

## **PART FOUR**

### **CHAPTER ONE**

Ricardo advanced prudently by short darts from one tree-trunk to another, more in the manner of a squirrel than a cat. The sun had risen some time before. Already the sparkle of open sea was encroaching rapidly on the dark, cool, early-morning blue of Diamond Bay; but the deep dusk lingered yet under the mighty pillars of the forest, between which the secretary dodged.

He was watching Number One's bungalow with an animal-like patience, if with a very human complexity of purpose. This was the second morning of such watching. The first one had not been rewarded by success. Well, strictly speaking, there was no hurry.

The sun, swinging above the ridge all at once, inundated with light the space of burnt grass in front of Ricardo and the face of the bungalow, on which his eyes were fixed, leaving only the one dark spot of the doorway. To his right, to his left, and behind him, splashes of gold appeared in the deep shade of the forest, thinning the gloom under the ragged roof of leaves.

This was not a very favourable circumstance for Ricardo's purpose. He did not wish to be detected in his patient occupation. For what he was watching for was a sight of the girl--that girl! just a glimpse across the burnt patch to see what she was like. He had excellent eyes, and the distance was not so great. He would be able to distinguish her face quite easily if she only came out on the veranda; and she was bound to do that sooner or later. He was confident that he could form some opinion about her--which, he felt, was very necessary, before venturing on some steps to get in touch with her behind that Swedish baron's back. His theoretical view of the girl was such that he was quite prepared, on the strength of that distant examination, to show himself discreetly--perhaps even make a sign. It all depended on his reading of the face. She couldn't be much. He knew that sort!

By protruding his head a little he commanded, through the foliage of a festooning creeper, a view of the three bungalows. Irregularly disposed along a flat curve, over the veranda rail of the farthest one hung a dark rug of a tartan pattern, amazingly conspicuous. Ricardo could see the very checks.

A brisk fire of sticks was burning on the ground in front of the steps, and in the sunlight the thin, fluttering flame had paled almost to invisibility--a mere rosy stir under a faint wreath of smoke. He could see the white bandage on the head of Pedro bending over it, and the wisps of black hair standing up weirdly. He had wound that bandage himself, after breaking that shaggy and enormous head. The creature balanced it like a load, staggering towards the steps. Ricardo could see a small, long-handled saucepan at the end of a great hairy paw.

Yes, he could see all that there was to be seen, far and near. Excellent eyes! The only thing they could not penetrate was the dark oblong of the doorway on the veranda under the low eaves of the bungalow's roof. And that was vexing. It was an outrage. Ricardo was easily outraged. Surely she would come out presently! Why didn't she? Surely the fellow did not tie her up to the bedpost before leaving the house!

Nothing appeared. Ricardo was as still as the leafy cables of creepers depending in a convenient curtain from the mighty limb sixty feet above his head. His very eyelids were still, and this unblinking watchfulness gave him the dreamy air of a cat posed on a hearth-rug contemplating the fire. Was he dreaming? There, in plain sight, he had before him a white, blouse-like jacket, short blue trousers, a pair of bare yellow calves, a pigtail, long and slender--

"The confounded Chink!" he muttered, astounded.

He was not conscious of having looked away; and yet right there, in the middle of the picture, without having come round the right-hand corner or the left-hand corner of the house, without falling from the sky or surging up from the ground, Wang had become visible, large as life, and engaged in the young-ladyish occupation of picking flowers. Step by step, stooping repeatedly over the flower-beds at the foot of the veranda, the startlingly materialized Chinaman passed off the scene in a very commonplace manner, by going up the steps and disappearing in the darkness of the doorway.

Only then the yellow eyes of Martin Ricardo lost their intent fixity. He understood that it was time for him to be moving. That bunch of flowers going into the house in the hand of a Chinaman was for the breakfast-table. What else could it be for?

"I'll give you flowers!" he muttered threateningly. "You wait!"

Another moment, just for a glance towards the Jones bungalow, whence he

expected Heyst to issue on his way to that breakfast so offensively decorated, and Ricardo began his retreat. His impulse, his desire, was for a rush into the open, face to face with the appointed victim, for what he called a "ripping up," visualized greedily, and always with the swift preliminary stooping movement on his part--the forerunner of certain death to his adversary. This was his impulse; and as it was, so to speak, constitutional, it was extremely difficult to resist when his blood was up. What could be more trying than to have to skulk and dodge and restrain oneself, mentally and physically, when one's blood was up? Mr. Secretary Ricardo began his retreat from his post of observation behind a tree opposite Heyst's bungalow, using great care to remain unseen. His proceedings were made easier by the declivity of the ground, which sloped sharply down to the water's edge. There, his feet feeling the warmth of the island's rocky foundation already heated by the sun, through the thin soles of his straw slippers he was, as it were, sunk out of sight of the houses. A short scramble of some twenty feet brought him up again to the upper level, at the place where the jetty had its root in the shore. He leaned his back against one of the lofty uprights which still held up the company's signboard above the mound of derelict coal. Nobody could have guessed how much his blood was up. To contain himself he folded his arms tightly on his breast.

Ricardo was not used to a prolonged effort of self-control. His craft, his artfulness, felt themselves always at the mercy of his nature, which was truly feral and only held in subjection by the influence of the "governor," the prestige of a gentleman. It had its cunning too, but it was being almost too severely tried since the feral solution of a growl and a spring was forbidden by the problem. Ricardo dared not venture out on the cleared ground. He dared not.

"If I meet the beggar," he thought, "I don't know what I mayn't do. I daren't trust myself."

What exasperated him just now was his inability to understand Heyst. Ricardo was human enough to suffer from the discovery of his limitations. No, he couldn't size Heyst up. He could kill him with extreme ease--a growl and a spring--but that was forbidden! However, he could not remain indefinitely under the funereal blackboard.

"I must make a move," he thought.

He moved on, his head swimming a little with the repressed desire of violence, and came out openly in front of the bungalows, as if he had just been down to the jetty to look at the boat. The sunshine enveloped him, very

brilliant, very still, very hot. The three buildings faced him. The one with the rug on the balustrade was the most distant; next to it was the empty bungalow; the nearest, with the flower-beds at the foot of its veranda, contained that bothersome girl, who had managed so provokingly to keep herself invisible. That was why Ricardo's eyes lingered on that building. The girl would surely be easier to "size up" than Heyst. A sight of her, a mere glimpse, would have been something to go by, a step nearer to the goal--the first real move, in fact. Ricardo saw no other move. And any time she might appear on that veranda!

She did not appear; but, like a concealed magnet, she exercised her attraction. As he went on, he deviated towards the bungalow. Though his movements were deliberate, his feral instincts had such sway that if he had met Heyst walking towards him, he would have had to satisfy his need of violence. But he saw nobody. Wang was at the back of the house, keeping the coffee hot against Number One's return for breakfast. Even the simian Pedro was out of sight, no doubt crouching on the door-step, his red little eyes fastened with animal-like devotion on Mr. Jones, who was in discourse with Heyst in the other bungalow--the conversation of an evil spectre with a disarmed man, watched by an ape.

His will having very little to do with it, Ricardo, darting swift glances in all directions, found himself at the steps of the Heyst bungalow. Once there, falling under an uncontrollable force of attraction, he mounted them with a savage and stealthy action of his limbs, and paused for a moment under the eaves to listen to the silence. Presently he advanced over the threshold one leg--it seemed to stretch itself, like a limb of india-rubber--planted his foot within, brought up the other swiftly, and stood inside the room, turning his head from side to side. To his eyes, brought in there from the dazzling sunshine, all was gloom for a moment. His pupils, like a cat's, dilating swiftly, he distinguished an enormous quantity of books. He was amazed; and he was put off too. He was vexed in his astonishment. He had meant to note the aspect and nature of things, and hoped to draw some useful inference, some hint as to the man. But what guess could one make out of a multitude of books? He didn't know what to think; and he formulated his bewilderment in the mental exclamation:

"What the devil has this fellow been trying to set up here--a school?"

He gave a prolonged stare to the portrait of Heyst's father, that severe profile ignoring the vanities of this earth. His eyes gleamed sideways at the heavy silver candlesticks--signs of opulence. He prowled as a stray cat entering a strange place might have done, for if Ricardo had not Wang's miraculous gift

of materializing and vanishing, rather than coming and going, he could be nearly as noiseless in his less elusive movements. He noted the back door standing just ajar; and all the time his slightly pointed ears, at the utmost stretch of watchfulness, kept in touch with the profound silence outside enveloping the absolute stillness of the house.

He had not been in the room two minutes when it occurred to him that he must be alone in the bungalow. The woman, most likely, had sneaked out and was walking about somewhere in the grounds at the back. She had been probably ordered to keep out of sight. Why? Because the fellow mistrusted his guests; or was it because he mistrusted her?

Ricardo reflected that from a certain point of view it amounted nearly to the same thing. He remembered Schomberg's story. He felt that running away with somebody only to get clear of that beastly, tame, hotel-keeper's attention was no proof of hopeless infatuation. She could be got in touch with.

His moustaches stirred. For some time he had been looking at a closed door. He would peep into that other room, and perhaps see something more informing than a confounded lot of books. As he crossed over, he thought recklessly:

"If the beggar comes in suddenly, and starts to prance, I'll rip him up and be done with it!"

He laid his hand on the handle, and felt the door come unlatched. Before he pulled it open, he listened again to the silence. He felt it all about him, complete, without a flaw.

The necessity of prudence had exasperated his self-restraint. A mood of ferocity woke up in him, and, as always at such times, he became physically aware of the sheeted knife strapped to his leg. He pulled at the door with fierce curiosity. It came open without a squeak of hinge, without a rustle, with no sound at all; and he found himself glaring at the opaque surface of some rough blue stuff, like serge. A curtain was fitted inside, heavy enough and long enough not to stir.

A curtain! This unforeseen veil, baffling his curiosity checked his brusqueness. He did not fling it aside with an impatient movement; he only looked at it closely, as if its texture had to be examined before his hand could touch such stuff. In this interval of hesitation, he seemed to detect a flaw in the perfection of the silence, the faintest possible rustle, which his

ears caught and instantly, in the effort of conscious listening, lost again. No! Everything was still inside and outside the house, only he had no longer the sense of being alone there.

When he put out his hand towards the motionless folds it was with extreme caution, and merely to push the stuff aside a little, advancing his head at the same time to peep within. A moment of complete immobility ensued. Then, without anything else of him stirring, Ricardo's head shrank back on his shoulders, his arm descended slowly to his side. There was a woman in there. The very woman! Lighted dimly by the reflection of the outer glare, she loomed up strangely big and shadowy at the other end of the long, narrow room. With her back to the door, she was doing her hair with bare arms uplifted. One of them gleamed pearly white; the other detached its perfect form in black against the unshuttered, uncurtained square window-hole. She was there, her fingers busy with her dark hair, utterly unconscious, exposed and defenceless--and tempting.

Ricardo drew back one foot and pressed his elbows close to his sides; his chest started heaving convulsively as if he were wrestling or running a race; his body began to sway gently back and forth. The self-restraint was at an end: his psychology must have its way. The instinct for the feral spring could no longer be denied. Ravish or kill--it was all one to him, as long as by the act he liberated the suffering soul of savagery repressed for so long. After a quick glance over his shoulder, which hunters of big game tell us no lion or tiger omits to give before charging home, Ricardo charged, head down, straight at the curtain. The stuff, tossed up violently by his rush, settled itself with a slow, floating descent into vertical folds, motionless, without a shudder even, in the still, warm air.

## CHAPTER TWO

The clock--which once upon a time had measured the hours of philosophic meditation--could not have ticked away more than five seconds when Wang materialized within the living-room. His concern primarily was with the delayed breakfast, but at once his slanting eyes became immovably fixed upon the unstirring curtain. For it was behind it that he had located the strange, deadened scuffling sounds which filled the empty room. The slanting eyes of his race could not achieve a round, amazed stare, but they remained still, dead still, and his impassive yellow face grew all at once careworn and lean with the sudden strain of intense, doubtful, frightened watchfulness. Contrary impulses swayed his body, rooted to the floor-mats. He even went so far as to extend his hand towards the curtain. He could not reach it, and he didn't make the necessary step forward.

The mysterious struggle was going on with confused thuds of bare feet, in a mute wrestling match, no human sound, hiss, groan, murmur, or exclamation coming through the curtain. A chair fell over, not with a crash but lightly, as if just grazed, and a faint metallic ring of the tin bath succeeded. Finally the tense silence, as of two adversaries locked in a deadly grip, was ended by the heavy, dull thump of a soft body flung against the inner partition of planks. It seemed to shake the whole bungalow. By that time, walking backward, his eyes, his very throat, strained with fearful excitement, his extended arm still pointing at the curtain, Wang had disappeared through the back door. Once out in the compound, he bolted round the end of the house. Emerging innocently between the two bungalows he lingered and lounged in the open, where anybody issuing from any of the dwellings was bound to see him--a self-possessed Chinaman idling there, with nothing but perhaps an unserved breakfast on his mind.

It was at this time that Wang made up his mind to give up all connection with Number One, a man not only disarmed but already half vanquished. Till that morning he had had doubts as to his course of action, but this overheard scuffle decided the question. Number One was a doomed man--one of those beings whom it is unlucky to help. Even as he walked in the open with a fine air of unconcern, Wang wondered that no sound of any sort was to be heard inside the house. For all he knew, the white woman might have been scuffling in there with an evil spirit, which had of course killed her. For nothing visible came out of the house he watched out of the slanting corner of his eye. The sunshine and the silence outside the bungalow reigned undisturbed.

But in the house the silence of the big room would not have struck an acute ear as perfect. It was troubled by a stir so faint that it could hardly be called a ghost of whispering from behind the curtain.

Ricardo, feeling his throat with tender care, breathed out admiringly:

"You have fingers like steel. Jimminy! You have muscles like a giant!"

Luckily for Lena, Ricardo's onset had been so sudden--she was winding her two heavy tresses round her head--that she had no time to lower her arms. This, which saved them from being pinned to her sides, gave her a better chance to resist. His spring had nearly thrown her down. Luckily, again, she was standing so near the wall that, though she was driven against it headlong, yet the shock was not heavy enough to knock all the breath out of her body. On the contrary, it helped her first instinctive attempt to drive her assailant backward.

After the first gasp of a surprise that was really too over-powering for a cry, she was never in doubt of the nature of her danger. She defended herself in the full, clear knowledge of it, from the force of instinct which is the true source of every great display of energy, and with a determination which could hardly have been expected from a girl who, cornered in a dim corridor by the red-faced, stammering Schomberg, had trembled with shame, disgust, and fear; had drooped, terrified, before mere words spluttered out odiously by a man who had never in his life laid his big paw on her.

This new enemy's attack was simple, straightforward violence. It was not the slimy, underhand plotting to deliver her up like a slave, which had sickened her heart and had made her feel in her loneliness that her oppressors were too many for her. She was no longer alone in the world now. She resisted without a moment of faltering, because she was no longer deprived of moral support; because she was a human being who counted; because she was no longer defending herself for herself alone; because of the faith that had been born in her--the faith in the man of her destiny, and perhaps in the Heaven which had sent him so wonderfully to cross her path.

She had defended herself principally by maintaining a desperate, murderous clutch on Ricardo's windpipe, till she felt a sudden relaxation of the terrific hug in which he stupidly and ineffectually persisted to hold her. Then with a supreme effort of her arms and of her suddenly raised knee, she sent him flying against the partition. The cedar-wood chest stood in the way, and Ricardo, with a thump which boomed hollow through the whole bungalow,



fell on it in a sitting posture, half strangled, and exhausted not so much by the efforts as by the emotions of the struggle.

With the recoil of her exerted strength, she too reeled, staggered back, and sat on the edge of the bed. Out of breath, but calm and unabashed, she busied herself in readjusting under her arms the brown and yellow figured Celebes sarong, the tuck of which had come undone during the fight. Then, folding her bare arms tightly on her breast, she leaned forward on her crossed legs, determined and without fear.

Ricardo, leaning forward too, his nervous force gone, crestfallen like a beast of prey that has missed its spring, met her big grey eyes looking at him--wide open, observing, mysterious--from under the dark arches of her courageous eyebrows. Their faces were not a foot apart. He ceased feeling about his aching throat and dropped the palms of his hands heavily on his knees. He was not looking at her bare shoulders, at her strong arms; he was looking down at the floor. He had lost one of his straw slippers. A chair with a white dress on it had been overturned. These, with splashes of water on the floor out of a brusquely misplaced sponge-bath, were the only traces of the struggle.

Ricardo swallowed twice consciously, as if to make sure of his throat before he spoke again:

"All right. I never meant to hurt you--though I am no joker when it comes to it."

He pulled up the leg of his pyjamas to exhibit the strapped knife. She glanced at it without moving her head, and murmured with scornful bitterness:

"Ah, yes--with that thing stuck in my side. In no other way."

He shook his head with a shamefaced smile.

"Listen! I am quiet now. Straight--I am. I don't need to explain why--you know how it is. And I can see, now, this wasn't the way with you."

She made no sound. Her still, upward gaze had a patient, mournfulness which troubled him like a suggestion of an inconceivable depth. He added thoughtfully:

"You are not going to make a noise about this silly try of mine?"

She moved her head the least bit.

"Jee-miny! You are a wonder--" he murmured earnestly, relieved more than she could have guessed.

Of course, if she had attempted to run out, he would have stuck the knife between her shoulders, to stop her screaming; but all the fat would have been in the fire, the business utterly spoiled, and the rage of the governor--especially when he learned the cause--boundless. A woman that does not make a noise after an attempt of that kind has tacitly condoned the offence. Ricardo had no small vanities. But clearly, if she would pass it over like this, then he could not be so utterly repugnant to her. He felt flattered. And she didn't seem afraid of him either. He already felt almost tender towards the girl--that plucky, fine girl who had not tried to run screaming from him.

"We shall be friends yet. I don't give you up. Don't think it. Friends as friends can be!" he whispered confidently. "Jee-miny! You aren't a tame one. Neither am I. You will find that out before long."

He could not know that if she had not run out, it was because that morning, under the stress of growing uneasiness at the presence of the incomprehensible visitors, Heyst had confessed to her that it was his revolver he had been looking for in the night; that it was gone, that he was a disarmed, defenceless man. She had hardly comprehended the meaning of his confession. Now she understood better what it meant. The effort of her self-control, her stillness, impressed Ricardo. Suddenly she spoke:

"What are you after?"

He did not raise his eyes. His hands reposing on his knees, his drooping head, something reflective in his pose, suggested the weariness of a simple soul, the fatigue of a mental rather than physical contest. He answered the direct question by a direct statement, as if he were too tired to dissemble:

"After the swag."

The word was strange to her. The veiled ardour of her grey gaze from under the dark eyebrows never left Ricardo's.

"A swag?" she murmured quietly. "What's that?"

"Why, swag, plunder--what your gentleman has been pinching right and left

for years--the pieces. Don't you know? This!"

Without looking up, he made the motion of counting money into the palm of his hand. She lowered her eyes slightly to observe this bit of pantomime, but returned them to his face at once. Then, in a mere breath:

"How do you know anything about him?" she asked, concealing her puzzled alarm. "What has it got to do with you?"

"Everything," was Ricardo's concise answer, in a low, emphatic whisper. He reflected that this girl was really his best hope. Out of the unfaded impression of past violence there was growing the sort of sentiment which prevents a man from being indifferent to a woman he has once held in his arms--if even against her will--and still more so if she has pardoned the outrage. It becomes then a sort of bond. He felt positively the need to confide in her--a subtle trait of masculinity, this almost physical need of trust which can exist side by side with the most brutal readiness of suspicion.

"It's a game of grab--see?" he went on, with a new inflection of intimacy in his murmur. He was looking straight at her now.

"That fat, tame slug of a gin-slinger, Schomberg, put us up to it."

So strong is the impression of helpless and persecuted misery, that the girl who had fought down a savage assault without faltering could not completely repress a shudder at the mere sound of the abhorred name.

Ricardo became more rapid and confidential:

"He wants to pay him off--pay both of you, at that; so he told me. He was hot after you. He would have given all he had into those hands of yours that have nearly strangled me. But you couldn't, eh? Nohow--what?" He paused. "So, rather than--you followed a gentleman?"

He noticed a slight movement of her head and spoke quickly.

"Same here--rather than be a wage-slave. Only these foreigners aren't to be trusted. You're too good for him. A man that will rob his best chum?" She raised her head. He went on, well pleased with his progress, whispering hurriedly: "Yes. I know all about him. So you may guess how he's likely to treat a woman after a bit!"

He did not know that he was striking terror into her breast now. Still the

grey eyes remained fixed on him unmovably watchful, as if sleepy under the white forehead. She was beginning to understand. His words conveyed a definite, dreadful meaning to her mind, which he proceeded to enlighten further in a convinced murmur.

"You and I are made to understand each other. Born alike, bred alike, I guess. You are not tame. Same here! You have been chucked out into this rotten world of 'yporcrits. Same here!"

