CHAPTER THE FOURTH ~~ THE SPIRITED HONEYMOON

1

It was a little after sunrise one bright morning in September that Benham came up on to the deck of the sturdy Austrian steamboat that was churning its way with a sedulous deliberation from Spalato to Cattaro, and lit himself a cigarette and seated himself upon a deck chair. Save for a yawning Greek sailor busy with a mop the first-class deck was empty.

Benham surveyed the haggard beauty of the Illyrian coast. The mountains rose gaunt and enormous and barren to a jagged fantastic silhouette against the sun; their almost vertical slopes still plunged in blue shadow, broke only into a little cold green and white edge of olive terraces and vegetation and houses before they touched the clear blue water. An occasional church or a house perched high upon some seemingly inaccessible ledge did but accentuate the vast barrenness of the land. It was a land desolated and destroyed. At Ragusa, at Salona, at Spalato and Zara and Pola Benham had seen only variations upon one persistent theme, a dwindled and uncreative human life living amidst the giant ruins of preceding times, as worms live in the sockets of a skull. Forward an unsavoury group of passengers still slumbered amidst fruit-peel and expectorations, a few soldiers, some squalid brigands

armed with preposterous red umbrellas, a group of curled-up human lumps brooded over by an aquiline individual caparisoned with brass like a horse, his head wrapped picturesquely in a shawl. Benham surveyed these last products of the "life force" and resumed his pensive survey of the coast. The sea was deserted save for a couple of little lateen craft with suns painted on their gaudy sails, sea butterflies that hung motionless as if unawakened close inshore....

The travel of the last few weeks had impressed Benham's imagination profoundly. For the first time in his life he had come face to face with civilization in defeat. From Venice hitherward he had marked with cumulative effect the clustering evidences of effort spent and power crumbled to nothingness. He had landed upon the marble quay of Pola and visited its deserted amphitheatre, he had seen a weak provincial life going about ignoble ends under the walls of the great Venetian fortress and the still more magnificent cathedral of Zara; he had visited Spalato, clustered in sweltering grime within the ample compass of the walls of Diocletian's villa, and a few troublesome sellers of coins and iridescent glass and fragments of tessellated pavement and such-like loot was all the population he had found amidst the fallen walls and broken friezes and columns of Salona. Down this coast there ebbed and flowed a mean residual life, a life of violence and dishonesty, peddling trades, vendettas and war. For a while the unstable Austrian ruled this land and made a sort of order that the incalculable chances of international politics might at any time shatter. Benham was drawing near now to the utmost limit of that extended peace. Ahead beyond the mountain capes was Montenegro and, further, Albania and Macedonia,

lands of lawlessness and confusion. Amanda and he had been warned of the impossibility of decent travel beyond Cattaro and Cettinje but this had but whetted her adventurousness and challenged his spirit. They were going to see Albania for themselves.

The three months of honeymoon they had been spending together had developed many remarkable divergences of their minds that had not been in the least apparent to Benham before their marriage. Then their common resolve to be as spirited as possible had obliterated all minor considerations. But that was the limit of their unanimity. Amanda loved wild and picturesque things, and Benham strong and clear things; the vines and brushwood amidst the ruins of Salona that had delighted her had filled him with a sense of tragic retrogression. Salona had revived again in the acutest form a dispute that had been smouldering between them throughout a fitful and lengthy exploration of north and central Italy. She could not understand his disgust with the mediaeval colour and confusion that had swamped the pride and state of the Roman empire, and he could not make her feel the ambition of the ruler, the essential discipline and responsibilities of his aristocratic idea. While his adventurousness was conquest, hers, it was only too manifest, was brigandage. His thoughts ran now into the form of an imaginary discourse, that he would never deliver to her, on the decay of states, on the triumphs of barbarians over rulers who will not rule, on the relaxation of patrician orders and the return of the robber and assassin as lordship decays. This coast was no theatrical scenery for him; it was a shattered empire. And it was shattered because no men had been found, united enough, magnificent and steadfast enough, to hold the cities,

and maintain the roads, keep the peace and subdue the brutish hates and suspicions and cruelties that devastated the world.

And as these thoughts came back into his mind, Amanda flickered up from below, light and noiseless as a sunbeam, and stood behind his chair.

Freedom and the sight of the world had if possible brightened and invigorated her. Her costume and bearing were subtly touched by the romance of the Adriatic. There was a flavour of the pirate in the cloak about her shoulders and the light knitted cap of scarlet she had stuck upon her head. She surveyed his preoccupation for a moment, glanced forward, and then covered his eyes with her hands. In almost the same movement she had bent down and nipped the tip of his ear between her teeth.

"Confound you, Amanda!"

"You'd forgotten my existence, you star-gazing Cheetah. And then, you see, these things happen to you!"

"I was thinking."

"Well--DON'T.... I distrust your thinking. This coast is wilder and grimmer than yesterday. It's glorious...."

She sat down on the chair he unfolded for her.

"Is there nothing to eat?" she asked abruptly.

"It is too early."

2

"This coast is magnificent," she said presently.

"It's hideous," he answered. "It's as ugly as a heap of slag."

"It's nature at its wildest."

"That's Amanda at her wildest."

"Well, isn't it?"

"No! This land isn't nature. It's waste. Not wilderness. It's the other end. Those hills were covered with forests; this was a busy civilized coast just a little thousand years ago. The Venetians wasted it. They cut down the forests; they filled the cities with a mixed mud of population, THAT stuff. Look at it"!--he indicated the sleepers forward by a movement of his head.

"I suppose they WERE rather feeble people," said Amanda.

"Who?"

"The Venetians."

"They were traders--and nothing more. Just as we are. And when they were rich they got splendid clothes and feasted and rested. Much as we do."

Amanda surveyed him. "We don't rest."

"We idle."

"We are seeing things."

"Don't be a humbug, Amanda. We are making love. Just as they did. And it has been--ripping. In Salona they made love tremendously. They did nothing else until the barbarians came over the mountains...."

"Well," said Amanda virtuously, "we will do something else."

He made no answer and her expression became profoundly thoughtful. Of course this wandering must end. He had been growing impatient for some time. But it was difficult, she perceived, to decide just what to do with him....

Benham picked up the thread of his musing.

He was seeing more and more clearly that all civilization was an effort, and so far always an inadequate and very partially successful effort. Always it had been aristocratic, aristocratic in the sense that it was the work of minorities, who took power, who had a common resolution against the inertia, the indifference, the insubordination and instinctive hostility of the mass of mankind. And always the set-backs, the disasters of civilization, had been failures of the aristocratic spirit. Why had the Roman purpose faltered and shrivelled? Every order, every brotherhood, every organization carried with it the seeds of its own destruction. Must the idea of statecraft and rule perpetually reappear, reclothe itself in new forms, age, die, even as life does--making each time its almost infinitesimal addition to human achievement? Now the world is crying aloud for a renascence of the spirit that orders and controls. Human affairs sway at a dizzy height of opportunity. Will they keep their footing there, or stagger? We have got back at last to a time as big with opportunity as the early empire. Given only the will in men and it would be possible now to turn the dazzling accidents of science, the chancy attainments of the nineteenth century, into a sane and permanent possession, a new starting point.... What a magnificence might be made of life!

He was aroused by Amanda's voice.

"When we go back to London, old Cheetah," she said, "we must take a house."

For some moments he stared at her, trying to get back to their point of

divergence.

"Why?" he asked at length.

"We must have a house," she said.

He looked at her face. Her expression was profoundly thoughtful, her eyes were fixed on the slumbering ships poised upon the transparent water under the mountain shadows.

"You see," she thought it out, "you've got to TELL in London. You can't just sneak back there. You've got to strike a note of your own. With all these things of yours."

"But how?"

"There's a sort of little house, I used to see them when I was a girl and my father lived in London, about Brook Street and that part. Not too far north.... You see going back to London for us is just another adventure. We've got to capture London. We've got to scale it. We've got advantages of all sorts. But at present we're outside. We've got to march in."

Her clear hazel eyes contemplated conflicts and triumphs.

She was roused by Benham's voice.

"What the deuce are you thinking of, Amanda?"

She turned her level eyes to his. "London," she said. "For you."

