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Victory

By

Joseph Conrad

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NOTE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The last word of this novel was written on 29 May 1914. And that last word was the single word of the title.

Those were the times of peace. Now that the moment of publication approaches I have been considering the discretion of altering the title-page. The word "Victory" the shining and tragic goal of noble effort, appeared too great, too august, to stand at the head of a mere novel. There was also the possibility of falling under the suspicion of commercial astuteness deceiving the public into the belief that the book had something to do with war.

Of that, however, I was not afraid very much. What influenced my decision most were the obscure promptings of that pagan residuum of awe and wonder which lurks still at the bottom of our old humanity. "Victory" was the last word I had written in peace-time. It was the last literary thought which had occurred to me before the doors of the Temple of Janus flying open with a crash shook the minds, the hearts, the consciences of men all over the world. Such coincidence could not be treated lightly. And I made up my mind to let the word stand, in the same hopeful spirit in which some simple citizen of Old Rome would have "accepted the Omen."

The second point on which I wish to offer a remark is the existence (in the novel) of a person named Schomberg.

That I believe him to be true goes without saying. I am not likely to offer pinchbeck wares to my public consciously. Schomberg is an old member of my company. A very subordinate personage in Lord Jim as far back as the year 1899, he became notably active in a certain short story of mine published in 1902. Here he appears in a still larger part, true to life (I hope), but also true to himself. Only, in this instance, his deeper passions come into play, and thus his grotesque psychology is completed at last.

I don't pretend to say that this is the entire Teutonic psychology; but it is indubitably the psychology of a Teuton. My object in mentioning him here is to bring out the fact that, far from being the incarnation of recent animosities, he is the creature of my old deep-seated, and, as it were, impartial conviction.

J. C.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

On approaching the task of writing this Note for Victory, the first thing I am conscious of is the actual nearness of the book, its nearness to me personally, to the vanished mood in which it was written, and to the mixed feelings aroused by the critical notices the book obtained when first published almost exactly a year after the beginning of the war. The writing of it was finished in 1914 long before the murder of an Austrian Archduke sounded the first note of warning for a world already full of doubts and fears.

The contemporaneous very short Author's Note which is preserved in this edition bears sufficient witness to the feelings with which I consented to the publication of the book. The fact of the book having been published in the United States early in the year made it difficult to delay its appearance in England any longer. It came out in the thirteenth month of the war, and my conscience was troubled by the awful incongruity of throwing this bit of imagined drama into the welter of reality, tragic enough in all conscience, but even more cruel than tragic and more inspiring than cruel. It seemed awfully presumptuous to think there would be eyes to spare for those pages in a community which in the crash of the big guns and in the din of brave words expressing the truth of an indomitable faith could not but feel the edge of a sharp knife at its throat.

The unchanging Man of history is wonderfully adaptable both by his power of endurance and in his capacity for detachment. The fact seems to be that the play of his destiny is too great for his fears and too mysterious for his understanding. Were the trump of the Last Judgement to sound suddenly on a working day the musician at his piano would go on with his performance of Beethoven's sonata and the cobbler at his stall stick to his last in undisturbed confidence in the virtues of the leather. And with perfect propriety. For what are we to let ourselves be disturbed by an angel's vengeful music too mighty for our ears and too awful for our terrors? Thus it happens to us to be struck suddenly by the lightning of wrath. The reader will go on reading if the book pleases him and the critic will go on criticizing with that faculty of detachment born perhaps from a sense of infinite littleness and which is yet the only faculty that seems to assimilate man to the immortal gods.

It is only when the catastrophe matches the natural obscurity of our fate that even the best representative of the race is liable to lose his detachment.

It is very obvious that on the arrival of the gentlemanly Mr. Jones, the single-minded Ricardo, and the faithful Pedro, Heyst, the man of universal detachment, loses his mental self-possession, that fine attitude before the universally irremediable which wears the name of stoicism. It is all a matter of proportion. There should have been a

remedy for that sort of thing. And yet there is no remedy. Behind this minute instance of life's hazards Heyst sees the power of blind destiny. Besides, Heyst in his fine detachment had lost the habit of asserting himself. I don't mean the courage of self-assertion, either moral or physical, but the mere way of it, the trick of the thing, the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead the man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue, and, for the matter of that, even in love. Thinking is the great enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man.

But I wouldn't be suspected even remotely of making fun of Axel Heyst. I have always liked him. The flesh-and-blood individual who stands behind the infinitely more familiar figure of the book I remember as a mysterious Swede right enough. Whether he was a baron, too, I am not so certain. He himself never laid claim to that distinction. His detachment was too great to make any claims, big or small, on one's credulity. I will not say where I met him because I fear to give my readers a wrong impression, since a marked incongruity between a man and his surroundings is often a very misleading circumstance. We became very friendly for a time, and I would not like to expose him to unpleasant suspicions though, personally, I am sure he would have been indifferent to suspicions as he was indifferent to all the other disadvantages of life. He was not the whole Heyst of course; he is only the physical and moral foundation of my Heyst laid on the ground of a short acquaintance. That it was short was certainly not my fault for he had charmed me by the mere amenity of his detachment which, in this case, I cannot help thinking he had carried to excess. He went away from his rooms without leaving a trace. I wondered where he had gone to--but now I know. He vanished from my ken only to drift into this adventure that, unavoidable, waited for him in a world which he persisted in looking upon as a malevolent shadow spinning in the sunlight. Often in the course of years an expressed sentiment, the particular sense of a phrase heard casually, would recall him to my mind so that I have fastened on to him many words heard on other men's lips and belonging to other men's less perfect, less pathetic moods.

The same observation will apply *mutatis mutandis* to Mr. Jones, who is built

on a much slenderer connection. Mr. Jones (or whatever his name was) did not drift away from me. He turned his back on me and walked out of the room. It was in a little hotel in the island of St. Thomas in the West Indies (in the year '75) where we found him one hot afternoon extended on three chairs, all alone in the loud buzzing of flies to which his immobility and his cadaverous aspect gave a most gruesome significance. Our invasion must have displeased him because he got off the chairs brusquely and walked out, leaving with me an indelibly weird impression of his thin shanks. One of the men with me said that the fellow was the most desperate gambler he had ever come across. I said: "A professional sharper?" and got for an answer: "He's a terror; but I must say that up to a certain point he will play fair. . . ." I wonder what the point was. I never saw him again because I believe he went straight on board a mail-boat which left within the hour for other ports of call in the direction of Aspinall. Mr. Jones's characteristic insolence belongs to another man of a quite different type. I will say nothing as to the origins of his mentality because I don't intend to make any damaging admissions.

It so happened that the very same year Ricardo--the physical Ricardo--was a fellow passenger of mine on board an extremely small and extremely dirty little schooner, during a four days' passage between two places in the Gulf of Mexico whose names don't matter. For the most part he lay on deck aft as it were at my feet, and raising himself from time to time on his elbow would talk about himself and go on talking, not exactly to me or even at me (he would not even look up but kept his eyes fixed on the deck) but more as if communing in a low voice with his familiar devil. Now and then he would give me a glance and make the hairs of his stiff little moustache stir quaintly. His eyes were green and every cat I see to this day reminds me of the exact contour of his face. What he was travelling for or what was his business in life he never confided to me. Truth to say, the only passenger on board that schooner who could have talked openly about his activities and purposes was a very snuffy and conversationally delightful friar, the superior of a convent, attended by a very young lay brother, of a particularly ferocious countenance. We had with us also, lying prostrate in the dark and unspeakable cuddy of that schooner, an old Spanish gentleman, owner of much luggage and, as Ricardo assured me, very ill indeed. Ricardo seemed to be either a servant or the confidant of that aged and distinguished-looking invalid, who early on the passage held a long murmured conversation with the friar, and after that did nothing but groan feebly, smoke cigarettes, and now and then call for Martin in a voice full of pain. Then he who had become Ricardo in the book would go below into that beastly and noisome hole, remain there mysteriously, and coming up on deck again with a face on which nothing could be read, would as likely as

not resume for my edification the exposition of his moral attitude towards life illustrated by striking particular instances of the most atrocious complexion. Did he mean to frighten me? Or seduce me? Or astonish me? Or arouse my admiration? All he did was to arouse my amused incredulity. As scoundrels go he was far from being a bore. For the rest my innocence was so great then that I could not take his philosophy seriously. All the time he kept one ear turned to the cuddy in the manner of a devoted servant, but I had the idea that in some way or other he had imposed the connection on the invalid for some end of his own. The reader, therefore, won't be surprised to hear that one morning I was told without any particular emotion by the padrone of the schooner that the "rich man" down there was dead: He had died in the night. I don't remember ever being so moved by the desolate end of a complete stranger. I looked down the skylight, and there was the devoted Martin busy cording cowhide trunks belonging to the deceased whose white beard and hooked nose were the only parts I could make out in the dark depths of a horrible stuffy bunk.

As it fell calm in the course of the afternoon and continued calm during all that night and the terrible, flaming day, the late "rich man" had to be thrown overboard at sunset, though as a matter of fact we were in sight of the low pestilential mangrove-lined coast of our destination. The excellent Father Superior mentioned to me with an air of immense commiseration: "The poor man has left a young daughter." Who was to look after her I don't know, but I saw the devoted Martin taking the trunks ashore with great care just before I landed myself. I would perhaps have tracked the ways of that man of immense sincerity for a little while, but I had some of my own very pressing business to attend to, which in the end got mixed up with an earthquake and so I had no time to give to Ricardo. The reader need not be told that I have not forgotten him, though.

My contact with the faithful Pedro was much shorter and my observation of him was less complete but incomparably more anxious. It ended in a sudden inspiration to get out of his way. It was in a hovel of sticks and mats by the side of a path. As I went in there only to ask for a bottle of lemonade I have not to this day the slightest idea what in my appearance or actions could have roused his terrible ire. It became manifest to me less than two minutes after I had set eyes on him for the first time, and though immensely surprised of course I didn't stop to think it out I took the nearest short cut--through the wall. This bestial apparition and a certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti only a couple of months afterwards, have fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal, to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards. Of Pedro never. The impression was less vivid. I got away

from him too quickly.

It seems to me but natural that those three buried in a corner of my memory should suddenly get out into the light of the world--so natural that I offer no excuse for their existence, They were there, they had to come out; and this is a sufficient excuse for a writer of tales who had taken to his trade without preparation, or premeditation, and without any moral intention but that which pervades the whole scheme of this world of senses.