Her stillness, her appalled stillness, wore to him an air of fascinated attention. He asked abruptly:

"Where is it?"

She made an effort to breathe out:

"Where's what?"

His tone expressed excited secrecy.

"The swag--plunder--pieces. It's a game of grab. We must have it; but it isn't easy, and so you will have to lend a hand. Come! is it kept in the house?"

As often with women, her wits were sharpened by the very terror of the glimpsed menace. She shook her head negatively.

"No."

"Sure?"

"Sure," she said.

"Ay! Thought so. Does your gentleman trust you?"

Again she shook her head.

"Blamed 'yporcrit," he said feelingly, and then reflected: "He's one of the tame ones, ain't he?"

"You had better find out for yourself," she said.

"You trust me. I don't want to die before you and I have made friends." This was said with a strange air of feline gallantry. Then, tentatively: "But he

could be brought to trust you, couldn't he?"

"Trust me?" she said, in a tone which bordered on despair, but which he mistook for derision.

"Stand in with us," he urged. "Give the chuck to all this blamed 'yporcrisy. Perhaps, without being trusted, you have managed to find out something already, eh?"

"Perhaps I have," she uttered with lips that seemed to her to be freezing fast.

Ricardo now looked at her calm face with something like respect. He was even a little awed by her stillness, by her economy of words. Womanlike, she felt the effect she had produced, the effect of knowing much and of keeping all her knowledge in reserve. So far, somehow, this had come, about of itself. Thus encouraged, directed in the way of duplicity, the refuge of the weak, she made a heroically conscious effort and forced her stiff, cold lips into a smile.

Duplicity--the refuge of the weak and the cowardly, but of the disarmed, too! Nothing stood between the enchanted dream of her existence and a cruel catastrophe but her duplicity. It seemed to her that the man sitting there before her was an unavoidable presence, which had attended all her life. He was the embodied evil of the world. She was not ashamed of her duplicity. With a woman's frank courage, as soon as she saw that opening she threw herself into it without reserve, with only one doubt--that of her own strength. She was appalled by the situation; but already all her aroused femininity, understanding that whether Heyst loved her or not she loved him, and feeling that she had brought this on his head, faced the danger with a passionate desire to defend her own.

### CHAPTER THREE

To Ricardo the girl had been so unforeseen that he was unable to bring upon her the light of his critical faculties. Her smile appeared to him full of promise. He had not expected her to be what she was. Who, from the talk he had heard, could expect to meet a girl like this? She was a blooming miracle, he said to himself, familiarly, yet with a tinge of respect. She was no meat for the likes of that tame, respectable gin-slinger. Ricardo grew hot with indignation. Her courage, her physical strength, demonstrated at the cost of his discomfiture, commanded his sympathy. He felt himself drawn to her by the proofs of her amazing spirit. Such a girl! She had a strong soul; and her reflective disposition to throw over her connection proved that she was no hypocrite.

"Is your gentleman a good shot?" he said, looking down on the floor again, as if indifferent.

She hardly understood the phrase; but in its form it suggested some accomplishment. It was safe to whisper an affirmative.

"Yes."

"Mine, too--and better than good," Ricardo murmured, and then, in a confidential burst: "I am not so good at it, but I carry a pretty deadly thing about me, all the same!"

He tapped his leg. She was past the stage of shudders now. Stiff all over, unable even to move her eyes, she felt an awful mental tension which was like blank forgetfulness. Ricardo tried to influence her in his own way.

"And my gentleman is not the sort that would drop me. He ain't no foreigner; whereas you, with your baron, you don't know what's before you--or, rather, being a woman, you know only too well. Much better not to wait for the chuck. Pile in with us and get your share--of the plunder, I mean. You have some notion about it already."

She felt that if she as much as hinted by word or sign that there was no such thing on the island, Heyst's life wouldn't be worth half an hour's purchase; but all power of combining words had vanished in the tension of her mind. Words themselves were too difficult to think of--all except the word "yes," the saving word! She whispered it with not a feature of her face

moving. To Ricardo the faint and concise sound proved a cool, reserved assent, more worth having from that amazing mistress of herself than a thousand words from any other woman. He thought with exultation that he had come upon one in a million--in ten millions! His whisper became frankly entreating.

"That's good! Now all you've got to do is to make sure where he keeps his swag. Only do be quick about it! I can't stand much longer this crawling-on-the-stomach business so as not to scare your gentleman. What do you think a fellow is--a reptile?"

She stared without seeing anyone, as a person in the night sits staring and listening to deadly sounds, to evil incantations. And always in her head there was that tension of the mind trying to get hold of something, of a saving idea which seemed to be so near and could not be captured. Suddenly she seized it. Yes--she had to get that man out of the house. At that very moment, raised outside, not very near, but heard distinctly, Heyst's voice uttered the words:

"Have you been looking out for me, Wang?"

It was for her like a flash of lightning framed in the darkness which had beset her on all sides, showing a deadly precipice right under her feet. With a convulsive movement she sat up straight, but had no power to rise. Ricardo, on the contrary, was on his feet on the instant, as noiseless as a cat. His yellow eyes gleamed, gliding here and there; but he too seemed unable to make another movement. Only his moustaches stirred visibly, like the feelers of some animal.

Wang's answer, "Ya tuan," was heard by the two in the room, but more faintly. Then Heyst again:

"All right! You may bring the coffee in. Mem Putih out in the room yet?"

To this question Wang made no answer.

Ricardo's and the girl's eyes met, utterly without expression, all their faculties being absorbed in listening for the first sound of Heyst's footsteps, for any sound outside which would mean that Ricardo's retreat was cut off. Both understood perfectly well that Wang must have gone round the house, and that he was now at the back, making it impossible for Ricardo to slip out unseen that way before Heyst came in at the front.

A darkling shade settled on the face of the devoted secretary. Here was the business utterly spoiled! It was the gloom of anger, and even of apprehension. He would perhaps have made a dash for it through the back door, if Heyst had not been heard ascending the front steps. He climbed them slowly, very slowly, like a man who is discouraged or weary--or simply thoughtful; and Ricardo had a mental vision of his face, with its martial moustache, the lofty forehead, the impassive features, and the quiet, meditative eyes. Trapped! Confound it! After all, perhaps the governor was right. Women had to be shunned. Fooling with this one had apparently ruined the whole business. For, trapped as he was he might just as well kill, since, anyhow, to be seen was to be unmasked. But he was too fair-minded to be angry with the girl.

Heyst had paused on the veranda, or in the very doorway.

"I shall be shot down like a dog if I ain't quick," Ricardo muttered excitedly to the girl.

He stooped to get hold of his knife; and the next moment would have hurled himself out through the curtain, nearly, as prompt and fully as deadly to Heyst as an unexpected thunderbolt. The feel more than the strength of the girl's hand, clutching at his shoulder, checked him. He swung round, crouching with a yellow upward glare. Ah! Was she turning against him?

He would have stuck his knife into the hollow of her bare throat if he had not seen her other hand pointing to the window. It was a long opening, high up, close under the ceiling almost, with a single pivoting shutter.

While he was still looking at it she moved noiselessly away, picking up the overturned chair, and placed it under the wall. Then she looked round; but he didn't need to be beckoned to. In two long, tiptoeing strides he was at her side.

"Be quick!" she gasped.

He seized her hand and wrung it with all the force of his dumb gratitude, as a man does to a chum when there is no time for words. Then he mounted the chair. Ricardo was short--too short to get over without a noisy scramble. He hesitated an instant; she, watchful, bore rigidly on the seat with her beautiful bare arms, while, light and sure, he used the back of the chair as a ladder. The masses of her brown hair fell all about her face.

Footsteps resounded in the next room, and Heyst's voice, not very loud,



called her by name.

"Lena!"

"Yes! In a minute," she answered with a particular intonation which she knew would prevent Heyst from coming in at once.

When she looked up, Ricardo had vanished, letting himself down outside so lightly that she had not heard the slightest noise. She stood up then, bewildered, frightened, as if awakened from a drugged sleep, with heavy, downcast, unseeing eyes, her fortitude tired out, her imagination as if dead within her and unable to keep her fear alive.

Heyst moved about aimlessly in the other room. This sound roused her exhausted wits. At once she began to think, hear, see; and what she saw--or rather recognized, for her eyes had been resting on it all the time--was Ricardo's straw slipper, lost in the scuffle, lying near the bath. She had just time to step forward and plant her foot on it when the curtains shook, and, pushed aside, disclosed Heyst in the doorway.

Out of the appeased enchantment of the senses she had found with him, like a sort of bewitched state, his danger brought a sensation of warmth to her breast. She felt something stir in there, something profound, like a new sort of life.

The room was in partial darkness, Ricardo having accidentally swung the pivoted shutter as he went out of the window. Heyst peered from the doorway.

"Why, you haven't done your hair yet," he said.

"I won't stop to do it now. I shan't be long," she replied steadily, and remained still, feeling Ricardo's slipper under the sole of her foot.

Heyst, with a movement of retreat, let the curtain drop slowly. On the instant she stooped for the slipper, and, with it in her hand, spun round wildly, looking for some hiding-place; but there was no such spot in the bare room. The chest, the leather bunk, a dress or two of hers hanging on pegs--there was no place where the merest hazard might not guide Heyst's hand at any moment. Her wildly roaming eyes were caught by the half-closed window. She ran to it, and by raising herself on her toes was able to reach the shutter with her fingertips. She pushed it square, stole back to the middle of the room, and, turning about, swung her arm, regulating the force

of the throw so as not to let the slipper fly too far out and hit the edge of the overhanging eaves. It was a task of the nicest judgement for the muscles of those round arms, still quivering from the deadly wrestle with a man, for that brain, tense with the excitement of the situation and for the unstrung nerves flickering darkness before her eyes. At last the slipper left her hand. As soon as it passed the opening, it was out of her sight. She listened. She did not hear it strike anything; it just vanished, as if it had wings to fly on through the air. Not a sound! It had gone clear.

Her valiant arms hanging close against her side, she stood as if turned into stone. A faint whistle reached her ears. The forgetful Ricardo, becoming very much aware of his loss, had been hanging about in great anxiety, which was relieved by the appearance of the slipper flying from under the eaves; and now, thoughtfully, he had ventured a whistle to put her mind at ease.

Suddenly the girl reeled forward. She saved herself from a fall only by embracing with both arms one of the tall, roughly carved posts holding the mosquito net above the bed. For a long time she clung to it, with her forehead leaning against the wood. One side of her loosened sarong had slipped down as low as her hip. The long brown tresses of her hair fell in lank wisps, as if wet, almost black against her white body. Her uncovered flank, damp with the sweat of anguish and fatigue, gleamed coldly with the immobility of polished marble in the hot, diffused light falling through the window above her head--a dim reflection of the consuming, passionate blaze of sunshine outside, all aquiver with the effort to set the earth on fire, to burn it to ashes.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Heyst, seated at the table with his chin on his breast, raised his head at the faint rustle of Lena's dress. He was startled by the dead pallor of her cheeks, by something lifeless in her eyes, which looked at him strangely, without recognition. But to his anxious inquiries she answered reassuringly that there was nothing the matter with her, really. She had felt giddy on rising. She had even had a moment of faintness, after her bath. She had to sit down to wait for it to pass. This had made her late dressing.

"I didn't try to do my hair. I didn't want to keep you waiting any longer," she said.

He was unwilling to press her with questions about her health, since she seemed to make light of this indisposition. She had not done her hair, but she had brushed it, and had tied it with a ribbon behind. With her forehead uncovered, she looked very young, almost a child, a careworn child; a child with something on its mind.

What surprised Heyst was the non-appearance of Wang. The Chinaman had always materialized at the precise moment of his service, neither too soon nor too late. This time the usual miracle failed. What was the meaning of this?

Heyst raised his voice--a thing he disliked doing. It was promptly answered from the compound:

"Ada tuan!"

Lena, leaning on her elbow, with her eyes on her plate, did not seem to hear anything. When Wang entered with a tray, his narrow eyes, tilted inward by the prominence of salient cheek-bones, kept her under stealthy observation all the time. Neither the one nor the other of that white couple paid the slightest attention to him and he withdrew without having heard them exchange a single word. He squatted on his heels on the back veranda. His Chinaman's mind, very clear but not far-reaching, was made up according to the plain reason of things, such as it appeared to him in the light of his simple feeling for self-preservation, untrammelled by any notions of romantic honour or tender conscience. His yellow hands, lightly clasped, hung idly between his knees. The graves of Wang's ancestors were far away, his parents were dead, his elder brother was a soldier in the yamen of some

Mandarin away in Formosa. No one near by had a claim on his veneration or his obedience. He had been for years a labouring restless vagabond. His only tie in the world was the Alfuro woman, in exchange for whom he had given away some considerable part of his hard-earned substance; and his duty, in reason, could be to no one but himself.

The scuffle behind the curtain was a thing of bad augury for that Number One for whom the Chinaman had neither love nor dislike. He had been awed enough by that development to hang back with the coffee-pot till at last the white man was induced to call him in. Wang went in with curiosity. Certainly, the white woman looked as if she had been wrestling with a spirit which had managed to tear half her blood out of her before letting her go. As to the man, Wang had long looked upon him as being in some sort bewitched; and now he was doomed. He heard their voices in the room. Heyst was urging the girl to go and lie down again. He was extremely concerned. She had eaten nothing.

"The best thing for you. You really must!"

She sat listless, shaking her head from time to time negatively, as if nothing could be any good. But he insisted; she saw the beginning of wonder in his eyes, and suddenly gave way.

"Perhaps I had better."

She did not want to arouse his wonder, which would lead him straight to suspicion. He must not suspect!

Already, with the consciousness of her love for this man, of that something rapturous and profound going beyond the mere embrace, there was born in her a woman's innate mistrust of masculinity, of that seductive strength allied to an absurd, delicate shrinking from the recognition of the naked necessity of facts, which never yet frightened a woman worthy of the name. She had no plan; but her mind, quieted down somewhat by the very effort to preserve outward composure for his sake, perceived that her behaviour had secured, at any rate, a short period of safety. Perhaps because of the similarity of their miserable origin in the dregs of mankind, she had understood Ricardo perfectly. He would keep quiet for a time now. In this momentarily soothing certitude her bodily fatigue asserted itself, the more overpoweringly since its cause was not so much the demand on her strength as the awful suddenness of the stress she had had to meet. She would have tried to overcome it from the mere instinct of resistance, if it had not been for Heyst's alternate pleadings and commands. Before this eminently

masculine fussing she felt the woman's need to give way, the sweetness of surrender.

"I will do anything you like," she said.

Getting up, she was surprised by a wave of languid weakness that came over her, embracing and enveloping her like warm water, with a noise in her ears as of a breaking sea.

"You must help me along," she added quickly.

While he put his arm round her waist--not by any means an uncommon thing for him to do--she found a special satisfaction in the feeling of being thus sustained. She abandoned all her weight to that encircling and protecting pressure, while a thrill went through her at the sudden thought that it was she who would have to protect him, to be the defender of a man who was strong enough to lift her bodily, as he was doing even then in his two arms. For Heyst had done this as soon as they had crept through the doorway of the room. He thought it was quicker and simpler to carry her the last step or two. He had grown really too anxious to be aware of the effort. He lifted her high and deposited her on the bed, as one lays a child on its side in a cot. Then he sat down on the edge, masking his concern with a smile which obtained no response from the dreamy immobility of her eyes. But she sought his hand, seized it eagerly; and while she was pressing it with all the force of which she was capable, the sleep she needed overtook her suddenly, overwhelmingly, as it overtakes a child in a cot, with her lips parted for a safe, endearing word which she had thought of but had no time to utter.

The usual flaming silence brooded over Samburan.

"What in the world is this new mystery?" murmured Heyst to himself, contemplating her deep slumber.

It was so deep, this enchanted sleep, that when some time afterwards he gently tried to open her fingers and free his hand, he succeeded without provoking the slightest stir.

"There is some very simple explanation, no doubt," he thought, as he stole out into the living-room.

Absent-mindedly he pulled a book out of the top shelf, and sat down with it; but even after he had opened it on his knee, and had been staring at the

pages for a time, he had not the slightest idea of what it was about. He stared and stared at the crowded, parallel lines. It was only when, raising his eyes for no particular reason, he saw Wang standing motionless on the other side of the table, that he regained complete control of his faculties.

"Oh, yes," he said, as if suddenly reminded of a forgotten appointment of a not particularly welcome sort.

He waited a little, and then, with reluctant curiosity, forced himself to ask the silent Wang what he had to say. He had some idea that the matter of the vanished revolver would come up at last; but the guttural sounds which proceeded from the Chinaman did not refer to that delicate subject. His speech was concerned with cups, saucers, plates, forks, and knives. All these things had been put away in the cupboards on the back veranda, where they belonged, perfectly clean, "all plopel." Heyst wondered at the scrupulosity of a man who was about to abandon him; for he was not surprised to hear Wang conclude the account of his stewardship with the words:

"I go now."

"Oh! You go now?" said Heyst, leaning back, his book on his knees.

"Yes. Me no likee. One man, two man, three man--no can do! Me go now."

"What's frightening you away like this?" asked Heyst, while through his mind flashed the hope that something enlightening might come from that being so unlike himself, taking contact with the world with a simplicity and directness of which his own mind was not capable. "Why?" he went on. "You are used to white men. You know them well."

"Yes. Me savee them," assented Wang inscrutably. "Me savee plenty."

All that he really knew was his own mind. He had made it up to withdraw himself and the Alfuro woman from the uncertainties of the relations which were going to establish themselves between those white men. It was Pedro who had been the first cause of Wang's suspicion and fear. The Chinaman had seen wild men. He had penetrated, in the train of a Chinese pedlar, up one or two of the Bornean rivers into the country of the Dyaks. He had also been in the interior of Mindanao, where there are people who live in trees--savages, no better than animals; but a hairy brute like Pedro, with his great fangs and ferocious growls, was altogether beyond his conception of anything that could be looked upon as human. The strong impression made

on him by Pedro was the prime inducement which had led Wang to purloin the revolver. Reflection on the general situation, and on the insecurity of Number One, came later, after he had obtained possession of the revolver and of the box of cartridges out of the table drawer in the living-room.

"Oh, you savee plenty about white men," Heyst went on in a slightly bantering tone, after a moment of silent reflection in which he had confessed to himself that the recovery of the revolver was not to be thought of, either by persuasion or by some more forcible means. "You speak in that fashion, but you are frightened of those white men over there."

"Me no flightened," protested Wang raucously, throwing up his head--which gave to his throat a more strained, anxious appearance than ever. "Me no likee," he added in a quieter tone. "Me velly sick."

He put his hand over the region under the breast-bone.

"That," said Heyst, serenely positive, "belong one piecee lie. That isn't proper man-talk at all. And after stealing my revolver, too!"

He had suddenly decided to speak about it, because this frankness could not make the situation much worse than it was. He did not suppose for a moment that Wang had the revolver anywhere about his person; and after having thought the matter over, he had arrived at the conclusion that the Chinaman never meant to use the weapon against him. After a slight start, because the direct charge had taken him unawares, Wang tore open the front of his jacket with a convulsive show of indignation.

"No hab got. Look see!" he mouthed in pretended anger.

He slapped his bare chest violently; he uncovered his very ribs, all astir with the panting of outraged virtue; his smooth stomach heaved with indignation. He started his wide blue breeches flapping about his yellow calves. Heyst watched him quietly.

"I never said you had it on you," he observed, without raising his voice; "but the revolver is gone from where I kept it."

"Me no savee levelvel," Wang said obstinately.

The book lying open on Heyst's knee slipped suddenly and he made a sharp movement to catch it up. Wang was unable to see the reason of this because of the table, and leaped away from what seemed to him a threatening

symptom. When Heyst looked up, the Chinaman was already at the door facing the room, not frightened, but alert.

"What's the matter?" asked Heyst.

Wang nodded his shaven head significantly at the curtain closing the doorway of the bedroom.

"Me no likee," he repeated.

"What the devil do you mean?" Heyst was genuinely amazed. "Don't like what?"

Wang pointed a long lemon-coloured finger at the motionless folds.

"Two," he said.

"Two what? I don't understand."

"Suppose you savee, you no like that fashion. Me savee plenty. Me go now."

Heyst had risen from his chair, but Wang kept his ground in the doorway for a little longer. His almond-shaped eyes imparted to his face an expression of soft and sentimental melancholy. The muscles of his throat moved visibly while he uttered a distinct and guttural "Goodbye" and vanished from Number One's sight.

The Chinaman's departure altered the situation. Heyst reflected on what would be best to do in view of that fact. For a long time he hesitated; then, shrugging his shoulders wearily, he walked out on the veranda, down the steps, and continued at a steady gait, with a thoughtful mien, in the direction of his guests' bungalow. He wanted to make an important communication to them, and he had no other object--least of all to give them the shock of a surprise call. Nevertheless, their brutish henchman not being on watch, it was Heyst's fate to startle Mr. Jones and his secretary by his sudden appearance in the doorway. Their conversation must have been very interesting to prevent them from hearing the visitor's approach. In the dim room--the shutters were kept constantly closed against the heat--Heyst saw them start apart. It was Mr. Jones who spoke:

"Ah, here you are again! Come in, come in!"

