



IT TAKES ALL KINDS

By
Louis Bromfield



Harper & Brothers Publishers

NEW YORK and LONDON

1939

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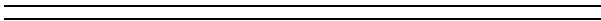
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FIRST EDITION

H-O

The story BETTER THAN LIFE was originally published serially under the title of AND IT ALL CAME TRUE and is published in England under the title of IT HAD TO HAPPEN. The story McLEOD'S FOLLY was originally published serially under the title of YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE.

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Bitter Lotus^[1]

[1] “*Bitter Lotus* is a technical experiment—that of taking three characters from *The Rains Came* and allowing them to work out their destinies in a different story and a fresh background.”

IN THE beginning Tom Dantry came to Nivandrum by accident. When he went aboard the *Vivandière* at Penang he did not even know whither she was bound. He had been for nine months in the Malay States and he was sick of the place, with that sickness and boredom which had overcome him again and again in one place after another in half the countries of the world. And he had come aboard quite drunk, as sick of himself as of the States, thinking, “I’m nothing but a damned bloody useless neurotic. I might just as well shoot myself and be done with it.” But at the last moment, instead of shooting himself, he had come aboard the *Vivandière*—he did not know why he chose her, save that she was French and a little untidy and unlikely to turn up at any big prosperous ports where he would meet people he knew and have to drink all day and half the night in clubs and bars and meet women of his own class, or something near to it, which was worse.

If you asked him why he was a damned neurotic he could not have told you. He had thought about it a good deal, until presently, after several years, his whole character had changed. In the beginning he had been what is called an

extravert, rushing about frantically, seeking to devour fun and excitement and life in great gulps, and by now, when he came drunk on board the *Vivandière*, he had reached that point where he thought no longer of the world in relation to himself, but only of himself in relation to the world. And that, he knew, for he was an intelligent fellow, made him a bore. And there were moments when he felt not only that he was a bore to others, but to himself, which was far worse. Bored with himself, he had begun lately to drink, not moderately as an occasional celebration as he had always done, but earnestly and steadily, to get away from himself, for he had no longer any faith in a change of scene. Suddenly one night in an awful moment of lucidity, he had discovered that ever since the war he had been going from place to place, not from any genuine restlessness or even from curiosity, but only to escape from himself. And wherever he arrived he always found himself.

At that time he was thirty-four, which is not a great age, and he might have begun a wholly new life, save that he had no desire to begin again. There was, he knew, something dead inside him, something which had been dead ever since they had dug him out of a mine hole in Flanders at the age of nineteen, given him the Victoria Cross, and invalided him out of the war for good. But by the time they dug him out, he had had enough of living—too much of it—and now, when he looked back on the rescue, he knew that in his heart he had been sorry when he found himself alive once more in a London hospital. It was as if his spirit had already accepted death and resented being dragged back to life.

He did not regard this theory of his own futility as an excuse. He merely accepted it as a possible explanation. He

had hated the war. He hated the killing and the danger and the insanity of the whole spectacle. He had been out of it forever, and then they played him the dirty trick of bringing him back to life in a world which from that moment on disgusted him. He knew now that all the fun he had had, all the reckless, vicious living, had not been fun at all, but only hysteria, the hysteria of a man trying to get back what had been taken from him as a boy. And he had been cursed, too, with enough money to live well, and with friends, too many friends, and with good looks and education and charm, so that he had never been forced to face a cold world and take himself by the scruff of the neck and work in an orderly fashion.

“No character,” he would say to himself. “Now at thirty-four, I suppose you could say that I have no character, not that that means anything either. Hell!”

He hated self-pity. He hated thinking about himself, but neither thing was he ever wholly able to escape. And while he had been running away from himself, he had been looking desperately for something which might have been peace or stability or faith, and was perhaps a mixture of all three. You would never have known or even suspected, as you sat drinking with him in some bar in the Far East, what went on inside the good-looking, well-shaped head. He never bored you with it. All his talk was trivial and noncommittal, like the talk of any remittance man. He saved all his despair for the moments when he was alone, and he hated those moments; that was one of the reasons why he was so often mixed up with women and never in love with any of them. Women liked him; they even fell in love with him all too easily, and so the game was easy enough; the difficult part was in escaping. There always came a time when he had to run away

because that was the easiest way out. He had never been in love since he was twenty-two, and he was still in love with the same woman, although he had not seen her for ten years and she couldn't possibly be the same woman any longer.

When he came aboard the *Vivandière* at Penang, he was running away again, this time from a woman who lived in the hotel, whose husband's business took him round and round the Malay States, the Dutch East Indies and Indo-China. He did not blame her, and he knew that in her heart she loved her husband more than himself, but he had had enough. So he got drunk in the Runnymede Bar after writing a note to say that it was finished and that she would never see him again, and came aboard.

The captain was a Breton, small with ruddy cheeks, black hair and bright blue eyes—a man who knew his way about in the world. When he saw Dantry, he thought, “This fellow is all right,” and took him aboard even though he was drunk. He even kept the *Vivandière* in port another few hours to make the necessary alterations in the ship's papers. He was not a soft man, but there was something in the look of Dantry which affected him. He had a feeling that Dantry was the sort of man who shouldn't be as drunk as he was, a man perhaps who was on the downgrade for reasons which the captain himself could not fathom, a man whom he felt inclined to help. He was not a soft man, but men much harder than he had felt the same way about Tom Dantry's easy-going charm. Even drunk, Dantry was not offensive like most men. Neither was he pathetic as many drunken men can be. The captain liked him. He felt that for reasons he could not quite understand the presence of this odd passenger would make

the long voyage home more pleasant for everyone on the ship from himself to the meanest of the stokers.

And so it proved. The presence of Tom Dantry, drunk or sober, always made the world seem a brighter, cheerier place. For he had been born one of the blessed whose vitality and good looks and charm have a way of making the world seem to the less fortunate a brighter and more agreeable place.

When he went aboard he knew nothing of the ports at which the ship might touch, save that in the end it was bound for St. Nazaire, and that meant France and Europe and home where he did not want to go. He would, he told himself, leave the ship at some port on the way back—if necessary the last port east of Aden—for he was sick of Europe. To him it seemed that Europe was dying, and dying or not, the spectacle was unpleasant and disgusting, like that of a man stricken with plague. The East was better. He felt no desire to do his small part in helping his own world to recover, for in his heart he felt that it was time for it to die. Better die than go on making a hideous spectacle of itself. He did not much care where he left the ship so long as it was not in Europe.

The next morning, as the ship left the lovely harbor of Penang, he rose from his berth and inquired the route of the ship. It was, he learned, bound for the Andaman Islands, for the Cocorandos, for Nivandrum, Aden, Port Said and St. Nazaire. He had, it seemed, chosen without knowing it a ship which touched only the most obscure ports, a ship which, at the moment, suited him to perfection.

“And Nivandrum?” he asked of the little Breton captain. “What is Nivandrum?”

“It is the port where we load copra and spices,” he said. “It used to be one of the great ports of the East ... two hundred

years ago. It is a dead place now. One can't even enter the harbor. The ship has to anchor off the Great Bar."

The Andaman Islands, he found, were dreadful and barren, inhabited by convicts and aborigines, and the Cocorandos were lovely but an old story, so as the ship approached Nivandrum he felt no very great curiosity. He had heard too many times of the charm of this island or that one, only to find them nearly all the same in the end, beautiful, banal and monotonous. He was not even impressed by the statement of the hard little Breton that it was a lovely spot with *un caractère tout à fait spécial*, different from obvious places like Bali and Penang and Tahiti. He liked the captain and he liked the untidy little *Vivandière*, and for seven weeks he was happier than he had been for a long time, perhaps because there were no women in that world to trouble him and nothing familiar to arouse memories or regrets. He would, he thought, stay aboard the ship as far as Aden and there find another boat bound East again. It would not be a bad way to spend one's life, always at sea, always free from the complications in which he found himself entangled the moment he went ashore.

It never occurred to him that when he reached Nivandrum he would leave the ship with the intention of remaining there forever.

Long ago in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it had been the richest port of all the coast. From Nivandrum were shipped the cargoes of silk and cardamom, cinnamon and pepper, which brought fabulous prices in far-off Europe. In those days it had belonged in turn to the Portuguese and the Dutch, and they had built houses there and churches, and first the Jesuits and Carmelites had come and after them the Dutch Protestant missionaries, and the governors and the traders had built themselves fine houses and lived in a style they could never have known at home. And then slowly the great river which carried down the earth of the vast burning red plateau that lay inland beyond the mountains, piled up a great barrier of mud and sand at the harbor's mouth and Nivandrum died, slowly strangled by the Great Bar, for no great trading ships could cross it, and for most of the year it was unsafe for ships to anchor outside in the open sea.

One by one the traders and the missionaries left and the trade moved far to the north and the south to more favored ports, and presently Nivandrum reverted to the people of the coast and there were no more Europeans and no more ships. The great houses remained—beautiful houses in the baroque style, executed by local workmen and painted shades of pale green and pink, yellow and blue. For a time the people of Nivandrum, on the principle of squatters' right, tried living in them, but in the end they went back to living in their own clean, small houses made of bamboo and thatched with the fronds of coconut palms, and the houses were left to ghosts and cobwebs, belonging to no one, claimed by no one, until the greedy old Ranee laid claim to them. They had no value,

for there were no tenants, but she had a way of claiming anything which lay about loose.

During the winter season, when the great ocean was still, two or three ships like the *Vivandière* called for bits and pieces of cargo, copra and spices, coconut matting and cheap brass ware, anchoring outside to be loaded by the *wallum* boats which could cross the Great Bar at high tide. There was a broken-down, narrow-gauge railway which ran from the cities beyond the high plateau down the mountains to the stifled port, but no one ever came by it. Only two Europeans lived in Nivandrum, one a Cockney called Carleton, who managed to scrape a living from his coconut palms and by a little trading, and a Dane called Rasmussen, who ran the Grand Oriental Hotel, whose only clients were Mees Opp, the State doctor, an occasional half-caste commercial traveler and the officers and the crews of the occasional tramps which called at the dead city during the winter season.

Vaguely Dantry knew that the whole coast was beautiful, a coast which somehow had been overlooked in the admiration of the sick West for Bali and the South Seas, and as the *Vivandière* cast her anchor outside the Great Bar, he could see the beauty of the distant blue mountains covered by rain-drenched jungles; but it was not until the ship's boat with himself and the captain had pitched across the Great Bar and entered the narrow mouth of the harbor between all the fishing nets, that he became aware of the extraordinary melancholy quality of the place. Slowly, as the boat advanced, the harbor opened up before him, its seven islands and the mainland covered by groves of coconut palms with the pale gleam of the deserted old Dutch and Portuguese houses showing between the trunks of the trees. The lovely

wallum boats, with the nostalgic look of China about their bows, moved back and forth across the water, some propelled by half-naked boatmen, others driven slowly like ships in a dream by the breeze from the jungle-covered mountains that filled their great sails of torn coconut fiber cloth. The water beneath the boat was green and clear. The little Breton captain had, he saw almost at once, been right. The place had *un caractère tout à fait spécial*; a ghostly quality. The pale baroque houses, deserted and empty, among the coconut palms of the islands were like houses in a dream.

Beneath the hand of the captain the boat steered toward a small island in the center of the harbor with an old house painted pale pink set in a garden of coconut and betel palms, crotons, bougainvillea and jacqueranda.

“First,” said the captain, “we have a drink at Rasmussen’s.” He grinned, “*Voilà, le Grand Hotel Oriental.*”

“That old house?” asked Dantry.

“Yes.”

It was the loveliest hotel he had ever seen.

Rasmussen, the captain told him, was a Dane who had run away from his ship in Colombo twenty years ago. He was married to a woman of the country who was cook of the Grand Oriental Hotel.

“Not bad,” he said. “She is a good cook ... for curries. A handsome woman but a bad face ... might poison you if she didn’t like you.”

Rasmussen himself greeted them. He was fishing from the small pier because there was nothing else to do, a small solid chunk of a man about fifty, with a ragged mustache and very bright blue eyes, clad in canvas trousers and singlet. Pulling

in his lines, he led them up the path beneath the coconut palms into what had once been the hall of the old house.

It had a vaulted roof, and in one corner a magnificent baroque stairway, and it was cool and damp. Now it was rigged up as a café and restaurant with a half-dozen cheap tables, a gramophone with a gigantic horn and an old-fashioned wireless set fed by batteries. At each end of the hall there was a great open archway which framed a lovely view, on the one side of the harbor entrance, and on the other of nearer islands and the distant mountains.

Inside the hall Dantry remained silent, watchful, like a cat. It was as if he were holding his breath, as if he had crossed his fingers, lest all this might suddenly vanish. He was thinking, "Perhaps this is the place. Perhaps I have found it at last. The place I have been looking for ever since I ran away from England."

The interior of the hall was clean. The cups and glasses shone. Rasmussen drank brandy and coffee with them and gossiped with the captain in broken French. When the captain asked, "Well, what is the news? What has happened since last year?" Rasmussen grinned and said, "Nothing. Nothing at all," and then added. "Oh, yes. Sandy Carleton's wife is having another kid."

"How many does that make?" asked the captain.

"An even dozen."

"A fertile climate."

They drank for a little time in silence, lazily, and then a bright look came into the eye of the cocky little Breton captain, and he said, "And that girl of his ... the oldest one ... she must be a woman by now."

“She’s eighteen,” said Rasmussen.

The Breton captain turned to Dantry with the look in his bright blue eyes of a Frenchman who is a connoisseur of women. “There’s a beauty,” he said. “In Marseilles or Paris she could have what she liked.”

But Dantry scarcely heard him. He was still caught, as if hypnotized by the beauty of the scene framed by the great doorway, and as the Breton captain spoke, he became aware of Rasmussen’s wife, Léah, who was serving them. She was, he calculated, perhaps forty or more, not fat, but on the contrary, tall and very straight with a handsome figure and fine dark eyes. There was a pride in her walk and carriage. She was still handsome; young, she must have been very beautiful. But he saw what the Breton captain meant when he said that she might poison you if she didn’t like you. The eyes were set too near together and the nose was too long. And she had a way of studying you when you were unaware of it.

Still silent and watchful, he looked out of the doorway again at the harbor where the *wallum* boats were moving past with the naked boatmen standing one in the bow, one in the stern, like gondoliers in Venice, and he thought, “The people are all beautiful here. Why has no one discovered this place? Why has it not been named ‘the Venice of the East,’ and ruined?” Then he remembered that it was safe because there was no way of getting there, no way at least luxurious enough for the sort of people who spoiled such places. And he still kept his fingers crossed against the discovery of the serpent which might contaminate this paradise.

And then, as he sat there drinking and feeling at peace and almost happy, one of the *wallum* boats drew up at the landing

and a woman climbed out from beneath the little hut of thatched palm leaves on its deck and stepped from the boat to the little landing stage. He noticed her at once, not because she was beautiful but because of her extraordinary appearance and of some special quality he could not quite define. She was tall and heavy and ugly and she was dressed in a business-like suit of very clean white drill, with a grotesque hat of straw upon which she had lavished the only gesture of femininity in the whole costume; it was covered with faded artificial flowers and carried a bedraggled bow of faded mauve ribbon. She gave two small bags to one of the boatmen and came up the path between the jacquerandas and bougainvillea toward the Grand Oriental Hotel. As she came nearer he saw that not only was she fat and ugly and walked with difficulty because of her huge weight; her skin was of that peculiar muddy color which sometimes goes with a half-caste and her eyes were blue, an extraordinary clear blue, and in one of them there was a squint. At sight of her the proprietor, Rasmussen, rose quickly from the table and went forward to greet her, and when she saw him she smiled, and with the smile the ugliness seemed to flow away from her. The smile illumined the whole face and made you forget the clumsy body and the grotesque costume.

Once inside the room she seated herself heavily near the door, glanced at Dantry and the Breton captain, and had a huge glass of beer. While she drank it, seated grotesquely in profile against the extraordinary beauty of the picture framed by the doorway, Dantry, who had a taste for young and pretty women, studied this ugly, middle-aged one. He did not quite know why, save that she was so extraordinary in appearance and that her manner was different from most half-caste women. There was something authoritative, even

commanding, about her, and he saw that the ugly face was a good face, just as the handsome face of Rasmussen's wife was an evil one.

Then, when she had finished the beer, she crossed the room and heavily climbed the lovely baroque stairway to disappear somewhere in the upper reaches of the vast and beautiful old house.

When she had gone, Dantry said to Rasmussen, "Who is that woman?" and the hotel proprietor, smiling, said, "That is Mees Opp."

"Everybody who comes here knows her," said the captain. "*Elle est presque une légende le long de la côte.* She is a doctor. She comes here twice a year to look after the health of the people. She has a kind of hospital inland at the capital. Now and then she gets some money for it ... God knows how ... out of the old Raneé. Tomorrow they'll come here from all parts of the islands and the lagoons to see her ... even those who believe in witch doctors and charms, because they know that somehow the powders Mees Opp gives them work better than the other things."

When the captain had finished drinking and prepared to leave for the harbormaster's office, Dantry said, "I'll stay here for the day. I suppose I can hire a boat to explore with."

"Yes," said Rasmussen. "My boys will take you out."

To the captain he said, "Send a boat for me about seven."

He spoke not as a stray passenger on a tramp steamer making a request, but as if he were giving a command. The captain showed no resentment. He did not even look up from his coffee. He had been right about this Monsieur Dantry; he was good-looking and gentle and charming, but he was sick, not the captain had divined, with any sickness of the strong

wiry body, but with some sickness of the mind and spirit. Being a Frenchman and a Breton he understood about things like that. There was something about this man with his good looks and dark unhappy eyes that made you want to do favors for him.

So the captain said, “*Bien sûr,*” and left him behind at the Grand Oriental Hotel. It was after he had gone that Dantry, going into the garden to stretch his long legs, saw the house.

It stood on an island so near to the edge of the water that one could land directly at the foot of the large outside stairway which led down from the upper floor—a big house with a Dutch baroque façade and a long wide balcony with arched windows opening on to it. The moldy pale yellow walls caught the mottled sunlight that fell through the trees. That it was empty and deserted was evident; the windows were barren of glass and the main door stood ajar. While he watched a flock of brilliant green parrots flew out of one of the windows. Taking up his glasses, he looked through them and made out with little difficulty the big cool rooms which had lain empty and undisturbed for more than a hundred years, but what he saw through the glasses was not a ruined empty house of extraordinary beauty, but a house, reclaimed, restored and livable, with himself moving about on the island, gardening, fishing, reading, painting, thinking undisturbed, at peace at last.

When he had gone back into the hotel, he said to Rasmussen, “Who owns that house?”

“Nobody in particular,” answered the Dane. “At least nobody knows who.”

“If I wanted to buy it how would I go about it?”

Rasmussen regarded him with an expression of doubt and wonder. He had made his estimate of Dantry, an estimate which was not very different from that made by the Breton captain. This was a man who knew the world. He wasn't a beachcomber and he wasn't a remittance man. What could he possibly want with a half-wrecked old house on an island in a ghost town like Nivandrum?

"Yes," Dantry repeated, "I might want to buy it."

Rasmussen laughed. "Well, if you're really serious, I guess you could buy it from the old Ranee. She'd sell anything for a few rupees, even herself, if anyone wanted her."

Dantry turned to look at it again, thinking how extraordinary it was that the house was exactly what he had dreamed of for years past, ever since Alix had married Simpson and he had left London forever. He had seen the house many times in his imagination, or one very like it, but only now, after more than ten years, had he found it.

"If you get me a boat and some sandwiches," he said, "I'll go off exploring."

All the afternoon, even through the heat, poled by the two boys whom Rasmussen had sent him, he drifted in a *wallum* boat among the islands along lagoons, past rice fields, up blind inlets, and everywhere the boat drifted he found the same still beauty filled with peace, and the same handsome, peaceful, forgotten people. It was a peace which to him in his bitterness was better than the peace of a primitive country uncontaminated by the touch of the white man; it was the peace of a country which had conquered the white man and been given back again to its own people. It was the great river which had vanquished the invaders—the river which in a half-primitive way the people of the country, even the

traditional Christians, still worshiped, because it was the great river which had choked the lovely harbor and kept out the great ships of the shopkeeping Europeans.

And as he drifted, he kept thinking, "This is the perfect place." But the wisdom of experience kept telling him, "There is no perfect place. There is always something wrong. What can it be here?"

But when he returned and talked to Rasmussen, he could discover from him no hint of any serpent in this Eden. For Rasmussen, the place was perfect. He had, he said, come upon it by chance when he had run away from his ship hundreds of miles from Nivandrum, twenty years before, and he asked for no better life than he found here in the dead city with the choked harbor.

So when the boat of the *Vivandière* called for him in the evening at the moment when the sun seemed to linger on the horizon and the fishing boats came rushing in like birds across the Great Bar, he sent it away again with a request that it should return with all his luggage.

He was afraid to return himself for fear that once he stepped upon the deck of the stolid little ship, common sense or perhaps weakness and indecision might return to claim him, and the port of Nivandrum with its melancholy beauty would vanish, lost forever. He meant to stay here for the rest of his life, for in his heart he knew suddenly that this was the place for which he had been searching.

That night, after his luggage had been landed and the *Vivandière* slipped over the horizon bound for Port Said and Europe, he had dinner in the big room alone, with Mees Opp in the far corner opposite him. Rasmussen waited on the two of them, serving the food which his wife Léah cooked,

stopping now and then and seating himself with the greatest informality to chat, now with Mees Opp, now with Dantry. When they had finished eating and he was having brandy and coffee, still watching the beauty of the harbor framed by the great doorway, a canoe appeared presently on the water between the hotel and the light and fires of the nearest island. It came up to the landing stage, and presently on the path in the glow of light from the great hall there appeared the figure of a young girl. For a moment, as she reached the doorway, she stood, a little blinded by the light, looking about the room. Then she saw Mees Opp and quickly crossed the room close by the table where Dantry sat, apparently without noticing him, but so close that he saw she was a beauty, even among these island people who seemed to him a race of gods and goddesses. For a second he felt a sudden rush of predatory excitement, but almost at once he said to himself, "No. None of that, in that direction lies ruin! It's always that which spoils everything."

The girl had a fair skin, the color, thought Dantry, of pale gold, was dressed in a simple clean white sari and she walked with the grace of a woman who had never known heels and was accustomed to carrying burdens on her head. But her eyes were the most extraordinary. They were enormous and dark and soft like the eyes of a doe. And suddenly he knew that as she had passed his table she had not looked at him at all because she was shy. Even the presence of a stranger in this forgotten world had not tempted her. The knowledge touched him—that there could still be in the world a woman like that.

At Mees Opp's table, she spoke for a moment with the big ugly half-caste woman, and then Mees Opp rose and,

climbing the stairs heavily, descended in a moment wearing the grotesque hat and carrying the smaller of her two bags, and the two women, the one so huge and coarse and ugly, the other so fragile and lovely, went out together. In a moment Dantry saw the canoe moving away again against the lights of the nearest island toward the mainland.

When Rasmussen came in again, he said, “Who was the young girl?” and Rasmussen said, “That’s Sandy’s oldest girl. Sandy’s the only other white man in Nivandrum. He’s English, too. His name is Carleton. The girl came to fetch Mees Opp because her mother is having a baby. Good luck, I call it, that it came along while Mees Opp was here....”

When Dantry had finished his brandy, he went out again in the *wallum* boat, drifting aimlessly among the islands where the fires threw a glow far in among the palms. It was long after midnight when he returned and went to bed at last in the *chambre de luxe*, a room with a turkey-red carpet, a paraffin lamp, and a huge Victorian bed of teakwood ornamented with bits of mother-of-pearl and draped with folds of white mosquito netting. At peace, he fell asleep almost as soon as he had drawn in and fastened the netting over the vast, ugly bed.

After their strange guest had gone to bed in one of the rooms overlooking the moonlit harbor, Rasmussen's woman, Léah, looked at her husband and said in her own tongue, "What for does he want to come and live in a place like this ... a fine gentleman like him? He's not like you and Sandy Carleton."

Long ago Léah had been suspected of being a witch, and in the dead town there were people who still believed that she had the evil eye and the power of cursing an enemy and withering all his life. That was how she had come to take up with Rasmussen in the beginning—because, despite her fine looks, most of the men in Nivandrum were afraid of her. Rasmussen did not mind the witchcraft nonsense. He had been a sailor, he was a Scandinavian and he knew a fine woman, witch or not, when he saw one, and in the twenty years he had lived with her he had been troubled by no evil manifestations of her fine black eyes.

Now he grinned at her, and it was a smug grin. He had no desire to be a fine gentleman like this Dantry; he knew he was quite well off, perhaps far better off than the unhappy stranger. His own eyes were clear and blue, not clouded and full of misery like Dantry's. His was a life which suited him to the ground, a far better life than he would ever have known in his overcrowded homeland.

He said, "Maybe he wants a life like mine and Sandy's. It's not such a bad life."

Léah only shook her dark head and went on putting out the kerosene lights.

“Maybe he’s done something he’s ashamed of. Maybe he had to get out of his white man’s country and hide. I guess he won’t stay long. Anyway, I wish he hadn’t come.”

“Why?” asked Rasmussen.

“Because I don’t like him.”

“Why? He’s good-looking. He’s a gentleman. He has nice manners. He’s got an honest face—a nice face.”

For a moment Léah was puzzled. It wasn’t easy for her to analyze her own feelings, and it was even more difficult to express them in a simple language which had no words for tortured, complicated analysis. At last she said, “There’s something not nice about him.”

“Rubbish.”

But she persisted. “It’s something inside him ...” She hesitated for a moment—“Like a maggot.”

He regarded her for a moment in surprise. Perhaps three or four times before in their lives together she had expressed an opinion like this suddenly and vehemently, and as he watched her he was remembering these occasions and remembering too that each time she had been right. But like Cassandra, no one had ever believed her prophecies. Now and then he did feel a sudden inexplicable awe at her shrewdness, and there were times when he felt that there was something deep within her, something almost animal, a vision undistorted, unblurred by civilization, some skill like that of the primitive trackers in the high jungles which permitted her to see true. But now, as ever, he would grant her nothing, for she was a proud woman who was sometimes arrogant and always likely to get out of hand.

So he merely repeated “Rubbish!” again and rose to go upstairs to his bed, up the beautiful winding stairway built long ago for a Captain Mynheer van der Burgh of the Dutch factory, a stairway that was like the stairways in the King’s palace back in Denmark. And it belonged to Rasmussen—his own—and to no king.

As he reached the turn in the stairway she spoke again. She was standing just below him, holding the last lamp in her hand, and as she looked up at him he could not help thinking now, even after twenty years, how lucky he was to have such a fine woman.

She said, “So long as the Bar is there to block the harbor we will be happy in Nivandrum. When they take away the Great Bar, we will be unhappy again. There will be tragedy and suffering as there was before the river brought down the Bar to protect us.”

There was a kind of beauty and dignity in her speech as well as in her attitude, standing there, a prophetess, with the shabby kerosene lamp in her hand, which Rasmussen had never noticed before. For a moment he was a little afraid of her—not of her body, which was the body of his woman, but of something inside her. He was so afraid that he laughed and said, “If they took away the Great Bar, my fortune would be made. The Grand Oriental Hotel would be one of the biggest hotels in the East.”

She put out the light and in the darkness he heard her saying, “And do you think that would make you happier?”

In the morning, a little after eight o'clock, Dantry wakened to the sound of murmuring and chattering beneath his window. For a moment he did not remember where he was or that the *Vivandière* had sailed and he was left behind to settle in Nivandrum, and live there for the rest of his life. And then presently through the netting he observed the details of the *chambre de luxe* of the Grand Oriental Hotel, the monstrous bed, the turkey-red carpet, the pitcher and washstand of hand-painted china, the chromos on the wall—all assembled by Rasmussen in the idea that they were luxurious and “tasty.” Outside, the murmuring and chattering continued, and at last, lazily, for he was by nature sensual and luxurious, he rose, and throwing a dressing gown about him, for he had long ago learned to sleep naked in the heat of the East, he went to the window and looked out.

There, just underneath, were assembled more than a hundred people who were ill with one disease or another—crooked, maimed, sallow, shaking with fever, a dozen or more clearly suffering from elephantiasis. There were old women and children, old men, and young women about to have babies. Patiently chattering among themselves, comparing symptoms and telling stories, they waited their turns to go into the little, half-ruined summerhouse where the huge ugly Mees Opp sat at a table examining them in turn. Before her on the table lay thermometers, medicines, bandages—all neatly laid out in the most scientific order. At the landing stage near by there were thirty or forty *wallum* boats and canoes lashed together until each patient, examined and satisfied and dosed, was finished with Mees Opp and ready to depart in his own conveyance.

The sight of so many sick people early in the morning did not cheer him, but he stood there for a time fascinated, watching Mees Opp go through the business cheerfully and efficiently, and as he watched he became aware that it was not only that she gave them medicines which were mixtures of chemicals and herbs, but another kind of medicine which probably did them quite as much good, for each one of them seemed to leave her presence in good-humor and full of confidence. They even exchanged jokes in passing with those whose turn to be dosed had not yet come, and presently, after watching for a long time, the spectacle, instead of depressing him, put him into a strange good-humor. Instead of finding the sight of so much sickness, of so many human ills, so much misery, utterly repulsive, he found it rather warming and touching. And that he saw was because of Mees Opp and her confident, jolly manner. Coming to see Mees Opp twice a year was, he began to understand from the behavior of the patients, a kind of festival and holiday. Invalids, both imaginary and real, could talk about their symptoms, and in Mees Opp they would always find a sympathetic listener, ready with some joke which they understood.

When he had had a shower with dipper and *chattee*, he dressed and went downstairs to breakfast, and from his table in the great hall he was still able to watch the clinic in progress, until, about eleven o'clock as the heat rose, all the suffering had been cared for and had gone away, leaving Mees Opp to pack up her belongings in the ruined little summerhouse.

Rasmussen said to him seriously, "She is a great help in the State. If ever you're really ill you can rely on her. She's a good doctor."

“How did she ever come here?”

“I don’t know. She’s been here for thirty years ... since before I came ... not here but up at the capital.”

“How old is she?”

“She must be fifty-five.”

Then Mees Opp came in carrying her two little bags, and ordered another large glass of beer, and Dantry said to Rasmussen, “Will you let me meet her? I’d like her to lunch with me.”

“You can meet her,” said Rasmussen, “but she won’t be here for lunch. She’s going away at once. She’s got to visit three villages before sundown.”

So he was introduced to her almost at the moment she was leaving and they exchanged a few polite remarks, which led to nothing at all, but he made the discovery that she was both intelligent and frank and he thought, “She will be interesting to talk to. She must have had some extraordinary experiences,” but when he asked her when she would be coming to Nivandrum again, she said, “In six months. You see I’m only able to get here twice a year ... sometimes not as often as that.”

He and Rasmussen walked with her as far as the landing stage and stood there looking after her until the *wallum* boat which carried her had disappeared behind the nearest island.

“Sandy Carleton’s new baby is a girl,” said Rasmussen, almost as if Dantry had lived in Nivandrum for ten years instead of a single night. Then suddenly, “Do you like shooting?”

“Yes. When there’s nothing else to do.”

“Sandy is a great *shikari*. And there’s wonderful shooting up there in the hills. No better in the world,” and he made a gesture toward the blue mountains covered with rain-drenched jungle. And Dantry thought, “It’s all better than I had hoped. It’s so easy. I am going to be happy here at last.”

Sandy Carleton was a fat little man, one of those extraordinary fat little men who seem more agile and full of vitality than many men of half their weight. On the mainland a mile or two from Dantry's island, he had a kind of compound filled with small palm-thatched houses that had been put up one after another as his ever-growing family increased. Like Rasmussen he had come to Nivandrum to escape a seafaring life and settle down, and like Rasmussen he had quickly taken a Christian woman from among the people of the islands. After three children had been born he married her, for he knew by that time that he had found the place he had been searching for, and that he would never leave it. His wife, unlike Rasmussen's sterile Léah, had proved unbelievably fertile, and now at forty-eight there were times when he found himself a little hard put to provide plenty of food and the rudiments of clothing for them; but he was never downhearted, because he knew that he was far better off than he would ever have been in Camden Town, and that his children, even though they lived on rice and coconut milk and went naked, had a better life than any children he might have bred in the slums of London.

He knew, too, that they were healthier, more beautiful children than he could ever have had at home by the Cockney girl he had jilted long ago. He liked children; he did not mind how many his wife bore him, and his children were both handsome and healthy. Some of them were dark, and some of them almost as fair as himself. The loveliest of all was Maria, his second child, whose older brother, Silas, went to work for Dantry when his house was finished at last, and he left the Grand Oriental Hotel and took to living in it.

Sandy did not mind his son going to work as a servant; on the contrary, it seemed to him a solution of Silas's problem, especially as he was going to work for Dantry, who, by the time the home was finished, had become a friend, almost an intimate friend after the shooting trip he had made with Sandy into the high mountains. The plump little Cockney was a good *shikari*.

He knew at once that Dantry was a "gentleman." With his English instinct he knew that it had taken dozens of generations to produce a man like him, and he respected him for it. He was glad to let his half-caste son work for Dantry, because Dantry, being a gentleman, would treat him well and teach him a great many things which only a "gentleman" could teach him, things which, whatever happened to Silas later in life, would be useful to him. Dantry would make him into a good servant and a great deal more. Perhaps—who knew—Rasmussen might die one day and then Silas could take over the Grand Oriental Hotel.

About his children and their future Sandy was a realist, and he did all that was possible to keep them from having the ideas above their station which ruined the lives of so many others of mixed blood. Their place, he knew, was in Nivandrum. They belonged with their mother's people and not with his own, and in that, he decided, thinking of his own undernourished, overworked childhood, they were very lucky, far luckier than they would ever know.

Sometimes he talked with Dantry about the problem while the two of them sat by a fire of coconut husks in Sandy's compound, in the evenings when Dantry left his house because he could no longer bear being alone with himself.

One evening, not long after they had come back from the shooting expedition, he said to Dantry, “What about women? Are you going on living without them?”

Dantry grinned, showing his fine strong teeth and said, “I don’t know.”

“I don’t suppose you’re used to doing without them.”

That made Dantry laugh. He said, “No, but I’m not sorry to give them a rest for a time.”

This time Sandy grinned, “Oh, so it’s like that.”

“No, it’s not like that ... at least not altogether. It’s true that I’ve only met one woman I ever wanted to marry—one woman who seemed to fit. You know what I mean ... a woman you felt suited you and would go on suiting you forever. But that was a long time ago. I haven’t seen her for years.”

“Why didn’t you marry her?”

“She married someone else ... a bounder who had millions.”

Sandy’s Cockney face wrinkled into a look of shrewdness. “If she was that kind,” he said, “if you’ll pardon me for saying so ... she wouldn’t have suited you for long.”

For a moment Dantry remained silent and thoughtful, and watching him in the firelight, even Sandy, who was not much given to admiration for masculine beauty, noticed the beauty of his friend’s head, its fineness and look of race. It was a head that was over-bred. It was almost too fine.

Then Dantry frowned, as if he were alone, as if Sandy weren’t there at all. “It wasn’t like that. It was my fault too. We were both foolish.” Then he smiled again, as if he were alone, almost as if he were talking to himself. “But rather

nice, attractive young people for all that—as young people went in London after the war. Which isn't saying a great deal.”

“Have you seen her since?”

“Once ... in the distance, in a hotel in New York. She was with her husband.”

The romantic in Sandy led him on. He'd never seen a cinema and he had no novels to read, and so Dantry had to take the place of such things. “Had she changed?” he asked.

“I really couldn't say. I didn't speak to her. It was bad enough just seeing her across a big room. She looked the same except a little ... well ... harder.”

“Yes,” said Sandy, “I suppose that would be true.” He relighted his pipe and said, “Well, I left behind a girl called Sarah Jane in London, but there wasn't anything very special about her. I reckon she didn't miss me. She got married, my old mother wrote me, less than a year after I sailed the last time.” He puffed at his pipe for a moment and then said, “I can't complain. I got the mother of all these fine brats instead. I never objected much to color and she's suited me well enough ... no trouble at all.”

He looked sharply at Dantry, who was staring into the fire, and after a moment he said, “There are worse solutions than one of these local girls.”

“Yes, sometimes I've thought about that. Sometimes in the night I can't help thinking about it, only it's complicated.”

“Not as complicated as you think,” said Sandy, and then quietly, “I know what you're thinking about ... the kids.”

“Yes ... and a lot of other things. I'm not very simple.”

“I see how it’s different for you. You’ve probably got ties and home responsibilities.” It was a feeler on Sandy’s part, just a thrust to see what he could discover of his friend’s mysterious past.

“None that I need observe,” said Dantry.

“Well, anyway it’s different.... You having a troupe of half-caste kids and me having ’em. You being a gentleman makes a difference.”

“It shouldn’t,” said Dantry.

“But it does,” said Sandy. “I can’t quite explain what I mean.”

Dantry didn’t answer him, so Sandy went on talking. “When I came here, I left everything behind. It wasn’t very hard because there wasn’t much to leave, and what I did leave I didn’t like much, just a lot of memories of being overworked and half-starved. It wasn’t the same with you.”

“One can have a lot of other memories,” said Dantry, “that are different perhaps, but just as bad. I’m sick of Europe.”

“Still, it ain’t the same with you.”

“No, I suppose it isn’t.”

Sandy gave a great laugh. “To hear me talk you’d think I was a bloody pimp.” Suddenly he grew shy. “It’s hard to explain what I’m driving at, only I’d like to get everything fixed up for you. Rasmussen and I would both sort of like to see you stay on here ... for good. It makes for company and, as you might say, it raises the tone of the community. If you had a woman, you wouldn’t get restless.”

“Thanks,” said Dantry, and the sharp angle of his jaw grew harder. “Anyway I’m staying here ... harem or no harem.”

“That’s good,” said Sandy. “We’ll have some good times. I haven’t taken you fishing yet ... with a torch and a spear. That’s real sport. We won’t talk about the ladies no more. It’s always kind of a disturbing subject, but if ever I can help, just pass along the word. They all like me here pretty well. Most of ’em would do a favor for a friend of mine, especially as any girl here would leave home and parents any time for a good-looking fellow like you, with a big house and a gramophone and a piano.”

“Right,” said Dantry, “and now I’ll go along to my lonely bed.”

And then as he rose to leave, he noticed suddenly that Sandy Carleton’s eldest girl, Maria, was standing in the doorway, and that at sight of him she sprang away shyly and disappeared. It was not the first time he had suspected her of watching him. He started to speak to Sandy, to say, “Tell your daughter she need not be afraid of me,” but after the conversation he thought that it might sound odd, and so he held his tongue.

As he drove the canoe ahead toward his island he turned once to look back toward the compound, and caught a glimpse of the plump Sandy tending his fishing lines on the pier—the lines which would bring him tomorrow’s food for that huge happy family of his, and suddenly he felt a sensation of warmth about his heart which surprised him because it had been so many years since he had felt like that about anyone. And he thought, “Perhaps it’s going to be all right. Perhaps I *am* being born again. If only I can get all the way back.”

At home in the bed in the big upper room which overlooked the harbor, with a brandy and soda by his side, he

lay awake for a long time thinking of the conversation which had taken place by the fire in Sandy's compound, and out of all the talk he remembered one phrase of Sandy's, "I guess you haven't really given up the other life."

Sandy wasn't a brilliant fellow, but he had the shrewdness both of the Cockney and the sailor, and without thinking of it, it seemed to Dantry that he had put his finger on the thing that troubled him most. It was true in a way that he had really given up the other life. Here in this house with its pleasant furniture, its chintzes and Kashmiri rugs, with the gramophone and piano, with the books and papers from the West, he wasn't living like Sandy and Rasmussen. In a way it was an artificial life, apart from the life of Nivandrum. And just a little drunk for the first time since he had left the *Vivandière*, he grinned and thought, "Perhaps it's the same thing over again. Perhaps I'm trying to eat my cake and have it too. Perhaps I'm not willing to give up anything." And then he thought, "Perhaps it's only because the house is all finished now and I haven't enough to do."

