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THE FLIGHT TO EDEN

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A FLORIDA ROMANCE

BY

HARRISON RHODES



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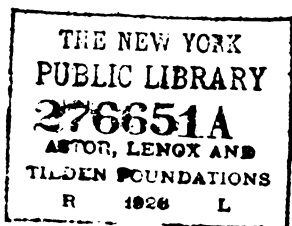
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THE FLIGHT TO EDEN

BOOK I

LONDON

THE FLIGHT TO EDEN

CHAPTER I

Lady Kitty

LADY KITTY had been dead seven days, buried two. To Basil Forrester the days had been weeks. The postman had seemed to stagger to the house under the weight of letters of condolence. The door-bell seemed perpetually clanging through the quiet house at the call of messengers and telegraph boys. The streets, when he ventured upon them, seemed thronged with friends bent upon condolence. Broken as he was, he found it almost beyond his strength to endure sympathy from those who knew nothing of the cause of his wife's death, nor of the manner of it, nor of his share in it. Now, when he longed for silence, solitude, and the sight of strangers, was the moment to have slipped away from London; yet somehow he could not go. It could serve no good end, minimise no one's shame and sorrow, he knew, to be there when the scandal came,

if come it must. But just this uncertainty of its coming held him in the silent house, covering his ears when the bell rang noisily, or drove him forth to walk through avenues of staring eyes upon the streets. Amid the turmoil and roar of London he strained after accusing whispers. His imagination played tricks with him; when, after ranging through the Park and Piccadilly, he turned into White's, he was always wondering whether men that afternoon would cut him, and he should learn that Kitty's mother had broken silence at last, choosing to suffer herself, rather than let him go scot-free.

It had been inevitable, of course, from the beginning that many should believe that Lady Kitty had killed herself. That same afternoon when, for the first time in weeks, a pale and watery February sun tempted people to the Park she had been seen driving for an hour. That midnight she was dead. It would not have been strange perhaps that a breath should put her out; she was a white flower of a creature, with the palest golden hair, the faintest rose upon her cheeks, and the blue of hazy April skies beneath her eyelids. It would not have surprised the world to learn that any trifle of an illness had stilled her heart. So it was credible enough that an accidental overdose of a sleeping draught

should have caused her death; yet this official statement gave food to wondering whispers. Too often had some such guarded bulletin bolstered up the pride of families and hid the shame of some poor tragedy. London hushed its tones to gossip.

Less than this explanation it would have been impossible to give. Even the servants in the Mount Street house knew the suddenness of their mistress' death. A little before midnight she had come home alone, nervous, they thought, but with unusual fire in her pale-blue eyes. She had worn amber satin that night, with her great chain of topazes; Brinton, her maid, remembered afterwards how she had thought her lovelier than ever before. Lady Kitty had sent the maid away, thanking her, and saying that she was a good girl. But first, when Brinton was putting away the jewels in their case, her mistress had stood by her side, and picking out a tiny brooch of gold with a pearl set in it had given it to the girl, who now for seven nights in her room under the attic roof had sobbed herself to sleep with it clutched in her hands.

From midnight until towards the half-hour the house had dozed; Thomas, the second man, blinking sleepily as he waited for Lord Basil. The footman had just had time to put out the lights when

he heard his lordship's sharp cry of alarm, and the frantic ringing of a bell from her ladyship's bedroom. Several of the servants, trooping down the passage before Masters, the butler, drove them back like frightened sheep, caught a glimpse of her bed, of her white figure with that pale gold hair streaming across the pillows, and of her husband kneeling by her side and chafing her hand. Alice Alman, a housemaid, swore later in the servants' hall that she had been able to see that from the hand the wedding ring was gone. For hours through the night the terrified creatures chattered, and their ignorant imaginations invented enough wild stories to set all London chattering as well. Yet though their disordered fancy ranged through suicide to the thought of murder even, none could bring forth any reason which gained general credence why Lady Kitty should destroy herself.

On a larger scale, and with some slight gain in refinement, London reproduced the conversation of the servants' hall, and in the end found itself confronted with the same difficulty. If she had killed herself, it was hard to know why. There was in her family no strain of madness, and in herself seemingly no trace of morbidness or melancholia. Instead she had seemed to sit in the sunlight and

be happy. And her marriage had been successful, notably so, said every one, though the bride's family had originally opposed it. It was a love match, every one had known that. Since she met him and walked with him in the Long Garden at Galtymore on that never-to-be-forgotten day, there had been no one in her world but Basil Forrester. Her whole vitality, every interest in her life had been absorbed by him, nothing had been left for others. She had few friends, and marriage had seemed to accentuate her excessive reserve, which had in it so strong a mixture of aloofness and pride.

When she had gone out, it had been because Basil wished her to, and she had often preferred to stay at home, pleading ill health as her excuse, and then watching till the small hours of the morning for his return. Not a week before she died she had said to a cousin of hers, one of her few intimates, "I am completely happy. Oh, I know you're thinking that I'm ill, and that I mightn't last long. Yes, that's true, but while I do, each day is paradise, so long as I have Basil."

The cousin now found in the repetition of this speech of the unhappy dead girl's an easy way to a kind of momentary celebrity as the last and strongest witness against the theory of suicide.

Her story turned the knife again in Lord Basil's heart. But even without it he could for himself have built up the whole structure of London's gossip. It was as if his senses were on edge with the pain of it all. He seemed to catch from every quarter scraps of talk, seemed to hear ten thousand idle creatures soiling by their touch the memory of poor Kitty and her love. He caught their cackling as they retold the story of those first days at Galtymore, and he almost thought he heard repeated with mocking laughs all that had been said along the fragrant paths of the rose-garden, or in the shaded alleys of the Small Wood, all the vows and protestations of eternal love, eternal constancy which made up that dream of young love, all the vows which Kitty had kept, and she alone. His ears almost cracked with the accusing murmurs which seemed to swell into a great roar around him, reminding him how his dead wife had loved him, reminding him of the one thing life could never drive from out his memory.

At the same time, as if to prove that the whisperings which kept him sleepless through the long nights were not merely the fictions of his conscience, but some real record on his supersensitised hearing, there was in them recognition of his love for her.

He could hear them say lightly of him that he was perhaps not an ideal husband; such things may be said lightly in this battered town of London. But he knew that they added with a laugh that his wife had never seemed to know, nor to care to know anything of his changing infidelities. And they admitted, they must admit, that he had loved her. Yes, he had loved her, loved her in the beginning, loved her till the end, if any one could but understand the emotions of his wretched soul. The horror of seven days had not clouded his vision of events. They had loved each other, so much the world could see. It was just this that for London deepened the mystery of the suicide, if suicide it could be believed to be. It was just this that for him darkened the horror of his responsibility for it, made him feel that he must call it murder.

There were times when the storm of his emotions, of his bitter self-reproach, wore itself out. Then he lost himself in tangled logic, and put himself endless questions that he could not answer. He ceased to ask why with him love could not mean constancy and loyalty. He began to ask himself whether since he could not give continually to his wife that singleness of devotion which she gave him, it would not have been better that he should have

given her nothing. Was not his love for her his crime? Had it not prepared the way for the blow that had sickened her of life? What better in the end was a fool's paradise, he wondered, than hell itself?

It was not that he saw at once any new sanctity in matrimony, or any essential wrong in his infidelity. The standards of his world, the manners of his class and generation were too intimately his own. Even as a boy at home he had somehow guessed that it was a world where men loved and rode gaily away to come as gaily back to love again; where women watched and wept and yet were glad of love. As a child he remembered overhearing whispered gossip among the servants of a strange lady with yellow hair who had come to live in the cottage in Watermill Lane, and finding his mother crying over the cradle of his sister, then a tiny child. Later he came to know of other ladies, other cottages, though he never again found his mother in tears. He had had moments of hot boyish resentment, for her sake, yet he saw that she bore what she had to bear as if it were a necessary part of life itself, and that with it all Lord Kingstowne had seemed loving and Lady Kingstowne happy, as happiness goes. Was it wonderful that

their son should think it small matter if he, too, when he grew to be a man, rode gaily to and fro in search of love?

The last wayside inn of this thoughtless wayfarer had been a tiny cottage near the Regent's Park where a silly girl from the theatres had hung up sillier pink window curtains, behind which she often watched for his coming. Another year, behind a different colour, perhaps, she would wait for someone else; so Basil judged her. He merely lit a campfire by the roadside. At his own hearth the blaze was bright and from every voyage he returned to sit beside it, Kitty's hand in his. Kitty was happy; why, then, should he not wander forth like a child on holidays, snatching at every bright and lovely thing along his path? Beauty was set in the world for those who had eyes to see it, hands to grasp it, he would have reasoned, had he reasoned at all. But he left little time for reasoning while he was grasping eagerly at pleasure, as though he feared it might escape him before youth was spent. Women when they loved him most called him a boy, pushing back the tangle of his dark curls and looking at his Irish eyes. A boy he was, with all a boy's thoughtlessness, all a boy's unconscious cruelty. The girl behind the pink curtains was only a sleek

pretty kitten that he kissed and petted; he would have said good-bye to her in a moment rather than cause his wife a moment's sorrow. But it never seemed to cross his mind that Mount Street should come to know of Regent's Park, nor did it occur to him what it would mean to the woman whose happiness he was pledged to maintain should she by chance, through the gates of her fool's paradise, catch a glimpse of the world outside. Women had loved him, yet what did he know of women's love? Kitty had been his wife; what did he know of her until the last revealing night?

A thousand times he had gone over every instant of those five minutes which had in one great lightning flash shown him the whole face of life anew, displayed to him under its hard light every detail of his weakness, his shame, his perfidy. He sat again in the little dining-room with its silly pink curtains and poor silly Rose Atherton across the supper table from him. Again he lifted his glass and smiling held her hand in his, a foolish boy risking everything for nothing that he valued at a farthing's worth.

She prattled on, telling some rambling, rather squalid tale of another foolish girl who thought she cared for Basil, who had quarrelled first with him

and then with the lucky occupant of the pink-lined nest, who threatened vengeance now, and talked wildly of letting Lady Kitty Forrester know how her husband spent his time away from her. Basil scarcely listened; bad grammar, the taste of the lower middle classes, and a gossiping mind had no charms for him. He murmured some soothing words, and leaning over kissed her hand again. From its daintiness his eyes wandered to the rosy curve of her cheek, to the tiny waves in which her gold-brown hair rose from off her brow, to every detail of the lovely material thing she was. This, he realised, as he seemed to feel his heart pumping his young blood to his finger-tips and to every cell of his hot brain, this was what held him now, this was what led him, a modern and a weaker Tannhäuser, into every gateway of the Venusberg through which beauty beckoned to him with shining eyes and white breasts. One romance, in which was all the glamour of the spirit, he lived with Kitty. Another he sought along life's highroads, stopping where the lights burned behind pink curtains and invited him. But for such hospitality he gave little of himself, and in return he asked only beauty's presence and kindness, not her inner soul. He had often wished that women might learn to love and

ride away, giving him a gay farewell in exchange for his. He was glad that a cheap heart like this Rose creature's would not break when parting came. The pink lining and the nest itself would be payment of the reckoning. When it was time to say good-bye, she would not be hurt, he mused. That was part of the self-respect he carried into what some might call his weaknesses, even his vices. He did not make women suffer, neither Kitty nor those nameless others. He made them happy, yes, that was his excuse, his justification for yielding to the temptation.

"You're happy, aren't you, Rose?" he asked, breaking in upon her prattle with this continuation of his own thoughts.

He was startled, almost displeased by the vehemence of her reply.

"Oh, I'm happy," she said, almost angrily, "but how long shall I be? Basil, you don't like Lydia, do you?"

"Lydia, Lydia?" he queried, almost forgetting the quarrel between this young person and Miss Atherton which had formed the topic of the last half-hour's monologue. "No, I don't especially like Lydia. Why should I? You're prettier than she."

"Yes, but there are others prettier than me."

"Not many," said Basil caressingly.

For a moment she was soothed.

"Well, perhaps not many," she said, half consciously arranging her lace flounces. Then she burst out with almost angry insistence, "You love me, Basil, don't you?"

He reached out a hand, and she, upsetting a glass or two as she did it, jumped up and came around the table to his side. He caught her round the waist and pulled her down until his lips touched hers. He felt her waving hair against his own brown curls and her warm arms around him. Surely he might say he loved her.

"You won't leave me?"

He promised afresh, feeling afresh the intoxication of her beauty.

"And if Lydia goes to her ladyship,—and she swore she would, the cat,—you won't let her take you from me?"

Lord Basil released the girl and turned to pour himself out a glass of wine. The passion had gone out of his voice when he spoke.

"Don't be a fool, Rose. Lydia isn't likely to go to my wife with any tales. She's not likely to be believed, if she does."

"But if she does, what will you do?"

"It isn't a question we need to discuss, my dear. Sit down and take some food, and a glass of wine. You've had nothing at all."

"You mean you'd give me up if your wife should find out." She walked across the room and then faced him against the background of silly pink. Basil gazed at her with astonished eyes. Had the vulgar squabble with Lydia roused the tiger in the peaceful, purring cat? Was this the Rose who would laugh when good-bye came?

"You'd give me up to please her ladyship, wouldn't you?" she screamed at him again.

For a moment he hesitated, a pained look in his eyes, then:

"Yes, I would," he said gravely.

It did not stop the torrent of her newly aroused vehemence.

"Oh, yes, that's you! I've been finding you out lately. Much you care about me! Just because I'm pretty—why, you just now said if Lydia were prettier you would go to her. And I loved you, God knows I did."

"Yes, yes," murmured her companion.

"Not that you care much whether I do or not," she went on to his amazement. "Oh, I don't know

how I've got to know what you're really like. But I know what you like me for. Ain't her ladyship pretty? Ain't she affectionate?"

Lord Basil got up from the table.

"We must manage to confine the discussion to ourselves."

"Oh, must we?" sneered Miss Atherton. "Out of respect for her? I jolly well respect her as much as ever you do. I'm not jealous of her. A fair lot you must love her, spending your time with us girls. I don't suppose she sent you off to spend a holiday with Rosie."

"You may rest assured," he said, his face a little pale and his mouth set, "that she knows nothing even of your existence."

"And happy she'll be if that cat Lydia tells her of it."

"Lydia is not such a fool."

"You're very fond of Lydia, it seems to me. Perhaps you'd leave me to please Lydia as well——"

"Well, if you are to go on like this——" Lord Basil took up his coat from a chair in the corner and laid his hand upon his hat. His move brought the inevitable reaction in this creature of crude impulse. She sprang at him with tears streaming down her cheeks, and tore the coat away. Her arms were

about his neck and she dragged him down into a chair while she knelt in her crumpled flounces at his feet, protesting her love and demanding forgiveness. He kissed the tear-stained face and swore he loved her. Why were men sent into the world to bring unhappiness to women? Rose asked between her sobs. Why? asked Basil to himself. He sat half frightened by this spectacle of affection almost unsought and ill repaid, holding poor Rosie in his arms; and he thought of Kitty. Silently he gave thanks that his wife was happy in her ignorance and in his love. The sobbing girl grew quiet gradually against his heart, and a calm seemed to fall upon the little room as the night wore on toward midnight. Basil's thoughts grew kindlier, and his hand rested upon the gold-brown head as on a child's. With this Rose he had plucked from the hedgerows as he passed along he must be gentle. With the other, the white flower in that closed garden of his heart to which he came at every journey's end, he must take no risks. He must never hear the sound of Kitty's sobbing as he had heard this girl to-night. In the stillness he seemed to get a view as from some hill crest back over the highway of his youth. His mood grew almost solemn. Why, he could scarcely have said; other foolish girls had sobbed out their

foolish rages on his breast. There had been other moments when the thought of Kitty should have constrained him. To-night in a curious way small happenings seemed to have great meanings. He bade a kind of farewell to the tumults of other days, smiling ironically to himself the while. An odd place, he thought, in which to be growing good.

Outside London little by little fell asleep. The half-hour clanged from the tower of a neighbouring church, and a solitary cab came clattering along the silent street. Basil listened to the hoof-beats, wondering whether it went to some doubtful nest behind drawn curtains, or to the domestic fireside of some shopkeeper of Camden Town.

As its pace slackened Rose spoke.

"Perhaps it's Cis and Charlie stopping for a bite," she said, jumping up and tentatively refurbishing the supper remnants. "Of course they always know that I have enough, hot or cold, for six at least. But it's pretty late. However, Cis will go anywhere for food, and she never as much as gives you the smell of anything to eat at her place, let alone drink."

Here was the old Rose again—all signs of the recently displayed realities of feeling effaced, the vulgar girl from the burlesque theatre, the squalid intrigue in an ugly room. Then the bell tinkled,

and she rushed to answer it, leaving the door wide open as she went. The light streamed from the dining-room across the untidy passage, and when she opened the outer door, upon the figure of his wife, upon her pale face, pale golden hair, and the pale glitter of her great topaz chain.

Nothing of this last time he saw her ever faded from Basil's memory, yet it lived there with the vividness of some ineffaceable dream, not with the semblance of reality. So little, oh, so little was said in those last moments when there was so much to say. For one instant as the glare of light fell on her and she saw her husband, Lady Kitty caught at her heart and seemed to sway against the dark background of the night outside. Then she came in the door, without a word until "Basil, Basil" she said as she passed into the dining-room.

"Who the devil is this?" asked Rose, and Basil remembered that she stubbed her toe and stumbled on the sill, but no one answered her.

There were some bright gas jets in the centre of the room, and Lady Kitty half unconsciously put up her hand for a moment to shade her eyes from the glare, then silently she looked around the room.

"Is it true, Basil, is it true?" she asked.

"Let me take you home, my dear, you shall know everything."

"Gawd! her ladyship!" ejaculated Rose.

"Is it true, Basil, is it true?"

"Why, yes, it's true," broke in the girl in pink, her accent relapsing into its original cockney as if to point the contrast with the other's voice. "'E's 'ere a good 'alf 'is time. Leastways 'e was. But 'e'll leave me for some one else as 'e left you for me. 'E'll break both our 'earts."

She threw herself on the sofa, a heap of crumpled pink, and her sobs punctuated the few speeches that were to be good-bye between the other two.

"Is it true, Basil?" Lady Kitty asked again.

"Yes," he answered, "the obvious thing, my presence here, yes. The other, no. Oh, Kitty, come away. Darling, let me take you home."

"No, Basil, no." She gave one glance at the flounces on the sofa, half in pity, half in scorn. "Try to keep her heart from breaking, if you can, mine is gone already."

Her face was calm enough, though Basil saw that her slender hands were clenched tight and that into her eyes the betraying tears that cannot be con-

trolled were rising. Suddenly he felt afraid, terrified at some unknown consequence of the night. Before he had been sorry, ashamed, abased, yet confident, fresh as he was from his meditations on virtue, that he could patch up the future, kiss away the past. Now confidence oozed out of him, he shivered as a gust of the rising wind reached him through the half-opened window. He turned to Kitty as if for strength, calling her name as it were a cry for help. In answer to him her own self-control seemed to give way. She came swiftly to him across the room, the tears streaming down her cheeks, and half-checked sobs struggling in her throat. She threw both arms around his neck with nervous violence and pressed her hot lips against his. Tears of mingled happiness and repentance came into his eyes. He held her safe within his arms; he was forgiven, he thought. So, for a minute they stood, and he felt her heart beat against his. Then before he knew it she had slipped away from him. Before he saw clearly through his tears her hand was on the door. Then with sudden frantic energy and determination he started to plead with her, even to command that at home she should listen to some explanation. But Rosie now clung to him, and the sound of her hysterical sobbing drowned his

words. In Kitty's pale-blue eyes he seemed to see unconquerable determination and hostility.

"No, Basil, I will not have you come home with me now."

Before he knew it she was gone, and she had said the last words he was ever to hear her say—words murmured as she went out into the night.

"Good-bye, Basil. Oh, Basil, Basil, good-bye!"

The words rang in his ears. The clatter of her cab died away in the distance, mingling in the faint, far roar of the great city.

"Good-bye, Basil. Oh, Basil, good-bye."

He turned gravely, though with nervous haste, to Rose Atherton. Again he kissed her on the cheek and again he held her hand in his—"Good-bye, little Rosie," he said, "good-bye."

And Rosie felt afraid and shivered in the west wind that blew across the room. Yes, thought Basil, in a numb and aloof sort of way, as he looked at her face, now pinched and pale under the glaring lights, yes, she had loved him too. She would reap her harvest of unhappiness as well. He saw himself, taking his pleasure in the love of women while their hearts were bleeding, a poor coward cursed because he loved them, more cursed because they

loved him in return. In the pink nest this unhappy fledgling sobbed and pleaded and raged in anger. Yet he went away, only a few minutes by the clock after the cab that bore his wife had clattered down the street. And they laughed at Rosie Atherton for years, at supper parties, and told her favourites that she had never cared for any one as for Lord Basil Forrester. Let us hope the suppers were always as gay for Rosie as for the others. In this tale we soon say good-bye to her.

There was no cab at the usual corner by the Park, and Basil half-ran, half-walked, down a long dismal street till he found at last a rickety one with a decrepit horse, and drove away. At first he ordered the man to go to Mount Street, then suddenly feeling that he must think, that he must make some plan, he changed the direction and went into Piccadilly to his club. But its lighted, cheerful windows frightened him away. How could he think? he asked himself;—what plan could he make? He was now in a kind of unnatural calm, feeling like a spectator of his own acts, or like one in a dream. The world looked strange as he came between the twinkling lights along the broad, deserted space of Grosvenor Square and through the quiet streets of Mayfair at last to Mount Street.

There he found her, dead among her pillows, her pale-gold hair streaming across them. On the little table at her head was a letter—to her mother—and from the poor, thin hand he covered with his kisses and his tears she had taken her wedding ring.

CHAPTER II

Judgment

FOR seven days the secret had stalked by Basil's side. On the seventh at the Mount Street house he found a note awaiting him from his mother. Lady Kingstowne begged him to come to Berkeley Square at once.

"The Duchess has written me [she wrote]. Oh, Basil, how could you leave me so unprepared for this fresh blow? She spares me nothing; she has even sent me a copy of the letter that Kitty left for her. It wrings my heart. Oh, my dear, my dear, that poor Kitty! You must come here at once. Your father is angry and frightened, and your brother as well. Alkinloch has heard that there are some stories in the clubs; he fears it will be too late for the Duchess's silence to avail anything, even could we secure it upon her conditions. We must talk everything over, pray God it may be with some calmness. Come here at once."

The evening was of one of those moist, warm days that sometimes come in February. They were lighting the lamps as Basil went across to Berkeley

Square and each seemed to gather round it a shining yellow globe of mist. The air smelt close, yet for Basil there was something almost of exhilaration in it, a sense of escape into the open. His secret no longer went with him. Already he could see it among the loungers in club windows, by the tables in ladies' drawing-rooms, and in the servants' hall. As darkness came he felt it scurrying to and fro, arousing London. It no longer walked whispering in his ear. He had a welcome feeling of solitude at last, a kind of bitter satisfaction in facing the very worst.

What was in the letter of farewell from Kitty to her mother, he could only guess. The Duchess had never shown it to him, though it was sure, he felt, to contain some word, some message of good-bye for him. He had sent it to Galt House that morning, with a hurried scrawl of his own giving the dreadful news. But never, except when others were by, had she willingly spoken one single word to him. In public she addressed him occasionally, with a faultless air of sympathy and repressed sorrow, though her words were impersonal and vague. In private he might have been not there. At the funeral she leant upon his arm, and sat by his side. She gave no hint of what was happening within.

But her pale-blue eyes, with a flash of steel in them that had not been in Kitty's, looked through him as if he had been thin air. She seemed like some grim figure of fate, meditating upon the means of justice. Reproach, hatred, vituperation, Basil had expected, could have borne. But this speechless preparation for revenge—he never took it for forgiveness—broke his courage, shattered his nerves. It had seemed to put him into a silent world, where he could hear only the pattering of his secret by his side, and the whisperings of London, so faint that it was painful to strain one's ears to catch them. He had waited for some catastrophe as one waits in the hot, close, lifeless air before a violent thunder-storm.

He had waited, but some others had fled before the threatening clouds. We must give the reader one more glimpse of poor Rose Atherton, a bedraggled and pale object upon the deck of a channel steamer scurrying out of the boisterous grey waves into the harbour of Boulogne. By her side was, oddly enough, some might think, another frightened creature, vaguely terrified lest in some way she be implicated in Lady Kitty's tragedy—Lydia, making friends again with Rosie in their terror and their common sorrow. They had stoutly announced a

pleasure trip to Paris and perhaps to Monte Carlo. Rosie was in luck and had some money,—Lord Basil's solicitors could have explained this, and how Rosie's luck was to be a quarterly event, helping her to remember, yet it was hoped without regret too poignant, the past in the pink nest. Of the culprits in the case Basil alone had waited for sentence to be given.

At the house in Berkeley Square his mother's sitting-room, as he came into it, gave him a strange sense of peace. Here, with faded red curtains drawn against the world outside, she had made herself a kind of refuge among shabby flowered chintzes and pink roses, a refuge where often by ignoring sorrow she had kept it outside this door, at least. Her son realised, as she came across the room to meet him, that this time with his entrance the lurking beast slipped in. Here was another woman added to the dreary list of those to whom he, who wished well by all of them, must bring suffering. Yet this woman, like the others, kissed him tenderly. No, not quite as the others did. Yet all of them could forgive, all of them, he thought, with a great pang, except Kitty, who had loved him most of all.

"I told them to bring you to me first," said Lady Kingstowne, quietly enough. "I have the letters

here. I thought perhaps you would rather read them alone or with me, than with your father and brother."

"Give me Kitty's," was all the answer he could make. His mother went to a desk and brought him some sheets of paper. They were covered, he saw, even from a distance, not with Kitty's rather waving lines, but with her mother's old-fashioned, small, black handwriting. Instead of being alone again with Kitty for one last farewell, he was in the Duchess's accusing presence. He took the letter; half the eagerness he had felt for one word from his dead wife was now gone. In the upper corner was an inscription blacker than the rest and twice underlined—

"Letter to me from my daughter Kitty, murdered by her husband, Lord Basil Forrester,
February 5th, 1871."

For an instant Lord Basil put down the paper, with a kind of gasp at this blow in the face. His mother looked and understood.

"Oh, she spares you nothing!" she said.

He took up the letter again, and Lady Kingstowne in a chair, the back of which hid her, and her

tears, from Basil, held her hands tight clasped, and prayed God, if He could, to help her son to bear the pain.

“Dear Mother”—the letter ran—

“This is to say good-bye to Basil as well as to you. I cannot trust myself to write to him. Perhaps it is to say good-bye. I shall know to-night. Basil has gone to Brighton. But a woman has been here this afternoon who swears that she can drive me to-night to a house near Regent’s Park where I shall find him with another woman, a common creature whom he loves. When I have finished writing this, I shall go to learn the truth. Oh, I’ve been all over the question; I know what would be brave, be dignified, be loyal to Basil, and I’m going to be all the other things. I must know, though I feel that I know already. If he has lied to me in the past, he will lie to me again; I must see with my own eyes. Then I will come home, and to-morrow they will find that I have taken an overdose of my sleeping-draught. Basil will understand, I think; this is to make you understand. You will say that I am weak and cowardly, that no woman of spirit, that no woman of our class, would solve the problem as I am solving it. I know all that, but I *am* weak, a coward, and of no spirit. A wretched body, racked with pain, as mine so often is, can’t hold anything but a wretched spirit. I only lived because Basil was mine, because I thought he loved me. If it prove that he does not, why should I live? I shall not care to.

"I am weaker even than you think. For I shall not be doing what I do to punish Basil, not even to resent his infidelity. I am too poor a thing even to resent that. I must die just because I have no courage to live. Other women, I know, learn to content themselves with part of a man's heart. And, indeed, why should I expect to hold his? Other women must love him, must tempt him away from me. That other woman will suffer too, if she loves him. Or perhaps she will take what is flung at her, and be happy. Oh, mother, why was the world invented, that we women should break our hearts in it? Why cannot I be happy and content to live on the crusts of his love?

"I cannot, I cannot, and I will not. I've this much courage. Perhaps he will be happier—no, I don't mean that. I don't believe it. Basil will be sorry, and sorry that he has hurt me. But he will not understand that I must have all or nothing. All is what I gave him. Oh, is it quite fair that I should not have everything in return? That's the way of the world, I suppose. Well, then, it's a poor world, and I am sick at heart. I'll say good-bye to it.

"Good-bye to you, mother dearest and best. You must have felt sometimes, during these years when I was so happy, that I had drifted away from you. Perhaps it was true; there was so little life in me that Basil took it all. Forgive me for that. I am still your loving Kitty, though I am doing nothing that you will think good or honest or brave. Try to forgive me, try when I'm gone.

"There is one chance that this need never have been written, that I shall tear it up before I go to sleep to-

night. God grant I may. Oh, mother dear, wherever you are to-night, pray for your child. I am so lonely and so afraid.

"K. F."

"Later.

"I have come home. Good-bye, mother; good-bye, world. Oh, Basil, my love, my husband, good-bye."

"Good-bye, Basil; oh, Basil, good-bye," this had been all she had found to say to him that night. This was all she had found to write. No hatred, scarcely blame put upon him. His eyes were dry and hot when he spoke:

"It's worse than I thought. She forgives me. She knows my utter weakness. What's her phrase? Oh, why was the world invented that we men should break women's hearts in it? I wish to God that I could have died instead of her. She did nothing but good in the world. I did nothing but mischief."

"You made her very happy, you succeeded in deceiving her for a time," said Lady Kingstowne; "that doesn't happen to every woman. It is something, in this world."

"Don't, don't, mother," he protested, "don't forgive! Oh, if women would be as hard as we can be! If they would only not sacrifice themselves to our selfishness and to our passions! The worst

of it all is"—his voice fell—"that I should probably behave as badly another time. I'm frightened now, but I don't dare to trust myself. I don't dare to stay in London, I don't dare to stay anywhere. I ought to find a Robinson Crusoe's island, if such things exist now——"

"Read the Duchess's letter," his mother's voice interrupted him. "You will find it *apropos*. And she does not forgive. No. She has been my friend for twenty-five years, yet she does not spare me now."

"Remember she has lost a daughter."

"Oh, Basil, if I felt sure that I were not going to lose a son!"

"I'm better lost," he said, almost lightly, and went across and kissed her on the cheek. The thought of escape, of losing himself somewhere at any cost was almost a cheerful one. It seemed to tone his grief, to make it other than a weak and whining one, to teach it a way to face the world. He took the Duchess's letter from its envelope eagerly,—

"For seven days [it began] I have tried to be a Christian woman, if, indeed, it be Christian to forgive and to bury in forgetfulness a great crime, which I begin to doubt. For seven days I have kept silent, but I can bear it no longer. I had to drive through Grosvenor

Square to-day. I saw Basil Forrester. Men speak to him; I suppose they are sorry for him because he has lost my Kitty. Don't I know? Didn't I sit by him at the funeral? Couldn't I hear what was said? There's a God of justice somewhere, I know, whether there's any other or not. It was not meant that your son should go scot-free. You have been trying to comfort him, perhaps. You can stop now.

"He has not told you, probably, that Kitty left a letter for me. Here it is, at least a copy of it. I won't say that I wouldn't trust you with the original, Helen, though it is like the relic of some martyred saint to me. Still, you are a mother—believe me, I remembered that for seven days, and that you were my lifelong friend—and this is all the proof I have of what drove my child to her death. Read it, and understand my actions, if you can and will.

"I will not endure it that Basil Forrester shall stay in England where she is buried, or that he shall be where I might see him again. His death would be the payment due me for my daughter's,—an eye for an eye, Helen,—call me wicked or mad, if you like. But he is too soft a coward for that."

The man who was reading paused a moment, and his face hardened as if the writer had stung him to some sudden resolution. The woman across the room, watching him from her corner, grew pale. Before he knew it she had come to him and, kneeling by his side, seemed instinctively to fix upon the

passage which had stopped his reading. She clutched his arm.

"Basil, Basil," she said in a broken kind of whisper, "not that, not that."

"It's her due," he answered with half a smile.

"It's my due that you shouldn't. Will you better things by breaking my heart as well?"

"As well," mused Basil; then he went over and kissed her hair, softened with grey. "I promise, dear," he said, "if I can make you any happier by living."

"He must, at least, die to our world [the letter went on]. If he stays here some other poor girl will marry him, and break her heart for him. Women will always love him, and it will be their curse; I wish I might make it his. Let him go away; there is surely some place for outcasts. Let him be somewhere, if that is possible, where he will not be spoiled and pampered because he is Lord Basil Forrester, somewhere where they kill a snake before it starts to bite. Let him go into the woods, and out under the sun, if he wants to live. I swear I will hunt him out of every capital in Europe, I will dog his footsteps into every provincial town, and people who befriend him shall know he is a murderer. The law cannot touch him, but he shall see I can.

"If he goes at once, I will keep the secret. You have my word for that. I have not told it to any one

yet. I am a lonely old woman, as you know, and never so lonely nor so alone as during the seven days just gone by. If any rumours of the truth have been heard they are not traceable to me. His own guilty conscience probably makes the whole world point its finger at him. What reports the vile companion of his crime may have circulated along the gutters of Regent Street, I cannot say. I know that I have almost bitten my lips till the blood came, but I have kept them closed. It rests with him, with you, with the family, whether I open them or not.

"There can be no doubt, I think, of how London will take the news. I can scarcely believe that your son is deceived, or flatters himself that the town would hear my revelation lightly. I do not pretend to be other than a woman of the world. As to the creature in Regent's Park, I am aware that most husbands are probably acquainted with that quarter of the town. Mine was, or worse; and I've heard that yours—but these were different; London takes such things lightly enough, but then we took them lightly, too, you and I. Lightly compared to the way my poor, unhappy girl did. I give Basil his chance, because even at the end Kitty would not have had him suffer. If he will slink away to some hole, if he will never cross my sight again, if he will go where no word of him may ever reach me, I will spare him, because that is what she would have wished. If not, she has put into my hand, never knowing that she did, the whip to lay across his back. Oh, we are a moral race, when there's a man so defenceless as Basil Forrester will be. No one will dare defend him. He will

be branded as the murderer he is. I say it now after the first rage of my anger and my sorrow is gone, I say it in cold blood; he is a murderer. He robbed me of part of my happiness when he won her love, now he has taken it all. I am a broken old woman with not much left to live for. Let him glory, if he likes, in adding one more name to the list of women whose lives are ruined because of him. Yes, I too; I lay this tribute at his feet. But I am not too broken yet to make him pay.

"I ask no pardon, want no allowance made for my action now. The one chance I give him is in part my tribute to you, my dear Helen, and to a friendship that has stood long usage, that I for one would wish to see continued. But you must forgive it in me that I hate your son.

"Yours,

"CONSTANCE AVERCREWE."

This was tonic, thought Basil, putting down the letter, and throwing back his head for an instant as if he felt the east wind and the sting of salt spray on his face. Terrified at love and all its consequences, he welcomed hate. To his accusing conscience, grown lonely at its work, now came a comrade with a stout arm to lay the lash across his back. With gratitude he felt it cut. It was no reparation, no atonement, yet somehow he felt himself more a man. Bankrupt though he was, he was

making some small payment on account with every throb of pain the bitter sentences caused him. And vaguely he caught a vision of himself toiling in the heat of some far-distant sun-bleached sands to make remittances of suffering and of remorse to clear his debt.

