



THE STORIES OF FIVE
UNFAITHFUL WOMEN

TROPICAL PASSIONS





Tales of STRANGE and EXOTIC LOVE

From out where the throbbing love-drums of the jungle heat the blood of white women to a boiling pitch, where the pale emotions of civilization are lashed into fury by primitive passions, come these tales of weird abandon and exotic love:

A woman alone at night in the Malay forest, a scream, a shot, and a strange white man found dead on the floor of her bedroom. Is it a faithful wife protecting her honor? Or—the heated quarrel of guilty lovers? Or what? The great W. Somerset Maugham unriddles this intriguing passion puzzle in *THE LETTER*.

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On the shores of the Sulu Sea a bored, titian-haired beauty finds a strange enchantment in the barbaric love rites of a handsome savage. She learns of the thin line that holds back the animal-in-man when the jungle calls. One of the most prolific of our young writers, Robert Payne relates what happens beneath *THE GREEN PALMS*.

These and other fascinating stories of unconventional love by Robert Hubner and John MacDonald round out this collection of great stories by truly great writers.





Tropical Passions

The Stories of Five Unfaithful Women

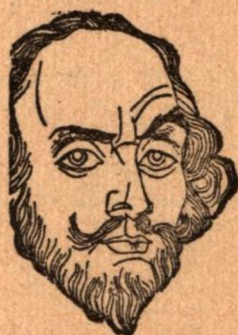
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The Green Palms BY ROBERT PAYNE

THE air steamed up from the mudbanks and the jungle, and far across the bay the red coastal oiler was waiting beside the palms. The palms hung there at the end of the jetty, listless, no leaves turning in the faint wind from the Sulu Sea, no breakers falling on the shore, the sea as smooth as blue silk, the harsh line of the horizon turning to black; and above that black harsh line, the sky was the same color as the sea. All morning, and every morning, there was the same changeless air of desolation on the shore. Sometimes a puff of smoke would come from the oiler, sometimes a Malay in a striped sarong would make his way along the road beside the glistening pipe line, tapping it with a steel hammer, and the sound, communicated along the whole length of the line, stirred the parakeets in the forests and the dazzling hothouse birds that screamed in the green silence of the place. A long winding road had been cut through the forest to the oil wells, where the varnished and continually re-painted derricks rose above the tallest trees; there were bungalows, frail patches of vegetables, stunted mangroves, coolie lines near the shore; and then there was the strip of red land forming a jetty, the palms and the coastal oiler.

The oppressive stillness of the morning, the faint powdery plumes from the oiler, and the tapping of the steel hammer seemed to be in some kind of harmony; impossible to imagine one without the other. But if you closed your eyes, overcome by the heat or by the shining of the immense sea, the thing that was impressed upon your retina was the clump of green palms. On Balik Tamang, the palms were a landmark. Sailors looked from the crow's-nest for that long half-mile jetty and the ridiculous tall palm trees that shot up straight from the red sandy soil, the leaves glistening, brighter than the green of the forest. Actually, the palm trees were dying, and the brightness of the green leaves came from the salt on them. These palm trees bore no fruit; they had been left standing when the mangroves and the forest near the shore had been cut down. No one knew why.

Dunhill lay on the long raffia chair of his porch, nursing his blood-poisoned hand, now heavily bandaged; the hot throbbing poison moved along his arm, festering the glands under the armpit, a sullen, endless throbbing like the rhythm of the whole island. The tapping infuriated him. He heard his servants clip-clopping at the back of the house, and once his wife called to him, but he paid no attention to her. He felt surly, ill, ill at ease; he wished he could leave with the coastal oiler; the sea dazzled him, so that another kind of throbbing began to inflame his eyes; a four-weeks-old *Straits Times* lay in a crumpled ball at his feet. He was thirty-seven, his face licked red by the sun, yet underneath the redness he felt worn out, drained by the malarial exhalations of the place, with no fight left in him. Every morning he had gone by buggy to the oil well in the interior, every afternoon he had returned, sick with loathing of the smell of the yellow-green oil, the sight of the drills and the derricks, the thud of the steam engines in the clearing. His wife had come from Singapore the previous year, and somehow her presence had only made him feel a more savage hatred of the place, the endless moist days broken only by the October monsoon, on this island off the coast of Borneo. He heard ice tinkling in a glass, then a shadow loomed over him. He knew by the scent of her body that it was Estelle.

"The doctor's coming over soon, darling," she said. "He just phoned."

She looked down at the enormous bandaged hand; she could almost feel the swollen pain that was mounting to his shoulder.

"I didn't hear the phone," he said quietly, looking up at her.

"He told me this morning he would come."

Watching her, seeing her bright red hair falling in clusters over her shoulders, the young body moving with incomparable ease within the white dress, he felt some of the pain leave him; he screwed up his mouth, and waited for her kiss. But it didn't come—she, too, was looking out to sea toward the green palms. He hated her for lying about the telephone.

"We'll get a better job soon," he said, drinking the whiskey she brought.

"When, darling?"

"Oh, soon—two or three months. I've written to Sandy.

I'll go to the Singapore Harbor Board. They'll take me. The important thing, sweetheart, is to hang on."

He spoke in a soft English drawl, every word prolonged, the sentences ending in a dying fall so that she nearly always had to guess the last words. The heat came up from the stone floor. She wondered how long she should remain with him—hating the proximity of the bandaged arm, the man ten years older than herself, the sullen composure of his burning blue eyes. He looked as though he might die and she did not care, really; it would be better, there would be a pension from the superannuation fund, she could return to California, it was absurd to have to come out here—why, why, why in this heat should she remain?

Yet she knew perfectly well why she remained. Habit, and security. There were servants; the Chinese cook, the Malay boys, the Filipinos and Malays working in the forest; the strange sense of desolate security on this island, where food was plentiful, because every fortnight crates would arrive from the Philippines. It was an American oil company—everything streamlined, clean, the insect powder always within reach, the refrigerator always filled to the brim. She had nothing to do, and she liked that; she always wanted to be in a position where she could spend her mornings in bed. She said: "I'm so worried. Does it hurt, darling?" and he turned his face away, because at that moment the hot pain sprang again along his inflamed arm.

Then the telephone rang. It was the doctor, Estelle told Dunhill. He had spent the morning at the oil well, and would be right out. Dunhill felt grateful to him, although he did not like the doctor. He was a youngster, hardly out of medical college, a little younger than Estelle, with a low forehead and greasy hair. He had a pleasant smile and imitated a comfortable bedside manner. In the clubhouse he was always the first to suggest a drink, the last to leave; there was a dash about him; he liked classical music; he fitted into no pattern. Once Dunhill had been to his bungalow. The whole place was filled with baseball pennants, yet every fortnight a great crate of new records arrived for him. "Must have a fortune," Dunhill thought, and then he noticed that his wife had left him and returned inside the bungalow.

He continued to stare across the shore until the doctor came, worrying vaguely over Estelle, conscious that he had not done his best by her, his mouth hard and embittered

whenever he conjured her up in his mind. "I ought to give her a break—take her to Singapore—dances—not always dancing with the same partners." And he was glad at that moment when his attention was distracted by something running across the beaten mud outside his bungalow.

At first he could not distinguish it clearly. In this hot light it resembled a ball of tawny yellow fur. Then he saw that it was a chicken, and suddenly one of the natives leaped from the shadow of the bungalow and ran after it, waving a knife. It was the tall, beautifully formed native servant Dunhill had hired shortly after landing at Balik Tamang, hardly more than a boy, with dark eyes, black oiled hair wound in a bun, long silky eyelashes and bright red lips stained with betel juice. The boy wore a short sarong, and seemed always to move with a slow, sulking, gliding motion, like a girl, proud of his beauty and his strength. Now he was swifter than the chicken, running like a ballet dancer with long graceful strides, the golden-brown body shining against the dull blue sea. Seeing the upraised knife, the flexing muscles, the eagerness and determination on the handsome beardless face, Dunhill found himself caught up in a wonderful sense of admiration for the boy's youth; but the admiration changed imperceptibly to an inexplicable fear for the ungainly idiotic bird that stopped, ran in zigzags, cawed loudly, opening its little metallic beak for gulps of hot air, then turned and almost lost its balance, the feathers scraping the sand. He had never felt such pity for a bird before. Perhaps it was the steely splendor of the upraised knife, the utter determination of the youth, the heavy momentum of the boy's black shadow on the ground. Dunhill wanted to shout out, "Stop it! Let the bird alone! If you want to kill it, kill it behind the house!" He said nothing. He was horrified by a sense of impending grief. The Malay boy was already straddling the chicken which was exhausted now, fluttering gamely between his legs. It made one last hesitant dash for freedom, and then the boy threw himself on it, his body falling at full length. It was only then that Dunhill realized that the boy had been performing a kind of dance.

Dunhill left his chair and with his free hand gripped the wooden rail of the bungalow with all his strength, incapable of tearing his eyes away from the spectacle of the boy lying at full length on the earth, holding the chicken in one hand and the knife in the other, playing with the

chicken, even speaking to it, and then drawing his head away and bringing up the knife. The knife swam into the sun. The chicken gave a final scream, and then the neck was cut, near the breast, slowly and dramatically, so that everything seemed to occur like a slow-motion film. Almost crazed by the spectacle, Dunhill wanted to shout, "Take it behind the house! I don't want to see it, do you hear! Take it away!"

He was too late. The blood was springing from the neck, and like a crab the head was moving in the sand. The boy held the chicken by the legs and turned it upside down to let the blood drain away. Dunhill could feel even at a distance of twenty yards the pitiful reflex actions of the chicken which even now, headless, was attempting to escape the boy's hands. When sufficient blood had been spilled, the boy pinched the wound together with his thumb and forefinger and carried the chicken to the back of the house. Along the whole coast there was only the Malay tapper, the palms, the coastal oiler, and the head of a chicken in the sand.

There were moments afterward when Dunhill thought that nothing had happened, the scene was a nightmare brought on by the throbbing in his arm, a mirage, or even a deliberate invention of his own perturbed mind. The heat trembled, thickened. Sometimes on the black rim of the horizon, he reminded himself, he had seen flowering islands. A faint stagnant wind blew over the sand, coming from the towering and mysterious green forest through which men had tunneled their threadlike road, with its metal pipe line already rotting—it was necessary to paint it three times a year, the strangest kind of green growths appeared on it, and there were rumors that a new concrete pipe line would be built. Snakelike, it wound from the shore to the heart of that green darkness within. He steadied himself, drank the iced whiskey which his wife had brought him, and closed his eyes.

When he opened them, the boy was beating the *gamelan* gong for dinner, and the doctor, wearing white starched shorts, a polo shirt, white stockings and white shoes, was gazing down at him.

"Oh, it's you, Alderton. The damned thing aches. I suppose you want to see it." The reverberations of the sweet-toned gong were still hanging in the air. "You'd better stay for dinner, Doc."

Alderton did not answer. He was busy swinging a thermometer in the air; the sun shining on the thermometer reminded Dunhill of the boy's knife.

"You'll have to rest up," Alderton was saying, in his sharp North American accents.

"How long?"

"Oh, a couple of weeks, maybe. We don't know half enough about blood changes in the tropics. A thing like that would be cured in a day on the Tropic of Capricorn."

He was slowly unwrapping the bandage. The thermometer lay under Dunhill's tongue. Dunhill felt the skin of his hand swelling and straining against the loosening bandage; somewhere in the center of his palm there was the faint prick he had received from a hanging liana on the road to the oil well. The skin was stretched, ballooning up, throbbing—he knew all this without looking at it. The doctor's dark oily hair was almost touching Dunhill's face. The furnace heat of the bay seemed to be growing every moment stronger, but perhaps this was only one more effect of the pain. There was lint on the hand, pale pink. When it had been removed, the doctor whistled under his breath.

"What's the matter, Doc?" Dunhill said it. It was the voice of an appealing, terrified child.

"Oh, nothing. Not very healthy. How does it feel?"

"Damnable."

"You bathed it?"

"Yes, my wife bathed it."

The doctor held the inflamed, inflated hand as though he were carefully weighing it.

"Any sore spots?"

"What the hell's a sore spot?"

"Glands."

The word was like a shock: it was the first time that Dunhill had admitted to himself the swelling under the armpit.

"There's something under my armpit."

"That's what I thought. The body's doing its job—getting the poison out of the hand and into the arm." He added, "Anywhere else?"

"No."

"Any other symptoms?"

"No. Except that I've got a damned headache, and I'm sick and tired of looking at the coaster."

"Oh, she'll leave tonight."

The conversation became desultory. The doctor was wondering whether to lance the hand, inject sulfanilamide—it was the time before sulfanilamide powder—or to use a new preparation, resembling molasses, which had arrived by the coastal steamer. Dunhill had heavy rings around his eyes. He looked played out, breathed heavily, and did not always seem to understand what Alderton was saying. Watching Dunhill carefully, the doctor spoke about the club, the new Gramophone records of *Don Giovanni* which had just arrived, gossip from the oil well, the prospects of a Japanese invasion, speaking hurriedly and effortlessly. The wind blew lightly over the rustling pages of *The Tatler* on the couch, but it was a hot, unconsoling wind, drugged with the scent of summer flowers, spices, decaying vegetable matter.

“What are you going to do, Doc?” Dunhill said at last, feeling for his pipe with his left hand—the curse of the thing was that it was his right hand which was wounded. “A fortnight’s a hell of a long time. It’s getting on Estelle’s nerves.” He could hear Estelle moving about in the bedroom. God knows what women did all day in their bedrooms.

“I tell you what I would like you to do. Go to Singapore on the coaster tonight. It’ll get you there in a week. Take Estelle. Give her a good time.”

Dunhill awoke from the drugged pain, conscious that Estelle was standing on the veranda in a print frock, the faint wind pressing her clothes to her skin. She wore nothing underneath, and in the light the print cloth was almost transparent. She half stood, half leaned there, smiling at the doctor, fresh and gleaming, her face freckled with little yellow sunspots, and the tremendous red flame of her hair blotting out the whole bay. There were women who had that effect—their faces coming across rooms obliterated everything, absorbed and reformed everything; Dunhill saw only her face, the golden-red hair, the brown-gold, quick, steady eyes. And seeing her there, while the blood rushed and hammered into his face, he knew she had been unfaithful to him. There was nothing he could do. It had happened recently, at most a day or two before, perhaps only a few hours before. He did not care any more, but he knew he would care later, there would be times near heartbreak, the future contained moments when a terrible

dark emptiness would fill his heart. He had no hatred for her, only a sharp distaste.

He said, "Hear what the doctor says, Estelle? Would you like to go to Singapore?"

"If you want to, darling."

The doctor was saying, "It's partly psychological. These things cure better with a change of air. I'll sign a chit for a three-week's absence on medical grounds."

"What's the alternative, Alderton?"

"I don't know. Frankly, I don't know. We've had some of these things with the natives—they've got tremendous resistance, but you can never tell. There are four alternatives—a rest, or a lancing, or some of that newfangled sulfanilamide in injection, or the new stuff. Or all of them. You can take your choice, Dunhill."

"I'd prefer a lancing," Dunhill said.

The doctor was feeling the raised place under the armpit; the smell of sweat suddenly filled the air.

Alderton shook his head. "No, you'd better have some of that newfangled stuff. I've read reports about it. The French have been doing wonders with it. You're sure you're not going on the coaster tonight?"

"No."

"You might regret it."

"Oh, hell, I've regretted so many things in my life."

The doctor filled the hypodermic syringe in the sunlight—once more there was the knife shining across the sun—and said, "Well, thank God, the temperature's steady. Don't have any alcohol. Remember that. Keep warm at night, and don't get excited. The usual things." Then he bared the left unwounded arm, searched for the vein in the elbow hollow and dug the needle in. At that moment the hooter sounded. Somewhere in the green forests the workers were dropping off work, the Americans were mopping their foreheads and beginning to return to their bungalows. It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and for the rest of the day they would be free under the burning sun to do as they pleased. The clubhouse would fill up. Some of the younger women would be cycling to meet their husbands, while others, uncomplaining, with lined red faces, would be sitting at their dinner tables, waiting. Estelle was holding in her hand an iced lemonade. He drank it, watched the doctor daubing iodine on the faint prick in his left arm. Now there was no movement in the huge bay, no plumes of smoke came from

the coastal oiler, the stiff leaves of the palm hung listless in the midsummer air, and already he had forgotten the place in the sand where the chicken's head lay.

He felt relieved of all responsibilities now, the pain gone, the throbbing nearly over, his wife smiling, the doctor snapping the metal prongs of his bag, Dunhill said, "You know, I've got a curious feeling it will be better in a day or two. Estelle will look after me. It's a damned silly idea to go to Singapore just when the company is doing so well." He held out his left hand, but before the doctor took it, he said, "Look here, Dunhill, you've got to take very good care of yourself. I've told you before that we don't know what these things are. Ever seen a case of *kurap*? It's a disease of the skin which makes it scaly. Oh, I'm not trying to frighten you, but you've had that for a week now, it doesn't seem to change, and then, too, there's something in the water here which makes resistance weaker. Are you sure you wouldn't go to Singapore?"

"No. I'll be well again in two days."

He knew somehow that in the end he would get over it, as the natives got over it. It happened often, other Europeans had suffered from it, it aged them for a while, but they always recovered. Not a single oilman had died since Balik Tamang was opened three years ago. Not one, and he was determined not to die; then he looked up at Estelle, who was whispering to the doctor at the other end of the veranda, and though he knew they were talking about his hand, a wild uncontrollable anger seized him, the throbbing increased, and with the greatest effort he turned his face away from them.

Sometimes Estelle played the Gramophone—they were cheap dance records, and he could hear her long heels clicking the floor in tune with the music, sometimes absent-mindedly she turned on the radio; through the heady atmospherics you could sometimes hear news from Singapore, Delhi, even from San Francisco. Dinner was brief, unceremonious, neither speaking much. The long afternoon wore away, the light faded from the sea, and then there was only the darkness. As the coastal oiler pushed away from the jetty, its deck lights lit the green palm trees. Once or twice during the dark evening they heard the animals growling in the forest.

Sometimes Dunhill would turn accusing glances at his wife, remembering the sudden motiveless fear of the morn-

ing; but at such moments he would be overcome with tenderness, admiring the graceful American girl whose hair was like flame. Her cheeks were highly colored, almost russet, and there was something about her unusual complexion which always delighted him; there was a hidden fire there, the girl's body bursting with sensual life. He said, "The headache's going. Alderton's a damned monkey. We'll go to Singapore as soon as I hear from Sandy, but it's no use losing the superannuation money." He turned over the pages of a mail-order catalogue. He said, "It's time you had a new dress." He wanted to say, "I've never seen you look so fresh, so beautiful," but something held him back, the knife glittered on the table, a faint wind was scouring the sand and through the window there was only the immensely high lamp at the end of the jetty throwing a stark incandescent light on the palms. He turned away from the window. A messenger had brought some reports from the oil well. He found them on the sideboard, where Estelle had placed them, and began to turn over the pages listlessly. He said to himself, "It's strange. I saw it only for a moment." He wondered whether he should talk to her about it. There had been, for a brief moment, an expression, not of horror or contempt, but of guilt, of someone enjoying guilt, on her face. He was certain she had been unfaithful, more certain of this than of anything in his whole life. But where? With whom? Alderton? But she had said so often how she disliked him, with a pitying voice, not troubling to conceal her distaste for him. The air was growing clammy, bats were wheeling outside, as always there was the strange exhalation from the forest, as though every evening and night the forest expelled its evil odors; malignantly evacuating the diseased combinations of oxygen and leaf mold which had gathered during the day. He heard voices from the coolie lines. Sometimes he heard a gibbon screaming in the dark mangrove swamps. His headache was gone, but he noticed that one of the effects of blood poisoning seemed to be that everything glinted more brightly than ever—the knives, his wife's face, the gold hair in the light. He said quietly, "One of those damned natives went after a chicken this morning. I do think they ought to do their executions in the kitchen. He left the head just outside the veranda."

Estelle was knitting for one of the oilmen's wives. "Darling, how's the hand?"

"I wish you would listen to me. It was Ambo, the tall one. I don't want him to do this kind of thing. You know, I've always been squeamish—there's something about beheading a chicken which is much worse than beheading a man. They're so damned pitifully weak against a knife, and I just don't like it."

He thought he saw the color mounting to her face, she looked more beautiful than ever, the young heavy body sitting there in an attitude of complete contentment and assurance. She looked up at him and then dropped her gaze. "You mean the Malay?" she asked.

"No, he's a Dusun, really, but have it your own way. Tell him not to make the front of the veranda his execution porch."

She nodded, the faintest inclination of the head, and then the knitting was resumed. His hand was numb, no longer aching, and he could hear the Chinese making the bed. It would be difficult. He could hardly caress her with a great wad of bandages on his hand, but he wanted her now more than he had wanted her for many weeks; wanted her with a kind of pure vengeful insistence, with that sudden motiveless desire which sprang so readily in the tropics. The bookcase glittered, the white enameled fan went ceaselessly round, whirring gently, the knitting needles clicked. He said, "Come on, redhead, let's go to bed," and then she laid the knitting aside and walked to the bedroom.

Far away he heard the breakers roaring on the other side of the island, twenty miles away. A moon came up, shining through the white silk mosquito netting, and in this light the torrential gold hair looked like a smoldering fire and his wife's body lay very quiet beside him. It was too hot for covers. He began to caress her slowly, at first with the unwounded hand, and then, more clumsily, with the other; but she was already asleep, and he had no heart to wake her. For perhaps an hour he stared through the mosquito netting into the surrounding darkness, wondering at the strange expression he had seen on her face, then at last he, too, slept.

There happens occasionally on Balik Tamang a sudden inexplicable storm which lasts hardly more than a day. At such times the sea whips up, turns steel gray, mists rise from the sea, rain beats against the forest, and everything more than ten paces away from you is hidden. You hear

the forest animals above the sound of the rain, the creaking of branches and the drumming of the natives, who beat gongs to send the storm away, praying in their damp *sulaps*. At such times very often the electric generator fails, and instead of the unchanging electric lights you are forced to use hissing oil lamps. For days afterward hot gusts of steam rise from the land, and the peasants go over the drowned vegetable patches, searching for whatever can be saved from the long onslaught of the storm. The island changes beyond recognition. The path to the oil derricks is littered with broken branches, drowned animals, and sometimes even the road has been washed away and the workmen must be sent out again with their sickles and their great pounding hammers to make a new road. Then, too, the oil pipe is suddenly covered with a thickness of green forest growths which have to be cleaned away.

During the night the storm arose, at daybreak it was raging over the whole island, the telegraph wires from the oil derricks had been pulled down, a heavy mist covered the bungalows, and the jetty entirely disappeared from view. When Dunhill awoke the next morning, he was cold, the window was banging open, and through the window there was nothing visible at all except a smoking white square. He covered his wife with a feather-weight eiderdown, and then went to the bathroom. His hand felt better, though the pain under the shoulder blade was sharper. He had forgotten his suspicions of the previous day. In the cold humid bathroom—cold only because the temperature had dropped two or three degrees—he bathed, shaved, and dressed hurriedly, determined to go over to the company's offices for his reports of the day. Afterward he would go to the clubhouse. He would tell Alderton that the injection had worked wonderfully well. He would read a few papers, and perhaps take a drink at the bar and yarn with young Dogherty about the prospects of new drillings on the other side of the island, and how the new refinery machinery was going on. The rain was still pelting the corrugated iron roof, but the asbestos beneath dulled the sound. He passed through the bedroom barefoot, afraid of waking her, admiring even then in the drowsy downpour of rain and mist through the window the hot red mass of her hair.

He must have awakened her, for as soon as he reached the door he heard her moving and looked back. She had thrown off the eiderdown, and now the woman, drowsily

awakening, looked younger than ever, and more than ever desirable. He said stupidly, "Did I wake you?" She turned, blinking in the unaccustomed white light of the storm.

"It's nothing—I had a bad dream."

He came back and sat on the edge of the bed, letting his fingers run through her red hair. She was still drowsy.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Yes, you know I'm all right," he answered, and once again he thought he detected that curious look of guilt in her eyes.

"You shouldn't go to the office. The doctor said you ought to rest."

He wondered why she said "the doctor," when usually they spoke of him as Alderton. He continued to play with her hair, and then, overcome by a strange and unusually tender affection for her, he began to stroke her with his bandaged hand over the high cheekbones, and along the face and neck and breasts. At last he said, "You mustn't worry. It doesn't hurt. And then we'll leave soon—you must hate it so much."

"I wish you wouldn't touch me," she said, turning her face away.

He flared up. "Why the hell shouldn't I? I'm sorry. I didn't mean to talk like that. What's happened? There's nothing I can do nowadays that you approve of. You don't like sleeping with me lately—Why?"

He was determined upon an answer.

"It's too hot," she said, almost in a whisper, her face turned away from him, her sharp breath rippling the pillow.

Often at night on this island he wondered what he would do if she left him. He knew now. Everything would be the same, but the air would have changed; instead of breathing lightly, he would breathe heavily, against the air. He said, "I didn't mean a damn thing. You know it. Oh, darling, what the hell have I done?" She did not answer. "It's my fault," he went on. "I should have rested. This rotten blood poisoning poisons everything. Forgive me, darling. Can I get you something?" He was like a child. He looked distractedly round the room in search of something she might need, an emblem of surrender, the bone a dog brings to the master after being whipped—there was nothing she needed, for she was perfectly self-contained. In utter despair he

began to babble, "Oh my God, you're so lovely, you're so soft, you're so smooth in bed."

She sat up suddenly, flinging her hair back. "Are you talking about a water bottle?" she said quietly.

He said, "What in God's name have I done? I'll do anything. You've never been like this before." But she had turned her face away, burying it in the pillow, as she sobbed quietly, the red hair shaking and her whole body quivering in the white sunlight.

He went away after that, knowing that there was nothing that could be done, not helpless any more, because he had begun to believe that when the storm was over, she would be herself again. He did not know why he believed this, but it kept him going through the day. He went to the office, remembering that she had been more restless than ever recently, drinking more, or perhaps it was the Chinese servant who was drinking—the level of whiskey was going down alarmingly.

Dogherty said, "Why the hell don't you rest up? It's getting us all down. If I had a blood-stained hand, I wouldn't come to the office."

"I suppose it's a sense of duty," he explained. "I can't bear things to go wrong."

