a millpond, and yet there's a gale as soon as one gets out of the lee of things.'

'She's doing twenty-two, I believe,' replied Van Torp, 'and she can do twenty-three if pressed. She will, by and by, when she gets warmed up.'

'Where are we going?' Margaret asked. 'At this rate we are sure to get somewhere!'

'I don't know where we're going, I'm sure.' The millionaire smiled in the gloom. 'But as you say, it doesn't take more than five minutes to get somewhere in a ship like this.'

'You must have told the captain what you wanted him to do! You must have given some orders!'

'Why, certainly. I told him to look around and see if he could find another yacht anything like this, anywhere in the Mediterranean. So he's just looking around, like that, I suppose. And if he finds another yacht anything like this, we'll see which of us can go fastest. You see I don't know anything about ships, or where to go, so I just thought of that way of passing the time, and when you're tired of rushing about and want to go anywhere in particular, why, I'll take you there. If the weather cuts up we'll go in somewhere and wait, and see things on shore. Will that do?'

Margaret laughed at the vagueness of such a roving commission, but Lady Maud looked towards her friend in the starlight and tried to see his expression, for she was sure that he had a settled plan in his mind, which he would probably put into execution.

'I've figured it out,' he continued presently. 'This thing will go over five hundred and twenty miles a day for eight days without stopping for coal, and that makes more than four thousand miles, and I call that a pretty nice trip, don't you? Time to cool off before going to Paris. Of course if I chose to take you to New York you couldn't get out and walk. You'd have to go.'

'I've no idea of offering any resistance, I assure you!' said Margaret. 'I'm too perfectly, completely, and unutterably comfortable on your yacht; and I don't suppose it will be any rougher than it was last March when we crossed in the *Leofric* together.'

'Seems a long time, doesn't it?' Van Torp's tone was thoughtful, but expressed anything rather than regret. 'I prefer this trip, myself.'

'Oh, so do I, infinitely! You're so much nicer than you used to be, or than I thought you were. Isn't he, Maud?'

'Far!' answered Lady Maud. 'I always told you so. Do you mind very much if I go to bed? I'm rather sleepy after the journey.' She rose. 'Oh, I mustn't forget to tell you,' she added, speaking to Margaret, 'I always lock my door at night, so don't be surprised! If you want to come in and talk when you come down just call, or knock, and I'll let you in directly.'

'All right,' Margaret answered.

Lady Maud disappeared below, leaving the two together, for Mrs. Rushmore and Kralinsky had found a pleasant sheltered place to sit, further aft, and the Count was explaining to the good American lady the delicious Russian mysteries of 'Borshtsh,' 'Shtshi,' 'Kasha,' and 'Smyetany,' after extolling the unapproachable flavour of fresh sturgeon's roe, and explaining that 'caviare' is not at all the Russian name for it and is not even a Russian word; and Mrs. Rushmore listened with intense interest and stood up for her country, on a basis of Blue Point oysters, planked shad, canvas-backs, and terrapin done in the Philadelphian manner, which she maintained to be vastly superior to the Baltimorian; and each listened to the other with real interest.

Van Torp and Margaret had not been alone together for five minutes since they had left Bayreuth on the previous day, but instead of talking, after Lady Maud was gone, the Primadonna began to sing very softly and beautifully, and not quite for herself only, for she well knew what pleasure her voice gave her companion, and she was the more ready to sing because he had never asked her to do so. Moreover, it cost her nothing, in the warm evening air under the awning, and like all great singers she loved the sound of her own voice. To be able to do almost anything supremely well, one must do it with real delight, and without the smallest effort which it is not a real pleasure to make.

So Margaret leaned back comfortably in her cushioned chair, with her head inclined a little forward, and the magic notes floated from her lips through the soft moving night; for as the yacht ran on through the calm sea at her great speed, it was as if she lay still and the night itself were flying over her with muffled wings.

Margaret sang nothing grand nor very difficult; not the waltz-song that had made her famous, nor the 'Good Friday' music which she could never sing to the world, but sweet old melodious songs she had learned when a girl; Schubert's 'Serenade' and 'Ave Maria,' and Tosti's 'Malia,' and then Beethoven's 'Adelaide'; and Van Torp was silent and perfectly happy, as well he might be. Moreover, Margaret was happy too, which was really more surprising, considering how very angry she had been with Logotheti for a whole week, and that she was quite aware of the manner in which he was passing his time in spite of her urgent message. But before the magnificent possibilities which the 'business agreement' had suddenly opened to her, the probability of her again sending him any word, within a reasonable time, had diminished greatly, and the prospect of flying into a rage and telling him her mind when she saw him was not attractive. She had always felt his influence over her more strongly when they had been together; and it had always lost its power when he was away, till she asked herself why she should even think of marrying him. She would not be the first woman who had thought better of an engagement and had broken it for the greater good of herself and her betrothed. In all probability she had never been really and truly in love, though she had been very sincerely fond of Edmund Lushington the English writer, who had discovered rather late that the magnificent and successful Margarita da Cordova was not at all the same person as the 'nice English girl,' Margaret Donne, whom he had

worshipped before she had gone upon the stage. So far as he was concerned, she had received his change of mind as a slight; as for Logotheti, she would never forgive him for not having remained faithful even during the few weeks since they had called themselves engaged; but Van Torp's position as a suitor was different. At all events, she said to herself, he was a man; and he did not offer her romantic affection, but power, and a future which should soon give her the first position in the musical world, if she knew how to use it. She was accustomed to the idea of great wealth and of the ordinary things it could give; mere money impressed her no more than it does most very successful artists, unless they are miserly and fond of it for its own sake, which is comparatively unusual. She wasted most of what she earned, in a sort of half-secret luxury and extravagance which made little show but cost a great deal and gave her infinite satisfaction. Even Lady Maud did not dream of the waste that was a pleasure to the Primadonna, and the meek Potts was as reticent as the fierce Justine was garrulous. It was a secret joy to Potts, besides being a large source of revenue, to live with a mistress who flatly refused ever to wear a pair of silk stockings more than once, much less a pair of gloves. Mrs. Rushmore would have held up her elderly hands at such reckless doings. Margaret herself, trusting to her private fortune for her old age in case she never married, did as she pleased with her money, and never thought of investing it; but now and then, in moments of depression, it had occurred to her that when she left the stage, as she must some day, she would not be able to live as she did now, and the thought vaguely disturbed her for a few minutes, but that was all, and she had always within reach the easy remedy of marrying a millionaire, to whom such a sum as five hundred pounds a year for silk stockings would be an insignificant trifle; and while her voice lasted she could make more than that by giving one concert in Chicago, for instance, or by singing two nights in opera.

This is not a digression. The Diva cared nothing for money in itself, but she could use a vast amount of it with great satisfaction and quite without show or noise. Mr. Van Torp's income was probably twenty or thirty times as large as the most she could possibly use, and that was a considerable asset in his favour.

He was not a cultivated man, like Logotheti; he had never known a word of Latin or Greek in his life, his acquaintance with history was lacunous—to borrow a convenient Latin word—and he knew very little about the lives of interesting people long dead. He had once read part of a translation of the *Iliad* and had declared it to be nonsense. There never were such people, he had said, and if there had been, there was no reason for writing about them, which was a practical view of the case, if not an æsthetic one. On the other hand, he was oddly gifted in many ways and without realising it in the least. For instance, he possessed a remarkable musical ear and musical memory, which surprised and pleased even the Diva, whenever they showed themselves. He could whistle her parts almost without a fault, and much more difficult music, too.

For everyday life he spoke like a Western farmer, and at first this had been intensely disagreeable to the daughter of the scholarly Oxford classic; but she had grown used to it quickly since she had begun to like him, till his way of putting things even amused her; and moreover, on that night by the gate of the field outside Bayreuth, she had found out that he could speak well enough, when he chose, in grave, strong words that few women could hear quite indifferently. Never, in all her acquaintance with Logotheti, had she heard from the Greek one phrase that carried such conviction of his purpose with it, as Van Torp's few simple words had done then.

Big natures are usually most drawn to those that are even bigger than themselves, either to love them, or to strive with them. It is the Second-Rates who take kindly to the little people, and are happy in the adulation of the small-fry.

So Margaret was drawn away from Logotheti, the clever spoilt child of fortune, the loving, unproductive worshipper of his own Greek Muses, by the Crown-Grasper, the ruthless, uncultured hard-hitter, who had cared first for power, and had got it unhelped, but who now desired one woman, to the exclusion of all others, for his mate.

Vaguely, the Diva remembered how, when Van Torp had asked her to walk with him on the deck of the *Leofric* and she had at first refused and then consented, Paul Griggs, looking on with a smile, had quoted an old French proverb: 'A fortress that parleys, and a woman who listens, will soon surrender.'

When she was silent after singing 'Adelaide,' association brought back the saying of the veteran man of letters, for Van Torp asked her if she cared to walk a little on the quiet deck, where there was a lee; and the sea air and even the chairs recalled the rest, with a little wonder, but no displeasure, nor self-contempt. Was she not her own mistress? What had any one to say, if she chose to change her mind and take the stronger man, supposing that she took either? Had Logotheti established any claim on her but that of constancy? Since that was gone, here was a man who seemed to be as much more enduring than his rival, as he was stronger in every other way. What were small refinements of speech and culture, compared with wide-reaching power? What availed it to possess in memory the passionate love-roses of Sappho's heart, if you would not follow her to the Leucadian cliff? Or to quote torrents of Pindar's deep-mouthed song, if you had not the constancy to run one little race to the end without swerving aside? Logotheti's own words and epithets came back to Margaret, from many a pleasant talk in the past, and she cared for them no longer. Full of life himself, he lived half among the dead, and his waking was only a dream of pleasure; but this rough-hewn American was more alive than he, and his dreams were of the living and came true.

When Margaret bid Van Torp good-night she pressed his hand, frankly, as she had never done before, but he took no sudden advantage of what he felt in her touch, and he returned the

pressure so discreetly that she was almost disappointed, though not quite, for there was just a little something more than usual there.

She did not disturb Lady Maud, either, when she went to her cabin, though if she had known that her beautiful neighbour was wide awake and restless, she would at least have said good-night, and asked her if she was still so very tired.

But Lady Maud slept, too, at last, though not very long, and was the only one who appeared at breakfast to keep Van Torp company, for Margaret slept the sleep of a singer, which is deep and long as that of the healthy dormouse, and Mrs. Rushmore had her first tea and toast happily in her cheerful surroundings of pink and gilding. As for Kralinsky, his man informed Stemp and the chief steward that the Count never thought of getting up till between nine and ten o'clock, when he took a cup of chocolate and a slice or two of sponge cake in his own room before dressing. So Lady Maud and Van Torp had the yacht to themselves for some time that morning.

'I fancy from what you said last night that your plan is to catch Logotheti and the Tartar girl at sea,' said Lady Maud, when they were alone.

'I supposed you'd understand,' answered Van Torp. 'Do you see any harm in that? It occurred to me that it might be quite a drastic form of demonstration. How does it strike you? At all low-down?'

'No, frankly not!' Lady Maud was still incensed at Logotheti's conduct. 'A man who does such things deserves anything that his rival can do to him. I hope you may overhaul the yacht, run alongside of her and show Margaret the two, making love to each other in Tartar on deck! That's the least that ought to happen to him!'

'Thank you. I like to hear you talk like that. Captain Brown will do his level best, I think. And now, tell me,' he lowered his voice a little more, 'is that man Leven, or not?'

'I am sure he is,' Lady Maud answered, 'and yet I feel as if there ought to be a little doubt still. I don't know how to express it, for it's rather an odd sensation.'