Since this Note is mostly concerned with personal contacts and the origins of the persons in the tale, I am bound also to speak of Lena, because if I were to leave her out it would look like a slight; and nothing would be further from my thoughts than putting a slight on Lena. If of all the personages involved in the "mystery of Samburan" I have lived longest with Heyst (or with him I call Heyst) it was at her, whom I call Lena, that I have looked the longest and with a most sustained attention. This attention originated in idleness for which I have a natural talent. One evening I wandered into a cafe, in a town not of the tropics but of the South of France. It was filled with tobacco smoke, the hum of voices, the rattling of dominoes, and the sounds of strident music. The orchestra was rather smaller than the one that performed at Schomberg's hotel, had the air more of a family party than of an enlisted band, and, I must confess, seemed rather more respectable than the Zangiaco musical enterprise. It was less pretentious also, more homely and familiar, so to speak, insomuch that in the intervals when all the performers left the platform one of them went amongst the marble tables collecting offerings of sous and francs in a battered tin receptacle recalling the shape of a sauceboat. It was a girl. Her detachment from her task seems to me now to have equalled or even surpassed Heyst's aloofness from all the mental degradations to which a man's intelligence is exposed in its way through life. Silent and wide-eyed she went from table to table with the air of a sleep-walker and with no other sound but the slight rattle of the coins to attract attention. It was long after the sea-chapter of my life had been closed but it is difficult to discard completely the characteristics of half a lifetime, and it was in something of the Jack-ashore spirit that I dropped a five-franc piece into the sauceboat; whereupon the sleep-walker turned her head to gaze at me and said "Merci, Monsieur" in a tone in which there was no gratitude but only surprise. I must have been idle indeed to take the trouble to remark on such slight evidence that the voice was very charming and when the performers resumed their seats I shifted my position slightly in order not to have that particular performer hidden from me by the little man with the beard who conducted, and who might for all I know have been her father, but whose real mission in life was to be a model for the Zangiaco of Victory. Having got a clear line of sight I

naturally (being idle) continued to look at the girl through all the second part of the programme. The shape of her dark head inclined over the violin was fascinating, and, while resting between the pieces of that interminable programme she was, in her white dress and with her brown hands reposing in her lap, the very image of dreamy innocence. The mature, bad-tempered woman at the piano might have been her mother, though there was not the slightest resemblance between them. All I am certain of in their personal relation to each other is that cruel pinch on the upper part of the arm. That I am sure I have seen! There could be no mistake. I was in too idle a mood to imagine such a gratuitous barbarity. It may have been playfulness, yet the girl jumped up as if she had been stung by a wasp. It may have been playfulness. Yet I saw plainly poor "dreamy innocence" rub gently the affected place as she filed off with the other performers down the middle aisle between the marble tables in the uproar of voices, the

rattling of dominoes through a blue atmosphere of tobacco smoke. I believe that those people left the town next day.

Or perhaps they had only migrated to the other big cafe, on the other side of the Place de la Comedie. It is very possible. I did not go across to find out. It was my perfect idleness that had invested the girl with a peculiar charm, and I did not want to destroy it by any superfluous exertion. The receptivity of my indolence made the impression so permanent that when the moment came for her meeting with Heyst I felt that she would be heroically equal to every demand of the risky and uncertain future. I was so convinced of it that I let her go with Heyst, I won't say without a pang but certainly without misgivings. And in view of her triumphant end what more could I have done for her rehabilitation and her happiness?

1920. J. C.

CHAPTER ONE

There is, as every schoolboy knows in this scientific age, a very close chemical relation between coal and diamonds. It is the reason, I believe, why some people allude to coal as "black diamonds." Both these commodities represent wealth; but coal is a much less portable form of property. There is, from that point of view, a deplorable lack of concentration in coal. Now, if a coal-mine could be put into one's waistcoat pocket--but it can't! At the same time, there is a fascination in coal, the supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel. And I suppose those two considerations, the practical and the mystical, prevented Heyst--Axel Heyst--from going away.

The Tropical Belt Coal Company went into liquidation. The world of finance is a mysterious world in which, incredible as the fact may appear, evaporation precedes liquidation. First the capital evaporates, and then the company goes into liquidation. These are very unnatural physics, but they account for the persistent inertia of Heyst, at which we "out there" used to laugh among ourselves--but not inimically. An inert body can do no harm to anyone, provokes no hostility, is scarcely worth derision. It may, indeed, be in the way sometimes; but this could not be said of Axel Heyst. He was out of everybody's way, as if he were perched on the highest peak of the Himalayas, and in a sense as conspicuous. Everyone in that part of the world knew of him, dwelling on his little island. An island is but the top of a mountain. Axel Heyst, perched on it immovably, was surrounded, instead of the imponderable stormy and transparent ocean of air merging into infinity, by a tepid, shallow sea; a passionless offshoot of the great waters which embrace the continents of this globe. His most frequent visitors were shadows, the shadows of clouds, relieving the monotony of the inanimate, brooding sunshine of the tropics. His nearest neighbour--I am speaking now of things showing some sort of animation--was an indolent volcano which smoked faintly all day with its head just above the northern horizon, and at night levelled at him, from amongst the clear stars, a dull red glow, expanding and collapsing spasmodically like the end of a gigantic cigar puffed at intermittently in the dark. Axel Heyst was also a smoker; and when he lounged out on his veranda with his cheroot, the last thing before going to bed, he made in the night the same sort of glow and of the same size as that other one so many miles away.

In a sense, the volcano was company to him in the shades of the night--which were often too thick, one would think, to let a breath of air through.

There was seldom enough wind to blow a feather along. On most evenings of the year Heyst could have sat outside with a naked candle to read one of the books left him by his late father. It was not a mean store. But he never did that. Afraid of mosquitoes, very likely. Neither was he ever tempted by the silence to address any casual remarks to the companion glow of the volcano. He was not mad. Queer chap--yes, that may have been said, and in fact was said; but there is a tremendous difference between the two, you will allow.

On the nights of full moon the silence around Samburan--the "Round Island" of the charts--was dazzling; and in the flood of cold light Heyst could see his immediate surroundings, which had the aspect of an abandoned settlement invaded by the jungle: vague roofs above low vegetation, broken shadows of bamboo fences in the sheen of long grass, something like an overgrown bit of road slanting among ragged thickets towards the shore only a couple of hundred yards away, with a black jetty and a mound of some sort, quite inky on its unlighted side. But the most conspicuous object was a gigantic blackboard raised on two posts and presenting to Heyst, when the moon got over that side, the white letters "T. B. C. Co." in a row at least two feet high. These were the initials of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, his employers--his late employers, to be precise.

According to the unnatural mysteries of the financial world, the T. B. C. Company's capital having evaporated in the course of two years, the company went into liquidation--forced, I believe, not voluntary. There was nothing forcible in the process, however. It was slow; and while the liquidation--in London and Amsterdam--pursued its languid course, Axel Heyst, styled in the prospectus "manager in the tropics," remained at his post on Samburan, the No. 1 coaling-station of the company.

And it was not merely a coaling-station. There was a coal-mine there, with an outcrop in the hillside less than five hundred yards from the rickety wharf and the imposing blackboard. The company's object had been to get hold of all the outcrops on tropical islands and exploit them locally. And, Lord knows, there were any amount of outcrops. It was Heyst who had located most of them in this part of the tropical belt during his rather aimless wanderings, and being a ready letter-writer had written pages and pages about them to his friends in Europe. At least, so it was said.

We doubted whether he had any visions of wealth--for himself, at any rate. What he seemed mostly concerned for was the "stride forward," as he expressed it, in the general organization of the universe, apparently. He was heard by more than a hundred persons in the islands talking of a "great stride forward for these regions." The convinced wave of the hand which

accompanied the phrase suggested tropical distances being impelled onward. In connection with the finished courtesy of his manner, it was persuasive, or at any rate silencing--for a time, at least. Nobody cared to argue with him when he talked in this strain. His earnestness could do no harm to anybody. There was no danger of anyone taking seriously his dream of tropical coal, so what was the use of hurting his feelings?

Thus reasoned men in reputable business offices where he had his entree as a person who came out East with letters of introduction--and modest letters of credit, too--some years before these coal-outcrops began to crop up in his playfully courteous talk. From the first there was some difficulty in making him out. He was not a traveller. A traveller arrives and departs, goes on somewhere. Heyst did not depart. I met a man once--the manager of the branch of the Oriental Banking Corporation in Malacca--to whom Heyst exclaimed, in no connection with anything in particular (it was in the billiard-room of the club):

"I am enchanted with these islands!"

He shot it out suddenly, a *propos des bottes*, as the French say, and while chalking his cue. And perhaps it was some sort of enchantment. There are more spells than your commonplace magicians ever dreamed of.

Roughly speaking, a circle with a radius of eight hundred miles drawn round a point in North Borneo was in Heyst's case a magic circle. It just touched Manila, and he had been seen there. It just touched Saigon, and he was likewise seen there once. Perhaps these were his attempts to break out. If so, they were failures. The enchantment must have been an unbreakable one. The manager--the man who heard the exclamation--had been so impressed by the tone, fervour, rapture, what you will, or perhaps by the incongruity of it that he had related the experience to more than one person.

"Queer chap, that Swede," was his only comment; but this is the origin of the name "Enchanted Heyst" which some fellows fastened on our man.

He also had other names. In his early years, long before he got so becomingly bald on the top, he went to present a letter of introduction to Mr. Tesman of Tesman Brothers, a Sourabaya firm--tip-top house. Well, Mr. Tesman was a kindly, benevolent old gentleman. He did not know what to make of that caller. After telling him that they wished to render his stay among the islands as pleasant as possible, and that they were ready to assist him in his plans, and so on, and after receiving Heyst's thanks--you know the usual kind of conversation--he proceeded to query in a slow,

paternal tone:

"And you are interested in--?"

"Facts," broke in Heyst in his courtly voice. "There's nothing worth knowing but facts. Hard facts! Facts alone, Mr. Tesman."

I don't know if old Tesman agreed with him or not, but he must have spoken about it, because, for a time, our man got the name of "Hard Facts." He had the singular good fortune that his sayings stuck to him and became part of his name. Thereafter he mooned about the Java Sea in some of the Tesmans' trading schooners, and then vanished, on board an Arab ship, in the direction of New Guinea. He remained so long in that outlying part of his enchanted circle that he was nearly forgotten before he swam into view again in a native proa full of Goram vagabonds, burnt black by the sun, very lean, his hair much thinned, and a portfolio of sketches under his arm. He showed these willingly, but was very reserved as to anything else. He had had an "amusing time," he said. A man who will go to New Guinea for fun--well!

Later, years afterwards, when the last vestiges of youth had gone off his face and all the hair off the top of his head, and his red-gold pair of horizontal moustaches had grown to really noble proportions, a certain disreputable white man fastened upon him an epithet. Putting down with a shaking hand a long glass emptied of its contents--paid for by Heyst--he said, with that deliberate sagacity which no mere water-drinker ever attained:

"Heyst's a puffect g'n'lman. Puffect! But he's a ut-uto-utopist."

Heyst had just gone out of the place of public refreshment where this pronouncement was voiced. Utopist, eh? Upon my word, the only thing I heard him say which might have had a bearing on the point was his invitation to old McNab himself. Turning with that finished courtesy of attitude, movement voice, which was his obvious characteristic, he had said with delicate playfulness:

"Come along and quench your thirst with us, Mr. McNab!"

Perhaps that was it. A man who could propose, even playfully, to quench old McNab's thirst must have been a utopist, a pursuer of chimeras; for of downright irony Heyst was not prodigal. And, may be, this was the reason why he was generally liked. At that epoch in his life, in the fulness of his physical development, of a broad, martial presence, with his bald head and

long moustaches, he resembled the portraits of Charles XII., of adventurous memory. However, there was no reason to think that Heyst was in any way a fighting man.