Heyst, taking his hat off in the doorway, entered the room.



## CHAPTER FIVE

Waking up suddenly, Lena looked, without raising her head from the pillow, at the room in which she was alone. She got up quickly, as if to counteract the awful sinking of her heart by the vigorous use of her limbs. But this sinking was only momentary. Mistress of herself from pride, from love, from necessity, and also because of a woman's vanity in self-sacrifice, she met Heyst, returning from the strangers' bungalow, with a clear glance and a smile.

The smile he managed to answer, but, noticing that he avoided her eyes, she composed her lips and lowered her gaze. For the same reason she hastened to speak to him in a tone of indifference, which she put on without effort, as if she had grown adept in duplicity since sunrise.

"You have been over there again?"

"I have. I thought--but you had better know first that we have lost Wang for good."

She repeated "For good?" as if she had not understood.

"For good or evil--I shouldn't know which if you were to ask me. He has dismissed himself. He's gone."

"You expected him to go, though, didn't you?"

Heyst sat down on the other side of the table.

"Yes. I expected it as soon as I discovered that he had annexed my revolver. He says he hasn't taken it. That's untrue of course. A Chinaman would not see the sense of confessing under any circumstances. To deny any charge is a principle of right conduct; but he hardly expected to be believed. He was a little enigmatic at the last, Lena. He startled me."

Heyst paused. The girl seemed absorbed in her own thoughts.

"He startled me," repeated Heyst. She noted the anxiety in his tone, and turned her head slightly to look at him across the table.

"It must have been something--to startle you," she said. In the depth of her

parted lips, like a ripe pomegranate, there was a gleam of white teeth.

"It was only a single word--and some of his gestures. He had been making a good deal of noise. I wonder we didn't wake you up. How soundly you can sleep! I say, do you feel all right now?"

"As fresh as can be," she said, treating him to another deep gleam of a smile. "I heard no noise, and I'm glad of it. The way he talks in his harsh voice frightens me. I don't like all these foreign people."

"It was just before he went away--bolted out, I should say. He nodded and pointed at the curtain to our room. He knew you were there, of course. He seemed to think--he seemed to try to give me to understand that you were in special--well, danger. You know how he talks."

She said nothing; she made no sound, only the faint tinge of colour ebbed out of her cheek.

"Yes," Heyst went on. "He seemed to try to warn me. That must have been it. Did he imagine I had forgotten your existence? The only word he said was 'two'. It sounded so, at least. Yes, 'two'--and that he didn't like it."

"What does that mean?" she whispered.

"We know what the word two means, don't we, Lena? We are two. Never were such a lonely two out of the world, my dear! He might have tried to remind me that he himself has a woman to look after. Why are you so pale, Lena?"

"Am I pale?" she asked negligently.

"You are." Heyst was really anxious.

"Well, it isn't from fright," she protested truthfully.

Indeed, what she felt was a sort of horror which left her absolutely in the full possession of all her faculties; more difficult to bear, perhaps, for that reason, but not paralysing to her fortitude.

Heyst in his turn smiled at her.

"I really don't know that there is any reason to be frightened."

"I mean I am not frightened for myself."

"I believe you are very plucky," he said. The colour had returned to her face. "I" continued Heyst, "am so rebellious to outward impressions that I can't say that much about myself. I don't react with sufficient distinctness." He changed his tone. "You know I went to see those men first thing this morning."

"I know. Be careful!" she murmured.

"I wonder how one can be careful! I had a long talk with--but I don't believe you have seen them. One of them is a fantastically thin, long person, apparently ailing; I shouldn't wonder if he were really so. He makes rather a point of it in a mysterious manner. I imagine he must have suffered from tropical fevers, but not so much as he tries to make out. He's what people would call a gentleman. He seemed on the point of volunteering a tale of his adventures--for which I didn't ask him--but remarked that it was a long story; some other time, perhaps.

"I suppose you would like to know who I am?" he asked me.

"I told him I would leave it to him, in a tone which, between gentlemen, could have left no doubt in his mind. He raised himself on his elbow--he was lying down on the camp-bed--and said:

"I am he who is--"

Lena seemed not to be listening; but when Heyst paused, she turned her head quickly to him. He took it for a movement of inquiry, but in this he was wrong. A great vagueness enveloped her impressions, but all her energy was concentrated on the struggle that she wanted to take upon herself, in a great exaltation of love and self-sacrifice, which is woman's sublime faculty; altogether on herself, every bit of it, leaving him nothing, not even the knowledge of what she did, if that were possible. She would have liked to lock him up by some stratagem. Had she known of some means to put him to sleep for days she would have used incantations or philtres without misgivings. He seemed to her too good for such contacts, and not sufficiently equipped. This last feeling had nothing to do with the material fact of the revolver being stolen. She could hardly appreciate that fact at its full value.

Observing her eyes fixed and as if sightless--for the concentration on her purpose took all expression out of them--Heyst imagined it to be the effect of a great mental effort.

"No use asking me what he meant, Lena; I don't know, and I did not ask him. The gentleman, as I have told you before, seems devoted to mystification. I said nothing, and he laid down his head again on the bundle of rugs he uses for a pillow. He affects a state of great weakness, but I suspect that he's perfectly capable of leaping to his feet if he likes. Having been ejected, he said, from his proper social sphere because he had refused to conform to certain usual conventions, he was a rebel now, and was coming and going up and down the earth. As I really did not want to listen to all this nonsense, I told him that I had heard that sort of story about somebody else before. His grin is really ghastly. He confessed that I was very far from the sort of man he expected to meet. Then he said:

"As to me, I am no blacker than the gentleman you are thinking of, and I have neither more nor less determination."

Heyst looked across the table at Lena. Propped on her elbows, and holding her head in both hands, she moved it a little with an air of understanding.

"Nothing could be plainer, eh?" said Heyst grimly. "Unless, indeed, this is his idea of a pleasant joke; for, when he finished speaking, he burst into a loud long laugh. I didn't join him!"

"I wish you had," she breathed out.

"I didn't join him. It did not occur to me. I am not much of a diplomatist. It would probably have been wise, for, indeed, I believe he had said more than he meant to say, and was trying to take it back by this affected jocularly. Yet when one thinks of it, diplomacy without force in the background is but a rotten reed to lean upon. And I don't know whether I could have done it if I had thought of it. I don't know. It would have been against the grain. Could I have done it? I have lived too long within myself, watching the mere shadows and shades of life. To deceive a man on some issue which could be decided quicker, by his destruction while one is disarmed, helpless, without even the power to run away--no! That seems to me too degrading. And yet I have you here. I have your very existence in my keeping. What do you say, Lena? Would I be capable of throwing you to the lions to save my dignity?"

She got up, walked quickly round the table, posed herself on his knees lightly, throwing one arm round his neck, and whispered in his ear:

"You may if you like. And may be that's the only way I would consent to leave you. For something like that. If it were something no bigger than your little finger."

She gave him a light kiss on the lips and was gone before he could detain her. She regained her seat and propped her elbows again on the table. It was hard to believe that she had moved from the spot at all. The fleeting weight of her body on his knees, the hug round his neck, the whisper in his ear, the kiss on his lips, might have been the unsubstantial sensations of a dream invading the reality of waking life; a sort of charming mirage in the barren aridity of his thoughts. He hesitated to speak till she said, businesslike:

"Well. And what then?"

Heyst gave a start.

"Oh, yes. I didn't join him. I let him have his laugh out by himself. He was shaking all over, like a merry skeleton, under a cotton sheet he was covered with--I believe in order to conceal the revolver that he had in his right hand. I didn't see it, but I have a distinct impression it was there in his fist. As he had not been looking at me for some time, but staring into a certain part of the room, I turned my head and saw a hairy, wild sort of creature which they take about with them, squatting on its heels in the angle of the walls behind me. He wasn't there when I came in. I didn't like the notion of that watchful monster behind my back. If I had been less at their mercy, I should certainly have changed my position. As things are now, to move would have been a mere weakness. So I remained where I was. The gentleman on the bed said he could assure me of one thing; and that was that his presence here was no more morally reprehensible than mine.

"'We pursue the same ends,' he said, 'only perhaps I pursue them with more openness than you--with more simplicity.'

"That's what he said," Heyst went on, after looking at Lena in a sort of inquiring silence. "I asked him if he knew beforehand that I was living here; but he only gave me a ghastly grin. I didn't press him for an answer, Lena. I thought I had better not."

On her smooth forehead a ray of light always seemed to rest. Her loose hair, parted in the middle, covered the hands sustaining her head. She seemed spellbound by the interest of the narrative. Heyst did not pause long. He managed to continue his relation smoothly enough, beginning afresh with a piece of comment.

"He would have lied impudently--and I detest being told a lie. It makes me uncomfortable. It's pretty clear that I am not fitted for the affairs of the wide

world. But I did not want him to think that I accepted his presence too meekly, so I said that his comings or goings on the earth were none of my business, of course, except that I had a natural curiosity to know when he would find it convenient to resume them.

"He asked me to look at the state he was in. Had I been all alone here, as they think I am, I should have laughed at him. But not being alone--I say, Lena, you are sure you haven't shown yourself where you could be seen?"

"Certain," she said promptly.

He looked relieved.

"You understand, Lena, that when I ask you to keep so strictly out of sight, it is because you are not for them to look at--to talk about. My poor Lena! I can't help that feeling. Do you understand it?"

She moved her head slightly in a manner that was neither affirmative nor negative.

"People will have to see me some day," she said.

"I wonder how long it will be possible for you to keep out of sight?" murmured Heyst thoughtfully. He bent over the table. "Let me finish telling you. I asked him point blank what it was he wanted with me; he appeared extremely unwilling to come to the point. It was not really so pressing as all that, he said. His secretary, who was in fact his partner, was not present, having gone down to the wharf to look at their boat. Finally the fellow proposed that he should put off a certain communication he had to make till the day after tomorrow. I agreed; but I also told him that I was not at all anxious to hear it. I had no conception in what way his affairs could concern me.

"Ah, Mr. Heyst," he said, "you and I have much more in common than you think."

Heyst struck the table with his fist unexpectedly.

"It was a jeer; I am sure it was!"

He seemed ashamed of this outburst and smiled faintly into the motionless eyes of the girl.

"What could I have done--even if I had had my pockets full of revolvers?"

She made an appreciative sign.

"Killing's a sin, sure enough," she murmured.

"I went away," Heyst continued. "I left him there, lying on his side with his eyes shut. When I got back here, I found you looking ill. What was it, Lena? You did give me a scare! Then I had the interview with Wang while you rested. You were sleeping quietly. I sat here to consider all these things calmly, to try to penetrate their inner meaning and their outward bearing. It struck me that the two days we have before us have the character of a sort of truce. The more I thought of it, the more I felt that this was tacitly understood between Jones and myself. It was to our advantage, if anything can be of advantage to people caught so completely unawares as we are. Wang was gone. He, at any rate, had declared himself, but as I did not know what he might take it into his head to do, I thought I had better warn these people that I was no longer responsible for the Chinaman. I did not want Mr. Wang making some move which would precipitate the action against us. Do you see my point of view?"

She made a sign that she did. All her soul was wrapped in her passionate determination, in an exalted belief in herself--in the contemplation of her amazing opportunity to win the certitude, the eternity, of that man's love.

"I never saw two men," Heyst was saying, "more affected by a piece of information than Jones and his secretary, who was back in the bungalow by then. They had not heard me come up. I told them I was sorry to intrude.

"Not at all! Not at all," said Jones.

"The secretary backed away into a corner and watched me like a wary cat. In fact, they both were visibly on their guard.

"I am come," I told them, "to let you know that my servant has deserted--gone off."

"At first they looked at each other as if they had not understood what I was saying; but very soon they seemed quite concerned.

"You mean to say your Chink's cleared out?" said Ricardo, coming forward from his corner. "Like this--all at once? What did he do it for?"

"I said that a Chinaman had always a simple and precise reason for what he did, but that to get such a reason out of him was not so easy. All he told me, I said, was that he 'didn't like'.

"They were extremely disturbed at this. Didn't like what, they wanted to know.

"The looks of you and your party,' I told Jones.

"Nonsense!' he cried out, and immediately Ricardo, the short man, struck in.

"Told you that? What did he take you for, sir--an infant? Or do you take us for kids?--meaning no offence. Come, I bet you will tell us next that you've missed something."

"I didn't mean to tell you anything of the sort,' I said, 'but as a matter of fact it is so.'

"He slapped his thigh.

"Thought so. What do you think of this trick, governor?"

"Jones made some sort of sign to him, and then that extraordinary cat-faced associate proposed that he and their servant should come out and help me catch or kill the Chink.

"My object, I said, was not to get assistance. I did not intend to chase the Chinaman. I had come only to warn them that he was armed, and that he really objected to their presence on the island. I wanted them to understand that I was not responsible for anything that might happen.

"Do you mean to tell us,' asked Ricardo, 'that there is a crazy Chink with a six-shooter broke loose on this island, and that you don't care?"

"Strangely enough they did not seem to believe my story. They were exchanging significant looks all the time. Ricardo stole up close to his principal; they had a confabulation together, and then something happened which I did not expect. It's rather awkward, too.

"Since I would not have their assistance to get hold of the Chink and recover my property, the least they could do was to send me their servant. It was Jones who said that, and Ricardo backed up the idea.



"Yes, yes--let our Pedro cook for all hands in your compound! He isn't so bad as he looks. That's what we will do!"

"He bustled out of the room to the veranda, and let out an ear-splitting whistle for their Pedro. Having heard the brute's answering howl, Ricardo ran back into the room.

"Yes, Mr. Heyst. This will do capitally, Mr. Heyst. You just direct him to do whatever you are accustomed to have done for you in the way of attendance. See?"

"Lena, I confess to you that I was taken completely by surprise. I had not expected anything of the sort. I don't know what I expected. I am so anxious about you that I can't keep away from these infernal scoundrels. And only two months ago I would not have cared. I would have defied their scoundrelism as much as I have scorned all the other intrusions of life. But now I have you! You stole into my life, and--"

Heyst drew a deep breath. The girl gave him a quick, wide-eyed glance.

"Ah! That's what you are thinking of--that you have me!"

It was impossible to read the thoughts veiled by her steady grey eyes, to penetrate the meaning of her silences, her words, and even her embraces. He used to come out of her very arms with the feeling of a baffled man.

"If I haven't you, if you are not here, then where are you?" cried Heyst. "You understand me very well."

She shook her head a little. Her red lips, at which he looked now, her lips as fascinating as the voice that came out of them, uttered the words:

"I hear what you say; but what does it mean?"

"It means that I could lie and perhaps cringe for your sake."

"No! No! Don't you ever do that," she said in haste, while her eyes glistened suddenly. "You would hate me for it afterwards!"

"Hate you?" repeated Heyst, who had recalled his polite manner. "No! You needn't consider the extremity of the improbable--as yet. But I will confess to you that I--how shall I call it?--that I dissembled. First I dissembled my

dismay at the unforeseen result of my idiotic diplomacy. Do you understand, my dear girl?"

It was evident that she did not understand the word. Heyst produced his playful smile, which contrasted oddly with the worried character of his whole expression. His temples seemed to have sunk in, his face looked a little leaner.

"A diplomatic statement, Lena, is a statement of which everything is true, but the sentiment which seems to prompt it. I have never been diplomatic in my relation with mankind--not from regard for its feelings, but from a certain regard for my own. Diplomacy doesn't go well with consistent contempt. I cared little for life and still less for death."

"Don't talk like that!"

"I dissembled my extreme longing to take these wandering scoundrels by their throats," he went on. "I have only two hands--I wish I had a hundred to defend you--and there were three throats. By that time their Pedro was in the room too. Had he seen me engaged with their two throats, he would have been at mine like a fierce dog, or any other savage and faithful brute. I had no difficulty in dissembling my longing for the vulgar, stupid, and hopeless argument of fight. I remarked that I really did not want a servant. I couldn't think of depriving them of their man's services; but they would not hear me. They had made up their minds.

"We shall send him over at once," Ricardo said, "to start cooking dinner for everybody. I hope you won't mind me coming to eat it with you in your bungalow; and we will send the governor's dinner over to him here."

"I could do nothing but hold my tongue or bring on a quarrel--some manifestation of their dark purpose, which we have no means to resist. Of course, you may remain invisible this evening; but with that atrocious-brute prowling all the time at the back of the house, how long can your presence be concealed from these men?"

Heyst's distress could be felt in his silence. The girl's head, sustained by her hands buried in the thick masses of her hair, had a perfect immobility.

"You are certain you have not been seen so far?" he asked suddenly.

The motionless head spoke.

"How can I be certain? You told me you wanted me to keep out of the way. I kept out of the way. I didn't ask your reason. I thought you didn't want people to know that you had a girl like me about you."

"What? Ashamed?" cried Heyst.

"It isn't what's right, perhaps--I mean for you--is it?"

Heyst lifted his hands, reproachfully courteous.

"I look upon it as so very much right that I couldn't bear the idea of any other than sympathetic, respectful eyes resting on you. I disliked and mistrusted these fellows from the first. Didn't you understand?"

"Yes; I did keep out of sight," she said.

A silence fell. At last Heyst stirred slightly.

"All this is of very little importance now," he said with a sigh. "This is a question of something infinitely worse than mere looks and thoughts, however base and contemptible. As I have told you, I met Ricardo's suggestions by silence. As I was turning away he said:

"If you happen to have the key of that store-room of yours on you, Mr. Heyst, you may just as well let me have it; I will give it to our Pedro."

"I had it on me, and I tendered it to him without speaking. The hairy creature was at the door by then, and caught the key, which Ricardo threw to him, better than any trained ape could have done. I came away. All the time I had been thinking anxiously of you, whom I had left asleep, alone here, and apparently ill."

Heyst interrupted himself, with a listening turn of his head. He had heard the faint sound of sticks being snapped in the compound. He rose and crossed the room to look out of the back door.

"And here the creature is," he said, returning to the table. "Here he is, already attending to the fire. Oh, my dear Lena!"

She had followed him with her eyes. She watched him go out on the front veranda cautiously. He lowered stealthily a couple of screens that hung between the column, and remained outside very still, as if interested by something on the open ground. Meantime she had risen in her turn, to take

a peep into the compound. Heyst, glancing over his shoulder, saw her returning to her seat. He beckoned to her, and she continued to move, crossing the shady room, pure and bright in her white dress, her hair loose, with something of a sleep-walker in her unhurried motion, in her extended hand, in the sightless effect of her grey eyes luminous in the half-light. He had never seen such an expression in her face before. It had dreaminess in it, intense attention, and something like sternness. Arrested in the doorway by Heyst's extended arm, she seemed to wake up, flushed faintly--and this flush, passing off, carried away with it the strange transfiguring mood. With a courageous gesture she pushed back the heavy masses of her hair. The light clung to her forehead. Her delicate nostrils quivered. Heyst seized her arm and whispered excitedly:

"Slip out here, quickly! The screens will conceal you. Only you must mind the stair-space. They are actually out--I mean the other two. You had better see them before you--"

She made a barely perceptible movement of recoil, checked at once, and stood still. Heyst released her arm.

"Yes, perhaps I had better," she said with unnatural deliberation, and stepped out on the veranda to stand close by his side.

Together, one on each side of the screen, they peeped between the edge of the canvas and the veranda-post entwined with creepers. A great heat ascended from the sun-smitten ground, in an ever-rising wave, as if from some secret store of earth's fiery heart; for the sky was growing cooler already, and the sun had declined sufficiently for the shadows of Mr. Jones and his henchman to be projected towards the bungalow side by side--one infinitely slender, the other short and broad.

The two visitors stood still and gazed. To keep up the fiction of his invalidism, Mr. Jones, the gentleman, leaned on the arm of Ricardo, the secretary, the top of whose hat just came up to his governor's shoulder.

"Do you see them?" Heyst whispered into the girl's ear. "Here they are, the envoys of the outer world. Here they are before you--evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back. A trio of fitting envoys perhaps--but what about the welcome? Suppose I were armed, could I shoot these two down where they stand? Could I?"

Without moving her head, the girl felt for Heyst's hand, pressed it and thereafter did not let it go. He continued, bitterly playful:

"I don't know. I don't think so. There is a strain in me which lays me under an insensate obligation to avoid even the appearance of murder. I have never pulled a trigger or lifted my hand on a man, even in self-defence."

The suddenly tightened grip of her hand checked him.

"They are making a move," she murmured.

"Can they be thinking of coming here?" Heyst wondered anxiously.

"No, they aren't coming this way," she said; and there was another pause.

"They are going back to their house," she reported finally.

After watching them a little longer, she let go Heyst's hand and moved away from the screen. He followed her into the room.