Dogherty was a tremendous, weak-chinned, prematurely white-haired Irishman. Dunhill looked at the charts in the office, red lines showing expanding production of oil, blue lines showing the decrease of wages under the new mechanical drills. The office was a bare room made of nipa palms.

"Take it easy, Dunhill. Oh, for God's sake! You don't seem to realize—" The fan was circling uneasily above his head. "Things are going from bad to worse."

"How?"

"Oh, the natives are talking about a mutiny. We've got the police going through the coolie lines. There's some damned agitator here. We don't know who he is yet, but we will; we'll have him flung out." Dunhill lit a cigarette, surprised that his hand was shaking. Gusts of white mist were pouring past the window, but the storm was abating. It would end as suddenly as it came.

"When did this happen?" he said.

"We noticed it three weeks ago for the first time. Not laziness—taking their time, complaining, whining. You

shouldn't employ Malays or Dusuns. I've told them before—the best labor force is Chinese. *They* don't complain."

"I've never seen the Dusuns complain."

"It's not the way they complain so much, as the damned uncertainty—you don't know which way they're going to spring."

"Come, come. They're lazy, man. They don't spring," Dunhill heard himself saying. "What the devil should they spring about? They live in the sun, take coconuts from the palms, we've built them comfortable quarters, they've got their wives—"

Dogherty was infuriating with his calm air of assumption of superior knowledge. "In the first place," he said, "the Dusuns are not Malays—you seem to think anyone who wears a sarong is a Malay. They're Borneo head-hunters. I don't like the situation. Oh, we can't prove anything. We haven't found any Marxist literature. Only they sit around in their councils, as they call them, and they talk about the white men, not the usual stuff, and we know something goes on in the forest at night. They slip away. There's a notice saying no one should go into the forest after night-fall. They keep on going. You can't stop them. And some dynamite has disappeared." Dogherty said "dynamite" in a loud voice of inexplicable tension.

Dunhill wandered down to the sea, seeing the word "dynamite" in white-hot letters over the horizon. "Senseless," he muttered. "The man's too young for the job." The last white shreds of mist were dissolving over the opaque blueness of the sky; and standing there, in the shade of the green palms, his blood-poisoned hand still aching a little, he gazed back at the island with an expression of delighted amusement. It was good that Dogherty should see visions!

"Oh my God!" he thought. "They need something to wake them up. They go to sleep here. They're such bloody bastards."

He did not know why he was being overwhelmed with a mounting sensation of horror of the white men there. They seemed to have no place on the island. They wore shorts and colored shirts, they even played golf, they were continually creeping into each other's beds, and somehow all this desperate motiveless life on the island gave proportion to the scene, fitted perfectly with the steaming forest in the distance and the coral sands. There was a corrugated iron shed under the palms with a smoke funnel

—God knows why they put a smoke funnel there—that, too was part of the providential arrangement of things, and you could not see the hut from the house, because the jetty sloped at this point. The women are worse, he told himself, looking toward the factory buildings, the terrible snakelike iron pipe, and high above him the palm trees stiff as telegraph poles, the bright yellow stems of the palms and the feathery green tufts waving in the soft sea wind. It was hot and moist, the terrible moisture that comes after a brief storm; and then looking up, he saw thin gray spider webs hanging from the palms.

The spiders were so small he thought they were harmless, till he saw the little green eyes and the curiously rough inflated skins. They were about the size of a penny, and they kept swinging slowly backward and forward in the wind. When everything else was silent and unmoving, he thought he heard the faint crepitation of the gray threads. Then he rubbed his eyes. It was odd. There were no spiders. Had they gone? No, very suddenly they had climbed up the long black silken ladders and five or six of them were hanging above his head; and he thought he saw the intensely small green eyes in the sun.

The heaviness which had oppressed him all morning remained. The doctor was still at the oil well. He wondered why he had come here, what chance had brought him to those detestable green palms under the heavy sun. Of course, there were spiders everywhere on the island, perhaps it was a spider along the road in the forest that had pricked his hand. He was sure of it now, looking up at the gray dangling net of viscous silk, the spiders suddenly sent into a frenzy of movement because he had lifted his head, green eyes winking like lamps. "It's my fault. I shouldn't have come here," he thought, and he was about to return when he noticed twenty feet below, in the place where the water was transparent and shaded, some natives bathing.

He had to confess it to himself, they looked magnificent, the slow, lithe copper-colored limbs against the faint redness of coral. They were taller and better built than the Malays in Singapore, with crinkled hair and heavy mouths, almost Negroid. He could see their sarongs on the shore, a dark patch of browns and striped yellows; and as their young bodies caught the copper glint of the sun, as they swam slowly in the shade, a profound envy rose within him. He had never dared to bathe here. There were too many

sharks, too many poisonous corals, too many uncharted pockets in the sea floor, giving rise to dangerous currents. Danger everywhere. The sun flashed white among them when they went beyond the shade, but how slowly, how effortlessly they moved in the shadow of the jetty. They were boys of about fourteen, the sons of the factory workers, and they spoke to one another across the waters, a soft sound perfectly in keeping with the slumberous stretch of water, the colored rocks, the unwavering palms and the sand pipers which kept prancing along the jetty, the only quick-witted things in the whole island.

After a while the boys came out of the water and bathed in the sun, tawny bronze and gold, like young lion cubs sweltering through the sandy midsummer heat. For a long time he watched them from the shade of the green palms.

Estelle rose from the bed, trembling with rage. The mist was rising, and already the hot blue day was shining through. She took off the flowered dressing gown and lay full length on the bed, softly fanning herself, and there came to her, together with the sound of breakers and the still softer sound of the Malay servants whispering together, the distant throaty roar and sudden spout of oil leaping through the derricks, and almost at the same moment she imagined the yellow transparent oil towering into froth in the sky, then falling heavily and damply on the clearing in the forest. Then she rang the bell, and Ambo came silently through the curtains.

She had never asked him his age, but she knew he was still young. The bronze skin was warm, though there were menacing shadows under the eyes. He wore a sarong of dark brown and purple, carefully plaited and folded, and he was barefoot, coming silently across the wooden floor. Seeing her lying on the bed, he made a movement as though to go, but she beckoned him, throwing back the whole shock of her flame-red hair on the pillow.

"Massa no come?" Ambo said, falling beside the bed and resting his hands on the edge of the bed—the fingers almost purple, soft yet bony.

She was oddly exhilarated, her breath coming in nervous jumps, smiling, arching her neck and gazing at her lover without tenderness but with a kind of insolent desire, almost a savagery.

Ambo said again, "Tuan Besar—he gone? What for? No place here. We go forest."

The urgency was being communicated to him, and she could see how much he desired her, his eyes becoming larger and more velvet.

"Tuan Besar says you mustn't kill chicken," she said softly, and so tenderly that the words were no more than a caress.

Ambo nodded. "I kill chicken before him. He no like. Massa good man, he no like dead chickens," and then his voice dropped again and he said, "We go forest."

"No, here."

It was like a summons, but it was a summons he had never obeyed before, and he was not accustomed to the thought of taking her there. There were a host of objections rising in his mind, but she was so beautiful, the flesh so firm and taut and alert, and the hair so red, that for a moment he surrendered, leaning forward and breathing over her, his face hardly an inch from her body. And while he did this, she held his head and put her hand through his dark crinkled hair, laughing softly in the pleasure of expectancy, already leaping a little toward him. "Come soon, come soon," she whispered, dragging him down, but there was a stiffness of repulsion in him, seeing the mosquito net and her husband's things all about the room.

"You come forest?" he said. "You come quick. He come back."

Once, three months ago, Ambo was with her when she heard her husband coming up the steps of the veranda. She had received a sudden stab of fright like a heavy blow in the chest which made her recoil from any more meetings with Ambo for a little while. Afterward they always went to the forest. She riding on the small pony and he following her at a distance, walking with long loping strides, or perhaps he would disappear altogether and they would meet in the little clearing he cut out of the hanging lianas with his *parang*. They had left cushions and blankets in a hollowed-out tree, protected from the rain by stones. Once or twice a week she met him there. They would remove the stones, lay the cushions carefully on the grass and for a long time they remained there; if her husband asked where she had been, there were always the flowers and orchids they collected from the forest to prove that she had been performing her wifely occupations. She loved flowers, and

to her Ambo was like one of those hanging orchids which glow in terrifyingly compact clusters on the trees, spreading in every direction, entwining the branches, dark red and purple and soft to touch.

He was called Ambo because he was a native of Amboina.

"Yes, we go?" he said urgently, his hot breath more quickening to her than the touch of hands.

There were moments when it was best to humor him; so she dressed quickly and allowed him to go. She hated the lonely journey to the forest, the roads of red ants, the succulent greenness and sappiness of the undergrowth. Parakeets would scream at her from the trees, breaking the long silences; or she would hear in the distance, coming through warm pockets of air, the voices of the laborers at the derricks five or ten miles away. Always she feared she would come upon some Malays spying on her, yet fear gave her courage, she liked riding in the shaded green lanes beneath the huge *merantis*, and the thought of Ambo waiting for her drove her into a kind of frenzy. "He makes love like a dog," she thought, and then she was in despair that he might not come.

He came long after she had tethered the pony and laid the cushions on the grass, his chest streaked with sweat and his sarong wet with the dew of the long grasses. Handsome and young, the bony face lifted jauntily in the air, the shoulders delicately rounded, he came with the loping stride which she always admired. He squatted there beside her, mindless and alone, not seeing her, seeing only the hunger she had aroused in him, while the sunlight stippled him black and gold; and outside the small square of cushions and blankets there was only the forest and the pony. She unbuttoned the white blouse and waited for him to undress her, knowing that this, too, would be the same, all his gestures would be the same, he would undress her a little and then breathe lightly upon her, and there were some herbs in his mouth which gave his breath a smell as of long earth-buried flowers, or of those poisonous orchids which resemble crabs. But this morning there was a greater haste in his movements; he did not carefully unfold his sarong, but leaped upon her with his sarong still on him, pulling it above his waist, addressing her in terrible urgency, moaning and saying words in Malay she could not understand, till at last she said, "Speak more softly—someone might hear you."

"Who care?" he answered.

"Oh, you must be careful, Ambo—for my sake. Please don't be rough. You know how I hate you when you are rough."

She could feel the cold steel blade of the *parang* against her bare legs, for it was still buckled into his sarong. He was leaping like some wild thing, breathless with impatience. She tried to push him away, to quiet him, to hold him so close to her that his urgency would disappear. Ambo pressed himself down with all his strength, and suddenly she yelled at him, trying to push him away, "Don't you see, you've cut me! You clumsy fool! Why do you have the *parang* there?" and she tried to take it away from him, pulling it up through the belt of his sarong. The sunlight spilled over the blankets, and she was rolling away from him. Her legs were streaked with blood. She said, "What's happened to you?" She was cowering on the edge of the blankets, and suddenly he had leaped into a crouching position, breathing heavily, unrecognizable, a yellow soft thing in the sunlight with a hard shining face, all his teeth showing. He was looking at her leg, where the blood spilled. He was murmuring to himself, and then she knew no more, for he had leapt at her again like a released tiger and he was so close to her that everything else was swallowed up in her passion for him. Now he was more tender than ever. He caressed her quietly, no longer wearing the sarong, the *parang* thrown away, and for a long time they lay there quietly.

The pony came toward them, and once a parakeet screamed so loud that they both jumped a little in fright and laughed nervously. The heat drained their surviving energy. In the sunlight her hair took on the quality of incandescence, and her skin glowed with sweat which rolled over her and turned into mist. She knew almost nothing about him. It was the springing stride, and the purple hands and the way he breathed all over her which made him so attractive to her, so that there were times when she wondered whether she could ever face life without him.

She remembered stepping through the kitchen and seeing the dark red guavas on a tray, overripe, but yet exciting to taste, and she wished she had brought some food with her. Nearly always she would remember food only when she had reached the place in the forest. Her temper had gone: the best part of love came afterward when you were drowsy in

the sun, not thinking, perfectly at peace. She said, "I wish there was some food—we must bring something to drink next time," and he only nodded.

Then she remembered the wound. It was a long wound, and the blood made her leg hideous. She had not noticed it before, but now she began to be afraid—it had spotted her blouse, someone might see her before she could change it. There was no stream where she could wash off the blood.

She said, "They mustn't see this. What shall I say? I cut myself in the bathroom?"

It was the only answer. She hoped her husband would not see the deep cut; she would keep away from him. She looked at her watch. They had been there only five minutes together, but it seemed an age. Ambo was breathing all over her again, as he always did, and wherever his breath fell there was a dull center of pleasure; she half hated it now; it was like a terribly chaste and at the same time evil kiss; it was better when he lay against her.

He said, "I'll take you again, but in my own place."

"Where?"

"In the forest. We'll go away."

She thought for a while, fighting against the idea of him.

"I must go back to him, Ambo," she said sorrowfully. "I must go back."

He was smiling at her. She looked at the cut which was still bleeding. The *parang* was curved and had cut a crescent shape into her leg.

"You go back? I wait?" he said.

"Yes, I go back," she said, and she thought of the days that would follow, Dunhill's bandaged hand, swimming out in the moonlight in the blue sea, the trip to Singapore and always the rendezvous in the forest and the blankets and cushions hidden in the hollowed-out tree. "Yes, you wait," she said, looking up at the sun and leaning her face in the crook of his arm.

The sun fell through the trees, staining her, but she did not care. The other wives went about their accustomed duties, gossiped, helped their husbands, went to bridge parties, and longed for the boat bringing mail from Singapore or Kuching. It was not her world. She would grow old, but while she was young she would sleep with a striped tiger and have him at her mercy—she would do as she pleased. "Am I beautiful?" she said, and he answered, "Yes, beautiful like the eye of the dawn, like the sea," and this

pleased her, and once again she would allow him to breathe on her, all over, until every part of her body had quickened under the hot, scented breath. "I'm beautiful," she said, "I'm the eye of the dawn, as beautiful as the sea."

Dunhill did not know why he was gazing out to sea; there was nothing there, only the endless blue hard stretch leading to the thin dark line on the horizon. His arm ached still, and occasionally he would make infantile gestures, as though he could shake off the pain. When the bell rang over the factory shed, he went in search of the doctor.

In his surgery Alderton wore a white starched coat and the red stethoscope hung around his neck. He was washing his hands when Dunhill came in.

"Well, let's have a look at it," Alderton said. "How's the temperature?"

"Rotten."

Alderton looked up sharply. "Was that you standing in the sun?"

Dunhill nodded.

"You shouldn't, you know. You ought to have more sense. The best thing is to stay indoors. The sun inflames everything. You ought to be more careful." He went on, "It's partly psychological. I've got to have the patient's help, otherwise the whole treatment is worthless. You do understand that, don't you?"

Dunhill knew then that he wanted to die; he couldn't face Estelle again. She had treated him once too often as though he wasn't there. The doctor was undoing the bandage. The gland under the shoulder gave a sudden spurt, and he went pale, not so much because of the ache as because he was afraid to look at the swollen hand, the skin drawn so tight that the hand was characterless, like a monkey's hand.

But the hand was better—Dunhill himself could see no change in it, but Alderton swore that it was healthier altogether, the medicine had done its work, in a few days it would be over. "Rest it, whatever you do, don't work or worry, and I'll give you another injection. Wonderful stuff. And there's another thing—keep it in ice, it will stop the pain." He said a little later, "I'm making some statistics. I think I can get the company to cut down our working hours and increase the holidays. The kind of life we are living drains hell out of us."

Dunhill nodded. He had no particular respect for the young doctor, who knew too much about the private lives of everyone in the island.

When the injection had been made, Alderton lit his pipe and said, "You know what is the best medicine for anyone in the tropics? A loving wife. It's taken me a hell of a time to learn that, but I shall never forget now. I'm going to get married next trip."

"Anyone in mind?"

"Oh, hell, no. I had a childhood sweetheart, but she got married—but you don't have to pick and choose. Find someone who is handsome, like Estelle, really handsome, and then you can teach them the tricks. No children for three or four years, say five years, and then they're tamed."

"Yes, it's something like that," Dunhill said, and he went out into the sunlight, dazed, the arm thumping again from the injection and the prick of the needle still hurting.

He did not expect to find Estelle: she was always either rowing or gathering flowers or taking long walks or riding. He was accustomed to her absence, and indeed preferred it. He rang the bell. The Chinese number-one boy answered, and he ordered a bowlful of cubes of ice, and iced lemonade, and some aspirins. He waited impatiently, gazing out of the window, now at the green palms, now at the sandy shore and the birds hovering on blue waves. The sea had never looked more solid or more motionless.

When the number-one boy returned he stripped off his coat and plunged his hand in the ice; dropped an aspirin in the lemonade and lit his pipe. He turned on the electric Gramophone and listened to the chorus of lovers at the opening of *Don Giovanni*. When dinner was laid, he asked if there was news from his wife, but when the boy shook his head, he was not distressed; she might be having lunch with the Naylor's, or perhaps she had decided to spend the whole day riding or rowing. It had happened before. With his arm in the bowl of ice, he lost all sense of pain.

In the evening, when she had not arrived, he phoned the Naylor's and asked whether she was there. It infuriated him when he heard Naylor's high-pitched voice saying, "No sirree, not a sign of her—I bet she's wandering again." He drank some whisky in defiance of Alderton's orders, and after a short meal, during which he hardly touched his food, he went to bed, bringing another bowl of ice with him for his hand. On the way to the bedroom he saw Ambo

squatting in the kitchen below, and he reminded himself that he would ask Estelle again when she came in to speak to him. He had seen the chicken's head again on his return from the doctor. Ambo should have picked it up and thrown it away.

He was content not to share his bed. When he first came to the island, Estelle had asked for twin beds, but he had told her that they were fatal for people in the tropics. "You see, Estelle," he said, "everyone has tiffs in this climate. You can't help yourself, but if you have a double bed, you can break through the anger, you don't just lie fuming at each other." He heard footsteps, thought it was Estelle, but it was only one of the Chinese boys turning out all the lights.

He slept heavily, drugged by the aspirin and the injection. When he awoke the next morning, he was calmer than ever and the pain was gone; he knew the swelling had gone down. He rang for the number-one boy and asked whether Estelle had returned.

"Me no know."

"Then what the hell's the matter with you? Go and look for her. Ask the number-two boy."

The Chinese giggled. It infuriated him. He lit a cigarette and went to the icebox, and poured himself a bowl of condensed milk, waiting till one of the other boys came in.

"They no see," the boy said. "They say no sign her she come, no sign her she go."

"Don't talk that bloody language. Who saw her last? I left her here. She was all right then. You go ask boys where she went." It suddenly staggered him to think that she might have got lost in the forest or drowned at sea. He hoped for her sake that she was drowned at sea rather than lost in the forest, for he hated the thought of her eaten by red ants. At that moment, standing on the veranda, he saw the boy Ambo running after a squawking red chicken, hardly large enough to make a meal. He shouted at the boy, "Stop it, do you hear? Leave the bloody thing alone, or do the killing in the kitchen. Come here. Who are you?"

The boy paused in his pursuit, with the *parang* in his hand, so graceful and lithe a thing in the yellow and purple sarong that Dunhill felt a momentary regret for bawling so loud. As the boy came nearer, the Englishman saw the slow white smile spreading in the heavy languorous face.

"Tuan Besar speak?"

"Yes, I want to tell you I don't want the front of the house cluttered up with chicken heads. Leave the bloody bird alone if you haven't strength enough to kill it in the kitchen. You always let them escape and run after them. It's a kind of game. Don't do it again."

The hot sun stretched over the sea, and there was no wind; the palms were tranquil in the sun. The boy moved away, nodding and bowing, the *parang* flashing in his hand, and Dunhill said aloud, "It's sheer laziness, or perhaps he wants to make an exhibition of himself—the bastards are all the same."

There was no sign of Estelle. He was angry and impatient now. He drank a short whiskey and followed it ten minutes later with a stiffer one. He thought of telephoning O'Brien, the manager, and then dismissed the thought from his mind. The radio was one continual crackle of atmospherics, as it was every morning of the year: it was only in the evening that you heard Delhi or Singapore with comparative clarity. He had pronounced views, and was furious with the Japanese: he wished Estelle were in the room, so that he could tell her what he thought of the Japanese.

After breakfast he read for the third time a month-old copy of the *Straits Times*, then he summoned the number-one boy again and told him that he must make inquiries about where Estelle had been last seen. There was a grape-vine: the servants knew far more than the officials, and he had long ago come to the conclusion that the only way to deal with the servants was with alternate beatings and bribes. He gave the boy five dollars, and sent him away.

In the evening the boy returned to say that no one knew where she was, but she had gone into the forest.

"It's some damned trick of hers," he told himself. "Flaming hair, and as cold as ice. I don't know what's come over her lately."

He went to bed early, but he could not sleep. The pain had gone entirely from his arm, but in its going it had left an emptiness which nothing in the ill-furnished bungalow could fill. At night he dreamed of her. He was ashamed of his dreams, but they brought her so vividly before him that he switched on the light, thinking she was there. "She's a bloody fool. The way to deal with a woman is the way I deal with the servants—beatings and bribes. I never gave her enough beatings, I never gave her enough bribes."

He felt sick and lonely, in a black storm of despair. He

heard one of the servants wandering about downstairs, and he thought he heard an animal howling. The little white transparent lizards were squeaking high up in the wall, and a moth, which had fluttered aimlessly around the electric lamp, suddenly fell to the floor, hopped, making a sound like starched cotton, rubbing together, and then lay still. "Probably dead. The bloody ants will eat it. It's a hell of a place." Like someone mesmerized he watched the ants creeping in long columns from the wall, glittering metallic red, going straight as a plumb line; they burrowed around the dead moth, formed a circle, crawled over it, bit away portions of the face, bit off the wings one by one, and then forming three inexhaustible columns carried off the three pieces of the still quivering moth. They did not carry it back to the hole where they had come from, but continued their journey across the floor. When they had gone, nothing was left except a faint stain of powder from the wings.

He had another drink, and knew he would not be able to sleep again that night—the death of a moth had kept him awake before. At dawn he rang for the Chinese boy.

"She may be hurt," he yelled at the boy. "Can you get that into your thoughtless, dumb, idiot head? She may be hurt. She must be found. Where did she go?"

"They say she go follest—"

"Yes."

"Thats all. She no come back."

A sharp, ghastly fear struck him. He said, "You've got to come with me. Have you got any senses, man. We've got to find her."

His face was dead white with sleeplessness. He dressed hurriedly and strode across the intervening half mile of land toward the forest, looking in the grass for a sign of her, but there was no sign. He had strapped on his revolver, and because there was a land mist, he shivered a little in his shorts and shirt. Then he found a trail of hoof marks. "She must have taken Jerry," he said. "What a fool I was not to see whether any of the ponies were missing." There were three ponies which were kept in the stable at the far end of the long kitchen. "Keep your eyes skinned," he shouted, unnecessarily loud. "Look out for her. I'll give you money if you find her, and I'll beat the living lights out of you if you don't." The boy did not understand what he was saying.

When they were in the forest, in one of the many lanes

carved through the undergrowth, he wished he had brought a knife. Hidden lianas suddenly swung into his face. There were caves of greenness, walls of vines, a maze of footpaths. The sun began to rise, burning through white mists, turning them to dew and sun haze, and the heat rose from the grasses and exuded from the trees; parakeets swung like flashes of red hot blood across his eyes, and he heard nearer at hand than he desired, the awakening sounds of beasts. He wished above all that he could hear the neighing of the pony, or his wife's voice. All thoughts of hatred had gone from him. He thought of her now only as she was in the early days of their marriage, when he lived thunder-struck by her red-gold hair. She was so beautiful that he knew he did not deserve her. It was like a pain, thinking of her. Now he felt he would promise her everything, even a lover, if only she would return. Loneliness faced him; a quick old age. You lose your bearings in the tropics, and you are no good for work at home after a few years in this stifling heat, which drains the saps and vigors from your body. He hated the forest. He hated the Chinese boy, waiting for bribes. If he found her, they would take the next boat to Singapore, take a holiday in Penang or the Cameron Highlands, and never return to these sweatshop islands off the north coast of Borneo. He smiled grimly. He would be a good lover, and he would give her small beatings and big bribes.

Then in a clearing he saw a tree which had been struck by lightning, blue and chalky yellow, the height of a man, and there were blankets strewn at its feet. Estelle was lying naked in the sunlight, surrounded by hosts of silent fat magpies and by line upon line of red ants, but what was more awful was that there was only a swollen red stump where her head had been and the ants were pouring all over her. He looked up. On a tree branch, on a level with his eyes, she was looking at him, hanging by her red hair. The ants were all over the branch and the severed neck, but her face was still recognizable. He shut his eyes, but the red hair, glinting in the sun, in great heaps, was so bright that even when he closed his eyes, he saw it—a slab of yellow and gold. He turned to the Chinese boy, who suddenly threw himself down on his knees and licked his shoes, in the gesture of a low-class Chinese avoiding arrest by the most complete subservience and self-surrender.

Without looking at the red-gold hair, he examined the

body, squashed out whole lanes of ants, kicked the heavy blood-swollen birds which could no longer lift their wings and which fell with a dull sound, without sufficient energy after their feast to squawk; and then, sweating heavily, he rolled the headless body in the blankets and ordered the Chinese to carry it. The boy refused. Dunhill put his revolver against the boy's side, and said, "You'll do as you're told." The boy obeyed. Dunhill picked up his wife's clothes, the blouse and the riding breeches, socks and boots and some blood-stained handkerchiefs, and he did not know what he was doing; he only knew that he could not look at that head hanging on the branches. "Christ, Christ, Christ," he said. "Christ, Christ, Christ—you bloody fool," he kept on saying, while tears ran down his face in heavy streams. "I didn't want this—but you, you wanted it—gold hair in the trees." He was choking with horror and remorse. "You carry the head," he said to the boy, and held out the riding breeches; but the boy stepped back and refused to carry anything more. There were birds everywhere, even great hawks, and they were all screaming and flying about the head, and others were attempting to perch on the boy's shoulders. "They'll get to the face soon," Dunhill said. "We'll have to save it." He couldn't think why the birds had not pecked the face, which was still beautiful, though thinner; then, holding up the riding breeches to catch the head, he carefully uncurled the hair tied to the branch. "Oh Christ, Oh my darling," he kept on saying. "What shall I do with it?" and then his voice changed and he asked accusingly, "What were you doing? Who was it? My darling, my sweet one, I forgive you—please believe me—I forgive you—you have suffered already—but never again."