CHAPTER TWO

It was about this time that Heyst became associated with Morrison on terms about which people were in doubt. Some said he was a partner, others said he was a sort of paying guest, but the real truth of the matter was more complex. One day Heyst turned up in Timor. Why in Timor, of all places in the world, no one knows. Well, he was mooning about Delli, that highly pestilential place, possibly in search of some undiscovered facts, when he came in the street upon Morrison, who, in his way, was also an "enchanted" man. When you spoke to Morrison of going home--he was from Dorsetshire--he shuddered. He said it was dark and wet there; that it was like living with your head and shoulders in a moist gunny-bag. That was only his exaggerated style of talking. Morrison was "one of us." He was owner and master of the Capricorn, trading brig, and was understood to be doing well with her, except for the drawback of too much altruism. He was the dearly beloved friend of a quantity of God-forsaken villages up dark creeks and obscure bays, where he traded for produce. He would often sail, through awfully dangerous channels up to some miserable settlement, only to find a very hungry population clamorous for rice, and without so much "produce" between them as would have filled Morrison's suitcase. Amid general rejoicings, he would land the rice all the same, explain to the people that it was an advance, that they were in debt to him now; would preach to them energy and industry, and make an elaborate note in a pocket-diary which he always carried; and this would be the end of that transaction. I don't know if Morrison thought so, but the villagers had no doubt whatever about it. Whenever a coast village sighted the brig it would begin to beat all its gongs and hoist all its streamers, and all its girls would put flowers in their hair and the crowd would line the river bank, and Morrison would beam and glitter at all this excitement through his single eyeglass with an air of intense gratification. He was tall and lantern-jawed, and clean-shaven, and looked like a barrister who had thrown his wig to the dogs.

We used to remonstrate with him:

"You will never see any of your advances if you go on like this, Morrison."

He would put on a knowing air.

"I shall squeeze them yet some day--never you fear. And that reminds me"--pulling out his inseparable pocketbook--"there's that So-and-So village. They are pretty well off again; I may just as well squeeze them to begin with."

He would make a ferocious entry in the pocketbook.

Memo: Squeeze the So-and-So village at the first time of calling.

Then he would stick the pencil back and snap the elastic on with inflexible finality; but he never began the squeezing. Some men grumbled at him. He was spoiling the trade. Well, perhaps to a certain extent; not much. Most of the places he traded with were unknown not only to geography but also to the traders' special lore which is transmitted by word of mouth, without ostentation, and forms the stock of mysterious local knowledge. It was hinted also that Morrison had a wife in each and every one of them, but the majority of us repulsed these innuendoes with indignation. He was a true humanitarian and rather ascetic than otherwise.

When Heyst met him in Delli, Morrison was walking along the street, his eyeglass tossed over his shoulder, his head down, with the hopeless aspect of those hardened tramps one sees on our roads trudging from workhouse to workhouse. Being hailed on the street he looked up with a wild worried expression. He was really in trouble. He had come the week before into Delli and the Portuguese authorities, on some pretence of irregularity in his papers, had inflicted a fine upon him and had arrested his brig.

Morrison never had any spare cash in hand. With his system of trading it would have been strange if he had; and all these debts entered in the pocketbook weren't good enough to raise a millrei on--let alone a shilling. The Portuguese officials begged him not to distress himself. They gave him a week's grace, and then proposed to sell the brig at auction. This meant ruin for Morrison; and when Heyst hailed him across the street in his usual courtly tone, the week was nearly out.

Heyst crossed over, and said with a slight bow, and in the manner of a prince addressing another prince on a private occasion:

"What an unexpected pleasure. Would you have any objection to drink something with me in that infamous wine-shop over there? The sun is really too strong to talk in the street."

The haggard Morrison followed obediently into a sombre, cool hovel which he would have distained to enter at any other time. He was distracted. He did not know what he was doing. You could have led him over the edge of a precipice just as easily as into that wine-shop. He sat down like an automaton. He was speechless, but he saw a glass full of rough red wine

before him, and emptied it. Heyst meantime, politely watchful, had taken a seat opposite.

"You are in for a bout of fever, I fear," he said sympathetically.

Poor Morrison's tongue was loosened at that.

"Fever!" he cried. "Give me fever. Give me plague. They are diseases. One gets over them. But I am being murdered. I am being murdered by the Portuguese. The gang here downed me at last among them. I am to have my throat cut the day after tomorrow."

In the face of this passion Heyst made, with his eyebrows, a slight motion of surprise which would not have been misplaced in a drawing-room. Morrison's despairing reserve had broken down. He had been wandering with a dry throat all over that miserable town of mud hovels, silent, with no soul to turn to in his distress, and positively maddened by his thoughts; and suddenly he had stumbled on a white man, figuratively and actually white--for Morrison refused to accept the racial whiteness of the Portuguese officials. He let himself go for the mere relief of violent speech, his elbows planted on the table, his eyes blood-shot, his voice nearly gone, the brim of his round pith hat shading an unshaven, livid face. His white clothes, which he had not taken off for three days, were dingy. He had already gone to the bad, past redemption. The sight was shocking to Heyst; but he let nothing of it appear in his bearing, concealing his impression under that consummate good-society manner of his. Polite attention, what's due from one gentleman listening to another, was what he showed; and, as usual, it was catching; so that Morrison pulled himself together and finished his narrative in a conversational tone, with a man-of-the-world air.

"It's a villainous plot. Unluckily, one is helpless. That scoundrel Cousinho--Andreas, you know--has been coveting the brig for years. Naturally, I would never sell. She is not only my livelihood; she's my life. So he has hatched this pretty little plot with the chief of the customs. The sale, of course, will be a farce. There's no one here to bid. He will get the brig for a song--no, not even that--a line of a song. You have been some years now in the islands, Heyst. You know us all; you have seen how we live. Now you shall have the opportunity to see how some of us end; for it is the end, for me. I can't deceive myself any longer. You see it--don't you?"

Morrison had pulled himself together, but one felt the snapping strain on his recovered self-possession. Heyst was beginning to say that he "could very well see all the bearings of this unfortunate--" when Morrison interrupted

him jerkily.

"Upon my word, I don't know why I have been telling you all this. I suppose seeing a thoroughly white man made it impossible to keep my trouble to myself. Words can't do it justice; but since I've told you so much I may as well tell you more. Listen. This morning on board, in my cabin I went down on my knees and prayed for help. I went down on my knees!"

"You are a believer, Morrison?" asked Heyst with a distinct note of respect.

"Surely I am not an infidel."

Morrison was swiftly reproachful in his answer, and there came a pause, Morrison perhaps interrogating his conscience, and Heyst preserving a mien of unperturbed, polite interest.

"I prayed like a child, of course. I believe in children praying--well, women, too, but I rather think God expects men to be more self-reliant. I don't hold with a man everlastingly bothering the Almighty with his silly troubles. It seems such cheek. Anyhow, this morning I--I have never done any harm to any God's creature knowingly--I prayed. A sudden impulse--I went flop on my knees; so you may judge--"

They were gazing earnestly into each other's eyes. Poor Morrison added, as a discouraging afterthought:

"Only this is such a God-forsaken spot."

Heyst inquired with a delicate intonation whether he might know the amount for which the brig was seized.

Morrison suppressed an oath, and named curtly a sum which was in itself so insignificant that any other person than Heyst would have exclaimed at it. And even Heyst could hardly keep incredulity out of his politely modulated voice as he asked if it was a fact that Morrison had not that amount in hand.

Morrison hadn't. He had only a little English gold, a few sovereigns, on board. He had left all his spare cash with the Tesmans, in Samarang, to meet certain bills which would fall due while he was away on his cruise. Anyhow, that money would not have been any more good to him than if it had been in the innermost depths of the infernal regions. He said all this brusquely. He looked with sudden disfavour at that noble forehead, at those

great martial moustaches, at the tired eyes of the man sitting opposite him. Who the devil was he? What was he, Morrison, doing there, talking like this? Morrison knew no more of Heyst than the rest of us trading in the Archipelago did. Had the Swede suddenly risen and hit him on the nose, he could not have been taken more aback than when this stranger, this nondescript wanderer, said with a little bow across the table:

"Oh! If that's the case I would be very happy if you'd allow me to be of use!"

Morrison didn't understand. This was one of those things that don't happen--unheard of things. He had no real inkling of what it meant, till Heyst said definitely:

"I can lend you the amount."

"You have the money?" whispered Morrison. "Do you mean here, in your pocket?"

"Yes, on me. Glad to be of use."

Morrison, staring open-mouthed, groped over his shoulder for the cord of the eyeglass hanging down his back. When he found it, he stuck it in his eye hastily. It was as if he expected Heyst's usual white suit of the tropics to change into a shining garment, flowing down to his toes, and a pair of great dazzling wings to sprout out on the Swede's shoulders--and didn't want to miss a single detail of the transformation. But if Heyst was an angel from on high, sent in answer to prayer, he did not betray his heavenly origin by outward signs. So, instead of going on his knees, as he felt inclined to do, Morrison stretched out his hand, which Heyst grasped with formal alacrity and a polite murmur in which "Trifle--delighted--of service," could just be distinguished.

"Miracles do happen," thought the awestruck Morrison. To him, as to all of us in the Islands, this wandering Heyst, who didn't toil or spin visibly, seemed the very last person to be the agent of Providence in an affair concerned with money. The fact of his turning up in Timor or anywhere else was no more wonderful than the settling of a sparrow on one's window-sill at any given moment. But that he should carry a sum of money in his pocket seemed somehow inconceivable.

So inconceivable that as they were trudging together through the sand of the roadway to the custom-house--another mud hovel--to pay the fine, Morrison broke into a cold sweat, stopped short, and exclaimed in faltering accents:

"I say! You aren't joking, Heyst?"

"Joking!" Heyst's blue eyes went hard as he turned them on the discomposd Morrison. "In what way, may I ask?" he continued with austere politeness.

Morrison was abashed.

"Forgive me, Heyst. You must have been sent by God in answer to my prayer. But I have been nearly off my chump for three days with worry; and it suddenly struck me: 'What if it's the Devil who has sent him?'"

"I have no connection with the supernatural," said Heyst graciously, moving on. "Nobody has sent me. I just happened along."

"I know better," contradicted Morrison. "I may be unworthy, but I have been heard. I know it. I feel it. For why should you offer--"

Heyst inclined his head, as from respect for a conviction in which he could not share. But he stuck to his point by muttering that in the presence of an odious fact like this, it was natural--

Later in the day, the fine paid, and the two of them on board the brig, from which the guard had been removed, Morrison who, besides, being a gentleman was also an honest fellow began to talk about repayment. He knew very well his inability to lay by any sum of money. It was partly the fault of circumstances and partly of his temperament; and it would have been very difficult to apportion the responsibility between the two. Even Morrison himself could not say, while confessing to the fact. With a worried air he ascribed it to fatality:

"I don't know how it is that I've never been able to save. It's some sort of curse. There's always a bill or two to meet."

He plunged his hand into his pocket for the famous notebook so well known in the islands, the fetish of his hopes, and fluttered the pages feverishly.

"And yet--look," he went on. "There it is--more than five thousand dollars owing. Surely that's something."

He ceased suddenly. Heyst, who had been all the time trying to look as unconcerned as he could, made reassuring noises in his throat. But

Morrison was not only honest. He was honourable, too; and on this stressful day, before this amazing emissary of Providence and in the revulsion of his feelings, he made his great renunciation. He cast off the abiding illusion of his existence.

"No. No. They are not good. I'll never be able to squeeze them. Never. I've been saying for years I would, but I give it up. I never really believed I could. Don't reckon on that, Heyst. I have robbed you."

Poor Morrison actually laid his head on the cabin table, and remained in that crushed attitude while Heyst talked to him soothingly with the utmost courtesy. The Swede was as much distressed as Morrison; for he understood the other's feelings perfectly. No decent feeling was ever scorned by Heyst. But he was incapable of outward cordiality of manner, and he felt acutely his defect. Consummate politeness is not the right tonic for an emotional collapse. They must have had, both of them, a fairly painful time of it in the cabin of the brig. In the end Morrison, casting desperately for an idea in the blackness of his despondency, hit upon the notion of inviting Heyst to travel with him in his brig and have a share in his trading ventures up to the amount of his loan.

