The Ragged Edge eBook

The Ragged Edge by Harold MacGrath

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BOOKRAGS

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Title: The Ragged Edge

Author: Harold MacGrath

Release Date: April 13, 2005 [EBook #15614]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

*** *Start of this project gutenberg* EBOOK *the ragged edge* ***

Produced by Charles Aldarondo, Clare Elliott and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team.

[Illustration: *Distinctive Pictures Photoplay. The Ragged Edge*. *Mimi Palmeri as Ruth* EMSCHEDE, *Alfred Lunt as Howard Spurlock*.]

THE RAGGED EDGE

BY HAROLD MACGRATH

AUTHOR OF DRUMS OF JEOPARDY, ETC.

Illustrated with scenes
from the photoplay
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distinctive pictures corporation

NEW YORK GROSSET & DUNLAP PUBLISHERS

THE RAGGED EDGE

CHAPTER I

The Master is inordinately fond of young fools. That is why they are permitted to rush in where angels fear to tread—and survive their daring! This supreme protection, this unwritten warranty to disregard all laws, occult or apparent, divine or earthly, may be attributed to the fact that none but young fools dream gloriously. For such of us as pretend to be wise—and we are but fools in a lesser degree—we know that humanity moves onward only by the impellant of fine dreams. Sometimes these dreams are simple and tender; sometimes they are magnificent.

With what airs we human atoms invest ourselves! What ridiculous fancies of our importance! We believe we have destinies, when we have only destinations: that we are something immortal, when each of us is in truth only the repository of a dream. The dream flowers and is harvested, and we are left by the wayside, having served our singular purpose in the scheme of progress: as the orange is tossed aside when sucked of its ruddy juice.

We middle-aged fools and we old fools can no longer dream. We have only those phantoms called memories, which are the husks of dreams. Disillusion stands in one doorway of our house and Mockery in the other.

This is a tale of two young fools.

* * * * *

In the daytime the streets of the ancient city of Canton are yet filled with the original confusion—human beings in quest of food. There is turmoil, shouts, cries, jostlings, milling congestions that suddenly break and flow in opposite directions.

It was a gray day in the spring of 1910. A tourist caravan of four pole-chairs jogged along a narrow street. It had rained during the night, and the patch-work pavement was greasy with mud. From a bi-secting street came shouting and music. At a sign from Ah Cum, official custodian of the sightseers, the pole-chair coolies pressed toward the left and halted.

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A wedding procession turned the corner. All the world over a wedding procession arouses laughter and derision in the bystanders. Even the children jeer. It may be instinctive; it may be that children vaguely realize that at the end of all wedding journeys is disillusion.

The girl in the forward chair raised herself a little, the better to see the gorgeous blue palanquin of the dimly visible bride.

“What a wonderful colour!” she exclaimed.

“Kingfisher feathers,” said Ah Cum. “It is an ordinary wedding,” he added; “some shopkeeper’s daughter. Probably she was married years ago and is now merely on the way to her husband’s house. The palanquin is hired and so is the procession. Quite ordinary.”

The air in the narrow street, which was not eight feet wide, swarmed with smells impossible to define; but all at once the pleasantly pungent odour of Chinese incense drifted across the girl’s face, and gratefully she quickened her inhalations.

In her ears there was a medley of sound: wailing music, rumbling tom-toms and sputtering firecrackers. She had never before heard the noise of firecrackers, and in the beginning the sputtering racket caused her to wince. Presently the odour of burnt powder mingled agreeably with that of the incense.

She was conscious of a ceaseless undercurrent of sound—the guttural Chinese tongue. She foraged about in her mind for some satisfying equivalent which would express in English this gurgling drone the Chinese called a language. At length she hit upon it: bubbling water. Her eyebrows, pulled down by the stress of thought, now resumed their normal arches; and pleased with her discovery, she smiled.

To Ah Cum, who was watching her covertly, the smile was like a bit of unexpected sunshine. What with these converging roofs that shut out all but a hand’s breadth of the sky, sunshine was rare at this point. If it came at all, it was as fleeting as the girl’s smile.

The wedding procession passed on, and the cynical rabble poured in behind. The pole-chair caravan resumed its journey.

The girl wished that she had come afoot, despite the knowledge that she would have suffered many inconveniences, accidental and intentional jostling, insolence and ribald jest. The Cantonese, excepting in the shops where he expects profit, always resents the intrusion of the *fan-quei*—foreign devil. The chair was torture. It hung from the centre of a stout pole, each end of which rested upon the calloused shoulder of a coolie; an ordinary Occidental chair with a foot-rest. The coolies proceeded at a swinging, mincing trot, which gave to the suspended seat a dancing action similar to that of a

suddenly agitated hanging-spring of a birdcage. It was impossible to meet the motion bodily.

Her shoulders began to ache. Her head felt absurdly like one of those noddling manikins in the Hong-Kong curio-shops. Jiggle-joggle, jiggle-joggle...! For each pause she was grateful. Whenever Ah Cum (whose normal stride was sufficient to keep him at the side of her chair) pointed out something of interest, she had to strain the cords in her neck to focus her glance upon the object. Supposing the wire should break and her head tumble off her shoulders into the street? The whimsey caused another smile to ripple across her lips.

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This amazing world she had set forth to discover! Yesterday at this time she had had no thought in her head about Canton. America, the land of rosy apples and snowstorms, beckoned, and she wanted to fly thitherward. Yet, here she was, in the ancient Chinese city, weaving in and out of the narrow streets some scarcely wide enough for two men to walk abreast, streets that boiled and eddied with yellow human beings, who worshipped strange gods, ate strange foods, and diffused strange suffocating smells. These were less like streets than labyrinths, hewn through an eternal twilight. It was only when they came into a square that daylight had a positive quality.

So many things she saw that her interest stumbled rather than leaped from object to object. Rows of roasted duck, brilliantly varnished; luscious vegetables, which she had been warned against; baskets of melon seed and water-chestnuts; men working in teak and blackwood; fan makers and jade cutters; eggs preserved in what appeared to her as petrified muck; bird's nests and shark fins. She glimpsed Chinese penury when she entered a square given over to the fishmongers. Carp, tench, and roach were so divided that even the fins, heads and fleshless spines were sold. There were doorways to peer into, dim cluttered holes with shadowy forms moving about, potters and rug-weavers.

Through one doorway she saw a grave Chinaman standing on a stage-like platform. He wore a long coat, beautifully flowered, and a hat with a turned up brim. Balanced on his nose were enormous tortoise-shell spectacles. A ragged gray moustache drooped from the corners of his mouth and a ragged wisp of whisker hung from his chin. She was informed by Ah Cum that the Chinaman was one of the *literati* and that he was expounding the deathless philosophy of Confucius, which, summed up, signified that the end of all philosophy is Nothing.

Through yet another doorway she observed an ancient silk brocade loom. Ah Cum halted the caravan and indicated that they might step within and watch. On a stool eight feet high sat a small boy in a faded blue cotton, his face like that of young Buddha. He held in his hands many threads. From time to time the man below would shout, and the boy would let the threads go with the snap of a harpist, only to recover them instantly. There was a strip of old rose brocade in the making that set an ache in the girl's heart for the want of it.

The girl wondered what effect the information would have upon Ah Cum if she told him that until a month ago she had never seen a city, she had never seen a telephone, a railway train, an automobile, a lift, a paved street. She was almost tempted to tell him, if only to see the cracks of surprise and incredulity break the immobility of his yellow countenance.

But no; she must step warily. Curiosity held her by one hand, urging her to recklessness, and caution held her by the other. Her safety lay in pretense—that what she saw was as a tale twice told.

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A phase of mental activity that men called courage: to summon at will this energy which barred the ingress of the long cold fingers of fear, which cleared the throat of stuffiness and kept the glance level and ever forward. She possessed it, astonishing fact! She had summoned this energy so continuously during the past four weeks that now it was abiding; she knew that it would always be with her, on guard. And immeasurable was the calm evolved from this knowledge.

The light touch of Ah Cum's hand upon her arm broke the thread of retrospective thought; and her gray eyes began to register again the things she saw.

"Jade," said Ah Cum.

She turned away from the doorway of the silk loom to observe. Pole coolies came joggling along with bobbing blocks of jade—white jade, splashed and veined with translucent emerald green.

"On the way to the cutters," said Ah Cum. "But we must be getting along if we are to lunch in the tower of the water-clock."

As if an order had come to her somewhere out of space, the girl glanced sideways at the other young fool.

So far she had not heard the sound of his voice. The tail-ender of this little caravan, he had been rather out of it. But he had shown no desire for information, no curiosity. Whenever they stepped from the chairs, he stepped down. If they entered a shop, he paused by the doorway, as if waiting for the journey to be resumed.

Young, not much older than she was: she was twenty and he was possibly twenty-four. She liked his face; it had on it the suggestion of gentleness, of fineness. She was lamentably without comparisons; such few young men as she had seen—white men—-had been on the beach, pitiful and terrible objects.

The word *handsome* was a little beyond her grasp. She could not apply it in this instance because she was not sure the application would be correct. Perhaps what urged her interest in the young man's direction was the dead whiteness of his face, the puffed eyelids and the bloodshot whites. She knew the significance: the red corpuscle was being burnt out by the fires of alcohol. Was he, too, on the way to the beach? What a pity! All alone, and none to warn him of the abject wretchedness at the end of Drink.

Only the night before, in the dining room of the Hong-Kong Hotel, she had watched him empty glass after glass of whisky, and shudder and shudder. He did not like it. Why, then, did he touch it?

As he climbed heavily into his chair, she was able to note the little beads of sweat under the cracked nether lip. He was in misery; he was paying for last night's debauch. His clothes were smartly pressed, his linen white, his jaws cleanly shaven; but the day would come when he would grow indifferent to bodily cleanliness. What a pity!

For all her ignorance of material things—the human inventions which served the physical comforts of man—how much she knew about man himself! She had seen him bereft of all those spiritual props which permit man to walk on two feet instead of four—-broken, without resilience. And now she was witnessing or observing the complicated machinery of civilization through which they had come, at length to land on the beach of her island. She knew now the supreme human energy which sent men to hell or carried them to their earthly heights. Selfishness.

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Supposing she saw the young man at dinner that night, emptying his bottle? She could not go to him, sit down and draw the sordid pictures she had seen so often. In her case the barrier was not selfishness but the perception that her interest would be misinterpreted, naturally. What right had a young woman to possess the scarring and intimate knowledge of that dreg of human society, the beachcomber?

CHAPTER II

Ah Cum lived at No. 6 Chiu Ping le, Chiu Yam Street. He was a Canton guide, highly educated, having been graduated from Yale University. If he took a fancy to you, he invited you to the house for tea, bitter and yellow and served in little cups without handles. If you knew anything about Canton ware, you were, as like as not, sorely tempted to stuff a teacup into your pocket.

He was tall, slender, and suave. He spoke English with astonishing facility and with a purity which often embarrassed his tourists. He made his headquarters at the Victoria on the Sha-mien, and generally met the Hong-Kong packet in the morning. You left Hong-Kong at night, by way of the Pearl River, and arrived in Canton the next morning. Ah Cum presented his black-bordered card to such individuals as seemed likely to require his services.

This morning his entourage (as he jestingly called it) consisted of the girl, two spinsters (Prudence and Angelina Jedson), prim and doubtful of the world, and the young man who appeared to be considerably the worse for the alcohol he had consumed.

In the beginning Ah Cum would run his glance speculatively over the assortment and select that individual who promised to be the most companionable. He was a philosopher. Usually his charges bored him with their interrogative chatter, for he knew that his information more often than not went into one ear and out of the other. To-day he selected the girl, and gave her the lead-chair. He motioned the young man to the rear chair, because at that hour the youth appeared to be a quantity close to zero. Being a Chinaman in blood and instinct, he despised all spinsters; they were parasites. A woman was born to have children, particularly male children.

Half a day had turned the corner of the hours; and Ah Cum admitted that this girl puzzled him. He dug about in his mind for a term to fit her, and he came upon the word *new*. She was new, unlike any other woman he had met in all his wide travel. He could not tell whether she was English or American. From long experience with both races he had acquired definitions, but none snugly applied to this girl. Her roving eagerness was at all times shaded with shyness, reserve, repression. Her voice was soft and singularly musical; but from time to time she uttered old-fashioned words which forced him to grope mentally. She had neither the semi-boisterousness of the average American girl nor the chilling insolence of the English.

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Ah, these English! They travelled all over, up and down the world, not to acquire information but rather to leave the impress of their superiority as a race. It was most amusing. They would suffer amazing hardships to hunt the snow-leopard; but in the Temple of Five Hundred Gods they would not take the trouble to ask the name of one!

But this girl, she was alone. That added to his puzzle. At this moment she was staring ahead; and again came the opportunity to study her. Fine but strong lines marked the profile: that would speak for courage and resolution. She was as fair as the lily of the lotus. That suggested delicacy; and yet her young body was strong and vital. Whence had she come: whither was she bound?

A temporary congestion in the street held up the caravan for a spell; and Ah Cum looked backward to note if any of the party had become separated. It was then that the young man entered his thought with some permanency: because there was no apparent reason for his joining the tour, since from the beginning he had shown no interest in anything. He never asked questions; he never addressed his companions; and frequently he took off his cap and wiped his forehead. For the first time it occurred to Ah Cum that the young man might not be quite conscious of his surroundings, that he might be moving in that comatose state which is the aftermath of a long debauch. For all that, Ah Cum was forced to admit that his charge did not look dissipated.

Ah Cum was more or less familiar with alcoholic types. In the genuinely dissipated face there was always a suggestion of slyness in ambush, peeping out of the wrinkles around the eyes and the lips. Upon this young fellow's face there were no wrinkles, only shadows, in the hollows of the cheeks and under the eyes. He was more like a man who had left his bed in the middle of convalescence.

Ah Cum's glance returned to the girl. Of course, it really signified nothing in this careless part of the world that she was travelling alone. What gave the puzzling twist to an ordinary situation was her manner: she was guileless. She reminded him of his linnet, when he gave the bird the freedom of the house: it became filled with a wild gaiety which bordered on madness. All that was needed to complete the simile was that the girl should burst into song.

But, alas! Ah Cum shrugged philosophically. His commissions this day would not fill his metal pipe with one wad of tobacco. The spinsters had purchased one grass-linen tablecloth; the girl and the young man had purchased nothing. That she had not bought one piece of linen subtly established in Ah Cum's mind the fact that she had no home, that the instinct was not there, or she would have made some purchase against the future.

Between his lectures—and primarily he was an itinerant lecturer—he manoeuvred in vain to acquire some facts regarding the girl, who she was, whence she had come; but always she countered with: "What is that?" Guileless she might be; simple, never.

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It was noon when the caravan reached the tower of the water-clock. Here they would be having lunch. Ah Cum said that it was customary to give the chair boys small money for rice. The four tourists contributed varied sums: the spinsters ten cents each, the girl a shilling, the young man a Mexican dollar. The lunches were individual affairs: sandwiches, bottled olives and jam commandeered from the Victoria.

“You are alone?” said one of the spinsters—Prudence Jedson.

“Yes,” answered the girl.

“Aren’t you afraid?”

“Of what?”—serenely.

“The men.”

“They know.”

“They know what?”

“When and when not to speak. You have only to look resolute and proceed upon your way.”

Ah Cum lent an ear covertly.

“How old are you?” demanded Miss Prudence.

The spinsters offered a good example of how singular each human being is, despite the fact that in sisters the basic corpuscle is the same. Prudence was the substance and Angelina the shadow; for Angelina never offered opinions, she only agreed with those advanced by Prudence.

“I am twenty,” said the girl.

Prudence shook her head. “You must have travelled a good deal to know so much about men.”

The girl smiled and began to munch a sandwich. Secretly she was gratified to be assigned to the role of an old traveller. Still, it was true about men. Seldom they molested a woman who appeared to know where she was going and who kept her glance resolutely to the fore.

Said Prudence, with commendable human kindness: “My sister and I are going on to Shanghai and Peking. If you are going that way, why not join us.”

The girl's blood ran warmly for a minute. "That is very kind of you, but I am on my way to America. Up to dinner yesterday I did not expect to come to Canton. I was the last on board. Wasn't the river beautiful under the moonlight?"

"We did not leave our cabins. Did you bring any luggage?"

"All I own. In this part of the world it is wise never to be separated from your luggage."

The girl fished into the bottle for an olive. How clever she was, to fool everybody so easily! Not yet had any one suspected the truth: that she was, in a certain worldly sense, only four weeks old, that her every act had been written down on paper beforehand, and that her success lay in rigidly observing the rules which she herself had drafted to govern her conduct.

She finished the olive and looked up. Directly in range stood the strange young man, although he was at the far side of the loft. He was leaning against a window frame, his hat in his hand. She noted the dank hair on his forehead, the sweat of revolting nature. What a pity! But why?

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There was no way over this puzzle, nor under it, nor around it: that men should drink, knowing the inevitable payment. This young man did not drink because he sought the false happiness that lured men to the bottle. To her mind, recalling the picture of him the night before, there had been something tragic in the grim silent manner of his tippling. Peg after peg had gone down his blistered throat, but never had a smile touched his lips, never had his gaze roved inquisitively. Apparently he had projected beyond his table some hypnotic thought, for it had held him all through the dining hour.

Evidently he was gazing at the dull red roofs of the city: but was he registering what he saw? Never glance sideways at man, the old Kanaka woman had said. Yes, yes; that was all very well in ordinary cases; but yonder was a soul in travail, if ever she had seen one. Here was not the individual against whom she had been warned. He had not addressed to her even the most ordinary courtesy of fellow travellers; she doubted that he was even aware of her existence. She went further: she doubted that he was fully conscious of where he was.

Suddenly she became aware of the fact that he had brought no lunch. A little kindness would not bring the world tumbling about her ears. So she approached him with sandwiches.

“You forgot your lunch,” she said. “Won’t you take these?”

For a space he merely stared at her, perhaps wondering if she were real. Then a bit of colour flowed into his sunken white cheeks.

“Thank you; but I’ve a pocket full of water-chestnuts. I’m not hungry.”

“Better eat these, even if you don’t want them,” she urged. “My name is Ruth Enschede.”

“Mine is Howard Spurlock.”

Immediately he stepped back. Instinctively she imitated this action, chilled and a little frightened at the expression of terror that confronted her. Why should he stare at her in this fashion?—for all the world as if she had pointed a pistol at his head?

CHAPTER III

He had said it, spoken it like that ... his own name! After all these weeks of trying to obliterate even the memory of it!... to have given it to this girl without her asking!

The thought of peril cleared a space in the alcoholic fog. He saw the expression on the girl’s face and understood what it signified, that it was the reflected pattern of his own.

He shut his eyes and groped for the wall to steady himself, wondering if this bit of mummery would get over.

“I beg your pardon!... A bit rocky this morning.... That window there.... Cloud back of your hat!” He opened his eyes again.

“I understand,” she said. The poor boy, imagining things! “That’s want of substantial food. Better take these sandwiches.”

“All right; and thank you. I’ll eat them when we start. Just now the water-chestnuts....”

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She smiled, and returned to the spinsters.

Spurlock began to munch his water-chestnuts. What he needed was not a food but a flavour; and the cocoanut taste of the chestnuts soothed his burning tongue and throat. He had let go his name so easily as that! What was the name she had given? Ruth something; he could not remember. What a frightened fool he was! If he could not remember her name, it was equally possible that already she had forgotten his. Conscience was always digging sudden pits for his feet and common sense ridiculing his fears. Mirages, over which he was constantly throwing bridges which were wasted efforts, since invariably they spanned solid ground.

But he would make it a point not to speak again to the girl. If he adhered to this policy —to keep away from her inconspicuously—she would forget the name by night, and to-morrow even the bearer of it would sink below the level of recollection. That was life. They were only passers-by.

Drink for him had a queer phase. It did not cheer or fortify him with false courage and recklessness; it simply enveloped him in a mist of unreality. A shudder rippled across his shoulders. He hated the taste of it. The first peg was torture. But for all that, it offered relief; his brain, stupefied by the fumes, grew dull, and conscience lost its edge to bite.

He wiped the sweat from his chin and forehead. His hand shook so violently that he dropped the handkerchief; and he let it lie on the floor because he dared not stoop.

Ah Cum, sensing the difficulty, approached, recovered the damp handkerchief and returned it.

“Thanks.”

“Very interesting,” said the Chinaman, with a wave of his tapering hand toward the roofs. “It reminds you of a red sea suddenly petrified.”

“Or the flat stones in the meadows, teeming with life underneath. Ants.”

“You are from America?”

“Yes.” But Spurlock put up his guard.

“I am a Yale man,” said Ah Cum.

“Yale? Why, so am I.” There was no danger in admitting this fact. Spurlock offered his hand, which Ah Cum accepted gravely. A broken laugh followed the action. “Yale!” Spurlock’s gaze shifted to the dead hills beyond the window; when it returned to the Chinaman there was astonishment instead of interest: as if Ah Cum had been a

phantom a moment since and was now actually a human being. “Yale!” A Chinaman who had gone to Yale!

“Yes. Civil engineering. Mentally but not physically competent. Had to give up the work and take to this. I’m not noble; so my honourable ancestors will not turn over in their graves.”

“Graves.” Spurlock pointed in the sloping fields outside the walls. “I’ve counted ten coffins so far.”

“Ah, yes. The land about these walls is a common graveyard. Every day in the year you will witness such scenes. There are no funerals among the poor, only burials. And many of these deaths could be avoided if it were not for superstition. Superstition is the Chinese Reaper. Rituals instead of medicines. Sometimes I try to talk. I might as well try to build a ladder to heaven. We must take the children—of any race—if we would teach knowledge. Age is set, impervious to innovations.”

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The Chinaman paused. He saw that his words were falling upon dull ears. He turned to observe what this object was that had so unexpectedly diverted the young man's attention. It was the girl. She was standing before a window, against the background of the rain-burdened April sky. There was enough contra-light to render her ethereal.

Spurlock was basically a poet, quick to recognize beauty, animate or inanimate, and to transcribe it in unuttered words. He was always word-building, a metaphorist, lavish with singing adjectives; but often he built in confusion because it was difficult to describe something beautiful in a new yet simple way.

He had not noticed the girl particularly when she offered the sandwiches; but in this moment he found her beautiful. Her face reminded him of a delicate unglazed porcelain cup, filled with blond wine. But there was something else; and in his befogged mental state the comparison eluded him.

Ruth broke the exquisite pose by summoning Ah Cum, who was lured into a lecture upon the water-clock. This left Spurlock alone.

He began munching his water-chestnuts—a small brown radish-shaped vegetable, with the flavour of coconut—that grow along the river brims. Below the window he saw two coolies carrying a coffin, which presently they callously dumped into a yawning pit. This made the eleventh. There were no mourners. But what did the occupant of the box care? The laugh was always with the dead: they were out of the muddle.

From the unlovely hillside his glance strayed to the several five-story towers of the pawnshops. Celestial Uncles! Spurlock chuckled, and a bit of chestnut, going down the wrong way, set him to coughing violently. When the paroxysm passed, he was forced to lean against the window-jamb for support.

"That young man had better watch his cough," said Spinster Prudence. "He acts queerly, too."

"They always act like that after drink," said Ruth, casually.

She intercepted the glance the spinsters exchanged, and immediately sensed that she had said too much. There was no way of recalling the words; so she waited.

"Miss Enschede—such an odd name!—are you French?"

"Oh, no. Pennsylvania Dutch. But I have never seen America. I was born on an island in the South Seas. I am on my way to an aunt who lives in Hartford, Connecticut."

The spinsters nodded approvingly. Hartford had a very respectable sound.

Ruth did not consider it necessary, however, to add that she had not notified this aunt of her coming, that she did not know whether the aunt still resided in Hartford or was underground. These two elderly ladies would call her stark mad. Perhaps she was.

“And you have seen ... drunken men?” Prudence’s tones were full of suppressed horror.

“Often. A very small settlement, mostly natives. There was a trader—a man who bought copra and pearls. Not a bad man as men go, but he would sell whisky and gin. Over here men drink because they are lonely; and when they drink too hard and too long, they wind up on the beach.”

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The spinsters stared at her blankly.

Ruth went on to explain. “When a man reaches the lowest scale through drink, we call him a beachcomber. I suppose the phrase—the word—originally meant a man who searched for food on the beach. The poor things! Oh, it was quite dreadful. It is queer, but men of education and good birth fall swiftest and lowest.”

She sent a covert glance toward the young man. She alone of them all knew that he was on the first leg of the terrible journey to the beach. Somebody ought to talk to him, warn him. He was all alone, like herself.

“What are those odd-looking things on the roofs?” she asked of Ah Cum.

“Pigs and fish, to fend off the visitations of the devil.” Ah Cum smiled. “After all, I believe we Chinese have the right idea. The devil is on top, not below. We aren’t between him and heaven; he is between us and heaven.”

The spinsters had no counter-philosophy to offer; so they turned to Ruth, who had singularly and unconsciously invested herself with glamour, the glamour of adventure, which the old maids did not recognize as such because they were only tourists. This child at once alarmed and thrilled them. She had come across the wicked South Seas which were still infested with cannibals; she had seen drunkenness and called men beachcombers; who was this moment as innocent as a babe, and in the next uttered some bitter wisdom it had taken a thousand years of philosophy to evolve. And there was that dress of hers! She must be warned that she had been imposed upon.

“You’ll pardon an old woman, Miss Enschede,” said Sister Prudence; “but where in this world did you get that dress?”

Ruth picked up both sides of the skirt and spread it, looking down. “Is there anything wrong with it?”

“Wrong? Why, you have been imposed upon somewhere. That dress is thirty years old, if a day.”

“Oh!” Ruth laughed softly. “That is easily explained. I haven’t much money; I don’t know how much it is going to cost me to reach Hartford; so I fixed over a couple of my mother’s dresses. It doesn’t look bad, does it?”

“Mercy, no! That wasn’t the thought. It was that somebody had cheated you.”

The spinster did not ask if the mother lived; the question was inconsequent. No mother would have sent her daughter into the world with such a wardrobe. Straitened circumstances would not have mattered; a mother would have managed somehow. In the ’80s such a dress would have indicated considerable financial means; under the

sun-helmet it was an anachronism; and yet it served only to add a quainter charm to the girl's beauty.

"Do you know what you make me think of?"

"What?"

"As if you had stepped out of some old family album."

The feminine vanities in Ruth were quiescent; nothing had ever occurred in her life to tingle them into action. She was dressed as a white woman should be; and that for the present satisfied her instincts. But she threw a verbal bombshell into the spinsters' camp.

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“What is a family album?”

“You poor child, do you mean to tell me you’ve never seen a family album? Why, it’s a book filled with the photographs of your grandmothers and grandfathers, your aunts and uncles and cousins, your mother and father when they were little.”

Ruth stood with drawn brows; she was trying to recall. “No; we never had one; at least, I never saw it.”

The lack of a family album for some reason put a little ache in her heart. Grandmothers and grandfathers and uncles and aunts ... to love and to coddle lonely little girls.

“You poor child!” said Prudence.

“Then I am old-fashioned. Is that it? I thought this very pretty.”

“So it is, child. But one changes the style of one’s clothes yearly. Of course, this does not apply to uninteresting old maids,” Prudence modified with a dry little smile.

“But this is good enough to travel in, isn’t it?”

“To be sure it is. When you reach San Francisco, you can buy something more appropriate.” It occurred to the spinster to ask: “Have you ever seen a fashion magazine?”

“No. Sometimes we had the *Illustrated London News* and *Tit-Bits.* Sailors would leave them at the trader’s.”

“Alice in Wonderland!” cried Prudence, perhaps a little enviously.

“Oh, I’ve read that!”

Spurlock had heard distinctly enough all of this odd conversation; but until the spinster’s reference to the family album, no phrase had been sufficient in strength of attraction to break the trend of his own unhappy thoughts. Out of an old family album: here was the very comparison that had eluded him. His literary instincts began to stir. A South Sea island girl, and this was her first adventure into civilization. Here was the corner-stone of a capital story; but he knew that Howard Spurlock would never write it.

Other phrases returned now, like echoes. The beachcomber, the lowest in the human scale; and some day he would enter into this estate. Between him and the beach stood the sum of six hundred dollars.

But one thing troubled him, and because of it he might never arrive on the beach. A new inexplicable madness that urged him to shrill ironically the story of his coat—to take it off and fling it at the feet of any stranger who chanced to be nigh.

“Look at it!” he felt like screaming. “Clean and spotless, but beginning to show the wear and tear of constant use. I have worn it for weeks and weeks. I have slept with it under my pillow. Observe it—a blue-serge coat. Ever hear of the djinn in the bottle? Like enough. But did you ever hear of a djinn in a blue-serge coat? *Stitched* in!”

Something like this was always rushing into his throat; and he had to sink his nails into his palms to stop his mouth. Very fascinating, though, trying to analyse the impulse. It was not an affair of the conscience; it was vaguely based upon insolence and defiance. He wondered if these abnormal mental activities presaged illness. To be ill and helpless.

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He went on munching his water-chestnuts, and stared at the skyline. He hated horizons. He was always visualizing the Hand whenever he let his gaze rest upon the horizon. An enormous Hand that rose up swiftly, blotting out the sky. A Hand that strove to reach his shoulder, relentless, soulless but lawful. The scrutiny of any strange man provoked a sweaty terror. What a God-forsaken fool he was! And dimly, out there somewhere in the South Seas—the beach!

Already he sensed the fascination of the inevitable; and with this fascination came the idea of haste, to get there quickly and have done. Odd, but he had never thought of the beach until this girl (who looked as if she had stepped out of the family album) referred to it with a familiarity which was as astonishing as it was profoundly sad.

The beach: to get there as quickly as he could, to reach the white man's nadir of abasement and gather the promise of that soothing indifference which comes with the final disintegration of the fibres of conscience. He had an objective now.

CHAPTER IV

The tourists returned to the Sha-mien at four o'clock. They were silent and no longer observant, being more or less exhausted by the tedious action of the chairs. Even Ah Cum had resumed his Oriental shell of reserve. To reach the Sha-mien—and particularly the Hotel Victoria—one crossed a narrow canal, always choked with rocking sampans over and about which swarmed yellow men and women and children in varied shades of faded blue cotton. At sunset the swarming abruptly ceased; even the sampans appeared to draw closer together, with the quiet of water-fowl. There is everywhere at night in China the original fear of darkness.

From the portals of the hotel—scarcely fifty yards from the canal—one saw the blank face of the ancient city of Canton. Blank it was, except for a gate near the bridgehead. Into this hole in the wall and out of it the native stream flowed from sunrise to sunset, when the stream mysteriously ceased. The silence of Canton at night was sinister, for none could prophesy what form of mob might suddenly boil out.

No Cantonese was in those days permitted to cross to the Sha-mien after sunset without a license. To simplify matters, he carried a coloured paper lantern upon which his license number was painted in Arabic numerals. It added to the picturesqueness of the Sha-mien night to observe these gaily coloured lanterns dancing hither and yon like June fireflies in a meadow.

Meantime the spinsters sought the dining room where tea was being served. They had much to talk about, or rather Miss Prudence had.

"But she is a dear," said Angelina, timidly.

“I’ll admit that. But I don’t understand her; she’s over my head. She leaves me almost without comparisons. She is like some character out of Phra the Phoenician: she’s been buried for thirty years and just been excavated. That’s the way she strikes me. And it’s uncanny.”

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“But I never saw anybody more alive.”

“Who wouldn’t be lively after thirty years’ sleep? Did you hear her explain about beachcombers? And yet she looks at one with the straightest glance I ever saw. Still, I’m glad she didn’t accept my invitation to join us. I shouldn’t care to have attention constantly drawn to us. This world over here! Everything’s upside-down or back-end-to. Humph!”

“What’s the matter?”

“Sh!”

Spurlock passed by on the way to the bar. Apparently he did not see his recent companions. There was a strained, eager expression on his face.

“Going to befuddle himself between now and dinner,” was the comment of Prudence.

“The poor young man!” sighed Angelina.

“Pah! He’s a fool. I never saw a man who wasn’t.”

“There was Father,” suggested Angelina gently.

“Ninny! What did we know about Father, except when he was around the house? But where is the girl? She said something about having tea with us. I want to know more about her. I wonder if she has any idea how oddly beautiful she is?”

Ruth at that precise moment was engaged by a relative wonder. She was posing before the mirror, critically, miserably, defensively, and perhaps bewilderedly. What was the matter with the dress? She could not see. For the past four weeks mirrors had been her delight, a new toy. Here was one that subtly mocked her.

Life is a patchwork of impressions, of vanishing personalities. Each human contact leaves some indelible mark. The spinsters—who on the morrow would vanish out of the girl’s life for ever—had already left their imprint upon her imagination. Clothes. Henceforth Ruth would closely observe her fellow women and note the hang of their skirts.

Around her neck was a little gold chain. She gathered up the chain, revealing a locket which had lain hidden in her bosom. The locket contained the face of her mother—all the family album she had. She studied the face and tried to visualize the body, clothed in the dress which had created the spinsters’ astonishment. Very well. To-morrow, when she returned to Hong-Kong, she would purchase a simple but modern dress. Anything that drew attention to her must be avoided.

She dropped the locket into its sweet hiding place. It was precious for two reasons: it was the photograph of her beautiful mother whom she could not remember, and it would identify her to the aunt in Hartford.

She uttered a little ejaculative note of joy and rushed to the bed. A dozen books lay upon the counterpane. Oh, the beautiful books! Romance, adventure, love stories! She gathered up the books in her arms and cuddled them, as a mother might have cuddled a child. Love stories! It was of negligible importance that these books were bound in paper; Romance lay unalterably within. All these wonderful comrades, henceforth and for ever hers. She would never again be lonely. Les Miserables, A Tale of Two Cities, Henry Esmond, The Last Days of Pompeii, The Marble Faun ... Love stories!

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Until her arrival in Singapore, she had never read a novel. Pilgrim's Progress, The Life of Martin Luther and Alice in Wonderland (the only fairy-story she had been permitted to read) were the sum total of her library. But in the appendix of the dictionary she had discovered magic names—Hugo, Dumas, Thackeray, Hawthorne, Lytton. She had also discovered the names of Grimm and Andersen; but at that time she had not been able to visualize "the pale slender things with gossamer wings"—fairies. The world into which she was so boldly venturing was going to be wonderful, but never so wonderful as the world within these paper covers. Already Cosette was her chosen friend. Daily contact with actual human beings all the more inclined her toward the imaginative.

Joyous, she felt the need of physical expression; and her body began to sway sinuously, to glide and turn and twist about the room. As she danced there was in her ears the faded echo of wooden tom-toms.

Eventually her movements carried her to the little stand at the side of the bed. There lay upon this stand a book bound in limp black leather—the Holy Bible.

Her glance, absorbing the gilt letters and their significance, communicated to her poised body a species of paralysis. She stood without motion and without strength. The books slid from her arms and fluttered to the floor. Presently repellance grew under the frozen mask of astonishment and dissipated it.

"No!" she cried. "No, no!"

With a gesture, fierce and intolerant, she seized the Bible and thrust it out of sight, into the drawer. Then, her body still tense with the atoms of anger, she sat down upon the edge of the bed and rocked from side to side. But shortly this movement ceased. The recollection of the forlorn and loveless years—stirred into consciousness by the unexpected confrontation—bent her as the high wind bends the water-reed.

"My father!" she whispered. "My own father!"

Queerly the room and its objects receded and vanished; and there intervened a series of mental pictures that so long as she lived would ever be recurring. She saw the moonlit waters, the black shadow of the proa, the moon-fire that ran down the far edge of the bellying sail, the silent natives: no sound except the slapping of the outrigger and the low sibilant murmur of water falling away from the sides—and the beating of her heart. The flight.

How she had fought her eagerness in the beginning, lest it reveal her ignorance of the marvels of mankind! The terror and ecstasy of that night in Singapore—the first city she had ever seen! There was still the impression that something akin to a miracle had piloted her successfully from one ordeal to another.

The clerk at the Raffles Hotel had accorded her but scant interest. She had, it was true, accepted doubtfully the pen he had offered. She had not been sufficiently prompted in relation to the ways of caravansaries; but her mind had been alert and receptive. Almost at once she had comprehended that she was expected to write down her name and address, which she did, in slanting cobwebby lettering, perhaps a trifle laboriously. Ruth Enschede, Hartford, Conn. The address was of course her destination, thousands of miles away, an infinitesimal spot in a terrifying space.

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She could visualize the picture she had presented, particularly the battered papier-mache kitbag at her feet. In Europe or in America people would have smiled; but in Singapore—the half-way port of the world—where a human kaleidoscope tumbles continuously east and west, no one had remarked her.

She would never forget the agony of that first meal in the great dining room. She could have dined alone in her room; but courage had demanded that she face the ordeal and have done with it. Every eye seemed focussed upon her; and yet she had known the sensation to be the conceit of her imagination.

The beautiful gowns and the flashing bare shoulders and arms of the women had disturbed and distressed her. Women, she had been taught, who exposed the flesh of their bodies under the eyes of man were in a special catagory of the damned. Almost instantly she had recognized the fallacy of such a statement. These women could not be bad, else the hotel would not have permitted them to enter! Still, the scene presented a riddle: to give immunity to the black women who went about all but naked and to damn the white for exposing their shoulders!

She had eaten but little; all her hunger had been in her eyes—and in her heart. Loneliness—something that was almost physical: as if the vitality had been taken out of the air she breathed. The longing to talk to someone! But in the end she had gone to her room without giving in to the craving.

Once in the room, the door locked, the sense of loneliness had dropped away from her as the mists used to drop away from the mountain in the morning. Even then she had understood vaguely that she had touched upon some philosophy of life: that one was never lonely when alone, only in the midst of crowds.

Another picture slid across her vision. She saw herself begin a slow, sinuous dance: and stop suddenly in the middle of a figure, conscious that the dance was not impromptu, her own, but native—the same dance she had quitted but a few minutes gone. She had fallen into it naturally, the only expression of the dance she had ever seen or known, and that a stolen sweet. That was odd: when young people were joyous, they had to express it physically. But native! She must watch out.

She remembered that she had not gone to bed until two o'clock in the morning. She had carried a chair into the room veranda and had watched and listened until the night silences had lengthened and only occasionally she heard a voice or the rattle of rickshaw wheels in the courtyard.

The great ordeal—that which she had most dreaded—had proved to be no ordeal at all. The kindly American consul-general had himself taken her to the bank, where her banknotes had been exchanged for a letter of credit, and had thoroughly advised her. Everything had so far come to pass as the withered old Kanaka woman had foretold.

“The Golden One knows that I have seen the world; therefore follow my instructions. Never glance sideways at man. Nothing else matters.”

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The prison bars of circumstance, they no longer encompassed her. Her wings were oddly weak, but for all that she could fly. That was the glorious if bewildering truth. She had left for ever the cage, the galling leash: she was free. The misty caravans of which she had dreamed were become actualities. She had but to choose. All about her, hither and yon, lay the enticing Unknown. Romance! The romance of passing faces, of wires that carried voices and words to the far ends of the world, of tremendous mechanisms that propelled ships and trains! And, oh the beautiful books!

She swiftly knelt upon the floor and once more gathered the books to her heart.

CHAPTER V

At dinner the spinsters invited Ruth to sit at their table, an invitation she accepted gratefully. She was not afraid exactly, but there was that about her loneliness to-night she distrusted. Detached, it was not impossible that she would be forced to leave the dining room because of invading tears. To be near someone, even someone who made a pretense of friendliness, to hear voices, her own intermingling, would serve as a rehabilitating tonic. The world had grown dark and wide, and she was very small. Doubts began to rise up all about her, plucking at her confidence. Could she go through with it? She must. She would never, never go back.

As usual the substantive sister—Prudence—did all the talking for the pair; Angelina, the shadow, offered only her submitting nods. Sometimes she missed her cue and nodded affirmatively when the gesture should have been the reverse; and Prudence would send her a sharp glance of disapproval. Angelina's distress over these mischances was pathetic.