He was happier than he had been any moment since that one night of nights. Never had he liked the Duchess so well as now.

"Shall we go down to a council of the family?" he asked, almost smiling, with that smile the mere suggestion of which brought boyishness into his face.

Lady Kingstowne rose wearily. The lash of shame, the sting of suffering were no tonic influence for her. Men might work out their atonement, and forget themselves in the sweat of their toil. Their women must weep, they the guiltless must bear half the burdens of men's sins. The smile faded from Basil's face, he saw himself again driving the spiked wheels of his car along a roadway paved with soft hearts. He offered his mother his arm, as to an old woman, gravely, and with a solicitude which her usual strength and self-reliance would have rendered needless.

"Will you go to them first? I'll come later when

you've heard your father. I'm too weary to go through it all a second time."

He went out quietly, but sorrow and shame that she had kept so long outside the door did not go out with him, though he lingered an instant in the odd fancy that it might follow him like a dog, leaving his mother, in this haven of her faded chintzes, again to forget that to a man she had borne men children and so must suffer.

He went down the staircase, stopping for a moment on the landing to look at an odd ill-painted little picture of the "Earl Alkinloch and Lord Basil Forrester, sons of the Marquess and Marchioness of Kingstowne. *Ætat.* 5 and 3 respectively." Once, he remembered, the small spaniel in the picture had been allowed to come to London and had raced with him down this same staircase. They both used to slip on the landing he remembered, and he remembered, too, that he and "Chevalier" had been banished to the country after two days of noisiness. How he had cried! A silly memory, he told himself. Yet it came across him suddenly, as he looked down the last well-worn stretch of steps that perhaps he was seeing them for the last time, and that the family council might be banishing him again. This time, however, he would be willing to

go. Under such circumstances one may await family decisions with a willing and obedient spirit. He was the least excited of the four persons in the drawing-room when he entered.

Lord Kingstowne was pacing down the room. As his son entered he nervously put down a cigar, then took it up again.

"If your mother is not coming, I might as well smoke."

"How are you, père?" Basil asked and gave a greeting to his brother, sitting sullenly in an arm-chair. Alkinloch had evidently thought the occasion demanded a relaxation of the regulations of his mother's drawing-room. A glass of whiskey stood at his elbow, and he replied to his brother's salutation by emptying this. The third occupant of the room, whose presence Lord Basil had not expected, was more daintily occupied; a glass of sherry and the thinnest wafer of a biscuit had been placed for his refreshment on a small gilt table, and Monsignor Forrester, in black *soutane* and purple sash, smiled benignantly upon his glass of wine, and upon his cousin as he entered.

"Ah, Cousin Henry. I didn't know you were here."

"Thought it was a case for the advice of the

Church," growled Lord Kingstowne, who was apparently by his flushed face endeavouring to retain some show of calmness. "And although your cousin's a Papist, he's in the family, and it isn't a question to be discussed much outside."

"Fancy old Mr. Etherton up from the country to hear about Basil and his friends." Lord Alkinloch in his armchair smiled rather disagreeably and took up his glass, discovering regretfully that it was empty.

In this room the air of tragedy was gone. The squalor of his misdeeds, the vulgarity of the impending scandal was all Basil could see now. Why, indeed, should they consult this distinguished old gentleman with his grey hair and his well-cut, amiable face? In cases like the present, any magistrate would give as good advice from the bench to the butcher and the baker, spicing it with cheap jests for the reporters of the morning newspapers. Then Monsignor Forrester spoke, and Basil gratefully recognised that he at once brought the affair back into recognised regions, where one sinned but also made reparation like a gentleman.

"Basil will, I'm sure, understand my wish to help him in this trouble." Then he added, "My name is Forrester, too."

"And a damned dirty service Basil's done the name," came from his brother.

For a moment Lord Kingstowne had the air of finding his elder son's method of expression complete and satisfactory. Then he seemed to remember the dignity of his position, and spoke slowly, choosing his words.

"I hope you realise how disgraceful, how damned disgraceful your conduct was, and how great a scandal, a public shame you are likely to inflict on your unhappy family."

It was ironic, thought Basil to himself, that these two who really realised so little the disgrace should urge him to confess.

"It will clear the ground, I think," he said, "if I confess at once the full wickedness of my actions. No one could feel the disgracefulness of infidelity to a wife as I do. I realise now, I dare say, the propriety of a clean and decent and pure life as much as any one of us."

There was a pause, almost awkward. Lord Kingstowne, with his back turned to his younger son, struck several matches before he managed to relight his cigar. His heir found words.

"Confound it, Basil, I'm not married yet, if you

refer to me. And I mean to give everything up when I am."

"I shall certainly insist on it." Lord Kingstowne's dignity was now thoroughly re-established.

"But how do I expect I'm to be married now?" Lord Alkinloch's heavy fist came down on the table. "The thing has troubled the Mertfields as it is." (To a daughter of this house the gentleman was to be married in June.) "Don't you expect when this comes out they will chuck me altogether? Violet's fond enough of me, but this is sure to frighten her off love matches in our family, even if it breaks her heart, poor little kid."

Basil said nothing. Would this Violet, a stupid, pop-eyed girl, always in limp white muslins, would she, too——? The indictment roll against him grew longer.

Lord Kingstowne turned almost impatiently to his cousin.

"I suppose there's no doubt in your judgment, Henry, as to how people will behave to Basil if the truth becomes known?"

Monsignor Forrester was tapping lightly on the table at his side with his well-shaped fingers. The suggestion of a smile, faintly ironic, passed over his face.

"That is a question of the world, Frederick, rather than of the spirit. My advice would presumably be——"

"Oh, hang it, Henry, you were of the world before you—— What I mean is," he went on, hesitating slightly, "of course I don't defend or uphold my son; still we all know that that sort of thing, men deceiving their wives, happens pretty generally, and nobody takes a high line about it."

"No, nobody does." The faintly ironic smile still played about Monsignor Forrester's lips, yet somehow as he went on, his words coming with even more exquisitely perfect enunciation, one felt that within a hidden fire burned; one caught a suggestion of what, to every one's astonishment, had made a priest of him.

"Betrayal of the marriage vow we treat lightly enough, if it is our happy sex which betrays it. We forgive, and we teach our women to. We forget the wife's side, and we teach our wives to. Everybody would have welcomed Basil with a jest, if it had been just the usual scandal. Poor Kitty wouldn't play the game; she broke the rules; though she paid high for it, she put her side of the question so that it must be faced. No, I don't think London would dare to palter with it now; I don't think it would dare to forgive Basil. We're all born and

bred in a Christian country, though we often forget."

"Yes, it's a rum thing, ain't it?" meditated Lord Kingstowne.

"I don't think she wanted revenge—Helen showed me the letters," went on the priest—"but she took it in the only way that was possible."

"And a damned, silly, selfish revenge I call it," broke in Alkinloch.

Basil turned white.

"Here, cut that," he said. "Good God," he went on, breaking for a moment completely from his self-control,—“do you think I'll sit here and hear anything from you against her? Father, the object of this meeting is to discuss my future, not my past. I've been a cur; what d'ye want me to be now?"

Lord Kingstowne got up from his chair, threw away one cigar, and lighted a fresh one, nervous as a child upon whom some unwelcome responsibility is thrust. There was an uneasy pause.

"I suppose, Basil, there's no chance of denying the whole thing, of facing the Duchess out? This woman, this girl, what will she do? And"—he hesitated, his curiosity obvious, though ashamed—"who is she?"

"Rose Atherton."

"Rose——?"

"Of the Regent's Theatre."

"Know her, father?" asked Alkinloch, with his disagreeable laugh.

"Basil means to deny nothing, I can see that." The priest again brought the discussion back from vulgarity.

"Then, what are we to do, Henry? There will be an atrocious scandal."

Alkinloch had a suggestion.

"Basil had jolly well better take the old Duchess's suggestion, she'll keep quiet then. And,—I may as well say it in the family council,—I'm the heir, I'm going to be married soon, unless this row stops it, and—well, you've seen Violet Mertfield—I don't think there's any doubt but that we can take care of the Kingstowne title."

Lord Kingstowne, in his peregrinations through the room, happened to be standing by his younger son. He put his hand awkwardly on his shoulder. For the first time that afternoon Basil felt that, after all, here was a father with something of a father's affection for his child, even though that affection was expressed, as now, in what his oversensitive imagination conceived to be terms of an ideal of life now grown repellent.

"But you'll hate to give up London, won't you, Basil, my boy, and all the fun you've had here?"

At the moment the son lost sight of the father's affection in horrified contemplation of the latter's probable conception of "fun" in London, a conception only seven days ago the son's as well. His revulsion from life as he had known and loved it was still his master, it made him almost shrink from his father's touch.

"I am quite ready to go away from London," he said in a dull, emotionless voice.

"It isn't that we wouldn't stand by you," went on Lord Kingstowne, "if you like to stay and face it out."

Here was the affection again. Basil, jumping up, gripped his father's hand an instant.

"Thanks," he said, "but I would rather go. Thanks all the same." Then he went quickly across the room and seated himself by Monsignor Forrester's side. A wave of emotion swept over him again. His elder brother watched him curiously and then turned to speak to his father, with that constrained air of the Anglo-Saxon in the presence of displays of feeling.

"Cousin Henry," began the young man in a voice full of suppressed energy, "can one go anywhere

and get away from the world, get away from temptation? You see I'm too weak to resist anything; still I think I've done about enough harm already in the world. Shall I be safe anywhere?"

The young face was worn and pale with seven days and nights of strain, but it recaptured all its youth as Basil leant eagerly forward, and with an impatient gesture put back the dark hair from his forehead. Henry Forrester involuntarily thought of some passionate, tormented boy in an old Italian story, and of the refuge from the storm to which he, had he been a Cardinal in mediæval Rome, might have counselled some distracted child of those turbulent days to fly. At ordinary moments, though his vocation—his own life, perhaps—might suggest such advice, his calmer common sense, his worldliness would make it seem ridiculous. Now, he, too, for a moment forgot the modern setting, forgot Lord Kingstowne, and Alkinloch sitting sullen in his chair.

"Safe, Basil?" he repeated. "I think one is only safe in this world with one's eyes fixed on the next. There is one refuge that has been open to every one for many centuries, but fewer and fewer seem to like to go to it now."

"You mean——" began the young man.

"Oh, the Church has always stood ready for those who are sick of this world."

"A priest?" asked Basil.

"Well, perhaps not just at first."

"But I've no beliefs, you know, at all."

Monsignor Forrester took no notice of this interruption.

"I've to go down to Hampshire to-morrow," he said, "to a small Carmelite monastery. It's just below the crest of the downs, with a walled garden, with decent flowers and fruits, running down the hill, and a jolly view from its upper windows as far as Hindhead and to Haslemere."

"But I should always know that London lay beyond."

"You forget London in time, Basil. Why, I remember the first time I went into retreat——" He paused a moment as if lost in contemplation of some memory.

"Yes, Cousin Henry."

"Oh, nothing! Except that I was just about your age and, well perhaps not quite unlike you. You forget London, Basil, you forget it."

"I should forget it; then I should remember again," came from the younger man with sudden emphasis. Then he laughed, at himself, it seemed,

and thus inoffensively. "No, that wouldn't do for me. If I only had ever been the least pious. But—well you know the family well enough. I don't mean to laugh at anything you propose, but it just won't do. I must get away altogether. I don't want a part of the old life fenced off to live in, I want something new, new. We needn't debate it; I'll go, I'll go to-morrow early. Every one would rather have me away and I'd rather go."

There was a slight sound by the door at his last words. Basil turned and saw his mother there, her hand for one instant pressed against her side. Another picture flashed across his memory, another swaying figure, this time against the dark background of the night outside, another hand pressed against another woman's heart, beating hard with pain, of which he was the cause. He started forward, but Lady Kingstowne recovered herself, as the other woman had done, and came into the room. Her face was pale and she had been crying, one could see. But her manner had no trace of feeling in it.

"It's settled then, is it?" she asked the company.

"Basil's cutting," answered Lord Alkinloch. "We all think it's necessary to avoid a scandal. And he's behaving very well, I'll say that."

His mother turned to the priest.

"Is it right, Henry?" she demanded. "Ought he to go? And what's to happen to him?"

Her husband fidgeted with his cigar and then said with a bluff air that was half embarrassment :

"Basil can go out somewhere and try it for a time. Things will blow over. We'll get him back after a while; eh, Basil?"

"Perhaps, père," the young man answered.

"Perhaps after a while he will feel he can come back," said his cousin the priest, the look again in his face that made one understand why he should be a priest.

For perhaps a half-minute there was silence in the room. Once more, and he felt it was for the last time, his eyes rested on all its old familiar chairs, on its dull red curtains, on the Sèvres china in the gilt cabinet which his mother had collected just after she was married, on every loved rag and stick in it. His father must be feeling it was time to dress and dine, he thought. Alkinloch must be thirsty. Cousin Henry had to go to Hampshire, to the hill-crest to-morrow. And his mother—they must all take up life and go on with it. The old room would be still the same when he was gone. He looked at it to say good-bye. He impressed its image on his

memory again with his father, his mother, his brother all in black, and Monsignor Forrester in the purple of the Church.

"I'll go to-morrow," he said.

"You will dine here to-night?" his mother asked.

"No, not if I must get away so soon."

"Where will you go to-morrow?"

"I had no plans."

"Perhaps then mine will help," she said. "You remember that land I'm supposed to have in America, in Florida. It was always a kind of joke in the family. Your grandfather took it, I believe, for a bad debt."

"At cards?" enquired Lord Alkinloch.

"Possibly. I never troubled to ask. I've no idea what it's like, though I know the rates and taxes are not heavy. How would you like to go to Tomocala for me, Basil, and prospect? I will give you the land, and if it is at all pleasant you can stay; you say you want to stay a little while."

There was another silence. Then Lord Kingstowne began with suspicious heartiness of tone, his first instinct being to hide the fact that it might stir emotions to wish their son God-speed.

"Then you're off for this Florida——" He wished him luck, he even managed to wonder about

the climate, and to mention oranges. He and Alkinloch both got away without a scene, finding a handshake and good-bye sufficient.

Monsignor Forrester rose and Basil, obeying a sudden impulse, knelt an instant at his feet, to hear a murmured Latin blessing, and to feel, rather than see, the hands that signed the cross above him. Then the priest was gone.

"Mother," he cried, "you understand, they're not sending me away, the Duchess, nor father and Alkinloch, nor the world. I have to go. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she repeated, as if afraid.

"Yes." He was at her feet now and held her hands. "I'll come back, if I ever feel I can."

He put his arms around her as he knelt there and they both said some incoherent, murmured words. Her tears were wet upon his face as he rushed away. This was good-bye.

Lady Kingstowne sat gazing fixedly at the disordered tea-things when they came to take them away. She rose, and trouble, that for so many years by a fierce effort of her will she had kept lurking outside the door, now went padding familiarly by her side. Often hearts that husbands cannot harm only wait for sons to bruise and break them.

CHAPTER III

Good-bye, London!

BASIL walked slowly home to Mount Street. Later there was to come to him a more poignant sense of parting with the city of his youth, but now a temporary peace settled upon him. The darkness enclosed him pleasantly, and the occasional yellow street lamps pointed out the way in friendly fashion. The secret no longer went by his side. He felt the calm that comes with finality in any form, and the gentle pervasive glow which even in the deepest sorrow for a little while at least follows on sacrifices and resolutions for reform. Basil's mood was solemn, and as he walked through the familiar streets they gave him a new and strange impression, the hushed feeling of some church.

In the small room which served as library he wrote letters for an hour, as if it were quite the usual thing. They were business letters. In his ordinary careless mood Basil might conceivably have gone away and left everything at loose ends. But this new solemnity of life made it seem natural to

write to solicitors, to attempt to put everything in order before he went. At half-past seven his man, discreetly entering, reminded him that dinner was ordered at home, and that it was time to dress. Was his Lordship dining alone? he asked. And Basil, with an odd smile, said, "Please lay the table for two, but if no one comes I will sit down at eight."

To the surprise of the butler, though perhaps not to that of his master, no one came. Lord Basil sat silent through a long dinner—it was in the days of long dinners, and his Lordship's chef could think of no other way of consoling his unhappy employer than to make the menu longer and more elaborately illustrative of his art than usual. But dinners—above all, the dinners that one eats alone—are food for memory as well. The room was in gloom, only the light from two candles fell on the white cloth and upon the shining silver at Basil's place, and at the one laid opposite, by a vacant chair. Somehow to-night, when he was about to hide himself in the wilderness, to begin the long vacant years which were to be his poor atonement, there came a moment when he could think of her without anguish that was intolerable. Again she sat opposite him, happy, smiling, as he was too; then the memory of

happiness brought back the flood of shame and sorrow, higher and more turbid than before, engulfing him in its bitter waters. And his imagination, which had given him in this raising the wraith of Kitty one fleeting instant almost of happiness, now brought before him other figures to torture him.

Into the room trooped London, London in all its infinite, what once he had thought its fascinating variety. In the shadows around his table Basil caught sight of crowding faces. There came, as if to some quiet family dinner, his father and mother, Monsignor Forrester in his purple, and the old Duchess, with her worn, rugged features. There came as well friends gathered along the whole course of his life, suggesting familiarly to him Eton, Oxford, London at last. Here were those whom he had loved, to whose love and friendship he had played false. In the gloom their pale faces stared at him in sorrow and shame. Yes, it was better to lose them, he thought, better to sit through the years in loneliness than to face their accusing eyes, their eyes which spoke of faith in him betrayed.

There were others, mocking faces, that seemed to delight in pushing their way into his lonely room, in spoiling these last moments in the place where the memories of Kitty clung thickest. These were

casual acquaintances who had done their part in the show of fashion and the season's pomp. They had meant nothing to him, nor he to them. As they once indifferently had enjoyed his hospitality, so now their phantoms seemed to stare at him in idle curiosity, showing no sorrow, feeling no sympathy, ready to go on, chattering merrily, to some gayer board. They laughed at him, though sometimes where the shadows were least deep and the look of laces and of the sparkle of jewels seemed to fix his gaze, there seemed to be women whose eyes demanded of him his ever ready tribute of admiration, or more than that. How easy a capture, how cheap a captive he must have been thought, he told himself: a silly fool ready at a glance to fly to their sides! Around him circled this hideous phantasmagoria of his former life, the awful panorama of what he had once thought pleasure. It whirled about the vacant chair where for one instant he had seemed to see Kitty with forgiveness in her face. It seemed to shut out the sight of her from him, to push him farther than ever from that thought of her which was all he could cling to now. Violently he roused himself, and by sheer will-power brought himself back to the lonely room and his solitary dinner.

To the servant at his side he gave a message of congratulation for the chef, and then told him briefly of his departure on the morrow and the closing of the house. Masters hesitated a moment.

"We shall all be sorry to go, my lord," he answered finally, "but there's none of us as can't understand how your lordship must wish a change."

"Thank you, Masters," said Basil.

Masters did not over-colour the picture, thought his master. A change! A change in everything that he had known, a change in everything that he had been!

When the butler had gone he rose and lingered a moment at his place, then gravely he poured out some wine. He was bending over the table, and one hand was stretched out on it toward the vacant place across from him. Slowly he lifted the glass to his lips. He was smiling, tenderly, affectionately, though there were tears in his eyes.

"Good-bye," he said in a half-whisper, "good-bye." Then he drained the glass, and tossed it from him towards the fireplace, where it crashed and lay in a hundred pieces on the hearth, sparkling white and red in the light of the flames. They had drunk his health and Kitty's at the wedding breakfast, and

had broken the glasses then, wishing endless happiness.

In the little library, after dinner, he sat, staring at the fire. He tried a cigarette and hated it: he lit a cigar and tossed it impatiently away. Books were hopeless, and he was driven to the rack of his thoughts. There was but one thing he could think of, indeed but one thing he could have wished to think of. Yet the torment of such meditation, now that he had borne it for seven lonely nights, seemed to grow into a physical torture. He paced the room, trying to quiet himself. The future was chosen, he told himself. What he must show now was courage to face it. He must conquer his nerves. Yes, he would go out, he suddenly resolved. The air, the exercise, the blackness of the night should pull him together. This last vigil in a house still pervaded by her presence would break him utterly. He must forget for an instant, just that so he might keep the strength to remember always. He did not go out, as he had sometimes done, to see London crowding through its narrow streets and to let his pulses quicken, as they had so often, at the roar and cry of the great town seeking its pleasures when the lamps were lit. To-night he went, like a sick wild thing, seeking some herb in its

familiar pastures that would bring momentary relief from pain.

The night was still warm for the season, and muggy. There was moisture enough in the air faintly to blur all outlines. The open space of Grosvenor Square seemed to stretch indefinitely before him like a great plain. He skirted the south side, and before a house near the middle saw some waiting carriages and a group of gossiping footmen. He remembered, as he quickened his pace, that he was to have been dining there that very night—with Kitty. As he went by a streak of light shot across the pavement as the door was opened, and he saw against the bright background the figure of a woman he had known, dined with, consequently probably made meaningless love to. He put down his head and hurried by.

Across Park Lane and into the Park chance, or caprice, led him and he turned north under the trees dripping with the afternoon's rain, toward the lights that blinked at him by the Marble Arch. The exceptional warmth had started again the preaching of the many gospels which the place knows, and Basil stopped near a group in the centre of which a short, red-whiskered man denounced the sins of London and called the shopkeepers' assistants grouped

around him to repentance. He looked at the weak face of the preacher and the stupid ones around him. What, pray, did they know of sin or of repentance? What should they renounce if they gave up London? He turned away, and saw the lamps of the Edgware Road shining gaily, and its pavements bringing their stream of evening promenaders toward the Park. Yes, after all, he told himself, they had their pleasures and their sins, perhaps their repentances and their renunciations. The changing show of the dingy street was as exciting for them as the pageant of the London season; the public house at the corner, gaudier and more merry than his clubs. And yes, the draper's assistant tucked under his arm a young person from some cheap milliner's shop, and the bright-coated guardsman convoyed some lovely housemaid,—there was the love of women. There was a moment when Basil felt that he might mount a park bench and harangue the crowd. Love which could make life could break it too; this they should know. If one could not be its master—and who could?—one would be its slave. They could resist, they might object, they could hold loyalty to one cherished and beloved object, they might protest. Basil could warn them against the folly of such hopes. He could counsel flight in the face of

danger, renunciation before it was too late. He could tell them that he himself, now as red-handed as any murderer, once for a little while dreamed the same dream, once, like them, thought that the woman by his side was for him—a red-faced, dingy couple lurching out of a public house jostled against him, and the man caught the woman round the waist to save her from falling. She giggled in Basil's face at this caress of love, and he turned away sickened at the comparison he had been about to make.

A passing hansom invited him and he stepped into it.

"Drive anywhere for an hour," he told the startled driver.

They wandered for the hour or more. In great curves and zigzags they went through the town of Basil's youth, down Park Lane, across the open space by Hyde Park Corner, down Constitution Hill between its arching trees, sweeping by the gloomy mass of Buckingham Palace, and along the south side of St. James' Park to hear the hour boomed out by Big Ben high above their heads in a misty sky. Then they came along Whitehall into the stateliness of Trafalgar Square and made a detour into the more gaily lighted Strand.

Why had he thought that he might escape his memories? London was no longer merely London; it was London where Kitty had lived; London where he had made her die. Every inch of the way was a reminder—Mayfair of the stately, ordered life of fashion, led with Kitty; Westminster of his own brief career in Parliament, undertaken because Kitty had been so sure that he would make a career in politics. If in the Strand the memories were of the follies of his youth, the youth only just now passing in this passionate remorse, they were for that only the more painful. The crowds poured out from the theatres, and he stared at them with a pale, haggard face. The lights blinded him, he hated the street and its surging crowd. There, around the corner of that quiet street, leading into the Adelphi, he had often waited in the dark corner of a cab for Rosie. He gave an almost inarticulate cry of protest, and hurriedly stopped the cab. Into the cabman's hand he thrust some money, and then half-stumbled, half-ran, up a quiet street leading north, flying in vain from memories.

But memory dogged his steps; at Covent Garden, where some early porters were carrying boxes of fragrant white hyacinths such as stood in a small sitting-room in Mount Street, that had become a

sanctuary to him now; before the dark façade of the Opera—she had cared for music. Long Acre was silent, but ahead was the brightness of Leicester Square, enlivened by the new Alhambra Palace. Here, where currents formed to carry the flood of home-going London toward the great eddying pool where Regent Street joined Piccadilly, Basil felt for one fleeting moment a faint flicker, the old excitement which a town by night, its light, its clamour, its suggestion of mystery and adventure, had never failed to give him. But it died at once, and he walked through almost with unseeing eyes. If he had ever thought that in his repentance he was paying a heavy price, he would have laughed scornfully now to see how the price turned to nothingness before him. Ah, gladly he said, “Good-bye light, good-bye clamour.” As for mystery, the future only could hold that.

He went west along Piccadilly, his eyes again on the pavement. He felt the swish of skirts against him and caught some whispered words. Involuntarily he looked up, involuntarily he noted a pretty, worn face below some tawdry, tossing feathers, glanced at a slender, graceful form, then below his breath he murmured an oath,—not at this poor, wayfaring merchant of her wares, but at himself.

Under a street lamp the skirts, slackening their pace, again swished against him. This time he did not look up.

"*Non, ma chère,*" he said, gently enough, and catching a hand in a dirty white glove thrust some gold pieces into it, then rushed on, straight to Mount Street now. London seemed to laugh at him behind his back. Were her streets not full of pretty faces, she seemed to say, that would make him forget his resolutions, his new-found strength? No, a thousand times no, he muttered to himself as he hurried on. He would retreat till he found some place where love was not.

And he vowed to himself again that somewhere (in Tomocala in that remote, strange land, he hoped) he would find new courage, would make over the world to what it was in Eden before Eve came. Monsignor Forrester, talking of the monastery on the Hampshire hillcrest, had in mind no greater exaltation of spirit, no fiercer fire of asceticism than his cousin Basil felt, planning to plant orange trees on his lands in Florida. He found himself at his own door without realising it, having come through the familiar streets in a strange, confused, forgetful uplifting of his deepest feelings, an unaccustomed thrill of almost happy pain.

The house was silent. In his bedroom he found a small trunk and some bags packed for his departure with the few simple country clothes he had asked for, and a few others not so simple without which no well-trained servant could allow a master to go. With a smile the prospective traveller dragged out a black tailed coat and some satin waistcoats and tossed them in a careless heap upon the floor. Not such equipment, not such memories did he mean to carry with him. Yet somewhere he meant to hide away a keepsake of the youth to which he now said good-bye.

He lit a candle, and gently opening the door, entered the bedroom that was Kitty's. They had given him her keys, and he opened a drawer in the great mahogany chest and took out her jewel case. The little key that fitted this he knew well, and often in those first days she had sent away Brinton when she was ready to put on her jewels, and called in Basil to help her choose them, when the two, like children, would play at adorning her in any strange, fantastic way they could invent. Half the gems that he fingered they had bought themselves, and to them had given in consequence associations that now racked Basil. Two tiny trays he lifted, and finally from the lowest corner of the casket drew

forth in one long, glittering, yellow stream the great chain of topazes which they had found in Paris that May afternoon, which Kitty had worn on that last night. He closed and locked the jewel case; but these hard stones he held clutched in his hands till the sharp edges of their setting almost cut into his palms. An odd, unwieldy keepsake it was for a man to take long journeys with, yet it was this and nothing else that he chose to take. It was this, and nothing else, though he could not know, that could so glitter again with its yellow lights beneath the golden splendour of a tropic moon and at so strange a crisis in his life. Now he carried it back and stuffed it in a dressing-bag, wrapped in a fine linen handkerchief with initials in the corner she had put there. Again he closed the door, and again in a hushed whisper he said good-bye.

With deliberate precaution he consulted again an evening paper as to the steamer he hoped to catch to-morrow. Then he turned to the writing table in the corner and wrote one note before he threw himself upon the bed. It was written in the solemn hush of the early hours of the morning. When they took it to the Duchess her son-in-law, after a few hours of restless sleep, was already speeding on his way to Liverpool. It was his last good-bye. It

was as well the solemn pledge with which he set out on his pilgrimage.

"When this comes to you [it read] I shall have gone away from London. I will not come back unless you call me, perhaps not then. I go willingly, I go hoping I may find a way to make reparation for what I have done. Will you keep the secret for my mother's sake, and for Kitty's—not for mine?

"Reparation! I find it impossible to imagine any way in which I can ever make it fully. I can only take my oath, upon what honour there is left in me, that I will not let any woman suffer for my sake. If I keep this pledge I shall have done the poor best that I can. Good-bye. Thank you for showing me the path away from London."

BOOK II
TOMOCALA

CHAPTER I

Exile

It is easy to go to Tomocala now. Luxurious trains crowd their way into what was once the sleepy old Spanish city of St. Augustine. Long, yellow lines of hot cars creep down through the sandy pine barrens of the East Coast almost to the very tip of Florida, discharging crowds of tourists all along their route. The magic of the original Spanish name still keeps something of its power. And the first sight of blue skies with glossy, dark-green leaves and orange fruit against them always gives one who has never spent a winter away from the inclement north, some sense of romance and unreality. But excursion tickets and illustrated "railway literature" have, for the most part, taken away all the feeling of strangeness, and the fabled Land of Flowers, where the great Spanish captain thought to find the Fountain of Perpetual Youth is reduced to the commonplace level of any tourist region. True it is that the jealous land guards even now at the outermost part of its peninsula in the vast track-

less region of the Everglades almost the one remaining mystery of America, the one labyrinth at whose edges the white man stops baffled, through whose wilderness of cypress and saw grass threaded through and through by narrow waterways and dotted with lakes in which strange shifting currents run, only the few remnants of the original race can go with surety. From this refuge even now only an occasional Seminole Indian comes forth, though in the little settlements along its edge one can hear curious half-legendary stories, of the village near the west coast to which flee negro convicts escaped from their labour on the Florida roads, of the cabins here and there where men whose names are now forgotten in the world still live. But even the tourist when he spends a winter near the Everglades herds with his fellow tourists and rarely hears these tales. For him Florida is a discovered and well-known land.

Thirty-odd years ago this was not so. The State has had a curious history. After the Spanish and the English left it, and it became a part of the Union, it was for long years an almost undiscovered country. The early time of its settlement and cultivation was forgotten. It was thought to be barren, a long spit of sand covered with pines and palmetto scrub

stretching down to the tropics. Until the orange culture began and the climate commenced to bring people south it lay year after year sleeping in the sun, its inhabitants (mostly white), scattered, ignorant, and shiftless. There were few negroes, though these gradually drifted into it. It was never in any real sense a part of the South. Except in the hill country of the northwest around Talahassee, which is indeed geographically part of Georgia and Alabama, it had no wealth, no gentry, no real Floridian families. It was a refuge for the idle and incompetent of the other Southern States and for occasional fugitives from the Spanish Indies. Lying between the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico its coasts caught driftwood, human and otherwise, from every quarter of the globe. But there are no annals of that time, when this enormous State, the greatest in area east of the Mississippi, still waited for the touch of modern civilisation. Fragments of stories of those days may be gathered here and there. One of them, the beginning of which in a distant great city we have already seen, is now to be put together as best one may.

The traveller in the hot yellow cars may perhaps wonder how they went down the East Coast before the railway came. If such an inquisitive person,

some time when he is staying in any of the sea-coast towns between St. Augustine and New Smyrna, will leave the hotels and boarding-houses on the Lagoon and wander back along one of the straggling, sandy wagon tracks that lead into the flatwoods, he will come upon a road almost overgrown and disused, but still traceable after more than a century's existence going its green way north and south at a distance of two to three miles inland. If along its bushy stretches he should have the rare chance to meet a "cracker" driving a melancholy horse and an antiquated vehicle to town from his lonely cabin in the back country, he will be told by this native that he is on the "King's Road."

Reminiscences of our English origin one expects to find in the old historic colonies, though indeed there in Revolutionary days most names were altered to obliterate traces of early loyalty to the British Crown. But in the loneliness of the Florida woods, in a land originally Spanish, and settled quite within most people's memory from the bustling modern North and West it is curious to go along a highroad still called for one of the Georges. The English occupation, lasting from 1763 to 1783, though generally forgotten still has its mark upon the region. It was then that the Minorcans were brought from

their Mediterranean island by Dr. Turnbull to cultivate rice, sugar, and indigo in his lands around New Smyrna—it was then that they revolted, freed themselves from their almost slavery, and scattered along the coast, where their descendants may be recognised now by their Spanish names, their dark skins, and their adherence to the Roman faith. It was then that the Governor drove the King's Road southward from St. Augustine, which was then the capital, as it had been since 1565. Those first days were the only ones when it saw much show of traffic or gaiety. Yet as far down as the early seventies it was still the post-road, and along it a so-called stage went southwards. In this one could go as far as New Smyrna—on his way to Tomocala.

It was March of '71 that a young Englishman who gave his name as Basil Forrester took the trip, sitting by the driver. The latter was curious, as are his class, and asked the stranger why he had come to Florida. They generally put the question to strangers in those days, but rarely expected an answer, nor took the one they got to be a true one. Many a secret before Basil's had sat on the front seat and hurried southwards. Mr. Forrester, though genial enough, and eager to talk of the country through which they passed, gave no more specific

information than that he had some land at Tomocala and hoped to do something with it.

"What crops do they raise here?" he asked.

The driver cracked his whip out over the scrub palmetto that lined the road and smiled.

"Reckon it looks to you like you couldn't raise nothing on this here land."

It had looked so to Basil. The tropics, for the Northerner, are a kind of fairyland of the imagination. What Basil had expected he could not perhaps have definitely explained. But he had had a confused idea of tangled primæval forests where the rich ground steamed with heat, where strange over-coloured flowers grew with heavy scents, where bright-plumaged birds flitted in the lofty trees uttering harsh, shrill cries. In clearings where the black soil was riotously fruitful he had pictured pleasant white houses standing among oranges and lemon trees, the proprietor resting luxuriously on cool, shady verandas while hundreds of black servants toiled in the sun. Instead there was this endless, barren flat country and the solemnity of the pines. Occasionally near a little pool of water, they passed cypresses, bare at this time of year, standing in a little thicker undergrowth. Sometimes they went through "hammocks," where the ground sank to a

shallow rill of dark-brown surface-water and slender palmettoes rose from the black earth through a tangle of creepers and rank tropic growths. Sometimes the monotonous level lifted to the slightest ridge and they passed through groves of small hickory and maple. But for hour after hour there would be nothing but the flat expanse of sand and blue scrub dotted over with slender pine trees in whose tops high above their heads sounded that indescribable continuous murmuring of the wind. The woods were not thick; open rather with a certain park-like look. But at a distance they seemed to gather themselves together into the appearance of a thicker screen hemming in the view. To the edge of this one continually advanced, only to find it melting away into the usual scattering trees, while still farther beyond a thick wood again shut out the horizon and baffled any onward progress. For hours at a time they passed over this same monotony, always going toward a retreating goal. It was too soon for any of the flowers that later sprinkle the patches of turf by the roadside. The sun shone and the wind was fresh and sweet. But the sands seemed quickening to no life. Moaning pine and crackling scrub sang a lonely and desolate song in the wind and under the bright sky.

"Yes," continued the driver, "looks like this here land won't bear nothing, but there's nothing much won't grow on it. Yes, sir, you go over to them God-forsaken sandhills by the ocean and scratch 'em and you can have garden truck, and plenty."