Maybe that was why the restlessness had returned to him; maybe that was why in spite of himself he was thinking about women again. Then he poured himself another brandy and soda, drank it and went through the pages of a six-weeks-old *Times*, and by that time sleep took possession of him, and he was happy again and at peace, listening through his sleep to the distant sound of drums and flutes that came from among the islands.

It was time now for Mees Opp's visit, and the house was finished at last.

From the moment he left the *Vivandière* and began to occupy himself with the idea, he had felt changed and charged again with interest and energy. With each new chair, with each tile and pane of glass, he came to love the old house a little more, until presently, thinking about it, he came to see that the house was a kind of symbol of his own existence—a house, abandoned, empty, filled with memories, falling into ruin, which was being restored, refitted and made human and livable once more; and during those months he succeeded in losing himself in the house and in the landscape of Nivandrum itself—that awful self from which he had been running away for so long, the self he hated for its treachery, its selfishness, its despair and cowardliness, for all those qualities which men like Rasmussen and Sandy never saw in him, because they were simple, innocent men, and because they liked him.

It was only when the work was nearly finished and he had left Rasmussen's hotel to live in the house that there were moments when the self returned—moments when there was no more work and he was bored, when he could not read one more word of the books which arrived from London, nor listen to one more of the gramophone records sent him from New York, when in the heat he could not even bear the thought of fishing. For a time he tried teaching Silas to cook European dishes. The boy was willing and clever, but after a time Dantry grew bored with the idea. He played the piano and went fishing, and called on Rasmussen and Sandy, but

still there were hours in the day ... long hours ... when there was nothing to do but think, and now that the house was finished he found that he always thought about the past and the world he had left behind him, not with regret, but because the life in Nivandrum somehow lacked reality and because the past, being more real to him, was always there, waiting.

The evenings were the worst, at that moment when the sun sinking into the Indian Ocean seemed to hang for a moment on the horizon and the fishing boats rushed in across the Great Bar to reach the harbor before night came down. Then for a moment the earth seemed to suspend all motion. The breeze from the land died away before the breeze arose from the sea. The air was still and hot, and then as the sun slipped below the horizon, the jackals came out in the foothills behind Nivandrum and their ghostly howling echoed back and forth across the lagoons and canals behind the harbor. All about, everywhere, in the still warm air there was that evening smell of woodsmoke and spices, jasmine and mangrove swamps, all blended together in a smell which was Nivandrum itself. At that hour the drums began, the sound drifting across the still waters as the night fell, and against the sound of the drums the thin thread of music from a flute or two. The music went on and on every night until long after midnight, nostalgic, restless, raising old longings for a life that was better than any life could possibly be, bringing back the memories of the old house where he had spent his childhood, and beyond that, farther back, strange, almost atavistic memories of things which had been dreamed. The sound ate into the soul. Then it was that he thought again of Alix, and dreamed sometimes of what life might have been if they had not been fools and had gone on loving each other. And her ghost came back to him, making him think how

perfect she would have been here in this lovely house, how she would have loved this place and this life. If he had not been a fool and lost her, there would never have been any other woman.

“But she was a fool too,” he thought bitterly. “We were both fools. We had everything between us—everything that humans could ask—and we threw it all away.”

And then he would forget her, hearing the sound of the drums which had never ceased. He had only not heard them because he himself had gone away from Nivandrum, far away. He was in a London night club just after the war and saw her coming in the door, saw her for the first time, lovely, dazzling, fresh, with that look of innocence which she seemed to keep through everything. Or he was in that house by the sea and the morning light was coming through the faded chintz curtains and she was there beside him, and they were both young and reckless and in love. And he would try to imagine what she was now and he was afraid, because he knew himself and what he had once been. And in the end, he would laugh at himself and think, “I’m behaving like a bloody fool in a melodrama. If we meet again we shall probably loathe each other—or worse, we shall bore each other.”

The sound of the drums would come back and then he would remember what the old Dutchman Tobias had said in Sumatra listening to the drums. “If a man listened long enough he’d commit murder or suicide.”

It was the most beautiful moment of the day, and in it he should have found peace, save that it was the one moment of the day when he felt utterly alone and friendless, when even Rasmussen and Sandy seemed strangers to him. There were

times when the sound of the jackals howling filled him with a sense of terror of the dead town and all the wild country beyond, of the people who were so friendly and yet so strange to him, of the lovely choked harbor and jungle-covered mountains beyond. It was a nameless, indescribable fear—the fear of a man who is lost and doomed, trapped and shut within the prison of his own character and destiny. The prophetess Léah never saw him at such moments; had she seen him she would have been triumphant.

And then slowly it seemed to him that he was beginning to discover what was wrong. It was not Nivandrum but himself, again that self which clung to him like a shadow. He was trying, too, to lead the life of a sophisticated, worldly man in a place that was primitive and simple and even wild, and so in a way he isolated himself in spirit even from men of his own race like Rasmussen and Sandy. They were happy, it seemed to him, as happy as Adam had been in Eden before the Fall, because they had left all Europe behind them. They belonged to this country; he did not belong, and perhaps never could belong.

So he began presently to believe that he had been wrong in thinking that he might make a life for himself in Nivandrum on the old terms. He began to believe, what he already knew but refused to admit, that he was wrong in thinking that he could do without women, that he, of all men, sensual and self-indulgent, and spoiled, could live like a hermit.

Yet he did not want a woman as Sandy and Rasmussen had their women—a part of their very lives. Sandy's wife going on breeding and breeding, Rasmussen's superior, dominating, a little sinister. And presently it occurred to him that in this country you might have a woman on your own terms, have

her when you wanted her, to quiet your spirit and your restless desire to kill the loneliness, to entertain and amuse you, to fill those hours of the day which were haunted by ghosts. You could send her away when she was not wanted. She would not poison your whole life with scenes and hysterics, reproaches and jealousy, in the way that women in the West had a way of doing. You could, perhaps, effect a compromise, a wonderful, hedonistic compromise between the old life and the new, by which you took everything you wanted and gave only what it was easy and convenient to give.

And so he began to look at the women of Nivandrum in a new way, not as creatures to be avoided, but creatures to be studied in cold blood as an expert studies bloodstock cattle to discover the finest, the fairest, the most docile. He was already looking at them in this fashion when Sandy Carleton spoke to him about the need of a woman in his life, and by that time he had, against his conscious will, almost without knowing it, made his choice.

It was Sandy's own daughter, Maria.

For a long time, ever since she had passed his table so shyly when she had come to fetch Mees Opp, he had been interested in the girl; but it was not until he had that sudden glimpse of her in the firelit doorway of Sandy's compound that he knew for the first time that she was the one. It was her shyness which caught him. The other girls in Nivandrum were bold enough, showing off their charms, waiting for him at the pier on the mainland, ambitious, coquettish and puzzled that he seemed never even to notice them. Maria he had never seen at all save in the shadows or vaguely through a tangle of bougainvillea.

Twice before that night he had seen her in his own garden, distantly on occasions when she came to see her brother Silas, and then one day, not long after his talk with Sandy, as he was reading on the balcony with a glass of brandy beside him, he became aware slowly that he was being watched by someone or something.

For a long time his nerves had been jumpy, and in odd moments he had suffered from an abnormal awareness of things which usually he would not have noticed, and to make himself more insensitive he had taken again to drinking, and now as he sat reading and drinking, he refused to give in to his nerves, to turn and discover who or what it was that kept staring at him and annoying him. For five minutes, for ten, he sat there trying to keep his attention on the book, but the words only grew blurred before his eyes, and the sense of what was printed on its pages escaped him completely. When at last the feeling of being watched became unbearable, he turned his head suddenly, quickly, but only quickly enough to catch a flying glimpse of a white *sari* disappearing among the crotons.

The experience both annoyed and pleased him. He was annoyed at the impertinence of the girl, and his vanity was pleased by her interest. Then suddenly he laughed, thinking, "I suppose if I were to play my proper role, if I were to behave the way men do in novels about the East, I would rush after her and carry her back into the house."

His instinct told him that this was the thing to have done, but his sense of the ridiculous held him back. Even here in Nivandrum he could not quite see himself in such a role, at least not without feeling comic and self-conscious. He was, he knew, no cave man and not altogether a scoundrel. His

methods had always been more subtle, partly because it was rare enough that he had found the pursuit on his side, and partly because, out of long experience, subtlety in the pursuit added pleasure to the conquest and the consummation. And so, his will paralyzed, he did nothing, and in a little while he had a distant view of a figure all in white, paddling across the harbor toward Sandy's compound.

After that his interest in the girl began slowly to attain the proportions of an obsession, so that at odd moments throughout the day, when he was reading or fishing and eating his solitary lunch he would find himself thinking of her, seeing her, speculating about her. And then after a while in the evenings he began to drink more than ever, so that at the nostalgic hour between twilight and dark he was too muddled to care.

It was not easy. He did not want to marry the girl; he had no thought of it; and he did not want to seduce the daughter of a friend. There were times when he thought of making an open declaration to Sandy, of proposing to take her for as long as it suited him, with a settlement which would be more money than anyone in Nivandrum had ever heard of, and which he himself would not miss at all. That he had never really spoken to the girl did not help the obsession; instead it seemed to make it worse. After a time, he thought, "If I see her clearly, if I talk to her, I may forget her. It may kill the damned thing."

So after that he kept watch to discover when she came to the island to see her brother. He found himself, standing like a fool in the upper part of the house watching for her. Two days passed and then three, and at last on the fourth day he saw her through the fronds of the coconut palms coming in a

dugout across the open water between the mainland and the island. He tried the glasses, but the palms spoiled his vision and so he came no nearer to her.

It was in the cookhouse he found her, helping Silas to prepare the lunch. He came down quickly and trapped her there in a corner so that she could not escape. At sight of him she stood up quickly, like a servant, and turned a little away from him. She was dressed in a white *sari*, the ceremonial *sari* of the country, with a tiny wreath of jasmine flowers about the knot of smooth, shining hair at the back of her small head. She had turned away from him quickly, but not quickly enough, for he had seen in the hot light of midday that she was more beautiful than he had imagined.

For a moment he was silent and then he said, "Please sit down," aware that he was trembling a little and that his face was as scarlet as that of a schoolboy at his first party ... his face, the face of Tom Dantry, whom no woman had been able to confuse since he was a boy of fifteen.

Then he said, "I suppose you are Maria," and with her eyes still cast down she said in a low voice, "Yes, *sahib*."

"You must come to the island often ... as often as you like." He looked again at her dress and asked, "Is there a festival today?" The girl still looking away, answered, "No, *sahib*."

Then he turned suddenly and left the cookhouse because he could not think how he might go on with the conversation. For a long time he sat on the terrace feeling like a fool, unable to discover why this shy half-wild girl had upset him so profoundly, and in a little while he saw her in her canoe moving again across the shining blue water toward her father's compound. He knew now what she looked like; it had not made it better, but worse.

That night when he went to play cribbage with Rasmussen, he got so drunk that Rasmussen had to bring him home. When Rasmussen returned to the Grand Oriental Hotel, Léah was waiting. She said nothing at all. She merely looked at her husband, but the brilliant evil eyes said triumphantly, “You see, it has begun.”

For nearly three weeks he waited, thinking now one thing now another, but never acting. He drank more than he had ever drunk in his life, not only on account of the queer unholy passion for the girl, but because he hated himself. One day he would be for going straight to Sandy, even for marrying the girl if necessary, and the next the idea would go from him completely in the belief that if he once took up with her it would be the first chapter of a story that would be monstrously like the story of a thousand other white men. First he would take to wearing a *sarong*, and then he would be drunk all day, and after a time there would be opium, and finally one day he would die, forgotten and regretted by no one. He hated all that. Sandy was right. It was different for Sandy and Rasmussen; with them such a thing was easy and simple and natural.

Again and again he thought, "If only I were like Sandy or Rasmussen." But he wasn't.

He had not meant it to be like this. He had meant to find peace in Nivandrum. There would be peace for a little time with Maria and drink and opium, but that was not the peace he had been seeking.

And he was ashamed, too, that a girl to whom he had spoken scarcely a half-dozen words should have aroused a desire so profound and enduring. For by now, he knew that the feeling he had for the girl was no simple thing. It was like nothing he had ever experienced before, so violent, so agonizing that in sober moments, it seemed to him a retribution for all the philandering he had done before he came to Nivandrum. He was suffering now, he knew, as that

hysterical woman in the hotel at Penang had suffered when he ran away from her. He was caught now as he had caught others not once or twice but many times. He did not pretend that it was love that he felt for the girl. How could you feel love for a girl to whom you had scarcely spoken, whom you barely knew, a girl who was half-savage and could barely read or write?

“Perhaps,” he thought, “I am growing old. Perhaps it is the senile passion of an old man for a young virgin,” and that thought made him feel sick, for he was a man to whom youth had been everything, the bright youth of one who had good looks and charm and riches and freedom.

Then one day when reading on the terrace he came across a paragraph which it seemed to him had been written for himself. Twice he read it through.

It read:

“Dans la damnation le feu est la moindre chose; le supplice propre au damné est le progrès infini dans le vice et dans le crime, l’âme s’endurçissant, se dépravant toujours s’enfonçant nécessairement dans le mal de minute en progression géométrique pendant l’éternité.”

When both Rasmussen and Sandy suggested that he was drinking too much for a climate like Nivandrum, he only said, “It’s all right. It’ll pass. It’s just a temporary business.”

But Léah *knew* and at last she told Rasmussen. “It’s Maria,” she said, “Sandy’s girl. That’s what the matter with him.”

“He’s hardly seen her,” said Rasmussen, but Léah, instead of answering him, shrugged her shoulders.

“How do you know?” he asked her.

“I know,” said Léah.

“Well, why doesn’t he have her and be done with it?”

“A man like him. He’s too grand for any of us.” And there was a fine scorn in her voice.

“He needn’t marry her. Sandy wouldn’t mind, if he was good to her.”

“It’s not that,” said Léah. “He’s afraid of himself ... he’s not thinking about Sandy or Maria. He’s haunted.”

“Haunted?” asked Rasmussen.

“Yes, haunted by himself. Most men who take to drink are haunted.” And as she put out the lights, she said, “You’ll see.”

When Rasmussen climbed the baroque stairway to his bed, Léah did not follow him. Instead, she put out all the lights but one, and when she had gone above to listen outside her husband’s door and make certain that he was asleep, she went out and unfastened a canoe from the landing stage, climbed in and set out in the direction of Sandy’s compound. She did not go to the compound itself but to an island farther on, surrounded by mangrove swamps and hidden away in one of the inlets. She found her way easily enough by the brilliant light of the moon, for she had known every island and every inlet since childhood. When she had circled part way the round island, she came to a break in the mangroves, and driving the canoe into it with the force of a strong boatman she ran its nose firmly into the thick mud on the shore beside a dugout which already lay moored there. Then pushing her way through the jungle she came at last to a little clearing before a ruined hut, and there in the moonlight she found Maria waiting for her.

At sight of her the girl sprang up timidly and came toward her without speaking, but Léah said, "It is working. He was drunk again tonight."

Then, while Maria listened in silence, Léah seated herself cross-legged facing the moon and recited a long prayer, addressed not to the moon but to the River God, who had closed up the harbor and driven away the white men Léah hated. When she had finished she remained for a time in a kind of trance, the girl watching her, shivering a little with fear. Then at last she opened her eyes and looked at Maria. She said, "You must go to him. He is a coward. He is afraid. He is haunted. It is for you to act now." Then she gave the girl a charm, and Maria went away again, alone through the thick jungle to the break in the mangroves, where she climbed into the dugout and set off in the direction of Sandy's compound.

When Maria had gone, Léah went into the hut, and from among the rubbish which littered the floor she took out an image, carved crudely from the soft red stone of the high mountains. It was squat, obscene, the crude representation of the River God who brought fertility and confounded the white man, killing his profits, and protecting from him all the wide, great valley that ran inland toward the high plateau. The squat little figure was caked with the blood of many sacrifices.

Alone, in the moonlight that streamed through the door, she prostrated herself before the image and began to address it in a whining, singsong tone, promising it that she would protect the harbor, that she would do away with white men who came there to remove the Great Bar and bring their ships once more among the islands. When she had finished she

rose and went behind the hut, where a she-goat and two kids were tethered. Taking one of them, she carried it back into the hut, struggling and bleating, and when she had taken a knife from among the rubbish, she cut its throat and held it above the image until it was dead and there was no more blood in it.

In the Grand Oriental Hotel, Rasmussen wakened about two in the morning and turning over found that Léah was not beside him in the vast double bed. The discovery did not alarm him, because it had happened before so many times. Once each month at the time of the new moon, she would go away in the middle of the night, whither he did not know, and he did not much care so long as she was a good bed companion and cooked well, and her witchcraft left him in peace and comfort.

The next night Dantry came sober to the Grand Oriental Hotel. He looked neat and pale and he did not drink at all. Most of the evening he was silent, and in her corner Léah, with an air of demureness, did the embroidery the nuns had taught her to do long ago in the days when there was still a convent in Nivandrum, and while she embroidered, she watched with a look of sinister triumph in her brilliant black eyes.

At midnight he rose and said to Rasmussen, "Good night and good-by. I'm going away tomorrow by the morning train."

"When'll you be coming back?"

"I'm not coming back."

Rasmussen regarded him in silence, tongue-tied and shy and a little emotional because he liked Dantry so much.

"If you and Sandy want the things in the house, divide them up between you."

Then Rasmussen managed to say, “It’s pretty sudden. We were used to you. We’ll miss you. It won’t be the same.”

“I’ll write to you. Perhaps sometimes ... in a year or so.... I’ll come back and pay you a visit.”

“Why are you going?”

“I can’t tell you. I always have to go. I’ve been going now for years, wherever I’ve been. I can’t stand it any longer.”

He turned and said, “Good-bye, Léah.”

She rose and came forward from her corner, putting down her work to shake his hand, but she did it only for Rasmussen’s sake. There was no emotion in her farewell. She liked Dantry no better than she had liked him on that first day more than a year before. She said, “Good-bye, Mr. Dantry.”

Then he put his arm about Rasmussen’s square thick shoulders and said, “You’ve been good to me. I envy you. Thank you.” And he went off suddenly down the path under the coconut palms he had loved so much.

When he had gone Rasmussen made a rueful attempt to laugh and said to Léah, “Well?” This time she was going to be wrong. Dantry was going away and nothing had happened.

“It’s a good riddance,” she said. “If he goes.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean *if* he goes.”

Then she put out the lights and followed him up the stairs.

When they had gone to bed and were lying in the darkness with only the sound of the drums to break the stillness, he could not sleep—he, Rasmussen, who always slept like a log. And he could not sleep because he kept thinking of Dantry. Now that he had gone, Rasmussen found that he was not sorry. It was odd, but suddenly he did not miss him. Indeed,

lying there between sleep and wakefulness, he found it difficult to remember what he was like. He could not even recall his face. It was as if he had never come to Nivandrum at all. He had given nothing at all and left nothing behind. He was, it seemed to the hotel proprietor, lying sleepless in the heat, not even a friend.

Puzzled, the simple Rasmussen thought, “I’m going crazy.”

Beside him Léah slept content. She had not meant to drive the stranger from the island. What she sought was something worse than that. She had promised the River God to destroy him.

Paddling the dugout back through the darkness, peace came to Dantry once more for the first time in weeks, the peace which never endured, the terrible, deceptive, illusory peace which always came when he was running away, because in his heart he always believed that the next place would be all right, that in the next place life would be endurable.

For a little while he allowed the canoe to drift and sat quite still looking up at the stars which in the soft, black night of Nivandrum seemed to hang down out of the sky like lanterns. In the distance from the islands all around came the sound of the eternal drums and the thin thread of sound from the flutes. Everywhere among the palms gleamed little fires of coconut husk, and about each fire there was, he knew, a little cluster of people gossiping, singing, beating drums, at home, happy and friendly. But he belonged to none of them. Even when he went to Sandy's the little group about the fire would break up at once and wander off to some other compound leaving the two of them alone. And the girl Maria was always the first to vanish into the shadows.

No, he did not belong here in this loveliest and most peaceful of places. And he was running away again. Well, this time would be the last. There could be no others. He had tried nearly all the places and always they were the same. Since running away did no good, he would go back to Europe or to America, and try to lose himself there. He would go to Colombo and take the first boat home.

It was a good feeling ... to have made a decision, to be leaving Nivandrum and that house which he had for a little

time loved so much. It was good to be making a clean break, to be going away, taking nothing with him but a few clothes. It was a little like being reborn, save that it had all happened so many times before. For a moment, in this new sense of triumph, he loved Nivandrum, now that he was leaving, as much as he had loved it on that first morning when he sat with Rasmussen and the Breton captain in the great vaulted room in the Grand Oriental Hotel. Then slowly he dipped his paddle again into the warm clear water, and at each thrust of the paddle the water sprang up and glittered and sparkled in the darkness in a thousand phosphorescent colors.

“All that color, all that beauty,” he thought, “is born of decay—the decay of a million tiny bodies, the death of billions of tiny lives,” and he wondered suddenly if from another planet like the moon, the whole earth appeared phosphorescent.

Half-drifting, the canoe came at last against the foot of the great stairway from which long ago priests and warriors, rich merchants and adventurers had stepped into the boats that took them across the once bustling harbor. When he had made fast the canoe, he stood for a moment listening again to the distant sound of the drums and to the sound of the lapping water which always brought him a certain peace. “Water,” he thought, “whatever else happens I shall never live away from the sound of water.” And as he turned to climb the steps in the house he discovered an extraordinary thing. For the first time since he had lived in the house he returned to find a light in his bedroom. He had given orders long ago to Silas that there was never to be a light because it attracted insects.

Quickly he climbed the great stairway, and as he reached the top he discovered that not only was there a light in the

room, but someone sitting there—a woman in European clothes wearing a great picture hat covered with flowers. She sat by the light with her back to the door, looking at the pictures in one of the illustrated London papers which were always on his bedside table, barometers of his own occasional nostalgia for England in which he always found photographs of old friends and acquaintances, out of that other life which was now so far away. They were all going slightly middle-aged now, and pictures of their children had begun to appear in their places. His own pictures, *his* children's pictures, might have been in them, but they were not. He had begun life like all those others, with even greater chances....

While he stood there, cautious, tempted to turn and escape before the woman became aware of his presence, the memory of a half-dozen women out of the years just past went through his brain, the woman left behind in Penang, the Russian woman in Shanghai, the wife of the French planter in Indo-China, that odd English girl in Calcutta. Which one of them had followed him all the way to Nivandrum and how had she got here? There had been no boat, and the first of the bi-weekly trains arrived only the next morning. It was perhaps the Russian woman. She was romantic and over-emotional and was given to wearing large hats covered with flowers.

Then the excitement stirred in his blood, the old excitement which had never brought him anything but complications and troubles, and he knew that it was impossible to go away without discovering who the woman was, and he knew too, that if he stayed, the venture was almost certain to end in scenes and complications and

perhaps tragedy. As he moved the woman heard the sound of his footsteps, and springing up as if terrified she turned toward him and he saw that it was none of the women out of his past, that it was no European woman at all, but Maria herself, and his heart gave a sudden leap.

She was trembling and leaned on the table as if she were going to faint, and suddenly he saw that the extraordinary hat was not a European hat at all, but simply an old hat of coconut fiber such as the women wore when working in the rice fields, and that the flowers which adorned it were not artificial ones, but real clusters of jasmine and bignonia, bougainvillea and jacqueranda. She must have seen a hat like it in one of the illustrated papers at some moment when she had come to see Silas and he himself was absent from the house ... she must have come alone to his bedroom when he was not there ... she had copied it from the picture of some dowdy woman opening a bazaar. The effect was charming, naïve and a little comic, like the European dress of cheap cotton which she must have made with her own hands, laboriously. She must have dressed like this for his sake.

And then he noticed another thing. The whole of the great Spanish bed had been strewn with flowers. They lay everywhere, trumpet flowers, jasmine, bougainvillea, even on the floor about the bed, their thick perfume filling the room, flowers which she herself had gathered out of the exuberant abundance of the islands.

At the sight of all the flowers and Maria, shy and frightened in the absurd frock and hat, a lump came into his throat and he could not tell whether he meant to laugh or to cry. It was a curious emotion and he did not deceive himself. He was weeping for himself ... that anything so simple and so

lovely should have happened to him after so many years of disillusionment and despair.

It was the girl who spoke first. In a low voice, scarcely more than a whisper, she said, with a kind of simple dignity, “*Sahib*, I have come to you.”

He smiled, a smile which women liked because in spite of everything, of all his selfishness and falseness and treachery, it was at the moment it happened, a real smile full of tenderness and emotion. Then he moved toward her and put his arm about her so that in her terrible shyness she would not have to go on looking at him, and when he touched her she began to cry like a frightened child. For a long time, in silence, he held her close to him, and with her young body, trembling, pressed against his, he saw suddenly that in spite of everything, in spite of his own misery and indecision, there had been a meaning in his coming to Nivandrum. There had been a reason why on that first morning he had been compelled to stay, without even going back to the *Vivandière*, to bid the ship farewell. This was something which had happened to few men, for it was as if, shedding all that tired and cynical world of his youth and young manhood, he had fallen into Eden. If nothing again ever happened to him, it would not matter....

At last he held the girl at arm's length and looking at her, said, “I like you better in your *sari*.”

The girl smiled and said in her odd, funny English, “I thought you didn't like my *saris*. I dressed like this because I thought you would like it. I thought it would help you.”

The expression “help you,” was a kind of revelation. He thought, “Then she knew all the time how I felt. She thought I was afraid. She knew it.”

She repeated, "I thought it would please you. I'm sorry."

"You are a good girl," he said quite simply. "I love you."

"I love you too. You're not ashamed of me?"

"No, I'm not ashamed of you. And you mustn't call me *sahib*."

"What shall I call you?"

He had meant to say simply, "Tom," but something would not let him and he found himself saying, "Dantry."

Then he put out the light, and for a long time there was only the sound of the lapping water and the distant thumping of the drums dying out one by one as the moon slipped down into the sea and silence crept in among the islands.

When the broken-down, narrow-gauge train left the next day for the burning plateau and the great cities beyond, it went without him, and when Rasmussen heard that he had not gone, he said nothing, even to Léah. He remembered her saying, "*If he goes,*" and again he was a little terrified of her.

He did not leave the next day or the next or the next and slowly, in the animal charm of days and nights with Maria, Nivandrum, with its island and backwaters and ancient houses and mountains came to be what he had dreamed on that first morning long ago when he came ashore. In it he found forgetfulness and a kind of peace the existence of which he had never known or even suspected until now. It was a peace in which all the memories, the remorse, the regrets of another life faded until at last they no longer had any existence. It was like a dream produced by certain drugs. And now and then, at rare moments when he awoke for a moment and tried desperately to see himself, he thought, "It is killed. It is dead. I have escaped at last."

There was nothing save Maria and the sun and the moon, the stars, the water and the mountains. Not even Sandy made any difficulties, for when Dantry went to see him, ashamed and filled with a desire to make amends, he found that the fat little Cockney was pleased. At first this astonished him, but when Sandy talked to him he understood.

"It is perfect now," Sandy said. "Now you won't go away. You'll stay. And Maria is happy and so I am happy. You'll be good to her. It is better for her than taking a fisherman for a husband. Perhaps some day you will want to marry her, but even that doesn't make much difference here. Even if you were married to her it wouldn't mean that you'd stay here. You could always run away. It's a good life. You'll never find a better one. It's better than Europe."

It was, Dantry thought, much much better than Europe. It was better than anything he had ever known, now that he had

lost himself, that self born and bred and educated in another world. He began to forget even the existence of Europe, reminded of it only by the bundles of London newspapers and the illustrated weeklies which went unopened for days, and the gramophone records from New York which sounded strange and yet extraordinarily like the music of the drums at night among the islands. He began to wear a *sarong*, and sometimes on days when he went fishing with Maria beyond the Great Bar he did not even wear a *sarong*, but only a loin cloth, and presently he became the same color as the café-au-lait fishermen, burned by the sun and the sea spray. But he did not begin to take drugs and even the desire to drink left him, for there was now no reason to stifle conscience and memory.

But Maria still called him “Dantry,” and she never came to the island to live in the house. She still lived with her brothers and sisters in Sandy’s compound and came to him only when he sent for her. And so he managed to keep what he liked of his old life intact, a thing apart from her and Sandy and Rasmussen—all the music and the books and the life of the spirit, all the things which none of them, he believed, could ever comprehend.

Thus, he thought, he might preserve his dignity. Thus he might save himself from the degeneration which overtook other white men who tried what he was doing. It was, he knew, a wise plan, but also it was a plan which at moments he knew was a little less than human, moments when Maria was unhappy because there was a whole part of him which he excluded from her passionate, self-sacrificing, worshipful love. He knew, too, that Maria was shamed before all Nivandrum because he did not take her into his fine house

with the piano and the gramophone, but kept her outside like a concubine. It was not that she complained or even betrayed her unhappiness by her looks or manner. He was her Lord whom she worshiped and his word was law.

And so he found a way at last into that world for which in his soul he had been forever searching; a world in which he would be given everything, and he need give only what he saw fit.

One year passed and then two and then three, with nothing to interrupt the selfish perfection of his existence, nothing to disturb the days spent partly in sport, partly with reading and amusement, partly with Maria, and presently the old life, all of Europe, everything of the past, faded into insignificance. He had found what he wanted. It would, he believed, go on forever. Even the memory of Alix, and all the bitter regrets associated with her, returned to him less frequently. He had, he sometimes thought, cheated Fate itself. He was not drinking any more. He did not take drugs. He had cheated the classic legend of the white man in the East.

There were not even any children, any “eight anna products,” to destroy his pleasure and fill him with remorse. That this filled Maria with shame and regret did not at first occur to him, and when it did occur he did not allow the knowledge to trouble him, any more than he allowed her unhappiness at living always in Sandy’s compound to trouble him. It was not that she ever complained or deliberately made him aware of her unhappiness as a western woman would have done, and so, after a time, he found it easy to be insensible to her unhappiness. He did not love her, but he was fond of her and he was kind to her, so long as the kindness cost him nothing. And at last the thought came to him that he

might as well marry her, since he meant never again to leave Nivandrum, and it would bring her a new dignity of position which would compensate for her unhappiness over her apparent barrenness and her exclusion from his house. Marriage would give her face among the people of the islands and it would cost him nothing.

So the marriage was arranged and took place in the Syrian Christian church by a rite which was half pagan and half a part of the ancient ceremony of the Church of Antioch, a ceremony which he found charming in a literary way; and afterward Sandy gave a great feast, to which half the people of the islands were invited. Mees Opp was there, for Maria had arranged that the ceremony be held during one of the brief visits of the woman doctor. The doctor saw her hundreds of patients during the morning and attended the ceremony and feast in the afternoon, drinking vast quantities of beer and making jokes with everyone save the bridegroom.

It was an odd thing that he had never got on with Mees Opp. Again and again he had tried to become friendly with her. It seemed such an easy thing to do; she was so friendly with all the natives. But nothing had come of it save a few polite speeches. There was something disturbing about her; there were even moments when he felt that she was as unfriendly toward him as the witch Léah. It was as if somehow in all their contacts, in every conversation, she left him "outside," as if she existed in another world into which he could not enter, almost it seemed that he was a little boy and she herself was as old as Time.

But at the feast even the detachment of Mees Opp did not trouble him. He was aware of her presence, full of kindness and good humor, beloved by all the people; that there was

neither real friendship nor real enmity between them did not disturb him, for he was happy now in a new way, because at the wedding feast he found that the people of the islands accepted him for the first time as one of them, as they had long ago accepted Rasmussen and Sandy. He ate and drank with them, seated on the sand. When he returned to his own island with Maria, their canoe was escorted by dozens of canoes and *wallum* boats filled with friends and neighbors.

That night, with Maria at his side, a married man, he lay awake for a long time and he thought, "At last it is all right. At last I have lost the past. At last I belong here."

But in the morning Maria went back to live again as before at her father's compound, and she still called him not "Tom" but "Dantry." Again he had cheated circumstance and Fate. He had become one of the island people and he had kept his dignity. He had taken what he wanted and gave only what cost him nothing. He was neither a beachcomber nor a remittance man. And that night he did not send for Maria, but went instead to play cribbage at the Grand Oriental Hotel with Rasmussen.

Only Léah had not come to the wedding. Pretending illness, she stayed away, and when Rasmussen chided her she said, "I am sick. I have a bad head. Why should I go? What good this marriage? Inside his heart he hasn't changed. He's got a use for us all. That's all. His heart is the same evil heart."

"Evil?" said Rasmussen. "There's no evil in him."

"He is one who brings unhappiness."

"Rot!" said Rasmussen. "He wishes evil to nobody."

"People can make great evil without wishing it. Sometimes the worst evil is made like that. They can make evil just by

being what they are.”

She hated him worse now than when he had first come to Nivandrum, because somehow he had outwitted her and undone her spells. He wore a *sarong* and had a native woman, but somehow he had not taken to drink or to drugs. He had not become degraded. She had hoped, and even planned, that by this time he would be a drunkard, living in squalor, his character gone, his end in sight. Léah had a strange feeling that he had cheated her and the River God, that he had charms of his own that were stronger than hers.

So on the night after the wedding, when Dantry came to play cribbage, Rasmussen almost at once caught her making desperate signs and incantations behind Dantry’s back, but he could not stop her because at that moment he had just told Dantry that Lord and Lady Groton with a secretary, a valet, an *ayah* and four servants were on their way to stay at the Grand Oriental Hotel, and the news had produced an extraordinary effect upon his friend.

Before he had finished speaking Dantry looked suddenly very strange and said, “Lord Groton! You’re sure that’s the name? Lord Groton? It can’t be. He’s in Europe. There must be some mistake.”

“It’s typewritten in the letter,” said Rasmussen. “It’s from his secretary; Eric Lansbury is the secretary’s name. There can’t be any mistake. Look!”

He passed the letter to Dantry and Dantry read it through not once, but twice without speaking, and the curious hard, mirthless grin changed the look of his whole face. He said, almost as if to himself, “Why is he coming here? Why is he bringing his wife to a place like this? It must be a dirty business of some kind.”

Rasmussen, watching Léah, a little uneasy now about what she might do, saw that she too had noticed the change in Dantry, had forgotten her incantations and was now watching him. Her dark eyes had become small, and their gaze concentrated as if they were not watching the body of Dantry but looking inside him at his soul.

The letter was short and direct and written on Government House paper. It merely said that Lord and Lady Groton were coming to Nivandrum for a short stay, and that their party would need at least four bedrooms and plenty of servants' quarters. The secretary wished to point out that Lord Groton and especially Lady Groton were accustomed to the best and most luxurious hotels and that it would be appreciated and the proprietor would be rewarded properly if the rooms were as clean and as comfortable as possible. It also requested especially good food, and at the end there was a postscript which read, "In case there is a good *shikari* in the vicinity, Lord Groton would be interested in some shooting. Lady Groton is interested in native dancing and would appreciate it if you could arrange to have an exhibition by some local dancers."

There was an arrogance in the letter which angered Dantry as he read it. Particularly there was arrogance in the postscript which assumed that the world existed only to provide Lord and Lady Groton with luxury and entertainment. The word "native" brought a sudden flush to his face for now it struck suddenly home. It also made him see and understand the secretary as clearly as if he had come into the room himself—an echo of the world he had nearly forgotten.

“It ain’t any Ritz,” said Rasmussen, “but it’s clean and Léah makes good curries.” Then he noticed Dantry’s face again and said, “You know them?”

For a moment Dantry was silent, thinking, and then he said, “No, I don’t know them. Perhaps they are just coming for the shooting.”

“Sandy hasn’t heard from them,” said Rasmussen. “Nobody ever comes here for the shooting. If they were coming for that they’d go to the hills to Rankotah. They sound like swells.”

“They are,” said Dantry. “Perhaps the last swells in Europe.”

This appeared to frighten Rasmussen. “Maybe,” he said, “they’d be more comfortable staying with you. You’d know what they like.”

Dantry laughed, a rather nasty laugh. “Oh, no, I’m not entertaining distinguished visitors. Anyway, why should I cut you out of a small fortune? Clean them, Rasmussen. They’re rich as Croesus.”

Rasmussen put away the letter and they began to play cribbage, but Dantry played badly and there were moments when he seemed not to know what he was doing, and a little before eleven in the middle of the game he pushed back his chair and said suddenly, “It’s no good. I’m too tired, I can’t keep my mind on the game.”

When he had gone Rasmussen said to Léah. “He seems upset by the news. You’d think he’d be glad people like that ... people of his own class ... were coming to Nivandrum.”

“Yes,” said Léah, “he was never tired like that before.” And set about putting out the lights.

Rasmussen put out his pipe. “Maybe,” he said, “this swell is coming because they’re going to do something at last about opening up the harbor again.”

Léah did not answer him. When he had gone upstairs she went quickly out of the hotel to the landing stage, unfastened a canoe and set out for the island with the ruined hut and the image of her god.

Halfway across the lagoon in his canoe, Dantry knew that his peace had come to an end. If Groton was coming to Nivandrum it could only mean the destruction of the place. And that she should be coming with him was unbelievable, now after nearly fifteen years, when he had thought himself free of her forever, when at last he had found peace. It was unbelievable, he kept telling himself; it couldn't be happening. She couldn't have heard that he was here and have come because of that. Perhaps she was divorced from Groton and this was a new wife, a strange woman who was coming with him. But that couldn't have been or he would have heard of it long before now in *The Times* or the *Telegraph* or one of the illustrated papers. People like them couldn't keep out of the newspapers.

Hysterically he thought, "I'll go away. I'll take Sandy and go up to the hills until they're gone again. I won't see her. I won't talk to her." And once more he thought, aloud now, speaking the words in a kind of wonder, "It's not possible. Such things don't happen. I'll go away. I'll go away."

But when he was a little more calm, he saw that the whole thing was more than possible. There weren't many places left in the world to be exploited, and forgotten Nivandrum was one of them; Groton, the great exploiter, the great destroyer, must have got wind of it.

All that night he lay awake tossing in the heat until the last sound of the drums had died away, until the jackals ceased their howling, until at last the sun came up behind the high blue mountains, for all the old memories of her had claimed him again with a terrible force he had never experienced

before, and he saw suddenly that all his life in Nivandrum had been nothing, only a bitter negation in which there had been no reality, a kind of makeshift, a drug. But most of all he was afraid, of what he did not know, but he thought, "I should not have boasted that I had cheated Fate." He kept repeating, half-aloud now, "I'll run away. I won't see her. I won't," but all the time he knew that he would see her, that it was the thing he wanted most in the world, the only thing. Nothing had changed the old desire.

Two hundred miles inland the narrow-gauge train bearing Lord and Lady Groton moved across the burning plateau toward the high mountains which sheltered Nivandrum from the heat of the interior and kept the rains from the southeast for the narrow strip of wet green coast. There were in the train seven third-class carriages filled with farmers and shopkeepers, pilgrims and *sadhus* and men who simply wandered from one part of the country to another, picking up a living where they could. They were all packed together, some on seats, some on the floors, the children perched on the laps of the adults. The carriages, baked by the sun and the heat which rose from the rocks and scorched barren red earth, were like ovens, the smell of them was staggering. There were two luggage vans, one containing the usual articles of commerce, and the other nothing but the trunks and hat and boot boxes of Lord and Lady Groton and their suite. Ahead, near the engine, where the smell of the rest of the train would not reach them, were three first-class carriages which had been converted into private cars. Here traveled Lord and Lady Groton with Lord Groton's secretary and valet, and the *ayah* who replaced Lady Groton's maid, Harris, left behind with malaria, and four bearers.