None of this by-play escaped Ruth, whose sense of humour needed no developing. That she possessed any sense of humour was in itself one of those human miracles which metaphysicians are always pothering over without arriving anywhere; for her previous environment had been particularly humourless. But if she smiled at all it was with her eyes. To-night she could have hugged both the old maids.

"Somebody ought to get hold of that young man," said Prudence, grimly, as she nodded in Spurlock's direction. "Look at him!"

Ruth looked. He was draining a glass, and as he set it down he shuddered. A siphon and a whisky bottle stood before him. He measured out the portion of another peg, the bottle wavering in his hand. His food lay untouched about his plate. There was no disgust in Ruth's heart, only an infinite pity; for only the pitiful understand.

"I'm sorry," she said.

“I have no sympathy,” replied Prudence, “with a man who deliberately fuddles himself with strong drink.”

“You would, if you had seen what I have. Men in this part of the world drink to forget the things they have lost.”

“And what should a young man like this one have to forget?” Prudence demanded to know.

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“I wonder,” said Ruth. “Couldn’t you speak to him?”

“What?—and be insulted for my trouble? No, thank you!”

“That is it. You complain of a condition, but you leave the correction to someone else.”

The spinster had no retort to offer such directness. This child was frequently disconcerting. Prudence attacked her chicken wing.

“If I spoke to him, my interest might be misinterpreted.”

“Where did you go to school?” Prudence asked, seeking a new channel, for the old one appeared to be full of hidden reefs.

“I never went to school.”

“But you are educated!”—astonished.

“That depends upon what you call educated. Still, my tutor was a highly educated scholar—my father.” Neither spinster noticed the reluctance in the tones.

“Ah! I see. He suddenly realized that he could not keep you for ever in this part of the world; so he sends you to your aunt. That dress! Only a man—and an unworldly one—would have permitted you to proceed on your adventure dressed in a gown thirty years out of date. What is your father’s business?”

The question was an impertinence, but Ruth was not aware of that.

“Souls,” she answered, drily.

“A missioner! That illuminates everything.” The spinster’s face actually became warm. “You will finish your education in the East and return. I see.”

“No. I shall never come back.”

Something in the child’s voice, something in her manner, warned the spinster that her well-meaning inquisitiveness had received a set-back and that it would be dangerous to press it forward again. What she had termed illuminative now appeared to be only another phase of the mystery which enveloped the child. A sinister thought edged in. Who could say that the girl’s father had not once been a fashionable clergyman in the States and that drink had got him and forced him down, step by step, until—to use the child’s odd expression—he had come upon the beach? She was cynical, this spinster. There was no such a thing as perfection in a mixed world. Clergymen were human. Still, it was rather terrible to suspect that one had fallen from grace, but nevertheless the

thing was possible. With the last glimmer of decency he had sent the daughter to his sister. The poor child! What frightful things she must have seen on that island of hers!

The noise of crashing glass caused a diversion; and Ruth turned gratefully toward the sound.

The young man had knocked over the siphon. He rose, steadied himself, then walked out of the dining room. Except for the dull eyes and the extreme pallor of his face, there was nothing else to indicate that he was deep in liquor. He did not stagger in the least. And in this fact lay his danger. The man who staggers, whose face is flushed, whose attitude is either noisily friendly or truculent, has some chance; liquor bends him eventually. But men of the Spurlock type, who walk straight, who are unobtrusive and intensely pale, they break swiftly and inexplicably. They seldom arrive on the beach. There are way-stations—even terminals.

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There was still the pity of understanding in Ruth's eyes. Perhaps it was loneliness. Perhaps he had lost his loved ones and was wandering over the world seeking forgetfulness. But he would die if he continued in this course. They were alike in one phase—loveless and lonely. If he died, here in this hotel, who would care? Or if she died, who would care?

A queer desire blossomed in her heart: to go to him, urge him to see the folly of trying to forget. Of what use was the temporary set-back to memory, when it always returned with redoubled poignancy?

Then came another thought, astonishing. This was the first young man who had drawn from her something more than speculative interest. True, on board the ships she had watched young men from afar, but only with that normal curiosity which is aroused in the presence of any new species. But after Singapore she found herself enduing them with the characteristics of the heroes in the novels she had just read for the first time. This one was Henry Esmond, that one the melancholy Marius, and so forth and so on; never any villains. It wasn't worth while to invest imaginatively a man with evil projects simply because he was physically ugly.

Some day she wanted to be loved as Marius loved Cosette; but there was another character which bit far more deeply into her mind. Why? Because she knew him in life, because, so long as she could remember, he had crossed and recrossed her vision—-Sidney Carton. The wastrel, the ne'er-do-well, who went mostly nobly to a fine end.

Here, then, but for the time and place, might be another Sidney Carton. Given the proper incentive, who could say that he might not likewise go nobly to some fine end? She thrilled. To find the incentive! But how? Thither and yon the idea roved, seeking the way. But always this new phase in life which civilization called convention threw up barrier after barrier.

She could not go to him with a preachment against strong drink; she knew from experience that such a plan would be wasted effort. Had she not seen them go forth with tracts in their pockets and grins in their beards? To set fire to his imagination, to sting his sense of chivalry into being, to awaken his manhood, she must present some irresistible project. She recalled that day of the typhoon and the sloop crashing on the outer reefs. The heroism of two beach combers had saved all on board and their own manhood as well.

"Are you returning to Hong-Kong to-morrow by the day boat?"

For a moment Ruth was astonished at the sound of the spinster's voice. She had, by the magic of recollection, set the picture of the typhoon between herself and her table companions: the terrible rollers thundering on the white shore, the deafening bellow of

the wind, the bending and snapping palms, the thatches of the native huts scattering inland, the blur of sand dust, and those two outcasts defying the elements.

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“I don’t know,” she answered vaguely.

“But there’s nothing more to see in Canton.”

“Perhaps I’m too tired to plan for to-morrow. Those awful chairs!”

After dinner the spinsters proceeded to inscribe their accustomed quota of postcards, and Ruth was left to herself. She walked through the office to the door, aimlessly.

Beyond the steps was a pole-chair in readiness. One of the coolies held the paper lantern. Near by stood Ah Cum and the young unknown, the former protesting gently, the latter insistent upon his demands.

“I repeat,” said Ah Cum, “that the venture is not propitious. Canton is all China at night. If we were set upon I could not defend you. But I can easily bring in a sing-song girl to play for you.”

“No. I want to make my own selection.”

“Very well, sir. But if you have considerable money, you had better leave it in the office safe. You can pay me when we return. The sing-song girls in Hong-Kong are far handsomer. That is a part of the show in Hong-Kong. But here it is China.”

“If you will not take me, I’ll find some guide who will.”

“I will take you. I simply warn you.”

Spurlock entered the office, passed Ruth without observing her (or if he did observe her, failed to recognize her), and deposited his funds with the manager.

“I advise you against this trip, Mr. Taber,” said the manager. “Affairs are not normal in Canton at present. Only a few weeks ago there was a bloody battle on the bridge there between the soldiery and the local police. Look at these walls.”

The walls were covered with racks of loaded rifles. In those revolutionary times one had to be prepared. Some Chinaman might take it into his head to shout: “Death to the foreign devils!” And out of that wall yonder would boil battle and murder and sudden death. A white man, wandering about the streets of Canton at night, was a challenge to such a catastrophe.

Taber. Ruth stared thoughtfully at the waiting coolies. That did not sound like the name the young man had offered in the tower of the water-clock. She remained by the door until the walls of the city swallowed the bobbing lantern. Then she went into the office.

“What is a sing-song girl?” she asked.

The manager twisted his moustache. “The same as a Japanese geisha girl.”

“And what is a geisha girl?”

Not to have heard of the geisha! It was as if she had asked: “What is Paris?” What manner of tourist was this who had heard neither of the geisha of Japan nor of the sing-song girl of China? Before he could marshal the necessary phrases to explain, Ruth herself indicated her thought.

“A bad girl?” She put the question as she would have put any question—level-eyed and level-toned.

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After a series of mental gymnastics—occupying the space of a few seconds—it came to him with a shock that here was a new specimen of the species. At the same time he comprehended that she was as pure and lovely as the white orchid of Borneo and that she did not carry that ridiculous shield called false modesty. He could talk to her as frankly as he could to a man, that she would not take offence at anything so long as it was in the form of explanation. On the other hand, there was a subconscious impression that she would be able to read instantly anything unclean in a man's eye. All her questions would have as a background the idea of future defence.

"The geisha and the sing-song girl are professional entertainers. They are not bad girls, but the average tourist has that misconception of them. If some of them are bad in the sense you mean, it is because there are bad folks in all walks of life. They sell only their talents, not their bodies; they are not girls of the street."

The phrase was new, but Ruth nodded understandingly.

"Still," went on the manager, "they are slaves in a sense; they are bought and sold until their original indebtedness is paid. A father is in debt, we'll say. He sells his daughter to a geisha or a sing-song master, and the girl is rented out until the debt is paid. Then the work is optional; they go on their own. There are sing-song girls in Hong-Kong and Shanghai who are famous and wealthy. Sometimes they marry well. If they become bad it is through inclination, not necessity."

Again Ruth nodded.

"To go a little further. Morality is a point of view. It is an Occidental point of view. The Oriental has no equivalent. What you would look upon as immorality is here merely an established custom, three thousand years older than Christianity, accepted with no more ado than that which would accompany you should you become a clerk in a shop."

"That is what I wanted to know," said Ruth gravely. "The poor things!"

The manager laughed. "Your sympathy is being wasted. They are the only happy women in the Orient."

"Do you suppose he knew?"

"He? Oh, you mean Mr. Taber?" He wondered if this crystal being was interested in that blundering fool who had gone recklessly into the city. "I don't know what his idea was."

"Will there be any danger?"

"To Mr. Taber? There is a possibility. Canton at night is as much China as the border town of Lan-Chow-fu. A white man takes his life in his hands. But Ah Cum is widely

known for his luck. Besides," he added cynically, "it is said that God watches over fools and drunken men."

This expression was old in Ruth's ears. She had heard the trader utter it many times.

"Thank you," she said, and left the office.

The manager stared at the empty doorway for a space, shrugged, and returned to his ledgers. The uncanny directness of those gray eyes, the absence of diffidence, the beauty of the face in profile (full, it seemed a little too broad to make for perfect beauty), the mellow voice that came full and free, without hesitance, all combined to mark her as the most unusual young woman he had ever met. He was certain that those lips of hers had never known the natural and pardonable simper of youth.

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Was she interested in that young ass who was risking his bones over there in the city? They had come up on the same boat. Still, one never could tell. The young fellow was almost as odd in his way as the girl was in hers. He seldom spoke, and drank with a persistence that was sinister. He was never drunk in the accepted meaning of the word; rather he walked in a kind of stupefaction. Supposing Ah Cum's luck failed for once?

The manager made a gesture of dismissal, and added up the bill for the Misses Jedson, who were returning to Hong-Kong in the morning.

CHAPTER VI

Sidney Carton, thought Ruth, in pursuit of a sing-song girl! The idea was so incongruous that a cold little smile parted her lips. It seemed as if each time her imagination reached out investingly, an invisible lash beat it back. Still, she knew instinctively that all of Sidney Carton's life had not been put upon the printed page. But to go courting a slave-girl, at the risk of physical hurt! A shudder of distaste wrinkled her shoulders.

She opened the window, for the night was mild, and sat on the floor with her chin resting upon the window-sill. Even the stars were strangers. Where was this kindly world she had drawn so rosily in fancy? Disillusion everywhere. The spinsters were not kind; they were only curious because she was odd and wore a dress thirty years out of date. Later, when they returned home, she would serve as the topic of many conversations. Everybody looked askance at everybody else. To escape one phase of loneliness she had plunged into another, so vast that her courage sometimes faltered.

She recalled how she had stretched out her arms toward the magic blue horizon. Just beyond there would be her heart's desire. And in these crowded four weeks, what had she learned? That all horizons were lies: that smiles and handshakes and goodbyes and welcomes were lies: that there were really no to-morrows, only a treadmill of to-days: and that out of these lies and mirages she had plucked a bitter truth—she was alone.

She turned her cheek to the cold sill; and by and by the sill grew warm and wet with tears. She wanted to stay where she was; but tears were dangerous; the more she wept, the weaker she would become defensively. She rose briskly, turned on the light, and opened Les Miserables to the episode of the dark forest: where Jean Valjean reaches out and takes Cosette's frightful pail from her chapped little hands.

There must be persons tender and loving in this world. There must be real Valjeans, else how could authors write about them? Supposing some day she met one of these astonishing creators, who could make one cry and laugh and forget, who could thrill one with love and anger and tenderness?

Most of us have witnessed carnivals. Here are all our harlequins and columbines of the spoken and written drama. They flash to and fro, they thrill us with expectancy. Then, presto! What a dreary lot they are when the revellers lay aside the motley!

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Ruth had come from a far South Sea isle. The world had not passed by but had gone around it in a tremendous half-circle. Many things were only words, sounds; she could not construct these words and sounds into objects; or, if she did, invariably missed the mark. Her education was remarkable in that it was overdeveloped here and underdeveloped there: the woman of thirty and the child of ten were always getting in each other's way. Until she had left her island, what she heard and what she saw were truths. And now she was discovering that even Nature was something of a liar, with her mirages and her horizons.

At the present moment she was living in a world of her own creation, a carnival of brave men and fair women, characters out of the tales she had so newly read for the first time. She could not resist enduing persons she met with the noble attributes of the fictional characters. We all did that in our youth, when first we came upon a fine story; else we were worthless metal indeed. So, step by step, and hurt by hurt, Ruth was learning that John Smith was John Smith and nobody else.

Presently she was again in that dreadful tavern of the Thenardiers. That was the wonder of these stories; one lived in them. Cosette sat under the table, still as a mouse, fondling her pitiful doll. Dolls. Ruth's gaze wandered from the printed page. She had never had a real doll. Instinct had forced her to create something out of rags to satisfy a mysterious craving. But a doll that rolled its eyes and had flaxen hair! Except for the manual labour—there had been natives to fetch and carry—she and Cosette were sisters in loneliness.

Perhaps an hour passed before she laid aside the book. A bobbing lantern, crossing the bridge—for she had not drawn the curtain—attracted her attention. She turned off the light and approached the window. She saw a pole-chair; that would be this Mr. Taber returning. Evidently Ah Cum's luck had held good.

As she stared her eyes grew accustomed to the night; and she discovered five persons instead of four. She remembered Taber's hat. (What was the name he had given her that day?) He was walking beside the chair upon which appeared to be a bundle of colours. She could not see clearly. All at once her heart began to patter queerly. He was bringing the sing-song girl to the hotel!

The strange cortege presently vanished below the window-sill. Curiosity to see what a sing-song girl was like took possession of Ruth's thoughts. She fought the inclination for a while, then surrendered. She was still fully dressed; so all she had to do was to pause before the mirror and give her hair a few pats.

Mirrors. Prior to the great adventure, her mirrors had been the still pools in the rocks after the ebb. She had never been able to discover where her father had hidden his shaving mirror.

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When she entered the office a strange scene was presented to her startled gaze. The sing-song girl, her fiddle broken, was beating her forehead upon the floor and wailing: *Ai, ai! Ai, ai!* Spurlock—or Taber, as he called himself—sat slumped in a chair, staring with glazed eyes at nothing, absolutely uninterested in the confusion for which he was primarily accountable. The hotel manager was expostulating and Ah Cum was replying by a series of expressive shrugs.

“What has happened?” Ruth asked.

“A drunken idea,” said Ah Cum, taking his hands out of his sleeves. “I could not make him understand.”

“She cannot stay here,” the manager declared.

“Why does she weep?” Ruth wanted to know.

Ah Cum explained. “She considers her future blasted beyond hope. Mr. Taber did not leave all his money in the office. He insisted on buying this girl for two hundred mex. He now tells her that she is free, no longer a slave. She doesn’t understand; she believes he has taken a sudden dislike to her. Free, there is nothing left to her but the canal. Until two hours ago she was as contented and as happy as a linnet. If she returns to the house from which we took her, her companions will laugh at her and smother her with ridicule. On this side of the canal she has no place to go. Her people live in Heng-Chow, in the Hu-nan province. It is all very complex. It is the old story of a Westerner meddling with an Eastern custom.”

“But why didn’t you oppose him?”

“I had to let him have his way, else he might not have returned safely. One cannot successfully argue with a drunken man.”

The object of this discussion sat motionless. The voices went into his ears but left no impression of their import. There was, in fact, only one clear thought in his fevered brain: he had reached the hotel without falling down.

The sing-song girl, seeing Ruth, extended her hands and began to chatter rapidly. Ruth made a little gesture, of infinite pity; and this was quickly seized upon by the slant-eyed Chinese girl. She crawled over and caught at the skirts of this white woman who understood.

“What is she saying to me?”

Ah Cum shrugged.

Ruth stared into the painted face, now sundrily cracked by the coursing tears. “But she is saying something to me! What is it?”

The hotel manager, who spoke Cantonese with facility, interpreted. He knew that he could translate literally. “She is saying that you, a woman, will readily understand the position in which she finds herself. She addresses you as the Flower of the Lotus, as the Resplendent Moonbeam.”

“Just to give her her freedom?” said Ruth, turning to Ah Cum.

“Precisely. The chair is in the veranda. I will take her back. But of course the money will not be refunded.

“Then take her back,” said the manager. “You knew better than to bring her here under the circumstances.”

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“Well,” said Ah Cum, amiably, “when I argued against the venture, he threatened to go wandering about alone, I was most concerned in bringing him back unhurt.”

He then spoke authoritatively to the girl. He appeared to thunder dire happenings if she did not obey him without further ado. He picked up the broken fiddle and beckoned. The sing-song girl rose and meekly pattered out of the office into the night.

Ruth crossed over to the dramatist of this tragicomedy and put a hand on his shoulder.

“I understand,” she said. Her faith in human beings revived. “You tried to do something that was fine, and ... and civilization would not let you.”

Spurlock turned his dull eyes and tried to focus hers. Suddenly he burst into wild laughter; but equally as suddenly something strangled the sound in his throat. He reached out a hand gropingly, sagged, and toppled out of the chair to the floor, where he lay very still.

CHAPTER VII

The astonishing collapse of Spurlock created a tableau of short duration. Then the hotel manager struck his palms together sharply, and two Chinese “boys” came pattering in from the dining room. With a gesture which was without any kind of emotional expression, the manager indicated the silent crumpled figure on the floor and gave the room number. The Chinamen raised the limp body and carried it to the hall staircase, up which they mounted laboriously.

“A doctor at once!” cried Ruth excitedly.

“A doctor? What he needs is a good jolt of aromatic spirits of ammonia. I can get that at the bar,” the manager said, curtly. He was not particularly grateful for the present situation.

“I warn you, if you do not send for a doctor immediately, you will have cause to regret it,” Ruth declared vigorously. “Something more than whisky did that. Why did you let him have it?”

“Let him have it? I can’t stand at the elbow of any of the guests and regulate his or her actions. So long as a man behaves himself, I can’t refuse him liquor. But I’ll call a doctor, since you order it. You’ll be wasting his time. It is a plain case of alcoholic stupor. I’ve seen many cases like it.”

He summoned another “boy” and rumbled some Cantonese. Immediately the “boy” went forth with his paper lantern, repeating a cry as he ran—warning to clear the way.

“Have the aromatic spirits of ammonia sent to Mr. Taber’s room at once,” Ruth ordered. “I will administer it.”

“You, Miss Enschede?”—frankly astonished that one stranger should offer succour to another.

“There is nobody else. Someone ought to be with him until the doctor arrives. He may die.”

The manager made a negative sign. “Your worry is needless.”

“It wasn’t the fumes of whisky that toppled him out of his chair. It was his heart. I once saw a man die after collapsing that way.”

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“You once saw a man die that way?” the manager echoed, his recent puzzlement returning full tide. Hartford, Connecticut; she had registered that address; but there was something so mystifyingly Oriental about her that the address only thickened the haze behind which she moved. “Where?”

“That can wait,” she answered. “Please hurry the ammonia;” and Ruth turned away abruptly.

Above she found the two Chinamen squatted at the side of the door. They rose as she approached. She hastened past. She immediately took the pillows from under the head of the man who had two names, released the collar and tie, and arranged the arms alongside the body. His heart was beating, but faintly and slowly, with ominous intermissions. All alone; and nobody cared whether he lived or died.

She was now permitted freely to study the face. The comparisons upon which she could draw were few and confusingly new, mixed with reality and the loose artistic conceptions of heroes in fiction. The young male, as she had actually seen him, had been of the sailor type, hard-bitten, primordial, ruthless. For the face under her gaze she could find but one expression—fine. The shape of the head, the height and breadth of the brow, the angle of the nose, the cut of the chin and jaws, all were fine, of a type she had never before looked upon closely.

She saw now that it was not a dissipated face; it was as smooth and unlined as polished marble, which at present it resembled. Still, something had marked the face, something had left an indelible touch. Perhaps the sunken cheeks and the protruding cheekbones gave her this impression. What reassured her, however, more than anything else, was the shape of the mouth: it was warmly turned. The confirmed drunkard’s mouth at length sets itself peculiarly; it becomes the mark by which thoughtful men know him. It was not in evidence here, not a sign of it.

A drunken idea, Ah Cum had called it. And yet it was basically a fine action. To buy the freedom of a poor little Chinese slave-girl! For what was the sing-song girl but a slave, the double slave of custom and of men? Ruth wanted to know keenly what had impelled the idea. Had he been trying to stop the grim descent, and had he dimly perceived that perhaps a fine deed would serve as the initial barrier? A drunken idea—-a pearl in the midst of a rubbish heap. That terrible laughter, just before his senses had left him!

Why? Here was a word that volleyed at her from all directions, numbed and bewildered her: the multiple echoes of her own first utterance of the word. Why wasn’t the world full of love, when love made happiness? Why did people hide their natural kindliness as if it were something shameful? Why shouldn’t people say what they thought and act as they were inclined? Why all this pother about what one’s neighbour thought, when this

pother was not energized by any good will? Why was truth avoided as the plague? Why did this

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young man have one name on the hotel register and another on his lips? Why was she bothering about him at all? Why should there be this inexplicable compassion, when the normal sensation should have been repellance? Sidney Carton. Was that it? Had she clothed this unhappy young man with glamour? Or was it because he was so alone? She could not get through the husks to the kernel of what really actuated her.

Somewhere in the world would be his people, perhaps his mother; and it might soften the bitterness, of the return to consciousness if he found a woman at his bedside. More than this, it would serve to mitigate her own abysmal loneliness to pool it temporarily with his.

She drew up a chair and sat down, putting her palm on the damp, cold forehead. A bad sign; it signified that the heart action was in a precarious state. So far he had not stirred; from his bloodless lips had come no sound.

At length the manager arrived; and together he and Ruth succeeded in getting some of the aromatic spirits of ammonia down the patient's throat. But nothing followed to indicate that the liquid had stimulated the heart.

"You see?" Ruth said.

The manager conceded that he saw, that his original diagnosis was at fault. Superimposed was the agitating thought of what would follow the death of this unwelcome guest: confusion, poking authorities, British and American red tape. It would send business elsewhere; and the hotel business in Canton was never so prosperous that one could afford to lose a single guest. Clientele was of the most transitory character.

And then, there would be the question of money. Would there be enough in the young man's envelope to pay the doctor and the hotel bill—and in the event of his death, enough to ship the body home? So all things pointed to the happy circumstance of setting this young fool upon his feet again, of seeing him hence upon his journey. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

An hour later the doctor arrived; and after a thorough examination, he looked doubtful.

"He is dying?" whispered Ruth.

"Well, without immediate care he would have passed out. He's on the ragged edge. It depends upon what he was before he began this racket. Drink, and no sustaining food. But while there's life there's hope. There isn't a nurse this side of Hong-Kong to be had. I've only a Chinaman who is studying under me; but he's a good sport and will

help us out during the crisis. This chap's recovery all depends upon the care he receives."

Out of nowhere Ruth heard her voice saying: "I will see to that."

"Your husband?"

"No. I do not even know his name."

The doctor sent her a sharp, quizzical glance. He could not quite make her out; a new type.

"Taber," said the manager; "Taber is the name."

For some reason she did not then understand, Ruth did not offer the information that Taber had another name.

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“This is very fine of you, Miss....”

“Enschede.”

“Ah. Well, come back in half an hour. I’ll send for Wu Fang. He speaks English. Not a job he may care about; but he’s a good sport. The hard work will be his, until we yank this young fellow back from the brink. Run along now; but return in half an hour.”

The doctor was in the middle fifties, gray and careworn, but with alert blue eyes and a gentle mouth. He smiled at Ruth as she turned away from the bed, smiled with both his mouth and eyes; and she knew that here would be a man of heart as well as of science. She went out into the hall, where she met the Jedsons in their kimonos.

“What has happened?” asked Sister Prudence. “We’ve heard coming and going.”

“Mr. Taber is very ill.”

“Oh.” Prudence shrugged. “Well, what can you expect, guzzling poison like that? Are you returning with us to Hong-Kong in the morning?”

“No. I am going to help take care of him,” said Ruth, quite ordinarily, as though taking care of unknown derelicts was an ordinary event in her life.

“What?—help take care of him? Why, you can’t do that, Miss Enschede!” was the protest.

“Why can’t I?”

“You will be compromised. It isn’t as if he were stricken with typhoid or pneumonia or something like that. You will certainly be compromised.”

“Compromised.” Ruth repeated the word, not in the effect of a query, but ruminantly. “Mutual concessions,” she added. “I don’t quite understand the application.”

Sister Prudence looked at Sister Angelina, who understood what was expected of her. Sister Angelina shook her head as if to say that such ignorance was beyond her.

“Why, it means that people will think evilly of you.”

“For a bit of kindness?” Ruth was plainly bewildered.

“You poor child!” Prudence took Ruth’s hands in her own. “I never saw the like of you! One has to guard one’s actions constantly in this wicked world, if one is a woman, young and pretty. A woman such as I am might help take care of Mr. Taber and no one comment upon it. But you couldn’t. Never in this world! Let the hotel people take care

of him; it's their affair. They sold him the whisky. Come along with us in the morning. Your father...."

Prudence felt the hands stiffen oddly; and again the thought came to her that perhaps this poor child's father had once been, perhaps still was, in the same category as this Taber.

"It's a fine idea, my child, but you mustn't do it. Even if he were an old friend, you couldn't afford to do it. But a total stranger, a man you never saw twenty-four hours ago! It can't be thought of. It isn't your duty."

"I feel bewildered," said Ruth. "Is it wrong, then, to surrender to good impulses?"

"In the present instance, yes. Can't I make you understand? Perhaps it sounds cruel to you; but we women often have to be cruel defensively. You don't want people to snub you later. This isn't your island, child; it's the great world."

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“So I perceive,” said Ruth, withdrawing her hands. “He is all alone. Without care he will die.”

“But, goodness me, the hotel will take care of him! Why not? They sold him the poison. Besides, I have my doubts that he is so very sick. Probably he will come around to-morrow and begin all over again. You’re alone, too, child. I’m trying to make you see the worldly point of view, which always inclines toward the evil side of things.”

“I have promised. After all, why should I care what strangers think?” Ruth asked with sudden heat. “Is there no charity? Isn’t it understood?”

“Of course it is! In the present instance I can offer it and you can’t, or shouldn’t. There are unwritten laws governing human conduct. Who invented them? Nobody knows. But woe to those who disregard them! Of course, basically it is all wrong; and sometimes God must laugh at our ideas of rectitude. But to live at peace with your neighbour....”

Ruth brushed her eyes with one hand and with the other signed for the spinster to stop. “No more, please! I am bewildered enough. I understand nothing of what you say. I only know that it is right to do what I do.”

“Well,” said Sister Prudence, “remember, I tried to save you some future heartaches. God bless you, anyhow!” she added, with a spontaneity which surprised Sister Angelina into uttering an individual gasp. “Good-bye!”

For a moment Ruth was tempted to fling herself against the withered bosom; but long since she had learned repression. She remained stonily in the middle of the hallway until the spinsters’ door shut them from view ... for ever.

[Illustration: *Distinctive Pictures Corporation. The Ragged Edge.* A *scene from the photoplay*.]

CHAPTER VIII

Slowly Ruth entered her own room. She opened her suitcase—new and smelling strongly of leather—and took out of it a book, dogeared and precariously held together, bound in faded blue cloth and bearing the inscription: The Universal Handbook. Herein was the sum of human knowledge in essence.

In the beginning it was a dictionary. Words were given with their original meaning, without their ramifications. If you were a poet in need of rhymes, you had only to turn to a certain page. Or, if you were about to embark upon a nautical career, here was all the information required. It also told you how to write on all occasions, how to take out a

patent, how to doctor a horse, and who Achates was. You could, if you were ambitious to round out your education, memorize certain popular foreign phrases.

But beyond “amicable agreement in which mutual concessions are made,” the word “compromise” was as blank as the Canton wall at night. There were words, then, that ran on indefinitely, with reversals? Here they meant one thing; there, the exact opposite. To be sure, Ruth had dimly been aware of this; but now for the first time she was made painfully conscious of it. Mutual concessions!—and then to turn it around so that it suggested that an act of kindness might be interpreted as moral obloquy!

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Walls; queer, invisible walls that receded whenever she reached out, but that still remained between her and what she sought. The wall of the sky, the wall of the horizon, the wall behind which each human being hid—the wall behind which she herself was hiding! If only her mother had lived, her darling mother!

Presently the unhappy puzzlement left her face; and an inward glow began to lighten it. The curtain before one mystery was torn aside, and she saw in reality what lay behind the impulse that had led her into the young man's room. Somebody to whom she would be necessary, who for days would have to depend upon her for the needs of life. An inarticulate instinct which now found expression. Upon what this instinct was based she could not say; she was conscious only of its insistence. Briefly explained, she was as the child who discards the rag baby for the living one. Spurlock was no longer a man before this instinct; he was a child in trouble.

Her cogitations were dissipated by a knock on the door. The visitor was the hotel manager, who respectfully announced that the doctor was ready for her. So Ruth took another step toward her destination, which we in our vanity call destiny.

"Will he live?" asked Ruth.

"Thanks to you," said the doctor. "Without proper medical care, he would have been dead by morning." He smiled at her as he smiled at death, cheerfully.

The doctor's smile is singular; there is no other smile that reaches the same level. It is the immediate inspiration of confidence; it alleviates pain, because we know by that smile that pain is soon to leave us; it becomes the bulwark against our depressive thoughts of death; and it is the promise that we still have a long way to go before we reach the Great Terminal.

In passing, why do we fear death? For our sins? Rather, isn't it the tremendous inherent human curiosity to know what is going to happen to-morrow that causes us to wince at the thought of annihilation? A subconscious resentment against the idea of entering darkness while our neighbour will proceed with his petty affairs as usual?

"It's nip and tuck," said the doctor; "but we'll pull him through. Probably his first serious bout with John Barleycorn. If he had eaten food, this wouldn't have happened. It is not a dissipated face."

"No; it is only—what shall I say?—troubled. The ragged edge."

"Yes. This is also the ragged edge of the world, too. It is the bottom of the cup, where all the dregs appear to settle. But this chap is good wine yet. We'll have him on his way before many days. But ... he must want to live in order that the inclination to repeat this incident may not recur. The manager tells me that you are an American. So am I.

For ten years I've been trying to go home, but my conscience will not permit me, I hate the Orient. It drives one mad at times. Superstition—you knock into it whichever way you turn. The Oriental accepts my medicines kowtowing, and when my back is turned, chucks the stuff out of the window and burns joss-sticks. I hate this part of the world."

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“So do I,” replied Ruth.

“You have lived over here?”—astonished.

“I was born in the South Seas and I am on my way to America, to an aunt.”

“Well, it’s mighty fine of you to break your journey in this fashion—for someone you don’t know, a passer-by.”

He held out his dry hard hand into which she placed hers. The manager had sketched the girl’s character, or rather had interpreted it, from the incidents which had happened since dinner. “You will find her new.” New? That did not describe her. Here, indeed, was a type with which he had never until now come into contact—a natural woman. She would be extraordinarily interesting as a metaphysical study. She would be surrendering to all her impulses—particularly the good impulses—many of which society had condemned long since because they entailed too much trouble. Imagine her, putting herself to all this delay and inconvenience for a young wastrel she did not know and who, the moment he got on his feet, would doubtless pass out of her life without so much as Thank you! And it was ten to one that she would not comprehend the ingratitude. To such characters, fine actions are in themselves sufficient.

Perhaps her odd beauty—and that too was natural—stirred these thoughts into being. Ashen blonde, a shade that would never excite the cynical commentary which men applied to certain types of blondes. It would be protective; it would with age turn to silver unnoticeably. A disconcerting gray eye that had a mystifying depth. In the artificial light her skin had the tint and lustre of a yellow pearl. She would be healthy, too, and vigorous. Not the explosive vigour of the north-born, but that which would quietly meet physical hardships and bear them triumphantly.

All this while he was arranging the medicines on the stand and jotting down his instructions on a chart sheet. He had absorbed her in a single glance, and was now defining her as he worked. After a while he spoke again.

“Our talking will not bother him. He will be some time in this comatose state. Later, there will be fever, after I’ve got his heart pumping. Now, he must have folks somewhere. I’m going through his pockets. It’s only right that his people should know where he is and what has happened to him.”

But he searched in vain. Aside from some loose coin and a trunk key, there was nothing in the pockets: no mail, no letter of credit, not even a tailor’s label. Immediately he grasped the fact that there was drama here, probably the old drama of the fugitive. He folded the garments carefully and replaced them on the chair.

“I’m afraid we’ll have to dig into his trunk,” he said. “There’s nothing in his clothes. Perhaps I ought not to; but this isn’t a case to fiddle-faddle over. Will you stand by and watch me?”

The contents of the trunk only thickened the fog. Here again the clothes were minus the labels. All the linen was new and stamped with the mark of Whiteaway, Laidlaw & Co., British merchants with branches all over the East. At the bottom of the trunk was a large manila envelope, unmarked. The doctor drew out the contents hopefully.

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“By George!” he exclaimed. “Manuscripts! Why, this chap is a writer, or is trying to be. And will you look! His name neatly cut out from each title page. This is clear over my head.”

“A novelist?” cried Ruth, thrilling. And yet the secondary emotion was one of suspicion. That a longing of hers should be realized in this strange fashion was difficult to believe: it vaguely suggested something of a trap.

“Or trying to be,” answered the doctor. “Evidently he could not destroy these children of his. No doubt they’ve all been rejected; but he couldn’t throw them overboard. I suspect he has a bit of vanity. I’ll tell you what. I’ll leave these out, and to-morrow you can read them through. Somewhere you may stumble upon a clew to his identity. To-morrow I’ll wire Cook’s and the American Express in Hong-Kong to see if there is any mail. Taber is the name. What is he—English or American?”

“American. What is a Yale man?”

“Did he say he was a Yale man?”

“He and Ah Cum were talking....”

“I see. Ah Cum is a Yale man and so is this Taber.”

“But what is it?”

“An American university. Now, I’ll be getting along. Give him his medicine every half hour. Keep his arms down. I’ll have my man Wu over here as soon as I can get in touch with him. We’ll get this chap on his feet if only to learn what the trouble is.”

Downstairs he sought the hotel manager.

“Can you pull him through?” was the anxious question.

“Hope to. The next few hours will tell. But it’s an odd case. His name is Taber?”

“Howard Taber.”

“Confidentially, I’m assured that he has another.”

“What gives you that idea?”

“Well, we could find no letter of credit, no letters, no labels in his clothes—not a single clew to his real identity. And stony broke.”

“Not quite,” replied the manager. “He left an envelope with some money in it. Perhaps I’d better open it now.” The envelope contained exactly five hundred dollars. “How long will he be laid up?”

“Three or four weeks, if he doesn’t peg out during the night.”

The manager began some computations. “There won’t be much left for you,” he said.

“That’s usual. There never is much left for me. But I’m not worrying about that. The thing is to get the patient on his feet. He may have resources of which we know nothing,” the doctor added optimistically.

“But, I say, that girl is a queer one.”

“I shouldn’t call her queer. She’s fine. She’ll be mighty interesting to watch.”

“For an old bachelor?”

“A human old bachelor. Has she any funds?”

“She must have. She’s headed for America. Of course, I don’t believe she’s what you would call flush. But I’ll take care of her bill, if worst comes to worst. Evidently her foresight has saved me a funeral. I’ll remember that. But “fine” is the word. How the deuce, though, am I going to account for her? People will be asking questions when they see her; and if I tell the truth, they’ll start to snubbing her. You understand what I mean. I don’t want her hurt. But we’ve got to cook up some kind of a story to protect her.”

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“I hadn’t thought of that. It wouldn’t do to say that she was from the hospital. She’s too pretty and unusual. Besides, I’m afraid her simple honesty will spoil any invented yarn. When anybody is natural, these days, we dub them queer. The contact is disturbing; and we prefer going around the fact to facing it. Aren’t we funny? And just as I was beginning to lose faith in human beings, to have someone like this come along! It is almost as if she were acting a role, and she isn’t. I’ll talk to her in the morning, but she won’t understand what I’m driving at. Born on a South Sea island, she said.”

“Ah! Now I can get a perspective. This is her first adventure. She isn’t used to cities.”

“But how in the Lord’s name was she brought up? There’s a queer story back of this somewhere.”

The manager extended his hands at large, as if to deny any responsibility in the affair. “Never heard of a sing-song girl; never heard of a geisha! Flower of the Lotus: the sing-song girl called her that.”

“The White Hollyhock would fit her better. There is something sensual in the thought of lotus flowers. Hollyhocks make one think of a bright June Sunday and the way to church!”

“Do you suppose that young fool has done anything?”

The doctor shrugged. “I don’t know. I shouldn’t care to express an opinion. I ought to stay the night through; but I’m late now for an operation at the hospital. Good night.”

He departed, musing. How plainly he could see the patch of garden in the summer sunshine and the white hollyhocks nodding above the picket fence!

* * * * *

Ruth sat waiting for the half hour, subconsciously. Her thoughts were busy with the possibilities of this break in her journey. Somebody to depend upon her; somebody to have need of her, if only for a little while. In all her life no living thing had had to depend upon her, not even a dog or a cat. All other things were without weight or consequence before the fact that this poor young man would have to depend upon her for his life. The amazing tonic of the thought!

From time to time she laid her hand upon Spurlock’s forehead: it was still cold. But the rise of the chest was quite perceptible now.

From where had he come, and why? An author! To her he would be no less interesting because he was unsuccessful. Stories ... love stories: and to-morrow she would know the joy of reading them! It was almost unbelievable; it was too good to be true. It filled her with indefinable fear. Until now none of her prayers had ever been answered. Why

should God give particular attention to such a prayer, when He had ignored all others? Certainly there was a trap somewhere.

So, while she watched, distressed and bewildered by her tumbling thoughts, the packet, Canton bound, ruffled the placid waters of the Pearl River. In one of the cabins a man sat on the edge of his narrow bunk. In his muscular pudgy hand was a photograph, frayed at the corners, soiled from the contact of many hands: the portrait of a youth of eighteen.

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The man was thick set, with a bright roving eye. The blue jaws suggested courage and tenacity. It was not a hard face, but it was resolute. As he balanced the photograph, a humorous twinkle came into his eyes.

Pure luck! If the boy had grown a moustache or a beard, a needle in the haystack would have been soft work. To stumble upon the trail through the agency of a bottle of whisky! Drank queer; so his bottle had rendered him conspicuous. And now, only twenty-four hours behind him ... that is, if he wasn't paddling by on the return route to Hong-Kong or had dropped down to Macao. But that possibility had been anticipated. He would have to return to Hong-Kong; and his trail would be picked up the moment he set foot on the Praya.

Pure luck! But for that bottle of whisky, nobody in the Hong-Kong Hotel would have been able to identify the photograph; and at this hour James Boyle O'Higgins would have been on the way to Yokohama, and the trail lost for ever.

Ho-hum!