It is characteristic of Heyst's unattached, floating existence that he was in a position to accept this proposal. There is no reason to think that he wanted particularly just then to go poking aboard the brig into all the holes and corners of the Archipelago where Morrison picked up most of his trade. Far from it; but he would have consented to almost any arrangement in order to put an end to the harrowing scene in the cabin. There was at once a great transformation act: Morrison raising his diminished head, and sticking the glass in his eye to look affectionately at Heyst, a bottle being uncorked, and so on. It was agreed that nothing should be said to anyone of this transaction. Morrison, you understand, was not proud of the episode, and he was afraid of being unmercifully chaffed.

"An old bird like me! To let myself be trapped by those damned Portuguese rascals! I should never hear the last of it. We must keep it dark."

From quite other motives, among which his native delicacy was the principal, Heyst was even more anxious to bind himself to silence. A gentleman would naturally shrink from the part of heavenly messenger that Morrison would force upon him. It made Heyst uncomfortable, as it was. And perhaps he did not care that it should be known that he had some means, whatever they might have been--sufficient, at any rate, to enable him to lend money to people. These two had a duet down there, like

conspirators in a comic opera, of "Sh--ssh, shssh! Secrecy! Secrecy!" It must have been funny, because they were very serious about it.

And for a time the conspiracy was successful in so far that we all concluded that Heyst was boarding with the good-natured--some said: sponging on the imbecile--Morrison, in his brig. But you know how it is with all such mysteries. There is always a leak somewhere. Morrison himself, not a perfect vessel by any means, was bursting with gratitude, and under the stress he must have let out something vague--enough to give the island gossip a chance. And you know how kindly the world is in its comments on what it does not understand. A rumour sprang out that Heyst, having obtained some mysterious hold on Morrison, had fastened himself on him and was sucking him dry. Those who had traced these mutters back to their origin were very careful not to believe them. The originator, it seems, was a certain Schomberg, a big, manly, bearded creature of the Teutonic persuasion, with an ungovernable tongue which surely must have worked on a pivot. Whether he was a Lieutenant of the Reserve, as he declared, I don't know. Out there he was by profession a hotel-keeper, first in Bangkok, then somewhere else, and ultimately in Sourabaya. He dragged after him up and down that section of the tropical belt a silent, frightened, little woman with long ringlets, who smiled at one stupidly, showing a blue tooth. I don't know why so many of us patronized his various establishments. He was a noxious ass, and he satisfied his lust for silly gossip at the cost of his customers. It was he who, one evening, as Morrison and Heyst went past the hotel--they were not his regular patrons--whispered mysteriously to the mixed company assembled on the veranda:

"The spider and the fly just gone by, gentlemen." Then, very important and confidential, his thick paw at the side of his mouth: "We are among ourselves; well, gentlemen, all I can say is, don't you ever get mixed up with that Swede. Don't you ever get caught in his web."

CHAPTER THREE

Human nature being what it is, having a silly side to it as well as a mean side, there were not a few who pretended to be indignant on no better authority than a general propensity to believe every evil report; and a good many others who found it simply funny to call Heyst the Spider--behind his back, of course. He was as serenely unconscious of this as of his several other nicknames. But soon people found other things to say of Heyst; not long afterwards he came very much to the fore in larger affairs. He blossomed out into something definite. He filled the public eye as the manager on the spot of the Tropical Belt Coal Company with offices in London and Amsterdam, and other things about it that sounded and looked grandiose. The offices in the two capitals may have consisted--and probably did--of one room in each; but at that distance, out East there, all this had an air. We were more puzzled than dazzled, it is true; but even the most sober-minded among us began to think that there was something in it. The Tesmans appointed agents, a contract for government mail-boats secured, the era of steam beginning for the islands--a great stride forward--Heyst's stride!

And all this sprang from the meeting of the cornered Morrison and of the wandering Heyst, which may or may not have been the direct outcome of a prayer. Morrison was not an imbecile, but he seemed to have got himself into a state of remarkable haziness as to his exact position towards Heyst. For, if Heyst had been sent with money in his pocket by a direct decree of the Almighty in answer to Morrison's prayer then there was no reason for special gratitude, since obviously he could not help himself. But Morrison believed both, in the efficacy of prayer and in the infinite goodness of Heyst. He thanked God with awed sincerity for his mercy, and could not thank Heyst enough for the service rendered as between man and man. In this (highly creditable) tangle of strong feelings Morrison's gratitude insisted on Heyst's partnership in the great discovery. Ultimately we heard that Morrison had gone home through the Suez Canal in order to push the magnificent coal idea personally in London. He parted from his brig and disappeared from our ken; but we heard that he had written a letter or letters to Heyst, saying that London was cold and gloomy; that he did not like either the men or things, that he was "as lonely as a crow in a strange country." In truth, he pined after the Capricorn--I don't mean only the tropic; I mean the ship too. Finally he went into Dorsetshire to see his people, caught a bad cold, and died with extraordinary precipitation in the bosom of his appalled family. Whether his exertions in the City of London

had enfeebled his vitality I don't know; but I believe it was this visit which put life into the coal idea. Be it as it may, the Tropical Belt Coal Company was born very shortly after Morrison, the victim of gratitude and his native climate, had gone to join his forefathers in a Dorsetshire churchyard.

Heyst was immensely shocked. He got the news in the Moluccas through the Tesmans, and then disappeared for a time. It appears that he stayed with a Dutch government doctor in Amboyna, a friend of his who looked after him for a bit in his bungalow. He became visible again rather suddenly, his eyes sunk in his head, and with a sort of guarded attitude, as if afraid someone would reproach him with the death of Morrison.

Naive Heyst! As if anybody would . . . Nobody amongst us had any interest in men who went home. They were all right; they did not count any more. Going to Europe was nearly as final as going to Heaven. It removed a man from the world of hazard and adventure.

As a matter of fact, many of us did not hear of this death till months afterwards--from Schomberg, who disliked Heyst gratuitously and made up a piece of sinister whispered gossip:

"That's what comes of having anything to do with that fellow. He squeezes you dry like a lemon, then chucks you out--sends you home to die. Take warning by Morrison!"

Of course, we laughed at the innkeeper's suggestions of black mystery. Several of us heard that Heyst was prepared to go to Europe himself, to push on his coal enterprise personally; but he never went. It wasn't necessary. The company was formed without him, and his nomination of manager in the tropics came out to him by post.

From the first he had selected Samburan, or Round Island, for the central station. Some copies of the prospectus issued in Europe, having found their way out East, were passed from hand to hand. We greatly admired the map which accompanied them for the edification of the shareholders. On it Samburan was represented as the central spot of the Eastern Hemisphere with its name engraved in enormous capitals. Heavy lines radiated from it in all directions through the tropics, figuring a mysterious and effective star--lines of influence or lines of distance, or something of that sort. Company promoters have an imagination of their own. There's no more romantic temperament on earth than the temperament of a company promoter. Engineers came out, coolies were imported, bungalows were put up on Samburan, a gallery driven into the hillside, and actually some coal got out.

These manifestations shook the soberest minds. For a time everybody in the islands was talking of the Tropical Belt Coal, and even those who smiled quietly to themselves were only hiding their uneasiness. Oh, yes; it had come, and anybody could see what would be the consequences--the end of the individual trader, smothered under a great invasion of steamers. We could not afford to buy steamers. Not we. And Heyst was the manager.

"You know, Heyst, enchanted Heyst."

"Oh, come! He has been no better than a loafer around here as far back as any of us can remember."

"Yes, he said he was looking for facts. Well, he's got hold of one that will do for all of us," commented a bitter voice.

"That's what they call development--and be hanged to it!" muttered another.

Never was Heyst talked about so much in the tropical belt before.

"Isn't he a Swedish baron or something?"

"He, a baron? Get along with you!"

For my part I haven't the slightest doubt that he was. While he was still drifting amongst the islands, enigmatical and disregarded like an insignificant ghost, he told me so himself on a certain occasion. It was a long time before he materialized in this alarming way into the destroyer of our little industry--Heyst the Enemy.

It became the fashion with a good many to speak of Heyst as the Enemy. He was very concrete, very visible now. He was rushing all over the Archipelago, jumping in and out of local mail-packets as if they had been tram-cars, here, there, and everywhere--organizing with all his might. This was no mooning about. This was business. And this sudden display of purposeful energy shook the incredulity of the most sceptical more than any scientific demonstration of the value of these coal-outcrops could have done. It was impressive. Schomberg was the only one who resisted the infection. Big, manly in a portly style, and profusely bearded, with a glass of beer in his thick paw, he would approach some table where the topic of the hour was being discussed, would listen for a moment, and then come out with his invariable declaration:

"All this is very well, gentlemen; but he can't throw any of his coal-dust in my eyes. There's nothing in it. Why, there can't be anything in it. A fellow like that for manager? Phoo!"

Was it the clairvoyance of imbecile hatred, or mere stupid tenacity of opinion, which ends sometimes by scoring against the world in a most astonishing manner? Most of us can remember instances of triumphant folly; and that ass Schomberg triumphed. The T.B.C. Company went into liquidation, as I began by telling you. The Tesmans washed their hands of it. The Government cancelled those famous contracts, the talk died out, and presently it was remarked here and there that Heyst had faded completely away. He had become invisible, as in those early days when he used to make a bolt clear out of sight in his attempts to break away from the enchantment of "these isles," either in the direction of New Guinea or in the direction of Saigon--to cannibals or to cafes. The enchanted Heyst! Had he at last broken the spell? Had he died? We were too indifferent to wonder overmuch. You see we had on the whole liked him well enough. And liking is not sufficient to keep going the interest one takes in a human being. With hatred, apparently, it is otherwise. Schomberg couldn't forget Heyst. The keen, manly Teutonic creature was a good hater. A fool often is.

"Good evening, gentlemen. Have you got everything you want? So! Good! You see? What was I always telling you? Aha! There was nothing in it. I knew it. But what I would like to know is what became of that--Swede."

He put a stress on the word Swede as if it meant scoundrel. He detested Scandinavians generally. Why? Goodness only knows. A fool like that is unfathomable. He continued:

"It's five months or more since I have spoken to anybody who has seen him."

As I have said, we were not much interested; but Schomberg, of course, could not understand that. He was grotesquely dense. Whenever three people came together in his hotel, he took good care that Heyst should be with them.

"I hope the fellow did not go and drown himself," he would add with a comical earnestness that ought to have made us shudder; only our crowd was superficial, and did not apprehend the psychology of this pious hope.

"Why? Heyst isn't in debt to you for drinks is he?" somebody asked him once with shallow scorn.

"Drinks! Oh, dear no!"

The innkeeper was not mercenary. Teutonic temperament seldom is. But he put on a sinister expression to tell us that Heyst had not paid perhaps three visits altogether to his "establishment." This was Heyst's crime, for which Schomberg wished him nothing less than a long and tormented existence. Observe the Teutonic sense of proportion and nice forgiving temper.

At last, one afternoon, Schomberg was seen approaching a group of his customers. He was obviously in high glee. He squared his manly chest with great importance.

"Gentlemen, I have news of him. Who? why, that Swede. He is still on Samburan. He's never been away from it. The company is gone, the engineers are gone, the clerks are gone, the coolies are gone, everything's gone; but there he sticks. Captain Davidson, coming by from the westward, saw him with his own eyes. Something white on the wharf, so he steamed in and went ashore in a small boat. Heyst, right enough. Put a book into his pocket, always very polite. Been strolling on the wharf and reading. 'I remain in possession here,' he told Captain Davidson. What I want to know is what he gets to eat there. A piece of dried fish now and then--what? That's coming down pretty low for a man who turned up his nose at my table d'hote!"