In one of these three carriages Lord Groton lay on the bed, half-naked, drinking brandy and soda, with a great packet of papers spread across his barrel chest. Now and then he shuffled the papers about and added a figure here or took away another there, but all the shuffling and jotting brought no order to them. In the heat his brain whirled round and round inside the hard, massive head; the brandy and soda sent up his blood pressure and made his face even more purple

and apoplectic than it usually was. It was a large, fleshy face which, unlike most fat faces, was unpleasant and ill humored, perhaps because of the thin, almost lipless mouth and the square hard angle of the jaw. It was a face upon which was written by the age of fifty-four the whole of his career—not a very nice career, in which ruthlessness and cunning, dishonesty and even cruelty had played large parts—from the time he had left a day school in Birmingham, plain Albert Simpson, son of a small building contractor, to this moment when, as the rich and powerful Lord Groton, one of the kings of the West, he rode in a miserable carriage on a second-rate, narrow-gauge railway across one of the hottest and dustiest plains in the world.

Although the sun had set long ago, the heat of the day still clung to the carriage, so that the metal was hot to the touch and the very sheets of the bed seemed to be filled with heat. The dust crept in everywhere, red, silky, hot dust, fine as powdered talc; it came in beneath the doors, through the ventilators and even through the fine screening that covered the windows. It lay in a film over everything, a film which on the floor was an inch thick, stirred into movement by the current of the fans. It lay on the sheets and covered his face and half-naked hairy body. It turned the papers on his chest all soiled and gritty, so that the movement of one bit of paper against another set his teeth on edge. It fell on the melting block of ice in the basin on the floor and turned quickly into a thin trickle of red mud that was like blood.

It was not the heat, he told himself, which muddled his brain. Damn it! What was heat to Albert Simpson, who, as a young man, had sold cutlery and cheap watches and clocks all over the Sudan, Malaya and India? And it wasn't the

brandy, he told himself. What was brandy to Groton, who had drunk as much as he wanted all his life without any harm?

Tortured, with the taste of the awful red dust in his mouth, he told himself that at fifty-four he was still young, as strong, as healthy as ever. He kept telling himself over and over again to still the small, gnawing suspicion that he was no longer young and was a little ill. Illness was something he had never known and he could not tolerate even a suspicion of it. But in spite of anything he could do, in spite of repeating assurances, of making a vast effort which seemed to burst his head, the small terror remained and the papers grew more and more muddled, and the figures out of which he meant to wring new wealth and fresh power, only danced and grew blurred before his bloodshot eyes.

The truth was that Lord Groton was no longer the bull-like young Albert Simpson who had flourished in the gridiron heat of the Sudan, and that alcohol had begun to devour him. In the beginning he had drunk without evil effects, and then presently he had drunk because his brain only functioned when saturated with fumes of alcohol, and now it had got beyond that; the alcohol, instead of helping him, only muddled his head. For thirty-two years he had worked like a dynamo; now, far from home, from his great house in Sussex and the beautiful house in Hill Street, the mechanics of the dynamo had begun to rattle and squeak.

Presently, when he could bear it no longer, he pounded on the wall of the carriage and shouted, "Bates! Bates!" and in a moment the door opened in a whirl of dust and his valet came in.

He was a thin little man with a narrow, undernourished face and high cheekbones, and a skin that seemed forever

damp. His eyes were of no color at all. At sight of him his lordship pulled himself up in bed and shouted, “Where’s Lansbury?”

Without raising his voice, without changing the expression of his face, Bates answered him, “Asleep, sir, I should think.”

This seemed to enrage his lordship. “Asleep!” he shouted. “Damn it, why is he sleeping? *I can’t sleep. Tell him to come here.*”

“Very good, sir.”

“And tell one of those black devils to bring more ice for the basin.”

“Very good, sir.”

Bates withdrew and delivered his various messages with calm. He had been with Lord Groton for twelve years, which was four years longer than any servant, or secretary, or partner or employee had ever been with his lordship, because either Lord Groton dismissed or betrayed them or they left, their nerves shattered, their self-respect destroyed. But all the shouting and abuse did not disturb Bates, because as insulation against it he had for his lordship a fine thin coating of pure, distilled hatred. And he regarded himself as a machine, and there were moments when he found himself feeling superior to his master, moments when he betrayed him without being discovered. He had made a neat little fortune by accepting bribes, and he was a secret member of the Communist party and hoped for the day when men like his lordship could be stood against a wall and be shot in cold blood. Sometimes Bates thought about this, imagining the scene and picturing himself as the Communist who gave the order to fire. It would be, he thought, like exterminating a plague-carrying rat.

For Bates, like most ignorant men and fanatics, had a single-track mind. Already he had laid aside quite a fund during the twelve years of his service, and within a year he would have enough on which to live for the rest of his life, in a semidetached villa, with a small garden, in the suburbs of his native town of Manchester. When the last necessary shilling had clinked into his postal savings account, he would pack his bag and walk out of his lordship's service without so much as giving notice. His lordship would ring the bell and bellow for Bates, and Bates would simply not appear; it was a scene which in imagination provided Bates with a great deal of pleasure—his lordship preparing for a large capitalistic banquet and at the last moment no one to dress him. He regretted that he would not be there to witness it. In the meanwhile he both pleased and exasperated his lordship, simply because he was a machine. He pleased because as a machine he was absolutely efficient, and he exasperated because as a machine he was beyond being hurt or humiliated.

The secretary, Mr. Lansbury, came in when he had put on a dressing gown with a scarf to match tied neatly under his rather weak chin. He was a pink-cheeked, good-looking young man, whose whole appearance, even in pyjamas and dressing gown, cried out, "Eton, Oxford, and the best clubs." As a secretary, he was conscientious and uninspired; he would not have kept his place for fourteen months if he had not been efficient. He had been engaged because his father was a gentleman, and being very hard up, had begged Lord Groton to take him on; the kindly old gentleman had been made to beg, with tears in his eyes, before Lord Groton agreed. The boy had been kept on because he was Eton and Oxford and the best clubs and a great many other things

which Lord Groton was not and never could be, and because the boy was over-bred and sensitive and could be made to suffer, and because Lord Groton had been born Albert Simpson and educated at the Laburnum Road Grammar School and the University of Hard Knocks.

Now Groton bellowed at Lansbury, “How can you sleep in this heat?”

Flushing the young man answered, “Sorry, sir. It must have been because I was exhausted from all the difficulty over the luggage.”

The older man grunted and shuffled the papers, gritty with dust. “Well, I’ve got a lot of work to do and I can’t make head or tail of your reports. Sit down.”

Lansbury, still flushed and trembling a little, sat down in the chair beside the bed, and together they went over the papers and figures while Lord Groton forced the aching head of the boy to do the work of two heads, one of them muddled and a little drunk. He drank more and more brandy to wash the burning dust from his throat. There was nothing wrong with the reports; they were neat and efficient, but Groton’s brain was unable to grasp their significance.

Two hours later, when poor Lansbury’s patient explanations had failed to make the figures any clearer, Lord Groton put up the papers, sent the secretary away and for half an hour experienced genuine terror for the first time in all his life. He was afraid that he was breaking up at last, and that now, when he needed them most to pull off a coup against the man he hated most in the world, his strength and energy were failing him.

For that was the reason he, the great Lord Groton, was bound on a second-rate, narrow-gauge, upcountry train,

through the heat of the Great Plateau. He must get there first and look over the ground and buy or lease everything that was loose before Hugo Deakin even suspected what was happening. The tip that brought him to Nivandrum had cost a fabulous sum, enough money to have ruined the character and conscience of at least three government servants, who otherwise would have been honest and conscientious. "Every man," he was accustomed to say, "has his price," but the price of these three government servants had been out of all reason. He had paid them each enough to found a fortune and leave their children provided for when they died. He had very likely ruined them, and it had cost him more than anything in the world, except his own wife. The money did not really matter, for he was so rich that from day to day he did not know whether he was a million pounds to this side or that. It was the principle of the thing. He hated being done. If he succeeded, the price was worth it, for he wanted to humble, to outwit a younger man, as ruthless as himself, who the world said was more clever, who was slowly passing him on the way to the utmost heights of money and power. He, Groton, had to beat out Lord Deakin and own Nivandrum and the burning plateau above it before Deakin ever discovered there was oil in the burning desert, and that the government meant to clear the silted channel of the harbor and make of Nivandrum once more a living city and a bustling port. And he had to go to Nivandrum to see for himself, lest something be wrong and he make a fool of himself. Because he pitied any man who trusted him he himself had never trusted any man.

When the moment of terror had passed, he chuckled in anticipation of his triumph, of the articles in the papers about his victory over Deakin—that damned clever Deakin—and

the talk that would go about the city. Again he would be the admiration and envy of all the little men who hoped that one day they, too, might be Grotons or Deakins. And then he chuckled at the knowledge that the world thought he was at this moment upcountry in Burma, shooting—Burma, where there wasn't another drop of oil or a teak tree or a laborer left to be exploited! And all the time here he was slipping across the hot plateau on his way to a forgotten place called Nivandrum. He had no idea of what Nivandrum was like nor what the Grand Oriental Hotel would be, but it did not matter to him who, long ago, as plain Albert Simpson, had slept in dock sheds and native huts and eaten lizards and flying foxes.

And then when the terror had passed, he thought of his wife in the second carriage behind—damn it, there was no corridor on the train—and decided he would go to her when the train stopped at the next station. He had need of her just now; there was something about her, a calmness, a certainty which always restored his weakened confidence. He thought of himself always as a man of hard common sense, but there were moments when it seemed to him that he was simply a giddy fool in comparison with her. And lately she had come to be a kind of obsession with him, as she had been long ago in the beginning, when he had snatched her out of the brilliant life she was leading in London. “Brilliant” was a word he liked; his wife, to him, was brilliant, despite her aloofness, or perhaps because of it, and the life she had led then was “brilliant.” The fact that he, a dull businessman, had been able to snatch her out of a brilliant life filled with clever, fashionable, fascinating people left him, after nearly fifteen years, still a little breathless with astonishment.

Lately she had become once more infinitely desirable, as if that period when he “had grown used to her,” had never existed. He could not see that she had changed at all save that she seemed to have grown finer and more delicate, like a steel knife which has been worn fine by much polishing and sharpening, and that now instead of withdrawing from him she accepted him, not with pleasure perhaps, but at least with indifference. If he loved anything or anyone in the world it was his wife, and he loved her, although he had never quite thought it out, for the same reasons that made him hate poor Lansbury—because she was everything that he was not and could never be. Unlike Lansbury, she belonged to him; she was a possession in which he took great pride as he took pride in his horses. Whenever they entered a great restaurant or a drawing-room he was aware that her beauty, and her air of distinction created a mild sensation, and the knowledge always filled him with a wild surge of pride. Lansbury could escape, but she *belonged* to him. Yet about her he had bad spells of terror, when it seemed to him that for all his pride in her, she had never belonged to him at all, not even in the moments when he embraced her; that no matter how much money he poured upon her, she had always managed somehow to elude him. But the knowledge did not dampen his ardor; on the contrary it seemed to kindle it, so that now, at fifty-four, it was stronger than ever.

But he thought, too, “Perhaps I feel like this about her again because I am growing old or because I am going to die.” And quickly he told himself, “But that is nonsense. I’m in the prime of life. I have never been stronger.” It was not a nice spectacle for himself or anyone else—the spectacle of Lord Groton facing the possibility of the grave, to which he could take neither his fortune, nor his power, nor his wife.

At the first station after Bates had left his lordship, he got down, and, pushing his way through the crowd on the platform, he knocked at the door of Lady Groton's carriage, calling out, "It's Bates, me lady. Is there anything you want?"

The *ayah* opened the door and Lady Groton called out, "Come in, Bates."

She was lying back in the silken sheets with which she always traveled, and as he came in she put down the book she had been trying to read. It struck him how miraculously cool she appeared—the only one of the whole party who did not seem hot, red-faced, dusty and disheveled. She seemed utterly undisturbed either by the heat or by the screaming that went on outside the carriage, as cool, as calm as if she were lying in the luxury of her own bedroom in Hill Street. And he thought, as he was forever thinking each time he saw her, how pretty she was, and how ageless and what a look of race she had. He did not think of her as a man might think of a desirable woman; that would have been disrespectful, and, in any case, it was not in his nature. He thought of her rather in the abstract, as an authority on Chinese art might consider a wonderfully fine Ming vase, of her fineness of bone, the clearness and easy straightforward gaze of her blue eyes, the somewhat faded gold of her hair and the perfect, almost insolent beauty of the gesture with which she raised the cigarette to her scarlet lips. Above all, he liked her perfect and undisturbed, undisturbable elegance.

He liked, too, the way she spoke to him and even to that strange, dark, half-savage woman, the *ayah*, whom she had known for only two days. He liked to think of the

generations, the centuries which had gone into her look of race, the quality of her voice and her manner, for in spite of his communist leanings, he liked ladies and gentlemen. Once the thing he referred to as “Boorjoy” civilization was destroyed, there would be no more room for them, but while it lasted he liked having them about. It gave him pleasure to see that she was luxuriously comfortable. He made it a point to see to it that the gilding of the frame which inclosed her should never become chipped or tarnished.

“I thought,” he said, very respectfully, “that with ’Arris away you might want a little attention.”

She smiled and gave him one of her warning looks—a look which seemed to say, “We understand each other. We both know his lordship and what a scoundrel he is.” Aloud she said, “You might find one of the boys and tell him to fetch some more ice. And bring me a brandy and water—plain Evian water with no ice in it.”

“Very good, my lady.”

“Cold, Bates, but no ice in it.”

He withdrew, and while he was preparing the brandy and water he continued to think about Lady Groton. She still fascinated him, after twelve years, because there was always something mysterious and unpredictable about her. He knew, if not everything about her, a great deal, much more than she imagined he knew, just as he knew vastly more about his lordship than his master ever guessed ... enough, indeed, to have sent him to jail unless he bought himself off the way very rich crooks had a way of doing under the “Boorjoy” régime.

He knew about her flirtations and friendships and he suspected her infidelities, but he had never spoken of these

things to anyone, not even to 'Arris, her maid, because somehow he had always felt a desire to protect and shield her, not only against others, but against her own husband, and sometimes, in her folly and unhappiness, against herself. It was always puzzling to him, when he "studied" the question, why she had ever married Lord Groton in the first place, and he had never been able to find out why she had done it, beyond a hint or two dropped by old 'Arris, lying ill now in the hospital in Madras. Old 'Arris had been with her since she was a little girl, and once or twice 'Arris had dropped a hint or two about the past ... that she had married Groton because she and her father were swamped with debt. And that there had been another man, long ago, at the time of the marriage, a man who was her own age, attractive, handsome, well-bred like herself. But that, Bates gathered, had gone badly because both of them were too high-spirited. They had quarreled and he had gone away from London, and so far as 'Arris knew, he had never come back. Sometimes, it seemed to Bates that 'er ladyship was the victim of a vast indifference, born of her unhappiness, that she no longer cared what she did or what happened to her. It was a pity, too, he thought, as he mixed the brandy and water, when she was so pretty and nice, and such a lady, and so many men would have liked making her happy. If she had never been unfaithful to Groton, thought Bates, it was a great pity. A woman like her needed love and protection, not just money, which was all Groton gave her—in vast, staggering quantities.

When the train pulled out of the station, Lady Groton, because it was too hot to sleep, went on trying to read her book. It could not be said that she actually *read*; she looked at the words, and now and then an idea, not always a very sound idea, it seemed to her, transmitted itself from the pages into her brain. It was a book called *The Colour Problem of the Empire*, and was written by a Cambridge professor who had never been farther from England than Etretat, where he had once spent a rainy week-end. There was no gainsaying the dullness of the book, and even to her untrained but keen intelligence, it seemed singularly vain and inept.

She had bought the book in Port Said, along with many others of the same sort, because she wanted to know about the countries whither she was bound with her husband, but beyond facts and statistics and somewhat moldy theories, she had found nothing in them to help her, and since her arrival three months earlier, she had learned very little at first hand, for it had been, it seemed to her, quite impossible to establish any contact with the people who lived in those countries. It seemed to her that she had spent all her time at pompous dinners and receptions, which had no reality, and that she was forever surrounded by her own countrymen, who were as ignorant of the country as herself, people whom at home she would have avoided like a plague. She had come to the East not because of devotion to Lord Groton, but because she had hoped that something would happen to her, something tremendous, which would excite and stimulate her and make of life something more than a succession of days to be got through. And nothing had happened, nothing whatever.

Now, hopelessly bored by the book, she fell to watching the *ayah*, and suddenly she felt a fierce desire to establish some contact with the woman, not as mistress and servant, but as woman to woman. In her heart she knew, out of her long experience as a *femme galante*, that neither race, nor color, nor creed, nor social station made people different from each other. She knew, as she knew so many things by instinct, that she and the *ayah* in the corner were both women and that in the tests of passion or disaster they were alike, and the rest was mere nonsense, a kind of veneered prejudice laid upon the surface of dull and stupid people by false education. That much, at least, her “badness” and unhappiness had taught her. That much nearer to reality she had been brought by it.

The *ayah* had no interest for her as a maidservant. She was stupid, untrained and more of a nuisance than a help to her, but as a woman, a fellow human, she was a subject of passionate interest. What was her life? What did she think? Had she a husband or a lover? With what bright hopes had she started life? Had all the *ayah*'s life, like her own, been one long process of disillusionment?

So presently she lighted another cigarette and fell to studying the woman who squatted at the far end of the carriage, fascinated a little by the mystery and the strangeness that separated them, a mystery and a strangeness which had been imposed upon them by other minds, by stupid traditions. “My world is dying,” she thought, “it is dead already. Perhaps the whole of Europe, the whole of the West is dying. That woman and her people are healthy. They have a past, but it is so remote that it has ceased to count as reality. Our

past is still too near for us to have a future. We have to die before we can be reborn and we are not yet quite dead.”

The woman was not ugly. She must, Lady Groton thought, be about her own age, thirty-seven or eight. She looked older. “She is not lucky like me in that way. I look no age at all. I might be anything you’d want to call me. I am not very changeable. I have bought all that security with the thousands of pounds I have spent on dressmakers and hairdressers and *masseuses*. She can’t buy such things, but she is healthier than me and in her soul not so tired.” The woman must have had many experiences. She wore a *sari* of some dark purple cloth, with a great many silver bangles, and set in the side of her nose was a single brilliant.

Presently Lady Groton said, “Laksmi.”

The *ayah* rose at once, all her silver bangles jangling, and Lady Groton said, “No, I don’t want anything. Don’t stand. I just wanted to talk to you.”

Shyly the woman squatted again, waiting.

“Are you married, Laksmi?”

“Yes, *memsahib*, twice.”

“How twice? I thought widows could not remarry in your country.”

The woman smiled, a humorous, almost malicious smile, as if she had outwitted someone who had meant to do her harm. “I got converted. I got a Christian. I got a divorce from my first husband. He was bad mans.”

“How was he bad?”

“He beat me and ran after other women and took the money I earned.”

“And your second husband?”

A relaxed, almost sultry look of pleasure came over the *ayah's* dark face and Lady Groton thought, "She's in love with him—lucky girl."

"Very good man, *memsahib*," said the *ayah*. "Very handsome man. Mahratta. *Chuprassi* at Government House."

"Does he mind your working like this?"

The woman grinned. "Don't go with any *memsahib* ... just now and then with *burra memsahibs* like you, to please Governor's lady. I make money, too. Save money. Going to buy land in his village."

"And your husband ... he's Christian, too?"

She laughed. "No. Bad Hindu. Mahrattas all bad Hindus. Too wild. Like me bad Christian. Never go church or temple." She grinned and this time the grin had no shyness in it, but a kind of friendliness, as if she were saying, "Me just like *memsahib*. Know *memsahib* has good heart. Temple church not matter when peoples have good hearts."

"Tell me all about your life," said Lady Groton. She had forgotten the cigarette and was listening now, charmed by the humorous, mischievous quality of the woman. *The Colour Problem of the Empire* had long since slipped to the floor to lie there, forever forgotten, even the next morning when they left the train.

The *ayah* began to talk, no longer shy now, but pleased to gossip with another woman. She said she came of a low caste and was born in a village on the great burning plateau, and was married when she was thirteen to a man she had never seen before. For ten years she endured being his wife, and then the handsome *chuprassi* came along, and the last child she had wasn't her husband's but the *chuprassi's*. Her husband and the *chuprassi* quarreled over her (and again her

face lighted with pleasure and became suddenly beautiful) and the *chuprassi* won, and then he told her about becoming a Christian and getting divorced and so she did. She went on and on, embroidering the story in her pidgin English with sly touches of humor and wit so that Lady Groton was amused and charmed and forgot all about the heat, and when she had finished, she fell abruptly silent and sat watching Lady Groton with dark, shining eyes. Waiting, it was as if she said, respectfully, “And now, *memsahib*, what about your life?”

But that couldn't be. “My life,” thought Lady Groton, “would probably shock her. Her story is perfectly natural and simple.” So she said, “It's a very interesting story, Laksmi ... not so different from the stories of a great many ladies in my country.”

Then the train drew into another station and the deafening noise began, made by the vendors of pineapples and sweets and Mohammedan and Hindu drinking water. Lady Groton said, “I won't need you any more tonight. In the morning wake me at the first station after it is light. I want to see the country.”

The *ayah* rose and smiling, salaamed with another tinkling of bracelets and anklets and withdrew. When she had gone Lady Groton felt more cheerful, for it seemed to her that this was the first time she had had a human conversation in three months, a conversation which was not either official mouthings or simply a wordy grovel at her feet because she was the rich wife of Lord Groton and a goddaughter of the old Queen. She felt much less alone in this vast and terrifying country. It had all been extremely dull and boring, as if she were wrapped round with cotton wool to protect her and keep

her from knowing the truth about anything. The *ayah* had made her feel human.

Then suddenly she felt an emotion of regret, almost of self-pity, which was like a physical pain. She, the rich Lady Groton, wife of one of the most powerful men in the West, felt a sudden envy of this humble native woman, to whom life was so exciting and satisfactory. And she thought, "If I had married Tom my life would never have been like this. I wouldn't have been so rich, but whatever we did would have been exciting. I would have been happy like that woman."

But it was far too late for regrets now. She did not even know what had become of poor Tom, so charming, so full of life and naïveté and excitement about living. And with a little stab at the heart she remembered herself, indeed saw herself suddenly as if she were another person, as a girl just after the war. She saw again the cottage near the sea with the faded chintz and herself—such a nice young girl, too—and Tom muddling together with inexpert hands to prepare the breakfast. What had happened to Tom? What had all those years done to him? Was he bored, too, and tired and utterly fed up?

In the middle of the reverie she became aware presently of something outside the window of her carriage, something which was large and white and bulky, standing quite near among all the vendors of pineapples and water and rice cakes, and as her gaze focused itself, she saw the figure of a very big and ugly woman dressed in a plain suit of white drill and wearing a large straw hat covered with ribbon and flowers, faded by the dreadful sun of the country. There was something extraordinary about the figure, some permanent, eternal static quality, like that of a monument, which held her

attention. The woman carried two small handbags and stood very quietly in the midst of all the pushing and shouting of the crowd. The face was rather flat and broad and the skin muddy, but even by the lights of the station platform, Lady Groton saw that the eyes were extraordinarily blue and alive with intelligence. In one of them there was a cast.

And then the Eurasian stationmaster came up to her and bowing elaborately he said, "I've found a place for you, Mees Opp," and the big woman moved away toward the third-class carriages, those dreadful, hot, reeking carriages filled with beggars and *sadhus* and native women and babies. And all at once she felt a wild desire to step out of the carriage and go and find this strange, big, ugly woman and talk to her as she had just talked to the *ayah*, Laksmi, to find out what she was like, and what sort of life she had. She even felt a half-hysterical desire to be a friend of hers, a little perhaps, because it would help her to break out of that world of enchantment surrounded by wealth and luxury and dull people, in which she lived, isolated in a way from all reality.

Then even above the clamor, on the station platform, she heard the voice of her husband shouting at Lansbury, and she thought, "He's got poor Lansbury in there torturing him because he can't sleep. When he's finished with him, he'll come in here to annoy me with his attentions."

She thought of him with a slight shudder, for his loutish clumsiness; but the shudder did not endure; she had grown used to him long ago, so that his embraces no longer troubled her much.

Presently she put out the light and lay back on the silken pillow waiting, and with her pale gold hair and her blue eyes

she was, even at thirty-seven, like a lovely child. At the next station, she knew, he would come in and wake her.

The *ayah* came faithfully to rouse her soon after dawn, saying, “Very pretty country, *memsahib* ... all green, not dry like my country.” And the look of friendliness was still in the woman’s dark eyes while she poured the tea.

When she looked out of the window she discovered that the narrow-gauge train was winding back and forth down the steep mountains toward the sea, and it seemed to her that after the high, burning plains she must have died in the night and was now waking in Paradise. The air was still warm, but after the burning dryness of the plain it seemed fresh and cool. Here there were no burning rocks and baked red soil, but only green everywhere—the thick, lush green of mountain jungle still glittering, where the long rays of the sun struck it, with the drops of an early morning shower. And the air was filled, not with dust, but with the rich odor of growing life and the scent of flowers and spices and rich, damp decay. It was green and damp like the England she loved, the England to which she always returned, her heart full of contentment. As with most sensual people there was in her some secret, mysterious affiliation with dampness and water, so that in deserts and hot, dry places she became frightened and a little mad.

Below the train, the damp valleys still lay in deep blue shadows, and as she watched the enchanting scene, forgetting even her tea, she thought, “I was right to come out here after all. Perhaps I shall be comfortable and at peace in this place,” and she experienced an odd sensation of having returned home, to a place which she knew very well. She forgot suddenly all the heat and dust and boredom of the past week,

and even the tipsy, messy visit of her husband the night before. But she did not consider whether she would be happy, for happiness had long since ceased to play any great part in her existence. "At any rate," she thought, "it will be a half-savage, primitive place, and at least there will be some fun in that."

And then the train came round a bold thrust of the mountains and below her suddenly outspread like a glorious map lay the whole harbor of Nivandrum, dotted with its seven islands covered with coconut palms, set like a jewel in the maze of lagoons and canals inside the reefs and bars along the coast that sheltered the harbor from the storms of the Indian Ocean. Beyond the mouth of the choked harbor the fishing boats, their great ragged sails filled by the morning breeze that came from the mountains, were rushing like a flock of swallows across the great bar and the line of foam which marked it.

For a moment she did not breathe lest the scene suddenly vanish like something she had dreamed, and leave her once more in the heat and dust of the horrible plain. In her weary spirit peace and excitement were born side by side. And then, like a sudden pain, the thought of Lord Groton returned to her. She thought of him vaguely, not as a man but as if he were something detached, which hung over her and all this lovely country like a black unspeakable menace. He was on this same train coming down the green mountains toward this lovely harbor, like a bird of prey. He would destroy all this. For the sake of money and more for the sake of power, he would build ugly piers and oil tanks and sheds roofed with corrugated iron, and the lovely green water would soon be covered with oil, and the fish and the sea birds would die, and

the simple people would become corrupt and diseased, and he would be proud of his small, spiteful victory over a rival as vulturine as himself.

At the foot of the mountains the train came to flat ground and ran for a time between rice fields, and green islets, and there for the first time she saw the people of the lovely coast, poling the *wallum* boats or working up to their waists in the water of the flooded rice fields, nearly as naked as Adam and Eve had been long ago in another paradise; and the sight of them brought to her a new interest and a new vitality as the sight of beautiful people always did. They were not small and thin and tough like the people of the hot plains, but tall, with rounded arms and legs and muscles beneath a smooth skin the color of pale café-au-lait.

And while she watched them as they turned smiling from their work to regard the train, a strange thought came to her, "I could do it. He would never need to know. It would even all sorts of old scores. It would be so easy to send a cable to Deakin about what he is up to. I could tip off his bribery. I could make a scandal that would rock London and ruin a whole government. But more important than all, it might save this lovely place from desecration for a few more years."

Then the train crossed a little causeway and halted unexpectedly beside a small, ramshackle station, and hastily she rose to dress herself and arrange her hair and remove the last vestiges of the dust of the hateful plains. By the time she had finished she heard the husky voice of her husband and the rather piping voice of poor Lansbury giving orders to the servants. When she got down she found that the train, like a caterpillar lopped in two, had lost half its length during the night. There were only the first-class carriages in which the

party had come, and one broken-down, third-class carriage, out of which came an old woman and a child. And she felt a thrill of delight that Nivandrum was a dead city to which no one came, that it remained forgotten, secret, lovely.

At the same time she saw coming toward her a short, grizzled man with bright blue eyes wearing a white yachting cap with the label, "Grand Oriental Hotel," in gold letters just above the peak. The sight gave her a sudden pang of disappointment, that here in Nivandrum you should be received exactly as if you were arriving in Cannes by the Blue Train. She guessed that the man was the proprietor and she thought shrewdly, "He looks well fed and good natured and contented. The hotel should be all right." But she could not know that Rasmussen's cap was simply a bit of swank made in Colombo, which he had reason to wear not more than once or twice in a year, when some rare and eccentric visitor came to Nivandrum by train.

Rasmussen took them in his own boat, poled by two boys, children of the people she had seen from the train in the fields and on the little boats, tall, straight boys, who wore nothing but a little cloth about their waists. There was no disappointment for her, neither in the lovely boat with its carved prow and stern nor in the look of the islands, with the pale old baroque houses set among the coconut palms. She had not expected these houses, pale green and yellow and pink, deserted and empty, and at the sight of them she thought as Tom Dantry had thought five years earlier, "I must have one of them." It did not matter if she had to return to that other weary world in the West; it did not matter if she should die without ever seeing the house again. If she had a house in Nivandrum—one of those pale, ghostly houses

surrounded by water—it would bring her peace. She would always think that something of her remained here among the green islands. In the midst of great deadly dinner parties she could suddenly think, “I always have that house in Nivandrum,” and she would feel cool and young again. And almost at once she remembered that her husband had come here for only one reason—to destroy Nivandrum, to turn these houses into storerooms for cheap cutlery and cotton and oil.

All the way she was silent, sitting just inside the palm-thatched roof of the boat, so that her eyes might drink in every beauty. She was very silent. Even when Groton said in his husky voice, “Pretty place, isn’t it?” she only replied, “Yes, but too picturesque,” because if he knew how she felt about it, he would be jealous of the place—he was as fantastic as that—and would hurry through his work and go away. If she remained indifferent, he would take his time. She might even induce him to go shooting in the mountains. She wanted to stay; it seemed to her at that moment that she would not mind staying here forever, doing nothing, the rest of the world forgotten.

When the boat suddenly came alongside Rasmussen’s pier, she felt yet another happy shock of surprise. She had dreaded the “Great Oriental Hotel,” thinking it might be some awful structure like the railway hotels one saw everywhere in the East.

“Here we are,” said Rasmussen, hopping on to the dock, and at sight of the hotel, she wanted to cry out with delight, for it was one of the loveliest of the ghostly old houses, brought back to life, set on its own small island with a lovely

garden surrounding it. But again she held her peace, lest her husband discover her secret delight and spoil everything.

Inside the great cool hall, where Dantry came sometimes to play cribbage with Rasmussen, she asked for a gin and tonic, and sat at one of the tables alone, while her husband bustled and snorted about, seeing rooms, making plans for boats, giving abrupt orders with poor Lansbury, pale and perspiring, at his heels. She sat looking out of the wide-arched door at the harbor with the little boats moving back and forth, and suddenly a strange thought came to her. It was in reality less a thought than a sensation, for by habit she thought through her senses, by her instinct. It occurred to her suddenly that she was happy, and happiness meant peace. It was as if she had come to the end of a journey which had gone on for days and months and years. And then her husband was standing beside her, red-faced and sweating.

He was saying, "It's all right. The rooms aren't bad at all. No plumbing, but they're big and cool and comfortable." He was, she saw, groveling and apologetic, afraid that the simple comfort of the place was not good enough for her.

She scarcely heard him, thinking that it did not matter what the rooms were like, and then, pulling herself together, she said, "I'm glad," and she saw for the first time that he looked ill. His face was purple and there seemed to be a film over the cold blue eyes. She thought, with a sudden leap of the heart, "Perhaps he is going to die. Then everything will fail and the place will be saved, and I can stay here and have a house and come back to it when I like. I can even come here when I am an old woman and there is nothing left."

Her instinct was right again, for death was there in Nivandrum, waiting for him, but not the quiet, swift death for

which her heart cried out—the death that would be better for him as well as for herself.

The coming of Lord Groton's party brought more excitement to Nivandrum than the annual arrivals of the ships, and all during the afternoon and early evening of the first day, boats and canoes circled round the Grand Oriental Hotel and its tiny island, a little way off the shore, their occupants eager for a glimpse of the great lord from the West, or some of his party. If they attempted to land or came too near, Léah rushed out from the kitchen and ordered them away, and they obeyed her because even the least superstitious of the lot were afraid of her evil reputation. A few did manage to come ashore on the pretext of business with Rasmussen, offering for sale cucumbers and gourds, chickens and passion fruit and mangosteens, and from the window of her bedroom Lady Groton watched them come and go, amused by the color of the spectacle and pleased that her presence should have excited so much interest. In the room itself, the *ayah* came and went, bringing bits of gossip and information collected belowstairs, about Nivandrum, unpacking, chatting, excited by all the new sights and by the greenness and beauty of a place so different from her own country. Her shyness was all gone now. Since the hot night on the train she felt that the *burra memsahib* was her friend. She talked to the men and women who came selling things, with difficulty because their language was so different from her own, and told them fantastic and exaggerated reports of the wealth and importance and beauty of her mistress. "A woman of milk and gold," she told them, "beautiful as the moon in its first quarter." By evening her stories had penetrated up and down the lagoon and even to the more remote islands.

The sightseers were treated to a view of Lord Groton himself, in shorts and shirt made by a Hanover Square tailor, bustling about red-faced and perspiring, making arrangements for boats and boatmen and studying the harbor through his glasses, and they had glimpses of the fair-haired, pink-cheeked secretary, whose clothes were of a cut even smarter than those of his lordship, and they saw Bates still dressed in the discreet, dark clothes he wore in cold, damp London, apparently unmoved by the heat, pale, and suffering as always from low blood pressure; but they had no glimpse of Lady Groton, and so by evening she had already become a kind of legend created largely by the *ayah*, Laksmi ... a lovely princess of great fragility, who appeared only after the sun had gone down into the sea.

In the evening, when Lord Groton came in to dress for dinner, he entered his wife's room while she was dressing.

He seemed in a good mood and said, "Not a bad place, really, quite comfortable, and the food's a lot better than some we've been treated to."

She saw that he was thinking of staying on for a time and needed only a little encouragement, so she said, "It's hot."

"Better than the heat of the plains. Of course, if you can't stand it, we'll leave as soon as I've had a look around."

She smiled. "Oh, it's not as bad as that. I think it's a good deal more pleasant than most places we've been. At least there aren't any bores here to sit next to at dinner. I have books. I shouldn't mind staying awhile."

"It's a long way from Cannes and the yacht."

"The lunch wasn't bad. The curry was excellent."

She knew, as she made up her face with infinite skill and taste, that he was watching her. In the mottled glass of the cheap dressing table she could watch his face while pretending to concentrate upon her own, and she noticed that he was watching her with that queer, concentrated, hungry look with which he had watched her long ago, when they were first married, a look which always set her teeth on edge, not so much from distaste as from sheer boredom—that any man could be at the same time so worshipful, so full of desire and so deadly uninteresting. And she hated being stared at as if he were trying to get beneath the smooth, perfect surface in order to discover what she really was ... she, who did not really know herself from hour to hour, from minute to minute.

She was thinking, “If I could only get him to go away for a time, I might be able to rest and enjoy this place.” So aloud she said, very casually, “The proprietor tells me that there is excellent shooting in the hills ... tiger, panther, sambur and bison and the Lord knows what else.”

“He told me.”

“And there’s a first-class *shikari* ... a Cockney called Sandy who has been out here for twenty years. Quite a character, I believe.”

Suspiciously he said, “Would *you* like to go shooting?”

“You know how I detest ‘characters.’ ”

Then for a time he was silent, suspicious and jealous, still trying ponderously to discover what was really going on inside her head. Was she trying to be rid of him? There couldn’t be any man in the offing but Lansbury, and he could fix that by taking Lansbury with him. Anyway, that was

ridiculous. She couldn't be interested in a pink-cheeked boy with an Oxford accent, who wasn't dry yet behind the ears.

"I shouldn't mind being left here," she said, leaning forward and putting rouge on her lips. (Perhaps if I am left alone here, something might happen to me. Something exciting. There's nothing to be afraid of. Nothing could happen to me that would be unbearable, and anything is better than this awful dullness.)

Aloud she said, "Anyway, it's lovely and cool as soon as the sun goes down. A breeze comes up from the sea. The proprietor says the nights are always cool." She turned and asked, "What are your plans for tomorrow?"

"I'm going off early down the lagoons. I want to discover the lay of the land. If I only had a launch I could do the whole thing in a few hours. I should have ordered a launch to meet me here."

She smiled. "And have someone tip off Hugo Deakin?"

He laughed, amused and pleased again at the fast one he was pulling over on Deakin. "I could have had it ordered in a false name. Anyway, we haven't any launch, so I shall have to be away overnight ... for only one night. You won't mind, will you?"

"No, of course not."

He watched her more sharply now and said, "I shall have to take Lansbury with me. That'll mean you'll be left with only Bates, except the natives and this Rasmussen I know nothing about."

She rose and turning, looked at her reflection in the spotted glass, thinking how well she looked and how young. On the

burning plain and in the great, steaming cities, she had looked haggard and tired.

“What should I be afraid of?” she asked. “What could happen to me?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Nothing.” (You fool, if you’d only go away, something *might* happen to me.)

“No, I suppose there isn’t any danger. Bates will look after you. He’d give up his life if necessary to protect anything belonging to me.” And he laughed in a smug way which made a shudder of hatred run up and down her spine.

She thought, “How can a man be so shrewd about money and such a fool about people! Bates would protect *me* if I wanted protection, but he wouldn’t protect anything else belonging to you. He hates you. You’re a fool not to have discovered it before now.” And aloud she said, “Don’t worry about me. I think I’m going to like this place very much, so take your time about your work. It’s as good as a cure. Perhaps we shan’t have to go to Freiburg this summer after a week or two here. Anyway, you might tell Lansbury to get me a boat of my own and a couple of boatmen so that I could go about seeing things.”

“It’s been done. The boat will be here every morning at nine to await your orders.”

Then there was a knock on the door and when Lady Groton said, “Come in,” Bates thrust his head in the door and said, “Me lord, the bath is ready. I had quite a little trouble getting them to understand that you like lots of hot water.”

A little while later they sat opposite each other at a table in the great vaulted hall eating a dinner of soup and prawns and

curry, salad, vegetable drumsticks and a pudding—an excellent dinner, for Rasmussen, wisely or not, had repeated to Léah what Dantry had said, “Clean them. They’re as rich as Croesus,” and Léah meant to keep them there, plucking them, as long as possible.

The old-fashioned wireless supplied a sputtering concert of café music from the Hotel des Indes in Batavia, and Rasmussen, his porter’s cap exchanged for an ill-fitting suit of white drill, served them, retiring discreetly after each course to a little distance according to the instructions of *The Waiter’s Guide and Instructor*.

“If only we had ice,” said Lord Groton, “it would be perfect.”

She looked at him and again she saw the queer glazed look in the cold blue eyes, and after a moment’s calculation, she said, “Lucky they haven’t. You’d drink a lot more. And you shouldn’t drink so much in this climate.” (Now he’ll take two or three extra drinks just to show me that Albert Simpson, Lord Groton, the Superman, can drink as much as he likes without any harm; and his blood pressure will go up again.)

“Rubbish,” said Lord Groton, and asked Rasmussen to bring him more soda for another drink.

When dinner was finished, he said, “I’ve ordered the boat. There’s a new moon. We might take a little turn about the harbor before going to bed.”

(To make me feel romantic, I suppose.)

“Yes, it would be lovely. I’ll go and fetch my coat.”

Half-drifting, the boat carried them as the tide rose, among the seven islands. It seemed to her that at night the place was even more beautiful than it had seemed in the early morning light, with the new moon above the palm trees and the distant sound of the drums and the dusky bodies of the boatmen shining a little in the pale light. But when Lord Groton said, "Almost as beautiful as Venice," she answered, her nerves on edge, her whole spirit hungry, "Almost as banal."