CHAPTER IX

The Hong-Kong packet lay alongside the warehouse frontage. Ah Cum patrolled the length of the boat innumerable times, but never letting his glance stray far from the gangplank. This was automatically rather than thoughtfully done; habit. His mind was busy with a resume of yesterday's unusual events.

The young man desperately ill and the girl taking care of him! Of course, there could be only one ending to such a bout with liquor, and that ending had come perhaps suddenly but not surprisingly. But the girl stood outside the circle of Ah Cum's knowledge—rather profound—of human impulses. Somehow logic could not explain her. Why should she trouble herself over that young fool, who was nothing to her; who, when he eventually sobered up, would not be able to recognize her, or if he did, as something phantasmagorical?

Perhaps he should not apply the term "fool"; "unfortunate" might be the more accurate application. Besides, he was a Yale man. He might be unfortunate, but he would scarcely be a fool. The Yale spirit! Ah Cum smiled whimsically. After fifteen years, to find that peculiarly Occidental attribute—college loyalty—still alive in his heart! A Western idea that had survived; an idea that was merely the flower of youthful enthusiasm!

With his hands still in his sleeves, his chin down in speculation over this phenomenon, he continued his patrol.

"Hey, you!"

Ah Cum stopped and turned. Framed in one of the square ports of the packet was a face which reminded Ah Cum of a Japanese theatrical mask. One side of the face was white with foamy lather and the other ruddy-cheeked and blue-jawed.

“Speak English?” boomed the voice.

“Yes; I speak English.”

“Fine! I’ll be wanting a guide. Where can I get one?” asked O’Higgins.

“I am one.”

“All right. I’ll be with you in a jiffy.” Quarter of an hour later O’Higgins stepped off the gangplank. He carried a small bag. “This your regular business?”

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“For the present. Will you be wanting me alone?” asked Ah Cum. “I generally take a party.”

“What’ll it cost to have you all to myself for the day?”

Ah Cum named the sum. He smiled inwardly. Here was one of those Americans who would make him breathless before sundown. The booming voice and the energetic movements spoke plainly of hurry.

“You’re on,” said O’Higgins. “Now, lead me to a hotel where I can get breakfast. Wait a moment. I’ve got an address here.”

O’Higgins emptied an inside pocket—and purposely let the battered photograph fall to the ground. He pretended to be unaware of the mishap. Politely Ah Cum stooped and recovered the photograph. He rose slowly and extended it. An ancient smile lay on his lips.

“You dropped this, sir.”

“Oh. Thanks.” O’Higgins, bitten with disappointment, returned the photograph to his pocket. “Victoria; that’s the hotel.”

“That’s but a short distance from here, sir.”

“O’Higgins is the name.”

“Mr. O’Higgins. Let me take the satchel, sir.”

“It’s light. I’ll tote it myself. Say, ever see any one resembling that photograph I dropped?”

“So many come and go,” said Ah Cum, shrugging. “Few stay more than a day. And there are other guides.”

“Uh-huh. Well, let’s beat it to the hotel. I’m hungry.”

“This way, sir.”

“What’s your name?”

Ah Cum got out his black-bordered card and offered it.

“Aw Come. That sounds kind of funny,” said O’Higgins. Smiling, the Chinaman gave the correct pronunciation. “I see. Ah Coom. What’s the idea of the black border?”

“My father recently died, sir.”

“But that style isn’t Oriental.”

“I was educated in America.”

“Where?”

“At Yale.”

“Well, well! This part of the world is jammed full of surprises. I met a Hindu a few weeks ago who was a Harvard man.”

“Will you be taking a pole-chair?”

“If that’s the racket. I naturally want to do it up in proper style.”

“Very well, sir. I’ll be outside the hotel at nine-thirty.”

Ten minutes’ walk brought them to the hotel. As O’Higgins signed the hotel register, his keen glance took in the latest signatures.

“Anywhere,” he said in answer to the manager’s query. “I’m not particular about rooms. Where’s the dining room? And, say, can I have some eggs? This jam-tea breakfast gets my goat.”

“Come this way, Mr. O’Higgins,” said the manager, amusedly.

O’Higgins followed him into the dining room. That register would be easy to get at; comforting thought. It did not matter in the least what name the young fellow was travelling under; all James Boyle O’Higgins wanted was the letter H. There was something fatalistic about the letter H. The individual twist was always there, even in the cleverest forgeries.

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The eggs were all right, but nobody in this part of the world had the least conception of what the coffee bean was for. Always as black and bitter as gall. Coffee a la Turque wasn't so bad; but a guy couldn't soak his breakfast toast in it.

Two women entered and sat down at the adjoining table. After a while one began to talk.

"The manager says there is still some doubt. The change will come to-day. Ah Cum had no business taking him into the city last night. The young man did not know what he was doing or where he was."

O'Higgins extracted a cigar from a pocket and inspected it. Henry Clay, thirteen cents in Hong-Kong and two-bits in that dear old New York. He would never be able to figure out that: all these miles from Cuba, and you could get a perfecto for thirteen cents. He heard the woman talking again.

"I feel guilty, going away and leaving that ignorant child; but our days have been so planned that we dare not change the schedule. Didn't understand me when I said she would be compromised! He won't be able to leave his bed under four weeks; and she said she hadn't much money. If she had once known him, if he were some former neighbour, it would be comprehensible. But an individual she never laid eyes on day before yesterday! And the minute he gets up, he'll head for the public bar. There's something queer about that young man; but we'll never be able to find out what it is. I don't believe his name is Taber."

O'Higgins tore free the scarlet band of his perfecto, the end of which he bit off with strong white teeth, and smiled. You certainly had to hand it to these Chinks. Picked up the photograph, looked at it, handed it back, and never batted an eye! The act was as clear as daylight, but the motive was as profoundly mysterious as the race itself. He hadn't patrolled old Pell Street as a plain clothes man without getting a glimmer of the ancient truth that East is East and West is West. He would have some sport with Mr. Ah Cum before the day was over, slyly baiting him. But what had young Spurlock done for Ah Cum in the space of twenty-four hours that had engaged Ah Cum's loyalty, not only engaged it but put it on guard? For O'Higgins, receiving light from the next table, had no doubt regarding the identity of the subject of this old maid's observations.

A queer game this: he could not move directly as in an ordinary case of man-hunt. He had certain orders from which on no account was he to deviate. But this made the chase all the more exciting. What was the matter with Spurlock that was to keep him in bed three or four weeks? He would dig that out of the hotel manager. Anyhow, there was some pleasurable satisfaction in knowing where the quarry would be for the next three weeks.

There was now a girl in the picture, so it seemed. Well, this was the side of the world where things like that happened. The boy would naturally attract the women, if the women were at all romantic. Good looks, with a melancholy cast, always drew sentimental females. Probably some woman on the loose; they were as thick as flies over here—dizzy blondes. That is, if Spurlock had been throwing money about, which was more than likely.

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“As long as I live, I’ll never forget that dress of hers,” Prudence declared.

“Out of a family album, you said,” Angelina reminded her sister.

O’Higgins struck a match and lit his Henry Clay, thereby drawing upon himself the mutual disapproval of the spinsters.

“Beg pardon,” he said, “but isn’t smoking allowed in the dining room?”

“It probably is,” answered Prudence, “but that in no wise mitigates the odiousness of the procedure.”

“Plumb in the eye!” said O’Higgins, rising. “I’ll tote the odiousness outside.”

He was delighted to find the office deserted. He inspected the formidable array of rifles and at length walked over to the register. Howard Taber. From his wallet he brought forth a yellow letter. Quickly he compared the Hs. They were so nearly alike that the difference would be due to a shaky hand. But for perfect satisfaction, he must take a peek into the bedroom. Humph. A crisis of some kind was toward. It might be that the boy had taken one drink too many, or someone had given him knock-out drops. The Oriental waterfronts were rank with the stuff.

But that Chink, Ah Cum! O’Higgins chuckled as he passed into the hall and rested his hand on the newel-post of the staircase. He’d have some fun with that Chinaman before the morning was out.

O’Higgins mounted the stairs, his step extraordinarily light for one so heavy. In the upper hall he paused to listen. There was absolute quiet. Boldly he turned the knob of a certain door and entered. The mock astonishment of his face immediately became genuine.

The brilliant sunshine poured through the window, effecting an oblong block of mote-swimming light. In the midst of this light stood a young woman. To O’Higgins—for all his sordid business he was not insensible to beauty—to O’Higgins she appeared to have entered the room with the light. Above her head was an aura of white fire. The sunshine broke across each shoulder, one lance striking the yellow face of a Chinaman, queueless and dressed in European clothes, the other lance falling squarely upon the face of the man he had journeyed thirteen thousand miles to find. He recognized the face instantly.

There came to O’Higgins the discouraging knowledge that upon the heels of a wonderful chase—blindman’s buff in the dark—would come a stretch of dull inaction. He would have to sit down here in Canton and wait, perhaps for weeks. Certainly he could not move now other than to announce the fact that he had found his man.

“I beg pardon,” he said. “Got the rooms mixed.”

The young woman laid a finger on her lips, cautioning O’Higgins to silence. The detective backed out slowly and closed the door without sound.

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Outside in the hall he paused and thoughtfully stroked his smooth blue chin. As he understood it, folks saw in two or three days all there was to see of Canton. After the sights he would have to twiddle his thumbs until the joints cracked. All at once he saw a way out of the threatening doldrums. Some trustworthy Chinaman to watch, for a small bribe, while he, James Boyle O'Higgins, enjoyed himself in Hong-Kong, seeing the spring races, the boxing matches, and hobnobbing with Yankee sailors. Canton was something like a blind alley; unless you were native, you couldn't get anywhere except by returning to Hong-Kong and starting afresh.

Satisfied that he had solved his difficulty, he proceeded to his room. At nine-thirty he climbed into the chair and signified to Ah Cum that he was ready.

"You speak English better than I do," said O'Higgins, as the coolies jogged across the bridge toward the gate. "Where did you pick it up?"

"I believe I told you; at Yale."

O'Higgins laughed. "I'd forgotten. But that explains everything."

"Everything." It was not uttered interrogatively; rather as though Ah Cum did not like the significance of the word and was turning it over and about in speculation.

"Ye-ah," said O'Higgins, jovially. "Why you pretended not to recognize the photograph of the young fellow you toted around these diggings all day yesterday."

Many wrinkles appeared at the corners of Ah Cum's slant eyes—as if the sun hurt—but the rest of his face remained as passive as a graven Buddha's.

CHAPTER X

Ah Cum was himself puzzled. Why hadn't he admitted that he recognized the photograph? What instinct had impelled him swiftly to assume his Oriental mask?

"Why?" asked O'Higgins. "What's the particular dope?"

"If I told you, you would laugh," answered Ah Cum, gravely.

"No; I don't think I'd laugh. You never saw him before yesterday. Why should you want to shield him?"

"I really don't know."

"Because he said he was a Yale man?"

“That might be it.”

“Treated you like a white man there, did they?”

“Like a gentleman.”

“All right. I had that coming. I didn’t think. But, holy smoke!—the Yale spirit in....”

“A Chinaman. I wonder. I spent many happy days there. Perhaps it was the recollection of those happy days. You are a detective?”

“Yes. I have come thirteen thousand miles for this young fellow; I’m ready to go galloping thirteen thousand more.”

“You have extradition papers?”

“What sort of a detective do you think I am?” countered O’Higgins.

“Then his case is hopeless.”

“Absolutely.”

“I’m sorry. He does not look the criminal.”

“That’s the way it goes. You never can tell.” There was a pause. “They tell me over here that the average Chinaman is honest.”

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Ah Cum shrugged. “Yes?”

“And that when they give their word, they never break it.” O’Higgins had an idea in regard to Ah Cum.

“Your tone suggests something marvellous in the fact,” replied Ah Cum, ironically. “Why shouldn’t a Chinaman be honest? Ah, yes; I know. Most of you Americans pattern all Chinese upon those who fill a little corner in New York. In fiction you make the Chinese secretive, criminal, and terrible—or comic. I am an educated Chinese, and I resent the imputations against my race. You Americans laugh at our custom of honouring our ancestors, our many-times great grandfathers. On the other hand, you seldom revere your immediate grandfather, unless he has promised to leave you some money.”

“Bull’s eye!” piped O’Higgins.

“Of course, there is a criminal element, but the percentage is no larger than that in America or Europe. Why don’t you try to find out how the every-day Chinese lives, how he treats his family, what his normal habits are, his hopes, his ambitions? Why don’t you come to China as I went to America—with an open mind?”

“You’re on,” said O’Higgins, briskly. “I’ll engage you for four days. To-day is for the sights; the other three days—lessons. How’s that strike you?”

“Very well, sir. At least I can give you a glimmer.” A smile broke the set of Ah Cum’s lips. “I’ll take you into a Chinese home. We are very poor, but manage to squeeze a little happiness out of each day.”

“And I promise that all you tell me and show me will sink in,” replied O’Higgins, frankly interested. “I’m a detective; my ears and eyes have been trained to absorb all I see and all I hear. When I absorb a fact, my brain weighs the fact carefully and stores it away. You fooled me this morning; but I overheard two old maids talking about you and the young man.”

“What has he done?”

“What did he have to drink over here last night?”

“Not even water. No doubt he has been drinking for days without eating substantially, and his heart gave out.”

“What happened?”

Ah Cum recounted the story of the sing-song girl. “I had to give in to him. You know how stubborn they get.”

“Surest thing you know. Bought the freedom of a sing-song girl; and all the while you knew you’d have to tote the girl back. But the Yale spirit!”

Ah Cum laughed.

“I’ve got a proposition to make,” said O’Higgins.

“So long as it is open and above board.”

“It’s that, but it interferes with the college spirit stuff. Would a hundred dollars interest you?”

“Very much, if I can earn it without offending my conscience.”

“It won’t. Here goes. I’ve come all these miles for this young fellow; but I don’t cotton to the idea of lallygagging four weeks in this burg. I’ve an idea it’ll be that long before the chap gets up. My proposition is for you to keep an eye on him, and the moment he puts on his clothes to send me a telegram, care of the Hong-Kong Hotel. Understand me. Double-crossing wouldn’t do any good. For all you might know, I might have someone watching you. This time he couldn’t get far. He will have to return to Hong-Kong.”

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“Not necessarily. There is a railroad.”

“He won’t be taking that. The only safe place for him is at sea; and if he had kept to the sea, I shouldn’t have found him so easily. Well, what about it?”

“I accept.”

“As an honest Chinaman?”—taking out the offensiveness of the query by smiling.

“As an honest Chinaman.”

O’Higgins produced his wallet. “Fifty now and fifty when I return.”

“Agreed. Here are the jade carvers. Would you like to see them at work?”

“Lead on, Macduff!”

Ah Cum raised the skirt of his fluttering blue silk robe and stored the bill away in a trouser wallet. It was the beginning and the end of the transaction. When he finally telegraphed his startling information to Hong-Kong, it was too late for O’Higgins to act. The quarry had passed out into the open sea.

* * * * *

From the comatose state, Spurlock passed into that of the babbling fever; but that guarding instinct which is called subconsciousness held a stout leash on his secret. He uttered one word over and over, monotonously:

“Fool! ... Fool!”

But invariably the touch of Ruth’s hand quieted him, and his head would cease to roll from side to side. He hung precariously on the ragged edge, but he hung there. Three times he uttered a phrase:

“A djinn in a blue-serge coat!”

And each time he would follow it with a chuckle—the chuckle of a soul in damnation.

Neither the American Express nor Cook’s had received mail for Howard Taber; he was not on either list. This was irregular. A man might be without relatives, but certainly he would not be without friends, that is to say, without letters. The affair was thick with sinister suggestions. And yet, the doctor recalled an expression of the girl’s: that it was not a dissipated face, only troubled.

The whole affair interested him deeply. That was one of the compensations for having consigned himself to this part of the world. Over here, there was generally some unusual twist to a case. He would pull this young fellow back; but later he knew that he would have to fight the boy's lack of will to live. When he recovered his mental faculties, he would lie there, neutral; they could save him or let him die, as they pleased; and the doctor knew that he would wear himself out forcing his own will to live into this neutrality. And probably the girl would wear herself out, too.

To fight inertia on the one hand and to study this queer girl on the other. Any financial return was inconsiderable against the promise of this psychological treat. The girl was like some north-country woodland pool, penetrated by a single shaft of sunlight—-beautifully clear in one spot and mysteriously obscured elsewhere. She would be elemental; there would be in her somewhere the sleeping tigress. The elemental woman was always close to the cat: as the elemental man was always but a point removed from the wolf.

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It was so arranged that Ruth went on duty after breakfast and remained until noon. The afternoon was her own; but from eight until midnight she sat beside the patient. At no time did she feel bodily or mental fatigue. Frequently she would doze in her chair; but the slightest movement on the bed aroused her.

At luncheon, on the third day, a thick-set man with a blue jaw smiled across his table at her. She recognized him as the man who had blundered into the wrong room.

“How is the patient?” he asked.

“He will live,” answered Ruth.

“That’s fine,” said O’Higgins. “I suppose he’ll be on his feet any day now.”

“No. It will take at least three weeks.”

“Well, so long as he gets on his feet in the end. You’re a friend of the young man?”

“If you mean did I know him before he became ill, no.”

“Ah.” O’Higgins revolved this information about, but no angle emitted light. Basically a kindly man but made cynical and derisive by sordid contacts, O’Higgins had almost forgotten that there was such a thing as unselfishness. The man or woman who did something for nothing always excited his suspicions; they were playing some kind of a game. “You mean you were just sorry for him?”

“As I would be for any human being in pain.”

“Uh-huh.” For the life of him, O’Higgins could not think of anything else to say. Just because she was sorry for that young fool! “Uh-huh,” he repeated, rising and bowing as he passed Ruth’s table. He wished he had the time to solve this riddle, for it was a riddle, and four-square besides. Back in the States young women did not offer to play the Good Samaritan to strange young fools whom Jawn D. Barleycorn had sent to the mat for the count of nine: unless the young fool’s daddy had a bundle of coin. Maybe the girl was telling the truth, and then again, maybe she wasn’t.

The situation bothered him considerably. Things happened frequently over here that wouldn’t happen in the States once in a hundred years. Who could say that the two weren’t in collusion? When a chap like Spurlock jumped the traces, *cherchez la femme*, every time. He hadn’t gambled or played the horses or hit the booze back there in little old New York....

“Aw, piffle!” he said, half aloud and rather disgustedly, as he stepped out into the sunshine. “My old coco is disintegrating. I’ve bumped into so much of the underside that I can’t see clean any more. No girl with a face like that.... And yet, dang it! I’ve

seen ’em just as innocent looking that were prime vipers. Let’s get to Hong-Kong, James, and hit the high spots while there is time.”

He signalled to Ah Cum; and the two of them crossed on foot into the city.

It was not until the morning of the fifth day that the constant vigil was broken. The patient fell into a natural and refreshing sleep. So Ruth found that for a while her eyes were free. She tiptoed to the stand and gathered up the manuscripts which she carried to a chair by the window. Since the discovery of them, she had been madly eager to read these typewritten tales. Treasure caves to explore!

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All through these trying days she had recurrently wondered what this strange young man would have to say that Dickens and Hugo had not already said. That was the true marvel of it. No matter how many books one read, each was different, as each human being was different. Some had the dignity and the aloofness of a rock in the sea; and others were as the polished pebbles on the sands—one saw the difference of pebble from pebble only by close scrutiny. Ruth, without suspecting it, had fallen upon a fundamental truth: that each and every book fitted into the scheme of human moods and intelligence.

Ruth was at that stage where the absorption of facts is great, but where the mental digestion is not quite equal to the task. She was acquiring truths, but in a series of shocks rather than by the process of analysis.

There were seven tales in all—short stories—a method of expression quite strange to her, after the immense canvases of Dickens and Hugo. When she had finished the first tale, there was a sense of disappointment. She had expected a love story; and love was totally absent. It was a tale of battle, murder, and sudden death on the New York waterfront. Sordid; but that was not Ruth's term for it; she had no precise commentary to offer.

From time to time she would come upon a line of singular beauty or a paragraph full of haunting music; and these would send her rushing on for something that never happened. Each manuscript was like the other: the same lovely treatment of an unlovely subject. Abruptly would come the end. It was as if she had come upon the beautiful marble facade of a fairy palace, was invited to enter, and behind the door—-nothing.

She did not realize that she was offering criticisms. The word "criticism" had no concrete meaning to her then; no more than "compromise." Some innate sense of balance told her that something was wrong with these tales. She could not explain in words why they disappointed her or that she was disappointed.

Two hours had come and gone during this tantalizing occupation. At the least, the tales had the ability to make her forget where she was; which was something in their favour.

"My coat!"

Ruth did not move but stared astonishedly at the patient.

"My coat!" he repeated, his glance burning into hers.

[Illustration: *Distinctive Pictures Corporation. The Ragged Edge.* A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY.]

CHAPTER XI

The second call energized her into action. She dropped the manuscripts and swiftly brought the coat to him, noting that a button hung loose. Later, she would sew it on.

“What is it you want?” she asked, as she held out the coat.

“Fold it ... under the pillow.”

This she did carefully, but inwardly commenting that he was still in the realm of strange fancies. Wanting his coat, when he must have known that the pockets were empty! But the effort to talk had cost him something. The performance over, he relaxed and closed his eyes. Even as she watched, the sweat of weakness began to form on his forehead and under the nether lip. She wet some absorbent cotton with alcohol and refreshed his face and neck. This done, she waited at the side of the bed; but he gave no sign that he was conscious of her nearness.

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The poor boy, wanting his empty coat! The incident, however, caused her to review the recent events. It was now evident that he had not been normal that first day. Perhaps he had had money in the coat, back in Hong-Kong, and had been robbed without knowing it. Perhaps these few words were the first real conscious words he had uttered in days. His letter of credit; probably that was it; and, observing the strangeness of the room he was in, his first concern on returning to consciousness would naturally relate to his letter of credit. How would he act when he learned that it had vanished?

She gathered up the manuscripts and restored them to the envelope. This she put into the trunk. She noticed that this trunk was not littered with hotel labels. These little squares of coloured paper interested her mightily—hotel labels. She was for ever scanning luggage and finding her way about the world, via these miniature pictures. London, Paris, Rome! There were no hotel labels on the patient's trunk, but there were ship labels; and by these she was able to reconstruct the journey: from New York to Naples, thence to Alexandria; from Port Said to Colombo; from Colombo to Bombay; from Calcutta to Rangoon, thence down to Singapore; from Singapore to Hong-Kong. The great world outside!

She stood motionless beside the trunk, deep in speculation; and thus the doctor found her.

"Well?" he whispered.

"I believe he is conscious," she answered. "He just asked for his coat, which he wanted under his pillow."

"Conscious; well, that's good news. He'll be able to help us a little now. I hope that some day he'll understand how much he owes you."

"Oh, that!" she said, with a deprecating gesture.

"Miss Enschede, you're seven kinds of a brick!"

"A brick?"

He chuckled. "I forgot. That's slang, meaning you're splendid."

"I begin to see that I shall have to learn English all over again."

"You have always spoken it?"

"Yes; except for some native. I wasn't taught that; I simply fell into it from contact."

"I see. So he's come around, then? That's fine."

He approached the bed and laid his palm on the patient's forehead, and nodded. Then he took the pulse.

"He will pull through?"

"Positively. But the big job for you is yet to come. When he begins to notice things, I want you to trap his interest, to amuse him, keep his thoughts from reverting to his misfortunes."

"Then he has been unfortunate?"

"That's patent enough. He's had a hard knock somewhere; and until he is strong enough to walk, we must keep his interest away from that thought. After that, we'll go our several ways."

"What makes you think he has had a hard knock?"

"I'm a doctor, young lady."

"You're fine, too. I doubt if you will receive anything for your trouble."

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“Oh, yes I will. The satisfaction of cheating Death again. You’ve been a great help these five days; for he had to have attendance constantly, and neither Wu nor I could have given that. And yet, when you offered to help, it was what is to come that I had in mind.”

“To make him forget the knock?”

“Precisely. I’m going to be frank; we must have a clear understanding. Can you afford to give this time? There are your own affairs to think of.”

“There’s no hurry.”

“And money?”

“I’ll have plenty, if I’m careful.”

“It has done me a whole lot of good to meet you. Over here a man quickly loses faith, and I find myself back on solid ground once more. Is there anything you’d like?”

“Books.”

“What kind?”

“Dickens, Hugo.”

“I’ll bring you an armful this afternoon. I’ve a lot of old magazines, too. There are a thousand questions I’d like to ask you, but I sha’n’t ask them.”

“Ask them, all of them, and I will gladly answer. I mystify you; I can see that. Well, whenever you say, I promise to do away with the mystery.”

“All right. I’ll call for you this afternoon when Wu is on. I’ll show you the Sha-mien; and we can talk all we want.”

“I was never going to tell anybody,” she added. “But you are a good man, and you’ll understand. I believed I was strong enough to go on in silence; but I’m human like everybody else. To tell someone who is kind and who will understand!”

“There, there!” he said. There was a hint of tears in her voice. “That’s all right. We’ll get together this afternoon; and you can pretend that I am your father.”

“No! I have run away from my father. I shall never go back to him; never, never!”

Distressed, embarrassed beyond measure by this unexpected tragic revelation, the doctor puttered about among the bottles on the stand.

“We’re forgetting,” he said. “We mustn’t disturb the patient. I’ll call for you after lunch.”

“I’m sorry.”

She began to prepare the room for Wu’s coming, while the doctor went downstairs. As he was leaving the hotel, Ah Cum stepped up to his side.

“How is Mr. Taber?”

“Regained consciousness this morning.”

Ah Cum nodded. “That is good.”

“You are interested?”

“In a way, naturally. We are both graduates of Yale.”

“Ah! Did he tell you anything about himself?”

“Aside from that, no. When will he be up?”

“That depends. Perhaps in two or three weeks. Did he talk a little when you took him into the city?”

“No. He appeared to be strangely uncommunicative, though I tried to draw him out. He spoke only when he saw the sing-song girl he wanted to buy.”

“Why didn’t you head him off, explain that it couldn’t be done by a white man?”

Ah Cum shrugged. “You are a physician; you know the vagaries of men in liquor. He was a stranger. I did not know how he would act if I obstructed him.”

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“We found all his pockets empty.”

“Then they were empty when he left,” replied Ah Cum, with dignity.

“I was only commenting. Did he act to you that day as if he knew what he was doing?”

“Not all of the time.”

“A queer case;” and the doctor passed on.

Ah Cum made a movement as though to follow, but reconsidered. The word of a Chinaman; he had given it, so he must abide. There was now no honest way of warning Taber that the net had been drawn. Of course, it was ridiculous, this inclination to assist the fugitive, based as it was upon an intangible university idea. And yet, mulling it over, he began to understand why the white man was so powerful in the world: he was taught loyalty and fair play in his schools, and he carried this spirit the world which his forebears had conquered.

Suddenly Ah Cum laughed aloud. He, a Chinaman, troubling himself over Occidental ideas! With his hands in his sleeves, he proceeded on his way.

* * * * *

Ruth and the doctor returned to the hotel at four. Both carried packages of books and magazines. There was an air of repressed gaiety in her actions: the sense of freedom had returned; her heart was empty again. The burden of decision had been transferred.

And because he knew it was a burden, there was no gaiety upon the doctor’s face; neither was there speech on his tongue. He knew not how to act, urged as he was in two directions. It would be useless to tell her to go back, even heartless; and yet he could not advise her to go on, blindly, not knowing whether her aunt was dead or alive. He was also aware that all his arguments would shatter themselves against her resolutions. There was a strange quality of steel in this pretty creature. He understood now that it was a part of her inheritance. The father would be all steel. One point in her narrative stood out beyond all others. To an unthinking mind the episode would be ordinary, trivial; but to the doctor, who had had plenty of time to think during his sojourn in China, it was basic of the child’s unhappiness. A dozen words, and he saw Enschede as clearly as though he stood hard by in the flesh.

To preach a fine sermon every Sunday so that he would lose neither the art nor the impulse; and this child, in secret rebellion, taking it down in long hand during odd hours in the week! Preaching grandiloquently before a few score natives who understood little beyond the gestures, for the single purpose of warding off disintegration! It reminded the doctor of a stubborn retreat; from barricade to barricade, grimly fighting to keep the enemy at bay, that insidious enemy of the white man in the South Seas—inertia.

The drunken beachcombers; the one-sided education; the utter loneliness of a white child without playfellows, human or animal, without fairy stories, who for days was left alone while the father visited neighbouring islands, these pictures sank far below their actual importance. He would always see the picture of the huge, raw-boned Dutchman, haranguing and thundering the word of God into the dull ears of South Sea Islanders, who, an hour later, would be carrying fruit penitently to their wooden images.

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He now understood her interest in Taber, as he called himself: habit, a twice-told tale. A beachcomber in embryo, and she had lent a hand through habit as much as through pity. The grim mockery of it!—those South Sea loafers, taking advantage of Enschede's Christianity and imposing upon him, accepting his money and medicines and laughing behind his back! No doubt they made the name a byword and a subject for ribald jest in the waterfront bars. And this clear-visioned child had comprehended that only half the rogues were really ill. But Enschede took them as they came, without question. Charity for the ragtag and the bobtail of the Seven Seas, and none for his own flesh and blood.

This started a thought moving. There must be something behind the missioner's actions, something of which the girl knew nothing nor suspected. It would not be possible otherwise to live in daily contact with this level-eyed, lovely girl without loving her. Something with iron resolve the father had kept hidden all these years in the lonely citadel of his heart. Teaching the word of God to the recent cannibal, caring for the sick, storming the strongholds of the plague, adding his own private income to the pittance allowed him by the Society, and never seeing the angel that walked at his side! Something the girl knew nothing about; else Enschede was unbelievable.

It now came to him with an added thrill how well she had told her story; simply and directly, no skipping, no wandering hither and yon: from the first hour she could remember, to the night she had fled in the proa, a clear sustained narrative. And through it all, like a golden thread on a piece of tapestry, weaving in and out of the patterns, the unspoken longing for love.

"Well," she said, as they reached the hotel portal, "what is your advice?"

"Would you follow it?"

"Probably not. Still, I am curious."

"I do not say that what you have done is wrong in any sense. I do not blame you for the act. There are human limitations, and no doubt you reached yours. For all that, it is folly. If you knew your aunt were alive, if she expected you, that would be different. But to plunge blindly into the unknown!"

"I had to! I had to!"

She had told him only the first part of her story. She wondered if the second part would overcome his objections? Several times the words had rushed to her tongue, to find her tongue paralysed. To a woman she might have confided; but to this man, kindly as he was, it was unthinkable. How could she tell him of the evil that drew her and drew her, as a needle to the magnet?—the fascinating evil that even now, escaped as it was, went on distilling its poison in her mind?

“Yes, yes!” said the doctor. “But if you do not find this aunt, what will you do? What can you do to protect yourself against hunger?”

“I’ll find something.”

“But warn the aunt, prepare her, if she lives.”

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“And have her warn my father! No. If I surprised her, if I saw her alone, I might make her understand.”

He shook his head. “There’s only one way out of the muddle, that I can see.”

“And what is that?”

“I have relatives not far from Hartford. I may prevail upon them to take you in until you are full-fledged, providing you do not find this aunt. You say you have twenty-four hundred in your letter of credit. It will not cost you more than six hundred to reach your destination. The pearls were really yours?”

“They were left to me by my mother. I sometimes laid away my father’s clothes in his trunk. I saw the metal box a hundred times, but I never thought of opening it until the day I fled. I never even burrowed down into the trunk. I had no curiosity of that kind. I wanted something *alive*.” She paused.

“Go on.”

“Well, suddenly I knew that I must see the inside of that box, which had a padlock. I wrenched this off, and in an envelope addressed to me in faded ink, I found the locket and the pearls. It is queer how ideas pop into one’s head. Instantly I knew that I was going to run away that night before he returned from the neighbouring island. At the bottom of the trunk I found two of my mother’s dresses. I packed them with the other few things I owned. Morgan the trader did not haggle over the pearls, but gave me at once what he judged a fair price. You will wonder why he did not hold the pearls until Father returned. I didn’t understand then, but I do now. It was partly to pay a grudge he had against father.”

“And partly what else?”

“I shall never tell anybody that.”

“I don’t know,” said the doctor, dubiously. “You’re only twenty—not legally of age.”

“I am here in Canton,” she replied, simply.

“Very well. I’ll cable to-night, and in a few days we’ll have some news. I’m a graybeard, an old bachelor; so I am accorded certain privileges. Sometimes I am frightfully busy; and then there will be periods of dullness. I have a few regular patients, and I take care of them in the morning. Every afternoon, from now on, I will teach you a little about life —I mean the worldly points of view you’re likely to meet. You are queerly educated; and it strikes me that your father had some definite purpose in thus educating you. I’ll try to fill in the gaps.”

The girl's eyes filled. "I wonder if you will understand what this kindness means to me? I am so terribly wise—and so wofully ignorant!"

CHAPTER XII

The doctor shifted his books and magazines to the crook of his elbow. He had done this a dozen times on the way from his office. Books were always sliding and slipping, clumsy objects to hold. Looking at this girl, a sense of failure swept over him. He had not been successful as the world counted success; the fat bank-account, the filled waiting room of which he had once dreamed, had never materialized except in the smoke of his evening pipe.

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And yet he knew that his skill was equal to that of any fashionable practitioner in Hong-Kong. He wasn't quite hard enough to win worldly success; that was his fault. Anybody in pain had only to call to him. So, here he was, on the last lap of middle age, in China, having missed all the thrills in life except one—the war against Death. It rather astonished him. He hadn't followed this angle of thought in ten years: what he might have been, with a little shrewd selfishness. This extraordinary child had opened up an old channel through which it was no longer safe to cruise. She was like an angel with one wing. The simile started a laugh in his throat.

"Why do you laugh?" she asked gravely.

"At a thought. Of you—an angel with one wing."

"Meaning that I don't belong anywhere, in heaven or on earth?"

"Meaning that you must cut off the wing or grow another to mate it. Let's go up and see how the patient is doing. Wu may have news for us. We'll get those books into your room first. And I'll have supper with you."

"If only...." But she did not complete the thought aloud. If only this man had been her father! The world would have meant nothing; the island would have been wide enough.

"You were saying—?"

"I started to say something; that is all."

"By the way, did you read those stories?"

"Yes."

"Worth anything?"

"I don't know."

"Silly love stories?"

"No; love wasn't the theme. Supposing you take them and read them? You might be able to tell me why I felt disappointed."

"All right. I'll take them back with me. Probably he has something to say and can't say it, or he writes well about nothing."

"Do you believe his failure caused...."

“What?” he barked. But he did not follow on with the thought. There was no need of sowing suspicion when he wasn’t really certain there were grounds for it. “Well, you never can tell,” he continued, lamely. “These writer chaps are queer birds.”

“Queer birds.”

He laughed and followed her into the hotel. “More slang,” he said. “I’ll have to set you right on that, too.”

“I have heard sailors use words like that, but I never knew what they meant.”

Sailors, he thought; and most of them the dregs of the South Seas, casting their evil glances at this exquisite creature and trying to smirch with innuendo the crystal clearness of her mind. Perhaps there were experiences she would never confide to any man. Sudden indignation boiled up in him. The father was a madman. It did not matter that he wore the cloth; something was wrong with him. He hadn’t played fair.

“Remember; we must keep the young fellow’s thoughts away from himself. Tell him about the island, the coconut dance, the wooden tom-toms; read to him.”

“What made him buy that sing-song girl?” Regarding this, Ruth had ideas of her own, but she wanted the doctor’s point of view.

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“Maybe he realized that he was slipping fast and thought a fine action might give him a hand-hold on life again. You tell me he didn’t like the stuff.”

“He shuddered when he drank.”

“Well, that’s a hopeful sign. I’ll test him out later; see if there is any craving. Give me the books. I’ll put them in your room; then we’ll have a look-see.”

The patient was asleep. According to Wu, the young man had not opened his eyes once during the afternoon.

So Ruth returned to her room and sorted the books and magazines the doctor had loaned her, inspected the titles and searched for pictures. And thus it was that she came upon a book of Stevenson’s verse—her first adventure into poetry. The hymnal lyrics had never stirred her; she had memorized and sung them parrot-wise. But here was new music, tender and kindly and whimsical, that first roved to and fro in the mind and then cuddled up in the heart. Anything that had love in it!

The doctor comprehended that he also had his work cut out. While the girl kept the patient from dwelling upon his misfortunes, whatever these were, he himself would have to keep the girl from brooding over hers. So he made merry at the dinner table, told comic stories, and was astonished at the readiness with which she grasped the comic side of life. His curiosity put itself into a question.

“Old Morgan the trader,” she explained, “used to save me *Tit-Bits*. He would read the jokes and illustrate them; and after a time I could see the point of a joke without having it explained to me. I believe it amused him. I was a novelty. He was always in a state of semi-intoxication, but he was always gentle with me. Probably he taught me what a joke was merely to irritate my father; for suddenly Father stopped my going to the store for things and sent our old Kanaka cook instead. She had been to San Francisco, and what I learned about the world was from her. Thank you for the books.”

“You were born on the island?”

“I believe so.”

“You don’t remember your mother?”

“Oh, no; she died when I was very little.”

She showed him the locket; and he studied the face. It was equally as beautiful but not quite so fine as the daughter’s. He returned the locket without comment.

“Perhaps things would have been different if she had lived.”

“No doubt,” he replied. “Mine died while I was over here. Perhaps that is why I lost my ambition.”

“I am sorry.”

“It is life.”

There was a pause. “He never let me keep a dog or a cat about the house. But after a time I learned the ways of the parrakeets, and they would come down to me like doves in the stories. I never made any effort to touch them; so by and by they learned to light fearlessly on my arms and shoulders. And what a noise they made! This is how I used to call them.”

She pursed her lips and uttered a whistle, piercingly shrill and high; and instantly she became the object of intense astonishment on the part of the other diners. She was quite oblivious to the sensation she had created.

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The picture of her flashed across the doctor's vision magically. The emerald wings, slashed with scarlet and yellow, wheeling and swooping about her head, there among the wild plantain.

"I never told anybody," she went on. "An audience might have frightened the birds. Only in the sunshine; they would not answer my whistle on cloudy days."

"Didn't the natives have a name for you?"

She blushed. "It was silly."

"Go on, tell me," he urged, enchanted. Never was there another girl like this one. He blushed, too, spiritually, as it were. He had invited himself to dine with her merely to watch her table manners. They were exquisite. Knowing the South Seas from hearsay and by travel, he knew something of that inertia which blunted the fineness, innate and acquired, of white men and women, the eternal warfare against indifference and slovenliness. Only the strong survived. This queer father of hers had given her everything but his arms. "Tell me, what did they call you?"

"Well, the old Kanaka cook used to call me the Golden One, but the natives called me the Dawn Pearl."

"The Dawn Pearl! Odd, but we white folks aren't half so poetical as the yellow or the black. What did you do when your father went on trips to other islands?"

"Took off my shoes and stockings and played in the lagoon."

"He made you wear shoes and stockings?"

"Always."

"What else did you do when alone?"

"I read the encyclopaedia. That is how I learned that there were such things as novels. Books! Aren't they wonderful?"

The blind alley of life stretching out before her, with its secret doorways and hidden menaces; and she was unconcerned. Books; an inexplicable hunger to be satisfied. Somewhere in the world there was a book clerk with a discerning mind; for he had given her the best he had. He envied her a little. To fall upon those tales for the first time, when the mind was fresh and the heart was young!

He became aware of an odd phase to this conversation. The continuity was frequently broken in upon by diversory suppositions. Take the one that struck him at this moment. Supposing that was it; at least, a solution to part of this amazing riddle? Supposing her

father had made her assist him in the care of the derelicts solely to fill her with loathing and abhorrence for mankind?

“Didn’t you despise the men your father brought home—the beachcombers?”

“No. In the beginning was afraid; but after the first several cases, I had only pity. I somehow understood.”

“Didn’t some of them ... try to touch you?”

“Not the true unfortunates. How men suffer for the foolish things they do!”

“Ay to that. There’s our young friend upstairs.”