'I should think it might be! Is there anything I can say or do? I'll ask the man any question you suggest. I'm certain he's not old Levi Longlegs, and if he's not Leven, who on earth is he? That's what I should like to know.'

'I shall find out, never fear! I know I shall, because I must, if I am ever to have any peace again. I'm not a very nervous person, you know, am I? But it's more than I can bear long, to sit opposite a man at table, again and again, as I shall have to, and not be sure whether he's my husband, come back from the dead, or some one else!' She paused, and her nostrils dilated a little, but Van Torp only nodded slowly and sympathetically. 'I mean to know before I go to bed to-night,' she said, with a little desperation in her voice. 'I shall talk to him till I am sure of one thing or the other. At table, I cannot tell, but if we are alone together I know I can settle the question. If you see that we are talking at the other end of the deck, try to keep Mrs. Rushmore and Margaret from coming near us. Will you?'

To Mrs. Rushmore's amazement and Margaret's surprise, Lady Maud made a dead set at Kralinsky all that day, an attention which he seemed to appreciate as it deserved. Before breakfast was over, Van Torp had repeated to her what Kralinsky had said about having formerly been intimate with Leven, and Lady Maud took this statement as a basis of operations for finding out just how much he knew of her own life; she judged that if he were not Leven himself, he must soon betray the fact by his ignorance.

That was the strangest day she had ever passed. She found it very easy to talk with Kralinsky, as it always is when there has been long familiarity, even if it has been only the familiar intercourse of domestic discord. He knew many details of her life in London. That was clear after half an hour's conversation. She alluded to the idle talk there had been about her and Van Torp; Kralinsky knew all about that and had heard, as he said, some silly story about Leven having found her with the American in certain rooms in the Temple, and about an envelope which was said to have contained over four thousand and one hundred pounds in bank-notes. He politely scouted the story as nonsense, but he had heard it, and Lady Maud knew that every word of it was true. He knew of Leven's unsuccessful attempt to divorce her on that ground, too, and he knew the number of her house in Charles Street, Berkeley Square.

On the other hand, there were many things of which he knew nothing, or pretended to be ignorant, such as the names of her brothers and sisters, her father's favourite pursuits and the like. But she understood very well that if he thought she suspected his identity under the disguise of his beard, and if he wished to avoid recognition, he was just the man to pretend blank ignorance of some vital matters, after admitting his acquaintance with many others. He had been very intimate with Leven, to the last, he said; Leven had always written to him very fully about his life, very wittily sometimes, but always without balance! That was it; he had no 'balance.' Yes, he himself had been in Petersburg when Leven was killed and had seen him on the previous day. Within a week he had made a rapid trip to New York, whence he had now just returned. He had crossed on five-day boats both going and coming, and he named them.

'I am naturally interested in meeting any one who knew my husband so well,' Lady Maud said, making a bold dash at a possibility. 'We had many differences, as you seem to know, but I daresay that if he could come back to life and know the real truth, we should forgive each other.'

She looked up to him with a gentle smile as she said this, for she had often felt it; and in that instant a flash of light came into his usually rather uncertain eyes. Her heart stood still; she looked at the sea again directly, for she was leaning against the rail; then she drew breath, as if from an effort. She had seen a look that could only mean recognition. Leven was alive and was standing beside her. But she had the courage to go on talking, after a moment, and she tried to change the subject, though not very adroitly.

During the afternoon Mr. Van Torp had a revelation, sudden and clear, for he had watched Lady Maud and Kralinsky all day and had thought about them a good deal, considering how his mind was occupied with other matters even nearer to his heart than his best friend's welfare. As soon as the revelation came upon him he rang for his own man.

Stemp, see here!' he began. 'You've valeted around with all sorts of different-looking men. How long does it take to grow a beard like Count Kralinsky's?'

'A year, sir. Not a day less, and longer with most gentlemen. If you were thinking of it, sir——'

'You don't believe it could be managed in three months, by taking an expert around with you to work on your face?'

'That's out of the question, sir. Gentlemen's beards that have shaved all their lives, as I suppose you have, sir, do grow faster, but I should consider a year a short time for such a fine one as the Count's. Indeed I should, sir.'

'Do you suppose you could stick it on fresh every day, the way they do for the stage?'

'Not so that it wouldn't show in broad daylight, sir.'

'Well, that's all. I wasn't exactly thinking of trying a beard. I was only thinking—just like that. What I rang for was a cap. Got any more like this? You see I've managed to get a spot of ink on this one. Had it on the table when I was writing, I suppose. That's the worst of white caps, they spot so.'

A little later, Mr. Van Torp was looking out for a chance to speak alone with Lady Maud, and as soon as he found his opportunity, he told her what Stemp had said. Strangely enough, it had never occurred to him that such a remarkable beard as Kralinsky's must have taken a long time to grow, and that Leven, who had none, had not left London more than three months ago. He watched the effect of this statement on his friend's face, but to his surprise she remained grave and sad.

'I cannot help it,' she said in a tone of conviction. 'He must be Leven, whatever Stemp tells you about his beard.'

'Well, then it's a false beard, and will come off,' observed Mr. Van Torp, with at least equal gravity. 'Stemp says that's impossible, but he must be wrong, unless you are.'

'It's real,' Lady Maud said, 'and he is my husband. I've talked to him all day, and he knows things about my life that no one else could, and if there are others about which he is vague, that must be because he is pretending, and does not want to show that he knows everything.'

Van Torp shook his head, but remained unconvinced; Lady Maud did not change her mind either, and was already debating with herself as to whether it would not be really wiser to speak out and tell Kralinsky that she had recognised him under his transparent disguise. She felt that she must know the worst, if she was ever to rest again.

Neither Margaret nor Mrs. Rushmore had ever seen Leven, and they had not the least idea of what was really going on under their eyes. They only saw that Lady Maud was making a dead set at the Count, and if Margaret wondered whether she had misjudged her friend's character, the elder lady had no doubt as to what was happening.

'My dear child,' she said to Margaret, 'your friend is going to console herself. Widows of that age generally do, my dear. I myself could never understand how one could marry again. I should always feel that dear Mr. Rushmore was in the room. It quite makes me blush to think of it! Yet it is an undeniable fact that many young widows marry again. Mark my words, Margaret, your friend is going to console herself before long. If it is not this one, it will be another. My dear, I am quite positive about it.'

When the sun went down that evening the yacht had passed Otranto and the Cape, and her course had been changed, to head her for Cape Spartivento and the Straits of Messina, having done in twenty-four hours as much as the little Italian mail-steamers do in forty-eight, and nearly half as much again as the *Erinna* could have done at her highest speed. As Mr. Van Torp had predicted, his engines had 'warmed up,' and were beating their own record. The gale made by the vessel's way was stronger than a woman could stand in with any regard to her appearance, but as the weather continued to be calm it was from dead-ahead, and there was plenty of shelter on the promenade deck abaft the wheel-house, on condition of not going too near the rail.

After dinner Kralinsky and Mrs. Rushmore walked a little, as on the previous evening, and Lady Maud sat with Margaret and Van Torp. But before the two walkers went off to sit down in the quiet corner they had found yesterday, Lady Maud rose, went half-way aft, and deliberately placed herself where they were obliged to pass close to her at each turn, standing and leaning against the bright white side of the engine skylight, which was as high as the wheel-house itself,

and broke in aft, where the big ventilating fans were situated, making a square corner inward.

She stood there, and as it was not very dark in the clear starlight, Kralinsky saw in passing that she followed his face with her eyes, turning her head to look at him when he was coming towards her, and turning it very slowly back again as he came near and went by. It was impossible to convey more clearly an invitation to get rid of his companion and join her, and he was the last man in the world to misunderstand it.

But Mrs. Rushmore saw it too, and as she considered him a lion, and therefore entitled to have his own way, she made it easy for him.

'My dear Count,' she said blandly, after passing Lady Maud twice, 'I have really had enough now, and if you will promise to finish your walk alone, I think I will go and sit with the others.'

He left her with Margaret and Van Torp and went back to Lady Maud, who moved as he came up to her, made two steps beside him, and then suddenly slipped into the recess where the fan-house joined the engine skylight. She stood still, and he instantly ranged himself beside her. They were quite out of sight of the others, and of the bridge, and even if it had been daylight they could not have been seen except by some one coming from aft.

'I want to speak to you,' she said, in a low, steady voice. 'Please listen quite quietly, for some of them may begin to walk again.'

Kralinsky bent his head twice, and then inclined it towards her, to hear better what she was going to say.

'It has pleased you to keep up this comedy for twenty-four hours,' she began.

He made a slight movement, which was natural under the circumstances.

'I do not understand,' he said, in his oily voice. 'What comedy? I really have no——'

'Don't go on,' she answered, interrupting him sharply. 'Listen to what I am going to tell you, and then decide what you will do. I don't think your decision will make very much difference to me, but it will make a difference to the world and to yourself. I saw you from a window when you brought Mr. Van Torp to the hotel in Bayreuth, and I recognised you at once. Since this afternoon I have no doubt left.'

'I never saw you till last night,' said Kralinsky, with some little surprise in his tone, and with perfect assurance.

'Do you really think you can deceive me any longer?' she asked. 'I told you this afternoon that if you could come back from the dead, and know the whole truth, we should probably forgive each other, though we had many differences. Shall we?' She paused a moment, and by his quick change of position she saw that he was much moved. 'I don't mean that we should ever go back to the old life, for we were not suited to each other from the first, you and I. You wanted to marry me because I was pretty and smart, and I married you because I wanted to be married, and you were better-looking than most men, and seemed to have what I thought was necessary—fortune and a decent position. No, don't interrupt me. We soon found out that we did not care for each other. You went your way, and I went mine. I don't mean to reproach you, for when I saw you were beginning to be tired of me I did nothing to keep you. I myself was tired of it already. But whatever you may have thought, I was a faithful wife. Mr. Van Torp had given me a great deal of money for my charity, and does still. I can account for it. I never used a penny of it for myself, and never shall; and he never was, and never will be, any more than a trusted friend. I don't know why you chose to disappear when the man who had your pocket-book was killed and you were said to be dead. It's not my business, and if you choose to go on living under another name, now that you are rich again, I shall not betray you, and few people will recognise you, at least in England, so long as you wear that beard. But you had it when we were married, and I knew you at once, and when I heard you were to be of the party here, I made up my mind at once that I would accept the invitation and come too, and speak to you as I'm speaking now. When I believed you were dead I forgave you everything, though I was glad you were gone; frankly, I did not wish you alive again, but since you are, God forbid that I should wish you dead. You owe me two things in exchange for my forgiveness: first, yours, if I treated you ungenerously or unkindly; and, secondly, you ought to take back every word you ever said to me about Mr. Van Torp, for there was not a shadow of truth in what you thought. Will you do that? I ask nothing else.'

'Indeed I will, my dear Maud,' said Count Kralinsky, in a voice full of emotion.

Lady Maud drew a long breath, that trembled a little as it left her heated lips again. She had done what she believed most firmly to be right, and it had not been easy. She had not been surprised by his patient silence while she had been talking; for she had felt that it was hers to speak and his to listen.

'Thank you,' she said now. 'I shall never go back to what I have said, and neither of us need ever allude to old times again during this trip. It will not last long, for I shall probably go home by land from the first port we touch, and it is not likely that we shall ever meet again. If we do, I shall behave as if you were Count Kralinsky whom I have met abroad, neither more nor less. I suppose you will have conscience enough not to marry. Perhaps, if I thought another woman's happiness depended on it, I would consent to divorce you, but you shall never divorce me.'