"Then why," asked his passenger, waving his hand over the pine-lands, "doesn't anybody do anything?"

"Shiftless! I asked the same questions you do when I first came down—I'm from Massachusetts myself. But, Lord, it's climate. Them crackers won't do no work, except perhaps turpentine pine and kill 'em. And then they're too lazy to clear 'em away."

He cracked his whip at the horses, and seemed to meditate.

"It's the climate, I judge. If I wasn't Massachusetts I expect I wouldn't be doin' even this drivin'. It seems like you change down here, somehow, when the west wind's a-blowin' good and hot."

"Well, I hope so," said the passenger, in a way that caused the driver to stare at him for a moment.

The monotonous landscape scarcely changed to mark the progress of the hours, yet Basil felt acutely that each step of the lazy horses carried him farther towards his refuge in the unknown, towards

the hermitage he was to make for himself here in the greenwood. Each pine tree, with the wind singing in its waving top as he passed along, seemed to range itself with its thousand brothers to thicken the screen that hid him from the world, seemed to close forever the path behind him that led back to London.

Two nights they slept in the pine woods, once at a "cracker" cabin surrounded by a struggling patchy vegetable garden, and a barnyard where a thin white horse and three scrawny cows were standing: the second night at a camp of turpentiners. Into one of the little temporary houses where there was a chimney built of mud and straw, a dozen men or more crowded after supper and around a blazing fire of fat pine, passing the evening with rough jest and song. The passenger from the stage wandered out after a time into the cool night air. A hundred yards or more away light flared from another door, and there could be heard a low, half-chanted song. Basil stepped softly down the grassy cart-track that led through the camp till he could look in the open doorway. There were a few negroes working for the turpentiners, and they too were gathered before a hearth after the day's work. Most Americans have lost almost wholly any sense of the strangeness

of the black man. But Basil Forrester, just from England, looking on the dark faces shining in the red firelight, and hearing the curious cadences of the song, got a fresh feeling that he was entering some new, half-barbarous land.

Somehow a negro from farther north had drifted here.

"Jaybird sat on a hickory tree," he sang (some Virginians may recognise it)—

"Wink at me. Shoot at he,
Jingle-bum. Cider come.
Massa give poor nigger some.
Sweet potato an' a dram
Carry nigger to Alabam'.
Sweet potato an' a guinea
Carry him back to ole Virginny."

The odd meaningless words, the mournful melody, the swaying woolly head of the singer, and the grinning faces of his comrades were part of a life all new now to the listener, but destined he felt to become familiar. For an instant, while the song of the lately-freed slave mingled with that of the wind in the pines, homesickness caught at Basil's heart. "Sweet potato and a guinea" would not carry *him* back. The lights of London would never twinkle for him at nightfall; he would see the blaze of pine logs and hear the moaning in the tree-tops.

Never again would he go through leafy, dripping English lanes winding their way up and down the hills about his home; he would go in this crackling palmetto scrub along the great monotonous lonely stretches of flatlands. This he must make home. These sallow, sad-faced men, bleeding the woods to death for their turpentine, these black creatures scarcely emerged from their jungle savagery, were to be his comrades. His courage faltered. For a moment he wondered if there was no other way, no compromise with his conscience and his remorse that would let him turn back. Then in an instant revulsion to braver feeling he saw that here in this desolation, in this alien life, was the very answer to his prayer. Here there would at least be none of the old temptation. Venus, if she set her snares among these pine lands, must be a dusky and a savage goddess. He would find new courage to withstand new wiles. Again, this time alone under the light of the stars, he swore that he would pay the price, vowed that he would make reparation for his sins.

The singer within the lighted hut increased the speed of his chant till it became a kind of militant and triumphant song. An awkward, loose-jointed boy in picturesque tatters came into the open space

before the blazing hearth and began to do a shuffling dance. It brought the man outside back from his dreaming. He went off to hunt for a place to lay his blanket. That night he slept more peacefully than he had for weeks.

The next day brought them to the oddly-named little village of New Smyrna, which competes with St. Augustine and Santa Fé in the distant Southwest for the honour of being the first permanent settlement by Europeans in what is now the United States. Here Basil found a coastwise schooner, which would be going on southwards in a couple of days and could give him passage to Tomocala. This was luck, he was told, as he might easily have waited a fortnight, in stormy weather even a month. The two days he spent pleasantly enough. He lodged at a dirty little hotel by the waterside and ate with zest abominably greasy food, for the east wind, blowing in from the sea, gave him an appetite for anything. He went back into the woods to see the ruins of the mission where Spanish priests so long ago had taught religion and planted sugar-cane. Its arched cloister had already almost yielded to time and encroaching vegetation while the local inhabitants, imitating the mediæval Romans, used it as a convenient quarry for building-stone. Making

friends on the front with the owner of a catboat, he sailed down to Turtle Mound, that curious heap of shells constructed by some prehistoric native race along the river's edge. He idly dug into it and gathered a few curious fragments of rude pottery which later were to decorate a shelf in a cabin undreamt of now. The east wind still swept in from the sea, the river broke into gay little waves, the sky was blue, and to his own astonishment it was almost bearable to be alive. His curiosity awakened as to Tomocala. A month ago it had been but a name, merely a refuge which would do as well as any other to hide him from the world. Now he found himself repeating to himself the musical Indian word, finding in it already vague suggestions that were pleasant. His life had not been all London—happily no Englishman's, of his class, is. The open air, even though it was not the breezes that blow over Scotch moors or Surrey hillsides, had in it an appeal to which his blood responded. He looked over the guns and fishing-tackle he had brought and was impatient for the *Rosie S.* to carry him out to sea and down the coast towards his new home. His conscience vaguely troubled him, as he meditatively polished a smooth barrel, that he could so soon feel any interest whatever, or that the sound of Tomo-

cala should come to mean to him anything not quite penitential. But he told himself that it could not be wrong to answer the call of sea and sands and woodlands. They could only lead him farther and farther away from the danger that lurked in human relationships, if indeed—and he put the question to himself with a kind of scornful satisfaction—there could be any question of human relationship worth the name for him in Tomocala.

The *Rosie S.* having discharged, one might have thought, sufficient canned goods permanently to weary the inhabitants of New Smyrna of such a diet, put out through the Mosquito Inlet and turned southward. The single passenger, sitting near the bow, watched the low, straight coast of sand dunes as eagerly as some early adventurer from Spain to whom any passage in from the sea might mean the way to where the sand of the rivers shone with gold, or where crystal-clear among the tropic forest the fabled Fountain of Perpetual Youth rose in its magic basin. All through its history there has been sought in the Florida peninsula fulfilment of some extravagant wish that the world denied. Since the earliest days broken men have buried lost hopes within its border. To many another before Basil Forrester, Carnaveral Inlet, opening at last between

the sand dunes, had seemed the gateway to a new life.

As eagerly as a boy he watched the schooner thread her way up the tortuous channel that showed smooth water through the surf, past the mournful fragments of two wrecked ships gone to grief finding their way into the river. They went over the bar—at high tide, though as they beat up a lagoon, in these regions called a river, toward the town, Basil saw behind great flats left by the ebbing waters on which innumerable pelicans and cranes were settling. Ahead the channel wound up towards a dozen or two white houses along the river-front. The *Rosie S.*, cleverly manœuvred, came to anchor by a rather rickety wharf, and Mr. Basil Forrester, for so he was called now, stepped ashore. This was Tomocala. This was home.

There was even then a tiny hotel, the Tomocala House, outwardly a fairly pleasant-looking building with a small veranda in front and a fine group of three slim palmettoes growing at the side. Basil signed his name in a yellow, fly-blown register and was given a room. Supper would be at half-past five, he was told, so he pulled a shirt out of a bag and poured some water into a wash-bowl of ungenerous proportions. But instead of proceeding

further with a toilet he lit a pipe and, seating himself by the window in a rocking-chair,—still for him a rather frightening novelty,—looked forth.

Before him stretching north and south lay the broad stream of the Carnaveral River, about three-quarters of a mile wide here, from mainland to peninsula. A little to the left he could see the wooded shore break into the piled-up dunes that flanked the Inlet. But otherwise the continuous green line extended on either hand as far as the eye could reach. With the east wind came borne in the regular booming of the surf upon the ocean beach, over a mile away. Thus for hundreds of miles along the East Coast, a narrow strip of sand keeps back the ocean and confines the long tidal lagoons or rivers which skirt the mainland and which now, since the cutting of a few canals, offer a whole system of inland waters and sheltered navigation. Behind Basil the sun was setting, but as he faced the east it flushed in answer to the west. The green line of the Peninsula brightened into a golden yellow. The little hollows of the ripples on the river seemed to fill with purpled brown, while towards the south the whole stream seemed to melt away in a grey and pink mist against which some tall, slim palmet-

toes on a small point of land silhouetted themselves.

In the hotel and below him along the front there was some stir of life, but the panorama that out-rolled itself seemed only water and sea and air, the fair loneliness of nature. Then suddenly the glow from the west seemed to light up the opposite shore more brightly than before, and Basil caught a glimpse of the roof-line of a house half-hidden among green trees toward the south. And as he did so suddenly upon the rippling river there came into his field of vision a rowboat, which had put off from the wharf and was heading obliquely across the river toward the house he had just discovered. It was laden with a number of tubs and buckets, carrying, if one might trust the east wind and one's nose, the refuse of the town. Its occupant, who bent vigorously to the oars, was a man with a great shaggy grey beard, which, with a battered hat pulled down over his eyes, almost concealed his face. This was the first glimpse Basil had of Jim Harriman, carrying his unsavoury freight away across the Carnival crimsoning in the sunset. He often wondered afterwards that the keen grey eyes did not catch and hold his attention then, that they gave him no hint of the part that Harriman and the drama of his life

were to play in that of the stranger just arrived. Basil plunged his face in the bowl, changed his shirt, and went down to supper.

After this was over he strolled out. The surf still boomed in the east, and a crescent moon added a dim light to that of the stars. Across the road by the waterside the hotel and the three shops of the town threw bright yellow streaks, and beyond an occasional lamp shone from a house window. "Sandford's Emporium" did what it could to justify its grandiloquent name; it was the largest of the commercial establishments, and it contained, so a sign indicated, the post office. Basil argued that an "emporium" might also contain tobacco for a pipe. It would save him the trouble of going up to his room, also it would give him a nearer view of Tomocala, five or six of the male inhabitants of which were seated under the most glaring lamp, in comfortable and negligent attitudes. He started towards the door, wondering lazily just how one introduced one's self in new communities, not knowing that new communities always introduce themselves.

"Mr. Forrester, ain't it?" asked a rather squeaky voice at his elbow, just as he was going in. "Thanks," its owner went on, "I jest stepped into the hotel to ask. Seen Captain Morton of the

'*Rosie S.* there, and he tells me he thinks it likely you'll settle here."

"Yes, I mean to settle," said Basil.

"Glad to know you, sir." Here a hand was extended. "My name's Herron, county assessor. I'm an old inhabitant here, sir; no one knows this country better'n I do."

Mr. Herron seemed disinclined to enter Sandford's. Instead he delayed outside, and as he proceeded his voice grew more confidential.

"If you're thinking of settling," he said, "and buying any land, there ain't nobody can tell you better'n I what you want to buy. In fact," and his voice sank mysteriously, "I've got a few hundred acres more than I can handle myself of the best orange-bearing land in this county that I'd be willing to dispose of. It ain't that I'm in any sweat to get rid of it, but I happen to be going out there tomorrow, and I thought if you'd like to have a look at it——"

"I should like to well enough, Mr. Herron," said Basil, "but I've some land already."

"You have?" squeaked the assessor incredulously. "Where did you get it?"

"In England, before I came here."

"You ain't bought that there tract belonging to

some woman called Kingstowne, have you?" Mr. Herron's manner grew distinctly excited.

"Yes, that's it."

"You have, have you? Here, boys," he called out to the group within, advancing to them followed by the wondering Basil. "Here's a gentleman has bought that English tract on the peninsula where I claim Jim Harriman's got his house put. I've told him for years that when that tract's surveyed he'll have to quit. He'd ought to be the other side of that cove. I've told him so times enough."

"And what effect did your telling him seem to have on Harriman, Herron?" asked a bystander quizzically.

"Said he liked the cove better. And told me I could go to——"

"This Harriman's a character," ventured Basil with a smile.

Sandford summed it up.

"He certainly is," he said. "Lord! he certainly is."

CHAPTER II

Legends

It was never difficult to induce Tomocala, grouped in Sandford's, to talk; it was least, of all supposable cases, difficult to make it talk of Harri-man, who was at once its detestation and its pride, whose "queerness" made Tomocala listen with complacency to any tales of eccentricity which other towns along the East Coast might bring forward in rivalry. Every stranger heard something of Harri-man. In honour of Basil, whose connection with him seemed so close and so likely to prove dramatic, the representative citizens in the Emporium talked till ten, first disclosing to the newcomer the fact that Sandford, discreetly retiring behind a pile of packing boxes at the back of the place, could dispense to him—and to any friends of his—something, which proved to be rye whiskey. A round or two of this cemented friendship, possibly loosened tongues. At any rate it will be easier to summarise the story of James Harriman as Tomocala knew it and imagined it, than to repeat the rambling and contradictory

gossip through which Basil learned it. It is hopeless to attempt to disentangle truth from invention. The man must remain what he always was for Basil, who came to know him best of any one at Tomocala, what he himself perhaps consciously wished to be, something mysterious and strange, playing tricks with the imagination. To the end Basil could never decide whether the old man's curious existence was a real necessity to his warped and embittered nature, or was, in part,—half subconsciously perhaps,—the result of some inborn desire to deck out his life in the finery of romance, however soiled and tattered. Tomocala drew no such fine distinctions, probably could not have understood them, for Harriman had come to it from out a world to which few or none of its inhabitants had ever belonged.

None of Basil's companions that night at Sandford's store had been in Tomocala when Harriman first came, twenty-two years before. They had gathered the story from earlier settlers, and it had already something of the quality of a legend. Just where he had come from no one could say with certainty; why he came, still less. It was said by some that the window sashes, the doors and the carved Italian chimney-pieces of white marble that had been put into the house, had come from an older mansion

in Washington Square, New York, demolished just as Harriman migrated to the south. Basil had driven through the peaceful, serene, aristocratic sunny square, with its row of spacious old-fashioned red-brick houses the day he landed, and it had reminded him to his astonishment of the best of his own London. He remembered the grey roof-line emerging from the green by the lonely Carnaval, and caught at the very beginning something of the flavour of the Harriman legend. But even here uncertainty began. Herron the assessor had been to New York once and had inquired in vain for any record of a Harriman who had been a householder in the Square. Yet there seemed something in the story, for one old man remembered that he had heard that Harriman tore down the house when his only child and heir, a boy a year old, died there. Or was it because in it the child had been born with some vile deformity? He thought he had heard both tales.

There were other stories of why the man had come down to the wilderness, stories to which Mr. Herron's investigations in New York and his theory of false names gave colour. It was said that Harriman fled to preserve from the law gains ill-gotten in his earlier life. Just what these were again no

one could quite say, with certainty, but the accepted theory built itself around a strange object seen by the few people who had ever succeeded in penetrating the house. They brought back the story of a Chinese pagoda standing four or five feet high from the carved-wood pedestal on which it rested. It was said to be constructed of blocks of a milky-greenish stone and "hung all up and down" with little gilt bells that tinkled as the wind swept through the big, bare room. Harriman had once told some visitor that it had been "presented to him by the Government at Peking for distinguished services." But here Tomocala thought it detected irony, and laughed at the few who took this statement at its face value and believed that the old man had been in the service of the Emperor. Instead it talked darkly of piracy in the China Seas, which had been the source of the fortune, which had built the mansion in New York and later had erected at enormous expense what was at that time a veritable palace in the wilderness.

Sandford, as befitted the manager of such a commercial enterprise as the Emporium, had a sane and unimaginative sense of humour.

"Appears to me, Herron," he said to the assessor, who was painting the picture in lively colours, "ap-

pears to me like we see so blamed little money down in this country we can't believe any one as has any come by it honest."

"Well, I reckon, Sandford," said the squeaky gentleman, turning on him with animation, "if you was a millionaire in New York City you wouldn't spend your money building a big house down here and living in it, unless New York was too hot for you. Why, when he come down," he went on, turning to Basil, the chief auditor, "he brought all his building material down in a schooner from Charleston, they say, and more'n a dozen men to build it. They was six months or more at it, and finishing it inside fit to kill. Then there comes another schooner filled with carpets, Brussels and velvet, and gilt mirrors and carved French furniture, a piano and wines. I've heard tell he brought a hundred cases of champagne. They do say that for a year there was high jinks over in that there house."

"That was when his first wife was alive, wasn't it?" asked some one. "The one he says was a lady. He says this one he has now is a 'cracker,'" the speaker went on in explanation to Basil, "and she certainly is. He must have got her right out of the backwoods."

The listener's imagination caught at the figure of the first wife "who was a lady" and who had only a year or two of this strange, luxurious existence in the wilderness. When everything was completed, the beautiful furniture set in place, and the champagne put to cool in a great vault built of coquina or shell-stone, parties of people from farther north used to come down and spend gay weeks in the new house. Then the blaze from its windows used to shine across the lagoon at night, and occasional curious townsfolk, floating near in rowboats, heard music and laughter, and saw dancing within the lighted rooms or strolling down the garden path toward the river, women in gowns of silks and laces and men in the smart finery of the day. It was a fantastic unreal episode in the history of Tomocala, as indeed it must have been to the fashionable, gaiety-loving people themselves of those pleasant ante-bellum days, this transplantation of the world into the wilderness. What sort had the woman been for whose sake Harriman had brought about this? What had the man carrying away the refuse of Tomocala to a dilapidated house to do with this earlier gallant figure? What was the meaning of this abandonment of the world? Vaguely Basil grasped at some resemblance to his own flight from London.

Vaguely he felt that he, and he alone of all those present, might understand the man. A half-formed impulse of friendliness seemed to stir within him. And an eagerness, that was perhaps not all curiosity, came over him to know Jim Harriman and to learn his history.

"But he doesn't live like that now," he put in.

"He lives worse than a nigger now, he lives like some brute," came the answer. "And as for his wife and them two gals of his, I reckon by this time they've clean forgot they was ever born white folks."

"But why did he change so?" pursued the enquirer. "Did he lose his money?"

After all, he reflected, this might be the simple, dull explanation. When one became penniless one blew out the candle, dismissed the band, and sped the guests upon their way. The world turned the tables on one, before one had any chance to abandon it.

"No one here knows whether he lost it," answered Sandford. "He may be as rich as he was in the beginning. You wouldn't think so, though," he added scornfully, "to judge by what trading he does here."

"Guess he don't spend much on soap," hazarded one of the Tomocalans, testifying to his own love of

cleanliness by spitting toward a receptacle on the opposite side of the floor with considerable accuracy for so long a range.

"About a dollar a year."

"I bet he's got money all right," came from Mr. Herron. "He's always got money to buy anything he wants and to pay his taxes, but he don't raise nothing and he don't sell nothing."

"They say he's always been queer since the first wife died," said a bystander. "Just adores her memory. Some folks say he's got her backbone inside that there pagoda. Seems a queer kind of remembrance, don't it?"

"Some folks says, so old man Storer tells, that she never did die, at least not here, but he had to pretend she did, so as to get this second woman. She got sick of this, and when one of them fine parties was finished she skipped with a handsomer man." Mr. Herron winked suggestively. "And left him with them two gals as babies."

"I seen her grave once," said a young man who hadn't spoken before.

"When was you to Harriman's? I didn't know he allowed young chaps like you nosin' around them gals of his."

"I reckon he didn't know I was there. Anyhow,

I seen her grave under a China tree with a little fence around it."

"Well, you can't tell anyhow," said Sandford, as if he were summing up the arguments, "not when folks is queer like Harriman. Maybe she died, and maybe she skipped. I should think this present woman of his would want to do one or the other."

Past history was closed, and Tomocala now passed to the surer ground of the present. Though indeed since Harriman generally warned off trespassers with a gun in hand and allowed Mrs. Harriman to come to Tomocala only twice a year on a shopping tour, as to even immediate details there was some controversy. But the main facts of a strange and repellent family life stood out. After the first wife died, or went away,—the one "who was a lady,"—Harriman had gone into the backwoods, some said within a month and brought back her successor, already somewhat worn, faded, and yellowed by the sun. This woman brought up the two daughters—at least it was supposed generally that the two girls were the first wife's. They never even came to town, but passing by on the river people saw them sometimes, splitting wood, or carrying up the filthy buckets from their father's boat to the fierce brown hogs that occupied the door-yard. It

was the impression in Tomocala that Harriman did no work at home, but rested like some savage potentate among his slaves. The girls had never been to school, it was said he refused to allow them to learn either to read or write.

"He brings 'em up jest like animals," said the young man who had seen the grave under the china tree, rather fiercely. "I think the town should have the law on him."

"If it can be done, my son," said a new voice, mellow, with a touch of brogue in it, "I'll join you."

Basil turned. By the glass case in which the Emporium displayed its tobacco stood a little man with a round face, which, in spite of repeated baking through the Florida summers, had kept something of the freshness that the sea mists of his Irish boyhood had given it. He was in clerical costume, somewhat shabby, but still recognisable, with the odd addition of a very battered yachtsman's cap with a visor. In his hand he carried a rod and on the floor by his side he had flung a string of fish.

"Good luck, Father Sullivan?" said some one, going over to examine the catch.

"Faith, better luck than Thursday generally gives me, though I am late home. But there will be no excuse for any one of my few people not keeping to-

morrow. Here, Hernandez," he said, detaching a fish and throwing it over to a dark-faced man—a Minorcan, Basil learned afterwards—"give this to the wife. 'Tis virtue made easy. And you, Dick," he went on, turning to the young man who had caused the priest's first interruption of the conversation, "I'm glad to hear you talk the way you were. And if you, or Mr. Baxter of your church, can find any legal way to take those two poor girls away from that father of theirs and teach them something of the ways of God and man, I'm with you through thick and thin."

"They certainly ought to be took away," said the young man called Dick, almost sullenly, flushing under his sunburnt skin.

"Be they good-looking gals, Dick?" asked Mr. Herron with a wink, but got no reply.

"Why don't you talk to Harriman yourself, Father?" asked Sandford.

"Have I not?" was the little man's brisk reply. "'Tis not only a fisher of fish I want to be. When I first came here some one told me his first wife had been a Catholic. So I went there once, and I landed, in spite of the lack of welcome, and I gave him the whole of my mind, in spite of the devil himself, which I believe the man to be."

. "And then?" some one said as he paused.

"And then I came away, that was all. Oh, but the foul oaths he used and the ignorant heart he showed! He swore he'd shoot me down if he ever found that I'd tried to talk religion to his girls." Father Sullivan looked around upon the company and after a moment went on—"But sometimes I go fishin' at night, and in the darkness of the river I might easily meet any boats that were driftin' about with any lost souls aboard. I met you once or twice, Dick."

"Oh, hell!" said Dick, flushing again. "I was fetching some firewood from down the river."

"I remember you said so," assented the priest. He took his tobacco and his string of fish, and with a nod to the company went out. There was a general movement to go. Mr. Herron found himself by Basil outside the store.

"You get that there tract of yours surveyed," he counselled again, "and you'll find that Jim Harri-man's house is on your land. I told him so the last time he came to pay his taxes."

"And what did he say?" asked Basil.

"He said I could be damned and he'd wait till the owner called on him."

"Well, I feel inclined to go to call to-morrow."

"I wish you could run him out of the town."

"Oh, I don't know," ventured the other with a laugh. "I think I'd like to have him stay just because he is so queer."

"Well, he certainly is queer," assented Herron, and then he added, as if in vague warning, "if you don't get your belly full of his queerness pretty soon."

But Basil was not to be warned. His dreams that night were of the vagaries of the household on the peninsula. Thus, when you fly from life, she meets you as you turn some strange and distant corner, and you catch up eagerly and begin to follow the threads she offers.

CHAPTER III

The House of the Pagoda

THE next morning the young man who was called Dick agreed to take the stranger in a catboat across to the peninsula to view his lands. He also arranged to sell Basil a second boat of his, now hauled out for repairs in the little shipyard beyond the Tomocala House. The shipyard was Dick's, and there was work in it to do, but the proprietor made no objection to leaving it, though, as Basil was to come to realise later, he was, for Tomocala, a model of industry and was alleged to work "as though he was drove every minute." Standards of industry vary, however, and perhaps even in the North few could have resisted the invitation of the *Gypsy's* flapping sail and of the little bright blue waves of the Carnaveral, dancing in the sunlight at the bidding of an east wind which blew gaily as if refreshed by the night, during which it had sunk to rest.

"I could land you to Harriman's too," said Dick,

hesitating a little, "if you still reckon you'll make that call on Jim."

"Right you are," assented Basil cheerfully.

Dick paused,—he was hauling on a sheet,—and for a moment sullen anger flared up in his eyes.

"He treats them girls like hell," he said, and then relapsing into silence, resumed his work with the sail.

His companion said nothing, but smiled a little to himself. He could guess at something beyond humanitarianism in Dick's protest and he felt himself seared and old, gently contemplative of the folly of youth, able, if he would, to warn this Floridian young man of all the suffering that lay in store for him in love. But even such reflections were morbid and forbidden, he told himself. He found it easy to put them by, as the sail filled and the boat swung off across the water. This was men's work they had in hand, to beat across the river, to explore his estate and consider what it was worth for orange planting, finally to visit a grizzled old reprobate with a shady history. What did it matter that Jim Harriman had two daughters and that Dick White was in love with one of them?

The Kingstowne tract lay south of the little curve in the shore where the Harriman house stood, and on the last tack, made slowly because they were in

the lee of the land and had lost part of their wind, Basil and Dick White could see it plainly. The house still stands at Tomocala, though it is inhabited by a Northern family, and fresh white paint and repairs have left little to remind one of what it once was. Then its shingled roof and clapboarded sides had turned the wonderful glistening silvery grey which comes to any wooden structure which does not shield itself with paint but abandons itself to long and friendly intimacy with the salt sea wind. The house was simple in design, a square structure, at the front and back of which the roof sloped down to cover a two-storied veranda, suggestive of the tropics and the blazing suns of summer. A doorway in the centre seemed to indicate a broad, straight hall leading to a similar opening on the other side, and one could imagine the cooling sweep of the wind along it.

"Yes, it certainly are cool," assented Dick to Basil's suggestion. "The hogs won't stay nowhere else when the weather heats up, folks say."

"And they let them?"

"Old Jim lets 'em. But I surmise it ain't 'cause he thinks so darned much of hogs, but because he thinks so darned little of humans, especially women. This here's your land," he went on, changing the

subject abruptly, and waving a hand towards the green bank covered with tangled vegetation along which they were passing out of sight of Harriman's cove.

They could not bring the boat actually to land, but they brought it close enough to a tiny sandy beach to wade ashore. Here there was a little clearing—some earlier owners had evidently contemplated building—and though it was overgrown with small pines as high as a man's head, it was still penetrable. Behind it they found the vestige of a trail, running perhaps fifty yards back into the scrub and then ending in a discouraged way. Standing there under the dwarf pines they heard the lonely booming of the surf, and behind through the green caught a glimpse of the river's blue. Overhead a small bird twittered upon a swaying branch and a tiny brown-green lizard ran away from beneath their feet. Basil filled his pipe and gave Dick White a cigar. The sun was warm on his back, and he stood for a moment in silence, watching the smoke drift lazily up through the branches of the pines. Here in America, he thought, with memories of a boy's reading of Fenimore Cooper, here one might call it smoking the pipe of peace. Nature seemed to make him welcome. The woods were friendly and

through their fringed branches he saw a smiling sky. The brown-green lizard emerged from behind a tree-trunk and contemplated with reassured curiosity the new master of the domain. Here, thought Basil, in this warm heart of the sandy peninsula perhaps was home.

"This'll be the likeliest place for a house," said Dick, as if in answer to his companion's unspoken thought, "though I don't know," he went on, "as I'd settle here. There's a sight o' clearing to be done, and when you get it done this here land on the peninsula don't compare with the hammocks on the mainland."

"What would hammock land cost?"

"Oh, about a dollar an acre."

"And this? What's my three hundred acres worth?"

Dick considered, his eye lighting with a humorous twinkle.

"Well," he said at length, "you wouldn't be doing badly if you give it away, but you might perhaps get twenty-five cents an acre, with luck."

Basil laughed, thinking of how these unknown estates had seemed so full of mysterious possibilities in England. He knelt down, digging his fingers through the carpet of pine needles into the white sea

sand beneath, and smiled as he let it run through his fingers.

"It won't ever make me rich," he said, "still I think I'll build and wait for a rise in prices. Let's go and see how my neighbours make a living," and he sprang up and pushed his way back to the river-side.

Basil was almost unconscious that he was already setting his feet upon a new, strange path; already he was caught again by the varying lure of life. It was left for Dick White, looking doubtfully at his passenger as the catboat came up at the little dock in Harriman's cove, to wonder why Basil was so eager to see his neighbours.

A lean dog, limping on one hind leg, rushed across the bare, hot, sandy yard to the dock, barking an alarm as they approached, but only sniffing uneasily at Basil when he disembarked and started towards the house. A few chickens were digging at a heap of refuse, on the side where two of the famous brown hogs allowed them space to scratch. A woman in a dark-blue gown looked furtively out of the doorway at him and disappeared as quickly and silently as she had come. Basil went slowly up the slope of fifty yards or more that led to the house,

turning once to see Dick and his catboat start on the short sail from which they were to return to pick him up, and feeling, for all its deserted air, that the grey house watched him sharply from somewhere behind each window. Near at hand, he could read upon its face something of its curious story. There were remains of glass set in old-fashioned designs on either side of and above the door, out of which now suddenly ran a tiny brown pig, hurrying as if unexpectedly driven out by some unseen person within. In the dormer windows of the roof, too, there were broken sashes, now free from glass, designed in the elegant manner which remained in America from late colonial times. The well-chosen proportions, the gracefully sloping roof over its pleasantly southern veranda, these few battered relics of former elegance gave the house an air of distinction which could not be found in any new, white-painted residence in Tomocala. This at least had been a gentleman's house. This was what a gentleman's house could come to be. This held within it an example—a prophecy perhaps, thought Basil, with the slightest touch of something almost like fear, of what a gentleman himself could come to be. He was nearly at the steps leading up to the veranda before the old house took any steps in its

defence. Then suddenly in the door stood old Harri-man slouching across its width, his sharp, restless eyes looking angrily from a tangle of grizzled hair and beard.

"Get out, will you?" he called out, and added an insulting epithet.

"Don't see very well how I can," replied the visitor genially. "White won't be back with the boat for half an hour."

"White!" exclaimed the old man, and he broke into a laugh. "He's got too much respect for his hide to land here himself. If I catch him again—you might as well know yourself; I don't allow any young fellows nosing around here. There's one old woman here's ugly enough to be safe. But the two girls, do you understand, have business of their own here, feeding the hogs and making their dear father comfortable. I'll have no nonsense with them. If you men in Tomocala need female society you can be contented with what you get in the damned settlement itself, and if that ain't enough you might bring a shipload down from the streets of New York. There were plenty of them there in my day."

This singular stream of abuse, coloured with some filth and blasphemy beyond what it has seemed neces-

sary to record, was nevertheless delivered in a voice pleasant in tone and modulation; in the accents, in short, of a gentleman. The situation kept all of its strangeness, and the young man who listened to this tirade felt acutely into how new and curious a world he had come.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I was not planning to call upon the ladies of your family, but on you."

He advanced a step, smiling, and the man in the door instinctively, so it seemed, stepped aside as if to make a passageway, then caught himself.

"Who the devil are you?" he asked.

"My name's Forrester," answered Basil, still smiling. "Shall I go in?"

A moment Harriman gazed at him. The breeze swept through the hall and from somewhere within came the tinkle of little bells, rung irregularly as if by the passing wind. Also there was about the place the same odd air of some one watching from behind cover.

"Go in if you want to," at last the older man said, and led the way to the right into the big room that had once been the drawing-room of the first wife, who was a lady. Basil looked around slowly, feeling that he could afford to take the time, and that

the ordinary courtesies of intercourse it might be wiser to dispense with. The bells still tinkled, and in the centre of one side of the room the green jade pagoda, legendary in Tomocala, was the first thing that caught the eye. It stood some three feet high upon a carved teakwood base, tapering gracefully through its seven stories to a pointed gilt roof. Each of its balconies was guarded by a delicately designed balustrade above which hung the small gold bells jingling in the breeze. A shaft of sunlight from a south window buried itself in the milky green translucence of the jade and seemed to make it glow as if with some inner life and fire. On the edge of the gilt roof sat a small brown warbler, which whisked itself out of an open window as they entered. But the domesticated occupants of the room were less frightened. Two yellow hens continued to walk with rather aimless curiosity about the room. And a half-grown brown pig succeeded at the moment of their entrance in overturning a pan of potato parings and other less savoury refuse, which he gobbled up in greater comfort from the floor. At one side of the fireplace, of white marble with a graceful female figure in relief carved on either side, the sort of thing one finds in old New York houses, stood a tumbled and frowsy bed, made

up on a cot, on the other a huge pile of firewood and kindling. By this latter on the floor lay a coat, two pairs of trousers, and a greasy black felt hat, whether discarded or not Basil felt he could not say. Near by was what seemed the most luxurious seat, the remnants of a gilt French sofa of the Empire period. On one arm there was still a patch, faded and befouled, of pink brocade, but sailcloth covered the rest of the upholstery, and three of the four legs had been replaced by pieces of rough pine scantling nailed on against the elegantly finished gilt framework. There was another gilt chair in the room, with the seat completely gone, and two deal chairs of the cheapest kitchen kind. On one of the last Harriman seated himself and commenced filling a pipe. Basil took out his handkerchief and flicked off what dirt was detached and removable from one end of the gold sofa.

"Filthy hole you keep it," he remarked, wondering whether this might not be the tone to suit his eccentric host.

"Dirt's healthy," was the answer, and Basil thought the old man looked at him with awakening curiosity, as if his were not the usual manner of visitors. "There's no reason," he went on, "why we should be cleaner than the animals."

"There's no reason, I suppose," retorted Basil in the politest tones, "why we should be dirtier—though that's none of my business, after all," he added.

"What the devil is your business?" came angrily from Harriman.

"I own the Kingstowne tract over here, and I'm thinking of settling on it."

This brought the old man promptly to his feet, swearing. He told his guest to leave the house at once, and then forgetting this invitation stood over him covering him with abuse and giving him defiance. The vehemence of his attack on Herron as a liar, a meddler, and a being generally doomed to perdition was sufficient to convince Basil that a surveyor would probably prove him to be the owner of the land on which this strange, wrecked, proud house stood. This Harriman started by denying, but soon, perhaps that his anger might have fuller scope, seemed willing to assume, if only for the sake of more violent argument.

"Suppose the land is yours by some confounded mistake of a surveyor twenty years back. Do you think I'll get out of my house?" he asked, striding up and down the room before Basil. "Try to eject me. Try it!" he screamed, stopping to shake a fist

in his visitor's face. "I'll shoot down the first man who tries. Perhaps you think not, just fresh from your blasted civilisation in England. Let me tell you, young fellow, that this is a slightly different country. I'll eat you and throw your bones into the palmetto scrub behind the house whenever I choose, and the law be damned."