“There’s a funny idea in my head. I’ve been thinking about it ever since morning. There was a loose button on that coat, and I want to sew it on. It keeps dangling in front of my eyes.”

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“Ah, yes; that coat. Probably a sick man’s whim. Certainly, there wasn’t a thing in the pockets. But be very careful not to let him know. If he awoke and caught you at it, there might be a set-back. By the way, what did he say when he was out of his head?”

“The word ‘Fool.’ He muttered it continually. There was another phrase which sounded something like ‘Gin in a blue-serge coat’. I wonder what he meant by that?”

“The Lord knows!”

The patient was restless during the first watch of the night. He stirred continually, thrusting his legs about and flinging his arms above his head. Gently each time Ruth drew down the arms. There was a recurrence of fever, but nothing alarming. Once she heard him mutter, and she leaned down.

“Ali Baba, in a blue-serge coat!... God-forsaken fool!”

CHAPTER XIII

One day Ruth caught the patient’s eyes following her about; but there was no question in the gaze, no interest; so she pretended not to notice.

“Where am I?” asked Spurlock.

“In Canton.”

“How long have I been in bed?”

“A week.”

“My coat, please.”

“It is folded under your pillow.”

“Did I ask for it?”

“Yes. But perhaps you don’t know; there was nothing in the pockets. You were probably robbed in Hong-Kong.”

“Nothing in the pockets.”

“You see, we didn’t know but you might die; and so we had to search your belongings for the address of your people.”

“I have no people—anybody who would care.”

She kindled with sympathy. He was all alone, too. Nobody who cared.

Ruth was inflammable; she would always be flaring up swiftly, in pity, in tenderness, in anger; she would always be answering impulses, without seeking to weigh or to analyse them. She was emerging from the primordial as Spurlock was declining toward it. She was on the rim of civilization, entering, as Spurlock was on the rim, preparing to make his exit. Two souls in travail; one inspired by fresh hopes, the other, by fresh despairs. Both of them would be committing novel and unforgettable acts.

“How long shall I be here?” he asked.

“That depends upon you. Not very long, if you want to get well.”

“Are you a nurse?”

“Yes. Don’t ask any more questions. Wait a little; rest.”

There was a pause. Ruth flashed in and out of the sunshine; and he took note of the radiant nimbus above her head each time the sunshine touched her hair.

“Haven’t I seen you somewhere before?”

“The first day you came. Don’t you remember? There were four of us, and we went touring in the city.”

“As in a dream.” There was another pause. “Was I out of my head?”

“Yes.”

“What did I say?”

“Only one word,” she said, offering her first white lie.

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“What was it?” He was insistent.

“You repeated the word ‘*Fool*’ over and over.”

“Nothing else?”

“No. Now, no more questions, or I shall be forced to leave the room.”

“I promise to ask no more.”

“Would you like to have me read to you?”

He did not answer. So she took up Stevenson and began to read aloud. She read beautifully because the fixed form of the poem signified nothing. She went from period to period exactly as she would have read prose; so that sense and music were equally balanced. She read for half an hour, then closed the book because Spurlock appeared to have fallen asleep. But he was wide awake.

“What poet was that?”

“Stevenson.” Ruth had read from page to page in “The Child’s Garden of Verse,” generally unfamiliar to the admirers of Stevenson. Of course Ruth was not aware that in this same volume there were lyrics known the world over.

Immediately Spurlock began to chant one of these.

“’Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
  And I laid me down with a will.’”

“’This be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea.
  And the hunter home from the hill.’”

“What is that?” she asked. Something in his tone pinched her heart. “Did you write it?”

“No. You will find it somewhere in that book. Ah, if I had written that!”

“Don’t you want to live?”

“I don’t know; I really don’t know.”

“But you are young!” It was a protest, almost vehement. She remembered the doctor’s warning that the real battle would begin when the patient recovered consciousness. “You have all the world before you.”

“Rather behind me;” and he spoke no more that morning.

Throughout the afternoon, while the doctor was giving her the first lesson out of his profound knowledge of life, her interest would break away continually, despite her honest efforts to pin it down to the facts so patiently elucidated for her. Recurrently she heard: “I don’t know; I really don’t know.” It was curiously like the intermittent murmur of the surf, those weird Sundays, when her father paused for breath to launch additional damnation for those who disobeyed the Word. “I don’t know; I really don’t know.”

Her ear caught much of the lesson, and many things she stored away; but often what she heard was sound without sense. Still, her face never betrayed this distraction. And what was singular she did not recount to the doctor that morning’s adventure. Why? If she had put the query to herself, she could not have answered it. It was in no sense confessional; it was a state of mind in the patient the doctor had already anticipated. Yet she held her tongue.

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As for the doctor, he found a pleasure in this service that would have puzzled him had he paused to analyse it. There was scant social life on the Sha-mien aside from masculine foregatherings, little that interested him. He took his social pleasures once a year in Hong-Kong, after Easter. He saw, without any particular regret, that this year he would have to forego the junket; but there would be ample compensation in the study of these queer youngsters. Besides, by the time they were off his hands, old McClintock would be dropping in to have his liver renovated.

All at once he recollected the fact that McClintock's copra plantation was down that way, somewhere in the South Seas; had an island of his own. Perhaps he had heard of this Enschede. Mac—the old gossip—knew about everything going on in that part of the world; and if Enschede was anything up to the picture the girl had drawn, McClintock would have heard of him, naturally. He might solve the riddle. All of which proves that the doctor also had his moments of distraction, with this difference: he was not distracted from his subject matter.

"So endeth the first lesson," he said. "Suppose we go and have tea? I'd like to take you to a teahouse I know, but we'll go to the Victoria instead. I must practise what I preach."

"I should be unafraid to go anywhere with you."

"Lord, that's just the lesson I've been expounding! It isn't a question of fear; it's one of propriety."

"I'll never understand."

"You don't have to. I'll tell you what. I'll write out certain rules of conduct, and then you'll never be in doubt."

She laughed; and it was pleasant laughter in his ears. If only this child were his: what good times they would have together! The thought passed on, but it left a little ache in his heart.

"Why do you laugh?" he asked.

"All that you have been telling me, our old Kanaka cook summed up in a phrase."

"What was it?"

"Never glance sideways at a man.".

"The whole thing in a nutshell!"

"Are there no men a woman may trust absolutely?"

“Hang it, that isn’t it. Of course there are, millions of them. It’s public opinion. We all have to kow-tow to that.”

“Who made such a law?”

“This world is governed by minorities—in politics, in religion, in society. Majorities, right or wrong, dare not revolt. Footprints, and we have to toddle along in them, willy-nilly; and those who have the courage to step outside the appointed path are called pariahs!”

“I’m afraid I shall not like this world very much. It is putting all my dreams out of joint.”

“Never let the unknown edge in upon your courage. The world is like a peppery horse. If he senses fear in the touch of your hand, he’ll give you trouble.”

“It’s all so big and aloof. It isn’t friendly as I thought it would be. I don’t know; I really don’t know,” she found herself repeating.

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He drew her away from this thought. “I read those stories.”

“Are they good?”

“He can write; but he hasn’t found anything real to write about. He hasn’t found himself, as they say. He’s rewriting Poe and De Maupassant; and that stuff was good only when Poe and De Maupassant wrote it.”

“How do you spell the last name?”

He spelt it. He wasn’t sure, but he thought he saw a faint shudder stir her shoulders. “Not the sort of stories young ladies should read. Poe is all right, if you don’t mind nightmares. But De Maupassant—sheer off! Stick to Dickens and Thackeray and Hugo. Before you go I’ll give you a list of books to read.”

“There are bad stories, then, just as there are bad people?”

“Yes. Sewn on that button yet?”

“I’ve been afraid to take the coat from under the pillow.”

“Funny, about that coat. You told him there wasn’t anything in the pockets?”

“Yes.”

“How did he take it?”

“He did not seem to care.”

“There you are, just as I said. We’ve got to get him to care. We’ve got to make him take up the harp of life and go twanging it again. That’s the job. He’s young and sound. Of course, there’ll be a few kinks to straighten out. He’s passed through some rough mental torture. But one of these days everything will click back into place. Great sport, eh? To haul them back from the ragged edge. Wouldn’t it be fun to see his name on a book-cover some day? He’ll go strutting up and down without ever dreaming he owed the whole shot to us. That would be fun, eh?”

“I wonder if you know how kind you are? You are like somebody out of a book.”

“There, now! You mustn’t get mixed. You mustn’t go by what you read so much as by what you see and hear. You must remember, you’ve just begun to read; you haven’t any comparisons. You mustn’t go dressing up Tom, Dick, and Harry in Henry Esmond’s ruffles. What you want to do is to imagine every woman a Becky Sharp and every man a Rawdon Crawley.”

“I know what is good,” she replied.

“Yes; but what is good isn’t always proper. And so, here we are, right back from where we started. But no more of that. Let’s talk of this chap. There’s good stuff in him, if one could find the way to dig it out. But pathologically, he is still on the edge. Unless we can get some optimism into him, he’ll probably start this all over again when he gets on his feet. That’s the way it goes. But between us, we’ll have him writing books some day. That’s one of the troubles with young folks: they take themselves so seriously. He probably imagines himself to be a thousand times worse off than he actually is. Youth finds it pleasant sometimes to be melancholy. Disappointed puppy-love, and all that.”

“Puppy-love.”

“A young fellow who thinks he’s in love, when he has only been reading too much.”

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“Do girls have puppy-love?”

“Land sakes, yes! On the average they are worse than the boys. A boy can forget his amatory troubles playing baseball; but a girl can’t find any particular distraction in doing fancy work. Do you know, I envy you. All the world before you, all the ologies. What an adventure! Of course, you’ll bark your shins here and there and hit your funnybone; but the newness of everything will be something of a compensation. All right. Let’s get one idea into our heads. We are going to have this chap writing books one of these days.”

Ideas are never born; they are suggested; they are planted seeds. Ruth did not reply, but stared past the doctor, her eyes misty. The doctor had sown a seed, carelessly. All that he had sown that afternoon with such infinite care was as nothing compared to this seed, cast without forethought. Ruth’s mind was fertile soil; for a long time to come it would be something of a hothouse: green things would spring up and blossom overnight. Already the seed of a tender dream was stirring. The hour for which, presumably, she had been created was drawing nigh. For in life there is but one hour: an epic or an idyll: all other hours lead up to and down from it.

“By the way,” said the doctor, as he sat down in the dining room of the Victoria and ordered tea, “I’ve been thinking it over.”

“What?”

“We’ll put those stories back into the trunk and never speak of them to him.”

“But why not?”

The doctor dallied with his teaspoon. Something about the girl had suggested an idea. It would have been the right idea, had Ruth been other than what she was. First-off, he had decided not to tell her what he had found at the bottom of that manila envelope. Now it occurred to him that to show her the sealed letter would be a better way. Impressionable, lonely, a deal beyond his analytical reach, the girl might let her sympathies go beyond those of the nurse. She would be enduing this chap with attributes he did not possess, clothing him in fictional ruffles. To disillusion her, forthwith.

“I’ll tell you why,” he said. “At the bottom of that big envelope I found this one.”

He passed it over; and Ruth read:

> To be opened in case of my death and the letter inside
> forwarded to the address thereon. All my personal effects
> to be left in charge of the nearest American Consulate.

CHAPTER XIV

Ruth lost the point entirely. The doctor expected her to seize upon the subtle inference that there was something furtive, even criminal, in the manner the patient set this obligation upon humanity at large, to look after him in the event of his death. The idea of anything criminal never entered her thoughts. Any man might have endeavoured to protect himself in this fashion, a man with no one to care, with an unnameable terror at the thought (as if it mattered!) of being buried in alien earth, far from the familiar places he loved.

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Close upon this came another thought. She had no place she loved. In all this world there was no sacred ground that said to her: Return! She was of all human beings the most lonely. Even now, during the recurring doubts of the future, the thought of the island was repellent. She hated it, she hated the mission-house; she hated the sleek lagoon, the palms, the burning sky. But some day she would find a place to love: there would be rosy apples on the boughs, and there would be flurries of snow blowing into her face. It was astonishing how often this picture returned: cold rosy apples and flurries of snow.

“The poor young man!” she said.

The doctor sensed that his bolt had gone wrong, but he could not tell how or why. He dared not go on. He was not sure that the boy had put himself beyond the pale; merely, the boy’s actions pointed that way. If he laid his own suspicions boldly before the girl, and in the end the boy came clean, he would always be haunted by the witless cruelty of the act.

That night in his den he smoked many pipes. Twice he cleaned the old briar; still there was no improvement. He poured a pinch of tobacco into his palm and sniffed. The weed was all right. Probably something he had eaten. He was always forgetting that his tummy was fifty-four years old.

He would certainly welcome McClintock’s advent. Mac would have some new yarns to spin and a fresh turn-over to his celebrated liver. He was a comforting, humorous old ruffian; but there were few men in the Orient more deeply read in psychology and physiognomy. It was, in a way, something of a joke to the doctor: psychology and physiognomy on an island which white folks did not visit more than three or four times a year, only then when they had to. Why did the beggar hang on down there, when he could have enjoyed all that civilization had to offer? Yes, he would be mighty glad to see McClintock; and the sooner he came the better.

Sometimes at sea a skipper will order his men to trim, batten down the hatches, and clear the deck of all litter. The barometer says nothing, neither the sky nor the water; the skipper has the “feel” that out yonder there’s a big blow moving. Now the doctor had the “feel” that somewhere ahead lay danger. It was below consciousness, elusive; so he sent out a call to his friend, defensively.

* * * * *

At the end of each day Ah Cum would inquire as to the progress of the patient, and invariably the answer was: “About the same.” This went on for ten days. Then Ah Cum was notified that the patient had sat up in bed for quarter of an hour. Promptly Ah Cum wired the information to O’Higgins in Hong-Kong. The detective reckoned that his quarry would be up in ten days more.

To Ruth the thought of Hartford no longer projected upon her vision a city of spires and houses and tree-lined streets. Her fanciful imagination no longer drew pictures of the aunt in the doorway of a wooden house, her arms extended in welcome. The doctor's lessons, perhaps delivered with too much serious emphasis, had destroyed that buoyant confidence in her ability to take care of herself.

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Between Canton and Hartford two giants had risen, invisible but menacing—Fear and Doubt. The unknown, previously so attractive, now presented another face—blank. The doctor had not heard from his people. She was reasonably certain why. They did not want her.

Thus, all her interest in life began to centre upon the patient, who was apparently quite as anchorless as she was. Sometimes a whole morning would pass without Spurlock uttering a word beyond the request for a drink of water. Again, he would ask a few questions, and Ruth would answer them. He would repeat them innumerable times, and patiently Ruth would repeat her answers.

“What is your name?”

“Ruth.”

“Ruth what?”

“Enschede; Ruth Enschede.”

“En-shad-ay. You are French?”

“No. Dutch; Pennsylvania Dutch.”

And then his interest would cease. Perhaps an hour later he would begin again.

At other times he seemed to have regained the normal completely. He would discuss something she had been reading, and he would give her some unexpected angle, setting a fictional character before her with astonishing clearness. Then suddenly the curtain would fall.

“What is your name?” To-day, however, he broke the monotony. “An American. Enschede—that’s a queer name.”

“I’m a queer girl,” she replied with a smile.

Perhaps this was the real turning point: the hour in which the disordered mind began permanently to readjust itself.

“I’ve been wondering, until this morning, if you were real.”

“I’ve been wondering, too.”

“Are you a real nurse?”

“Yes.”

“Professional?”

“Why do you wish to know?”

“Professional nurses wear a sort of uniform.”

“While I look as if I had stepped out of the family album?”

He frowned perplexedly. “Where did I hear that before?”

“Perhaps that first day, in the water-clock tower.”

“I imagine I’ve been in a kind of trance.”

“And now you are back in the world again, with things to do and places to go. There is a button loose on that coat under your pillow. Shall I sew it on for you?”

“If you wish.”

This readiness to surrender the coat to her surprised Ruth. She had prepared herself to meet violent protest, a recurrence of that burning glance. But in a moment she believed she understood. He was normal now, and the coat was only a coat. It had been his fevered imagination that had endued the garment with some extraordinary value. Gently she raised his head and withdrew the coat from under the pillow.

“Why did I want it under my pillow?” he asked.

“You were a little out of your head.”

Gravely he watched the needle flash to and fro. He noted the strong white teeth as they snipped the thread. At length the task was done, and she jabbed the needle into a cushion, folded the coat, and rose.

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“Do you want it back under the pillow?”

“Hang it over a chair. Or, better still, put all my clothes in the trunk. They litter up the room. The key is in my trousers.”

This business over, she returned to the bedside with the key. She felt a little ashamed of herself, a bit of a hypocrite. Every article in the trunk was fully known to her, through a recounting of the list by the doctor. To hand the key back in silence was like offering a lie.

“Put it under my pillow,” he said.

Immediately she had spoken of the loose button he knew that henceforth he must show no concern over the disposition of that coat. He must not in any way call their attention to it. He must preserve it, however, as they preserved the Ark of the Covenant. It was his redemption, his ticket out of hell—that blue-serge coat. To witness this girl sewing on a loose button, flopping the coat about on her knees, tickled his ironic sense of humour; and laughter bubbled into his throat. He smothered it down with such a good will that the reaction set his heart to pounding. The walls rocked, the footrail of the bed wavered, and the girl’s head had the nebulosity of a composite photograph. So he shut his eyes. Presently he heard her voice.

“I must tell you,” she was saying. “We went through your belongings. We did not know where to send ... in case you died. There was nothing in the pockets of the coat.”

“Don’t worry about that.” He opened his eyes again.

“I wanted you to know. There is nobody, then?”

“Oh, there is an aunt. But if I were dying of thirst, in a desert, I would not accept a cup of water at her hands. Will you read to me? I am tired; and the sound of your voice makes me drowsy.”

Half an hour later she laid aside the book. He was asleep. She leaned forward, her chin in her palms, her elbows on her knees, and she set her gaze upon his face and kept it there in dreamy contemplation. Supposing he too wanted love and his arms were as empty as hers?

Some living thing that depended upon her. The doll she had never owned, the cat and the dog that had never been hers: here they were, strangely incorporated in this sleeping man. He depended upon her, for his medicine, for his drink, for the little amusement it was now permissible to give him. The knowledge breathed into her heart a satisfying warmth.

At noon the doctor himself arrived. "Go to lunch," he ordered Ruth. He wanted to talk with the patient, test him variously; and he wanted to be alone with him while he put these tests. His idea was to get behind this sustained listlessness. "How goes it?" he began, heartily. "A bit up in the world again; eh?"

"Why did you bother with me?"

"Because no human being has the right to die. Death belongs to God, young man."

"Ah." The tone was neutral.

"And had you been the worst scoundrel unhung, I'd have seen to it that you had the same care, the same chance. But don't thank me; thank Miss Enschede. She caught the fact that it was something more than strong drink that laid you out. If they hadn't sent for me, you'd have pegged out before morning."

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“Then I owe my life to her?”

“Positively.”

“What do you want me to do?”

The doctor thought this query gave hopeful promise. “Always remember the fact. She is something different. When I told her that there were no available nurses this side of Hong-Kong, she offered her services at once, and broke her journey. And I need not tell you that her hotel bill is running on the same as yours.”

“Do you want me to tell her that I am grateful?”

“Well, aren’t you?”

“I don’t know; I really don’t know.”

“Look here, my boy, that attitude is all damned nonsense. Here you are, young, sound, with a heart that will recover in no time, provided you keep liquor out of it. And you talk like that! What the devil have you been up to, to land in this bog?” It was a cast at random.

His guardian angel warned Spurlock to speak carefully. “I have been very unhappy.”

“So have we all. But we get over it. And you will.”

After a moment Spurlock said: “Perhaps I am an ungrateful dog.”

“That’s better. Remember, if there’s anything you’d like to get off your chest, doctors and priests are in the same boat.”

With no little effort—for the right words had a way of tumbling back out of reach—he marshalled his phrases, and as he uttered them, closed his eyes to lessen the possibility of a break. “I’m only a benighted fool; and having said that, I have said everything. I’m one of those unfortunate duffers who have too much imagination—the kind who build their own chimeras and then run away from them. How long shall I be kept in this bed?”

“That’s particularly up to you. Ten days should see you on your feet. But if you don’t want to get up, maybe three times ten days.”

There had never been, from that fatal hour eight months gone down to this, the inclination to confess. He had often read about it, and once he had incorporated it in a story, that invisible force which sent men to prison and to the gallows, when a tongue controlled would have meant liberty indefinite. As for himself, there had never been a

touch of it. It was less will than education. Even in his fevered hours, so the girl had said, his tongue had not betrayed him. Perhaps that sealed letter was a form of confession, and thus relieved him on that score. And yet that could not be: it was a confession only in the event of his death. Living, he knew that he would never send that letter.

His conscience, however, was entirely another affair. He could neither stifle nor deaden that. It was always jabbing him with white-hot barbs, waking or sleeping. But it never said: "Tell someone! Tell someone!" Was he something of a moral pervert, then? Was it what he had lost—the familiar world—rather than what he had done?

He stared dully at the footrail. For the present the desire to fly was gone. No doubt that was due to his helplessness. When he was up and about, the idea of flight would return. But how far could he fly on a few hundred? True, he might find a job somewhere; but every footstep from behind...!

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“Who is she? Where does she come from?”

“You mean Miss Enschede?”

“Yes. That dress she has on—my mother might have worn it.”

He was beginning to notice things, then? The doctor was pleased. The boy was coming around.

“Miss Enschede was born on an island in the South Seas. She is setting out for Hartford, Connecticut. The dress was her mother’s, and she was wearing it to save a little extra money.”

The doctor had entered the room fully determined to tell the patient the major part of Ruth’s story, to inspire him with proper respect and gratitude. Instead, he could not get beyond these minor details—why she wore the dress, whence she had come, and whither she was bound. The idea of this sudden reluctance was elusive; the fact was evident but not the reason for it.

“How would you like a job on a copra plantation?” he asked, irrelevantly to the thoughts crowding one another in his mind. “Out of the beaten track, with a real man for an employer? How would that strike you?”

Interest shot into Spurlock’s eyes; it spread to his wan face. Out of the beaten track! He must not appear too eager. “I’ll need a job when I quit this bed. I’m not particular what or where.”

“That kind of talk makes you sound like a white man. Of course, I can’t promise you the job definitely. But I’ve an old friend on the way here, and he knows the game down there. If he hasn’t a job for you, he’ll know someone who has. Managers and accountants are always shifting about, so he tells me. It’s mighty lonesome down there for a man bred to cities.”

“Find me the job. I don’t care how lonesome it is.”

Out of the beaten track! thought Spurlock. A forgotten island beyond the ship lanes, where that grim Hand would falter and move blindly in its search for him! From what he had read, there wouldn’t be much to do; and in the idle hours he could write.

“Thanks,” he said, holding out a thin white hand. “I’ll be very glad to take that kind of a job, if you can find it.”

“Well, that’s fine. Got you interested in something, then? Would you like a peg?”

“No. I hated the stuff. There was a pleasant numbness in the bottle; that’s why I went to it.”

“Thought so. But I had to know for sure. Down there, whisky raises the very devil with white men. Don’t build your hopes too high; but I will do what I can. While there’s life there’s hope. Buck up.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“Understand what?”

“You or this girl. There are, then, in this sorry world, people who can be disinterestedly kind!”

The doctor laughed, gave Spurlock’s shoulder a pat, and left the room. Outside the door he turned and stared at the panels. Why hadn’t he gone on with the girl’s story? What instinct had stuffed it back into his throat? Why the inexplicable impulse to hurry this rather pathetic derelict on his way?

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CHAPTER XV

Previous to his illness, Spurlock's mind had been tortured by an appalling worry, so that now, in the process of convalescence, it might be compared to a pool which had been violently stirred: there were indications of subsidence, but there were still strange forms swirling on the surface—whims and fancies which in normal times would never have risen above sub-consciousness.

Little by little the pool cleared, the whims vanished: so that both Ruth and the doctor, by the middle of the third week, began to accept Spurlock's actions as normal, whereas there was still a mote or two which declined to settle, still a kink in the gray matter that refused to straighten out.

Spurlock began to watch for Ruth's coming in the morning; first, with negligent interest, then with positive eagerness. His literary instincts were reviving. Ruth was something to study for future copy; she was almost unbelievable. She was not a reversion to type, which intimates the primordial; she suggested rather the incarnation of some goddess of the South Seas. He was not able to recognize, as the doctor did, that she was only a natural woman.

His attitude toward her was purely intellectual, free of any sentimentality, utterly selfish. Ruth was not a woman; she was a phenomenon. So, adroitly and patiently, he pulled Ruth apart; that is, he plucked forth a little secret here, another there, until he had quite a substantial array. What he did not know was this: Ruth surrendered these little secrets because the doctor had warned her that the patient must be amused and interested.

From time to time, however, he was baffled. The real tragedy—which he sensed and toward which he was always reaching—eluded all his verbal skill. It was not a cambric curtain Ruth had drawn across that part of her life: it was of iron. Ruth could tell the doctor; she could bare many of her innermost thoughts to that kindly man; but there was an inexplicable reserve before this young man whom she still endued with the melancholy charm of Sydney Carton. It was not due to shyness: it was the inherent instinct of the Woman, a protective fear that she must retain some elements of mystery in order to hold the interest of the male.

When she told him that the natives called her The Dawn Pearl, his delight was unbounded. He addressed her by that title, and something in the tone disturbed her. A sophisticated woman would have translated the tone as a caress. And yet to Spurlock it was only the title of a story he would some day write. He was caressing an idea.

The point is, Spurlock was coming along: queerly, by his own imagination. The true creative mind is always returning to battle; defeats are only temporary set-backs.

Spurlock knew that somewhere along the way he would write a story worth while. Already he was dramatizing Ruth, involving her, now in some pearl thieving adventure, now in some impossible tale of a white goddess. But somehow he could not bring any of these affairs to an orderly end. Presently he became filled with astonishment over the singular fact that Ruth was eluding him in fancy as well as in reality.

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One morning he caught her hand suddenly and kissed it. Men had tried that before, but never until now had they been quick enough. The touch of his lips neither thrilled nor alarmed her, because the eyes that looked into hers were clean. Spurlock knew exactly what he was doing, however: speculative mischief, to see how she would act.

“I haven’t offended you?”—not contritely but curiously.

“No”—as if her thoughts were elsewhere.

Something in her lack of embarrassment irritated him. “Has no man ever kissed you?”

“No.” Which was literally the truth.

He accepted this confession conditionally: that no young man had kissed her. There was nothing of the phenomenon in this. But his astonishment would have been great indeed had he known that not even her father had ever caressed her, either with lips or with hands.

Ruth had lived in a world without caresses. The significance of the kiss was still obscure to her, though she had frequently encountered the word and act in the Old and New Testaments and latterly in novels. Men had tried to kiss her—unshaven derelicts, some of them terrible—but she had always managed to escape. What had urged her to wrench loose and fly was the guarding instinct of the good woman. Something namelessly abhorrent in the eyes of those men...!

She knew what arms were for—to fold and embrace and to hold one tightly; but why men wished to kiss women was still a profound mystery. No matter how often she came across this phase in love stories, there was never anything explanatory: as if all human beings perfectly understood. It would not have been for her an anomaly to read a love story in which there were no kisses.

This salute of his—actually the first she could remember—while it did not disturb her, began to lead her thoughts into new channels of speculation. The more her thoughts dwelt upon the subject, the more convinced she was that she could not go to any one for help; she would have to solve the riddle by her own efforts, by some future experience.

“The Dawn Pearl,” he said.

“The natives have foolish ways of saying things.”

“On the contrary, if that is a specimen, they must be poets. Tell me about your island. I have never seen a lagoon.”

“But you can imagine it. Tell me what you think the island is like.”

He did not pause to consider how she had learned that he had imagination; he comprehended only the direct challenge. To be free of outward distraction, he shut his eyes and concentrated upon the scraps she had given him; and shortly, with his eyes still closed, he began to describe Ruth's island: the mountain at one end, with the ever-recurring scarves of mist drifting across the lava-scarred face; the jungle at the foot of it; the dazzling border of white sand; the sprawling store of the trader and the rotting wharf, sundrily patched with drift-wood; the native huts on the sandy floor of the palm groves; the scattered sandalwood and ebony; the screaming parakeets in the plantains; the fishing proas; the mission with its white washed walls and barren frontage; the lagoon, fringed with coco palms, now ruffled emerald, now placid sapphire.

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“I think the natives saw you coming out of the lagoon, one dawn. For you say that you swim. Wonderful! The water, dripping from you, must have looked like pearls. Do you know what? You’re some sea goddess and you’re only fooling us.”

He opened his eyes, to behold hers large with wonder.

“And you saw all that in your mind?”

“It wasn’t difficult. You yourself supplied the details. All I had to do was to piece them together.”

“But I never told you how the natives fished.”

“Perhaps I read of it somewhere.”

“Still, you forgot something.”

“What did I forget?”

“The breathless days and the faded, pitiless sky. Nothing to do; nothing for the hands, the mind, the heart. To wait for hours and hours for the night! The sea empty for days! You forgot the monotony, the endless monotony, that bends you and breaks you and crushes you—you forgot that!”

Her voice had steadily risen until it was charged with passionate anger. It was his turn to express astonishment. Fire; she was full of it. Pearls in the dawn light, flashing and burning!

“You don’t like your island?”

“I hate it!... But, there!”—weariness edging in. “I am sorry. I shouldn’t talk like that. I’m a poor nurse.”

“You are the most wonderful human being I ever saw!” And he meant it.

She trembled; but she did not know why. “You mustn’t talk any more; the excitement isn’t good for you.”

Drama. To get behind that impenetrable curtain, to learn why she hated her island. Never had he been so intrigued. Why, there was drama in the very dress she wore! There was drama in the unusual beauty of her, hidden away all these years on a forgotten isle!

“You’ve been lonely, too.”

“You mustn’t talk.”

He ignored the command. “To be lonely! What is physical torture, if someone who loves you is nigh? But to be alone ... as I am!... yes, and as you are! Oh, you haven’t told me, but I can see with half an eye. With nobody who cares ... the both of us!”

He was real in this moment. She was given a glimpse of his soul. She wanted to take him in her arms and hush him, but she sat perfectly still. Then came the shock of the knowledge that soon he would be going upon his way, that there would be no one to depend upon her; and all the old loneliness came smothering down upon her again. She could not analyse what was stirring in her: the thought of losing the doll, the dog, and the cat. There was the world besides, looming darker and larger.

“What would you like most in this world?” he asked. Once more he was the searcher.

“Red apples and snow!” she sent back at him, her face suddenly transfixed by some inner glory.

“Red apples and snow!” he repeated. He returned figuratively to his bed—the bed he had made for himself and in which he must for ever lie. Red apples and snow! How often had these two things entered his thoughts since his wanderings began? Red apples and snow!—and never again to behold them!

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“I am going out for a little while,” she said. She wanted to be alone. “Otherwise you will not get your morning’s sleep.”

He did not reply. His curiosity, his literary instincts, had been submerged by the recurring thought of the fool he had made of himself. He heard the door close; and in a little while he fell into a doze; and there came a dream filled with broken pictures, each one of which the girl dominated. He saw her, dripping with rosy pearls, rise out of the lagoon in the dawn light: he saw her flashing to and fro among the coco palms in the moonshine: he saw her breasting the hurricane, her body as full of grace and beauty as the Winged Victory of the Louvre. The queer phase of the dream was this, she was at no time a woman; she was symbolical of something, and he followed to learn what this something was. There was a lapse of time, an interval of blackness; then he found his hand in hers and she was leading him at a run up the side of the mountain.

His heart beat wildly and he was afraid lest the strain be too much; but the girl shook her head and smiled and pointed to the top of the mountain. All at once they came to the top, the faded blue sky overhead, and whichever way he looked, the horizon, the great rocking circle which hemmed them in. She pointed hither and yon, smiled and shook her head. Then he understood. Nowhere could he see that reaching, menacing Hand. So long as she stood beside him, he was safe. That was what she was trying to make him understand.

He awoke, strangely content. As it happens sometimes, the idea stepped down from the dream into the reality; and he saw it more clearly now than he had seen it in the dream. It filled his thoughts for the rest of the day, and became an obsession. How to hold her, how to keep her at his side; this was the problem with which he struggled.

When she came in after dinner that night, Ruth was no longer an interesting phenomenon, something figuratively to tear apart and investigate: she was talismanic. So long as she stood beside him, the Hand would not prevail.

CHAPTER XVI

Ah cum began to worry. Each morning his inquiry was properly answered: the patient was steadily improving, but none could say when he would be strong enough to proceed upon his journey. The tourist season would soon be at ebb, and it would be late in September before the tide returned. So, then, fifty gold was considerable; it would carry Ah Cum across four comparatively idle months. And because of this hanging gold Ah Cum left many doors open to doubt.

Perhaps the doctor, the manager and the girl were in collusion: perhaps they had heard indirectly of the visit paid by Mr. O’Higgins, the American detective, and were waiting against the hour when they could assist the young man in a sudden dash for liberty.

Why not? Were not his own sentiments inclined in favour of the patient? But fifty gold was fifty gold.

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One morning, as he took his stand on the Hong-Kong packet dock to ambush the possible tourist, he witnessed the arrival of a tubby schooner, dirty gray and blotched as though she had run through fire. Her two sticks were bare and brown, her snugged canvas drab, her brasses dull, her anchor mottled with rust. There was only one clean spot in the picture—the ship's wash (all white) that fluttered on a line stretched between the two masts. The half-nude brown bodies of the crew informed Ah Cum that the schooner had come up from the South Seas. The boiling under her stern, however, told him nothing. He was not a sailor. It would not have interested him in the least to learn that the tub ran on two powers—wind and oil.

Sampans with fish and fruit and vegetables swarmed about, while overhead gulls wheeled and swooped and circled. One of the sampans was hailed, and a rope-ladder was lowered. Shortly a man descended laboriously. He was dressed immaculately in a suit of heavy Shantung silk. His face was half hidden under a freshly pipeclayed *sola topee*—sun-helmet. He turned and shouted some orders to the Kanaka crew, then nodded to the sampan's coolies, who bore upon the sweeps and headed for the Sha-mien.

Ah Cum turned to his own affairs, blissfully ignorant that this tub was, within forty-eight hours, to cost him fifty gold. What had shifted his casual interest was the visible prospect of a party of three who were coming down the packet gang-plank. The trio exhibited that indecisive air with which Ah Cum was tolerably familiar. They were looking for a guide. Forthwith he presented his card.

The Reverend Henry Dolby had come to see China; for that purpose he had, with his wife and daughter, traversed land and sea to the extent of ten thousand miles. Actually, he had come all this distance simply to fulfil a certain clause in his contract with Fate, to be in Canton on this particular day.

Meantime, as the doctor was splitting his breakfast orange, he heard a commotion in his office, two rooms removed: volleys of pidgin English, one voice in protest, the other dominant. This was followed by heavy footsteps, and in another moment the dining-room door was flung open.

The doctor jumped to his feet. "Mac, you old son-of-a-gun!"

"Got a man's breakfast?" McClintock demanded to know.

"Tom! Hey, Tom!" The Chinese cook thrust his head into the dining room. "Those chops, fried potatoes, and buttered toast."

"Aw light!"

The two old friends held each other off at arms' length for inspection; this proving satisfactory, they began to prod and pummel one another affectionately. No hair to fall awry, no powder to displace, no ruffles to crush; men are lucky. Women never throw themselves into each other's arms; they calculate the distance and the damage perfectly.

They sat down, McClintock reaching for a lump of sugar which he began munching.

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“Come up by the packet?”

“No; came up with *The Tigress*.”

“*The Tigress!*” The doctor laughed. “You’d have hit it off better if you’d called her *The Sow*. I’ll bet you haven’t given her a bucket of paint in three years. Oh, I know. You give her a daub here and there where the rust shows. A man as rich as you are ought to have a thousand-ton yacht.”

“Good enough for me. She’s plenty clean below.”

“I’ll bet she still smells to heaven with sour coconut. Bring your liveralong?”

“I sometimes wonder if I have any—if it isn’t the hole where it was that aches.”

“You look pretty fit.”

“Oh, a shave and a clean suit will do a lot. It’s a pity you wouldn’t give me the prescription instead of the medicine, so I could have it filled nearer home.”

“I’d never set eyes on you again. You’d be coming up to Hong-Kong, but you’d be cutting out Canton. I’ll bet you’ve been in Hong-Kong these two weeks already, and never a line to me.”

“Didn’t want any lectures spoiling a good time.”

“How long will you be here?”

“To-morrow night. It’s sixteen days down, with *The Tigress*. The South China will be dropping to a dead calm, and I want to use canvas as much as I can. You simply can’t get good oil down there, so I must husband the few drams I carry.”

“What a life!”

“No worse than yours.”

“But I’m a poor man. I’m always shy the price of the ticket home. You’re rich. You could return to civilization and have a good time all the rest of your days.”

“Two weeks in Hong-Kong,” replied McClintock, “is more than enough.”

“But, Lord, man!—don’t you ever get lonesome?”

“Don’t you?”

“I’m too busy.”

“So am I. I am carrying back a hundred new books and forty new records for the piano-player. Whenever I feel particularly gregarious, I take the launch and run over to Copeley’s and play poker for a couple of days. Lonesomeness isn’t my worry. I can’t keep a good man beyond three pay-days. They want some fun, and there isn’t any. No other white people within twenty miles. I’ve combed Hong-Kong. They all balk because there aren’t any petticoats. I won’t have a beachcomber on the island. The job is easy. The big pay strikes them; but when they find there’s no place to spend it, good-bye!”

Tom the cook came in with the chops and the potatoes—the doctor’s dinner—and McClintock fell to with a gusto which suggested that there was still some liver under his ribs. The doctor smoked his pipe thoughtfully.

“Mac, did you ever run across a missioner by the name of Enschede?”

“Enschede?” McClintock stared at the ceiling. “Sounds as if I had heard it, but I can’t place it this minute. Certainly I never met him. Why?”

“I was just wondering. You say you need a man. Just how particular are you? Will he have to bring recommendations?”

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“He will not. His face will be all I need. Have you got someone in mind for me?”

“Finish your breakfast and I’ll tell you the story.” Ten minutes later, the doctor, having marshalled all his facts chronologically, began his tale. He made it brief. “Of course, I haven’t the least evidence that the boy has done anything wrong; it’s what I’d call a hunch; piecing this and that together.”

“Are you friendly toward him?” asked McClintock, passing a fine cigar across the table.

“Yes. The boy doesn’t know it, but I dug into his trunk for something to identify him and stumbled upon some manuscripts. Pretty good stuff, some of it. The subject matter was generally worthless, but the handling was well done. You’re always complaining that you can’t keep anybody more than three months. If my conjectures are right, this boy would stay there indefinitely.”

“I don’t know,” said McClintock.

“But you said you weren’t particular. Moreover, he’s a Yale University man, and he’d be good company.”

“What’s he know about copra and native talk?”

“Nothing, probably; but I’ll wager he’ll pick it all up fast enough.”

“A fugitive.”

“But that’s the point—I don’t know. But supposing he is? Supposing he made but one misstep? Your island would be a haven of security. I know something about men.”

“I agree to that. But it strikes me there’s a nigger in the woodpile somewhere, as you Yankees say. Why are you so anxious?”

“Oh, if you can’t see your way....”

“I’ll have a look-see before I make any decision. It’s your eagerness that bothers me. You seem to want this chap out of Canton.”

The doctor hesitated, puffing his tobacco hastily. “There’s a young woman.”

“I remember now!” interrupted McClintock. “This Enschede—the missioner. One of his converted Kanakas dropped in one day. He called Enschede the Bellower. Seems Enschede’s daughter ran away and left him, and he’s combing the islands in search of her. He’s a hundred miles sou’-east of me.”

“Well, this young lady I was about to describe,” said the doctor, “is Enschede’s daughter.”

McClintock whistled. “Oho!” he said. “So she got away as far as this, eh? But where does she come in?”