"I don't want London," he said.

"I thought you did. You ought to. I do."

"But to take a house! Make an invasion of London!"

"You dear old Cheetah, you can't be always frisking about in the wilderness, staring at the stars."

"But I'm not going back to live in London in the old way, theatres, dinner-parties, chatter--"

"Oh no! We aren't going to do that sort of thing. We aren't going to join the ruck. We'll go about in holiday times all over the world. I want to see Fusiyama. I mean to swim in the South Seas. With you. We'll dodge the sharks. But all the same we shall have to have a house in London. We have to be FELT there."

She met his consternation fairly. She lifted her fine eyebrows. Her little face conveyed a protesting reasonableness.

"Well, MUSTN'T we?"

She added, "If we want to alter the world we ought to live in the world."

Since last they had disputed the question she had thought out these new phrases.

"Amanda," he said, "I think sometimes you haven't the remotest idea of what I am after. I don't believe you begin to suspect what I am up to."

She put her elbows on her knees, dropped her chin between her hands and regarded him impudently. She had a characteristic trick of looking up with her face downcast that never failed to soften his regard.

"Look here, Cheetah, don't you give way to your early morning habit of calling your own true love a fool," she said.

"Simply I tell you I will not go back to London."

"You will go back with me, Cheetah."

"I will go back as far as my work calls me there."

"It calls you through the voice of your mate and slave and doormat to just exactly the sort of house you ought to have.... It is the privilege and duty of the female to choose the lair."

For a space Benham made no reply. This controversy had been gathering

for some time and he wanted to state his view as vividly as possible. The Benham style of connubial conversation had long since decided for emphasis rather than delicacy.

"I think," he said slowly, "that this wanting to take London by storm is a beastly VULGAR thing to want to do."

Amanda compressed her lips.

"I want to work out things in my mind," he went on. "I do not want to be distracted by social things, and I do not want to be distracted by picturesque things. This life--it's all very well on the surface, but it isn't real. I'm not getting hold of reality. Things slip away from me. God! but how they slip away from me!"

He got up and walked to the side of the boat.

She surveyed his back for some moments. Then she went and leant over the rail beside him.

"I want to go to London," she said.

"I don't."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Where I can see into the things that hold the world together."

"I have loved this wandering--I could wander always. But... Cheetah! I tell you I WANT to go to London."

He looked over his shoulder into her warm face. "NO," he said.

"But, I ask you."

He shook his head.

She put her face closer and whispered. "Cheetah! big beast of my heart. Do you hear your mate asking for something?"

He turned his eyes back to the mountains. "I must go my own way."

"Haven't I, so far, invented things, made life amusing, Cheetah? Can't you trust the leopard's wisdom?"

He stared at the coast inexorably.

"I wonder," she whispered.

"What?"

"You ARE that, Cheetah, that lank, long, EAGER beast--."

Suddenly with a nimble hand she had unbuttoned and rolled up the sleeve

of her blouse. She stuck her pretty blue-veined arm before his eyes. "Look here, sir, it was you, wasn't it? It was your powerful jaw inflicted this bite upon the arm of a defenceless young leopardess--"

"Amanda!"

"Well." She wrinkled her brows.

He turned about and stood over her, he shook a finger in her face and there was a restrained intensity in his voice as he spoke.

"Look here, Amanda!" he said, "if you think that you are going to make me agree to any sort of project about London, to any sort of complication of our lives with houses in smart streets and a campaign of social assertion--by THAT, then may I be damned for an uxorious fool!"

Her eyes met his and there was mockery in her eyes.

"This, Cheetah, is the morning mood," she remarked.

"This is the essential mood. Listen, Amanda--"

He stopped short. He looked towards the gangway, they both looked. The magic word "Breakfast" came simultaneously from them.

"Eggs," she said ravenously, and led the way.

A smell of coffee as insistent as an herald's trumpet had called a truce between them.

3

Their marriage had been a comparatively inconspicuous one, but since that time they had been engaged upon a honeymoon of great extent and variety. Their wedding had taken place at South Harting church in the marked absence of Lady Marayne, and it had been marred by only one untoward event. The Reverend Amos Pugh who, in spite of the earnest advice of several friends had insisted upon sharing in the ceremony, had suddenly covered his face with the sleeves of his surplice and fled with a swift rustle to the vestry, whence an uproar of inadequately smothered sorrow came as an obligato accompaniment to the more crucial passages of the service. Amanda appeared unaware of the incident at the time, but afterwards she explained things to Benham. "Curates," she said, "are such pent-up men. One ought, I suppose, to remember that. But he never had anything to go upon at all--not anything--except his own imaginations."

"I suppose when you met him you were nice to him."

"I was nice to him, of course...."

They drove away from Harting, as it were, over the weeping remains of this infatuated divine. His sorrow made them thoughtful for a time, and then Amanda nestled closer to her lover and they forgot about him, and their honeymoon became so active and entertaining that only very rarely and transitorily did they ever think of him again.

The original conception of their honeymoon had been identical with the plans Benham had made for the survey and study of the world, and it was through a series of modifications, replacements and additions that it became at last a prolonged and very picturesque tour in Switzerland, the Austrian Tyrol, North Italy, and down the Adriatic coast. Amanda had never seen mountains, and longed, she said, to climb. This took them first to Switzerland. Then, in spite of their exalted aims, the devotion of their lives to noble purposes, it was evident that Amanda had no intention of scamping the detail of love, and for that what background is so richly beautiful as Italy? An important aspect of the grand tour round the world as Benham had planned it, had been interviews, inquiries and conversations with every sort of representative and understanding person he could reach. An unembarrassed young man who wants to know and does not promise to bore may reach almost any one in that way, he is as impersonal as pure reason and as mobile as a letter, but the presence of a lady in his train leaves him no longer unembarrassed. His approach has become a social event. The wife of a great or significant personage must take notice or decide not to take notice. Of course Amanda was prepared to go anywhere, just as Benham's shadow; it was the world that was unprepared. And a second leading aspect of his original scheme had been the examination of the ways of government in cities and the shifting

and mixture of nations and races. It would have led to back streets, and involved and complicated details, and there was something in the fine flame of girlhood beside him that he felt was incompatible with those shadows and that dust. And also they were lovers and very deeply in love. It was amazing how swiftly that draggled shameful London sparrow-gamin, Eros, took heart from Amanda, and became wonderful, beautiful, glowing, life-giving, confident, clear-eyed; how he changed from flesh to sweet fire, and grew until he filled the sky. So that you see they went to Switzerland and Italy at last very like two ordinary young people who were not aristocrats at all, had no theory about the world or their destiny, but were simply just ardently delighted with the discovery of one another.

Nevertheless Benham was for some time under a vague impression that in a sort of way still he was going round the world and working out his destinies.

It was part of the fascination of Amanda that she was never what he had supposed her to be, and that nothing that he set out to do with her ever turned out as they had planned it. Her appreciations marched before her achievement, and when it came to climbing it seemed foolish to toil to summits over which her spirit had flitted days before. Their Swiss expeditions which she had foreseen as glorious wanderings amidst the blue ice of crevasses and nights of exalted hardihood became a walking tour of fitful vigour and abundant fun and delight. They spent a long day on the ice of the Aletsch glacier, but they reached the inn on its eastward side with magnificent appetites a little late for dinner.

Amanda had revealed an unexpected gift for nicknames and pretty fancies. She named herself the Leopard, the spotless Leopard; in some obscure way she intimated that the colour was black, but that was never to be admitted openly, there was supposed to be some lurking traces of a rusty brown but the word was spotless and the implication white, a dazzling white, she would play a thousand variations on the theme; in moments of despondency she was only a black cat, a common lean black cat, and sacks and half-bricks almost too good for her. But Benham was always a Cheetah. That had come to her as a revelation from heaven. But so clearly he was a Cheetah. He was a Hunting Leopard; the only beast that has an up-cast face and dreams and looks at you with absent-minded eyes like a man. She laced their journeys with a fantastic monologue telling in the third person what the Leopard and the Cheetah were thinking and seeing and doing. And so they walked up mountains and over passes and swam in the warm clear water of romantic lakes and loved each other mightily always, in chestnut woods and olive orchards and flower-starred alps and pine forests and awning-covered boats, and by sunset and moonlight and starshine; and out of these agreeable solitudes they came brown and dusty, striding side by side into sunlit entertaining fruit-piled market-places and envious hotels. For days and weeks together it did not seem to Benham that there was anything that mattered in life but Amanda and the elemental joys of living. And then the Research Magnificent began to stir in him again. He perceived that Italy was not India, that the clue to the questions he must answer lay in the crowded new towns that they avoided, in the packed bookshops and the talk of men, and not in the picturesque and flowery solitudes to which

their lovemaking carried them.