Very slowly they walked through the trembling forest, hardly knowing where they were going or what they were doing. Dunhill held the riding breeches close to his chest with one hand; with the other he held the blood-stained blouse.

They walked blindly back to the house, laid the head and the body in the drawing room without saying a word to anyone. The other servants were not in sight. They had probably seen him coming and retreated into their own quarters. "Poor darling," Dunhill kept on saying, delirious with grief. For a moment he thought that if he could tie the head and the body together, and cover them—with flowers,

she would be made whole again. The boy was slipping away from the room.

"Come here—you can't go yet," he shouted after the boy. "It's not over. You've got to help me, you understand. I'll beat the heart out of you if I have any more nonsense. What's the matter with you?"

He went up to the boy and pulled him back in the room. "We can't have it here," he said dazedly. "We've got to get it away."

"Where to?"

"It doesn't matter, as long as we get it away. You carry again. You carry, or I'll beat your guts in—I'll make it worth your while, you've got to help me."

He knew where he was going now. He was going to the doctor. He would lay the body there—it was the doctor's prerogative, not his, to care for the dead. They went out again. On the way he passed the chicken head and stopped, nearly dropping the riding breeches, for the head had shriveled in the sun, a little yellow thing with dead cracked eyes and an open beak, the blood dried up, no more than a dead twig or a stone. He said, "I told him not to do it. I wish she was here—she could tell him. I'll have to speak to him again when I get back."

When he reached the doctor's bungalow, he turned for a moment to look at the green palms. It was strange how they glinted there, the color of some savage metal, unmoving in the faint wind. No breakers fell on the shore, the sea was like steel or like glass and the heavy midsummer sun was still sucking all life from the earth, and there, halfway between the sky and sea, like an unchanging green face, lay the green leaves of the palm. The red coastal steamer from Singapore was returning.

The Letter BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

OUTSIDE on the quay the sun beat fiercely. A stream of motors, lorries and busses, private cars and hirelings, sped up and down the crowded thoroughfare, and every chauffeur blew his horn; rickshaws threaded their nimble path amid the throng, and the panting coolies found breath to yell at one another; coolies, carrying heavy bales, sidled along with their quick jog-trot and shouted to the passer-by to make way; itinerant vendors proclaimed their wares. Singapore is the meeting-place of a hundred peoples; and men of all colours, black Tamils, yellow Chinks, brown Malays, Armenians, Jews and Bengalis, called to one another in raucous tones. But inside the office of Messrs. Ripley, Joyce & Naylor it was pleasantly cool; it was dark after the dusty glitter of the street and agreeably quiet after its unceasing din. Mr. Joyce sat in his private room, at the table, with an electric fan turned full on him. He was leaning back, his elbows on the arms of the chair, with the tips of the outstretched fingers of one hand resting neatly against the tips of the outstretched fingers of the other. His gaze rested on the battered volumes of the Law Reports which stood on a long shelf in front of him. On the top of a cupboard were square boxes of japanned tin on which were painted the names of various clients.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

A Chinese clerk, very neat in his white ducks, opened it.

"Mr. Crosbie is here, sir."

He spoke beautiful English, accenting each word with precision, and Mr. Joyce had often wondered at the extent of his vocabulary. Ong Chi Seng was a Cantonese, and he had studied law at Gray's Inn. He was spending a year or two with Messrs. Ripley, Joyce & Naylor in order to prepare himself for practice on his own account. He was industrious, obliging, and of exemplary character.

"Show him in," said Mr. Joyce.

He rose to shake hands with his visitor and asked him to sit down. The light fell on him as he did so. The face of Mr. Joyce remained in shadow. He was by nature a silent man, and now he looked at Robert Crosbie for quite a minute

without speaking. Crosbie was a big fellow well over six feet high, with broad shoulders, and muscular. He was a rubber-planter, hard with the constant exercise of walking over the estate and with the tennis which was his relaxation when the day's work was over. He was deeply sunburned. His hairy hands, his feet in clumsy boots, were enormous, and Mr. Joyce found himself thinking that a blow of that great fist would easily kill the fragile Tamil. But there was no fierceness in his blue eyes; they were confiding and gentle; and his face, with its big, undistinguished features, was open, frank and honest. But at this moment it bore a look of deep distress. It was drawn and haggard.

"You look as though you hadn't had much sleep the last night or two," said Mr. Joyce.

"I haven't."

Mr. Joyce noticed now the old felt hat, with its broad double brim, which Crosbie had placed on the table; and then his eyes travelled to the khaki shorts he wore, showing his red hairy thighs, the tennis shirt open at the neck, without a tie, and the dirty khaki jacket with the ends of the sleeves turned up. He looked as though he had just come in from a long tramp among the rubber trees. Mr. Joyce gave a slight frown.

"You must pull yourself together, you know. You must keep your head."

"Oh, I'm all right."

"Have you seen your wife to-day?"

"No, I'm to see her this afternoon. You know, it is a damned shame that they should have arrested her."

"I think they had to do that," Mr. Joyce answered in his level, soft tone.

"I should have thought they'd have let her out on bail."

"It's a very serious charge."

"It is damnable. She did what any decent woman would do in her place. Only, nine women out of ten wouldn't have the pluck. Leslie's the best woman in the world. She wouldn't hurt a fly. Why, hang it all, man, I've been married to her for twelve years, do you think I don't know her? God, if I'd got hold of the man I'd have wrung his neck. I'd have killed him without a moment's hesitation. So would you."

"My dear fellow, everybody's on your side. No one has a good word to say for Hammond. We're going to get her off.

I don't suppose either the assessors or the judge will go into court without having already made up their minds to bring in a verdict of not guilty."

"The whole thing's a farce," said Crosbie violently. "She ought never to have been arrested in the first place, and then it's terrible, after all the poor girl's gone through, to subject her to the ordeal of a trial. There's not a soul I've met since I've been in Singapore, man or woman, who hasn't told me that Leslie was absolutely justified. I think it's awful to keep her in prison all these weeks."

"The law is the law. After all, she confesses that she killed the man. It is terrible, and I'm dreadfully sorry both for you and for her."

"I don't matter a hang," interrupted Crosbie.

"But the fact remains that murder has been committed, and in a civilised community a trial is inevitable."

"Is it murder to exterminate noxious vermin? She shot him as she would have shot a mad dog."

Mr. Joyce leaned back again in his chair and once more placed the tips of his ten fingers together. The little construction he formed looked like the skeleton of a roof. He was silent for a moment.

"I should be wanting in my duty as your legal adviser," he said at last, in an even voice, looking at his client with his cool, brown eyes, "if I did not tell you that there is one point which causes me just a little anxiety. If your wife had only shot Hammond once, the whole thing would be absolutely plain sailing. Unfortunately she fired six times."

"Her explanation is perfectly simple. In the circumstances any one would have done the same."

"I daresay," said Mr. Joyce, "and of course I think the explanation is very reasonable. But it's no good closing our eyes to the facts. It's always a good plan to put yourself in another man's place, and I can't deny that if I were prosecuting for the Crown that's the point on which I should centre my enquiry."

"My dear fellow, that's perfectly idiotic."

Mr. Joyce shot a sharp glance at Robert Crosbie. The shadow of a smile hovered over his shapely lips. Crosbie was a good fellow, but he could hardly be described as intelligent.

"I daresay it's of no importance," answered the lawyer, "I just thought it was a point worth mentioning. You haven't got very long to wait now, and when it's all over I

recommend you to go off somewhere with your wife on a trip and forget all about it. Even though we are almost dead certain to get an acquittal, a trial of that sort is anxious work and you'll both want a rest."

For the first time Crosbie smiled, and his smile strangely changed his face. You forgot the uncouthness and saw only the goodness of his soul.

"I think I shall want it more than Leslie. She's borne up wonderfully. By God, there's a plucky little woman for you."

"Yes, I've been very much struck by her self-control," said the lawyer. "I should never have guessed that she was capable of such determination."

His duties as her counsel had made it necessary for him to have a good many interviews with Mrs. Crosbie since her arrest. Though things had been made as easy as could be for her, the fact remained that she was in jail, awaiting her trial for murder, and it would not have been surprising if her nerves had failed her. She appeared to bear her ordeal with composure. She read a great deal, took such exercise as was possible, and by favour of the authorities worked at the pillow lace which had always formed the entertainment of her long hours of leisure. When Mr. Joyce saw her she was neatly dressed in cool, fresh, simple frocks, her hair was carefully arranged, and her nails were manicured. Her manner was collected. She was able even to jest upon the little inconveniences of her position. There was something casual about the way in which she spoke of the tragedy, which suggested to Mr. Joyce that only her good breeding prevented her from finding something a trifle ludicrous in a situation which was eminently serious. It surprised him, for he had never thought that she had a sense of humour.

He had known her off and on for a good many years. When she paid visits to Singapore she generally came to dine with his wife and himself, and once or twice she had passed a week-end with them at their bungalow by the sea. His wife had spent a fortnight with her on the estate and had met Geoffrey Hammond several times. The two couples had been on friendly, if not on intimate terms, and it was on this account that Robert Crosbie had rushed over to Singapore immediately after the catastrophe and begged Mr. Joyce to take charge personally of his unhappy wife's defence.

The story she told him the first time he saw her, she had never varied in the smallest detail. She told it as coolly then, a few hours after the tragedy, as she told it now. She told it connectedly, in a level, even voice, and her only sign of confusion was when a slight colour came into her cheeks as she described one or two of its incidents. She was the last woman to whom one would have expected such a thing to happen. She was in the early thirties, a fragile creature, neither short nor tall, and graceful rather than pretty. Her wrists and ankles were very delicate, but she was extremely thin and you could see the bones of her hands through the white skin, and the veins were large and blue. Her face was colourless, slightly sallow, and her lips were pale. You did not notice the colour of her eyes. She had a great deal of light brown hair, and it had a slight natural wave; it was the sort of hair that with a little touching-up would have been very pretty, but you could not imagine that Mrs. Crosbie would think of resorting to any such device. She was a quiet, pleasant, unassuming woman. Her manner was engaging and if she was not very popular it was because she suffered from a certain shyness. This was comprehensible enough, for the planter's life is lonely, and in her own house, with people she knew, she was in her quiet way charming. Mrs. Joyce after her fortnight's stay had told her husband that Leslie was a very agreeable hostess. There was more in her, she said, than people thought; and when you came to know her you were surprised how much she had read and how entertaining she could be.

She was the last woman in the world to commit murder.

Mr. Joyce dismissed Robert Crosbie with such reassuring words as he could find and, once more alone in his office, turned over the pages of the brief. But it was a mechanical action, for all its details were familiar to him. The case was the sensation of the day, and it was discussed in all the clubs, at all the dinner tables, up and down the Peninsula from Singapore to Penang. The facts that Mrs. Crosbie gave were simple. Her husband had gone to Singapore on business and she was alone for the night. She dined by herself, late, at a quarter to nine, and after dinner sat in the sitting-room working at her lace. It opened on to the verandah. There was no one in the bungalow, for the servants had retired to their own quarters at the back of the compound. She was surprised to hear a step on the gravel path

in the garden, a booted step which suggested a white man rather than a native, for she had not heard a motor drive up and she could not imagine who could be coming to see her at that time of night. Some one ascended the few stairs that led up to the bungalow, walked across the verandah, and appeared at the door of the room in which she sat. At the first moment she did not recognise the visitor. She sat with a shaded lamp and he stood with his back to the darkness.

"May I come in?" he said.

She did not even recognise the voice.

"Who is it?" she asked.

She worked with spectacles, and she took them off as she spoke.

"Geoff Hammond."

"Of course. Come in and have a drink."

She rose and shook hands with him cordially. She was a little surprised to see him, for though he was a neighbour neither she nor Robert had been lately on very intimate terms with him, and she had not seen him for some weeks. He was the manager of a rubber estate nearly eight miles from theirs and she wondered why he had chosen this late hour to come and see them.

"Robert's away," she said. "He had to go to Singapore for the night."

Perhaps he thought his visit called for some explanation, for he said:

"I'm sorry. I felt rather lonely to-night, so I thought I'd just come along and see how you were getting on."

"How on earth did you come? I never heard a car."

"I left it down the road. I thought you might both be in bed and asleep."

This was natural enough. The planter gets up at dawn in order to take the roll-call of the workers, and soon after dinner he is glad to go to bed. Hammond's car was in point of fact found next day a quarter of a mile from the bungalow.

Since Robert was away there was no whisky and soda in the room. Leslie did not call the boy, since he was probably asleep, but fetched it herself. Her guest mixed himself a drink and filled his pipe.

Geoff Hammond had a host of friends in the colony. He was at this time in the late thirties, but he had come out as a lad. He had been one of the first to volunteer on the

outbreak of war, and had done very well. A wound in the knee caused him to be invalided out of the army after two years, but he returned to the Federated Malay States with a D.S.O. and an M.C. He was one of the best billiard players in the colony. He had been a beautiful dancer and a fine tennis player, but, though able no longer to dance, and his tennis, with a stiff knee, was not so good as it had been, he had the gift of popularity and was universally liked. He was a tall, good-looking fellow, with attractive blue eyes and a fine head of black, curling hair. Old stagers said his only fault was that he was too fond of the girls, and after the catastrophe they shook their heads and vowed that they had always known this would get him into trouble.

He began now to talk to Leslie about the local affairs, the forthcoming races in Singapore, the price of rubber, and his chances of killing a tiger which had been lately seen in the neighbourhood. She was anxious to finish by a certain date, the piece of lace on which she was working, for she wanted to send it home for her mother's birthday, and so put on her spectacles again and drew towards her chair the little table on which stood the pillow.

"I wish you wouldn't wear those great horn-spectacles," he said. "I don't know why a pretty woman should do her best to look plain."

She was a trifle taken aback at this remark. He had never used that tone with her before. She thought the best thing was to make light of it.

"I have no pretensions to being a raving beauty, you know, and, if you ask me point blank, I'm bound to tell you that I don't care two pins if you think me plain or not."

"I don't think you're plain. I think you're awfully pretty."

"Sweet of you," she answered ironically. "But in that case I can only think you half-witted."

He chuckled. But he rose from his chair and sat down in another by her side.

"You're not going to have the face to deny that you have the prettiest hands in the world," he said.

He made a gesture as though to take one of them. She gave him a little tap.

"Don't be an idiot. Sit down where you were before and talk sensibly, or else I shall send you home."

He did not move.

"Don't you know that I'm awfully in love with you?" he said.

She remained quite cool.

"I don't. I don't believe it for a minute, and even if it were true I don't want you to say it."

She was the more surprised at what he was saying, since during the seven years she had known him he had never paid her any particular attention. When he came back from the war they had seen a good deal of one another, and once when he was ill Robert had gone over and brought him back to their bungalow in his car. He had stayed with them then for a fortnight. But their interests were dissimilar and the acquaintance had never ripened into friendship. For the last two or three years they had seen little of him. Now and then he came over to play tennis, now and then they met him at some planter's who was giving a party, but it often happened that they did not set eyes on him for a month at a time.

Now he took another whisky and soda. Leslie wondered if he had been drinking before. There was something odd about him, and it made her a trifle uneasy. She watched him help himself with disapproval.

"I wouldn't drink any more if I were you," she said, good-humouredly still.

He emptied his glass and put it down.

"Do you think I'm talking to you like this because I'm drunk?" he asked abruptly.

"That is the most obvious explanation, isn't it?"

"Well, it's a lie. I've loved you ever since I first knew you. I've held my tongue as long as I could, and now it's got to come out. I love you, I love you, I love you."

She rose and carefully put aside the pillow.

"Good night," she said.

"I'm not going now."

At last she began to lose her temper.

"But, you poor fool, don't you know that I've never loved any one but Robert, and even if I didn't love Robert you're the last man I should care for."

"What do I care? Robert's away."

"If you don't go away this minute I shall call the boys and have you thrown out."

"They're out of earshot."

She was very angry now. She made a movement as

though to go on to the verandah from which the house-boy would certainly hear her, but he seized her arm.

"Let me go," she cried furiously.

"Not much. I've got you now."

She opened her mouth and called "Boy, boy," but with a quick gesture he put his hand over it. Then before she knew what he was about he had taken her in his arms and was kissing her passionately. She struggled, turning her lips away from his burning mouth.

"No, no, no," she cried. "Leave me alone. I won't."

She grew confused about what happened then. All that had been said before she remembered accurately, but now his words assailed her ears through a mist of horror and fear. He seemed to plead for her love. He broke into violent protestations of passion. And all the time he held her in his tempestuous embrace. She was helpless, for he was a strong, powerful man, and her arms were pinioned to her sides; her struggles were unavailing and she felt herself growing weaker; she was afraid she would faint, and his hot breath on her face made her feel desperately sick. He kissed her mouth, her eyes, her cheeks, her hair. The pressure of his arms was killing her. He lifted her off her feet. She tried to kick him, but he only held her more closely. He was carrying her now. He wasn't speaking any more, but she knew that his face was pale and his eyes hot with desire. He was taking her into the bedroom. He was no longer a civilised man, but a savage. And as he ran he stumbled against a table which was in the way. His stiff knee made him a little awkward on his feet, and with the burden of the woman in his arms he fell. In a moment she had snatched herself away from him. She ran round the sofa. He was up in a flash and flung himself towards her. There was a revolver on the desk. She was not a nervous woman, but Robert was to be away for the night and she had meant to take it into her room when she went to bed. That was why it happened to be there. She was frantic with terror now. She did not know what she was doing. She heard a report. She saw Hammond stagger. He gave a cry. He said something, she didn't know what. He lurched out of the room on to the verandah. She was in a frenzy now, she was beside herself, she followed him out, yes, that was it, she must have followed him out, though she remembered nothing of it, she followed firing automatically shot after shot till the six chambers were empty. Hammond fell down

on the floor of the verandah. He crumpled up into a bloody heap.

When the boys, startled by the reports, rushed up, they found her standing over Hammond with the revolver still in her hand, and Hammond lifeless. She looked at them for a moment without speaking. They stood in a frightened, huddled bunch. She let the revolver fall from her hand and without a word turned and went into the sitting room. They watched her go into her bedroom and turn the key in the lock. They dared not touch the dead body, but looked at it with terrified eyes, talking excitedly to one another in undertones. Then the head-boy collected himself; he had been with them for many years, he was Chinese and a level-headed fellow. Robert had gone into Singapore on his motor-cycle and the car stood in the garage. He told the seis to get it out; they must go at once to the Assistant District Officer and tell him what had happened. He picked up the revolver and put it in his pocket. The A.D.O., a man called Withers, lived on the outskirts of the nearest town, which was about thirty-five miles away. It took them an hour and a half to reach him. Every one was asleep, and they had to rouse the boys. Presently Withers came out and they told him their errand. The head-boy showed him the revolver in proof of what he said. The A.D.O. went into his room to dress, sent for his car, and in a little while was following them back along the deserted road. The dawn was just breaking as he reached the Crosbies' bungalow. He ran up the steps of the verandah, and stopped short as he saw Hammond's body lying where he fell. He touched the face. It was quite cold.

"Where's mem?" he asked the house-boy.

The Chinese pointed to the bedroom. Withers went to the door and knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again.

"Mrs. Crosbie," he called.

"Who is it?"

"Withers."

There was another pause. Then the door was unlocked and slowly opened. Leslie stood before him. She had not been to bed and wore the tea-gown in which she had dined. She stood and looked silently at the A.D.O.

"Your house-boy fetched me," he said. "Hammond. What have you done?"

"He tried to rape me and I shot him."

"My God! I say, you'd better come out here. You must tell me exactly what happened."

"Not now. I can't. You must give me time. Send for my husband."

Withers was a young man, and he did not know exactly what to do in an emergency which was so out of the run of his duties. Leslie refused to say anything till at last Robert arrived. Then she told the two men the story, from which since then, though she had repeated it over and over again, she had never in the slightest degree diverged.

The point to which Mr. Joyce recurred was the shooting. As a lawyer he was bothered that Leslie had fired not once but six times, and the examination of the dead man showed that four of the shots had been fired close to the body. One might almost have thought that when the man fell she stood over him and emptied the contents of the revolver into him. She confessed that her memory, so accurate for all that had preceded, failed her here. Her mind was blank. It pointed to an uncontrollable fury; but uncontrollable fury was the last thing you would have expected from this quiet and demure woman. Mr. Joyce had known her a good many years, and had always thought her an unemotional person; during the weeks that had passed since the tragedy her composure had been amazing.

Mr. Joyce shrugged his shoulders.

"The fact is, I suppose," he reflected, "that you can never tell what hidden possibilities of savagery there are in the most respectable of women."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

The Chinese clerk entered and closed the door behind him. He closed it gently, with deliberation, but decidedly, and advanced to the table at which Mr. Joyce was sitting.

"May I trouble you, sir, for a few words' private conversation?" he said.

The elaborate accuracy with which the clerk expressed himself always faintly amused Mr. Joyce and now he smiled.

"It's no trouble, Chi Seng," he replied.

"The matter on which I desire to speak to you, sir, is delicate and confidential."

"Fire away."

Mr. Joyce met his clerk's shrewd eyes. As usual, Ong Chi Seng was dressed in the height of local fashion. He wore

very shiny patent-leather shoes and gay silk socks. In his black tie was a pearl and ruby pin, and on the fourth finger of his left hand a diamond ring. From the pocket of his neat white coat protruded a gold fountain pen and a gold pencil. He wore a gold wrist-watch, and on the bridge of his nose invisible pince-nez. He gave a little cough.

"The matter has to do with the case R. v. Crosbie, sir."

"Yes?"

"A circumstance has come to my knowledge, sir, which seems to me to put a different complexion on it."

"What circumstance?"

"It has come to my knowledge, sir, that there is a letter in existence from the defendant to the unfortunate victim of the tragedy."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised. In the course of the last seven years I have no doubt that Mrs. Crosbie often had occasion to write to Mr. Hammond."

Mr. Joyce had a high opinion of his clerk's intelligence and his words were designed to conceal his thoughts.

"That is very probable, sir. Mrs. Crosbie must have communicated with the deceased frequently, to invite him to dine with her for example, or to propose a tennis game. That was my first thought when the matter was brought to my notice. This letter, however, was written on the day of the late Mr. Hammond's death."

Mr. Joyce did not flicker an eyelash. He continued to look at Ong Chi Seng with the smile of faint amusement with which he generally talked to him.

"Who has told you this?"

"The circumstances were brought to my knowledge, sir, by a friend of mine."

Mr. Joyce knew better than to insist.

"You will no doubt recall, sir, that Mrs. Crosbie has stated that until the fatal night she had had no communication with the deceased for several weeks?"

"Have you got the letter?"

"No, sir."

"What are its contents?"

"My friend gave me a copy. Would you like to peruse it, sir?"

"I should."

Ong Chi Seng took from an inside pocket a bulky wallet. It was filled with papers, Singapore dollar notes and cigarette cards. From the confusion he presently extracted a

half sheet of thin note-paper and placed it before Mr. Joyce. The letter read as follows:

R. will be away for the night. I absolutely must see you. I shall expect you at eleven. I am desperate and if you don't come I won't answer for the consequences. Don't drive up.—L.

It was written in the flowing hand which the Chinese were taught at the foreign schools. The writing, so lacking in character, was oddly incongruous with the ominous words.

"What makes you think that this note was written by Mrs. Crosbie?"

"I have every confidence in the veracity of my informant, sir," replied Ong Chi Seng. "And the matter can very easily be put to the proof. Mrs. Crosbie will no doubt be able to tell you at once whether she wrote such a letter or not."

Since the beginning of the conversation Mr. Joyce had not taken his eyes off the respectful countenance of his clerk. He wondered now if he discerned in it a faint expression of mockery.

"It is inconceivable that Mrs. Crosbie should have written such a letter," said Mr. Joyce.

"If that is your opinion, sir, the matter is of course ended. My friend spoke to me on the subject only because he thought, as I was in your office, you might like to know of the existence of this letter before a communication was made to the Deputy Public Prosecutor."

"Who has the original?" asked Mr. Joyce sharply.

Ong Chi Seng made no sign that he perceived in this question and its manner a change of attitude.

"You will remember, sir, no doubt, that after the death of Mr. Hammond it was discovered that he had had relations with a Chinese woman. The letter is at present in her possession."

That was one of the things which had turned public opinion most vehemently against Hammond. It came to be known that for several months he had had a Chinese woman living in his house.

For a moment neither of them spoke. Indeed everything had been said and each understood the other perfectly.

"I'm obliged to you, Chi Seng. I will give the matter my consideration."

"Very good, sir. Do you wish me to make a communication to that effect to my friend?"

"I daresay it would be as well if you kept in touch with him," Mr. Joyce answered with gravity.

"Yes, sir."

The clerk noiselessly left the room, shutting the door again with deliberation, and left Mr. Joyce to his reflections. He stared at the copy, in its neat, impersonal writing, of Leslie's letter. Vague suspicions troubled him. They were so disconcerting that he made an effort to put them out of his mind. There must be a simple explanation of the letter, and Leslie without doubt could give it at once, but, by heaven, an explanation was needed. He rose from his chair, put the letter in his pocket, and took his topee. When he went out, Ong Chi Seng was busily writing at his desk.

"I'm going out for a few minutes, Chi Seng," he said.

"Mr. George Reed is coming by appointment at twelve o'clock, sir. Where shall I say you've gone?"

Mr. Joyce gave him a thin smile.

"You can say that you haven't the least idea."

But he knew perfectly well that Ong Chi Seng was aware that he was going to the jail. Though the crime had been committed in Belanda and the trial was to take place at Belanda Bharu, since there was in the jail there no convenience for the detention of a white woman Mrs. Crosbie had been brought to Singapore.

When she was led into the room in which he waited she held out her thin, distinguished hand, and gave him a pleasant smile. She was as ever neatly and simply dressed and her abundant, pale hair was arranged with care.

"I wasn't expecting to see you this morning," she said graciously.

She might have been in her own house, and Mr. Joyce almost expected to hear her call the boy and tell him to bring the visitor a gin pahit.

"How are you?" he asked.

"I'm in the best of health, thank you." A flicker of amusement flashed across her eyes. "This is a wonderful place for a rest cure."

The attendant withdrew and they were left alone.

"Do sit down," said Leslie.

He took a chair. He did not quite know how to begin. She

was so cool that it seemed almost impossible to say to her the thing he had come to say. Though she was not pretty there was something agreeable in her appearance. She had elegance, but it was the elegance of good breeding in which there was nothing of the artifice of society. You had only to look at her to know what sort of people she had and what kind of surroundings she had lived in. Her fragility gave her a singular refinement. It was impossible to associate her with the vaguest idea of grossness.