The doctor recounted that side of the tale. “And so I want the boy out of the way,” he concluded. “She in intensely impressionable and romantic, and probably she is giving the chap qualities he doesn’t possess. All the talk in the world would not describe Ruth. You have to see her to understand.”

“And what are you going to do with her, supposing I’m fool enough to take this boy with me?”

“Send her to my people, in case she cannot find her aunt.”

“I see. Afraid there’ll be a love-affair. Well, I’ll have a look-see at this young De Maupassant. I know faces. Down in my part of the world it’s all a man has to go by. But if he’s in bed, how the devil is he going with me, supposing I decide to hire him? The mudhook comes up to-morrow night.”

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“I can get him aboard all right. A sea voyage under sail will be the making of him.”

“Let’s toddle over to the Victoria at once. I’ll do anything in reason for you, old top; but no pig in a poke. Enschede’s daughter. Things happen out this way. That’s a queer yarn.”

“It’s a queer girl.”

“With a face as square and flat as a bottle of gin. I know the Dutch.” He sent the doctor a sly glance.

“She’s the most beautiful creature you ever set eyes on,” said the doctor, warmly. “That’s the whole difficulty. I want her to get forward, to set her among people who’ll understand what to do with her.”

“Ship her back to her father”—sagely.

“No. I tell you, that girl would jump into the sea, rather. Something happened down there, and probably I’ll never know what. Every time you mention the father, she turns into marble. No; she’d never go back. Mac, she’s the honestest human being I ever saw or heard of; and at the same time she is velvet over steel. And yet, she would be easy prey in her present state of mind to any plausible, attractive scoundrel. That’s why I’m so anxious to get her to a haven.”

“Come along, then. You’ve got me interested and curious. If you were ten years younger, you’d have me wondering.”

The doctor did not reply to this rather ambiguous statement, but pushed back his chair and signed to McClintock to follow. They found Ruth reading to Spurlock, whose shoulders and head were propped by pillows.

McClintock did not exaggerate his ability to read faces. It was his particular hobby, and the leisure he had to apply to it had given him a remarkable appraising eye. Within ten minutes he had read much more than had greeted his eye. A wave of pity went over him—pity for the patient, the girl, and his friend. The poor old imbecile! Why, this child was a firebrand, a wrecker, if ever he had seen one; and the worst kind because she was unconscious of her gifts.

As for the patient, his decision was immediate. Here was no crooked soul; a little weak perhaps, impulsive beyond common, but fundamentally honest. Given time and the right environment, and he would outgrow these defects. Confidence in himself would strengthen him. If the boy had done anything wrong back there in the States, his would be the brand of conscience to pay him out in full. With a little more meat on him, he would be handsome.

“My friend here,” said McClintock, “tells me you are looking for a job.”

“Yes.”

“Well, I’ve a job open; but I don’t want you to get the wrong idea of it. In the first place, it will be damnably dull. You won’t often see white folks. There will be long stretches of idleness, heat, and enervation; and always the odour of drying coconut. A good deal of the food will be in tins. You’ll live to hate chicken; and the man in you will rise up and demand strong drink. But nobody drinks on my island unless I offer it, which is seldom. If there is any drinking, I’ll do it.”

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Spurlock smiled at the doctor.

“He’ll not trouble you on the liquor side, Mac.”

[Illustration: *Distinctive Pictures Corporation. The Ragged Edge.* A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY.]

“So much the better. You will have a bungalow to yourself,” continued McClintock, “and your morning meal will be your own affair. But luncheon and dinners you will sit at my table. I’m a stickler about clothes and clean chins. How you dress when you’re loafing will be no concern of mine; but fresh twill or Shantung, when you dine with me, collar and tie. If you like books and music, we’ll get along.”

“Then you are taking me on?” Spurlock’s eyes grew soft like those of a dog that, expecting the whip, saw only the kindly hand.

“I am going to give you a try.”

“When will you want me?”—with pitiful eagerness. “How shall I get to you?”

“My yacht is in the river. The doctor here says he can get you aboard to-morrow night. But understand me thoroughly: I am offering you this job because my friend wants to help you. I don’t know anything about you. I am gambling on his intuition.” McClintock preferred to put it thus.

“To-morrow night!” said Spurlock, in a wondering whisper. Out of the beaten track, far from the trails of men! He relaxed.

The doctor reached over and laid his hand upon Spurlock’s heart. “Thumping; but that’s only excitement. You’ll do.”

Then he looked at Ruth. Her face expressed nothing. That was one of the mysterious qualities of this child of the lagoon: she had always at instant service that Oriental mask of impenetrable calm that no Occidental trick could dislodge. He could not tell by the look of her whether she was glad or sorry that presently she would be free.

“I have good news for you. If you do not find your aunt, my people will take you under wing until you can stand on your own.”

“That is very kind of you,” she acknowledged. The lips of the mask twisted upward into a smile.

The doctor missed the expression of terror and dismay that flitted across Spurlock’s face.

Once they were below, McClintock turned upon the doctor. “I can readily see,” he said, “why you’ll always be as poor as a church mouse.”

“What?” said the doctor, whose thoughts were in something of a turmoil. “What’s that?”

“The old human cry of something for nothing; but with you it is in reverse. You are always doing something for nothing, and that is why I love you. If I offered you half of my possessions, you’d doubtless wallop me on the jaw. To be with you is the best moral tonic I know. You tonic my liver and you tonic my soul. It is good sometimes to walk with a man who can look God squarely in the face, as you can.”

“But wasn’t I right? That pair?”

“I’ll take the boy; he’ll be a novelty. Amiable and good-looking. That’s the kind, my friend, that always fall soft. No matter what they do, always someone to bolster them up, to lend them money, and to coddle them.”

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“But, man, this chap hasn’t fallen soft.”

“Ay, but he will. And here’s the proof. You and the girl have made it soft for him, and I’m going to make it soft for him. But what I do is based upon the fact that he is one of those individuals who are conscience-driven. Conscience drove him to this side of the world, to this bed. It drives him to my island, where I can study him to my heart’s content. He believes that he is leaving this conscience behind; and I want to watch his disillusion on this particular point. Oh, don’t worry. I shall always be kind to him; I sha’n’t bait him. Only, he’ll be an interesting specimen for me to observe. But ship that girl east as soon as you can.”

“Why?”

McClintock put a hand on the doctor’s shoulder. “Because she’s a fire-opal, and to the world at large they bring bad luck.”

“Rot! Mac, what do you suppose the natives used to call her? The Dawn Pearl!”

McClintock wagged his Scotch head negatively. He knew what he knew.

* * * * *

Spurlock possessed that extraordinary condition of the mind which is called New England conscience. Buried under various ancestral sixteenths, smothered under modern thought, liberty of action and bewildering variety of flesh-pots, it was still alive to the extent that it needed only his present state to resuscitate it in all its peculiar force. The Protestant Flagellant, who whipped his soul rather than his body, who made self-denial the rack and the boot, who believed that on Sunday it was sacrilegious to smile, blasphemous to laugh! Spurlock had gone back spiritually three hundred years. In the matter of his conscience he was primitive; and for an educated man to become primitive is to become something of a child.

From midnight until morning he was now left alone. He had sufficient strength to wait upon himself. During the previous night he had been restless; and in the lonely dragging hours his thoughts had raced in an endless circle—action without progress. He was reaching wearily for some kind of buffer to his harrying conscience. He thought rationally; that is to say, he thought clearly, as a child thinks clearly. The primitive superstition of his Puritan forbears was his; and before this the buckler of his education disintegrated. The idea of Ruth as a talisman against misfortune—which he now recognized as a sick man’s idea—faded as his appreciation of the absurd reasserted itself. But in its stead—toward morning—there appeared another idea which appealed to him as sublime, appealed to the primitive conscience, to his artistic sense of the drama, to the poet and the novelist in him. He was and always would be dramatizing his emotions; perpetually he would be confounding his actual with his imaginary self.

To surrender himself to the law, to face trial and imprisonment, was out of the question. Let the law put its hand on his shoulder—if it could! But at present he was at liberty, and he purposed to remain in that state. His conscience never told him to go back and take his punishment; it tortured him only in regard to the deed itself. He had tossed an honoured name into the mire; he required no prison bars to accentuate this misery.

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Something, then, to appease the wrath of God; something to blunt this persistent agony. It was not necessary to appease the wrath of human society; it was necessary only to appease that of God for the broken Commandment. To divide the agony into two spheres so that one would mitigate the other. In fine, to marry Ruth (if she would consent) as a punishment for what he had done! To whip his soul so long as he lived, but to let his body go free! To provide for her, to work and dream for her, to be tender and thoughtful and loyal, to shelter and guard her, to become accountable to God for her future.

It was the sing-song girl idea, magnified many diameters. In this hour its colossal selfishness never occurred to him.

So, then, when McClintock offered the coveted haven, Spurlock became afire to dramatize the idea.

“Ruth!”

She had gone to the door, aimlessly, without purpose. All the sombre visions she had been pressing back, fighting out of her thoughts, swarmed over the barrier and crushed her. She did not want to go to the doctor’s people; however kindly that might be, they would be only curious strangers. She would never return to her father; that resolution was final. What she actually wanted was the present state of affairs to continue indefinitely.

That is what terrified her: the consciousness that nothing in her life would be continuous, that she would no sooner form friendships (like the present) than relentless fate would thrust her into a new circle. All the initial confidence in herself was gone; her courage was merely a shell to hide the lack. To have the present lengthen into years! But in a few hours she would be upon her way, far lonelier than she had ever been. As Spurlock called her name, she paused and turned.

“Dawn Pearl!... come here!”

She moved to the side of the bed. “What is it?”

“Can’t you see? Together, down there; you and I!... As my wife! Both of us, never to be lonely again!... Will you marry me, Ruth?”

As many a wiser woman had done, Ruth mistook thrilling eagerness for love. Love and companionship. A fire enveloped her, a fire which was strangely healing, filling her heart with warmth, blotting out the menace of the world. She forgot her vital hatred of the South Seas; she forgot that McClintock’s would not differ a jot from the old island she had for ever left behind her; she forgot all the doctor’s lessons and warnings.

She would marry him. Because of the thought of love and companionship? No. Because here was the haven for which she had been blindly groping: the positive abolition of all her father's rights in her—the right to drag her back. The annihilation of the Terror which fascinated her and troubled her dreams o' nights.

"You want me, then?" she said.

"Oh, yes!—for always!"

He took her hands and pressed them upon his thrumming heart; and in this attitude they remained for some time.

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Something forbade him to draw her toward him and seal the compact with a kiss. Down under the incalculable selfishness of the penitent child there was the man's uneasy recollection of Judas. He could not kiss Ruth.

CHAPTER XVII

After the Ten Commandments have been spoken, conscience becomes less something inherent than something acquired. It is now a point of view, differing widely, as the ignorant man differs from the educated. You and I will agree upon the Ten Commandments; but perhaps we will refuse to accept the other's interpretation of the ramifications. I step on my neighbour's feet, return and apologize because my acquired conscience orders me to do so; whereas you might pass on without caring if your neighbour hopped about on one foot. The inherent conscience keeps most of us away from jail, from court, from the gallows; the acquired conscience helps us to preserve the little amenities of daily life. So then, the acquired is the livelier phase, being driven into action daily; whereas the inherent may lie dormant for months, even years.

To Spurlock, in this hour, his conscience stood over against the Ten Commandments, one of which he had broken. He became primitive, literal in his conception; the ramifications were, for the nonce, fairly relegated to limbo. He could not kiss Ruth because the acquired conscience—struggling on its way to limbo—made the idea repellant. Analysis would come later, when the primitive conscience, satisfied, would cease to dominate his thought and action.

Since morning he had become fanatical; the atoms of common sense no longer functioned in the accustomed groove. And yet he knew clearly and definitely what he purposed to do, what the future would be. This species of madness cannot properly be attributed to his illness, though its accent might be. For a time he would be the grim Protestant Flagellant, pursuing the idea of self-castigation. That he was immolating Ruth on the altar of his conscience never broke in upon his thought for consideration. The fanatic has no such word in his vocabulary.

Ruth had not expected to be kissed; so the omission passed unnoted. For her it was sufficient to know that somebody wanted her, that never again would she be alone, that always this boy with the dreams would be depending upon her.

A strange betrothal!—the primal idea of which was escape! The girl, intent upon abrogating for ever all legal rights of the father in the daughter, of rendering innocuous the thing she had now named the Terror: the boy, seeking self-crucifixion in expiation of his transgression, changing a peccadillo into damnation!

It was easy for Ruth to surrender to the idea, for she believed she was loved; and in gratitude it was already her determination to give this boy her heart's blood, drop by

drop, if he wanted it. To her, marriage would be a buckler against the two evils which pursued her.

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There was nothing on the Tablets of Moses that forebade Spurlock marrying Ruth; there were no previous contracts. And yet, Spurlock was afraid of the doctor; so was Ruth. They agreed that they must marry at once, this morning, before the doctor could suspect what was toward. The doctor would naturally offer a hundred objections; he might seriously interfere; so he must be forestalled.

What marriage really meant (aside from the idea of escape), Ruth had not the least conception, no more than a child. If she had any idea at all, it was something she dimly recalled from her books: something celestially beautiful, with a happy ending. But the clearly definite thing was the ultimate escape. Wherein she differed but little from her young sisters.

That is what marriage is to most young women: the ultimate escape from the family, from the unwritten laws that govern children. Whether they are loved or unloved has no bearing upon this desire to test their wings, to try this new adventure, to take this leap into the dark.

Spurlock possessed a vigorous intellect, critical, disquisitional, creative; and yet he saw nothing remarkable in the girl's readiness to marry him! An obsession is a blind spot.

"We must marry at once! The doctor may put me on the boat and force you to remain behind, otherwise."

"And you want me to find a minister?" she asked, with ready comprehension.

"That's it!"—eagerly. "Bring him back with you. Some of the hotel guests can act as witnesses. Make haste!"

Ruth hurried off to her own room. Before she put on her sun-helmet, she paused before the mirror. Her wedding gown! She wondered if the spirit of the unknown mother looked down upon her.

"All I want is to be happy!" she said aloud, as if she were asking for something of such ordinary value that God would readily accord it to her because there was so little demand for the commodity.

Thrilling, she began to dance, swirled, glided, and dipped. Whenever ecstasy—any kind of ecstasy—filled her heart to bursting, these physical expressions eased the pressure.

Fate has two methods of procedure—the sudden and the long-drawn-out. In some instances she tantalizes the victim for years and mocks him in the end. In others, she acts with the speed and surety of the loosed arrow. In the present instance she did not want any interference; she did not want the doctor's wisdom to edge in between these two young fools and spoil the drama. So she brought upon the stage the Reverend

Henry Dolby, a preacher of means, worldly-wise and kindly, cheery and rotund, who, with his wife and daughter, had arrived at the Victoria that morning. Ruth met him in the hall as he was following his family into the dining room. She recognized the cloth at once, waylaid him, and with that directness of speech particularly hers she explained what she wanted.

“To be sure I will, my child. I will be up with my wife and daughter after lunch.”

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“We’ll be waiting for you. You are very kind.” Ruth turned back toward the stairs.

Later, when the Reverend Henry Dolby entered the Spurlock room, his wife and daughter trailing amusedly behind him, and beheld the strained eagerness on the two young faces, he smiled inwardly and indulgently. Here were the passionate lovers! What their past had been he neither cared nor craved to know. Their future would be glorious; he saw it in their eyes; he saw it in the beauty of their young heads. Of course, at home there would have been questions. Were the parents agreeable? Were they of age? Had the license been procured? But here, in a far country, only the velvet manacles of wedlock were necessary.

So, forthwith, without any preliminaries beyond introductions, he began the ceremony; and shortly Ruth Enschede became Ruth Spurlock, for better or for worse. Spurlock gave his full name and tremblingly inscribed it upon the certificate of marriage.

The customary gold band was missing; but a soft gold Chinese ring Spurlock had picked up in Singapore—the characters representing good luck and prosperity—was slipped over Ruth’s third finger.

“There is no fee,” said Dolby. “I am very happy to be of service to you. And I wish you all the happiness in the world.”

Mrs. Dolby was portly and handsome. There were lines in her face that age had not put there. Guiding this man of hers over the troubled sea of life had engraved these lines. He was the true optimist; and that he should proceed, serenely unconscious of reefs and storms, she accepted the double buffets.

This double buffetting had sharpened her shrewdness and insight. Where her husband saw only two youngsters in the mating mood, she felt that tragedy in some phase lurked in this room—if only in the loneliness of these two, without kith or kin apparently, thousands of miles from home. Not once during the ceremony did the two look at each other, but riveted their gaze upon the lips of the man who was forging the bands: gazed intensively, as if they feared the world might vanish before the last word of the ceremony was spoken.

Spurlock relaxed, suddenly, and sank deeply into his pillows. Ruth felt his hand grow cold as it slipped from hers. She bent down.

“You are all right?”—anxiously.

“Yes ... but dreadfully tired.”

Mrs. Dolby smiled. It was the moment for smiles. She approached Ruth with open arms; and something in the way the child came into that kindly embrace hurt the older woman to the point of tears.

These passers-by who touch us but lightly and are gone, leaving the eternal imprint! So long as she lived, Ruth would always remember that embrace. It was warm, shielding, comforting, and what was more, full of understanding. It was in fact the first embrace of motherhood she had ever known. Even after this woman had gone, it seemed to Ruth that the room was kindlier than it had ever been.

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Inexplicably there flashed into vision the Chinese wedding procession in the narrow, twisted streets of the city, that first day: the gorgeous palanquin, the tom-toms, the weird music, the ribald, jeering mob that trailed along behind. It was surely odd that her thought should pick up that picture and recast it so vividly.

At half after five that afternoon the doctor and his friend McClintock entered the office of the Victoria.

“It’s a great world,” was the manager’s greeting.

“So it is,” the doctor agreed. “But what, may I ask, arouses the thought?”

The doctor was in high good humour. Within forty-eight hours the girl would be on her way east and the boy see-sawing the South China Sea, for ever moving at absolute angles.

“Then you haven’t heard?”

“Of what?”

“Well, well!” cried the manager, delighted at the idea of surprising the doctor. “Miss Enschede and Mr. Spurlock—for that’s his real name—were married at high noon.”

Emptiness; that was the doctor’s initial sensation: his vitals had been whisked out of him and the earth from under his feet. All his interest in Ruth, all his care and solicitude, could now be translated into a single word—love. Wanted her out of the way because he had been afraid of her, afraid of himself! He, at fifty-four! Then into this void poured a flaming anger, a blind and unreasoning anger. He took the first step toward the stairs, and met the restraining hand of McClintock.

“Steady, old top! What are you going to do?”

“The damned scoundrel!”

“I told you that child was opal.”

“She? My God, the pity of it! She knows nothing of life. She no more realizes what she has done than a child of eight. Marriage! ... without the least conception of the physical and moral responsibilities! It’s a crime, Mac!”

“But what can you do?” McClintock turned to the manager. “’It was all perfectly legal?

“My word for it. The Reverend Henry Dolby performed the cermony, and his wife and daughter were witnesses.”

“When you heard what was going on, why didn’t you send for me?”

“I didn’t know it was going on. I heard only after it was all over.”

“If he could stand on two feet, I’d break every bone in his worthless body!”

McClintock said soothingly: “But that wouldn’t nullify the marriage, old boy. I know. Thing’s upset you a bit. Go easy.”

“But, Mac . . . !”

“I understand,” interrupted McClintock. Then, in a whisper: “But there’s no reason why the whole hotel should.”

The doctor relaxed. “I’ve got to see him; but I’ll be reasonable. I’ve got to know why. And what will they do, and where will they go?”

“With me—the both of them. So far as I’m concerned, nothing could please me more. A married man!—the kind I’ve never been able to lure down there! But keep your temper in check. Don’t lay it all to the boy. The girl is in it as deeply as he is. I’ll wait for you down here.”

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When the doctor entered the bedroom and looked into the faces of the culprits, he laughed brokenly. Two children, who had been caught in the jam-closet: ingratiating smiles, back of which lay doubt and fear.

Ruth came to him directly. “You are angry?”

“Very. You don’t realize what you have done.”

“My courage gave out. The thought of going back!—the thought of the unknown out there!—” with a tragic gesture toward the east. “I couldn’t go on!”

“You’ll need something more than courage now. But no more of that. What is done cannot be undone. I want to talk to Mr. Spurlock. Will you leave us for a few minutes?”

“You are not going to be harsh?”

“I wish to talk about the future.”

“Very well.”

She departed reluctantly. The doctor walked over to the bed, folded his arms across his chest and stared down into the unabashed eyes of his patient.

“Do you realize that you are several kinds of a damned scoundrel?” he began. This did not affect Spurlock. “Your name is Spurlock?”

“It is.”

“Why did you use the name of Taber?”

“To keep my real name out of the mess I expected to make of myself over here.”

“That’s frank enough,” the doctor admitted astonishedly. So far the boy’s mind was clear. “But to drag this innocent child into the muck! With her head full of book nonsense—love stories and fairy stories! Have you any idea of the tragedy she is bound to stumble upon some day? I don’t care about you. The world is known to you. I can see that you were somebody, in another day. But this child! ... It’s a damnable business!”

“I shall defend her and protect her with every drop of blood in my body!” replied the Flagellant.

The intensity of the eyes and the defiant tone bewildered the doctor, who found his well-constructed jeremiad without a platform. So he was forced to shift and proceed at another angle, forgetting his promise to McClintock to be temperate.

“When I went through your trunk that first night, I discovered an envelope filled with manuscripts. Later, at the bottom of that envelope I found a letter.”

“To be opened in case of my death,” added Spurlock. From under his pillow he dragged forth the key to the trunk. “Here, take this and get the letter and open and read it. Would you tell her ... now?” his eyes flaming with mockery.

CHAPTER XVIII

The doctor reached for the key and studied it sombrely. The act was mechanical, a bit of sparring for time: his anger was searching about for a new vent. He was a just man, and he did not care to start any thunder which was not based upon fairness. He had no wish to go foraging in Spurlock’s trunk. He had already shown the covering envelope and its instructions to Ruth, and she had ignored or misunderstood the warning. The boy was right. Ruth could not be told now. There would be ultimate misery, but it would be needless cruelty to give her a push toward it. But all these hours, trying to teach the child wariness toward life, and the moment his back was turned, this!

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He was, perhaps, still dazed by the inner revelation—his own interest in Ruth. The haste to send her upon her way now had but one interpretation—the recognition of his own immediate danger, the fear that if this tender association continued, he would end in offering her a calamity quite as impossible as that which had happened—the love of a man who was in all probability older than her father! The hurt was no less intensive because it was so ridiculous.

He would talk to Spurlock, but from the bench; as a judge, not as a chagrined lover. He dropped the key on the counterpane.

“If I could only make you realize what you have done,” he said, lamely.

“I know exactly what I have done,” replied Spurlock. “She is my lawful wife.”

“I should have opened that letter in the beginning,” said the doctor. “But I happen to be an honest man myself. Had you died, I should have fully obeyed the instructions on that envelope. You will make her suffer.”

“For every hurt she has, I shall have two. I did not lay any traps for her. I asked her to marry me, and she consented.”

“Ah, yes; that’s all very well. But when she learns that you are a fugitive from justice....”

“What proof have you that I am?”—was the return bolt.

“A knowledge of the ways of men. I don’t know what you have done; I don’t want to know now. But God will punish you for what you have done this day.”

“As for that, I don’t say. But I shall take care of Ruth, work for her and fight for her.” A prophecy which was to be fulfilled in a singular way. “Given a chance, I can make bread and butter. I’m no mollycoddle. I have only one question to ask you.”

“And what might that be?”

“Will McClintock take us both?”

“You took that chance. There has never been a white woman at McClintock’s.”

He paused, and not without malice. He was human. The pause lengthened, and he had the satisfaction of seeing despair melt the set mockery of Spurlock’s mouth.

“You begin to have doubts, eh? A handful of money between you, and nothing else. There are only a few jobs over here for a man of your type; and even these are more or less hopeless if you haven’t trained mechanical ability.” Then he became merciful. “But McClintock agrees to take you both—because he’s as big a fool as I am. But I give you

this warning, and let it sink in. You will be under the eye of the best friend I have; and if you do not treat that child for what she is—an innocent angel—I promise to hunt you across the wide world and kill you with bare hands."

Spurlock's glance shot up, flaming again. "And on my part, I shall not lift a hand to defend myself."

"I wish I could have foreseen."

"That is to say, you wish you had let me die?"

"That was the thought."

This frankness rather subdued Spurlock. His shoulders relaxed and his gaze wavered. "Perhaps that would have been best."

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“But what, in God’s name, possessed you? You have already wrecked your own life and now you’ve wrecked hers. She doesn’t love you; she hasn’t the least idea what it means beyond what she has read in novels. The world isn’t real yet; she hasn’t comparisons by which to govern her acts. I am a physician first, which gives the man in me a secondary part. You have just passed through rather a severe physical struggle; just as previously to your collapse you had gone through some terrific mental strain. Your mind is still subtly sick. The man in me would like to break every bone in your body, but the physician understands that you don’t actually realize what you have done. But in a little while you will awake; and if there is a spark of manhood in you, you will be horrified at this day’s work.”

Spurlock closed his eyes. Expiation. He felt the first sting of the whip. But there was no feeling of remorse; there was only the sensation of exaltation.

“If you two loved each other,” went on the doctor, “there would be something to stand on—a reason why for this madness. I can fairly understand Ruth; but you...!”

“Have you ever been so lonely that the soul of you cried in anguish? Twenty-four hours a day to think in, alone?... Perhaps I did not want to go mad from loneliness. I will tell you this much, because you have been kind. It is true that I do not love Ruth; but I swear to you, before the God of my fathers, that she shall never know it!”

“I’ll be getting along.” The doctor ran his fingers through his hair, despairingly. “A hell of a muddle! But all the talk in the world can’t undo it. I’ll put you aboard *The Tigress* to-morrow after sundown. But remember my warning, and play the game!”

Spurlock closed his eyes again. The doctor turned quickly and made for the door, which he opened and shut gently because he was assured that Ruth was listening across the hall for any sign of violence. He had nothing more to say either to her or to Spurlock. All the king’s horses and all the king’s men could not undo what was done; nor kill the strange exquisite flower that had grown up in his own lonely heart.

Opals. He wondered if, after all, McClintock wasn’t nearest the truth, that Ruth was one of those unfortunate yet innocent women who make havoc with the hearts of men.

Marriage!—and no woman by to tell the child what it was! The shocks and disillusions she would have to meet unsuspectingly—and bitterly. Unless there was some real metal in the young fool, some hidden strength with which to breast the current, Ruth would become a millstone around his neck and soon he would become to her an object of pity and contempt.

There was once a philanthropist who dressed with shameful shabbiness and carried pearls in his pocket. The picture might easily apply to *The Tigress*: outwardly disreputable, but richly and comfortably appointed below. The flush deck was without

wells. The wheel and the navigating instruments were sternward, under a spread of heavy canvas, a protection against rain and sun. Amidship there was also canvas, and like that over the wheel, drab and dirty.

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The dining saloon was done in mahogany and sandalwood, with eight cabins, four to port and four to starboard. The bed-and table-linen were of the finest texture. From the centre of the ceiling hung a replica of the temple lamp in the Taj Mahal. The odour of coconut prevailed, delicately but abidingly; for, save for the occasioned pleasure junket, *The Tigress* was a copra carrier, shell and fibre.

McClintock's was a plantation of ten thousand palms, yielding him annually about half a million nuts. Natives brought him an equal amount from the neighbouring islands. As the palm bears nuts perennially, there were always coconut-laden proas making the beach. Thus, McClintock carried to Copeley's press about half a million pounds of copra. There was a very substantial profit in the transaction, for he paid the natives in commodities—coloured cotton cloths, pipes and tobacco, guns and ammunition, household utensils, cutlery and glass gewgaws. It was perfectly legitimate. Money was not necessary; indeed, it would have embarrassed all concerned.. A native sold his supply of nuts in exchange for cloth, tobacco and so forth. In the South Seas, money is the eliminated middleman.

Where the islands are grouped, men discard the use of geographical names and simply refer to "McClintock's" or "Copeley's," to the logical dictator of this or that island.

* * * * *

At sundown Spurlock was brought aboard and put into cabin 2, while Ruth was assigned to cabin 4, adjoining. From the Sha-mien to the yacht, Spurlock had uttered no word; though, even in the semi-darkness, no gesture or word of Ruth's escaped him.

Now that she was his, to make or mar, she presented an extraordinary fascination. She had suddenly become as the jewels of the Madonna, as the idol's eye, infinitely beyond his reach, sacred. He could not pull her soul apart now to satisfy that queer absorbing, delving thing which was his literary curiosity; he had put her outside that circle. His lawful wife; but nothing more; beyond that she was only an idea, a trust.

An incredible road he had elected to travel; he granted that it was incredible; and along this road somewhere would be Desire. There were menacing possibilities; the thought of them set him a-tremble. What would happen when confronted by the actual? He was young; she was also young and physically beautiful—his lawful wife. He had put himself before the threshold of damnation; for Ruth was now a vestal in the temple. Such was the condition of his mind that the danger exhilarated rather than depressed him. Here would be the true test of his strength. Upon this island whither he was bound there would be no diversions, breathing spells; the battle would be constant.

All at once it came to him what a fool he was to worry over this phase which was wholly suppositional. He did not love Ruth. They would be partners only in loneliness. He would provide the necessities of life and protect her. He would teach her all he knew of

life so that if the Hand should ever reach his shoulder, she would be able to defend herself. He was always anticipating, stepping into the future, torturing himself with non-existent troubles. These cogitations were interrupted by the entrance of the doctor.

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“Good-bye, young man; and good luck.”

“You are offering your hand to me?”

“Without reservations.” The doctor gave Spurlock’s hand a friendly pressure. “Buck up! While there’s life there’s hope. Play fair with her. You don’t know what you have got; I do. Let her have her own way in all things, for she will always be just.”

Spurlock turned aside his head as he replied: “Words are sometimes useless things. I might utter a million, and still I doubt if I could make you understand.”

“Probably not. The thing is done. The main idea now is of the future. You will have lots of time on your hands. Get out your pad and pencil. Go to it. Ruth will be a gold mine for a man of your peculiar bent.”

“You read those yarns?” Spurlock’s head came about, and there was eagerness in his eyes. “Rot, weren’t they?”

“No. You have the gift of words, but you haven’t started to create yet. Go to it; and the best of luck!”

He went out. This farewell had been particularly distasteful to him. There was still in his heart that fierce anger which demands physical expression; but he had to consider Ruth in all phases. He proceeded to the deck, where Ruth and McClintock were waiting for him by the ladder. He handed Ruth a letter.

“What is this?” she wanted to know.

“A hundred dollars which was left from your husband’s money.”

“Would you be angry if I offered it to you?”

“Very. Don’t worry about me.”

“You are the kindest man I have ever known,” said Ruth, unashamed of her tears. “I have hurt you because I would not trust you. It is useless to talk. I could never make you understand.”

Almost the identical words of the boy. “Will you write,” asked the doctor, “and tell me how you are getting along?”

“Oh, yes!”

“The last advice I can give you is this: excite his imagination; get him started with his writing. Remember, some day you and I are going to have that book.” He patted her

hand. “Good-bye, Mac. Don’t forget to cut out all effervescent water. If you will have your peg, take it with plain water. You’ll be along next spring?”

“If the old tub will float. I’ll watch over these infants, if that’s your worry. Good-bye.”

The doctor went down the side to the waiting sampan, which at once set out for the Sha-mien. Through a blur of tears Ruth followed the rocking light until it vanished. One more passer-by; and always would she remember his patience and tenderness and disinterestedness. She was quite assured that she would never see him again.

“Yon’s a dear man,” said McClintock. His natal burr was always in evidence when he was sentimentally affected. He knocked his pipe on the teak rail. “Took a great fancy to you. Wants me to look out for you a bit. I take it, down where we’re going will be nothing new to you. But I’ve stacks of books and a grand piano-player.”

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“Piano-player? Do you mean someone who plays for you?”

“No, no; one of those mechanical things you play with your feet. Plays Beethoven, Rubenstein and all those chaps. I’m a bit daffy about music.”

“That sounds funny ... to play it with your feet!”

McClintock laughed. “It’s a pump, like an organ.”

“Oh, I see. What a wonderful world it is!” Music. She shuddered.

“Ay. Well, I’ll be getting this tub under way.”

Ruth walked to the companion. It was one of those old sliding trap affairs, narrow and steep of descent. She went down, feeling rather than seeing the way. The door of cabin 2 was open. Someone had thoughtfully wrapped a bit of tissue paper round the electric bulb.

She did not enter the cabin at once, but paused on the threshold and stared at the silent, recumbent figure in the bunk. In the subdued light she could not tell whether he was asleep or awake. Never again to be alone! To fit herself into this man’s life as a hand into a glove; to use all her skill to force him into the position of depending upon her utterly; to be the spark to the divine fire! He should have his book, even if it had to be written with her heart’s blood.

What she did not know, and what she was never to know, was that the divine fire was hers.

“Ruth?” he called.

She entered and approached the bunk. “I thought you were asleep. Is there anything you want?” She laid her hand on his forehead, and found it without fever. She had worried in fear that the excitement would be too much for him.

“Call me Hoddy. That is what my mother used to call me.”

“Hoddy,” she repeated. “I shall like to call you that. But now you must be quiet; there’s been too much excitement. Knock on the partition if you want anything during the might. I awaken easily. Good night!” She pressed his hand and went out.

For a long time he stared at the empty doorway. He heard the panting of the donkey-engine, then the slithering of the anchor chains. Presently he felt motion. He chuckled. The vast ironic humour of it: he was starting on his honeymoon!

CHAPTER XIX

Meanwhile the doctor, upon returning to his office, found Ah Cum in the waiting room. “Why, hello, Ah Cum! What’s the trouble?”

Ah Cum took his hands from his sleeves. “I should like to know where Mr. Spurlock has gone.”

“Did he owe you money?”

“Oh, no!”

“Then why do you wish to know?”

Ah Cum pondered. “I have a client who is very much interested in Mr. Spurlock. He was here shortly after the young man was taken ill.”

“Ah. What was this man?”

“A detective from the States.”

“Why didn’t he arrest Mr. Spurlock then?”

“I imagine that Mr. O’Higgins is rather a kindly man. He couldn’t have taken Mr. Spurlock back to Hong-Kong with him, so he considered it would be needless to give an additional shock. He asked me to watch Mr. Spurlock’s movements and report progress. He admitted that it would bore him to dally here in Canton, with the pleasures of Hong-Kong so close.”

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The doctor caught the irony, and he warmed a little. “I’m afraid I must decline to tell you. Do you know what Spurlock has done?”

“Mr. O’Higgins did not confide in me. But he told me this much, that no matter how far Mr. Spurlock went, it would not be far enough.”

A detective. The doctor paced the room half a dozen times. How easily an evil thought could penetrate a normally decent mind! All he had to do was to disclose Spurlock’s destination, and in a few months Ruth would be free. For it was but logical that she would seek a divorce on the ground that she had unknowingly married a fugitive from justice. McClintock would be on hand to tell her how and where to obtain this freedom. He stopped abruptly before the apparently incurious Chinaman.

“Your detective has been remiss in his duty; let him suffer for it.”

“Personally, I am neutral,” said Ah Cum. “I wish merely to come out of this bargain honourably. It would make the young wife unhappy.”

“Very.”

“There was a yacht in the river?”

“I have nothing to say.”

“By the name of *The Tigress*?”

The doctor smiled, but shook his head. He sent a speculative glance at the immobile yellow face. Was Ah Cum offering him an opportunity to warn Spurlock? But should he warn the boy? Why not let him imagine himself secure? The thunderbolt would be launched soon enough.

“I haven’t a word to say, Ah Cum, not a word.”

“Then I wish you good night.”

Ah Cum went directly to the telegraph office, and his message was devoted particularly to a description of *The Tigress*. Spurlock had been taken aboard that yacht with the Kanaka crew, because *The Tigress* was the only ship marked for departure that night. Ah Cum was not a sailor, but he knew his water-front. One of his chair coolies had witnessed the transportation of Spurlock by stretcher to the sampan in the canal. There were three other ships at anchor; but as two would be making Shanghai and one rounding to Singapore two days hence, it was logically certain that no fugitive would seek haven in one of these.

But whither *The Tigress* was bound or who the owner was lay beyond the reach of Ah Cum's deductions. He did not particularly care. It was enough that Spurlock had been taken aboard *The Tigress*.

He wisely refrained from questioning the manager of the Victoria. He feared to antagonize that distinguished person. The Victoria was Ah Cum's bread and butter.

The telegram dispatched, his obligation cancelled, Ah Cum proceeded homeward, chuckling occasionally. The Yale spirit!

James Boyle O'Higgins was, as the saying goes, somewhat out of luck. Ah Cum's wire reached the Hong-Kong Hotel promptly enough; but O'Higgins was on board a United States cruiser, witnessing a bout between a British sailor and a sergeant in the U.S. Marines. It was a capital diversion; and as usual the Leatherneck bested the Britisher, in seven rounds. O'Higgins returned to town and made a night of it, nothing very wild, nothing very desperate. A modest drinking bout which had its windup in a fan-tan house over in Kowloon, where O'Higgins tussled with varying fortune until five in the morning.

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When he was given the telegram he flew to the Praya, engaged the fast motor-boat he had previously bespoken against the need, and started for the Macao Passage, with the vague hope of speaking *The Tigress*. He hung round those broad waters from noon until three and realized that he had embarked upon a wild-goose chase. Still, his conscience was partly satisfied. He made Hong-Kong at dusk: wet, hungry, and a bit groggy for the want of sleep; but he was in no wise discouraged. The girl was in the game now, and that narrowed the circle.

The following morning found him in the doctor's waiting room, a black cigar turning unlighted in his teeth. When the doctor came in—he had just finished his breakfast—-O'Higgins rose and presented his card. Upon reading the name, the doctor's eyebrows went up.

"I rather fancy, as you Britishers say, that you know the nature of my visit?"

"I'm an American."

"Fine!" said O'Higgins, jovially. "We won't have any trouble understanding each other; same language. There's nothing on the card to indicate it, but I'm a detective."

O'Higgins threw out his chest, gave it a pat, and smiled. This smile warned the doctor not to underestimate the man. O'Higgins was all that the doctor had imagined a detective to be: a bulky policeman in civilian clothes. The blue jowl, the fat-lidded eyes —now merry, now alert, now tungsten hard—the bullet head, the pudgy fingers and the square-toed shoes were all in conformation with the doctor's olden mental picture.

"Yes; I know I look it," said O'Higgins, amiably.

The doctor laughed. But he sobered instantly as he recollected that O'Higgins had found Spurlock once. Journeying blindly half way across the world, this man had found his quarry.

"I never wear false whiskers," went on O'Higgins. "The only disguise I ever put on is a dress-suit, and I look as natural as a pig at a Mahomedan dinner." O'Higgins was disarming the doctor. "Won't you sit down?"

"I beg your pardon! Come into the consultation office"; and the doctor led the way. "What is it you want of me?"

"All you know about this young fellow Spurlock."

"What has he done?"

"He has just naturally peeved his Uncle Sam. Now, you know where he is bound."

“Did Ah Cum advise you?”

“He did pretty well for a Chinaman. But that’s his American education. Now, it won’t do a bit of good to warn Spurlock. He carries with him something that will mark him anywhere—the girl. Say, that girl fooled me at first glance. You see, we guys bump up against so much of the seamy side that we look upon everybody as guilty until proved innocent, which is hind-side-to. The second look told me I was wrong.”

“I’m going to put one question,” interrupted the doctor. “Was there any other woman back there in the States?”

“Nary a female. Oh, they are married fast. What are you going to tell me?”

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“Nothing.” But the doctor softened the refusal by smiling.

“For the sake of the girl. Well, I don’t blame you on that ground. If the boy was legging it alone....”

“I’m a doctor. I took him out of the hands of death. Unless he has killed someone. I sha’n’t utter a word.”