Moods began in which he seemed to forget Amanda altogether.

This happened first in the Certosa di Pavia whither they had gone one afternoon from Milan. That was quite soon after they were married. They had a bumping journey thither in a motor-car, a little doubtful if the excursion was worth while, and they found a great amazement in the lavish beauty and decorative wealth of that vast church and its associated cloisters, set far away from any population as it seemed in a flat wilderness of reedy ditches and patchy cultivation. The distilleries and outbuildings were deserted--their white walls were covered by one monstrously great and old wisteria in flower--the soaring marvellous church was in possession of a knot of unattractive guides. One of these conducted them through the painted treasures of the gold and marble chapels; he was an elderly but animated person who evidently found Amanda more wonderful than any church. He poured out great accumulations of information and compliments before her. Benham dropped behind, went astray and was presently recovered dreaming in the great cloister. The guide showed them over two of the cells that opened thereupon, each a delightful house for a solitary, bookish and clean, and each with a little secret walled garden of its own. He was covertly tipped against all regulations and departed regretfully with a beaming dismissal from Amanda. She found Benham wondering why the Carthusians had failed to produce anything better in the world than a liqueur. "One might have imagined that men would have done something in this beautiful quiet; that there would have come thought from here or will from here."

"In these dear little nests they ought to have put lovers," said Amanda.

"Oh, of course, YOU would have made the place Thelema...."

But as they went shaking and bumping back along the evil road to Milan, he fell into a deep musing. Suddenly he said, "Work has to be done. Because this order or that has failed, there is no reason why we should fail. And look at those ragged children in the road ahead of us, and those dirty women sitting in the doorways, and the foul ugliness of these gaunt nameless towns through which we go! They are what they are, because we are what we are--idlers, excursionists. In a world we ought to rule....

"Amanda, we've got to get to work...."

That was his first display of this new mood, which presently became a common one. He was less and less content to let the happy hours slip by, more and more sensitive to the reminders in giant ruin and deserted cell, in a chance encounter with a string of guns and soldiers on their way to manoeuvres or in the sight of a stale newspaper, of a great world process going on in which he was now playing no part at all. And a curious irritability manifested itself more and more plainly, whenever human pettiness obtruded upon his attention, whenever some trivial dishonesty, some manifest slovenliness, some spiritless failure, a cheating waiter or a wayside beggar brought before him the shiftless, selfish, aimless elements in humanity that war against the great dream

of life made glorious. "Accursed things," he would say, as he flung some importunate cripple at a church door a ten-centime piece; "why were they born? Why do they consent to live? They are no better than some chance fungus that is because it must."

"It takes all sorts to make a world," said Amanda.

"Nonsense," said Benham. "Where is the megatherium? That sort of creature has to go. Our sort of creature has to end it."

"Then why did you give it money?"

"Because-- I don't want the thing to be more wretched than it is. But if I could prevent more of them--... What am I doing to prevent them?"

"These beggars annoy you," said Amanda after a pause. "They do me. Let us go back into the mountains."

But he fretted in the mountains.

They made a ten days' tour from Macugnaga over the Monte Moro to Sass, and thence to Zermatt and back by the Theodule to Macugnaga. The sudden apparition of douaniers upon the Monte Moro annoyed Benham, and he was also irritated by the solemn English mountain climbers at Saas Fee. They were as bad as golfers, he said, and reflected momentarily upon his father. Amanda fell in love with Monte Rosa, she wanted to kiss its snowy forehead, she danced like a young goat down the path to Mattmark,

and rolled on the turf when she came to gentians and purple primulas. Benham was tremendously in love with her most of the time, but one day when they were sitting over the Findelen glacier his perceptions blundered for the first time upon the fundamental antagonism of their quality. She was sketching out jolly things that they were to do together, expeditions, entertainments, amusements, and adventures, with a voluble swiftness, and suddenly in a flash his eyes were opened, and he saw that she would never for a moment feel the quality that made life worth while for him. He saw it in a flash, and in that flash he made his urgent resolve not to see it. From that moment forth his bearing was poisoned by his secret determination not to think of this, not to admit it to his mind. And forbidden to come into his presence in its proper form, this conflict of intellectual temperaments took on strange disguises, and the gathering tension of his mind sought to relieve itself along grotesque irrelevant channels.

There was, for example, the remarkable affair of the drive from Macugnaga to Piedimulera.

They had decided to walk down in a leisurely fashion, but with the fatigues of the precipitous clamber down from Switzerland still upon them they found the white road between rock above and gorge below wearisome, and the valley hot in the late morning sunshine, and already before they reached the inn they had marked for lunch Amanda had suggested driving the rest of the way. The inn had a number of brigand-like customers consuming such sustenance as garlic and salami and wine; it received them with an indifference that bordered on

disrespect, until the landlord, who seemed to be something of a beauty himself, discovered the merits of Amanda. Then he became markedly attentive. He was a large, fat, curly-headed person with beautiful eyes, a cherished moustache, and an air of great gentility, and when he had welcomed his guests and driven off the slatternly waiting-maid, and given them his best table, and consented, at Amanda's request, to open a window, he went away and put on a tie and collar. It was an attention so conspicuous that even the group of men in the far corner noticed and commented on it, and then they commented on Amanda and Benham, assuming an ignorance of Italian in the visitors that was only partly justifiable. "Bellissima," "bravissima," "signorina," "Inglesa," one need not be born in Italy to understand such words as these. Also they addressed sly comments and encouragements to the landlord as he went to and fro.

Benham was rather still and stiff during the meal, but it ill becomes an English aristocrat to discuss the manners of an alien population, and Amanda was amused by the effusion of the landlord and a little disposed to experiment upon him. She sat radiating light amidst the shadows.

The question of the vehicle was broached. The landlord was doubtful, then an idea, it was manifestly a questionable idea, occurred to him. He went to consult an obscure brown-faced individual in the corner, disappeared, and the world without became eloquent. Presently he returned and announced that a carozza was practicable. It had been difficult, but he had contrived it. And he remained hovering over the conclusion of their meal, asking questions about Amanda's mountaineering

and expressing incredulous admiration.

His bill, which he presented with an uneasy flourish, was large and included the carozza.

He ushered them out to the carriage with civilities and compliments. It had manifestly been difficult and contrived. It was dusty and blistered, there had been a hasty effort to conceal its recent use as a hen-roost, the harness was mended with string. The horse was gaunt and scandalous, a dirty white, and carried its head apprehensively. The driver had but one eye, through which there gleamed a concentrated hatred of God and man.

"No wonder he charged for it before we saw it," said Benham.

"It's better than walking," said Amanda.

The company in the inn gathered behind the landlord and scrutinized Amanda and Benham intelligently. The young couple got in. "Avanti," said Benham, and Amanda bestowed one last ineradicable memory on the bowing landlord.

Benham did not speak until just after they turned the first corner, and then something portentous happened, considering the precipitous position of the road they were upon. A small boy appeared sitting in the grass by the wayside, and at the sight of him the white horse shied extravagantly. The driver rose in his seat ready to jump. But the crisis

passed without a smash. "Cheetah!" cried Amanda suddenly. "This isn't safe." "Ah!" said Benham, and began to act with the vigour of one who has long accumulated force. He rose in his place and gripped the one-eyed driver by the collar. "ASPETTO," he said, but he meant "Stop!" The driver understood that he meant "Stop," and obeyed.

Benham wasted no time in parleying with the driver. He indicated to him and to Amanda by a comprehensive gesture that he had business with the landlord, and with a gleaming appetite upon his face went running back towards the inn.

The landlord was sitting down to a little game of dominoes with his friends when Benham reappeared in the sunlight of the doorway. There was no misunderstanding Benham's expression.