'No power could make me wish to,' Kralinsky answered, still deeply moved. 'I was mad in those days, Maud; I was beside myself, between my debts and my entanglements with women not fit to touch your shoes. I've seen it all since. That is the chief reason why I chose to disappear from society when I had the chance, and become some one else! I swear to you, on my mother's soul in heaven, that I thought of nothing but that—to set you free and begin life over again as another man. No thought of marrying has ever crossed my mind! Do you think I could be as bad as that? But I'm not defending myself—how could I? All the right is on your side, and all the wrong on mine. And now—I would give heaven and earth to undo it all and to come back to you!'

Lady Maud drew as far as she could into the corner where the fan-house joined the engine skylight. She had not expected this; it was too much repentance; it was too like a real attempt to win her again. He had not seen her for more than three months; she knew she was very beautiful; his fleeting passion had come to life again, as he had. But her old repulsion for him was ten times stronger than when they had parted, and she shrank back as far as she could, without speaking. From far below the noiseless engines sent a quick vibration up to the ironwork of the skylight. She felt it, but could hardly tell it from the beatings of her own heart. He saw her shrinking from him and was wise.

'Don't be afraid of me!' he cried, in a low and pleading tone. 'Not that! Oh, please not that! I will not come nearer; I will not put out my hand to touch yours, I swear it to you! But I love you as I never loved you before; I never knew how beautiful you were till I had lost you, and now that I have found you again you are a thousand times more beautiful than in my dreams! No, I ask nothing! I have no right to ask for what I have thrown away! You do not even pity me, I think! Why should you? You were free when you thought me dead, and I have come back to be a burden and a weight on your life. Forgive me, forgive me, my lost darling, for the sake of all that might have been, but don't fear me! Pity me, if you can, but don't be afraid of me! Say that you pity me a little, and I shall be satisfied, and grateful too!'

Lady Maud was silent for a few seconds, while he stood turned towards her, his hands clasped in a dramatic gesture, as if still imploring her commiseration.

'I do pity you,' she said at last, quite steadily, for just then she did not fear that he would try to touch even her hand. 'I pity you, if you are really in love with me again. I pity you still more if this is a passing thing that has taken hold of you merely because you still think me handsome. But I will never take you back to be my husband again. Never. That is finished, for good and all.'

'Ah, Maud, listen to me——'

But she had already slipped out of the corner and was walking slowly away from him, not towards the others, but aft, so that he might join her quietly before going back to them. He was a man of the world and understood her, and did what was expected of him. Almost as soon as he was beside her, she turned to go forward with her leisurely, careless grace.

'We've been standing a long time,' said she, as if the conversation had been about the weather. 'I want to sit down.'

'I am in earnest,' he said, very low.

'So am I,' answered Lady Maud.

They went on towards the wheel-house side by side, without haste, and not very near together, like two ordinary acquaintances.

CHAPTER XIV

While the *Lancashire Lass* was racing down to the Straits of Messina the *Erinna* was heading for the same point from the opposite direction, no longer dawdling along at half-speed, but going her full sixteen knots, after coaling in Naples, and any navigator who knew the positions and respective speeds of the two yachts could have calculated with approximate precision the point at which they would probably sight each other.

Logotheti had given up the idea of taking Baraka to Paris, if he had ever really entertained it at all. He assured her that Naples was a great city, too, and that there was a first-rate French dressmaking establishment there, and that the Ville de Lyon would turn her out almost as smartly as the Rue de la Paix itself. He took Baraka ashore and placed her for half a day in the hands of Madame Anna, who undertook to do all that money could do in about a fortnight. He had the effrontery to say that Baraka was a niece of his from Constantinople, whose mother was on board the yacht, but had unfortunately sprained her ankle in falling down the companion during a gale, and could therefore not accompany her daughter on shore. The young lady, he said, spoke only Turkish. Madame Anna, grave and magnificently calm under all circumstances, had a vague recollection of having seen the handsome Oriental gentleman already with another niece, who spoke only French; but that was none of her business. When would the young lady try on the things? On any day Madame Anna chose to name; but in the meantime her uncle would take her down to Sicily, as the weather was so wonderfully fine and it was still so hot. Madame Anna therefore named a day, and promised, moreover, to see the best linen-drapers and sempstresses herself, and to provide the young lady with as complete an outfit as if she were going to be married. She should have all things visible and invisible in the shortest possible time. Logotheti,

who considered himself a stranger, insisted on putting down a thousand-franc note merely as a guarantee of good faith. The dressmaker protested almost furiously and took the money, still protesting. So that was settled, and Baraka was to be outwardly changed into a beautiful Feringhi lady without delay. To tell the truth, the establishment is really a smart one, and she was favourably impressed by the many pretty frocks and gowns that were tried on several pretty young women in order that she might make her choice.

Baraka would have liked a blue satin skirt with a yellow train and a bright-green silk body, but in her travels she had noticed that the taste of Feringhi ladies was for very sober or gentle colours, compared with the fashionable standards of Samarkand, Tiflis, and Constantinople, and she meekly acquiesced to everything that Logotheti and Madame Anna proposed, after putting their heads together. Logotheti seemed to know a great deal about it.

He took Baraka for a long drive in the afternoon, out by Pozzuoli to Baia and back. The girl loved the sea; it was the only thing in the western world that looked big to her, and she laughed at wretched little mountains only four or five thousand feet high, for she had dwelt at the feet of the lofty Altai and had sojourned in Tiflis under the mighty peak of Kasbek. But the sea was always the sea, and to her mountain sight it was always a new wonder beyond measure, vast, moving, alive. She gazed out with wide eyes at the purpled bay, streaked by winding currents of silver, and crisped here and there by the failing summer breeze. Logotheti saw her delight, and musical lines came back to him out of his reading, how the ocean is ever the ocean, and the things of the sea are the sea's; but he knew that he could not turn Greek verse into Turkish, try as he might, much less into that primeval, rough-hewn form of it which was Baraka's native tongue.

It was nearly dark when the naphtha launch took them out to the yacht, which lay under the mole where the big English and German passenger steamers and the men-of-war are moored.

Logotheti had at last received Margaret's telegram asking him to meet her at once. It had failed to reach him in Gibraltar, and had been telegraphed on thence to Naples, and when he read it he was considerably disturbed. He wrote a long message of explanations and excuses, and sent it to the Primadonna at Bayreuth, tripling the number of words she had prepaid for his answer. But no reply came, for Margaret was herself at sea and nothing could reach her. He sent one of his own men from the yacht to spend the day at the telegraph office, with instructions for finding him if any message came. The man found him three times, and brought three telegrams; and each time as he tore open the little folded brown paper he felt more uncomfortable, but he was relieved to find each time that the message was only a business one from London or Paris, giving him the latest confidential news about a Government loan in which he was largely interested. When he reached the yacht he sent another man to wait till midnight at the office.

The Diva was angry, he thought; that was clear, and perhaps she had some right to be. The tone of her telegram had been peremptory in the extreme, and now that he had answered it after a delay of several days, she refused to take any notice of him. It was not possible that such a personage as she was should have left Bayreuth without leaving clear instructions for sending on any telegrams that might come after she left. At this time of year, as he knew, she was beset with offers of engagements to sing, and they had to be answered. From eight o'clock in the morning to midnight there were sixteen hours, ample time for a retransmitted message to reach her anywhere in Europe and to be answered. Logotheti felt a sensation of deep relief when the man came aboard at a quarter-past midnight and reported himself empty-handed; but he resolved to wait till the following evening before definitely leaving Naples for the ten days which must elapse before Baraka could try on her beautiful Feringhi clothes.

He told her anything he liked, and she believed him, or was indifferent; for the idea that she must be as well dressed as any European woman when she met the man she was seeking had appealed strongly to her, and the sight of the pretty things at Madame Anna's had made her ashamed of her simple little ready-made serges and blouses. Logotheti assured her that Kralinsky was within easy reach, and showed no inclination to travel far. There was news of him in the telegrams received that day, the Greek said. Spies were about him and were watching him for her, and so far he had shown no inclination to admire any Feringhi beauty.

Baraka accepted all these inventions without doubting their veracity. In her eyes Logotheti was a great man, something like a king, and vastly more than a Tartar chieftain. He could send men to the ends of the earth if he chose. Now that he was sure of where Kralinsky was, he could no doubt have him seized secretly and brought to her, if she desired it earnestly of him. But she did not wish to see the man, free or a prisoner, till she had her beautiful new clothes. Then he should look upon her, and judge whether he had done well to despise her love, and to leave her to be done to death by her own people and her body left to the vulture that had waited so long on a jutting point of rock over her head three years ago.

Meanwhile, also, there were good things in life; there were very fat quails and marvellous muscatel grapes, and such fish as she had never eaten in Europe during her travels, and there was the real coffee of the Sheikhs, and an unlimited supply of rose-leaf preserve. Her friend was a king, and she was treated like a queen on the yacht. Every day, when Gula had rubbed her small feet quite dry after the luxurious bath, Gula kissed them and said they were like little tame white mice. Saving her one preoccupation, Baraka was in an Eastern paradise, where all things were perfect, and Kéf descended upon her every day after luncheon. Even the thought of the future was brighter now, for though she never left her cabin without her long bodkin, she was quite sure that she should never need it. In imagination she saw herself even more beautifully arrayed in Feringhi clothes than the pretty ladies with champagne hair whom she had seen

driving in the Bois de Boulogne not long ago when she walked there with Spiro. She wondered why Logotheti and Gula were both so much opposed to her dyeing her hair or wearing a wig. They told her that ladies with champagne hair were not always good ladies; but what did that matter? She thought them pretty. But she wondered gravely how Gula knew that they were not good. Gula knew a great many things.

Besides, Baraka was 'good' herself, and was extremely well aware of the fact, and of its intrinsic value, if not of its moral importance. If she had crossed a quarter of the world in spite of dangers and obstacles which no European girl could pass unharmed, if alive at all, it was not to offer a stained flower to the man she sought when she found him at last.

As for Logotheti, though he was not a Musulman, and not even an Asiatic, she felt herself safe with him, and trusted him as she would certainly not have trusted Van Torp, or any other European she had chanced to meet in the course of selling precious stones. He was more like one of her own people than the Greeks and Armenians of Constantinople or even the Georgians of the Caucasus.

She was not wrong in that, either. Logotheti was beginning to wonder what he should do with her, and was vaguely surprised to find that he did not like the idea of parting with her at all; but beyond that he had no more thought of harming her than if she had been confided to his care and keeping by his own mother.

Few Latins, whether Italians, French, or Spanish, could comprehend that, and most of them would think Logotheti a milksop and a sentimental fool. Many northern men, on the other hand, will think he did right, but would prefer not to be placed in such a trying position, for their own part, because beauty is beauty and human nature is weak, and the most exasperating difficulty in which an honest northern man can find himself where a woman is concerned is that dilemma of which honour and temptation are the two horns. But the best sort of Orientals look on these things differently, even when they are young, and their own women are safer with them than European women generally are among European men. I think that most men who have really known the East will agree with me in this opinion.

And besides, this is fiction, even though it be founded on facts; and fiction is an art; and the end and aim of art is always to discover and present some relation between the true and the beautiful—as perhaps the aim of all religions has been to show men the possible connexion between earth and heaven. Nothing is so easily misunderstood and misapplied as bare truth without comment, most especially when it is an ugly truth about the worst side of humanity. We know that all men are not mere animals; for heaven's sake let us believe that very few, if any, must be! Even Demopithekos, the mob-monkey, may have a conscience, when he is not haranguing the people.

Logotheti certainly had one, of its kind, though he seemed to Margaret Donne and Lady Maud to be behaving in such an outrageous manner as to have forfeited all claim to the Diva's hand; and Baraka, who was a natural young woman, though a remarkably gifted and courageous one, felt instinctively that she was safe with him, and that she would not need to draw out her sharp bodkin in order to make her position clear, as she had been obliged to do at least twice already during her travels.