He winked with immense malice. A bell started ringing, and he led the way to the dining-room as if into a temple, very grave, with the air of a benefactor of mankind. His ambition was to feed it at a profitable price, and his delight was to talk of it behind its back. It was very characteristic of him to gloat over the idea of Heyst having nothing decent to eat.

CHAPTER FOUR

A few of us who were sufficiently interested went to Davidson for details. These were not many. He told us that he passed to the north of Samburan on purpose to see what was going on. At first, it looked as if that side of the island had been altogether abandoned. This was what he expected. Presently, above the dense mass of vegetation that Samburan presents to view, he saw the head of the flagstaff without a flag. Then, while steaming across the slight indentation which for a time was known officially as Black Diamond Bay, he made out with his glass the white figure on the coaling-wharf. It could be no one but Heyst.

"I thought for certain he wanted to be taken off, so I steamed in. He made no signs. However, I lowered a boat. I could not see another living being anywhere. Yes. He had a book in his hand. He looked exactly as we have always seen him--very neat, white shoes, cork helmet. He explained to me that he had always had a taste for solitude. It was the first I ever heard of it, I told him. He only smiled. What could I say? He isn't the sort of man one can speak familiarly to. There's something in him. One doesn't care to.

"But what's the object? Are you thinking of keeping possession of the mine?" I asked him.

"Something of the sort," he says. "I am keeping hold."

"But all this is as dead as Julius Caesar," I cried. "In fact, you have nothing worth holding on to, Heyst."

"Oh, I am done with facts," says he, putting his hand to his helmet sharply with one of his short bows."

Thus dismissed, Davidson went on board his ship, swung her out, and as he was steaming away he watched from the bridge Heyst walking shoreward along the wharf. He marched into the long grass and vanished--all but the top of his white cork helmet, which seemed to swim in a green sea. Then that too disappeared, as if it had sunk into the living depths of the tropical vegetation, which is more jealous of men's conquests than the ocean, and which was about to close over the last vestiges of the liquidated Tropical Belt Coal Company--A. Heyst, manager in the East.

Davidson, a good, simple fellow in his way, was strangely affected. It is to be

noted that he knew very little of Heyst. He was one of those whom Heyst's finished courtesy of attitude and intonation most strongly disconcerted. He himself was a fellow of fine feeling, I think, though of course he had no more polish than the rest of us. We were naturally a hail-fellow-well-met crowd, with standards of our own--no worse, I daresay, than other people's; but polish was not one of them. Davidson's fineness was real enough to alter the course of the steamer he commanded. Instead of passing to the south of Samburan, he made it his practice to take the passage along the north shore, within about a mile of the wharf.

"He can see us if he likes to see us," remarked Davidson. Then he had an afterthought: "I say! I hope he won't think I am intruding, eh?"

We reassured him on the point of correct behaviour. The sea is open to all.

This slight deviation added some ten miles to Davidson's round trip, but as that was sixteen hundred miles it did not matter much.

"I have told my owner of it," said the conscientious commander of the Sissie.

His owner had a face like an ancient lemon. He was small and wizened--which was strange, because generally a Chinaman, as he grows in prosperity, puts on inches of girth and stature. To serve a Chinese firm is not so bad. Once they become convinced you deal straight by them, their confidence becomes unlimited. You can do no wrong. So Davidson's old Chinaman squeaked hurriedly:

"All right, all right, all right. You do what you like, captain--"

And there was an end of the matter; not altogether, though. From time to time the Chinaman used to ask Davidson about the white man. He was still there, eh?

"I never see him," Davidson had to confess to his owner, who would peer at him silently through round, horn-rimmed spectacles, several sizes too large for his little old face. "I never see him."

To me, on occasions he would say:

"I haven't a doubt he's there. He hides. It's very unpleasant." Davidson was a little vexed with Heyst. "Funny thing," he went on. "Of all the people I speak to, nobody ever asks after him but that Chinaman of mine--and Schomberg," he added after a while.

Yes, Schomberg, of course. He was asking everybody about everything, and arranging the information into the most scandalous shape his imagination could invent. From time to time he would step up, his blinking, cushioned eyes, his thick lips, his very chestnut beard, looking full of malice.

"Evening, gentlemen. Have you got all you want? So! Good! Well, I am told the jungle has choked the very sheds in Black Diamond Bay. Fact. He's a hermit in the wilderness now. But what can this manager get to eat there? It beats me."

Sometimes a stranger would inquire with natural curiosity:

"Who? What manager?"

"Oh, a certain Swede,"--with a sinister emphasis, as if he were saying "a certain brigand." "Well known here. He's turned hermit from shame. That's what the devil does when he's found out."

Hermit. This was the latest of the more or less witty labels applied to Heyst during his aimless pilgrimage in this section of the tropical belt, where the inane clacking of Schomberg's tongue vexed our ears.

But apparently Heyst was not a hermit by temperament. The sight of his land was not invincibly odious to him. We must believe this, since for some reason or other he did come out from his retreat for a while. Perhaps it was only to see whether there were any letters for him at the Tesmans. I don't know. No one knows. But this reappearance shows that his detachment from the world was not complete. And incompleteness of any sort leads to trouble. Axel Heyst ought not to have cared for his letters--or whatever it was that brought him out after something more than a year and a half in Samburan. But it was of no use. He had not the hermit's vocation! That was the trouble, it seems.

Be this as it may, he suddenly reappeared in the world, broad chest, bald forehead, long moustaches, polite manner, and all--the complete Heyst, even to the kindly sunken eyes on which there still rested the shadow of Morrison's death. Naturally, it was Davidson who had given him a lift out of his forsaken island. There were no other opportunities, unless some native craft were passing by--a very remote and unsatisfactory chance to wait for. Yes, he came out with Davidson, to whom he volunteered the statement that it was only for a short time--a few days, no more. He meant to go back to Samburan.

Davidson expressing his horror and incredulity of such foolishness, Heyst explained that when the company came into being he had his few belongings sent out from Europe.

To Davidson, as to any of us, the idea of Heyst, the wandering drifting, unattached Heyst, having any belongings of the sort that can furnish a house was startlingly novel. It was grotesquely fantastic. It was like a bird owning real property.

"Belongings? Do you mean chairs and tables?" Davidson asked with unconcealed astonishment.

Heyst did mean that. "My poor father died in London. It has been all stored there ever since," he explained.

"For all these years?" exclaimed Davidson, thinking how long we all had known Heyst flitting from tree to tree in a wilderness.

"Even longer," said Heyst, who had understood very well.

This seemed to imply that he had been wandering before he came under our observation. In what regions? And what early age? Mystery. Perhaps he was a bird that had never had a nest.

"I left school early," he remarked once to Davidson, on the passage. "It was in England. A very good school. I was not a shining success there."

The confessions of Heyst. Not one of us--with the probable exception of Morrison, who was dead--had ever heard so much of his history. It looks as if the experience of hermit life had the power to loosen one's tongue, doesn't it?

During that memorable passage, in the Sissie, which took about two days, he volunteered other hints--for you could not call it information--about his history. And Davidson was interested. He was interested not because the hints were exciting but because of that innate curiosity about our fellows which is a trait of human nature. Davidson's existence, too, running the Sissie along the Java Sea and back again, was distinctly monotonous and, in a sense, lonely. He never had any sort of company on board. Native deck-passengers in plenty, of course, but never a white man, so the presence of Heyst for two days must have been a godsend. Davidson was telling us all about it afterwards. Heyst said that his father had written a lot of books. He

was a philosopher.

"Seems to me he must have been something of a crank, too," was Davidson's comment. "Apparently he had quarrelled with his people in Sweden. Just the sort of father you would expect Heyst to have. Isn't he a bit of a crank himself? He told me that directly his father died he lit out into the wide world on his own, and had been on the move till he fetched up against this famous coal business. Fits the son of the father somehow, don't you think?"

For the rest, Heyst was as polite as ever. He offered to pay for his passage; but when Davidson refused to hear of it he seized him heartily by the hand, gave one of his courtly bows, and declared that he was touched by his friendly proceedings.

"I am not alluding to this trifling amount which you decline to take," he went on, giving a shake to Davidson's hand. "But I am touched by your humanity." Another shake. "Believe me, I am profoundly aware of having been an object of it." Final shake of the hand. All this meant that Heyst understood in a proper sense the little Sissie's periodic appearance in sight of his hermitage.

"He's a genuine gentleman," Davidson said to us. "I was really sorry when he went ashore."

We asked him where he had left Heyst.

"Why, in Sourabaya--where else?"

The Tesmans had their principal counting-house in Sourabaya. There had long existed a connection between Heyst and the Tesmans. The incongruity of a hermit having agents did not strike us, nor yet the absurdity of a forgotten cast-off, derelict manager of a wrecked, collapsed, vanished enterprise, having business to attend to. We said Sourabaya, of course, and took it for granted that he would stay with one of the Tesmans. One of us even wondered what sort of reception he would get; for it was known that Julius Tesman was unreasonably bitter about the Tropical Belt Coal fiasco. But Davidson set us right. It was nothing of the kind. Heyst went to stay in Schomberg's hotel, going ashore in the hotel launch. Not that Schomberg would think of sending his launch alongside a mere trader like the Sissie. But she had been meeting a coasting mail-packet, and had been signalled to. Schomberg himself was steering her.

"You should have seen Schomberg's eyes bulge out when Heyst jumped in

with an ancient brown leather bag!" said Davidson. "He pretended not to know who it was--at first, anyway. I didn't go ashore with them. We didn't stay more than a couple of hours altogether. Landed two thousand coconuts and cleared out. I have agreed to pick him up again on my next trip in twenty days' time."

CHAPTER FIVE

Davidson happened to be two days late on his return trip; no great matter, certainly, but he made a point of going ashore at once, during the hottest hour of the afternoon, to look for Heyst. Schomberg's hotel stood back in an extensive enclosure containing a garden, some large trees, and, under their spreading boughs, a detached "hall available for concerts and other performances," as Schomberg worded it in his advertisements. Torn, and fluttering bills, intimating in heavy red capitals CONCERTS EVERY NIGHT, were stuck on the brick pillars on each side of the gateway.

The walk had been long and confoundedly sunny. Davidson stood wiping his wet neck and face on what Schomberg called "the piazza." Several doors opened on to it, but all the screens were down. Not a soul was in sight, not even a China boy--nothing but a lot of painted iron chairs and tables. Solitude, shade, and gloomy silence--and a faint, treacherous breeze which came from under the trees and quite unexpectedly caused the melting Davidson to shiver slightly--the little shiver of the tropics which in Sourabaya, especially, often means fever and the hospital to the incautious white man.

The prudent Davidson sought shelter in the nearest darkened room. In the artificial dusk, beyond the levels of shrouded billiard-tables, a white form heaved up from two chairs on which it had been extended. The middle of the day, table d'hote tiffin once over, was Schomberg's easy time. He lounged out, portly, deliberate, on the defensive, the great fair beard like a cuirass over his manly chest. He did not like Davidson, never a very faithful client of his. He hit a bell on one of the tables as he went by, and asked in a distant, Officer-in-Reserve manner:

"You desire?"

The good Davidson, still sponging his wet neck, declared with simplicity that he had come to fetch away Heyst, as agreed.

"Not here!"

A Chinaman appeared in response to the bell. Schomberg turned to him very severely:

"Take the gentleman's order."