"I'm looking forward to seeing Robert this afternoon," she said, in her good-humored, easy voice. (It was a pleasure to hear her speak, her voice and her accent were so distinctive of her class.) "Poor dear, it's been a great trial to his nerves. I'm thankful it'll all be over in a few days."

"It's only five days now."

"I know. Each morning when I awake I say to myself, 'one less.'" She smiled then. "Just as I used to do at school and the holidays were coming."

"By the way, am I right in thinking that you had no communication whatever with Hammond for several weeks before the catastrophe?"

"I'm quite positive of that. The last time we met was at a tennis-party at the MacFarrens'. I don't think I said more than two words to him. They have two courts, you know, and we didn't happen to be in the same sets."

"And you haven't written to him?"

"Oh, no."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Oh, quite," she answered, with a little smile. "There was nothing I should write to him for except to ask him to dine or to play tennis, and I hadn't done either for months."

"At one time you'd been on fairly intimate terms with him. How did it happen that you had stopped asking him to anything?"

Mrs. Crosbie shrugged her thin shoulders.

"One gets tired of people. We hadn't anything very much in common. Of course, when he was ill Robert and I did everything we could for him, but the last year or two he'd been quite well, and he was very popular. He had a good many calls on his time, and there didn't seem to be any need to shower invitations upon him."

"Are you quite certain that was all?"

Mrs. Crosbie hesitated for a moment.

"Well, I may just as well tell you. It had come to our ears

that he was living with a Chinese woman, and Robert said he wouldn't have him in the house. I had seen her myself."

Mr. Joyce was sitting in a straight-backed arm-chair, resting his chin on his hand, and his eyes were fixed on Leslie. Was it his fancy that as she made this remark her black pupils were filled on a sudden, for the fraction of a second, with a dull red light? The effect was startling. Mr. Joyce shifted in his chair. He placed the tips of his ten fingers together. He spoke very slowly, choosing his words.

"I think I should tell you that there is in existence a letter in your handwriting to Geoff Hammond."

He watched her closely. She made no movement, nor did her face change colour, but she took a noticeable time to reply.

"In the past I've often sent him little notes to ask him to something or other, or to get me something when I knew he was going to Singapore."

"This letter asks him to come and see you because Robert was going to Singapore."

"That's impossible. I never did anything of the kind."

"You'd better read it for yourself."

He took it out of his pocket and handed it to her. She gave it a glance and with a smile of scorn handed it back to him.

"That's not my handwriting."

"I know, it's said to be an exact copy of the original."

She read the words now, and as she read a horrible change came over her. Her colourless face grew dreadful to look at. It turned green. The flesh seemed on a sudden to fall away and her skin was tightly stretched over the bones. Her lips receded, showing her teeth, so that she had the appearance of making a grimace. She stared at Mr. Joyce with eyes that started from their sockets. He was looking now at a gibbering death's head.

"What does it mean?" she whispered.

Her mouth was so dry that she could utter no more than a hoarse sound. It was no longer a human voice.

"That is for you to say," he answered.

"I didn't write it. I swear I didn't write it."

"Be very careful what you say. If the original is in your handwriting it would be useless to deny it."

"It would be a forgery."

"It would be difficult to prove that. It would be easy to prove that it was genuine."

A shiver passed through her lean body. But great beads of sweat stood on her forehead. She took a handkerchief from her bag and wiped the palms of her hands. She glanced at the letter again and gave Mr. Joyce a sidelong look.

"It's not dated. If I had written it and forgotten all about it, it might have been written years ago. If you'll give me time, I'll try and remember the circumstances."

"I noticed there was no date. If this letter were in the hands of the prosecution they would cross-examine the boys. They would soon find out whether some one took a letter to Hammond on the day of his death."

Mrs. Crosbie clasped her hands violently and swayed in her chair so that he thought she would faint.

"I swear to you that I didn't write that letter."

Mr. Joyce was silent for a little while. He took his eyes from her distraught face, and looked down on the floor. He was reflecting.

"In these circumstances we need not go into the matter further," he said slowly, at last breaking the silence. "If the possessor of this letter sees fit to place it in the hands of the prosecution you will be prepared."

His words suggested that he had nothing more to say to her, but he made no movement of departure. He waited. To himself he seemed to wait a very long time. He did not look at Leslie, but he was conscious that she sat very still. She made no sound. At last it was he who spoke.

"If you have nothing more to say to me I think I'll be getting back to my office."

"What would any one who read the letter be inclined to think that it meant?" she asked then.

"He'd know that you had told a deliberate lie," answered Mr. Joyce sharply.

"When?"

"You have stated definitely that you had had no communication with Hammond for at least three months."

"The whole thing has been a terrible shock to me. The events of that dreadful night have been a nightmare. It's not very strange if one detail has escaped my memory."

"It would be very unfortunate when your memory has reproduced so exactly every particular of your interview with Hammond, that you should have forgotten so important a point as that he came to see you in the bungalow on the night of his death at your express desire."

"I hadn't forgotten. After what happened I was afraid to mention it. I thought you'd none of you believe my story if I admitted that he'd come at my invitation. I daresay it was stupid of me; but I lost my head, and after I'd said once that I'd had no communication with Hammond I was obliged to stick to it."

By now Leslie had recovered her admirable composure, and she met Mr. Joyce's appraising glance with candour. Her gentleness was very disarming.

"You will be required to explain, then, *why* you asked Hammond to come and see you when Robert was away for the night."

She turned her eyes full on the lawyer. He had been mistaken in thinking them insignificant, they were rather fine eyes, and unless he was mistaken they were bright now with tears. Her voice had a little break in it.

"It was a surprise I was preparing for Robert. His birthday is next month. I knew he wanted a new gun and you know I'm dreadfully stupid about sporting things. I wanted to talk to Geoff about it. I thought I'd get him to order it for me."

"Perhaps the terms of the letter are not very clear to your recollection. Will you have another look at it?"

"No, I don't want to," she said quickly.

"Does it seem to you the sort of letter a woman would write to a somewhat distant acquaintance because she wanted to consult him about buying a gun?"

"I daresay it's rather extravagant and emotional. I do express myself like that, you know. I'm quite prepared to admit it's very silly." She smiled. "And after all, Geoff Hammond wasn't quite a distant acquaintance. When he was ill I'd nursed him like a mother. I asked him to come when Robert was away, because Robert wouldn't have him in the house."

Mr. Joyce was tired of sitting so long in the same position. He rose and walked once or twice up and down the room, choosing the words he proposed to say; then he leaned over the back of the chair in which he had been sitting. He spoke slowly in a tone of deep gravity.

"Mrs. Crosbie, I want to talk to you very, very seriously. This case was comparatively plain sailing. There was only one point which seemed to me to require explanation: as far as I could judge, you had fired no less than four shots into Hammond when he was lying on the ground. It was

hard to accept the possibility that a delicate, frightened, and habitually self-controlled woman, of gentle nurture and refined instincts, should have surrendered to an absolutely uncontrolled frenzy. But of course it was admissible. Although Geoffrey Hammond was much liked and on the whole thought highly of, I was prepared to prove that he was the sort of man who might be guilty of the crime which in justification of your act you accused him of. The fact, which was discovered after his death, that he had been living with a Chinese woman gave us something very definite to go upon. That robbed him of any sympathy which might have been felt for him. We made up our minds to make use of the odium which such a connection cast upon him in the minds of all respectable people. I told your husband this morning that I was certain of an acquittal, and I wasn't just telling him that to give him heart. I do not believe the assessors would have left the court."

They looked into one another's eyes. Mrs. Crosbie was strangely still. She was like a little bird paralyzed by the fascination of a snake. He went on in the same quiet tones.

"But this letter has thrown an entirely different complexion on the case. I am your legal adviser, I shall represent you in Court. I take your story as you tell it to me, and I shall conduct your defence according to its terms. It may be that I believe your statements, and it may be that I doubt them. The duty of counsel is to persuade the Court that the evidence placed before it is not such as to justify it in bringing in a verdict of guilty, and any private opinion he may have of the guilt or innocence of his client is entirely beside the point."

He was astonished to see in Leslie's eyes the flicker of a smile. Piqued, he went on somewhat dryly.

"You're not going to deny that Hammond came to your house at your urgent, and I may even say, hysterical, invitation?"

Mrs. Crosbie, hesitating for an instant, seemed to consider.

"They can prove that the letter was taken to his bungalow by one of the house-boys. He rode over on his bicycle."

"You mustn't expect other people to be stupider than you. The letter will put them on the track of suspicions which have entered nobody's head. I will not tell you what I personally thought when I saw the copy. I do not wish

you to tell me anything but what is needed to save your neck."

Mrs. Crosbie gave a shrill cry. She sprang to her feet, white with terror.

"You don't think they'd hang me?"

"If they came to the conclusion that you hadn't killed Hammond in self-defense, it would be the duty of the assessors to bring in a verdict of guilty. The charge is murder. It would be the duty of the judge to sentence you to death."

"But what can they prove?" she gasped.

"I don't know what they can prove. You know. I don't want to know. But if their suspicions are aroused, if they begin to make enquiries, if the natives are questioned—what is it that can be discovered?"

She crumpled up suddenly. She fell on the floor before he could catch her. She had fainted. He looked round the room for water, but there was none there, and he did not want to be disturbed. He stretched her out on the floor and kneeling beside her waited for her to recover. When she opened her eyes he was disconcerted by the ghastly fear that he saw in them.

"Keep quite still," he said. "You'll be better in a moment."

"You won't let them hang me," she whispered.

She began to cry, hysterically, while in undertones he sought to quieten her.

"For goodness' sake, pull yourself together," he said.

"Give me a minute."

Her courage was amazing. He could see the effort she made to regain her self-control, and soon she was once more calm.

"Let me get up now."

He gave her his hand and helped her to her feet. Taking her arm, he led her to the chair. She sat down wearily.

"Don't talk to me for a minute or two," she said.

"Very well."

When at last she spoke it was to say something which he did not expect. She gave a little sigh.

"I'm afraid I've made rather a mess of things," she said.

He did not answer, and once more there was a silence.

"Isn't it possible to get hold of the letter?" she said at last.

"I do not think anything would have been said to me

about it if the person in whose possession it is was not prepared to sell it."

"Who's got it?"

"The Chinese woman who was living in Hammond's house."

A spot of colour flickered for an instant on Leslie's cheekbones.

"Does she want an awful lot for it?"

"I imagine that she has a very shrewd idea of its value. I doubt if it would be possible to get hold of it except for a very large sum."

"Are you going to let me be hanged?"

"Do you think it's so simple as all that to secure possession of an unwelcome piece of evidence? It's no different from suborning a witness. You have no right to make any such suggestion to me."

"Then what is going to happen to me?"

"Justice must take its course."

She grew very pale. A little shudder passed through her body.

"I put myself in your hands. Of course I have no right to ask you to do anything that isn't proper."

Mr. Joyce had not bargained for the little break in her voice which her habitual self-restraint made quite intolerably moving. She looked at him with humble eyes and he thought that if he rejected their appeal they would haunt him for the rest of his life. After all, nothing could bring poor Hammond back to life again. He wondered what really was the explanation of that letter. It was not fair to conclude from it that she had killed Hammond without provocation. He had lived in the East a long time and his sense of professional honour was not perhaps so acute as it had been twenty years before. He stared at the floor. He made up his mind to do something which he knew was unjustifiable, but it stuck in his throat and he felt dully resentful towards Leslie. It embarrassed him a little to speak.

"I don't know exactly what your husband's circumstances are?"

Flushing a rosy red, she shot a swift glance at him.

"He has a good many tin shares and a small share in two or three rubber estates. I suppose he could raise money."

"He would have to be told what it was for."

She was silent for a moment. She seemed to think.

"He's in love with me still. He would make any sacrifice to save me. Is there any need for him to see the letter?"

Mr. Joyce frowned a little, and, quick to notice, she went on.

"Robert is an old friend of yours. I'm not asking you to do anything for me, I'm asking you to save a rather simple, kind man who never did you any harm from all the pain that's possible."

Mr. Joyce did not reply. He rose to go and Mrs. Crosbie, with the grace that was natural to her, held out her hand. She was shaken by the scene, and her look was haggard, but she made a brave attempt to speed him with courtesy.

"It's so good of you to take all this trouble for me. I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am."

Mr. Joyce returned to his office. He sat in his own room, quite still, attempting to do no work, and pondered. His imagination brought him many strange ideas. He shuddered a little. At last there was the discreet knock on the door which he was expecting. Ong Chi Seng came in.

"I was just going out to have my tiffin, sir," he said.

"All right."

"I didn't know if there was anything you wanted before I went, sir."

"I don't think so. Did you make another appointment for Mr. Reed?"

"Yes, sir. He will come at three o'clock."

"Good."

Ong Chi Seng turned away, walked to the door, and put his long slim fingers on the handle. Then, as though on an afterthought, he turned back.

"Is there anything you wish me to say to my friend, sir?"

Although Ong Chi Seng spoke English so admirably, he had still a difficulty with the letter r, and he pronounced it "friend."

"What friend?"

"About the letter Mrs. Crosbie wrote to Hammond deceased, sir."

"Oh! I'd forgotten about that. I mentioned it to Mrs. Crosbie and she denies having written anything of the sort. It's evidently a forgery."

Mr. Joyce took the copy from his pocket and handed it to Ong Chi Seng. Ong Chi Seng ignored the gesture.

"In that case, sir, I suppose there would be no objection

if my friend delivered the letter to the Deputy Public Prosecutor."

"None. But I don't quite see what good that would do your friend."

"My friend, sir, thought it was his duty in the interests of justice."

"I am the last man in the world to interfere with any one who wishes to do his duty, Chi Seng."

The eyes of the lawyer and of the Chinese clerk met. Not the shadow of a smile hovered on the lips of either, but they understood each other perfectly.

"I quite understand, sir," said Ong Chi Seng, "but from my study of the case *R. v. Crosbie* I am of opinion that the production of such a letter would be damaging to our client."

"I have always had a very high opinion of your legal acumen, Chi Seng."

"It has occurred to me, sir, that if I could persuade my friend to induce the Chinese woman who has the letter to deliver it into our hands it would save a great deal of trouble."

Mr. Joyce idly drew faces on his blotting-paper.

"I suppose your friend is a business man. In what circumstances do you think he would be induced to part with the letter?"

"He has not got the letter. The Chinese woman has the letter. He is only a relation of the Chinese woman. She is an ignorant woman; she did not know the value of the letter till my friend told her."

"What value did he put on it?"

"Ten thousand dollars, sir."

"Good God! Where on earth do you suppose Mrs. Crosbie can get ten thousand dollars! I tell you the letter's a forgery."

He looked up at Ong Chi Seng as he spoke. The clerk was unmoved by the outbursts. He stood at the side of the desk, civil, cool and observant.

"Mr. Crosbie owns an eighth share of the Betong Rubber Estate and a sixth share of the Selantan River Rubber Estate. I have a friend who will lend him the money on the security of his properties."

"You have a large circle of acquaintance, Chi Seng."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you can tell them to go to hell. I would never ad-

wise Mr. Crosbie to give a penny more than five thousand for a letter that can be very easily explained."

"The Chinese woman does not want to sell the letter, sir. My friend took a long time to persuade her. It is useless to offer her less than the sum mentioned."

Mr. Joyce looked at Ong Chi Seng for at least three minutes. The clerk bore the searching scrutiny without embarrassment. He stood in a respectful attitude with downcast eyes. Mr. Joyce knew his man. Clever fellow, Chi Seng, he thought, I wonder how much he's going to get out of it.

"Ten thousand dollars is very large sum."

"Mr. Crosbie will certainly pay it rather than see his wife hanged, sir."

Again Mr. Joyce paused. What more did Chi Seng know than he had said? He must be pretty sure of his ground if he was obviously so unwilling to bargain. That sum had been fixed because whoever it was that was managing the affair knew it was the largest amount that Robert Crosbie could raise.

"Where is the Chinese woman now?" asked Mr. Joyce.

"She is staying at the house of my friend, sir."

"Will she come here?"

"I think it more better if you go to her, sir. I can take you to the house to-night and she will give you the letter. She is a very ignorant woman, sir, and she does not understand cheques."

"I wasn't thinking of giving her a cheque. I will bring banknotes with me."

"It would only be a waste of valuable time to bring less than ten thousand dollars, sir."

"I quite understand."

"I will go and tell my friend after I have had my tiffin, sir."

"Very good. You'd better meet me outside the club at ten o'clock to-night."

"With pleasure, sir," said Ong Chi Seng.

He gave Mr. Joyce a little bow and left the room. Mr. Joyce went out to have luncheon too. He went to the club and here, as he had expected, he saw Robert Crosbie. He was sitting at a crowded table, and as he passed him, looking for a place, Mr. Joyce touched him on the shoulder.

"I'd like a word or two with you before you go," he said.

"Right you are. Let me know when you're ready."

Mr. Joyce had made up his mind how to tackle him. He

played a rubber of bridge after luncheon in order to allow time for the club to empty itself. He did not want on this particular matter to see Crosbie in his office. Presently Crosbie came into the card-room and looked on till the game was finished. The other players went on their various affairs, and the two were left alone.

"A rather unfortunate thing has happened, old man," said Mr. Joyce, in a tone which he sought to render as casual as possible. "It appears that your wife sent a letter to Hammond asking him to come to the bungalow on the night he was killed."

"But that's impossible," cried Crosbie. "She's always stated that she had had no communication with Hammond. I know from my own knowledge that she hadn't set eyes on him for a couple of months."

"The fact remains that the letter exists. It's in the possession of the Chinese woman Hammond was living with. Your wife meant to give you a present on your birthday, and she wanted Hammond to help her to get it. In the emotional excitement that she suffered from after the tragedy, she forgot all about it, and having once denied having any communication with Hammond, she was afraid to say that she had made a mistake. It was of course very unfortunate, but I daresay it was not unnatural."

Crosbie did not speak. His large, red face bore an expression of complete bewilderment, and Mr. Joyce was at once relieved and exasperated by his lack of comprehension. He was a stupid man, and Mr. Joyce had no patience with stupidity. But his distress since the catastrophe had touched a soft spot in the lawyer's heart; and Mrs. Crosbie had struck the right note when she asked him to help her, not for her sake, but for her husband's.

"I need not tell you that it would be very awkward if this letter found its way into the hands of the prosecution. Your wife has lied, and she would be asked to explain the lie. It alters things a little if Hammond did not intrude, an unwanted guest, but came to your house by invitation. It would be easy to arouse in the assessors a certain indecision of mind."

Mr. Joyce hesitated. He was face to face now with his decision. If it had been a time for humour, he could have smiled at the reflection that he was taking so grave a step, and that the man for whom he was taking it had not the smallest conception of its gravity. If he gave the matter a

thought, he probably imagined that what Mr. Joyce was doing was what any lawyer did in the ordinary run of business.

"My dear Robert, you are not only my client, but my friend. I think we must get hold of that letter. It'll cost a good deal of money. Except for that I should have preferred to say nothing to you about it."

"How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"That's a devil of a lot. With the slump and one thing and another it'll take just about all I've got."

"Can you get it at once?"

"I suppose so. Old Charlie Meadows will let me have it on my tin shares and on those two estates I'm interested in."

"Then will you?"

"Is it absolutely necessary?"

"If you want your wife to be acquitted."

Crosbie grew very red. His mouth sagged strangely.

"But . . ." He could not find words, his face now was purple. "But I don't understand. She can explain. You don't mean to say they'd find her guilty? They couldn't hang her for putting a noxious vermin out of the way."

"Of course they wouldn't hang her. They might only find her guilty of manslaughter. She'd probably get off with two or three years."

Crosbie started to his feet and his red face was distraught with horror.

"Three years."

Then something seemed to dawn in that slow intelligence of his. His mind was darkness across which shot suddenly a flash of lightning, and though the succeeding darkness was as profound, there remained the memory of something not seen but perhaps just descried. Mr. Joyce saw that Crosbie's big red hands, coarse and hard with all the odd jobs he had set them to, trembled.

"What was the present she wanted to make me?"

"She says she wanted to give you a new gun."

Once more that great red face flushed a deeper red.

"When have you got to have the money ready?"

There was something odd in his voice now. It sounded as though he spoke with invisible hands clutching at his throat.

"At ten o'clock to-night. I thought you could bring it to my office at about six."

"Is the woman coming to you?"

"No, I'm going to her."

"I'll bring the money. I'll come with you."

Mr. Joyce looked at him sharply.

"Do you think there's any need for you to do that? I think it would be better if you left me to deal with this matter by myself."

"It's my money, isn't it? I'm going to come."

Mr. Joyce shrugged his shoulders. They rose and shook hands. Mr. Joyce looked at him curiously.

At ten o'clock they met in the empty club.

"Everything all right?" asked Mr. Joyce.

"Yes. I've got the money in my pocket."

"Let's go then."

They walked down the steps. Mr. Joyce's car was waiting for them in the square, silent at that hour, and as they came to it Ong Chi Seng stepped out of the shadow of a house. He took his seat beside the driver and gave him a direction. They drove past the Hotel de l'Europe and turned up by the Sailors' Home to get into Victoria Street. Here the Chinese shops were open still, idlers lounged about, and in the roadway rickshaws and motor-cars and gharries gave a busy air to the scene. Suddenly their car stopped and Chi Seng turned around.

"I think it more better if we walk here, sir," he said.

They got out and he went on. They followed a step or two behind. Then he asked them to stop.

"You wait here, sir. I go in and speak to my friend."

He went into a shop, open to the street, where three or four Chinese were standing behind the counter. It was one of those strange shops where nothing was on view and you wondered what it was they sold there. They saw him address a stout man in a duck suit with a large gold chain across his breast and the man shot a quick glance out into the night. He gave Chi Seng a key and Chi Seng came out. He beckoned to the two men waiting and slid into a doorway at the side of the shop. They followed him and found themselves at the foot of a flight of stairs.

"If you wait a minute I will light a match," he said, always resourceful. "You come upstairs, please."

He held a Japanese match in front of them, but it scarcely dispelled the darkness and they groped their way up behind him. On the first floor he unlocked a door and going in lit a gas-jet.

"Come in, please," he said.

It was a small square room, with one window, and the only furniture consisted of two low Chinese beds covered with matting. In one corner was a large chest, with an elaborate lock, and on this stood a shabby tray with an opium pipe on it and a lamp. There was in the room the faint, acrid scent of the drug. They sat down and Ong Chi Seng offered them cigarettes. In a moment the door was opened by the fat Chinaman whom they had seen behind the counter. He bade them good evening in very good English and sat down by the side of his fellow-countryman.

"The Chinese woman is just coming," said Chi Seng.

A boy from the shop brought in a tray with a teapot and cups and the Chinaman offered them a cup of tea. Crosbie refused. The Chinese talked to one another in undertones, but Crosbie and Mr. Joyce were silent. At last there was the sound of a voice outside; some one was calling in a low tone; and the Chinaman went to the door. He opened it, spoke a few words, and ushered a woman in. Mr. Joyce looked at her. He had heard much about her since Hammond's death, but he had never seen her. She was a stoutish person, not very young, with a broad, phlegmatic face. She was powdered and rouged and her eyebrows were a thin black line, but she gave you the impression of a woman of character. She wore a pale blue jacket and a white skirt, her costume was not quite European nor quite Chinese, but on her feet were little Chinese silk slippers. She wore heavy gold chains round her neck, gold bangles on her wrists, gold ear-rings and elaborate gold pins in her black hair. She walked in slowly, with the air of a woman sure of herself, but with a certain heaviness of tread, and sat down on the bed beside Ong Chi Seng. He said something to her and nodding she gave an incurious glance at the two white men.

"Has she got the letter?" asked Mr. Joyce.

"Yes, sir."

Crosbie said nothing, but produced a roll of five-hundred-dollar notes. He counted out twenty and handed them to Chi Seng.

"Will you see if that is correct?"

The clerk counted them and gave them to the fat Chinaman.

"Quite correct, sir."

The Chinaman counted them once more and put them in his pocket. He spoke again to the woman and she drew

from her bosom a letter. She gave it to Chi Seng who cast his eyes over it.

"This is the right document, sir," he said, and was about to give it to Mr. Joyce when Crosbie took it from him.

"Let me look at it," he said.

Mr. Joyce watched him read and then held out his hand for it.

"You'd better let me have it."

Crosbie folded it up deliberately and put it in his pocket.

"No, I'm going to keep it myself. It's cost me enough money."

Mr. Joyce made no rejoinder. The three Chinese watched the little passage, but what they thought about it, or whether they thought, it was impossible to tell from their impassive countenances. Mr. Joyce rose to his feet.

"Do you want me any more to-night, sir?" said Ong Chi Seng.

"No." He knew that the clerk wished to stay behind in order to get his agreed share of the money, and he turned to Crosbie. "Are you ready?"

Crosbie did not answer, but stood up. The Chinaman went to the door and opened it for them. Chi Seng found a bit of candle and lit it in order to light them down, and the two Chinese accompanied them to the street. They left the woman sitting quietly on the bed smoking a cigarette. When they reached the street the Chinese left them and went once more upstairs.

"What are you going to do with that letter?" asked Mr. Joyce.

"Keep it."

They walked to where the car was waiting for them and here Mr. Joyce offered his friend a lift. Crosbie shook his head.

"I'm going to walk." He hesitated a little and shuffled his feet. "I went to Singapore on the night of Hammond's death partly to buy a new gun that a man I knew wanted to dispose of. Good night."

He disappeared quickly into the darkness.

Mr. Joyce was quite right about the trial. The assessors went into court fully determined to acquit Mrs. Crosbie. She gave evidence on her own behalf. She told her story simply and with straightforwardness. The D.P.P. was a kindly man and it was plain that he took no great pleasure in his task. He asked the necessary questions in a deprecate-

ing manner. His speech for the prosecution might really have been a speech for the defence, and the assessors took less than five minutes to consider their popular verdict. It was impossible to prevent the great outburst of applause with which it was received by the crowd that packed the courthouse. The judge congratulated Mrs. Crosbie and she was a free woman.