Yet it was a dreamy and sense-compelling life that she led on the yacht, surrounded with every luxury she had ever heard of, and constantly waited on by the only clever man she had ever really talked with, excepting the old Persian merchant in Stamboul. The vision of the golden-bearded giant who had left her to her fate after treating her with stony indifference was still before her, but the reality was nearer in the shape of a visible 'great man,' who could do anything he chose, who caused her to be treated like a queen, and who was undeniably handsome.

She wondered whether he had a wife. Judging marriage from her point of view, there probably had been one put away in that beautiful house in Paris. He was an Oriental, she told herself, and he would not parade his wife as the Feringhis did. But she was one, too, and she considered that it would be an insult to ask him about such things. Spiro knew, no doubt, but she could not demean herself to inquire of a servant. Perhaps Gula had found out already, for the girl had a way of finding out whatever she wanted to know, apparently by explaining things to the second mate. Possibly Gula could be made to tell what she had learned, without being directly questioned. But after all, Baraka decided that it did not matter, since she meant to marry the fair-beard as soon as she had her pretty clothes. Yet she became conscious that if he had not existed, she would think it very satisfactory to marry the great man who could do anything he liked, though if he had a wife already, as he probably had, she would refuse to be the second in his house. The Koran allowed a man four, it was said, but the idea was hateful to her, and moreover the Persian merchant's wife had told her that it was old-fashioned to have more than one, mainly because living had grown so expensive.

Logotheti sat beside her for hours under the awnings, talking or not, as she chose, and always reading when she was silent, though he often looked up to see if she wanted anything. He told her when they left Naples that he would show her beautiful islands and other sights, and the great fire-mountains of the South, Ætna and Stromboli, which she had heard of on her voyage to Marseilles but had not seen because the steamer had passed them at night. The fire-mountain at Naples had been quiet, only sending out thin wreaths of smoke, which Baraka insisted came from fires made by shepherds.

'Moreover,' she said, as they watched Vesuvius receding when they left Naples, 'your mountains

are not mountains, but ant-hills, and I do not care for them. But your sea has the colours of many sherbets, rose-leaf and violet, and lemon and orange, and sometimes even of pale yellow peach-sherbet, which is good. Let me always see the sea till the fine dresses are ready to be tried on.'

'This sea,' answered Logotheti, 'is always most beautiful near land and amongst islands, and the big fire-mountain of Sicily looks as tall as Kasbek, because it rises from the water's edge to the sky.'

'Then take me to it, and I will tell you, for my eyes have looked on the Altai, and I wish to see a real mountain again. After that we will go back and get the fine dresses. Will Gula know how to fasten the fine dresses at the back, do you think?'

'You shall have a woman who does, and who can talk with Gula, and the two will fasten the fine dresses for you.' Logotheti spoke with becoming gravity.

'Yes,' Baraka answered. 'Spend money for me, that I may be good to see. Also, I wish to have many servants. My father has a hundred, perhaps a thousand, but now I have only two, Gula and Spiro. The man I seek will think I am poor, and that will be a shame. While I was searching for him, it was different; and besides, you are teaching me how the rich Franks live in their world. It is not like ours. You know, for you are more like us, though you are a king here.'

She spoke slowly and lazily, pausing between her phrases, and turning her eyes to him now and then without moving her head; and her talk amused him much more than that of European women, though it was so very simple, like that of a gifted child brought suddenly to a new country, or to see a fairy pantomime.

'Tell me,' he said after a time, 'if it were the portion of Kralinsky to be gathered to his fathers before you saw him, what would you do?'

Baraka now turned not only her eyes to him but her face.

'Why do you ask me this? Is it because he is dead, and you are afraid to tell me?'

'He was alive this morning,' Logotheti answered, 'and he is a strong man. But the strong die sometimes suddenly, by accident if not of a fever.'

'It is emptiness,' said Baraka, still looking at him. 'He will not die before I see him.'

'Allah forbid! But if such a thing happened, should you wish to go back to your own people? Or would you learn to speak the Frank and live in Europe?'

'If he were dead, which may Allah avert,' Baraka answered calmly, 'I think I would ask you to find me a husband.'

'Ah!' Logotheti could not repress the little exclamation of surprise.

'Yes. It is a shame for a woman not to be married. Am I an evil sight, or poor, that I should go down to the grave childless? Or is there any reproach upon me? Therefore I would ask you for a husband, because I have no other friend but only you among the Feringhis. But if you would not, I would go to Constantinople again, and to the Persian merchant's house, and I would say to his wife: "Get me a husband, for I am not a cripple, nor a monster, nor is there any reproach upon me, and why should I go childless?" Moreover, I would say to the merchant's wife: "Behold, I have great wealth, and I will have a rich husband, and one who is young and pleasing to me, and who will not take another wife; and if you bring me such a man, for whatsoever his riches may be, I will pay you five per cent."'

Having made this remarkable statement of her intentions, Baraka was silent, expecting Logotheti to say something. What struck him was not the concluding sentence, for Asiatic match-makers and peace-makers are generally paid on some such basis, and the slim Tartar girl had proved long ago that she was a woman of business. What impressed Logotheti much more was what seemed the cool cynicism of her point of view. It was evidently not a romantic passion for Kralinsky that had brought her from beyond Turkestan to London and Paris; her view had been simpler and more practical; she had seen the man who suited her, she had told him so, and had given him the secret of great wealth, and in return she expected him to marry her, if she found him alive. But if not, she would immediately take steps to obtain another to fill his place and be her husband, and she was willing to pay a high price to any one who could find one for her.

Logotheti had half expected some such thing, but was not prepared for her extreme directness; still less had he thought of becoming the matrimonial agent who was to find a match worthy of her hand and fortune. She was sitting beside him in a little ready-made French dress, open at the throat, and only a bit of veil twisted round her hair, as any European woman might wear it; possibly it was her dress that made what she said sound strangely in his ears, though it would have struck him as natural enough if she had been muffled in a yashmak and ferajeh, on the deck of a Bosphorus ferry-boat.

He said nothing in answer, and sat thinking the matter over.

'I could not offer to pay you five per cent,' she said after a time, 'because you are a king, but I could give you one of the fine rubies I have left, and you would look at it sometimes and rejoice because you had found Baraka a good husband.'

Logotheti laughed low. She amused him exceedingly, and there were moments when he felt a

new charm he had never known before.

'Why do you laugh?' Baraka asked, a little disturbed. 'I would give you a good ruby. A king may receive a good ruby as a gift, and not despise it. Why do you laugh at me? There came two German merchants to me in Paris to see my rubies, and when they had looked, they bought a good one, but not better than the one I would give you, and Spiro heard them say to each other in their own language that it was for their King, for Spiro understands all tongues. Then do you think that their King would not have been glad if I had given him the ruby as a gift? You cannot mock Baraka. Baraka knows what rubies are worth, and has some still.'

'I do not mock you,' Logotheti answered with perfect gravity. 'I laughed at my own thoughts. I said in my heart, "If Baraka asks me for a husband, what will she say if I answer, Behold, I am the man, if you are satisfied!" This was my thought.'

She was appeased at once, for she saw nothing extraordinary in his suggestion. She looked at him quietly and smiled, for she saw her chance.

'It is emptiness,' she said. 'I will have a man who has no other wife.'

'Precisely,' Logotheti answered, smiling. 'I never had one.'

'Now you are indeed mocking me!' she said, bending her sharp-drawn eyebrows.

'No. Every one knows it who knows me. In Europe, men do not always marry very young. It is not a fixed custom.'

'I have heard so,' Baraka answered, her anger subsiding, 'but it is very strange. If it be so, and if all things should happen as we said, which Allah avert, and if you desired me for your wife, I would marry you without doubt. You are a great man, and rich, and you are good to look at, as Saäd was. Also you are kind, but Saäd would probably have beaten me, for he beat every one, every day, and I should have gone back to my father's house. Truly,' she added, in a thoughtful tone, 'you would make a desirable husband for Baraka. But the man I seek must marry me if I find him alive, for I gave him the riches of the earth and he gave me nothing and departed, leaving me to die. I have told you, and you understand. Therefore let us not jest about these things any more. What will be, will be, and if he must die, it is his portion, and mine also, though it is a pity.'

Thereupon the noble little features became very grave, and she leaned back in her chair and folded her hands in her lap, looking out at the violet light on the distant volcano. After that, at dinner and in the evening, they talked pleasantly. She told him tales of her own land, and of her childhood, with legends of the Altai, of genii and enchanted princesses; and he, in return, told her about the great world in which he lived; but of the two, she talked the more, no doubt because he was not speaking his own language. Yet there was a bond of sympathy between them more natural and instinctive than any that had ever drawn him and Margaret together.

When the sun was up the next morning and Logotheti came on deck to drink his coffee alone, he saw the magic Straits not many miles ahead, in an opalescent haze that sent up a vapour of pure gold to the pale blue enamel of the sky. He had been just where he was now more than once before, and few sights of nature had ever given him keener delight. On the left, the beautiful outline of the Calabrian hills descended softly into the still sea, on the right the mountains of Sicily reared their lofty crests; and far above them all, twice as high as the highest, and nobler in form than the greatest, Ætna towered to the very sky, and a vast cloud of smoke rose from the summit, and unfolded itself like a standard, in flowing draperies that streamed westward as far as the eye could reach.

'Let her go half-speed, Captain,' said Logotheti, as his sailing-master came up to bid him good-morning. 'I should like my guest to see the Straits.'

'Very good, sir. We shall not go through very fast in any case, for the tide is just turning against us.'

'Never mind,' Logotheti answered. 'The slower the better to-day, till we have Ætna well astern.'

Now the tide in the Straits of Messina is as regular and easy to calculate as the tide in the Ocean, and at full and change of the moon the current runs six knots an hour, flowing or ebbing; it turns so suddenly that small freight steamers sometimes get into difficulties, and no sailing vessel I have ever seen has a chance of getting through against it unless the wind is both fresh and free.

Furthermore, for the benefit of landsmen, it is well to explain here that when a steamer has the current ahead, her speed is the difference between her speed in slack water and that of the current or tide, whereas, if the latter is with her, its speed increases her own.

Consequently, though the *Erinna* could run sixteen knots, she would only be able to make ten against the tide; for it chanced that it was a spring tide, the moon being new on that very day. Similarly the *Lancashire Lass*, running her twenty-three knots like a torpedo boat, would only do seventeen under the same conditions.

CHAPTER XV

At two o'clock in the morning Captain Brown was called by the officer of the watch, who told him that he was overhauling a good-sized steam yacht. The latter was heading up for the Straits from the southward, and the officer judged her to be not more than three or four miles on the port bow.

Captain Brown, who meant business, was sleeping in his clothes in the chart-room, and was on the bridge in ten seconds, peering over the search-light with his big binocular. At two in the morning even the largest yachts do not show such a blaze of lights as passenger steamers generally do all night, and the one Captain Brown was watching had only two or three, besides the regulation ones. She might be white, too, though she might be a light grey, but he thought on the whole that she was painted white. She was rigged as a two-masted fore-and-aft schooner. So was the *Erinna* now, though she had once carried square topsails at the fore. She was also of about the same size, as far as it was possible to judge under the search-light. Captain Brown did not feel sure that he recognised her, but considering what his orders were he knew it was his duty to settle the question of her identity, which would be an easy matter in a quarter of an hour or less, as the course of the two vessels converged.