His voice grew coarser as he railed, and his rage seemed to pull up his drooping shoulders and make him a younger, more picturesque figure of bravado. As he paused for breath, Basil heard again the tinkle of the pagoda bells, and saw the sunlight bury itself in milky green jade. The furious old man glaring at him through his tangled hair and beard seemed now at last to fit into the vague tales told in Sandford's of a tempestuous youth in the East and gains ill-gotten in the China seas, tales which last night, though they had fired the imagination, had not convinced the reason. For Basil Forrester in that moment the world that he had known, the real world, seemed suddenly to recede another step from him, to retreat as he gazed back on it in memory into a region of trailing mists, seemed to take on itself a strange, shimmering look of unreality. He who had so wanted to forget seemed to have wandered already farther than he had dreamed. It was one

thing to have found the remote loneliness of the pine lands, the warm, friendly hollows in the white sands of the peninsula—his hermitage in the greenwood; it was another to have come into this country of romance where somehow there was a new sun and moon and a strange light over everything. He seemed to feel some magic in the land, to recognise already that along the long reaches of its deserted rivers he had come into the comradeship of passions that like his own had blazed high and could even now puff up hotly from their smouldering embers. Meanwhile, as he meditated, old Harriman poured forth blasphemies till they seemed to buzz in a cloud about his head like bees in a swarm. For the fifteenth time he consigned his visitor's soul to hell and invited him to attempt eviction.

Basil looked up lazily and smiled, a smile with the least touch of insolence in it.

"I don't know why you take it for granted that I want the land, even if it is mine," he said, "so where's the use of swearing at me? They tell me," he went on, as Harriman stared at him, "that it's worth at most five-and-twenty cents the acre, which is comparatively unimportant, I should say."

"I won't pay you a penny," said the old man threateningly.

"Don't!" answered Basil. "You're quite welcome to the land as far as I'm concerned."

There was a pause before the old man spoke.

"You will disappoint Herron considerably." This was said with the suggestion of a smile.

"I don't know that I mind that. If I'm to live over here I would rather be friendly with my neighbours than with the mainland people."

"I don't want any friendliness," began Harri-man gruffly, "but," and he hesitated, "you're acting like a gentleman. Have a drink. I haven't taken a drink with a gentleman for above ten years. Hi, Marion," he called out in a louder voice, seating himself meanwhile and spitting with genial copiousness on the floor.

A door behind Basil opened and he turned. But the observer that he meant to be became at once the observed as well. The girl who stood there in a faded and torn blue calico looked him over with a frank insolence in her gaze only equalled by the boldness with which she seemed to invite him in return to look upon her beauty. She was actually in slatternly rags, but they draped swelling and graceful lines, and on her head, held proudly, her dark-brown hair was sleekly and carefully piled,

with irreproachable neatness. She was like a Neapolitan woman in the slums, her pride seeming to be only in the dressing of her head.

"Are you Marion?" cried out old Harriman in a harsh voice. "I called for Marion."

He reached down to the floor over the arm of his chair and seized a boot that lay near. This he flung petulantly across the room at his daughter. She moved a little aside to avoid it, and as she did so the colour deepened in her cheeks and the light in her dark eyes grew angrier. She turned slowly to her father, and spoke, with the lazy drawling accent of the backwoods native, into which she put a note of insolence.

"How come I won't do as well as Marion?"

"Speak English, will you?" snapped the old man. "It's bad enough to have the old woman talking 'cracker' around here."

"Very well," she answered, with a totally different intonation. "I'll send Marion."

With her hand upon the door she turned again. Her glance swept past her father with scorn and fixed itself on Basil. She smiled slowly and deliberately, with lazy provocation in her eyes beneath their half-closed lids. Then she was gone, and the visitor involuntarily drew a long breath as at the

passing of a vision. For weeks he had lived without even the thought of woman. Though he had no longer any outer signs of the storm through which he had passed, within he still felt himself a fugitive hurrying to the safety of the wilderness, seeking a refuge which should at least be the poor Paradise that Eden was before Eve came. Now in the greenwood the Devil had set this ragged temptress, this slatternly dryad of the pines and palmettoes. Basil brushed a hand across his eyes as if to shut out the very memory of her.

"That's one of 'em," snarled Harriman. "Constance by name. Lord God, who can teach women their place?"

Basil blurted out an answer from the fulness of his freshly awakened memories.

"Mustn't we learn ours first?"

The old man turned on him.

"Women were made to serve our pleasure when we're young, our comfort when we're old, and they need a good lash over their backs. The man who loves them and who tries to make them happy is a fool, and will be sold out for his pains. There's one, thank God," he went on, pointing to the farther door, "there's one that's kept where she belongs; ain't that so, Marion?"

"Yes, father," came in response in a soft, frightened voice, much gentler in quality than had been Constance's even when she was "speaking English" instead of "cracker." Basil turned to see what this second wood nymph might be like.

This time no bold eyes met his, no wild, compelling beauty from which there would be refuge only in flight. This was a shy, furtive creature, looking at him in unresponsive wonder, eager to slip back to some hiding-place under a tangle of brown branches and green leaves. A mere slip of a girl she was, a slender, swaying figure just to be guessed at beneath the clumsy blue gown she, like the other, wore. Her cheeks, which he guessed to be usually pale, now flushed a faint pink; her head drooped in embarrassment, and her hands were clasped together, half in fright. Beauty there was in the oval of the face, in the light blue of the eyes, and in the pale gold of the hair which waved timidly back from the low forehead and fell in a heavy shining plait behind, but it was beauty so shy, so gentle, so elusive that Basil, as he looked upon it, felt calmed and reassured. Pity he gave her there at once, and liking, poor victim that she seemed of the fantastic whims of this mad old man. But no panic fear seized on him, no impulse of flight, nothing of the

half-hatred, half-fascination which her sister's rankly growing beauty had made him feel.

She found a cracked tumbler and a white stoneware teacup with the handle gone, and brought out from under a heap of odds and ends which almost completely filled the space beneath the bed, a bottle of what proved to be port.

"I had some decent wines once," murmured old Harriman (and this indeed was mellow with age), "but corn whiskey's good enough for me now. And you're the first man I've seen in years that wine wouldn't be wasted on."

"Your health, sir," said Basil, raising the cracked tumbler. "Long life and happiness."

"Happiness!" growled the old man, and with a quick, impatient movement he tossed the teacup with the handle gone into the fireplace, where it clattered against the bricks, but did not break. Marion, with eyes still frightened, rescued it from the ashes and began polishing it on the skirt of her gown.

"That's what I've got here," continued her father. "Enough grub, enough sleep, and women to wait on me. There's your boat, Mr. Forrester," rising and looking at Dick's approaching sail through the front window.

Basil felt that he was dismissed.

"I'm starting to build soon down on that clearing," he said.

"I'll stop and see you some day," said the old man—then suddenly: "Shall you be keeping pigs?"

"I scarcely know," this with a laugh.

"Because if you don't I could stop and fetch your swill away for mine."

"Certainly, certainly," assented Basil, and on this he went.

Marion said no good-bye, nor did Constance appear again. But he encountered by the front door a small woman with a bent figure and a pinched, yellow face with high cheek-bones, who murmured a good-morning and seemed to examine him with eyes which seemed in a strange way at once appealing and distrustful. What did she think of life and happiness? wondered Basil. What did she ask of existence for these girls, strange, lovely flowers of a new kind sprung from barren Floridian soil? Did her eyes beg him to help, or only to leave her alone bending under the yoke she had worn so long? Even the bright sunlight and fresh breeze before which the catboat skimmed back towards Tomocala could not wholly drive these strange vapours from

his mind, could not quite waken him from what seemed a dream into which he had irrevocably fallen, in which he himself was now to live, in which he seemed bound by some fatality to the grey house of the Harrimans.

CHAPTER IV

Spring Again

SPRING came, then summer. Basil superintended the building of a little house, and the cutting of a trail that should lead backwards from it across the peninsula to the sea. In his little clearing a kitchen garden began to flourish. He planted orange trees, and learned something of the mysteries of "budding" and "grafting." He and a boy named Jim did all the work. Gradually his days filled with little occupations and duties. He rarely went to Tomocala. Yet the months dragged on faster than he could have thought. Outwardly he was busy, almost content. But within he still felt numbed and chill. There were nights when again he felt the bitterness of his memories almost intolerable, and asked himself despairingly whether an eternity could ever bring peace, or make reparation. Then kneeling in his lonely cabin he would pray passionately to God—perhaps rather to the pale ghost of Kitty—to show him the great task, the great duty which could wipe out his sin. Yet in the mornings his

garden, his orchard, or his boat made some simple, homely demand, and he did his little duties as though they were great ones. Winter came again, and then, for the second time, spring.

It is a common misconception with Northerners that the South is a land of perpetual summer. The belief is fostered in the railway folders advertising the yellow cars. Tourists come, admire the well-weathered green of pine and palmetto and the serviceable dark glossiness of old magnolia leaves, then when the thickets begin to quicken with life and the awakening season throws a thin veil of delicately coloured flowers over the burnt-grass patches of the flatwoods, turn backward to the chill north country, there to await the spring. No one, however, can know the Florida sands nor feel the haunting charm of their strange loveliness until he has watched the rout of winter and the triumph of coming summer. The air softens, even the gales from the north lose their bluster and their nip of cold. Gradually they veer to the south, and little by little begins the gentle pulsing rhythm of the summer winds. By day the breeze pours over the land from the southeast like some great mild river, bringing in the smell of salt and the tonic freshness of mid-ocean until the sun has set. By night while the whip-poor-wills call from

their hiding in the shadowy trees and fireflies begin to dance among the bushes the west wind springs up in the darkness and carries back to the sea the fragrance of pine needles and the burnt smell of long stretches of the back country that have been baking in the sun all day.

There come days when the sky becomes suddenly alive with twittering, whirling birds, as some great migrating army rests for a little while on its great journey to the north. They pass on their way and others come, for the same brief encampment. One can feel the spring sweep majestically up from the tropics towards the pole.

The green landscape turns a greener green. The pine puts out pale tassels, and the cypress covers each twig and branch with the stiff fringe of its young needles. Deciduous trees, modest and unnoticed through the winter by the side of the evergreens, now break out into their lighter, gayer foliage. The sea grows lazy and sleeps at times for days like some placid lake, the smallest curling wave where it meets the sand taking the place of the boisterous surf of winter. On days of fresher wind seaweed and innumerable shells begin to come in with the tides. Blue and grey crabs spawn in the shallow pools left where there is any undulation in

the tight-packed beach. The very sands themselves at low tide are alive with tiny clams gaily striped with greys, greens, pinks, and mauves. Under the blown and tattered bushes on the crest of the dunes next the sea the sands grow starry with small, white flowers. In the sunny shelter where the dunes dip behind their outermost defences, bay trees drop their fragrant, glossy leaves and put out new tender foliage. Here, too, bristling Spanish Bayonets shoot forth great creamy spikes of velvety blossoms, and cumbrous spiny cacti which have stood in a dull lethargy through the winter suddenly grow gorgeous with large, soft-petalled, yellow flowers, like golden roses that might bloom in some Northern hedgerow. The most barren spots, the most awkward plants, are transformed by the hurrying hands of spring. The saddest hearts quicken to some poor blossoming.

Basil himself only half realised what changes the passing year had brought to him. What he felt most strongly, as he settled in his little house by the river and grew familiar with each fresh leaf that was put forth by its surrounding trees, was the fading of London and his life that was. As it seemed that the sweet monotony of the present days could have no end, so at last it came to seem that they could have known no beginning. Two worlds, he

knew, divided from each other by that sharp catastrophe which was the one great fixed point in his life. One was a dream world, one was real, but which was which he could not tell. They grew to stand unconnected in his mind—unconnected, that is, except by his great loss, his great guilt, and this reparation which could never be adequate through all the years. He forgot all London except that one pale ghost of Kitty, saw in the future only one duty, never again to cause a woman pain. And as the friendly wilderness took him to its heart, and made a hermitage for his asceticism, the task of self-restraint seemed easy. So far Basil understood his flight and its results.

But there were vague, indefinite workings within him that he could not have formulated. Love comes with springtime, but so too do a hundred other impulses with which humanity, stirring with the universal sense of growth and mating, grows kindlier to fellow humanity, longs for friendliness and comradeship, and feels its heart pulsate with the joys and sorrows of the whole race. Basil, growing closer, somehow, to the green things with which he lived, could not keep himself from putting forth tendrils. In the past these had curled themselves about the varied images of woman, his kindliness

had spent itself in love. There were nights now when the moon flooded the world with gold—of old he would inevitably have sat by beauty's side and begged her treasures while the west wind murmured in the pines and the broad river shone in glory. Now love was dead within him, so he thought. May one perhaps guess at its metamorphosis? May one suspect that its force transmuted was what now caused the confused and half-understood impulses of sympathy with the world, a sympathy, be it said, he had never felt so strongly when he lived closest to its misery and suffering?

This must suffice for explanation of why this young hermit, too desperately heartsick even to think of women, so he would have told himself, still this second spring could let his imagination wander to the old grey house by the waterside, could grow hot and indignant over the wrongs of three of them, living beneath its shelter. His very uncertainty as to facts, the vagueness of what he actually knew of life under its roof, preserved for him the mystery, and thus inevitably deepened the fascination of the problem. It had been a long time since he put foot into the room where the jade pagoda stood, but he sat sometimes for hours trying to picture what might be happening there. Brooding thus was apt

to make him restless, and he would often jump into his boat and sail up and down the Carnaveral watching the light at Harriman's till it went out. On nights of moon his lonely sail would be the only thing moving on the river, but at other times he was met by another silent craft slipping through the blackness, and was occasionally hailed by Dick White. With this young man Basil had formed a kind of friendship, founded perhaps, for each of them, on their common wish to talk about the house on the peninsula. Basil came to know that sometimes when the nights were darkest Dick dared to run the *Gypsy* up to the old man's rickety dock, and that if her father was safely asleep Constance Harriman would come out with him for an hour.

"But I can't understand her," complained Dick—it was a night when Con had disappointed him and he had come, as he sometimes did, to Basil's house for a talk. "I don't know what she wants, I reckon perhaps she don't know herself. She likes me to love her, and—well—she let me kiss her the other night. And she kissed me too. It ain't right if she don't like me. It's too hard, by God it is! But when I ask her to come away and get out of it all and marry me, she just laughs."

Dick sat a moment plunged in meditative gloom, then he went on.

"It ain't as if she was happy to home; she hates her father."

"And her stepmother?" put in Basil. "She is the stepmother, isn't she?"

"I reckon so. But she's like a mother to 'em, as good to the gals as she can be—— But—well, I guess Con thinks the old woman's poor-spirited."

"Con's not poor-spirited though, is she?"

"Not her." Dick was emphatic. "She means to go away and leave 'em altogether, I guess. But she said once that when she got away she was a-going farther than Tomocala. Don't know what she thinks of. Perhaps St. Augustine. I told her once I could easy settle there. But she only laughed again."

Perhaps it was only as far as sleepy, Spanish St. Augustine that her fancy wandered, thought Basil; but he doubted. Somehow, he could imagine, those bold eyes of hers had caught sight of the world beyond the river and across the sea, and seen there lovers who offered her a life more splendid than Tomocala and Dick White could ever dream of. The once he had seen her, holding her proud, sleek head so high and gazing at him so unabashedly, had

made him feel her an untamed spirit, needing and asking no sympathy. As he had then put her out of his mind as a creature too violently beautiful for him to see, so now, in the reassurance of Dick White's knowledge, with something of a feeling of glad relief, he set her outside the circle of those who seemed by their helplessness to demand a share in this new kindliness of his.

But if he thought less of Constance and her flaunting loveliness, he brooded more over the old woman with the dumb, questioning look in her eyes, and over Marion, with that helpless and wistful grace and shyness, and the drooping head with its heavy crown of pale-gold hair. These two came to be in a sense companions of his loneliness, of the long, meditative hours which he had never known till now. But for a time after his first visit to Harri-man's he saw no more of the three women of the family, than a glimpse of them caught as his boat sailed by.

The old man, on the contrary, he saw, for Harri-man paid him occasional visits. These must have been prompted by some desire for companionship, for the scant refuse of Basil's modest kitchen could scarcely have been worth the carrying away. Basil himself felt no growth of friendliness. Indeed it

seemed to him that he and Harriman had fled to the wilderness for reasons so diametrically opposed as almost to breed dislike. He had come as some wounded thing might plunge into the thickets, bewildered and suffering because he had done so much hurt to women. Harriman had retreated to a lair where he might growl at the world and might take revenge upon three captives for the hurt he fancied women had done to him. Basil did not believe in the grave under the China tree. He thought that the old man's pride had dug it, and that though undoubtedly he had buried there much that was precious in his life, he had sunk it to hide the disgraceful memory of that first wife who was a lady and who must have run away with her lover, perhaps after an evening when the house had been gay with music and dancing, and idle, pleasure-loving guests from the North had in those remote days made carnival by the lonely river. The very dissimilarity of their attitudes, however, made Harriman for the younger man a figure that fascinated though it no longer claimed sympathy.

"I think," Basil was saying one morning as the house neared completion, "that, after all, I must try to find a servant. I'm so confoundedly ignorant of every household duty."

Harriman in his unsavoury rowboat looked up—the conversation was taking place by Basil's new dock.

"You can find a wife easier," he said, "if you'll hire a rig and drive out some afternoon into the backwoods."

Basil stared at him a moment, and then, unwilling to make a confidant of the old man by giving any of the various answers that sprang to his lips, said with a smile:

"No, thanks; I don't believe that it is the sort of life I should care to ask any woman to share."

"Who wants any woman to share his life?" broke in Harriman scornfully. "Give one a share in your life and she'll ruin her share and yours, too, before she's done. Take a share in hers, that's the way to do it."

"But is that quite fair?"

"Hell! Is life fair? I don't care; I want it to be livable."

"It doesn't appear to take much to make it livable for you," suggested Basil. This elicited only a grunt in answer, so he went on. "I hope I, too, shall be able to content myself with just what is barely necessary."

"You won't, young man. I don't know why you

came out here, but it wasn't to earn your living I can guess. Perhaps you thought you would run away from trouble. If you did you'll find you'll get deeper into it somehow here. If you ain't a fool you'll go back and get what pleasure you can out of the world. And when you're forty you can come back and get your revenge against it by living on the bare necessities and organising the society you live in on a new basis. And you can keep hogs," he added with a somewhat sardonic smile. "We live like hogs at our place. So there's no jealousy, and nobody gets any ideas about having any right to happiness. We know that all we want is food and a place to wallow in."

"Is that all your wife and daughters want?" asked Basil suddenly, with a challenge in his voice.

Harriman met his look squarely and deliberated a moment.

"Sure," he answered gravely, but for an instant there was a mocking flash beneath his shaggy brows.

Then came silence for a moment.

"Have a cigar?" asked Basil, offering one.

The old man took it in a dirty claw, looked it over, smelled it, and passed it back.

"No, thank you," he said. "But I can give you something really fit to smoke," as he hauled out a

ragged red leather case from his pocket. "I have them sent from Havana especially for me."

Basil took one, looked it over, smelled it.

"Wallowing?" he enquired at last.

"Yes, my hogs get the best swill going. Don't I row across the river every day to fetch 'em delicacies? Don't they live high by the sweat of my brow? Humph!"

With this grunting explanation he pushed the boat off and rowed slowly home, leaving Basil to puzzle over the oddness of the character which was being revealed in this fragmentary way, and to brood again over the household in which it ruled. The old man's occasional visits, highly-coloured patches in the dreamy, green world, kept his curiosity alive, and carried on to summer the impulse of sympathy which he felt first as spring crept over the land, and there were no other impressions in Tomocala vivid enough to threaten its supremacy. Now and then he went to the village, but even its poor attempts at civilisation, its meagre gossip in Sandford's store, seemed to haul him with too sharp a pull from the secluded life he was leading and was learning to love. It is the first months when one begins to live alone that cost; afterwards, for a time

at least, the love of solitude becomes a growing passion. Dick White and Harriman Basil saw on the peninsula; Father Sullivan he occasionally visited in the tiny house at the north end of the village. The black boy who came to act as cook and gardener combined was, oddly for that race, a silent creature himself, though he may have made up for the quality by the social gaiety of the evenings he was constantly rowing across to Tomocala for. All through the long, hot summers when comfort was only to be secured by indolence in the shade Basil lived alone. But, though he himself did not realise it, the second summer he was alone with the thought of Marion Harriman.

The first time that he talked with her was on the beach, towards evening. He had come across the little trail cut from his house to the sea across the undulations of the dunes, first through the kind of dwarf pine wood that nestled in the valleys in the sand on the landward side, just below the low crest that sheltered it from the full force of the winter's northeast wind and then across the moor-like green stretch that led to the thickets of palmetto scrub which cover the dunes at the beach's edge. To the north the broad stretch of sands left by the ebb tide seemed to sink gradually into the tossing white-

crested breakers that marked the inlet; to the south the smooth path of tight-packed sands, a hundred yards across, led the eye in a long curve to a horizon where land and water melted together in the sun-lit distance. Here Basil had found solitude shared only by lonely hawks floating above the surf, by herons fishing in the shallows, or pelicans playing follow-the-leader in long, curving flights close to the varying undulations of the waves. The unbroken waters stretched before him to the hot coast of Africa, the desolate beach went north and south through hundreds of miles before it came upon the settlements of men. Here especially he was used to feeling the sense of remoteness from all that life had meant to him. Here he hugged closest the thought that he had safely accomplished his flight into the wilderness. But here, too, that night, as the sun sank behind the peninsula and as the shallow pools shone with purplish metallic lights, he saw her slender figure on the great loneliness of the yellow sands, and felt a pang almost of welcome as he moved towards her.

He thought of their meeting afterwards—indeed he was never to forget it—as if he had been trying to come close to some woodland creature, too wild to trust man, yet also too wild to know him as an

enemy. The soft southeast wind, dying gently as the sun set, was still strong enough to blow the tattered blue gown and disturb the tendrils of pale gold that fringed her brow. Her eyes grew wide in wonder or in fear, and she held in both hands the battered and rusty pail which she had been filling with parti-coloured coquina clams from the heaps that the tide had left upon the sands. She stood before Basil like the image of youth itself; not the flaunting, triumphant youth that Constance was, but that wistful, wondering thing, gazing at the uncertain future, whose very loveliness brings unreasoning tears to the eyes, and to the heart undefined apprehension and hope mingled. For an instant he feared she was going to retreat from him, through the trail which, as his did, connected the Harriman house with the sea. But she stood her ground, and though her figure, he imagined, grew a little tense and nervous, a flickering smile answered his as he came across the sands.

“You remember me, don’t you? I came to your house one day more than a year ago,” he said.

“Yes,” she answered, and then, seeming to gain courage—“pa’s like that,” she added, “but he treated you better than he does most people. We

wondered, that is ma and Con and I, if you'd know."

"Oh, that's all right," laughed Basil. "We're good friends now."

"Are you? Pa hasn't got any friends. None of us has any friends. Ma used to, when she was a girl in the back settlements. But she wasn't a lady, you see."

She spoke slowly, each word coming out as if the search for it, though in a very limited vocabulary, had been almost painful. But the effect was startling in its unconscious frankness. Would the wild deer or the birds, wondered Basil, use so little concealment could they but speak? He had meant to question the girl, to "draw her out," but somehow before the serene simplicity of these few first sentences he drew back, abashed.

He dropped to his knees and scooped up a handful of the striped clams.

"Mayn't I help?"

"There's enough for supper. We make broth of them."

"Is it good?"

"No," she answered with a smile that was calm and mild. "But pa likes it."

There was no note of irritation, of complaint in

her voice, which in spite of the languid, soft drawl which betrayed the "cracker" stepmother, had nevertheless an odd suggestion of breeding. He stared at the pale-blue eyes as if to drag some secret from them. Was there no revolt in the girl, no sense of the injustice of her life? Was it conceivable that when one grew up in ignorance of all the world calls desirable one could realise no deprivation? He had smouldered with dull anger for her sake through long, lonely weeks. Was there no answering gleam in those wide eyes? Basil had been looking up at the girl from the sands. Now he rose, and asked of her almost harshly:

"Are you happy?"

"Happy?" she repeated, and for a moment it seemed as if a veil were swept across the blue pools he was gazing at so eagerly. Her voice sank lower. "That's what ma wants us to be. That's what Dick White says Con will be if she'll go away with him. I don't know as I know what it is. I reckon I'm happy. Are you?"

"No," he answered, his voice roughened with the sudden fierce sweep of memory upon his emotions. She looked at him enquiringly, and then with a kind of helpless movement of her hands, "I'm sorry. People like to be happy; isn't that it? Perhaps I'm

not. But I'm happy in the woods and here on the beach."

"Don't you ever want to get away from it?"

"I don't know," she answered, her face troubled as if with an effort to think clearly. "Perhaps Con is going some day, but that's a secret; you mustn't tell. If I did too, it would leave ma alone. No, I reckon I don't want to go."

She paused, and then with the smile that was so unconscious of itself, she said:

"But I'd like sometimes to talk to some one."

"You'll talk to me sometimes," came eagerly from the man. "You'll be coming to the beach and I often come here to watch the sea. I'll look out for you."

"No, no," she said nervously, taking the clam bucket up, and glancing as if in sudden fright towards the trail's end, "pa won't like it. He doesn't want us to talk to any one."

"I know, I know," protested Basil, "but you must let me be your friend."

"No, I can't. Dick White wants to be Con's friend, and make her go away. It would leave ma alone, and I don't know what pa'd do. He'd kill us both."

"But I won't be like Dick White. I won't want

you to go away. I only thought we could talk, and that perhaps we might both be happier."

The uncertain look swept across her face again. "Perhaps. Yes, I'll come sometimes," she said, and she turned towards the trail. "It's right, isn't it, that we should both be happier?"

"I think we may as well face the fact," he wrote towards the end of a long letter to his mother that night, "that I shall never come back. I believed this in the beginning, but I have waited to make sure. This doesn't mean that I shall never see you again, dear; somehow we'll manage that, you and I. But it means that there are no reasons, there never were, why I should come back to England. I have no duties there, and little chance, if one is to judge by the past, of leading a life that I should not be ashamed of. Once the break was made I came into something so new that I seemed to get free of the past and start fresh. Here I can be happy, in a calm and a harmless way. The responsibilities, such as they are, I can shoulder here. And here moments have come to me, of late, when I believed that sometime, somehow I should be happier than I am now, should perhaps have brought some happiness, instead of sorrow, into the world. Oh, I don't

forget, mother, you know that! I can't forget! But perhaps it would be right that I should be a little happier. Even Kitty would have wished it, though it is only lately that I have dared let myself think of that."

CHAPTER V

The Secret Rose

SUMMER, in its blaze of heat, slipped away, and often, as the sun sank behind Tomocala, turning its scattered white houses on the waterfront rosy in the fading light, through two green trails carpeted with fragrant pine needles, a man and a girl went to the sea and met on the broad stretches of its yellow sands. It was a strange relationship, but in the dream-like world in which Basil seemed to himself to live it was natural enough. London, and Basil himself in the London days, would have permitted themselves a smile at the thought of such philanthropy. Now, though he could not have told to what future he planned to lead the girl, he felt it an obvious duty to hold out a hand in help. At first all there was to do was to learn the habits of the wild-grown thing, to understand the mind of a little child. He never thought that perhaps he might make the plant in the hot sands break into blossoming, this girl open and flower into womanhood. Once he might have seen such possibilities as these,

and laughed, or been afraid. Now he was unconscious of them, unconscious as well of anything happening to himself. Yet vaguely he felt that he was growing happier. More than ever he lost the sense of time; it seemed to him that he had always lived by this Floridian river. London was as far away as the moon; Kitty had been gone—always. He could not, he did not forget. But need we smile at him because time and the incessant ministrations of the wilderness had made his wound throb with a less angry pain?

It would be impossible to give the full record of those meetings by the sea, the long talks in which Basil, wooing the girl from the shy reticence into which she had relapsed after the candour of that first encounter, gradually learned the story of that stunted childhood, and strange, barren, monotonous girlhood. In the beginning she could talk easily only of the things about which her knowledge was full, of the life of the sands and the dunes of the peninsula, of matters in short in which she was the master and he the pupil. Together they watched hawks dive and patient herons fish the shallows, saw shoals of porpoises rolling in clumsy happiness in the surf, and detected by his sharp fin an occasional shark spreading terror along the shore. She taught

him to recognise the darkening of the water where solid banks of mullet were migrating northwards, and to know when the sea-crabs would come tumbling in with the tide to lay their eggs. On the smooth expanse of sands she showed him the lace-like tracery that the pale land-crabs in their wanderings left and in a little hollow in the seaward crest of the dunes the heaps of their shells and scattered claws which marked where a coon had come to the shore for a prodigal feast. Down from the scrub to the sea she tracked for him once the almost imperceptible path of a rattlesnake which had gone down to swim in the salt water. Venturing a little way towards home with him along the trail, she pointed out the traces of deer and bear, and the little paths on which rabbits and the other smaller inhabitants of the woods wound their way through the underbrush, beating their roadways hard with their small, furry feet. Sometimes they would catch a land-tortoise or "gopher" sunning its bossy back in some bare spot among the palmettoes. She told him how when June came again he was to wait for the gopher's cousin, the great loggerhead turtle of the deep sea, which on moonlight nights crawls painfully up the Florida beaches to deposit its eggs. This was the world she knew, and into it she made

him welcome, like some woodland divinity granting to a mortal the privilege of her domain. She did it with laughter and childish delight, with gaiety such as only the morning of the world could have known, he thought.

Of anything beyond the boundaries within which she had lived she was almost completely ignorant, and—what was more astonishing—she was not even curious. Basil could see how the faded, beaten little mother clung desperately to poor fragments of knowledge saved from her ignorant, unlettered girlhood in the backwoods, and how Constance, snatching eagerly at these, and later risking her father's anger to learn from Dick White, or from any one she could seize upon, built up in fancy some image of the world outside, and began to feel an imperious necessity to venture into it, an inner clamouring for its happiness and its suffering. Marion, on the other hand, lived as if the old grey house and the peninsula were a kind of island of reality in a dream world. Even Tomocala, where she went twice a year "shopping" with her mother and Constance, might all other days have been a kind of mirage floating upon the Carnaval. If there was a world outside, was it not inevitably, perhaps, a world where a grizzled father bullied and beat his woman-

kind, where red hogs disputed with you the comforts you had, where there were escape and affection only in the green heart of the woods? The facts of life were to the girl a kind of phantasmagoria, which she could not understand, but accepted with a helpless contentment which was not happiness. Her curiosity, her dumb demands were concerned with the spirit and the emotions, not with material things. The one thing that had been vivid in her life, so it seemed to Basil, was her stepmother's affection.

"Ma likes Con and me," she had once said wonderingly, her eyes shining softly as she spoke. "Is it that way everywhere?"

"Yes," he had answered softly, his thoughts flying back to England.

"I talked with a priest once," she went on. "He told me about God. God likes Con and me and everybody, and He wants me to like Him, so Father Sullivan said. Ma had heard of God, too. When she was a girl she got religion, back in the woods, and when we were little she tried to tell us. But pa caught her at it and beat her. So she stopped. But after I'd met Father Sullivan I asked her. And she hadn't forgotten."

"You've never been to church?"

"Ma went when she was a girl. Pa don't let us.

But Con says she's going some time; she says everybody goes, and she wants to see them. I went by Father Sullivan's church last year and the door was open. I could see something bright, and flowers, and candles burning. I think sometimes that God would like our pagoda, if I could put flowers and candles around it. But pa wouldn't let me. I wonder why pa isn't more like God. You're more like Him than pa, aren't you?" she went on after a pause. "You like me and you want me to like you, don't you?"

"Yes," answered Basil softly.

"Oh, I do, I do," she murmured.

For an instant he looked at her sharply, but he met the innocent candour of her eyes and turned away from their perfect unconsciousness, reassured that it was still a child who spoke.

"There's the blue heron again," he said, pointing down the beach.

"Yes," answered Marion, as though she had not heard. "I think I'm happier now. That's what ma wants me to be."

Thus far had summer carried these two children. We who look at them now may perhaps smile almost in unbelief at their unconsciousness; at Basil especially, the thoughtless loiterer who had plucked

and thrown away so many flowers in love's garden. We, however, are not lying on the sand dunes when the southeast wind pours over the land. We do not solve the problems of life while the tropic moon floods the world with gold, and the South with her eternal magic stirs the senses while she makes the understanding drowsy. And none is so blind as he who will not see. No one is so little safe as he who thinks his heart is dead. Basil, telling himself that pity sent him so many an afternoon to the waterside in the hope that Marion would come, thinking himself an anchorite leaving his hermitage to instruct some peasant of the country-side, is indeed a thing to be laughed at, but pitied as well—a poor, tormented boy imagining that passionate renunciation of his world that was could in itself buy safety, could be reparation, that Tomocala by the Carnaveral was far enough to fly. So while July and August burned themselves out he came to believe that he was finding some happiness and a quiet soul. He and Marion Harriman still saw the sunset from the lonely beach.

The first of these meetings had been a milestone in his progress. As September approached there came another, which even less was he ever to forget.

The day had been unusually close and lowering.

The great trade-wind from the sea had seemed to hesitate and then fail. In the early afternoon there was thunder in the west and a furious downpour with lightning about three. It ceased towards sunset, the air grew fresher, and patches of blue sky broke through. As Basil went through the trail the little pines and the scrub palmettoes that were scattered here and there over the expanse of brown needles were dripping still, and as he came up a little hill and emerged from the dwarf woods upon the moor-like tract that lay next the sea all the bushes were glistening in the level rays that the sun suddenly shot from the west, touching everything with an almost unreal gold. And arching over the sea in a prodigious circle from the unknown north to the unknown south of the green peninsula was a great shining rainbow. There is almost no one who can forget the legendary significance of the part-coloured vision; Basil going towards it felt somehow that it held a pledge of happiness, that he went through its tremendous gateway into some promised land.

By the end of the other trail he found Marion, her slender figure poised almost as it were on tip-toe as she lifted her gold-crowned head towards the shimmering east. The blue-green palmettoes that

crowned the dunes caught the light in the raindrops still hanging on their sharp-pointed, fan-shaped leaves. Through the opening of the trail the sunset light poured in a full flood on the girl, making the pale hair a kind of misty glory under which her face, partly in the shadow, seemed, so Basil imagined, to have taken on a faint, delicate look of ecstatic forgetfulness. At first she did not seem to notice his approach, but at last she turned towards him with a slow, solemn smile of welcome. Against the dull, faded blue of her poor blue calico rags he saw a patch of colour, and as he drew nearer he found that she held in both hands a green branch on which nodded three heavy, great yellow rosebuds, so tight-packed with petals that they seemed to be opening in their impatience at their own rich stores. Basil looked at them in astonishment. In the woodland kingdom of the sand dunes of which he had been made a citizen, no such blossoms grew. And in the barren, ill-kempt surroundings of the grey house, overrun with pigs and picked bare by chickens, there was no such thing as a flower garden. Once he had asked her, he remembered, as she stood in delight before the yellow splendour of a cactus, why she had no flowers at home.

“Pa,” she had answered. “He won’t let us.”