For a moment the landlord was disposed to be defiant. Then he changed his mind. Benham's earnest face was within a yard of his own, and a threatening forefinger was almost touching his nose.

"Albergo cattivissimo," said Benham. "Cattivissimo! Pranzo cattivissimo 'orrido. Cavallo cattivissimo, dangerousissimo. Gioco abominablissimo, damnissimo. Capisce. Eh?" [*]

* This is vile Italian. It may--with a certain charity to Benham--be rendered: "The beastliest inn! The beastliest! The beastliest, most awful lunch! The vilest horse! Most dangerous! Abominable trick! Understand?"

The landlord made deprecatory gestures.

"YOU understand all right," said Benham. "Da me il argento per il carozzo. Subito?" [*]

* "Give me back the money for the carriage. QUICKLY!"

The landlord was understood to ask whether the signor no longer wished for the carriage.

"SUBITO!" cried Benham, and giving way to a long-restrained impulse seized the padrone by the collar of his coat and shook him vigorously.

There were dissuasive noises from the company, but no attempt at rescue. Benham released his hold.

"Adesso!" said Benham. [*]

* "NOW!"

The landlord decided to disgorge. It was at any rate a comfort that the beautiful lady was not seeing anything of this. And he could explain afterwards to his friends that the Englishman was clearly a lunatic,

deserving pity rather than punishment. He made some sound of protest, but attempted no delay in refunding the money Benham had prepaid. Outside sounded the wheels of the returning carriage. They stopped. Amanda appeared in the doorway and discovered Benham dominant.

He was a little short of breath, and as she came in he was addressing the landlord with much earnestness in the following compact sentences.

"Attendez! Ecco! Adesso noi andiamo con questa cattivissimo cavallo a Piedimulera. Si noi arrivero in safety, securo that is, pagaremo. Non altro. Si noi abbiamo accidento Dio--Dio have mercy on your sinful soul. See! Capisce? That's all." [*]

* "Now we will go with this beastly horse to Piedimulera. If we get there safely I will pay. If we have an accident, then--"

He turned to Amanda. "Get back into the thing," he said. "We won't have these stinking beasts think we are afraid of the job. I've just made sure he won't have a profit by it if we smash up. That's all. I might have known what he was up to when he wanted the money beforehand." He came to the doorway and with a magnificent gesture commanded the perplexed driver to turn the carriage.

While that was being done he discoursed upon his adjacent fellow-creatures. "A man who pays beforehand for anything in this filthy sort of life is a fool. You see the standards of the beast. They think

of nothing but their dirty little tricks to get profit, their garlic, their sour wine, their games of dominoes, their moments of lust. They crawl in this place like cockroaches in a warm corner of the fireplace until they die. Look at the scabby frontage of the house. Look at the men's faces.... Yes. So! Adequato. Aspettate.... Get back into the carriage, Amanda."

"You know it's dangerous, Cheetah. The horse is a shier. That man is blind in one eye."

"Get back into the carriage," said Benham, whitely angry. "I AM GOING TO DRIVE!"

"But--!"

Just for a moment Amanda looked scared. Then with a queer little laugh she jumped in again.

Amanda was never a coward when there was excitement afoot. "We'll smash!" she cried, by no means woefully.

"Get up beside me," said Benham speaking in English to the driver but with a gesture that translated him. Power over men radiated from Benham in this angry mood. He took the driver's seat. The little driver ascended and then with a grim calmness that brooked no resistance Benham reached over, took and fastened the apron over their knees to prevent any repetition of the jumping out tactics.

The recovering landlord became voluble in the doorway.

"In Piedimulera pagero," said Benham over his shoulder and brought the whip across the white outstanding ribs. "Get up!" said Benham.

Amanda gripped the sides of the seat as the carriage started into motion.

He laid the whip on again with such vigour that the horse forgot altogether to shy at the urchin that had scared it before.

"Amanda," said Benham leaning back. "If we do happen to go over on THAT side, jump out. It's all clear and wide for you. This side won't matter so--"

"MIND!" screamed Amanda and recalled him to his duties. He was off the road and he had narrowly missed an outstanding chestnut true.

"No, you don't," said Benham presently, and again their career became erratic for a time as after a slight struggle he replaced the apron over the knees of the deposed driver. It had been furtively released. After that Benham kept an eye on it that might have been better devoted to the road.

The road went down in a series of curves and corners. Now and then there were pacific interludes when it might have been almost any road. Then,

again, it became specifically an Italian mountain road. Now and then only a row of all too infrequent granite stumps separated them from a sheer precipice. Some of the corners were miraculous, and once they had a wheel in a ditch for a time, they shaved the parapet of a bridge over a gorge and they drove a cyclist into a patch of maize, they narrowly missed a goat and jumped three gullies, thrice the horse stumbled and was jerked up in time, there were sickening moments, and withal they got down to Piedimulera unbroken and unspilt. It helped perhaps that the brake, with its handle like a barrel organ, had been screwed up before Benham took control. And when they were fairly on the level outside the town Benham suddenly pulled up, relinquished the driving into the proper hands and came into the carriage with Amanda.

"Safe now," he said compactly.

The driver appeared to be murmuring prayers very softly as he examined the brake.

Amanda was struggling with profound problems. "Why didn't you drive down in the first place?" she asked. "Without going back."

"The landlord annoyed me," he said. "I had to go back.... I wish I had kicked him. Hairy beast! If anything had happened, you see, he would have had his mean money. I couldn't bear to leave him."

"And why didn't you let HIM drive?" She indicated the driver by a motion of the head.

"I was angry," said Benham. "I was angry at the whole thing."

"Still--"

"You see I think I did that because he might have jumped off if I hadn't been up there to prevent him--I mean if we had had a smash. I didn't want him to get out of it."

"But you too--"

"You see I was angry...."

"It's been as good as a switchback," said Amanda after reflection. "But weren't you a little careless about me, Cheetah?"

"I never thought of you," said Benham, and then as if he felt that inadequate: "You see--I was so annoyed. It's odd at times how annoyed one gets. Suddenly when that horse shied I realized what a beastly business life was--as those brutes up there live it. I want to clear out the whole hot, dirty, little aimless nest of them...."

"No, I'm sure," he repeated after a pause as though he had been digesting something "I wasn't thinking about you at all."

The suppression of his discovery that his honeymoon was not in the least the great journey of world exploration he had intended, but merely an impulsive pleasure hunt, was by no means the only obscured and repudiated conflict that disturbed the mind and broke out upon the behaviour of Benham. Beneath that issue he was keeping down a far more intimate conflict. It was in those lower, still less recognized depths that the volcanic fire arose and the earthquakes gathered strength. The Amanda he had loved, the Amanda of the gallant stride and fluttering skirt was with him still, she marched rejoicing over the passes, and a dearer Amanda, a soft whispering creature with dusky hair, who took possession of him when she chose, a soft creature who was nevertheless a fierce creature, was also interwoven with his life. But-- But there was now also a multitude of other Amandas who had this in common that they roused him to opposition, that they crossed his moods and jarred upon his spirit. And particularly there was the Conquering Amanda not so much proud of her beauty as eager to test it, so that she was not unmindful of the stir she made in hotel lounges, nor of the magic that may shine memorably through the most commonplace incidental conversation. This Amanda was only too manifestly pleased to think that she made peasant lovers discontented and hotel porters unmercenary; she let her light shine before men. We lovers, who had deemed our own subjugation a profound privilege, love not this further expansiveness of our lady's empire. But Benham knew that no aristocrat can be jealous; jealousy he held to be the vice of the hovel and farmstead and suburban villa, and

at an enormous expenditure of will he ignored Amanda's waving flags and roving glances. So, too, he denied that Amanda who was sharp and shrewd about money matters, that flash of an Amanda who was greedy for presents and possessions, that restless Amanda who fretted at any cessation of excitement, and that darkly thoughtful Amanda whom chance observations and questions showed to be still considering an account she had to settle with Lady Marayne. He resisted these impressions, he shut them out of his mind, but still they worked into his thoughts, and presently he could find himself asking, even as he and she went in step striding side by side through the red-scarred pinewoods in the most perfect outward harmony, whether after all he was so happily mated as he declared himself to be a score of times a day, whether he wasn't catching glimpses of reality through a veil of delusion that grew thinner and thinner and might leave him disillusioned in the face of a relationship--

Sometimes a man may be struck by a thought as though he had been struck in the face, and when the name of Mrs. Skelmersdale came into his head, he glanced at his wife by his side as if it were something that she might well have heard. Was this indeed the same thing as that? Wonderful, fresh as the day of Creation, clean as flame, yet the same! Was Amanda indeed the sister of Mrs. Skelmersdale--wrought of clean fire, but her sister?...