He had been told to find the *Erinna*, but for what purpose he knew not, and he naturally supposed it to be a friendly one. As a first step, he ordered the Coston signal of his owner's yacht club to be burned, turned off the search-light, and waited for an answer. None came, however. Foreign yachts do not always burn signals to please vessels of other nations.

A couple of minutes later, however, the white beam of a search-light shot out and enveloped Captain Brown and his ship. The other man was evidently having a good look at him, for the light was kept full on for some time. But no signal was burned after it went out. Then Captain Brown turned on his own light again, and looked once more; and he had almost made up his mind that the other yacht was not quite as long as the *Erinna*, when she suddenly starboarded her helm, made a wide sweep away from him, and headed down the Sicilian coast in the direction of Catania.

Captain Brown was so much surprised that he lowered his glasses and looked at his chief mate, whose watch it was, and who was standing beside him. It really looked very much as if the other vessel had recognised him and were running away. The chief mate also looked at him, but as they were more or less dazzled by the search-light that had been played on them, they could hardly see one another's faces at all. The captain wished his owner were on deck, instead of being sound asleep below. Owners who are not at all nautical characters do not like to be waked up at two o'clock in the morning by inquiries for instructions. Captain Brown considered the situation for two or three minutes before he made up his mind. He might be mistaken about the length and the bows of the *Erinna*, and if by any possibility it were she, he would not lose much by making sure of her. No other steamer could now pass out of the Straits without being seen by him.

'Hard-a-starboard,' he said to the mate.

'Hard-a-starboard,' said the mate to wheel.

The big *Lancashire Lass* described a vast curve at her racing speed, while the captain kept his eye on the steamer he was going to chase. Before she was dead ahead the mate ordered the wheel amidships, and the *Lancashire Lass* did the rest herself.

'That will do for a course,' the captain said, when he had the vessel one point on the starboard bow.

'Keep her so,' said the mate to the wheel.

'Keep her so, sir,' answered the quartermaster.

It soon became clear to Captain Brown that he was chasing an uncommonly fast vessel, though he was willing to admit that he might have been a little out in judging the distance that separated him from her. Allowing that she might do sixteen knots, and even that is a high speed for yachts, he ought to have overtaken her in half an hour at the outside. But he did not, and he was much puzzled to find that he had gained very little on her when six bells were struck. Twice already he had given a little more starboard helm, and the pursued vessel was now right ahead, showing only her stern-light and the glare of her after-masthead light.

'Didn't I hear four bells go just after you called me?' he asked of the mate. 'Or was it five?'

'Four bells, sir. I logged it. At two-twenty we gave chase.'

'Mr. Johnson,' said the captain solemnly, 'he's doing at least twenty.'

'At least that.'

The quartermaster who came to relieve the wheel at the hour, touched his cap, and reported eighty-five and eighty-six revolutions of the port and starboard engines respectively, which meant that the *Lancashire Lass* was doing her best. Then he took the other quartermaster's place.

'Chase,' said the man relieved. 'Keep her so.'

'Keep her so,' answered the other, taking over the wheel.

Captain Brown spoke to his officer.

'Tell them to try and work the port engine up to eighty-six, Mr. Johnson.'

The chief mate went to the engine telephone, delivered the message, and reported that the engineer of the watch in the port engine said he would do his best, but that the port engine had not given quite such a good diagram as the starboard one that morning.

Then something happened which surprised and annoyed Captain Brown; and if he had not been a religious man, and, moreover, in charge of a vessel which was so very high-class that she ranked as third in the world amongst steam yachts, and perhaps second, a fact which gave him a position requiring great dignity of bearing with his officers, he would certainly have said things.

The chased vessel had put out her lights and disappeared into complete darkness under the Sicilian coast. Again he and his officer looked at one another, but neither spoke. They were outside the wheel-house on the bridge on the starboard side, behind a heavy plate-glass screen. The captain made one step to the right, the mate made one to the left, and both put up their glasses in the teeth of the gale made by the yacht's tremendous way. In less than a minute they stepped back into their places, and glanced at each other again.

Now it occurred to Captain Brown that such a financier as his owner might be looking out for such another financier as the owner of the *Erinna* for some reason which would not please the latter, whose sailing-master had without doubts recognised the *Lancashire Lass* at once, because she was very differently built from most yachts.

'Search-light again, Mr. Johnson,' said the captain.

The great beacon ran out instantly like a comet's tail, and he stood behind it with his glasses. Instead of a steamer, he saw a rocky islet sticking up sharp and clear, half a point on the starboard bow, about three miles off. It was the largest of the Isles of the Cyclops, as he very well knew, off Aci Reale, and it was perfectly evident that the chased vessel had first put out her lights and had then at once run behind the islands, close inshore. Captain Brown reflected that the captain he was after must know the waters well to do such a thing, and that the deep draught of his own ship made it the height of folly to think of imitating such a trick at night. Yet so long as the other stayed where she was, she could not come out without showing herself under his search-light.

'Half-speed both engines,' he said quickly.

The mate worked the engine telegraph almost as soon as the captain began to speak.

'Starboard five degrees more,' said Captain Brown.

The order was repeated to the wheel, and the quartermaster gave it back, and repeated it a second time when the vessel's head had gone off to port exactly to the required degree.

'Slow,' said Captain Brown. 'Stop her,' he said a moment later.

Twin-screw steamers cannot be stopped as quickly by reversing as those with a single screw can, and the *Lancashire Lass* would keep way on for three miles or more, by which time she would be abreast of the islands, and at a safe distance from them. Besides, the spring tide was now running fresh down the Straits, making a current along the coast, as Captain Brown knew. The instant the engines stopped, the third mate came round from the chart-room, where he had been sent to work a sight for longitude by Aldebaran for the good of his young nautical soul.

A moment later Mr. Van Torp himself appeared on the bridge in pyjamas.

'Got her?' he asked eagerly.

Captain Brown explained that he thought he had cornered the *Erinna* behind the islet, but was not quite sure of her. Mr. Van Torp waited and said nothing, and the chief mate kept the search-light steadily on the rocks. The yacht lost way rapidly, and lay quite still with the islet exactly abeam, half a mile off, as the captain had calculated. He then gave the order to go slow ahead.

A minute had not passed when the vessel that had lain concealed behind the island ran out suddenly with all her regulation lights up, apparently making directly across the bows of the *Lancashire Lass*. Now the rule of the road at sea requires every steamer under weigh to keep out of the way of any steamer that appears on her starboard side forward of the beam. At such a short distance Captain Brown had hardly any choice but to stop his ship again and order 'half-speed astern' till she had no way, and he did so. She was barely moving when the order was given, and a few turns of the engines stopped her altogether.

'Is that the *Erinna*, Captain?' asked Mr. Van Torp.

Captain Brown had his glasses up and did not answer at once. After nearly a minute he laid them down on the lid of the small box fastened to the bridge-rail.

'No, sir,' he answered in a tone of considerable disappointment. 'At four miles' distance she looked so much like her that I didn't dare to let her slip through my fingers, but we have not lost more than a couple of hours.'

'What is this thing, anyway? She's coming towards us pretty quick.'

'She's one of those new fast twin-screw revenue cutters the Italians have lately built, sir. They

look very like yachts at night. There's a deal of smuggling on this coast, over from Malta. She's coming alongside to ask what we mean by giving chase to a government vessel.'

Captain Brown was right, and when the big cutter had crossed his bows, she ran all round him while she slowed down, and she stopped within speaking distance on his starboard side. The usual questions were asked and answered.

'English yacht *Lancashire Lass*, from Venice for Messina, expecting to meet a friend's yacht at sea. Thought the revenue cutter was she. Regretted mistake. Had the captain of the cutter seen or heard of English yacht *Erinna*?'

He had not. There was no harm done. It was his duty to watch all vessels. He wished Captain Brown a pleasant trip and good-night.

The Italian officer spoke English well, and there was no trouble. Revenue cutters are very civil to all respectable yachts.

'Hard-a-starboard. Port engine slow astern, starboard engine half-speed ahead.'

That was all Captain Brown said, but no one could guess what he was thinking as his big vessel turned quickly to port on her heel, and he headed her up for the Straits again. Mr. Van Torp said nothing at all, but his lips moved as he left the bridge and went off to his own quarters. It was now nearly four o'clock and the eastern sky was grey.

The current was dead against the yacht through the Straits, which were, moreover, crowded with all sorts of large and small craft under sail, taking advantage of the tide to get through; many of them steered very badly under the circumstances, of course, and it was out of the question to run between them at full speed. The consequence was that it was eight o'clock when the *Lancashire Lass* steamed slowly into Messina and dropped anchor out in the middle of the harbour, to wait while Captain Brown got information about the *Erinna*, if there were any to be had at the harbourmaster's office. It would have been folly to run out of the Straits without at least looking in to see if she were there, lying quietly moored behind the fortress of San Salvatore and the very high mole.

She was not there, and had not been heard of, but a Paris *Herald* was procured in which it was stated that the *Erinna* had arrived in Naples, 'owner and party on board.'

'Well,' said Mr. Van Torp, 'let's get to Naples, quick. How long will it take, Captain?'

'About eight hours, sir, counting our getting under weigh and out of this crowded water, which won't take long, for the tide will soon turn.'

'Go ahead,' said Mr. Van Torp.

Captain Brown prepared to get under weigh again as quickly as possible. The entrance to Messina harbour is narrow, and it was natural that, as he was in a hurry, a huge Italian man-of-war should enter the harbour at that very moment, with the solemn and safe deliberation which the movements of line-of-battle ships require when going in and out of port. There was nothing to be done but to wait patiently till the fairway was clear. It was not more than a quarter of an hour, but Captain Brown was in a hurry, and as there was a fresh morning breeze blowing across the harbour he could not even get his anchor up with safety before he was ready to start.

The result of all these delays was that at about nine o'clock he saw the *Erinna* right ahead, bows on and only half a mile away, just between Scylla and Faro, where the whirlpool is still a danger to sailing vessels and slow steamers, and just as the tide was turning against her and in his own favour. He did not like to leave the bridge, even for a moment, and sent the second mate with an urgent message requesting Mr. Van Torp to come up as soon as he could.

Five minutes earlier the owner had sat down to breakfast opposite Lady Maud, who was very pale and had dark shadows under her eyes for the first time since he had known her. As soon as the steward left them alone, she spoke.

'It is Leven,' she said, 'and he wants me to take him back.'

Mr. Van Torp set down his tea untasted and stared at her. He was not often completely taken by surprise, but for once he was almost speechless. His lips did not even move silently.

'I was sure it was he,' Lady Maud said, 'but I did not expect that.'

'Well,' said Mr. Van Torp, finding his voice, 'he shan't. That's all.'

'No. I told him so. If I had been dressed I would have asked you to put me ashore at Messina. I thought you were going to stop there—the stewardess told me where we were, but she knew nothing else; and now we're off again.'

'I can't help it, Maud,' said Van Torp, almost in a whisper, 'I don't believe it. I don't believe in impossibilities like that beard of his. It may sound ridiculous in the face of your recognising your own husband, but it's a solid fact, and you can't get over it. I wish I could catch the *Erinna* and show him to that Tartar girl. She'd know in a minute. He can't be her man and Leven too. There's only one thing to be done that I can see.'

'What?' asked Lady Maud sadly and incredulously.

'Tell him you'll take him back on condition that he'll shave.'

Mr. Van Torp, who was in dead earnest, had just given his best friend this piece of sound practical advice when the door opened, though he had not rung, and the steward announced that the second mate had a message for Mr. Van Torp. He was admitted, and he delivered it.

The owner sprang to his feet.

'By thunder, we've caught 'em!' he cried, as he rushed out of the deck saloon.

Lady Maud leaned back and stared at his empty chair, wondering what was going to happen next.