And then as they drifted back across the channel between the Grand Oriental Hotel and the nearest island, she heard above the faint rhythm of the drums, the sound of European music, played on a piano, quite a good piano. It came across the water, faintly and in snatches, but clearly enough for her to recognize it as one of the Chopin nocturnes, and she thought, "What perfect music for a night and a place like this!"

"Listen!" she said to Lord Groton.

"Yes, what?" He was a little annoyed at being interrupted while planning a spot to build the oil tanks. They would have to be near deep water but isolated on account of the insurance rates. Tomorrow he would go over the charts with Lansbury, while they were on their way down the lagoons.

"Music."

"Oh, that!"

"It must be a European," and she tried to keep the excitement out of her voice.

"It's a wireless."

(You fool, I know the difference. It's coming from that house over there ... the one opposite the hotel with the beautiful stairway down to the water. What a lovely house!)

“It's probably coming all the way from Madras or Singapore.”

Then through the great arched windows of the house she discovered the evidence of her rightness. There *was* someone playing a piano, a man, but he was not a European. He was naked to the waist, and by the dim light from the old-fashioned lamps his skin seemed very dark, but he was playing Chopin and playing it not too badly; there could be no mistake about that. It was very odd. She wanted to tell the boatman to alter the course of the boat and go nearer to the house, but she did not know the language, and almost immediately she was thankful that she had not spoken, for that would have made Albert suspicious of the house and the musician.

Turning a little, she kept watching the house until the boat had passed it and she could no longer see the man playing Chopin.

“Perhaps,” she thought, “something is going to happen to me after all.”

When they had returned to the hotel, she made an excuse to stay behind in the hall, and to Rasmussen, who was waiting for them, she said, “Who lives in that house on the next island ... the one with the great stairway?”

Rasmussen made a great effort to collect himself, for he was a simple, truthful man to whom lying was not easy. After an extra breath or two, he said, “A rich half-caste, madam. He's a little daft. He never leaves the island.” That was what Dantry had told him to say.

“Does he play the piano?”

Rasmussen stammered, “Oh, yes, yes. He plays the piano.”

“Funny that a half-caste should own a piano and be playing European music.”

Again Rasmussen choked. This time he had to improvise.

“But he was educated in Europe, madam.”

“Thank you. Good night.”

As she started up the stairs, Rasmussen recovered himself a little and said, speaking out of *The Waiter's Guide and Instructor*. “I beg your pardon, madam, but I've engaged some dancers. They can come tomorrow night if you like.”

“That will be all right.”

“Lord Groton won't be here.”

“That doesn't matter. He wouldn't be interested.” And she turned and went up the stairs, leaving Rasmussen confounded and a little angry because she seemed always so abrupt and so casual. It had been a long time since he had seen a woman like her. When he thought about her, carefully and laboriously, he could not remember ever having known any woman quite like her. For a moment he was sorry that she had ever come to the Grand Oriental Hotel, even if she was rich as Croesus. There was something disturbing about her, something which alarmed him more than he had ever been alarmed by Léah.

Abovestairs in a little while Lord Groton came into her room, but he went again in half an hour, and after he had gone, the wind, having changed a little, brought the sound of the piano fitfully into the bedroom. It came faintly, now vanishing, now returning, always against the dying sound of the drums. Lying in the darkness, striving to hear, she found

in it something decadent and corrupt ... the music of Chopin against the barbaric sound of drums.

In the morning she wakened to a sound of murmuring, a little confused, wondering where she was and how she had come there, and then after a moment she remembered the journey down the lovely mountains and the sight of the harbor after nightfall with the drums and the Chopin and she felt suddenly happy to be alive, consciously happy for the first time for months and years. Beneath the window the murmuring continued and presently, filled with curiosity, she pushed back the nettings, rose and crossed the room to look out. Beneath her window there was a great crowd of people of all ages and sexes, murmuring and talking together, and in a half-ruined little summerhouse before a table filled with medicines, sat the woman in the white drill suit and the extraordinary hat whom she had seen two nights before on the station platform on the dusty plain beyond the mountains. The quality of solidity, of eternity, still marked her, as she sat there, taking temperatures, chatting, making jokes as one after another the patients—old men and women, sick babies, pregnant women, passed before the table. And again the idea came to Lady Groton that she would like to know this big ugly woman.

“She must be staying at this hotel,” she thought. “She must be a doctor of some kind. When I go down I will speak to her. She will be able to tell me all about the country.”

But by the time she had had a bath, and coped with the blunderings of the *ayah* and made up her face and dressed and gone downstairs, the woman had gone. Rasmussen said, “She’s a very busy woman. She has to visit two more villages before sundown.”

And again Lady Groton felt regret, why she could not say, but she had an odd feeling that something had passed her by, something the quality of which she could not define. And she thought, “Perhaps she is in my destiny. Perhaps that is why I noticed her.” But almost at once she laughed, thinking, “Soon I’ll be getting mystical and having my horoscope done and trying to find a *guru*.”

Tom Dantry had not gone away. In the house on the island he was waiting, in indecision and weakness, trying to find a compromise by which he might still remain and even see her, somehow perhaps from a distance, without ever letting her discover that he was in Nivandrum. All the first day he waited, impatiently, watching the hotel from time to time through his glasses without ever having a glimpse of her. And in the evening when he could not sleep he played the piano until long after midnight, hoping to lose himself and discipline his spirit by the music.

It was extraordinary how the memory of her was still able to disturb him, how he kept seeing her still with an extraordinary vividness and clarity after so many years. It was extraordinary, when he considered it, how there was some fate which had linked them together since the beginning, how it was Groton, her husband, who had separated them in the beginning, who brought them together again now nearly fifteen years later, again to destroy something which he cherished. Groton, it seemed, was meant by God to be his enemy.

And then the next morning he saw her, quite early before the heat had come up, drifting in a *wallum* boat in the channel which separated the hotel from his house ... the boat poled by an old fisherman called Raniji and his equally decrepit brother-in-law. When he recognized them it struck him as odd that she should have chosen the oldest and ugliest boatmen in the place where so many young and handsome fishermen were available. Then he thought, "Perhaps Groton

chose them. He can't really be as bad as that. He couldn't insult her in that way."

She was half-sitting, half-lying on a pile of coconut mats, dressed all in white, wearing a broad-rimmed hat of white straw. A dark woman, perhaps an *ayah* from her dress, squatted near her. At first he could not see her face because of the hat, and studied her body, clad in the most expensive and simple of Paris clothes. What she wore, he reflected, must have cost enough to have supported a whole family in Nivandrum for a year ... the stockings, the perfect shoes, the dress, the expensive hat. Then she turned her head, and with a little leap of the heart he saw again the lovely pure line of her throat and the oval of her face, and noticed that she had scarcely changed at all. There was still about her that rather childish look which had always disarmed him, and in her face the same expression almost of innocence and purity. He thought, "How has she accomplished it? What has she done in order to keep herself so intact, so unchanged?" And he saw that she was as desirable as ever, perhaps more so with the wisdom and the experience which must have come to her during all those years.

Then the boat disappeared around the end of the island and he was alone again, and lost. It was done now. He knew that now, having seen her, his only salvation had been in running away to the hills with Sandy. And it was too late. He had to see her now. He had to talk to her, to try to find a little of that thing which long ago they had thrown away so wantonly.

Then the maggot, that maggot which Léah had divined, began to work, and he thought, "Weakness, it is. If I were strong I would run away—now—today, and save this good life I have made with so much wisdom and care." But another

voice answered, "You would be a fool to run away now, after having seen her. You would never again have peace. And why should you give up pleasure? Pleasure is the only thing of value in life and the memory of it is the only thing that endures." And he told himself that it was fate, an extraordinary, unbelievable manifestation of fate, which had brought about her presence in the hotel there in sight of his own house, and that to resist fate was only folly. And another voice said, "Fate is nothing but the combination of one's character with the set of circumstances in which one finds oneself. The seeds of one's fate are there at birth." If only he were simple and honest like Sandy or Rasmussen. And all day the maggot gnawed, until in order to have peace he knew there was only one thing to do.

During the day Silas, coming back from the mainland, brought him the gossip that Lord Groton had gone away and would not return for two days, and that tonight the dancers were coming to the hotel to perform for Lady Groton alone in the great hall.

When he had told the news, Silas said, "I have a message from Maria. She wants to know if she shall come to the island tonight?"

For a moment he was silent, and then quickly he said:

"No. Tell her tomorrow, perhaps, but not tonight. I'll send word." It was a habit now, this carrying of messages between Maria and himself. It was as if Dantry were ordering vegetables from the greengrocer.

Then as Silas turned to go, Dantry said, "Take the night off if you like. Go and see your wife."

"Thank you, *sahib*," and Silas went away.

It was all following the old pattern, as if nothing had ever intervened, as if Silas were not a half-caste boy in dead, forgotten Nivandrum, but the manservant in the flat in Bruton Street long ago. It was as if he no longer had control over his own will or actions, but was being carried along by something stronger than himself.

The day was interminable, and at eight o'clock he began to dress, alone, for Silas had already gone, and when he was all dressed in the black trousers and waistcoat and smart white mess jacket he had not put on for months and years, a new idea came to him and, taking off all his clothes once more, he put on a purple *sarong*, a singlet, a white drill jacket and sandals on his naked feet.

“That is better,” he thought, “that will tell her what I have been doing, what has happened to me.”

Then he went into the garden and gathered a great bunch of jacqueranda flowers and going down the steps climbed into the canoe, paddled across the channel. It was quite dark now. She could not see him from her window.

In the big hall, Rasmussen in his waiter's costume, a napkin thrown over his arm, was standing beside a table where one place had been laid. At sight of Dantry, a look of astonishment came into the clear blue eyes. Dantry answered the look before Rasmussen was able to speak.

“It's all right. Don't look so alarmed, Rasmussen. I've changed my mind. Put another place at the table.”

“But...”

“Don't worry. It'll be all right. Do as I say. If it isn't all right, it doesn't matter.”

It was the old voice, the voice which the Breton captain was the last to have heard, a voice of authority, and even arrogance, which Rasmussen out of the far past remembered as the voice of those who have been born with every privilege, the voice of the very rich. It was no longer the voice of Dantry, his friend.

While Rasmussen laid the place, Dantry took from the table the scrubby bunch of flowers placed there by Léah, and put the great glowing bouquet of jacqueranda flowers in their stead. After that he fumbled with the old wireless set until he found music that came this time from Raffles Hotel in Singapore. Then he lighted a cigarette and waiting, shaking a little with excitement, not only at the prospect of seeing her again, but of seeing a woman, any woman, elegant, expensive, frivolous, out of the old life. Through the great archway at the end of the room he could hear above the sputtering music from Singapore, the occasional tinkle of music as the musicians who had come to play for the dancers squatted in the garden trying out their instruments. For a moment he listened to them, and then, shutting off the old wireless, he stepped to the door and ordered them to play where they were in the garden until it was time for the dancers to appear.

A little before nine o'clock she came down the stairs, dressed all in white in an evening gown as if she were going to supper at the Savoy. On one arm she wore three wide bracelets of diamonds and emeralds, and when he saw her he thought, "How bored she must be to have taken all that trouble when she is dining alone!" and then he remembered, digging up evidence out of the distant past, that this was

exactly what he should have expected of her, with all her love of elegance and jewels.

She moved slowly, watching the wide stairs before her as if she were afraid of tripping. He had her at a disadvantage for she clearly thought herself alone, and because she thought this, he was able to see her as she was, perhaps for the first time; and he had a quick impression of aloofness and pride and self-sufficiency and weariness which was new even to him who had known her so well. And like a revelation the thought came to him that she had remained lovely and uncorrupted by the years because nothing had ever touched her. She was intact, complete, perfect, a work of art produced by a decadent civilization. He thought, "It's odd. It's as if nothing had ever happened to her."

Then halfway down the beautiful stairway, she raised her head to look at the room and saw him. He was standing by the table and he did not move or change the expression of his face. He merely looked at her, inwardly a little amused to see how long it would take before it dawned upon her who he was. Even when she recognized or thought she recognized him, she would not believe that he was here in Nivandrum in the Grand Oriental Hotel. But she was quicker and more clever than he had believed possible. She saw him, dressed in *sarong*, singlet and sandals, and the languid look of indifference quickened into interest, but without changing her manner she came to the end of the stairs and halted, looking at him again, this time frankly and boldly in a queer, near-sighted way for a long time, for nearly a minute, with a look which, by its poise and recklessness, made his heart leap with old memories.

Then suddenly she smiled, the old unchanged smile which out of her sleeping vitality somehow reached out, embraced and warmed you. She said, "So you are the half-caste who plays Chopin?" She came a little nearer and said, "Let me look at you. Yes, it is you. It couldn't be anyone else with those large, suffering dark eyes."

He smiled then and came toward her, a little shy, a little uncertain what to do. Deceived a little by the fact that she looked almost the same as when he had last seen her, his impulse was to kiss her, but quickly he knew that he could not do that on account of Rasmussen, who was watching. So he took her hand instead and as he took it he noticed an extraordinary thing. There were tears in her eyes where he had never before seen any tears save those of anger.

"You were a swine to take me like this unawares. You might have sent word. Don't mind if I feel like crying, only something awful has happened just now inside me." She looked at him again and said, "I don't know what I'm doing. Give me a moment." For a second she closed her eyes, then she asked, as if nothing at all had happened, "What are you doing here, dressed like this?"

"I live here. That's my house on the island over there."

She smiled, "Beachcombing?"

"No, I've still plenty of money."

"Oh, a remittance man!"

"Not that either ... not quite."

"I've always heard that a white man without a job has to be one thing or the other in the East."

"I flatter myself that I've got away with being neither. I've set a new precedent. With Europe as it is I should think it's a

precedent which might become very fashionable.”

Again she smiled, this time a little cynically, so that he had a sudden glimpse of the hardness that was new to him.

“Perhaps,” she said. “Anyway, I’d rather have found you here than any person in the world. You know, it’s funny, I was thinking about you on the way here.”

“Thanks.”

“Don’t let’s do that. Let’s not begin again where we left off.”

“All right. What about a cocktail? It’ll make us feel a little more natural.”

“Yes, it *is* what you might call an extraordinary situation.”

“Yes, your coming here.”

“But extraordinary things rarely happen to ordinary people.”

“Thanks again.”

“Well, a thing like this wouldn’t have happened if we’d been ordinary. An ordinary woman would have let Albert come alone to a place like this and stayed at Government House and played bridge. An ordinary man wouldn’t be standing here now in the Grand Oriental Hotel, tanned as dark as a native and dressed in a *sarong*.”

“Native is a word I don’t like.”

“Ah, so now you’ve got principles!”

“Didn’t I always have?”

“Yes, put away in a cupboard where you never used them except to dazzle dull stuffy people. Then you dragged them out.”

“Still the sharp tongue.”

Then he told Rasmussen to fetch gin and lime juice and himself made gimlets for them to drink. It was better than he had imagined, far better. There was no strangeness. It was, as she had suggested, as if they had taken up where they left off. They must have changed; it was impossible for two people to have spent so many years apart without changing. Yet the core of each of them was the same. They had struck fire at once, and the old excitement which she, of all the women he had known, was the only one to arouse, was there again. He thought, "Sentimental, may be, but we must have been meant for each other, whether for good or evil."

When the first shock of surprise had gone from her, they felt easy and more natural. When he asked her, with an edge of irony in his voice, "Why is the most noble Lord Groton here?" she said, smiling, "It's a secret. I'm not allowed to tell."

"Money to be made, I suppose."

"Yes, if it works out. Don't sneer."

"It couldn't be that there's a plan to open up the harbor?"

"It might be."

"And he's bought the information in advance."

"Don't go on. I shan't tell you anything."

"I think I've guessed it." His face grew serious for a moment. "That means I'll be chased out of here, just when I was settled for life. I suppose he'll pull down my house and put oil tanks in its place." The sharp angle of the jaw hardened. "Well, for once he's met his match. The island is mine. He'll never get it during his life. I think I'm likely to survive him." His voice raised a little. "You can tell him that

from me. He took one thing from me. He shan't take another, not for all his money."

Quietly she said, "Let's forget that. Let's not poison the evening by talking about Albert ... not tonight, anyway. He's poisoned so many evenings for me."

"So I was right. It hasn't got any better. Time didn't make him decent or you indifferent."

She put down her glass. "If you go on talking about Albert, I shall go upstairs and have my dinner in bed. I mean it. Listen!" She was silent for a moment listening to the sound of the music in the garden against the distant sound of the drums. "Why should we spoil that? You haven't learned a thing about living since I last saw you. You never did know how to squeeze the most out of an occasion."

"If you mean living is a business of snatching pleasure and excitement here and there for a moment or two when it is convenient and opportune...."

"I meant nothing of the sort. You can give me another cocktail and take one yourself. If I remember rightly, after a drink or two you always locked your principles in the cupboard and threw away the key."

He made another gimlet and she said, "The trouble is that you're a Utopian."

"Perhaps."

"You'd like to change the whole world, but you never work at it. When it doesn't change itself, you grow sulky."

"Go on. Abuse me."

"Then forget Albert. He needn't matter to us. He's an outsider. He always has been. That's why he had to make so much money. He had to have some sort of compensation, but

he knows he's still an outsider, from everyone and everything in the world. He'd give everything he has—all his money, all his power—for five minutes like this with me, or even perhaps with anyone in the world, even with his own valet. There now, that's Albert. Finished! Done! No more speaking of Albert, the great Lord Groton ... poor Lord Groton, the most futile and pathetic man in the world."

"He has the power to hurt people and ruin their lives."

But she said stubbornly, "No more talk about Albert. Shall we have the dancers now ... like a turn in a West End restaurant?"

"Yes, if you like. They'll go on dancing forever until you stop them. They do a kind of dance Marathon."

"Let's have them and go on with our dinner. I'm in excellent health and very hungry. The heat agrees with me."

"The British talk a great deal of nonsense about heat and sun. Look at me. Half the time I live like a fisherman. I've never been harder or healthier in my life."

She looked at him slowly, from head to foot, her eyes closed a little with an air of appraisal. "I must say," she said, "it seems to agree with you. I've never seen you look so handsome. And the *sarong* is very becoming. You looked very handsome last night, playing the piano. I got quite excited thinking that you were a stranger and that I might make a new conquest."

"I hate it when you talk like that. It's cheap."

"You're not going to be jealous of yourself? That would be a little too complicated, even for you, my dear."

"I wish to hell that just for once we could be simple. We talk too much."

“And primitive?”

“Yes, primitive as hell.”

“Have you been taking lessons here?”

“Yes, I have, and I’d almost learned my lesson and then you turned up. I was right. I meant to run away and not see you. That’s what I should have done.”

“Yes, that’s what you should have done. Perhaps it would have been better for both of us. But what does that matter? We’re having fun now and fun isn’t lying about waiting to be picked up. I know.”

Rasmussen served the cold soup, his blue eyes wider than ever with astonishment, not only because these two seemed to know each other so well, but because the fragments of conversation that he heard were so complicated and puzzling. He strained his ears because each time he went into the kitchen Léah attacked him hungrily, asking what he had overheard, and he was able to tell her nothing. If he told her word for word it would have meant nothing to either of them. And each time he went into the kitchen he was forced to open the door cautiously because Léah was standing behind it, watching through the little grill.

Dantry said to him, “Tell the dancers to begin. We’ll watch while we eat.”

Then Lady Groton said, “Have your lessons been a success?” and the simple Rasmussen was a little startled by the look in her blue eyes, a look of hungriness and excitement.

“Yes. Quite.”

Then the dancers came in and they both turned to watch.

First came the little band—a man who played the drum, a man who played the harmonium, another who played the lute, and a boy with a violin of the country. They squatted on the floor on the opposite side of the great room, gay and brilliant in their gala costumes, like tropical birds, and then abruptly and without ceremony the two dancing girls came in. They were plump and neither of them was young, for they had been retired by the old Ranee and had come back to live in their native Nivandrum, to live well on the money and the jewels they had begun collecting long ago when they first came out of the temple schools in Tanjore. They were dressed now more gaudily than birds of paradise, in gold and silver and brilliant colors with large headdresses made of real flowers, the sight of which brought a sudden pang of memory to Dantry.

Lady Groton, disappointed, said, “But they’re not young and they’re not beautiful.”

“Wait,” said Dantry.

Then one of the dancers spoke to him in the local tongue and he answered her and in turn she spoke to the little orchestra, which began to play. Lady Groton looked at him a little astonished and said, “You’re very clever. What did they say?”

“They asked me what Your Highness—they really said ‘Her Highness’—would like to see danced. I told them to dance the Kite Dance, and Krishna and the Gopis, and the Legend of Rama and Sita. They take a very long time, each of them. I think you’ll have enough before they finish.”

The two dancers took their positions, ugly artificial positions they appeared at first, until suddenly by faint quivering gestures they evoked the beauty of all the statues

and carvings scattered through the islands of the East. Watching them, it suddenly occurred to Dantry that it was good that they were neither young nor beautiful because youth and beauty would have distracted the attention from the dancing, from the beauty of the archaic patterns thousands of years old, refined now to the point of decadence. There was no longer even a trace of realism in their dancing, nor any compromise made to lust or desire. Each incident, each action, had become thousands of years ago merely a pattern, a filigree, part of a frieze, exquisite in itself and related to nothing else. It was a pure art, pushed to its ultimate refinement beyond which there was nothing but decadence and finally destruction and at last a new beginning.

Dantry, watching Lady Groton, saw presently that she too understood the beauty of the dancing. She had forgotten to drink her coffee. Her cigarette had gone out, and she sat quite still watching. He had been afraid that she would expect something cheap and be disappointed in the dancers and so in turn disappoint him. In a way it was a kind of test. Long ago he was certain that she would have understood, but now, on this night, he had been unsure and a little troubled.

She had not failed him. She had not lost, in all those years, either taste or understanding and now, sitting beside her, he was again acutely aware of her perfection, her breeding and her poise, of her clothes and jewels, her hair, her grace of manner as she sat, leaning back a little, absorbed, listening and watching. And it seemed to him suddenly that he had discovered the very essence of her existence. He thought, "She is one of the last examples of something which will soon be gone from the world because there is no longer any

place for it.” She was not, like Groton, a kind of crude fungous growth, sprung up overnight out of the confused ordure of his times; she was the product of hundreds of years of leisure, of privilege and responsibility, of intelligence and feeling and education. And now even the civilization, the epoch to which she belonged, was coming to an end, and there was no longer any place for her or for himself for that matter, and both of them were touched by the decay of something which was too old. They were, he feared, both already rotten at the core. And suddenly he had a vision of Groton himself, the Samson who was pulling down upon them all the whole structure of their times.

Then the Legend of Rama and Sita came to an end and the dancers stood, perspiring but unwearied, in archaic positions, side by side, one foot placed slightly in front of the other at right angles, awaiting orders. Dantry looked at his watch: it was long after midnight and he said to the dancers in their own language, “That is enough. Her Highness thinks you very wonderful, and will see that you get a rich gift. She would, I think, like to see you again.” And the dancers, smiling and salaaming, withdrew.

Lady Groton said, “I should like to have seen more.”

“No, that’s enough. More would be too much. We’ll have them another time. Don’t try to swallow everything at once.”

She looked at him and smiled, “You might do well to follow your own advice.” Then they had some brandy and she said, “I think they’re wonderful. If I can do that at their age ... how old are they?”

“Nearly sixty, I should think.”

“I wonder what exercises they do?”

“Do you do exercises?”

“Not yet. But I suppose I shall have to think about doing them one of these days.” And suddenly a look of terror and anger came into her face. “I can’t bear the thought of growing old. If ever I *feel* old I shall kill myself.”

“It is worse to *be* old and *feel* young.”

“You needn’t have said that.”

“No, I suppose not. I know well enough what you mean.”

“I’ll have another brandy. I’m beginning to feel that the time is growing short and there is so much that I have missed.”

“You’ve drunk quite a lot already.”

“Why not? Isn’t it an occasion to celebrate? That was always the trouble with you. You only got drunk when you were angry or depressed ... never to enjoy yourself.”

So they each had another brandy and Dantry said, “You must come and see my house. It’s quite beautiful ... built by the Dutch when Nivandrum was still a great port, about two hundred years ago.”

“I noticed it. I wanted it for myself.”

“What could you want it for?”

“To come to when I’m old. It might be a shade better than suicide.”

“It’s a lot better, believe me. It’s a little like being born again.”

She looked at him sharply, and then said, “If you had really been born again, you wouldn’t be here now sitting at this table with me. You’d have run away to the hills. You’d have fled from me as from a plague.”

“Perhaps.”

“No perhaps about it. You mustn’t go on forever deceiving yourself.”

“What’s the use of being unpleasant?”

And suddenly he seemed collapsed and tired as if all vitality had been drained from him.

Then they were silent, hearing the sound of the drums as they died away one by one among the islands, and presently she said, “Why shouldn’t I come and see your house now? I couldn’t possibly sleep if I went to bed now and it’s a lovely night.”

For a moment he was thoughtful, the maggot working rapidly inside him. He had not meant to make so much progress in one evening. He had meant to keep her at a little distance. He was not even certain now of what it was that he wanted from her.

She said, “It will be more difficult when Albert comes back. He’s such a fool.”

He answered her without enthusiasm, a little wearily, for he was frightened.

“Yes, I think it’s an excellent idea. I’ll take you over in my canoe. We can have a drink and I’ll bring you back.”

She was aware that for some reason he had turned suddenly cold, withdrawing from her in spirit to a great distance, and the knowledge left her puzzled, irritated, uncertain. For the first time it seemed to her that he had changed, that there was in him something new and strange and annoying.

“I shan’t embarrass you by coming?” she asked. “You haven’t a woman in the house?”

“No, I haven’t a woman.” He rose suddenly and said,
“Shall we go?”

Sitting at the table he watched her climb the long stairway, angry and annoyed at himself because suddenly the savor had gone out of the evening and in its place there was a kind of inexplicable dread, why or of what he did not know. In a little while she returned, wearing a long cloak of purple velvet over her white evening gown. When he saw it he said, "That's not a very good slumming costume. You're not going in a Rolls-Royce to the flat in Bruton Street. You'll ruin it. You may even get a soaking."

She smiled. "It doesn't matter. It's an old one."

"A cloak," thought Dantry, "which from the cut and material must have cost at least fifty pounds." Obviously it was neither old nor worn.

To Rasmussen he said, "Lady Groton is going to have a look at my house. She'll be back in half an hour," and Rasmussen, his eyes still a mirror of astonishment, said (out of the *Waiter's Manual*), "Very good, sir," exactly as, if Dantry were a stranger to him.

They walked down the narrow path beneath the palm trees to the landing stage and behind them Rasmussen remained, puzzled and still watching them until they had both entered the canoe and Dantry had shoved off from the shore. When he returned to the kitchen, he found it empty, and he discovered after a little while that Léah was outside in the garden in the shadow of the crotons watching the canoe as it was swallowed up slowly by the darkness which separated the two islands. As she turned and came toward him he remembered sharply the prophecy she had made long ago on the first night that Dantry ever came to the island.

When she came near to him, she said, "That Lady Groton is a bad woman," and from her eyes Rasmussen saw that she hated the Englishwoman as much as she hated Dantry.

Farther down in the garden, hidden away in a little arbor, Bates, still wearing his dark clothes, smoked his pipe and indulged himself in philosophical ponderings on the ways of the people who caused revolutions and Communism. All the evening from his hiding place he had watched her ladyship and the stranger through the great arched doorway, wondering who Dantry could possibly be, until at last unable any longer to control his curiosity he had gone into the kitchen to demean and humble himself by asking for information from the heathen cook. He could not fathom how her ladyship was able to become as intimate as her whole manner, her face, her voice indicated. He knew the look she had in her face tonight, and he knew what it meant. He knew the change which always came into her voice. It was always like that, as if suddenly she came alive.

As they crossed to the island Dantry's spirits rose again, kindled by the beauty of the evening and the sound of the single drum which remained out of the evening chorus. The others were stilled now and only the one, accompanied by the thin music of a flute, went on and on, drifting toward them from somewhere on the mainland near Sandy's compound, drawing his thoughts against his will toward Maria, a Maria who only three days ago had filled his life and brought him peace and happiness, a Maria who now, since nightfall, had become simply an ordinary native girl in whom he had no special interest.

In front of him, Alix, wrapped in the purple cloak, lay back in the canoe trailing one hand in the water like a child on a

boating party, watching the phosphorescence which sprang up whenever her hand touched the surface. She was silent all the way until he said presently, "What are you thinking of?" and she laughed and answered, "I'm thinking how incredible this whole night is."

At the foot of the stairs he brought the canoe to a stop in the shadow of the big, silent, dark house, and, springing ashore, helped her out of it. While he stood making it fast, she waited, looking about her, her head thrown back a little, breathing in the night smells, so familiar to him, of smoke and jasmine, mangrove swamp and spices. She seemed for a moment to have forgotten where she was or that he was near, for when he had finished fastening the canoe and stood up beside her, she did not move or speak.

He said, "Now do you see why I love it so much? Why I never mean to leave here?"

As if coming back from a great distance, she said, "I see." And then, as if pulling herself, with a great effort, back to reality, she said bitterly, "It would be a pity to let Albert destroy all this peace and beauty."

"Isn't there some way to stop him?"

"I don't know. I have an odd feeling that this place will be the end of Albert. I've a feeling that it's stronger even than the great Lord Groton. I'd like to stay on here forever and ever and never again see that other world." And again suddenly the idea of the cable to Hugo Deakin came to her, "only how could you send a cable from a place like this?"

He did not answer her, but instead said, "Let's go in and have a drink."

He led her up the great stairway and halfway to the top she said, "Is there no one here? Is the house empty?"

“Yes, I sent away my boy for the night.”

“And the house is all open?”

“No one in Nivandrum would steal anything from me.”

She gave a harsh laugh. “That’ll all be changed if Albert has his way with the place.”

In the long room that was half a balcony he lighted the kerosene lamps and went himself to fetch the drinks, and when he returned he found the room empty and Alix outside again on the terrace as if the harbor fascinated her in some way. She was half-sitting, half-lying on the Indian bed covered with skins and cushions, one foot touching the great tiger skin that covered the floor just beside her.

When she took her drink, she said, “I think you’re very lucky ... and wiser than I thought.”

“It had come to the point either of suicide or finding a place like this.”

“I can understand that.”

Then they talked for a little while, almost shyly, of their life together long ago, and of people they had known then and of what had become of them, and presently they fell silent listening to the sound of the single drum from the mainland. She lay back, with her eyes half-closed, relaxed as if the peace of the night had stilled the restlessness of her spirit. The old excitement stole over him, and after a little time he smiled and looked at her and said, “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

At the sound of his voice she came suddenly to life again and gave a low excited laugh, “Of course I am, you ninny.”

“You’re looking very beautiful tonight ... you’re more beautiful than you were then.”

“It’s a long way from the farm in Sussex. We’ve come a long way since then.”

“It’s as if it were meant to be ... something about the whole evening—the music, the dancers, the drums.”

Again she laughed, almost derisively now. “Yes, it’s all very Elinor Glyn.”

“Don’t do that.”

“Even to the tiger skin,” she said, kicking the skin with her toe.

He did not answer her and again she laughed. “Yes ... all very romantic and unhealthy ... not a good place for Europeans. It heats the blood. It’s too provocative and savage and primitive. So what?”

He crossed the terrace to the Indian bed where she lay among the cushions, but as he reached the divan she slipped down from it and stood up, and even in the soft darkness he was aware that her whole mood had changed, that somehow she was different, as if she had become another person, as if it was Lady Groton now who stood suddenly beside him instead of Alix, the old laughing gay Alix he had once known so well.

She said, “No, it’s no use trying to begin over again. We can never get back what we threw away. We’re no good, either of us.”

And then he too changed. He felt himself changing, growing cold, and detached, as he had changed a little while before in the hotel just before they had set out for the island. He did not touch her. He did not even speak, and she said, “I think I’ll go back now. Otherwise they will begin to talk.”

He fetched her purple cloak, and as he crossed the terrace he was sharply aware of two things—that the solitary drum was no longer being beaten, and that on the water just off the shore, in the shadow of the island, there was a canoe and in it a solitary watcher. But he said nothing of his discovery because he did not want to frighten her. He felt suddenly exhausted and despairing, as if a part of him had died.

It was the habit of Bates to regard all hotelkeepers as natural enemies and all hotel servants as worms beneath the contempt of a gentleman's servant, and so when he arrived at the Grand Oriental Hotel, he behaved as usual, looking down his long thin nose at both Rasmussen and Léah; but after twenty-four hours he reached the conviction that the Grand Oriental Hotel was neither a hotel proper nor a country house but a kind of cross between the two set down in "jungly" country in the East. For a little time the discovery upset him, and then slowly it occurred to him that he might like it and that out of such conditions something of excitement and interest might be born. By the middle of the second day he had even begun to unbutton a little, not the black, correct clothing which he wore, but the jacket of his spirit and curiosity.

By nature he was a spectator, not an altogether unmalicious one, who really disliked the human race and held it in contempt, for he was as much a Methodist as a Communist; and because watching, eavesdropping, intriguing was a passion, even a disease with him, he had a way of discovering the most startling and unexpected things about people. He had all the talents of a blackmailer, and inside his narrow head he kept information, gossip and evidence about any number of rich and important people which could have made for him a large fortune; but he really had no desire for a great fortune and would not have known what to do with it, and so he remained an amateur and a philosopher endowed with a never-waning wonder at the folly and viciousness of the rich world in which as a servant, detached and no part of it, he found himself.

He lived, in an odd way, through other people, for he had a lively imagination and an extraordinary power of projecting his own mind and spirit into the laggard bodies of others about him. All this endowed him not only with the powers of a blackmailer but with something of the attitude of a scientist. There were, for example, times when he imagined himself to be Lord Groton and understood perfectly the motives and actions of his master. That was one of the reasons why he held him in a contempt so profound. And there were times when in a mystical way he *became* Lady Groton, and so understood her restlessness, her unhappiness and that shell of artificiality and indifference with which she had as a protection inclosed herself.

Thus Bates led a life in which there were few dull moments, and the only element in the prospect of retirement to a semidetached villa in Manchester which troubled him was the thought of dropping out of the exciting world in which he had spent most of his life as a servant. It would not be very stimulating to project yourself into the body of the greengrocer who lived in villa Number Eighteen or into that of the clerk who dwelt at Number Twenty-two, unless by some lucky chance one of them happened to be a Doctor Crippen or a Mr. Peace. There was always that hope.

In the beginning he had come to Nivandrum somewhat resentfully, expecting a dull time, for, belonging to the pavements, he detested the jungle and all nature no matter how beautiful, and he saw no excitement in the prospect of projecting himself into the body of a fisherman or a boatman. Immediately on arrival he had initiated an investigation into the character of Rasmussen whom he chose as the most likely prospect on the horizon of Nivandrum; but almost at once he

had come to a dead end in disappointment. Rasmussen, he discovered quickly, was just a simple fellow, like most honest, working people, not very bright, with no mystery and no vices. He lived a simple life, it was quite clear, performing the natural functions of a working man in his prime, but simply and directly without any of the complications and the perversities which lent tone to fashionable life. And you could get nothing out of Rasmussen because there was nothing there—no gossip, no good tips, no scandals. Rasmussen, Bates divined, even in the face of the most blatant scandal would simply have been unaware of it. He never *saw* anything. He was what Bates, in his private catalogue, marked off as an “empty.”

But Rasmussen’s wife, Léah, was a different proposition.

He discovered it almost at once, on that first evening when he had difficulty in impressing upon Rasmussen the importance of quantities, vast quantities, of hot water, ready at all hours in case His Lordship wanted a bath; for His Lordship, as Bates knew, was like Lady Macbeth; he had a kind of obsession about washing himself, as if there were inside him something that he felt might be washed away if only he had enough baths. Sometimes, to Bates’s annoyance, he had as many as four a day. “Just like Lady Macbeth,” Bates used to think.

When he saw Léah for the first time in the kitchen superintending the cooking of the first dinner, his heart leaped, not because of her handsome face (a thing which had never interested him very much and now interested him scarcely at all) but because of the extraordinary eyes, black and opaque and set a little too near together, and the look about the disapproving mouth. He had divined, almost at

once, what no one else had ever discovered, that Léah must have European blood, that she must have had a grandfather or a great-grandfather in whose bloodstream coursed the corpuscles of Mrs. Grundy. She was the type, he saw, which not only was aware of *things* but made things happen, not openly and with violence, but subtly. From the way she looked at him, a little coldly and defiantly, he saw that she was the one for him ... the agitator type. She would have been a good agitator anywhere in the world. She was, he decided, just his kettle of fish.

He succeeded in wresting from her several more kettles of hot water for His Lordship's bath, and by the time this operation had been concluded, he had also succeeded, by tact and a great display of false meekness and subtle flattery, in making at least a sizable break in the wall of her hostility. He had never quite seen himself in the role of flatterer to a "native," but in this case he made a concession. After all, in this out of the way place, where there was no society, and very little civilization, there would be no one to suspect or discover such an awful lapse.

During the next day he made a point of poking his head in the door of the kitchen once or twice to pass the time of day. He was not even above clowning a little, so that by evening he had even succeeded in winning from the grim Léah the shadow of a smile.

So when the canoe bearing Dantry and Lady Groton had left the hotel in the direction of the island, Bates, still smoking his pipe with an air of reflection, had slowly made his way back from the garden to the kitchen of the hotel. He was suffering from excitement and a curiosity so devouring, that it was like a painful malignant disease. Actually the

curiosity, at work all the evening while he spied on Her Ladyship and her friend through the great arched doorway, had given him a bad case of indigestion. If he did not discover something about this stranger from the island—this newcomer whom Her Ladyship had seemed to invoke out of thin air—he knew that he would not sleep at all.

Léah was not in the kitchen when he entered it. He waited for a time, and as he was about to give up the chance of seeing her, she was suddenly there behind him without having made a sound.

He remarked at once that she did not glare at him as ferociously as she had done on the occasion of his first invasion. This, he knew, was the technique of many cooks, even in the great houses in the country in England, for he had had experience with cooks, and had practiced the same methods, on the occasions when he discovered that the cook was the only good source of information in a house.

He said, “What about having a beer with me?”

Léah made a sound that was something like a snort, the faintest ghost of a snort, and said, “I never drink beer,” as if she belonged to the congregation of Plymouth Brethren.

“What will you have?”

“Maybe having a bit of grenadine.”

So Bates told one of the boys to fetch him a beer and a grenadine and water for Missus, and Léah allowed him to pay for them, for as yet Bates was nothing to her but one of Lord Groton’s party which was “rich as Croesus,” whoever that was.

“Nice place this,” said Bates.

“Yes, nice place.”

“Beautiful place.”

“Yes, beautiful place.”

She sat across the room from him at a small table, aloof, watching him suspiciously as she watched all Europeans except Rasmussen and perhaps Sandy.

“Yes, it’s a beautiful place,” said Bates. But this time as if she felt that Bates needn’t have repeated himself she did not trouble to answer and Bates felt strangely ill at ease. He thought that perhaps if he asked a question things might go better so he said, “Ever get much hotter than this?”

“Getting much hotter in monsoon time.”

Bates took another sip or two of beer and came to the conclusion that all this preliminary talk, all this warming up so to speak, was getting him nowhere, so he said, speaking very loudly as if Léah were deaf and he wanted to make her understand, “What’s the name of the gentleman who came here tonight?”

“Dantry,” said Léah, “Mister Dantry.”

“European?”

“Yes, Englishman.”

“Live here long?”

“Five years.”

“Is he a pretty nice chap?”

“Not nice.”

“Oh,” said Bates, and then after a minute, “What does he do?”

“Doing nothing.”

Again Bates took a reflective sip of beer, thinking again that all this was really getting him nowhere, for he might

have answered all these questions himself. What he wanted was to get her talking; that was the only way you found out things—by people giving themselves away, saying things that weren't discreet.