But also beside the inimical aspects which could set such doubts afoot there were in her infinite variety yet other Amandas neither very dear nor very annoying, but for the most part delightful, who entertained him

as strangers might, Amandas with an odd twist which made them amusing to watch, jolly Amandas who were simply irrelevant. There was for example Amanda the Dog Mistress, with an astonishing tact and understanding of dogs, who could explain dogs and the cock of their ears and the droop of their tails and their vanity and their fidelity, and why they looked up and why they suddenly went off round the corner, and their pride in the sound of their voices and their dastardly thoughts and sniffing satisfactions, so that for the first time dogs had souls for Benham to see. And there was an Amanda with a striking passion for the sleekness and soft noses of horses. And there was an Amanda extremely garrulous, who was a biographical dictionary and critical handbook to all the girls in the school she had attended at Chichester--they seemed a very girlish lot of girls; and an Amanda who was very knowing--knowing was the only word for it--about pictures and architecture. And these and all the other Amandas agreed together to develop and share this one quality in common, that altogether they pointed to no end, they converged on nothing. She was, it grew more and more apparent, a miscellany bound in a body. She was an animated discursiveness. That passion to get all things together into one aristocratic aim, that restraint of purpose, that imperative to focus, which was the structural essential of Benham's spirit, was altogether foreign to her composition.

There were so many Amandas, they were as innumerable as the Venuses--Cytherea, Cypria, Paphia, Popularia, Euploea, Area, Verticordia, Etaira, Basilea, Myrtea, Libertina, Freya, Astarte, Philommedis, Telessigamma, Anadyomene, and a thousand others to whom men have bowed and built temples, a thousand and the same, and yet it seemed

to Benham there was still one wanting.

The Amanda he had loved most wonderfully was that Amanda in armour who had walked with him through the wilderness of the world along the road to Chichester--and that Amanda came back to him no more.

5

Amanda too was making her observations and discoveries.

These moods of his perplexed her; she was astonished to find he was becoming irritable; she felt that he needed a firm but gentle discipline in his deportment as a lover. At first he had been perfect....

But Amanda was more prepared for human inconsecutiveness than Benham, because she herself was inconsecutive, and her dissatisfaction with his irritations and preoccupation broadened to no general discontent. He had seemed perfect and he wasn't. So nothing was perfect. And he had to be managed, just as one must manage a dog or a cousin or a mother or a horse. Anyhow she had got him, she had no doubt that she held him by a thousand ties, the spotless leopard had him between her teeth, he was a prisoner in the dusk of her hair, and the world was all one vast promise of entertainment.

6

But the raid into the Balkans was not the tremendous success she had expected it to be. They had adventures, but they were not the richly coloured, mediaeval affairs she had anticipated. For the most part until Benham broke loose beyond Ochrida they were adventures in discomfort. In those remote parts of Europe inns die away and cease, and it had never occurred to Amanda that inns could die away anywhere. She had thought that they just became very simple and natural and quaint. And she had thought that when benighted people knocked at a door it would presently open hospitably. She had not expected shots at random from the window. And it is not usual in Albania generally for women, whether they are Christian or Moslem, to go about unveiled; when they do so it leads to singular manifestations. The moral sense of the men is shocked and staggered, and they show it in many homely ways. Small boys at that age when feminine beauty does not yet prevail with them, pelt. Also in Mahometan districts they pelt men who do not wear fezzes, while occasionally Christians of the shawl-headed or skull-cap persuasions will pelt a fez. Sketching is always a peltable or mobable offence, as being contrary to the Koran, and sitting down tempts the pelter. Generally they pelt. The dogs of Albania are numerous, big, dirty, white dogs, large and hostile, and they attack with little hesitation. The women of Albania are secluded and remote, and indisposed to be of service to an alien sister. Roads are infrequent and most bridges have

broken down. No bridge has been repaired since the later seventeenth century, and no new bridge has been made since the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. There are no shops at all. The scenery is magnificent but precipitous, and many of the high roads are difficult to trace. And there is rain. In Albania there is sometimes very heavy rain.

Yet in spite of these drawbacks they spent some splendid hours in their exploration of that wild lost country beyond the Adriatic headlands. There was the approach to Cattaro for example, through an arm of the sea, amazingly beautiful on either shore, that wound its way into the wild mountains and ended in a deep blue bay under the tremendous declivity of Montenegro. The quay, with its trees and lateen craft, ran along under the towers and portcullised gate of the old Venetian wall, within clustered the town, and then the fortifications zigzagged up steeply to a monstrous fantastic fortress perched upon a great mountain headland that overhung the town. Behind it the rocks, slashed to and fro with the road to Cettinje, continued to ascend into blue haze, upward and upward until they became a purple curtain that filled half the heavens. The paved still town was squalid by day, but in the evening it became theatrically incredible, with an outdoor cafe amidst flowers and creepers, a Hungarian military band, a rabble of promenaders like a stage chorus in gorgeous costumes and a great gibbous yellow moon.

And there was Kroia, which Benham and Amanda saw first through the branches of the great trees that bordered the broad green track they were following. The town and its castle were poised at a tremendous height, sunlit and brilliant against a sombre mass of storm cloud, over

vast cliffs and ravines. Kroia continued to be beautiful through a steep laborious approach up to the very place itself, a clustering group of houses and bazaars crowned with a tower and a minaret, and from a painted corridor upon this crest they had a wonderful view of the great seaward levels, and even far away the blue sea itself stretching between Scutari and Durazzo. The eye fell in succession down the stages of a vast and various descent, on the bazaars and tall minarets of the town, on jagged rocks and precipices, on slopes of oak forest and slopes of olive woods, on blue hills dropping away beyond blue hills to the coast. And behind them when they turned they saw great mountains, sullenly magnificent, cleft into vast irregular masses, dense with woods below and grim and desolate above....

These were unforgettable scenes, and so too was the wild lonely valley through which they rode to Ochrida amidst walnut and chestnut trees and scattered rocks, and the first vision of that place itself, with its fertile levels dotted with sheep and cattle, its castle and clustering mosques, its spacious blue lake and the great mountains rising up towards Olympus under the sun. And there was the first view of the blue Lake of Presba seen between silvery beech stems, and that too had Olympus in the far background, plain now and clear and unexpectedly snowy. And there were midday moments when they sat and ate under vines and heard voices singing very pleasantly, and there were forest glades and forest tracks in a great variety of beauty with mountains appearing through their parted branches, there were ilex woods, chestnut woods, beech woods, and there were strings of heavily-laden mules staggering up torrent-worn tracks, and strings of blue-swathed mysterious-eyed women

with burthens on their heads passing silently, and white remote houses and ruins and deep gorges and precipices and ancient half-ruinous bridges over unruly streams. And if there was rain there was also the ending of rain, rainbows, and the piercing of clouds by the sun's incandescence, and sunsets and the moon, first full, then new and then growing full again as the holiday wore on.