No one had expressed a more violent disapprobation of Hammond's behaviour than Mrs. Joyce; she was a woman loyal to her friends and she had insisted on the Crosbies staying with her after the trial, for she in common with every one else had no doubt of the result, till they could make arrangements to go away. It was out of the question for poor, dear, brave Leslie to return to the bungalow at which the horrible catastrophe had taken place. The trial was over by half-past twelve and when they reached the Joyces' house a grand luncheon was awaiting them. Cocktails were ready, Mrs. Joyce's million-dollar cocktail was celebrated through all the Malay States, and Mrs. Joyce drank Leslie's health. She was a talkative, vivacious woman and now she was in the highest spirits. It was fortunate, for the rest of them were silent. She did not wonder, her husband never had much to say, and the other two were naturally exhausted from the long strain to which they had been subjected. During luncheon she carried on a bright and spirited monologue. Then coffee was served.

"Now, children," she said in her gay, bustling fashion, "you must have a rest and after tea I shall take you both for a drive to the sea."

Mr. Joyce, who lunched at home only by exception, had of course to go back to his office.

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Mrs. Joyce," said Crosbie. "I've got to get back to the estate at once."

"Not to-day?" she cried.

"Yes, now. I've neglected it for too long and I have urgent business. But I shall be very grateful if you will keep Leslie until we have decided what to do."

Mrs. Joyce was about to expostulate, but her husband prevented her.

"If he must go, he must, and there's an end of it."

There was something in the lawyer's tone which made her look at him quickly. She held her tongue and there was a moment's silence. Then Crosbie spoke again.

"If you'll forgive me, I'll start at once so that I can get

there before dark." He rose from the table. "Will you come and see me off, Leslie?"

"Of course."

They went out of the dining-room together.

"I think that's rather inconsiderate of him," said Mrs. Joyce. "He must know that Leslie wants to be with him just now."

"I'm sure he wouldn't go if it wasn't absolutely necessary."

"Well, I'll just see that Leslie's room is ready for her. She wants a complete rest, of course, and then amusement."

Mrs. Joyce left the room and Joyce sat down again. In a short time he heard Crosbie start the engine of his motorcycle and then noisily scrunch over the gravel of the garden path. He got up and went into the drawing-room. Mrs. Crosbie was standing in the middle of it, looking into space, and in her hand was an open letter. He recognised it. She gave him a glance as he came in and he saw that she was deathly pale.

"He knows," she whispered.

Mr. Joyce went up to her and took the letter from her hand. He lit a match and set the paper afire. She watched it burn. When he could hold it no longer he dropped it on the tiled floor and they both looked at the paper curl and blacken. Then he trod it into ashes with his foot.

"What does he know?"

She gave him a long, long stare and into her eyes came a strange look. Was it contempt or despair? Mr. Joyce could not tell.

"He knows that Geoff was my lover."

Mr. Joyce made no movement and uttered no sound.

"He'd been my lover for years. He became my lover almost immediately after he came back from the war. We knew how careful we must be. When we became lovers I pretended I was tired of him, and he seldom came to the house when Robert was there. I used to drive out to a place we knew and he met me, two or three times a week, and when Robert went to Singapore he used to come to the bungalow late, when the boys had gone for the night. We saw one another constantly, all the time, and not a soul had the smallest suspicion of it. And then lately, a year ago, he began to change. I didn't know what was the matter. I couldn't believe that he didn't care for me any more. He always denied it. I was frantic. I made him scenes. Some-

times I thought he hated me. Oh, if you knew what agonies I endured. I passed through hell. I knew he didn't want me any more and I wouldn't let him go. Misery! Misery! I loved him. I'd given him everything. He was all my life. And then I heard he was living with a Chinese woman. I couldn't believe it. I wouldn't believe it. At last I saw her, I saw her with my own eyes, walking in the village, with her gold bracelets and her necklaces, an old, fat, Chinese woman. She was older than I was. Horrible! They all knew in the kampong that she was his mistress. And when I passed her, she looked at me and I knew that she knew I was his mistress too. I sent for him. I told him I must see him. You've read the letter. I was mad to write it. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't care. I hadn't seen him for ten days. It was a lifetime. And when last we'd parted he took me in his arms and kissed me and told me not to worry. And he went straight from my arms to hers."

*She had been speaking in a low voice, vehemently, and now she stopped and wrung her hands.

"That damned letter. We'd always been so careful. He always tore up any word I wrote to him the moment he'd read it. How was I to know he'd leave that one? He came and I told him I knew about the Chinawoman. He denied it. He said it was only scandal. I was beside myself. I don't know what I said to him. Oh, I hated him then. I tore him limb from limb. I said everything I could to wound him. I insulted him. I could have spat in his face. And at last he turned on me. He told me he was sick and tired of me and never wanted to see me again. He said I bored him to death. And then he acknowledged that it was true about the Chinawoman. He said he'd known her for years, before the war, and she was the only woman who really meant anything to him, and the rest was just pastime. And he said he was glad I knew, and now at last I'd leave him alone. And then I don't know what happened, I was beside myself, I saw red. I seized the revolver and I fired. He gave a cry and I saw I'd hit him. He staggered and rushed for the verandah. I ran after him and fired again. He fell, and then I stood over him and fired and fired till the revolver went click, click, and I knew there were no more cartridges."

At last she stopped, panting. Her face was no longer human, it was distorted with cruelty, and rage and pain. You would never have thought that this quiet, refined woman was capable of such a fiendish passion. Mr. Joyce

took a step backwards. He was absolutely aghast at the sight of her. It was not a face, it was a gibbering, hideous mask. Then they heard a voice calling from another room, a loud, friendly, cheerful voice. It was Mrs. Joyce.

"Come along, Leslie darling, your room's ready. You must be dropping with sleep."

Mrs. Crosbie's features gradually composed themselves. Those passions, so clearly delineated, were smoothed away as with your hand you would smooth a crumpled paper, and in a minute the face was cool and calm and unlined. She was a trifle pale, but her lips broke into a pleasant, affable smile. She was once more the well-bred and even distinguished woman.

"I'm coming, Dorothy dear. I'm sorry to give you so much trouble."

Interlude in India BY JOHN DANN MACDONALD

MILLER tilted his chair back cautiously, with the gentle regard for chair legs that all large men develop. He wanted to be able to watch her as she returned from the women's room. He stared absently out over the murmuring mass of uniformed coffee drinkers, faces dark and light, bobbing and sipping and staring. Turbaned Indian bearers in dirty white slid by his obstructing back, carrying trays of battered china. Over all, the bitter haze of coffee tang and tobacco smoke, accenting the morning sun slanting across the large room.

Soon the Eurasian girl reappeared, coming toward him with the careful lilt, on her long, thin legs. His face tightened just a bit as he realized for the hundredth time that she swung her hips just a bit more provocatively when walking through a roomful of men. He made aimless motions at getting up until she was safely seated, then relaxed again.

"Coffee's cold, Sal. Want some fresh?"

She abruptly widened and narrowed her dark eyes, and gave him her smile of enigma—both practiced so constantly that they had become natural to her. "No thank you very much, Billy. What I have will do." The "Billy" came out with just a touch too much accent on the *y*, so that it had a faint foreign flavor. He felt a quick rush of irritation, and subdued it, wondering vaguely why one of her tricks of speech, which had been so delightful three months ago, should gradually become so irritating.

Insensitive to his mood, she covertly watched the men at the near-by tables, and tried to remember just how Rita Hayworth had held herself in that café scene. When she was certain that he was no longer looking at her, she made another one of her appraisals of him, from the thinning blond hair, across the florid cheekbones and wide shoulders to the tinsel gold bar stitched to the shoulder of his field jacket. She frowned slightly then and thought. "Two times they will have to promote him and then he will be just a captain, and Ella has a major." To avoid such disconcerting thoughts she stared at his brown paw resting easily on the

table, and stealthily placed her own hand near it. There! How white her hand looked! She glared searchingly at her arm, looking for any signs of the increasing sallowness that Ella had said would come as she got older.

Satisfied, she again looked at his hand and then her eyes traveled to his square corded wrist and a faint, delicious wave of languor began to sweep down her; her eyes followed up the length of his arm to those thick shoulders and to that column of solid, firm throat rising out of his open shirt collar. By now, the excited feeling had become a sort of pulsation and she could feel the old familiar way it seemed to settle in the backs of her knees. He had been staring around the room trying to locate and identify acquaintances, and glanced back at her. What he read in her eyes pushed all minor irritations far away. They leaned slightly toward each other and conversed without words in that old and new language in which they could escape everything around them, and even escape the dozens of irritations that were so steadily growing and breeding in the warm, fertile soil of their essential differences.

Slowly it ebbed, leaving in its place a patient urgency, the same warm, waiting feeling that she had first felt so many months before after he had kissed her roughly when they stood out on the hotel porch after trying to dance in the sodden summer heat of India.

"Time to get back to the mines, Sal." He began to stir and shake himself slightly, like a large dog ambling forward to some well-accustomed exertion.

"You did not say if you would come to get me tonight."

"Necessary?"

She bridled and threw her head back, looking through lowered lashes, and he felt a flash of annoyance as he realized how that little trick must have come right out of her mirror.

"What makes you think I won't have a date?"

"Don't be a jerk, Baby."

They angled their way through the tables to the door. She turned and looked up at him, a ghost of vague apprehension in her eyes. "Good-by, Billy."

"S'long." And she stood for a moment and watched his receding back, annoyance conflicting with a small feeling of pride in how firmly and quickly he strode away. Hearing the voices of a group of men pushing out of the door behind her, she turned and walked away, glancing into the

store windows, admiring the way her short coat furred away from her body in the slight speed of her movement. Behind her, the group of officers stood outside the restaurant for a few minutes, gazing after her.

"My God! Look at those colors—purple and yellow!"

"Her mother must have been chased into the woods by a rainbow."

"Or a mad Englishman."

"That's a damn nice little figure, though."

"Come on, Tommy, you've been over here too long."

And they strolled off with the quiet satisfaction of a group of men who have just accurately appraised a woman.

As Miller unlocked the door of his room and stepped aside to let her go in that night, she felt once more that thrilling feeling of high adventure that came with a room that had so many evidences of unrestrained masculinity—military masculinity. There were slippers under the desk, pipes on the mantel, and the bed was disturbed, as if he had napped after lunch. As always, he kissed her hungrily, and then pushed her into a chair by the fireplace while he hunted for the gin and lemon squash. He was fumbling with glasses and humming softly behind her, when all of the little evidences of insecurity that had piled up over the coffee table came back to her. She felt a need to test her security, and began to ask questions about his day at work—getting monosyllabic answers that, in many cases, could have been yes, no, good, or bad.

Finally, when she felt that he was listening in his most offhand manner, she said, "You won't mind, will you, if I double date with Ella tomorrow night? A friend of her major is coming to town."

He stopped mixing a drink and straightened up slowly. All the accumulated disappointments and irritations of the past months rushed to his mind. Swaggering with her past the enlisted men, and studiously looking away; hiding his face as he passed his superior officers. Ignoring the faint aroma of strange spiced foods that came from her parted lips sometimes as she lay breathing warmly beside him. Avoiding certain restaurants where he knew she would be a bit too obvious. Controlling the quickened pulsations of his blood as he saw how other men looked at her, and how she answered their knowing analysis. It all bubbled up in him so that the room finally began to look unreal, frozen by

the silence that had hung in the air since her question. He walked unsteadily around and faced her, face red and immobile, voice hoarse and low. "Haven't I had enough God-damn trouble without you catting off after some hungry joe from the hills?"

"Trouble? Trouble? How have you had trouble?"

"Trouble pretending that you are something you're not."

"What do you pretend that I should be since I come up here and stay with you for so many nights?"

"I shut my eyes and pretend that you would only do this with me. That you are any girl from home. That you are . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Speak! Say what you were going to say."

"Ask somebody else to tell you. You know anyway."

She lunged at him, fingernails reaching for his eyes. He grabbed her wrist and flung her back in the chair. The pressure of his hand against her heavy silver bracelet cut her arm slightly. He suddenly realized he felt unaccountably free. He stared at her for a minute with a fond half-smile, and then said softly, "I'm leaving and I'll be back in fifteen minutes. When I get back you will be gone. No matter what you are, you are also cheap, and a complete bitch." He walked quickly to the door and closed it quietly behind him.

She sat for a few minutes looking carefully at the small droplets of her red blood that gathered along the scratch on her arm. Then she picked up her purse, opened the door and walked out. Her heels clacked loudly in the corridor as she walked down the hall, carrying her pride like a small Indian bundle balanced firmly on her shining head.

Amok BY STEFAN ZWEIG

IN MARCH, 1912, when a big mailboat was unloading at Naples, there was an accident about which extremely inaccurate reports appeared in the newspapers. I myself saw nothing of the affair, for (in common with many of the passengers), wishing to escape the noise and discomfort of coaling, I had gone to spend the evening ashore. As it happens, however, I am in a position to know what really occurred, and to explain the cause. So many years have now elapsed since the incidents about to be related, that there is no reason why I should not break the silence I have hitherto maintained.

I had been travelling in the Federated Malay States. Recalled home by cable on urgent private affairs, I joined the *Wotan* at Singapore, and had to put up with very poor accommodation. My cabin was a hole of a place squeezed into a corner close to the engine-room, small, hot, and dark. The fusty, stagnant air reeked of oil. I had to keep the electric fan running, with the result that a fetid draught crawled over my face reminding me of the fluttering of a crazy bat. From beneath came the persistent rattle and groans of the engines, which sounded like a coal-porter tramping and wheezing as he climbed an unending flight of iron stairs; from above came the no less persistent tread of feet upon the promenade deck. As soon as I had had my cabin baggage properly stowed away, I fled from the place to the upper deck, where with delight I inhaled deep breaths of the balmy south wind.

But on this crowded ship the promenade deck, too, was full of bustle and disquiet. It was thronged with passengers, nervously irritable in their enforced idleness and unavoidable proximity, chattering without pause as they prowled to and fro. The light laughter of the women who reclined in deck-chairs, the twists and turns of those who were taking a constitutional on the encumbered deck, the general hubbub, were uncongenial. In Malaysia, and before that in Burma and Siam, I had been visiting an unfamiliar world. My mind was filled with new impressions, with lively images which chased one another in rapid succession.

I wanted to contemplate them at leisure, to sort and arrange them, to digest and assimilate; but in this noisy boulevard, humming with life of a very different kind, there was no chance of finding the necessary repose. If I tried to read, the lines in the printed page ran together before my tired eyes when the shadows of the passers-by flickered over the white page. I could never be alone with myself and my thoughts in this thickly peopled alley.

For three days I did my utmost to possess my soul in patience, resigned to my fellow-passengers, staring at the sea. The sea was always the same, blue and void, except that at nightfall for a brief space it became resplendent with a play of varied colours. As for the people, I had grown sick of their faces before the three days were up. I knew every detail of them all. I was surfeited with them, and equally surfeited with the giggling of the women and with the windy argumentativeness of some Dutch officers coming home on leave. I took refuge in the saloon; though from this haven, too, I was speedily driven away because a group of English girls from Shanghai spent their time between meals hammering out waltzes on the piano. There was nothing for it but my cabin. I turned in after luncheon, having drugged myself with a couple of bottles of beer, resolved to escape dinner and the dance that was to follow, hoping to sleep the clock round and more, and thus to spend the better part of a day in oblivion.

When I awoke it was dark, and stuffier than ever in the little coffin. I had switched off the fan, and was dripping with sweat. I felt heavy after my prolonged slumber, and some minutes slipped by before I fully realized where I was. It must certainly be past midnight, for there was no music to be heard, and the tramp-tramp of feet overhead had ceased. The only sound was that of the machinery, the beating heart of the leviathan, who wheezed and groaned as he bore his living freight onward through the darkness.

I groped my way to the deck, where there was not a soul to be seen. Looking first at the smoking funnels and the ghostlike spars, I then turned my eyes upward and saw that the sky was clear; dark velvet, sprinkled with stars. It looked as if a curtain had been drawn across a vast source of light, and as if the stars were tiny rents in the curtain, through which that indescribable radiance poured. Never had I seen such a sky.

The night was refreshingly cool, as so often at this hour

on a moving ship even at the equator. I breathed the fragrant air, charged with the aroma of distant isles. For the first time since I had come on board I was seized with a longing to dream, conjoined with another desire, more sensuous, to surrender my body—womanlike—to the night's soft embrace. I wanted to lie down somewhere, and gaze at the white hieroglyphs in the starry expanse. But the long chairs were all stacked and inaccessible. Nowhere on the empty deck was there a place for a dreamer to rest.

I made for the forecastle, stumbling over ropes and past iron windlasses to the bow, where I leaned over the rail watching the stem as it rose and fell, rhythmically, cutting its way through the phosphorescent waters. Did I stand there for an hour, or only for a few minutes? Who can tell? Rocked in that giant cradle, I took no note of the passing of time. All I was conscious of was a gentle lassitude, which was well-nigh voluptuous. I wanted to sleep, to dream; yet I was loath to quit this wizard's world, to return to my 'tween-decks coffin. Moving a pace or two, I felt with one foot a coil of rope. I sat down, and, closing my eyes, abandoned myself to the drowsy intoxication of the night. Soon the frontiers of consciousness became obscured; I was not sure whether the sound I heard was that of my own breathing or that of the mechanical heart of the ship; I gave myself up more and more completely, more and more passively, to the envioning charm of this midnight world.

A dry cough near at hand recalled me to my senses with a start. Opening eyes that were now attuned to the darkness, I saw close beside me the faint gleam of a pair of spectacles, and a few inches below this a fitful glow which obviously came from a pipe. Before I sat down I had been intent on the stars and the sea, and had thus overlooked this neighbour, who must have been sitting here motionless all the while. Still a little hazy as to my whereabouts, but feeling as if somehow I was an intruder, I murmured apologetically in my native German: "Excuse me!" The answer came promptly, "Not at all!" in the same language, and with an unmistakably German intonation.

It was strange and eerie, this darkling juxtaposition to an unseen and unknown person. I had the sensation that he was staring vainly at me just as I was staring vainly at him. Neither of us could see more than a dim silhouette,

black against a dusky background. I could just hear his breathing and the faint gurgle of his pipe.

The silence became unbearable. I should have liked to get up and go away, but was restrained by the conviction that to do this without a word would be unpardonably rude. In my embarrassment I took out a cigarette and struck a match. For a second or two there was light, and we could see one another. What I saw was the face of a stranger, a man I had never yet seen in the dining saloon or on the promenade deck; a face which (was it only because the lineaments were caricatured in that momentary illumination?) seemed extraordinarily sinister and suggestive of a hobgoblin. Before I had been able to note details accurately, the darkness closed in again, so that once more all that was visible was the fitful glow from the pipe, and above it the occasional glint of the glasses. Neither of us spoke. The silence was sultry and oppressive, like tropical heat.

At length I could bear it no longer. Standing up, I said a civil "Good night."

"Good night!" came the answer, in a harsh and raucous voice.

As I stumbled aft amid the encumbrances on the fore-deck, I heard footsteps behind me, hasty and uncertain. My neighbour on the coil of rope was following me with unsteady gait. He did not come quite close, but through the darkness I could sense his anxiety and uneasiness.

He was speaking hurriedly.

"You'll forgive me if I ask you a favour. I . . . I," he hesitated, "I . . . I have private, extremely private reasons for keeping to myself on board. . . . In mourning. . . . That's why I have made no acquaintances during the voyage. You excepted, of course. . . . What I want is . . . I mean I should be very greatly obliged if you would refrain from telling any one that you have seen me here. It is, let me repeat, strictly private grounds that prevent my joining in the life of the ship, and it would be most distressing to me were you to let fall a word about my frequenting this fore-castle alone at night. I . . ."

He paused, and I was prompt in assuring him that his wishes should be respected. I was but a casual traveller, I said, and had no friends on board. We shook hands. I went back to my cabin to sleep out the night. But my slumbers were uneasy, for I had troublous dreams.

I kept my promise to say nothing to any one about my strange encounter, though the temptation to indiscretion was considerable. On a sea voyage the veriest trifle is an event—a sail on the horizon, a shoal of porpoises, a new flirtation, a practical joke. Besides, I was full of curiosity about this remarkable fellow-passenger. I scanned the list of bookings in search of a name which might fit him; and I looked at this person and that, wondering if they knew anything about him. All day I suffered from nervous impatience, waiting for nightfall when I hoped I might meet him again. Psychological enigmas have invariably fascinated me. An encounter with an inscrutable character makes me thrill with longing to pluck the heart out of the mystery, the urge of this desire being hardly less vehement than that of a man's desire to possess a woman. The day seemed insufferably long. I went to bed early, certain that an internal alarum would awaken me in the small hours.

Thus it was. I awoke at about the same time as on the previous night. Looking at my watch, whose figures and hands stood out luminous from the dial, I saw that the hour had just gone two. Quickly I made for the deck.

In the tropics the weather is less changeable than in our northern climes. The night was as before: dark, clear, and lit with brilliant stars. But in myself there was a difference. I no longer felt dreamy and easeful, was no longer agreeably lulled by the gentle swaying of the ship. An intangible something confused and disturbed me, drew me irresistibly to the fore-deck. I wanted to know whether the mysterious stranger would again be sitting there, solitary, on the coil of rope. Reluctant and yet eager, I yielded to the impulse. As I neared the place, I caught sight of what looked like a red and glowing eye—his pipe. He was there!

Involuntarily I stopped short, and was about to retreat, when the dark figure rose, took two steps forward, and, coming close to me, said in an apologetic and lifeless voice:

"Sorry! I'm sure you were coming back to your old place, and it seems to me that you were about to turn away because you saw me. Won't you sit down? I'm just off."

I hastened to rejoin that I was only on the point of withdrawing because I was afraid of disturbing him, and that I hoped he would stay.

"You won't disturb me!" he said with some bitterness. "Far from it; I am glad not to be alone once in a while. For

days upon days I have hardly spoken to a soul; years, it seems; and I find it almost more than I can bear to have to bottle everything up in myself. I can't sit in the cabin any longer, the place is like a prison-cell; and yet I can't stand the passengers either, for they chatter and laugh all day. Their perpetual frivolling drives me frantic. The silly noise they make finds its way into my cabin, so that I have to stop my ears. Of course, they don't know I can hear them, or how they exasperate me. Not that they'd care if they did, for they're only a pack of foreigners."

He suddenly pulled himself up, saying: "But I know I must be boring you. I didn't mean to be so loquacious."

He bowed, and moved to depart, but I pressed him to stay.

"You are not boring me in the least. Far from it, for I too am glad to have a quiet talk up here under the stars. Won't you have a cigarette?"

As he lighted it, I again got a glimpse of his face, the face which was now that of an acquaintance. In the momentary glare, before he threw away the match, he looked earnestly, searchingly at me, appealingly it almost seemed, as his spectacled eyes fixed themselves on mine.

I felt a thrill akin to horror. This man, so it seemed to me, had a tale to tell, was on fire to tell it, but some inward hindrance held him back. Only by silence, a silence that invited confidence, could I help him to throw off his restraint.

We sat down on the coil of rope, half facing one another, leaning against the top rail. His nervousness was betrayed by the shaking of the hand which held the cigarette. We smoked, and still I said never a word. At length he broke the silence.

"Are you tired?"

"Not an atom!"

"I should rather like to ask you something." He hesitated. "It would be more straightforward to say I want to tell you something. I know how ridiculous it is of me to begin babbling like this to the first comer; but, mentally speaking, I'm in a tight place. I've got to the point where I simply must tell some one, or else go clean off my head. You'll understand why, as soon as I've told you. Of course, you can do nothing to help me, but keeping my trouble to myself is making me very ill, and you know what fools sick folk are—or what fools they seem to healthy people."

I interrupted him, and begged him not to distress himself

with fancies of that sort, but to go ahead with his story. "Naturally there would be no meaning in my giving you unlimited promises of help, when I don't know the situation. Still, I can at least assure you of my willingness to give you what help I may. That's one's plain duty, isn't it, to show that one's ready to pull a fellow-mortal out of a hole? One can try to help, at least."

"Duty to offer help? Duty to try, at least? Duty to show that one's ready to pull a fellow-mortal out of a hole?"

Thus did he repeat what I had said, staccato, in a tone of unwonted bitterness flavoured with mockery, whose significance was to become plain to me later. For the moment, there was something in his scanning iteration of my words which made me wonder whether he was mad, or drunk.

As if guessing my thoughts, he went on in a more ordinary voice: "You'll perhaps think me queer in the head, or that I've been imbibing too freely in my loneliness. That's not what's the matter, and I'm sane enough—so far! What set me off was one word you used, and the connexion in which you happened to use it, the word 'duty.' It touched me on the raw, and I'm raw all over, for the strange thing is that what torments me all the time is a question of duty, duty, duty."

He pulled himself up with a jerk. Without further circumlocution, he began to explain himself clearly.

"I'm a doctor, you must know. That's a vital point in my story. Now in medical practice one often has to deal with cases in which duty is not so plain as you might think. Fateful cases; you can call them borderline cases, if you like. In these cases there's not just one obvious duty; there are conflicting duties: one duty of the ordinary kind, which runs counter to a duty to the State, and perhaps on the other side runs counter to a duty to science. Help pull a fellow-mortal out of a hole? Of course one should. That's what one's there for. But such maxims are purely theoretical. In a practical instance, how far is help to go? Here you turn up, a nocturnal visitant, and, though you've never seen me before, and I've no claim on you, I ask you not to tell any one you've seen me. Well, you hold your tongue, because you feel it your duty to help me in the way I ask. Then you turn up again, and I beg you to let me talk to you because silence is eating my heart out. You are good enough to listen. After all, that's easy enough. I haven't asked you anything very difficult. But suppose I were to

say: 'Catch hold of me and throw me overboard!' You would quickly reach the limit of your complaisance, wouldn't you? You would no longer regard it as a 'duty to help,' I suppose! There must be a limit somewhere. This duty of which you speak, surely it comes to an end before the point is reached at which one's own life is gravely imperiled, or one's own responsibility to accept public institutions is affected? Or perhaps this duty to help has no limits at all, where a doctor is concerned? Should a doctor be a universal saviour, simply because he has a diploma couched in Latin? Has he for that reason to fling away his life when some one happens along and implores him to be helpful and kindhearted? There is a limit to one's duty, and one reaches it when one is at the end of one's tether!"

He went off at a tangent once more.