Even her saying “not nice” didn't mean a thing, except perhaps that for some purely personal reason she herself did not like him. She seemed neither resentful nor embarrassed, but sat there opposite him drinking her grenadine and staring at him with such boldness and intensity that he began to feel more and more uneasy. Bates, the watcher, had no liking for being watched. He had a feeling that in this cook he had met his match. At last he said, “Family man?”

“Who?”

“This Dantry.”

But this was too much for Léah's English. She said, “What you mean—family man?”

“Is he married?”

“Sure, married—three days ago. Big feast.”

Bates unconsciously took a long breath and then said, “European woman?”

“No. Half-caste woman.”

“Oh,” said Bates.

He took another sip of beer wishing that she were drinking beer too, so that she would become more communicative. Then, while he was trying to find some new method of attack, Léah took the offensive.

“What for,” she asked, “you want to know about this man?”

“Nothing ... no reason ... just interested.”

“What for your master come here?”

“Well,” thought Bates, “that is a poser.” He had no intention of telling why His Lordship was in Nivandrum, so he said, “Don’t know. Perhaps he’s going shooting.”

“What for lying?” asked the woman and Bates thought, “Well, she’s got me beat.”

“Not lying,” said Bates, beginning in spite of himself to talk pidgin.

“Maybe he come to open up harbor.”

This rather took Bates’s breath away. Trying to collect himself he said, “Not knowing.”

But the woman took her answer from his manner and look of surprise. She simply assumed that he had said, “Yes.”

“Better going away again. Shaputra stopping him.”

“Who’s Shaputra?” asked Bates. “Head man?”

“Big River God. He closed harbor. Wants harbor stay closed.”

“Hmmm,” said Bates, “perhaps you’re right.”

Then he took out his pipe and filled it slowly, still disconcerted and made uneasy by her stare. Also he was trying to collect himself and discover some way of getting round her, of making her more friendly. “Perhaps,” he thought, “direct attack is best.” So he said, “I don’t want the harbor open either. I like it much better this way.”

She did not answer him and so he said abruptly, “Look here. We ought to get along together. No use treating me like a bloody vulture.”

Something, perhaps the fact that Bates with his long head and long nose looked a little like a vulture, made her smile. It was a grudging smile, which emerged in spite of her will. But she didn’t say anything, and after a little while he said, “You

know a lot of things I don't know and I know a lot you don't know. That's right, ain't it?"

"Maybe right."

"Well, I don't like this place and I don't give a damn whether the old man has come here to open the harbor or not. I'd like to be friendly."

"Me friendly," said Léah surprisingly, without changing her expression. "Liking you too. Right at beginning."

"Well, you'd never guess it," said Bates. Then he smiled too and the woman smiled back at him and Bates, suddenly alarmed, thought, "I 'ope she hasn't taken a bloody fancy to me."

"Well, that's fine," he continued. "You tell me what you know and I'll tell you what I know. How about it? A bargain?"

"Bargain," said Léah grinning.

"Have another grenadine?"

"Sure," said Léah.

This time, in the new-found intimacy, Bates took his beer across the vast kitchen and seated himself at the table beside her, and Léah, as a token of the treaty between them fetched some damp, stale biscuits, for which she made no charge.

"Well," thought Bates, "this is cozier."

"To tell the truth," he said, "the old man *has* come here to see about opening up the harbor, only it's a secret, see? A terrific, terrible secret."

"Woman making trouble," said Léah.

"What woman?"

"Old man's woman."

Bates wagged his head, and said nothing. So she said, “Dantry no good either,” and Bates thought, “Anyway she’s no fool. Pretty quick she is.”

And he said, “Tell me about this man Dantry,” and Léah, trusting him a little now, told him about Dantry in her pidgin English, about how he had come there and stayed and taken Maria and at last married her, how he never allowed her to stay in the house but kept her in her father’s compound on the mainland. She told him a lot of other things, small things which she had observed and which to an ordinary listener would have meant nothing at all, but to Bates in his role of watcher-amateur blackmailer, meant a great deal, for they helped him to fill in a great many gaps so that by the time Léah had told the story he had a very good and a very accurate picture of Dantry. “Another one of those,” he thought, “that makes revolutions and Communism.”

When she had finished he did not ask her any more questions, thinking it better to go a little slowly so that she would not become alarmed and suddenly close up the spring he had just tapped with such success.

He said, “Well, well,” and filled up his glass with an air of pondering deeply all she had said.

“What about missus?” said Léah.

“Well,” said Bates, “that’s a whole story in itself.”

After he had collected himself, he told her a little, a very little of Lady Groton’s wealth, and her success and how she had her pictures in all the papers, and how Lord Groton was one of the richest men in the world.

“Why she marry old pig like master?” asked Léah.

“Don’t know,” said Bates. “No accounting for tastes.”

“Money,” said Léah, and a curious look of hatred came into the queer black eyes so that for a moment Bates was startled and thought, “Mebbe she’s one of those evil eyes.”

Then for a long time they just sat, Bates rather embarrassed, studying the bowl of his pipe as if it were a new and wondrous object he had just seen for the first time, Léah simply staring at him with an opaque black-eyed gaze, which seemed to bore into him like a gimlet into soft wood.

Certainly, thought Bates, the woman had no social graces; she did not know how to keep a conversation afloat. “The watcher watched,” thought Bates. “The joke is on me. She’s already got out of me what she wanted to know.”

The strain came to an end when one of the boys put his head in the door and said, “*Memsahib* coming home,” and Bates rose and said, “Well, good night.”

“Good night,” said Léah.

“Have another grenadine tomorrow night?”

“Sure.”

It was all right. He had won. They understood each other.

He reached the big hallway in time to see Her Ladyship returning. She was alone, wrapped in the purple cloak, looking, Bates thought, as if she were about to step into the Rolls and drive off to dinner, her hair perfectly done, her face made up in that musklike perfection which had been fashionable just after the war. But Bates had been with her too long to be deceived. It was not in such things that you discovered what she had been up to; it was in the eyes that you always found an answer.

So as he went toward her, his own back to the light, and said, “Is there anything Your Ladyship wants?” he watched

the eyes, and before she had time to answer him, he thought, “Well, she *is* a fast worker.”

“Nothing, Bates, except some lime juice and water.”

“It’s already by the bed, me Lady, in the stone jug. That keeps it cool when there’s no ice.”

She said, “Thank you, Bates,” and went past him up the stairs and he knew that she had not seen him at all but, like a woman drugged, had simply answered a familiar voice which came to her out of a fog.

Behind them beyond the great doorway, Léah, like a ghost, slipped away through the tangle of bougainvillea down to the landing stage to find her canoe. It was necessary now to see the River God quickly, to give him the blood of a goat, to tell him what she had discovered—that the white men were coming to open up his harbor. It was necessary to invoke his aid against their powerful charms, to find some way of defeating them as she meant, in the end, to defeat the charms of Dantry which up to now had been too strong for her. She knew that it would be an intricate and difficult business because the white men were not afraid of her like the people in the islands.

On the mat at the door of her room the *ayah* lay asleep, and at the sound of Lady Groton's footstep the woman sprang up, awake in an instant. Again as through a fog she was aware of the *ayah* and said to her, "Don't trouble, I shan't need you tonight," for she wanted to be alone. When the *ayah* annoyed her by protesting she said, "No, I don't need you," and then, half aloud to herself, a little to the *ayah*, she said, "Once, long ago I dressed and undressed myself and even did my own hair. I'm not as dependent as that. I don't want you. Understand, I don't want you." The woman looked at her, puzzled, as if she had seen her for the first time, and then held the door for Lady Groton, closing it behind her to lie down once more on the mat like a faithful dog.

Inside the room, Alix lighted a cigarette and undressed herself slowly. She had never taken drugs because it had always seemed to her a foolish thing to do, but she thought, "This is what it must be like." There was a softness, a haziness all about her. Even her reflection in the cheap spotted glass came back to her more dimly, more blotched and mottled than usual, so that when she first looked in the glass she had a sudden startled feeling of terror as if she had been dreaming and was really an old woman who had simply imagined all that had happened to her of beauty and romance since that moment when the train, rounding the shoulder of the mountain, had permitted her to look down upon the loveliness of Nivandrum. Once or twice she thought, "No, it can't be. It can't have happened," and then half-undressed she began to cry, silently, the tears rolling down her cheeks. They were neither tears of sorrow nor of regret, but the relaxing luxurious tears of happiness and pleasure touched by

melancholy. She had not wept like this, luxuriously, pleausurably, since she was an hysterical schoolgirl.

For a long time she sat there weeping helplessly, and then presently she rose and went to the window and stood there looking out across the water toward Dantry's house. It was dark now save for the light in his room, and presently that too went out, and with a pang she wished that she had not been discreet and come back to the hotel when her heart cried out for her to remain, to stay there always, never to go back again to the old life. Once long ago she would have done it, but now, she knew, it was not herself who brought her back, the reckless self who once gave up everything for him, but the long habit of years, the habit imposed by the world in which she lived, a habit based upon the rule that it does not matter what you do but how you do it, the rule that you must never be found out. And she knew suddenly how changed she was by those years between, how much of weakness, how much of hardness there was in her now.

She thought, "I could go back now," only there was no way of going back unless, like Leander, she swam the channel. And then an awful thought came to her that perhaps he would not want her to come back. And she remembered how he had changed suddenly in the hotel and looked at her as if she were a stranger. Perhaps he cherished this solitude he had won for himself even more than herself. Men, she knew, were like that.

"It would not matter," she told herself, "if I went back tomorrow and stayed forever, if I never again left here." But immediately she was frightened at the thought that perhaps it was too late now. Perhaps now she would not have the courage to stick it out. For even in moments like this she was

honest with herself; she had been born honest and her life had made honesty a necessity if she were to survive.

“I was a fool then, long ago, and perhaps I am still a fool.”

At last, aware with a painful suddenness of the stillness of the night, she left the window and finished undressing. Before climbing into the bed she took a double portion of sleeping draught, not because she needed it, but because tonight of all nights she must go to sleep at once in order not to go on thinking. But once in bed, with the net drawn about her and the light out, the draught had no more effect than if it had been water. Her mind, it seemed, was on fire, and thought after thought, regret after regret, bitterness after bitterness, passed through it in turn, tormenting her and aggravating her state of indecision.

For a long time she thought that perhaps it would be better if she went away as quickly as possible, back across the burning plains in that awful train to Government House to sit all day on the veranda playing bridge and mahjong, gossiping and hating all the women she saw. Boring that might be, but it would not be painful, and it would not be dangerous. Then the thought rejected itself because she knew that she would do no such thing. She had always done what she wanted to do, from the very beginning when her father spoiled her and gave her whatever she wanted, although there were times when he put himself deeply into debt in order to give it to her. And now she would again do what she wanted, and she wanted to stay here, to go on and on seeing Tom, night after night, forever, in an effort to get back what they had lost. What she wanted, in her heart, was never again to leave Nivandrum.

She thought, "I wanted something to happen to me, and it has happened. The last thing I ever expected or wanted to happen."

And yet she did want it. She had wanted it all the time in her heart, more than anything in the world. It was the only thing she could possibly have wanted. For she was in love again, as she had been long ago, recklessly, voluptuously in love, as she had never been since that day when Tom had walked out of her life, as both of them had believed, forever. She knew now what it was that she had been searching for all those years. She had wanted that old feeling back again and she had tried to find it here and there, where she might, but she had never found it, and presently she had come to enjoy the endless, restless search; the variety, the perverse curiosity which compelled her to regard every attractive man as a possible lover. She had come to enjoy it so much that in the end it was the only thing which interested her. She had tried now and then to find what Tom alone had been able to give her, but she had never found it. Not one man had made any difference to her. In a way it was as if she were still innocent, save that the scars were there—the scars were there—the scars of dozens of encounters, which ended always in boredom and restlessness and a desire to run away.

Thinking now of all that had happened during the evening, it seemed to her that suddenly she understood his changeableness, the moods of depression and coldness, which came over him as if suddenly he felt a distaste for her. It was the scars which he had seen, those scars which she kept so carefully concealed that no one before had ever discovered them.

“But,” she told herself, “he has been no better than I have been.” Only, with a man, alas, it was different. In her honesty, she could not deny that. It *was* different. Things like that could leave a man untouched, but they bit into the soul of a woman, because with a woman the emotions, even in the most casual flirtation, were involved—women involved sentiment, the romantic, and sometimes even tenderness. She knew it now, perhaps for the first time, and she was ashamed of her cynicism, of the cheap wit she had used, the cheap gibes she had made at him over principles.

At last the sleeping medicine made her drowsy, and on the verge of sleep, once more in a daze, as she had been on returning from the island, she kept repeating to herself, “I am in love. I am in love. I have never been in love with any other man. I never loved him then as much as I love him now.”

There was a new savor in this love, different from the first, almost innocent raptures of long ago, born of what had happened to both of them since then, a savor almost of perversity. As a boy he had been desirable; now he was more so. As a gourmet or the eater of curries demands more and more seasoning and hotter and hotter spices as he eats his way through life, so what she had needed now was not love so much as passion, and he could give it to her, this Tom who was the same Tom with something more. This Tom, hard as iron and half-naked in a sarong, burned as dark as any fisherman.

She thought, “Tomorrow I shall see him again. Tomorrow! It does not matter what happens to Albert.”

But on the next day she did not see him, for early in the morning before the sleeping draught had worn away, he set

out with the fishermen across the Great Bar to escape from her.

He wakened late, and when Silas brought him his tea he did not, as he always did, ask the boy if he had enjoyed his evening out, but scarcely spoke to him, and then only to say that he would need lunch packed to take with him and that he meant to be gone for the day.

After he had been given his orders the boy still remained, passively, as if there were something that he meant to say. It was only a matter of a second, but to Dantry, with his nerves on edge, it seemed that he stood there for a long time, silent with a reproachful expression in his eyes which were so much like the great, gentle eyes of Maria.

Angrily he said, "Well, what is it? What is it you want?" and the boy simply answered, "Nothing, *sahib*," and went away. As his back disappeared through the doorway, Dantry felt a sudden impulse to shout after him, "Tell your bloody sister never to come back, and to take Lady Groton with her. I never want to see any woman again." But he said nothing.

On waking he knew that he did not want to see Alix, for now in cold blood, the intoxication of the night having passed, he saw the whole thing in a new way and was a little terrified by what he saw.

He thought, "We are a couple of fools. I am as bad as she is. What can come of this but misery and catastrophe?" For he did not pretend that this was simply a passing adventure like so many others. It was not even like that strange passion he had felt for Maria in the beginning. It was, he knew, more serious than that, more profound and more lasting. It was like recurrent malaria which attacks its victim when he least expects it. The mere knowledge that he had but to see her

again to be in love with her told him how serious it was. For a little time, as he dressed, he hated her for having come again into his life, for he knew now that the peace was gone, that the slow, never-changing, animal contentment of the life he had built up for himself so carefully was gone again forever, exchanged for what he did not know.

With a sense of shock and fright he realized suddenly that he had not thought of Maria since the second when he fancied he saw the canoe in the shadow of the island. Without his knowing or willing it, he understood now that he was tired of her, that he had no desire ever to see her again, and he knew that this was what, in the heart to which he would not listen, he had known from the beginning—that there would come a time when her beauty would no longer be beautiful to him and her devotion would be only something to bore him. It had been true, he knew now for a long time, but he had not recognized or admitted it because it did not seem, in the long peace of monotonous days, to matter very much. Since last night everything was clear. He could think of Maria now only as she was—a pretty, ignorant, half-wild half-caste who no longer held even the faintest interest for him. He thought, “My bad luck is that I’ve never been thoroughgoing. If I had been, bitter things like Maria wouldn’t upset me.”

All day he stayed fishing, with no luck, beneath the burning sun above the shoals beyond the Great Bar, but he had not come to fish but to escape from her and from himself, and so the fishing was not a matter of great importance save that a fight with a great fish would have diverted his mind for a time. So he sat in the boat all the day, brooding. By sundown, at the hour the wind changed and the jackals came

out and the drums began, he had come again to a plan of action.

He would run away this time, for certain, taking Sandy with him into the hills to remain there until she had gone away, and while he was there he would tell Sandy that he did not want Maria any longer and that he would settle on her a sum which would keep her in luxury by the standards of Nivandrum for the rest of her life. And as usual, having made a decision, he felt suddenly free once more, and as the boat sped homeward, charging across the Bar and into the still water of the lovely harbor, he experienced a wild sense of exhilaration. He even decided that when he came back from the hills he would go away for a time to Shanghai or Hong Kong. It would make a change, and perhaps he had stayed too long in Nivandrum. It was nearly five years now since he had left the place save to go shooting in the hills. He would be free again, free of Maria, and free of Alix, this time forever.

Lest, from the window of her room, she should see him returning, he drove the boat through the inner channels and approached the island from the back, leaving the boat there until it was dark, when Silas brought it round to the landing stage.

When he saw Silas he did not ask for news of what had happened during the day, but the boy again, after waiting for a second, respectfully said, "English lady came to island about five o'clock."

To which Dantry replied, "Very good," and then he said, "Get together my shooting kit. Tomorrow I am going off to the hills," and he fancied that a look of relief and approval came into the eyes of the boy, and he called him back,

meaning to tell him that even if Maria was his sister, what went on between Maria and his master was none of his business. But immediately he knew that it was impossible to make such a speech and he said instead, "Bring me the brandy."

And so he knew that his self had returned, the self from which he had at last escaped for all those months and years when Maria had made him happy, for it was not the eyes and voice and manner of Silas which were reproaching him now, but his own self, that spiteful, divided, wavering self, looking back at him from Silas's eyes, speaking to him with Silas's voice.

By nine o'clock he was quite drunk, and when Silas came to help him dress he told Silas to lay out his European clothes, and hesitatingly, unsteadily, with Silas's aid, he put them on, even to the starched shirt which had long since turned soft and a little yellow from the dampness. Even while he dressed he drank.

And Silas, hovering about, handed him his clothes, brushing off bits of invisible dust, a little embarrassed and a little fascinated by the spectacle of his master rapidly making himself drunk. Through the mist of intoxication, Dantry was aware of the reproachful eyes of Silas, and presently he came to understand that this was nothing new in the manner of the servant. Silas had always watched him thus, with a kind of velvety curiosity, as if he were an exotic animal. Now, aware of it, the watching annoyed him, but no matter how quickly he turned, he was never able to catch the boy staring at him directly. Yet all the time he knew that Silas was watching everything he did, every change of expression on his face. He could feel the eyes of the boy on his back, and slowly he

became fascinated by the speculation as to what went on inside the head of the boy.

Then, drunk and irritated, he turned quickly from the mirror, but again the boy was too quick for him and appeared to be absorbed in a spot in the cloth of the dinner jacket he held. Looking at him, Dantry said, "Well, what is it you see? What are you looking at all the time?"

But Silas was not to be caught. His face went cold and opaque and he said, "Nothing, *sahib*, I don't understand."

"You see too bloody much. What is it? Have I changed? Am I different? What are you staring at?"

"Nothing different, *sahib*," replied the boy, and again, "I don't understand."

And then it occurred to him that it was impossible ever to discover what went on inside the head of his servant, and in his drunkenness it seemed to him that all along, all these months and years, he had been deceived not only by Silas but by Maria herself. He did not know what she was thinking. He had never known. Perhaps all of them, even Sandy, had simply found him a convenience, a rich man off whom they might all live. Perhaps they still looked on him as an outsider whom they tolerated for what they could get out of him.

Or again, he thought, Silas might only be interested in the process of a white man getting drunk. Perhaps he was glad or perhaps he was sorry. Or it might be that Silas saw his master as he did not see himself, even in moments of self-reproach ... as a broken, useless, dissipated man to whom it was worth while being devoted because the place was good and easy and there was money in it. Perhaps he was thinking, "One more European going the way of the others. One more European who will soon be finished and out of the way." For

five years they had been together, but he had not the slightest idea what his servant thought of him. And suddenly catching a glimpse of the reflected face of Silas in the mirror before him, he had a quick impression of contempt and even enmity.

He turned quickly and said to Silas, "I won't have any dinner. I am going to Sandy's compound." And then an inspiration came to him. "When I go, put out all the lights." If the house was dark it might not occur to Alix to come over to the island and wait for his return.

On his way to the mainland and Sandy's compound he passed by chance quite close to another boat, the biggest, most important *wallum* boat in the harbor, and in the pale light of the new moon he had recognized, lying on a pile of matting, the bull-like figure of Lord Groton, all in white, returning from the lagoons.

During the whole of the morning Lady Groton had waited for Dantry to come to the hotel or for a message asking her to come to the island. A little before lunch she went to her room, and locking the door she took the glasses and watched the island for a long time, but she saw nothing save a servant, a good-looking boy, dressed all in white. Through the great windows she could see into the sitting room and the bedroom, but there was no one there save the boy, who came in once and, seating himself, looked through the copies of the London illustrated magazines which lay on the table. And then when she was about to abandon the watching, she saw a canoe approaching the island from the mainland, and in it the figure of a woman who was young and as nearly as she could make out, pretty. The canoe disappeared behind the house, and the woman in a little while reappeared in the garden where she set about cutting bunches of jacqueranda and trumpet flowers. Then she entered the house and went into Dantry's bedroom, and there she placed the flowers in a vase on the table by the bed and the servant joined her and they talked for a moment and then disappeared again.

For another hour she watched the house through the glasses and presently the woman walked across the garden and disappeared, and a moment later the canoe came out again from behind the house on the way back to the mainland.

She thought, "That is his woman. She has put the flowers there to make him think of her when he comes in. Someone must have seen us last night. Someone must have told her."

Alone, bored and restless, with no appetite, she ate lunch, and then she waited again all through the heat of the early afternoon, thinking of nothing but what had happened the night before and what had happened years ago, of that first night when she had seen him and liked his face for the misery and the intelligence and even the weakness she found in it—the weakness which she did not then recognize—of the days and nights at Tipton Farm when sometimes they had quarreled but most of the time they had been wildly happy.

About five o'clock when she could bear the waiting no longer, she ordered the boat and crossed to the island. At first she found no one and wandered through the house observing many things which she had not noticed in the excitement of the night before, and when at last she came to the bedroom she could see nothing in it but the bunch of flowers thrust tightly into the vase by the side of the bed, for to her it was not simply a vase filled with flowers, but the spirit of that woman who had come and gone without her ever having seen her face clearly. And the flowers, brought there by the woman, became a symbol of the menace which might separate Tom from her for a second time. For a long time she stood regarding the flowers as if fascinated, wondering what the woman was like and whether she had made Tom happy even for a little while. And then a thought came to her, "If I were to take away the flowers, he would never know that she brought them. He would never know that she had been there, and so he would never think of her, but only of me." But she thought too, "No, I can't do anything as cheap as that. I can't behave like a tart."

Yet she did do it. As if hypnotized, she walked to the flowers and took them out of the vase, thinking, "Now I must

go quickly before the servant appears,” and she felt faintly disgusted with herself, but she did not put the flowers back in the vase. Quickly she made her way out on to the terrace with the Indian bed and the great tiger skin, and quickly she descended the wide stairway, but not quickly enough, for as she reached the bottom, the figure of the servant appeared, hastily buttoning his white jacket. There was nothing now that she could do. She could not throw the flowers away, pretending she had never had them. So she stopped, blushing, waiting for the servant to come up. She, Alix Groton, who never blushed, felt suddenly like a small child caught in a nasty act.

With a great effort she said to the boy, “Tell *sahib* that Lady Groton came.”

“Yes, *memsahib*.”

She saw that the boy had noticed the flowers and wildly she said, “Tell him that I took the flowers for my room. There are no flowers at the hotel.” And at once she knew that what she had said was idiotic, for the boy had only to turn his eyes and see on Rasmussen’s island the garden filled with jasmine, jacqueranda, cannas, bignonia, and a hundred other flowers. And she saw by the eyes of the boy that he understood what she had done, and why she had done it. She saw that he knew the story—the whole thing. How he could have known it, she could not imagine.

Quickly she stepped into the boat and gave orders to return to the hotel. She still held the miserable flowers in her hot hand. She could not pitch them overboard with the servant and the boatmen watching. They stayed with her, like the Albatross about the neck of the Ancient Mariner, all the way to Rasmussen’s island. Even when she stepped ashore she

still had them, hating them now passionately because they had made her ridiculous and cost her her dignity in front of a servant. She carried them all the way to her room and there she flung them on a table and called for the *ayah*.

When the woman came, she said, "Take those and throw them out."

The woman said nothing, but looked at her in an odd way, so that she thought, "Does she too know everything? What sort of a place is this?" And for the first time she was a little frightened, feeling suddenly something of that dread and sense of doom which long ago had sometimes come to Dantry in the evenings when the jackals came out and the drums began.

Through the rest of the evening she waited, sitting by the window, and at dusk she saw the fishing boats returning, each one finding its way home like a bird seeking its nest among the channels and the islands, and presently she heard the jackals begin to call to each other, back and forth among the rice fields on the mainland, but still there was no sign of Tom. Even when it grew dark there was no light in the house. And presently anger took the place of anxiety and her injured vanity cried out, saying, "He has no right to do this to me. He is a coward and a swine." And she thought, "He can wait now forever before I will make any effort to see him. I hate this place. I'll go away on Thursday by the first train and never see him again."

But she did not forget him.

At last a light appeared in the house and she thought, "He has returned and is dressing and will come over in a little while," and all her anger was swallowed up again in anxiety and desire. Then presently the light went out and she thought,

“He will be here now in a few minutes,” and rising from the seat by the window she went to the dressing table and made up her face again for the fourth time that afternoon, and when she had done that she dressed herself, without the help of the *ayah*, in another gown, and put on more jewels, and all the time she was thinking, “Now there will be a knock at the door. Now Rasmussen will come to say that he is downstairs again, waiting for me.” And she saw him again very clearly in the purple *sarong* which made him seem more attractive than he had been even in the old days.

But there was no knock and no Rasmussen, and when she went to the window again the house on the island was still dark and she knew that he was not coming at all, and throwing herself down on the bed she began to weep. She did not know how long she lay there, but presently there was a knock at the door and she started up from the bed half-covering her face with her hands, and said, “Who is it? What is it?” trying to control her voice so that the *ayah* or Rasmussen or whoever it was who stood outside the door should not know that she had been weeping and spread the story among the islands. For an instant she had a sudden hysterical feeling that all those people she had seen from the train and from the *wallum* boat as she drifted among the islands, all those swarming, anonymous half-savage people were all watching and listening.

But it was only Rasmussen, who had come not to say that Tom was downstairs waiting, but to ask if she would have her dinner in her room. She sent him away, saying that she wanted nothing, and then undressed herself and taking a heavy dose of sleeping draught climbed into the bed hoping that she would lose consciousness at once and not waken

again for hours, because the waiting and the disappointment had now become unbearable to her, like the violent aching of a tooth.

She tried to read, thinking that it would make her sleep more quickly, but the book she chose meant nothing to her. She could not even see the words on the pages. She was falling asleep at last when again there was a knock at the door, and lying with her eyes closed she tried to take no notice of it, but after the second knock the door opened and into the room, carrying one of the kerosene lamps, came Lord Groton. Opening her eyes a little she recognized the great bulk of his body, filling the whole doorway, and with a shock she realized that during the whole day and the evening she had forgotten him, forgotten that tonight he was coming back. It was as if he had never existed.

As he crossed the room toward her she wanted to cry out, but instead she remained mute, her whole body contracted, her eyes still half-closed, watching him. He was wearing a dressing gown which she hated, and the sight of it set her teeth on edge. She had given it to him long ago at Christmas, thinking that it would please him because it was covered with a design of horses, and she had succeeded only too well. It had been cleaned countless times and was worn shabby, but he would not become separated from it. Whenever she suggested chucking it away, he always told her that it brought him luck. It was covered with horses—horses racing, horses clearing hedges and ditches, horses rearing, horses in full stride at the finishing post. It had come slowly with the passage of years to be a symbol of his visits to her. It had succeeded in the end in making her hate horses so much that she no longer hunted nor went racing.

He did not speak until he came to the bed where, lifting the netting and placing the lamp on the table beside it, he seated himself. His silence made her think, "He has found out. Now there is going to be a row." And she wanted to cry out, "Go away. Please go away just for tonight." But in the next moment she saw from his face that he did not mean to stay. He looked ill and sullen, and at the corners of the heavy jaw there were little knots of hard muscle which always appeared when he meant to make a scene.

He said, "You might have waited for me."

She made a great effort to control herself and said, "I didn't know what hour to expect you and I was very tired. Was the trip a success?"

"In some ways, yes." And then he took out a cigar and lighted it while she watched him, and then he said, "Alix, who is this man Dantry?"

For a second she hesitated, aware even in the haziness that enveloped her, that she must spar for time, to find out how much he knew. The sparring did not require much effort, for she had done it so often that in a way it had become a kind of fixed technique. She said, "An old friend. Why?"

"I was just interested."

"I haven't seen him for nearly fifteen years."

"Was he the boy ... the Dantry who had the V.C.?"

(So he knows that much. How much more does he know?)

"Yes. Who told you about him?"

"Bates."

The name of Bates made it easier for her. If it was Bates who told him about Dantry, then he had no knowledge but only suspicions. Bates had protected her so many times.

She said, “He turned up here last night. He’s been living here for a long time.”

In reply he said, “He ought to know a good deal about the place. He ought to be of some use to me.”

“I doubt it.”

“Why?”

“He wouldn’t know the things you’re interested in. He’s not very practical.”

“Is that meant to be a sneer?”

“No ... no.”

She was certain now that he did not know all the story, either of what had happened last night, or many years ago. He was suspicious and he was being disagreeable because the man was Tom Dantry, and men like Tom Dantry always gave him a sense of inferiority. He never minded her friendships with sporting men. It was that eternal inverted snobbery of his, that unhealthy hatred of any man born with the things he had never achieved and would never be able to achieve.

“That,” she thought, “is how the caste system works at home,” for suddenly her mind, challenged, was clear, and she felt strong and full of hatred for him, not the physical hatred she usually knew, but a kind of cold dispassionate hatred for him as a symbol of all those men like him, whose lives, whose souls, however dubious their existence, were concerned only with material things.

He was saying, “How friendly are you with him?”

“I used to know him very well. We were friends in London just after the war.”

His jaw set a little harder. “Where has he been since then?”

“Wandering about the world. I don’t know exactly where.”

“By choice?”

“By desire.”

“He must be a damned fool.”

“I don’t think so. He’s been trying to straighten himself out.”

“What’s the matter with him? What has he got to straighten out?”

“A lot of things. What happened to him in the war ... and his own character. It’s not a very interesting story. It would bore you.”

The ash from his cigar fell on the pink silk sheets and she wanted to say, “At least you needn’t smoke in here,” but again she thought, “If I let him do as he pleases, he’ll go away sooner.” She was feeling drowsy again, and with a conscious effort she raised herself in the bed and sank back among the piled-up pillows, aware that she must keep her wits about her if she was to endure this game and not betray herself.

He said, “One of those damned radicals, I suppose?”

“I suppose you might call it that. Anyway he doesn’t fit into the world as it is.”

“Why do you always pick up asses like that?”

She laughed, and the laugh was a secret one, against his stupidity. She had no special taste for radicals or intellectuals or any other class of men. She wasn’t attracted to men by their ideas or their brains, but by something else, much simpler. “It’s comic,” she thought, “how a husband is always the last to understand the truth.”

She was tired and bored because she had been through these same scenes so many times before. She knew all the

questions and all the answers, and at this sort of thing she was much the quicker witted of the two.

He went on bitterly and abusively, about her carelessness in the matter of propriety, about the provocative way she dressed and looked at other men, about a hundred other things. She did not trouble to listen, but now and then she looked at him, and for a time she thought that he had been drinking too much again, but presently she realized that it was not drink which made him look and behave thus. His face, instead of being purple as drink made it, was pale and pasty, and at times it seemed to her that he was making a great effort in order to speak. And then she became aware of her boredom again and the awful dressing gown, and in her drowsiness it seemed to her that the horses had all come to life. They were in dizzy motion, jumping, striding, rearing, plunging.

Because it never did any good, she never lost her temper and never answered back during these long scenes of jealousy, and now it was not Groton who made her angry, but the dressing gown and the silly, rearing, plunging horses. She heard herself saying, "Why do you always pick on men like Tom Dantry? Is it because you hate all gentlemen? Because you know that in a lot of ways they're better than you?"

For a moment he stared at her, his heavy, lipless mouth half open, so astounded that he seemed unable to find words with which to speak. Then he asked, "What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing in particular."

"Well, don't get any silly ideas. I'm proud of being Albert Simpson. I'm proud of having made my own way. I'm proud

of everything I've built up. It's more than any of your sickly, down-at-the-heel gentlemen could do."

And again she astonished him by saying, "Yes, that's quite true," and before he could speak, she said, "What is it you want of me, Albert? If you don't like men speaking to your wife, why did you marry me? You should have married a plain suburban respectable woman who wore fancy hats, but not me. Sometimes I think you didn't marry me for any reason save that I was Alix Ainsworth, who was in 'society,' who had a lot of cheap publicity in the illustrated papers. You wanted to show people that you could take what you wanted from the world—that nobody was too good for you. I was a kind of prize and you wanted to show me off. You didn't really want *me*. If I'd been just plain Mary Smith living in Bloomsbury, you wouldn't have looked at me. We've never had the least understanding or sympathy. You just wanted what I, quite by accident, happened to be."

For a long time he regarded the end of his cigar without speaking. She knew what he was doing. He was pulling himself together, counting ten before he spoke, so that he would say nothing which he need ever take back. He was being the shrewd businessman. She had caught him at it now and then when he was talking to other businessmen. But it was in truth that and a great deal more, for suddenly, in his tired, muddled brain, he saw that perhaps for the first time since he had married her he had a chance to learn the truth and his vanity was afraid. For a moment he hesitated, wondering whether it was better to continue in ignorance and doubt as he had done for years, and then, like a man hesitating to dive into icy water, he plunged.

"Why did you marry me?" he asked.

She answered at once. She said, "Because my father and I were stony and had a lot of debts. Because you offered me a big settlement, because I thought it would be wonderful to be colossally rich, and because I was in love with somebody else and was unhappy and really didn't much care who I married." Then for a moment she was silent, thinking, trying her best to be honest, and the effort, the concentration made her look very young, like a naughty child. She said, "I think it was the settlement that did it. That meant that whatever happened I should always be independent. I wouldn't even need your money."

He looked at her for a moment, directly, wearily, understanding for the first time the fathomless indifference of the woman he had married, the hopelessness of ever dominating her or breaking her will. Then silently he rose and crushed out the end of his half-smoked cigar on the table beside the bed, leaving it there, sordid, dead and broken among her own feminine things, the gold and platinum cigarette case, the smelling salts, the prayer book. It was a coarse, brutal gesture, and she thought, "That is what he would like to do to me at this moment, but he's afraid. He's poor, bumptious, awkward Albert Simpson, afraid of the gentry."

He started to speak, but his mouth only opened and closed and then he managed to say, "Good night," and went out of the room, closing the door behind him, leaving her aware that she had at last hurt him who she thought could not be hurt. She had found the vulnerable spot in the first Baron Groton, born plain Albert Simpson in Wilhelmina Crescent, Birmingham, and she was not sorry. It avenged her for many things. Perhaps now he would leave her in peace forever.

Anyway, with the settlement she would always have enough money, even if he left her nothing in his will. But she was a little ashamed because she knew that he had been made to suffer because Tom had never appeared. He had paid for what Tom had done to her.

The effect of the sleeping medicine had worn off now and she was dreadfully awake, and excited because she believed now that she would have to remodel her whole life and be free again, but she was able to bring no order to her own thoughts, and presently she rose and lighted a cigarette and took more sleeping medicine, and while she was out of bed she went, despite her pride, to the window again and looked toward the house on the island and found it still dark. It was late, for the drums had begun to die away, slowly, one by one among the islands.

When she was in bed again there was another knock at the door and when she said, "Who is it?" a voice answered, "Bates, me lady."

"Come in."

He came in, respectful, rather shifty in manner and cadaverous in appearance.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Sorry to disturb Your Ladyship, but I think there's something wrong with His Lordship. He's not well."

"What is it, Bates?"

"I've no idea, me lady, but he certainly has a fever. I wanted to take his temperature, but he wouldn't hear of it. You know how he is. He'll never admit it when he's feeling seedy."

"What about a doctor?"

“He wouldn’t hear of that either. He said there wouldn’t be any good doctors in a place like this.” The ghost of a smile appeared on the long face and he added, “He used much stronger language than that, but that was what he meant.”

It was as if the shadowy grin had said, “You and I understand the old bastard.” It disturbed her, the smile. They might both hate Groton. They both did. But while they were living off him they ought not to admit it to each other. The implications of the smile were too uncomfortable.

For a moment she was silent, thinking of a great many things, and then said, “Thank you, Bates. If he’s not better in the morning, I’ll try to find a doctor. I can persuade him, I think.”

“Thank you, me lady, good night.”

“Good night, Bates.”

When he had gone, thinking about Bates, she came to the conclusion that he was a bad servant, not because he was inefficient or stupid, but because his spirit was far too independent and his powers of divination far too great. It was not pleasant to have about you a servant who knew your motives and even your very thoughts. “He is probably one of those servants,” she thought, “who are involved in lodging-house murders.” His manner was one of the utmost professional discretion, and in her own case, Heaven knew, he had given evidence of discretion in practice; yet her instinct told her that he was not to be trusted. The interview left her with a curious sense of distaste, as if somehow he had managed to make her an accomplice to one of his own plots. As if somehow he had involved her in something sordid. He had betrayed himself, save for that single shadow of a grin, neither by glance nor by word, nor even by the intonation of

his voice, but she *knew* that he was thinking of Groton's death and finding pleasure in the thought, and that he knew that she too had been thinking of it in the same fashion.

Presently she put out the light again, but she did not sleep for a long time. The distant sound of the dying drums and the buzzing of insects annoyed her, and for a moment, while she lay between sleep and wakefulness, a hysterical terror of Nivandrum and all the country about it seized her. And then again just as she was falling asleep she had a strange dream in which she was searching for something desperately, but what it was she did not know. She was aware of a terrible anxiety and the necessity of haste, and of wandering through ill-smelling streets and vast dusty fields, and at last through a jungle in which she seemed to *hear* the plants, the trees, the giant ferns, the vines, growing all about her, closing her in. And everywhere there were eyes without faces watching her struggles, and then just as she knew that she was about to find what she was searching for, she wakened screaming, and in the first moment of consciousness she remembered that all the eyes were alike, black and set rather close together. They were the eyes of the woman called Léah, Mrs. Rasmussen, whom she had scarcely noticed, whom she would never have noticed save for the peculiar quality of her eyes.

When Dantry arrived at Sandy's compound he found the Cockney with half his family and a half-dozen neighbors seated about the fire. One of them, Sandy's third son, sat with one drum between his knees and another beside him. While the others gossiped and gambled, he thumped at both drums, exploring new rhythms, finding new combinations of sound between the male and female drums. Save for the hands which moved swiftly from one drum to another and back again, he sat quite still, absorbed utterly in his playing. At sight of Dantry coming out of the darkness dressed in European evening clothes, the little party fell silent, so silent that the boy with the drums, aware suddenly that the accompaniment of gossip had ceased, looked up and stopped his playing. Then one by one the family and guests, embarrassed and awkward, stole silently away to join the fire in another compound, and last of all the boy picked up his drums and vanished into the crotons and ragged bougainvillea that grew close about the houses. It was as if a ghost had suddenly appeared, or some creature infected with a nameless and terrible disease. And Dantry thought, "My God, they must all know something is wrong." It was all different again, the way it had been in the beginning.

At last only Sandy was left seated before the fire, smoking his pipe, fatter now than he had been when Dantry first came to the islands, and more placid and solid, more than ever a plump little Cockney Buddha.