This was what happened. The *Lancashire Lass* reversed her starboard engine with full speed astern, put her helm hard over to port, and turned back towards the Straits in the smallest space possible for her, passing less than a cable's length from the Scylla rock, and nearly running down half a dozen fishing-boats that pulled like mad to get out of her way; for they supposed that her steering-gear had broken down, unless her captain had gone raving mad.

While this was going on, Captain Brown himself, with the International Signal Code in his hand, was calling out letters of the alphabet to a quartermaster, and before his ship had made half a circle the flags ran up the single stick the yacht carried.

'My owner has urgent business with your owner,' was what the flags meant in plain English.

The *Erinna* was going slow, for Baraka was only just ready to come on deck, haste being, in her opinion, an invention of Shaitan's. Logotheti, who wished her to see the Straits, was just inside the door of the deck saloon, waiting for her to come out of her cabin. The officer of the watch read off the signals of the other yacht, ran up the answering pennant, and sent for the sailing-master, but could of course do nothing else without orders. So the *Erinna* continued to go slow. All this took some minutes, for the officer had naturally been obliged to look up the signal in the Code before answering that he understood it; and in that time Van Torp's yacht had completed her turn and was nearly alongside. The *Lancashire Lass* slowed down to the *Erinna's* speed, and the two captains aimed their megaphones accurately at each other from their respective bridges for a little pleasant conversation. Captain Brown, instructed by Mr. Van Torp at his elbow, repeated what his signals had meant. The other sailing-master answered that he had already informed his owner, who was coming to the bridge directly.

At that moment Logotheti appeared. There was not much more than a cable's length between the two yachts, which in land-talk means two hundred yards. Van Torp also saw a slim young lady in blue serge, with a veil tied over her hair, leaning on the rail of the promenade deck and looking towards him. With his glasses he recognised the features of Baraka.

'Got 'em!' he ejaculated in a low but audible tone of intense satisfaction.

Logotheti had also seen Van Torp, and waved his hand in a friendly manner.

'Ask the gentleman if he'll come aboard, Captain,' said the American. 'I can't talk through your corneopean anyway. I suppose we can send the naphtha launch for him if we stop, can't we?'

'Can't stop here,' answered Captain Brown. 'The currents might jam us into each other, and we should most likely get aground in any case. This is not even a safe place for going slow, when the tide is running.'

'Well, you know your business, and I don't. Tell him we don't want to interfere with any arrangements he's made, and that if he'll kindly set the pace he likes we'll trot along behind him till we get to a nice place, somewhere where we can stop. I suppose he can't run away from us now, can he?'

Captain Brown smiled the smile of a man who commands a twenty-three-knot boat, and proceeded to deliver the message in a more concise form. Logotheti heard every word, and the answer was that he was in no hurry and was quite at Mr. Van Torp's disposal. He would be glad to know whom the latter had on board with him.

'Lady Maud Leven, Miss Margaret Donne, Mrs. Rushmore, and Count Kralinsky,' answered Captain Brown, prompted by Van Torp.

The latter was watching the Greek through a pair of deer-stalking glasses, and saw distinctly the expression of surprise that came into his face when he heard the last of the names.

'Tell the gentleman,' said Van Torp, 'that if he'll bring his party with him when we stop, I'll be very glad to have them all take lunch with me.'

Captain Brown delivered the message. At such a short distance he did not even have to raise his voice to be heard through the six-foot megaphone.

To Van Torp's surprise, Logotheti nodded with alacrity, and the answer came that he would bring his party with pleasure, but thought that his visit would be over long before luncheon time.

'All right, good-bye,' said Van Torp, as if he were at the telephone. 'Ring off, Captain. That's all. Just let him give us a lead now and we'll follow him through this creek again, since you say you can't stop here.'

As he went off the bridge to return to his breakfast he passed close to the chief mate, who had

turned again, though it was his watch below.

'I say, Mr. Johnson,' he asked, 'have we got a barber-shop on board this ship?'

'No, sir,' answered the mate, who knew better than to be surprised at anything.

'It's no matter,' said Mr. Van Torp. 'I was only asking.'

He went back to his breakfast with an improved appetite. When he re-entered the saloon Lady Maud was still leaning back in her chair, staring at his empty place.

'Well,' he said, 'they're both coming on board as soon as we get to a place where we can stop.'

'Have you really seen the girl?' Lady Maud sat up, as if she were waking from sleep.

'Oh, yes! There she was, looking over the rail, as neat as a pin, in a blue serge dress, with a white veil tied over her hair, watching me. We've got 'em right enough, and that's going to be the end of this mystery!'

'Did you see any one else on the yacht?'

'Logo. That's all. He and I talked. At least, our captains talked for us. They do know how to yell, those men! If the girl's the party, Logo beats the band for brass, that's all I can say!'

'It is rather cool,' said Lady Maud thoughtfully. 'If he's alone with her, it will be all up with his engagement.'

'Well, if that's the way he's going on, it's about time.' His tone was all at once serious. 'Now, see here, have I done anything you consider unfair to make this happen? I want your opinion right away, for if you think I have, I'll stand up for Logo to Miss Donne as hard as I can. Just think it over, please, and tell me your honest opinion. If I've done anything low-down, I want to go right back and begin over again.'

He was thoroughly in earnest, and awaited her answer with evident anxiety. Knowing the man as she did, she would not give it hastily, though it was hard to concentrate her thoughts just then on anything but her own trouble; for she was quite convinced that Baraka would not recognise Kralinsky as the man she was looking for, and that this final proof would settle his identity as Leven, which she already did not doubt.

She asked one or two questions.

'Before I answer you,' she said, 'tell me something, as you tell me things, when you do. Have you any entanglement with another woman from which you feel that you're not perfectly free? I don't like to ask such a question, and I wouldn't if you had not put me on my honour for my opinion.'

'No,' answered Van Torp very gravely, 'I have not. No living woman has any claim on me, and no dead woman could have, if she came to life again.'

'Then I think you had a right to do what you've done, and what you are going to do. When a man behaves in that way he deserves no pity, and now that the crisis is coming I may as well tell you that I've done everything in my power to make Margaret give him up, ever since I have been sure that he had taken the girl with him on his yacht. So far as catching them under Margaret's very eyes is concerned, I'm glad you have succeeded—very glad!'

On certain points Lady Maud was inflexible as to the conduct of men and women, but especially of men. 'Mrs. Foxwell' spent much time behind the Virtue-Curtain, seeking for poor souls who were willing to be helped, and her experiences had led her to believe a modified version of the story of Adam and Eve and the Apple-tree which was quite her own. In her opinion Adam had been in the habit of talking to his wife about the tree for some time, and when the serpent presented itself to explain things he discreetly withdrew till the interview was over. Therefore 'Mrs. Foxwell' was, on the whole, more charitably inclined to her own sex than the other, and when she was 'Lady Maud' she held very strong views indeed about the obligations of men who meant to marry, and she expressed them when the intended bride was a friend of hers.

'Thank you,' said Mr. Van Torp, after she had finished her speech. 'I'm glad you don't disapprove, for if you did I'd try to begin all over again, as I told you. Any other question? You said "one or two," and I'd like to have them all now.'

'Only one more, though perhaps I've no business to ask it. If Margaret marries you, shall you want her to leave the stage?'

'Why, no!' answered Mr. Van Torp with alacrity. 'That wouldn't suit my plans at all. Besides, we're a Company, she and I.'

'What do you mean?' Lady Maud thought he was joking.

'Well, I wasn't going to tell you till we'd organised, but you're as good as a deaf and dumb asylum about business things. Yes. We're organising as "The Madame da Cordova and Rufus Van Torp Company." I'm going to build an opera-house in New York on some land I've got on Fifth Avenue, and Miss Donne is going to run it, and we mean to have Wagner festivals and things, besides regular grand opera, in which she's engaged to sing as often as she likes. There's never been an opera-house on Fifth Avenue, but there's going to be, and people will go to it. Miss Donne caught on to the scheme right away, so you see she's not going to leave the stage anyhow. As for her

accepting me, I can't tell you, because I don't know. Maybe she will, maybe she won't. That isn't going to interfere with the Company either way. Good scheme, isn't it?'

'You're a wonderful man,' said Lady Maud, with genuine admiration. 'Do you mean to say that you have settled all that between you already?'

'She signed the preliminary agreement in Bayreuth, and the papers are being made out by my lawyer in New York. You don't think it was unfair to offer to build a theatre and call it after her, do you? That isn't "exercising undue influence," I suppose?'

'No, and I think you're going to win. The other man hasn't had a chance since you got into your stride.'

'When a man chucks his chances, I'm not going to pick them up for him. Charity begins at home.'

'Even if "home" is a bachelor establishment?' Lady Maud smiled for the first time that day.

They talked a few minutes longer, agreeing that she should tell Margaret what was going to happen; but that Mrs. Rushmore and Kralinsky should be kept in ignorance of the plan, the American lady because she might possibly yield to temptation and tell the Count, and the latter for obvious reasons. It was not likely that any of them would be on deck much before Logotheti came on board.

There is good anchorage out of the tidal current at Scaletta, some few miles below Messina, on the Sicilian side, and towards this well-known water the *Erinna* led the way, followed at a short distance by the *Lancashire Lass*.

Logotheti and Baraka watched her, and the girl recognised Van Torp on the bridge of his yacht, without even using glasses, for she had eyes like an eagle's, and the American millionaire stood alone at one end of the bridge looking towards her.

Logotheti had told her that Kralinsky was on board, and that she should see him as soon as both yachts could anchor. He explained that it was an unforeseen coincidence, and that Mr. Van Torp must have taken him on board somewhere on the previous day. To the Greek's surprise, Baraka showed no outward sign of emotion. He had promised to take her to the man, and had said that he was near at hand; that the meeting should take place sooner than had been intended hardly surprised her, because she had been so perfectly sure that it was near. Her only preoccupation now was about her appearance in her ready-made serge and blouse, when she had meant to show herself to Kralinsky in the glory of a beautiful and expensive Feringhi dress.

But Logotheti explained that even the richest Feringhi ladies often wore little blue serge frocks on yachts, and told her to watch the *Lancashire Lass* with her glasses, as there were three very great Feringhi ladies on board, and she might see one, and be reassured; and presently she saw Lady Maud walking alone on the promenade deck, in clothes very like her own, excepting that they were black instead of dark blue. So Baraka was satisfied, but she never took her eyes from the following yacht, for she hoped that Kralinsky would come out and show himself.

All at once he was there, taking off his white cap to Lady Maud, and they stood still facing each other, and talking.

'I see him,' Baraka said in a low voice, without lowering her glasses. 'It is he.'

Logotheti, who had been much absorbed in thinking about his coming interview with Margaret, raised his glasses too, for he was curious to see the man at last. He had known Leven for years, though never intimately, as he knew a vast number of people in London, and he was struck at once by the resemblance in size, build, and complexion.

'He is fatter than he was, and paler,' Baraka said quietly, 'but it is he. He is speaking earnestly with the beautiful woman in black. I can see well. He likes her, but she does not like him. I think she is telling him so. I am glad. But she is more beautiful than Baraka, even in those poor clothes. When he sees me, he will deny me, because he likes the beautiful woman in black. I will tell Spiro to be ready. It is a pity, but I see there will be no other way. It is his portion and mine. It is a great pity, for I have been happy with you.'

Instead of any look of anger, Logotheti now saw an expression of profound resignation in her lovely young features. If he had been less anxious about his own affairs, he would have smiled at her simplicity.

'When we are on that ship you will let me talk with him a little apart from the rest, and Spiro shall go behind him and wait, looking at me. If he denies me, I will make a sign, and Spiro shall shoot him, and then kill me. It will be very easy and quick.'