"I'm sorry to show so much excitement. It's not because I'm drunk. I'm not drunk—yet. True, I'm drinking heavily here on board; and I've got drunk now and again of late, for my life has been so damnably lonely in the East. Just think, for seven years I've been living almost exclusively among natives and animals; and in such conditions one naturally forgets how to talk sanely and calmly. When, at last, one gets a chance of talking to a man of one's own people, one's tongue runs away with one. Where was I? I was going to put a question to you, was going to place a problem before you, to ask you whether it was really incumbent on one to help, no matter in what circumstances, as an angel from heaven might help. . . . But I'm afraid it will be rather a long business. You're really not tired?"

"Not the least bit in the world!"

He was groping behind him in the darkness. I heard something clink, and could make out the forms of a couple of bottles. He poured from one of them into a glass, and handed it to me—a large peg of neat whiskey.

"Won't you have a drink?"

To keep him company, I sipped, while he, for lack of another glass, took a bountiful swig from the bottle. There was a moment's silence, during which came five strokes on the ship's bell. It was half-past two in the morning.

"Well, I want to put a case before you. Suppose there was a doctor practising in a little town—in the country, really. A doctor who . . ."

He broke off, hesitated a while, and then made a fresh start.

"No, that won't do. I must tell you the whole thing exactly as it happened, and as it happened to myself. A direct narrative from first to last. Otherwise you'll never be able to understand. There must be no false shame, no concealment. When people come to consult me, they have to strip to the buff, have to show me their excreta. If I am to help them, they must make no bones about informing me as to the most private matters. It will be of no use for me to tell you of something that happened to some one else, to a mythical Doctor Somebody, somewhere and sometime. I shall strip naked, as if I were your patient. Anyway, I have forgotten all decency in that horrible place where I have been living, in that hideous solitude, in a land which eats the soul out of one's body and sucks the marrow out of one's bones."

I must have made some slight movement of protest, for he went off on a side issue.

"Ah, I can see you are an enthusiast for the East, an admirer of the temples and the palm trees, filled full with the romance of the regions where you have been travelling for your pleasure, to while away a month or two. No doubt the tropics are charming to one who hurries or saunters through them by rail, in a motor car, or in a rickshaw. I felt the same when I first came out here seven years ago. I was full of dreams about what I was going to do: learn the native tongue; read the Sacred Books in the original; study tropical diseases; do original scientific work; master the psychology of the indigenes (thus do we phrase it in our European jargon); become a missionary of civilization. . . .

"But life out there is like living in a hothouse with invisible walls. It saps the energies. You get fever, though you swallow quinine by the teaspoonful; and fever takes all the guts out of you, you become limp and lazy, as soft as a jellyfish. A European is cut adrift from his moorings if he has to leave the big towns and is sent to one of those accursed settlements in a jungle or a swamp. Sooner or later he will lose his poise. Some take to drink; others learn opium-smoking from the Chinese; others find relief in brutality, sadism, or what not—they all go off the rails. How one longs for home! To walk along a street with proper buildings in it! To sit in a solidly constructed room with glass windows, and among white men and women. So it

goes on year after year, until at length the time for home leave comes round—and a man finds he has grown too inert even to take his furlough. What would be the use? He knows he has been forgotten, and that if he did go home there would be no welcome awaiting him or, worse still, his coming might be utterly ignored. So he stays where he is, in a mangrove swamp, or in a steaming forest. It was a sad day for me when I sold myself into servitude on the equator.

“Besides, forgoing my home leave was not quite so voluntary an affair as I have implied. I had studied medicine in Germany, where I was born, and soon after I was qualified, I got a good post at the Leipzig Clinic. If you were to look up the files of the medical papers of that date, you would find that a new method of treatment I advocated for one of the commoner diseases made some little stir, so that I had been a good deal talked about for so young a man.

“Then came a love affair which ruined my chances. It was with a woman whose acquaintance I made at the hospital. She'd been living with a man she'd driven so crazy that he tried to shoot himself and failed to make a clean job of it. Soon I was as crazy as he. She had a sort of cold pride about her which I found irresistible. Women that are domineering and rather impudent can always do anything they like with me, but this woman reduced me to pulp. I did whatever she wanted and in the end (it seems hard to tell you, though the story's an old one now, dating from eight years ago) for her sake I stole some money from the hospital safe. The thing came out, of course, and there was the devil to pay. An uncle of mine made the loss good, but there was no more career for me in Leipzig.

“Just at this time I heard that the Dutch Government was short of doctors in the colonial service, would take Germans, and was actually offering a premium. That told me there must be a catch in it somewhere, and I knew well enough that in these tropical plantations tombstones grow as luxuriantly as the vegetation. But when one is young one is always ready to believe that fever and death will strike some other fellow down and give one's self the go-by.

“After all, I hadn't much choice. I made my way to Rotterdam, signed on for ten years, and got a fine, thick wad of banknotes. I sent half of them to my uncle. A girl of the town got the rest—the half of the premium and any other money I could raise—all because she was so like the young

woman to whom I owed my downfall. Without money, without even a watch, without illusions, I steamed away from Europe, and was by no means sad at heart when the vessel cleared the port. I sat on deck much as you are sitting now; ready to take delight in the East, in the palm trees under new skies; dreaming of the wonderful forests, of solitude, and of peace.

"I soon had my fill of solitude. They did not station me in Batavia or in Surabaya, in one of the big towns where there are human beings with white skins, a club and a golf-course, books and newspapers. They sent me to—well, never mind the name! A god-forgotten place up country, a day's journey from the nearest town. The 'society' consisted of two or three dull-witted and sundried officials and one or two half-castes. The settlement was encircled by interminable forests, plantations, jungles, and swamps.

"Still, it was tolerable at first. There was the charm of novelty. I studied hard for a time. Then the Vice-Resident was making a tour of inspection through the district, and had a motor smash. Compound fracture of the leg, no other doctor within hail, an operation needed, followed by a good recovery—and a considerable amount of kudos for me, since the patient was a big gun. I did some anthropological work, on the poisons and weapons used by the primitives. Until the freshness had worn off, I found a hundred and one things which helped to keep me alive.

"This lasted just as long as the vigour I had brought with me from Europe. Then the climate got hold of me. The other white men in the settlement bored me to death. I shunned their company, began to drink rather heavily, and to browse on my own weary thoughts. After all, I had only to stick it for another two years. Then I could retire on a pension, and start life afresh in Europe. Nothing to do but wait till the time was up. And there I should still be waiting, but for the unexpected happening I am going to tell you about."

The voice in the darkness ceased. So still was the night that once more I could hear the sound of the ship's stem clearing the water, and the distant pulsing of the machinery. I should have been glad to light a cigarette, but I was afraid I might startle the narrator by any sudden movement and by the unexpected glare.

For a time the silence was unbroken. Had he changed his

mind, and decided it would be indiscreet to tell me any more? Had he dropped off into a doze?

While I was thus meditating, six bells struck. It was three in the morning. He stirred, and I heard a faint clink as he picked up the whiskey bottle. He was priming himself again. Then he resumed, with a fresh access of tense passion.

"Well, so things went with me. Month after month, I had been sitting inactive in that detestable spot, as motionless as a spider in the centre of its web. The rainy season was over. For weeks I had been listening to the downpour on the roof, and not a soul had come near me—no European, that is to say. I had been alone in the house with my native servants and my whiskey. Being even more homesick than usual, when I read in a novel about lighted streets and white women, my fingers would begin to tremble. You are only what we call a globe-trotter; you don't know the country as those who live there know it. A white man is seized at times by what might be accounted one of the tropical diseases, a nostalgia so acute as to drive him almost into delirium. Well, in some such paroxysm I was poring over an atlas, dreaming of journeys possible and impossible. At this moment two of my servants came, open-mouthed with astonishment, to say that a lady had called to see me—a white lady.

"I, too, was amazed. I had heard no sound of carriage or of car. What the devil was a white woman doing in this wilderness?

"I was sitting in the upstairs veranda of my two-storied house, and not dressed for white company. In the minute or two that were needed for me to make myself presentable, I was able to pull myself together a little; but I was still nervous, uneasy, filled with disagreeable forebodings, when at length I went downstairs. Who on earth could it be? I was friendless. Why should a white woman come to visit me in the wilds?

"The lady was sitting in the ante-room, and behind her chair was standing a China boy, obviously her servant. As she jumped up to greet me, I saw that her face was hidden by a thick motor-veil. She began to speak before I could say a word.

"'Good morning, Doctor,' she said in English. 'You'll excuse my dropping in like this without an appointment, won't you?' She spoke rather rapidly, almost as if repeating a speech which had been mentally rehearsed. 'When we were

driving through the settlement, and had to stop the car for a moment, I remembered that you lived here.' This was puzzling! If she had come in a car, why hadn't she driven up to the house? 'I've heard so much about you—what a wonder you worked when the Vice-Resident had that accident. I saw him the other day playing golf as well as ever. Your name is in every one's mouth down there, and we'd all gladly give away our grumpy old senior surgeon and his two assistants if we could but get you in exchange. Besides, why do you never come to headquarters? You live up here like a yogi!'

"She ran on and on, without giving me a chance to get in a word edgewise. Manifestly her loquacity was the outcome of nervousness, and it made me nervous in my turn. 'Why does she go on chattering like this?' I wondered. 'Why doesn't she tell me who she is? Why doesn't she take off her veil? Has she got fever? Is she a mad-woman?' I grew more and more distraught, feeling like a fool as I stood there dumb-chance, while she overwhelmed me with her babble. At length the stream ran dry, so that I was able to invite her upstairs. She made a sign to the boy to stay where he was, and swept up the stairway in front of me.

"'Pleasant quarters here,' she exclaimed, letting her gaze roam over my sitting-room. 'Ah, what lovely books. How I should like to read them all!' She strolled to the bookcase and began to con the titles. For the first time since she had said good morning to me, she was silent for a space.

"'May I offer you a cup of tea?' I inquired.

"She answered without turning round.

"'No, thank you, Doctor. I've only a few minutes to spare. Hullo, there's Flaubert's *Education sentimentale*. What a book! So you read French, too. Wonderful people, you Germans—they teach you so many languages at school. It must be splendid to be able to speak them as you do. The Vice-Resident swears he would never allow any one but you to use a knife on him. That senior surgeon of ours, all he's fit for is bridge. But you—well, it came into my head today that I should like to consult you, and, as I was driving through the settlement, I thought to myself. "There's no time like the present!" But'—all this she said without looking at me, for she kept her face towards the books—'I expect you're frightfully busy. Perhaps I'd better call another day?'

"'Are you going to show your cards at last?' I wondered.

Of course I gave no sign of this, but assured her that I was at her service, now or later, as she preferred.

"'Oh, well, since I'm here!' she turned half round towards me, but did not look up, continuing to flutter the pages of a book she had taken from the shelf. 'It's nothing serious. The sort of troubles women often have. Giddiness, fainting-fits, nausea. This morning in the car, when we were rounding a curve, I suddenly lost my senses completely. The boy had to hold me up, or I should have slipped on to the floor. He got me some water, and then I felt better. I suppose the chauffeur must have been driving too fast. Don't you think so, Doctor?'"

"'I can't answer that offhand. Have you had many such fainting-fits?'"

"'No. Not until recently, that is. During the last few weeks, pretty often. And I've been feeling so sick in the mornings.'"

"She was back at the bookcase, had taken down another volume, and was fluttering the pages as before. Why did she behave so strangely? Why didn't she lift her veil and look me in the face? Purposely I made no answer. It pleased me to let her wait. If she could behave queerly, so could I! At length she went on, in her nonchalant, detached way:

"'You agree, don't you, Doctor? It can't be anything serious. Not one of those horrid tropical diseases, surely? Nothing dangerous.'"

"'I must see if you have any fever. Let me feel your pulse.'"

"I moved towards her, but she evaded me.

"'No, Doctor, I'm sure I have no fever. I've taken my temperature every day since . . . since I began to be troubled with this faintness. Never above normal. And my digestion's all right, too.'"

"I hesitated for a little. The visitor's strange manner had aroused my suspicions. Obviously she wanted to get something out of me. She had not driven a couple of hundred miles into this remote corner in order to discuss Flaubert! I kept her waiting for a minute or two before saying: 'Excuse me, but may I ask you a few plain questions?'"

"'Of course, of course. One comes to a doctor for that,' she said lightly. But she had turned her back on me again, and was fiddling with the books.

"'Have you had any children?'"

"‘Yes, one, a boy.’

"‘Well, did you have the same sort of symptoms then, in the early months, when you were pregnant?’

"‘Yes.’

"The answer was decisive, blunt, and no longer in the tone of mere prattle which had characterized her previous utterances.

"‘Well, isn’t it possible that that’s what’s the matter with you now?’

"‘Yes.’

"Again the response was sharp and decisive.

"‘You’d better come into my consulting-room. An examination will settle the question in a moment.’

"At length she turned to face me squarely, and I could almost feel her eyes piercing me through her veil.

"‘No need for that, Doctor. I haven’t a shadow of doubt as to my condition.’"

A pause.

I heard the narrator take another dose of his favorite stimulant. Then he resumed.

"Think the matter over for yourself. I had been rotting away there in my loneliness, and then this woman turned up from nowhere, the first white woman I had seen for years—and I felt as if something evil, something dangerous, had come into my room. Her iron determination made my flesh creep. She had come, it seemed, for idle chatter; and then without warning she voiced a demand as if she were throwing a knife at me. For what she wanted of me was plain enough. That was not the first time women had come to me with such a request. But they had come imploringly, had with tears besought me to help them in their trouble. Here, however, was a woman of exceptional, of virile determination. From the outset I had felt that she was stronger than I, that she could probably mould me to her will. Yet if there were evil in the room, it was in me likewise, in me the man. Bitterness had risen in me, a revolt against her. I had sensed in her an enemy.

"For a time I maintained an obstinate silence. I felt that she was eyeing me from behind her veil, that she was challenging me; that she wanted to force me to speak. But I was not ready to comply. When I did answer, I spoke beside the point, as if unconsciously mimicking her discursive and indifferent manner. I pretended that I had not under-

stood her; tried to compel her to be candid. I was unwilling to meet her half way. I wanted her to implore me, as the others had done—wanted it for the very reason that she had approached me so imperiously, and precisely because I knew myself to be a weakling in face of such arrogance as hers.

“Consequently, I talked all round the subject, saying that her symptoms were of trifling importance, that such fainting-fits were common form in early pregnancy, and that, far from being ominous, they generally meant that things would go well. I quoted cases I had seen and cases I had read of; I treated the whole affair as a bagatelle; I talked and talked, waiting for her to interrupt me. For I knew she would have to cut me short.

“She did so with a wave of the hand, as if sweeping my words of reassurance into the void.

“‘That’s not what worries me, Doctor. I’m not so well as I was the time before. My heart troubles me.’

“‘Heart trouble, you say?’ I rejoined, feigning an anxiety I did not feel. ‘Well, I’d better go into that at once.’ I made a movement as if to reach for my stethoscope.

“Once more she was recalcitrant. She spoke commandingly, almost like a drill-sergeant.

“‘You may take my word for it that I have heart trouble. I don’t want to waste my time and yours with examinations that are quite unnecessary. Besides, I think you might show a little more confidence in what I tell you. I have trusted you to the full!’

“This was a declaration of war. She had thrown down the glove, and I did not hesitate to lift it.

“‘Trust implies frankness, perfect frankness. Please speak to me straightforwardly. But, above all, take off your veil and sit down. Let the books alone and put your cards on the table. One doesn’t keep a veil on when one comes to consult a medical man.’

“In her turn she accepted the challenge. Sitting down in front of me, she lifted her veil. The face thus disclosed was the sort of face I had dreaded; it was controlled and inscrutable; one of those exceptionally beautiful English faces which age cannot wither; but this lovely woman was still quite young, this woman with grey eyes that seemed so full of self-confident repose, and yet to hint at depths of passion. Her lips were firmly set, and would betray nothing she wished to keep to herself. For a full minute we

gazed at one another; she imperiously and yet questioningly, with a look almost cruelly cold, so that in the end I had to lower my eyes.

"Her knuckles rattled against the table. She could not shake off her nervousness. Suddenly she said:

"'Doctor, do you or do you not know what I want of you?'

"'I can make a shrewd guess, I fancy! Let us speak plainly. You want to put an end to your present condition. You want me to free you from the fainting-fits, the nausea, and so on—by removing the cause. Is that it?'

"'Yes.'

"The word was as decisive as the fall of the knife in a guillotine.

"'Are you aware that such things are dangerous—to both the persons concerned?'

"'Yes.'

"'That the operation is illegal?'

"I know that there are circumstances in which it is not prohibited; nay, in which it is regarded as essential.'

"'Yes, when there are good medical grounds for undertaking it.'

"Well, you can find such grounds. You are a doctor.'

"She looked at me without a quiver, as if issuing an order; and I, the weakling, trembled in my amazement at the elemental power of her resolve. Yet I still resisted. I would not let her see that she was too strong for me. 'Not so fast,' I thought. 'Make difficulties! Compel her to sue!'

"'A doctor cannot always find sufficient reasons. Still, I don't mind having a consultation with one of my colleagues. . . .'

"'I don't want one of your colleagues. It is you I have come to consult.'

"'Why me, may I ask?'

"She regarded me coldly, and said:

"'I don't mind telling you that! I came to you because you live in an out-of-the-way place, because you have never met me before, because of your known ability, and because' . . . she hesitated for the first time, 'because . . . you are not likely to stay in Java much longer—especially if you have a large sum of money in hand to go home with.'

"A shiver ran through me. This mercantile calculation made my flesh creep. No tears, no beseeching. She had taken my measure, had reckoned up my price, and had

sought me out in full confidence that she could mould me to her will. In truth, I was almost overpowered; but her attitude towards me filled me with gall, and I constrained myself to reply with a chilly, almost sarcastic inflection:

"This large sum of money you speak of, you offer it me for . . . ?"

"For your help now, to be followed by your immediate departure from the Dutch Indies."

"Surely you must know that that would cost me my pension?"

"The fee I propose would more than compensate you."

"You are good enough to use plain terms, but I should like you to be even more explicit. What fee were you thinking of?"

"One hundred thousand gulden, in a draft on Amsterdam."

"I trembled, both with anger and surprise. She had reckoned it all out, had calculated my price, and offered me this preposterous fee upon the condition that I should break my contract with the Dutch Government; she had bought me before seeing me; she had counted on my compliance. I felt like slapping her face, so angered was I by this contumelious treatment. But when I rose up in my wrath (she, too, was standing once more), the sight of that proud, cold mouth of hers which would not beg a favour, the flash of her arrogant eyes, aroused the brute in me, and of a sudden I burned with desire. Something in my expression must have betrayed my feeling, for she raised her eyebrows as one does when a beggar is importunate. In that instant we hated one another, and were aware of our mutual detestation. She hated me because she had to make use of me, and I hated her because she demanded my help instead of imploring it. In this moment of silence we were for the first time speaking frankly to one another. As if a venomous serpent had bitten me, a terrible thought entered my mind, and I said to her . . . I said to her . . .

"But I go too fast, and you will misunderstand me. I must first of all explain to you whence this crazy notion came."

He paused. More whiskey. His voice was stronger when he resumed.

"I'm not trying to make excuses for myself. But I don't want you to misunderstand me. I suppose I've never been what is called a 'good' man, and yet I think I've always

been ready to help people whenever I could. In the rotten sort of life I had to live out there, my one pleasure was to use the knowledge I had scraped together, and thus to give poor sick wretches new hopes of health. That's a creative pleasure, you know; makes a man feel as if, for once, he were a god. It was pure delight to me when a brown-skinned Javanese was brought in, foot swollen to the size of his head from snake-bite, shrieking with terror lest the only thing that would save him might be an amputation—and I was able to save both life and leg. I have driven hours into the jungle to help a native woman laid up with fever. At Leipzig, in the clinic, I was ready enough, sometimes, to help women in just the same plight as my lady here. But in those cases, at least, one felt that one's patient had come to one in bitter need, asking to be rescued from death or from despair. It was the feeling of another's need that made me ready to help.

"But this particular woman—how can I make you understand? She had irritated me from the first moment when she dropped in with the pretence that she was on a casual excursion. Her arrogance had set my back up. Her manner had aroused the slumbering demon, the Caliban that lies hidden in us all. I was furious that she should come to me with her fine-lady airs, with her assumption of dispassionateness in what was really a life-or-death matter. Besides, a woman does not get in the family way from playing golf, or some such trifle. I pictured to myself with exasperating plainness that this imperious creature, so cold, so aloof—for whom I was to be a mere instrument, and, apart from that, of no more significance to her than the dirt beneath her feet—must, only two or three months before, have been passionate enough when clasped in the arms of the father of this unborn child she now wished me to destroy. Such was the thought which obsessed me. She had approached me with supercilious contempt; but I would make her mine with all the virile masterfulness and impetus and ardour of that unknown man. This is what I want you to grasp. Never before had I tried to take advantage of my position as doctor. If I did so now, it was not from lust, not from an animal longing for sexual possession. I assure you it was not. I was moved by the craving to master her pride, to prove myself a dominant male, and thus to assert the supremacy of my ego over hers.

"I have already told you that arrogant, seemingly cold women have always exercised a peculiar power over me. Superadded to this, on the present occasion, was the fact that for seven years I had not had a white woman in my arms, had never encountered resistance in my wooing. Native girls are timorous little creatures who tremble with respectful ecstasy when a 'white lord,' a 'tuan,' deigns to take possession of them. They are overflowing with humility, always ready to give themselves for the asking—with a servility that robs voluptuousness of its tang. The Arab girls are different, I believe, and perhaps even the Chinese and the Malays; but I had been living among the Javanese. You can understand, then, how thrilled I was by this woman, so haughty and fierce and reserved; so brim-full of mystery, and gravid with the fruit of a recent passion. You can realize what it meant to me that such a woman should walk boldly into the cage of such a man as I—a veritable beast, lonely, starved, cut off from human fellowship. I tell you all this that you may understand what follows. Those were the thoughts that coursed through my brain, those were the impulses that stirred me, when simulating indifference, I said coolly:

"'One hundred thousand gulden? No, I won't do it for that.'

"She looked at me, paling a little. No doubt she felt intuitively that the obstacle was not a matter of money. All she said however, was:

"'What fee do you ask, then?'

"'Let's be frank with one another,' I rejoined. 'I am no trader. You must not look upon me as the poverty-stricken apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet* who vends poison for the "worse poison," gold. You will never get what you want from me if you regard me as a mere man of business.'

"'You won't do it, then?'

"'Not for money,'

"For a moment there was silence. The room was so still that I could hear her breathing.

"'What else can you want?'

"I answered hotly:

"'I want, first of all, that you should approach me, not as a trader, but as a man. That when you need help you should come to me, not with a parade of your gold "that's poison to men's souls," but with a prayer to me, the human

being, that I should help you, the human being. I am not only a doctor. "Hours of Consultation" are not the only hours I have to dispose of. There are other hours as well—and you may have chanced upon me in one of those other hours.'

"A brief silence followed. Then she pursed up her lips and said:

"So you would do it if I were to implore you?"

"I did not say so. You are still trying to bargain, and will only plead if you have my implied promise. Plead first, and then I will answer you.'

"She tossed her head defiantly, like a spirited horse.

"I would not plead for your help. I would rather die.'

"I saw red, and answered furiously:

"If you will not sue, I will demand, I think there is no need for words. You know already what I want. When you have given it, I will help you.'

She stared at me for a moment. Then (how can I make you realize the horror of it?) the tension of her features relaxed and she burst out laughing. She laughed with a contempt which at once ground me to powder and intoxicated me to madness. It came like an explosion of incredible violence, this disdainful laughter; and its effect on me was such that I wanted to abase myself before her, longed to kiss her feet. The energy of her scorn blasted me like lightning—and in that instant she turned, and made for the door.

"Involuntarily I pursued her to mumble excuses, to pray forgiveness, so crushed was I in spirit. But she faced me before leaving, to say, to command:

"Do not dare to follow me, or try to find out who I am. If you do, you will repent it.'

"In a flash, she was gone."

Further hesitation. Another silence. Then the voice issued from the darkness once more.

"She vanished through the doorway, and I stood rooted to the spot. I was, as it were, hypnotized by her prohibition. I heard her going downstairs; I heard the house-door close; I heard everything. I longed to follow her. Why? I don't know whether it was to call her back, to strike her, to strangle her. Anyhow, I wanted to follow her—and could not. It was as if her fierce answer had paralysed me. I know

this will sound absurd; such, however, was the fact. Minutes passed—five, ten, it may be—before I could stir.

“But as soon as I made the first movement, the spell was broken. I rushed down the stairs. There was only one road by which she could have gone, first to the settlement, and thence back to civilization. I hastened to the shed to get my bicycle, only to find that I had forgotten the key. Without waiting to fetch it I dragged the frail bamboo door from its hinges and seized the wheel. Next moment I was pedalling madly down the road in pursuit. I must catch her up; I must overtake her before she could get to her car; I must speak to her.

“The dusty track unrolled itself in front of me, and the distance I had to ride before I caught sight of her showed me how long I must have stood entranced after she left. There she was at last, where the road curved round the forest just before entering the settlement. She was walking quickly; behind her strode the China boy. She must have become aware of my pursuit the instant I saw her, for she stopped to speak to the boy and then went on alone, while he stood waiting. Why did she go on alone? Did she want to speak to me where no one could listen? I put on a spurt, when suddenly the boy, as I was about to pass him, leapt in front of me. I swerved to avoid him, ran up the bank, and fell.

“I was on my feet again in an instant, cursing the boy, and I raised my fist to deal him a blow, but he evaded it. Not bothering about him any more, I picked up my bicycle and was about to remount when the rascal sprang forward and seized the handle-bar, saying in pidgin-English:

“‘Master stoppee here.’

“You haven’t lived in the tropics. You can hardly realize the intolerable impudence of such an action on the part of a native, and a servant at that. A yellow beast of a China boy actually presumed to catch hold of my bicycle and to tell me, a white ‘tuan’ to stay where I was! My natural answer was to give him one between the eyes. He staggered, but maintained his grip on the cycle. His slit-like, slanting eyes were full of slavish fear, but for all that he was stout of heart, and would not let go.

“‘Master stoppee here!’ he repeated.

“It was lucky I had not brought my automatic pistol. Had I had it with me, I should have shot him then and there.

"'Let go, you dog!' I shouted.

"He stared at me, panic-stricken, but would not obey. In a fury, and feeling sure that further delay would enable her to escape me, I gave him a knock-out blow on the chin, which crumpled him up in the road.