"You have seen them now," he began. "Think what it was to me to see them land in the dusk, fantasms from the sea--apparitions, chimeras! And they persist. That's the worst of it--they persist. They have no right to be--but they are. They ought to have aroused my fury. But I have refined everything away by this time--anger, indignation, scorn itself. Nothing's left but disgust. Since you have told me of that abominable calumny, it has become immense--it extends even to myself." He looked up at her.

"But luckily I have you. And if only Wang had not carried off that miserable revolver--yes, Lena, here we are, we two!"

She put both her hands on his shoulders and looked straight into his eyes. He returned her penetrating gaze. It baffled him. He could not pierce the grey veil of her eyes; but the sadness of her voice thrilled him profoundly.

"You are not reproaching me?" she asked slowly.

"Reproach? What a word between us! It could only be myself--but the mention of Wang has given me an idea. I have been, not exactly cringing, not exactly lying, but still dissembling. You have been hiding yourself, to please me, but still you have been hiding. All this is very dignified. Why shouldn't we try begging now? A noble art? Yes. Lena, we must go out together. I couldn't think of leaving you alone, and I must--yes, I must speak to Wang. We shall go and seek that man, who knows what he wants and how to secure what he wants. We will go at once!"

"Wait till I put my hair up," she agreed instantly, and vanished behind the curtain.

When the curtain had fallen behind her, she turned her head back with an expression of infinite and tender concern for him--for him whom she could never hope to understand, and whom she was afraid she could never satisfy, as if her passion were of a hopelessly lower quality, unable to appease some exalted and delicate desire of his superior soul. In a couple of minutes she reappeared. They left the house by the door of the compound, and passed within three feet of the thunderstruck Pedro, without even looking in his direction. He rose from stooping over a fire of sticks, and, balancing himself clumsily, uncovered his enormous fangs in gaping astonishment. Then suddenly he set off rolling on his bandy legs to impart to his masters the astonishing discovery of a woman.

## CHAPTER SIX

As luck would have it, Ricardo was lounging alone on the veranda of the former counting-house. He scented some new development at once, and ran down to meet the trotting, bear-like figure. The deep, growling noises it made, though they had only a very remote resemblance to the Spanish language, or indeed to any sort of human speech, were from long practice quite intelligible to Mr. Jones's secretary. Ricardo was rather surprised. He had imagined that the girl would continue to keep out of sight. That line apparently was given up. He did not mistrust her. How could he? Indeed, he could not think of her existence calmly.

He tried to keep her image out of his mind so that he should be able to use its powers with some approach to that coolness which the complex nature of the situation demanded from him, both for his own sake and as the faithful follower of plain Mr. Jones, gentleman.

He collected his wits and thought. This was a change of policy, probably on the part of Heyst. If so, what could it mean? A deep fellow! Unless it was her doing; in which case--h'm--all right. Must be. She would know what she was doing. Before him Pedro, lifting his feet alternately, swayed to and fro sideways--his usual attitude of expectation. His little red eyes, lost in the mass of hair, were motionless. Ricardo stared into them with calculated contempt and said in a rough, angry voice:

"Woman! Of course there is. We know that without you!" He gave the tame monster a push. "Git! Vamos! Waddle! Get back and cook the dinner. Which way did they go, then?"

Pedro extended a huge, hairy forearm to show the direction, and went off on his bandy legs. Advancing a few steps, Ricardo was just in time to see, above some bushes, two white helmets moving side by side in the clearing. They disappeared. Now that he had managed to keep Pedro from informing the governor that there was a woman on the island, he could indulge in speculation as to the movements of these people. His attitude towards Mr. Jones had undergone a spiritual change, of which he himself was not yet fully aware.

That morning, before tiffin, after his escape from the Heyst bungalow, completed in such an inspiring way by the recovery of the slipper, Ricardo had made his way to their allotted house, reeling as he ran, his head in a

whirl. He was wildly excited by visions of inconceivable promise. He waited to compose himself before he dared to meet the governor. On entering the room, he found Mr. Jones sitting on the camp bedstead like a tailor on his board, cross-legged, his long back against the wall.

"I say, sir. You aren't going to tell me you are bored?"

"Bored! No! Where the devil have you been all this time?"

"Observing--watching--nosing around. What else? I knew you had company. Have you talked freely, sir?"

"Yes, I have," muttered Mr. Jones.

"Not downright plain, sir?"

"No. I wished you had been here. You loaf all the morning, and now you come in out of breath. What's the matter?"

"I haven't been wasting my time out there," said Ricardo. "Nothing's the matter. I--I--might have hurried a bit." He was in truth still panting; only it was not with running, but with the tumult of thoughts and sensations long repressed, which had been set free by the adventure of the morning. He was almost distracted by them now. He forgot himself in the maze of possibilities threatening and inspiring. "And so you had a long talk?" he said, to gain time.

"Confound you! The sun hasn't affected your head, has it? Why are you staring at me like a basilisk?"

"Beg pardon, sir. Wasn't aware I stared," Ricardo apologized good-humouredly. "The sun might well affect a thicker skull than mine. It blazes. Phew! What do you think a fellow is, sir--a salamander?"

"You ought to have been here," observed Mr. Jones.

"Did the beast give any signs of wanting to prance?" asked Ricardo quickly, with absolutely genuine anxiety. "It wouldn't do, sir. You must play him easy for at least a couple of days, sir. I have a plan. I have a notion that I can find out a lot in a couple of days."

"You have? In what way?"



"Why, by watching," Ricardo answered slowly.

Mr Jones grunted.

"Nothing new, that. Watch, eh? Why not pray a little, too?"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's a good one," burst out the secretary, fixing Mr. Jones with mirthless eyes.

The latter dropped the subject indolently.

"Oh, you may be certain of at least two days," he said.

Ricardo recovered himself. His eyes gleamed voluptuously.

"We'll pull this off yet--clean--whole--right through, if you will only trust me, sir."

"I am trusting you right enough," said Mr. Jones. "It's your interest, too."

And, indeed, Ricardo was truthful enough in his statement. He did absolutely believe in success now. But he couldn't tell his governor that he had intelligences in the enemy's camp. It wouldn't do to tell him of the girl. Devil only knew what he would do if he learned there was a woman about. And how could he begin to tell of it? He couldn't confess his sudden escapade.

"We'll pull it off, sir," he said, with perfectly acted cheerfulness. He experienced gusts of awful joy expanding in his heart and hot like a fanned flame.

"We must," pronounced Mr. Jones. "This thing, Martin, is not like our other tries. I have a peculiar feeling about this. It's a different thing. It's a sort of test."

Ricardo was impressed by the governor's manner; for the first time a hint of passion could be detected in him. But also a word he used, the word "test," had struck him as particularly significant somehow. It was the last word uttered during that morning's conversation. Immediately afterwards Ricardo went out of the room. It was impossible for him to keep still. An elation in which an extraordinary softness mingled with savage triumph would not allow it. It prevented his thinking, also. He walked up and down the veranda far into the afternoon, eyeing the other bungalow at every turn. It gave no

sign of being inhabited. Once or twice he stopped dead short and looked down at his left slipper. Each time he chuckled audibly. His restlessness kept on increasing till at last it frightened him. He caught hold of the balustrade of the veranda and stood still, smiling not at his thought but at the strong sense of life within him. He abandoned himself to it carelessly, even recklessly. He cared for no one, friend or enemy. At that moment Mr. Jones called him by name from within. A shadow fell on the secretary's face.

"Here, sir," he answered; but it was a moment before he could make up his mind to go in.

He found the governor on his feet. Mr. Jones was tired of lying down when there was no necessity for it. His slender form, gliding about the room, came to a standstill.

"I've been thinking, Martin, of something you suggested. At the time it did not strike me as practical; but on reflection it seems to me that to propose a game is as good a way as any to let him understand that the time has come to disgorge. It's less--how should I say?--vulgar. He will know what it means. It's not a bad form to give to the business--which in itself is crude, Martin, crude."

"Want to spare his feelings?" jeered the secretary in such a bitter tone that Mr. Jones was really surprised.

"Why, it was your own notion, confound you!"

"Who says it wasn't?" retorted Ricardo sulkily. "But I am fairly sick of this crawling. No! No! Get the exact bearings of his swag and then a rip up. That's plenty good enough for him."

His passions being thoroughly aroused, a thirst for blood was allied in him with a thirst for tenderness--yes, tenderness. A sort of anxious, melting sensation pervaded and softened his heart when he thought of that girl--one of his own sort. And at the same time jealousy started gnawing at his breast as the image of Heyst intruded itself on his fierce anticipation of bliss.

"The crudeness of your ferocity is positively gross, Martin," Mr. Jones said disdainfully. "You don't even understand my purpose. I mean to have some sport out of him. Just try to imagine the atmosphere of the game--the fellow handling the cards--the agonizing mockery of it! Oh, I shall appreciate this greatly. Yes, let him lose his money instead of being forced to hand it over. You, of course, would shoot him at once, but I shall enjoy the refinement

and the jest of it. He's a man of the best society. I've been hounded out of my sphere by people very much like that fellow. How enraged and humiliated he will be! I promise myself some exquisite moments while watching his play."

"Ay, and suppose he suddenly starts prancing. He may not appreciate the fun."

"I mean you to be present," Mr. Jones remarked calmly.

"Well, as long as I am free to plug him or rip him up whenever I think the time has come, you are welcome to your bit of sport, sir. I shan't spoil it."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

It was at this precise moment of their conversation that Heyst had intruded on Mr. Jones and his secretary with his warning about Wang, as he had related to Lena. When he left them, the two looked at each other in wondering silence. My Jones was the first to break it.

"I say, Martin!"

"Yes, sir."

"What does this mean?"

"It's some move. Blame me if I can understand."

"Too deep for you?" Mr. Jones inquired dryly.

"It's nothing but some of his infernal impudence," growled the secretary. "You don't believe all that about the Chink, do you, sir? 'Tain't true."

"It isn't necessary for it to be true to have a meaning for us. It's the why of his coming to tell us this tale that's important."

"Do you think he made it up to frighten us?" asked Ricardo.

Mr Jones scowled at him thoughtfully.

"The man looked worried," he muttered, as if to himself. "Suppose that Chinaman has really stolen his money! The man looked very worried."

"Nothing but his artfulness, sir," protested Ricardo earnestly, for the idea was too disconcerting to entertain. "Is it likely that he would have trusted a Chink with enough knowledge to make it possible?" he argued warmly. "Why, it's the very thing that he would keep close about. There's something else there. Ay, but what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Mr. Jones let out a ghostly, squeaky laugh. "I've never been placed in such a ridiculous position before," he went on, with a sepulchral equanimity of tone. "It's you, Martin, who dragged me into it. However, it's my own fault too. I ought to--but I was really too bored to use my brain, and yours is not to be trusted. You are a hothead!"

A blasphemous exclamation of grief escaped from Ricardo. Not to be trusted! Hothead! He was almost tearful.

"Haven't I heard you, sir, saying more than twenty times since we got fired out from Manila that we should want a lot of capital to work the East Coast with? You were always telling me that to prime properly all them officials and Portuguese scallywags we should have to lose heavily at first. Weren't you always worrying about some means of getting hold of a good lot of cash? It wasn't to be got hold of by allowing yourself to become bored in that rotten Dutch town and playing a two-penny game with confounded beggarly bank clerks and such like. Well, I've brought you here, where there is cash to be got--and a big lot, to a moral," he added through his set teeth.

Silence fell. Each of them was staring into a different corner of the room. Suddenly, with a slight stamp of his foot, Mr. Jones made for the door. Ricardo caught him up outside.

"Put an arm through mine, sir," he begged him gently but firmly. "No use giving the game away. An invalid may well come out for a breath of fresh air after the sun's gone down a bit. That's it, sir. But where do you want to go? Why did you come out, sir?"

Mr Jones stopped short.

"I hardly know myself," he confessed in a hollow mutter, staring intently at the Number One bungalow. "It's quite irrational," he declared in a still lower tone.

"Better go in, sir," suggested Ricardo. "What's that? Those screens weren't down before. He's spying from behind them now, I bet--the dodging, artful, plotting beast!"

"Why not go over there and see if we can't get to the bottom of this game?" was the unexpected proposal uttered by Mr. Jones. "He will have to talk to us."

Ricardo repressed a start of dismay, but for a moment could not speak. He only pressed the governor's hand to his side instinctively.

"No, sir. What could you say? Do you expect to get to the bottom of his lies? How could you make him talk? It isn't time yet to come to grips with that gent. You don't think I would hang back, do you? His Chink, of course, I'll

shoot like a dog the moment I catch sight of him; but as to that Mr. Blasted Heyst, the time isn't yet. My head's cooler just now than yours. Let's go in again. Why, we are exposed here. Suppose he took it into his head to let off a gun on us! He's an unaccountable, 'yporcritical skunk."

Allowing himself to be persuaded, Mr. Jones returned to his seclusion. The secretary, however, remained on the veranda--for the purpose, he said, of seeing whether that Chink wasn't sneaking around; in which case he proposed to take a long shot at the galoot and chance the consequences. His real reason was that he wanted to be alone, away from the governor's deep-sunk eyes. He felt a sentimental desire to indulge his fancies in solitude. A great change had come over Mr. Ricardo since that morning. A whole side of him which from prudence, from necessity, from loyalty, had been kept dormant, was aroused now, colouring his thoughts and disturbing his mental poise by the vision of such staggering consequences as, for instance, the possibility of an active conflict with the governor. The appearance of the monstrous Pedro with his news drew Ricardo out of a feeling of dreaminess wrapped up in a sense of impending trouble. A woman? Yes, there was one; and it made all the difference. After driving away Pedro, and watching the white helmets of Heyst and Lena vanishing among the bushes he stood lost in meditation.

"Where could they be off to like this?" he mentally asked himself.

The answer found by his speculative faculties on their utmost stretch was--to meet that Chink. For in the desertion of Wang Ricardo did not believe. It was a lying yarn, the organic part of a dangerous plot. Heyst had gone to combine some fresh move. But then Ricardo felt sure that the girl was with him--the girl full of pluck, full of sense, full of understanding; an ally of his own kind!

He went indoors briskly. Mr. Jones had resumed his cross-legged pose at the head of the bed, with his back against the wall.

"Anything new?"

"No, sir."

Ricardo walked about the room as if he had no care in the world. He hummed snatches of song. Mr. Jones raised his waspish eyebrows, at the sound. The secretary got down on his knees before an old leather trunk, and, rummaging in there, brought out a small looking-glass. He fell to examining his physiognomy in it with silent absorption.

"I think I'll shave," he decided, getting up.

He gave a sidelong glance to the governor, and repeated it several times during the operation, which did not take long, and even afterwards, when after putting away the implements, he resumed his walking, humming more snatches of unknown songs. Mr. Jones preserved a complete immobility, his thin lips compressed, his eyes veiled. His face was like a carving.

"So you would like to try your hand at cards with that skunk, sir?" said Ricardo, stopping suddenly and rubbing his hands.

Mr Jones gave no sign of having heard anything.

"Well, why not? Why shouldn't he have the experience? You remember in that Mexican town--what's its name?--the robber fellow they caught in the mountains and condemned to be shot? He played cards half the night with the jailer and the sheriff. Well, this fellow is condemned, too. He must give you your game. Hang it all, a gentleman ought to have some little relaxation! And you have been uncommonly patient, sir."

"You are uncommonly volatile all of a sudden," Mr. Jones remarked in a bored voice. "What's come to you?"

The secretary hummed for a while, and then said:

"I'll try to get him over here for you tonight, after dinner. If I ain't here myself, don't you worry, sir. I shall be doing a bit of nosing around--see?"

"I see," sneered Mr. Jones languidly. "But what do you expect to see in the dark?"

Ricardo made no answer, and after another turn or two slipped out of the room. He no longer felt comfortable alone with the governor.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Meantime Heyst and Lena, walking rather fast, approached Wang's hut. Asking the girl to wait, Heyst ascended the little ladder of bamboos giving access to the door. It was as he had expected. The smoky interior was empty, except for a big chest of sandalwood too heavy for hurried removal. Its lid was thrown up, but whatever it might have contained was no longer there. All Wang's possessions were gone. Without tarrying in the hut, Heyst came back to the girl, who asked no questions, with her strange air of knowing or understanding everything.

"Let us push on," he said.

He went ahead, the rustle of her white skirt following him into the shades of the forest, along the path of their usual walk. Though the air lay heavy between straight denuded trunks, the sunlit patches moved on the ground, and raising her eyes Lena saw far above her head the flutter of the leaves, the surface shudder on the mighty limbs extended horizontally in the perfect immobility of patience. Twice Heyst looked over his shoulder at her. Behind the readiness of her answering smile there was a fund of devoted, concentrated passion, burning with the hope of a more perfect satisfaction. They passed the spot where it was their practice to turn towards the barren summit of the central hill. Heyst held steadily on his way towards the upper limit of the forest. The moment they left its shelter, a breeze enveloped them, and a great cloud, racing over the sun, threw a peculiar sombre tint over everything. Heyst pointed up a precipitous, rugged path clinging to the side of the hill. It ended in a barricade of felled trees, a primitively conceived obstacle which must have cost much labour to erect at just that spot.

"This," Heyst, explained in his urbane tone, "is a barrier against the march of civilization. The poor folk over there did not like it, as it appeared to them in the shape of my company--a great step forward, as some people used to call it with mistaken confidence. The advanced foot has been drawn back, but the barricade remains."

They went on climbing slowly. The cloud had driven over, leaving an added brightness on the face of the world.

"It's a very ridiculous thing," Heyst went on; "but then it is the product of honest fear--fear of the unknown, of the incomprehensible. It's pathetic, too, in a way. And I heartily wish, Lena, that we were on the other side of it."



"Oh, stop, stop!" she cried, seizing his arm.

The face of the barricade they were approaching had been piled up with a lot of fresh-cut branches. The leaves were still green. A gentle breeze, sweeping over the top, stirred them a little; but what had startled the girl was the discovery of several spear-blades protruding from the mass of foliage. She had made them out suddenly. They did not gleam, but she saw them with extreme distinctness, very still, very vicious to look at.

"You had better let me go forward alone, Lena," said Heyst.

She tugged, persistently at his arm, but after a time, during which he never ceased to look smilingly into her terrified eyes, he ended by disengaging himself.

"It's a sign rather than a demonstration," he argued, persuasively. "Just wait here a moment. I promise not to approach near enough to be stabbed."

As in a nightmare she watched Heyst go up the few yards of the path as if he never meant to stop; and she heard his voice, like voices heard in dreams, shouting unknown words in an unearthly tone. Heyst was only demanding to see Wang. He was not kept waiting very long. Recovering from the first flurry of her fright, Lena noticed a commotion in the green top-dressing of the barricade. She exhaled a sigh of relief when the spear-blades retreated out of sight, sliding inward--the horrible things! in a spot facing Heyst a pair of yellow hands parted the leaves, and a face filled the small opening--a face with very noticeable eyes. It was Wang's face, of course, with no suggestion of a body belonging to it, like those cardboard faces at which she remembered gazing as a child in the window of a certain dim shop kept by a mysterious little man in Kingsland Road. Only this face, instead of mere holes, had eyes which blinked. She could see the beating of the eyelids. The hands on each side of the face, keeping the boughs apart, also did not look as if they belonged to any real body. One of them was holding a revolver--a weapon which she recognized merely by intuition, never having seen such an object before.

She leaned her shoulders against the rock of the perpendicular hillside and kept her eyes on Heyst, with comparative composure, since the spears were not menacing him any longer. Beyond the rigid and motionless back he presented to her, she saw Wang's unreal cardboard face moving its thin lips and grimacing artificially. She was too far down the path to hear the dialogue, carried on in an ordinary voice. She waited patiently for its end.

Her shoulders felt the warmth of the rock; now and then a whiff of cooler air seemed to slip down upon her head from above; the ravine at her feet, choked full of vegetation, emitted the faint, drowsy hum of insect life. Everything was very quiet. She failed to notice the exact moment when Wang's head vanished from the foliage, taking the unreal hands away with it. To her horror, the spear-blades came gliding slowly out. The very hair on her head stirred; but before she had time to cry out, Heyst, who seemed rooted to the ground, turned round abruptly and began to move towards her. His great moustaches did not quite hide an ugly but irresolute smile; and when he had come down near enough to touch her, he burst out into a harsh laugh:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

She looked at him, uncomprehending. He cut short his laugh and said curtly:

"We had better go down as we came."

She followed him into the forest. The advance of the afternoon had filled it with gloom. Far away a slant of light between the trees closed the view. All was dark beyond. Heyst stopped.

"No reason to hurry, Lena," he said in his ordinary, serenely polite tones. "We return unsuccessful. I suppose you know, or at least can guess, what was my object in coming up there?"

"No, I can't guess, dear," she said, and smiled, noticing with emotion that his breast was heaving as if he had been out of breath. Nevertheless, he tried to command his speech, pausing only a little between the words.