And she had seemed troubled and constrained by the question. Once or twice Basil had broken off a bit of some flowering shrub in a Tomocala door-yard as he passed by and brought it to the peninsula to her. It had hardened his heart against the old man to see the joy that a fringe of pink along a green branch could bring to the girl. It had made him angry that she must leave the flowers by the sea to fade, because she did not dare to take them home.

Events are only relative in importance—these rosebuds in the Florida wilderness seemed to him an inexplicable apparition. Then suddenly he asked angrily, startling himself, as he did so:

“Who gave you those?”

Marion laughed like a mischievous child, shaking her head as she sat down on a crest of white sand.

“No one. I knew you would be surprised.”

His suspicion passed, but not his own astonishment at it. He laughed a little too, and then went on in a caressing voice, such as one might use to persuade a child.

“Tell me, Marion, won’t you? That’s a dear.”

“I’ll show you,” and she scrambled up. Then at the beginning of the trail she stopped, and the shy, wild woodland look that he knew so well came over

her. She glanced nervously ahead and then back at him.

"You'll never tell?"

"No."

She started over the trail, Basil close behind her. After a moment she began to talk hurriedly, the words tumbling one over the other as they did sometimes when her shyness gave way and she poured herself out in a flood of startling frankness.

"I couldn't help it. I do what father wants always. I've done it all my life. I try to understand why he wants us not to have things. But I couldn't ever see what hurt a flower would do him, or us. Ma says when I was a little girl and first went to Tomocala I cried for the rosebushes. If pa had only let me plant just one I'd have liked it so."

"Did you ever try?"

"Yes, ma sneaked in a little bush for me once. But pa pulled it up and he gave me a real hiding."

"Then you gave it up?"

She stopped; the path was rising to the crest of a tiny hill. Basil caught glimpses of the colour of the sunset sky. She stood above him and, smiling, waved mysteriously her green branch with its three nodding yellow blossoms, sending out waves of their

heavy perfumes to mingle with the scent of pines and the sharp smell of moist earth.

"Oh, no," she said triumphantly, "I tried again." Then her face hardened for an instant as she went on:

"He wants to keep flowers away from me, and God and happiness, I guess. He'd keep you away, if he knew."

"He shan't do that," broke impulsively from Basil.

"Never?"

"Never!"

"I'll always be happy then," she said quite simply.

They went a little farther along the trail till it dipped to the bottom of one of the little valleys where under cover from the sea wind the scrub pines of the peninsula flourished in a sun-warmed shelter. Here Marion stopped again.

"No one knows," she said, "not even ma and Con. It's my secret."

Again she glanced both ways along the trail, then murmured:

"Come."

By the side of the path, under the shade of the pines, grew a bank of palmetto scrub. Into this the girl seemed to plunge, parting the rattling, stiff

leaves and forcing a way through. Basil wonderingly followed her. Ten feet beyond they emerged into clearer ground, and went along a little animal track that wound through the pines and underbrush. Sometimes they passed great patches of white moss, like drifted ghostly snow. Then the way led over the crest of one of the undulations of the sands. Here the pines were scarcer. They came out under the sky where the evening star hung like a soft-burning lamp in the pale pink. Across the moor-like stretches from the sea came the boom of the surf. A whip-poor-will called from its hiding-place in some neighbouring tree. Here and there fireflies sparkled against the green. Even Tomocala and the two houses on the peninsula grew remote. As the light faded, the wilderness with a thousand caressing touches, a thousand soft voices, seemed to creep nearer, to enfold them close to its everlasting heart. Basil's senses stirred at the magic of its beauty, at the loveliness of the slender woodsprite who stood before him against the background of a clump of glossy bay trees, whose eyes shone tenderly at him as she led him to this mysterious and enchanted goal within the greenwood. He felt a thrill as though somewhere here, at the end of this journey, there was a talisman which could make

life over. Did he not already feel its spell? Did he not experience more vividly than ever before the sense of escape into some primæval world of poetry? Was there, he wondered, anything in the world except himself, this girl, and love? At the moment the past was dead; more than that, it had never existed. Thoughts and emotions, understood and formulated, passed into feelings felt. Basil, going along this path, breaking through the thicket of bay trees with Marion, might have been any boy since the beginning of time, wondering at the grasp in which love caught him.

Marion went silently on. The path dipped to the hollow of another valley, and ahead through the trees there seemed to be a greater flashing of light, as though with the dropping of the wind the fire-flies had drifted down into a great sparkling pool. The girl paused, and laid a hand upon her companion's arm, as if to bring him to the journey's end herself. Nothing was said. They turned a corner beyond a palmetto bank and came upon the secret rose.

It stood in a tiny round clearing among the sober pines, a kind of radiant princess cloistered in some hidden bower. Sheltered from wind, warmed by sun, tended, so one may imagine, by all the love of

one human heart, it had grown high. It was starred with heavy blossoms, clad in a yellow fragrant glory. And its beauty had in addition a strangeness beyond even the strangeness of its wild setting. For the lights that had pierced the leafy screens around came from six candles which stood upon a rude table before the rose-bush and lit it up, making it shine like the altar to some strange woodland divinity. Occasional fire-flies wandered out from the shadow of the pines and danced confusedly near these rival flames, and a bewildered moth, with dark velvety wings spotted with pale green, lay fluttering at the candles' feet, burnt already at this new god's shrine. Basil stopped, speechless, now that he had arrived at this heart of the world of dreams. Finally he stole a glance at the girl by his side; she too had been in a kind of ecstasy; it was the spirit, if not the attitude, of prayer. She turned as if in answer to his eyes.

"That time I saw into Father Sullivan's church there were candles. Sometimes, if I've saved up for a long time and gone to bed in the dark, I get enough to burn them here. Do you think God likes it?"

"Yes," Basil answered softly.

"Do you like it?" She paused anxiously for a reply.

"Yes, I like it too. Did you do it for me?"

"I've been saving them almost ever since I first knew you. It takes so long. Pa swears awfully about the candles I use. He caught me taking the last one to-day. Look,"—she pulled the blue sleeve of her gown and showed the blue-black marks where some rough hand had gripped her. "Pa's so strong."

"Oh!" said Basil in pity, and then flushed hot with anger. He bent gently down and brushed the poor flesh with his lips—for pity. Then suddenly he caught her firmly in both his arms, in anger and in love, fused to one fire.

"Marion, my poor Marion," he cried, as he covered her face with kisses. Her eyes were closed, and her slender figure abandoned itself to him. He could feel her heart pound against his breast.

"I must take you away. I must make you happy. I love you, I love you, dear; do you understand?"

She opened her eyes and he saw tears in them, she put an arm on his shoulder.

"Ma told us about love. Men used to love girls in the backwoods where she came from. But I

never thought there would be any one to love me. I prayed——” she stopped.

“Yes, dearest.”

“Oh, not at first,” she said. “But three weeks ago. I only had three candles then, but I lit them one evening here by my rosebush, and I asked God to let you love me. Father Sullivan said He could do anything. Did He make you love me?”

“Something made me, dearest.”

Again he kissed her, again he murmured the half-articulate protestations of lovers in her ears.

Powers denied and disowned swept in and took up their old dominion over him. He could not remember that he had ever thought it possible to fly from love. The phrases which he used he had used before—so often! But he forgot that now. The old miracle repeated itself afresh. Again new desires within him strove for utterance, again a new glamour covered the earth with beauty, as he told Marion Harriman that he loved her.

“And you love me, Marion?”

“Of course.” The pale-blue eyes opened wider in surprise.

“Say it.”

For the first time shyness and a kind of delicious confusion seized her, her eyes fell.

"I love you."

"Say—'Basil, I love you.'"

"Basil, I love you."

Silly, dear, fond speeches! Why should they be written down except that they may be comprehended by the memories there are within each one of us? The light faded and the moon began to mingle silver with the flush of sunset; the roses poured out their perfume, and the candles' flames streamed up into a breathless air, while the girl told how year by year she had watched and tended the tiny plant the priest had once brought her, bringing black earth from the house-yard, and, when the drought came, secretly carrying water along the hidden trail. On this the fourth year it seemed to be of inexhaustible resources, and month by month had bloomed with gold. This was its summer of all summers, Marion's, too, and Basil's, so their foolish logic told them. Here in the circle of the little pine trees all life was flowering; here, as if it had been in that garden of Paradise, long ago and for the first time of all time, so it seemed to both these children, love and beauty met in one inextinguishable flame of happiness. Again Basil pledged himself to everlasting faithfulness, again with his kisses a woman seemed to drink in his whole soul.

Finally the girl remembered home, the grim father, and the frightened little mother in the grey house. Together, through the underbrush in the gathering dusk, starred by fireflies, and flooded in the open places by faint, pale moonlight, the pair went back to the trail, Basil's arm protectingly about her shoulders. Here they parted, Marion, all her woodland shyness suddenly come back to her, darting away into the dark shadow of the pines after one hurried kiss upon his cheek; Basil, still drunk with emotion, going slowly towards the sea whose booming drifted back over the sandhills.

He came out of the pine wood, and started across the undulations of the dunes. The open sky and the cooler air brought him down from his highest pitch of ecstasy. Yet while now he saw clearly, so he told himself, he still burned with a fine, steady flame and faced his happiness and the future with reasoned convictions. He had come, he felt, to a deeper truth than the renunciations of his ascetic fervour, had found a way to pay his debt by adding happiness to the world's store to replace something of what he had taken away. The thought of it grew solemn, and the consciousness of new impassioned wisdom deepened as he found that in this moment he could think of Kitty, could call upon her

memory for justification. To her pale ghost he went to ask the right to comfort, to cherish, and to love this other shy, dear creature. Kitty had understood so much, she could understand this now. She had forgiven so much, she could—no, here there was nothing to forgive. The old duty of renunciation had been too easy a one. The new vow to bring happiness to Marion, to guard her safely from the terror of sorrow, this was more worthy of a man, more worthy of the debt he owed to the angel that was Kitty. A second time, as once before in the streets of London, he consecrated himself, and pledged the honour he had once so stained. He felt uplifted, sustained, and happy in a solemn way.

But Nature, sometimes so quick to answer our moods, this time seemed to protest. As Basil came down upon the sands he could see great clouds to the north gathering and marching southwards along the coast as he had seen them in some winter storm. The summer air around him was still warm and fragrant, yet it seemed to wait, as the wind died, for some sharp change, the coming of autumn perhaps. Basil sank down on the sands, something already gone of his serenity, something vaguely foreboding already clutching at his spirit. He shrugged his shoulders in a scornful, irritated way, telling him-

self that he had grown too sensitive to Nature's whims. Yet still he sat there in the cold light of the young moon, awaiting the storm, feeling vaguely that he must stand and meet its onset, must shelter from it his dear thoughts of Marion.

The clouds drew nearer and finally the wind reached him in one sharp, cold breath. It roused him from his mooning meditations and sent him southwards along the beach towards home. But the world was somehow all turned grey. The wind whipped the wiregrass and palmetto scrub upon the dunes into frantic, fantastic activity, lit up by the occasional flickering of the little moon as she sped through the clouds. A rising tide of lead-coloured waves edged with white foam encroached upon the land. The beach itself grew blurred and misty as the furious wind caught up the loose, dry sand and sent it south like a great streaming eddying river of grey mist, in whose shallows ghostly, grey-white land-crabs scuttled away from Basil's approach. Through this pale stream he came to his trail and across it through the dwarf pine wood bending before the high sea wind to his cabin. As he emerged into his clearing he saw to his astonishment that there was a light within. Jim, his negro cook, had gone, he knew, that afternoon to Tomocala for the

night. Nervous, angry at himself for being so, cursing his agitation, and blaming it upon this sudden storm, he rushed to the door and tore it open. Within sat his brother, Lord Alkinloch, drinking whiskey. He rose and lurched unsteadily toward Basil by way of welcoming him.

CHAPTER VI

The Shadow of London

THE two brothers shook hands. Alkinloch laughed.

"Fancy meetin' me!" he said jocosely.

"How did you get here?" asked Basil.

"Sailed over from Tomocala."

"I meant from England."

"Boat again," answered Alkinloch gaily. "Did you think I swam?"

"Sit down," Basil suggested, a little wearily.

"And have a drink?"

"Not necessarily."

"I'm forbidden to take it now. But you were so late coming back to this happy little home that I hunted out your whiskey." He pushed the glass on the table away from him with sudden, awkward impulsiveness. "No, I won't have any more."

For a moment they sat silent, Basil looking at his brother intently. When he spoke there was for the first time in their interview a note of friendliness, almost affection in his voice.

"Are you ill, Freddy? You look seedy."

Indeed Lord Alkinloch's changed appearance would have been the cause of immediate astonishment to Basil, had not the feeling been swamped at first by the great surprise at his mere presence. For his high colouring was brushed over with grey, and his well-filled cheeks were already dragged a little into lines. His whole figure, though it still indicated enormous strength, drooped loosely, and his eye seemed dimmed beyond the dimness for which the bottle by his side might claim credit.

"Oh, I'm done for, Basil, old man."

He smiled vaguely at his younger brother, but there was a seriousness beneath the speech which brought Basil to his feet.

"Rot!" he said, as he crossed the room and stood for a moment with his hand on Alkinloch's shoulder, looking down at him searchingly. "What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you about it later, What time do you feed here?"

"Oh, any time I put the food out. Jim—I have a servant, you know—has gone to Tomocala, but I can easily find all there is,—there isn't much, you know, Freddy."

"I'm hungry as the devil," was the guest's com-

ment. "I thought you were never coming back. What was it, crocodile-hunting, or some fair negress? Did she give you your button-hole?"

"Nonsense!" commented Basil, after an almost imperceptible start.

"What is it, 'the white flower of a blameless life'?" roared Alkinloch, laughing loudly. "Oh, I'll be damned if it is. It's yellow anyhow, ain't it?"

He stretched out a hand as if to take the golden rosebud from his brother's coat. Basil turned quickly away and went across the room. He poured some water into a glass and took the flower out.

"Oh, Bassy, Bassy! I know you of old."

"Don't be a fool, Fred."

Lord Alkinloch smashed a heavy fist down upon the table and ripped out an oath.

"I shall be anything I like, d'ye understand?" he said. "If I've only got about a year longer to live, anything I like, d'ye understand? I hope she's pretty, my boy, and that there are more where she came from."

He poured himself out another drink of whiskey, while Basil stared at him.

"You're really ill, Fred, badly?"

"Oh, yes, that's all right; I'm really ill. Get us

something to eat and I'll tell you about it and why I'm here and why you've got to go back."

"Oh, I'll not go back," said Basil.

"Oh, yes, you will," replied Alkinloch, his cheerfulness all returned, "I've come to fetch you."

To this the younger brother vouchsafed no reply. He occupied himself with the preparations for the meal. Removing the whiskey from the table, in face of Alkinloch's protests, he laid a cloth, the checkered red and white which was the mode of the country, and put on some thick white stoneware plates and a few serviceable-looking knives and forks. From the kitchen he produced a cold boiled sea bass and a slab of canned corned-beef.

"There's a fire in the kitchen, Fred; I could make you some coffee. That's what we drink with supper here in Rome—a large cup of it—will you do as we do, now you're here?"

"Oh, yes," was the unenthusiastic answer. "I thought of course you'd be living simply." Alkinloch went on with more alertness of expression on his face than it had hitherto displayed, "but you've always done yourself so uncommon well."

"Oh, you'll find me changed." Basil spoke almost lightly, then he repeated the words, and they

sounded somehow more serious. "Yes, I really think you'll find me a little changed."

"Changed!" Alkinloch stared at his brother. "You may think you change. Don't get such foolish ideas into your head. You jolly well don't. You're the old—the old Adam still, my boy. I know you of old."

He spoke, so it seemed to Basil, with the accent of conviction and sincerity—or was it of prophecy? Alkinloch in London in his usual ruddy health might have expounded his philosophy to Basil in vain. But here in this lonely hut by the Carnaveral, here with a worn, grey face his brother had never seen, with this new, strange talk of death, he produced an unaccustomed impression—was, in fact, such a messenger from the old, forgotten world as might well have arrived with this cold, northern storm which had broken the warm spell of the long, enchanted summer. Something of almost superstitious dread had seized upon him when, after parting from Marion, he had sat on the edge of the dunes and watched the wind sweep southward over the placid sea. Something of panic fear now caught him in its grip as, while the rain beat against the house with gusty, intermittent deluges, he laid the table for this apparition from England across the

water, from the land of old violent, painful memories which he had almost lulled to sleep. Could Alkinloch carry him back to all that he had counted lost for ever? No, a thousand times no, he told himself; calling up the vision of Marion in her magic sanctuary of the secret rose, to give him strength and courage. Yet he knew in his heart that he did not quite conquer doubt and fear. There could be no reason, so he told himself, which could force him back to England. Yet in spite of himself he felt his powers of resistance oozing away from him. He realised now that the dream world in which he had lived had never become quite real. To keep his paradise he must find some way to close the gates that were now swinging ajar. He must learn definitely what danger threatened, why Lord Alkinloch had with no warning descended upon the Floridian solitudes.

In spite of Basil's impatience, however, by a kind of tacit agreement the brothers talked only of commonplaces while they ate their simple meal. The older brother commented upon the Atlantic voyage, the younger discoursed of the orange industry—which he himself, idler that he was, had not even attempted. The food and the coffee—as the Romans take it, in large cups—lessened only slightly

the buoyancy of Lord Alkinloch's spirits, but at the same time they increased what one may call the responsibility of his conversation. In short, he became sober. When the canned corned-beef was finished and Basil had given him a cigar, he pushed back his chair and put his feet on the table with the red checkered cloth.

"You do that in America, only higher, don't you?" he asked cheerily. "No? Then I won't," as he took them down. "I suppose we must settle down and have a jaw—I feel better now. I've come out on a serious mission from the family—my being the family diplomat is a rum thing, ain't it? I've come to take you home."

"Why must I go home?"

The sight of his brother's face, the sound of a hollow cough which broke in from time to time upon his cheerful vulgarities, had indeed made Basil see only too clearly why the presence of the second son might soon be required at home, but he had tried to avoid facing the facts. Now he felt, as he put his question almost impatiently, that he must have them all.

"Because you'll be having to take up my duties and my pleasures, soon, and in due time the governor's."

"Oh, we'll have you well, Fred, I swear we will," cried out Basil with such real eagerness that Alkinloch looked surprised.

"It won't be so very bad for you," he said slowly in reply. "My duties aren't much and my pleasures are quite worth while. The same could be said of the governor's. Look here, Basil, old man, there ain't any need of nonsense between us. Of course you're sorry I've got this beastly trouble here"—he thumped his chest. "So am I, damned sorry. But it ain't your fault, and why shouldn't you be glad that you'll get the title one day, and the places? The shooting at King's-Thornton would be as decent a bit as there is anywhere in the southern counties, if the governor would have it half looked after. That fool of a head-keeper of his——"

"How did this start?" Basil interrupted.

"The lungs, you mean?" Lord Alkinloch asked. The account of his illness must be summarised; it will be less picturesque, but much shorter than if it were told in his own words. About a year after Basil had left England his brother had a violent attack of pneumonia, from which he recovered (that was the word employed) in March. He was, however, left in a weak condition. He would not condescend, moreover, to take any care of himself.

These two things must have left him peculiarly open to the attack of some latent germ of consumption, hereditary perhaps, going back to generations two or three past. The medical aspects of his case, though interesting perhaps from that point of view, have, however, little bearing on the present story. It is sufficient to know that the traces of the disease were to be discovered in April and that awful progress had been made by August.

"And that's my story," said the victim, "as they say in the music-halls, 'from the cradle to the grave.'"

"And Violet Mertfield?" asked Basil.

"Oh, she was fond enough of me to have married me, poor little beggar. But naturally her family made a row. And of course one wouldn't want to breed a rotten lot of weak-lunged kids. I'm out of the race, so the family want to enter you."

"For Violet Mertfield?"

"Oh, no. But you see that everything is on your back now. Choose for yourself."

"You think I can," mused Basil.

"Oh, hang it all; yes, of course I understand,—Kitty,—and all that. But, oh, well! a man can bear it to marry again, I dare say. And you can easily

enough find a pretty girl. You're more of a catch now, Basil."

To this no answer was made. Basil seemed plunged in thought—or gloom; and his brother might easily have wondered whether he had ever heard what had been said. They sat perhaps a full minute in silence, then Basil, who had till now drunk nothing, poured himself out some whiskey. Finally he spoke, hesitatingly.

"It's all so unexpected. And so difficult to think out."

"I should say it was damned simple," commented Alkinloch. "I've a long letter for you from the mater. Perhaps that will make it clearer."

He reached into his pocket and brought out an envelope. Basil took it and for an instant held it helplessly, almost fearfully, before he opened it. The path back from the world of dreams is often a painful one. Alkinloch's rude recall to the realities Basil could more easily endure than the unknown one now in his hands. The first, by its very harshness, roused in him some opposing strength to argue and to fight against it. The second, he knew already, while the letter was still unread, would play on his liveliest emotions, would with tears and tenderness and loving words exact as reparation

for the past some new cruelty in the future, call for some fresh sacrifice, when he had thought, poor fool, that he had already sacrificed all. The letter stung his hands. For one moment he would have liked to tear it to bits, to leave it unread, to plunge back at any cost into the green thickets of his new life. Then, with a sudden reaction, the love for his mother that had never left him from childhood up seemed to sweep over him in a great, warm wave. Pity, sorrow, painful uncertainty were still in his heart. But for her sake, willingness to face his problem was there too. He broke the seal of his letter and read.

"MY DEAREST BASIL: It is so hard merely to be able to write you, for we have always talked things over, haven't we, you and I? Alkinloch can tell you what has happened; indeed only to see him is enough to let you know. Of course, everything has been done and will be done, and the doctors give some hope—don't they always?—but very little. It has been a bad year for your father and me. First it seemed that we had lost you—oh, I knew, and you knew that I knew, that when you left me that night you meant never to come back. Now it seems that we may lose your brother, too. The marriage is not to take place. Everything seems changing and crumbling down about us. I feel old. And you'll find your father changed. In their way Alkinloch and he were

great pain. He liked Violet, too, and I think he had begun to think of grandchildren. You see, the Kingstowne name and the family mean very much to him—more, I think, than they do to your generation. And he has great affection for us all—though he may have shown it sometimes in odd ways. He is growing old, like me, and we both need all the kindness and liking we can give each other, and can get from our children. You must come back to us, Basil; you must come back to me.

“It is possible. I have been to the Duchess, though I had not seen her since—since that letter of February a year ago. It would only be painful to you to hear much about our interview. I abased myself, and that is hardest to do before an old friend with whom one has lived on terms of equality for many years. I begged of her—well, I went down on my knees, almost. I could do it, my dear, because I want you back, and because—forgive me for saying it—because I can understand why she feels as she does. She yielded, because—even through all this breach—she is a loving and a loyal woman, and because she is, as well, a woman who can see reason. I told her of the danger that threatened my eldest son; she saw that it was too much to ask the sacrifice of my youngest. Then, too, she is of an older generation than yours; she feels what I now want you to feel, the meaning of your name and the duty one has to preserve a family. She makes a sacrifice to her principle more painful than any you can possibly be making in coming back to face your memories, and to take up, as you must now, the duties of your life again. Indeed, in the end she

came so completely around to my point of view that I can almost say that now she lays it upon you as a command, as a reparation which she has a right to exact, that you are to come to England. She is very broken and very odd, my dear, and her temper, with age and with sorrow, seems to have grown quite unbridled. I cannot deny that her complete *volte-face* has startled me; that I feel, somehow, that she is no longer altogether to be reckoned with. I cannot complain now when she helps to bring me back the boy I had lost, yet—oh, this is all more than I had meant to tell you. I had meant, even though the truth might help me more, to say that in calmness she had consented to your return. But the truth is that she became as violently insistent upon it, once I suggested it to her, as she was upon your banishment. I fear—forgive me, Basil, if I seem to use anything I find that will serve me as an argument—that she is capable of employing the same means of compulsion which were within her power before. I am afraid she has come to take a kind of unworthy pleasure in the idea that she can drive you hither and thither at her caprice. Yet it's an ill wind—— Oh, Basil, if you'll only come back to me!

“‘Yes, we must have him home,’ she said, ‘quite apart from what you tell me of Alkinloch. He will do less mischief if we watch him,’—and then, no, I won’t repeat to you what she said. I had to speak out in your defence. I know you went away to fly from your weaknesses, to avoid your temptations; I know you have been strong. When you come back to me there will be no woman left behind in Florida who will be

sorry that you went there. I know you learnt your lesson; *that* I know.

"I feel ashamed of even telling you of the Duchess's threats—I must call them that. I want you to come back just because you see it is right, just because it will be a kindness to your father and to me. Yet what I have told you is only the truth. If you should linger too long in Florida there is danger. There might be the scandal which we once feared. I, at least, am even less able to bear the thought of it than I was then. So is your father. So is the family name and our honour, if we are to think of that. The responsibility for everything is on your shoulders now; I know you will be brave and take it up.

"I have just read over what I have written. It would seem to most people, so it occurs to me now, that I am making a tragedy where none exists. I knew how deeply wounded you were by the circumstances of poor Kitty's death, I remembered with what solemn resolve you had gone to Florida, not because you were forced there, but because you wished to go. I have taken it for granted that you are still in just that state of mind. Yet indeed, Basil, I hope that you are not. Life in such rough countries cannot be pleasant for you. And it is only right that time should make your sorrow less, even your regrets. You can cancel much of what you have done in the past if you will find yourself a wife here who, with the grandchildren I might then hope for, will be a friend and companion for your father and me as we grow old. And it is not wrong to say what Alkinloch himself understands, and wishes us all to be honest about, that his

death, should it come, will bring you much that you cannot help being glad to have.

"There is nothing more to write. You are very dear to me, Basil; you are still to me always my baby. I shall be happy when you come home.

"MOTHER."

Basil sat staring blankly at the lamp and slowly tearing the letter in tiny bits. This, then, was the world, he thought with a kind of despair,—a place where no course of action could ever again be wholly right, could ever fail to bring unhappiness to some one in its trail. He was in a trap, and for the moment he lacked the strength even to try for freedom. What was freedom but a mockery? What was the world but hell? He had had a glimpse of Eden, but now the gates were closed.

"Good God, Basil," cried Lord Alkinloch, "don't look as if the noose were around your neck. Anybody would think you were me. I mightn't be blamed if I pulled a long face. But aren't I cheerful? And if I can be cheerful about your becoming Marquess of Kingstowne, I should think you might manage it."

"There isn't anything, Freddy," answered Basil, almost angrily, "that would so ruin my plans and wreck my life as your death."

"Well then, old son, there is just a chance. And between you and me that's partly why I came out on this diplomatic mission. One of the medical Johnnies did give me some hope. He was a queer duck and he didn't prescribe drugs. But he said if I'd come here and live every minute in the open, even sleep *à la belle étoile*, I might get well. I'd try it if I didn't think it would be so damned dull. At any rate, drink my health."

Basil sprang to his feet, light again in his eyes. He raised his glass and drank.

"We'll have you well, Freddy, we'll have you well," he cried.

Lord Alkinloch looked at him curiously again.

"Thank you, Basil," he said, "thank you, very much. You're behaving uncommon decently, my boy. Perhaps I will get well."

Basil scarcely heard. His mind had already gone crashing through the rain-soaked underbrush of the peninsula to the grey house, to Marion, and to the secret rose. He might at least prowl through the wind-swept night outside the walls of paradise, though he perhaps should never again see the lights within.

Lord Alkinloch slept through the night on his

brother's bed, snoring stertorously. Basil, with a blanket and a pillow on the floor, lay hour after hour, open-eyed and staring into the darkness. His head throbbed and his throat was hot and dry. His problems remained unsolved, though with that ceaseless activity of brain which renders nights of insomnia still more dreadful, he turned them over a thousand times, seeking frantically for some immediate assurance that happiness might be his without waiting upon the doubtful chance of his brother's recovery. But balanced arguments of duty to the Forresters in England and to Marion in Tomocala seemed to fall upon him as relentlessly as did the downpour outside upon the pines. Somehow the two grew confused in his mind, and at last he came to feel that only if the rain would stop could he think clearly.

Between one and two of the morning the storm moderated. Basil, making the hundredth uneasy journey to the cabin's door, found that the sky had partly cleared, and that the moon, scudding through flying rags and tatters of cloud, gave a fitful light. He caught up a cap—he had not undressed—and closing the door behind him, started forth. Instinctively he took the trail towards the sea, dashing along it and cooling his hot head against the

heavy, soaked branches of the pines, which brushed his brow with wet needles as he ran upon them in the half-darkness. The tide was full, and the beach along which he had earlier come was now a tumbling confusion of foaming waters, gleaming white when the moon broke for a moment into a patch of open sky. He was forced to pick his way along the undulations of the sand hillocks. He had turned north, towards that other trail, scarcely knowing what he did, yet proceeding as if some immediate necessity urged him on. It was not till he found himself going inland again that he realised that he was blindly making his way to the bower where he had sealed his love to Marion; that by that yellow rosebush, now drenched and bedraggled by the storm, he hoped to find some talisman, some magic that would give him back the old dream world of summer, would hide for ever in forgetfulness this new call to duty and sacrifice. In this kind of madness born of his anxieties and of the great loneliness of the night he plunged along Harriman's trail, somewhat as a wounded wild thing might fly to nurse its wounds in some well-worn hollow of the wilderness.

But the little hidden path through which he had gone with Marion he could not find again. He had

been sure that he knew the dip in which was the screen of palmetto scrub that covered its beginning. Perhaps indeed he found it, but in the darkness could not make out the secret trail. Disappointment and anger blinded him, it may be. Almost crying with rage, almost dropping with exhaustion, he fought his way for an hour or more through the underbrush, tearing his hands and cutting his face upon thick-growing trees and sharp palmetto leaves that would not let him through. Once or twice quail or rabbits frightened him by starting up from under his very feet. Once at least a snake glided ominously across his path. Before he gave up in despair he had lost his reckoning altogether. The crash of the surf that might have guided him seemed to sound in his ears from every side. Finally on a little sandy summit where the trees were sparse, he made out his direction by the fading stars in a sky faintly lit by the coming dawn. He turned back towards the trail, whipped and beaten now.

He reached the trail and walked slowly back to the sea. The tide had ebbed and a line of minor wreckage marked its highest point; seaweed, fish turning up silvery bellies to the light, crabs cast on their backs with dead legs sprawled helplessly askew. Everything looked mournful and hopeless

in this pale, white light. Nature gave no encouragement, no help to the man whom she had been teaching for months to lean on her for sympathy and aid. Marion, in happy unconsciousness, slept with a smile upon her face in the attic under the grey roof. Basil was alone with trouble.

There was no possible compromise. Marion by the Carnaveral was perfection, a dream princess in a dream world. In England, as the future Marchioness of Kingstowne, she would be a hopelessly ignorant and untutored savage, the offspring of a disreputable and disordered father and a wayward, disgraced mother. Here in a cottage among the pines and palmettoes her beauty, her gentleness, and his love would make her in his new life a comrade of whom he might be proud. There in Berkeley Square or at King's-Thornton in the country she would be uncouth, a source of endless mortifications among which love would probably die. Basil winced as this thought passed through his mind, yet in the pale dawn he forced himself to go on with his argument. In Tomocala the image of Marion was his whole world. In England it faded away to nothingness; it could not exist. More than ever before he felt a passionate protest against the conventions, the duties, and the cowardices of civili-

sation ; as he had never done, he clutched despairingly at this simple, primitive existence which he had half seen, already half begun to live. Yet the old world had sent its messenger, and he felt its tentacles close about him and prepare to drag him back.

There was nothing now that he could not see clearly, for exaltation had died with weariness and lack of sleep. It did not fail to come into his mind that marriage and a title were not the only things that were offered to ignorant country girls whose loveliness caught one's eye. He could imagine Alkinloch's advice in the matter. But his own attitude was for him a measure of the progress he had made. Chilled and weary as he was both in body and in soul, he could yet feel some satisfaction and some pride in the fact that a wife in Mount Street and this poor, dear child in a nest by the Regent's Park seemed no longer possible to him. If he and Marion were to part it should be for ever. If they were not they would go to the end of the world and of time, hand in hand, together always. Love had come to mean something better than it had been when he was a vagabond of the emotions, something which consorted better with the memory of Kitty.

There was another change which his intelligence,

lucid in a weary body, could mark that morning. But it was a change, not so much from those earlier days as from the asceticism of the dark period through which he had gone. Time had taught him reason, or perhaps it was that the constant pressure of his inclinations had at last made him see reason where before he had seen crime and folly. No one need settle the question. It is enough to know that Basil himself felt that wisdom had come to him. When the heart spoke, when the flesh cried out, Nature gave a call, so he told himself, that was not to be denied. He was not meant to live alone. Marion must be his. His face grew grim as he went back towards his cottage in the crimsoning dawn.

"He must get well. He must live," he kept muttering to himself.

The sunlight roused Lord Alkinloch, who woke to find his brother rattling breakfast dishes and frying bacon. The sight seemed to cheer him, though he ventured to assert that it was a "rum" one. He made a rapid toilet, and was soon devouring the results of Basil's culinary efforts with avidity. The night's rest, perhaps already the fresh sea air, seemed to have made his face less haggard than it

had looked by last night's candles. Basil was inclined for a time to think that he had been exaggerating his danger. But it was not for long. The faded colour would not be denied, nor the curious, restless activity which seemed to have replaced the old phlegmatic strength. Basil watched him, and the seriousness of the situation came back in redoubled force. With it, too, came the redoubled determination that the prescription of the "medical Johnny" who advised fresh air and life in the *auberge de la belle étoile* should have fair trial. Alkinloch *should* grow well again.

After breakfast, they explored the small clearing, and Basil drew the picture of life by the Carnaveral as he thought it might seem most pleasing to his brother. He made no mention of the problem that confronted the younger brother, nor of the fate that hung over the elder. He talked of the comforts of roughing it. He told of the bear and deer which were to be shot in the woods of the peninsula, of the wild turkey and quail to be found in the flatlands back of Tomocala, and of bass to be taken in the surf on the ocean beach. The air was clean, with the hint of autumn in it, and the blue waves of the river danced invitingly. With such weather and the catboat tugging at the wharf as the tide

streamed up from the inlet, it was easy to plan cruises along the deserted reaches of the coast lagoons, almost with favouring winds a crossing to Cuba, or failing that, an exploration of the mysterious Everglades. Basil grew eloquent. At about ten o'clock his brother called for a drink.

Basil fetched it, but went on with his talk. "That's about what it is, Freddie, and it's not a bad life. I hope we can manage to have a decent enough winter of it."

Alkinloch gulped down some whiskey.

"Havana sounds all right," he said. "And if the shootin' and fishin's as good as you say, I can do with a week of it very well. I'd like to pot a bear before I leave—no grizzlies here, I suppose. But winter? You don't catch Freddie! I've been thinking it over."

"You'll be well at the end of it."

"Will I? It's too much of a gamble. Do you think that, if I've only six months left, I'm going to waste 'em over any beastly cure?"

Basil protested warmly. But Alkinloch, the sullen look which his brother knew so well coming over his face, took no notice of it.

"No, I mean to have a little run of it. Why the devil shouldn't I? Fishing and shooting for a while

if you like. Then London, Paris, Monte Carlo. Not this hole, with all respect to you, Basil. Some good champagne, some pretty women. What's the German motto—*Wein, Weib?*—well, some sport anyhow before I go. Since Violet Mertfield was made to chuck me——” He meditated over his empty glass and drew a rather gusty sigh.