"Now the cycle was free; but, when I tried to mount, I found that the front wheel had been buckled in the fall and would not turn. After a vain attempt to straighten the wheel, I flung the machine in the dust beside the China boy (who, bleeding from my violence, was coming to his senses) and ran along the road into the settlement.

"Yes, I ran; and here again, you, who have not lived in the tropics, will find it hard to realize all that this implies. For a white man, a European, thus to forget his dignity, and to run before a lot of staring natives, is to make himself a laughing-stock. Well, I was past thinking of my dignity. I ran like a madman in front of the huts, where the inmates gaped to see the settlement doctor, the white lord, running like a rickshaw coolie.

"I was dripping with sweat when I reached the settlement.

"'Where's the car?' I shouted breathless.

"'Just gone, Tuan,' came the answer.

"They were staring at me in astonishment. I must have looked like a lunatic, wet and dirty, as I shouted out my question the moment I was within hail. Glancing down the road I saw, no longer the car, but the dust raised by its passing. She had made good her escape. Her device of leaving the boy to hinder me had been successful.

"Yet, after all, her flight availed her nothing. In the tropics the names and doings of the scattered members of the ruling European caste are known to all. From this outlook, Java is but a big village where gossip is rife. While she had been visiting me, her chauffeur had spent an idle hour in the settlement headquarters. Within a few minutes I knew everything; knew her name, and that she lived in the provincial capital more than a hundred and fifty miles away. She was (as, indeed, I knew already) an Englishwoman. Her husband was a Dutch merchant, fabulously rich. He had been away five months, on a business journey in America, and was expected back in a few days. Then husband and wife were to pay a visit to England.

"Her husband had been five months away. It had been

obvious to me that she could not be more than three months pregnant."

"Till now it has been easy for me to explain everything to you clearly, for up to this point my motives were plain to myself. As a doctor, a trained observer, I could readily diagnose my own condition. But from now on I was like a man in delirium. I had completely lost self-control. I knew how preposterous were my actions, and yet I went on doing them. Have you ever heard of 'running amuck'?"

"Yes, I think so. It's some sort of drunken frenzy among the Malays, isn't it?"

"More than drunkenness. More than frenzy. It's a condition which makes a man behave like a rabid dog, transforms him into a homicidal maniac. It's a strange and terrible mental disorder. I've seen cases of it and studied them carefully while in the East, without ever being able to clear up its true nature. It's partly an outcome of the climate, of the sultry, damp, oppressive atmosphere, which strains the nerves until at last they snap. Of course a Malay who runs amuck has generally been in trouble of some sort—jealousy, gambling losses, or what not. The man will be sitting quietly, as if there were nothing wrong—just as I was sitting in my room before she came to see me.

"Suddenly he will spring to his feet, seize his kris, dash into the street, and run headlong, no matter where. He stabs any who happen to find themselves in his path, and the shedding of blood infuriates him more and more. He foams at the mouth, shouts as he runs, tears on and on brandishing his blood-stained dagger. Every one knows that nothing but death will stop the madman; they scurry out of his way, shouting 'Amok, Amok,' to warn others. Thus he runs, killing, killing, killing, until he is shot down like the mad dog that he is.

"It is because I have seen Malays running amuck that I know so well what was my condition during those days, those days still so recent, those days about which I am going to tell you. Like such a Malay, I ran my furious course in pursuit of that Englishwoman, looking neither to the right nor to the left, obsessed with the one thought of seeing her again. I can scarcely remember all I did in the hurried moments before I actually set out on her trail. Within a minute or two of learning her name and where she lived, I had borrowed a bicycle and was racing back

to my own quarters. I flung a spare suit or two into a valise, stuffed a bundle of notes into my pocket, and rode off to the nearest railway station. I did not report to the district officer; I made no arrangements about a substitute; I left the house just as it was, paying no heed to the servants who gathered round me asking for instructions. Within an hour from the time when that woman had first called to see me, I had broken with the past and was running amuck into the void.

"In truth I gained nothing by my haste, as I should have known had I been able to think. It was late afternoon when I got to the railway station, and in the Javanese mountains the trains do not run after dark for fear of washouts. After a sleepless night in the dak-bungalow and a day's journey by rail, at six in the evening I reached the town where she lived, feeling sure that, by car, she would have got there long before me. Within ten minutes I was at her door. 'What could have been more senseless?' you will say. I know, I know; but one who is running amuck runs amuck; he does not look where he is going.

"I sent in my card. The servant (not the China boy—I suppose he had not turned up yet) came back to say that his mistress was not well enough to see any one.

"I stumbled into the street. For an hour or more I hung around the house, in the forlorn hope that perhaps she would relent and would send out for me. Then I took a room at a neighbouring hotel and had a couple of bottles of whiskey sent upstairs. With these and a stiff dose of veronal I at length managed to drug myself into unconsciousness—a heavy sleep that was the only interlude in the race from life to death."

Eight bells struck. It was four in the morning. The sudden noise startled the narrator, and he broke off abruptly. In a little while, however, collecting himself, he went on with his story.

"It is hard to describe the hours that followed. I think I must have had fever. Anyhow I was in a state of irritability bordering on madness. I was running amuck. It was on Tuesday evening that I got to the coast town, and, as I learned next morning, her husband was expected on Saturday. There were three clear days during which I might help her out of her trouble. I knew there wasn't a moment to waste—and she wouldn't see me! My longing to help, and

my longing (still greater, if possible) to excuse myself for my insane demand, intensified the disorder of my nerves. Every second was precious. The whole thing hung by a hair, and I had behaved so outrageously that she would not let me come near her. Imagine that you are running after some one to warn him against an assassin, and that he takes you for the would-be assassin, so that he flees from you towards destruction. All that she could see in me was the frenzied pursuer who had humiliated her with a base proposal and now wanted to renew it.

"That was the absurdity of the whole thing. My one wish was to help her, and she would not see me. I would have committed any crime to help her, but she did not know.

"Next morning when I called, the China boy was standing at the door. I suppose that he had got back by the same train as myself. He must have been on the look-out; for the instant I appeared he whisked out of sight—though not before I had seen the bruises on his face. Perhaps he had only hurried in to announce my coming. That is one of the things that maddens me now, to think that she may have realized that, after all, I wanted to help, and may have been ready to receive me. But the sight of him reminded me of my shame, so that I turned back from the door without venturing to send in my name. I went away; went away in torment, when she, perhaps, in no less torment, was awaiting me.

"I did not know how to pass the weary hours in this unfamiliar town. At length it occurred to me to call on the Vice-Resident, the man whose leg I had set to rights up country after he had had a motor smash. He was at home, and was, of course, delighted to see me. Did I tell you that I can speak Dutch as fluently as any Dutchman? I was at school in Holland for a couple of years. That was one reason why I chose the Dutch colonial service when I had to clear out of Leipzig.

"There must have been something queer about my manner, though. My grateful patient, for all his civility, eyed me askance, as if he divined that I was running amuck! I told him I had come to ask for a transfer. I couldn't live in the wilds any longer. I wanted an instant remove to the provincial capital. He looked at me questioningly, and in a noncommittal way—much as a medical man looks at a patient.

"'A nervous break-down, Doctor?' he inquired. 'I under-

stand that only too well. We can arrange matters for you, but you'll have to wait for a little while; three or four weeks, let us say, while we're finding some one to relieve you at your present post.'

"'Three or four weeks!' I exclaimed. 'I can't wait a single day!'

"Again that questioning look.

"'I'm afraid you'll have to put up with it, Doctor. We mustn't leave your station unattended. Still, I promise you I'll set matters in train this very day.'

"I stood there biting my lips and realizing for the first time how completely I had sold myself into slavery. It was in my mind to defy him and his regulations; but he was tactful, he was indebted to me, and he did not want an open breach. Forestalling my determination to reply angrily, he went on:

"'You've been living like a hermit, you know, and that's enough to put any one's nerves on edge. We've all been wondering why you never asked for leave, why you never came to see us down here. Some cheerful company, now and then, would have done you all the good in the world. This evening, by the way, there's a reception at Government House. Won't you join us? The whole colony will be there, including a good many people who have often asked about you, and have wanted very much to make your acquaintance.'

"At this I pricked up my ears. 'Asked about me?' 'Wanted to make my acquaintance?' Was she one of them? The thought was like wine to me. I remembered my manners, thanked him for his invitation, and promised to come early.

"I did go early, too early! Spurred on by impatience, I was the first to appear in the great drawing-room at the Residency. There I had to sit cooling my heels and listening to the soft tread of the bare-footed native servants who went to and fro about their business and (so it seemed to my morbid imagination) were sniggering at me behind my back. For a quarter of an hour I was the only guest amid a silence which, when the servants had finished their preparations, became so profound that I could hear the ticking of my watch in my pocket.

"Then the other guests began to arrive, some government officials with their wives, and the Vice-Resident put in an appearance. He welcomed me most graciously, and entered

into a long conversation, in which (I think) I was able to keep my end up all right—until, of a sudden, my nervousness returned, and I began to falter.

"She had entered the room, and it was a good thing that at this moment the Vice-Resident wound up his talk with me and began a conversation with some one else, for otherwise I believe I should simply have turned my back on the man. She was dressed in yellow silk, which set off her ivory shoulders admirably, and was talking brightly amid a group. Yet I, who knew her secret trouble, could read (or fancied I could read) care beneath her smile. I moved nearer, but she did not or would not see me. That smile of hers maddened me once more, for I knew it to be feigned. 'Today is Wednesday' I thought. 'On Saturday her husband will be back. How can she smile so unconcernedly? How can she toy with her fan, instead of breaking it with a convulsive clutch?'

"I, a stranger, was trembling in face of what awaited her. I, a stranger, had for two days been suffering with her suffering. What could her smile be but a mask to hide the storm that raged within?

"From the next room came the sound of music. Dancing was to begin. A middle-aged officer claimed her as his partner. Excusing herself to those with whom she had been conversing, she took his arm and walked with him towards the ballroom. This brought her close to me, and she could not fail to see me. For a moment she was startled, and then (before I could make up my mind whether or not to claim acquaintance) she nodded in a friendly way, said 'Good evening, Doctor,' and passed on.

"No one could have guessed what lay hidden behind that casual glance. Indeed, I myself was puzzled. Why had she openly recognized me? Was she making an advance, an offer of reconciliation? Was she still on the defensive? Had she merely been taken by surprise? How could I tell? All I knew was that I had been stirred to the depths.

"I watched her as she waltzed, a smile of enjoyment playing about her lips, and I knew that all the while she must be thinking, not of the dance, but of the one thing of which I was thinking, of the dread secret which she and I alone shared. The thought intensified (if possible) my anxiety, my longing, and my bewilderment. I don't know if any one else was observing me, but I am sure that my eager scrutiny of her must have been in manifest contrast

to her ostensible unconcern. I simply could not look at any one but her, for I was watching all the time to see whether she would not, were it but for a moment, let the mask fall. The fixity of my stare must have been disagreeable to her. As she came back on her partner's arm, she flashed a look at me, dictatorial, angry, as if bidding me to exercise a little more self-control.

"But I, as I have explained to you, was running amuck. I knew well enough what her glance meant! 'Don't attract attention to me like this. Keep yourself in hand.' She was asking me to show some discretion in this place of public assembly. I felt assured, now, that if I went quietly home she would receive me should I call on the morrow; that all she wanted of me was that I should behave decorously; that she was (with good reason) afraid of my making a scene. Yes, I understood what she wanted; but I was running amuck, and I had to speak to her there and then. I moved over to the group amid which she was talking. They were all strangers to me; yet I rudely shouldered my way in among them. There I stood my ground listening to her, though I trembled like a whipped cur whenever her eyes rested coldly on mine. I was obviously unwelcome. No one said a word to me, and it must have been plain that she resented my intrusion.

"I cannot tell how long I should have gone on standing there. To all eternity, perhaps. I was spellbound. To her, however, the strain became unbearable. Suddenly she broke off, and, with a charming and convincing assumption of indifference, said: 'Well, I'm rather tired, so I shall turn in early. I'll ask you to excuse me. Good night!'

"She gave a friendly nod which included me with the others, and turned away. I watched her smooth, white, well-shaped back above her yellow silk gown, and at first (so dazed was I) I scarcely realized that I was to see her no more that evening, that I was to have no word with her on that last evening to which I had looked forward as the evening of salvation. I stood stock-still until I grasped this. Then . . . then . . .

"I must put the whole picture before you, if I am to make you understand what an idiot I made of myself. The big drawing-room at the Residency was now almost empty, though blazing with light. Most of the guests were dancing in the ballroom, while the older men who had lost taste for pairing off in this way had settled down to cards else-

where. There were but a few scattered groups talking here and there. Across this huge hall she walked, with that dignity and grace which enthralled me, nodding farewell to one and to another as she passed. By the time I had fully taken in the situation, she was at the other end of the room and about to leave it. At that instant, becoming aware that she would escape me, I started to run after her, yes, to run, my pumps clattering as I sped across the polished floor. Of course every one stared at me, and I was overwhelmed with shame—yet I could not stop. I caught her up as she reached the door, and she turned on me, her eyes blazing, her nostrils quivering with scorn.

“But she had the self-command which in me was so lamentably lacking, and in an instant she had mastered her anger and burst out laughing. With ready wit, speaking loudly so that all could hear, she said:

“‘Ah, Doctor, so you’ve just remembered that prescription for my little boy, after all! You men of science are apt to be forgetful now and again, aren’t you?’

“Two men standing near by grinned good-humouredly. I understood, admired the skill with which she was glossing over my clownishness, and had the sense to take her hint. Pulling out my pocketbook, in which there were some prescription blanks, I tore one off and handed it to her with a muttered apology. Taking the paper from me with a smile and a ‘Good night!’ she departed.

“She had saved the situation; but I felt that, as far as my position with her was concerned, the case was hopeless, that she loathed me for my insensate folly, hated me more than death; that again and again and again (however often I might come) she would drive me from her door like a dog.

“I stumbled across the room, people staring at me. No doubt there was something strange about my appearance. Making my way to the buffet, I drank four glasses of brandy in brief succession. My nerves were worn to rags, and nothing but this overdose of stimulant would have kept me going. I slipped away by a side door, furtively, as if I had been a burglar. Not for a kingdom would I have crossed the great hall again, have exposed myself to mocking eyes. What did I do next? I can hardly remember. Wandering from one saloon to another, I tried to drink myself into oblivion; but nothing could dull my senses. Still I heard the laugh which had first driven me crazy, and the

feigned laughter with which she had covered up my boorishness that evening. Walking on the quays, I looked down into the water, and regretted bitterly that I had not brought my pistol with me, so that I could blow out my brains and drop into the quiet pool. My mind became fixed on this automatic, and I resolved to make an end of myself. I wearily went back to the hotel.

"If I refrained from shooting myself in the small hours, it was not, believe me, from cowardice. Nothing I should have liked better than to press the trigger, in the conviction that thus I could put an end to the torment of my thoughts. After all, I was obsessed by the idea of duty, that accursed notion of duty. It maddened me to think that she might still have need of me, to know that she really did need me. Here was Thursday morning. In two days her husband would be back. I was sure this proud woman would never live to face the shame that must ensue upon discovery. I tramped up and down my room for hours, turning these thoughts over in my mind, cursing the impatience, the blunders, that had made it impossible for me to help her. How was I to approach her now? How was I to convince her that all I asked was to be allowed to serve her? She would not see me, she would not see me. In fancy I heard her fierce laughter, and watched her nostrils twitching with contempt. Up and down, up and down the ten feet of my narrow room, till the tropic day had dawned, and, speedily, the morning sun was glaring into the veranda. As you know, in the tropics every one is up and about by six.

"Flinging myself into a chair, I seized some letter-paper and began to write to her, anything, everything, a cringing letter, in which I implored her forgiveness, proclaimed myself a madman and a villain, besought her to trust me, to put herself in my hands after all. I swore that I would disappear thereafter, from the town, the colony, the world, if she wanted me to. Let her only forgive me and trust me, allow me to help her in this supreme moment.

"I covered twenty pages. It must have been a fantastic letter, like one penned in a lunatic asylum, or by a man in the delirium of fever. When I had finished, I was dripping with sweat, and the room whirled round me as I rose to my feet. Gulping down a glass of water, I tried to read through what I had written, but the words swam before my eyes. I reached for an envelope, and then it occurred to me to add something that might move her. Snatching up the pen once

more, I scrawled across the back of the last page: 'Shall await a word of forgiveness here at the hotel. If I don't hear from you before nightfall, I shall shoot myself.'

"Closing the letter, I shouted for one of the boys and told him to have the chit delivered instantly. There was nothing more for me to do but to await an answer."

As if to mark this interval, it was some minutes before he spoke again. When he did so, the words came with a renewed impetus.

"Christianity has lost its meaning for me. The old myths of heaven and hell no longer influence me. But if there were a hell, I should dread it little, for there could be no hell worse than those hours I spent in the hotel. A little room, baking in the noonday heat. You know these hotel rooms in the tropics—only a bed and a table and a chair. Nothing on the table but a watch and an automatic. Sitting on the chair in front of the table a man staring at the watch and the pistol—a man who ate nothing, drank nothing, did not even smoke, but sat without stirring as he looked at the dial of his watch and saw the second hand making its unending circuit. That was how I spent the day, waiting, waiting, waiting. And yet, for all that I was motionless, I was still like the Malay running amuck, or like a rabid dog, pursuing my frenzied course to destruction.

"Well, I won't make any further attempt to describe those hours. Enough to say that I don't understand how any one can live through such a time and keep reasonably sane.

"At twenty-two minutes past three (my eyes were still glued to the watch) there came a knock at the door. A native youngster with a folded scrap of paper—no envelope. I snatched it from him, and he was gone before I had time to open the note. Then, to begin with, I could not read the brief message. Here was her reply at last, and the words ran together before my eyes! They conveyed no meaning to me. I had to dip my head in cold water and calm my agitation before my senses cleared and I could grasp the meaning of the penciled English.

"Too late! Still, you'd better stay at the hotel. Perhaps I shall have to send for you in the end.'

"There was no signature on the crumpled page, a blank half-sheet torn from a prospectus or something of the kind. The writing was unsteady, perhaps from agitation, perhaps because it had been written in a moving carriage. How

could I tell? All I knew was that anxiety, haste, horror, seemed to cling to it; that it gripped me profoundly; and yet that I was glad, for at least she had written to me. I was to keep alive, for she might need me, she might let me help her after all. I lost myself in the maddest conjectures and hopes. I read the curt words again and again; I kissed them repeatedly; I grew calmer, and passed into a state betwixt sleep and waking when time no longer had any meaning—coma-vigil is what we doctors call it.

"This must have lasted for hours. Dusk was at hand when I came to myself with a start, so it was certainly near six o'clock. Had there been another knock? I listened intently. Then it was unmistakable—a knocking, gentle yet insistent. Unsteadily (for I felt giddy and faint) I sprang to the door. There in the passage stood the China boy. It was still light enough to show me, not only the traces of my rough handling, not only black eyes and a bruised chin, but that his yellow face was ashen pale.

"'Master come quickly.' That was all.

"I ran downstairs, the boy at my heels. A gharry was waiting, and we jumped in.

"'What has happened?' I asked, as the man drove off, without further orders.

"The boy looked at me, his lips twitched, but he said never a word. I repeated my questions; still he was silent. I felt angry enough to strike him once more; yet I was touched by his devotion to his mistress, and so I kept myself in hand. If he wouldn't speak, he wouldn't; that was all.

"The gharryman was flogging his ponies, driving so furiously that people had to jump out of the way to avoid being run over. The streets were thronged, for we had left the European settlement, and were on our way through the Javanese and Malay town into the Chinese quarter. Here the gharry drew up in a narrow alley, in front of a tumble-down house. It was a sordid place, a little shop in front, lighted by a tallow candle; the attached dwelling was an unsavoury hotel—one of those opium-dens, brothels, thieves' kitchens, or receivers' stores such as are run by the worse sort of Chinese in all the big cities of the East.

"The boy knocked at the door. It opened for an inch or two, and a tedious parley ensued. Impatiently I, too, jumped out of the gharry, put my shoulder to the door, forced it open—an elderly Chinese woman fled before me

with a shriek. I dashed along a passage, the boy after me, to another door. Opening this, I found myself in a dim interior, reeking of brandy and of blood. Some one was groaning. I could make out nothing in the gloom, but I groped my way towards the sound."

Another pause. When he spoke again, it was with sobs almost as much as with words.

"I groped my way towards the sound—and there she was, lying on a strip of dirty matting, twisted with pain, sighing and groaning. I could not see her face, so dark was the room. Stretching out my hand, I found hers, which was burning hot. She was in a high fever. I shuddered as I realized what had happened. She had come to this foul den in quest of the service I had refused, had sought out a Chinese midwife, hoping in this way to find the secrecy she no longer trusted me to observe. Rather than place herself in my care, she had come to the old witch I had seen in the passage, had had herself mauled by a bungler—because I had behaved like a madman, had so grievously affronted her that she thought it better to take any risks rather than to let me give the aid which, to begin with, I had only been willing to grant on monstrous terms.

"I shouted for light, and that detestable beldame brought a stinking and smoky kerosene lamp. I should have liked to strangle her—but what good would that have done? She put the lamp down on the table; and now, in its yellow glare, I could see the poor, martyred body.

"Then, of a sudden, the fumes were lifted from my brain. No longer half crazed, I forgot my anger, and even for the time forgot the evil mood that had brought us to this pass. Once more I was the doctor, the man of skill and knowledge, to whom there had come an urgent call to use them for the best advantage of a suffering fellow-mortal. I forgot my wretched self; and, with reawakened intelligence, I was ready to do battle with the forces of destruction.

"I passed my hands over the nude body which so recently I had lusted for. Now it had become the body of my patient, and was nothing more. I saw in it only the seat of a life at grips with death, only the form of one writhing in torment. Her blood on my hands was not horrible to me, now that I was again the expert upon whose coolness everything turned. I saw, as an expert, the greatness of her danger. . . .

"I saw, indeed, that all was lost, short of a miracle. She had been so mishandled that her life-blood was rapidly draining away. And what was there, in this filthy hovel, which I could make use of in the hope of stanching the flow? Everything I looked at, everything I touched, was besoiled. Not even a clean basin and clean water!

"'We must have you removed to hospital instantly,' I said. Thereupon, torture of mind superadded to torture of body, she writhed protestingly.

"'No,' she whispered, 'no, no. I would rather die. No one must know. No one must know. Take me home, home!'

"I understood. Her reputation was more to her than her life. I understood, and I obeyed. The boy fetched a litter. We lifted her on to it, and then carried her, half dead, home through the night. Ignoring the terrified questions and exclamations of the servants, we took her to her room. Then began the struggle; the prolonged and futile struggle with death."

He clutched my arm, so that it was hard not to shout from surprise and pain. His face was so close that I could see the white gleam of teeth and the pale sheen of spectacle-glasses in the starlight. He spoke with such intensity, with such fierce wrath, that his voice assailed me like something betwixt a hiss and a shriek.

"You, a stranger I have never glimpsed in the daylight, you who are (I suppose) touring the world at your ease, do you know what it is to see some one die? Have you ever sat by any one in the death agony, seen the body twisting in the last wrestle and the blue fingernails clawing at vacancy; heard the rattle in the throat; watched the inexpressible horror in the eyes of the dying? Have you ever had that terrible experience—you, an idler, a globe-trotter, who can talk so glibly about one's duty to help?

"I have seen it often enough as a doctor, have studied death as a clinical happening. Once only have I experienced it in the full sense of the term. Once only have I lived with another and died with another. Once only, during that ghastly vigil a few nights ago when I sat cudgelling my brain for some way of stopping the flow of blood, some means of cooling the fever which was consuming her before my eyes, some method of staving off imminent death.

"Do you understand what it is to be a doctor, thoroughly trained in the science and practice of medicine, and (as you sagely remark) one whose first duty is to help—and to sit

powerless by the bedside of the dying; knowing, for all one's knowledge, only one thing—that one can give no help? To feel the pulse as it flickers and fades? My hands were tied! I could not take her to the hospital, where something might have been done to give her a chance. I could not summon aid. I could only sit and watch her die, mumbling meaningless invocations like an old applewoman at church, and next minute clenching my fists in impotent wrath against a non-existent deity.

"Can you understand? Can you understand? What I cannot understand is how one survives such hours, why one does not die with the dying, how one can get up next morning and clean one's teeth and put on one's necktie; how one can go on living in the ordinary way after feeling what I had felt, for the first time, that one I would give anything and everything to save was slipping away, somewhere, beyond recall.

"There was an additional torment. As I sat beside the bed (I had given her an injection of morphine to ease the pain, and she lay quiet now, with cheeks ashen pale), I felt the unceasing tension of a fixed gaze boring into my back. The China boy was sitting cross-legged on the floor, murmuring prayers in his own tongue. Whenever I glanced at him, he raised his eyes imploringly to mine, like a hound dumbly beseeching aid. He lifted his hands as if in supplication to a god—lifted them to me, the impotent weakling who knew that all was vain, that I was of no more use in that room than an insect running across the floor.

"It added to my torture, this petitioning of his, this fanatical conviction that my skill would enable me to save the woman whose life was ebbing as he looked on and prayed. I could have screamed at him and have trampled him under foot, so much did his eager expectancy hurt me; and yet I felt that he and I were bound together by our fondness for the dying woman and by the dread secret we shared.

"Like an animal at watch, he sat huddled up behind me; but the instant I wanted anything he was alert, eager to fetch it, hoping I had thought of something that might help even now. He would have given his own blood to save her life. I am sure of it. So would I. But what was the use of thinking of transfusion (even if I had had the instruments) when there were no means of arresting the flow of blood? It would only have prolonged her agony. But this China

boy would have died for her, as would I. Such was the power she had. And I had not even the power to save her from bleeding to death!

"Towards daybreak she regained consciousness, awoke from the drugged sleep. She opened her eyes, which were no longer proud and cold. The heat of fever glowed in them as she looked round the room. Catching sight of me, she was puzzled for a moment, and needed an effort to recall who this stranger was. Then she remembered. She regarded me at first with enmity, waving her arms feebly as if to repel me, and showing by her movements that she would have fled from me had she but had the strength. Then, collecting her thoughts, she looked at me more calmly. Her breathing was laboured; she tried to speak; she wanted to sit up, but was too weak. Begging her to desist, I leaned closer to her, so that I should be able to hear her lightest whisper. She regarded me piteously, her lips moved, and faint indeed was the whisper that came from them:

"'No one will find out? No one?'"