They found tolerable accommodation at Cattaro and at Cettinje and at a place halfway between them. It was only when they had secured a guide and horses, and pushed on into the south-east of Montenegro that they began to realize the real difficulties of their journey. They aimed for a place called Podgoritza, which had a partially justifiable reputation for an inn, they missed the road and spent the night in the open beside a fire, rolled in the blankets they had very fortunately bought in Cettinje. They supped on biscuits and Benham's brandy flask. It chanced to be a fine night, and, drawn like moths by the fire, four heavily-armed mountaineers came out of nowhere, sat down beside Benham and Amanda, rolled cigarettes, achieved conversation in bad Italian through the muleteer and awaited refreshment. They approved of the brandy highly, they finished it, and towards dawn warmed to song. They did not sing badly, singing in chorus, but it appeared to Amanda that the hour might have been better chosen. In the morning they were agreeably surprised to find one of the Englishmen was an Englishwoman, and followed every accessible detail of her toilette with great interest. They were quite helpful about breakfast when the trouble was put to them; two vanished over a crest and reappeared with some sour milk, a slabby kind of bread, goat's cheese young but hardened, and

coffee and the means of making coffee, and they joined spiritedly in the ensuing meal. It ought to have been extraordinarily good fun, this camp under the vast heavens and these wild visitors, but it was not such fun as it ought to have been because both Amanda and Benham were extremely cold, stiff, sleepy, grubby and cross, and when at last they were back in the way to Podgoritza and had parted, after some present-giving from their chance friends, they halted in a sunlit grassy place, rolled themselves up in their blankets and recovered their arrears of sleep.

Podgoritza was their first experience of a khan, those oriental substitutes for hotels, and it was a deceptively good khan, indeed it was not a khan at all, it was an inn; it provided meals, it had a kind of bar, or at any rate a row of bottles and glasses, it possessed an upper floor with rooms, separate rooms, opening on to a gallery. The room had no beds but it had a shelf about it on which Amanda and Benham rolled up in their blankets and slept. "We can do this sort of thing all right," said Amanda and Benham. "But we mustn't lose the way again."

"In Scutari," said Benham, "we will get an extra horse and a tent."

The way presently became a lake and they reached Scutari by boat towards the dawn of the next day....

The extra horse involved the addition of its owner, a small suspicious Latin Christian, to the company, and of another horse for him and an ugly almost hairless boy attendant. Moreover the British consul prevailed with Benham to accept the services of a picturesque Arnaut

CAVASSE, complete with a rifle, knives, and other implements and the name of Giorgio. And as they got up into the highlands beyond Scutari they began to realize the deceitfulness of Podgoritza and the real truth about khans. Their next one they reached after a rainy evening, and it was a cavernous room with a floor of indurated mud and full of eye-stinging wood-smoke and wind and the smell of beasts, unpartitioned, with a weakly hostile custodian from whom no food could be got but a little goat's flesh and bread. The meat Giorgio stuck upon a skewer in gobbets like cats-meat and cooked before the fire. For drink there was coffee and raw spirits. Against the wall in one corner was a slab of wood rather like the draining board in a scullery, and on this the guests were expected to sleep. The horses and the rest of the party camped loosely about the adjacent corner after a bitter dispute upon some unknown point between the horse owner and the custodian.

Amanda and Benham were already rolled up on their slanting board like a couple of chrysalids when other company began to arrive through the open door out of the moonlight, drawn thither by the report of a travelling Englishwoman.

They were sturdy men in light coloured garments adorned ostentatiously with weapons, they moved mysteriously about in the firelit darknesses and conversed in undertones with Giorgio. Giorgio seemed to have considerable powers of exposition and a gift for social organization. Presently he came to Benham and explained that raki was available and that hospitality would do no harm; Benham and Amanda sat up and various romantic figures with splendid moustaches came forward and shook hands

with him, modestly ignoring Amanda. There was drinking, in which Benham shared, incomprehensible compliments, much ineffective saying of "BUONA NOTTE," and at last Amanda and Benham counterfeited sleep. This seemed to remove a check on the conversation and a heated discussion in tense undertones went on, it seemed interminably.... Probably very few aspects of Benham and Amanda were ignored.... Towards morning the twanging of a string proclaimed the arrival of a querulous-faced minstrel with a sort of embryonic one-stringed horse-headed fiddle, and after a brief parley singing began, a long high-pitched solo. The fiddle squealed pitifully under the persuasion of a semicircular bow. Two heads were lifted enquiringly.

The singer had taken up his position at their feet and faced them. It was a compliment.

"OH!" said Amanda, rolling over.

The soloist obliged with three songs, and then, just as day was breaking, stopped abruptly and sprawled suddenly on the floor as if he had been struck asleep. He was vocal even in his sleep. A cock in the far corner began crowing and was answered by another outside....

But this does not give a full account of the animation of the khan. "OH!" said Amanda, rolling over again with the suddenness of accumulated anger.

"They're worse than in Scutari," said Benham, understanding her trouble

instantly.

"It isn't days and nights we are having," said Benham a few days later, "it's days and nightmares."

But both he and Amanda had one quality in common. The deeper their discomfort the less possible it was to speak of turning back from the itinerary they had planned....

They met no robbers, though an excited little English Levantine in Scutari had assured them they would do so and told a vivid story of a ride to Ipek, a delay on the road due to a sudden inexplicable lameness of his horse after a halt for refreshment, a political discussion that delayed him, his hurry through the still twilight to make up for lost time, the coming on of night and the sudden silent apparition out of the darkness of the woods about the road of a dozen armed men each protruding a gun barrel. "Sometimes they will wait for you at a ford or a broken bridge," he said. "In the mountains they rob for arms. They assassinate the Turkish soldiers even. It is better to go unarmed unless you mean to fight for it.... Have you got arms?"

"Just a revolver," said Benham.

But it was after that that he closed with Giorgio.

If they found no robbers in Albania, they met soon enough with bloodshed. They came to a village where a friend of a friend of

Giorgio's was discovered, and they slept at his house in preference to the unclean and crowded khan. Here for the first time Amanda made the acquaintance of Albanian women and was carried off to the woman's region at the top of the house, permitted to wash, closely examined, shown a baby and confided in as generously as gesture and some fragments of Italian would permit. Benham slept on a rug on the first floor in a corner of honour beside the wood fire. There had been much confused conversation and some singing, he was dog-tired and slept heavily, and when presently he was awakened by piercing screams he sat up in a darkness that seemed to belong neither to time nor place....

Near his feet was an ashen glow that gave no light.

His first perplexity gave way to dismay at finding no Amanda by his side. "Amanda!" he cried....

Her voice floated down through a chink in the floor above. "What can it be, Cheetah?"

Then: "It's coming nearer."

The screaming continued, heart-rending, eviscerating shrieks. Benham, still confused, lit a match. All the men about him were stirring or sitting up and listening, their faces showing distorted and ugly in the flicker of his light. "CHE E?" he tried. No one answered. Then one by one they stood up and went softly to the ladder that led to the stable-room below. Benham struck a second match and a third.

"Giorgio!" he called.

The cavasse made an arresting gesture and followed discreetly and noiselessly after the others, leaving Benham alone in the dark.

Benham heard their shuffling patter, one after the other, down the ladder, the sounds of a door being unbarred softly, and then no other sound but that incessant shrieking in the darkness.

Had they gone out? Were they standing at the door looking out into the night and listening?

Amanda had found the chink and her voice sounded nearer.

"It's a woman," she said.

The shrieking came nearer and nearer, long, repeated, throat-tearing shrieks. Far off there was a great clamour of dogs. And there was another sound, a whisper--?

"RAIN!"

The shrieks seemed to turn into a side street and receded. The tension of listening relaxed. Men's voices sounded below in question and answer. Dogs close at hand barked shortly and then stopped enquiringly.

Benham seemed to himself to be sitting alone for an interminable time. He lit another match and consulted his watch. It was four o'clock and nearly dawn....

Then slowly and stumbling up the ladder the men began to return to Benham's room.

"Ask them what it is," urged Amanda.

But for a time not even Giorgio would understand Benham's questions. There seemed to be a doubt whether he ought to know. The shrieking approached again and then receded. Giorgio came and stood, a vague thoughtful figure, by the embers of the fire. Explanation dropped from him reluctantly. It was nothing. Some one had been killed: that was all. It was a vendetta. A man had been missing overnight, and this morning his brother who had been prowling and searching with some dogs had found him, or rather his head. It was on this side of the ravine, thrown over from the other bank on which the body sprawled stiffly, wet through, and now growing visible in the gathering daylight. Yes--the voice was the man's wife. It was raining hard.... There would be shrieking for nine days. Yes, nine days. Confirmation with the fingers when Benham still fought against the facts. Her friends and relatives would come and shriek too. Two of the dead man's aunts were among the best keeners in the whole land. They could keen marvellously. It was raining too hard to go on.... The road would be impossible in rain.... Yes it was very melancholy. Her house was close at hand. Perhaps twenty or thirty women would join her. It was impossible to go on until it had stopped raining.