“I don't think I quite realised that you'd take it so much to heart as this.” Basil looked at him with curiosity.

“Violet was a damned well set-up girl,” blustered the other, “and devilish fond of me. If you want me to stay out here and take the cure of the *belle étoile*, find me another one like her.”

“Oh, that!” Basil got up from his chair, and stood leaning against a post of the little veranda where they had been sitting. “Oh, I didn't come out here for that, you know.”

“Yes, I know, dear boy. But it ain't a question of what you came out for, it's what you found.”

Nothing was said in reply to this. Basil still stood gazing out upon the river, while Alkinloch beat a kind of tattoo on the arm of his chair with his empty glass. Then around the point to the north, where a group of palmettoes stood out against the Çarnaveral's blue, there came a boat. It carried

some tubs and buckets, and old Harriman, bending to the oars, was pulling it towards Basil's wharf.

"A neighbour?" asked Alkinloch.

"Yes, a leading citizen."

"Well," with a laugh, the elder brother went on, "I'll apply to him for information you don't seem willing to give. Perhaps he'll give me a better idea of Tomocala for my cure!"

They went down to the wharf to meet the boat. That had come to be the custom when the old man came.

"He's a rum chap," said Basil. There was not time for much explanation.

"You're all a rum lot down here," commented his brother, and appeared to be satisfied not to know more.

The boat came alongside the wharf.

"Morning," said the old man, then seeing the newcomer, added, "Who's this?"

"My brother," said Basil.

"Oh!" The interest appeared to fade out of his voice. "Got any swill to-day?" he asked indifferently.

"Some, not much."

"I should have thought there'd have been more,

with two of you." He turned to Alkinloch, and it was characteristic of him that he now spoke with a sudden change to apparent heartiness and cordiality. "How are you, Mr. Forrester? Glad to see you here. Just got here?"

"Yes, yesterday," replied Alkinloch, responding in kind to Harriman's cheerfulness. The old man took note of this.

"England get too hot for you?" he asked, breaking into a kind of guffaw.

"No, damn you," answered Alkinloch promptly. The old man's eyes lit with appreciation.

"You can go back then. Well, well! The sooner the better, I expect."

"Right you are, old man," was the reply. And then all three laughed. The sun was cheerfully bright, and after all it was natural that in Florida they should behave like a rum lot. Basil called on Freddy to lend a hand with a bucket which contained his contribution to the dinner of Harriman's hogs. The recipient did not thank them; it was not his way.

"A person might think you were starving yourself to judge by this," he said. This was, for him, gratitude indeed. Without further comments he put hands again upon the oars, when a fit of cough-

ing which seized Lord Alkinloch seemed to arrest him. It was Basil, however, who spoke.

"You ought to know the Florida climate, Harriman. I've been telling my brother it will cure that, if he will stay and give it the chance. Am I right?"

An odd, faraway look was for one instant in the old man's eyes as he answered slowly:

"Florida climate will cure most things, if you give it the chance. What does he want to be cured of? Better not. He's young yet." Then he seemed to rouse himself, and, quite as any one else might, gave instances, all of them encouraging, of what tropical warmth and air had done for various invalids who had found their way into this little-known region during the twenty-odd years that he had known it.

"There, you see, Fred!" exclaimed Basil.

"I see what I saw before, that it would be a devilish tiresome process, getting well, if one did get well. You're a leading citizen, Mr. Harriman, so Basil tells me. Isn't your house somewhat more gay and festive than my brother's? Won't you take me home now for a call? I'll help row the boat."

Alkinloch spoke with the cheerful familiarity of tone which the situation—and the whiskey he had

already taken—seemed to suggest to him. He started as Harriman's face clouded with unrestrained anger.

"When you set foot on my place, I'll set the dog on you."

"And I'll shoot him," replied Alkinloch, adding an oath. But his directness did not, as it had earlier, mollify Harriman, who, as usual when roused, began to abound in strange blasphemies, not to be set down here.

"You've set him to sneaking around my house, I suppose," he began, turning on Basil. "Weren't you warned off yourself? Aren't there any of the — over in Tomocala? Don't you know that you're not to come near my daughters?"

"You flatter us," said Alkinloch. "Now Basil here—but I'm quite safe."

"None of your modesty."

"Why shouldn't I know your daughters? Are they good-looking, Basil?" Alkinloch's tone was insolent.

Before Basil could answer the old man took the words from his mouth.

"They are; the one called Constance is a beauty. Isn't that reason enough why I won't have you skulking about them?"

"Oh, I don't know." Alkinloch's laugh was not altogether pleasant.

"Do you want to marry either of them?" said Harriman sharply.

For an instant Basil felt that he must speak, that he was willing to make the irretrievable decision rather than allow the discussion to proceed. But while he hesitated, his brother's laugh broke the train of his thoughts.

"Oh," said he, "I hadn't gone so far as to be thinkin' of marryin' them."

"The more fool you'd be if you did," was the father's amazing comment upon this. "Ignorant—though they're the better for that; dirty—though that's no harm; idle, silly creatures. No, of course, you don't want to marry them. Though you're young and fools yourselves. Yet why shouldn't you? And then let them trick you, pull the wool over your eyes, and be common property of all your friends."

"Stop," interrupted Basil sharply. "Control yourself. You know your girls are good girls. And that they've a good mother."

"Oh, they're good. So is their mother. I look out for that. And I mean to keep up doing it. You don't care to make an offer to marry one of

them, you say, Mr. Forrester"—this to Alkinloch. "Well, then, you shan't even see them. I don't think it will be wise for them to marry before their old father dies. They're needed around the house—the pigs need their care. But meanwhile any fellow who comes around proposing anything else will get into trouble."

"You arouse my curiosity to know the ladies of your family," said Lord Alkinloch, smiling.

Harriman put his oars in the locks and slowly pushed the ill-smelling boat away from the wharf. Then he looked up.

"By God, sir," he said, "I'd shoot the man who makes any trouble at my house. Shoot him on sight, do you understand?"

The boat slowly made its way around the point. The brothers watched it silently.

"Rum lot," said Alkinloch finally. "Think I'll have another drink."

"Thought it wasn't allowed," suggested Basil.

"No. But the climate's going to do me so much good, according to you all, that I ought to be able to do myself a little harm occasionally."

"You'll have to stay to give the climate a chance."

"I suppose so."

The drink was procured, and the drinker seemed to meditate.

"Rum lot," he murmured again. Then later—"Confounded impertinent old fool." Finally he put a question.

"Are these girls of his really beauties?"

For a moment Basil hesitated, as if he ventured something by his answer—then :

"Yes," came from him slowly.

"Well, perhaps I might give the climate a chance," said Alkinloch with a smile and the suggestion of a wink.

Basil looked at him doubtfully, filled with hope, yet oppressed with forebodings which he dared not put definitely to himself.

CHAPTER VII

Treacherous Galm

MR. FRED FORRESTER, who had commonly been known in England as the Earl of Alkinloch, made himself most easily at home in Tomocala. His geniality and friendliness were much greater than his brother's had been. His crossings of the Carnaval to the little town were as frequent as those of Jim, the black servant, and Basil suspected that they led him into a society in essentials little more elevated. The younger brother had begun by attempting to establish with the elder a companionship of some sort. This was partly with the idea that in this way Alkinloch might be induced to stay on, partly with an idea, vaguely defined and only half admitted, that the stay might thus be made altogether of good consequences. But what years in England had failed to do, weeks in Tomocala could not accomplish. The ties of blood and of common interests had sometimes brought them momentarily together. But they had never been comrades. They were not so now. Mr. Fred Forrester ac-

cepted his brother's cabin on the peninsula as a *piéd à terre*. He ate half his meals there, and for perhaps that part of the time he slept on a cot bed in the little room through which swept unimpeded the health-giving breath of the Atlantic. The other half of his life he soon ceased to explain.

Basil knew that in the meetings of the town at Sandford's Emporium his brother had come to be a familiar figure. He heard vaguely of gatherings less representative and also less respectable at out-lying and lonely cottages. Freddy went off upon fishing and shooting expeditions of a week or more with his new friends, and came back burned by the sun and seemingly invigorated and toned by the climate. But he also took, so rumour had it, excursions of shorter duration and more doubtful character to certain remote settlements in the pine woods where even so far back as those days nameless and oddly composed families gained a living denied them on the barren sands in purveying illicit whiskey and the opportunity for squalid debaucheries. Quiet inhabitants of Tomocala were sometimes aroused from their sleep by the half-drunk yells of returning revellers. And once, at two o'clock of a moonlit morning, the sharp crack of a pistol was heard, and Jim Blagdon, one of Freddy's friends,

was found dead by the river front. It was whispered afterwards that on that night the "boys"—so they called them at Sandford's—after an unusual bout with corn whiskey had enjoyed by force the hospitality of a lonely house up the creek where, as it chanced that night, the husband and father of the three women left alone there was away, searching for some strayed cattle. He had returned, after the boys had gone, at one. And at two, desperately spurring a worn-out old black mule to the limit of its poor speed, he had come on Jimmy Blagdon where the road skirted the Carnaveral and shot him from behind a clump of magnolia trees. For all that Tomocala knew or guessed, it might as well have been Fred Forrester, or any of the others, who paid the penalty of that night's revelry. There were other stories, too, though this was perhaps the darkest, as it was the most dramatic.

Basil listened to such tales as little as possible. He was not his brother's keeper, he told himself. His business was only to note the colour on Alkinloch's cheek, to watch his shoulders straighten, and to listen for the lessening hacking in his cough. Fred was to live; it would be asking too much to choose *how* he should live. Yet often in the late golden afternoon when in the little space which the secret

rosebush, as autumn came, had strewn thick with its yellow petals and green leaves Basil sat with one protecting arm around Marion's shoulder he gave thanks that Alkinloch had never seen this wild sweet flower, that her new paradise at least was undisturbed by his blustering cries.

It seemed now always to be his fate to be retreating from the alarums and excursions of whatever was his world to the peace and sanctity of some remoter retreat. As he had fled from London to Tomocala, so now he fled from Tomocala, from the sinister vision of how his brother was passing the little time he thought was left him, to the enchanted sanctuary in the wilderness where his love was.

By Marion's side there was no need to face the future. In her divine simplicity and ignorance she was content merely to know that he loved her; she asked no questions. Deep in his heart he knew that this too perhaps must end, but he forced himself to forget. He too, like Alkinloch, chose how he should pass the little time that was left. There were moments when he called himself a coward, when he accused himself of needless cruelty, when he felt that, as in the old days, he was sitting at a banquet for which in the end a woman must pay in sorrow and in tears. But the first force of the resolutions

he had so passionately made at Kitty's death was now half worn out, had indeed been slipping from him through the long languorous tropical summer, in that warm, soft air in which the moral rigidity of the Northerner droops and dies. In the nights sometimes, when Alkinloch's hollow cough kept him awake, he still had spasms of self-abasement, and clear visions of the treachery he would doubtless perpetrate if Alkinloch died and England with a new welcome called him back. He saw himself loving and riding away, as he had before. Some new shock, terrible, like that first, might give him strength again, he thought. But no shock came. Some further flight—oh, could flight be ever far enough!—might carry him beyond his own miserable weakness and the temptations of the world. But no flight was possible when for nine days out of ten one could forget the need of it. The days passed, and Basil, sedulously teaching himself not to count their flight, gave himself up again to the spell of nature and of the woodsprite who had taught him to know the wilderness.

At first he had feared that Freddy's presence might prevent his meetings with Marion. But in fact his absences made it possible for Basil not only to see her as before, but to forget his brother and

all that his presence in Florida meant. It was late in October that Basil was startled by Marion's saying:

"Con knows your brother, Basil; why don't I?"

"How does she come to know him?" he asked, almost sharply.

"I don't think I know. Con don't tell me many of her secrets. She don't tell mother. She says we're too simple; stupid, I suppose she means. I guess she thinks I haven't any secrets." Marion smiled with an innocent air of superiority.

"I think I can guess how it happened," meditated Basil. He was remembering a meeting with Father Sullivan some weeks before. He had been used to seeing the priest sailing the lagoon or fishing in his strange, shabby nondescript costume. But he had not been included in the father's parochial visits, and he had consequently been surprised one morning, when loafing on the dock, to see the well-known cat-boat sail up to it.

"Is Mr. Fred Forrester here?"

"No," Basil had answered.

"Well, I don't want him," said the little ruddy-faced Galway man, bringing his craft alongside. "I want to talk to you about him. Have you any influence over him?"

"Not any, I should say."

"Well, he has over Dick White, and for the bad. Dick's a damned Protestant—why, of course he's damned! that's theology, not blasphemy as you seem to think—but he's a good lad, a decent, clean boy."

"Yes, Dick's all of that."

"But how long he will be I don't know, I don't know."

Father Sullivan had shaken his head in doubt. It was certain, he said, that Fred Forrester had sought Dick's acquaintance. They had sailed and fished together; lately they had drunk together. And often had gone off at night, to what devil's cabin in the backwoods Father Sullivan could not say. "Of course it's not my business, but 'tis a pity."

This conversation came back to Basil now. "It would be through Dick White, I think, that he came to know Con. She still sees Dick White, doesn't she?"

"I think she must be planning to run away with him the way he has always wanted her to. She's got the stuff for a pink dress hidden away in the garret, and when pa's away she sews on it. Dick must have bought it for her, and he must be rich, for oh, it's so lovely. It's silk! Con told me that it was to wear to church, that Dick was going to

take her to the Primitive Baptist meeting in November. But Con doesn't always tell me everything. I thought perhaps she was going to St. Augustine with him. She hates everything at home, and I know she's been thinking of running away for a long time. Con hasn't ever been happy, not even so happy as I was before you came. I wish Con could be. Of course she can't ever be so happy as I am. But I guess Dick loves her. You told me once you thought so too."

"Yes."

"The way you do me. Did you know," the girl went on, "that I talked to ma the other day about love? Ma was in love herself when she was just my age. But the man didn't love her. Ma was sorry. And then pa came and she married him."

"Without caring for him?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then why——"

"Her pa and ma didn't want her at home much longer. You see she was nineteen, and girls have to marry, so ma says. Oh, I couldn't tell her she was wrong without letting her know our secret! But we haven't got to marry, Basil, have we? And be like pa and ma? We love each other, dear. Say we haven't got to."

For a moment he laughed. But she had grown used to his laughing at her speeches, even those which seemed to her the profoundest. Then he suddenly became grave.

"No," he said, "we needn't be married. As you say, we love each other, dear. But perhaps it would be better that we should."

"Of course," answered Marion in a low voice, "if you want us to." Then she looked up. "But, oh, Basil, you won't be like pa is to ma; you couldn't be."

"No," said he gently. "Marriage doesn't mean just that. It would mean for us that we would say that we would never be apart, that we would always be together."

"Oh, but we're always going to be together." She caught him by the arm like a frightened child. "Basil, you won't ever leave me. I couldn't live if things were like what they were before you came." She put her head down on the sleeve of his coat and ever so quietly, with no sobs, she began to cry.

"You see," he said, with a laugh and a pat on her head, but with an underlying note more serious, "we ought to be married, just to make quite sure."

"Yes, if that will keep you always with me! To-night, Basil; let's be married to-night."

He held her for a moment tight-clasped in his arms, and his lips were against her soft, warm cheek. But as he spoke he knew there were other things he must remember.

"We must wait a little," he said. "But when my brother, who's ill now, gets well, you and I will be married."

"But we will still be in love."

"Always," answered Basil, "whatever happens."

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A few days later, coming through the path, now worn wider, that led to the enclosure of the rose, Basil saw again, as on that first evening, the flash of lights through the green bushes that sheltered it. The fireflies which had danced all through the long summer had vanished, and he knew that Marion must have lit the lights of her woodland altar. He saw her on the ground before the little table on which, as before, stood six candles, and he experienced, as so often with Marion, a sense that, even with her guidance, he had not quite entered into the wild world in which she lived. He felt as some early Christian might, who had loved some wood nymph lingering from an earlier day, and had been present when she celebrated half-forgotten pagan

rites. Though he knew that Marion groping in her ignorance had raised her shrine to the God of Christians, he still thought of some autumn festival of the divinities of the woods and sands. She must have heard the crackling of the trail under his footsteps, yet she did not turn from her half-kneeling, half-crouching position on the soft carpet of pine needles in front of the altar. The six candles retouched her hair with an even brighter gold, and seemed to reveal to him with a fresh impression of beauty the wild grace of her attitude. With a quick wave of emotion it came to him that the shrine was reared to Eros, the immemorial God of young men and maidens. He bent over and brushed her cheek lightly with his lips; half reverently, as if in a sacred presence. He saw her eyes hazy and far-away in expression.

"Aren't they beautiful?" she asked. "When I lit them before it made you love me. Now, perhaps, it will make your brother well."

Basil almost unconsciously bent one knee and sank by her side, memories of the church-going of his childhood and of its simple faith coming back to him: thoughts of his mother, of his Cousin Henry, as he had talked with him that last night. For an instant the pine trees seemed to arch over him in a

great cathedral aisle, and he too asked God to make Alkinloch well.

"We will light them every night," exclaimed Marion, clapping her hands softly together in a sudden mood of gaiety, "and when these are gone you can bring some, Basil. You don't have such trouble to get them as I do. And God will make your brother well. I think God likes me, Basil, you and me."

So as autumn went on towards winter, and the rose shed its yellowed leaves over the carpet of pine needles before undertaking its winter growth and flowering, each time they met the candles were lit upon the tiny altar. And the miracle happened. Nowadays it would perhaps be explained by the marvellous healing power of fresh air and the re-creative effect of life in the open. Some of Freddy's pals advanced a medical theory—no stranger than a thousand others which gain credence—that the corn whiskey he consumed so freely "pickled" him to an extent which not only prevented the further progress of his disease, but ultimately killed it altogether. Gradually his eye brightened and his shoulders grew straighter. The grey of his haggard countenance vanished and the colour bred of English airs came back, while the tired lines were

effaced. Basil watching him carefully, and noting day by day that he seemed better, suddenly woke to the fact that he was well. The hacking cough was gone. Alkinloch was what he had always been. It was all like the waking from some unpleasant dream, though the former invalid remained, an incongruous figure not wholly without menace in the Arcadian landscape.

Full realisation of this seemed to come one November day, a day with a kind of memory of summer in it, when Alkinloch had chanced to loaf about the cabin, smoking a pipe contentedly and warming himself in the sun. After lunch Basil found him gazing on the few leather bags he had brought from England, and poking them meditatively with his foot.

"Well, Freddy?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I'll go. This is all deuced comfortable and idle, but I think I'd like some hunting." He overturned a kit-bag with his foot and went on.

"You know the New York chap, big crack as a doctor, who was at the Tomocala House——"

"No, I didn't know."

"You don't know anything that happens in the town. You miss what fun there is." Alkinloch's

eye lit up for a moment as if with memories. "You're too damned moral now, or at least you pretend to be."

"Don't let that trouble you, Freddy."

"It don't, my boy. But of course I have to speak nicely before you. Lord, if I told you half the larks, or one game in especial—Well, I spare you, Bassy, and I'll take myself off and leave you. Tomorrow I think I'll go. The doctor said—it's really amazing, it really is—that I'm actually perfectly fit again. He was surprised himself, and jawed a lot about the extraordinary effects of great change of climate and so on while he was thumping me over. So I've done you. Oh, you were decent about it; I'll be the first to say it. But personally I'm jolly glad I'm to live and get what perquisites there are when the Governor cracks up—and I call it sportsmanlike of you to urge me to stay the way you did, and give Florida a chance."

"You haven't disliked it so much, have you?"

"I haven't, my son. I have done myself most uncommon well. I have had it both ways, you see. I've thought it was my last three months and taken it as such. And now it isn't. I could tell your old friend Harriman," he chuckled, "that life here is

quite worth the living. By Jove, I could tell him some things."

At another time Basil might have invited his brother's confidences. To-day he was too elated by his escape into the open, by complete freedom again from doubts and problems. It would have been his duty, he could now admit it, to have gone back to London. There would have been something for him, it was not now longer to be denied, in standing as the head of his house, in bearing the title, and in enjoying the rich full life England offers to her petted few. But he had once paid heavily for the world's pleasures with human suffering, and might indeed, so he feared, have gone on through the years paying the same price. Now he no longer needed to distrust his strength. Life had grown again simple, possible. He could hope to be a man and bear his head with pride. The tragedy that had threatened for months was never to take place.

As the sun sank westwards he went to a box hidden away under his bed and slipped a small parcel into the pocket of his coat. Then he sauntered away over the familiar trail to the sea, along the sand, and back again to his old meeting-place with Marion. The wind had fallen, and a solemn hush

seemed over all the green peninsula, as if in sympathy with his mood, and the great decisive step that he was now to take. To the girl waiting there he brought this time the gift of his whole life, with no doubts, no hesitations, and no hidden dangers.

CHAPTER VIII

Treasures

MARION was shy, gentle, with possibilities of long silences, but she was also at times gay with the gaiety of all young wild things, laughing with little reason, skipping with happiness like a dryad, approaching Basil with fleeting caresses such as a frolicking kitten might bestow. In such a mood she was that late afternoon. In the enclosure of the rosebush it was truly St. Martin's summer, warm and perfumed with scent of pines. The slanting sun's rays fell full on the girl, as Basil, lounging on the fragrant carpet of needles, watched her. They touched the gold of her hair, and the glittering yellow glory of the great chain of topazes which hung round her neck, and was held out at the length of her arms in three long festoons of sparkling light. It swung gently to and fro, catching the light on its many facets. In her face were wonder and ecstasy. It was more than a woman's first sight of jewels, it was some sylvan creature's first glimpse of the sun, or first startled vision of the radiant moon. Basil

remembered the times he had heard the Jewel Song in "Faust," and listened while that ecstatic fountain of melody poured from Margaret's throat in bell-like tones. But the heroine of the poem and the music seemed by contrast squalid, worldly, and sophisticated. Nothing that he had ever imagined could equal the simplicity of this girl's joy, who for the first time in her life gazed upon this unimagined miracle of precious stones. In Basil's eyes, too, these yellow gems were transfigured. In renewed wonder at their beauty, he could for a moment almost forget the associations that clung round them.

For the great chain of topazes, taken that day from its hiding-place for the first time since Basil came to Florida, had been to him less a jewel than a symbol almost religious, a great chain of his memories, ranging from the happy morning in Paris when he bought it to that last awful night when he had seen it weighing down the loved figure of Kitty. He had brought it to Marion as a wedding gift, so he told her, and it seemed to him a pledge of all his future, sanctified by all his holiest memories of the past. But now, as had happened before with him when he was with Marion, he felt the world elude him, fade away into the dimmest

vision, leaving him alone with this one woman in the wilderness. He could still cling to the thought of Kitty somewhere in the vague unknown, smiling upon and consenting to this happiness. But except for her image, he seemed to have been carried by magic back along the ages, till he was in that first Paradise with which history began.

Something touched him on the forehead and roused him from this reverie. Marion had unwound the chain, which had been passed twice round her neck, and now swaying toward him, till she seemed just poised for flight, swung in a long curve the shining yellow gems, smiling meanwhile. He put out one hand and caught the chain, and then pulling gently on it, drew her a laughing but willing captive to his arms.

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"I'll walk home with you to-night," he said, a little later.

She started. With this speech her world, such as it was, came back to frighten her.

"Yes, we will tell our secret," he went on. "My brother goes away to-morrow, and then on the day after we will be married, and you will come to live always with me."

"Pa won't let me."

"He must let you. We will tell him to-night. And your mother will be glad, I believe."

"Yes," said Marion shyly, "she will be glad. I think mother guessed that something was happening to make me happy."

This time they went bravely along the secret trail, Marion taking a childish delight in making the stiff palmettoes crackle loudly as they crushed through the thickets, which at so many points hid the path from ordinary observation. With no hesitations, no preliminary reconnoitings, such as were usual, they passed the screen that sheltered the entrance from the main trail. And there no farewell was said. Frightened, yet exulting in her boldness and feigning, with elaborate self-consciousness which broke down into laughter, an indifference to the strangeness of the act, Marion turned towards the west with Basil's arm around her.

The old grey house looked sleepy still, as on that other day when he had gone to it. Fowls and pigs were busy in the clearing where it stood; nothing else alive stirred. Yet as before, in spite of peace and somnolence it seemed to watch from behind its windows, and to have in its deserted silence an air mysterious and threatening. Involuntarily the two

approaching it stopped as they emerged from the trail.

"Pa's still over to Tomocala for the swill, I guess, and Con—Oh! I didn't tell you about Con," said Marion, lowering her voice with an air of secrecy. "This made me forget it," fingering her chain and laughing silently. "Con's gone to church up Tomocala Creek, the Foot-washing Baptists, they call it, with Dick White. I don't know how she dared. Pa'll beat her so when she comes back. He missed her this afternoon, and he banged ma with a stick, but ma wouldn't tell."

"Did he touch you?" interrupted her companion angrily.

"I—Oh, I ran away, and then he had to go over to town."

The thin dog that Basil had seen before skulked out from the door and down to greet them, otherwise the grey house gave no sign of life.

"He's always lame," was Basil's comment.

"Pa gets angry."

They both stooped with a common impulse and caressed the wretched beast's head. Then Marion spoke almost as if in fear, at asking so great a favour.

"Could I take him with me, Basil? so that he can be happy too."

"Certainly, dearest."

They had started again towards the house when the girl stopped, as if struck by a sudden thought.

"Ought I to take mother? He beats her worse'n he does Sammy. Could I take her too?"

"Would she want to come?" asked Basil in return.

Marion hesitated.

"I don't know. She don't mind beatings much now, I guess. And, I don't know—sometimes I think she likes pa, spite of everything. I wouldn't much mind if you beat me if you wanted to, Basil," she went on, as if meditating on the mystery of woman's devotion to man, of the quality of which she now caught a glimpse.

As they talked they went up the steps to the back veranda. Basil remembered how in some occult way the old house, when he first saw it, seemed to promise that it would bring changes in his life. These changes had indeed come, he thought, yet in the house nothing was changed. A speckled hen foraged along the hall, and a brown sow, established under the staircase, suckled two tiny pigs. In the big room there was the same confusion of filth and

tattered elegance, and as the breeze swept through the windows from the Carnaveral, the golden bells of the green jade pagoda still tinkled, stirring the imagination with suggestions of the East where nothing can seem strange.

"I've tried to keep it cleaner lately," said Marion, glancing round as if she had learned to see the place with new eyes, "but pa wouldn't let me. Now we can have clean new furniture from Tomocala, can't we, in your house? And you won't let the pigs come in, will you? I'll do what I want, won't I?"

She did not wait for an answer.

"No one's here," she announced, and then, as if carried away by this new-found freedom, she ran to the pagoda, jingling its bells with her finger as she circled round it, and laughing like a happy child. They went through the empty room and out upon the veranda. The sun was setting, and the western sky and the river were both aglow. Upon the rippling expanse of the Carnaveral one dark spot travelled slowly towards them, the familiar row-boat, laden with the refuse of the settlement and with old Harriman. Half-way down the sandy stretch to the wharf was the bent figure of a woman, alternately raising a heavy axe, and bring-

ing it down with a kind of convulsive, tired energy. Mrs. Harriman was splitting firewood.

Marion caught sight of her, and with a little cry rushed down to her, the lame dog following at her heels. Basil saw her throw both arms about Mrs. Harriman's neck, and knew that while he came slowly across the loose sand towards them, she was telling the old woman their secret. For an instant he saw Marion stand back and hold up to her astonished mother one long festoon of the topaz chain, which caught blood-red lights from the crimson sky, then take her again in her arms and murmur half inarticulately to her of this new happiness. As he came near them Mrs. Harriman disengaged herself from her daughter, and turned to him, in painful embarrassment, he could see, yet with a grotesquely heroic attempt to seem dignified, even brave. She cast one quick, frightened glance upon the river where the black rowboat was coming closer in to shore, then nervously rubbing her hand on her faded thin blue gown, finally raised her head with a pathetic little jerk, which had, in her whom Basil had seen before silent, bent, and cowering, an odd air, almost of bravado. She gave him her hand.

"I'm right pleased to meet you," she said. "I'm right glad that you——" She paused, and her

struggle to go on was almost painful. Then she suddenly broke out, speaking more rapidly, as though deeper feelings had swept away her embarrassment. "I know I ain't brought up them gals like I ought; I surely does know it. But their pa is—well, he's mighty curious. They ain't had no fair show, and I reckon I'm to blame." The tears began to stream down her yellow, furrowed cheeks, but she went on. "Marion's a good girl, though; and she's a lady, 'cause her ma wa'n't no pore white trash like we-all was. She'll make you a good wife. You do want to marry her right, don't you?"

"I do, Mrs. Harriman."

"She's a good girl. Make her happy. She ain't never had no chance to be happy."

"You ain't neither, ma," interrupted Marion. "You are to come and live with us, so pa won't beat you, and the hogs won't worry you, and you won't have to split wood. You can split wood, can't you, Basil? Anyhow, I can. You're to live with us always."

"No, I reckon I won't come." The older woman suddenly relapsed into the kind of unemotional stupidity so common among the ignorant women of the backwoods. The dull veil, which for a moment

had been pulled aside, seemed again drawn over her face. Yet there was, in spite of this, a kind of a look of craft, a sort of elusive suggestion that years of weariness and fear had taught her to conceal all feeling. "No, I reckon I'd better not," she said, almost stolidly. Somehow her tears had not quite stopped flowing yet, and she caught up a fold of her skirt to dry them. "You'll be better off without me."

"No, ma, no," protested Marion.

"Besides, who'd cook for your pa? He ain't no hand at cooking," she said with an air of explaining to Basil. Again she looked furtively at the river, and it seemed to him that in one briefest second the varied emotions of the long years passed as if in review through her eyes. Then "I guess I'll stick to pa,—and to Con. I ought ter. Con and her pa don't always get on very well," she added, again as if for the third party's sake.

"Con won't stay long, I don't believe," said Marion in a hushed voice. "Then, ma, you could come."

"No, Marion. Perhaps he won't be quite so curious. You gals worry him, you know. Anyhow, I can stand it."

"But you won't be happy."

"P'raps I won't never be," assented Mrs. Harriman. "But when you gals is fixed, somehow I guess I can stand it." She paused a moment, and Basil found himself suspecting in astonishment how it had happened that she had endured this long marriage, that looked like slavery. A curious look seemed to him to come over her face. "He's the father of my little gal I've told you about that died," she said. "I dunno but I'd as soon stay. There's a sight of things about being married you don't understood yet, Marion. You can make her happy, you know," she added to Basil, "if you'll only try just the littlest mite."

"God knows I'll try," he answered fervently, with solemnity in his voice. They stood silent for a little while, watching the rowboat come along the last part of its ruddy sunset path and touch the wharf. The old man stopped a minute before he made the painter fast, shook his fist at them, and, so they guessed, began to mutter blasphemies. Marion had been drooping on her mother's shoulder; now she raised her head and smiled at Basil.

"It's funny," she said; "I'm not afraid of him now."

Mrs. Harriman, however, spoke in sudden agitation.

"How are you going to tell him? Oh, don't make him mad, don't!"

The old man was half-way up the path.

"I thought there was some wood to split," he said, seeming to take no notice either of Basil or of Marion. His wife without a word turned to the pile of logs and took up the axe. But she did not start to use it. A little way off she stood through all that followed, her eager eyes strained first upon one and then another of the three. Old Harriman stooped and picked up a block of wood. With it he managed to catch Sammy on the ribs. The dog limped away hurriedly, yelping sharply with pain.

"If that dog was worth his salt, he'd have driven you off before now, instead of leaving it to me. Why in hell are you here?" The enquiry was at last directly to Basil—"Haven't you been warned off, you skulking hound?" He went on, comparing the intruder to various kinds of vermin, of which it was difficult to rid oneself. Basil glanced once at Marion, wondering what effect this filthy torrent of oaths could have on her. She smiled back at him bravely, a little frightened perhaps at her father's vehemence, but in no way astonished at his foulness, unconscious of it in fact, as some flower might be of the vileness of the soil from which it had sprung.

"What do you want?" asked the old man at last, stopping his curses, as he usually did, from mere lack of breath.

"I can tell you now you've stopped swearing. Though really I want nothing from you. You've to listen to what's been decided. I'm going to take your daughter Marion away to-morrow and marry her."

There was a moment's silence after Basil spoke. Mother and daughter exchanged a quick look of terrified anxiety. Then, as they waited, the old man began to laugh softly.

"Marry her?" he chuckled. He looked at Marion, and to her he spoke sharply. "Where did you get that?"

He took a step towards her. She retreated, catching up the great lengths of the topaz chain and holding it as if to protect it against her breast.

"He gave it to me," she faltered.

"Then why wait till to-morrow?" The old man turned to the younger again, who too shrank from him for one fleeting instant, almost frightened by this queer merriment. "Why not take her away to-night? Why marry her? Why should he marry you, my dear?"—again he spoke to Marion—"you'll go with him for the pretty jewel. Oh, it

won't be the first time it's happened here." He stopped. Basil saw an odd glitter of rage in his deep-set eyes. The old man pointed suddenly towards the feathery green China tree that stood by the side of the old house. "He gave her two strings of pearls, they said. I saw them, and I never guessed. Oh, but I forgot"—he laughed again—"you didn't know her. But they are all alike."

"I dare say you think so. And I won't stop to tell you what an ignoble and unworthy father I think you've been to the two children you chose to bring into the world."

"Don't," retorted Harriman. "I brought them into it for myself, not for you."

"Exactly. But you didn't reckon with me. And one of them at least I'm going to rescue. I'm going to take her away to-morrow."

"Not to-night?" insinuated the old man in a tone that made Basil white.

"Don't insult her," he broke in. "I tell you I'm going to make her my wife."

"About time, I guess," muttered Harriman under his breath. "How long has this been going on?" he asked Marion, speaking louder.

"I don't know."

"I'll teach you to sneak off to your lover while I break my back fetching swill back from Tomocala for you and the other hogs. I'll teach you——"

But this time Marion stood her ground. Her head was raised, as old Harriman perhaps had never seen it before.

"He won't let you beat me now. He ain't going to let you beat ma. You don't dare touch Con, and if you hurt Sammy we're going to take him to live with us, too."

"You impudent slut——" began Harriman, starting towards her.

"Don't be a fool," interposed Basil, standing between.

Harriman drew back an arm, still powerful. Basil caught him by the wrist and held him.

"You're an old man, Harriman. I have to remember that. And you're not insane, are you? Try to remember that as well."

"No, damn you," was the snarling reply, as Harriman's arm was released and he stepped back. "I'm not. You mean that I ought to be glad that you are to honour my family with an alliance. My God, my God, you are a fool!"

He seated himself on the step leading to the veranda, and broke again into his strange, mocking

laughter, slapping his leg the while. It ran through Basil's mind that he was dealing with a madman, when Harriman suddenly became calm, and began to speak quietly, with the accent and the unmistakable air which marked him, even in his squalid decay, as a gentleman.

"I don't dislike you, Forrester," he said, "though one's manners do grow odd in the wilderness, I must admit. In fact, my example is probably worth following in very few ways indeed. I can see that; I'm not insane, as you were good enough to observe. I have my reasons for not caring for the world as I find it."

"So have I," said Basil quietly.