As he watched Dantry approach, he saw from his walk that he had been drinking, and then when he saw that Dantry was dressed the way people dressed to dine in restaurants in

London, he knew that he must be very drunk, and quietly he thought that it was a great pity after things had gone so well for so long. It was a pity that this should have happened just when the people of the islands were becoming used to him, and beginning to accept him. Now, tonight, at sight of him drunk and dressed as he was, they all ran away again as they had done when he first came to the islands. Sandy knew why they ran away; they were not, by nature, a drinking people, and the sight of drunkenness always offended them a little. It made them feel shy and ashamed as when they saw a mad person. And Dantry had made it worse by putting on all those European clothes. The sight of a European drunk always upset them profoundly; a European, drunk, became either bestial or overfamiliar and embarrassed them, or he became brutal and their enemy. Now Sandy waited, as Dantry came toward him, to see which manifestation the brandy had taken with his son-in-law, and as soon as the firelight struck Dantry's face he knew. It had turned ugly and unfamiliar. It was a strange face which Sandy, his friend, had never seen before, a face that struck him, in his simple way, as a little like the masks which the dancers wore to impersonate the demon in the legend of Rama and Sita.

It disturbed him, but he sat quietly until Dantry had come up to the fire, and then he said, "Hello."

Dantry did not seat himself. It was hardly possible in a dinner jacket to squat by the fire, and the gesture of remaining standing alarmed Sandy a little more. It was as if the gesture, with the clothes, were a kind of silent declaration, as if Dantry had said, "I have gone back to what I was by birth. There is a barrier between us at home, where we both came from, and nothing can change it here...." And

the memory of Sandy, traveling back across twenty-five years, roused an obscure impulse to rise to his feet and likewise to stand, not arrogantly, balancing a little drunkenly on two feet like Dantry, but submissively, awaiting orders. But immediately he thought, "All that is past and finished. That is something I shall never do again. This is my world, not his, and he will have to suit himself to me."

Dantry did not answer his greeting, he merely said, "Why did they all run away? Have I got the plague?"

"No," said Sandy quietly. "They were frightened."

"Why were they frightened?"

"Because drinking makes friends into strangers."

"I haven't been drinking."

Then Sandy, very quietly, turned a little hard. It was a manifestation which Dantry had never seen in the plump, good-natured little man, but Sandy was still thinking, "This is my world, not his, and he must neither dominate nor destroy it."

Very gently, Sandy said, "You must have been drinking a great deal more than I guessed, if you think that anyone can't see how drunk you are." And as he spoke a strange thing happened inside him. He knew that he had no respect for this countryman of his, and he knew now that he had never had any respect. In the jungle, shooting, or here at home spearing fish and living a healthy, placid life, he knew that he was a better man than Dantry. Without him Dantry would have no shooting, no fishing, not even a wife, if it came to that. Without him Dantry in Nivandrum would have been lost, a stranger. Until now he had not thought of any of these things, save once or twice when Dantry's treatment of Maria had wounded him. He had overlooked them partly from good

nature, partly from natural friendliness. He had been willing to overlook the occasional arrogance of this man who came from a different class and a different world, and was so helpless once he found himself outside of its buttresses and protections. No, Sandy was the better man, and now he knew it. All the money, the background, the education had in reality brought nothing to Dantry, save perhaps disadvantages. In a way, before the world, they had weakened him. Sandy did not mind drinking, but he liked drinking for fun, noisily, wildly, with good nature when there was an occasion to celebrate. He did not like sullen drinkers, who drank in solitude only to give themselves courage and decision or to make them forget their own unhappiness, and now, as if the smoldering, sweet-smelling fire before him were a blinding white light, he knew that this was why Dantry drank; this was why each time he drank, during the five years Sandy had known him, he had grown more and more impossible. He had always drunk not to be gay or to celebrate, but to drown his own misery.

The face of Dantry looking down at him in the light from the fire went suddenly blank as the significance of Sandy's speech made its way into his muddled brain. For a moment he felt a desire to say, "Stand up when you are speaking to me," but almost at once, even in his drunkenness, he knew that under the circumstances such a speech would only echo, ridiculous and grotesque, without response, through the silence of the compound. For a moment he felt ashamed, as a little while before he had felt ashamed and angry as Silas watched him dressing. So he said feebly, "I'm not drunk, not as drunk as that."

“I’ll get you a chair,” said Sandy, and raising his voice he called toward the main house, “Anthony! Anthony! Bring Sahib Dantry the chair.” And a moment later one of Sandy’s smaller boys came out, bringing with him a cheap, stiff chair—the only chair in the house, which was never used save when Sandy’s wife sat at the elegant sewing machine which Sandy had bought her with money that came from Dantry.

The boy, shyly, awkwardly, placed the chair beside Dantry, glanced at him with fear and then scurried off again into the darkness.

For a moment Dantry stood regarding it, suddenly ill at ease and feeling a little ridiculous, aware now for the first time why in his drunkenness he had dressed himself so pompously. Without thinking, he had dressed himself as if he were going out to dinner in London in a feeble effort to reestablish his prestige, as if already he were a beachcomber who was forced to *demand* dignity and respect instead of having it given him. He had tried to force something to which he no longer had any right. And now as he stood beside the chair he saw that if he sat on it, that stiff cheap chair, beside the fire in Sandy’s compound with Sandy seated on the ground, he would become hopelessly ridiculous. Even now the neighbors and the children were probably hiding among the crotons and bougainvilleas watching him, grinning at one another, stifling their good-natured chuckles. The calmness, even the dignity of that squat little Cockney Buddha sitting cross-legged on the opposite side of the fire, did nothing to help him. It was as if Sandy said, “You have made a fool of yourself. Now get out of it as best you can.”

So with a sudden kick, he sent the chair halfway across the compound, and taking off his coat, he threw it on the ground,

and after that he tore off his shirt, and at last, naked to the waist, he seated himself on the ground beside the fire opposite Sandy, and Sandy watching him, made no sign save the shadow of a sardonic grin, so faint that in the flickering light of the fire, Dantry could not be certain it had ever existed, crossed his face.

Then he said, "And now," and looked at Sandy, but Sandy said nothing.

He had come meaning to propose a shooting trip, but now, with a sensibility that was partly natural and morbid and partly the result of his intoxicated condition, he saw that this was impossible because something had come between them, something which would mar the whole trip and make it and the relationship between them strained and unnatural. And the silence of Sandy disturbed him, making him believe that all the five years in Nivandrum had been for nothing. It seemed to him that, sitting there half-naked by the fire, clad only in black evening trousers, he was as much a stranger as on the first day he had come to the islands.

When Sandy said nothing, he felt a sudden compulsion to speak, and so when he spoke he was a little hysterical and jumped farther than he had meant to. He said, "I am going away."

This time Sandy answered him. He said, "I think it would be a good idea. I think a change would do you good. You have been here too long without going away. The place is getting you down."

And then again when he spoke, he jumped, driven this time by irritation, farther than he meant, "No, I mean I am going away for good." And this time Sandy said nothing. Once before he had said he was going away, but he had not gone

because of Maria. After a silence Dantry said, "I'll make a settlement on Maria. I'll leave her an income that will take care of her forever. I'll be generous."

"I wasn't thinking about that," said Sandy.

"You've all been much better off since I married Maria."

"No," said Sandy. "Not much better. Not better off at all."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You haven't brought any special happiness. A sewing machine and a few European clothes for the kids ain't happiness."

"There's been a lot more than that."

"Not much. There's been more unhappiness than happiness."

"How?"

"There's Maria."

"Haven't I been good to Maria? Haven't I given her everything?"

"Everything you've given her didn't mean anything. You didn't give her the one thing she wanted." Dantry did not ask, "What was that?" for even in his drunkenness he knew all the things he had refused to give her.

"You mustn't forget," said Sandy quietly, "that Maria is half-European. Even if she wasn't she wouldn't have liked being treated as a convenience."

"You're very fond of Maria, aren't you?" asked Dantry.

"Yes. You see she's my child. That her mother is dark doesn't make any difference. Her mother has been a good wife. She has made a good life for me. She has brought happiness to me and to her children."

For a second Sandy was silent, puffing his pipe and staring into the fire. Then he said, "But I wouldn't ask you to stay. It wouldn't get any better. I thought it might be all right. I had doubts even when you married her, but I still thought it might be all right." Again he paused and quietly, shaking the ashes from his pipe, he refilled it; and said, "And I'll tell you frankly that I hoped it would be all right. I wanted it to be for your sake as much as hers, but now I know it won't be. I was wrong when I thought you might be different. You aren't. It was bad for you and for her and for everybody. Now it's better that you go away and that she forgets you. I can find a good husband for her among the islands who'll care for her and give her the children you were never willing to give her because you were never willing to give up that other world. You never really wanted to be one of us. You wanted to have everything and give nothing."

Then surprisingly he rose and held out his hand and said, "Maybe it isn't your fault. To judge things like that you have to know the whole story. I'll wish you good-bye. Don't worry about the settlement. Maria won't need it because money isn't very important here. I hope that some day you'll find a place where you fit."

So Sandy was dismissing him, Sandy, a Cockney sailor who had been his *shikari*, was sending him off. He still remained seated on the ground, feeling awkward and aware that for a second time Sandy had him at a disadvantage. He had meant to come to the compound as the injured party, to accuse Sandy and his family and all Nivandrum of putting up with him for the money they got out of him, and somehow Sandy had turned the tables, not because he was more intelligent or clever, but simply because he was right, because

both his small plump feet were planted in the earth, in reality. The knowledge sobered him a little and he felt ashamed, and at the same time a fury sprang up inside him and he thought, "It's her fault and Groton's for ever coming here. They've destroyed everything, and now Groton is going to destroy the islands and corrupt all the people with his petrol tanks and docks. God blast them!"

In silence he rose to his feet and took Sandy's hand, and then very quietly he said, "Good-by Sandy," and Sandy said, with an odd embarrassed dignity, "Good-by, sir."

The word "sir" was almost like a blow. For a moment it left him without words. It was as if in that single short word Sandy had ironically condemned everything he was and everything he stood for, all that world from which he had come and from which Sandy had escaped so surely, so triumphantly, and which he himself had never been able to lose. He looked for the irony in Sandy's face, uncertain whether he had spoken thus deliberately or from a habit long dead, but the plump, pleasant face was both calm and expressionless.

There was nothing to do now but take his leave, and how to take it with dignity was a problem. Sandy helped him a little, for he said, suddenly, "And Maria?"

"I think I had better not see her. It would be easier for her."

"Perhaps." And again the faint ghost of a grin drifted across the plump face, but a ghost potent enough to say, "Easier for you. Now you can run away again. You can run away, but your precious self will be waiting for you on the dock in Singapore or Batavia or Shanghai, or wherever it is you land."

Then, because there was nothing else to do, Dantry turned and walked away from Sandy and the little fire, but before he had reached the gate of the compound, he heard Sandy's voice, "You've forgotten your coat and shirt," (Would there be no end to Sandy's power of making him ridiculous?) and he called back, "Throw the damned things in the fire."

Then he was outside the compound where the sardonic eye of little Sandy could no longer follow him, but he was not yet free, for as he approached the little pier there stepped toward him, out of the bamboo, the familiar figure of Maria. The moon gave enough light for him to recognize her at once, and even as she came near to him, enough light for him to see her face and her great dark eyes. She looked very small, and the sight of her caused his heart to contract suddenly, not from fear or from affection, but from pity ... the pity against which he was never able to arm himself, the pity from which he could never escape save by running away, the pity which lay at the core of all his weakness and indecision so that he had no peace. And there was a kind of wonder, too, in his confused brain, that once the sight of her should have roused him so terribly and that now it roused not the faintest desire.

He stopped at the edge of the pier because there was nothing else to do, and he said nothing. It was Maria who spoke. She merely said, "Dantry," and now the name seemed to him more inappropriate, more shameful than it had ever been. Somehow, he saw, the fact that she should call him "Dantry" instead of "Tom," lay at the root of everything, a kind of symbol. That was why he did not know her at all; why he had never known her; that was the reason he had never known any of them here in the islands. To all of them he had never been either "Mr. Dantry," or "Sahib," or "Mr.

Tom,” or “Tom,” but merely “Dantry,” an impersonal appellation which meant nothing at all—neither dignity, respect, friendliness nor intimacy; it only meant that he had tried to take everything they had to give him and to give nothing in return. In a blinding moment of clarity, watching the still, small figure in the moonlight, he saw the whole thing complete for the first time.

He said, as gently as possible, “Yes, Maria?”

“What have I done?”

He could not answer her. How could he? How could he make her understand—a simple, direct child, living in a state of nature when he had never been able to make other women, far older and wiser and more subtle, understand that there came a time when they were all measured against one woman and suddenly became intolerable. So he said, “Nothing, Maria. It isn’t what you’ve done. It’s myself.”

She looked at him, puzzled, and he felt a sudden impulse to put his hands on her shoulders and try to make her understand, but he was afraid to touch her, lest the gesture should bring back to him all the strange, healthy animal happiness which they had had together and weaken him once more. And he meant to run away; he had to run away.

Yet he had not the courage to tell her that he was going away forever, and that this was the last time she would ever see him. That he could leave for Sandy to do.

“When will you let me come back?” she asked.

And he lied, saying, “I don’t know. I’ll send word by Silas.”

There was a little silence, and Dantry heard the drum beginning again in Sandy’s compound and knew now for

certain that the rest of Sandy's family, the neighbors, the boy with the drum, had all been waiting, watching from the bushes, until he went away. Now that the man with the plague had gone they would return.

"Dantry," she said softly, "I'll do what you want because it is you I want to be happy."

The speech made him silent and full of shame, because it was a speech he had never made in all his life, not even to Alix long ago. If he had made it then, the whole of life would have been different. He had wanted people to be happy, not for their own sakes, but because their happiness in turn made him happy. When they could not be happy he ran away.

At last he said, "There isn't anything you can do. It's too late now to do anything." And in the fear that she might think he was accusing her, he added, "You see, it isn't your fault, Maria ... it's the fault of things which happened long ago ... which have gone on happening for years and years."

He knew that it was impossible for her, whose whole world was the harbor, the islands, ever to understand what he wanted, and for a moment he hated her for loving him. In the end it had always been like that; he had come to hate those who loved him, who somehow in a shadowy way fastened responsibilities upon him, roused his pity and made him miserable. Only Alix had never done this to him, never once. He saw it clearly now for the first time; that was the reason why nothing had ever changed his feeling for her, why he had used her as a standard by which to measure all other women. She loved him, but left him free because she herself was free, in spite of everything; in spite of Groton and the life she had led, she was free always. "Free," he thought. "Shining and free." And suddenly he saw her very clearly in all her beauty,

with her childlike face as if she were enveloped in light so that he could not see Maria at all. In all her overbreeding and decadence that one good thing stood forth. She was clear and unmuddled and free. Perhaps it had taken hundreds of years to produce that freedom, just as it had taken hundreds of years to produce the decadence.

Now, half-sober, his mind worked with brilliant alertness so that he seemed to see all things at once, and to understand everything with an understanding that was neither agreeable nor helpful, and so the course he must take became clearer than it had ever been. He must go away and finish himself off before he caused misery to any more people, before he muddled their lives and corrupted their spirits. He could drink himself to death, going from one bar to another back and forth among the islands and the cities of the East. But Alix should finish herself off too, for she had the same curse upon her, only she would never do it because she was wiser and more scornful and harder, and she was free.

For a long time he had stood there, ignoring Maria, his hands pressed against his aching head, covering his eyes as if to shut out the pale light from the virginal new moon—that moon which was new and fresh with all her course still before her. It was the moment of blackest misery he had ever known, and it was Maria who roused him from it by the touch of her hand. When he took his hands down and looked he found her prostrate before him, her arms about his knees. She was crying quietly and saying, “Dantry, I will do whatever will make you happy ... because in your heart you are a good man.”

He left her there lying on the ground and went quickly to his canoe, not to set out for his own island, but to drift about

on the enchanted lagoons and channels. As his canoe disappeared into the mist, another came out from the shadow of the shore and slipped along the glassy water up to Sandy's little pier.

When Dantry had gone, Sandy remained sitting by the fire, and presently, one by one, the children and the neighbors reappeared to take their places in the little circle. But Sandy's good humor had gone, and he no longer made the jokes which set them to laughing. Dantry's coat and shirt lay beside him on the ground, and he did not speak of them nor make any joke about them, for he was thinking how he could explain to Maria what Dantry had told him without hurting her too much. He knew well enough that when Dantry had left the compound, Maria must have followed him, but he knew too, for by now he knew his son-in-law all too well, that Dantry would not tell her the truth, but only put her off. He thought again, "There is nothing to be done. The sooner he leaves Nivandrum forever the better. For every day he stays on there will be new tragedy." And he reflected that the only train would not leave until tomorrow in the late afternoon. He was afraid, not of Dantry, but for what Maria might do.

Beside him his third son went on thumping and exploring new rhythms, and one of the old men with a flute presently joined in the music, first setting a theme and then, accompanied by Sandy's boy, playing it over and over again with countless variations. Sometimes the neighbors conversed in low voices, but most of the time they remained silent, for it was as if Dantry had left behind him not only the tangible jacket and shirt, but a kind of shadow which dimmed the fire and made the theme and variations of the old man playing the flute, turn more and more melancholy and sinister.

Sandy stared into the fire, not a merry Buddha now, but a grave one like the Buddhas of the north, until presently he was aware of a murmur all about him and a restless moving, and then raising his eyes he saw that the old man who was playing the flute had stopped and was making with his withered old fingers the sign against the evil eye. There was a look of terror in his wrinkled face, and as Sandy followed the glance he discovered standing silently in the light by the fire, the figure of Léah, Rasmussen's wife. She was dressed in a dark *sari*, so that, in the shadows, you saw only her narrow-eyed face, so handsome and yet so disturbing, with its expression of malevolence and its implications of evil.

The children ran away and the older people remained, terrified, but afraid to offend her by leaving. Sandy watching her, thought as he always thought, "All this evil eye business is nonsense," yet he was obscurely disturbed, less perhaps by any fear of her magic than by the sense of her subtle malevolence. She never left Rasmussen's island, she had not been to the compound since the night long ago when Maria had stolen away to Dantry's island, that night which was the beginning of all her unhappiness. Now, for the first time, it occurred to him that Léah perhaps had had something to do with Maria's behavior.

He made an effort, especially before all the others, to regard her visit as perfectly usual, and said, "Sit down, Léah." And a little afraid of what she had to say, he spoke in English, which his neighbors, if they understood at all, understood but vaguely.

And Léah answered him in English, saying, "No sit down. Coming to see Maria."

"What for see Maria?" asked Sandy.

“Helping Maria.”

“How helping?”

“Telling her how she get her man back.”

For a second, sparring for time, Sandy was silent. Then he said, “Maria still got her man.”

Léah smiled. It was an expression which was scarcely a smile, but more the look of a tired prophetess in a trance.... The prophetess, the Cassandra who always predicted rightly, whom no one ever believed until it was too late.

“No got her man,” she said stubbornly, “Maria knowing it too.”

“Maria no want her man,” said Sandy stubbornly.

“Maria wanting her man ... wanting him happy.”

For a moment Sandy reflected, thinking, “Perhaps after all she can help the girl. Perhaps there is something in her hocus-pocus. After all it was Léah who got Dantry for her in the first place. Perhaps she’s interested. Perhaps she wants to keep him for her. Perhaps I haven’t got any right to interfere. Anyway she can’t do any harm.” So he said, “Maria inside house. No do Maria harm.”

“What harm?” asked Léah, smiling with benevolence.

“Making Maria happy. Knowing what Maria want.”

“All right,” said Sandy.

“Thanking,” said Léah and moved off into the shadows in the direction of the main hut. The eyes of the others followed her, still filled with awe. She walked slowly and with prophetic dignity, and as she disappeared like a shadow into the door, Sandy felt a sudden impulse to rise and go after her and send her back to Rasmussen’s island without her ever seeing Maria, but he did not move. It was only laziness that

prevented him, and the fact that he was growing older and that it was not so easy to get up and down as it had once been.

At eight o'clock in the morning Lady Groton was roused by a violent knocking at the door and, still befogged by all the sleeping stuff she had taken, wakened with difficulty, to say, "Come in," expecting the door of her bedroom in Hill Street to open and admit Harris. But the door, which very strangely was not at all like the door of her own bedroom, opened and admitted Bates, who seemed as nearly as it was possible for him to be in a state of agitation. Mechanically she said, "What is it, Bates?" and then listened, still trying to discover where she was and why it was so hot and why there was no grate with a fire in it.

His Lordship, so Bates said, had not wakened properly. He appeared to be in what Bates referred to as a "comber," and now that he was no longer able to resist, Bates had managed to take his temperature and found that it was seven degrees above normal.

"I'm afraid, me lady," said Bates, "that he has one of them Eastern fevers."

Then suddenly Bates and the room became clear to her, clear enough for her to think, "You're not afraid at all. You hope he has. You hope it's nothing worse than plague." But pulling herself together with a great effort, she said, "I suppose we should send for a doctor, only I don't know whom to send for or where to send for him."

"I've inquired, me lady, from this man Rasmussen and there isn't any doctor, except a kind of witch doctor." He hesitated for a moment and then said, "I've heard that sometimes they can be quite good. They have all kinds of native remedies for snake bite and things like that."

After a moment of thought, she said, “No, we can’t do that. Lord Groton would be furious.”

Then Bates said, “This man Rasmussen did say there was a kind of lady doctor—a half-caste or something—that lives in the capital. She is called Mees Opp ... only the capital is a long way from here and no train.”

The name brought up at once the picture of the great, homely woman dressed in white with the hat covered with faded flowers. Lady Groton saw her again as she had seen her outside the carriage window, calm, reassuring, serene, in the midst of the squalling pilgrims and vendors of rice cakes. She saw her again as she had seen her from the window, dosing the long lines of ill and suffering islanders. And suddenly the thought returned to her that this woman was somehow mixed up in her own destiny. It kept returning again and again. But she thought, “I mustn’t be an idiot. I must have common sense.” So aloud she said, “We might telegraph to Madras or Colombo for a doctor to come by plane.”

But Bates saw the error of this. He said, “I went into that, me lady, with this man Rasmussen. There isn’t a decent place for a plane to land, and anyway he doubts whether a doctor would come.”

“Even if he knew who the patient was?”

Bates smirked. “That’s just it, me lady. We can’t tell them that. His Lordship strictly forbade sending for a doctor.”

“When?”

“Last night, when I was trying to get him to let me take his temperature. He said, ‘One thing, Bates, if I fall ill you’re not to send for any doctor. I’m a strong man and I’ll pull through, but I’m not going to have any doctor messin’ around here. That’s orders,’ he said, ‘the strictest orders you ever got, and

you're not to let Her Ladyship change them. You're working for me,' he said, 'and not for her.' ”

“Why did he say that?”

“I'm not sure, me lady, but you know how he is about doctors. They always make him curse. And then ...” he hesitated and plunged, “I suppose he doesn't want it to get out why he's here. That's something I'm not supposed to know, but I do.”

Again, as on the night before, the shadow of a confidential smirk crossed his face, and again Lady Groton felt a moment of uneasiness. It was terrifying how much Bates knew. She did not mind how much he knew about her so long as they did not admit it to each other. Suddenly she said, “Can one send a telegram from here?”

“No, me lady; I inquired. It has to be sent from the other side of the mountains.”

“Do you mean to say there's no telegraph at the station?”

“No, me lady. That's the kind of place it is.”

She thought for a moment, wearily and with a great effort, “Then I suppose Mees Opp is the best we can do.”

“His Lordship hates doctors,” said Bates. “A lady doctor would send his blood pressure up to bursting.”

Then suddenly she felt angry, wildly angry, because Albert had put her in this position, alone, isolated in this forgotten place with himself helpless and ill, with no doctors, no nurses, no telegraph, no luxuries, all because he wanted to make more money and have more power. He wanted it so much—this victory over Hugo Deakin—that he was willing to run the risk of dying rather than have the news get out to the world that he was in Nivandrum. He was willing to die

rather than let Deakin discover his secret. It was incredible; yet faintly, obscurely, there was something magnificent in such determination and singleness of purpose. That, she supposed, was how men like Albert became rich and powerful. But it was terrifying too, because it was a kind of madness.

She said, "I think it's got beyond what Lord Groton wants. If he's unconscious he can't make a row. I think that brings us back to Mees Opp. How can she get here?"

"By boat, me lady."

"How long will it take?"

"Two or three days."

Again she reflected and then said, "I'll go in and see him and then I'll send a note to Mr. Dantry. He'll be better than anyone under the circumstances. He has lived here for five years. He ought to know."

She thought she heard Bates saying, "Very good, me lady, I think that is the wisest thing," but she could not be quite certain, because deep inside her she kept hearing a voice which said, "It's Mees Opp you need here. She could manage everything. It's Mees Opp you want."

She felt strangely tired and for a moment she thought, "Perhaps I too am going to be ill," but she was aware of Bates standing there watching her and she said, "That's all, Bates; if I need you, I'll send for you."

And as he went out of the room it seemed to her that there was almost a look of glee on his face as if he thought, "Now these fine birds are in hot water. Now they'll know what it means to be poor and without the money for a doctor. Now

the bloody old fool is going to be ill and die proper like any ordinary man.”

For the first time she was profoundly disturbed by Bates, and she was troubled by his manner of confidence as if somehow he sought, feeling his way, with the greatest diplomacy, an alliance with Albert.

When she had made up her face and arranged her hair and put on a peignoir she seemed less dazed and numbed, although her brain still felt as if incased in cotton wool, and when she raised her hand it was leaden and strange as if it did not belong to her.

It was the first time that she had gone to Groton's room, and when she saw it she was tempted to laugh, not only because of the room itself, but at the thought that Albert had undoubtedly chosen it because it was the largest and most imposing room in Rasmussen's hotel. He lay, grotesquely, in a vast bed of teakwood, ornamented with bits of mother-of-pearl, placed on a square of faded turkey-red carpet, and the sight of him lying half-conscious in the bed (as she had never seen him in all their life together) gave her a sudden shock. It was as if she had never before seen him quite properly, as he was, as if she had never seen how heavy, how gross he could be, for now the spark, the vitality, the energy which had always animated his great bulk and turned mere weight into strength, was absent, and he appeared dull, inert and heavy, the hard line of the brutal jaw gone soft, the muscles of the big face all flaccid.

And then she remembered a little vaguely, as if she had dreamed it, what had happened the night before and the quarrel that had taken place in her bedroom when for a moment she had been vulgar and common; and she was filled

with a feeling of shame and a loathing of herself as well, because she had lived for more than fifteen years with this gross mass of flesh that lay on the bed, that again and again she had been able to accept him with indifference. And she thought suddenly of Tom Dantry and how different his body was, how slim and hard and brown, in spite of all his drinking. And she felt a strange desire to weep for herself, for all her mistakes and folly and cold misery. Looking down at Groton, she thought, "Whether he lives or dies it is all finished between us. I shall never live with him again." But now, she wished shamelessly, in her heart, that he would die, for she knew now that so long as he lived and perhaps long after he was dead, she would always see him thus, betrayed by his illness, heavy, gross, purple-faced, with his mouth hanging open a little; and each time that she saw him or thought of him she would remember that she had prostituted her fine slim body for him, not once, but many times.

Leaning over the bed, she knew that Bates from his corner of the room was watching her, darkly curious to see how she would behave, and she knew that she must put up some sort of show which would check forever that dreadful insinuating grin of his, a show which, although it would probably not deceive him, would nevertheless put him in his place.

She said, as if she were a devoted wife, "Albert! Albert! It's Alix," and the dull pale blue eyes opened a little way but only looked into space, far beyond her, without focusing. Then he made a faint grunting sound and again closed his eyes. Again she tried to rouse him, but with no better success, and then to Bates she said, "I'll write a note to Mr. Dantry. You can send it across at once. If we're to send for Mees Opp, we must do it at once, but I want to hear first what Mr.

Dantry has to advise. You'd better take it across yourself and wait for an answer."

"Very good, me lady."

"I'll bring it when I've finished," she said, and then went out of the room, leaving Bates content that he was, after all, going to see this Dantry at close range, in his own house, where he could discover all sorts of things about him, what sort of furniture he had, and what sort of servant and how he lived, and whether he was really as much of a gentleman as he appeared.

In her own room she opened her writing case, but when she began the note she found it far from simple to write, because there were other things she wanted besides simple information about Mees Opp or a doctor. She was aware now that he was deliberately avoiding her, and she was a little afraid that if he had not already gone away he might go away during the course of the day, and now, with Albert lying in that awful bed like a sick animal, she could not think of Tom leaving her here alone in this strange hotel with a half-witted proprietor, and Bates becoming more and more difficult. And in her mind there hovered all the while, like a subtle temptation, the thought that after all, whether he lived or died, she might soon be free of Albert, and then she could have Tom perhaps forever. She wasn't so young any more; perhaps it was time to think about settling down for good, forever; and at the thought of being old a little shiver of horror shook her body. And finally, while she struggled, trying to think how she could best accomplish her complicated purpose, the image of Tom returned to her as he had been on that first evening when the dancers came, and

she knew that she wanted him more than any man in the world and that there had never been any other man.

Three times she drafted the note and destroyed it, and she might have gone on for half the morning save that time pressed, and she was afraid that if she delayed too long Bates would begin to grow curious and insinuating. It was odd, but slowly she was becoming afraid of Bates, as if he were her own conscience of a spy stationed to watch her.

Then as she began a fourth draft, she thought suddenly, "What a fool I am! I'll not send him a note. I'll go to him myself." For now she saw, she had an excuse, a reason, which would save her vanity and her pride. She could go to him and perhaps manage to keep him here in Nivandrum, near her, at least for a little while longer, because each hour, each minute, seemed precious to her now.

Hastily she tore up the note, and when she had looked at herself in the blotched old glass and arranged her hair a second time and touched her lips with scarlet, she dressed and put on her hat and went down the stairs to order Rasmussen to send for her boatmen.

A little while later Bates, watching from the window of Lord Groton's *chambre de luxe*, saw her cross over to Dantry's island, and he thought, "There is going to be trouble before we've finished."

He was disappointed and a little resentful that he had not been sent himself, for now he would very likely never see the inside of Dantry's house and discover whether he was really as much of a gentleman as he looked. He watched her step ashore and climb the great open stairway and disappear into Dantry's house, and then he went downstairs to fetch gruel for His Lordship. The gruel was not what interested him

most, but the opportunity for another chat with that woman Léah.

The train left at noon, but Dantry had been awake since a little after dawn, going through the house for the last time, telling Silas what to pack in one or two rather battered handbags—some shorts, some shirts, some books, the toilet things. As he watched the boy packing, it occurred to him how deeply he had sunk into the life of Nivandrum, how far he had drifted from the civilization of the West. There was scarcely anything material left out of the old life. And now, for the first time, the departure became a reality, and he felt a sudden pang at the thought that very likely he would never again wear a *sarong* and never again go naked save for a loin cloth, fishing beyond the Great Bar. His head ached from sleeplessness and the drinking of the night before and his spirit sagged with shame at the memory of the humiliating scene which had taken place in Sandy's compound. For a moment he thought, "I could still stay and never see her again." But in his heart he knew that such an idea was no good. He would have no peace so long as she was in Nivandrum.

He had had tea and two drinks to put him on his feet, and was standing in the great bedroom overlooking the harbor when he heard someone enter the room, softly, as Silas always entered it, but with a different softness, and turning, he saw Maria standing shyly in the doorway. She was dressed all in white as he had seen her on that day long ago when he surprised her in the cookhouse, and she wore a wreath of jasmine flowers about the knot of her dark hair. Something in the sight of her made him feel not annoyed, but shy and a little ashamed, so he said to her, with softness in his voice, "Come in."

Shyly she came toward him, saying, "I have come to say good-by."

It was a strange scene and he was aware of its strangeness. He was aware that she had come to him full of love, and he knew that in his heart he no longer felt any emotion for her save that of pity. He was not good at acting, and now he felt the imposition by something stronger than himself, something in the situation itself, of the necessity to play a role which he did not feel.

She said, "I will go to the station, if you don't mind. I will help carry your things."

The speech hurt him somehow by its implications of simplicity and devotion, for she made the speech with a childlike sincerity and not as other women, Western women, had done, to save their vanity or to heap coals of fire upon his head. She was not playing the martyr. She had come thus simply because she loved him, because she had wanted to look at him again for the last time, and there was something agonizing in the knowledge that he had to hurt her; it was like hurting a child or a puppy.

He said, "No, of course not. I won't have you carrying my bundles on your head like a farmer's wife," and quite simply she answered, "I would like it if it would please you."

"Sit down, Maria. We can talk while I finish what I have to do." For he saw suddenly that it would be much easier if he made the visit an affair as casual as possible, and that it would be much easier if he found himself occupied while she was there watching him. In that way he would not have to see the look in the great dark eyes, the look of someone who was dying.

She seated herself not on a chair, but shyly on the edge of the great Spanish bed, and as she did so he saw the bed again as it had been on that first night long ago, when it had been covered with jasmine and jacqueranda and bignonia blossoms. The memory gave him a sudden feeling of illness and he thought bitterly, "That too is finished. That went the way of everything else." Some day, when he was an old man, the memory would no longer be like an acute pain, but glowing and beautiful. But for that he would have to wait; it was still too near to cause anything but pain. The girl sitting on the edge of the bed was not the girl he had found in his room that night dressed in a European frock, wearing an old fiber hat covered with real flowers. This was simply a pretty half-caste girl toward whom he felt no emotion whatever. And in a moment of revelation he saw what it was that had caused the whole thing to fail. There had never been anything between them but the bond of their bodies. For her, in her simplicity, that had been beautiful. It had been enough. For men like Rasmussen and Sandy that was enough. But on him, Dantry, rested the complicated curse of civilization, and so after a little time he had grown bored, with a boredom which did not matter until Alix had arrived. The moment he saw her, he had known at once his madness and his error. He had discovered that after all he had not escaped.

The girl sat on the bed quietly, with that stillness which Eastern women have, filled with sadness, yet knowing a kind of resigned happiness that he was still there, that there were still precious minutes, being ticked off with horrible speed by the noisy little clock on the dressing table—moments, seconds, when she could watch him, knowing how much she loved him, how many hours of delight they had had together.

Presently she lifted her feet from the floor and sat on them native fashion, covering them with the edge of her white *sari*.

Dantry, too, was aware of the ticking of the clock, but for him each minute, each second, dragged. Occupying himself uselessly with taking things in and out of drawers, he talked to her without looking at her. He told her that he was arranging to send her money so that always at Nivandrum she would be rich. The girl neither protested nor accepted the offer, but only sat there silently, but her silence carried a reproach born, not of her intention, but out of Dantry's own bad conscience, as if the silence said, "I do not want the money, but if it gives you pleasure to give it me, if it makes your mind more peaceful and happy, I will accept it."

It was not easy, the conversation, for she did not feel the European woman's necessity for talk to hide the emotions. She had never talked much. He remembered now that in all the time they had been together she had said very little, and nothing which had ever interested him very profoundly or roused in him a desire to talk. On that side their life together had always been empty. It had endured because whenever he grew bored with her he sent her back to Sandy's compound.

The hands of the clock crawled slowly round the face that had grown rusty from the eternal damp of the lagoons. It seemed to him that it would never reach that point which would permit him with decency to say that he must leave for the train and that she had better go back to the compound. He had run away many times, but never had it been as painful as this. Scenes, hysterics, screams, anything was far better than the simple, questioning silence of the tiny figure on the great bed.

He lighted a cigarette and gave it to her and then took one himself and poured himself a glass of whisky. At the same moment he saw standing in the great doorway silhouetted against the brilliant blue of the harbor, the figure of Alix in her white expensive clothes, and he thought, "The bitch! Why should she have come here now?" Then he thought, "Well, here's for it. Now she'll know."

Aloud he said, in as casual a voice as he was able to command, "Hullo! Come in. I was just packing." He thought, "I've been caught ... this time by two women instead of one," for at the moment he thought only of escape. It seemed to him that he had never felt so tired in all his life.

She came across the threshold and then saw Maria sitting on the edge of the great bed. For a moment she hesitated, and he saw that for once she very nearly lost her self-command. He said, "This is Lady Groton, Maria," and to Alix he said, "This is my wife."

This time she found nothing to say and the color went out of her face. He might not have noticed it, save that the sudden paleness left the subtly placed rouge isolated in two spots of color high on the cheekbones.

Maria slipped to the floor, trembling a little. She did not salaam, as a full-blooded native woman would have done, but stood, a little frightened, clinging with one hand to the end of the painted bed.

Then Alix recovered herself and said, "How do you do?" and Maria bowed and muttered something which he could not understand.

"I seem to have come at an awkward moment," said Alix. "I apologize for having run in without warning, but it couldn't well be helped."

“Sit down,” said Dantry. “I can’t entertain you for very long. My train leaves in forty-five minutes.”

He was aware that there was something comical in the air of politeness between them, something which would not have been comical with any other woman in the world. But with her it was absurd. They knew each other so well that there were times when each knew what the other was thinking, when there was scarcely any necessity for speech.

She did not sit down, and he knew that it was her pride that prevented her. She said, “It’s about Albert. He’s very ill. I didn’t know what to do. I don’t know anyone here. I don’t know whom to send for.”

“How ill?” asked Dantry.

“As ill as it is possible to be. He has a temperature of a hundred and seven.”

For a moment, he was silent thinking, “Why not let him die? It would be better for everyone. No one wants him to live ... not Alix, not the secretary, nor me, nor even the valet. If he died Nivandrum might be saved ... for a little while anyway.” Then he said, “I suppose there’s nothing to do but try and get Mees Opp. It’s a pity he wasn’t taken ill three days ago when she was here. She’s back in the capital by now.”

“He was ill then, but he wouldn’t let anyone do anything about it.”

“I don’t know whether she will come or not.”

“When she hears who it is?”

Tom laughed, a quick rather harsh laugh. “I don’t think that would impress her much. The name of the great Lord Groton doesn’t mean much out here ... especially to Mees Opp. She’s

a singularly simple and human person. To her rajahs and coolies are much the same except that coolies have a greater need for her.”

He was aware again, sharply, of the ticking of the clock. The time was growing short. In a little while he would have to go or he would miss the train, and if he missed the train.... Now suddenly, with her standing there in front of him, outwardly so utterly calm, he did not want to go, and he knew that in his heart he had never wanted to go. There was something about her self-possession, her quietness, even the hardness which he divined beneath the smooth surface, which gave him a kind of strength. And he knew that in her heart she was suffering as he was suffering. He thought again, “But *she* is honest. Shining and free.”

Then Maria did an extraordinary thing, the first positive thing he had ever known her to do. She said, “It is half-past eleven, Dantry. If you do not go now you will miss your train.” And he knew that she had divined everything, even if she had not divined it earlier, and that she preferred to let him go out of her life forever than to stay behind with this white woman.

Alix said, “If you must catch your train, go by all means. I shall manage somehow.”

He felt the great dark eyes of Maria watching him, but he dared not look at her, for he knew that whatever happened, whatever course he took, she was finished. The clock kept on ticking loudly. He was thinking, “If I stay there is only one end to it all. If I stay she will have to quit Groton and come with me, forever,” and then he heard himself saying to Maria without looking at her, “Tell Silas I shall not be going by this train. Perhaps by the train on Saturday; perhaps straight from

the capital; I cannot go and leave the *burra sahib* who is very ill.”

For a moment Maria stood quite still, silently watching him, and then without a word, she turned and like a servant, went out of the room to obey his order.

When she had gone there was a little silence, and then Alix said, “It is good of you to stay.”

“It isn’t good of me. I didn’t want to go. I only wanted an excuse.”

“Then why were you going?”

The speech, he saw, was characteristic of her, of all her honesty and her freedom, of all the strength he found in her. Weakly he said, “Because I thought it best ... because it seemed the only thing to do.”

After a little silence she said, “What is the matter between us, Tom? Why can we never be honest with each other and just a little simple? If only we’d been honest a long while ago, everything would have been different.”

He did not answer her, and she turned away from him, saying, “I didn’t know it was as bad as that.”