“Killed someone?” O’Higgins laughed. “He wouldn’t hurt a rabbit.”

“You won’t tell me what he has done?”

“If you’ll tell me where he’s heading.”

“You can give me a little of his history, can’t you? Something about his people?”

“Oh, his folks were all right. His father and mother are gone now. Rich folks, once. The boy had all kinds of opportunity; but it’s the old story of father making it too easy. It’s always hard work for a rich man’s son to stand alone. Then you won’t tell me where he’s going?”

“I will tell you six months from now.”

“Prolonging the misery. Unless he deserts the girl, he won’t be so hard to find as formerly. You see, it’s like this. The boss says to me: ’Higg, here’s a guy we want back. He’s down in Patagonia somewhere.’ So I go to Patagonia. I know South America and Canada like the lines in my hand. This is my first venture over here. The point is, I know all the tricks in finding a man. Sure, I lose one occasionally—if he stays in New York. But if he starts a long jog, his name is Dennis. You may not know it, but it’s easier to find a guy that’s gone far than it is when he lays dogo in little old New York.”

“You had Spurlock once.”

O’Higgins grinned. “Women are always balling up and muddling clean cases. If this girl hadn’t busted into the game, Spurlock would still be at the hotel.”

The doctor was forced to admit the truth of this. Ruth out of the picture, he wouldn’t have concerned himself so eagerly in regard to Spurlock’s departure.

“I’m sorry, Mr. O’Higgins, but I decline to give you the least information.”

The detective ruefully inspected the scarlet band on his perfecto. “And I’ll bet a doughnut that boy in his soul is crazy to have it over with. Well-born, well-educated; those are the lads that pay in full.”

“You’re a philosopher, too. I’ll tell you something. One of the reasons why I decline to talk is this: that boy’s punishment will be enough.”

“That’s not my game. They order me to get my man, and I get him. There ends my duty. What they do with him afterward is off my ticket, no concern of James Boyle; they can lock him up or let him go. Say, how about this Ah Cum: is he honest?”

“As the day is long.”

“Didn’t know but what I’d been out-bid. I offered him a hundred to watch Spurlock. Fifty in advance. This morning I met him at the dock, and he wouldn’t take the other fifty. A queer nut. Imagine any one on this side refusing fifty bucks! Well, I’ll be toddling along. Don’t feel fussed upon my account. I get your side all right. H’m!”

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Over the desk, on the wall, was a map of the South Pacific archipelagoes, embossed by a number of little circles drawn in red ink. O'Higgins eyed it thoughtfully.

"That's your hunting ground," said the doctor.

"It's a whale of a place. Ten thousand islands, and each one good for a night's rest. Why, that boy could hide for thirty years—without the girl. She's my meal-ticket. What are those little red circles?" O'Higgins asked, rising and inspecting the map. A film of dust lay upon it; the ink marks were ancient. For a moment O'Higgins had hoped that the ink applications would be recent. "Been to those places?"

"No. Years ago I marked out an intinerary for myself; but the trip never materialized. Too busy."

"That's the way it goes. Well, I'll take myself off. But if I were you, I shouldn't warn Spurlock. Let him have his honeymoon. So long."

For a long time after O'Higgins had gone the doctor rocked in his swivel chair, his glance directed at the map. In all his life he had never realized a dream; but the thought had never before hurt him. The Dawn Pearl. It did not seem quite fair. He had plugged along, if not happy, at least with sound philosophy. And then this girl had to sweep into and out of his life! He recalled McClintock's comment about Spurlock being the kind that fell soft. Even this man-hunting machine was willing to grant the boy his honeymoon.

Meantime, O'Higgins wended his way to the Victoria, mulling over this and that phase, all matters little and big that bore upon the chase. Mac's. In one of the little red circles the doctor had traced that abbreviation. That could signify nothing except that the doctor had a friend down there somewhere, on an island in one of those archipelagoes. But the sheer immensity of the tract! James Boyle was certainly up against it, hard. One chance in a thousand, and that would be the girl. She wouldn't be able to pass by anywhere without folks turning their heads.

Of course he hadn't played the game wisely. But what the deuce! He was human; he was a machine only when on the hunt. He had found Spurlock. In his condition the boy apparently had been as safe as in the lock-up. Why shouldn't James Boyle pinch out a little fun while waiting? How was he to anticipate the girl and the sea-tramp called *The Tigress*? Something that wasn't in the play at all but had walked out of the scenery like the historical black cat?

"I'll have to punish a lot of tobacco to get the kinks out of this. Sure Mike!"

At the hotel he wrote a long letter to his chief, explaining every detail of the fizzle. Later he dispatched a cable announcing the escape and the sending of the letter. When he returned to Hong-Kong, there was a reply to his cable:

“Hang on. Find that boy.”

Some order. South America was big; but ten thousand islands, scattered all over the biggest ocean on the map! Nearly all of them clear of the ship lanes and beaten tracks! The best thing he could do would be to call up the Quai d’Orsay and turn over the job to Lecocq. Only a book detective could dope this out.

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What he needed most in this hour was a bottle of American rye-whisky and a friendly American bar-keep to talk to. He regretted now that in his idle hours he hadn't hunted up one against the rainy day. The barmaids had too strongly appealed to his sense of novelty. So he marched into the street, primarily bent upon making the favourable discovery. If there was a Yankee bar-keep in Hong-Kong, James Boyle would soon locate him. No blowzy barmaids for him to-day: an American bar-keep to whom he could tell his troubles and receive the proper meed of sympathy.

The sunshine was brilliant, the air mild. The hotel on the Peak had the aspect of a fairy castle. The streets were full of colour. O'Higgins wandered into this street and that, studying the signs and resenting the Britisher's wariness in using too much tin and paint. This niggardliness compelled him to cross and recross streets.

Suddenly he came to a stop, his mouth agape.

"Solid ivory!" he said aloud; "solid from dome to neck! That's James Boyle in the family group. And if I hadn't been thirsty, that poor boob would have made a sure getaway and left James Boyle high and dry among the moth-balls! Oh, the old dome works once every so often. Fancy, as they say hereabouts!"

What had aroused this open-air monologue was a small tin sign in a window. Marine Insurance. Here was a hole as wide as a church-door. What could be simpler than, with a set of inquiries relative to a South Sea tramp registered as *The Tigress*, to make a tour of all the marine insurance companies in Hong-Kong? O'Higgins proceeded to put the idea into action; and by noon he had in his possession a good working history of the owner of *The Tigress* and the exact latitude and longitude of his island.

He cabled to New York: "Probable destination known."

"Make it positive," was the brisk reply.

O'Higgins made it positive; but it required five weeks of broken voyages: with dilapidated hotels, poor food, poor tobacco, and evil-smelling tramps. It took a deal of thought to cast a comprehensive cable, for it had to include where Spurlock was, what he was doing, and the fact that O'Higgins's letter of credit would not now carry him and Spurlock to San Francisco. The reply he received this time put him into a state of continuous bewilderment.

"Good work. Come home alone."

CHAPTER XX

To Spurlock it seemed as if a great iron door had swung in behind him, shutting out the old world. He was safe, out of the beaten track, at last really comparable to the needle

in the haystack. The terrific mental tension of the past few months—that had held his bodily nourishment in a kind of strangulation—became as a dream; and now his vitals responded rapidly to food and air. On the second day out he was helped to a steamer-chair on deck; on the third day, his arm across Ruth's shoulder, he walked from his chair to the foremast and back. The will to live had returned.

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For five days *The Tigress* chugged her way across the burnished South China, grumpily, as if she resented this meddling with her destiny. She had been built for canvas and oil-lamps, and this new thingumajig that kept her nose snoring at eight knots when normally she was able to boil along at ten, and these unblinking things they called lamps (that neither smoked nor smelled), irked and threatened to ruin her temper.

On the sixth day, however, they made the strong southwest trade, and broke out the canvas, stout if dirty; and *The Tigress* answered as a bird released. Taking the wind was her business in life. She creaked, groaned, and rattled; but that was only her way of yawning when she awoke.

The sun-canvas was stowed; and Spurlock's chair was set forward the foremast, where the bulging jib cast a sliding blue shadow over him. Rather a hazardous spot for a convalescent, and McClintock had been doubtful at first; but Spurlock declared that he was a good sailor, which was true. He loved the sea, and could give a good account of himself in any weather. And this was an adventure of which he had dreamed from boyhood: aboard a windjammer on the South Seas.

There were mysterious sounds, all of them musical. There were swift actions, too: a Kanaka crawled out upon the bowsprit to make taut a slack stay, while two others with pulley-blocks swarmed aloft. Occasionally the canvas snapped as the wind veered slightly. The sea was no longer rolling brass; it was bluer than anything he had ever seen. Every so often a wall of water, thin and jade-coloured, would rise up over the port bow, hesitate, and fall smacking amidships. Once the ship faltered, and the tip of this jade wall broke into a million gems and splashed him liberally. Ruth, standing by, heard his true laughter for the first time.

This laughter released something that had been striving for expression—her own natural buoyancy. She became as *The Tigress*, a free thing. She dropped beside the chair, sat cross-legged, and laughed at the futile jade-coloured wall. There was no past, no future, only this exhilarating present. Yesterday!—who cared? To-morrow!—who knew?

"Porpoise," she said, touching his hand.

"Fox-terriers of the sea; friends with every ship that comes along. Funny codgers, aren't they?" he said.

"When you are stronger we'll go up to the cutwater and watch them from there."

"I have . . . from many ships."

A shadow, which was not cast by the jib, fell upon them both. His voice had changed, the joy had gone out of it; and she understood that something from the past had rolled

up to spoil this hour. But she did not know what he knew, that it would always be rolling up, enlivened by suggestion, no matter how trifling.

What had actually beaten him was not to have known if someone had picked up his trail. The acid of this incertitude had disintegrated his nerve; and in Canton had come the smash. But that was all over. Nobody could possibly find him now. The doctor would never betray him. He might spend the rest of his days at McClintock's in perfect security.

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McClintock, coming from below, saw them and went forward. “Well, how goes it?” he asked.

“Thank you, sir,” said Spurlock, holding out his hand.

McClintock, without comment, accepted the hand. He rather liked the “sir”; it signified both gratefulness and the chastened spirit.

“And I want to thank you, too,” supplemented Ruth.

“Tut, tut! Don’t exaggerate. I needed a man the worst kind of way—a man I could keep for at least six months. What do you think of the old tub?”

“She’s wonderful!” cried Ruth. “I love her already. I had no idea she could go so fast.”

“Know anything about ships?”

“This kind. I have seen many of them. Once a sick sailor drew three pictures for me and set down every stay and brace and sail—square-rigger, schooner, and sloop. But this is the first time I ever sailed on any one of the three. And I find I can’t tell one stay from another!”

McClintock laughed. “You can’t go to sea with a book of rules. *The Tigress* is second-hand, built for coast-trade. There used to be an after deckhouse and a shallow well for the wheel; but I changed that. Wanted a clean sweep for elbow-room. Of course I ought to have some lights over the saloon; but by leaving all the cabin doors open in the daytime, there’s plenty of daylight. She’s not for pleasure, but for work. Some day I’m going to paint her; but that will be when I’ve retired.”

Ruth laughed. “The doctor said something about that.”

“I’ll tell you really why I keep her in peeled paint. Natives are queer. I have established a fine trade. She is known everywhere within the radius of five hundred miles. But if I painted her as I’d like to, the natives would instantly distrust me; and I’d have to build up confidence all over again. I did not know you spoke Kanaka,” he broke off.

“So the wheelman told you? I’ve always spoken it, though I can neither read nor write it.”

“I never heard of anybody who could,” declared McClintock. “I have had Kanakas who could read and write in Dutch, and English, though. The Kanaka—which means man—-is a Sandwich Islander, with a Malayan base. He’s the only native I trust in these parts. My boys are all Sandwich Island born. I wouldn’t trust a Malay, not if he were reared in the Vatican.”

Spurlock, who was absorbing this talk thirstily, laughed.

“What’s that?” demanded McClintock.

“The idea of a Malay, born Mahometan, being reared in the Vatican, hit me as funny.”

“It would be funny—just as a trustworthy Malay would be funny. I have a hundred of them—mixed blood—on my island, and they are always rooking me. But none ever puts his foot on this boat. To-morrow we’ll raise our first island. And from then on we’ll see them, port and starboard, to the end of the voyage. I’ve opened the case of books. They’re on the forward lounge in the saloon. Take your pick, Mrs. Spurlock.”

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The shock of hearing this title pronounced was equally distributed between Ruth and her husband; but it aroused two absolutely different emotions. There came to Spurlock the recurrence of the grim resolution of what he had set out to do: that comradeship was all he might ever give this exquisite creature; for she was exquisite, and in a way she dominated this picture of sea and sky and sail. Ruth's emotion was a primitive joy: she was essential in this man's life, and she would always be happy because he would always be needing her.

"You will be wanting your broth, Hoddy," she said. "I'll fetch it."

She made the companion without touching stay or rail, which necessitated a fine sense of balance, for there was a growing vigour to the wind and a corresponding lift to the roll of the sea. The old-fashioned dress, with its series of ruffles and printed flowers, ballooned treacherously, revealing her well-turned leg in silk stockings, as it snapped against her body as a mould.

Silk. In Singapore that had been her only dissipation: a dozen pairs of silk stockings. She did not question or analyze the craving; she took the plunge joyously. It was the first expression of the mother's blood. Woman's love of silk is not set by fashion; it is bred in the bone; and somewhere, somehow, a woman will have her bit of silk.

McClintock watched her interestedly until her golden head vanished below; then, with tolerant pity, he looked down at Spurlock, who had closed his eyes. She would always be waiting upon this boy, he mused. Proper enough now, when he could not help himself, but the habit would be formed; and when he was strong again it would become the normal role, hers to give and his to receive. He wondered if the young fool had any idea of what he had drawn in this tragic lottery called marriage. Probably hadn't. As for that, what man ever had?

"That's a remarkable young woman," he offered, merely to note what effect it would have.

Spurlock looked up. "She's glorious!" He knew that he must hoodwink this keen-eyed Scot, even as he must hoodwink everybody: publicly, the devoted husband; privately, the celibate. He was continually dramatizing the future, anticipating the singular role he had elected to play. He saw it in book-covers, on the stage. "Did you ever see the like of her?"

"No," answered McClintock, gravely. "I wonder how she picked up Kanaka? On her island they don't talk Kanaka lingo."

Her island! How well he knew it, thought Spurlock, for all he lacked the name and whereabouts! Suddenly a new thought arose and buffeted him. How little he knew about Ruth—the background from which she had sprung! He knew that her father was

a missioner, that her mother was dead, that she had been born on this island, and that, at the time of his collapse, she had been on the way to an aunt in the States. But what did he know beyond these facts? Nothing, clearly. Oh, yes; of Ruth herself he knew much; but the more he mulled over what he knew, the deeper grew his chagrin. The real Ruth was as completely hidden as though she stood behind the walls of Agra Fort. But after all, what did it matter whether she had secrets or not? To him she was not a woman but a symbol; and one did not investigate the antecedents of symbols.

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“She tells me there was a Kanaka cook; been in the family as long as she can remember.”

“I see. I deal with the Malay mostly; but twice a year I visit islands occupied by the true blacks, recently cured of their ancient taste for long-pig.”

“What’s that?”

“Think it over,” said McClintock, grimly.

“Good Lord!—cannibals?”

“Aye. Someday I’ll take you down there and have them rig up the coconut dance for you. The Malays have one, too, but it’s a rank imitation, tom-toms and all. But what I want to get at is this. If your wife can coach you a bit in native lingo, it will help all round. I have two Malay clerks in the store; but I’m obliged to have a white man to watch over them, or they’d clean me out. Single pearls—Lord knows where they come from!—are always turning up, some of them of fine lustre; but I never set eyes on them. My boys buy them with beads or bolts of calico of mine. They steal over to Copeley’s at night and dispose of the pearl for cash. That’s how I finally got wind of it. Primarily your job will be to balance the stores against the influx of coconut and keep an eye on these boys. There’ll be busy days and idle. Everything goes—the copra for oil, the fibre of the husk for rope, and the shell for carbon. If you fall upon a good pearl, buy it in barter and pay me out of your salary.”

“Pearls!”

“Sounds romantic, eh? Well, forty years ago the pearl game hereabouts was romantic; but there’s only one real pearl region left—the Persian Gulf. In these waters the shell has about given out. Still, they bob up occasionally. I need a white man, if only to talk to; and it will be a god send to talk to someone of your intelligence. The doctor said you wrote.”

“Trying to.”

“Well, you’ll have lots of time down there.”

Here Ruth returned with the broth; and McClintock strode aft, convinced that he was going to have something far more interesting than books to read.

Spurlock stared at Ruth across the rim of his bowl. He was vaguely uneasy; he knew not what about. Here was the same Ruth who had left him a few minutes since: the same outwardly; and yet...!

On the ninth day Spurlock was up and about; that is, he was strong enough to walk alone, from the companion to his chair, to lean upon the rail when the chair grew irksome, to join Ruth and his employer at lunch and dinner: strong enough to argue about books, music, paintings. He was, in fact, quite eager to go on living.

Ruth drank in these intellectual controversies, storing away facts. What she admired in her man was his resolute defense of his opinions. McClintock could not browbeat him, storm as he might. But whenever the storm grew dangerous, either McClintock or Spurlock broke into saving laughter.

McClintock would bang his fist upon the table. “I wouldn’t give a betel-nut for a man who wouldn’t stick to his guns, if he believed himself in the right. We’ll have some fun down there at my place, Spurlock; but we’ll probably bore your wife to death.”

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“Oh, no!” Ruth protested. “I have so much to learn.”

“Aye,” said McClintock, in a tone so peculiar that it sent Spurlock’s glance to his plate.

“All my life I’ve dreamed of something like this,” he said, divertingly, with a gesture which included the yacht. “These islands that come out of nowhere, like transparent amethyst, that deepen to sapphire, and then become thickly green! And always the white coral sand rimming them—emeralds set in pearls!”

“‘A thing of beauty is a joy forever!’” quoted McClintock. “But I like Bobby Burns best. He’s neighbourly; he has a jingle for every ache and joy I’ve had.”

So Ruth heard about the poets; she became tolerably familiar with the exploits of that engaging ruffian Cellini; she heard of the pathetic deafness of Beethoven; she was thrilled, saddened, exhilarated; and on the evening of the twelfth day she made bold to enter the talk.

“There is something in The Tale of Two Cities that is wonderful,” she said.

“That’s a fine tale,” said Spurlock. “The end is the most beautiful in English literature. ’It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known.’ That has always haunted me.”

“I liked that, too,” she replied; “but it wasn’t that I had in mind. Here it is.” She opened the book which she had brought to the table. “’A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city at night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it!’ ... It kind of terrifies me,” said Ruth, looking up, first at the face of her husband, then at McClintock’s. “No matter how much I tell of myself, I shall always keep something back. No matter how much you tell me, you will always keep something back.”

Neither man spoke. McClintock stared into the bowl of his pipe and Spurlock into his coffee cup. But McClintock’s mind was perceptive, whereas Spurlock’s was only dully confused. The Scot understood that, gently and indirectly, Ruth was asking her husband a question, opening a door if he cared to enter.

So the young fool had not told her! McClintock had suspected as much. Everything in this world changed—except human folly. This girl was strong and vital: how would she take it when she learned that she had cast her lot with a fugitive from justice? For McClintock was certain that Spurlock was a hunted man. Well, well; all he himself could do would be to watch this singular drama unroll.

The night before they made McClintock's Ruth and Spurlock leaned over the rail, their shoulders touching. It might have been the moon, or the phosphorescence of the broken water, or it might have been his abysmal loneliness; but suddenly he caught her face in his hands and kissed her on the mouth.

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“Oh!” she gasped. “I did not know ... that it was ... like that!” She stepped back; but as his hands fell she caught and held them tightly. “Please, Hoddy, always tell me when do I things wrong. I never want you to be ashamed of me. I will do anything and everything I can to become your equal.”

“You will never become that, Ruth. But if God is kind to me, someday I may climb up to where you are. I’d like to be alone now. Would you mind?”

She wanted another kiss, but she did not know how to go about it; so she satisfied the hunger by pressing his hands to her thundering heart. She let them fall and sped to the companion, where she stood for a moment, the moonlight giving her a celestial touch. Then she went below.

Spurlock bent his head to the rail. The twists in his brain had suddenly straightened out; he was normal, wholly himself; and he knew now exactly what he had done.

CHAPTER XXI

McClintock’s island was twelve miles long and eight miles wide, with the shape of an oyster. The coconut plantation covered the west side. From the white beach the palms ran in serried rows quarter of a mile inland, then began a jungle of bamboo, gum-tree, sandalwood, plantain, huge fern, and choking grasses. The south-east end of the island was hillocky, with volcanic subsoil. There was plenty of sweet water.

The settlement was on the middle west coast. The stores, the drying bins, McClintock’s bungalows and the native huts sprawled around an exquisite landlocked lagoon. One could enter and leave by proa, but nothing with a keel could cross the coral gate. The island had evidently grown round this lagoon, approached it gradually from the volcanic upheaval—an island of coral and lava.

There were groves of cultivated guava, orange, lemon, and pomegranate. The oranges were of the Syrian variety, small but filled with scarlet honey. This fruit was McClintock’s particular pride. He had brought the shrubs down from Syria, and, strangely enough, they had prospered.

“Unless you have eaten a Syrian orange,” he was always saying, “you have only a rudimentary idea of what an orange is.”

The lemons had enormously thick skins and were only mildly acidulous—sweet lemons, they were called; and one found them delicious by dipping the slices in sugar.

But there was an abiding serpent in this Eden. McClintock had brought from Penang three mangosteen evergreens; and, wonders of wonders, they had thrived—as trees. But not once in these ten years had they borne blossom or fruit. The soil was identical,

the climate; still, they would not bear the Olympian fruit, with its purple-lined jacket and its snow-white pulp. One might have said that these trees grieved for their native soil; and, grieving, refused to bear.

Of animal life, there was nothing left but monkeys and wild pig, the latter having been domesticated. Of course there were goats. There's an animal! He thrives in all zones, upon all manner of food. He may not be able to eat tin-cans, but he tries to. The island was snake-free.

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There were all varieties of bird-life known in these latitudes, from the bird of paradise down to the tiny scarlet-beaked love-birds. There were always parrots and parrakeets screaming in the fruit groves.

The bungalows and stores were built of heavy bamboo and gum-wood; sprawly, one-storied affairs; for the typhoon was no stranger in these waters. Deep verandas ran around the bungalows, with bamboo drops which were always down in the daytime, fending off the treacherous sunshine. White men never went abroad without helmets. The air might be cool, but half an hour without head-gear was an invitation to sunstroke.

Into this new world, vivid with colour, came Spurlock, receptively. For a few days he was able to relegate his conscience to the background. There was so much to see, so much to do, that he became what he had once been normally, a lovable boy.

McClintock was amused. He began really to like Spurlock, despite the shadow of the boy's past, despite his inexplicable attitude toward this glorious girl. To be sure, he was attentive, respectful; but in his conduct there was none of that shameless *camaraderie* of a man who loved his woman and didn't care a hang if all the world knew it. If the boy did not love the girl, why the devil had he dragged her into this marriage?

Spurlock was a bit shaky bodily, but his brain was functioning clearly; and, it might be added, swiftly—as the brain always acts when confronted by a perplexing riddle. No matter how swiftly he pursued this riddle, he could not bring it to a halt. Why had Ruth married *him*? A penniless outcast, for she must have known he was that. Why had she married him, off-hand, like that? She did not love him, or he knew nothing of love signs. Had she too been flying from something and had accepted this method of escape? But what frying-pan could be equal to this fire?

All this led him back to the original circle. He saw the colossal selfishness of his act; but he could not beg off on the plea of abnormality. He had been ill; no matter about that: he recollected every thought that had led up to it and every act that had consummated the deed.

To make Ruth pay for it! He wanted to get away, into some immense echoless tract where he could give vent to this wild laughter which tore at his vitals. To make Ruth pay for the whole shot! To wash away his sin by crucifying her: that was precisely what he had set about. And God had let him do it! He was—and now he perfectly understood that he was—treading the queerest labyrinth a man had ever entered.

Why had he kissed her? What had led him into that? Neither love nor passion—utter blankness so far as reducing the act to terms. He had kissed his wife on the mouth ... and had been horrified! There was real madness somewhere along this road.

He was unaware that his illness had opened the way to the inherent conscience and that the acquired had been temporarily blanketed, or that there was any ancient fanaticalism in his blood. He saw what he had done only as it related to Ruth. He would have to go on; he would be forced to enact all the obligations he had imposed upon himself.

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His salvation—if there was to be any—lay in her ignorance of life. But she could not live in constant association with him without having these gaps filled. And when she learned that she had been doubly cheated, what then? His thoughts began to fall on her side of the scales, and his own misery grew lighter as he anticipated hers. He was an imaginative young man.

Never again would he repeat that kiss; but at night when they separated, he would touch her forehead with his lips, and sometimes he would hold her hand in his and pat it.

“I’ll have my cot in here,” said Spurlock to Ruth, “where this table is. You never can tell. I’m likely to get up any time in the night to work.”

Together they were making habitable the second bungalow, which was within calling distance of McClintock’s. They had scrubbed and dusted, torn down and hung up until noon.

“Whatever you like, Hoddy,” she agreed, wiping the sweat from her forehead. She was vaguely happy over this arrangement which put her in the wing across the middle hall, alone. “This will be very comfortable.”

“Isn’t that lagoon gorgeous? I wonder if there’ll be sharks?”

“Not in the lagoon. Mr. McClintock says they can’t get in there, or at least they never try it.”

“Lord!—think of having sharks for neighbours? Every morning I’ll take a dip into the lagoon. That’ll tune me up.”

“But don’t ever swim off the main beach without someone with you.”

“I wonder where the deuce I’ll be able to get some writing paper? I’m crazy to get to work again.”

“Probably Mr. McClintock will have some.”

“I sha’n’t want these curtains. You take them. The veranda bamboo will be enough for me.”

He stuffed the printed chintz into her arms and smiled into her eyes. And the infernal thought of that kiss returned—the softness of her lips and the cool smoothness of her cheeks. He turned irresolutely to the table upon which lay the scattered leaves of his old manuscripts.

“I believe I’ll tear them up. So long as they’re about, I’ll always be rewriting them and wasting my time.”

“Let me have them.”

“What for? What do you want of them?”

“Why, they are ... yours. And I don’t want anything of yours destroyed, Hoddy. Those were dreams.”

“All right, then.” He shifted the pages together, rolled and thrust them under her arm. “But don’t ever let me see them again. By George, I forgot! McClintock said there was a typewriter in the office and that I could have it. I’ll dig it up. I’ll be feeling fine in no time. The office is a sight—not one sheet of paper on another; bills and receipts everywhere. I’ll have to put some pep into the game—American pep. It will take a month to clean up. I’ve been hunting for this particular job for a thousand years!”

She smiled a little sadly over this fine enthusiasm; for in her wisdom she had a clear perception where it would eventually end—in the veranda chair. All this—the island and its affairs—was an old story; but her own peculiar distaste had vanished to a point imperceptible, for she was seeing the island through her husband’s eyes, as in the future she would see all things.

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For Ruth was in love, tenderly and beautifully in love; but she did not know how to express it beyond the fetch and carry phase. Her heart ached; and that puzzled her. Love was joy, and joyous she was when alone. But in his presence a wall of diffidence and timidity encompassed her.

The call of youth to youth, and we name it love for want of something better: a glamorous, evanescent thing "like snow upon the desert's dusty face, lighting a little hour or two, was gone." Man is a peculiar animal. No matter what the fire and force of his passion, it falters eventually, and forever after smoulders or goes out. He has nothing to fall back upon, no substitute; but a woman always has the mother love. When the disillusion comes, when the fairy story ends, if she is blessed with children, she doesn't mind. If she has no children, she goes on loving her husband; but he is no longer a man but a child.

A dog appeared unexpectedly upon the threshold. He was yellow and coarse of hair; flea-bitten, too; and even as he smiled at Ruth and wagged his stumpy tail, he was forced to turn savagely upon one of these disturbers who had no sense of the fitness of things.

"Well, well; look who's here!" cried Spurlock.

He started toward the dog with the idea of ejecting him, but Ruth intervened.

"No, please! It is good luck for a dog to enter your house. Let me keep him."

"What? Good Lord, he's alive with fleas! They'll be all over the place."

"Please!"

She dropped the curtains and the manuscripts, knelt and held out her arms. The dog approached timidly, his tail going furiously. He suspected a trap. The few whites he had ever known generally offered to pet him when they really wanted to kick him. But when Ruth's hand fell gently upon his bony head, he knew that no one in this house would ever offer him a kick. So he decided to stay.

"You want him?"

"Please!" said Ruth.

"All right. What'll we call him—Rollo?"—ironically.

"I never had a pet. I never had even a real doll," she added, as she snuggled the flea-bitten head to her heart. "See how glad he is!"

His irony and displeasure subsided. She had never had a pet, never had a real doll. Here was a little corner of the past—a tragic corner. He knew that tragedy was as blind as justice, that it struck the child and the grown-up impartially. He must never refuse her anything which was within his power to grant—anything (he modified) which did not lead to his motives.

“You poor child!—you can have all the dogs on the island, if you want them! Come along to the kitchen, and we’ll give Rollo a tubbing.”

And thus their domesticity at McClintock’s began—with the tubbing of a stray yellow dog. It was an uproarious affair, for Rollo now knew that he had been grieviously betrayed: they were trying to kill him in a new way. Nobody will ever know what the fleas thought.

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The two young fools laughed until they cried. They were drenched with water and suds. Their laughter, together with the agonized yowling of the dog, drew a circle of wondering natives; and at length McClintock himself came over to see what the racket was about. When he saw, his roars could be heard across the lagoon.

“You two will have this island by the ears,” he said, wiping his eyes. “Those boys out there think this is some new religious rite and that you are skinning the dog alive to eat him!”

The shock of this information loosened Spurlock’s grip on the dog, who bolted out of the kitchen and out of the house, maintaining his mile-a-minute gait until he reached the jungle muck, where he proceeded to neutralize the poison with which he had been lathered by rolling in the muck.

But they found him on the veranda when they returned from McClintock’s that evening. He had forgiven everybody. From then on he was Ruth’s dog.

Nothing else so quickly establishes the condition of comradeship as the sharing of a laughable incident. Certain reserves went down on both sides. Spurlock discussed the affairs of the island and Ruth gave him in exchange her adventures with the native girl who was to be their servant.

This getting up at dawn—real dawn—and working until seven was a distinct novelty. From then until four in the afternoon there was nothing to do—the whole island went to sleep. Even the chattering monkeys, parrots, and parrakeets departed the fruit groves for the smelly dark of the jungle. If, around noon, a coconut proa landed, the boys made no effort to unload. They hunted up shady nooks and went to sleep; but promptly at four they would be at the office, ready for barter.

Spurlock had found the typewriter, oiled and cleaned it, and began to practise on it in the night. He would never be able to compose upon it, but it would serve to produce the finished work. Above the work-table was a drop-light—kerosene. The odour of kerosene permeated the bungalow; but Ruth mitigated the nuisance to some extent by burning native punk in brass jars.

He was keen to get to work, but the inspiration would not come. He started a dozen stories, but they all ended in the waste-basket. Then, one night, he glanced up to behold Ruth and Rollo in the doorway. She crooked her finger.

“What is it?”

“The night,” she answered. “Come and see the lagoon in the moonlight.”

He drew down the lamp and blew it out, and followed her into the night, more lovely than he had ever imagined night to be. There was only one sound—the fall of the sea

upon the main beach, and even that said: “Hush! Hush! Hus-s-sh!” Not a leaf stirred, not a shadow moved. The great gray boles of the palms reminded him of some fabulous Grecian temple.

“Let us sit here,” she said, indicating the white sand bordering the lagoon; “and in a minute or two you will see something quite wonderful . . . . There!”

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Out of the dark unruffled sapphire of the lagoon came vertical flashes of burning silver, singly and in groups.

“What in the world is it?” he asked.

“Flying fish. Something is feeding upon them. I thought you might like to see. You might be able to use the picture some day.”

“I don’t know.” He bent his head to his knees. “Something’s wrong. I can’t invent; the thing won’t come.”

“Shall I tell you a real story?”

“Something you have seen?”

“Yes.”

“Tell it. Perhaps what I need is something to bite in.”

So she told him the adventure of the two beachcombers in the typhoon, and how they became regenerated by their magnificent courage.

“That’s tremendous!” he cried. “Lord, if I can only remember to write it exactly as you told it!” He jumped to his feet. “I’ll tackle it to-night!”

“But it’s after ten!”

“What’s that got to do with it? ... The roofs of the native huts scattering in the wind! ... the absolute agony of the twisting palms!.... and those two beggars laughing as they breasted death! Girl, you’ve gone and done it!”

He leaned down and caught her by the hand, and then raced with her to the bungalow.

Five hours later she tiptoed down the hall and paused at the threshold of what they now called his study. There were no doors in the bungalow; instead, there were curtains of strung bead and bamboo, always tinkling mysteriously. His pipe hung dead in his teeth, but the smoke was dense about him. His hand flew across the paper. As soon as he finished a sheet, he tossed it aside and began another. Occasionally he would lean back and stare at the window which gave upon the sea. But she could tell by the dullness of his eyes that he saw only some inner vision.

Unobserved, she knelt and kissed the threshold: for she knew what kisses were now. The curtain tinkled as her head brushed it, but he neither saw nor heard.

CHAPTER XXII

Every morning at dawn it was Spurlock's custom to take a plunge in the lagoon. Ruth took hers in the sea, but was careful never to go beyond her depth because of the sharks. She always managed to get back to the bungalow before he did.

As she came in this morning she saw that the lamp was still burning in the study; so she stopped at the door. Spurlock lay with his head on his arms, asleep. The lamp was spreading soot over everything and the reek of kerosene was stronger than usual. She ran to the lamp and extinguished it. Spurlock slept on. It was still too dark for reading, but she could see well enough to note the number of the last page—fifty-six.

Ruth wore a printed cotton kimono. She tied the obi clumsily about her waist, then gently laid her hand on the bowed head. He did not move. Mischief bubbled up in her. She set her fingers in the hair and tugged, drawing him to a sitting posture and stooping so that her eyes would be on the level with his when he awoke.

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He opened his eyes, protestingly, and beheld the realization of his dream. He had been dreaming of Ruth—an old recurrency of that dream he had had in Canton, of Ruth leading him to the top of the mountain. For a moment he believed this merely a new phase of the dream. He smiled.

“The Dawn Pearl!” he said, making to recline again.

But she was relentless. “Hoddy, wake up!” She jerked his head to and fro until the hair stung.

“What?... Oh!... Well, good Lord!” He wrenched loose his head and stood up, sending the chair clattering to the floor. Rollo barked.

“Go and take your plunge while I attend to breakfast.”

He started to pick up a sheet of manuscript, but she pushed him from the table toward the doorway; and he staggered out of the bungalow, suddenly stretched his arms, and broke into a trot.

Ruth returned to the table. The tropical dawn is swift. She could now see to read; so she stirred the manuscript about until she came upon the first page. “The Beachcombers.”

Romance! The Seven Seas are hers. She roves the blue fields of the North, with the clean North Wind on her lips and her blonde head jewelled with frost—mocking valour and hardihood! Out of the West she comes, riding the great ships and the endless steel ways that encompass the earth, and smoke comes with her and the glare of furnace fires—commerce! From the East she brings strange words upon her tongue and strange raiment upon her shoulders and the perfume of myrrh—antiquity! But oh! when she springs from the South, her rosy feet trailing the lotus, ripe lequats wreathing her head, in one hand the bright torch of danger and in the other the golden apples of love, with her eyes full of sapphires and her mouth full of pearls!

“With her eyes full of sapphires and her mouth full of pearls.” All day long the phrase interpolated her thoughts.

A week later the manuscript was polished and typewritten, ready for the test. Spurlock felt very well pleased with himself. To have written a short story in a week was rather a remarkable feat.

It was at breakfast on this day that he told Ruth he had sent to Batavia for some dresses. They would arrive sometime in June.

“That gown is getting shabby.”

Ruth spread out the ruffled skirt, sundrily torn and soiled. “I haven’t worn anything else in weeks. I haven’t touched the other.”

“Anything like that?”

“Yes; but the colour is lavender.”

“Wear that to-night, then. It fits your style. You are very lovely, Ruth.”

She wanted to dance. The joy that filled her veins with throbbing fire urged her to rise and go swinging and whirling and dipping. She sat perfectly still, however.

“I am glad you think that,” she replied. “Please tell me whenever I am at fault.”

“I wish you did have some faults, Ruth. You’re an angel of goodness.”

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“No, no! I have had wicked thoughts.”

He laughed and pushed back his chair. “So has the butterfly evil thoughts. We’re to be given a treat to-night. McClintock will be tuning up the piano to-day. I say, I’ll take the yarn over and read it to McClintock. That old chap has a remarkable range in reading. But, hang it, I know it’s good!”

“Of course it is!”

In the afternoon he began work on another tale. It was his purpose to complete four or five stories before he sent any away. But to-day he did not get beyond half a dozen desultory start-offs. From McClintock’s came an infernal *tinkle-tinkle, tump-tump*! There was no composing with such a sound hammering upon the ear. But eventually Spurlock laughed. Not so bad. Battle, murder, and sudden death—and an old chap like McClintock tuning his piano in the midst of it. He made a note of the idea and stored it away.

He read “The Beachcombers” to McClintock that night after coffee; and when he had done, the old trader nodded.

“That’s a good story, lad. You’ve caught the colour and the life. But it sounds too real to be imagined. You’ve never seen a typhoon, have you?”

“No.”

“Well, imagination beats me!”

“It’s something Ruth saw. She told me the tale the other night, and I’ve only elaborated it.”

“Ah, I see.” McClintock saw indeed—two things: that the boy had no conceit and that this odd girl would always be giving. “Well, it’s a good story.”

He offered cigars, and Ruth got up. She always left the table when they began to smoke. Spurlock had not coached her on this line of conduct. Somewhere she had read that it was the proper thing to do and that men liked to be alone with their tobacco. She hated to leave; for this hour would be the most interesting. Both Spurlock and McClintock stood by their chairs until she was gone.

“Yes, sir,” said McClintock, as he sat down; “that’s South Sea stuff, that yarn of yours. I like the way you shared it. I have read that authors are very selfish and self-centred.”

“Oh, Ruth couldn’t put it on paper, to be sure; but there was no reason to hide the source.”

“Have you told her?”

“Told her? Told her what?” Spurlock sat straight in his chair.

“You know what I mean,” said the trader, gravely. “In spots you are a thoroughbred; but here’s a black mark on your ticket, lad. My friend the doctor suspected it, and so do I. You are not a tourist seeking adventure. You have all the earmarks of a fugitive from justice.”

Spurlock grew limp in his chair. “If you thought that, why did you give me this job?”—his voice faint and thick.

“The doctor and I agreed to give you a chance—for her sake. Without realizing what she has done, she’s made a dreadful mess of it. A child—as innocent as a child! Nothing about life; bemused by the fairy stories you writers call novels! I don’t know what you have done; I don’t care. But you must tell her.”

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“I can’t! I can’t—not now!”

“Bat!—can’t you see that she’s the kind who would understand and forgive? She loves you.”

The walls appeared to rock; bulging shadows reached out; the candle flames became mocking eyes; and the blood drummed thunderously in Spurlock’s ears. The door to the apocalypse had opened!

“Loves me? . . . Ruth?”

“Why the devil not? Why do you suppose she married you if she didn’t love you? While you read I watched her face. It was in her eyes—the big thing that comes but once. But you! Why the devil did *you* marry *her*? That’s the thing that confounds me.”

“God help me, what a muddle!” The cigar crumbled in Spurlock’s hand.