"'No one.' I responded, with heartfelt conviction. 'No one shall ever know.'

"Her eyes were still uneasy. With a great effort she managed to breathe the words:

"'Swear that no one shall know. Swear it.'

"I raised my hand solemnly and murmured: 'I pledge you my word.'

"She looked at me, weak though she was, cordially, gratefully. Yes, despite all the harm I had done, she was grateful to me at the last, she smiled her thanks. A little later she tried to speak again, but was not equal to the exertion. Then she lay peacefully, with her eyes closed. Before daylight shone clearly into the room, all was over."

A long silence. He had overcome the frenzy which had prompted him to seize me by the arm, and had sunk back exhausted. The stars were paling when three bells struck. A fresh though gentle breeze was blowing as herald of the dawn that comes so quickly in the tropics. Soon I could see him plainly. He had taken off his cap, so that his face was exposed. It was pinched with misery. He scanned me through his spectacles with some interest, to see what sort of man was this stranger to whom he had been pouring out

his heart. Then he went on with his story, speaking with a scornful intonation.

"For her, all was over; but not for me. I was alone with the corpse, in a strange house; in a town where (as in all such places) gossip runs like wildfire, and I had pledged my word that her secret should be kept! Consider the situation. Here was a woman moving in the best society of the colony, and, to all seeming, in perfect health. She had danced the evening before last at Government House. Now she was dead, and the only doctor who knew anything about the matter, the man who had sat by her while she died, was a chance visitor to the town, summoned to her bedside by one of the servants. This doctor and this servant had brought her home in a litter under cover of darkness and had kept every one else out of the way. Not until morning did they call the other servants to tell them their mistress was dead. The news would be all over the town within an hour or two, and how was I, the doctor from an up-country station, to account for the sudden death, for what I had done and for what I had failed to do? Why hadn't I sent for one of my colleagues to share the responsibility? Why? . . . Why? . . . Why?

"I knew what lay before me. My only helper was the China boy; but he, at any rate, was a devoted assistant, who realized that there was still a fight to be fought.

"I had said to him: 'You understand, don't you? Your mistress's last wish was that no one shall know what has happened.'

"'Savee plenty, Master,' he answered simply; and I knew that I could trust him.

"He washed the blood stains from the floor, set all to rights as quickly as possible, and his fortitude sustained mine.

"Never before have I had so much concentrated energy, nor shall I ever have it again. When one has lost everything but a last remnant, one fights for that last remnant with desperate courage, with fierce resolution. The remnant for which I was fighting was her legacy to me, her secret. I was calm and self-assured in my reception of every one who came, telling them the tale I had decided upon to account for the death. After all, people are used to sudden, grave, and fatal illness in the tropics; and the laity cannot openly question a doctor's authoritative statements. I explained that the China boy, whom she had sent to fetch the doctor

when she was taken ill, had chanced to meet me. But while talking thus to all and sundry with apparent composure, I was awaiting the one man who really mattered, the senior surgeon, who would have to inspect the body before burial could take place. It was Thursday morning, and on Saturday the husband was coming back. Speedy burial is the rule in this part of the world; but the senior surgeon, not I, would have to sign the necessary certificates.

"At nine he was announced. I had sent for him, of course. He was my superior in rank, and he bore me a grudge because of the local reputation I had acquired in the little matter of the Vice-Resident's broken leg. This was the doctor of whom she had spoken so contemptuously, as good only for bridge. According to official routine my wish for a transfer would pass through his hands. No doubt the Vice-Resident had already mentioned it to him.

"The instant we met that morning, I guessed his enmity, but this only steeled me to my task.

"As soon as I came into the ante-room where he was waiting, he began the attack.

"'When did Madam Blank die?'

"'At six this morning.'

"'When did she send for you?'

"'At nightfall yesterday.'

"'Did you know that I was her regular professional attendant?'

"'Yes.'

"'Why didn't you send for me, then?'

"'There wasn't time—and, besides, Madame Blank had put herself in my hands exclusively. In fact, she expressly forbade me to call in any other doctor.'

"He stared at me. His face flushed. Suppressing an angry retort, he said with assumed indifference:

"'Well, even though you could get on without me so long as she was alive, you have fulfilled your official duty in sending for me now, and I must fulfil mine by verifying the death and ascertaining the cause.'

"I made no answer, and let him lead the way to the death-chamber. As soon as we were there, and before he could touch the body, I said:

"'It is not a question of ascertaining the cause of death, but of inventing a cause. Madame Blank sent for me to save her, if I could, from the consequences of an abortion, clumsily performed by a Chinese midwife. To save her life

was impossible, but I pledged my word to save her reputation. I want you to help me.'

"He looked his surprise.

"'You actually want me, the senior surgeon of this province, to join you in concealing a crime?'

"'Yes, that is what I want you to do.'

"'In fact,' he said with a sneer, 'I am to help in the hushing-up of a crime you have committed.'

"'I have given you to understand that, as far as Madame Blank is concerned, all I have done is to try to save her from the consequences of her own indiscretion and some one else's crime (if you want to insist on the word). Had I been the culprit, I should not be alive at this hour. She has herself paid the extreme penalty, and the miserable bungler who procured the abortion really does not matter one way or the other. You cannot punish the criminal without tarnishing the dead woman's reputation, and that I will not suffer.'

"'You will not suffer it? You talk to me as if you were my official chief, instead of my being yours. You dare to order me about. I had already surmised there must be something queer when you were summoned from your nook in the backwoods. A fine beginning you've made of it with your attempt to interlope here. Well, all that remains for me is to make my own investigation, and I can assure you that I shall report exactly what I find. I'm not going to put my name to a false certificate; you needn't think so!'

"I was imperturbable.

"'You'll have to, this once. If you don't you'll never leave the room alive.'

"I put my hand in my pocket. The pistol was not there (I had left it in my room at the hotel), but the bluff worked. He drew back in alarm; whereupon I made a step forward and said, with a calculated mingling of threat and conciliation:

"'Look here! I shall be sorry to go to extremes, but you'd better undersand that I don't value either my life or yours at a single stiver. I'm so far through that there's only one thing in the world left for me to care about, and that's the keeping of my promise to this dead woman that the manner of her death shall remain secret. I give you my word that if you sign a certificate to the effect that she died of—what shall we say?—a sudden access of malignant tropical fever with hyperpyrexia, leading to heart failure—that will

sound plausible enough—if you do this, I will leave the Indies within a week. I will, if you like, put a bullet through my head as soon as she is buried and I can be sure that no one (you understand, no one) can make any further examination. That should satisfy you. In fact, it must satisfy you.'

"My voice, my whole aspect, must have been menacing, for he was cowed. Whenever I advanced a little, he retreated, showing that uncontrollable fear with which people flee from a man brandishing a blood-stained kris, a man who is running amuck. He wilted visibly, and changed his tone. He was no longer the adamantine official, standing invincibly upon punctilio.

"Still, with a last vestige of resistance, he murmured:

"'Never in my life have I signed a false certificate. Perhaps there would be no question raised if I were to word the document as you suggest. It is perfectly clear to me, however, that I ought not to do anything of the kind.'

"'Of course you "ought not," judging by conventional standards,' I rejoined, wishing to help him to save his face. 'But this is a special case. When you know that the disclosure of the truth can only bring grievous suffering to a living man and blast the reputation of a dead woman, why hesitate?'

"He nodded. We sat down together at the table. Amicable enough now to all seeming, we concocted the certificate which was the basis of the account of the matter published in next day's newspaper. Then he stood up and looked at me searchingly:

"'You'll sail for Europe by the next boat, won't you?'

"'Of course! I've pledged you my word.'

"He continued to stare at me. I saw that he wanted to be strict and businesslike, and that the task was hard. It was as much in the endeavour to hide his embarrassment as from any wish to convey information that he said:

"'Blank was going home with his wife immediately after his arrival from Yokohama. I expect the poor fellow will want to take his wife's body back to her people in England. He's a wealthy man, you know, and the rich can indulge these fancies. I shall order the coffin instantly, and have it lined with sheet lead so that it can be sealed. That will get over immediate difficulties, and he will know that in this sweltering heat there was no possibility of awaiting his appearance on the scene. Even if he thinks we've been pre-

capitate, he won't venture to say so. We're officials, and he's only a merchant after all, though he could buy us both up and never miss the money. Besides, we're acting as we do to save him needless pain.'

"My enemy of a few minutes back was now my acknowledged confederate. Well, he knew he was soon going to be rid of me for ever; and he had to justify himself to himself. But what he did next was utterly unexpected. He shook me warmly by the hand!

" 'I hope you'll soon be all right again,' he said.

"What on earth did he mean? Was I ill? Was I mad? I opened the door for him ceremoniously, and bade him farewell. Therewith my energies ran down. The room swam round me, and I collapsed beside her bed, as the frenzied Malay collapses when he has run his murderous course and is at last shot down.

"I don't know how long I lay on the floor. At length there was a rustling noise, a movement in the room. I looked up. There stood the China boy, regarding me uneasily.

" 'Some one have come. Wanchee see Missee,' he said.

" 'You mustn't let any one in.'

" 'But, Master . . . '

"He hesitated, looked at me timidly, and tried in vain to speak. The poor wretch was obviously suffering.

" 'Who is it?'

"He trembled like a dog in fear of a blow. He did not utter any name. A sense of delicacy rare in a native servant restrained him. He said simply:

" 'B'long that man!'

"He did not need to be explicit. I knew instantly whom he meant. At the word I was all eagerness to see this unknown, whose very existence I had forgotten. For, strange as it may seem to you, after the first disclosure she had made to me and her rejection of my infamous proposal, I had completely put him out of my mind. Amid the hurry and anxiety and stress of what had happened since, it had actually slipped my memory that there was another man concerned in the affair, the man this woman had loved, the man to whom she had passionately given what she had refused to give me. The day before, I should have hated him, should have longed to tear him to pieces. Now I was eager to see him because I loved him—yes, loved the man whom she had loved.

"With a bound I was in the ante-room. A young, very

young, fair-haired officer was standing there, awkward and shy. He was pale and slender, looking little more than a boy, and yet touchingly anxious to appear manlike, calm, and composed. His hand was trembling as he raised it in salute. I could have put my arms round him and hugged him, so perfectly did he fulfill my ideal of the man I should have wished to be this woman's lover—not a self-confident seducer, but a tender stripling to whom she had thought fit to give herself.

"He stood before me, abashed. My sudden apparition, my eager scrutiny, increased his embarrassment. His face puckered slightly, and it was plain that he was on the verge of tears.

"I don't want to push in,' he said at length, 'but I should like so much to see Madame Blank once more.'

"Scarcely aware of what I was doing, I put an arm round the young fellow's shoulders and guided him towards the door. He looked at me with astonishment, but with gratitude as well. At this instant we had an indubitable sense of fellowship. We went together to the bedside. She lay there; all but the head, shoulders, and arms hidden by the white linen. Feeling that my closeness must be distasteful to him, I withdrew to a distance. Suddenly he collapsed, as I had done; sank to his knees, and, no longer ashamed to show his emotion, burst into tears.

"What could I say? Nothing! What could I do? I raised him to his feet and led him to the sofa. There we sat side by side; and, to soothe him, I gently stroked his soft, blond hair. He took my hand in his and pressed it affectionately. Then he said:

"Tell me the whole truth, Doctor. She didn't kill herself, did she?"

"No,' I answered.

"Then is any one else to blame for her death?"

"No,' I said once more, although from within was welling up the answer: 'I, I, I—and you. The two of us. We are to blame. We two—and her unhappy pride.'

"But I kept the words unuttered, and was content to say yet again:

"No! No one was to blame. It was her doom.'

"I can't realize it,' he groaned. 'It seems incredible. The night before last she was at the ball; she nodded to me and smiled. How could it happen? How did she come to die so unexpectedly, so swiftly?"

am returning to Germany a pauper—like a dog that slinks behind a coffin. A man cannot run amuck without paying for it. In the end, he is shot down; and I hope that for me the end will come soon. I'm obliged to you for proposing to call, but I've the best of companions to prevent my feeling lonely in my cabin—plenty of bottles of excellent whiskey. They're a great consolation. Then there's another old friend, and my only regret is that I didn't make use of it soon instead of late. My automatic, I mean, which will in the end be better for my soul than any amount of open confession. So I won't trouble you to call, if you don't mind. Among the 'rights of man' there is a right which no one can take away, the right to croak when and where and how one pleases, without a 'helping hand.' ”

He looked at me scornfully and with a challenging air, but I knew that at bottom his feeling was one of shame, infinite shame. Saying no word of farewell, he turned on his heel, and slouched off in the direction of the cabins. I never saw him again, though I visited the foredeck several times after midnight. So completely did he vanish that I might have thought myself the victim of hallucination had I not noticed among the other passengers a man wearing a crape armlet, a Dutchman, I was told, whose wife had recently died of tropical fever. He walked apart, holding converse with no one, and was melancholy of mien. Watching him, I was distressed by the feeling that I was aware of his secret trouble. When my path crossed his, I turned my face away, lest he should divine from my expression that I knew more about his fate than he did himself.

In Naples harbour occurred the accident which was explicable to me in the light of the stranger's tale. Most of the passengers were, as I have said, ashore at the time. I had been to the opera, and had then supped in one of the brightly lit cafés in the Via Roma. As I was being rowed back to the steamer, I noticed that there was a commotion going on round the gangway, boats moving to and fro, and men in them holding torches and acetylene lamps as they scanned the water. On deck there were several carabinieri, talking in low tones. I asked one of the deckhands what was the matter. He answered evasively, so that it was obvious he had been told to be discreet. Next morning, too, when we were steaming towards Genoa, I found it impossible to glean any information. But at Genoa, in an Italian

newspaper, I read a highflown account of what had happened that night at Naples.

Under cover of darkness, it appeared, to avoid disquieting the passengers, a coffin from the Dutch Indies was being lowered into a boat. It contained the body of a lady; and her husband (who was taking it home for burial) was already waiting in the boat. Something heavy had, when the coffin was half way down the ship's side, dropped on it from the upper deck, carrying it away, so that it fell with a crash into the boat, which instantly capsized. The coffin, being lined with lead, sank. Fortunately there had been no loss of life, for no one had been struck by the falling coffin, and the widower together with the other persons in the boat had been rescued, though not without difficulty.

What had caused the accident? One story, said the reporter, was that a lunatic had jumped overboard, and in his fall had wrenched the coffin from its lashings. Perhaps the story of the falling body had been invented to cover up the remissness of those responsible for lowering the coffin, who had used tackle that was too weak, so that the lead-weighted box had broken away of itself. Anyhow, the officers were extremely reticent.

In another part of the paper was a brief notice to the effect that the body of an unknown man, apparently about thirty-five years of age, had been picked up in Naples harbour. There was a bullet-wound in the head. No one connected this with the accident which occurred when the coffin was being lowered.

Before my own eyes, however, as I read the brief paragraphs, there loomed from the printed page the ghostly countenance of the unhappy man whose story I have here set down.

The Visit of Senor Reilly

BY ROBERT NORMAN HUBNER

OH, HAPPY, happy morning! Even the tortillas seemed to make music as Josefina slap-slapped the yellow corn dough back and forth between her brown hands. She had gotten up an hour earlier than usual. She had bathed her whole body in warm ditch water, and as soon as the tortillas were made and the young ones sent off to school she would put on the newly made print dress and the blue rayon *rebozo*. Then, with her best combs in her hair, she would wait, wait on the doorstone for the car to come over the hill.

It had been five years now since the car last came over the hill with *him* in it. The war had kept him away, but now the war seemed long ago, and he was coming back. Oh, happy, happy morning! She held in her hand a token of his last visit, the little patented oilcan, dry now, but not for long. She looked wistfully toward the hill.

No car yet. All she could see was the angular figure of María Teresa, coming up the road carrying maguey cuttings on her back.

"She-goat!" she cursed softly to herself. "You had better keep your hands off him this time." Then she smiled with inward satisfaction as she remembered how five years previously she had triumphed over that slattern.

Preoccupied thus with thought, Josefina scarcely noticed her husband, Julio, who had returned with a burro loaded with wood.

"What passes woman?" he asked gruffly. "Is there a fiesta in town?"

"Certainly not."

"Then why all the dressing up? You'd think it was a saint's day."

"Are the women in the village dressed up, too?" asked Josefina.

"They are," said Julio, "and they're all silly and giggling, talking behind their hands. What passes around here? I demand to know."

"Why didn't you ask the village women?"

"I did, but they only giggled and ran away from me. I talked to Doña Concepción, Ernestina and . . ."

There was the noise of a motor. It grew louder and louder quickly, and before Julio could finish his sentence the car had pushed over the hill, a Model A Ford, top down and dust covered.

The car pulled up in front of the house, making wretched noises and spouting steam from the radiator, and there he was sitting at the wheel just the same as she had last seen him. At least he had on the same suit. Perhaps he was a little fatter, but not much.

Her eyes liquid, Josefina watched him step down grandly from the car, a *caballero*, truly, with red hair and fair skin. And what was that big box lashed to the back seat? It couldn't be, but it was, surely it was! A brand-new sewing machine!

As the man stepped from the running board he said in English, "Christ, I'm thirsty," and Josefina understanding not a word said, "*Buenos días, Señor Reilly.*"

"Doña Josefina," he rejoined in the language of the land, "Greetings!" and to Julio, "*Saludos* to you, also, my friend."

Josefina stepped quickly in front of Reilly as she saw María Teresa coming around the back of the car and acted as though she hadn't seen her. But María Teresa made her presence known with a rasping "Ah, Señor Reilly," and she pushed past Josefina and shook his hands.

Julio grumbled and went about untying the wood.

"I have a great thirst," said Reilly.

"I am at your service," said Josefina quickly, turning her back on María Teresa and guiding the man into the house.

Julio said, "An idiot *gringo* with the head of a carrot." María Teresa's eyes flashed at the front door which barred her view to the inside of the house.

The women were coming up from the village now. The word had spread quickly. They gathered around the car and scrutinized the crated object in the back seat.

"It is a new model," one said.

"I wonder what time he will give the demonstration," said another.

Julio walked over to the car and looked at the sewing machine with a sour expression.

"Why all the excitement?" he asked. "Everybody dressing up. He has been here before, has he not?"

Yes, but Julio didn't understand. Señor Reilly had not

been here for five years, five long years. Before the war he used to come to the town once a year, bringing with him the little oilcans, the thimbles, the needles, the measuring tapes, the bobbins, and the trays of the beautiful colored threads. And he did the repairing and he gave the demonstrations on the latest models. The annual event of his visits always was an important day in the village, but today, as anybody could see, it had taken on the proportions of a fiesta.

Josefina poured Señor Reilly a tall jar of cool tamarind juice. He drank it quickly, saying, "Christ, that's good!" Then he drank another.

"It has been a long time," Josefina said softly.

"It has that," said Reilly, pouring himself a third drink.

"It has been longer than you think," Josefina added, looking for a tender response.

Reilly motioned over his shoulder toward the front of the house. "Was everything well after I left?" he asked.

"He suspected nothing," answered Josefina.

Reilly got up and kissed her warmly on the cheek. "Then everything is all right?"

"Yes, yes," said Josefina assuredly.

The demonstration took place that night in the plaza following the band concert. The women crowded around the machine while their husbands looked on curiously from benches close at hand. And what a wonderful surprise! The sewing machine worked by electricity! Reilly had run the cord down from a socket in the bandstand.

"But how can we afford such a machine, even though the town now has electricity?" a woman asked. "And furthermore, we do not all have it; only a few homes."

Reilly explained that the women should buy the machine on a coöperative basis, install it in an electrified home, and use it communally. And as he finished suggesting this, he turned to Josefina and asked, as though he didn't already know, "Doña Josefina, your home, does it have the electricity yet?"

"Yes, yes," answered Josefina quickly. "We have had electricity now for more than two years, since the Americans came down and built the dam for the factory."

"*Qué bueno*," said Reilly, and turning to the other women, "We could install the machine in the home of Doña Josefina, here, and each of you who is interested could

share the cost. It is the same thing as the collective farms some of you live on. It is possible to make the machines collective, too."

Josefina's heart expanded with pride as she listened to him. What a philosopher he was!

Then she was aware that the sharp-nosed María Teresa was standing beside her.

"Why must the machine go into *your* house?" María Teresa asked.

"It is the Señor's wish," said Josefina.

"We shall see about that," said María Teresa coldly.

Meanwhile, Reilly had continued his sales talk. "And you can look at it this way," he was saying, again addressing Josefina. "How long would it take Julio, selling his wood, to earn enough money to buy this machine?"

The women laughed, María Teresa a little harder than the rest, and Josefina threw up her hands.

"*Que vá!*" she exclaimed. "It would take him the rest of his life."

Julio, sitting on a near-by bench, looked glum, and when his cronies chided him after his wife's unseemly remark, he got up and walked away, embarrassed. He walked across the plaza to the *pulque* saloon and kicked a ragged dog swiftly in the behind as he pushed through the swinging doors. Reilly watched him out of the corner of his eye, then he made a motion with his eyebrows to Josefina. Josefina motioned back.

Reilly finished up the demonstration quickly. He passed out the little spools of colored threads, the little cans of oil, the needles and bobbins, and he told the different women that he would come to their homes in the morning to repair their machines. Meanwhile, he would install the electric machine in the home of Doña Josefina, and by tomorrow those who needed a machine could decide if they wanted to buy this one on shares. Machines still were hard to get. Better take this one. Really, this collective business was a wonderful idea.

Josefina kept telling Reilly just how wonderful it was as they rode back to the house together in the Ford, the sewing machine bouncing gently up and down on the springs of the back seat. At the house, Reilly brought in the machine and Josefina caressed it lovingly. As she rubbed the palm of her rough hand over the smooth lacquer, she felt the palm of another hand slide smoothly over her shoulder.

"The electricity," said Reilly, "goes off, does it not?" Where is the little switch?"

Josefina pointed it out to him. He switched off the light and they sat there on the wooden bench with the light of the moon coming through the front window.

"It has been a long time," said Josefina.

"I'm sure glad everything was all right," said Reilly.

By the time Julio returned the moon had waxed and waned.

In the morning there was trouble in the village. María Teresa had gotten the women's heads together and she said to them, "Who is this Josefina, anyway? Why does she have to have the machine in *her* house? Do not others of us have electricity? I know her nature. She is inclined to be a hog. She will use it more than we do. Besides, her place is way over the hill. The place where the machine is kept should be more centrally located." And then she went on in a more confiding voice, "Did you see the way they made sheep's eyes at one another last night? Well, I did. He is giving her the machine because—well, you know why. I walked up on the hill last night, and after they took the machine inside, the light went out and Julio didn't come home from the *pulquería* until away toward morning. A fine thing this is, right in our midst."

The heads came closer together. "You don't say, you don't say! Tell us more. What more?"

"Well," said María Teresa, "there was five years ago, too, and I ask you, who always had the most needles and the most colored threads? I am asking you!"

Their eyes narrowed and their voices lowered, and one said, "Here comes Julio now."

María Teresa called out, "*Oiga! Julio!* How is the little machine of the sewing? Is Josefina using it?"

"How should I know?" answered Julio. "I have my wood to take care of."

"And Señor Reilly," said María Teresa. "We hope Josefina is showing her hospitality. Is she making the good Señor comfortable?"

The women burst out with laughter and Julio turned his back, embarrassed, and sat down on a bench just as the Model-A Ford rounded the corner and stopped alongside the plaza, Josefina sitting in the front seat proudly beside the driver.

Reilly addressed the women from the running board. Had they decided about the machine? He had the bill of sale already drawn. It would take only a moment to close the deal.

Some there were who were ready to pay their share, but María Teresa declared, "I have not had the opportunity to inspect the machine closely. I would like to examine it more closely before I pay out my money." And she pointed an accusing finger at Reilly while addressing the women. "He brought the machine out for fifteen minutes last night and then whisked it away to the house of Josefina. Is there something wrong with it? Is he trying to hide its defects in the dark? We must examine it in the daylight."

Several of the women sided with María Teresa; so Reilly drove over the hill, got the machine, and brought it back. He sewed for them, demonstrated the new attachments, and pointed out the new model's many virtues.

"Are you satisfied now?" asked Josefina.

"I am satisfied with the machine," answered María Teresa, "but I am not satisfied that it should be in *your* house. Your house is out of the way. All the women will have to troop over the hill to use it. That is not fair to us."

"It is but a short distance," said Josefina.

"Yes, only a short distance," agreed Reilly.

"But my house is located in the center of town," said María Teresa. Why cannot it go there? That would be the best place for it."

The women nodded and agreed. Yes, that would be the best place for it. Señor Reilly had to admit that they were right. Josefina felt her cheeks burning at the prospect of having María Teresa get the best of her.

That afternoon the machine was taken back to Josefina's, temporarily, until the deal could be closed, and that night Julio returned to the *pulque* saloon. He drank seven or eight jars of *pulque*, all the time mumbling to himself, "Comfortable. Is she making the good Señor comfortable?" Finally he bellowed as loud as he could, scrunched on his sombrero, and stalked out of the saloon.

When he reached the rim of the hill he saw that the light was out. The Ford car was outside, bathed softly in the light of the waning moon. He pulled off his hat, scrunched it back on his head again, and bolted down the hill.

He kicked open the door, snapped on the light, reached

in the corner for his *machete*, and roared, "You of the sewing machine! *Cabrón* of a *cabrón* of a carrot head! On your feet before I split you like a piece of wood. The fiesta is ended!" He started slashing the air with the *machete*.

Reilly leaped for the front door as though his legs were springs, but Julio stopped him by holding the point of the *machete* two inches from his throat.

"Now back up," Julio ordered, "into the little automobile. That's it."

Julio then picked up Reilly's shoes, his oilcans, his threads, his needles, his bobbins, his thimbles, and his measuring tapes and threw them after him, then he picked up the sewing machine and hurled it into the back seat of the car. Reilly already had the car started, and as Julio began slashing the air again with the *machete*, he pulled away without delay in the direction of the next village.

Josefina crouched in the corner fearing Julio's wrath, but Julio was too amused to be angry. She could hear him bellowing at the moon and laughing and swiping at saplings with his *machete* as he started back for the village.

She knew that Señor Reilly was now gone forever, and during the night she wept bitterly, but in the morning when she thought things over, weighing the situation without emotion, she felt comforted by the realization that even though she would not have the beautiful sewing machine, María Teresa would not have it either. Perhaps things were better this way. Anything is better than losing to another woman.

THE END

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