'And what will become of Spiro?' inquired Logotheti gravely.

'I do not know,' Baraka said quietly. 'Perhaps he will lose his head. How can I tell? But he is a good servant, and will obey me. Afterwards it will not matter, for he is really a Musulman, and will go at once to paradise if he dies, because he has killed a Christian.'

'But you are a Musulman, and he is to kill you also. What about that?'

'I am only a woman,' answered Baraka with supreme indifference. 'Now I will call Spiro and tell him what he is to do. He has a good revolver.'

Logotheti let her clap her hands and send the steward for her man, and she rose when he appeared and made him follow her a little way along the deck. The interview did not last long. She handed him her glasses and made him look carefully at the intended victim; then she apparently repeated her brief instructions again, pointing here and there to the deck at her feet, to show him how they were to stand; after which she turned quietly, came back to Logotheti's side, and sat down again.

'He understands,' she said. 'It will be quite easy.'

But Logotheti, looking past her as she came forward, had met Spiro's eyes; and he felt not even the slightest anxiety for Kralinsky's safety, nor for Baraka's. He was still wondering what he should say to Margaret, but while he tried to think it over, his eyes dwelt on the noble little profile of the slender Asiatic girl at his side; and it occurred to him that, although she had worn man's clothes and done things that few women would dare to do, for the one purpose of her life, she would much rather die than show herself on the stage in a very low dress before thousands of people and sing to them, and take money for doing it; and he remembered a time, not much more than two years past, when the mere thought had driven the idea of marrying the Primadonna quite out of his head for a while, and that, after all, it had been her physical attraction that had overcome the prejudice, making him say that he was as much in love with the Cordova as he had been with Margaret Donne, that 'very nice English girl.' For men are changeable creatures after they think they have changed themselves to suit their tastes or their ideals, and the original man in them, good or bad, fine or coarse, generally comes back in the great moments.

At a distance, Logotheti had supposed that he could somehow account to the Diva for the position in which he had foolishly placed himself, because he had done nothing and said nothing that he would have been ashamed of before her, if she knew the whole truth; and he fancied that even if they quarrelled she would make up with him before long, and marry him in the end. He had a good opinion of himself as a desirable husband; and with reason, since he had been persecuted for years with offers of excellent marriages from mothers of high degree who had daughters to dispose of. And beneath that conviction there lurked, in spite of him, the less worthy thought, that singers and actresses were generally less squeamish than women of the world about the little entanglements of their intended husbands.

But now, at the very moment of meeting Margaret, he knew that if he found her very angry with him, he would simply listen to what she had to say, make a humble apology, state the truth coldly, and return to his own yacht with Baraka, under her very eyes, and in full sight of Lady Maud and Mrs. Rushmore. Besides, he felt tolerably sure that when Spiro failed to carry out the young Tartar girl's murderous instructions, she would forget all about the oath she had sworn by the 'inviolable water of the Styx' and try to kill him with her own hands, so that it would be necessary to take her away abruptly, and even forcibly.

Matters did not turn out as he expected, however, after the two yachts stopped their engines in the quiet waters off Scaletta, under the Sicilian mountains.

Before the *Erinna* had quite lost her way, Logotheti had his naphtha launch puffing alongside, and he got into it with Baraka and Spiro, and the *Lancashire Lass* had barely time to lower her ladder, while still moving slowly, before the visitors were there.

Baraka bade Logotheti go up first, and trod daintily on the grated steps as she followed him. The chief mate and chief steward were waiting at the gangway. The mate saluted; the steward led the visitors to the main saloon, ushered them in, and shut the door. Spiro was left outside, of course.

Lady Maud was there, sitting in an easy-chair in the farthest corner. She nodded to Logotheti, but did not rise, and paid no more attention to Baraka than if she had not existed.

Mr. Van Torp shook hands coldly with Logotheti; Baraka walked directly to Kralinsky, and then stood stone-still before him, gazing up steadily into his eyes.

Neither Margaret nor Mrs. Rushmore was to be seen. Van Torp and Logotheti both watched the other two, looking from one face to the other. Kralinsky, with his eye-glass in his eye, surveyed the lovely young barbarian unmoved, and the silence lasted half a minute. Then she spoke in her own language and Kralinsky answered her, and only Logotheti understood what they said to each other. Probably it did not occur to Kralinsky that the Greek knew Tartar.

'You are not Ivan. You are fatter, and you have not his eyes.'

Logotheti drew a long breath.

'No,' answered Kralinsky. 'I am Yuriy, his brother. I never saw you, but he told me of you.'

'Where is Ivan?'

'Dead.'

The proud little head was bowed down for a moment and Baraka did not speak till several seconds had passed. Then she looked up again suddenly. Her dark eyes were quite dry.

'How long?'

'More than four months.'

'You know it?'

'I was with him and buried him.'

'It is enough.'

She turned, her head high, and went to the door, and no one hindered her from going out.

'Monsieur Logotheti!' Lady Maud called him, and the Greek crossed the saloon and stood by her. 'He is not the man, I see,' she said, with a vague doubt in her voice.

'No.'

Van Torp was speaking with Kralinsky in low tones. Lady Maud spoke to Logotheti again, after an instant, in which she drew a painful breath and grew paler.

'Miss Donne knows that you are on board,' she said, 'but she wishes me to say that she will not see you, and that she considers her engagement at an end, after what you have done.'

Logotheti did not hesitate.

'Will you kindly give a message to Miss Donne from me?' he asked.

'That quite depends on what it is,' Lady Maud answered coldly.

She felt that she herself had got something near a death-wound, but she would not break down.

'I beg you to tell Miss Donne that I yield to her decision,' said Logotheti with dignity. 'We are not suited to each other, and it is better that we should part. But I cannot accept as the cause of our parting the fact that I have given my protection to a young girl whom I have extricated from great trouble and have treated, and still treat, precisely as I should have treated Miss Donne if she had been my guest. Will you tell her that?'

'I will tell her that.'

'Thank you. Good-morning.'

'Good-morning,' said Lady Maud icily.

He turned and went towards the door, but stopped to speak to Van Torp.

'This gentleman,' he said, 'is not the man my guest was anxious to find, though he is strikingly like him. I have to thank you for giving her an opportunity of satisfying herself. Good-morning.'

Mr. Van Torp was extremely grateful to Logotheti for having ruined himself in Margaret's eyes, and would in any case have seen him to the gangway, but he was also very anxious to know what Kralinsky and Baraka had said to each other in Tartar. He therefore opened the door for the Greek, followed him out and shut it behind him. Baraka and Spiro had disappeared; they were already in the launch, waiting.

'Now what did they say, if it isn't a rude question?' asked the American.

Logotheti repeated the short conversation almost word for word.

'He said that his name was Yuriy,' he concluded.

'That is George in English.'

'Oh, he's George, is he? And what's his dead brother's name again, please?'

'Ivan. That is John. Before we part, Van Torp, I may as well tell you that my engagement with Miss Donne is at an end. She was good enough to inform me of her decision through Lady Maud. One thing more, please. I wish you to know, as between man and man, that I have treated Baraka as I would my own sister since I got her out of prison, and I beg that you won't encourage any disagreeable talk about her.'

'Well, now,' said the American slowly, 'I'm glad to hear you say that, just in that way. I guess it'll be all right about any remarks on board my ship, now you've spoken.'

'Thank you,' said Logotheti, moving towards the gangway.

They shook hands with some cordiality, and Logotheti ran down the steps like a sailor, without laying his hand on the man-rope, stepped on board his launch, and was off in a moment.

'Good-bye! good-bye, Miss Barrack, and good luck to you!' cried Van Torp, waving his cap.

Logotheti translated his words to Baraka, who looked back with a grateful smile, as if she had not just heard that the man she had risked her life to find in two continents had been dead four months.

'It was his portion,' she said gravely, when she was alone with Logotheti on the *Erinna*, and the chain was coming in fast.

Van Torp went back to the main saloon and found Lady Maud and Kralinsky there. She was apparently about to leave the Count, for she was coming towards the door, and her eyes were dark and angry.

'Rufus,' she said, 'this man is my husband, and insists that I should take him back. I will not. Will

you kindly have me put ashore before you start again? My things are ready now.'

'Excuse me,' answered Mr. Van Torp, digging his large thumbs into his waistcoat pockets, 'there's a mistake. He's not your husband.'

'He is, indeed!' cried Lady Maud, in a tone her friend never forgot.

'I am Boris Leven,' said Kralinsky in an authoritative tone, and coming forward almost defiantly. 'Then why did you tell the Tartar girl that your name was George?' asked Mr. Van Torp, unmoved.

'I did not.'

'You've evidently forgotten. That Greek gentleman speaks Tartar better than you. I wonder where you learned it! He's just told me you said your name was George.'

'My name is George Boris,' answered Kralinsky, less confidently.

He was not a coward, but he had never been face to face with Van Torp when he meant business, and the terrible American cowed him.

'My husband's name is only Boris—nothing else,' said Lady Maud.

'Well, this isn't your husband; this is George, whoever he is, and if you don't believe it, I'm going to give you an object-lesson.'

Thereupon Mr. Van Torp pressed the button of a bell in the bulk-head near the door, which he opened, and he stood looking out. A steward came at once.

'Send me Stemp,' said Van Torp in a low voice, as he stepped outside.

'Yes, sir.'

'And, see here, send six sailors with him.'

'Six, sir?'

'Yes. Big fellows who can handle a man.'

'Very good, sir.'

Mr. Van Torp went in again and shut the door. Kralinsky disdained flight, and was looking out of a window. Lady Maud had sat down again. For the first time in her life she felt weak.

In less than one minute the door opened and Stemp appeared, impassive and respectful. Behind him was the boatswain, a huge Northumbrian, and five young seamen in perfectly new guernseys, with fair quiet faces.

'Stemp.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Take that man somewhere and shave him. Leave his moustache on.' Van Torp pointed to Kralinsky.

For once in his life Stemp gasped for breath. Kralinsky turned a greenish white, and seemed paralysed with rage.

'Take his beard off, sir, you mean?'

'Yes. Leave his moustache. Here, men,' added Van Torp, 'take that fellow outside and hold him down in a chair while Stemp shaves him. See?' The boatswain looked doubtful. 'He's pretending to be somebody he's not,' said Van Torp, 'on my ship, and I want to see his face. It's mutiny if you don't obey orders!'

'Aye, aye, sir,' responded the boatswain cheerfully, for he rather liked the job since there was a good reason for it.

But instead of going about his business gently, the Northumbrian giant suddenly dashed past Van Torp in a flash, and jumped and hurled himself head foremost at Kralinsky's legs, exactly as if he were diving. In the Count's violent fall the revolver he had drawn was thrown from his hand and went off in the air. The boatswain had seen it in time. The big man struggled a little, but the five seamen held him fast and carried him out kicking.

'Stemp.'

The valet was preparing to follow the prisoner, and was quite calm again.

'Yes, sir.'

'If he won't sit still to be shaved, cut his head off.'

'Yes, sir.'

Van Torp's eyes were awful to see. He had never been so angry in his life. He turned and saw Lady Maud pressing her handkerchief to her right temple. The ball had grazed it, though it had

certainly not been meant for her.

'Rufus!' she cried in great distress, 'what have you done?'

'The question is what he's done to you,' answered Van Torp. 'I believe the blackguard has shot you!'

'It's nothing. Thank God it hit me! It was meant for you.'

Van Torp's rage instantly turned into tender care, and he insisted on examining the wound, which was slight but would leave a scar. By a miracle the ball had grazed the angle of the temple without going near the temporal artery, and scarcely singeing the thick brown hair.