Davidson had to be going. Couldn't wait--only begged that Heyst should be informed that the Sissie would leave at midnight.

"Not--here, I am telling you!"

Davidson slapped his thigh in concern.

"Dear me! Hospital, I suppose." A natural enough surmise in a very feverish locality.

The Lieutenant of the Reserve only pursed up his mouth and raised his eyebrows without looking at him. It might have meant anything, but Davidson dismissed the hospital idea with confidence. However, he had to get hold of Heyst between this and midnight:

"He has been staying here?" he asked.

"Yes, he was staying here."

"Can you tell me where he is now?" Davidson went on placidly. Within himself he was beginning to grow anxious, having developed the affection of a self-appointed protector towards Heyst. The answer he got was:

"Can't tell. It's none of my business," accompanied by majestic oscillations of the hotel-keeper's head, hinting at some awful mystery.

Davidson was placidity itself. It was his nature. He did not betray his sentiments, which were not favourable to Schomberg.

"I am sure to find out at the Tesmans' office," he thought. But it was a very hot hour, and if Heyst was down at the port he would have learned already that the Sissie was in. It was even possible that Heyst had already gone on board, where he could enjoy a coolness denied to the town. Davidson, being stout, was much preoccupied with coolness and inclined to immobility. He lingered awhile, as if irresolute. Schomberg, at the door, looking out, affected perfect indifference. He could not keep it up, though. Suddenly he turned inward and asked with brusque rage:

"You wanted to see him?"

"Why, yes," said Davidson. "We agreed to meet--"

"Don't you bother. He doesn't care about that now."

"Doesn't he?"

"Well, you can judge for yourself. He isn't here, is he? You take my word for it. Don't you bother about him. I am advising you as a friend."

"Thank you," said, Davidson, inwardly startled at the savage tone. "I think I will sit down for a moment and have a drink, after all."

This was not what Schomberg had expected to hear. He called brutally:

"Boy!"

The Chinaman approached, and after referring him to the white man by a nod the hotel-keeper departed, muttering to himself. Davidson heard him gnash his teeth as he went.

Davidson sat alone with the billiard-tables as if there had been not a soul staying in the hotel. His placidity was so genuine that he was not unduly, fretting himself over the absence of Heyst, or the mysterious manners Schomberg had treated him to. He was considering these things in his own fairly shrewd way. Something had happened; and he was loath to go away to investigate, being restrained by a presentiment that somehow enlightenment would come to him there. A poster of CONCERTS EVERY EVENING, like those on the gate, but in a good state of preservation, hung on the wall fronting him. He looked at it idly and was struck by the fact--then not so very common--that it was a ladies' orchestra; "Zangiaco's eastern tour--eighteen performers." The poster stated that they had had the honour of playing their select repertoire before various colonial excellencies, also before pashas, sheiks, chiefs, H. H. the Sultan of Mascate, etc., etc.

Davidson felt sorry for the eighteen lady-performers. He knew what that sort of life was like, the sordid conditions and brutal incidents of such tours led by such Zangiacos who often were anything but musicians by profession. While he was staring at the poster, a door somewhere at his back opened, and a woman came in who was looked upon as Schomberg's wife, no doubt with truth. As somebody remarked cynically once, she was too unattractive to be anything else. The opinion that he treated her abominably was based on her frightened expression. Davidson lifted his hat to her. Mrs. Schomberg gave him an inclination of her sallow head and incontinently sat down behind a sort of raised counter, facing the door, with a mirror and rows of bottles at her back. Her hair was very elaborately done with two ringlets on

the left side of her scraggy neck; her dress was of silk, and she had come on duty for the afternoon. For some reason or other Schomberg exacted this from her, though she added nothing to the fascinations of the place. She sat there in the smoke and noise, like an enthroned idol, smiling stupidly over the billiards from time to time, speaking to no one, and no one speaking to her. Schomberg himself took no more interest in her than may be implied in a sudden and totally unmotivated scowl. Otherwise the very Chinamen ignored her existence.

She had interrupted Davidson in his reflections. Being alone with her, her silence and open-eyed immobility made him uncomfortable. He was easily sorry for people. It seemed rude not to take any notice of her. He said, in allusion to the poster:

"Are you having these people in the house?"

She was so unused to being addressed by customers that at the sound of his voice she jumped in her seat. Davidson was telling us afterwards that she jumped exactly like a figure made of wood, without losing her rigid immobility. She did not even move her eyes; but she answered him freely, though her very lips seemed made of wood.

"They stayed here over a month. They are gone now. They played every evening."

"Pretty good, were they?"

To this she said nothing; and as she kept on staring fixedly in front of her, her silence disconcerted Davidson. It looked as if she had not heard him-- which was impossible. Perhaps she drew the line of speech at the expression of opinions. Schomberg might have trained her, for domestic reasons, to keep them to herself. But Davidson felt in honour obliged to converse; so he said, putting his own interpretation on this surprising silence:

"I see--not much account. Such bands hardly ever are. An Italian lot, Mrs. Schomberg, to judge by the name of the boss?"

She shook her head negatively.

"No. He is a German really; only he dyes his hair and beard black for business. Zangiaco is his business name."

"That's a curious fact," said Davidson. His head being full of Heyst, it

occurred to him that she might be aware of other facts. This was a very amazing discovery to anyone who looked at Mrs. Schomberg. Nobody had ever suspected her of having a mind. I mean even a little of it, I mean any at all. One was inclined to think of her as an It--an automaton, a very plain dummy, with an arrangement for bowing the head at times and smiling stupidly now and then. Davidson viewed her profile with a flattened nose, a hollow cheek, and one staring, unwinking, goggle eye. He asked himself: Did that speak just now? Will it speak again? It was as exciting, for the mere wonder of it, as trying to converse with a mechanism. A smile played about the fat features of Davidson; the smile of a man making an amusing experiment. He spoke again to her:

"But the other members of that orchestra were real Italians, were they not?"

Of course, he didn't care. He wanted to see whether the mechanism would work again. It did. It said they were not. They were of all sorts, apparently. It paused, with the one goggle eye immovably gazing down the whole length of the room and through the door opening on to the "piazza." It paused, then went on in the same low pitch:

"There was even one English girl."

"Poor devil!"--said Davidson, "I suppose these women are not much better than slaves really. Was that fellow with the dyed beard decent in his way?"

The mechanism remained silent. The sympathetic soul of Davidson drew its own conclusions.

"Beastly life for these women!" he said. "When you say an English girl, Mrs. Schomberg, do you really mean a young girl? Some of these orchestra girls are no chicks."

"Young enough," came the low voice out of Mrs. Schomberg's unmoved physiognomy.

Davidson, encouraged, remarked that he was sorry for her. He was easily sorry for people.

"Where did they go to from here?" he asked.

"She did not go with them. She ran away."

This was the pronouncement Davidson obtained next. It introduced a new

sort of interest.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed placidly; and then, with the air of a man who knows life: "Who with?" he inquired with assurance.

Mrs. Schomberg's immobility gave her an appearance of listening intently. Perhaps she was really listening; but Schomberg must have been finishing his sleep in some distant part of the house. The silence was profound, and lasted long enough to become startling. Then, enthroned above Davidson, she whispered at last:

"That friend of yours."

"Oh, you know I am here looking for a friend," said Davidson hopefully. "Won't you tell me--"

"I've told you"

"Eh?"

A mist seemed to roll away from before Davidson's eyes, disclosing something he could not believe.

"You can't mean it!" he cried. "He's not the man for it." But the last words came out in a faint voice. Mrs. Schomberg never moved her head the least bit. Davidson, after the shock which made him sit up, went slack all over.

"Heyst! Such a perfect gentleman!" he exclaimed weakly.

Mrs. Schomberg did not seem to have heard him. This startling fact did not tally somehow with the idea Davidson had of Heyst. He never talked of women, he never seemed to think of them, or to remember that they existed; and then all at once--like this! Running off with a casual orchestra girl!

"You might have knocked me down with a feather," Davidson told us some time afterwards.

By then he was taking an indulgent view of both the parties to that amazing transaction. First of all, on reflection, he was by no means certain that it prevented Heyst from being a perfect gentleman, as before. He confronted our open grins or quiet smiles with a serious round face. Heyst had taken the girl away to Samburan; and that was no joking matter. The loneliness, the ruins of the spot, had impressed Davidson's simple soul. They were

incompatible with the frivolous comments of people who had not seen it. That black jetty, sticking out of the jungle into the empty sea; these roof-ridges of deserted houses peeping dismally above the long grass! Ough! The gigantic and funereal blackboard sign of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, still emerging from a wild growth of bushes like an inscription stuck above a grave figured by the tall heap of unsold coal at the shore end of the wharf, added to the general desolation.

Thus was the sensitive Davidson. The girl must have been miserable indeed to follow such a strange man to such a spot. Heyst had, no doubt, told her the truth. He was a gentleman. But no words could do justice to the conditions of life on Samburan. A desert island was nothing to it. Moreover, when you were cast away on a desert island--why, you could not help yourself; but to expect a fiddle-playing girl out of an ambulant ladies' orchestra to remain content there for a day, for one single day, was inconceivable. She would be frightened at the first sight of it. She would scream.

The capacity for sympathy in these stout, placid men! Davidson was stirred to the depths; and it was easy to see that it was about Heyst that he was concerned. We asked him if he had passed that way lately.

"Oh, yes. I always do--about half a mile off."

"Seen anybody about?"

"No, not a soul. Not a shadow."

"Did you blow your whistle?"

"Blow the whistle? You think I would do such a thing?"

He rejected the mere possibility of such an unwarrantable intrusion. Wonderfully delicate fellow, Davidson!

"Well, but how do you know that they are there?" he was naturally asked.

Heyst had entrusted Mrs. Schomberg with a message for Davidson--a few lines in pencil on a scrap of crumpled paper. It was to the effect: that an unforeseen necessity was driving him away before the appointed time. He begged Davidson's indulgence for the apparent discourtesy. The woman of the house--meaning Mrs. Schomberg--would give him the facts, though unable to explain them, of course.

"What was there to explain?" wondered Davidson dubiously.

"He took a fancy to that fiddle-playing girl, and--"

"And she to him, apparently," I suggested.

"Wonderfully quick work," reflected Davidson. "What do you think will come of it?"

"Repentance, I should say. But how is it that Mrs. Schomberg has been selected for a confidante?"

For indeed a waxwork figure would have seemed more useful than that woman whom we all were accustomed to see sitting elevated above the two billiard-tables--without expression, without movement, without voice, without sight.

"Why, she helped the girl to bolt," said Davidson turning at me his innocent eyes, rounded by the state of constant amazement in which this affair had left him, like those shocks of terror or sorrow which sometimes leave their victim afflicted by nervous trembling. It looked as though he would never get over it.

"Mrs. Schomberg jerked Heyst's note, twisted like a pipe-light, into my lap while I sat there unsuspecting," Davidson went on. "Directly I had recovered my senses, I asked her what on earth she had to do with it that Heyst should leave it with her. And then, behaving like a painted image rather than a live woman, she whispered, just loud enough for me to hear:

"I helped them. I got her things together, tied them up in my own shawl, and threw them into the compound out of a back window. I did it."

"That woman that you would say hadn't the pluck to lift her little finger!" marvelled Davidson in his quiet, slightly panting voice. "What do you think of that?"

I thought she must have had some interest of her own to serve. She was too lifeless to be suspected of impulsive compassion. It was impossible to think that Heyst had bribed her. Whatever means he had, he had not the means to do that. Or could it be that she was moved by that disinterested passion for delivering a woman to a man which in respectable spheres is called matchmaking?--a highly irregular example of it!