“All life is a muddle, and we are all muddlers, more or less. It is a matter of degree. Lord, I am sixty. For thirty years I have lived alone; but once upon a time I lived among men. I know life. I sit back now, letting life slip by and musing upon it; and I find my loneliness sweet. I have had my day; and there were women in it. So, when I tell you she loves you, I know. Supposing they find you and take you away?—and she unprepared? Have you thought of that? Why did you marry her?”

“God alone knows!”

“And you don’t love her! What kind of a woman do you want, anyhow?”—with rising anger. He saw the tragedy on the boy’s face; but he was merciless. “Are you a poltroon, after all?”

“That’s it! I ought to have died that night!”

“Or is there a taint of insanity in your family history? Alone and practically penniless like yourself! You weren’t even stirred by gratitude. You just married her. Lad, that fuddles me!”

“Did you bring me down here to crucify me?” cried Spurlock, in passionate rebellion.

“No, lad,” said McClintock, his tone becoming kindly. “Only, what you have done is out of all human calculation. You did not marry her because you loved her; you did not marry because she might have had money; you did not marry her out of gratitude; you did not marry her because you had to. You just married her! But there she is—’with her eyes full of sapphires and her mouth full of pearls’!” McClintock quoted with gentle irony. “What have you got there in your breast—a stone? Is there blood or water in your veins?”

The dam broke, but not with violence. A vast relief filled Spurlock's heart as he decided to tell this man everything which related to Ruth. This island was the one haven he had; he might be forced to remain here for several years—until the Hand had forgotten him. He must win this man's confidence, even at the risk of being called mad. So, in broken, rather breathless phrases, he told his story; and when he had done, he laid his arms upon the table and bent his head to them.

There followed a silence which endured several minutes; or, rather a tableau. The candles—for McClintock never used oil in his dining room—were burning low in the sconces. Occasionally the flames would bend, twist and writhe crazily as the punka-boy bestirred himself.

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McClintock's astonishment merged into a state of mild hypnosis. That any human being could conceive and execute such a thing! A Roundhead, here in these prosaic times!—-and mad as a hatter! Trying the role of St. Anthony, when God Himself had found only one man strong enough for that! McClintock shook his head violently, as if to dismiss this dream he was having. But the objects in his range of vision remained unchanged. Presently he reached out and laid his hand upon Spurlock's motionless shoulders.

"'Tis a cruel thing you've done, lad. Even if you were sick in the mind and did not understand what you were doing, it's a mighty cruel thing you have done. Probably she mistook you; probably she thought you cared. I'm neither an infidel nor an agnostic, so I'll content myself by saying that the hand of God is in this somewhere. 'He's a good fellow, and 'twill all end well'. You have set out to do something which is neither God's way nor man's. What'll you be doing?"

"What can I do?" asked Spurlock, raising his haggard face. "Can't you see? I can't hurt her, if ... if she cares! I can't tell her I'm a madman as well as a thief!... What a fool! What a fool!"

A thief. McClintock's initial revulsion was natural; he was an honest man. But this revulsion was engulfed by the succeeding waves of pity and understanding. One transgression; he was sure of that. The boy was all conscience, and he suffered through this conscience to such lengths that the law would be impotent to add anything. All this muddle to placate his conscience!

"Here—quick!" McClintock thrust a cigar into Spurlock's hand. "Put it in your teeth and light it. I hear her coming."

Spurlock obeyed mechanically. The candle was shaking in his hand as Ruth appeared in the doorway.

"I thought we were going to have some music," she said.

Her husband stared at her over the candle flame. Flesh and blood, vivid, alluring; she was no longer the symbol, therefore she had become, as in the twinkling of an eye, an utter stranger. And this utter stranger ... loved him! He had no reason to doubt McClintock's statement; the Scot had solved the riddle why Ruth Enschede had married Howard Spurlock. All emotions laid hold of him, but none could he stay long enough to analyze it. For a space he rode the whirligig.

"We were talking shop," said McClintock, rising. Observing Spurlock's spell-bound attitude, he clapped the boy on the shoulder. "Come along! We'll start that concert right away."

In the living room Spurlock's glance was constantly drawn toward Ruth; but in fear that she might sense something wrong, he walked over to the piano and struck a few chords.

"You play?" asked McClintock, who was sorting the rolls.

"A little. This is a good piano."

"It ought to be; it cost enough to get it here," said the Scot, ruefully. "Ever play one of these machines?"

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“Yes. I’ve always been more or less music-mad. But machinery will never approach the hand.”

“I know a man.... But I’ll tell you about him some other time. I’m crazy over music, too. I can’t pump out all there is to these compositions. Try something.”

Spurlock gratefully accepted the Grieg *concerto*, gratefully, because it was brilliant and thunderous. *Papillon* would have broken him down; anything tender would have sapped his will; and like as not he would have left the stool and rushed into the night. He played for an hour—Grieg, Chopin, Rubenstein, Liszt, crashing music. The action steadied him; and there was a phase of irony, too, that helped. He had been for months without music of the character he loved—and he dared not play any of it!

McClintock, after the music began, left the piano and sat in a corner just beyond the circle of light cast by the lamp. His interest was divided: while his ears drank in the sounds, his glance constantly roved from Ruth to the performer and back to Ruth. These amazing infants!

Suddenly he came upon the true solution: that the boy hadn’t meant to steal whatever it was he had stolen. A victim of one of those mental typhoons that scatter irretrievably the barriers of instinct and breeding; and he had gone on the rocks all in a moment. Never any doubt of it. That handsome, finely drawn face belonged to a soul with clean ideals. All in a moment. McClintock’s heart went out to Spurlock; he would always be the boy’s friend, even though he had dragged this girl on to the rocks with him.

Love and lavender, he thought, perhaps wistfully. He could remember when women laid away their gowns in lavender—as this girl’s mother had. He would always be her friend, too. That boy—blind as a bat! Why, he hadn’t seen the Woman until to-night!

From the first chord of the Grieg *concerto* to the *finale* of the Chopin *ballade*, Ruth had sat tensely on the edge of her chair. She had dreaded the beginning of this hour. What would happen to her? Would her soul be shaken, twisted, hypnotized?—as it had been those other times? Music—that took out of her the sense of reality, whirled her into the clouds, that gave to her will the directless energy of a chip of wood on stormy waters. But before the Grieg *concerto* was done, she knew that she was free. Free! All the fine ecstasy, without the numbing terror.

Spurlock sat limply, his arms hanging. McClintock, striking a match to relight his cigar, broke the spell. Ruth sighed; Spurlock stood up and drew his hand across his forehead as if awakening from a dream.

“I didn’t know the machine had such stuff in it,” said McClintock. “I imagine I must have a hundred rolls—all the old fellows. It’s a sorry world,” he went on. “Nobody composes any more, nobody paints, nobody writes—I mean, on a par with what we’ve just heard.”

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The clock tinkled ten. Shortly Ruth and Spurlock took the way home. They walked in silence. With a finger crooked in his side-pocket, she measured her step with his, her senses still dizzy from the echo of the magic sounds. At the threshold of the study he bade her good-night; but he did not touch her forehead with his lips.

“I feel like work,” he lied. What he wanted desperately was to be alone.

“But you are tired!”

“I want to go over the story again.”

“Mr. McClintock liked it.”

“He couldn’t help it, Ruth. It’s big, thanks to you.”

“You.... need me a little?”

“Not a little, but a great deal.”

That satisfied something of her undefined hunger. She went to her bedroom, but she did not go to bed. She drew a chair to the window and stared at the splendour of the tropical night. By and by she heard the screen door. Hollo rumbled in his throat.

“Hush!” she said.

Presently she saw Spurlock on the way to the lagoon. He walked with bent head. After quarter of an hour, she followed.

The unexpected twist—his disclosure to McClintock—had given Spurlock but temporary relief. The problem had returned, made gigantic by the possibility of Ruth’s love. The thought allured him, and therein lay the danger. If it were but the question of his reason for marrying her, the solution would have been simple. But he was a thief, a fugitive from justice. On that basis alone, he had no right to give or accept love.

Had he been sick in the mind when he had done this damnable thing? It did not seem possible, for he could recall clearly all he had said and done; there were no blank spaces to give him one straw of excuse.

Ruth loved him. It was perfectly logical. And he could not return this love. He must fight the thought continually, day in and day out. The Dawn Pearl! To be with her constantly, with no diversions to serve as barricades! Damn McClintock for putting this thought in his head—that Ruth loved him!

He flung himself upon the beach, face downward, his outflung hands digging into the sand: which was oddly like his problem—he could not grip it. Torment!

And so Ruth discovered him. She was about to rush to his side, when she saw his clenched hands rise and fall upon the sand repeatedly. Her heart swelled to suffocation. To go to him, to console him! But she stirred not from her hiding place. Instinctively she knew—some human recollection she had inherited—that she must not disturb him in this man-agony. She could not go to him when it was apparent that he needed her beyond all other instances! What had caused this agony did not matter—then. It was enough that she witnessed it and could not go to him.

By and by—as the paroxysm subsided and he became motionless—she stole back to the bungalow to wait. Through her door curtain she could see the light from the study lamp. If, when he returned, he blew out the light, she would go to bed; but if the light burned on for any length of time, she would go silently to the study curtain to learn if his agony was still upon him. She heard him come in; the light burned on.

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She discovered him sitting upon the floor beside his open trunk. He had something across his knees. At first she could not tell what it was; but as her eyes became accustomed to the light, she recognized the old coat.

CHAPTER XXIII

Next morning Ruth did not refer to the episode on the sands of the lagoon. Here again instinct guided her. If he had nothing to tell her, she had nothing to ask. She did not want particularly to know what had caused his agony, what had driven him back to the old coat. He was in trouble and she could not help him; that was the ache in her heart.

At breakfast both of them played their parts skillfully. There was nothing in his manner to suggest the misery of the preceding night. There was nothing on her face to hint of the misery that brimmed her heart this morning. So they fenced with smiles.

He noted that she was fully dressed, that her hair was carefully done, that there was a knotted ribbon around her throat. It now occurred to him that she had always been fully dressed. He did not know—and probably never would unless she told him—that it was very easy (and comfortable for a woman) to fall into slatternly ways in this latitude. So long as she could remember, her father had never permitted her to sit at the table unless she came fully dressed. Later, she understood his reasons; and it had now become habit.

Fascination. It would be difficult to find another human being subjected to so many angles of attack as Spurlock. Ruth loved him. This did not tickle his vanity; on the contrary, it enlivened his terror, which is a phase of fascination. She loved him. That held his thought as the magnet holds the needle, inescapably. The mortal youth in him, then, was fascinated, the thinker, the poet; from all sides Ruth attacked him, innocently. The novel danger of the situation enthralled him. He saw himself retreating from barricade to barricade, Ruth always advancing, perfectly oblivious of the terror she inspired.

While he was stirring his tea, she ran and fetched the comb. She attacked his hair resolutely. He laughed to hide his uneasiness. The touch of her hands was pleasurable.

“The part was crooked,” she explained.

“I don’t believe McClintock would have gone into convulsions at the sight of it. Anyhow, ten minutes after I get to work I’ll be rumpling it.”

“That isn’t the point, Hoddy. You don’t notice the heat; but it is always there, pressing down. You must always shave and part your hair straight. It doesn’t matter that you deal with black people. It isn’t for their sakes, it’s for your own. Mr. McClintock does it;

and he knows why. In the morning and at night he is dressed as he would dress in the big hotels. In the afternoon he probably loafs in his pajamas. You can, too, if you wish..”

“All right, teacher; I’ll shave and comb my hair.” He rose for fear she might touch him again.

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But such is the perversity of the human that frequently thereafter he purposely crooked the part in his hair, to give her the excuse to fetch the comb. Not that he deliberately courted danger; it was rather the searcher, seeking analysis, the why and wherefore of this or that invading emotion.

He was always tenderly courteous; he answered her ordinary questions readily and her extraordinary ones patiently; he always rose when she entered or left the room. This formality irked her: she wanted to play a little, romp. The moment she entered the room and he rose, she felt that she was immediately consigned to the circle of strangers; and it emptied her heart of its joy and filled it with diffidence. There was a wall; she was always encountering it; the one time she was able to break through this wall was when the part in his hair was crooked.

She began to exercise those lures which were bred in her bone—the bones of all women. She required no instructions from books; her wit and beauty were her own. What lends a tragic mockery to all these tender traps of hers was that she was within lawful bounds. This man was her husband in the eyes of both God and man.

But Spurlock was ever on guard, even when she fussed over his hair. His analytical bent saved him many times, though he was not sensitive to this. The fire—if there was any in him—never made headway against this insistant demand to know the significance of these manifold inward agitations.

Thus, more and more Ruth turned to the mongrel dog who bore the name of Rollo unflinchingly—the dog that adored her openly, shamelessly, who now without a whimper took his diurnal tubbing. Upon this grateful animal she lavished that affection which was subtly repelled by its lawful object.

Spurlock was by nature orderly, despite his literary activities. Before the first month was gone, McClintock admitted that the boy was a find. Accounts were now always where he could put his hand on them. The cheating of the boys in the stores ceased. If there were any pearls, none came into the light. Gradually McClintock shifted the burden to Spurlock's shoulders and retired among his books and music rolls.

Twice Spurlock went to Copeley's—twenty miles to the northwest—for ice and mail. It was a port of call, since fortnightly a British mail-boat dropped her mudhook in the bay. All sorts of battered tramps, junks and riff-raff of the seas trailed in and out. Spurlock was tremendously interested in these derelicts, and got a good deal of information regarding them, which he stored away for future use. There were electric and ice plants, and a great store in which one could buy anything from jewsharps to gas-engines. White men and natives dealt conveniently at Copeley's. It saved long voyages and long waits; and the buyers rarely grumbled because the prices were stiff. There were white men with families, a fine mission-house, and a club-house for cards and billiards.

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He was made welcome as McClintock's agent; but he politely declined all the proffered courtesies. Getting back the ice was rather a serious affair. He loaded the launch with a thousand pounds—all she could carry—and started home immediately after sundown; but even then he lost from a hundred to a hundred and fifty pounds before he had the stuff cached in McClintock's bamboo-covered sawdust pit. This ice was used for refrigerator purposes and for McClintock's evening peg.

Ruth with Rollo as her guide explored the island. In the heart of the jungle the dog had his private muck baths. Into one of these he waded and rolled and rolled, despite her commands. At first she thought he was endeavouring to rid himself of the fleas, but after a time she came to understand that the muck had healing qualities and soothed the burning scratches made by his claws. In the presence of the husband of his mistress Rollo was always dignifiedly cheerful, but he never leaped or cavorted as he did when alone with Ruth.

Spurlock was fond of dogs; he was fond of this offspring of many mesalliances; but he never made any attempt to win Rollo, to share him. The dog was, in a sense, a gift of the gods. He filled the role of comrade which Spurlock dared not enact, at least not utterly as he would have liked. Yes—as he would have liked.

For Ruth grew lovelier as the days went on. She was as lovely in the spirit as in the flesh. Her moods were many and always striking. She was never violent when angry: she became as calm and baffling as the sea in doldrums. She never grew angry for anything her husband did: such anger as came to her was directed against the lazy, incompetent servant who was always snooping about in the inner temple—Spurlock's study.

She formed a habit which embarrassed Spurlock greatly, but at first he dared not complain. She would come and sit cross-legged just beyond the bamboo curtain and silently watch him at work. One night she apparently fell asleep. He could not permit her to remain in that position. So, very carefully, he raised her in his arms and carried her to her bed. The moment he was out in the hall, Ruth sat up hugging and rocking her body in delight. This charming episode was repeated three times. Then he sensed the trap.

"Ruth, you must not come and sit on the threshold. I can't concentrate on my work. It doesn't annoy me; it only disturbs me. I can't help looking at you frequently. You don't want me to spoil the story, do you?"

"No. But it's so wonderful to watch you! Whenever you have written something beautiful, your face shows it."

"I know; but ..."

“And sometimes you say out loud: ‘That’s great stuff!’ I never make any sound.”

“But it is the sight of you!”

“All right, Hoddy. I promise not to do it again.” She rose. “Good night.”

He stared at the agitated curtain; and slowly his chin sank until it touched his chest. He had hurt her. But the recollection of the warm pliant body in his arms ...!

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“I am a thief!” he whispered. He had only to recall this fact (which he did in each crisis) to erect a barrier she could not go around or over.

Sometimes it seemed to him that he was an impostor: that Ruth believed him to be one Howard Spurlock, when he was only masquerading as Spurlock. If ever the denouement came—if ever the Hand reached him—Ruth would then understand why he had rebuffed all her tender advances. The law would accord her all her previous rights: she would return to the exact status out of which in his madness he had taken her. She might even forgive him.

He thanked God for this talent of his. He could lose himself for hours at a time. Whatever he wrote he was: he became this or that character, he suffered or prospered equally. He was the beachcomber, or the old sailor with the black pearl (Ruth’s tales), or the wastrel musician McClintock had described to him. There was a fourth story; but he never told either Ruth or McClintock about this. He called it “The Man Who Could Not Go Home.” Himself. He did not write this with lead but with his heart’s blood.

By the middle of July he was in full health. In the old days he had been something of an athlete—a runner, an oarsman, and a crack at tennis. The morning swims in the lagoon had thickened the red corpuscle. For all the enervating heat, he applied himself vigorously to his tasks.

Late in July he finished the fourth story. This time there wasn’t any doubt. He had done it. These were *yarns*! As he was about to slip the manuscripts into the envelope, something caught his eye: by Howard Spurlock. Entranced, he stared at the name. Suddenly he understood what had happened. A wrathful God was watching him. Howard Spurlock. The honey on his tongue turned to ashes. To write under a pseudonym!—to be forced to disown his children! He could not write under his own name, enjoy the fruits of fame should these tales prove successful.

Here was a thundering blow. All his dreams shattered in an instant. What is the supreme idea in the heart and mind of youth? To win fame and fortune: and particularly to enjoy them. Spurlock slumped in his chair, weak and empty. This was the bitterest hour he had ever known. From thoughts of fame to thoughts of mere bread and butter! It seemed to Spurlock that he had tumbled off the edge of Somewhere into the abyss of Nowhere.

At length, when he saw no escape from the inevitable, he took the four title pages from the manuscripts and typed new ones, substituting Taber for Spurlock. A vast indifference settled down upon him. He did not care whether the stories were accepted or not. He was so depressed and disheartened that he did not then believe he would ever write again.

Both Ruth and McClintock came down to the launch to wish him God-speed and good luck. Ruth hugged the envelope and McClintock, with the end of a burnt match, drew a cabalistic sign. Through it all Spurlock maintained a gaiety which deceived them completely. But his treasured dream lay shattered at his feet.

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And yet—such is the buoyancy of youth—within a fortnight he began his first novel, pretending to himself that it was on Ruth's account. To be alone with her, in idleness, was an intolerable thought.

* * * * *

Coconuts grew perpetually. There will often be six growths in a single palm. So proas loaded with nuts were always landing on the beach. *The Tigress* went prowling for nut, too. Once, both Ruth and Spurlock accompanied McClintock far south, to an island of blacks; and Spurlock had his first experience with the coconut dance and the booming of wooden tom-toms.

At first Spurlock tasted coconut in his eggs, in what meat he ate; it permeated everything, taste and smell. For a long time even the strong pipe tobacco (with which McClintock supplied him) possessed a coconut flavour. Then, mysteriously, he no longer smelled or tasted it.

On the day he carried the manuscript to Copeley's he brought back a packet of letters, magazines, and newspapers. McClintock never threw away any advertising matter; in fact, he openly courted pamphlets; and they came from automobile dealers and great mail-order houses, from haberdashers and tailors and manufacturers of hair-tonics, razors, gloves, shoes, open plumbing. In this way (he informed Spurlock) he kept posted on what was going on in the strictly commercial world. "Besides, lad, even an advertisement of a cough-drop is something to read." So there was always plenty of mail.

Among the commercial enticements McClintock found a real letter. In privacy he read and reread it a dozen times, and eventually destroyed it by fire. It was, in his opinion, the most astonishing letter he had ever read. He hated to destroy it; but that was the obligation imposed; and he was an honourable man.

Not since she had discovered it had Ruth touched or opened the mission Bible; but to-night (the same upon which the wonderful manuscripts started on their long and circuitous voyage to America) she was inexplicably drawn to it. In all these weeks she had not once knelt to pray. Why should she? she asked rebelliously. God had never answered any of her prayers. But this time she wanted nothing for herself: she wanted something for Hoddy—success. So, not exactly hopefully but earnestly, she returned to the feet of God. She did not open the Bible but laid it on the edge of the bed, knelt and rested her forehead upon the worn leather cover.

It was not a long prayer. She said it audibly, having learned long since that an audible prayer was a concentrated one. And yet, at the end of this prayer a subconscious thought broke through to consciousness. "And someday let him care for me!"

She sprang up, alarmed. This unexpected interpolation might spoil the efficacy of all that had gone before. She hadn't meant to ask anything for herself. Her stifled misery had betrayed her. She had been fighting down this thought for days: that Hoddy did not care, that he did not love her, that he had mistaken a vagary of the mind for a substance, and now regretted what he had done—married a girl who was not his equal in anything. The agony on the sands now ceased to puzzle her.

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All her tender lures, inherent and acquired, had shattered themselves futilely against the reserve he had set between them. Why had he offered her that kiss on board *The Tigress*? Perhaps that had been his hour of disenchantment. She hadn't measured up; she had been stupid; she hadn't known how to make love.

Loneliness. Here was an appalling fact: all her previous loneliness had been trifling beside that which now encompassed her and would for years to come.

If only sometimes he would grow angry at her, impatient! But his tender courtesy was unfailing; and under this would be the abiding bitterness of having mistaken gratitude for love. Very well. She would meet him upon this ground: he should never be given the slightest hint that she was unhappy.

She still had her letter of credit. She could run away from him, if she wished, as she had run away from her father; she could carry out the original adventure. But the cases were not identical. Her father—man of rock—had never needed her, whereas Hoddy, even if he did not love her, would always be needing her.

Love stories!... A sob rushed into her throat, and to smother it she buried her face in a pillow.

Spurlock, filled with self-mockery, sat in a chair on the west veranda. The chair had extension arms over which a man might comfortably dangle his legs. For awhile he watched the revolving light on Copeley's. Occasionally he relit his pipe. Once he chuckled aloud. Certain phases of irony always caused him to chuckle audibly. Every one of those four stories would be accepted. He knew it absolutely, as if he had the check in his hand. Why? Because Howard Spurlock the author dared not risk the liberty of Howard Spurlock the malefactor; because there were still some dregs in this cup of irony. For what could be more ironical than for Howard Spurlock to see himself grow famous under the name of Taber? The ambrosia of which he had so happily dreamt!—and this gall and wormwood! He stood up and rapped his pipe on the rail.

"All right," he said. "Whatever you say—you, behind those stars there, if you are a God. We Spurlocks take our medicine, standing. Pile it on! But if you can hear the voice of the mote, the speck, don't let her suffer for anything I've done. Be a sport, and pile it all on me!"

He went to bed.

There is something in prayer; not that there may be any noticeable result, any definite answer; but no human being can offer an honest prayer to God without gaining immeasurably in courage, in fortitude, in resignation, and that alone is worth the effort.

On the morrow Spurlock (who was unaware that he had offered a prayer) let down the bars to his reserve. He became really companionable, discussed the new story he had in mind, and asked some questions about colour. Ruth, having decided a course for herself—that of renunciation—and having the strength to keep it, met these advances in precisely the mood they were offered. So these two young philosophers got along very well that day; and the succeeding days.

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She taught him all the lore she had; about bird-life and tree-life and the changing mysteries of the sea. She taught him how to sail a proa, how to hack open a milk-coconut, how to relish bamboo sprouts. Eventually this comradeship (slightly resented by Rollo) reached a point where he could call out from the study: "Hey, Ruth!—come and tell me what you think of this."

Her attitude now entirely sisterly, he ceased to be afraid of her; there was never anything in her eyes (so far as he could see) but friendly interest in all he said or did. And yet, often when alone, he wondered: had McClintock been wrong, or had she ceased to care in that way? The possibility that she no longer cared should have filled him with unalloyed happiness, whereas it depressed him, cut the natural vanity of youth into shreds and tatters. Yesterday this glorious creature had loved him; to-day she was only friendly. No more did she offer her forehead for the good-night kiss. And instead of accepting the situation gratefully, he felt vaguely hurt!

One evening in September a proa rasped in upon the beach. It brought no coconut. There stepped forth a tall brown man. He remained standing by the stem of the proa, his glance roving investigatingly. He wore a battered sun-helmet, a loin-cloth and a pair of dilapidated canvas shoes. At length he proceeded toward McClintock's bungalow, drawn by the lights and the sound of music.

Sure of foot, noiseless, he made the veranda and paused at the side of one of the screened windows. By and by he ventured to peer into this window. He saw three people: a young man at the piano, an elderly man smoking in a corner, and a young woman reclining in a chair, her eyes closed. The watcher's intake of breath was sibilant.

It was she! The Dawn Pearl!

He vaulted the veranda rail, careless now whether or not he was heard, and ran down to the beach. He gave an order, the proa was floated and the sail run up. In a moment the brisk evening breeze caught the lank canvas and bellied it taut. The proa bore away to the northwest out of which it had come.

James Boyle O'Higgins knew little or nothing of the South Seas, but he knew human beings, all colours. His deduction was correct that the beauty of Ruth Enschede could not remain hidden long even on a forgotten isle.

CHAPTER XXIV

Spurlock's novel was a tale of regeneration. For a long time to come that would naturally be the theme of any story he undertook to write. After he was gone in the morning, Ruth would steal into the study and hurriedly read what he had written the

previous night. She never questioned the motives of the characters; she had neither the ability nor the conceit for that; but she could and often did correct his lapses in colour. She never touched the manuscript with pencil, but jotted down her notes on slips of paper and left them where he might easily find them.

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She marvelled at his apparent imperviousness to the heat. He worked afternoons, when everybody else went to sleep; he worked at night under a heat-giving light, with insects buzzing and dropping about, with a blue haze of tobacco smoke that tried to get out and could not. With his arms bare, the neckband of his shirt tucked in, he laboured. Frequently he would take up a box of talc and send a shower down his back, or fill his palms with the powder and rub his face and arms and hands. He kept at it even on those nights when the monsoon began to break with heavy storms and he had to weight down with stones everything on his table. Soot was everywhere, for the lamp would not stay trimmed in the gale. But he wrote on.

As the novel grew Ruth was astonished to see herself enter and dominate it: sometimes as she actually was, with all her dreams reviewed—as if he had caught her talking in her sleep. It frightened her to behold her heart and mind thus laid bare; but the chapter following would reassure her. Here would be a woman perfectly unrecognizable, strong, ruthless but just.

This heroine ruled an island which (in the ’80s) was rich with shell—pearl-shell; and she fought pearl thievers and marauding beachcombers, fought them with weapons and with woman’s guile. No man knew whence she had come nor why. That there would eventually be a lover Ruth knew; and she waited his appearance upon the scene, waited with an impatience which was both personal and literary. If the creator drew a hero anything like himself, she would accept it as a sign that he did care a little.

Ruth did not resent the use of her mind and body in this tale of adventure. She gloried in it: he needed her. When the hero finally did appear, Ruth became filled with gentle self-mockery. He was no Hoddy, but a tremendous man, with hairy arms and bearded face and drink-shattered intellect. Day by day she followed the spiritual and physical contest between this man and woman. One day a pall of blackness encompassed the sick mind of the giant; and when he came to his senses, they properly functioned: and he saw his wife by his bedside!

An astonishing idea entered Ruth’s head one day—when the novel was complete in the rough—an astonishing idea because it had not developed long ago. A thing which had mystified her since childhood, a smouldering wonder why it should be, and until now she had never felt the urge to investigate. She tucked the mission Bible under her arm, and crooking a finger at Rollo, went forth to the west beach where the sou’-west surge piled up muddily, burdened with broken spars, crates, boxes, and weeds. During the wet monsoon the west beach was always littered. Where the stuff came from was always a mystery.

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The Enschede Bible—the one out of which she read—had been strangely mutilated. Sections and pages had been pasted together, and all through both Testaments a word had been blotted out. The open books she knew by heart; aye, they had been ground into her, morning and night. One of her duties, after she had been taught to read, had been to read aloud after breakfast and before going to bed. The same old lines and verses, over and over, until there had come times when shrieking would have relieved her. How she had hated it!... All these mumblings which were never explained, which carried no more sense to her brain than they would have carried to Old Morgan's swearing parrot. Like the parrot, she could memorize the lines, but she could not understand them. Never had her father explained. "Read the first chapter of Job"; beyond that, nothing. Whenever she came upon the obliterated word and paused, her father would say: "Faith. Go on." So, after a time, encountering the blot, she herself would supply the word Faith. But was it Faith? That is what she was this day going to find out.

She closed her eyes more vividly to recall some line which had carried the blot. And so she came upon the word *Love*. Blotted out—Love! With infinite care, through nearly a thousand pages, her father had obliterated the word *Love*. Why? Love was a word of God's, and yet her father had denied it—denied it to the Book, denied it to his own flesh and blood. Why? He could preach the Word and deny Love!—tame the savage heart, succour broken white men!—pray with his face strained with religious fervour! The idea made her dizzy because it was so inexplicable. She could accord her father with one grace: he was not in any manner a hypocrite. Tender with the sick, firm with the strong, fearless, with a body that had the resistance of iron, there was nothing of the hypocrite in him.

She recalled him. A gaunt, powerful man: no feature of his face decided, and yet for all that it had the significance of a countenance hewn out of rock. Never had he corrected her with hand or whip, the ring in his voice had always been sufficient to cower her. But never had the hand touched her with a father's caress; never had he taken her into his arms; never had he kissed her. She had never been "My child" or "My dear"; always her name—Ruth.

Love, obliterated, annihilated; out of his heart and out of his Bible. Why? Here was a curtain indeed. No matter. It was ended. She herself had cut the slender tie that had bound them. Ah, but she could remember; and many things there were that she would never forgive. Sometimes—a lonely forlorn child—she had gone to him and put her arms around his neck. Stonily he had disengaged himself. "I forbid you to do that." She had brought home a puppy one day. He had taken it back. He destroyed her clumsily made dolls whenever he found them.

Once she had asked him: "Are you my father?"

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He had answered: “I am.”

She had no reason to doubt him. Her father, her own father! She remembered now a verse from the Psalms her father had always been quoting; but now she recited it with perfect understanding.

How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?

She came upon the Song of Songs—which had been pasted down in the Enschede Bible—the burning litany of love; and from time to time she intoned some verse of tender lyric beauty. There was one verse that haunted and mocked her.

Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love.

Here was Ruth Enschede—sick of love! Love—something the world would always keep hidden from her, at least human love. All she had found was the love of this dog. She threw her arms around Rollo’s neck and laid her cheek upon the flea-bitten head.

“Oh, Rollo, there are so many things I don’t know! But you love me, don’t you?”

Rollo wagged his stump violently and tried to lick her face. He understood. When she released him he ran down the beach for a stick which he fetched and laid at her feet. But she was staring seaward and did not notice the offering.

* * * * *

October. The skies became brilliant; the dry monsoon was setting in. Then came the great day. It was at lunch when McClintock announced that in the mail-pouch he had found a letter addressed to Howard Taber, care of Donald McClintock and so-forth.

Spurlock grew cold. All that confidence, born of irony, disappeared; and fear laid hold of him. The envelope might contain only a request as to what he wanted done with the manuscripts. In mailing the tales he had not enclosed return postage or the equivalent in money.

“So you’re writing under a nom de plume, eh?” said McClintock, holding out the letter.

“You open it, Ruth. I’m in a funk,” Spurlock confessed.

McClintock laughed as he gave the letter to Ruth. She, having all the confidence in the world, ripped off an end and drew out the contents—a letter and a check. What the editor had to say none of the three cared just then. Spurlock snatched the check out of Ruth’s hands and ran to the window.

“A thousand dollars in British pounds!... A thousand dollars for four short stories!” The tan on Spurlock’s face lightened. He was profoundly stirred. He turned to Ruth and McClintock. “You two ... both of you! But for you I couldn’t have done it. If only you knew what this means to me!”

“We do, lad,” replied McClintock, gravely. The youth of them! And what was he going to do when they left his island? What would Donald McClintock be doing with himself, when youth left the island, never more to return?

Ruth was thrilling with joy. Every drop of blood in her body glowed and expanded. To go to Hoddy, to smother him with kisses and embraces in this hour of triumph! To save herself from committing the act—the thought of which was positive hypnotism—she began the native dance. Spurlock (himself verging upon the hysterical) welcomed the diversion. He seized a tray, squatted on the floor, and imitated the tom-tom. It was a mad half-hour.

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“Well, lad, supposing you read what the editor has to say?” was McClintock’s suggestion, when the frolic was over.

“You read it, Ruth. You’re luck.”

“Aye!” was McClintock’s inaudible affirmative. Luck. The boy would never know just how lucky he was. Ruth read:

> DEAR SIR:
>
> “We are delighted to accept these four stories, particularly ‘The Man Who Could Not Go Home.’ We shall be pleased to see more of your work.

“‘The Man Who Could Not Go Home.’ Why,” said Ruth, “you did not read that to us.”

“Wanted to see if I could turn out one all on my own,” replied Spurlock, looking at McClintock, who nodded slightly. “It was the story of a man, so to speak, who had left his vitals in his native land and wandered strange paths emptily. But never mind that. Come along home, Ruth. I’m burning to get to work.”

After all those former bitter failures, this cup was sweet, even if there was the flavour of irony. At least, he would always be able to take care of Ruth. The Dawn Pearl; how well they had named her! The pearl without price—his and not his!

He took her arm and drew it under his; and together they went down the veranda steps. Ruth’s arm trembled and her step faltered, but he was too far away in thought to be observant. He saw rifts in clouds—sunshine. The future was not so black. All the money he earned—serving McClintock and the muse—could be laid away. Then, in a few years, he and Ruth might fare forth in comfort and security. After five or six years it would not be difficult to hide in Italy or in France. No; the future was not so dark; there was a bit of dawn visible. If this success continued, it would be easy to assume the name of Taber. Ruth could not very well object, since an air of distinction would go with Taber.

Suddenly he felt Ruth swing violently away from him, and he wheeled to learn the cause.

He beheld a tall gaunt man, his brown face corrugated like a winter’s road, grim, stony. His gangling body was clothed in rusty twill trousers and a long black seersucker coat, buttoned to the throat, around which ran a collar which would have marked him the world over as a man of the Word. His hand rested heavily and cruelly upon Ruth’s shoulder.

“So, wanton, I have found you!”

“Wanton! Why, you infernal liar!” cried Spurlock, striking at the arm. But the free arm of the stranger hit him a flail-like blow on the chest and sent him sprawling into the yielding sand. Berserker, Spurlock rose, head down, and charged.

“Hoddy, Hoddy!... No, no! This is my father!” warned Ruth.

Spurlock halted in his tracks. “But what does he mean by calling you a wanton?—you, my wife?”

Enschede’s hand slipped from his daughter’s shoulder. The iron slipped from his face, leaving it blank with astonishment. “Your wife?”

“His lawful wife,” said Ruth, with fine dignity.

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For a moment none of them stirred; then slowly Enschede turned away. To Spurlock's observing eye, Enschede's wrinkles multiplied and the folds in his clothes. The young man's imagination suddenly pictured the man as a rock, loosed from its ancient bed, crumbling as it fell. But why did he turn away?

"Wait!" Ruth called to her father.

The recollection of all her unhappiness, the loveless years, the unending loneliness, the injustice of it, rolled up to her lips in verbal lava. It is not well that a daughter should talk to her father as Ruth talked to hers that day.

The father, granite; the daughter, fire: Spurlock saw the one and heard the other, his amazement indescribable. Never before had he seen a man like Enschede nor heard a voice like Ruth's. But as the mystery which surrounded Ruth fell away that which enveloped her father thickened.

"I used to cry myself to sleep, Hoddy, I was so forlorn and lonely. He heard me; but he never came in to ask what was the matter. For fifteen years!—so long as I can remember! All I wanted was a little love, a caress now and then. But I waited in vain. So I ran away, blindly, knowing nothing of the world outside. Youth! You denied me even that," said Ruth, her glance now flashing to her father. "Spring!—I never knew any. I dared not sing, I dared not laugh, except when you went away. What little happiness I had I was forced to steal. I am glad you found me. I am out of your life forever, never having been in it. Did you break my mother's heart as you tried to break mine? I am no longer accountable to you for anything. Wanton! Had I been one, even God would have forgiven me, understanding. Some day I may forgive you; but not now. No, no! Not now!"

Ruth turned abruptly and walked toward the bungalow, mounted the veranda steps, and vanished within. Without a word, without a sign, Enschede started toward the beach, where his proa waited.

For a time Spurlock did not move. This incredible scene robbed him of the sense of locomotion. But his glance roved, to the door through which Ruth had gone, to Enschede's drooping back. Unexpectedly he found himself speeding toward the father.

"Enschede!" he called.

Enschede halted. "Well?" he said, as Spurlock reached his side.

"Are you a human being, to leave her thus?"

"It is better so. You heard her. What she said is true."

“But why? In the name of God, why? Your flesh and blood! Have you never loved anything?”

“Are you indeed my daughter’s lawful husband?” Enschede countered.

“I am. You will find the proof in McClintock’s safe. You called her a wanton!”

“Because I had every reason to believe she was one. There was every indication that she fled the island in company with a dissolute rogue.” Still the voice was without emotion; calm, colourless.

Fired with wrath, Spurlock recounted the Canton episode. “She travelled alone; and she is the purest woman God ever permitted to inhabit the earth. What!—you know so little of that child? She ran away from *you*. Somebody tricked you back yonder—baited you for spite. She ran away from you; and now I can easily understand why. What sort of a human being are you, anyhow?”

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Enschede gazed seaward. When he faced Spurlock, the granite was cracked and rived; never had Spurlock seen such dumb agony in human eyes. “What shall I say? Shall I tell you, or shall I leave you in the dark—as I must always leave her? What shall I say except that I am accursed of men? Yes; I have loved something—her mother. Not wisely but too well. I loved her beyond anything in heaven or on earth—to idolatry. God is a jealous God, and He turned upon me relentlessly. I had consecrated my life to His Work; and I took the primrose path.”

“But a man may love his wife!” cried Spurlock, utterly bewildered.

“Not as I loved mine. So, one day, because God was wroth, her mother ran away with a blackguard, and died in the gutter, miserably. Perhaps I’ve been mad all these years; I don’t know. Perhaps I am still mad. But I vowed that Ruth should never suffer the way I did—and do. For I still love her mother. So I undertook to protect her by keeping love out of her life, by crushing it whenever it appeared, obliterating it. I made it a point to bring beachcombers to the house to fill her with horror of mankind. I never let her read stories, or have pets, dolls. Anything that might stir the sense of love And God has mocked me through it all.”

“Man, in God’s name, come with me and tell her this!” urged Spurlock.

“It is too late. Besides, I would tear out my tongue rather than let it speak her mother’s infamy. To tell Ruth anything, it would be necessary to tell her everything; and I cannot and you must not. She was always asking questions about her mother and supplying the answers. So she built a shrine. Always her prayers ended—’And may my beautiful mother guide me!’ No. It is better as it is. She is no longer mine; she is yours.”

“What a mistake!”

“Yes. But you—you have a good face. Be kind to her. Whenever you grow impatient with her, remember the folly of her father. I can now give myself to God utterly; no human emotion will ever be shuttling in between.”

“And all the time you loved her?”—appalled.

“Perhaps.”

Enschede stepped into the proa, and the natives shoved off. Spurlock remained where he was until the sail became an infinitesimal speck in the distance. His throat filled; he wanted to weep. For yonder went the loneliest man in all God’s unhappy world.

CHAPTER XXV

Spurlock pushed back his helmet and sat down in the white sand, buckling his knees and folding his arms around them—pondering. Was he really awake? The arrival and departure of this strange father lacked the essential human touch to make it real. Without a struggle he could give up his flesh and blood like that! "I can now give myself to God utterly; no human emotion will ever be shuttling in between." The mortal agony behind those eyes! And all the while he had probably loved his child. To take Spring and Love out of her life, as if there were no human instincts to tell Ruth what was being denied her! And what must have been the man's thought as he came upon Ruth wearing a gown of her mother's?—a fair picture of the mother in the primrose days? Not a flicker of an eyelash; steel and granite outwardly.