"No? I went up to find Wang. I went up"--he gasped again here, but this was for the last time--"I made you come with me because I didn't like to leave you unprotected in the proximity of those fellows." Suddenly he snatched his cork helmet off his head and dashed it on the ground. "No!" he cried roughly. "All this is too unreal altogether. It isn't to be borne! I can't protect you! I haven't the power."

He glared at her for a moment, then hastened after his hat which had bounded away to some distance. He came back looking at her face, which was very white.

"I ought to beg your pardon for these antics," he said, adjusting his hat. "A

movement of childish petulance! Indeed, I feel very much like a child in my ignorance, in my powerlessness, in my want of resource, in everything except in the dreadful consciousness of some evil hanging over your head--yours!"

"It's you they are after," she murmured.

"No doubt, but unfortunately--"

"Unfortunately--what?"

"Unfortunately, I have not succeeded with Wang," he said. "I failed to move his Celestial, heart--that is, if there is such a thing. He told me with horrible Chinese reasonableness that he could not let us pass the barrier, because we should be pursued. He doesn't like fights. He gave me to understand that he would shoot me with my own revolver without any sort of compunction, rather than risk a rude and distasteful contest with the strange barbarians for my sake. He has preached to the villagers. They respect him. He is the most remarkable man they have ever seen, and their kinsman by marriage. They understand his policy. And anyway only women and children and a few old fellows are left in the village. This is the season when the men are away in trading vessels. But it would have been all the same. None of them have a taste for fighting--and with white men too! They are peaceable, kindly folk and would have seen me shot with extreme satisfaction. Wang seemed to think my insistence--for I insisted, you know--very stupid and tactless. But a drowning man clutches at straws. We were talking in such Malay as we are both equal to.

"Your fears are foolish,' I said to him.

"Foolish? of course I am foolish,' he replied. 'If I were a wise man, I would be a merchant with a big hong in Singapore, instead of being a mine coolie turned houseboy. But if you don't go away in time, I will shoot you before it grows too dark to take aim. Not till then, Number One, but I will do it then. Now--finish!'

"All right,' I said. 'Finish as far as I am concerned; but you can have no objections to the mem putih coming over to stay with the Orang Kaya's women for a few days. I will make a present in silver for it.' Orang Kaya, is the head man of the village, Lena," added Heyst.

She looked at him in astonishment.

"You wanted me to go to that village of savages?" she gasped. "You wanted me to leave you?"

"It would have given me a freer hand."

Heyst stretched out his hands and looked at them for a moment, then let them fall by his side. Indignation was expressed more in the curve of her lips than in her clear eyes, which never wavered.

"I believe Wang laughed," he went on. "He made a noise like a turkey-cock."

"That would be worse than anything," he told me.

"I was taken aback. I pointed out to him that he was talking nonsense. It could not make any difference to his security where you were, because the evil men, as he calls them, did not know of your existence. I did not lie exactly, Lena, though I did stretch the truth till it cracked; but the fellow seems to have an uncanny insight. He shook his head. He assured me they knew all about you. He made a horrible grimace at me."

"It doesn't matter," said the girl. "I didn't want--I would not have gone."

Heyst raised his eyes.

"Wonderful intuition! As I continued to press him, Wang made that very remark about you. When he smiles, his face looks like a conceited death's head. It was his very last remark that you wouldn't want to. I went away then."

She leaned back against a tree. Heyst faced her in the same attitude of leisure, as if they had done with time and all the other concerns of the earth. Suddenly, high above their heads the roof of leaves whispered at them tumultuously and then ceased.

"That was a strange notion of yours, to send me away," she said. "Send me away? What for? Yes, what for?"

"You seem indignant," he remarked listlessly.

"To these savages, too!" she pursued. "And you think I would have gone? You can do what you like with me--but not that, not that!"

Heyst looked into the dim aisles of the forest. Everything was so still now

that the very ground on which they stood seemed to exhale silence into the shade.

"Why be indignant?" he remonstrated. "It has not happened. I gave up pleading with Wang. Here we are, repulsed! Not only without power to resist the evil, but unable to make terms for ourselves with the worthy envoys, the envoys extraordinary of the world we thought we had done with for years and years. And that's bad, Lena, very bad."

"It's funny," she said thoughtfully. "Bad? I suppose it is. I don't know that it is. But do you? Do you? You talk as if you didn't believe in it."

She gazed at him earnestly.

"Do I? Ah! That's it. I don't know how to talk. I have managed to refine everything away. I've said to the Earth that bore me: 'I am I and you are a shadow.' And, by Jove, it is so! But it appears that such words cannot be uttered with impunity. Here I am on a Shadow inhabited by Shades. How helpless a man is against the Shades! How is one to intimidate, persuade, resist, assert oneself against them? I have lost all belief in realities . . . Lena, give me your hand."

She looked at him surprised, uncomprehending.

"Your hand," he cried.

She obeyed; he seized it with avidity as if eager to raise it to his lips, but halfway up released his grasp. They looked at each other for a time.

"What's the matter, dear?" she whispered timidly.

"Neither force nor conviction," Heyst muttered wearily to himself. "How am I to meet this charmingly simple problem?"

"I am sorry," she murmured.

"And so am I," he confessed quickly. "And the bitterest of this humiliation is its complete uselessness--which I feel, I feel!"

She had never before seen him give such signs of feeling. Across his ghastly face the long moustaches flamed in the shade. He spoke suddenly:

"I wonder if I could find enough courage to creep among them in the night,

with a knife, and cut their throats one after another, as they slept! I wonder--"

She was frightened by his unwonted appearance more than by the words in his mouth, and said earnestly:

"Don't you try to do such a thing! Don't you think of it!"

"I don't possess anything bigger than a penknife. As to thinking of it, Lena, there's no saying what one may think of. I don't think. Something in me thinks--something foreign to my nature. What is the matter?"

He noticed her parted lips, and the peculiar stare in her eyes, which had wandered from his face.

"There's somebody after us. I saw something white moving," she cried.

Heyst did not turn his head; he only glanced at her out-stretched arm.

"No doubt we are followed; we are watched."

"I don't see anything now," she said.

"And it does not matter," Heyst went on in his ordinary voice. "Here we are in the forest. I have neither strength nor persuasion. Indeed, it's extremely difficult to be eloquent before a Chinaman's head stuck at one end of a lot of brushwood. But can we wander among these big trees indefinitely? Is this a refuge? No! What else is left to us? I did think for a moment of the mine; but even there we could not remain very long. And then that gallery is not safe. The props were too weak to begin with. Ants have been at work there--ants after the men. A death-trap, at best. One can die but once, but there are many manners of death."

The girl glanced about fearfully, in search of the watcher or follower whom she had glimpsed once among the trees; but if he existed, he had concealed himself. Nothing met her eyes but the deepening shadows of the short vistas between the living columns of the still roof of leaves. She looked at the man beside her expectantly, tenderly, with suppressed affright and a sort of awed wonder.

"I have also thought of these people's boat," Heyst went on. "We could get into that, and--only they have taken everything out of her. I have seen her oars and mast in a corner of their room. To shove off in an empty boat

would be nothing but a desperate expedient, supposing even that she would drift out a good distance between the islands before the morning. It would only be a complicated manner of committing suicide--to be found dead in a boat, dead from sun and thirst. A sea mystery. I wonder who would find us! Davidson, perhaps; but Davidson passed westward ten days ago. I watched him steaming past one early morning, from the jetty."

"You never told me," she said.

"He must have been looking at me through his big binoculars. Perhaps, if I had raised my arm--but what did we want with Davidson then, you and I? He won't be back this way for three weeks or more, Lena. I wish I had raised my arm that morning."

"What would have been the good of it?" she sighed out.

"What good? No good, of course. We had no forebodings. This seemed to be an inexpugnable refuge, where we could live untroubled and learn to know each other."

"It's perhaps in trouble that people get to know each other," she suggested.

"Perhaps," he said indifferently. "At any rate, we would not have gone away from here with him; though I believe he would have come in eagerly enough, and ready for any service he could render. It's that fat man's nature--a delightful fellow. You would not come on the wharf that time I sent the shawl back to Mrs. Schomberg through him. He has never seen you."

"I didn't know that you wanted anybody ever to see me," she said.

He had folded his arms on his breast and hung his head.

"And I did not know that you cared to be seen as yet. A misunderstanding evidently. An honourable misunderstanding. But it does not matter now."

He raised his head after a silence.

"How gloomy this forest has grown! Yet surely the sun cannot have set already."

She looked round; and as if her eyes had just been opened, she perceived the shades of the forest surrounding her, not so much with gloom, but with a sullen, dumb, menacing hostility. Her heart sank in the engulfing

stillness, at that moment she felt the nearness of death, breathing on her and on the man with her. If there had been a sudden stir of leaves, the crack of a dry branch, the faintest rustle, she would have screamed aloud. But she shook off the unworthy weakness. Such as she was, a fiddle-scraping girl picked up on the very threshold of infamy, she would try to rise above herself, triumphant and humble; and then happiness would burst on her like a torrent, flinging at her feet the man whom she loved.

Heyst stirred slightly.

"We had better be getting back, Lena, since we can't stay all night in the woods--or anywhere else, for that matter. We are the slaves of this infernal surprise which has been sprung on us by--shall I say fate?--your fate, or mine."

It was the man who had broken the silence, but it was the woman who led the way. At the very edge of the forest she stopped, concealed by a tree. He joined her cautiously.

"What is it? What do you see, Lena?" he whispered.

She said that it was only a thought that had come into her head. She hesitated for a moment giving him over her shoulder a shining gleam in her grey eyes. She wanted to know whether this trouble, this danger, this evil, whatever it was, finding them out in their retreat, was not a sort of punishment.

"Punishment?" repeated Heyst. He could not understand what she meant. When she explained, he was still more surprised. "A sort of retribution, from an angry Heaven?" he said in wonder. "On us? What on earth for?"

He saw her pale face darken in the dusk. She had blushed. Her whispering flowed very fast. It was the way they lived together--that wasn't right, was it? It was a guilty life. For she had not been forced into it, driven, scared into it. No, no--she had come to him of her own free will, with her whole soul yearning unlawfully.

He was so profoundly touched that he could not speak for a moment. To conceal his trouble, he assumed his best Heystian manner.

"What? Are our visitors then messengers of morality, avengers of righteousness, agents of Providence? That's certainly an original view. How flattered they would be if they could hear you!"



"Now you are making fun of me," she said in a subdued voice which broke suddenly.

"Are you conscious of sin?" Heyst asked gravely. She made no answer. "For I am not," he added; "before Heaven, I am not!"

"You! You are different. Woman is the tempter. You took me up from pity. I threw myself at you."

"Oh, you exaggerate, you exaggerate. It was not so bad as that," he said playfully, keeping his voice steady with an effort.

He considered himself a dead man already, yet forced to pretend that he was alive for her sake, for her defence. He regretted that he had no Heaven to which he could recommend this fair, palpitating handful of ashes and dust--warm, living sentient his own--and exposed helplessly to insult, outrage, degradation, and infinite misery of the body.

She had averted her face from him and was still. He suddenly seized her passive hand.

"You will have it so?" he said. "Yes? Well, let us then hope for mercy together."

She shook her head without looking at him, like an abashed child.

"Remember," he went on incorrigible with his delicate raillery, "that hope is a Christian virtue, and surely you can't want all the mercy for yourself."

Before their eyes the bungalow across the cleared ground stood bathed in a sinister light. An unexpected chill gust of wind made a noise in the tree-tops. She snatched her hand away and stepped out into the open; but before she had advanced more than three yards, she stood still and pointed to the west.

"Oh look there!" she exclaimed.

Beyond the headland of Diamond Bay, lying black on a purple sea, great masses of cloud stood piled up and bathed in a mist of blood. A crimson crack like an open wound zigzagged between them, with a piece of dark red sun showing at the bottom. Heyst cast an indifferent glance at the ill-omened chaos of the sky.

"Thunderstorm making up. We shall hear it all night, but it won't visit us, probably. The clouds generally gather round the volcano."

She was not listening to him. Her eyes reflected the sombre and violent hues of the sunset.

"That does not look much like a sign of mercy," she said slowly, as if to herself, and hurried on, followed by Heyst. Suddenly she stopped. "I don't care. I would do more yet! And some day you'll forgive me. You'll have to forgive me!"

## CHAPTER NINE

Stumbling up the steps, as if suddenly exhausted, Lena entered the room and let herself fall on the nearest chair. Before following her, Heyst took a survey of the surroundings from the veranda. It was a complete solitude. There was nothing in the aspect of this familiar scene to tell him that he and the girl were not as completely alone as they had been in the early days of their common life on this abandoned spot, with only Wang discreetly materializing from time to time and the uncomplaining memory of Morrison to keep them company.

After the cold gust of wind there was an absolute stillness of the air. The thunder-charged mass hung unbroken beyond the low, ink-black headland, darkening the twilight. By contrast, the sky at the zenith displayed pellucid clearness, the sheen of a delicate glass bubble which the merest movement of air might shatter. A little to the left, between the black masses of the headland and of the forest, the volcano, a feather of smoke by day and a cigar-glow at night, took its first fiery expanding breath of the evening. Above it a reddish star came out like an expelled spark from the fiery bosom of the earth, enchanted into permanency by the mysterious spell of frozen spaces.

In front of Heyst the forest, already full of the deepest shades, stood like a wall. But he lingered, watching its edge, especially where it ended at the line of bushes, masking the land end of the jetty. Since the girl had spoken of catching a glimpse of something white among the trees, he believed pretty firmly that they had been followed in their excursion up the mountain by Mr. Jones's secretary. No doubt the fellow had watched them out of the forest, and now, unless he took the trouble to go back some distance and fetch a considerable circuit inland over the clearing, he was bound to walk out into the open space before the bungalows. Heyst did, indeed, imagine at one time some movement between the trees, lost as soon as perceived. He stared patiently, but nothing more happened. After all, why should he trouble about these people's actions? Why this stupid concern for the preliminaries, since, when the issue was joined, it would find him disarmed and shrinking from the ugliness and degradation of it?

He turned and entered the room. Deep dusk reigned in there already. Lena, near the door, did not move or speak. The sheen of the white tablecloth was very obtrusive. The brute these two vagabonds had tamed had entered on its service while Heyst and Lena were away. The table was laid. Heyst walked

up and down the room several times. The girl remained without sound or movement on the chair. But when Heyst, placing the two silver candelabra on the table, struck a match to light the candles, she got up suddenly and went into the bedroom. She came out again almost immediately, having taken off her hat. Heyst looked at her over his shoulder.

"What's the good of shirking the evil hour? I've lighted these candles for a sign of our return. After all, we might not have been watched--while returning, I mean. Of course we were seen leaving the house."

The girl sat down again. The great wealth of her hair looked very dark above her colourless face. She raised her eyes, glistening softly in the light with a sort of unreadable appeal, with a strange effect of unseeing innocence.

"Yes," said Heyst across the table, the fingertips of one hand resting on the immaculate cloth. "A creature with an antediluvian lower jaw, hairy like a mastodon, and formed like a pre-historic ape, has laid this table. Are you awake, Lena? Am I? I would pinch myself, only I know that nothing would do away with this dream. Three covers. You know it is the shorter of the two who's coming--the gentleman who, in the play of his shoulders as he walks, and in his facial structure, recalls a Jaguar. Ah, you don't know what a jaguar is? But you have had a good look at these two. It's the short one, you know, who's to be our guest."

She made a sign with her head that she knew; Heyst's insistence brought Ricardo vividly before her mental vision. A sudden languor, like the physical echo of her struggle with the man, paralysed all her limbs. She lay still in the chair, feeling very frightened at this phenomenon--ready to pray aloud for strength.

Heyst had started to pace the room.

"Our guest! There is a proverb--in Russia, I believe--that when a guest enters the house, God enters the house. The sacred virtue of hospitality! But it leads one into trouble as well as any other."

The girl unexpectedly got up from the chair, swaying her supple figure and stretching her arms above her head. He stopped to look at her curiously, paused, and then went on:

"I venture to think that God has nothing to do with such a hospitality and with such a guest!"

She had jumped to her feet to react against the numbness, to discover whether her body would obey her will. It did. She could stand up, and she could move her arms freely. Though no physiologist, she concluded that all that sudden numbness was in her head, not in her limbs. Her fears assuaged, she thanked God for it mentally, and to Heyst murmured a protest:

"Oh, yes! He's got to do with everything--every little thing. Nothing can happen--"

"Yes," he said hastily, "one of the two sparrows can't be struck to the ground--you are thinking of that." The habitual playful smile faded on the kindly lips under the martial moustache. "Ah, you remember what you have been told--as a child--on Sundays."

"Yes, I do remember." She sank into the chair again. "It was the only decent bit of time I ever had when I was a kid, with our landlady's two girls, you know."

"I wonder, Lena," Heyst said, with a return to his urbane playfulness, "whether you are just a little child, or whether you represent something as old as the world."

She surprised Heyst by saying dreamily:

"Well--and what about you?"

"I? I date later--much later. I can't call myself a child, but I am so recent that I may call myself a man of the last hour--or is it the hour before last? I have been out of it so long that I am not certain how far the hands of the clock have moved since--since--"

He glanced at the portrait of his father, exactly above the head of the girl, as if it were ignoring her in its painted austerity of feeling. He did not finish the sentence; but he did not remain silent for long.

"Only what must be avoided are fallacious inferences, my dear Lena--especially at this hour."

"Now you are making fun of me again," she said without looking up.

"Am I?" he cried. "Making fun? No, giving warning. Hang it all, whatever truth people told you in the old days, there is also this one--that sparrows

do fall to the ground, that they are brought to the ground. This is no vain assertion, but a fact. That's why"--again his tone changed, while he picked up the table knife and let it fall disdainfully--"that's why I wish these wretched round knives had some edge on them. Absolute rubbish--neither edge, point, nor substance. I believe one of these forks would make a better weapon at a pinch. But can I go about with a fork in my pocket?" He gnashed his teeth with a rage very real, and yet comic.

"There used to be a carver here, but it was broken and thrown away a long time ago. Nothing much to carve here. It would have made a noble weapon, no doubt; but--"

He stopped. The girl sat very quiet, with downcast eyes. As he kept silence for some time, she looked up and said thoughtfully:

"Yes, a knife--it's a knife that you would want, wouldn't you, in case, in case--"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There must be a crowbar or two in the sheds; but I have given up all the keys together. And then, do you see me walking about with a crowbar in my hand? Ha, ha! And besides, that edifying sight alone might start the trouble for all I know. In truth, why has it not started yet?"

"Perhaps they are afraid of you," she whispered, looking down again.

"By Jove, it looks like it," he assented meditatively. "They do seem to hang back for some reason. Is that reason prudence, or downright fear, or perhaps the leisurely method of certitude?"

Out in the black night, not very far from the bungalow, resounded a loud and prolonged whistle. Lena's hands grasped the sides of the chair, but she made no movement. Heyst started, and turned his face away from the door.

The startling sound had died away.

"Whistles, yells, omens, signals, portents--what do they matter?" he said. "But what about the crowbar? Suppose I had it! Could I stand in ambush at the side of the door--this door--and smash the first protruding head, scatter blood and brains over the floor, over these walls, and then run stealthily to the other door to do the same thing--and repeat the performance for a third time, perhaps? Could I? On suspicion, without compunction, with a calm

and determined purpose? No, it is not in me. I date too late. Would you like to see me attempt this thing while that mysterious prestige of mine lasts--or their not less mysterious hesitation?"

"No, no!" she whispered ardently, as if compelled to speak by his eyes fixed on her face. "No, it's a knife you want to defend yourself with--to defend--there will be time--"

"And who knows if it isn't really my duty?" he began again, as if he had not heard her disjointed words at all. "It may be--my duty to you, to myself. For why should I put up with the humiliation of their secret menaces? Do you know what the world would say?"

He emitted a low laugh, which struck her with terror. She would have got up, but he stooped so low over her that she could not move without first pushing him away.

"It would say, Lena, that I--the Swede--after luring my friend and partner to his death from mere greed of money, have murdered these unoffending shipwrecked strangers from sheer funk. That would be the story whispered--perhaps shouted--certainly spread out, and believed--and believed, my dear Lena!"

"Who would believe such awful things?"

"Perhaps you wouldn't--not at first, at any rate; but the power of calumny grows with time. It's insidious and penetrating. It can even destroy one's faith in oneself--dry-rot the soul."

All at once her eyes leaped to the door and remained fixed, stony, a little enlarged. Turning his head, Heyst beheld the figure of Ricardo framed in the doorway. For a moment none of the three moved, then, looking from the newcomer to the girl in the chair, Heyst formulated a sardonic introduction.

"Mr Ricardo, my dear."

Her head drooped a little. Ricardo's hand went up to his moustache. His voice exploded in the room.

"At your service, ma'am!"

He stepped in, taking his hat off with a flourish, and dropping it carelessly on a chair near the door.