"It must have been a very small bundle," remarked Davidson further.

"I imagine the girl must have been specially attractive," I said.

"I don't know. She was miserable. I don't suppose it was more than a little linen and a couple of those white frocks they wear on the platform."

Davidson pursued his own train of thought. He supposed that such a thing had never been heard of in the history of the tropics. For where could you find anyone to steal a girl out of an orchestra? No doubt fellows here and there took a fancy to some pretty one--but it was not for running away with her. Oh dear no! It needed a lunatic like Heyst.

"Only think what it means," wheezed Davidson, imaginative under his invincible placidity. "Just only try to think! Brooding alone on Samburan has upset his brain. He never stopped to consider, or he couldn't have done it. No sane man . . . How is a thing like that to go on? What's he going to do with her in the end? It's madness."

"You say that he's mad. Schomberg tells us that he must be starving on his island; so he may end yet by eating her," I suggested.

Mrs. Schomberg had had no time to enter into details, Davidson told us. Indeed, the wonder was that they had been left alone so long. The drowsy afternoon was slipping by. Footsteps and voices resounded on the veranda--I beg pardon, the piazza; the scraping of chairs, the ping of a smitten bell. Customers were turning up. Mrs. Schomberg was begging Davidson hurriedly, but without looking at him, to say nothing to anyone, when on a half-uttered word her nervous whisper was cut short. Through a small inner door Schomberg came in, his hair brushed, his beard combed neatly, but his eyelids still heavy from his nap. He looked with suspicion at Davidson, and even glanced at his wife; but he was baffled by the natural placidity of the one and the acquired habit of immobility in the other.

"Have you sent out the drinks?" he asked surlily.

She did not open her lips, because just then the head boy appeared with a loaded tray, on his way out. Schomberg went to the door and greeted the customers outside, but did not join them. He remained blocking half the doorway, with his back to the room, and was still there when Davidson, after sitting still for a while, rose to go. At the noise he made Schomberg turned his head, watched him lift his hat to Mrs. Schomberg and receive her

wooden bow accompanied by a stupid grin, and then looked away. He was loftily dignified. Davidson stopped at the door, deep in his simplicity.

"I am sorry you won't tell me anything about my friend's absence," he said. "My friend Heyst, you know. I suppose the only course for me now is to make inquiries down at the port. I shall hear something there, I don't doubt."

"Make inquiries of the devil!" replied Schomberg in a hoarse mutter.

Davidson's purpose in addressing the hotel-keeper had been mainly to make Mrs. Schomberg safe from suspicion; but he would fain have heard something more of Heyst's exploit from another point of view. It was a shrewd try. It was successful in a rather startling way, because the hotel-keeper's point of view was horribly abusive. All of a sudden, in the same hoarse sinister tone, he proceeded to call Heyst many names, of which "pig-dog" was not the worst, with such vehemence that he actually choked himself. Profiting from the pause, Davidson, whose temperament could withstand worse shocks, remonstrated in an undertone:

"It's unreasonable to get so angry as that. Even if he had run off with your cash-box--"

The big hotel-keeper bent down and put his infuriated face close to Davidson's.

"My cash-box! My--he--look here, Captain Davidson! He ran off with a girl. What do I care for the girl? The girl is nothing to me."

He shot out an infamous word which made Davidson start. That's what the girl was; and he reiterated the assertion that she was nothing to him. What he was concerned for was the good name of his house. Wherever he had been established, he had always had "artist parties" staying in his house. One recommended him to the others; but what would happen now, when it got about that leaders ran the risk in his house--his house--of losing members of their troupe? And just now, when he had spent seven hundred and thirty-four guilders in building a concert-hall in his compound. Was that a thing to do in a respectable hotel? The cheek, the indecency, the impudence, the atrocity! Vagabond, impostor, swindler, ruffian, schwein-hund!

He had seized Davidson by a button of his coat, detaining him in the doorway, and exactly in the line of Mrs. Schomberg's stony gaze. Davidson

stole a glance in that direction and thought of making some sort of reassuring sign to her, but she looked so bereft of senses, and almost of life, perched up there, that it seemed not worth while. He disengaged his button with firm placidity. Thereupon, with a last stifled curse, Schomberg vanished somewhere within, to try and compose his spirits in solitude. Davidson stepped out on the veranda. The party of customers there had become aware of the explosive interlude in the doorway. Davidson knew one of these men, and nodded to him in passing; but his acquaintance called out:

"Isn't he in a filthy temper? He's been like that ever since."

The speaker laughed aloud, while all the others sat smiling. Davidson stopped.

"Yes, rather." His feelings were, he told us, those of bewildered resignation; but of course that was no more visible to the others than the emotions of a turtle when it withdraws into its shell.

"It seems unreasonable," he murmured thoughtfully.

"Oh, but they had a scrap!" the other said.

"What do you mean? Was there a fight!--a fight with Heyst?" asked Davidson, much perturbed, if somewhat incredulous.

"Heyst? No, these two--the bandmaster, the fellow who's taking these women about and our Schomberg. Signor Zangiaco ran amuck in the morning, and went for our worthy friend. I tell you, they were rolling on the floor together on this very veranda, after chasing each other all over the house, doors slamming, women screaming, seventeen of them, in the dining-room; Chinamen up the trees. Hey, John? You climb tree to see the fight, eh?"

The boy, almond-eyed and impassive, emitted a scornful grunt, finished wiping the table, and withdrew.

"That's what it was--a real, go-as-you-please scrap. And Zangiaco began it. Oh, here's Schomberg. Say, Schomberg, didn't he fly at you, when the girl was missed, because it was you who insisted that the artists should go about the audience during the interval?"

Schomberg had reappeared in the doorway. He advanced. His bearing was stately, but his nostrils were extraordinarily expanded, and he controlled his

voice with apparent effort.

"Certainly. That was only business. I quoted him special terms and all for your sake, gentlemen. I was thinking of my regular customers. There's nothing to do in the evenings in this town. I think, gentlemen, you were all pleased at the opportunity of hearing a little good music; and where's the harm of offering a grenadine, or what not, to a lady artist? But that fellow--that Swede--he got round the girl. He got round all the people out here. I've been watching him for years. You remember how he got round Morrison."

He changed front abruptly, as if on parade, and marched off. The customers at the table exchanged glances silently. Davidson's attitude was that of a spectator. Schomberg's moody pacing of the billiard-room could be heard on the veranda.

"And the funniest part is," resumed the man who had been speaking before--an English clerk in a Dutch house--"the funniest part is that before nine o'clock that same morning those two were driving together in a gharry down to the port, to look for Heyst and the girl. I saw them rushing around making inquiries. I don't know what they would have done to the girl, but they seemed quite ready to fall upon your Heyst, Davidson, and kill him on the quay."

He had never, he said, seen anything so queer. Those two investigators working feverishly to the same end were glaring at each other with surprising ferocity. In hatred and mistrust they entered a steam-launch, and went flying from ship to ship all over the harbour, causing no end of sensation. The captains of vessels, coming on shore later in the day, brought tales of a strange invasion, and wanted to know who were the two offensive lunatics in a steam-launch, apparently after a man and a girl, and telling a story of which one could make neither head nor tail. Their reception by the roadstead was generally unsympathetic, even to the point of the mate of an American ship bundling them out over the rail with unseemly precipitation.

Meantime Heyst and the girl were a good few miles away, having gone in the night on board one of the Tesman schooners bound to the eastward. This was known afterwards from the Javanese boatmen whom Heyst hired for the purpose at three o'clock in the morning. The Tesman schooner had sailed at daylight with the usual land breeze, and was probably still in sight in the offing at the time. However, the two pursuers after their experience with the American mate, made for the shore. On landing, they had another violent row in the German language. But there was no second fight; and finally, with looks of fierce animosity, they got together into a gharry--obviously with

the frugal view of sharing expenses--and drove away, leaving an astonished little crowd of Europeans and natives on the quay.

After hearing this wondrous tale, Davidson went away from the hotel veranda, which was filling with Schomberg's regular customers. Heyst's escapade was the general topic of conversation. Never before had that unaccountable individual been the cause of so much gossip, he judged. No! Not even in the beginnings of the Tropical Belt Coal Company when becoming for a moment a public character was he the object of a silly criticism and unintelligent envy for every vagabond and adventurer in the islands. Davidson concluded that people liked to discuss that sort of scandal better than any other.

I asked him if he believed that this was such a great scandal after all.

"Heavens, no!" said that excellent man who, himself, was incapable of any impropriety of conduct. "But it isn't a thing I would have done myself; I mean even if I had not been married."

There was no implied condemnation in the statement; rather something like regret. Davidson shared my suspicion that this was in its essence the rescue of a distressed human being. Not that we were two romantics, tingeing the world to the hue of our temperament, but that both of us had been acute enough to discover a long time ago that Heyst was.

"I shouldn't have had the pluck," he continued. "I see a thing all round, as it were; but Heyst doesn't, or else he would have been scared. You don't take a woman into a desert jungle without being made sorry for it sooner or later, in one way or another; and Heyst being a gentleman only makes it worse."

CHAPTER SIX

We said no more about Heyst on that occasion, and it so happened that I did not meet Davidson again for some three months. When we did come together, almost the first thing he said to me was:

"I've seen him."

Before I could exclaim, he assured me that he had taken no liberty, that he had not intruded. He was called in. Otherwise he would not have dreamed of breaking in upon Heyst's privacy.

"I am certain you wouldn't," I assured him, concealing my amusement at his wonderful delicacy. He was the most delicate man that ever took a small steamer to and fro among the islands. But his humanity, which was not less strong and praiseworthy, had induced him to take his steamer past Samburan wharf (at an average distance of a mile) every twenty-three days--exactly. Davidson was delicate, humane, and regular.

"Heyst called you in?" I asked, interested.

Yes, Heyst had called him in as he was going by on his usual date. Davidson was examining the shore through his glasses with his unwearied and punctual humanity as he steamed past Samburan.

I saw a man in white. It could only have been Heyst. He had fastened some sort of enormous flag to a bamboo pole, and was waving it at the end of the old wharf.

Davidson didn't like to take his steamer alongside--for fear of being indiscreet, I suppose; but he steered close inshore, stopped his engines, and lowered a boat. He went himself in that boat, which was manned, of course, by his Malay seamen.

Heyst, when he saw the boat pulling towards him, dropped his signalling-pole; and when Davidson arrived, he was kneeling down engaged busily in unfastening the flag from it.

"Was there anything wrong?" I inquired, Davidson having paused in his narrative and my curiosity being naturally aroused. You must remember that Heyst as the Archipelago knew him was not--what shall I say--was not

a signalling sort of man.

"The very words that came out of my mouth," said Davidson, "before I laid the boat against the piles. I could not help it!"

Heyst got up from his knees and began carefully folding up the flag thing, which struck Davidson as having the dimensions of a blanket.

"No, nothing wrong," he cried. His white teeth flashed agreeably below the coppery horizontal bar of his long moustaches.

I don't know whether it was his delicacy or his obesity which prevented Davidson from clambering upon the wharf. He stood up in the boat, and, above him, Heyst stooped low with urbane smiles, thanking him and apologizing for the liberty, exactly in his usual manner. Davidson had expected some change in the man, but there was none. Nothing in him betrayed the momentous fact that within that jungle there was a girl, a performer in a ladies' orchestra, whom he had carried straight off the concert platform into the wilderness. He was not ashamed or defiant or abashed about it. He might have been a shade confidential when addressing Davidson. And his words were enigmatical.