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The conceit of Howard Spurlock in imagining he knew what mental suffering was! But Enschede was right: Ruth must never know. To find the true father at the expense of the beautiful fairy tale Ruth had woven around the woman in the locket was an intolerable thought. But the father, to go his way forever alone! The iron in the man!—-the iron in this child of his!

Wanting a little love, a caress now and then. Spurlock bent his head to his knees. He took into his soul some of the father's misery, some of the daughter's, to mingle with his own. Enschede, to have starved his heart as well as Ruth's because, having laid a curse, he knew not how to turn aside from it! How easily he might have forgotten the unworthy mother in the love of the child! And this day to hear her voice lifted in a quality of anathema. Poor Ruth: for a father, a madman; for a husband—a thief!

Spurlock rocked his body slightly. He knew that at this moment Ruth lay upon her bed in torment, for she was by nature tender; and the reaction of her scathing words, no matter how justifiable, would be putting scars on her soul. And he, her lawful husband, dared not go to her and console her! Accursed—all of them—Enschede, Ruth, and himself.

"What's the matter, lad, after all the wonderful fireworks at lunch?"

Spurlock beheld McClintock standing beside him. He waved a hand toward the sea.

"A sail?" said McClintock. "What about it?"

"Enschede."

"Enschede?—her father? What's happened?" McClintock sat down. "Do you mean to tell me he's come and gone in an hour? What the devil kind of a father is he?"

Spurlock shook his head.

"What's become of Ruth?"

"Gone to her room."

"Come, lad; let's have it," said McClintock. "Anything that concerns Ruth is of interest to me. What happened between Ruth and her father that made him hurry off without passing ordinary courtesies with me?"

"I suppose I ought to tell you," said Spurlock; "but it is understood that Ruth shall never know the truth."

"Not if it will hurt her."

“Hurt her? It would tear her to pieces; God knows she has had enough. Her mother.... Do you recall the night she showed you the face in the locket? Do you remember how she said—’If only my mother had lived’? Did you ever see anything more tender or beautiful?”

“I remember. Go on and tell me.”

When Spurlock had finished the tale, touched here and there by his own imagination, McClintock made a negative sign.

“So that was it? And what the devil are you doing here, moping alone on the beach? Why aren’t you with her in this hour of bitterness?”

“What can I do?”

“You can go to her and take her in your arms.”

“I might have been able to do that if you hadn’t told me ... she cared.”

“Man, she’s your wife!”

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“And I am a thief.”

“You’re a damn fool, too!” exploded the trader.

“I am as God made me.”

“No. God gives us an equal chance; but we make ourselves. You are captain of your soul; don’t forget your Henley. But I see now. That poor child, trying to escape, and not knowing how. Her father for fifteen years, and you now for the rest of her life! Tell her you’re a thief. Get it off your soul.”

“Add that to what she is now suffering? It’s too late. She would not forgive me.”

“And why should you care whether she forgave you or not?”

Spurlock jumped to his feet, the look of the damned upon his face. “Why? Because I love her! Because I loved her at the start, but was too big a fool to know it!”

His own astonishment was quite equal to McClintock’s. The latter began to heave himself up from the sand.

“Did I hear you ...” began McClintock.

“Yes!” interrupted Spurlock, savagely. “You heard me say it! It was inevitable. I might have known it. Another labyrinth in hell!”

A smile broke over the trader’s face. It began in the eyes and spread to the lips: warm, embracing, even fatherly.

“Man, man! You’re coming to life. There’s something human about you now. Go to her and tell her. Put your arms around her and tell her you love her. Dear God, what a beautiful moment!”

The fire went out of Spurlock’s eyes and the shadow of hopeless weariness fell upon him. “I can’t make you understand; I can’t make you see things as I see them. As matters now stand, I’m only a thief, not a blackguard. What!—add another drop to her cup? Who knows? Any day they may find me. So long as matters remain as they are, and they found me, there would be no shame for Ruth. Can’t I make you see?”

“But I’m telling you Ruth loves you. And her kind of love forgives everything and anything but infidelity.”

“You did not hear her when she spoke to her father; I did.”

“But she would understand you; whereas she will never understand her father. Spurlock: ’tis Roundhead, sure enough. Go to her, I say, and take her in your arms, you poor benighted Ironsides! I can’t make *you* see. Man, if you tell her you love her, and later they took you away to prison, who would sit at the prison gate until your term was up? Ruth. Why am I here—thirty years of loneliness? Because I know women, the good and the bad; and because I could not have the good, I would not take the bad. The woman I wanted was another man’s wife. So here I am, king of all I survey, with a predilection for poker, a scorched liver, and a piano-player. But you! Ruth is your lawful wife. Not to go to her is wickeder than if I had run away with my friend’s wife. You’re a queer lad. With your pencil you see into the hearts of all; and without your pencil you are dumb and blind. Ruth is not another man’s wife; she is all your own, for better or for worse. Have you thought of the monstrous lie you are adding to your theft?”

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“Lie?” said Spurlock, astounded.

“Aye—to pretend to her that you don’t care. That’s a most damnable lie; and when she finds out, ’tis then she will not forgive. She’ll have this hour always with her; and you failed her. Go to her.”

“I can’t.”

“Afraid?”

“Yes.”

This simple admission disarmed McClintock. “Well, well; I have given out of my wisdom. I’d like to shake you until your bones rattled; but the bones of a Roundhead wouldn’t rattle to any purpose. Lad, I admire you even in your folly. Mountains out of molehills and armies out of windmills; and you’ll tire yourself in one direction and shatter yourself in the other. There is strength in you—misguided. You will torture yourself and torture her all through life; but in the end she will pour the wine of her faith into a sound chalice. I would that you were my own.”

“I, a thief?”

“Aye; thief, Roundhead and all. If a certain kink in your sense of honour will not permit you to go to her as a lover, go to her as a comrade. Talk to her of the new story; divert her; for this day her heart has been twisted sorely.”

McClintock without further speech strode toward his bungalow; and half an hour later Spurlock, passing, heard the piano-tuning key at work.

Spurlock plodded through the heavy sand, leaden in the heart and mind as well as in the feet. But recently he had asked God to pile it all on him; and God had added this, with a fresh portion for Ruth. One thing—he could be thankful for that—the peak of his misfortunes had been reached; the world might come to an end now and not matter in the least.

Love ... to take her in his arms and to comfort her: and then to add to her cup of bitterness the knowledge that her husband was a thief! For himself he did not care; God could continue to grind and pulverize him; but to add another grain to the evil he had already wrought upon Ruth was unthinkable. The future? He dared not speculate upon that.

He paused at the bamboo curtain of her room, which was in semi-darkness. He heard Rollo’s stump beat a gentle tattoo on the floor.

“Ruth?”

Silence for a moment. “Yes. What is it?”

“Is there anything I can do?” The idiocy of the question filled him with the craving of laughter. Was there anything he could do!

“No, Hoddy; nothing.”

“Would you like to have me come in and talk?” How tender that sounded!—talk!

“If you want to.”

Bamboo and bead tinkled and slithered behind him. The dusky obscurity of the room was twice welcome. He did not want Ruth to see his own stricken countenance; nor did he care to see hers, ravaged by tears. He knew she had been weeping. He drew a chair to the side of the bed and sat down, terrified by the utter fallowness of his mind. Filled as he was with conflicting emotions, any stretch of silence would be dangerous. The fascination of the idea of throwing himself upon his knees and crying out all that was in his heart! As his eyes began to focus objects, he saw one of her arms extended upon the counterpane, in his direction, the hand clenched tightly.

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“I am very wicked,” she said. “After all, he is my father, Hoddy; and I cursed him. But all those empty years!... My heart was hot. I’m sorry. I do forgive him; but he will never know now.”

“Write him,” urged Spurlock, finding speech.

“He would return my letters unopened or destroy them.”

That was true, thought Spurlock. No matter what happened, whether the road smoothed out or became still rougher, he would always be carrying this secret with him; and each time he recalled it, the rack.

“Would you rather be alone?”

“No. It’s kind of comforting to have you there. You understand. I sha’n’t cry any more. Tell me a story—with apple-blossoms in it—about people who are happy.”

Miserably his thoughts shuttled to and fro in search of what he knew she wanted—a love story. Presently he began to weave a tale, sorry enough, with all the ancient claptraps and rusted platitudes. How long he sat there, reeling off this drivel, he never knew. When he reached the happy ending, he waited. But there was no sign from her. By and by he gathered enough courage to lean toward her. She had fallen asleep. The hand that had been clenched lay open, relaxed; and upon the palm he saw her mother’s locket.

CHAPTER XXVI

Spurlock went out on his toes, careful lest the bamboo curtain rattle behind him. He went into the study and sat down at his table, but not to write. He drew out the check and the editorial letter. He had sold half a dozen short tales to third-rate magazines; but this letter had been issued from a distinguished editorial room, of international reputation. If he could keep it up—style and calibre of imagination—within a year the name of Taber would become widely known. Everything in the world to live for!—fame that he could not reap, love that he must not take! What was all this pother about hell as a future state?

By and by things began to stir on the table: little invisible things. The life with which he had endued these sheets of paper began to beckon imperiously. So he sharpened a score of pencils, and after fiddling about and rewriting the last page he had written the previous night, he plunged into work. It was hot and dry. There were mysterious rustlings that made him glance hopefully toward the sea. He was always deceived by these rustlings which promised wind and seldom fulfilled that promise.

“Time to dress for dinner,” said Ruth from behind the curtain. “I don’t see how you do it, Hoddy. It’s so stuffy—and all that tobacco smoke!”

He inspected his watch. Half after six. He was astonished. For four hours he had shifted his own troubles to the shoulders of these imaginative characters.

“He called me a wanton, Hoddy. That is what I don’t understand.”

“There isn’t an angel in heaven, Ruth, purer or sweeter than you are. No doubt—-because he did not understand you—he thought you had run away with someone. The trader you spoke about: he disliked your father, didn’t he? Well, he probably played your father a horrible practical joke.”

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“Perhaps that was it. I always wondered why he bought my mother’s pearls so readily. I am dreadfully sad.”

“I’ll tell you what. I’ll speak to McClintock to-night and see if he won’t take us for a junket on *The Tigress*. Eh? Banging against the old rollers—that’ll put some life into us both. Run along while I rig up and get the part in my hair straight.”

“If he had only been my father!—McClintock!”

“God didn’t standardize human beings, Ruth; no grain of wheat is like another. See the new litter of Mrs. Pig? By George, every one of them looks like the other; and yet each one attacks the source of supply with a squeal and an oof that’s entirely different from his brothers’ and sisters’. Put on that new dress—the one that’s all white. We’ll celebrate that check, and let the rest of the world go hang.”

“You are very good to me, Hoddy.”

Something reached down into his heart and twisted it. But he held the smile until she turned away from the curtain. He dressed mechanically; so many moves this way, so many moves that. The evening breeze came; the bamboo shades on the veranda clicked and rasped; the loose edges of the manuscript curled. To prevent the leaves from blowing about, should a blow develop, he distributed paper weights. Still unconscious of anything he did physically.

He tried not to think—of Ruth with her mother’s locket, of her misguided father, taking his lonely way to sea. He drew compellingly upon his new characters to keep him out of this melancholy channel; but they ebbed and ebbed; he could not hold them. Enschede: no human emotion should ever again shuttle between him and God. As if God would not continue to mock him so long as his brain held a human thought! God had given him a pearl without price, and he had misunderstood until this day.

McClintock was in a gay mood at dinner that night; but he did not see fit to give these children the true reason. For a long time there had been a standing offer from the company at Copeley’s to take over the McClintock plantation; and to-day he had decided to sell. Why? Because he knew that when these two young people left, the island would become intolerable. For nearly thirty years he had lived here in contented loneliness; then youth had to come and fill him with discontent.

He would give *The Tigress* a triple coat of paint, and take these two on a long cruise, wherever they wanted to go—Roundhead and Seraph, the blunderbus and the flaming angel. And there was another matter. To have sprung this upon them to-night would have been worth a thousand pounds. But his lips were honour-locked.

There was a pint of champagne and a quart of mineral water (both taboo) at his elbow. In a tall glass the rind of a Syrian orange was arranged in spiral form. The wine bubbled and seethed; and the exquisite bouquet of oranges permeated the room.

“I sha’n’t offer any of these to you two,” he said; “but I know you won’t mind me having an imitation king’s peg. The occasion is worth a dash of the grape, lad. You’re on the way to big things. A thousand dollars is a lot of money for an author to earn.”

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Spurlock laughed. “Drink your peg; don’t bother about me. I wouldn’t touch the stuff for all the pearls in India. A cup of lies. I know all about it.”

Ruth’s eyes began to glow. She had often wondered if Hoddy would ever go back to it. She knew now that he never would.

“Sometimes a cup of lies is a cheering thing,” replied the trader. “In wine there is truth. What about that?”

“It means that drink cheats a man into telling things he ought not to. And there’s your liver.”

“Ay, and there’s my liver. It’ll be turning over to-morrow. But never mind that,” said McClintock grinning as he drew the dish of bread-fruit toward him. “To-morrow I shall have a visitor. I do not say guest because that suggests friendship; and I am no friend of this Wastrel. I’ve told you about him; and you wrote a shrewd yarn on the subject.”

“The pianist?”

“Yes. He’ll be here two or three days. So Mrs. Spurlock had better stick to the bungalow.”

“Ah,” said Spurlock; “that kind of a man.”

“Many kinds; a thorough outlaw. We’ve never caught him cheating at cards; too clever; but we know he cheats. But he’s witty and amusing, and when reasonably drunk he can play the piano like a Paderewski. He’s an interpretative genius, if there ever was one. Nobody knows what his real name is, but he’s a Hollander. Kicked out of there for something shady. A remittance man. A check arrives in Batavia every three months. He has a grand time. Then he goes stony, and beats his way around the islands for another three months. Retribution has a queer way of acting sometimes. The Wastrel —as we call him—cannot play when he’s sober; hands too shaky. He can’t play cards, either, when he’s sober. Alcohol—would you believe it?—steadies his nerves and keens his brain: which is against the laws of gravitation, you might say. He has often told me that if he could play sober, he would go to America and reap a fortune.”

“You never told me what he is like,” said Spurlock.

“I thought it best that you should imagine him. You were wide the mark, physically; otherwise you had him pat. He is big and powerful; one of those drinkers who show it but little outwardly. Whisky kills him suddenly; it does not sap him gradually. In his youth he must have been a remarkably handsome man, for he is still handsome. I don’t believe he is much past forty. A bad one in a rough-and-tumble; all the water-front tricks. His hair is oddly streaked with gray—I might say a dishonourable gray. Perhaps in the beginning the women made fools of themselves over him.”

“That’s reasonable. I don’t know how to explain it,” said Spurlock, “but music hits women queerly. I’ve often seen them storming the Carnegie Hall stage.”

“Aye, music hits them. I’m thinking that the Wastrel was one day a celebrated professional; and the women were partly the cause of his fall. Women! He is always chanting the praise of some discovery; sometimes it will be a native, often a white woman out of the stews. So it will be wise for Mrs. Spurlock to keep to the bungalow until the rogue goes back to Copeley’s. Queer world. For every Eden, there will be a serpent; for every sheepfold, there will be a wolf.”

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“What’s the matter, Ruth?” asked Spurlock, anxiously.

“It has been ... rather a hard day, Hoddy,” Ruth answered. She was wan and white.

So, after the dinner was over, Spurlock took her home; and worked far into the night.

* * * * *

The general office was an extension of the west wing of the McClintock bungalow. From one window the beach was always visible; from another, the stores. Spurlock was invariably at the high desk in the early morning, poring over ledgers, and giving the beach and the stores an occasional glance. Whenever McClintock had guests, he loafed with them on the west veranda in the morning.

This morning he heard voices—McClintock’s and the Wastrel’s.

“Sorry,” said McClintock, “but I must ask you to check out this afternoon before five. I’m having some unexpected guests.”

“Ah! Sometimes I wonder I don’t run amok and kill someone,” said the Wastrel, in broken English. “I give you all of my genius, and you say—’Get out!’ I am some kind of a dog.”

“That is your fault, none of mine. Without whisky,” went on McClintock, “your irritability is beyond tolerance. You have said a thousand times that there was no shame in you. Nobody can trust you. Nobody can anticipate your next move. We tolerate you for your genius, that’s a fact. But underneath this tolerance there is always the vague hope that your manhood will someday reassert itself.”

The Wastrel laughed. “Did you ever hear me whine?”

“No,” admitted McClintock

“You’ve no objection to my dropping in again later, after your guests go?”

“No. When I’m alone I don’t mind.”

“Very well. You won’t mind if I empty this gin?”

“No. Befuddle yourself, if you want to.”

Silence.

Spurlock mused over the previous night. After he had eaten dinner with Ruth, he had gone to McClintock’s; and he had heard music such as he had heard only in the great

concert halls. The picturesque scoundrel had the true gift; and Spurlock was filled with pity at the thought of such genius gone to pot. To use it as a passport to card-tables and gin-bottles! McClintock wasn't having any guests; at any rate, he had not mentioned the fact.

Spurlock had sensed what had gone completely over McClintock's head—that this was the playing of a soul in damnation. His own peculiar genius—a miracle key to the hidden things in men's souls—had given him this immediate and astonishing illumination. As the Wastrel played, Spurlock knew that the man saw the inevitable end—death by drink; saw the glory of the things he had thrown away, the past, once so full of promise. And, decently as he could, McClintock was giving the man the boot.

There was, it might be said, a double illumination. But for Ruth, he, Howard Spurlock, might have ended upon the beach, inescapably damned. The Dawn Pearl. After all, the Wastrel was in luck: he was alone.

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These thoughts, however, came to a broken end. From the window he saw *The Tigress* faring toward Copeley's! Then somebody was coming? Some political high muckamuck, probably. Still, he was puzzled because McClintock had not spoken.

Presently McClintock came in. "General inspection after lunch; drying bins, stores and the young palms south-east. It will be hot work, but it must be done at once."

"All right, Mr. McClintock." Spurlock lowered his voice. "You are giving that chap the boot rather suddenly?"

"Had to."

"Somebody coming?"

"Yes. Top-side insurance people. You know all this stuff is insured. They'll inspect the schooner on the way back," McClintock lied, cheerfully.

"The Wastrel seemed to take it all right."

"Oh, it's a part of the game," said McClintock. "He knows he had to take it. There are some islands upon which he is not permitted to land any more."

At luncheon, preoccupied in thought, Spurlock did not notice the pallor on Ruth's cheeks or the hunted look in her eyes. She hung about his chair, followed him to the door, touched his sleeve timidly, all the while striving to pronounce the words which refused to rise to her tongue.

He patted the hand on his sleeve. "Could you get any of the music last night?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful! It's an infernal shame."

"Couldn't ... couldn't I go with you this afternoon?"

"Too hot."

"But I'm used to that, Hoddy," she said, eagerly.

"I'd rather you went over the last four chapters, which I haven't polished yet. You know what's what. Slash and cut as much as you please. I'll knock off at tea. By-by."

The desperate eagerness to go with him—and she dared not voice it! She watched him until McClintock joined him and the two made off toward the south. She turned back into the hall. Rollo began to cavort.

“No, Rollo; not this afternoon.”

“But I’ve got to go!” insisted Rollo, in perfectly understandable dog-talk.

“Be still!”

“Oh, come along! I’ve just got to have my muck bath. I’m burning up.”

“Rollo!”

There were no locks or panelled doors in the bungalow; and Rollo was aware of it. He dashed against the screen door before she could catch him and made the veranda. Once more he begged; but as Ruth only repeated her sharp command, he spun about and raced toward the jungle. Immediately he was gone, she regretted that she had not followed.

Hidden menace; a prescience of something dreadful about to happen. Ruth shivered; she was cold. Alone; not even the dog to warn her, and Hoddy deep in the island somewhere. Help—should she need it—from the natives was out of the question. She had not made friends with any; so they still eyed her askance.

Yes; she had heard the music the night before. She had resisted as long as she could; then she had stolen over. She had to make sure, for the peace of her mind, that this was really the man. One glance through the window at that picturesque head had been sufficient. A momentary petrifaction, and terror had lent wings to her feet.

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He had found her by the same agency her father had: native talk, which flew from isle to isle as fast as proas could carry it. She was a lone white woman, therefore marked.

What was it in her heart or mind or soul that went out to this man? Music—was that it? Was he powerless to stir her without the gift? But hadn't he fascinated her by his talk, gentle and winning? Ah, but that had been after he had played for her.

She had gone into Morgan's one afternoon for a bag of salt. One hour later she had gone back to the mission—without the salt. For the first time in her life she had heard music; the door to enchanted sounds had been flung wide. For hours after she had not been sensible to life, only to exquisite echoes.

Of course she had often heard sailors hammering out their ditties. Sometimes ships would stop three or four days for water and repairs; and the men would carouse in the back room at Morgan's.

Day after day—five, to be exact—she had returned to Morgan's; and each time the man would understand what had drawn her, and with a kindly smile would sit down at the piano and play. Sometimes the music would be tender and dreamy, like a native mother's crooning to her young; sometimes it would be so gay that the flesh tingled and the feet were urged to dance; again, it would be like the storms crashing, thunderous.

On the fifth day he had ventured speech with her. He told her something about music, the great world outside. Then he had gone away. But two weeks later he returned. Again he played for her; and again the eruption of the strange senses that lay hidden in her soul. He talked with his manner gentle and kindly. Shy, grateful in her loneliness for this unexpected attention, she had listened. She had even confided to him how lonely it was in the island. He had promised her some books, for she had voiced her hunger for stories. On his third visit to the island she had surprised him, that is, she had glanced up suddenly and caught the look of the beast in his eyes.

And it had not shocked her! It was this appalling absence of indignation that had put terror into her heart. The same look she had often seen in the eyes of the drunken beachcombers her father had brought home, and it had not filled her with horror. And now she comprehended that the man (she had never known him by any name) knew she had surprised the look and had not resented it.

Still, thereafter she had avoided Morgan's; partly out of fear and partly because of her father's mandate. Yet the thing hidden within her called and called.

Traps, set with peculiar cunning; she had encountered them everywhere. By following her he had discovered her secret nook in the rocks. Here she would find candy awaiting her, bits of ribbon, books. She wondered even at this late day how she had been able to hold her maddening curiosity in check. Books! She knew now what had

saved her—her mother's hand, reaching down from heaven, had set the giver's flaming eyes upon the covers of these books. One day she had thrown all the gifts into the lagoon, and visited the secret nook no more.

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And here he was, but a hundred yards away, this wastrel who trailed his genius through the mud. Hoddy! All her fears fell away. Between herself and yonder evil mind she had the strongest buckler God could give—love. Hoddy. No other man should touch her; she was Hoddy's, body and soul, in this life and after.

She turned into the study, sat down at the table and fingered the pencils, curiously stirred. Lead, worth nothing at all until Hoddy picked them up; then they became full of magic. She began to read, and presently she entered another world, and remained in it for two hours. She read on and on, now thrilled by the swiftly moving drama, now enraptured by the tender passages of love. Love.... He could imagine it even if he could not feel it. That was the true miracle of the gift; without actual experience, to imagine love and hate and greed and how they would react upon each other; and then, when these passions had served their temporary purpose, to cast them aside for new imaginings.

She heard the bamboo curtain rattle slightly. She looked up quickly. The Wastrel, his eyes full of humorous evil, stood inside the room.

CHAPTER XXVII

His idea, cleverly planned, was to shatter her resistance, to confound her suddenly by striking her mind with words which would rob her coherent thought. Everything in his favour—the luck of the gods! The only white men were miles down the coast. She might scream until her voice failed; the natives would not come to her aid; they never meddled with the affairs of the whites.

"It is droll," he said. "Your father—poor imbecile!—believes we ran away together. I arranged that he should. So that way is closed. You never can go back."

There was a roaring in her ears like that of angry waters. Wanton!... This, then, was what her father had meant. And he had gone away without knowing the truth!

"My proa boys are ready; the wind is brisk; and in an hour we shall be beyond all pursuit. Will you come sensibly, or shall I carry you? You are *mine*!"

Ruth's peculiar education had not vitiated the primitive senses; they were always on guard; and in a moment such as this they rushed instantly to the surface. Danger, the most terrible she had ever faced, was substantially in this room. She must kill this man, or kill herself. She knew it. No tricks would serve. There would be no mercy in this man. Any natural fineness would be numbed by drink. To-morrow he might be sorry; but to-day, this hour!

She rose, not quickly, but with a dignity which only accentuated her beauty.

“And you ran away with a weakling! You denied me for a puppet!”

“My lawful husband.”

“Ah, yes, yes; lawful husbands in these parts are those who can take and hold.... As I shall take and hold.” The Wastrel advanced.

“If you touch me I will kill you,” said Ruth, grasping the scissors which lay beside the pencils—Hoddy’s!

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The Wastrel laughed, still advancing. “Fire! That was what drew me to you in the beginning. Well, kill me. Either we go forth together, or they shall bury me.”

“Beast!”

For a little while they manoeuvred around the table. Suddenly the Wastrel took hold of the edge and flung the table aside. Even in this dread moment Ruth was conscious of a pathetic interest in the scattering pencils.

He reached for her, and she struck savagely. But with the skill of a fencer he met the blow and broke it, seizing the wrist.

“It looks as though, we should go together,” he said, pulling her toward him.

Ruth was strong in body and soul. She fought him with tooth and nail. Three times she escaped. Chairs were overturned. Once she reached the bamboo curtain, clutched at it and tore it down as his arms went around her waist. The third time she escaped she reached the inconsequent barricade of the overturned table.

“If there is any honour in you, stop and think. I love my husband. I love him!” She was weak and dizzy: from horror as much as from physical exertion. She knew that the next time he caught her she would not be able to free herself. “What good would it do you to destroy me? For I have courage to kill myself.”

The Wastrel laughed. He had heard this talk before.

The race began once more; but this time Ruth knew that there would be no escape. If only she had thought to plunge the scissors into her own heart! Hoddy ... to return and find her either gone or dead! But even as the Wastrel’s arms gathered her, there came the sound of hurrying steps on the veranda.

“Ruth?”

“Hoddy!” she cried.

Spurlock stepped into the room. One of those hanging moments ensued—hypnotic.

Spurlock had seen Rollo heading for the jungle, and for some reason he could not explain the incident had bothered him. Fretting and fidgeting, he had, after an hour or so, turned to McClintock.

“I’m going back for Ruth.”

“Nonsense!”

“Something’s wrong.”

“Wrong? What the devil could be wrong?” McClintock had demanded, irascibly. He had particular reasons for wanting to keep Spurlock away from the jetty.

“I haven’t any answer for that; but I’m going back after her. She wanted to come, and I wouldn’t let her.”

“Run along, then.”

* * * * *

“To me, you dirty blackguard!” cried Spurlock, flinging aside his helmet. That he was hot and breathless was of no matter; in that moment he would have faced a dozen Samsons.

“She was mine before you ever saw her.” The Wastrel tried to reach Ruth’s lips.

“You lie!”

Head down, fists doubled, Spurlock rushed: only to be met with a kick which was intended for the groin but which struck the thigh instead. Even then it sent Spurlock spinning backward, to crash against the wall. He felt no pain from this cowardly kick. That would come later. Again he rushed. He dodged the boot this time, and smashed his left upon the Wastrel’s lips, leaving them bloody pulp.

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The Wastrel did not relish this. He flung Ruth aside, careless whether she fell or not. There was only one idea in his head now—to batter and bruise and crush this weakling, then cast him at the feet of his love-lorn wife. He brought into service all his Oriental bar-room tricks. Time after time he sent Spurlock into this corner or that; but always the boy regained his feet before the murderous boot could reach the mark. From all angles he was at a disadvantage—in weight, skill, endurance. But Ruth was his woman, and he had sworn to God to defend her.

“One of us has got to die,” he panted. “You’ve got to kill me to get out of here alive.”

The Wastrel rushed. Spurlock dove headlong at the other’s legs, toppling the man. In this moment he could have stamped upon the Wastrel’s face, and ended the affair; but all that was clean in him, chivalrous, revolted at the thought. Not even for Ruth could he do such a beastly thing. So, bloody but unbeaten, weak and spent but undaunted, he waited for the Wastrel to spring up.

The unequal battle went on. It came to Spurlock suddenly that if something did not react in his favour inside of five minutes, he was done. In a side-glance—for the floor was variously encumbered with overturned objects—he saw one of his paper weights, a coloured glass ball such as McClintock used in trade. As the Wastrel rushed, Spurlock sidestepped, swept the ball into his hand, set himself and threw it. If the Wastrel had not turned the instant he did, the ball would have missed him; as it was he turned directly into its path. It struck his forehead, splitting it, and brought him to his knees.

Luck. Spurlock understood that his vantage would be temporary; the Wastrel had been knocked down, not out. Still, the respite was sufficient for Spurlock to look about for some weapon. Hanging on the wall was a temple censer, bronze, moulded in the shape of a lotus blossom with stem and leaves—deadly as a club. He tore it down just as the Wastrel rose, wavering slightly. Spurlock advanced, the censer swung high.

The Wastrel wiped the blood from his forehead. The blow had brought him back to the realm of sober thought. He glanced at Ruth (who had stood with her back to the wall, pinned there throughout the contest by terror and the knowledge of her own helplessness), then at the bronze menace, and calculated correctly that this particular adventure was finished.

His hesitation was visible, and Spurlock took advantage of this to run to Ruth. He put his free arm around her and held the censer ready; and as Ruth snuggled her cheek against his sleeve, they were, so far as intent, in each other’s arms. Without a word or a gesture, the Wastrel turned and staggered forth, out of the orbit of these two, having been thrust into it for a single purpose already described.

For a while they stood there, silent, motionless, staring at the doorway where still a few strings of the bamboo curtain swayed and twisted, agitated by the Wastrel’s passage.

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“I was going to die, Hoddy!” she whispered. “You do love me?”

“God knows how much!” Suddenly he laid his head on her shoulder. “But I’m a blackguard, too, Ruth. I had no right to marry you. I have no right to love you.”

“Why not?”

“I am a thief, a hunted man.”

“So that is what separated us! Oh, Hoddy, you have wasted so many wonderful days! Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I couldn’t!” He made as though to draw away, but her arms became hoops of steel.

“Because you did not wish to hurt me?”

“Yes. If I let you believe I did not love you, and they found me, your shame would be negligible.”

“And loving me, you fought me, avoided all my traps! I’m glad I’ve been so unhappy. Remember, in your story—look at it, scattered everywhere!—that line? *We arrive at true happiness only through labyrinths of misery.*”

“I am a thief, nevertheless.”

“Oh, that!”

He raised his head, staring at her in blank astonishment. “You mean, it doesn’t matter?”

“Poor Hoddy! When you were ill in Canton, out of your head, you babbled words. Only a few, but enough for me to understand that some act had driven you to this part of the world, where the hunted hide.”

“And you married me, knowing?”

“I married the man who bought a sing-song girl to give her her freedom.”

“But I was intoxicated!”

“So was the man you just fought in this room. There is no hidden beast in you, Hoddy. I could not love you else.”

“They may find me.”

“Well, if they send you to prison, I’ll be outside when they let you go.”

He took her face between his hands and kissed her on the lips. "I'm not worth it. You are all that I am or hope to be—the celestial atom God put into me at the beginning. Now He has taken that out and given it form and beauty—you!"

"Wonderful hand!" Ruth seized his right hand and kissed it. "All the wonderful things it is going to do! If I could only know for certain that my mother knew how happy I'm going to be!"

"You love the memory of your mother?"

"It is a part of my blood ... my beautiful mother!"

He saw Enschede, putting out to sea, alone, memories and regrets crowding upon his wake. Her father was right: Ruth must never know. The mother was far more real to her than the father; the ghostly far more substantial than the living form. So long as he lived, Spurlock knew that in fancy he would be reconstructing that scene between himself and Ruth's father.

Their heads touched again, their arms tightened. Gazing into each other's eyes with new-found rapture, neither observed the sudden appearance in the doorway of an elderly woman in travel-stained linen.

There was granite in her face and agate in her eyes. The lips were straight and pale, the chin aggressive, the nose indomitable. She was, by certain signs, charged with anger, but she saw upon the faces of these two young fools the look of angels and an ineffable kindness breathed upon her withered heart.

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“So, you young fool, I have found you!” she said, harshly.

Ruth and Spurlock separated, the one embarrassed, the other utterly dumfounded.

“Auntie?” he cried.

“Yes, Auntie! And to date you have cost me precisely sixteen thousand dollars—hard earned, every one of them.”

Spurlock wondered if something hadn’t suddenly gone awry in his head. He had just passed through a terrific physical test. Surely he was imagining this picture. His aunt, here at McClintock’s? It was unbelievable. He righted a chair and sat in it, his face in his hands. But when he looked again, there she was!

“I don’t understand,” he said, finally.

“You will before I’m done with you. I have come to take you home; and hereafter my word will be the law. You will obey me out of common decency. You can scribble if you want to, but after you’ve given your eight hours daily to the mills. Sixteen thousand! Mark me, young man, you’ll pay it back through the nose, every dollar of it!”

“I owe you nothing.” Pain was stabbing him, now here, now there; pain was real enough; but he could not establish as a fact in his throbbing brain the presence of his aunt in the doorway. “I owe you nothing,” he repeated, dully.

“Hoity-toity! You owe me sixteen thousand dollars. They were very nice about it, in memory of your father. They telephoned that you had absconded with ten thousand, and that if I would make good the loss within twenty-four hours, they would not prosecute. I sent my check for ten thousand; and it has cost me six thousand to find you. I should say that you owed me considerable.”

Still his brain refused to assimilate the news or to deduce the tremendous importance of it.

“You are Ruth?”

“Yes,” said Ruth, stirred by anger and bitterness and astonishment. This, then, was the woman from whom Hoddy would not have accepted a cup of water.

“Come here,” said the petticoated tyrant. Ruth obeyed, not willingly, but because there was something hypnotic in the authoritative tone. “Put your arms about me.” Ruth did so, but without any particular fervour. “Kiss me.” Ruth slightly brushed the withered cheek. The aunt laughed. “Love me, love my dog! Because I’ve scolded him and told him a few truths, you are ice to me. Not afraid of me, either.”

“No,” said Ruth, pulling back.

But the aunt seized her in her arms and rocked with her. “A miserly old woman. Well, I’ve had to be. All my life I’ve had to fight human wolves to hold what I have. So I’ve grown hard—outside. What’s all this about, anyhow? You. Far away there was the one woman for this boy of mine—some human being who would understand the dear fool better than all the rest of the world. But God did not put you next door. He decided that Hoddy should pay a colossal price for the Dawn Pearl—shame, loneliness, torment, for only through these agencies would he learn your worth. The fibre of his soul had to be tested, queerly, to make him worthy of you. Through fire and water, through penury and pestilence, your hand will always be on his shoulder. McClintock wrote me about you; but all I needed was the sight of your face as it was a moment gone.”

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Gently she thrust Ruth aside. Ruth's eyes were wet, but she saw light everywhere: the room was filled with celestial aura.

The aunt rushed over to her nephew, knelt and wrapped him in her arms. "My little Hoddy! You used to love me; and I have always loved you. The thought of you, wandering from pillar to post, believing yourself hunted—it tore my old heart to pieces! For I knew you. You would suffer the torments of the damned for what you had done. So I set out to find you, even if it cost ten times sixteen thousand. My poor Hoddy! I had to talk harshly, or break down and have hysterics. I've come to take you back home. Don't you understand? Back among your own again, and only a few of us the wiser. Have you suffered?"

"Dear God!... every hour since!"

"The Spurlock conscience. That is why Wall Street broke your father; he was honest."

"Ah, my father! The way you treated him...!"

"Good money after bad. You haven't heard my side if it, Hoddy. To shore up a business that never had any foundation, he wanted me to lend him a hundred thousand; and for his sake as well as for mine I had to refuse. He wasn't satisfied with an assured income from the paper-mills your grandfather left us. He wanted to become a millionaire. So I had to buy out his interest, and it pinched me dreadfully to do it. In the end he broke his own heart along with your mother's. I even offered him back the half interest he had sold to me. You sent back my Christmas checks."

"I had to. I couldn't accept anything from you."

"You might have added 'then'," said Miss Spurlock, drily.

"I'm an ungrateful dog!"

"You will be if you don't instantly kiss me the way you used to. But your face! What happened here just before I came?"

"Perhaps God wasn't quite sure that I could hold what I had, and wanted to try me out."

"And you whipped the beast? I passed him."

"At any rate, I won, for he went away. But, Auntie, however in this world did you find this island?"

She told him. "The chief of the detective agency informed me that it would be best not to let Mr. O'Higgins know the truth; he wouldn't be reckless with the funds, then. For a time I didn't know we'd ever find you. Then came the cable that you were in Canton, ill,

but not dangerously so. Mr. O'Higgins was to keep track of you until I believed you had had enough punishment. Then he was to arrest you and bring you home to me. When I learned you were married, I changed my plans. I did not know what God had in mind then. Mr. O'Higgins and I landed at Copeley's yesterday; and Mr. McClintock sent his yacht over for us this morning. Hoddy, what made you do it? Whatever made you do it?"

"God knows! Something said to me: *Take it! Take it!* And ... I took it. After I took the bills it was too late to turn back. I drew out what I had saved and boarded the first ship out. Wait!"

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He released himself from his aunt's embrace, ran to the trunk and fetched the old coat. With the aid of a penknife he ripped the shoulder seams and drew out the ten one-thousand dollar bills. Gravely he placed them in his aunt's hand.

"You didn't spend it?"

"I never intended to spend it—any more than I really intended to steal it. That's the sort of fool your nephew is!"

"Not even a good time!" said the aunt, whimsically, as she stuffed the bills into her reticule. "Not a single whooper-upter! Nothing but torment and remorse ... and Ruth! Children, put your arms around me. In a little while—to-morrow—all these tender, beautiful emotions will pass away, and I'll become what I was yesterday, a cynical, miserly old spinster. I'll be wanting my sixteen thousand."

"Six," he corrected.

"Why, so it is," she said, in mock astonishment. "Think of me forgetting ten thousand so quickly!"

"Go to, you old fraud! You'll never fool me again. God bless you, Auntie! I'll go into the mills and make pulp with my bare hands, if you want me to. Home!—which I never hoped to see again. To dream and to labour: to you, my labour; to Ruth, my dreams. And if sometimes I grow heady—and it's in the blood—remind me of this day when you took me out of hell—a thief."

"Hoddy!" said Ruth. "You mustn't!"

"Nothing can change that, Dawn Pearl. Auntie has taken the nails out of my palms, but the scars will always be there."

There fell upon the three the silence of perfect understanding; and in this silence each saw a vision. To Ruth came that of the great world, her lawful lover at her side; and there would be glorious books into each of which he would unconsciously put a little of her soul along with his own, needing her always. The spinster saw herself growing warm again in the morning sunshine of youth—a flaring ember before the hearth grew cold. Spurlock's vision was oddly of the past. He saw Enschede, making the empty sea, alone, alone, forever alone.

"Children," said the aunt, first to awake, "be young fools as long as God will permit you. And don't worry about the six thousand, Hoddy. I'll call it my wedding gift. There's nothing so sad in this world as an old fool," she added.

The three of them laughed joyously.

And Rollo, who had been waiting for some encouraging sound, presented himself at the doorway. He was caked with dried muck. He was a bad dog; he knew it perfectly; but where there was laughter, there was hope. With his tongue lolling and his flea-bitten stump wagging apologetically, he glanced from face to face to see if there was any forgiveness visible. There was.

THE END

[Illustration: *Distinctive Pictures Photoplay The Ragged Edge* MIMI PALMERI AS RUTH ENSCHEDE ALFRED LUNT AS HOWARD SPURLOCK]

[Illustration: *Distinctive Pictures Photoplay The Ragged Edge* A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY]

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