"I choose to live like this"—he glanced around in scorn—"with a dull, ignorant cracker woman, some hogs, and the litters of both breeds. Is that any reason why you should do likewise, my lord?" His voice had grown gentle, almost caressing, but there was mockery in the last words, in the false obsequiousness of this new mode of address. "Oh, I know the honour done the family when Lord Basil proposes for my daughter's hand, but I also know what a fool his lordship is."

"Why do you call him lord?" It was the girl who spoke, her eyes on Basil, and a look of exalta-

tion, almost religious, in her face. "Is he Lord?"

"It's just my name," answered Basil hastily. "It doesn't mean anything especial."

"I call him lord, my dear," her father went on, "because his drunken blackguard of a brother can't hold his tongue. He's had to tell them over at Tomocala that this is Lord Basil, that he is Lord Alkinloch, and that one or the other of them will be the Marquess of Kingstowne some day."

"I don't understand, I don't know what you mean," murmured Marion helplessly, her eyes filling with tears.

"Of course you don't, you fool. By gad," the old man chuckled, "to think that you, you, if he marries you, will be the Lady Basil Forrester."

"No, no," protested Marion eagerly. "He knows I wasn't brought up to be a lady. He don't blame ma for that, and he don't blame me, because I'm just like ma."

"Yes"—it was old Harriman who spoke—"she's just like ma. You don't think so now, because she's young and fresh, and her hair is yellow. That's how they always catch us. She'll change, she'll shrivel and grow old soon. But their souls are always the same; it's their lying souls that trick us; that's what tricks us." At the end, he seemed to

be talking half to himself. Marion roused him, Marion with her strange, new bravery.

"You don't understand, pa. He loves me and I love him—and it makes him happy."

Harriman looked at her with curiosity, but he made no answer. Then he turned to Basil.

"I think it must have been your grandfather I met once, at dinner at the British Consul's in Tientsin, a tall, thin man, with white hair and moustaches."

The faint tinkling of the pagoda bells struck on Basil's ear. The mysterious atmosphere of the grey house closed round them. It was always thus; when one had for the moment come to think of Harriman as a common East Coast ruffian, one was suddenly taken back to civilisation, and beyond that to the Orient.

"He was in the East a good deal, I believe. I, of course, can't remember."

"That would be he, I think. Yes, I'm sure Kingstowne was the name. An ass about Eastern politics, so far as my recollections go, but a fine aristocratic type."

"Yes, he was that."

"Is he alive still?"

"No."

"That's a pity. I can imagine how delighted he

would have been to welcome a cracker from the East Coast as a granddaughter. It ought to be made clear to you, dear Marion," he went on, turning to his daughter with a new politeness which was in itself insulting, "if it is possible to make anything clear to you. Your young man's family, back in England where he came from, all live in large houses, and wear beautiful clothes. They never work. They know how to read and write. They would think of you about as they think of a nigger. They wouldn't speak to you, they wouldn't even let you feed their hogs. They wouldn't think you were even good enough for that. Very likely, if they knew that he had married such a girl as you, they wouldn't speak to him. They'd be ashamed of him. It wouldn't be long before he'd be ashamed of you."

Basil stretched out a reassuring hand to her. "It's none of it true," he said.

"It's true, and you know it. You ought to be grateful to me for putting the case so well. You're not insane either, are you? Picture this girl in England. She can't even be a lady in Tomocala, she knows that herself. Think of her humiliating position there. Come, you must see the difficulties. Or are you a complete fool?"

"I have no intention of returning to England.

Even if there were difficulties, I have no need to face them."

"Oh, they will have you back there some day, even if they don't want the Lady Basil."

"I think," said Basil with a smile, "that you exaggerate the importance of younger sons,—and their wives."

"How would they like her as the Marchioness of Kingstowne? And yes, now I think of it, wasn't your brother coughing his lungs up a little while ago?"

"He's quite well now. If his ill health were any obstacle to my marriage, it is removed now. Be as reasonable as you like. Granted that I couldn't very well have married Marion if he hadn't got well. What does that matter now?"

Marion had followed the conversation as best she could, a pained look of failure to understand in her eyes half the time. But here her face cleared, as she came to Basil's help.

"You don't understand, pa. That's how he asked me to marry him, if his brother got well," she smiled triumphantly.

"Humph," grunted her father, "not such a fool as he seems, after all. Do you know what that means, Marion?"

The girl was again confused and frightened after her bravery.

"I dunno," she faltered.

"Well, it means that if his brother were to die, your young man would become a great man; that he couldn't have such a wife as you—then; that he'd be ashamed of you then; that you would spoil all his chances in the world? That's why he wouldn't marry you unless his brother got well. But he thinks you good enough for him if he stays in this hole."

"Is it true, Basil?" she asked, looking a little pale, yet smiling at him. "You can say what you like. I reckon I ain't good enough for you anywhere, nohow."

"Yes, yes, dear, you are," he protested.

"I know more than you think, pa," she went on with a pathetic touch of pride. "I know I couldn't go to St. Augustine or—England—isn't it? But he's well now, isn't he?" she asked almost vehemently of Basil. "You said he was. And you said it'd make you happy for me to marry you. I didn't ask for you to marry me. I don't want to do you any harm. I didn't know you might have to go away. Oh, you won't have to go away now, will you?"

"No, Marion. My brother's well. He starts back to-morrow to England. And he leaves me here—in Paradise," he added gently.

"What's Paradise?" she asked.

"Where you and I can be together, and where the world can't find us out."

She threw herself on him, and for the first time her tears began to flow. Basil's arm was about her, and with one hand he patted the golden head, as if it had been a troubled child's. On the top step leading to the veranda, sat old Harriman, whittling at a chip of wood and chuckling softly. The sun had set and the brief, grey twilight of the tropics rested for a moment on the river. It was the old man who broke the silence.

"Hurry up, old woman, with your splitting," he shouted to the bent figure by the woodpile. "'Cause I want some grub, and damned quick, too. As for you two, you're going to marry her to-morrow, you say? Well, if this is the best you can do, instead of taking what life offers while you're young, I don't know that I can express my opinion of you better than to let you have your way. Marry her! Good Lord, I did have more respect for you than that. Get out, will you, you poor specimen."

Marion dried her eyes.

"I'll have to cook supper," she said. "Good-night, Basil."

"I'll come for you to-morrow," he said. This time he took her hand, and held it firmly in farewell. "To-morrow."

Then to Harriman, "Remember, if you lay hand on either of them I shall know it, and you'll pay for it, old man though you are."

"All right, sonny. I won't touch either of them," Then as Basil turned to go, with a chuckle the old man added, "I'm waiting for Con."

"Don't touch *her*," said Basil.

Harriman made no answer. He rose and went slowly into the house. But as the younger man started homeward in the half-darkness along the trail, he heard the old man's voice growing shriller as he grew more blasphemous, cursing Constance. The sound was disquieting somehow; the voice one which must be kept out of Paradise, if it were indeed to be Paradise. Basil was happy, yet his happiness had still some thread of vague, uncertain fear. He wished that to-morrow had come and gone, that his flight from the world had already been completed, for in old Harriman's voice the world still seemed to menace and deride him.

CHAPTER IX

Victims

THE coming home that night seemed to Basil the second great milestone in his progress. One had been when revelation had come to him by the secret rose, and he had returned to his cabin to find Alkinloch there—that was Freddy's first night in Tomocala; this his last. Was there something, the younger brother wondered, that tangled the fates of the two together? Was the dim foreboding which he felt a sign that his happiness still lay in his brother's hand. For months it had been there, he could admit that now. Alkinloch's death would have been a call from the world that he must have obeyed. He would have brushed aside the mists and dreams that made his happiness and gone back to realities, to London as he knew it. Yet the reluctance which he felt to make any such return was evidence to him, even leaving out of consideration, if that were possible, his love for Marion, of how far he had made himself a part of this vision of a simpler life. In life, as chance had placed him in

it, he had proved himself a failure, unequal to its responsibilities, weak before its temptations. In this primæval woodland existence, this Eden which for him, in a cabin by the Carnaveral with Marion, might almost be free from the taint of the knowledge of good and evil, he felt that he could be a man. The sacrifice of it had been almost demanded. To-morrow was to be witness that it had not been asked. As he meditated the foreboding disappeared, like clouds gradually scattered by a steady sun. What mischief was there, he asked himself, that Alkinloch still could do? It was womanish fear to doubt his actual safety when he had come safely through the danger of so many months. As for drink and debaucheries, they had only seemed to make him ruddier with the health which was Basil's title to freedom. Disease was conquered. Alkinloch would be married in a month; in a year or so heirs would have finished the work of cutting Basil Forrester out of the old, distrusted world.

The cottage was empty when he came home, but there were glowing wood embers on the hearth and the fresh smell of tobacco smoke in the room. On the table were the remains of the simple evening meal which Lord Alkinloch had laid for himself, and by the door was a small portmanteau which he had

evidently been packing. Basil stepped out upon the veranda. The night was just light enough to show shadows against the grey of the river and on the wharf he saw his brother's figure, evidently bending over to untie the rowboat.

"Hello, Freddy!" he called. "You've packed up, I see."

"Yes, there's a boat going up to St. Augustine to-morrow. When do you think of going to bed?"

"Hadn't planned."

"Well, sit up for me if you like and we'll have a good-bye jaw."

"You off to town now?"

"I'm off on a very particular errand, my son, not for good little hermits like you to know about."

"All right, Freddy. Make your farewell calls. I'll smoke a pipe or two and wait."

The boat went off into the blackness of the river and the splash of the oars finally died away. Basil turned back to the house, lit a lamp, and remembered that he had had no supper. He ate some cold corned-beef with bread—there had been no butter in Tomocala for a month. Then he lit his pipe and, as the evening seemed a trifle chill, threw some fresh logs on the fire. When these blazed up he put out the lamp and, pulling his one comfortable chair

up before the hearth, sat down, puffing a meditative cloud of blue tobacco smoke into the air, and thinking, as he had so often in those early, lonely days, of the House of Harriman and its fortunes.

The old man remained a mystery,—neither his history nor his character wholly to be understood. His future, however, and that of the bent, yellow cracker woman who bore his insults and his cruelty and yet seemed to love him, seemed certain to be what they had been for years, except that loneliness might increase for Mrs. Harriman when she was left alone with her strange lord and master. In those early evenings it had been about the shadowy figure of Marion that his wandering thoughts had gathered. Marion's future was now secure. There was left Constance, and somehow to-night it was with new interest, with a new pity and kindness, almost brotherly, that he thought of that proud, beautiful, wild creature as he had seen her that one time in the long room where the pagoda stood. He remembered how then the hint of tumultuous, unruly passions there was about her had made him avoid even the thought of her as part of that world he had turned his back upon. Would these same qualities, he wondered, ever lead her out into that world to which she seemed so naturally to belong,

whose rich pleasures she must instinctively divine and ask as her own right? He hoped that something might catch and keep her here in this wilderness, where alone, as he knew so well, there was safety. The strangeness of her inheritance and the very insolence of her beauty would mark her in that outer world, he could not help feeling, for some tragic and ill-starred fate. It would be better if she could be induced to cheat her doom in some cottage here with a man to whom she might bear children, making bonds which should fix her here. It was natural to think of Dick White and his patient wooing. He had always wished its success. Now more than ever he did so, the thought gaining warmth and kindness from his own happiness, and finding hope in the decisive step which Constance had taken that very day in going with Dick to the church meeting up Tomocala Creek.

The wind, rising a little as the night deepened, stirred the trees outside, and, as the tide rose, made the waves of the Carnaveral lap against the dock. Basil threw another log on his crackling fire, filled his pipe afresh, and fell to thinking of a Sunday the spring before when curiosity had led him to ride back into the woods to see the May church meeting of the Primitive Baptists. As he went over it again

while he waited for Alkinloch, it deepened his sense of the mystery and romance of the land to which he had emigrated, and it prepared his mind to some extent for the visitor who was to come later that night to break his solitude.

Even now, when the tourists invade Florida in their thousands in the yellow cars, there are such festivals in the deserted stretches of the flatwoods, strange, pathetic religious rites seen by none but the native Floridians themselves. In the towns negroes work themselves into hysterical religious emotions before crowds of giggling whites who crowd the churches as if they were theatres. But a few times a year in some remote recess of the forest the primitive church performs its ceremonial. The scoffer, if he is there, is a "cracker" himself, and has ridden his mule or his rawboned horse from some isolated farm. The church meeting draws its congregation from a radius of some twenty or thirty miles, but even now rarely from the towns.

Basil remembered how he had gone back over mile after mile of wandering tracks, at times barely to be traced over the pine needles. Often he lost his way, and it had been impossible to ask it, for even the rare farmhouses had been left that day in the charge of pigs and chickens. He had stopped

once or twice, to water his horse at a sulphur well flowing in a sunken tub where strange, grey-blue growths like seaweed flourished, or to cool himself in the thick shade of the China tree which usually grows by such artesian fountains. The ramshackle cabins and the sandy yards looked stricken with poverty. The lean hens seemed to scratch out all that even tried to grow in the hot, dry kitchen gardens. It was a marvel how life could be sustained. The only conceivable source of it seemed to be the wild brown hogs which Basil occasionally heard crashing through the underbrush, where water was, or foraging over the more open pine lands. They wander freely, but they are all branded, and to this day in Florida it is more dangerous to shoot a pig than a negro.

The church-house "up the creek" was a rough structure, lit only from the opening that served as doorway and from the spaces between the logs that made its walls. It stood in the pine woods about half a mile from the stream, where the trees had been thinned out a little. There was no house in sight, nor within a mile. Yet this desolate spot seemed a convenient centre for the scattered inhabitants of the region. Here they came riding horses and mules, or driving them in grotesquely

antiquated vehicles. They came to a religious ceremonial, but they came also, as Constance and Dick White, to a social gathering, bringing dinner with them, wearing their best clothes, exchanging the gossip of the season, making its matches. Basil remembered how blankets had been spread on the hard-packed earth near the preacher's platform and how here played or slept the smallest children while the mothers, during the praying or preaching, occasionally went outside for a chat. Girls in their cheap finery sat together on the back benches, and giggled with the younger men. Constance must have found it more intoxicating than any girl's first ball had ever been, thought Basil, smiling.

Yet it had had its profoundly impressive religious side, as well. He remembered the older men and women, sallow, high-cheekboned, sad, furtive-looking creatures, placed on either side of the table, as befitted the brethren and sisters of the church. He remembered the preaching, falling almost at once into a monotonous chant which took on at times in the strangest way the cadences of the Mass, and rose sometimes to a kind of hysterical frenzy of half-intelligible words which quieted the congregation, even to the giggling girls, as if by some hypnotic spell. There had been two preachers on

the occasion of Basil's visit to the church-house, and these, helped out by a young lay aspirant, had preached for hours. This time, so he remembered hearing from Dick White, a powerful exhorter from over Kissimmee way, Willie Elwell, was to be there. He was noted for his ability to make "folks get religion" and repent of their sins, so Dick had said. Basil almost wished he had gone. It would have been curious to see the effect of this man upon such primitive ignorance as Constance's.

To himself, however, the celebration of the Communion and the curious ceremony of the footwashing had been more impressive than the preaching. The wine had been taken from its bottle, first opened with a corkscrew by one of the preachers sitting at a rude table covered with a white cloth, and poured into thick, white stoneware coffee-cups. The bread was upon a plate of the same material,—homely dishes such as served them in their own poor farm-houses. They ate and drank with no ceremonial, yet with the solemnity that mere quiet always brings. The mystical element of the Mass seemed absent; this was a simple supper that they ate, in commemoration of that one so long ago in Palestine.

"Has every one been served?" he remembered that the preacher had asked, and that one woman

who had been outside with a crying baby had been given her sup of bread and wine. Such one could imagine early celebrations might have been, in the days when Christianity was a faith of peasants and the poor of towns. It was all the stranger now to find this hint of the primitive church in a log cabin set among the whispering Florida pines.

Then had come the foot-washing. Tin basins filled with water from the creek were produced. One preacher took off his shoes and his thick, home-knit socks. The other, girding himself with a towel, knelt by his comrade and after a low-murmured salutation and prayer washed the other's feet in the tin of water and dried them with the white cloth he wore bound around him. This office was then performed for him in return. And on either side of the little altar, bending laboriously down, sisters did this humble service for sisters and brothers for brothers. Then there was prayer again, followed by what was quaintly called "good-fellowship meeting." The communicants all stood and every one solemnly shook the others in turn by the hand, wishing each God-speed until the next church meeting. There had been one feeble, shrivelled old woman in a black silk sunbonnet standing by a fat, middle-aged daughter, down

whose cheeks tears were streaming freely. The mother was the oldest Christian of them all, but it was not to be hoped that she would live to come to the church meeting in the autumn. It had not been only the daughter, nor only the women, whose eyes had been wet as their hands grasped the poor, thin, old claws in "good fellowship."

This was religion as it brought its message to the backwoods country, too forlorn to be noticed by any but this obscure, shy sect. This was the church as Constance's mother had known it in those half-forgotten days when she "had heard of God," as Marion had told him. To-day Constance had, for the first time, seen the world and heard of God, such world and such God as existed in the wilderness. The quiet of the night, and the memories he had just gone over made him frame a wish that was almost a prayer that the world and what powers there be above it might treat this wild Constance tenderly and give her happiness.

The peace of the night and the seeming happy and simple solution of the problem of his own troubled life made it easier to believe that his prayer for another might be answered. The vague forebodings which earlier in the evening had assailed him fled away. The fire on his hearth warmed him.

And he felt that all around him, for every one, difficulties were being swept away, chapters concluded happily. To-morrow his backward flight would bring him to Arcadia in the Golden Age.

The earlier flurry of west wind had died down. The night, too, had gone through a restless hour to peace. Then upon its stillness there came the faint sound of oars. Basil in his chair by the fire raised his head to listen. Alkinloch was coming home, he supposed. Yet afterwards he could remember that at the time he had thought the strokes too agitated and violent for his lazy brother. It is possible that for one moment he may have wondered whether anything could have happened to Fred, and this boat hurrying across the blackness of the Carnaveral be bringing him the news. But the fear was dismissed at once and easily. Basil rose and went to the doorway, his figure showing black against the flickering firelit interior. Nothing seemed to tell him, so he was to think afterwards when he went over the memories of that night, that instead of chapters concluding happily around him, the most violent that he had known was even then opening out before him, and that, by the tragic ordering of events, he himself was again to be put on trial for

his happiness and his honour,—for the peace of his soul.

He watched and gradually upon the dim, grey river the moving black spot that was the boat disengaged itself, coming straight to the dock. It came under the darker shadow of the bank, and as he knew that it must now be alongside the landing-place he started slowly across the veranda as if to stroll down the path. A voice, not Alkinloch's, rang suddenly out:

"Stop; which one of you is it?"

There was an instant during which Basil did not recognise it. Then—

"Dick, is that you?" he responded with great friendliness in his tone.

"Yes," came back. "Where's your brother?"

"I don't know. Over at Tomocala, I thought."

Dick White was coming up the pathway. "I reckon I'll see for myself," he said roughly, and brushed by Basil, who saw him go into the cabin and look around its single room with an angry, half-bewildered air. The owner followed him through the door.

"What's up, Dick?"

"I'm a-lookin' for your brother."

"Well, sit down and wait for him. He'll be back any minute."

"You ain't got no call to be by when I find him. If he ain't here, I reckon I know where he is. Got anything to drink?" He asked the question abruptly.

"Yes," said Basil, fetching a glass from a shelf at the side of the room and shoving a bottle across the table towards his visitor. "You didn't use to be much of a drinker, Dick."

"Mebbe not," was the sullen answer. Then suddenly he flared up into anger, till his hand trembled as he poured the whiskey out. "Who got me started at it?" he demanded. "You know. Damn him! I know why it was now. So as he could go across the river to her while I was swilling it down over to Tomocala. Well, I'll learn him as how he learnt me too much."

He gulped down half of what he had poured out, then angrily smashed the glass down on the table.

"No, I won't drink his whiskey, though he never treated us to any as good as this in town."

"It's my whiskey," amended Basil quietly.

Dick grunted inarticulately, then slowly taking up the glass he drained it. He smiled at Basil. (It was evident that he had already had something,

if not of this admirable quality, across the river.) Then he gazed at him with sudden suspicion, quickly passing into a feeling more violent.

"Was it you told him about her? If I thought so——" He did not finish his threat, but instead slumped down into a chair by the table, and looked half-abstractedly at the bottle and beyond it at the fire. "Oh, Lord, Lord," he went on in a lower voice that quivered with feeling, "when I think how I used to come here and talk about her like I never talked to nobody else."

"You mean Constance Harriman?"

"Who else could I mean? Oh, you're a lord, too, so he says. Are you all skunks like that? Did you send him after her? Perhaps you've been coming it around the other one, Marion. Perhaps——"

"Stop, Dick," cried Basil sharply. He came across the room and sat down across the table from his visitor.

"Tell me, Dick, and pull yourself together—what has my brother done? I must know."

"He's ruined her." Dick spoke solemnly, as if for the moment his pity was greater than his anger.

"How do you know this? Did he tell you?"

Dick laughed ironically as well as half-drunkenly.

"No? Well, then, did she?"

Dick rose from his chair. When he spoke it was in a torrent of words so over-laden with anger, pity, shame, and half-blended astonishment at the scene of which he spoke that Basil sat dumb and fascinated.

"Did she tell me?" repeated Dick. "She told me. She told everybody at the church meeting up the creek. Willie Elwell was a-preachin'. And he prayed and he exhorted and then he prayed again until it was enough to drive anybody plumb out of their mind. And then the women commenced singing one of those high, creepy kind of hymns that goes through you, and Willie Elwell kept on right through it calling on sinners to come to Christ and confess their sins, till he worked himself up right powerful. And then old man Streeter's old woman and her daughter got the power and was on their knees by Willie Elwell and was a-screaming and praying and confessing to beat the band. I thought it was sort of comic like, and I looked at Con and then I see she was a-trembling and wild-looking.

"'Curious, ain't it?' I said to her, but she didn't seem to hear me. She just kept looking at Willie Elwell and kind of swaying with the hymn-singing.

And then she stood up and I could see her eyes and they looked like she didn't know where she was. But you could see how she was feeling something mighty powerful. Willie Elwell, he went on about the temptations and the weaknesses of the flesh and cursed 'em all and said how many poor sinners there was everywhere, men who was bad and women as was led astray through loving them. Then she broke out and told 'em, broke out before all them women that had been a-looking at her before as if she was mighty queer. She said she was an unworthy sinner, that she wasn't pure. And she went out to where them Streeter women was and kneeled down in the new pink silk dress. And she said he giv' her that and then she up and tore two great long gashes in it with her hands. And that made her cry more than anything somehow, and she broke down, and they all sang hymns and prayed like hell."

"And she told them it was my brother?" Basil put the question as Dick White paused for an instant and glowered at the fire.

"Willie Elwell asked her, 'cause he said he would make him marry her. He won't marry her."

"I'm afraid not," assented Basil.

"I could have told 'em that. There wasn't no good of their screeching and praying."

"What did you do? Did you say anything?"

"No, I just sat quiet, thinking and planning something."

"And afterwards?"

"Well, it was all over after a while and it seemed like Con waked up from a kind of dream.

" 'I dunno why I did it,' she says to me kind of stupid-like. And she didn't say she was sorry no more. And somehow she didn't seem ashamed like she was when she was repenting in church.

" 'He said he'd take me away,' says she. 'I guess he'll marry me if I ask him to. Then they can't say I'm so wicked.'

" 'I heard he was going up to Augustine on the *Rosie B.* to-morrow,' says I, and then she began to cry."

"Were you taking her home?" asked Basil.

"Yes. The preacher said he was going to take her home to her father and see that things was fixed up right. But she wouldn't let him; seemed almost like she had forgotten what had happened at the church meeting. Elwell got mad and he started off to Tomocala without her. I expect he'd go over to old man Harriman's alone. He ain't afraid. She come along with me." He stopped a moment and then: "I tried to comfort her," he went on medi-

tatively. "I kissed her, and she let me. Somehow she didn't seem to notice. I don't expect I'll ever kiss her again. Why don't he come home?"

Dick roused himself from the kind of reverie into which he had been sinking. He started for the door.

"I'll find him," he said. "I know where he'll be."

"Dick, what are you going to do?" Basil put the question as a sudden alarm and instinctive comprehension of the other's mood swept over him.

The answer came slowly, in Dick's drawl which was usually so good-natured.

"I'm going to fix him. I'm going to learn him what he can't come and do down here."

"Where are you going? To Harriman's? I'll come along with you."

"No," said Dick. "You ain't a-comin' with me; see? You're his brother and you've been a kind of friend of mine. I don't think it's just exactly appropriate that you should come along now. No, it ain't no use trying to stop my going, nor trying to go along with me."

Dick was by this time out of the cabin and down the steps to the path. He faced Basil against the black background of the night, one hand half in the

pocket where Basil guessed there was a pistol. He had suddenly become in himself a symbol of all the lawlessness of this lonely land, of all the rough-and-ready chivalry of the West.

"When a man does like that to a woman he's got to pay for it here. I don't want to do it, but if you try any tricks with me now I'll shoot you, too. I swear to God I will."

"You're drunk," said Basil.

"Well, perhaps I be," came slowly in reply. "But it was him got me to taking too much. He'll have to pay for that now, too."

He went slowly down the path into the darkness. Basil started to follow him, and was stopped by a sharp warning from the black shadows which made the danger seem real to him for the first time. He heard Dick clamber into his boat, and saw the dark spot creep along under the bank. The sound of rowing was now slow, measured, almost stealthy. It died away, and then Basil awoke from the kind of lethargy which had seemed to hold him.

Now he accused himself of cowardice. But while Dick had told his story Basil's sympathy had been with him and with Constance and her broken pride, rather than with Alkinloch. The bitter memory of his own fault and its punishment, the vivid presence

of his own repentance seemed to give him the right to judge. He condemned his brother. For the moment the ties of blood meant nothing. He had experienced almost rejoicing at Dick's anger and his threats of vengeance. Now his eyes were opened, and the figure of murder was before them. To prevent this seemed now his only duty. In a swift revulsion of feeling he branded himself a useless, inactive, faltering creature. Down to the wharf he ran, untied his rowboat and jumped in. The oars were gone; out on the dim expanse of water he thought he could see two white streaks which might be they, floating towards the inlet with the tide upon which Dick must have thrown them, cunningly making himself safe from pursuit as he stole upon the old grey house and its inhabitants. The wind was dead and the sailboat consequently useless. The white streaks drifted out of sight and reach. But this perverse opposition to immediate action stirred Basil, roused him as the cut of a whip lash might. The way by the water was cut off, but there still remained the land. Two green trails and a stretch of white sands divided him from Harri-man's, a path along which he had gone on many an errand, but on none more urgent than this on which he now sped, plunging through the black shadow of

the dwarf pine wood and racing across the starlit billowing of the dunes. What sinister tragedies the grey house might see to-night he did not dare to guess. His mind was intent on Dick creeping upon the house from the waterside, Dick aflame with rage, made rash by drink, Dick coming to this house where already, so Basil thought, fierce and dark passions might be alight. But he had no plans of action for his arrival. Indeed, when he stopped to think he knew that Dick, if he went straight to Harriman's, must inevitably arrive before he himself could. He only felt as he panted along the trail back from the sea that he alone could even have the forlorn hope of giving warning of the breaking of some dreadful storm. At last he saw the yellow glow of the window in the room where the jade pagoda stood, and as he stumbled up the steps caught sight of the Earl of Alkinloch within, and saw Marion by her mother's side. With a catch in his breath he realised that he had perhaps come in time, or that Dick had not come at all.

CHAPTER X

The Price

LATER Basil was to learn just how the company in the Harrimans' big room was assembled. Willie Elwell had come first, alone, to break the news, as he imagined, to a grieved and angry parent, and to aid him to meet the crisis as a Christian should. Old man Harriman was indeed angry, but his manner of confronting the situation was a mixture of contempt for the girl and half-admiration, half-hatred of her seducer, which infuriated the preacher, a profoundly devout and fanatical man in no way afraid of Harriman. There had been high and violent words between them. But Elwell remained, his thin, yellow, clean-shaven face hardened into an expression of grim determination to force events into channels that he, and not Harriman, should indicate. He was seated on one of the rickety chairs, near the old man's. Near by stood Marion and her mother, the girl's arm around the older woman's shoulders. Farther down the room, beyond the fireplace, and by the green pagoda, were Constance

and Alkinloch, as if they had just come in by the door on the river-side. Constance was in the pink silk dress, awkwardly made, yet lovely in the freshness of its colour in this dingy room. Freddy, standing a little behind the girl, was red-faced and defiant—at bay.

“Where’s Dick White?” Basil asked urgently, as he came in, panting from his last spurt through the loose sand of the trail. “Is Dick White here, I say?”

Every one turned to him, startled at his violent and sudden entrance, but it was the old man who was first to reply.

“Why should there be another of you whelps here?” he snarled. “Is he after the old woman?”

“Has he been here, Marion?” Basil asked, paying no attention to her father.

“No,” she answered.

“He mustn’t come.”

She slipped away from her mother, and went towards the door into the long passage.

“I’ll watch,” she said as she went by Basil, “and let you know if he comes.”

“No, I’ll go,” objected Basil.

“No, please, no. Stay and see if you can help Con. Poor Con!”

These few sentences were exchanged in lowered tones. No one seemed to notice Marion's departure; every one by this time seemed to have forgotten Basil's presence. It was true, he reflected, that Marion could see Dick land. Indeed, there had been time for him to land already, and now, reasoning more calmly, he thought it probable that he might, after all, have crossed the river to Tomocala. Basil could stay, he felt. He did not realise, perhaps, how the drama happening in the long room riveted his interest, made him half forget danger.

"Then you decline to do justice to this unhappy creature, this woman who is already your wife in the sight of God?" It was Elwell who put the question, making the well-worn phrase ring solemnly, spoken in his deep tones.

"I have to do justice to a great many people besides her. What are you meddling for?"

"She is one of His sheep."

"She's the daughter of that black old ram there." 'Alkinloch glared at Harriman. "This affair is between him and me. I know what he thinks of women. What does he expect? They say his wife had to run away from him because she couldn't stand his damned brutality."

"You lie! By God, you lie!" Old Harriman jumped up from his chair. His eyes fairly blazed at Alkinloch. "She never knew what unkindness was. She ran away because she was a——"

"Don't say it, man." The preacher's voice rang out so unexpectedly that it pulled up the speaker short.

"Glad to find you know the word I mean, Mr. Elwell," he said finally with a sneer, sitting down again.

"I ain't never blamed her." Constance spoke. Her head was thrown back proudly, and the light glistened on her sleek, dark hair. Basil suddenly remembered his first sight of her, before trouble had come. She met her father's gaze now with a courage as untamed as then.

"He'll take me away with him," she said, with a backward movement of her head towards Alkinloch. "And I'm a-going."

"No," cried Elwell.

"Certainly you're not, my dear." Old Harri-man's voice was silky.

"I certainly am." The girl's speech was gradually taking on more strongly the backwoods intonations of her stepmother. "What for you think I want to stay here?"

"Anything is better than a life of shame."

She turned on Elwell.

"Shame! What's that? Ain't this shame? Ain't we just niggers, pigs here? He knows; pa there. He knows anything would be better'n staying here. He knows how I hate him."

She paused a moment, looking at the old man contemptuously. Then her anger broke out, and she began:

"I ain't never told you, pa, just what I think of you, but I'm a-going to now."

As she went on they were all silenced, though varied emotions of resentment, astonishment, and horror must have moved them all to protest. For Constance, in her ignorance, borrowed from her father's own speech the terms of abuse for him. Blasphemous and foul oaths fell from her lips, and vile expressions rained down on his head. It was the tired, frightened mother who first found the courage to speak.

"Con, Con," she quavered, "you mustn't talk like that."

"How else should I talk, ma? I ain't ever heard any other sort of talk."

"You never heard me——"

"You've always been scared to speak out. If you

did, you'd speak about pa just as I do. He's a ——."

The sentence finished in another strange, abominable phrase. Alkinloch touched her lightly on the arm.

"Don't, old girl. Your mother's right."

The girl suddenly seemed to grow conscious, shy. When Willie Elwell spoke this time she looked at him with an almost frightened expression.

"Have you forgotten, you wretched and abandoned woman, that not six hours ago you knelt at God's feet and begged for mercy and forgiveness for your sins? Have you forgotten that Christ forgave you and that you were washed clean by His Blood? How has your soul turned black again within you? How can you turn away from the light of His love to sin and abomination and hell fire? What did you mean; answer me? What did you mean when you asked our prayers?"

"I dunno," she answered, with a stupid, half-comprehending air. "You made me feel queer. I did what you told me," she went on. "I asked him to marry me. But he can't 'cause he's a lord."

"Again I ask you, sir, as you value your honour and the salvation of your soul, will you make this girl your wife?"

"No," Alkinloch answered. "I tell you I can't. She understands."

"Then, Constance Harriman, you must give him up. You must let him go, that is, if the boys over to Tomocala ever let him go without doing you justice, which I doubt."

"He's going to show me the world," said Constance. "Besides," she added in a lower voice, "I can't let him go, nohow." She turned to Alkinloch and, swaying towards him, lifted her head and just brushed his cheek with her lips. There was a softer light in her eyes. "I can't let him go without me, nohow."

"You aren't going away." It was the old man who spoke. "But he's not going without you, neither. He was warned. He can't say he wasn't warned. You may think I'm an old man, but I'll teach you that my teeth aren't drawn yet."

"Basil! Basil!" It was Marion's voice, with a note of alarm in it. She stood at the door nearest the river-side of the house. "There's some one been out here underneath the window. I just saw him. Perhaps it is Dick."

Basil started down the room, but in spite of himself turned at the sound of a scream from Constance and a scuffle at its farther end. Old man Harriman

had a pistol in his hand, but the preacher, and an instant afterwards the girl, were upon him and had caught his arm. They struggled a moment and then Elwell, wrenching the weapon from him, stepped to the open window and threw it violently out. They heard it crackle as it fell upon a clump of stiff scrub palmettoes.

"It is written 'Thou shalt not kill,' " the preacher's voice boomed out.

"Dick, Dick," called out Basil at the door.

"Thou shalt not kill," repeated Elwell within. Then there came the sharp crack of a pistol shot. Looking back, Basil saw his brother sway and fall. Then down the path toward the river he saw a dark figure flying. Pulling his pistol out of his own pocket he aimed at it, shot, and then ran quickly down the path. He heard the clatter with which the fugitive threw himself into the boat. There came a shot in return, and Basil stumbled and fell with a quick, sharp pain in his leg. He got to his feet, however, and plunged down upon the dock. He heard the splash of oars, but the rowboat, lost in the shadow of the bank, he could not make out. He shot once at random. Then Dick's voice came out of the black distance:

"I got a line on you there on that dock," it said.

"I don't mean you no harm. But don't you try to get into one of them boats to follow me."

Basil hesitated, then with a feeling that no foolhardiness now could ever atone for his delay in the long room while Dick must have been hiding near, he started to step down into Alkinloch's boat, which lay alongside.

"Look out!" yelled Dick. Then Basil found himself caught from behind.

"He can shoot you, dear, he can shoot you. Come back. If you was to be hurt, I should die. Come back; oh, do!"

It was Marion, clinging to him desperately. The splash of oars grew fainter in the distance, but he could tell that Dick was now rowing with frantic haste.

"You can find him to-morrow," the girl pleaded. "Come back to your brother now, won't you?"

"Is he alive still?"