Van Torp rang and sent for water and absorbent cotton, and made a very neat dressing, over which Lady Maud tied her big veil. Just as this was done, Stemp appeared at the door.

'It's ready, sir, if you would like to come and see. I've not scratched him once, sir.'

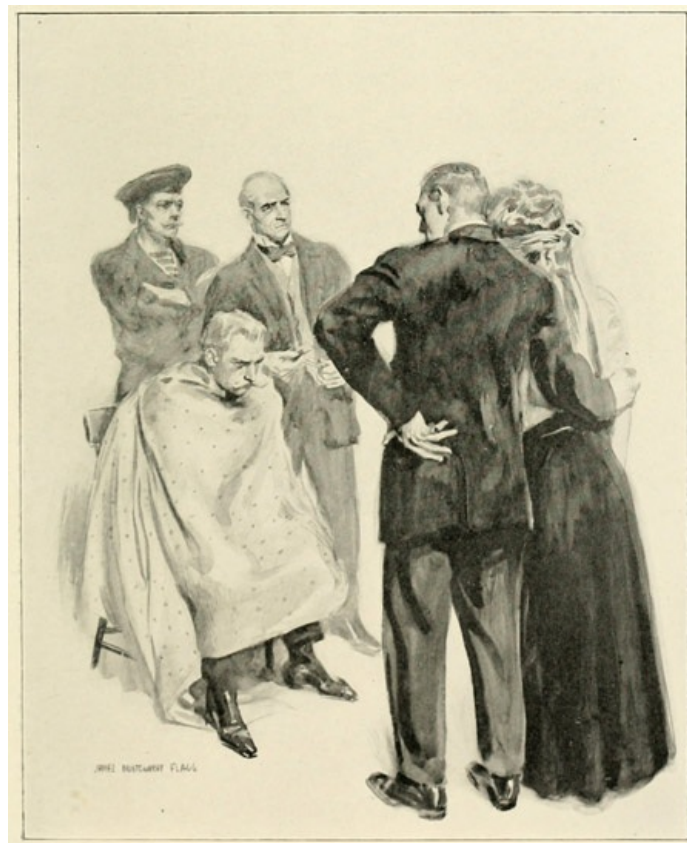
'All right.' Van Torp turned to Lady Maud. 'Do you feel faint? Lean on my arm.'

But she would not, and she walked bravely, holding herself so straight that she looked much taller than he, though she felt as if she were going to execution.

A moment later she uttered a loud cry and clung to Van Torp's shoulder with both hands. But as for him, he said only two words.

'You hellhound!'

The man was not Boris Leven.



"The man was not Boris Leven."

The eyes, the upper part of the face, the hair, even the flowing moustaches were his, but not the small retreating chin crossed by the sharp, thin scar of a sword-cut long healed.

'I know who you are,' said Van Torp, surveying him gravely. 'You're Long-legged Levi's brother, that disappeared before he did. I remember that scar.'

The sham Kralinsky was securely tied down in a chair and the boatswain and the five seamen stood round him, an admiring public. Captain Brown had been informed of what had happened and was going on, and the discipline he maintained on board was so perfect that every man on the watch was at his post, and the steamer was already under weigh again. The boatswain and his contingent belonged to the watch below, which had not been called for the start.

'Let me off easy,' said Long-legged Levi's brother. 'I've not done you any harm.'

'Beyond wounding Lady Maud, after trying to pass yourself off as her dead husband. No. I won't

let you off. Boatswain, I want this man arrested, and we'll take him and all his belongings before the British Consul in Messina in less than an hour. You just attend to that, will you? Somebody go and tell the Captain.'

'Aye, aye, sir.'

For the boatswain and the men had seen and heard, and they knew that Mr. Van Torp was right, and they respected him, and the foreign impostor had wounded an English woman; and having given his orders, the owner and Lady Maud turned and left Long-legged Levi's brother tied to the chair, in a very dejected state, and his uncertain eyes did not even follow them.

The rest is soon told. A long inquiry followed, which led to the solution of the mystery and sent Count Yuryi Leven to Siberia; for he was Boris Leven's twin brother.

The truth turned out to be that there had been three brothers, the youngest being Ivan, and they had all entered the same Cossack regiment, and had served in the Caucasus, where most officers learn the Tartar language, which is spoken by all the different tribes. It will be simpler to designate them by the English equivalents for their names.

Boris behaved himself tolerably well in the army, but both his brothers, John and George, who was his twin, were broken for cheating at cards, and emigrated to America. So long as they all wore their beards, as officers of Cossack regiments usually do, they were very much alike. They were all educated men of refined tastes, and particularly fond of music.

When his two brothers were cashiered, Boris resigned, entered the diplomatic service, married Lady Maud Foxwell, and was killed by a bomb in St. Petersburg.

John and George separated in America when they were tired of punching cattle.

John was something of a naturalist and was by far the most gifted of the three as well as the most daring. He gravitated to China and at last to Mongolia, wandering alone in search of plants and minerals, and it was to him that Baraka showed the ruby mine. He got back to civilisation with his treasure and took it to Petersburg unmolested.

There he found George earning a poor living in an obscure position in the public service, his conduct in the army having been condoned or overlooked. John, who was the incarnation of selfishness, would do nothing for him. George, exasperated by him, and half starved, murdered him in such a way that he was supposed to have died by an accident, took possession of his hoard of unsold rubies, and wrote to his twin brother to come and share the fortune John had left them.

George and Boris had been in constant correspondence, and had even helped each other with money from time to time. Some weeks elapsed after Boris's return to St. Petersburg before his death, and during that time, he told George, who knew London well and had moreover helped him in his attempt to get a divorce, a vast number of details about his married life and his wife's behaviour, her character and tastes. Then Boris was killed in the street, and George left the country and changed his name, with the vague idea that his own was not a very creditable one and that if he kept it he might be troubled by his brother Boris's numerous creditors. He began life over again as Kralinsky.

He had not entertained the least intention of passing himself for Boris and claiming Lady Maud as his wife, till he met her, and her beauty made him lose his head completely when he saw that she took him for her husband. He would have been found out inevitably sooner or later, but Van Torp's vigorous action shortened Lady Maud's torments.

George was tried, and Russian justice awoke, possibly under pressure from England. The family history of the Levens was exhumed and dissected before the courts. The creditors of Boris Leven appeared in legions and claimed that in proper course he should have inherited the rubies from his murdered brother, who would then have been able to pay his debts. The court thought so too, and ordered the confiscated treasure to be sold.

But since it had been Boris's, the law was obliged to declare that the residue of the money, after paying the debts, was the property of Countess Leven, Boris's widow.

Lady Maud thus found herself in possession of a considerable fortune, for she accepted the inheritance when she was assured that it would go to the Russian Crown if she refused it. But there was a fall in the price of rubies, and the Russian government at once sent an expensive expedition to find the mine, an attempt which altogether failed, because Ivan Leven had never told any one where it was, nor anything about it, and the court only knew from certain jewellers who had dealt both with Kralinsky and Baraka, that it was 'somewhere in Central Asia,' which is an insufficient direction, even for a ruby mine.

The wealth Lady Maud thus commands enables her to carry much further than formerly the peculiar form of charity which she believes to be her own invention, if it may be properly called charity at all, and which consists in making it worth while and agreeable to certain unfortunate people to live decent lives in quiet corners without starving, instead of calling to them to come out from behind the Virtue-Curtain and be reformed in public. It is a very expensive charity, however, and very hard to exercise, and will never be popular; for the popular charities are those

that cost least and are no trouble.

Madame Konstantinos Logotheti is learning French and English, on the Bosphorus, with her husband, and will make a sensation when he brings her to London and Paris. On the day of his marriage, in Constantinople, Logotheti received a letter from Lady Maud, telling him how sorry she was that she had not believed him, that day on the yacht at Scaletta, and saying that she hoped to meet his wife soon. It was an honest apology from an honest woman.

He received a letter a few days later from Margaret, and on the same day a magnificently printed and recklessly illustrated booklet reached him, forwarded from Paris. The letter was from Margaret to tell him that she also took back what she had thought about Baraka and hoped to see him and her before long. She said she was glad, on the whole, that he had acted like a lunatic, because it was likely that they would both be happier. She herself, she said, was going to be married to Mr. Van Torp, at St. George's, Hanover Square, before sailing for New York, where she was going to sing at the Opera after Christmas. If he should be in town then, she hoped he would come, and bring his wife.

The booklet was an announcement, interleaved with fine etchings, to the effect that 'The Madame da Cordova and Rufus Van Torp Company' would open their new Opera House in Fifth Avenue less than two years hence, with a grand Wagner Festival, to last two months, and to include the performance of *Parsifal* with entirely new scenery, and the greatest living artistes, whose names were given. There was a plan of the house at the end of the booklet for the benefit of those who wished to make arrangements for being at the festival, and such persons were admonished that they must apply early if they expected to get seats.

Mr. Van Torp had told the Diva that he would like her to choose a wedding present which she really wanted, adding that he had a few little things for her already. He produced some of them, but some were on paper. Among the latter was a house in New York, overlooking the Park and copied exactly from her own in London, the English architect having been sent to New York himself to build it. Two small items were two luxurious private cars of entirely different patterns, one for America and one for Europe, which she was always to use when she travelled, professionally or otherwise. He said he did not give her the *Lancashire Lass* because 'it wasn't quite new'—having been about ten months in the water—but he had his own reasons, one of which was that the yacht represented a sentiment to him, and was what he would have called a 'souvenir.' But if she could think of anything else she fancied, 'now was the time.'

She said that there was only one thing she should really like, but that she could not have it, because it was not in the market. He asked what it was, and it turned out to be the ruby which Logotheti had given her, and had taken to Pinney's to be cut, and which had been the cause of so many unexpected events, including her marriage. Logotheti had it in his possession, she supposed, but he had shown good taste in not trying to press it on her as a wedding present, for she could not have accepted it. Nevertheless, she wanted it very much, more as a remembrance than for its beauty.

Mr. Van Torp said he 'thought he could fix that,' and he did. He went directly to Mr. Pinney and asked what had become of the stone. Mr. Pinney answered that it was now cut, and was in his safe, for sale. The good man had felt that it would not be tactful to offer it to Mr. Van Torp. Logotheti, who was a fine gentleman in his way, had ordered it to be sold, when a good opportunity offered, and directed that the money should be given to the poor Greeks in London, under the supervision of Lady Maud Leven, the Turkish Ambassador, and the Greek Minister, as a committee. Mr. Pinney, after consultation with the best experts, valued it at fourteen thousand pounds sterling. Mr. Van Torp wrote a cheque for the money, put the stone into an inner pocket, and took it to the Diva.

'Well,' he said, smiling, 'here's your ruby, anyway. Anything else to-day?'

Margaret looked at him wonderingly, and then opened the small morocco case.

'Oh—oh—oh!' she cried, in rising intimations of delight. 'I never saw anything so beautiful in my life! It's ever so much more glorious than when I last saw it!'

'It's been cut since then,' observed Mr. Van Torp.

'It ought to have a name of its own! I'm sure it's more beautiful than many of the named crown jewels!' She felt half hypnotised as she gazed into the glorious depths of the great stone. 'Thank you,' she cried, 'thank you so very much. I'm gladder to have it than all the other things.'

And thereupon she threw her magnificent arms round Rufus Van Torp's solid neck, and kissed his cool flat cheek several times; and it seemed quite natural to her to do so; and she wished to forget how she had once kissed one other man, who had kissed her.

'It wants a name, doesn't it?' assented Mr. Van Torp.

'Yes. You must find one for it.'

'Well,' he said, 'after what's happened, I suppose we'd better call it "The Diva's Ruby."''

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