"I took this course of signalling to you," he said to Davidson, "because to preserve appearances might be of the utmost importance. Not to me, of course. I don't care what people may say, and of course no one can hurt me. I suppose I have done a certain amount of harm, since I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough, but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole. But I have done with it! I shall never lift a little finger again. At one time I thought that intelligent observation of facts was the best way of cheating the time which is allotted to us whether we want it or not; but now I, have done with observation, too."

Imagine poor, simple Davidson being addressed in such terms alongside an abandoned, decaying wharf jutting out of tropical bush. He had never heard anybody speak like this before; certainly not Heyst, whose conversation was concise, polite, with a faint ring of playfulness in the cultivated tones of his voice.

"He's gone mad," Davidson thought to himself.

But, looking at the physiognomy above him on the wharf, he was obliged to dismiss the notion of common, crude lunacy. It was truly most unusual

talk. Then he remembered--in his surprise he had lost sight of it--that Heyst now had a girl there. This bizarre discourse was probably the effect of the girl. Davidson shook off the absurd feeling, and asked, wishing to make clear his friendliness, and not knowing what else to say:

"You haven't run short of stores or anything like that?"

Heyst smiled and shook his head:

"No, no. Nothing of the kind. We are fairly well off here. Thanks, all the same. If I have taken the liberty to detain you, it is not from any uneasiness for myself and my--companion. The person I was thinking of when I made up my mind to invoke your assistance is Mrs. Schomberg."

"I have talked with her," interjected Davidson.

"Oh! You? Yes, I hoped she would find means to--"

"But she didn't tell me much," interrupted Davidson, who was not averse from hearing something--he hardly knew what.

"H'm--Yes. But that note of mine? Yes? She found an opportunity to give it to you? That's good, very good. She's more resourceful than one would give her credit for."

"Women often are--" remarked Davidson. The strangeness from which he had suffered, merely because his interlocutor had carried off a girl, wore off as the minutes went by. "There's a lot of unexpectedness about women," he generalized with a didactic aim which seemed to miss its mark; for the next thing Heyst said was:

"This is Mrs. Schomberg's shawl." He touched the stuff hanging over his arm. "An Indian thing, I believe," he added, glancing at his arm sideways.

"It isn't of particular value," said Davidson truthfully.

"Very likely. The point is that it belongs to Schomberg's wife. That Schomberg seems to be an unconscionable ruffian--don't you think so?"

Davidson smiled faintly.

"We out here have got used to him," he said, as if excusing a universal and guilty toleration of a manifest nuisance. "I'd hardly call him that. I only

know him as a hotel-keeper."

"I never knew him even as that--not till this time, when you were so obliging as to take me to Sourabaya, I went to stay there from economy. The Netherlands House is very expensive, and they expect you to bring your own servant with you. It's a nuisance."

"Of course, of course," protested Davidson hastily.

After a short silence Heyst returned to the matter of the shawl. He wanted to send it back to Mrs. Schomberg. He said that it might be very awkward for her if she were unable, if asked, to produce it. This had given him, Heyst, much uneasiness. She was terrified of Schomberg. Apparently she had reason to be.

Davidson had remarked that, too. Which did not prevent her, he pointed out, from making a fool of him, in a way, for the sake of a stranger.

"Oh! You know!" said Heyst. "Yes, she helped me--us."

"She told me so. I had quite a talk with her," Davidson informed him. "Fancy anyone having a talk with Mrs. Schomberg! If I were to tell the fellows they wouldn't believe me. How did you get round her, Heyst? How did you think of it? Why, she looks too stupid to understand human speech and too scared to shoo a chicken away. Oh, the women, the women! You don't know what there may be in the quietest of them."

"She was engaged in the task of defending her position in life," said Heyst. "It's a very respectable task."

"Is that it? I had some idea it was that," confessed Davidson.

He then imparted to Heyst the story of the violent proceedings following on the discovery of his flight. Heyst's polite attention to the tale took on a sombre cast; but he manifested no surprise, and offered no comment. When Davidson had finished he handed down the shawl into the boat, and Davidson promised to do his best to return it to Mrs. Schomberg in some secret fashion. Heyst expressed his thanks in a few simple words, set off by his manner of finished courtesy. Davidson prepared to depart. They were not looking at each other. Suddenly Heyst spoke:

"You understand that this was a case of odious persecution, don't you? I became aware of it and--"

It was a view which the sympathetic Davidson was capable of appreciating.

"I am not surprised to hear it," he said placidly. "Odious enough, I dare say. And you, of course--not being a married man--were free to step in. Ah, well!"

He sat down in the stern-sheets, and already had the steering lines in his hands when Heyst observed abruptly:

"The world is a bad dog. It will bite you if you give it a chance; but I think that here we can safely defy the fates."

When relating all this to me, Davidson's only comment was:

"Funny notion of defying the fates--to take a woman in tow!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Some considerable time afterwards--we did not meet very often--I asked Davidson how he had managed about the shawl and heard that he had tackled his mission in a direct way, and had found it easy enough. At the very first call he made in Samarang he rolled the shawl as tightly as he could into the smallest possible brown-paper parcel, which he carried ashore with him. His business in the town being transacted, he got into a gharry with the parcel and drove to the hotel. With his precious experience, he timed his arrival accurately for the hour of Schomberg's siesta. Finding the place empty as on the former occasion, he marched into the billiard-room, took a seat at the back, near the sort of dais which Mrs. Schomberg would in due course come to occupy, and broke the slumbering silence of the house by thumping a bell vigorously. Of course a Chinaman appeared promptly. Davidson ordered a drink and sat tight.

"I would have ordered twenty drinks one after another, if necessary," he said--Davidson's a very abstemious man--"rather than take that parcel out of the house again. Couldn't leave it in a corner without letting the woman know it was there. It might have turned out worse for her than not bringing the thing back at all."

And so he waited, ringing the bell again and again, and swallowing two or three iced drinks which he did not want. Presently, as he hoped it would happen, Mrs. Schomberg came in, silk dress, long neck, ringlets, scared eyes, and silly grin--all complete. Probably that lazy beast had sent her out to see who was the thirsty customer waking up the echoes of the house at this quiet hour. Bow, nod--and she clambered up to her post behind the raised counter, looking so helpless, so inane, as she sat there, that if it hadn't been for the parcel, Davidson declared, he would have thought he had merely dreamed all that had passed between them. He ordered another drink, to get the Chinaman out of the room, and then seized the parcel, which was reposing on a chair near him, and with no more than a mutter--"this is something of yours"--he rammed it swiftly into a recess in the counter, at her feet. There! The rest was her affair. And just in time, too. Schomberg turned up, yawning affectedly, almost before Davidson had regained his seat. He cast about suspicious and irate glances. An invincible placidity of expression helped Davidson wonderfully at the moment, and the other, of course, could have no grounds for the slightest suspicion of any sort of understanding between his wife and this customer.

As to Mrs. Schomberg, she sat there like a joss. Davidson was lost in admiration. He believed, now, that the woman had been putting it on for years. She never even winked. It was immense! The insight he had obtained almost frightened him; he couldn't get over his wonder at knowing more of the real Mrs. Schomberg than anybody in the Islands, including Schomberg himself. She was a miracle of dissimulation. No wonder Heyst got the girl away from under two men's noses, if he had her to help with the job!

The greatest wonder, after all, was Heyst getting mixed up with petticoats. The fellow's life had been open to us for years and nothing could have been more detached from feminine associations. Except that he stood drinks to people on suitable occasions, like any other man, this observer of facts seemed to have no connection with earthly affairs and passions. The very courtesy of his manner, the flavour of playfulness in the voice set him apart. He was like a feather floating lightly in the workaday atmosphere which was the breath of our nostrils. For this reason whenever this looker-on took contact with things he attracted attention. First, it was the Morrison partnership of mystery, then came the great sensation of the Tropical Belt Coal where indeed varied interests were involved: a real business matter. And then came this elopement, this incongruous phenomenon of self-assertion, the greatest wonder of all, astonishing and amusing.

Davidson admitted to me that, the hubbub was subsiding; and the affair would have been already forgotten, perhaps, if that ass Schomberg had not kept on gnashing his teeth publicly about it. It was really provoking that Davidson should not be able to give one some idea of the girl. Was she pretty? He didn't know. He had stayed the whole afternoon in Schomberg's hotel, mainly for the purpose of finding out something about her. But the story was growing stale. The parties at the tables on the veranda had other, fresher, events to talk about and Davidson shrank from making direct inquiries. He sat placidly there, content to be disregarded and hoping for some chance word to turn up. I shouldn't wonder if the good fellow hadn't been dozing. It's difficult to give you an adequate idea of Davidson's placidity.

Presently Schomberg, wandering about, joined a party that had taken the table next to Davidson's.

"A man like that Swede, gentlemen, is a public danger," he began. "I remember him for years. I won't say anything of his spying--well, he used to say himself he was looking for out-of-the-way facts and what is that if not spying? He was spying into everybody's business. He got hold of Captain Morrison, squeezed him dry, like you would an orange, and scared him off to

Europe to die there. Everybody knows that Captain Morrison had a weak chest. Robbed first and murdered afterwards! I don't mince words--not I. Next he gets up that swindle of the Belt Coal. You know all about it. And now, after lining his pockets with other people's money, he kidnaps a white girl belonging to an orchestra which is performing in my public room for the benefit of my patrons, and goes off to live like a prince on that island, where nobody can get at him. A damn silly girl . . . It's disgusting--tfui!"

He spat. He choked with rage--for he saw visions, no doubt. He jumped up from his chair, and went away to flee from them--perhaps. He went into the room where Mrs. Schomberg sat. Her aspect could not have been very soothing to the sort of torment from which he was suffering.

Davidson did not feel called upon to defend Heyst. His proceeding was to enter into conversation with one and another, casually, and showing no particular knowledge of the affair, in order to discover something about the girl. Was she anything out of the way? Was she pretty? She couldn't have been markedly so. She had not attracted special notice. She was young--on that everybody agreed. The English clerk of Tesmans remembered that she had a sallow face. He was respectable and highly proper. He was not the sort to associate with such people. Most of these women were fairly battered specimens. Schomberg had them housed in what he called the Pavilion, in the grounds, where they were hard at it mending and washing their white dresses, and could be seen hanging them out to dry between the trees, like a lot of washerwomen. They looked very much like middle-aged washerwomen on the platform, too. But the girl had been living in the main building along with the boss, the director, the fellow with the black beard, and a hard-bitten, oldish woman who took the piano and was understood to be the fellow's wife.

This was not a very satisfactory result. Davidson stayed on, and even joined the table d'hote dinner, without gleaning any more information. He was resigned.

"I suppose," he wheezed placidly, "I am bound to see her some day."

He meant to take the Samburan channel every trip, as before of course.

"Yes," I said. "No doubt you will. Some day Heyst will be signalling to you again; and I wonder what it will be for."

Davidson made no reply. He had his own ideas about that, and his silence concealed a good deal of thought. We spoke no more of Heyst's girl. Before

we separated, he gave me a piece of unrelated observation.

"It's funny," he said, "but I fancy there's some gambling going on in the evening at Schomberg's place, on the quiet. I've noticed men strolling away in twos and threes towards that hall where the orchestra used to play. The windows must be specially well shuttered, because I could not spy the smallest gleam of light from that direction; but I can't believe that those beggars would go in there only to sit and think of their sins in the dark."

"That's strange. It's incredible that Schomberg should risk that sort of thing," I said.