"Yes, and groaning. Pa says he's done for; and Willie Elwell's praying on his knees by his side. He'll want to see you if he's going to die."

Basil gave one look at the darkness of the river and then turned. Up the path he limped, conscious now of a sharp pain in his leg. As he went across

the long room towards his brother lying on the floor, he left a trail of tiny drops of blood along it. Marion saw this, and gave a cry as he knelt by Alkinloch's side.

Constance had stripped his coat and shirt open and had stanchd the little outward bleeding there was from his wound with a great mass of the thin, rose silk of her skirt. She was on the floor by his side, a hand on either of his shoulders, her pale, tragic face bent searchingly over his. By the fireplace, in the battered relic of a gilt Empire chair, sat the old man, puffing into the room a great cloud of blue-grey smoke from one of the cigars he imported from Havana.

Basil called his brother by name. Alkinloch slowly opened his eyes, and seemed to make a feeble effort to brush off Constance's hands upon his shoulders. The girl took them away silently, after one single gasping sob.

"Rum lot, Bassy," murmured the dying man. "Damn them." Then he seemed to grow pale with pain or faintness. Constance's head went down into the hollow underneath his shoulder. The whole crumpled mass of pink at his side was stirred convulsively by her crying. Finally Alkinloch spoke again.

"You've got my job now, old man, and you'll be going back to England, won't you?"

Basil made no answer, though his head sank lower as he bent over his brother, almost as if he were answering affirmatively.

"Good luck," Alkinloch went on, and then again, almost inarticulately, "Good—luck—for you. Don't begrudge you—Damn 'em. Damn——"

He seemed to faint away. A minute later there was one quick shudder of the prostrate figure. Old Harriman flicked a long ash off his cigar.

"He's gone, I guess," he said.

Basil put his hand on Alkinloch's breast.

"He's gone," he repeated.

"God in His mercy save his soul. We ask this for Christ's sake. Amen."

After Elwell spoke there was no sound for a minute except that of Constance sobbing. The preacher silently put the dead man's arms straight, and Mrs. Harriman with shaky hands closed his eyelids. At last Marion touched Basil timidly on the shoulder. Her face was wet with tears.

"Your leg's bleeding still," she said. "Won't you let me tie a cloth round it?" Basil seated himself in one of the deal chairs, and pulled up one trouser leg to the knee. He was bleeding still, but

only from a flesh wound. Marion found some rags just outside the door and, kneeling, put a bandage on. Then she went over to Constance, who lay still, her face hidden, on the filthy floor. She bent over her and whispered her name. The older girl rose slowly to her feet. She was no longer crying, and she wiped away the tears from her face with her pink sleeve.

"My goodness, Con," said her mother, "you've ruined your skirt."

The girl looked down. There were great scarlet patches on the rose-pink. She smiled ever so faintly and then said very gently:

"It don't matter, ma. He give me the dress, and it's only his blood on it. Besides I'm a-going up to change. I should have worn the blue anyhow to go away."

"Be you going away, Con? I should have thought you could stay here—now."

"She will stay, mother," interposed the old man. Constance turned her pale face toward him.

"No, I ain't a-going to stay, pa. Don't begin cursing and carrying on. It ain't nothing to me no more. You ain't nothing to me, pa, and you can't scare me no more. I'm growed up."

"Speak English, will you!" rapped out her father.

"I'd rather speak like ma than like you, pa. I'm going away, I tell you, to-night. He was going to make me see the world. Now he's killed and I'm going to see it by myself."

"Where are you going, woman?" Willie Elwell put to her sternly.

"First I'm going to find Dick White, and——"

"You aren't going away with him now? After this?" broke from Basil in amazed revolt.

"No, I ain't going away with him. I just want to find him." A look went across her face, a far-away something in her eyes which made Basil understand. He seemed to see her again, as she had appeared in his reveries earlier that night, marked out for tragic and ill-starred deeds and fate. He went quickly to her side, and catching her arm looked her straight in the eyes.

"I understand, Con. But don't. That's what I must do."

For an instant she drew away from him, and held her head more proudly, as if claiming vengeance as her own. Then suddenly the stupid, sullen, cunning look he had seen before in the inhabitants of the backwoods swept over and changed her whole face. She answered as if she had not understood him.

"I've just a-got to find him and then I'm going up North."

She started towards the door. Before it stood her mother. The events of the night had done something to rouse her, too, from the lethargy of years. It was as if in Alkinloch's death there had been emancipation for all in the old grey house. Old Harriman sat in his cloud of smoke, smiling his faint, mocking smile, but he was no longer ruler. He could still scoff, he could still make them suffer, but he could not command. Even bent, shrivelled Mrs. Harriman found a little courage, where she never had had any before.

"If you go, Con, it'll be powerful lonely here for me alone with your pa." For an instant she glanced at the old man. "It'll be mighty hard."

"You won't be alone, ma. You'll have Marion."

"Marion's a-going to be married."

Constance turned in astonishment to her sister, who was still kneeling by Basil's side, just finishing binding up his leg.

"Him?" she asked.

"Yes," answered the younger girl, her head pressed for a moment against her lover's arm.

Constance went across the room to the two.

"I'm glad, Marion," she said, and the girls kissed each other. Perhaps each wept a few tears.

Then Con spoke to Basil.

"You got the pick of us," she said. "And I guess you'll be good to her. Marion don't know much about men,—and things." She paused a moment, looking at them. "Ain't it wonderful," she went on, "you're going to marry her."

"Yes," said Basil, involuntarily pulling himself straighter.

"And you're a lord, too." Constance meditated.

The air somehow grew close, and Basil felt himself tugging at his thoughts, trying to hold them back from headlong flight. In the silence he heard old Harriman chuckle, and it seemed as if at that sound they were released and dragged him after them. He looked at the old man, and clenched his fists at his side in helpless rage.

"Yes, he's a lord, too, now, Con. He's going to go back to England and be the Marquess of Kingstowne some day, thanks to Dick White. He can't marry Marion now any more than his late lordship could marry you. So perhaps your ma and I will have our dear girl with us after all."

Basil heard Marion cry his name. And he remembered that he had said "No, no," hurriedly and

fiercely. He was vaguely conscious that old Harri-man went on talking. But for the time he sat among them alone with his own thoughts, face to face, at last, with his temptation.

He could realise now that he had never, even for one second, believed that his brother would not live. Even while he had delayed to take the final step that would link him forever with this new life and plunge him into eternal forgetfulness of the old, there had been no real doubt in his mind of the end. He had never believed that the world would have anything to set before him which could really tempt. But now on the floor before him lay Freddy, growing cold. And in the distance he seemed to see the flare of beacon lights along the coast of England with which the past signalled to him to return. There lay wealth, pleasure—more than that, duty. There lay everything which a year ago he would have thought made life worth living. Here on this barren, low-lying coast there was only forgetfulness, and love. But even if he could count the world well lost, could he (and here his memories poisoned the very fountain of his hopes), could he, who had proved so weak and unstable in the past, dare believe himself capable of unchanging love? His emotions had tricked him before when he had sworn, God

knew with what deep sincerity, to make Kitty happy always. Ought he not to ask himself whether they deluded him now? Would it not be the greater kindness, even to Marion herself, to wrench himself away now rather than stay and try to do for her what he had failed to do for Kitty.

Then flushing at his own thoughts, and despising himself for what suddenly seemed cowardly attempts to twist logic to his own uses, and to hide his own weakness under the cover of a pretended unselfishness and thoughtfulness, he faced his temptation squarely. Yes, it would be good to go home as he might now go. A sudden homesickness rushed over him. He saw the lights of London, and he breathed again the perfume of English gardens and the smell of heather. The whole land called him. For a moment at least he was ready to go back. For a moment he was ready, as he had been so often before, to buy his own happiness at the cost of a woman's. Again the world was too powerful for him. Again, if he could have seen clearly, it was proved that for him the only safety lay in flight beyond its reach, in refuge in the first Eden. For he stood not only face to face at last with real temptation, but looking squarely at treachery and dishonour.

A breath of wind stirred the pagoda bells and called him back to consciousness.

"Is it true, Basil, is it true?" Marion was asking him. The words were re-echoed from his memories.

He found courage to answer, "No." His thoughts had gone beyond control, but he could still force his words to speak for a better man than he felt himself to be.

Marion stood before him bending forward, her face pale and tear-stained, her hands clasped tight together. Her eyes searched his. His struggled not to answer. Yet what they saw wrung his heart. Her gold-crowned beauty, her love and her surrender complete and pathetic, burned themselves into his memory, making the vision of the future for ever bitter-sweet. It shamed him into a fresh struggle.

"I always knew I wasn't good enough for you, nohow," she said, "but you said you were happy. And I ain't forgot you only said we'd be married when your brother got well."

"We will be married now." He had a curious sensation that some one else spoke the words for him, yet, he thanked God, they were what he wished them to be.

"You don't need to be afraid to tell me, dear; I can understand. I'm growed up, too, like Con said. I guess we're all growed up after to-night." She cast one long glance about the room as if she saw it, and the world, with new eyes. "If it's right, I want to marry you and go to England with you,—because I love you."

"We won't go to England." The words came almost involuntarily from Basil.

Old Harriman chuckled.

"But you want to go, don't you? Tell me," she demanded with an odd note of command in her voice. "I must know."

"There are many reasons," he answered, speaking gravely, "why I should like to go. But there are at least as many why I want to stay here. You are one of them, you are the best reason."

"So I'd be keeping you here?"

"He can't take you to England, dear," interposed Constance gently, "except if he doesn't marry you. I know that; Fred told me. If you was his wife his folks would hate him. 'Cause it ain't right for a lord to marry a cracker."

"Your father ain't no cracker, Con." Mrs. Harriman spoke almost angrily.

"Will you take me to England without marrying

me, Basil?" Marion asked anxiously. "I don't care."

Willie Elwell sprang to his feet and fixed his stern eyes on the young man.

Basil smiled a wry smile.

"No, dearest," he answered gently. "I won't do that."

"Then I'm keepin' you here."

"Don't you want to keep me?" His weakness broke into a cry to her for strength. "Oh, try to keep me, dear."

"Yes, try, my dear." It was Harriman's scoffing voice. "You're a poor critter. But you," he spoke to Basil, "you're a poorer critter still. Be honest with her. If you're going to break her heart, have the courage to do it. What are their hearts for? Don't they break ours? He wants to go, but perhaps you can keep him, Marion."

"Do you want to go?" she asked again.

"I want to stay."

"If Dick had hit me, too, when he shot him, would you have wanted to go?"

"Yes," answered Basil. "There would have been nothing to keep me then."

She threw her arms around his neck and, kissing him, sobbed on his breast.

"All I want is for you to be happy," she murmured through her tears. Then detaching herself from his embrace, she slowly unwound the great chain of topazes from around her neck.

"May I give it to Con?" she asked. "She ain't never had anything pretty to wear, except this pink silk, and that's spoiled now."

Constance took the chain, and stood dumbly gazing on it, as if fascinated by its yellow lights.

"You must go to England, Basil."

He made no answer. Temptation, so it seemed, would not be routed. Again England called him. Again his mother's voice reached him, preaching duty. And again there stood before him a pale, golden-haired woman, ready to sacrifice her own happiness because she loved him. His brain and heart whirled in a turmoil of conflicting arguments and emotions. His face grew drawn and old as Marion watched and tried to read it.

"You must go to England," she repeated.

"How could I go and leave you here?" he broke out, putting this inner question to her, again in his weakness asking help from her strength.

She was silent an instant. A look of pain swept over her face; as she stood, swaying slightly, she put

her hand to her heart for one moment in a gesture which suddenly stirred bitter memories in Basil. Then she smiled faintly, like a frightened child, and it seemed to her lover, as he looked at her, that never had she seemed more the incarnation of innocence, of the simplicity of the primæval wilderness. Even as he felt that he was giving it up, he caught a vision lovelier than ever before of the new dream world which he had found by the Carnaveral, and he felt his heart contract with a pang of sorrow. Marion was still smiling faintly, tenderly, at him out of her pale-blue eyes.

"You'd let me go?" he asked. "And not be too unhappy?"

"You don't need to think of me," she said. "I can fix that."

Then her eyes swam with tears and the smile faded. She caught her mother's hand, and for a moment buried her head and muffled her sobs on the old woman's shoulder.

"Oh, ma, ma," she cried; "it wa'n't no use trying to be happy."

Then, with her arm held up to cover her tear-stained face, she went swiftly to the door. There she stopped, gave Basil one fleeting look, and went on. Outside in the night they heard her hurry

down the steps. Basil thought he heard her murmuring good-bye.

In the long room there was silence. The five who were left stared at each other questioningly. It was old Harriman who spoke. He suddenly pulled himself up from his chair and started across the room.

"After her, you cur!" he cried. "Good God, don't you see what she means to do?"

Mrs. Harriman began screaming shrilly, and in a rush together Basil and she were out of the house and down the path toward the dark water of the river.

The old man, following them, caught Willie Ellwell by the arm.

"Preacher," he said, "it's years since I thought much of women. But, by God, sir, they beat men."

CHAPTER XI

Good-bye, Tomocala!

By the river tiny waves were lapping against the dock and the boats, but there was no one there.

"Marion, Marion!" Basil called out.

Mrs. Harriman gripped his arm convulsively.

"Look, look!" she said.

Even before he saw he began tearing his coat off. Then somehow the night seemed to lighten, or their eyes grew accustomed to its blackness. On the dark tide that swept down the river they saw faintly a drifting something that sank again as they looked, below the surface of the little dancing waves.

"Thank God!" cried Basil, and he was as he spoke in the water, chilled by the approaching winter, swimming frantically out toward the spot where she had disappeared. His leg, where the wound was, was cut with a pain like a knife, and he was terrified lest he should have a cramp. The water seemed to stretch illimitably before him, a black waste where he searched vainly. Suddenly he heard Mrs. Harriman's voice again. "There,

there!" she screamed. And a little way off he saw rise like a ghost Marion's pale face and floating, yellow hair. The girl's arms struggled wildly, and the splashing helped to guide him. He caught hold of thick masses of her hair. The tide was against him now, and the distance from the dock had increased. His wounded leg was almost useless. Just how he swam as far as the boat's stern, from which Willie Elwell stretched out helping hands to him, he never knew. But it was accomplished. Marion lay limp and almost unconscious on the wharf. He found himself wrapped in the preacher's coat, and saw Marion carried up to the grey house in Elwell's arms, followed by her mother and Constance. He noticed how the wind had drifted the clouds apart till in tiny patches the stars shone. He heard old Harriman speak to him in an altered and a kindly voice.

"You all right?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Basil, without turning to look at him. "I'm all right *now*;—all right."

And indeed for him in the few minutes just gone by the world had changed. Within had happened the miracle, wrought by the catastrophe of the night. All doubts and all hesitations had vanished. He walked in the serene, clear atmosphere left by

a storm that has passed, and before him he saw stretching, clear and inevitable, the path by which he was to go. A half-hour ago there had been for him flaring beacons on the cliffs of England, the sky he had seen crimsoned by the reflection of the lights of London. Now the cloudy heavens arched over only his own Floridian land and river. The wilderness welcomed him home at last.

The world had tried its last fascinations, had set its last lure for him, and had failed. It had put its temptations before him, calling them alternately pleasure and duty, and his weakness had almost yielded.

Marion had saved him, choosing in her abandonment of self-sacrificing love the one way in which he could have been saved. He thought with awe-struck horror of how closely his miserable history had come to repeating itself. Once before his weakness and his disloyalty had exacted the sacrifice of a woman's life; when Marion's white face and floating hair rose upon the cold surface of the Carnaveral he had seemed to see Kitty lying dead among her pillows, the pale gold of her hair streaming across them. The intolerable shame of that first sacrifice became doubly intolerable now. As he had struggled against the ebbing tide of the river he had

sworn that if he could not save Marion he would at least die with her, and be swept in her arms out through the Inlet with its white-capped breakers over the sandbar to the oblivion of the Atlantic beyond. And if they should come safe to land he knew the future. There could be no reasons, no arguments whatever, to dissuade him. His life was to be always with Marion and to make her happy; that was the only reparation for the past, it was the only conceivable duty he could find in life. And it was indeed the only conceivable hope. Flight must be made still further from the world, Tomocala itself was the world in little. Tomocala must be left behind, as London had been. It must be abandoned for some remoter solitude, some perfect isolation in the mysterious and untracked depths of the tropic wilderness. Earlier ages had sought in it the legendary Fountain of Eternal Youth. Something of the influence of their old adventures still seemed to linger like a hint of magic in the land. Basil now could believe that he would find for himself some hidden Eden where blue skies and love were perpetual, and where history had never begun and the world was not. This was the solution of his problem. In his new home the stars should be as near and as companionable as the earth. History

should begin again, and begin aright. He would in time cease to believe that anything had ever been real but his own Paradise. Marion and he, like gods, would re-create the world that they might live in it. As once to London, he now said good-bye to everything. He felt a passionate and solemn happiness, disturbed only by a new feeling of sorrow for the humanity that could not discover, as he was discovering, this mystic gate of exit from a world gone wrong.

In the long room of the old grey house they laid the body of Lord Alkinloch on the cot. Mrs. Harri-man found somewhere a clean white cloth and spread it on the face. Near the foot sat the old man, puffing a cloud of smoke like incense into the brightness around two candles some one had placed by the dead man's side. The grey-bearded, old face was expressionless, almost inscrutable. Yet somehow the happenings of the night seemed to have touched him too. He seemed, as Basil had never seen him before, withdrawn into himself, meditating in abstraction and in the presence of his own strange memories. On a deal chair was the preacher, praying in a low, monotonous voice, as if he spoke only for himself and for Alkinloch lying near. There had been almost nothing said since the

little procession came up from the river. Upstairs they heard the women's voices, then the mother came silently into the room, and Harriman, rousing himself, said:

"Marion will be cold, ma. Give her a glass of my port."

"Why, pa, will you let me?" the woman answered, looking half-frightened. "I guess it'll get her het up a little."

"How is Marion, Mrs. Harriman? Is she coming down?" Basil asked.

"She's all right. Yes, she'll come down when she's changed into something. I don't reckon as we'll many of us go to bed to-night. We'll want to watch by the corpse."

She disappeared, and there was silence again. Finally at the door he saw Marion.

"Are you all right, girl?" her father asked.

"Yes, pa," she answered, then she crossed to Basil.

"You'd ought to have let me go, dear," she said.

"I'll never let you go," he replied fervently. "Never. . It's all been a mistake, dearest, an awful dream. Forget it. I never meant to go to England. I shall never want to go."

"I only wanted for you to be happy. And I thought——"

"The only way to make me happy"—he interrupted her—"is to keep me here for ever."

"You're sure?" she asked again, and again she threw herself upon his breast and cried, but this time with happiness.

"Mr. Elwell," Basil turned to him, "will you marry us?"

"What, now?"

"Now, if that's possible."

There was some delay before the ceremony could take place. The bride was dressed in the same tattered blue she always wore. But Constance hung round her neck and gave back to her with a bridal kiss the glittering, yellow chain of gems. And the girl's mother, disappearing for a moment, came back excited and flustered, as mothers are apt to be at other weddings, with a little strip of the cheapest, coarsest cotton lace.

"I got it to Tomocala once, pa," she said, as with trembling hands she pinned it around Marion's neck. "It cost a quarter, I ain't never dared tell you till now. Don't it make her look pretty, pa?"

"Nobody could look lovelier, Mrs. Harriman." Basil spoke, and the old woman glowed with pride.

"She could ha' had my pink dress," said Constance, "only it's spoiled." She suddenly went across to the cot where her dead lover lay, and knelt in her soiled, blood-stained, pink finery by his side. Later she rose, but all through the service she stood there, and Basil could not help entertaining the fantastic notion that, as the words were said which were to join him and Marion as man and wife, Constance felt that in some silent, mystical ceremony of the same sort she and Alkinloch who had gone, had a part.

It was towards midnight that they stood before Elwell. The night was silent, but in the little hush before he began to speak, a bird somewhere outside chirped a few plaintive, sweet notes, as it woke for a confused moment from its sleep. It seemed to Basil to bring greeting from the wilderness, to promise him and his new bride welcome into its secret heart. He was at peace with the sands and the river and the sea, with his world that was to be. The marriage service, patched together from Elwell's memory, had nothing of the rich beauty which Basil remembered. It was simpler, as perhaps befitted their primitive surroundings. But the strangeness of the scene and hour and the presence of the grim witness from the bridegroom's

family, lying stark on the narrow cot, gave solemnity to the words, and the power in Elwell that moved the church meetings, that had urged Constance to confess, and ultimately had brought on the whole tragedy of the night, now made the sacrament which came last in the hurried march of events a strongly emotional act.

Questions were duly put and answered, and at last the minister asked for the ring. There was no ring, no one had thought of it, no one had remembered. Elwell paused, awkwardly. Basil instinctively turned to Marion's stepmother.

"Mrs. Harriman," he began, "have you——"

He stopped, for he could see that even through her wrinkled, yellowish skin she was flushing deep.

"No," she said, "I ain't got one."

"Well, I guess we'll have to go on without it," said Elwell. "It's jest as legal."

"I'd 'a' liked Marion to have one," murmured Mrs. Harriman.

The minister had started again when suddenly he was interrupted by the old man, who seemed labouring under the stress of some strong and unusual emotion.

"Wait a minute," he said, and he went across the floor to the jade pagoda. Putting his hand inside

and then up it, he drew out a box of Chinese lacquer. Every one watched in silence while he fumbled at his watch-chain for a key and opened it.

"What's the good of bringing 'em up so that they shan't be like all the others of their damned female race?" he asked the company. "They're all alike. But Marion's not such a bad lot, after all. Here, young man, here's a ring," and he lifted a band of gold from the box. "Here's a ring that was left here once by some one who went away. Give it to Marion and listen to me, both of you. If you don't make each other happy may you be cursed for ever. If you don't treat her well, I'd kill you if I could. And if she was to go away from you and leave the ring behind as it was left once before, I'd serve her the same."

Basil was looking at the girl. She swayed slightly towards him. He bent over and kissed her on the forehead. It might have been an appointed part of the sacred ceremony.

"We can promise," he said in a low voice.

"It was her mother's ring. I loved her, too, before I found out what she was and hated her. You're a pair of fools, but if you're determined to run the risk, here, take this thing. Get on with your job, Elwell."

Harriman seemed to repent of his momentary lapse into kind speech. He was gruffer than ever when he spoke to Elwell, and he ostentatiously struck matches and relit his cigar during the last prayer. Yet the last prayer came, the final words were said, and Basil and Marion stood together, man and wife.

Then the dead again claimed their attention. Basil sat by his brother all night, his wife by his side asleep, with her tired head on his shoulder. Old Harriman, in another chair, snored loudly, his grizzled head thrown back; Lord Alkinloch's body lay upon the old man's usual bed. Somewhere upstairs Mrs. Harriman found a bed for the preacher, and she herself must have gone to her own. Basil remembered afterwards that towards dawn, when his eyes were heavy with sleep, Con came into the room, dressed again in the blue she always wore. She went silently to the bedside, kissed the dead man's forehead lightly, and then disappeared again, to Basil's drowsy perceptions like a figure in a dream. When morning came they found she had slipped away. Never again did Tomocala see her. That same day too Dick White was missing. It was thought in the town that they had gone away together. Only those who had been in the grey house when Lord

Alkinloch died remembered what she had said then, and wondered whether the forest or the river hid the evidence of some tragedy.

Of what happened to her in after years some little can be told. Men who knew New Orleans, though perhaps not its better side, in the late seventies, will remember a woman called Constance, a dark and splendid beauty with angry eyes. She was taken from a resort of the most doubtful character, so the story goes, by a rich young Brazilian, who married her. Rio knew her later, gorgeous in a kind of barbaric splendour. Then fate brought her tragedy, the tragedy that had seemed to dog her footsteps always. She had a lover, and she tried to fly with him, as long years ago her mother was said to have fled from the house by the Carnaveral. The plot was discovered and the husband shot her with her lover—the story makes one wonder and fear what may have been the truth about the grave upon which the China tree dropped its purple flowers in Tomocala.

This all, however, is history by the way. To the watchers at Harriman's the grey daylight came at last. Mrs. Harriman brought coffee, and Basil and Willie Elwell prepared to take the dead man to the village for immediate burial. They offered, too, to

search for Constance, but the old man with violent words forbade them, saying the girl should never enter his house again. Basil turned to the mother.

"Perhaps it's just as well," she meditated. "I shall be powerful lonely. But Con wanted to go anyhow, perhaps she's happier away."

"What are you going to do about Dick White?" Elwell asked his companion as they rowed slowly across the river.

"Make a deposition of my evidence this morning," replied Basil, "and let the authorities, if there are any, do what they like. Isn't there something about vengeance being the Lord's? I can't take justice between Dick and poor Fred into my hands."

In the afternoon he crossed the river again to the old grey house, alone this time. On the dock Marion waited for him, and as the setting sun again crimsoned the Carnaveral he took her to his cabin.

The farewells had been brief. Basil gave the old man a deed of the Kingstowne tract, and the old woman a bolt of black silk from the Emporium. Marion clung to her mother, but her eyes, though wet, were happy as she stepped down into the boat.

"Be you going to live in your house?" asked Mrs.

Harriman timidly, "'cause then I could see Marion sometimes."

"No, Mrs. Harriman," answered Basil, "only to-night. To-morrow morning we're going south in the sailboat."

"Far?"

"As far as ever we can."

"Are you going to live in Miami?"

"No," said Basil, and he laughed. "In Paradise, I think."

Then they floated out upon the streaming river. The setting sun which had shone upon their first love-making now smiled upon the beginning of their journey into the unknown. The clouds and sea took on magic tints, and in their eyes was the vision of happiness. London, Tomocala, the world sank below the horizon. Nothing existed except their two selves and love.

BOOK III

THE EVERGLADES

CHAPTER I

Eden

Six islands there were, rising with their weight of palmettoes and orange trees from the middle of a clear lake, the shores of which were great belts of sawgrass, the outlet from which was a long, winding waterway which led to labyrinths of twisting channels through the reeds, to other lonely lakes bearing on their placid bosoms other heavily luxuriant islands, fertile oases in the watery desert of the Everglades. Thirty miles away the San Josefa River went in rapids down over the great limestone rim that encloses the brimming waters of the central basin. At the mouth of the river lay the few scattered houses around the deserted Fort Scott. But in that southernmost region even now civilisation seems a mere outpost on the edge of the unconquered Everglades. In those days the thirty miles might well have been a hundred.

Secret ways there were into the mysterious heart of Florida, this was sure. Old Joe Manetti, who lived in a cabin alone at the head of the San Josefa,

could thread his way safely, it was said, through the network of narrow passages beyond his house, guiding himself by the stars and gaining strange information from the inexplicable set of currents this way and that in the curious, clean, sweet waters which are alive as are those of no mere swamp or marsh. But Manetti was half Minorcan, half Seminole Indian, and guarded his knowledge safely. He was gatekeeper of the Everglades, it was said; a guard for the inhabitants within. That inhabitants there were the legends of the coast had always maintained. And it was not uncommon in the settlements by the sea for men to assert that, fishing or shooting beyond the rapids of the San Josefa, they had heard voices beyond impenetrable barriers of sawgrass, seen canoes disappear furtively around distant corners, or even come upon the huts which these unknown people called home. But these accounts varied, and Joe Manetti chuckled derisively when questioned as to their authenticity. Through long years the wilderness hid safely those who had sought its refuge. As once the dwarf wood on the peninsula at Tomocala had concealed a golden rosebush, so through the years the Everglades shut out from the world the six islands where roses bloomed more prodigally than ever they had among the pines.

Six tiny isles there were, lying close together and connected with rude wooden bridges which rose with something of the curve of those in the Chinese landscape on a willow-pattern plate. Here in the sheltered heart of Florida there is little change in the seasons, all the year round flowers bloomed, gardens flourished, and fruits grew purple and gold as they ripened. On the island round which the others seemed to hang like a jewelled circlet stood a low house built roughly of palmetto logs, embowered in fragrant orange trees and hibiscus blazing with scarlet blossoms. The long veranda was half enclosed by the growth of climbing crimson roses, tawny trumpet-vine, and white star-jessamine. By the water's edge, where the dock was, there was a kind of rude terrace, one tangled mass of yellow roses. Near by along the shore grew hundreds of irises, a great patch of white, pale-yellow, and deep purple, with blue forget-me-nots in between. Scarcely an inch of the home island did not flame with colour and greet one with heavy fragrance, while around the sister islands seemed to offer to load your table with simple fruits of the earth, as the sparkling lake to supply fish, and the low shores beyond to give you wild birds and their eggs. Here in this generous Paradise within the wilderness life

seemed given with full hands. Here within the enclosure of the Everglades, as once in Tomocala the secret rose had bloomed, so now hidden from the world in primæval solitude flourished happiness and love for Basil and Marion, as in the first Eden. Summers came and winters, the birds migrated north to return again. Nothing seemed to mark the years but the coming of three curly, golden-haired children. Perhaps the passing of time may have seemed to bring forgetfulness with it. And certainly Basil, in this world created from the very substance of his dreams, could play his part, was competent, was a man at last. Here he wrought no mischief, here indeed he made these human creatures happy, here he was beholden to no man for the living he made by the work of his own hands. And it was something that in England great useless revenues could go to the unhappy and unfortunate who could not live their lives as he was doing, who could not fly for ever from a wretched world. As the years went by he could come to feel that some reparation, some atonement had been made, and that he need no longer bow his head in utter shame. Yet reparation and atonement were not quite complete. England over the waters still called for another sacrifice, still signalled to him that his work in her

world must be done by a substitute since he himself had proved unworthy.

When all else faded he could still see this message flashing from distant white cliffs.

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By the dock one morning lay a rowboat. In it had been placed a small leather trunk and a dressing-bag, the luggage the boy's father had brought from that distant, strange England before the boy was born. For years they had excited the children's admiration. Now it was perhaps just the possession of these marvellous treasures which made it seem real at last to Helen and Constance that Ed, having attained the great age of ten, was to go away. Of course they had known always that this time would come. They had been told that across the lake, at the end of many winding channels through the reeds, beyond great belts of sawgrass, oh! so far away, lay something called the world. In this world, perhaps across greater lakes, wider channels, there was the place called England. That was father's land, as this was mother's. Father stayed in mother's land because he loved mother so. But they, though they too loved mother, were some day to go to father's land. Ed was to go first, because he was older, also because he was a boy and

there was so much that he must do in England. In England, so it seemed, was father's mother, all alone. She was old; that meant that her hair was not gold like mother's, nor her face pink and beautiful. It meant that she was lonely and that she needed Ed, to take care of her, since father could not go, but must stay here to look after mother and the little girls. In England Eddie had to do all that father could not do, had not done. Sometimes Helen and Constance thought this must be a great deal, even for a boy so old as ten.

This was the day of his going. Father was to take him in the boat. They were to camp one night. The next day they would come to Joe Manetti's house on the San Josefa River. (Manetti they knew, he came once a year with a boat piled high with boxes of clothing and nails and seeds and garden tools which he got for father at a place called Fort Scott, where as many as two hundred people lived.) Manetti was to carry Ed to Fort Scott, and there some one from England was to meet him and row him, they supposed, to father's land, in another boat, while father came home again.

Ed's journey was to take a fortnight, and since it was so long, it was hoped that his companion would not object to screech-owls. For it had been

secretly planned by the three children that two of these birds, in a wooden box, should be conveyed as a gift to father's mother. The secrecy was necessary because—well, if father *had* a fault it was a distaste for these birds as pets. In the dusk the night before they had stealthily dragged the box to the terrace by the water's edge, and hidden it in the tangle of roses, to be produced at the very moment of departure.

The night had gone quickly, though Eddie thought he had not slept at all. He had a confused memory of some one coming into his room in the blackness and crying by his bedside. He thought he had put out a little hand, and called, "Mother," and that the crying sound had ceased as some one took his hand and covered it with soft, warm kisses. But this was only vaguely remembered. He seemed to have lain in the darkness and wondered, till his head almost cracked, about England. The name he had always known, but lately it had seemed to grow solemnly beautiful. Merely to think of it made him almost a man, filled him with great hopes that almost frightened him. Merely to talk of it with father seemed to draw them closer together than they had ever been. For it was not only that in England and the world he could see and

learn and enjoy as was never possible on their six islands; in England he could do something for father which no one else in the world could do, something which would make father happier because of it every hour of every day and every night, while he was fishing, or shooting, or pruning the orange trees, or weeding the garden, or feeding the pets that Eddie had to leave behind. If in England he was loving and kind always to father's mother, if he was always good and honest and loyal and generous, people—there were many of them in England, more than in Fort Scott—people would tell each other whose boy he was, and father away here in Florida would know and would be proud and happy. When father had talked to him like this he had trembled with a strange, new excitement, but he had lifted his head and taken father's hand in his and promised. It was so wonderful that he could do anything so great for father.

They had talked again together the last night. The little girls had gone to bed, and mother was busy in the kitchen wing. Basil and the boy walked out for a minute to the veranda, to look at the stars, to listen to the lapping waters of their little lake, and to smell the perfumed air around them. Basil picked a great rosebud from a bush near by and,

when they came indoors again, shut it up in a small box, and gave it to his son.

"There's another thing you must do for me in England, son," he said. "I've asked you to do a lot of things, haven't I, old man?" he added with a smile. "You must know, Eddie, that when I came away from England some one I loved very much had died—died, you know, as the little dog did, that Joe Manetti brought you from Fort Scott. It was some one I loved as I love mother now. When you are older they will tell you about her, and show you her picture. I want you to go with your grandmother to the place where she lies. There will be plenty of flowers there, I think, but I want you to put this rosebud from our garden here there, even if it is dried and old, and I think somehow she will understand that you are there and that you've come to tell her about us and our islands here, and that we are happy. And she'll understand, too, that you're going to be a good boy and an honest man, and if you are that always, she will be proud and happy, just as your mother and I are here. You see you can make everybody happy at last, if you will, old son."

Then for one instant father, sitting by the table, put his head down upon the box where the rosebud

was and—no, it couldn't of course have been that father cried. In a moment, at any rate, he was smiling as he kissed the boy good-night. In his room Eddie, though he dozed occasionally, kept a kind of vigil, filled with solemn thoughts, a tiny knight-errant about to go forth on a great quest. When the east began to crimson he was up and out, saying good-bye to every nook and corner of his little world, dividing its sovereignty between the admiring Helen and Constance trotting at his heels.

The sun rose, there was breakfast. And mother smiled, so perhaps he had only dreamed that she had cried at night. They embarked in the boat—[alas, poor screech-owls, destined never to leave the Fortunate Isles!]—and rowed away. Mother in a white dress with an arm around each of his sisters stood on the dock, the morning sun making her wonderful hair shine, oh! so brightly. The mists of the morning had cleared away and the green, fertile islands in their lonely lake were brilliant in the clear air. Some sudden sense of their beauty must have come to the small traveller, for turning to his father, he said:

“Will England be better than this, father?”

“For you, old son,” Basil had answered. “Not for me. When you're older, and come back to visit

us perhaps I can tell you more. Look at home now, how beautiful it is! Look at your mother and your sisters. You'll never see any one lovelier and better in the whole world. Still the world is good. You and I will divide it up between us like kings. You shall have England and all the other countries. You take good care of England, dear, for I love that too. I'll keep this; this is Eden, this is Paradise. And I've a right to it at last."

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