“What?”

“That you were married.”

He laughed. “I’ve been married less than a month. I was married the day before the letter came announcing your arrival.” Again he laughed. “Oh, it wasn’t a new story. We’d been living together for more than three years.”

“Do you love her?”

“No, I never loved her.”

For a little time she was silent, thinking. Then she said, “No, I don’t suppose that’s not possible ... not with a man like

you.”

He finished his whisky and heard her saying, “Now I suppose we had better talk sense. How am I to send for this woman doctor? How long does it take?”

“It’s a good twenty-four hours’ hard traveling one way. If she’ll come at once, we can be back here day after tomorrow. I’ll go for her myself. I doubt if she’d come if we only sent a boy to fetch her. Very likely she’ll need some persuading.”

“It’s a good deal to ask of you ... *you* of all people.”

“Yes, it is rather.” And he laughed again, mirthlessly, at the idea of Alix and himself working to save the life of a man whom neither of them in their hearts wanted to go on living. “But I don’t mind. It’s all in the day’s work.”

He turned away from her and said, “You’d better go along now to the hotel and tell Rasmussen to send for Sandy’s third boy. He’s called Anthony. He can show me the way. I’ll come over there as soon as I’ve changed my clothes and got ready for the journey.”

She did not say anything more, but went out of the room and down the stairs to her waiting boat, but she kept remembering all the time what he had said to Maria, “Perhaps I’ll go on Saturday or perhaps I’ll go straight on from the capital.” He couldn’t go now. He mustn’t go when she had just found him again. As the boat crossed the inlet she thought, “I should have had courage. I should have said to him in spite of everything that we have always loved each other ... that now we’ve found each other again we must stay together for always.” And then she knew that she had not spoken because of his perverse mood of irony. You could not say things like that no matter how much you wanted to say them when the air was filled with bitter mockery. And there

was that girl, his wife. Even after she had gone, she had left something behind, some intangible thing which had made them both feel a little ashamed, something which separated them and left them silent.

And as she walked up the path she thought, "If only I could help him in some way," and strangely enough she thought suddenly of the girl she had seen in his bedroom, so tiny and so young, and she felt sorry for her too, because she would never be able to understand why Tom was so strange and perverse and miserable. She would never understand that power he had of torturing himself and bringing misery to others.

When she left the pier she gave Rasmussen the message and then went to Groton's room, idly, vaguely, because she did not know what she wanted to do. He was alone, still in a kind of coma, breathing heavily, and she saw him now, objectively, coldly, more coldly perhaps than she had ever seen him before in all their life together. He had not stirred when she came in, and now he gave no sign of knowing that she was in the room. The *ayah* had said that she ought not to enter his room until she knew what the illness was; if it were the plague or even cholera, it might be dangerous. But she had no feeling about danger, because deep within her was a consciousness, like that of many soldiers in battle, that nothing would happen to her. And lately she had had the feeling too, a depressing feeling, that it was her fate to go on living, on and on until she had lived the damned thing out to the very end, that this perhaps would be her atonement, because as she grew older, she was at times aware that she had an atonement to make at some time in some place, and that there was no escaping it.

Now in her coldness she felt no desire to leave the room and the spectacle of her husband unconscious on the awful teakwood bed. It even gave her a kind of perverse pleasure to look at him lying thus, helpless, down, beaten for the first time. She had no particular feeling of pity or regret, because she knew so well that neither feeling had ever touched him in all his life.

While she sat there she thought, “There you are—not the great swaggering Lord Groton, boasting and bullying and buying what you want—but just plain, vulgar Albert Simpson, the son of a small building contractor in Birmingham, Albert Simpson, who got beyond himself. You’ve never done a good or generous deed for anyone unless it brought you profit and glory. And you’ve ruined men and women who trusted you, for the sake of power and money. Oh, you’ve given money to charities in large lumps, well advertised in your newspapers, but it never cost you anything. You never missed it, and it made people who didn’t know you say you were generous, and it served to whitewash your character and cover up a lot of skulduggery and stifle the criticism of your enemies. You’d betray your own country if it brought you another shilling or another ounce of power. Long ago you sold rifles and shells in underhand ways to the Turks to kill at Gallipoli boys who came from your own country, men better than yourself who went off to their death while you stayed at home to make money out of the tragic needs of your own people and wrote wild leaders in your own papers to keep the war going. And now, only a fortnight ago in Singapore, you wrote a leader to be printed in all the Groton papers that was certain to make ill-feeling and bitterness and cause more wars. It cost you a nice lot to cable it all the way from Singapore—enough for my father and I to

have lived on for a couple of months long ago—but it didn't matter because if there was a war you'd get it all back a million times over. You didn't know that I read it before it was sent, but I did.

“There are so many things you don't know about me and what I know of you. Bates and I together could write a biography of you that could put you in jail for the rest of your life or in an asylum for madness, only you'd probably buy your way out. Oh, you're very shrewd—using your newspapers, your steamship lines, your mines, your factories, round and round in an endless chain, turning out profits for yourself at the expense of workmen and shareholders and humanity itself. You've never had a friend you didn't buy. You even bought your own wife, and a bad bargain she was, probably the worst you ever made. What was it that happened to you long ago, perhaps when you were a little child, that made you want all those things for which you sacrificed everything decent? Were you thinking about all this long ago when you were selling cheap cutlery and watches in Malaya? Who hurt you? What put into your head the idea that all this power and all this money were the only things worth having in all the world? What made you think you could buy things in life—things like love and fidelity and respect and breeding? What are you like inside? What must it be like to be *you*? What does it feel like to be so ruthless, so bitter, so alone, hating everybody who does not lick your boots?

“You'll never tell anyone because you don't know yourself how it feels. You've never known. You can't know because you're like a man born with a horrible physical deformity who can never know what it is like to be fine and straight and young and beautiful. Your brain, your soul, must have some

horrible deformity which is all the worse because it cannot be seen. You must have been a horrible child—grasping, calculating how to make money even out of your own mother. But it's destroyed you, too. Because you're a finished man, Albert Simpson. The world has finished with you, and you are sick of yourself and tired and worn down by the thing you built up with so much trickery and ambition. You're going to die in a cheap uncomfortable hotel in a horrible bed, and not at your fine house in Hill Street or your great Georgian house in the country. You're going to die in the East of some awful disease and no one will care, not one person in the world, not even your wife or your secretary or your servant. Perhaps your ashes will go home on one of your own boats and perhaps they won't. But you're finished, goddamn you! You'll never leave this lovely place alive, this place which you meant to ruin as you've ruined everything you've touched. You'll never come into my room again to sleep with me like the animal you are. You'll never again shout at servants and inferiors as if they were dogs. You'll never again make me ashamed in public that I ever knew you. You did something horrible to me, to my very soul. Oh, I let you do it because I was tired and didn't care, but you could have helped a little. You might have seen what I needed—oh, so little—to have saved me, because in the beginning I tried to make it go, but you didn't see. You never had time. All you did was to shove money at me.

“Well, you're finished. You're going to die and rot, and in a few years nobody will even remember who you were. You haven't even an heir to leave behind you. I'm glad that vile blood of yours won't go on living because I bore you a child. I'm glad I saw to that. You're finished and nobody cares. Go on, slobber and snore, like the gross animal you are. There

were times when you thought you could break my pride and make me as coarse as yourself, but you never did. In the end I've won. Even last night I won when I sent you skulking out of my room. You hadn't any kindness or any sensibility or any morals or any ethics, so nobody could ever touch you but me. I knew you well enough to know where it would hurt, and you made me use my knowledge at last. You forced me to do it. I'm not sorry. I only wish I had been more cruel. Oh, if you only knew how many times I've betrayed you, and never once with a man who wasn't better than yourself—warmer, kinder, more decent, more human, more beautiful. Yes, and every one of them was a better lover than you. People grow to look like what they are, Albert. You were a hog and you've grown to look like a hog, lying there snoring and slobbering in your own spittle. Well, you're going to die. This is the end of you, and the whole world—even the little brats in the streets of Canton and Bombay and Madagascar—will be happier and have a better life because you are dead.”

And suddenly she felt a wild desire to cross the room and spit on him, but she did not do it because it occurred to her almost immediately that such a spectacle would only be extremely funny.

“What's happened to me?” she thought. “Perhaps I, too, am going to be ill. I shouldn't be in here, but even if I caught something, what difference would it make? I shouldn't care. Why should I suddenly care so profoundly about Albert's nastiness? Why should I be so hysterical?”

And suddenly she was afraid, not of Albert, of whom she had never been afraid, nor of any illness, but of herself and of that nameless dread which she had felt now and again ever since coming to Nivandrum. Quickly she ran from the room,

and in her own room she bolted the door and threw herself on the bed, where she wept for a long time, silently, hysterically, without making a sound, and presently, when the weeping was finished, she lay with her face buried in the pillow, cold again and terrifyingly calm, and after an hour she rose and went to her writing case and wrote a telegram addressed to Lord Deakin in London.

It read: "Groton in Nivandrum on South coast. Oil prospects certain. Buying up railway and water front. Act at once or too late."

It was the only way to save Nivandrum. If Albert and Deakin began fighting over it, the whole thing might end in a deadlock, and neither the one nor the other would be able to ruin the place.

She was very calm now. She knew what she was doing. She thought, "He has double-crossed everyone all his life and now his own wife is double-crossing him."

Then she sent the *ayah* to find Bates, and when Bates came in she was silent for a long time looking at him, searching the pale eyes and the long sallow face, wondering whether she dared do what she meant to do. At last, after Bates had half-divined what was going on in her mind, she said with as much dignity as possible, "Bates, you've always been a good friend to me."

Bates's face remained inscrutable, "Yes, me lady. You've always been able to trust me, I think."

"I want to do something terrible."

Still unmoved, Bates said, "Yes, me lady."

She handed him the message and watched his face while he read it. When he had finished, he looked at her and the

slow grin appeared once more, the grin which now sealed their understanding and their alliance and delivered her into his hands for good or for evil. But it did not matter now, for she had a strange feeling that everything was coming to an end.

Again he said, "Yes, me lady."

"Is there any way it can be sent?"

"I think it could be managed."

"Do you understand ... can you imagine why I am sending it?"

"Yes, me lady."

"Send it then ... the sooner the better."

"Yes, me lady."

He left her, his face still lighted by a grin that had become almost mystical. Slowly, each step a satisfaction, he made his way down the great stairway and out into the garden. On the way he met Lansbury and when they exchanged good mornings, the pink-faced secretary asked, "Is His Lordship better?" And then in a feudal patronizing way, with a strong Oxford accent, "You look like the cat that swallowed the canary."

"About the same," said Bates; "I was thinking of something else." Bates hated Lansbury, but he never hated him more than at that moment because he was so stupid, so useless, so patronizing.

Down the narrow path he went to the place where the crotons and bougainvillea were thickest, and there, taking out a match, he set fire to the bit of paper, watching it burn until nothing but ashes remained.

He had destroyed the cable not because he disapproved, but because there was no need to do anything about it, for the message had already been sent by himself, with a messenger who had gone, not by train, but down the coast to the capital, and it had been sent in duplicate, one message to London and the other to Deakin's agent in Bombay, so that there could be no delay and no error. Bates knew the ways of businessmen; he had had a long experience and knew what to do. It was not the first time he had received money from Lord Deakin. With what he would be paid for this message he could buy the semidetached villa in Manchester and become a member of the Manchester division of the Communist party. Bates, too, felt that things were drawing to a close.

It was Léah who had helped him, Léah who had produced the runner to take the telegram down the coast, for with all her faith in the River God, she believed in the force of action. Sometimes it was necessary when you had to get things done.

When he had taken off the worn traveling suit and was dressed again in a *sarong*, Dantry crossed over to the Grand Oriental Hotel. At the landing stage he found Lansbury, dressed in white drill trousers, a school blazer and topi, fishing languidly. The secretary regarded him with astonishment, and when he divined that this dark-skinned man dressed in native clothes was a countryman, he said, "Good morning," rather uncomfortably as if Dantry had been a leper, and Dantry, walking up the path thought, "The damned narrow-minded snob! They don't want me here in Nivandrum and now little pip-squeaks like him don't want me back."

Lady Groton sent down word that she was dressing, and while he waited he ordered a brandy and soda.

Rasmussen, still in his preposterous waiter's costume, said "Good morning, sir!" and the word "sir" puzzled and hurt Dantry as it had hurt him on the night before when Sandy used it. He inquired after Dantry's health, not cordially as a friend, but distantly as a waiter making a professional inquiry, and Dantry thought, "So, he's in on it, too! They're all against me!" And then he realized that he must appear openly ridiculous to Rasmussen after he had failed a second time in his announced determination to quit Nivandrum forever. Then the idea of Fate occurred to him again—that there must be some obscure mystical reason for his having come to Nivandrum in the first place, some reason why whenever he tried to leave it something always intervened to prevent his going. Perhaps it was his destiny. Perhaps there was something ahead waiting for him, which he must go

through to the very end. And then he thought, “But that’s all bloody Eastern nonsense!”

Then Alix came down the stairs, slowly, as she had come down on the first evening, and at sight of her he was at first angry again and then a little shaken. But he told himself, “No, I must go through with this. I must go away forever.”

She smiled at him, and when he said abruptly to her without any other greeting, “Have a drink?” she replied, “No, it’s much too early for that.”

He tried to discover from her face whether she was troubled by Groton’s illness, but the face betrayed nothing save a faint weariness which made her seem more attractive to him. When she sat down he said, “What do they think he has?”

“Nobody knows. Here they just call it ‘the fever.’ I suppose that covers almost everything.”

“Everything but elephantiasis and leprosy.”

“I don’t think it likely he has either of those two things. What might he catch here?”

“It might be cholera or plague or typhus or malaria or half a dozen other things. They’re all pretty nasty. From the symptoms it’s likely that it’s typhoid or malaria; I should think it might be what is called ‘black malaria.’ ”

“Is that bad?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because it attacks the brain.”

She was silent for a long time considering what he had told her, thinking, “Perhaps I was a hysterical fool. Perhaps it wasn’t necessary to send that telegram.” Aloud she said,

“Perhaps I had better take things in my own hands and send for a regular physician.”

“No. Mees Opp is quite as good as any of them, and she has had a lot more experience than most with this kind of thing.”

“I was thinking, too, that a woman doctor might be very annoying to have about.”

He glanced at her sharply, wondering what it was she had in mind in making such a speech. He said, “A woman doctor can be more inquisitive, I suppose, but I don’t think Mees Opp will be. She’s too busy.” This remark she did not answer and he asked, “Did you send for the boy?”

“Yes. He should be here any moment.”

“He’s the best to be had ... the quickest. He wins all the canoe races.”

“Tom.”

“Yes.”

“What are you going to do?”

“What do you mean?”

“Are you going away ... straight from the capital?”

“I don’t know.”

“Will you lunch with me today ... before you start?”

“No. I’m taking some curry and rice with me. I’ve got to get underway.”

“I shan’t be leaving here very soon.”

“No, with his Nibs in the present state, I should think not.”

“You’re being stupid, Tom.”

“No, I’m not being stupid. I’m trying to make sense, for once.”

“Whenever you were disagreeable you used to call it making sense.” He did not answer her and she said, “Is there any special reason? I promise to behave myself.”

(Why in God’s name couldn’t she leave him in peace? Why did she keep stirring him up, prodding the past into life, again and again?)

“No, there’s no special reason except that I’m a bloody neurotic and I’ve got to be alone. I’ve got the jitters ... permanently, I think. I’ve made a mess out of everything I’ve ever touched.”

“Take another drink.”

“No, Jezebel. That’s no solution. I drank last night and made a hopeless ass of myself.”

“It certainly never makes you more attractive.” Again he did not answer her and presently she said, “You’ve got to be a little kind to me. I can’t run away and leave Albert here. I’ll have to stay for two or three weeks more. You’ve got to help me or I’ll go crazy in a place like this.”

He grinned. “I thought you found it so beautiful?”

“I did, but something has happened to it. Once or twice I’ve been frightened.”

“What do you mean, frightened?”

“It isn’t anything I can explain. Just frightened ... by everything.” And as if somehow it made her fear more tangible and concrete she said, “I hate that woman, Mrs. Rasmussen.”

“She won’t poison you.”

“I’m not afraid of that.”

“What else could she do?”

“Nothing, I suppose.”

“They say she has the evil eye.”

Again a silence fell between them and he said presently, “Well, we seem to be getting nowhere.” He finished his drink and rose.

She said nothing. She did not accuse him of letting her down. She did not reproach him. She only said, “Shall I ever see you again?”

“Perhaps.”

“Have you any books I could borrow? I shall be awfully bored here.” (He can’t be going away. He can’t be leaving me now. If he does, I can’t go on living.)

“Send over and take anything you like.”

He was aware suddenly of someone crossing the room just beyond the range of his vision and turning, he discovered Léah. She did not speak to them or give any sign of recognition, but he knew that she had been there all the time in the room with them, listening from behind the screen near the wireless where she sat to work at her embroidery.

Alix said, “I thought you loved it here. I thought you meant to die here. Is it my fault?”

“No, not really. But if you hadn’t come here, I shouldn’t have gone away.”

She thought for a moment and then said, “You can come back again when I’ve gone. It’ll be the same as before.”

“No, it wouldn’t be the same. It wouldn’t be any good. It isn’t as simple as that. Your being here or not being here wouldn’t make any difference.”

“Oh, it’s like that.”

“Yes, that’s it. If I’d never seen you again it might have gone on being all right. It was bad luck—your coming here.

You were the only person in this world who could have made that difference.”

Then Rasmussen appeared with Sandy’s boy Anthony. The boy was naked save for a loin cloth and stood respectfully waiting. He was seventeen and he had the great dark eyes of Maria. Even Lady Groton saw the likeness.

Dantry spoke to the boy in his own tongue and then turned to Alix. “He says it’s all right. He thinks Mees Opp can be here in three days.” When he sent the boy away she said, “The people here are extraordinarily beautiful.”

Dantry grinned a sort of bitter half-grin, and said, “Yes, you wouldn’t think that boy’s father was a Cockney from Camden Town.” He stood up and said, “I suppose we should be getting off.”

For a long moment she looked at him and then said, holding out her hand, “Good-by and good luck. Very likely we shan’t see each other again.”

“No, it’s not likely.”

He took her hand as coldly as he was able and then turned and left her. Feeling sick, he crossed the stone floor, and as he reached the great doorway he heard her voice crying out in a kind of anguish, “Tom!”

In the doorway he halted, “Yes?”

“We haven’t said it all.”

“No, we haven’t said it all.”

She came toward him and when she reached his side, she said, “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking, not just now, but at night when I couldn’t sleep. I’ll go away with you, Tom. I’ll stay with you forever, if that’s what you want. I’ll stay with you here.”

“No, that I can’t do.”

“It would be all right once Albert is gone.”

“No, it wouldn’t be all right.”

“Why?”

“Because we could never stay here now ... it’s too late for that.” He grinned. “You see, in a way, we’ve been driven out of paradise.”

She looked away from him and then said, “Oh, I understand. On account of her....”

“On account of her ... and ourselves ... what we are ... what I am.”

“And you never even loved her.”

“No. Never, not even in the beginning.” He put his hands to his head as if the gesture would help to clear his muddled brain, as if she were not there at all and he was talking to himself. “I had to have her. I was searching.... I was looking for something.”

“I know. I understand.” Then impulsively, “I’ll go away with you now if you want ... today ... now.”

He laughed. “That would be a pretty thing to do ... worthy of both of us.”

“Why not?”

“And let him die and let the world say that we ran off together leaving him to die. Oh, that would be a fine story! That would finish us off properly. It would follow us wherever we went. There wouldn’t be a place we could go to. Oh, no, we can’t get out of it as easily as that! We should simply hate each other in the end and destroy each other.”

“I wouldn’t mind even that if we were together.”

“No, for a little while, for a week or two it might be all right. And then there would only be hell. A woman doesn’t mind things like that as much as a man.” Again he put his hands to his head. “No, I’ve got to think it out. It’s a last chance. I can’t muddle this too.”

“It’s the only thing we have left ... the only thing in the world.”

“No, you mustn’t talk like that. That hasn’t anything to do with it.” He took her hand and holding it in both his, kissed it and said in a low voice, “It’s the thing I want most in the world. If we’d never lost each other in the beginning we wouldn’t be such rotters now.”

She said quietly, “Go away then. And while you are gone remember that some day when we’re both old and there isn’t any longer any savor in life, there will always be an agony in our hearts because one of us was not strong. If you change you can send me a message. I won’t say good-by this time ... even if we never see each other again. But you can remember that I shall always be waiting ... always.”

He turned away without another word and walked to the little landing stage where Sandy’s son Anthony was awaiting him, and she remained, standing in the doorway until the canoe had disappeared out of sight among the islands of the blue lagoon.

As she climbed the stairs she thought, “Oh, I’m paying for being a fool! I’m paying all right. And I’ve got a lot more to pay. It isn’t finished yet. It’ll go on and on and on ... forever.”

As she went toward her own room she heard the voice of Groton shouting angrily and then the voice of Bates trying to calm him, and thinking that Bates could perhaps do nothing with him, she opened the door and went into the room.

He was half out of the bed, delirious, with Bates doing his best to keep him down. He was shouting, “Where is that bastard Dantry?... The bloody Communist. The double-crosser ... trying to steal my wife while I’m done in.... Where is he? I’ll straighten him out. I’ll finish him.”

Then the pale blue eyes caught sight of his wife and he fell suddenly silent, as if ashamed by the memory of their quarrel the night before. He recognized her for a moment and then began to rave again against Dantry, against her, against Deakin, against everyone in the world who had ever dared to oppose him. Quietly she put both hands on his bulky shoulders and tried to shake him.

“Listen, Albert! Listen to me! He’s gone away, do you understand? He’s gone away forever. It’s all over.”

The pale eyes looked at her for a moment wildly and then suddenly the huge body collapsed on the bed and lay there breathing heavily, the face congested and purple.

The “hospital” stood in a compound of its own a little way outside the capital, not far from the palace of the old Raneë. In the beginning it had been no more than an abandoned house once occupied by a cousin of the Raneë, but after his death left abandoned to the rats and flying foxes until Mees Opp returned from Edinburgh and, after a long struggle with the avaricious old queen, received permission to use it as a hospital. Now, fifteen years after, on the night that Sandy’s son arrived from Nivandrum it had half a dozen “wings” all inclosed by neam and peepul trees.

The original house had never been pretentious—merely an affair of stone walls with a roof of thatch which required constant repairing and was inhabited by rats, lizards and snakes. It was built about a great court with a tank of fresh water in the center, which was a great convenience from Mees Opp’s point of view. The “wings” were even less pretentious, for the walls consisted not of stone, but of bamboo, and there were no floors save the beaten earth, but the whole was a remarkable structure considering the circumstances under which Mees Opp labored, as remarkable as the finest of modern hospitals in any city of Europe. For it had been called into being out of nothing by the will of Mees Opp, with no help from the old Raneë, and with the very little capital which had been left her by her Dutch grandfather, and with the pittance she received from time to time from two old Presbyterian ladies whose acquaintance she had made during her studies in Edinburgh. Out of nothing she had created it and on next to nothing she kept it going. She needed no money for herself. And there were times when it became so overcrowded with the ill and the miserable that sheets of

tarpaulin were put up beneath the peepul trees to shelter patients for whom there was no place either in the “hospital” or in the “wings.” There were sufferers from typhoid and malaria, measles and elephantiasis, and even sometimes from cholera and typhus, from nearly all the ills that affect the human race in the tropics. There were victims of snake bites and women having babies—special cases suffering from deformities or acute anemia who had to be kept beneath the eye of Mees Opp from hour to hour.

Mees Opp did it all, aided by three or four coolies and four native women whom miraculously she had recruited from among the widows and the unmarried, women like herself, unwanted or forgotten. On the edge of the compound near the gate she lived in a little house which consisted of an office, a bedroom and a veranda, which was no more than a thatched roof above the naked earth where three times a week she held a clinic and administered medicine and advice to a long line of ill, suffering and maimed men, women and children.

It was in this tiny pavilion that Dantry found her when he arrived thirty hours after having left Nivandrum. For all that time, without sleep, without stopping even to eat, he and Sandy’s boy, Anthony, had paddled through the heat of the day and run along obscure short cuts known only to the boy, until the sun went down into the ocean. In spite of every effort, it had taken them longer than he had expected, for they had lost much time after darkness had fallen finding their way and trying to make themselves understood among people whose dialect was so different from that of Nivandrum. By the time they reached Mees Opp’s compound the sun was setting a second time since they had left Alix standing in the great doorway of the Grand Oriental Hotel.

Mees Opp was having her supper when they arrived, seated with another woman, very dark, whom she introduced as Mrs. Badoki. She was dressed no longer in the suit of white drill with the bizarre flowered hat, but wore against the terrible heat a kind of Mother Hubbard wrapper. At sight of Dantry and the boy, she looked up in surprise, not recognizing them at first because of her nearsightedness. Before they had spoken she said, "What is it? Who is ill?" and Dantry answered, "Lord Groton."

She only repeated the name, and Dantry saw that she did not at first remember who Lord Groton was, so he said, "An Englishman who has come to Nivandrum."

Then she remembered the train which she had boarded at that little station high on the burning plateau—the train which, save the few third-class carriages filled with *sadhus* and workmen and farmers, had belonged to the great *burra sahib*, with his secretary, his wife, his servants, his mountains of luggage.

"Yes," she said, "I remember now. I thought it might be Sandy or Maria."

Then quietly she told them to sit down, and the first thing she asked was how long it would take her to get there "not by bullock cart and *wallum* but by canoe." She addressed the question to Anthony, knowing that he could tell her more surely than Dantry. At the same time she clapped her hands, and when a servant appeared she told him to fetch water and toddy, and turning to Dantry she asked, "Have you eaten?"

"No, doctor."

"You had better eat here then. The Magistrate eats early so that he can play polo in the cool of the evening."

"Thank you," said Dantry.

“I suppose you’ll be staying with the Magistrate?”

“No, I don’t know him. I didn’t come prepared for that. If you have a corner here, I would prefer it.”

She turned to Mrs. Badoki and said, “Mr. Dantry could stay in the *jobedar*’s room.” And to Dantry she said, “It isn’t very luxurious, but it’s clean.”

“That will be all right.”

He divined that she was puzzled by his presence, wondering why he was there at all when the boy Anthony could have brought the message alone. The servant brought the toddy and water, and when both of them had been served, she told the servant to bring curry for them both, and to Dantry she said, “What is the matter with Lord Groton?”

And Dantry told her of the high fever and the violence of the symptoms. “Of course, I don’t know myself, but I should think it was black malaria. There’s no typhoid or typhus in Nivandrum.”

She was silent for a moment, and Dantry wondered that she did not send Anthony away to eat with the hospital servants. That was what he wanted, in order that he should be able to talk to her alone. The presence of Anthony, with his great dark eyes so like Maria’s, embarrassed him. And then he remembered that she was treating him, as he had desired to be treated only a few days earlier, as one of the people. He remembered with a little shock that after all the boy Anthony was his own brother-in-law.

She interrupted his thoughts by saying, “I shan’t be able to leave before tomorrow night at the earliest.”

“It’s a very urgent case, doctor. Lord Groton is a very important man,” and again he felt the irony of his making a

case for Groton, of trying to persuade her to leave at once to save the life of the man he hated most in the world, perhaps the only man he had ever hated. And almost at once he knew that the big, ugly woman had divined a certain falseness in the tone of what he said.

The servant brought the curries and served him and Anthony at the same table with Mees Opp and Mrs. Badoki, and then he knew that he would have to continue his persuasion there in front of all the others. Quietly he told her of the beginning of Groton's illness, of how perhaps he had been already ill when he arrived in Nivandrum, and she listened, asking him now and then a professional question, expertly, so that his faith in her was greater than it had been before.

At last he said, "That is the only reason I came. I knew you were busy. I know you are always busy. I only came in order to explain to you how important it is that something should be done at once. You understand he is one of the most important men in the British Empire."

"Oh, yes," she said quietly. "I understand that. I remember all about him, perfectly. I give you my word that I am doing everything possible. I cannot leave here before tomorrow evening." Then she rose and said, "If you'll excuse me, I must make the evening round with Mrs. Badoki while it's still light. If there is anything you want simply ask the servant. I shall be free again at half-past eight."

He too rose and remained standing until she had left the little house and crossed the compound with its tank of fresh water. Then he seated himself and tried again to eat, but he was so tired that he had no appetite and, rising, he called the

servant and asked to be shown the room where he was to spend the night.

He was too tired to argue Groton's case any further, not only dog-tired in body but weary in spirit, and in his heart he knew that the whole journey had been useless. He knew it from the moment Mees Opp had said, "I cannot leave before tomorrow night."

He had respected her, always, since that first morning when he had looked out of the window and seen her dosing and joking with the long line of suffering humanity beneath the window of the Grand Oriental Hotel, but never until now, when he found her on her own ground in this hospital which she had created out of nothing, had he suspected her sense of authority. It was as if here she were all-important, as if here he and even the great Lord Groton were of no more importance than any coolie. And he thought, lying on the hard Indian bed, in the dying light of the evening, "Perhaps she sees the world in a different way. Perhaps she sees us as we are. Perhaps she thinks us equally useless ... both Groton and myself."

In a little while Anthony came in to share the room with him, sleeping on the floor on mats which Mrs. Badoki sent in. The boy, less tired than himself, stayed for a moment to inquire if there was anything he wanted and then went out again to talk with the servants, something which he, Dantry, could not do. He could neither talk with the porters nor go to stay with the Magistrate. "Neither flesh, fish, nor fowl," he thought.

Vaguely, he could not quite divine why, the whole trip left him feeling empty and useless and insignificant. It was as if a part of him had died, as if that part of him which he might

have respected, was gone now forever. And he thought bitterly, “Well, I have done the honorable thing. I have done my best to bring back a doctor as quickly as possible. I will try again tomorrow, and if I fail and he dies, I cannot blame myself. We have done our best ... Alix and I.”

In his weariness he could not sleep, but lay thinking of Alix left behind in Nivandrum with Groton dying, with only that ass of a secretary and the sinister manservant for company. In a way she had not been left behind at all. She had been with him all the time, throughout the long hours of paddling through the heat of midday, during the dark stumbling journey through the jungle. She had been with him all the time. And for the first time he thought, “Nothing else matters. Nothing but this thing between us. It is something which happens to few people, never to most. It is in a way indestructible.” Yet he could see no way out, not because of Groton, or even of Maria, but because of the weight of folly, and selfishness, weakness and self-indulgence that hung over them both. Somewhere in the future they would have to atone. He felt the thing closing in upon him with a sense of indefinable dread.

At last, unable to sleep, he sat up on the edge of the bed, smoking, in a kind of half-conscious state, and he thought of nothing but of her, standing in the great doorway, of her saying, “We haven’t said it all, Tom. I’ll go away with you now ... forever ... wherever you like.” The thing was stronger than either of them. His whole body, spent and exhausted, ached with desire.

A knock at the door roused him and pulling himself together he said in the local dialect, “Come in.” It was the great figure of Mees Opp which shut out the dim twilight in

the doorway. She stood there with an electric torch in her hand saying, “Have you everything you want? Anthony tells me you were planning to go away. So I sent a runner to fetch your suitcases. He told me you’d left them behind with the canoe.”

So everything, everyone was against them now. There was no excuse left for returning to Nivandrum.

During the rounds with Mrs. Badoki, Mees Opp had gone through the motions of making the regular evening tour of the hospital. She talked to the patients and even made jokes with them ... all the sufferers from malaria and dysentery and typhoid and horrible skin diseases. But on this occasion she did it all half-mechanically, a part of intelligent mind distracted by the problem of Lord Groton and of this strange man, Dantry, so clever, so brilliant, so unhappy, whose misery she had never been able to touch or to fathom.

She was no longer young. Lately, for the first time in her life, she had been aware of a weakening of that immense vitality and strength which had carried her through the most unbelievable trials and achievements, and now she faced the prospect of the long hot journey back to Nivandrum with a sense of dread. Another woman ... almost any other woman —would have refused to go; there was no lack of reasons for a refusal to make the trip. And she had no interest in Lord Groton nor any particular desire to save the life of Lord Groton. She had known the West long ago, well enough to know all about Lord Groton and his sort, to understand that they were a scourge in their own world quite as much as in the East. She knew the slums of Glasgow and Leeds and Birmingham, where people lived in a squalor and depravity worse than anything which existed even among the outcaste people of her own world. When she thought of Lord Groton, the idea occurred to her that it might not be a bad plan to let him die there alone in Nivandrum far away from all the luxury and power he had won by exploiting his fellow men. Such a decision might even prove to be a blessing to mankind.

But she was at heart a humble woman, and she felt that this decision was not in her hands but in the hands of God, and because she had spent all her life in helping other people she knew that in the end she could not do this, even to a man like Lord Groton. The habit was too strong. In the end she would have to make the long hot journey.

And then, in the very midst of going through the poorest ward, where there was only earth for a floor and palm thatch for a roof, another idea came to her, an idea which seemed almost miraculous, and she was a little astonished that it had not occurred to her, driven and harassed as she always was, at the very beginning. It was founded upon the twin facts that Lord Groton was fabulously rich and that the “hospital” was miserably poor. If she went to Nivandrum and saved his life, he might give her a huge sum of money, enough money to build real “wings” and put new floors in the main building, enough money to buy a generator for electricity, enough to buy the X-ray machine of which she had dreamed for years. Long ago she had abandoned the idea of ever receiving any help from the old Ranee, and men of Lord Groton’s sort never made gifts to obscure, unknown hospitals like that of Mees Opp; they had only made spectacular extravagant gifts to institutions which were big and rich and would attract public attention to the generosity of the donor; they were like the feudal barons who bought absolution for their oppression and evil deeds. Now, in a way, she had one of them in her power; she could almost force him to give her money, not for herself, but for the swarming, suffering, ignorant people of the villages whom she loved so profoundly that she had given her whole life to them.

She was not a religious woman, but for a moment it seemed to her, sitting there in the steaming heat, that God had sent her a sign, that He had delivered into her hands a man who could help her, whether he wished to or not, to establish something that would go on and on after they were both dead, that would help the poor and the miserable and serve to annihilate a little of the world's vast burden of wretchedness.

Mrs. Badoki was a tiny, thin, dark woman, a widow of forty, ugly and unwanted like Mees Opp herself. She came of a low caste and once she had been miserable, but Mees Opp had cured her too, not of any illness of the body but of the illness of defeat and despair of the spirit. For ten years now she had worked in the hospital. She was as clever as she was ugly, and much of what Mees Opp had learned long ago in the medical schools of Edinburgh she had passed on to Mrs. Badoki, so that when she left on her tours through the district there was always someone whom she might leave behind in charge of all the sick and suffering who filled the old houses and thatched huts. It was Mrs. Badoki who accompanied her on the rounds she made of the compound twice daily.

When Mees Opp had said good night to Dantry and closed the door of the *jobedar's* room, Mrs. Badoki said to her, "Who is this white man?" and Mees Opp said, "He has lived in Nivandrum for nearly five years. He is the one who married Sandy Carleton's daughter."

But that was not what the ugly clever little Mrs. Badoki wanted to know. That told her almost nothing. So she said in Hindustani, "I don't mean that. What is he like?"

"Ah?" said Mees Opp, and after a moment's reflection, she said, "He is unhappy. It's hard to explain what he's like if you've never been to Europe. He's got a sickness of the soul

which many Europeans have ... only he's better than the rest. The ones you usually see out here aren't worth saving."

They were crossing the compound now to the ward where the maternity patients were kept, a ward that Mees Opp tried desperately to keep as clean and as modern as possible. She walked in silence for a few paces, until they had passed the tank of fresh water, and then she said, "He could be cured of the sickness ... but he doesn't want to be. He is like a Hindu who wants to die and won't make a fight. He knows he is sick just as well as I do, but he won't let anyone help him. He has a kind of stubborn pride. He won't let me help him. It's a pity. He could do so much. He could be happy too." And at last she said, "He should never have married Sandy's daughter. He did that, too, because he was ill."

Then they came to the converted old house where the pregnant women were, and Mees Opp suddenly forgot Dantry and said, "Is there any sign yet?"

And Mrs. Badoki said, "No, she hasn't complained."

There was no need to use a name, for the two women knew who "she" was, the wife of a coolie who had been there for three days awaiting her baby.

Mees Opp said, "Was she awake?"

"She was a moment ago."

"Frightened?"

"She says not, but I think she is. Her mother came to see her. I let her stay."

"That's right. I'll go and talk to her. When I go away you might take her something to make her sleep. There's no use in her being frightened."

"Shall I come with you?"

“No, it might alarm her.”

So Mees Opp went into a room where on a cheap bed in the corner lay an abnormally small woman huddled in the heat beneath a single sheet of cheap cotton. On the earth beside her lay an old woman with white hair and a wrinkled face like a bit of old black leather. At sight of Mees Opp she scrambled stiffly to her feet and salaamed, but Mees Opp bade her lie down again, and the old woman squatted beside the bed, looking up at Mees Opp with eyes that were bright with anxiety. On the bed the crippled woman tried to smile shyly at Mees Opp, her face yellow-gray with acute anemia, her big dark eyes dull with fear.

“How do you feel?” asked Mees Opp.

“Not good.”

“It will be all right tomorrow. You must trust me.”

“Yes, *memsahib*.”

“You will have a fine baby.”

“Thank you, *memsahib*.”

“And Mrs. Badoki will give you something to drink that will make you sleep and forget everything. You must take it. It will do you good.”

“Yes, *memsahib*.”

“Good night.”

“Good night.”

The old woman scrambled to her feet again, but this time Mees Opp scarcely noticed her and walked out of the room again into the ward where Mrs. Badoki sat. To Mrs. Badoki she said, “She *is* frightened. Give her something to make her sleep and keep her asleep until after it’s over.”

Then she went out again into the clear night, and for a long time she walked up and down under the trees because she herself was frightened. Tomorrow or the day after she would have to do an operation which she had never done before. She had seen it done in Edinburgh, and she had read book after book about it since women were always dying in the village because when they were children they had not had enough to eat and were deformed. This woman she had found in the coolie quarter, almost a dwarf, with legs that were twisted and half-paralyzed. And when Mees Opp had persuaded her to come to the “hospital” they discovered that there was no way for her to have her baby. There would be nothing for her but death unless Mees Opp could save her. So now it had to be done. She had to be saved because she believed in Mees Opp—the woman herself, and her husband and her mother and all her relations and the people of her village. They all believed that Mees Opp could work miracles. That was what made it all so terrifying. If she failed, the people of the village would suffer a weakening of faith in her, and she would have to begin all over again to get them to come to her away from the filthy midwives and the witch doctors. She was afraid, now, but if she succeeded it would be easier after that to save the lives of hundreds of women before she herself died.

Presently she went back to the little house to have a few hours’ sleep so that her nerves would be steady to make the operation, but she did not sleep. She sat for a long time in the little veranda overlooking the “hospital,” dark now save here and there where the dim yellow glow of a paraffin lamp showed beneath the black shadows of the neem and peepul trees. And as she sat there she experienced one of those moments of emotion which had come to her now and then

over the long years she had spent here in the wilderness, a moment of satisfaction, of elation, of having conquered life itself.

This thing, this compound, this “hospital” was her own; she had made it out of nothing, or perhaps out of her own sense of defeat in life. For at eighteen Mees Opp had understood that the gods had not been kind to her; they had made her ugly and fat and poor and, worst of all, a half-caste, so that in a way she was forever shut out from both the people whose blood was mixed in her veins. The gods had given her nothing at all save intelligence and health, but those gifts, she knew, were great ones which few of the people about her had been given. And at eighteen she had already known what she must do and what was to be her role in life, and from then on she had gone on stubbornly learning, persistently studying, until somehow at last she had managed to go to Edinburgh and learn what she had to know. She had done what she had been told, again and again, both in the East and the West, was impossible. And now this “hospital,” this compound, those clinics held three times a week in the little veranda, were for her love and a husband, children, household, domesticity, everything which she would have liked and which had been denied her. Now she was not sorry any longer that she had missed those other things. She was content with what she had done, and even more content in the knowledge that there was so much more yet to do—enough indeed to keep her occupied all day and all night for the rest of her life until at last she grew old and ill and died and was buried here in the compound which she loved so profoundly. There was all the East swarming, ignorant, ill and suffering—the East which was slowly, painfully being born again in a

kind of magnificence like the rising of the sun in the high mountains.