"At your service," he repeated, in quite another tone. "I was made aware there was a lady about, by that Pedro of ours; only I didn't know I should have the privilege of seeing you tonight, ma'am."

Lena and Heyst looked at him covertly, but he, with a vague gaze avoiding them both, looked at nothing, seeming to pursue some point in space.

"Had a pleasant walk?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes. And you?" returned Heyst, who had managed to catch his glance.

"I haven't been a yard away from the governor this afternoon till I started for here." The genuineness of the accent surprised Heyst, without convincing him of the truth of the words.

"Why do you ask?" pursued Ricardo with every inflection of perfect candour.

"You might have wished to explore the island a little," said Heyst, studying the man, who, to render him justice, did not try to free his captured gaze. "I may remind you that it wouldn't be a perfectly safe proceeding."

Ricardo presented a picture of innocence.

"Oh, yes--meaning that Chink that has ran away from you. He ain't much!"

"He has a revolver," observed Heyst meaningly.

"Well, and you have a revolver, too," Mr. Ricardo argued unexpectedly. "I don't worry myself about that."

"That's different. I am not afraid of you," Heyst made answer after a short pause.

"Of me?"

"Of all of you."

"You have a queer way of putting things," began Ricardo.

At that moment the door on the compound side of the house came open with some noise, and Pedro entered, pressing the edge of a loaded tray to his breast. His big, hairy head rolled a little, his feet fell in front of each other



with a short, hard thump on the floor. The arrival changed the current of Ricardo's thought, perhaps, but certainly of his speech.

"You heard me whistling a little while ago outside? That was to give him a hint, as I came along, that it was time to bring in the dinner; and here it is."

Lena rose and passed to the right of Ricardo, who lowered his glance for a moment. They sat down at the table. The enormous gorilla back of Pedro swayed out through the door.

"Extraordinary strong brute, ma'am," said Ricardo. He, had a propensity to talk about "his Pedro," as some men will talk of their dog. "He ain't pretty, though. No, he ain't pretty. And he has got to be kept under. I am his keeper, as it might be. The governor don't trouble his head much about details. All that's left to Martin. Martin, that's me, ma'am."

Heyst saw the girl's eyes turn towards Mr. Jones's secretary and rest blankly on his face. Ricardo, however, looked vaguely into space, and, with faint flickers of a smile about his lips, made conversation indefatigably against the silence of his entertainers. He boasted largely of his long association with Mr. Jones--over four years now, he said. Then, glancing rapidly at Heyst:

"You can see at once he's a gentleman, can't you?"

"You people," Heyst said, his habitual playful intonation tinged with gloom, "are divorced from all reality in my eyes."

Ricardo received this speech as if he had been expecting to hear those very words, or else did not mind at all what Heyst might say. He muttered an absent-minded "Ay, ay," played with a bit of biscuit, sighed, and said, with a peculiar stare which did not seem to carry any distance, but to stop short at a point in the air very near his face:

"Anybody can see at once you are one. You and the governor ought to understand each other. He expects to see you tonight. The governor isn't well, and we've got to think of getting away from here."

While saying these words he turned himself full towards Lena, but without any marked expression. Leaning back with folded arms, the girl stared before her as if she had been alone in the room. But under that aspect of almost vacant unconcern the perils and emotion that had entered into her life warmed her heart, exalted her mind with a sense of an inconceivable

intensity of existence.

"Really? Thinking of going away from here?" Heyst murmured.

"The best of friends must part," Ricardo pronounced slowly. "And, as long as they part friends, there's no harm done. We two are used to be on the move. You, I understand, prefer to stick in one place."

It was obvious that all this was being said merely for the sake of talking, and that Ricardo's mind was concentrated on some purpose unconnected with the words that were coming out of his mouth.

"I should like to know," Heyst asked with incisive politeness, "how you have come to understand this or anything else about me? As far as I can remember, I've made you no confidences."

Ricardo, gazing comfortably into space out of the back of his chair--for some time all three had given up any pretence of eating--answered abstractedly:

"Any fellow might have guessed it!" He sat up suddenly, and uncovered all his teeth in a grin of extraordinary ferocity, which was belied by the persistent amiability of his tone. "The governor will be the man to tell you something about that. I wish you would say you would see my governor. He's the one who does all our talking. Let me take you to him this evening. He ain't at all well; and he can't make up his mind to go away without having a talk with you."

Heyst, looking up, met Lena's eyes. Their expression of candour seemed to hide some struggling intention. Her head, he fancied, had made an imperceptible affirmative movement. Why? What reason could she have? Was it the prompting of some obscure instinct? Or was it simply a delusion of his own senses? But in this strange complication invading the quietude of his life, in his state of doubt and disdain and almost of despair with which he looked at himself, he would let even a delusive appearance guide him through a darkness so dense that it made for indifference.

"Well, suppose I do say so."

Ricardo did not conceal his satisfaction, which for a moment interested Heyst.

"It can't be my life they are after," he said to himself. "What good could it be to them?"

He looked across the table at the girl. What did it matter whether she had nodded or not? As always when looking into her unconscious eyes, he tasted something like the dregs of tender pity. He had decided to go. Her nod, imaginary or not imaginary, advice or illusion, had tipped the scale. He reflected that Ricardo's invitation could scarcely be anything in the nature of a trap. It would have been too absurd. Why carry subtly into a trap someone already bound hand and foot, as it were?

All this time he had been looking fixedly at the girl he called Lena. In the submissive quietness of her being, which had been her attitude ever since they had begun their life on the island, she remained as secret as ever. Heyst got up abruptly, with a smile of such enigmatic and despairing character that Mr. Secretary Ricardo, whose abstract gaze had an all-round efficiency, made a slight crouching start, as if to dive under the table for his leg-knife--a start that was repressed, as soon as begun. He had expected Heyst to spring on him or draw a revolver, because he created for himself a vision of him in his own image. Instead of doing either of these obvious things, Heyst walked across the room, opened the door and put his head through it to look out into the compound.

As soon as his back was turned, Ricardo's hand sought the girl's arm under the table. He was not looking at her, but she felt the groping, nervous touch of his search, felt suddenly the grip of his fingers above her wrist. He leaned forward a little; still he dared not look at her. His hard stare remained fastened on Heyst's back. In an extremely low hiss, his fixed idea of argument found expression scathingly:

"See! He's no good. He's not the man for you!"

He glanced at her at last. Her lips moved a little, and he was awed by that movement without a sound. Next instant the hard grasp of his fingers vanished from her arm. Heyst had shut the door. On his way back to the table, he crossed the path of the girl they had called Alma--she didn't know why--also Magdalen, whose mind had remained so long in doubt as to the reason of her own existence. She no longer wondered at that bitter riddle, since her heart found its solution in a blinding, hot glow of passionate purpose.

## CHAPTER TEN

She passed by Heyst as if she had indeed been blinded by some secret, lurid, and consuming glare into which she was about to enter. The curtain of the bedroom door fell behind her into rigid folds. Ricardo's vacant gaze seemed to be watching the dancing flight of a fly in mid air.

"Extra dark outside, ain't it?" he muttered.

"Not so dark but that I could see that man of yours prowling about there," said Heyst in measured tones.

"What--Pedro? He's scarcely a man you know; or else I wouldn't be so fond of him as I am."

"Very well. Let's call him your worthy associate."

"Ay! Worthy enough for what we want of him. A great standby is Peter in a scrimmage. A growl and a bite--oh, my! And you don't want him about?"

"I don't."

"You want him out of the way?" insisted Ricardo with an affectation of incredulity which Heyst accepted calmly, though the air in the room seemed to grow more oppressive with every word spoken.

"That's it. I do want him out of the way." He forced himself to speak equably.

"Lor! That's no great matter. Pedro's not much use here. The business my governor's after can be settled by ten minutes' rational talk with--with another gentleman. Quiet talk!"

He looked up suddenly with hard, phosphorescent eyes. Heyst didn't move a muscle. Ricardo congratulated himself on having left his revolver behind. He was so exasperated that he didn't know what he might have done. He said at last:

"You want poor, harmless Peter out of the way before you let me take you to see the governor--is that it?"

"Yes, that is it."

"H'm! One can see," Ricardo said with hidden venom, "that you are a gentleman; but all that gentlemanly fancifulness is apt to turn sour on a plain man's stomach. However--you'll have to pardon me."

He put his fingers into his mouth and let out a whistle which seemed to drive a thin, sharp shaft of air solidly against one's nearest ear-drum. Though he greatly enjoyed Heyst's involuntary grimace, he sat perfectly stolid waiting for the effect of the call.

It brought Pedro in with an extraordinary, uncouth, primeval impetuosity. The door flew open with a clatter, and the wild figure it disclosed seemed anxious to devastate the room in leaps and bounds; but Ricardo raised his open palm, and the creature came in quietly. His enormous half-closed paws swung to and fro a little in front of his bowed trunk as he walked. Ricardo looked on truculently.

"You go to the boat--understand? Go now!"

The little red eyes of the tame monster blinked with painful attention in the mass of hair.

"Well? Why don't you get? Forgot human speech, eh? Don't you know any longer what a boat is?"

"Si--boat," the creature stammered out doubtfully.

"Well, go there--the boat at the jetty. March off to it and sit there, lie down there, do anything but go to sleep there--till you hear my call, and then fly here. Them's your orders. March! Get, vamos! No, not that way--out through the front door. No sulks!"

Pedro obeyed with uncouth alacrity. When he had gone, the gleam of pitiless savagery went out of Ricardo's yellow eyes, and his physiognomy took on, for the first time that evening, the expression of a domestic cat which is being noticed.

"You can watch him right into the bushes, if you like. Too dark, eh? Why not go with him to the very spot, then?"

Heyst made a gesture of vague protest.

"There's nothing to assure me that he will stay there. I have no doubt of his

going, but it's an act without guarantee."

"There you are!" Ricardo shrugged his shoulders philosophically. "Can't be helped. Short of shooting our Pedro, nobody can make absolutely sure of his staying in the same place longer than he has a mind to; but I tell you, he lives in holy terror of my temper. That's why I put on my sudden-death air when I talk to him. And yet I wouldn't shoot him--not I, unless in such a fit of rage as would make a man shoot his favourite dog. Look here, sir! This deal is on the square. I didn't tip him a wink to do anything else. He won't budge from the jetty. Are you coming along now, sir?"

A short-silence ensued. Ricardo's jaws were working ominously under his skin. His eyes glided: voluptuously here and there, cruel and dreamy, Heyst checked a sudden movement, reflected for a while, then said:

"You must wait a little."

"Wait a little! Wait a little! What does he think a fellow is--a graven image?" grumbled Ricardo half audibly.

Heyst went into the bedroom, and shut the door after him with a bang. Coming from the light, he could not see a thing in there at first; yet he received the impression of the girl getting up from the floor. On the less opaque darkness of the shutter-hole, her head detached itself suddenly, very faint, a mere hint of a round, dark shape without a face.

"I am going, Lena. I am going to confront these scoundrels." He was surprised to feel two arms falling on his shoulders. "I thought that you--" he began.

"Yes, yes!" the girl whispered hastily.

She neither clung to him, nor yet did she try to draw him to her. Her hands grasped his shoulders, and she seemed to him to be staring into his face in the dark. And now he could see something of her face, too--an oval without features--and faintly distinguish her person, in the blackness, a form without definite lines.

"You have a black dress here, haven't you, Lena?" he asked, speaking rapidly, and so low that she could just hear him.

"Yes--an old thing."

"Very good. Put it on at once."

"But why?"

"Not for mourning!" There was something peremptory in the slightly ironic murmur. "Can you find it and get into it in the dark?"

She could. She would try. He waited, very still. He could imagine her movements over there at the far end of the room; but his eyes, accustomed now to the darkness, had lost her completely. When she spoke, her voice surprised him by its nearness. She had done what he had told her to do, and had approached him, invisible.

"Good! Where's that piece of purple veil I've seen lying about?" he asked.

There was no answer, only a slight rustle.

"Where is it?" he repeated impatiently.

Her unexpected breath was on his cheek.

"In my hands."

"Capital! Listen, Lena. As soon as I leave the bungalow with that horrible scoundrel, you slip out at the back--instantly, lose no time!--and run round into the forest. That will be your time, while we are walking away, and I am sure he won't give me the slip. Run into the forest behind the fringe of bushes between the big trees. You will know, surely, how to find a place in full view of the front door. I fear for you; but in this black dress, with most of your face muffled up in that dark veil, I defy anybody to find you there before daylight. Wait in the forest till the table is pushed into full view of the doorway, and you see three candles out of four blown out and one relighted--or, should the lights be put out here while you watch them, wait till three candles are lighted and then two put out. At either of these signals run back as hard as you can, for it will mean that I am waiting for you here."

While he was speaking, the girl had sought and seized one of his hands. She did not press it; she held it loosely, as it were timidly, caressingly. It was no grasp; it was a mere contact, as if only to make sure that he was there, that he was real and no mere darker shadow in the obscurity. The warmth of her hand gave Heyst a strange, intimate sensation of all her person. He had to fight down a new sort of emotion, which almost unmanned him. He went on, whispering sternly:

"But if you see no such signals, don't let anything--fear, curiosity, despair, or hope--entice you back to this house; and with the first sign of dawn steal away along the edge of the clearing till you strike the path. Wait no longer, because I shall probably be dead."

The murmur of the word "Never!" floated into his ear as if it formed itself in the air.

"You know the path," he continued. "Make your way to the barricade. Go to Wang--yes, to Wang. Let nothing stop you!" It seemed to him that the girl's hand trembled a little. "The worst he can do to you is to shoot you, but he won't. I really think he won't, if I am not there. Stay with the villagers, with the wild people, and fear nothing. They will be more awed by you than you can be frightened of them. Davidson's bound to turn up before very long. Keep a look-out for a passing steamer. Think of some sort of signal to call him."

She made no answer. The sense of the heavy, brooding silence in the outside world seemed to enter and fill the room--the oppressive infinity of it, without breath, without light. It was as if the heart of hearts had ceased to beat and the end of all things had come.

"Have you understood? You are to run out of the house at once," Heyst whispered urgently.

She lifted his hand to her lips and let it go. He was startled.

"Lena!" he cried out under his breath.

She was gone from his side. He dared not trust himself--no, not even to the extent of a tender word.

Turning to go out he heard a thud somewhere in the house. To open the door, he had first to lift the curtain; he did so with his face over his shoulder. The merest trickle of light, coming through the keyhole and one or two cracks, was enough for his eyes to see her plainly, all black, down on her knees, with her head and arms flung on the foot of the bed--all black in the desolation of a mourning sinner. What was this? A suspicion that there were everywhere more things than he could understand crossed Heyst's mind. Her arm, detached from the bed, motioned him away. He obeyed, and went out, full of disquiet.



The curtain behind him had not ceased to tremble when she was up on her feet, close against it, listening for sounds, for words, in a stooping, tragic attitude of stealthy attention, one hand clutching at her breast as if to compress, to make less loud the beating of her heart. Heyst had caught Mr. Jones's secretary in the contemplation of his closed writing-desk. Ricardo might have been meditating how to break into it; but when he turned about suddenly, he showed so distorted a face that it made Heyst pause in wonder at the upturned whites of the eyes, which were blinking horribly, as if the man were inwardly convulsed.

"I thought you were never coming," Ricardo mumbled.

"I didn't know you were pressed for time. Even if your going away depends on this conversation, as you say, I doubt if you are the men to put to sea on such a night as this," said Heyst, motioning Ricardo to precede him out of the house.

With feline undulations of hip and shoulder, the secretary left the room at once. There was something cruel in the absolute dumbness of the night. The great cloud covering half the sky hung right against one, like an enormous curtain hiding menacing preparations of violence. As the feet of the two men touched the ground, a rumble came from behind it, preceded by a swift, mysterious gleam of light on the waters of the bay.

"Ha!" said Ricardo. "It begins."

"It may be nothing in the end," observed Heyst, stepping along steadily.

"No! Let it come!" Ricardo said viciously. "I am in the humour for it!"

By the time the two men had reached the other bungalow, the far-off modulated rumble growled incessantly, while pale lightning in waves of cold fire flooded and ran off the island in rapid succession. Ricardo, unexpectedly, dashed ahead up the steps and put his head through the doorway.

"Here he is, governor! Keep him with you as long as you can--till you hear me whistle. I am on the track."

He flung these words into the room with inconceivable speed, and stood aside to let the visitor pass through the doorway; but he had to wait an appreciable moment, because Heyst, seeing his purpose, had scornfully slowed his pace. When Heyst entered the room it was with a smile, the Heyst

smile, lurking under his martial moustache.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Two candles were burning on the stand-up desk. Mr. Jones, tightly enfolded in an old but gorgeous blue silk dressing-gown, kept his elbows close against his sides and his hands deeply plunged into the extraordinarily deep pockets of the garment. The costume accentuated his emaciation. He resembled a painted pole leaning against the edge of the desk, with a dried head of dubious distinction stuck on the top of it. Ricardo lounged in the doorway. Indifferent in appearance to what was going on, he was biding his time. At a given moment, between two flickers of lightning, he melted out of his frame into the outer air. His disappearance was observed on the instant by Mr. Jones, who abandoned his nonchalant immobility against the desk, and made a few steps calculated to put him between Heyst and the doorway.

"It's awfully close," he remarked

Heyst, in the middle of the room, had made up his mind to speak plainly.

"We haven't met to talk about the weather. You favoured me earlier in the day with a rather cryptic phrase about yourself. 'I am he that is,' you said. What does that mean?"

Mr. Jones, without looking at Heyst, continued his absentminded movements till, attaining the desired position, he brought his shoulders with a thump against the wall near the door, and raised his head. In the emotion of the decisive moment his haggard face glistened with perspiration. Drops ran down his hollow cheeks and almost blinded the spectral eyes in their bony caverns.

"It means that I am a person to be reckoned with. No--stop! Don't put your hand into your pocket--don't."

His voice had a wild, unexpected shrillness. Heyst started, and there ensued a moment of suspended animation, during which the thunder's deep bass muttered distantly and the doorway to the right of Mr. Jones flickered with bluish light. At last Heyst shrugged his shoulders; he even looked at his hand. He didn't put it in his pocket, however. Mr. Jones, glued against the wall, watched him raise both his hands to the ends of his horizontal moustaches, and answered the note of interrogation in his steady eyes.

"A matter of prudence," said Mr. Jones in his natural hollow tones, and with

a face of deathlike composure. "A man of your free life has surely perceived that. You are a much talked-about man, Mr. Heyst--and though, as far as I understand, you are accustomed to employ the subtler weapons of intelligence, still I can't afford to take any risks of the--er--grosser methods. I am not unscrupulous enough to be a match for you in the use of intelligence; but I assure you, Mr. Heyst, that in the other way you are no match for me. I have you covered at this very moment. You have been covered ever since you entered this room. Yes--from my pocket."

During this harangue Heyst looked deliberately over his shoulder, stepped back a pace, and sat down on the end of the camp bedstead. Leaning his elbow on one knee, he laid his cheek in the palm of his hand and seemed to meditate on what he should say next. Mr. Jones, planted against the wall, was obviously waiting for some sort of overture. As nothing came, he resolved to speak himself; but he hesitated. For, though he considered that the most difficult step had been taken, he said to himself that every stage of progress required great caution, lest the man in Ricardo's phraseology, should "start to prance"--which would be most inconvenient. He fell back on a previous statement:

"And I am a person to be reckoned with."

The other man went on looking at the floor, as if he were alone in the room. There was a pause.

"You have heard of me, then?" Heyst said at length, looking up.

"I should think so! We have been staying at Schomberg's hotel."

"Schom--" Heyst choked on the word.

"What's the matter, Mr. Heyst?"

"Nothing. Nausea," Heyst said resignedly. He resumed his former attitude of meditative indifference. "What is this reckoning you are talking about?" he asked after a time, in the quietest possible tone. "I don't know you."

"It's obvious that we belong to the same--social sphere," began Mr. Jones with languid irony. Inwardly he was as watchful as he could be. "Something has driven you out--the originality of your ideas, perhaps. Or your tastes."

Mr Jones indulged in one of his ghastly smiles. In repose his features had a curious character of evil, exhausted austerity; but when he smiled, the

whole mask took on an unpleasantly infantile expression. A recrudescence of the rolling thunder invaded the room loudly, and passed into silence.

"You are not taking this very well," observed Mr. Jones. This was what he said, but as a matter of fact he thought that the business was shaping quite satisfactorily. The man, he said to himself, had no stomach for a fight. Aloud he continued: "Come! You can't expect to have it always your own way. You are a man of the world."

"And you?" Heyst interrupted him unexpectedly. "How do you define yourself?"

"I, my dear sir? In one way I am--yes, I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit. In another sense I am an outcast--almost an outlaw. If you prefer a less materialistic view, I am a sort of fate--the retribution that waits its time."