It would be tiresome, but what could one do?...

7

As they sat upon the parapet of a broken bridge on the road between Elbassan and Ochrida Benham was moved to a dissertation upon the condition of Albania and the politics of the Balkan peninsula.

"Here we are," he said, "not a week from London, and you see the sort of life that men live when the forces of civilization fail. We have been close to two murders--"

"Two?"

"That little crowd in the square at Scutari-- That was a murder. I didn't tell you at the time."

"But I knew it was," said Amanda.

"And you see the filth of it all, the toiling discomfort of it all. There is scarcely a house here in all the land that is not filthier and viler than the worst slum in London. No man ventures far from his village without arms, everywhere there is fear. The hills are impassable because of the shepherd's dogs. Over those hills a little while ago a

stranger was torn to pieces by dogs--and partially eaten. Amanda, these dogs madden me. I shall let fly at the beasts. The infernal indignity of it! But that is by the way. You see how all this magnificent country lies waste with nothing but this crawling, ugly mockery of human life."

"They sing," said Amanda.

"Yes," said Benham and reflected, "they do sing. I suppose singing is the last thing left to men. When there is nothing else you can still sit about and sing. Miners who have been buried in mines will sing, people going down in ships."

"The Sussex labourers don't sing," said Amanda. "These people sing well."

"They would probably sing as well if they were civilized. Even if they didn't I shouldn't care. All the rest of their lives is muddle and cruelty and misery. Look at the women. There was that party of bent creatures we met yesterday, carrying great bundles, carrying even the men's cloaks and pipes, while their rascal husbands and brothers swaggered behind. Look at the cripples we have seen and the mutilated men. If we have met one man without a nose, we have met a dozen. And stunted people. All these people are like evil schoolboys; they do nothing but malicious mischief; there is nothing adult about them but their voices; they are like the heroic dreams of young ruffians in a penitentiary. You saw that man at Scutari in the corner of the bazaar, the gorgeous brute, you admired him--."

"The man with the gold inlaid pistols and the diamonds on his yataghan. He wanted to show them to us."

"Yes. You let him see you admired him."

"I liked the things on his stall."

"Well, he has killed nearly thirty people."

"In duels?"

"Good Lord! NO! Assassinations. His shoemaker annoyed him by sending in a bill. He went to the man's stall, found him standing with his child in his arms and blew out his brains. He blundered against a passer-by in the road and shot him. Those are his feats. Sometimes his pistols go off in the bazaar just by accident."

"Does nobody kill him?"

"I wanted to," said Benham and became thoughtful for a time. "I think I ought to have made some sort of quarrel. But then as I am an Englishman he might have hesitated. He would have funked a strange beast like me. And I couldn't have shot him if he had hesitated. And if he hadn't--"

"But doesn't a blood feud come down on him?"

"It only comes down on his family. The shoemaker's son thought the matter over and squared accounts by putting the muzzle of a gun into the small of the back of our bully's uncle. It was easier that way.... You see you're dealing with men of thirteen years old or thereabouts, the boy who doesn't grow up."

"But doesn't the law--?"

"There's no law. Only custom and the Turkish tax collector.

"You see this is what men are where there is no power, no discipline, no ruler, no responsibility. This is a masterless world. This is pure democracy. This is the natural state of men. This is the world of the bully and the brigand and assassin, the world of the mud-pelter and brawler, the world of the bent woman, the world of the flea and the fly, the open drain and the baying dog. This is what the British sentimentalist thinks a noble state for men."

"They fight for freedom."

"They fight among each other. There are their private feuds and their village feuds and above all that great feud religion. In Albania there is only one religion and that is hate. But there are three churches for the better cultivation of hate and cruelty, the Latin, the Greek and the Mahometan."

"But no one has ever conquered these people."

"Any one could, the Servians, the Bulgarians, the Greeks, the Italians, the Austrians. Why, they can't even shoot! It's just the balance of power and all that foolery keeps this country a roadless wilderness. Good God, how I tire of it! These men who swagger and stink, their brawling dogs, their greasy priests and dervishes, the down-at-heel soldiers, the bribery and robbery, the cheating over the money...."

He slipped off the parapet, too impatient to sit any longer, and began to pace up and down in the road.

"One marvels that no one comes to clear up this country, one itches to be at the job, and then one realizes that before one can begin here, one must get to work back there, where the fools and pedants of WELT POLITIK scheme mischief one against another. This country frets me. I can't see any fun in it, can't see the humour of it. And the people away there know no better than to play off tribe against tribe, sect against sect, one peasant prejudice against another. Over this pass the foolery grows grimmer and viler. We shall come to where the Servian plots against the Bulgarian and the Greek against both, and the Turk, with spasmodic massacres and indulgences, broods over the brew. Every division is subdivided. There are two sorts of Greek church, Exarchic, Patriarchic, both teaching by threat and massacre. And there is no one, no one, with the sense to over-ride all these squalid hostilities. All those fools away there in London and Vienna and St. Petersburg and Rome take sides as though these beastly tribes and leagues and superstitions meant anything but blank, black, damnable ignorance. One fool stands up for

the Catholic Albanians, another finds heroes in the Servians, another talks of Brave Little Montenegro, or the Sturdy Bulgarian, or the Heroic Turk. There isn't a religion in the whole Balkan peninsula, there isn't a tribal or national sentiment that deserves a moment's respect from a sane man. They're things like niggers' nose-rings and Chinese secret societies; childish things, idiot things that have to go. Yet there is no one who will preach the only possible peace, which is the peace of the world-state, the open conspiracy of all the sane men in the world against the things that break us up into wars and futilities. And here am I--who have the light--WANDERING! Just wandering!"

He shrugged his shoulders and came to stare at the torrent under the bridge.

"You're getting ripe for London, Cheetah," said Amanda softly.

"I want somehow to get to work, to get my hands on definite things."

"How can we get back?"

She had to repeat her question presently.

"We can go on. Over the hills is Ochrida and then over another pass is Presba, and from there we go down into Monastir and reach a railway and get back to the world of our own times again."

But before they reached the world of their own times Macedonia was to show them something grimmer than Albania.

They were riding through a sunlit walnut wood beyond Ochrida when they came upon the thing.

The first they saw of it looked like a man lying asleep on a grassy bank. But he lay very still indeed, he did not look up, he did not stir as they passed, the pose of his hand was stiff, and when Benham glanced back at him, he stifled a little cry of horror. For this man had no face and the flies had been busy upon him....

Benham caught Amanda's bridle so that she had to give her attention to her steed.

"Ahead!" he said, "Ahead! Look, a village!"

(Why the devil didn't they bury the man? Why? And that fool Giorgio and the others were pulling up and beginning to chatter. After all she might look back.)

Through the trees now they could see houses. He quickened his pace and jerked Amanda's horse forward....

But the village was a still one. Not a dog barked.

Here was an incredible village without even a dog!

And then, then they saw some more people lying about. A woman lay in a doorway. Near her was something muddy that might have been a child, beyond were six men all spread out very neatly in a row with their faces to the sky.

"Cheetah!" cried Amanda, with her voice going up. "They've been killed. Some one has killed them."

Benham halted beside her and stared stupidly. "It's a band," he said. "It's--propaganda. Greeks or Turks or Bulgarians."

"But their feet and hands are fastened! And--... WHAT HAVE THEY BEEN DOING TO THEM?..."

"I want to kill," cried Benham. "Oh! I want to kill people. Come on, Amanda! It blisters one's eyes. Come away. Come away! Come!"

Her face was white and her eyes terror-stricken. She obeyed him mechanically. She gave one last look at those bodies....

Down the deep-rutted soil of the village street they clattered. They came to houses that had been set on fire....

"What is that hanging from a tree?" cried Amanda. "Oh, oh!"

"Come on...."

Behind them rode the others scared and hurrying.

The sunlight had become the light of hell. There was no air but horror. Across Benham's skies these fly-blown trophies of devilry dangled mockingly in the place of God. He had no thought but to get away.

Presently they encountered a detachment of Turkish soldiers, very greasy and ragged, with worn-out boots and yellow faces, toiling up the stony road belatedly to the village. Amanda and Benham riding one behind the other in a stricken silence passed this labouring column without a gesture, but presently they heard the commander stopping and questioning Giorgio....

Then Giorgio and the others came clattering to overtake them.

Giorgio was too full to wait for questions. He talked eagerly to Benham's silence.

It must have happened yesterday, he explained. They were Bulgarians--traitors. They had been converted to the Patriarchists by the Greeks--by a Greek band, that is to say. They had betrayed one of their own people. Now a Bulgarian band had descended upon

them. Bulgarian bands it seemed were always particularly rough on Bulgarian-speaking Patriarchists....

9

That night they slept in a dirty little room in a peasant's house in Resnia, and in the middle of the night Amanda woke up with a start and heard Benham talking. He seemed to be sitting up as he talked. But he was not talking to her and his voice sounded strange.

"Flies," he said, "in the sunlight!"

He was silent for a time and then he repeated the same words.

Then suddenly he began to declaim. "Oh! Brutes together. Apes. Apes with knives. Have they no lord, no master, to save them from such things? This is the life of men when no man rules.... When no man rules.... Not even himself.... It is because we are idle, because we keep our wits slack and our wills weak that these poor devils live in hell. These things happen here and everywhere when the hand that rules grows weak. Away in China now they are happening. Persia. Africa.... Russia staggers. And I who should serve the law, I who should keep order, wander and make love.... My God! may I never forget! May I never forget! Flies in the sunlight! That man's face. And those six men!

"Grip the savage by the throat.

"The weak savage in the foreign office, the weak savage at the party headquarters, feud and indolence and folly. It is all one world. This and that are all one thing. The spites of London and the mutilations of Macedonia. The maggots that eat men's faces and the maggots that rot their minds. Rot their minds. Rot their minds. Rot their minds...."

To Amanda it sounded like delirium.

"CHEETAH!" she said suddenly between remonstrance and a cry of terror.

The darkness suddenly became quite still. He did not move.

She was afraid. "Cheetah!" she said again.

"What is it, Amanda?"

"I thought--. Are you all right?"

"Quite."

"But do you feel well?"

"I've got this cold I caught in Ochrida. I suppose I'm feverish. But--yes, I'm well."

"You were talking."

Silence for a time.

"I was thinking," he said.

"You talked."

"I'm sorry," he said after another long pause.

10

The next morning Benham had a pink spot on either cheek, his eyes were feverishly bright, he would touch no food and instead of coffee he wanted water. "In Monastir there will be a doctor," he said. "Monastir is a big place. In Monastir I will see a doctor. I want a doctor."

They rode out of the village in the freshness before sunrise and up long hills, and sometimes they went in the shade of woods and sometimes in a flooding sunshine. Benham now rode in front, preoccupied, intent, regardless of Amanda, a stranger, and she rode close behind him wondering.

"When you get to Monastir, young man," she told him, inaudibly, "you will go straight to bed and we'll see what has to be done with you."

"AMMALATO," said Giorgio confidentially, coming abreast of her.

"MEDICO IN MONASTIR," said Amanda.

"SI,--MOLTI MEDICI, MONASTIR," Giorgio agreed.

Then came the inevitable dogs, big white brutes, three in full cry charging hard at Benham and a younger less enterprising beast running along the high bank above yapping and making feints to descend.

The goatherd, reclining under the shadow of a rock, awaited Benham's embarrassment with an indolent malice.

"You UNCIVILIZED Beasts!" cried Benham, and before Amanda could realize what he was up to, she heard the crack of his revolver and saw a puff of blue smoke drift away above his right shoulder. The foremost beast rolled over and the goatherd had sprung to his feet. He shouted with something between anger and dismay as Benham, regardless of the fact that the other dogs had turned and were running back, let fly a second time. Then the goatherd had clutched at the gun that lay on the grass near at hand, Giorgio was bawling in noisy remonstrance and also getting ready to shoot, and the horse-owner and his boy were clattering back to a position of neutrality up the stony road. "BANG!" came a flight of lead within a yard of Benham, and then the goatherd was in retreat

behind a rock and Giorgio was shouting "AVANTI, AVANTI!" to Amanda.

She grasped his intention and in another moment she had Benham's horse by the bridle and was leading the retreat. Giorgio followed close, driving the two baggage mules before him.

"I am tired of dogs," Benham said. "Tired to death of dogs. All savage dogs must be shot. All through the world. I am tired--"

Their road carried them down through the rocky pass and then up a long slope in the open. Far away on the left they saw the goatherd running and shouting and other armed goatherds appearing among the rocks. Behind them the horse-owner and his boy came riding headlong across the zone of danger.

"Dogs must be shot," said Benham, exalted. "Dogs must be shot."

"Unless they are GOOD dogs," said Amanda, keeping beside him with an eye on his revolver.

"Unless they are good dogs to every one," said Benham.

They rushed along the road in a turbulent dusty huddle of horses and mules and riders. The horse-owner, voluble in Albanian, was trying to get past them. His boy pressed behind him. Giorgio in the rear had unslung his rifle and got it across the front of his saddle. Far away they heard the sound of a shot, and a kind of shudder in the air

overhead witnessed to the flight of the bullet. They crested a rise and suddenly between the tree boughs Monastir was in view, a wide stretch of white town, with many cypress and plane trees, a winding river with many wooden bridges, clustering minarets of pink and white, a hilly cemetery, and scattered patches of soldiers' tents like some queer white crop to supplement its extensive barracks.

As they hurried down towards this city of refuge a long string of mules burthened with great bales of green stuff appeared upon a convergent track to the left. Besides the customary muleteers there were, by way of an escort, a couple of tattered Turkish soldiers. All these men watched the headlong approach of Benham's party with apprehensive inquiry. Giorgio shouted some sort of information that made the soldiers brighten up and stare up the hill, and set the muleteers whacking and shouting at their convoy. It struck Amanda that Giorgio must be telling lies about a Bulgarian band. In another moment Benham and Amanda found themselves swimming in a torrent of mules. Presently they overtook a small flock of fortunately nimble sheep, and picked up several dogs, dogs that happily disregarded Benham in the general confusion. They also comprehended a small springless cart, two old women with bundles and an elderly Greek priest, before their dusty, barking, shouting cavalcade reached the outskirts of Monastir. The two soldiers had halted behind to cover the retreat.

Benham's ghastly face was now bedewed with sweat and he swayed in his saddle as he rode. "This is NOT civilization, Amanda," he said, "this is NOT civilization."

And then suddenly with extraordinary pathos:

"Oh! I want to go to BED! I want to go to BED! A bed with sheets...."

To ride into Monastir is to ride into a maze. The streets go nowhere in particular. At least that was the effect on Amanda and Benham. It was as if Monastir too had a temperature and was slightly delirious. But at last they found an hotel--quite a civilized hotel....

The doctor in Monastir was an Armenian with an ambition that outran his capacity to speak English. He had evidently studied the language chiefly from books. He thought THESE was pronounced "theser" and THOSE was pronounced "thoser," and that every English sentence should be taken at a rush. He diagnosed Benham's complaint in various languages and failed to make his meaning clear to Amanda. One combination of words he clung to obstinately, having clearly the utmost faith in its expressiveness.
To Amanda it sounded like, "May, Ah! Slays," and it seemed to her that he sought to intimate a probable fatal termination of Benham's fever.
But it was clear that the doctor was not satisfied that she understood.
He came again with a queer little worn book, a parallel vocabulary of half-a-dozen European languages.

He turned over the pages and pointed to a word. "May! Ah! Slays!" he repeated, reproachfully, almost bitterly.

"Oh, MEASLES!" cried Amanda....

So the spirited honeymoon passed its zenith.

11

The Benhams went as soon as possible down to Smyrna and thence by way of Uskub tortuously back to Italy. They recuperated at the best hotel of Locarno in golden November weather, and just before Christmas they turned their faces back to England.

Benham's plans were comprehensive but entirely vague; Amanda had not so much plans as intentions....

CHAPTER THE FIFTH ~~ THE ASSIZE OF JEALOUSY

1

It was very manifest in the disorder of papers amidst which White spent