"I wish to goodness you were the commonest sort of ruffian!" said Heyst, raising his equable gaze to Mr. Jones. "One would be able to talk to you straight then, and hope for some humanity. As it is--"

"I dislike violence and ferocity of every sort as much as you do," Mr. Jones declared, looking very languid as he leaned against the wall, but speaking fairly loud. "You can ask my Martin if it is not so. This, Mr. Heyst, is a soft age. It is also an age without prejudices. I've heard that you are free from them yourself. You mustn't be shocked if I tell you plainly that we are after your money--or I am, if you prefer to make me alone responsible. Pedro, of course, knows no more of it than any other animal would. Ricardo is of the faithful-retainer class--absolutely identified with all my ideas, wishes, and even whims!"

Mr Jones pulled his left hand out of his pocket, got a handkerchief out of another, and began to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, neck, and chin. The excitement from which he suffered made his breathing visible. In his long dressing-gown he had the air of a convalescent invalid who had imprudently overtaxed his strength. Heyst, broad-shouldered, robust, watched the operation from the end of the camp bedstead, very calm, his hands on his knees.

"And by the by," he asked, "where is he now, that henchman of yours? Breaking into my desk?"

"That would be crude. Still, crudeness is one of life's conditions." There was

the slightest flavour of banter in the tone of Ricardo's governor.

"Conceivable, but unlikely. Martin is a little crude; but you are not, Mr. Heyst. To tell you the truth, I don't know precisely where he is. He has been a little mysterious of late; but he has my confidence. No, don't get up, Mr. Heyst!"

The viciousness of his spectral face was indescribable. Heyst, who had moved a little, was surprised by the disclosure.

"It was not my intention," he said.

"Pray remain seated," Mr. Jones insisted in a languid voice, but with a very determined glitter in his black eye-caverns.

"If you were more observant," said Heyst with dispassionate contempt, "you would have known before I had been five minutes in the room that I had no weapon of any sort on me."

"Possibly; but pray keep your hands still. They are very well where they are. This is too big an affair for me to take any risks."

"Big? Too big?" Heyst repeated with genuine surprise. "Good Heavens! Whatever you are looking for, there's very little of it here--very little of anything."

"You would naturally say so, but that's not what we have heard," retorted Mr. Jones quickly, with a grin so ghastly that it was impossible to think it voluntary.

Heyst's face had grown very gloomy. He knitted his brows.

"What have you heard?" he asked.

"A lot, Mr. Heyst--a lot," affirmed Mr. Jones. He was vying to recover his manner of languid superiority. "We have heard, for instance, of a certain Mr. Morrison, once your partner."

Heyst could not repress a slight movement.

"Aha!" said Mr. Jones, with a sort of ghostly glee on his face.

The muffled thunder resembled the echo of a distant cannonade below the horizon, and the two men seemed to be listening to it in sullen silence.

"This diabolical calumny will end in actually and literally taking my life from me," thought Heyst.

Then, suddenly, he laughed. Portentously spectral, Mr. Jones frowned at the sound.

"Laugh as much as you please," he said. "I, who have been hounded out from society by a lot of highly moral souls, can't see anything funny in that story. But here we are, and you will now have to pay for your fun, Mr. Heyst."

"You have heard a lot of ugly lies," observed Heyst. "Take my word for it!"

"You would say so, of course--very natural. As a matter of fact I haven't heard very much. Strictly speaking, it was Martin. He collects information, and so on. You don't suppose I would talk to that Schomberg animal more than I could help? It was Martin whom he took into his confidence."

"The stupidity of that creature is so great that it becomes formidable," Heyst said, as if speaking to himself.

Involuntarily, his mind turned to the girl, wandering in the forest, alone and terrified. Would he ever see her again? At that thought he nearly lost his self-possession. But the idea that if she followed his instructions those men were not likely to find her steadied him a little. They did not know that the island had any inhabitants; and he himself once disposed of, they would be too anxious to get away to waste time hunting for a vanished girl.

All this passed through Heyst's mind in a flash, as men think in moments of danger. He looked speculatively at Mr. Jones, who, of course, had never for a moment taken his eyes from his intended victim. And, the conviction came to Heyst that this outlaw from the higher spheres was an absolutely hard and pitiless scoundrel.

Mr Jones's voice made him start.

"It would be useless, for instance, to tell me that your Chinaman has run off with your money. A man living alone with a Chinaman on an island takes care to conceal property of that kind so well that the devil himself--"

"Certainly," Heyst muttered.

Again, with his left hand, Mr. Jones mopped his frontal bone, his stalk-like neck, his razor jaws, his fleshless chin. Again his voice faltered and his aspect became still more gruesomely malevolent as of a wicked and pitiless corpse.

"I see what you mean," he cried, "but you mustn't put too much trust in your ingenuity. You don't strike me as a very ingenious person, Mr. Heyst. Neither am I. My talents lie another way. But Martin--"

"Who is now engaged in rifling my desk," interjected Heyst.

"I don't think so. What I was going to say is that Martin is much cleverer than a Chinaman. Do you believe in racial superiority, Mr. Heyst? I do, firmly. Martin is great at ferreting out such secrets as yours, for instance."

"Secrets like mine!" repeated Heyst bitterly. "Well I wish him joy of all he can ferret out!"

"That's very kind of you," remarked Mr. Jones. He was beginning to be anxious for Martin's return. Of iron self-possession at the gaming-table, fearless in a sudden affray, he found that this rather special kind of work was telling on his nerves. "Keep still as you are!" he cried sharply.

"I've told you I am not armed," said Heyst, folding his arms on his breast.

"I am really inclined to believe that you are not," admitted Mr. Jones seriously. "Strange!" he mused aloud, the caverns of his eyes turned upon Heyst. Then briskly: "But my object is to keep you in this room. Don't provoke me, by some unguarded movement, to smash your knee or do something definite of that sort." He passed his tongue over his lips, which were dry and black, while his forehead glistened with moisture. "I don't know if it wouldn't be better to do it at once!"

"He who deliberates is lost," said Heyst with grave mockery.

Mr Jones disregarded the remark. He had the air of communing with himself.

"Physically I am no match for you," he said slowly, his black gaze fixed upon the man sitting on the end of the bed. "You could spring--"

"Are you trying to frighten yourself?" asked Heyst abruptly. "You don't seem to have quite enough pluck for your business. Why don't you do it at once?"



Mr Jones, taking violent offence, snorted like a savage skeleton.

"Strange as it may seem to you, it is because of my origin, my breeding, my traditions, my early associations, and such-like trifles. Not everybody can divest himself of the prejudices of a gentleman as easily as you have done, Mr. Heyst. But don't worry about my pluck. If you were to make a clean spring at me, you would receive in mid air, so to speak, something that would make you perfectly harmless by the time you landed. No, don't misapprehend us, Mr. Heyst. We are--er--adequate bandits; and we are after the fruit of your labours as a--er--successful swindler. It's the way of the world--gorge and disgorge!"

He leaned wearily the back of his head against the wall. His vitality seemed exhausted. Even his sunken eyelids drooped within the bony sockets. Only his thin, waspish, beautifully pencilled eyebrows, drawn together a little, suggested the will and the power to sting--something vicious, unconquerable, and deadly.

"Fruits! Swindler!" repeated Heyst, without heat, almost without contempt. "You are giving yourself no end of trouble, you and your faithful henchman, to crack an empty nut. There are no fruits here, as you imagine. There are a few sovereigns, which you may have if you like; and since you have called yourself a bandit--"

"Yaas!" drawled Mr. Jones. "That, rather than a swindler. Open warfare at least!"

"Very good! Only let me tell you that there were never in the world two more deluded bandits--never!"

Heyst uttered these words with such energy that Mr. Jones, stiffening up, seemed to become thinner and taller in his metallic blue dressing-gown against the whitewashed wall.

"Fooled by a silly, rascally innkeeper!" Heyst went on. "Talked over like a pair of children with a promise of sweets!"

"I didn't talk with that disgusting animal," muttered Mr. Jones sullenly; "but he convinced Martin, who is no fool."

"I should think he wanted very much to be convinced," said Heyst, with the courteous intonation so well known in the Islands. "I don't want to disturb

your touching trust in your--your follower, but he must be the most credulous brigand in existence. What do you imagine? If the story of my riches were ever so true, do you think Schomberg would have imparted it to you from sheer altruism? Is that the way of the world, Mr. Jones?"

For a moment the lower jaw of Ricardo's gentleman dropped; but it came up with a snap of scorn, and he said with spectral intensity:

"The beast is cowardly! He was frightened, and wanted to get rid of us, if you want to know, Mr. Heyst. I don't know that the material inducement was so very great, but I was bored, and we decided to accept the bribe. I don't regret it. All my life I have been seeking new impressions, and you have turned out to be something quite out of the common. Martin, of course, looks to the material results. He's simple--and faithful--and wonderfully acute."

"Ah, yes! He's on the track--" and now Heyst's speech had the character of politely grim raillery--"but not sufficiently on the track, as yet, to make it quite convenient to shoot me without more ado. Didn't Schomberg tell you precisely where I conceal the fruit of my rapines? Pah! Don't you know he would have told you anything, true or false, from a very clear motive? Revenge! Mad hate--the unclean idiot!"

Mr Jones did not seem very much moved. On his right hand the doorway incessantly flickered with distant lightning, and the continuous rumble of thunder went on irritatingly, like the growl of an inarticulate giant muttering fatuously.

Heyst overcame his immense repugnance to allude to her whose image, cowering in the forest was constantly before his eyes, with all the pathos and force of its appeal, august, pitiful, and almost holy to him. It was in a hurried, embarrassed manner that he went on:

"If it had not been for that girl whom he persecuted with his insane and odious passion, and who threw herself on my protection, he would never have--but you know well enough!"

"I don't know!" burst out Mr. Jones with amazing heat. "That hotel-keeper tried to talk to me once of some girl he had lost, but I told him I didn't want to hear any of his beastly women stories. It had something to do with you, had it?"

Heyst looked on serenely at this outburst, then lost his patience a little.

"What sort of comedy is this? You don't mean to say that you didn't know that I had--that there was a girl living with me here?"

One could see that the eyes of Mr. Jones had become fixed in the depths of their black holes by the gleam of white becoming steady there. The whole man seemed frozen still.

"Here! Here!" he screamed out twice. There was no mistaking his astonishment, his shocked incredulity--something like frightened disgust.

Heyst was disgusted also, but in another way. He too was incredulous. He regretted having mentioned the girl; but the thing was done, his repugnance had been overcome in the heat of his argument against the absurd bandit.

"Is it possible that you didn't know of that significant fact?" he inquired. "Of the only effective truth in the welter of silly lies that deceived you so easily?"

"No, I didn't!" Mr. Jones shouted. "But Martin did!" he added in a faint whisper, which Heyst's ears just caught and no more.

"I kept her out of sight as long as I could," said Heyst. "Perhaps, with your bringing up, traditions, and so on; you will understand my reason for it."

"He knew. He knew before!" Mr. Jones mourned in a hollow voice. "He knew of her from the first!"

Backed hard against the wall he no longer watched Heyst. He had the air of a man who had seen an abyss yawning under his feet.

"If I want to kill him, this is my time," thought Heyst; but he did not move.

Next moment Mr. Jones jerked his head up, glaring with sardonic fury.

"I have a good mind to shoot you, you woman-ridden hermit, you man in the moon, that can't exist without--no, it won't be you that I'll shoot. It's the other woman-lover--the prevaricating, sly, low-class, amorous cuss! And he shaved--shaved under my very nose. I'll shoot him!"

"He's gone mad," thought Heyst, startled by the spectre's sudden fury.

He felt himself more in danger, nearer death, than ever since he had entered that room. An insane bandit is a deadly combination. He did not, could not know that Mr. Jones was quick-minded enough to see already the end of his

reign over his excellent secretary's thoughts and feelings; the coming failure of Ricardo's fidelity. A woman had intervened! A woman, a girl, who apparently possessed the power to awaken men's disgusting folly. Her power had been proved in two instances already--the beastly innkeeper, and that man with moustaches, upon whom Mr. Jones, his deadly right hand twitching in his pocket, glared more in repulsion than in anger. The very object of the expedition was lost from view in his sudden and overwhelming sense of utter insecurity. And this made Mr. Jones feel very savage; but not against the man with the moustaches. Thus, while Heyst was really feeling that his life was not worth two minutes, purchase, he heard himself addressed with no affectation of languid impertinence but with a burst of feverish determination.

"Here! Let's call a truce!" said Mr. Jones.

Heyst's heart was too sick to allow him to smile.

"Have I been making war on you?" he asked wearily. "How do you expect me to attach any meaning to your words?" he went on. "You seem to be a morbid, senseless sort of bandit. We don't speak the same language. If I were to tell you why I am here, talking to you, you wouldn't believe me, because you would not understand me. It certainly isn't the love of life, from which I have divorced myself long ago--not sufficiently, perhaps; but if you are thinking of yours, then I repeat to you that it has never been in danger from me. I am unarmed."

Mr Jones was biting his lower lip, in a deep meditation. It was only towards the last that he looked at Heyst.

"Unarmed, eh?" Then he burst out violently: "I tell you, a gentleman is no match for the common herd. And yet one must make use of the brutes. Unarmed, eh? And I suppose that creature is of the commonest sort. You could hardly have got her out of a drawing-room. Though they're all alike, for that matter. Unarmed! It's a pity. I am in much greater danger than you are or were--or I am much mistaken. But I am not--I know my man!"

He lost his air of mental vacancy and broke out into shrill exclamations. To Heyst they seemed madder than anything that had gone before.

"On the track! On the scent!" he cried, forgetting himself to the point of executing a dance of rage in the middle of the floor.

Heyst looked on, fascinated by this skeleton in a gay dressing-gown, jerkily

agitated like a grotesque toy on the end of an invisible string. It became quiet suddenly.

"I might have smelt a rat! I always knew that this would be the danger." He changed suddenly to a confidential tone, fixing his sepulchral stare on Heyst. "And yet here I am, taken in by the fellow, like the veriest fool. I've been always on the watch for some beastly influence, but here I am, fairly caught. He shaved himself right in front of me and I never guessed!"

The shrill laugh, following on the low tone of secrecy, sounded so convincingly insane that Heyst got up as if moved by a spring. Mr. Jones stepped back two paces, but displayed no uneasiness.

"It's as clear as daylight!" he uttered mournfully, and fell silent.

Behind him the doorway flickered lividly, and the sound as of a naval action somewhere away on the horizon filled the breathless pause. Mr. Jones inclined his head on his shoulder. His mood had completely changed.

"What do you say, unarmed man? Shall we go and see what is detaining my trusted Martin so long? He asked me to keep you engaged in friendly conversation till he made a further examination of that track. Ha, ha, ha!"

"He is no doubt ransacking my house," said Heyst.

He was bewildered. It seemed to him that all this was an incomprehensible dream, or perhaps an elaborate other-world joke, contrived by that spectre in a gorgeous dressing gown.

Mr Jones looked at him with a horrible, cadaverous smile of inscrutable mockery, and pointed to the door. Heyst passed through it first. His feelings had become so blunted that he did not care how soon he was shot in the back.

"How oppressive the air is!" the voice of Mr. Jones said at his elbow. "This stupid storm gets on my nerves. I would welcome some rain, though it would be unpleasant to get wet. On the other hand, this exasperating thunder has the advantage of covering the sound of our approach. The lightning's not so convenient. Ah, your house is fully illuminated! My clever Martin is punishing your stock of candles. He belongs to the unceremonious classes, which are also unlovely, untrustworthy, and so on."

"I left the candles burning," said Heyst, "to save him trouble."

"You really believed he would go to your house?" asked Mr. Jones with genuine interest.

"I had that notion, strongly. I do believe he is there now."

"And you don't mind?"

"No!"

"You don't!" Mr. Jones stopped to wonder. "You are an extraordinary man," he said suspiciously, and moved on, touching elbows with Heyst.

In the latter's breast dwelt a deep silence, the complete silence of unused faculties. At this moment, by simply shouldering Mr. Jones, he could have thrown him down and put himself, by a couple of leaps, beyond the certain aim of the revolver; but he did not even think of that. His very will seemed dead of weariness. He moved automatically, his head low, like a prisoner captured by the evil power of a masquerading skeleton out of a grave. Mr. Jones took charge of the direction. They fetched a wide sweep. The echoes of distant thunder seemed to dog their footsteps.

"By the by," said Mr. Jones, as if unable to restrain his curiosity, "aren't you anxious about that--ouch!--that fascinating creature to whom you owe whatever pleasure you can find in our visit?"

"I have placed her in safety," said Heyst. "I--I took good care of that."

Mr Jones laid a hand on his arm.

"You have? Look! is that what you mean?"

Heyst raised his head. In the flicker of lightning the desolation of the cleared ground on his left leaped out and sank into the night, together with the elusive forms of things distant, pale, unearthly. But in the brilliant square of the door he saw the girl--the woman he had longed to see once more as if enthroned, with her hands on the arms of the chair. She was in black; her face was white, her head dreamily inclined on her breast. He saw her only as low as her knees. He saw her--there, in the room, alive with a sombre reality. It was no mocking vision. She was not in the forest--but there! She sat there in the chair, seemingly without strength, yet without fear, tenderly stooping.

"Can you understand their power?" whispered the hot breath of Mr. Jones into his ear. "Can there be a more disgusting spectacle? It's enough to make the earth detestable. She seems to have found her affinity. Move on closer. If I have to shoot you in the end, then perhaps you will die cured."

Heyst obeyed the pushing pressure of a revolver barrel between his shoulders. He felt it distinctly, but he did not feel the ground under his feet. They found the steps, without his being aware that he was ascending them--slowly, one by one. Doubt entered into him--a doubt of a new kind, formless, hideous. It seemed to spread itself all over him, enter his limbs, and lodge in his entrails. He stopped suddenly, with a thought that he who experienced such a feeling had no business to live--or perhaps was no longer living.

Everything--the bungalow, the forest, the open ground--trembled incessantly, the earth, the sky itself, shivered all the time, and the only thing immovable in the shuddering universe was the interior of the lighted room and the woman in black sitting in the light of the eight candle-flames. They flung around her an intolerable brilliance which hurt his eyes, seemed to sear his very brain with the radiation of infernal heat. It was some time before his scorched eyes made out Ricardo seated on the floor at some little distance, his back to the doorway, but only partly so; one side of his upturned face showing the absorbed, all forgetful rapture of his contemplation.

The grip of Mr. Jones's hard claw drew Heyst back a little. In the roll of thunder, swelling and subsiding, he whispered in his ear a sarcastic: "Of course!"

A great shame descended upon Heyst--the shame of guilt, absurd and maddening. Mr. Jones drew him still farther back into the darkness of the veranda.

"This is serious," he went on, distilling his ghostly venom into Heyst's very ear. "I had to shut my eyes many times to his little flings; but this is serious. He has found his soul-mate. Mud souls, obscene and cunning! Mud bodies, too--the mud of the gutter! I tell you, we are no match for the vile populace. I, even I, have been nearly caught. He asked me to detain you till he gave me the signal. It won't be you that I'll have to shoot, but him. I wouldn't trust him near me for five minutes after this!"

He shook Heyst's arm a little.

"If you had not happened to mention the creature, we should both have

been dead before morning. He would have stabbed you as you came down the steps after leaving me and then he would have walked up to me and planted the same knife between my ribs. He has no prejudices. The viler the origin, the greater the freedom of these simple souls!"

He drew a cautious, hissing breath and added in an agitated murmur: "I can see right into his mind, I have been nearly caught napping by his cunning."

He stretched his neck to peer into the room from the side. Heyst, too, made a step forward, under the slight impulse of that slender hand clasping his hand with a thin, bony grasp.

"Behold!" the skeleton of the crazy bandit jabbered thinly into his ear in spectral fellowship. "Behold the simple, Acis kissing the sandals of the nymph, on the way to her lips, all forgetful, while the menacing fife of Polyphemus already sounds close at hand--if he could only hear it! Stoop a little."



## CHAPTER TWELVE

On returning to the Heyst bungalow, rapid as if on wings, Ricardo found Lena waiting for him. She was dressed in black; and at once his uplifting exultation was replaced by an awed and quivering patience before her white face, before the immobility of her reposeful pose, the more amazing to him who had encountered the strength of her limbs and the indomitable spirit in her body. She had come out after Heyst's departure, and had sat down under the portrait to wait for the return of the man of violence and death. While lifting the curtain, she felt the anguish of her disobedience to her lover, which was soothed by a feeling she had known before--a gentle flood of penetrating sweetness. She was not automatically obeying a momentary suggestion, she was under influences more deliberate, more vague, and of greater potency. She had been prompted, not by her will, but by a force that was outside of her and more worthy. She reckoned upon nothing definite; she had calculated nothing. She saw only her purpose of capturing death--savage, sudden, irresponsible death, prowling round the man who possessed her, death embodied in the knife ready to strike into his heart. No doubt it had been a sin to throw herself into his arms. With that inspiration that descends at times from above for the good or evil of our common mediocrity, she had a sense of having been for him only a violent and sincere choice of curiosity and pity--a thing that passes. She did not know him. If he were to go away from her and disappear, she would utter no reproach, she would not resent it; for she would hold in herself the impress of something most rare and precious--his embraces made her own by her courage in saving his life.

All she thought of--the essence of her tremors, her flushes of heat, and her shudders of cold--was the question how to get hold of that knife, the mark and sign of stalking death. A tremor of impatience to clutch the frightful thing, glimpsed once and unforgettable, agitated her hands.

The instinctive flinging forward of these hands stopped Ricardo dead short between the door and her chair, with the ready obedience of a conquered man who can bide his time. Her success disconcerted her. She listened to the man's impassioned transports of terrible eulogy and even more awful declarations of love. She was even able to meet his eyes, oblique, apt to glide away, throwing feral gleams of desire.

"No!" he was saying, after a fiery outpouring of words in which the most ferocious phrases of love were mingled with wooing accents of entreaty. "I

will have no more of it! Don't you mistrust me. I am sober in my talk. Feel how quietly my heart beats. Ten times today when you, you, you, swam in my eye, I thought it would burst one of my ribs or leap out of my throat. It has knocked itself dead and tired, waiting for this evening, for this very minute. And now it can do no more. Feel how quiet it is!"

He made a step forward, but she raised her clear voice commandingly:

"No nearer!"

He stopped with a smile of imbecile worship on his lips, and with the delighted obedience of a man who could at any moment seize her in his hands and dash her to the ground.

"Ah! If I had taken you by the throat this morning and had my way with you, I should never have known what you are. And now I do. You are a wonder! And so am I, in my way. I have nerve, and I have brains, too. We should have been lost many times but for me. I plan--I plot for my gentleman. Gentleman--pah! I am sick of him. And you are sick of yours, eh? You, you!"

He shook all over; he cooed at her a string of endearing names, obscene and tender, and then asked abruptly:

"Why don't you speak to me?"

"It's my part to listen," she said, giving him an inscrutable smile, with a flush on her cheek and her lips cold as ice.

"But you will answer me?"

"Yes," she said, her eyes dilated as if with sudden interest.

"Where's that plunder? Do you know?"

"No! Not yet."

"But there is plunder stowed somewhere that's worth having?"

"Yes, I think so. But who knows?" she added after a pause.

"And who cares?" he retorted recklessly. "I've had enough of this crawling on my belly. It's you who are my treasure. It's I who found you out where a gentleman had buried you to rot for his accursed pleasure!"

He looked behind him and all around for a seat, then turned to her his troubled eyes and dim smile.

"I am dog-tired," he said, and sat down on the floor. "I went tired this morning, since I came in here and started talking to you--as tired as if I had been pouring my life-blood here on these planks for you to dabble your white feet in."

Unmoved, she nodded at him thoughtfully. Woman-like, all her faculties remained concentrated on her heart's desire--on the knife--while the man went on babbling insanely at her feet, ingratiating and savage, almost crazy with elation. But he, too, was holding on to his purpose.

"For you! For you I will throw away money, lives--all the lives but mine! What you want is a man, a master that will let you put the heel of your shoe on his neck; not that skulker, who will get tired of you in a year--and you of him. And then what? You are not the one to sit still; neither am I. I live for myself, and you shall live for yourself, too--not for a Swedish baron. They make a convenience of people like you and me. A gentleman is better than an employer, but an equal partnership against all the 'yporcrits is the thing for you and me. We'll go on wandering the world over, you and I both free and both true. You are no cage bird. We'll rove together, for we are of them that have no homes. We are born rovers!"

She listened to him with the utmost attention, as if any unexpected word might give her some sort of opening to get that dagger, that awful knife--to disarm murder itself, pleading for her love at her feet. Again she nodded at him thoughtfully, rousing a gleam in his yellow eyes, yearning devotedly upon her face. When he hitched himself a little closer, her soul had no movement of recoil. This had to be. Anything had to be which would bring the knife within her reach. He talked more confidentially now.

"We have met, and their time has come," he began, looking up into her eyes. "The partnership between me and my gentleman has to be ripped up. There's no room for him where we two are. Why, he would shoot me like a dog! Don't you worry. This will settle it not later than tonight!"

He tapped his folded leg below the knee, and was surprised, flattered, by the lighting up of her face, which stooped towards him eagerly and remained expectant, the lips girlishly parted, red in the pale face, and quivering in the quickened drawing of her breath.

"You marvel, you miracle, you man's luck and joy--one in a million! No, the only one. You have found your man in me," he whispered tremulously.

"Listen! They are having their last talk together; for I'll do for your gentleman, too, by midnight."

Without the slightest tremor she murmured, as soon as the tightening of her breast had eased off and the words would come:

"I wouldn't be in too much of a hurry--with him."

The pause, the tone, had all the value of meditated advice.

"Good, thrifty girl!" he laughed low, with a strange feline gaiety, expressed by the undulating movement of his shoulders and the sparkling snap of his oblique eyes. "You are still thinking about the chance of that swag. You'll make a good partner, that you will! And, I say, what a decoy you will make! Jee-miny!"

He was carried away for a moment, but his face darkened swiftly.

"No! No reprieve. What do you think a fellow is--a scarecrow? All hat and clothes and no feeling, no inside, no brain to make fancies for himself? No!" he went on violently. "Never in his life will he go again into that room of yours--never any more!"

A silence fell. He was gloomy with the torment of his jealousy, and did not even look at her. She sat up and slowly, gradually, bent lower and lower over him, as if ready to fall into his arms. He looked up at last, and checked this droop unwittingly.

"Say! You, who are up to fighting a man with your bare hands, could you--eh?--could you manage to stick one with a thing like that knife of mine?"

She opened her eyes very wide and gave him a wild smile.

"How can I tell?" she whispered enchantingly. "Will you let me have a look at it?"

Without taking his eyes from her face, he pulled the knife out of its sheath--a short, broad, cruel double-edged blade with a bone handle--and only then looked down at it.

"A good friend," he said simply. "Take it in your hand and feel the balance,"

he suggested.

At the moment when she bent forward to receive it from him, there was a flash of fire in her mysterious eyes--a red gleam in the white mist which wrapped the promptings and longings of her soul. She had done it! The very sting of death was in her hands, the venom of the viper in her paradise, extracted, safe in her possession--and the viper's head all but lying under her heel. Ricardo, stretched on the mats of the floor, crept closer and closer to the chair in which she sat.

All her thoughts were busy planning how to keep possession of that weapon which had seemed to have drawn into itself every danger and menace on the death-ridden earth. She said with a low laugh, the exultation in which he failed to recognize:

"I didn't think that you would ever trust me with that thing!"

"Why not?"

"For fear I should suddenly strike you with it."

"What for? For this morning's work? Oh, no! There's no spite in you for that. You forgave me. You saved me. You got the better of me, too. And anyhow, what good would it be?"

"No, no good," she admitted.

In her heart she felt that she would not know how to do it; that if it came to a struggle, she would have to drop the dagger and fight with her hands.

"Listen. When we are going about the world together, you shall always call me husband. Do you hear?"

"Yes," she said bracing herself for the contest, in whatever shape it was coming.

The knife was lying in her lap. She let it slip into the fold of her dress, and laid her forearms with clasped fingers over her knees, which she pressed desperately together. The dreaded thing was out of sight at last. She felt a dampness break out all over her.

"I am not going to hide you, like that good-for-nothing, finicky, sneery gentleman. You shall be my pride and my chum. Isn't that better than

rotting on an island for the pleasure of a gentleman, till he gives you the chuck?"

"I'll be anything you like," she said.

In his intoxication he crept closer with every word she uttered, with every movement she made.

"Give your foot," he begged in a timid murmur, and in the full consciousness of his power.

Anything! Anything to keep murder quiet and disarmed till strength had returned to her limbs and she could make up her mind what to do. Her fortitude had been shaken by the very facility of success that had come to her. She advanced her foot forward a little from under the hem of her skirt; and he threw himself on it greedily. She was not even aware of him. She had thought of the forest, to which she had been told to run. Yes, the forest--that was the place for her to carry off the terrible spoil, the sting of vanquished death. Ricardo, clasping her ankle, pressed his lips time after time to the instep, muttering gasping words that were like sobs, making little noises that resembled the sounds of grief and distress. Unheard by them both, the thunder growled distantly with angry modulations of its tremendous voice, while the world outside shuddered incessantly around the dead stillness of the room where the framed profile of Heyst's father looked severely into space.

Suddenly Ricardo felt himself spurned by the foot he had been cherishing--spurned with a push of such violence into the very hollow of his throat that it swung him back instantly into an upright position on his knees. He read his danger in the stony eyes of the girl; and in the very act of leaping to his feet he heard sharply, detached on the comminatory voice of the storm the brief report of a shot which half stunned him, in the manner of a blow. He turned his burning head, and saw Heyst towering in the doorway. The thought that the beggar had started to prance darted through his mind. For a fraction of a second his distracted eyes sought for his weapon all over the floor. He couldn't see it.

"Stick him, you!" he called hoarsely to the girl, and dashed headlong for the door of the compound.

While he thus obeyed the instinct of self-preservation, his reason was telling him that he could not possibly reach it alive. It flew open, however, with a crash, before his launched weight, and instantly he swung it to behind him.

There, his shoulder leaning against it, his hands clinging to the handle, dazed and alone in the night full of shudders and muttered menaces, he tried to pull himself together. He asked himself if he had been shot at more than once. His shoulder was wet with the blood trickling from his head. Feeling above his ear, he ascertained that it was only a graze, but the shock of the surprise had unmanned him for the moment.

What the deuce was the governor about to let the beggar break loose like this? Or--was the governor dead, perhaps?

The silence within the room awed him. Of going back there could be no question.

"But she knows how to take care of her self," he muttered.

She had his knife. It was she now who was deadly, while he was disarmed, no good for the moment. He stole away from the door, staggering, the warm trickle running down his neck, to find out what had become of the governor and to provide himself with a firearm from the armoury in the trunks.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Mr Jones, after firing his shot over Heyst's shoulder, had thought it proper to dodge away. Like the spectre he was, he noiselessly vanished from the veranda. Heyst stumbled into the room and looked around. All the objects in there--the books, portrait on the wall--seemed shadowy, unsubstantial, the dumb accomplices of an amazing dream-plot ending in an illusory effect of awakening and the impossibility of ever closing his eyes again. With dread he forced himself to look at the girl. Still in the chair, she was leaning forward far over her knees, and had hidden her face in her hands. Heyst remembered Wang suddenly. How clear all this was--and how extremely amusing! Very.

She sat up a little, then leaned back, and taking her hands from her face, pressed both of them to her breast as if moved to the heart by seeing him there looking at her with a black, horror-struck curiosity. He would have pitied her, if the triumphant expression of her face had not given him a shock which destroyed the balance of his feelings. She spoke with an accent of wild joy:

"I knew you would come back in time! You are safe now. I have done it! I would never, never have let him--" Her voice died out, while her eyes shone at him as when the sun breaks through a mist. "Never get it back. Oh, my beloved!"

He bowed his head gravely, and said in his polite, Heystian tone:

"No doubt you acted from instinct. Women have been provided with their own weapon. I was a disarmed man, I have been a disarmed man all my life as I see it now. You may glory in your resourcefulness and your profound knowledge of yourself; but I may say that the other attitude, suggestive of shame, had its charm. For you are full of charm!"

The exultation vanished from her face.

"You mustn't make fun of me now. I know no shame. I was thanking God with all my sinful heart for having been able to do it--for giving you to me in that way--oh, my beloved--all my own at last!"

He stared as if mad. Timidly she tried to excuse herself for disobeying his directions for her safety. Every modulation of her enchanting voice cut deep



into his very breast, so that he could hardly understand the words for the sheer pain of it. He turned his back on her; but a sudden drop, an extraordinary faltering of her tone, made him spin round. On her white neck her pale head dropped as in a cruel drought a withered flower droops on its stalk. He caught his breath, looked at her closely, and seemed to read some awful intelligence in her eyes. At the moment when her eyelids fell as if smitten from above by an the gleam of old silver familiar to him from boyhood, the very invisible power, he snatched her up bodily out of the chair, and disregarding an unexpected metallic clatter on the floor, carried her off into the other room. The limpness of her body frightened him. Laying her down on the bed, he ran out again, seized a four-branched candlestick on the table, and ran back, tearing down with a furious jerk the curtain that swung stupidly in his way, but after putting the candlestick on the table by the bed, he remained absolutely idle. There did not seem anything more for him to do. Holding his chin in his hand he looked down intently at her still face.

"Has she been stabbed with this thing?" asked Davidson, whom suddenly he saw standing by his side and holding up Ricardo's dagger to his sight. Heyst uttered no word of recognition or surprise. He gave Davidson only a dumb look of unutterable awe, then, as if possessed with a sudden fury, started tearing open the front of the girls dress. She remained insensible under his hands, and Heyst let out a groan which made Davidson shudder inwardly the heavy plaint of a man who falls clubbed in the dark.

They stood side by side, looking mournfully at the little black hole made by Mr. Jones's bullet under the swelling breast of a dazzling and as it were sacred whiteness. It rose and fell slightly--so slightly that only the eyes of the lover could detect the faint stir of life. Heyst, calm and utterly unlike himself in the face, moving about noiselessly, prepared a wet cloth, and laid it on the insignificant wound, round which there was hardly a trace of blood to mar the charm, the fascination, of that mortal flesh.

Her eyelids fluttered. She looked drowsily about, serene, as if fatigued only by the exertions of her tremendous victory, capturing the very sting of death in the service of love. But her eyes became very wide awake when they caught sight of Ricardo's dagger, the spoil of vanquished death, which Davidson was still holding, unconsciously.

"Give it to me," she said. "It's mine."

Davidson put the symbol of her victory into her feeble hands extended to him with the innocent gesture of a child reaching eagerly for a toy.

"For you," she gasped, turning her eyes to Heyst. "Kill nobody."

"No," said Heyst, taking the dagger and laying it gently on her breast, while her hands fell powerless by her side.

The faint smile on her deep-cut lips waned, and her head sank deep into the pillow, taking on the majestic pallor and immobility of marble. But over the muscles, which seemed set in their transfigured beauty for ever, passed a slight and awful tremor. With an amazing strength she asked loudly:

"What's the matter with me?"

"You have been shot, dear Lena," Heyst said in a steady voice, while Davidson, at the question, turned away and leaned his forehead against the post of the foot of the bed.

"Shot? I did think, too, that something had struck me."

Over Samburan the thunder had ceased to growl at last, and the world of material forms shuddered no more under the emerging stars. The spirit of the girl which was passing away from under them clung to her triumph convinced of the reality of her victory over death.

"No more," she muttered. "There will be no more! Oh, my beloved," she cried weakly, "I've saved you! Why don't you take me into your arms and carry me out of this lonely place?"

Heyst bent low over her, cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life. He dared not touch her and she had no longer the strength to throw her arms about his neck.

"Who else could have done this for you?" she whispered gloriously.

"No one in the world," he answered her in a murmur of unconcealed despair.

She tried to raise herself, but all she could do was to lift her head a little from the pillow. With a terrible and gentle movement, Heyst hastened to slip his arm under her neck. She felt relieved at once of an intolerable weight, and was content to surrender to him the infinite weariness of her tremendous achievement. Exulting, she saw herself extended on the bed, in a black dress, and profoundly at peace, while, stooping over her with a

kindly, playful smile, he was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart--for ever! The flush of rapture flooding her whole being broke out in a smile of innocent, girlish happiness; and with that divine radiance on her lips she breathed her last--triumphant, seeking for his glance in the shades of death.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"Yes, Excellency," said Davidson in his placid voice; "there are more dead in this affair--more white people, I mean--than have been killed in many of the battles in the last Achin war."

Davidson was talking with an Excellency, because what was alluded to in conversation as "the mystery of Samburan" had caused such a sensation in the Archipelago that even those in the highest spheres were anxious to hear something at first hand. Davidson had been summoned to an audience. It was a high official on his tour.

"You knew the late Baron Heyst well?"

"The truth is that nobody out here can boast of having known him well," said Davidson. "He was a queer chap. I doubt if he himself knew how queer he was. But everybody was aware that I was keeping my eye on him in a friendly way. And that's how I got the warning which made me turn round in my tracks. In the middle of my trip and steam back to Samburan, where, I am grieved to say, I arrived too late."

Without enlarging very much, Davidson explained to the attentive Excellency how a woman, the wife of a certain hotel-keeper named Schomberg, had overheard two card-sharpping rascals making inquiries from her husband as to the exact position of the island. She caught only a few words referring to the neighbouring volcano, but there were enough to arouse her suspicions--"which," went on Davidson, "she imparted to me, your Excellency. They were only too well founded!"

"That was very clever of her," remarked the great man.

"She's much cleverer than people have any conception of," said Davidson.

But he refrained from disclosing to the Excellency the real cause which had sharpened Mrs. Schomberg's wits. The poor woman was in mortal terror of the girl being brought back within reach of her infatuated Wilhelm. Davidson only said that her agitation had impressed him; but he confessed that while going back, he began to have his doubts as to there being anything in it.

"I steamed into one of those silly thunderstorms that hang about the

volcano, and had some trouble in making the island," narrated Davidson. "I had to grope my way dead slow into Diamond Bay. I don't suppose that anybody, even if looking out for me, could have heard me let go the anchor."

He admitted that he ought to have gone ashore at once; but everything was perfectly dark and absolutely quiet. He felt ashamed of his impulsiveness. What a fool he would have looked, waking up a man in the middle of the night just to ask him if he was all right! And then the girl being there, he feared that Heyst would look upon his visit as an unwarrantable intrusion.

The first intimation he had of there being anything wrong was a big white boat, adrift, with the dead body of a very hairy man inside, bumping against the bows of his steamer. Then indeed he lost no time in going ashore--alone, of course, from motives of delicacy.

"I arrived in time to see that poor girl die, as I have told your Excellency," pursued Davidson. "I won't tell you what a time I had with him afterwards. He talked to me. His father seems to have been a crank, and to have upset his head when he was young. He was a queer chap. Practically the last words he said to me, as we came out on the veranda, were:

"Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life!"

"As we stood there, just before I left him, for he said he wanted to be alone with his dead for a time, we heard a snarly sort of voice near the bushes by the shore calling out:

"Is that you, governor?"

"Yes, it's me."

"Jeeminy! I thought the beggar had done for you. He has started prancing and nearly had me. I have been dodging around, looking for you ever since."

"Well, here I am," suddenly screamed the other voice, and then a shot rang out.

"This time he has not missed him," Heyst said to me bitterly, and went back into the house.

"I returned on board as he had insisted I should do. I didn't want to intrude on his grief. Later, about five in the morning, some of my calashes came

running to me, yelling that there was a fire ashore. I landed at once, of course. The principal bungalow was blazing. The heat drove us back. The other two houses caught one after another like kindling-wood. There was no going beyond the shore end of the jetty till the afternoon."

Davidson sighed placidly.

"I suppose you are certain that Baron Heyst is dead?"

"He is--ashes, your Excellency," said Davidson, wheezing a little; "he and the girl together. I suppose he couldn't stand his thoughts before her dead body--and fire purifies everything. That Chinaman of whom I told your Excellency helped me to investigate next day, when the embers got cooled a little. We found enough to be sure. He's not a bad Chinaman. He told me that he had followed Heyst and the girl through the forest from pity, and partly out of curiosity. He watched the house till he saw Heyst go out, after dinner, and Ricardo come back alone. While he was dodging there, it occurred to him that he had better cast the boat adrift, for fear those scoundrels should come round by water and bombard the village from the sea with their revolvers and Winchesters. He judged that they were devils enough for anything. So he walked down the wharf quietly; and as he got into the boat, to cast her off, that hairy man who, it seems, was dozing in her, jumped up growling, and Wang shot him dead. Then he shoved the boat off as far as he could and went away."

There was a pause. Presently Davidson went on, in his tranquil manner:

"Let Heaven look after what has been purified. The wind and rain will take care of the ashes. The carcass of that follower, secretary, or whatever the unclean ruffian called himself, I left where it lay, to swell and rot in the sun. His principal had shot him neatly through the head. Then, apparently, this Jones went down to the wharf to look for the boat and for the hairy man. I suppose he tumbled into the water by accident--or perhaps not by accident. The boat and the man were gone, and the scoundrel saw himself alone, his game clearly up, and fairly trapped. Who knows? The water's very clear there, and I could see him huddled up on the bottom, between two piles, like a heap of bones in a blue silk bag, with only the head and the feet sticking out. Wang was very pleased when he discovered him. That made everything safe, he said, and he went at once over the hill to fetch his Alfuro woman back to the hut."

Davidson took out his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration off his forehead.

"And then, your Excellency, I went away. There was nothing to be done there."

"Clearly!" assented the Excellency.

Davidson, thoughtful, seemed to weigh the matter in his mind, and then murmured with placid sadness:

"Nothing!"

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