She knew now what she must do. Lord Groton could wait. He might even die, but the coolie woman must be saved. And there was, too, the question of Dantry. She liked him, in spite of everything. He was too good to be lost. She might cure him too as she had cured poor ugly Mrs. Badoki. She knew what the cure was, but she would have to have a little time. Dantry must not go away now, back into that other world from which he had come, the world which had made him sick and despairing. She knew that he was running away, and that if he ran away this time he was certain to be lost. Somehow she must force him to go back with her to Nivandrum.

And then another thought came to her. There was the question of Léah and the mischief she might do, the mischief which she had already done so many times when Mees Opp was not there to stop it. She knew that it was Léah who had sent Maria to Dantry in the first place. It might too be Léah who was responsible for the strange violence of Lord Groton's symptoms.

Tomorrow she would make the operation, and she must make it with a sure hand so that there was no delay, so that she might leave at once, taking Dantry with her.

In the morning when Dantry wakened he found the two battered suitcases already by the side of his bed. Anthony had already disappeared from the *jobedar's* room, and Dantry, on the edge of the corded Indian bed, sat for a long time regarding the two worn pieces of luggage as if somehow they were symbols, as if there was some mystical force in them which had the power of making him do what he did not want to do. More than ever it seemed clear to him that Mees Opp had divined most of the story and was intent on sending him away, to Singapore, to Colombo, to Batavia, anywhere outside this world in which he had failed so miserably. The physical weariness had gone now, but the weariness of the spirit still remained, so that he was in a way glad of the presence of the two miserable suitcases, since they forced him to make a decision which he no longer had the force to make. And then the desire for a drink came over him, a frantic, ravening desire which he had never before experienced in all his years of drink. It seemed to him that he would be unable to rise from the bed and wash himself at the tank of fresh water and set about the day without the stimulus of alcohol. And he thought, "This is the end. It has caught up with me at last," and it seemed to him suddenly that not only had the desire for drink caught up with him but that all his life was there, too, weighing down upon him ... all the hedonism, the selfishness, the evasions, the shameless profit he had made out of his own good looks and charm, out of all the advantages with which circumstances had endowed him in the beginning.

"Now," he thought, "I know what a real beachcomber feels like." He knew that desire suddenly to lose oneself in drink,

in sensuality, in debauchery; to achieve a kind of oblivion in which nothing was any longer of any importance save plunging deeper and deeper into vice and dissipation, until in the end one destroyed oneself and so there was no longer any misery but only nothingness. And suddenly he was frightened.

The sound of a knock on the door of the room startled him out of his reflections, and he was aware sharply of a neurotic dread of seeing and talking to anyone, even to one of the hospital porters; but something of the compulsion of civilization remained, and he wrapped himself in the *sarong* and said, "Come in."

It was one of the porters, who salaamed and said, "Mees Opp sent me to ask if you would have coffee with her on her veranda."

For a second he hesitated, still filled with the dread of having to talk with anyone, and he was about to send a message saying that he felt too ill, when the boy said, "She wanted to know if the *sahib* would like a drink? She said to say there was only brandy."

Then he answered, "Yes. And say that I will come for coffee in a few minutes."

When the boy had gone, he sat for a time considering with amazement the character of Mees Opp—that she, an old maid, who had never lived in the world, who had never known drunkards nor what it was to want a drink on opening one's eyes in the morning, should have thought of brandy, the one thing which he needed. He thought, "She knows everything," and again the old desire to be friendly with her came to him so strongly that now it seemed that friendliness between them was as necessary to him as the brandy. It was

as if he could not go on with the day until he saw her and had some assurance of her respect for him.

When the boy had brought the brandy and he had drunk it, he went to the tank of fresh water and there bathed himself. On the great steps descending into the water were half a dozen women doing their washing, and opposite him, quite naked and shameless, were two *sadhus* who had come into the compound off the red and dusty road. The women stared at him with their great dark eyes, pausing in their work to watch him, a white *sahib*, bathing simply in the tank like one of their own people.

The sun was not yet high and the air was clear and still cool, but in it there was that stillness, almost sinister in quality, which always preceded the breaking of the monsoon, a stillness which once, long ago, had sometimes in the hot nights terrified him. Now he no longer had any fear of it because, like the people of the country, he knew that in a little while the rains would come, the drenching, cleansing rains which set the trees and shrubs and vines growing with a kind of animal vitality; the rains which brought their own damp heat but which also brought a sense of cleanness and a freshness, as if the world, tired and dusty and exhausted, were being reborn.

He found Mees Opp seated at a plain teakwood table in the little shed which she called her "veranda." She was dressed again in the spotless white drill, but wore no hat, so that he saw for the first time that her hair was thin and straight and mud-colored. There was no beauty about her save the look in the pale china-blue eyes. In front of her were piles of papers and hospital charts, each anchored to the table with lumps of coral or jade or garnet which patients had brought her as

offerings. At one end of the table there was a jug of coffee and a painted wooden bowl filled with papayas and melons and pomegranates. She had been reading a copy of *The Times* already six weeks old, and when he saw it he thought, "What a fool I am! Of course she knows who Groton is. She knows all about him."

She greeted him with a remark about the beauty of the morning and poured out his coffee. Then she said quite abruptly, "Are you planning to leave today?" and again he was aware that he had made no decision and had no plans. In his weariness, he wanted simply to stay on and on, drinking and sleeping there on the hard bed in the *jobedar's* room.

But the memory of the battered suitcases forced him to say, "Yes. I was planning to go when you leave for Nivandrum."

"If everything goes well, I shall leave tomorrow about noon."

"In the heat?"

"I cannot go before then, and I must get there as soon as possible. There is no other way."

He lighted a cigarette and then said, "I was hoping that you could leave tonight. You see, there isn't only the question of Lord Groton. His wife is there, too." He hesitated and then went ahead. "She is not much used to the life out here. I think she is frightened."

Mees Opp looked at him and said, "What is she like?" And for a moment he did not answer, because he could not think of any way to describe Alix and her life to a woman like Mees Opp. If he told her about the jewels and the expensive clothes and the luxurious hotels to which she was accustomed it would not give Mees Opp any proper impression of what she was like. Because she was not like that. He had to make

her understand about the peculiar honesty, the sense of freedom, the quality of innocence which in spite of everything was so much a part of Alix.

So he said, “She’s very hard to describe. She’s unhappy. She’s had bad luck. She is an admirable woman who has always had the wrong place in life. When you see her perhaps you won’t think what I say is true. But it is.”

“Why did she come to Nivandrum? She should have stayed behind at Government House.”

“Because she is like that. She has always been waiting for something. She has always been searching for something. But in her world she never found it because it doesn’t exist there.” And then he knew that he was saying too much and that he was speaking with emotion which he had not meant to show, and he was aware that ugly Mees Opp had missed neither the words nor the peculiar emotion which went into them. He had a sudden feeling that he was one of those suffering natives who waited their turn patiently to come before her, be examined and have their illnesses diagnosed.

Mees Opp said, “You must have known her for a long time to know her so well.” And he said, “I have known her always, even before I saw her.”

She took one of his cigarettes, lighted it and moved one of the lumps of jade which served as paper weights. Then she said, “Where are you going when you leave here?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t any plans.”

“Isn’t there anything you want to do ... any necessity which makes you go here or there?”

He had never thought of it before in that way. He was simply aware that he had had freedom, absolute freedom

from every tie, for even Maria had never made any real difference. He had worked and planned for years to achieve that freedom from every tie, from every responsibility, and now Mees Opp made that freedom seem a cheap and sordid thing, something which was even dangerous and sinister.

“No,” he said. “There is nothing.”

“If there is nothing, you could be a help to me.”

He looked at her sharply and asked, “How?”

“You could go back with me to Nivandrum.”

His heart gave a sudden leap, but he said in a low voice, “No, that I can’t do.”

“Is it because of Maria?”

“Yes ... a little on account of Maria.”

“I will talk to Maria. I will make her see.” Then she said, “You should never have married Maria.”

“No, when I did it, I thought it didn’t matter.”

She went on persistently, “You could help me. I don’t suppose Lord Groton will be an easy patient ... under the circumstances.”

He knew what she meant, without her saying it ... that a man like Groton would have only contempt for her, both as a woman and a half-caste. He said, “I couldn’t be of much help to you there. Lord Groton hates me.” And then he realized that without meaning to do it, he had told her everything.

“I didn’t mean exactly that. Only you could be of help in a great many ways. Rasmussen and Sandy aren’t of much help, not with grand people like that.”

Then Mrs. Badoki appeared, coming across the compound from the “maternity ward.” As she stepped on to the veranda, Mees Opp said, “Is everything ready?” and when Mrs.

Badoki said, “Yes,” she rose and said to Dantry, “You must excuse me now. I have to do an operation,” and she left him, walking beside Mrs. Badoki through the dust. She was trembling, and she kept saying to herself, “I must not tremble. I must keep my nerve.” When she reached the “ward” she found the crippled woman lying on the makeshift operating table. She was not frightened any longer. She lay quite still, breathing quietly.

In Nivandrum the heat which heralded the coming of the monsoon came up suddenly, strangely, without the usual warning wind that each day grew a little more moist and hot. Only the trees, the plants and the vines seemed aware of its approach, and for ten days before it arrived they began sending out green new shoots and fresh leaves and extravagant blossoms from trunks which had grown tired and a little weary with the long months of dry sunshine. It was as if each one had been touched by some invisible and miraculous hand; each hedge, each cluster of croton and bougainvillea became thicker and more green. Against the houses and at the edge of the water the bamboos grew feathery with the rush of delicate pale-green new leaves. And then with the changing of the moon, the heat came down in the night like the suffocating blast from the open door of a furnace. Beyond the Great Bar the sea grew ominously still, so that at midday it became a sheet of copper, waveless and burnished beneath the cruel sun; and in the evenings the breeze which always brought freshness from the sea did not rise at all, and quietly, imperceptibly, as the night advanced the heat of darkness became more intolerable than the heat of midday had been. For the first time the fishermen failed to stay out the whole day, but came hurrying in before noon because it was impossible to live beneath that cloudless sky on that sheet of burning metal. They returned, too, in fear of that first great gale which one day would come up suddenly, without warning from the southwest to destroy even the strongest boat before it could slip across the bar into the shelter of the palm-fringed harbor.

Inside the barrier on the still surface of the lagoons and channels, the heat rose from the water, carrying with it an invisible vapor so that the islands and the lovely old houses of pink and blue and yellow seemed from a distance to grow insubstantial and to float without support in the hot still air.

In the middle of the day all life ceased and all Nivandrum, if the heat was not too great even for sleeping, slept. From the window of the Grand Oriental Hotel at noon the houses and islands appeared deserted, a town from which all life had fled. Even Léah, thin, and bred in the heat of that world, fled her kitchen for the coolness of the great stone hall where, wakeful, in one corner, sheltered by the screen of coconut matting, she prepared her vegetables, and when that was finished, did a little sewing. She sat there all through the heat of the day, the only person in all the hotel who remained awake and watching.

Abovestairs, Bates, when no one was about, capitulated at last and sat by Lord Groton's bed in braces without a collar, for his Lordship being unconscious could not see him; nor did the Saxon pinkness of the secretary Lansbury trouble him, for the pinkness had turned to a painful lobster red under the tropical sun, and Lansbury himself never appeared at all save after the sun had gone down, when he came out timorously, soft and wilted like a lettuce in need of water. Once each evening he came to knock on Lord Groton's door, but Bates never admitted him, and before Bates opened the door he always had time to adjust his collar and put on his coat, so that he appeared correctly dressed, impeccable in manner, as if he were still living in the damp fog of Hill Street. The *ayah*, used to the burning heat of the plains, found the dampness of Nivandrum less terrible and, being free all

the day, went off in the afternoon to the mainland where she had already found a lover among the fishermen. Of all of them only Bates was able to maintain what he called his “moral.” The others, even the correct Lansbury, went to pieces. As the heat, rising from the lagoons, drove the inhabitants indoors and made the houses and islands float in the air, so it altered the minds and the very characters of every European in Nivandrum.

And all the while Lord Groton lay, feverish, in a coma broken now and then by spells of delirium. Bates remained at his side, not so much from devotion to His Lordship as from devotion to his calling, and because the sight of His Lordship, broken, helpless, perhaps dying, like any ordinary man, gave him a subtle satisfaction and pleasure. He even found satisfaction in the idea of keeping His Lordship alive to suffer as long as possible. The illness became in Bates’s mind a kind of atonement, and His Lordship had much to atone for. That he should have the opportunity of sitting by to watch the atonement was a privilege and a pleasure of which Bates had never dreamed. And while His Lordship was atoning, his wife was betraying him.

It was not that she betrayed him openly, physically, as she had done before, but in the spirit, which, Bates knew, was far worse. Watching her, the manservant discovered something he had never believed possible—that Lady Groton was in love. He knew the difference. He had watched her before with other men, but nothing on those occasions had ever touched her. Always she had remained free and intact, and always a little apart. This, Bates saw at once, was a different thing ... a thing, indeed, which she obviously took the trouble of trying to hide from him. With the departure of that

mysterious character Dantry, Bates saw Her Ladyship go to pieces. It was a process of which men like Rasmussen and Lansbury would remain perhaps forever unaware, but Bates understood it and so did Léah, who came to believe that her prayers and sacrifices and incantations had begun to work at last with a power beyond her hopes.

Lady Groton no longer lunched at all, but left the hotel during the cool of the early morning and returned only after the brazen sun had gone down into the sea. Regularly, dutifully, she called at Lord Groton's room twice each day, once in the morning before she left, and once after she returned. But her visits were different now, because she no longer made any attempt to deceive Bates. Since the sending of the telegram she had capitulated. She no longer gave a kind of theatrical performance, pretending in front of Bates that she was a devoted wife and profoundly concerned over the health of her husband. It was as if she said to him, without speaking a word, "I am too tired any longer to pretend. You have known always. In this place that other life, that other world, does not exist."

It seemed to Bates that for the first time in all the years he had known her she had lost that poise, that control, that resignation which had at times seemed to him almost inhuman. And out of the knowledge a new feeling for her was born, a warm feeling of sympathy and affection which astounded the cold-blooded Bates. She was better than he had believed, much better, because now, having given up what Bates thought of as "playing the game," she had become human, a woman such as Bates might have encountered anywhere and not simply in that world of wealth and

artificiality which Bates had passed most of his life in watching.

Each morning the aged boatmen came for her a little after dawn, and for an hour or two before the heat rose steaming from the lagoons they poled the *wallum* boat here and there, back and forth among the islands, ending the voyage at last at the foot of the great stairway on Dantry's island. There she sent them away to return for her at nightfall. At first after he had gone away she felt only a kind of numbness and despair, and then quickly the numbness passed and in its place came pain, the aching pain of desire and regret and emptiness, for now it seemed to her nothing remained to live for. Before she had seen him again there had not been much, but life had taken care of itself, moving in a round of prescribed and rigid habits and formalities, varied only by the excitement of an adventure; but now all that was broken, and she knew that for as long as she lived she would never again find even the faint excitement which came of flirtations and adventures.

The sight of his house, of his books and bed and chairs seemed to ease the pain a little. She had for the house the feeling of a woman who had once been very happy there with a lover who was long since dead. And she came there too because the hotel with Rasmussen, the eavesdropping Léah, the stupid Lansbury and the knowing Bates, had become intolerable to her, a hideous place, which set her nerves on edge.

The day on the island passed slowly. She tried to read, to play on the piano. She walked in the thin shadow of the coconut palms during the heat of midday. And she drank more than she should have drunk, which in the heat only made her feel ill. It astonished her that the house remained

open, with all its doors and windows wide for all the islanders to see, a deserted place where neither theft nor trespass was committed. It was as if it were enchanted, as if something about the place inspired the islanders with a fear and horror. And sometimes it seemed to her, when her nerves were on edge, that she was not alone there in the house, but that it was a haunted place. On the second day she told the boatmen to return for her before sundown, because she was afraid of the shadows and that quick silent nightfall with the howling of the jackals which came down suddenly as if a black curtain had muffled all the earth.

At the hotel she always went quickly to her own room because she was aware that everyone in the place watched her—Léah with the gimlety black eyes, Rasmussen with his blue uncomprehending stare, Lansbury with his idiotic half-feminine giggle. It seemed to her that even the porters and the boatmen followed her everywhere with their eyes, perhaps gloating over her misery, perhaps sorry for her, which was more intolerable, but always curious and aware of her suffering.

Abovestairs she forced herself to go to Groton's room. He still remained unconscious most of the day, and whenever for a little time he opened his eyes and looked about him, he became wild again, cursing and raging against Dantry, so that Bates had difficulty in keeping him in bed, a thing which grew a little easier each day, as the fever made him weaker and weaker. Dantry, it seemed, had become an obsession with him, a fact which Bates regarded, too, as significant, because he had never before been like this; never before had he been very profoundly disturbed by an adventure of his wife; usually he knew nothing about them. But now, suddenly, in

his illness, he was filled with a delirious desire to destroy Dantry.

When Bates, trying to reach His Lordship's reason through the mist of his illness, said, "But, Your Lordship, Mr. Dantry has gone away for good. He has gone forever. He is not coming back," Groton would stare at him for a moment and then say, "No, he is coming back. He hasn't gone away," and then he would fall to raving again until from exhaustion he fell back on the teakwood and mother-of-pearl bed, and Bates, watching him, would think, "This is the end of you, all right. It can't go on much longer. Not even a bull could survive that fever. You're going where you'll pay for all your deviltry."

And when Lady Groton returned in the evening, Bates said nothing of the attacks, for he did not want to disturb her, and he knew well enough that she understood what was happening. There were moments when even Bates felt sorry for both of them. There was something pitiful in their helplessness, in this place where all their money and all their power brought them nothing, where they were both alone as they had never been alone before.

On the fourth day, at Dantry's house, a little after the heat of midday, Lady Groton lay on the Indian bed beneath the awning with her eyes closed. She was saying over and over again to herself, as she had done many times lately, "He will come back. He is on his way now. I can't think of him slowly drinking himself to death, not even knowing where he is. He will come back. He will come back. He must come back."

She lay there, silently, her whole body tense, *willing* him to return. She who was without superstition, who detested mysticism, was willing now to try anything at all. She no longer seemed ridiculous to herself. There were even moments when wildly she considered going to Léah for charms. She was no longer the proud, self-sufficient, overcivilized Lady Groton, but only a woman who was in love for the first and only time in her life. And then, as she lay there in the terrible heat, whispering to herself in a kind of trance, she became aware that someone was watching her. The consciousness of being stared at came over her slowly, forcing its way through the wall of her misery, and presently, opening her eyes, she saw standing over her with a pistol in her hand, Dantry's wife.

The sight of the pistol brought her back to reality with a sudden shock, and she thought first, "It can't be true. A thing like this is too melodramatic to happen to *me*."

The golden skin of the girl had gone quite pale. The revolver she held awkwardly as if her slender wrists were not strong enough for its weight. For a long moment they looked into each other's eyes, and then a strange thing happened. The pistol dropped from Maria's hand and she slipped to her

knees, burying her head in her arms on the edge of the Indian bed. She made no sound, but her whole body shook with sobs.

Lady Groton sat up and put one hand on her shoulder and said, with a kind of tragi-comic politeness, “Did you come to talk to me?”

The girl only shook her head, and Lady Groton said, “Shoot me if you like. Perhaps that would be a good way out.” And suddenly the girl began to talk, in her halting English, her voice broken by sobs. She spoke with her head still buried in her arms as if she were overcome by shame.

She said, “I meant to kill. I came here to kill you. I was going to kill you and then kill myself ... but I couldn’t, not when I saw you. I didn’t know it was like that. I didn’t know it hurt you, too.” And Lady Groton, clear-headed now, had a sudden vision of how she must have looked, lying there on the bed with her eyes closed, saying over and over again, half-aloud, “He will come back. He must come back.” She did not know how long the girl had stood there watching her.

Quietly she put her arm about the girl and lifted her up, but Maria, like a child, still kept her face covered with her arms, and although she sat with docility on the edge of the bed, she would not look at Lady Groton.

She said, “Forgive. I was wrong. What I did was evil. I was crazy. I didn’t know.”

Sitting there beside the girl, the sense of pity for her returned to Lady Groton. Her own unhappiness seemed less to her now because, in a way, the black misery of the girl was so much blinder and more profound. She herself was strong, strengthened at least by knowledge and understanding. She herself had known Tom always; she knew what he was like

inside; she knew what had made him what he was; she knew the sick world out of which he came. This girl, who had never been outside Nivandrum, could not know these things. She had no way of knowing why he acted as he did. She had no way of protecting herself against him.

She heard herself saying, “You must not take it so hard, because he isn’t worth it. He is never coming back to you. It is best to forget him.” Then, after a little silence, she said again, “I do not say that because I want him. It is finished and he has run away. You must not care for him so much, because he is selfish and weak and spoiled. Do you hear me? Do you understand what I mean?” She found herself speaking carefully and slowly and with exaggerated distinctness, as she would speak to a foreigner or a child, for she was trying honestly to help the girl and make her understand.

Maria said, “Yes, I understand. If only you hadn’t come here, he would not have run away.”

“Some day he would have gone. Some day he would have been fed up and gone away. You see, he’s no good. He’s not worth your caring so much.”

Then Maria stood up suddenly, and for the first time took her arm from in front of her face. She said, “You mustn’t talk of him like that, because he is really a good man. You mustn’t try to make me hate him. That is wicked.”

“Oh, I love him as much as you do, only I know what he is like. He is not a good man. He is evil because he is weak ... you understand?”

Then all at once the girl seemed to collapse again and, sobbing, she turned and went down the stairs, running all the way into the garden. And Lady Groton, still filled with a desire to help her, followed her a little way, but stopped at the

head of the stairs, aware that there was nothing she could do, that whatever she said or did, the girl would never believe that she meant good and not evil.

She remained standing at the head of the stairs until the canoe with Maria in it appeared crossing the lagoon toward Sandy's compound. As it disappeared she thought, "Oh, God, I wanted something to happen to me. It has happened." It had happened, but it wasn't finished yet. A little frightened, she returned to the Indian bed, picked up the pistol and placed it among the embroidered cushions. Then she lay down again, and late in the afternoon, because she had scarcely slept for nights, she fell asleep.

On the fourth day after the heat began, they traveled all the day from early morning without stopping at noon even to eat ... Dantry in one canoe, Mees Opp and Anthony in the other. Mees Opp hated the heat, and there were times when it seemed to her that her great bulk was slowly melting away, but her spirit was fortified by the knowledge that she had done the operation and that the coolie woman with a son by her side lay convalescent in the care of Mrs. Badoki. All day, even at noon when the leaves of the trees curled piteously beneath the burning sun, there was in her mind the picture of the crippled woman, no longer terrified, the old mother no longer frightened and the coolie husband childishly delighted by the birth of a son who even the witch doctors and midwives had said could never be born. Mees Opp had accomplished the miracle and the news like fire had gone through the districts, and now they would come to her from all over the State, even from the distant mountain jungles. But best of all, she was no longer afraid. She had done the thing.

In the canoe behind Mees Opp, Dantry paddled through the heat in a kind of daze, scarcely knowing what he was doing or whither he was bound. The rhythmic dip and swing of the paddle brought with it a hypnotic sense of relief. The physical effort, which once would have been torture in the great heat, now seemed almost pleasant and agreeable.

In his weariness he had become like an obedient dog, content in the sacrifice of will for the comfort of being told what to do, for now he had placed himself in the hands of Mees Opp. He would do what she told him to do. Why she

wanted him to return to Nivandrum he had been unable to divine—perhaps it was because she really wanted him to help her, perhaps it was because she hoped he would return to Maria. He made no very great attempt to discover her reasons, and certainly she did not betray them by the slightest hint, but it never occurred to him that she regarded him as an ill man and, in her compassion for human suffering, could have no rest until she had cured him. Presently he ceased to think at all, but only paddled ... dip, swing ... dip, swing ... driving the light canoe across the glassy surface of the lagoons.

When the sun went down at last the little party was still twenty miles from Nivandrum, but in the darkness and by the aid of the fires and the torches of the fishermen, Sandy's boy Anthony kept his way along the main channel. With the fall of night Mees Opp took on a new vigor, and from time to time she gently urged the boy to fresh efforts, for now that the coolie woman and her child were safe, she thought only of Groton and, knowing Léah, she was afraid.

It was the kind of night which roused to consciousness all her passionate love for this country, which made her know that whatever happened she would never again be content away from the magnificence of the East, which made her know that in spite of her divided blood this was where she belonged. Along the edge of the lagoon the torches of the boys spearing fish were like gigantic fireflies. It was as if she and Anthony and Dantry were in a way making a triumphal advance guarded on both sides by the lights of the village fires. And overhead the heat lightning broke in great sheets of opalescent color, revealing now and then a canoe or a *wallum* boat drifting close beside them in the breathless darkness.

And above everything rose the sound of the eternal music of drums and flutes, punctuated by the occasional solitary howl of a jackal. There was a splendor in the scene which she had never found in the West, as if here man was allowed by nature to survive on sufferance alone.

Now and then she would say, "Is it much farther?" for in the darkness she no longer knew the familiar channel. And Sandy's boy Anthony would say, spent and weary, "Only a little farther."

When the little party came within sight of the familiar lights of the Grand Oriental Hotel, some of the apathy flowed away from Dantry, leaving him alive again in the first cool of the evening and conscious for the first time of the complications which were certain to come of his return. Now, suddenly, he dreaded seeing the faces of people like Rasmussen and Léah. He dreaded even the first moment of the encounter with Alix, and so his instinct was to put it all off as long as possible, and pressing forward he brought his canoe abreast of Mees Opp and Anthony, and shouted to her, "I will go to my house first and come to the hotel as soon as I've made myself presentable." And then as they entered the channel between the two islands, he turned away from them and drove his canoe to the foot of the great stairway.

Against the glittering sky the old baroque house stood out solid and black, and at sight of it something of the old pleasure and his love for it returned. He thought, "I might stay here and never leave the island again. That way I could perhaps escape getting myself into a mess." But he knew that he would not stay forever on the island, for the excitement of Alix had returned suddenly, and in spite of his weariness he was filled with impatience to see her again.

“Now,” he thought, “now that I have been fool enough to come back, it doesn’t matter what happens.”

Taking the electric torch from one of the worn handbags, he swung the two bags ashore and climbed after them to the foot of the stairway. With the aid of the torch he found his way up the stairs. From among the islands the drums had begun again, and in the distance from the mainland came the sound of the jackals, and in his blood the old excitement of the place returned.

The stillness of the house and of the whole tiny island, set down among the sounds of life from the shores near by, was like something tangible, and for a moment he too experienced a sense of the place being haunted. For a moment his weary nerves grew taut with a fear and horror which he could not seize or understand, as if the figure were a ghost he saw or a dead person. Then turning the light full on the bed he saw that the person lying there was Alix. She was not dead, for she was breathing easily and quietly, her head thrown back a little, her face very pale in the yellow light. She looked, in her sleep, like a tired child.

Quietly, his heart thumping, he crossed to the bed and there knelt quietly beside it and laid his head on her breast thinking, “It was meant to be. This could not have happened otherwise.” And the last resistance flowed from him like water from a broken dam and he was happy.

For a second, as she wakened at the touch of his hand, she was frightened, and then, suddenly awake, she thought, “It can’t be true. It can’t be Tom. Such things don’t happen.” Then without opening her eyes she reached out and touched his head, and feeling the dark strong hair as she had done long ago in the darkness of the little room at Tipton Farm, she

thought, "It is Tom. Oh, thank you, God! Thank you for bringing him back to me! I will be good now forever." And slowly she drew his head up to hers, and said softly, "Tom, dear Tom." And the tears began to flow. Then he kissed her, and against the sound of the drums and the jackals the world about them ceased to exist, and it seemed to her that they were enveloped by a great and blinding light.

When the canoe arrived at the little landing stage of the Grand Oriental Hotel it was Rasmussen himself who answered the hail of Anthony and came hurrying to meet them ... a Rasmussen alarmed and made sullen by the heat and the strange sense of muddle which had seemed to envelop the hotel since the moment Lord Groton's party had arrived. Without welcoming Mees Opp, he said abruptly, "I am glad you have come."

Standing on the little pier with her two bags, Mees Opp asked, "How is the patient?"

"The same. He can't stand the fever much longer."

"What have you done for him?"

Rasmussen shrugged his heavy shoulders. "Quinine. Cold water. What we could."

"I could not come sooner."

"I hope it is not too late."

Carrying her bags, Rasmussen led her through the great hall and, as they passed, the head of Léah appeared for a moment in the doorway of the kitchen. She did not greet Mees Opp. She simply stared at her sullenly, with a terrifying expression of hostility in the black eyes. Mees Opp in her haste did not even see her, but followed Rasmussen up the stairs to a room next to that of Lord Groton. Indicating a door, he said rudely, with an odd lack of respect, "He's in there."

"Thanks," said Mees Opp. "I'd like something to eat and drink."

"What would you like?"

“Anything you have.”

Then when he had gone she went to the door and knocked, and Bates, relaxed at last in a dressing gown for the night, opened it, and carrying her little bag of medicine, she went in, saying, “I am the doctor, Miss Opp.”

Bates, a little astonished by the precipitancy of her entrance and the authority of her manner, said stiffly, “My name is Bates. I am His Lordship’s manservant.”

For the space of a second they regarded each other with something near to hostility, Bates because he did not fancy welcoming a half-caste woman doctor, and Mees Opp because she was aware of his feeling, and because something in the narrow, pale, long-nosed face put her on her guard. Then she glanced at the teakwood and mother-of-pearl bed, sat down without being asked and said, “Tell me exactly what happened, how it began and how it progressed.”

Bates, awed a little by something in the fat woman which he could not quite analyze, remained standing, and told her how His Lordship had seemed ill for two or three days before he had been forced to give in, how he had lain for nearly four days between a coma and delirium, how they had done what they could, trusting to Rasmussen’s and Léah’s knowledge of local medicines.

Then she asked more intimate questions and said suddenly, “Where is Lady Groton?” and for a moment, to his own astonishment, Bates felt shame, because he saw that Mees Opp would expect the wife to be at the bedside. Clumsily he said, “The heat has been hard on her. She’s not used to it, and in the evenings she goes out in the boat for some air. Sometimes in the daytime she goes to a house belonging to

an Englishman who is away just now. It's much cooler there than in the hotel."

Without looking at him Mees Opp said, "Yes. Mr. Dantry came back with me." And Bates thought, "Ah, so that's it! That's why she stayed out long after sundown. She knew he was coming back." But it seemed to him, with his new feeling for Her Ladyship, that he must cover her tracks, so he said, quietly, "Her Ladyship will be very glad of that. I think she is very bored here."

"Oh!" She opened the bag which rested on her huge knees and began taking out bottles and thermometers, and presently she said, "When do you expect her back?"

And again Bates felt ashamed, without quite knowing why. He said, "She should have been back two or three hours ago. She's much later than usual." He had not meant to defend Lady Groton; he had not even thought it necessary to defend her to a half-caste woman doctor, but this woman upset him because she ignored all the rules which gave solidity to his world, this woman who clearly was not impressed by Lord Groton, nor even by Lady Groton. She overlooked or ignored his own casual rudeness, and somehow, in some mysterious fashion, her authority and dignity and calmness made him feel small and uneasy and a little ashamed.

"I should like to see her when she comes in. Have you been caring for him?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd better go and have some sleep. I'll take charge. I'll sleep in the next room and come in now and then. How old is the patient?"

"Fifty-four."

“Has he had malaria before?”

“No ... not for ten years. Before that I don't know.”

“Before that it wouldn't matter. Does he drink?”

“Yes.”

“Heavily?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I'll examine him. From what you say, it seems to me that it's malaria, the bad kind. It certainly isn't enteric. You might stay about in case I want anything.”

So Bates remained, watching from the foot of the bed, resentful as a child from whom some cherished privilege had been taken away. This woman, this strange woman, had taken from him in a moment, not only His Lordship but the pleasure he got from watching His Lordship die.

He watched while she took the pulse and the blood pressure, and then, turning to him, she said, “Tell that woman Léah to fetch some hot water. I want to give him a tepid bath. After you've done that you can go to bed.”

He went out without answering her or bidding her good night, aware suddenly that he wanted Lord Groton to die and that now the chances were that he would not die, because this woman was here, because Bates saw at once, with his talent for such things, that this woman knew her business, and she had, what was more important, a devotion to her profession and a talent for it.

In a little while Rasmussen brought her some supper, and then a coolie appeared with jars of hot water, followed by Léah, who came not so much from a desire to help as from curiosity. Mees Opp greeted her. She did not even come into the room, but stood outside peering through the half-opened

doorway. Mees Opp told her to go to bed after leaving a boy outside the door, in case she wanted anything during the night.

The curry and rice which Rasmussen brought her she did not touch until Lord Groton had been bathed and given medicines, to bring down his fever. When at last he lay quiet, breathing peacefully for the first time in days, she returned to her own room, and, leaving the door open a little, she sat down to a supper which long since had grown as cold as the heat of Nivandrum permitted. She did not mind the tepid food; she was scarcely aware of what she was eating, but she knew that in the heat she must feed the great bulk of her body, because if the fat ugly body should break down, the spirit would be of no use. For her the body had long since become something almost detached from her, little more than an instrument, a machine which served her and without which she would be useless.

So she did not think of the food, but of Lord Groton and Bates and Rasmussen and the woman Léah and the strange sense of confusion and doom which had struck her at once on arriving at the landing stage. Rasmussen, the only one among them all whom she had known at all well, seemed to her changed, anxious, irritable and nervy. The woman Léah, she scarcely knew, save by reputation, but she did not like the long-nosed, narrow-eyed face which had a way of appearing from behind screens and at half-closed doors. Mees Opp had no belief in the evil eye, but she did believe in the power of atmosphere and environment. It was, she knew, quite possible for a patient to be killed by those about him, neither by blows nor by poison, but by emanations which came very near to the borders of magic. She had known patients in the villages,

who should have recovered, to die simply because there was in the tiny world about them an atmosphere of death and a will to death. Now her dark blood told her that there was here, in the Grand Oriental Hotel, an atmosphere which was strained and sinister, something which she could not quite analyze because she still knew too little, but which seemed directed toward the helpless, unconscious man on the bed in the next room. There were things she was able to divine which no European doctor would have suspected.

And as she ate she kept seeing the faces, the stolid Rasmussen's, perplexed now and uneasy, and the face of his wife, never seen quite clearly, but from the shelter of the coconut matting screen or the half-closed door. Mees Opp did not like that face, and as she thought about it, thinking of the evil eye and the witchcraft of the villages, a strange thought came to her and she said to herself, "Tomorrow I will tell the woman that I mean to eat myself whatever is brought for the patient."

It was a strange thought. The man was ill, certainly, and quite as certainly the illness was malaria, but it might not be the black malaria, which was rare enough. The violence of the symptoms might come from something else, from something which was being given him by the woman Léah. Cases like this were common enough in the villages, cases of men and women who died violently of an illness which in itself was simple enough. Only the absence of motive perplexed her. Why should the woman Léah want a stranger like Lord Groton, a man who was rich and powerful and could benefit her, to die?

She wondered, too, about the manservant, but to judge him was for her far more difficult. The woman Léah she

understood; there was a woman like her in almost every village, who, as she grew old and toothless, became an outcast, but an outcast who kept the whole village paralyzed beneath the spell of terror she was able to impose. But the manservant was different; he came out of a world which Mees Opp, even during her stay in the West, had never seen, for her life there had been confined to classrooms and cheap lodgings. Never once had she seen the inside of one of those great houses where the rich of England—the world which kept menservants like Bates—dwelt in a kind of secret luxury. The surroundings, the world of menservants, might be something of which she knew nothing, but a human face was a human face, no matter what the difference of wealth and environment, and the face of Bates, the manservant, Mees Opp decided that she liked little more than the face of Léah. Indeed, by the time she had finished her meal, she disliked it so much that she began to mistrust his devotion.

About the sick man it was difficult to form any judgment beyond the facts which her experience with the human body at once revealed to her—that he was heavy and gross and that he was soaked with alcohol. So long as he remained unconscious and sodden, without that animating spark which invested the body with personality, the rest of him must remain a mystery. Out of the lot it was Lady Groton who interested her most—that the wife should be absent at such a time from the bedside of her husband, that she should have been devoted enough to come with him to a place like Nivandrum and then leave him in his illness to the care of a manservant like this one.

When she had placed the tray with the remnants of her supper outside the door, she put on a kind of Mother Hubbard

in coarse white cotton and looked at the clock. To her astonishment it was well after midnight, and she thought, “Perhaps Lady Groton has come in and gone to her room without coming here at all,” but after she had combed her hair and taken another look at the sleeping patient, she heard a footstep on the stair, followed in a moment by the sound of a knock on the door of Lord Groton’s room. Knowing that Lady Groton would be expecting to find the manservant there, she went herself and opened the door.

Outside stood a tall, slim, blond woman, dressed all in white. She was not what Mees Opp had expected. She had thought to find Lady Groton middle-aged and faded and dowdy and a little eager and anxious, like so many Englishwomen she had seen in the East who were married to important and domineering men, and so for a moment, in the shock of surprise, she could only say, “Won’t you come in?”

Her tongue was leaden, but the intuitive mind set in the great body worked rapidly. She did not know what was *chic* and what was not, for such things had never had anything to do with her life, but she did know that the woman in the beautifully cut white clothes had a look of race and a manner of poise and authority. She thought at once, “She is better than I expected. She is better both ways,” and for a moment a little stab of envy struck at the great heart of Mees Opp, because in the doorway stood a vision of what, long ago, as a young girl, she had wanted to be more than anything in the world—beautiful and blond and slender. And at the same moment it struck her as very odd that this woman should be the wife of the coarse alcoholic who lay unconscious, snoring faintly, on the teakwood bed. It was all wrong, thought Mees Opp. “The whole thing is wrong.”

But by that time Lady Groton had recovered from her astonishment at finding this ugly, great half-caste woman instead of Bates, and she said, "I suppose you are Mees Opp?"

"Yes," said Mees Opp softly. "Come into my room. We can talk there without disturbing him."

So she led the way, and in her own plain room Lady Groton sat down just within the circle of light from the paraffin lamp and now, when Mees Opp saw her more clearly, she wondered that she seemed, in the awful heat, so calm and cool, so utterly free from either discomfort or anxiety. And then, even while they were talking, it seemed to Mees Opp that there was a radiance in the face of the woman, a kind of light which was exciting and brought to her small, childlike face a look that again struck back into thoughts and emotions which had not occurred to Mees Opp for more than thirty years. She thought, trying to keep her mind on what she was saying, "But this woman is in love!" One did not have to know great houses or Paris dressmakers or menservants to know when a woman was in love and that her love was fulfilled. In the villages of the East and in the West End of London, women, Mees Opp knew well, were exactly the same when it came to love.

Lady Groton was saying, even before she asked after her husband, "I hope your journey here wasn't too bad. It was wonderfully kind of you to have come, but the circumstances were a bit exceptional. Perhaps I can explain all the reasons later on ... before I leave."

"No," said Mees Opp, "I'm used to such weather. I couldn't come sooner. You see, I have a very busy life."

“It was good of you to come at all. Neither of us can ever be grateful enough to you.” There was a little silence and then she said, “How do you find him?”

Shyly Mees Opp smoothed her own stringy mud-colored hair and replied, “I can’t say yet. Tomorrow I can tell more. I should think everything would be all right. A great deal depends on your husband’s vitality.”

“It is immense,” said Lady Groton.

“And I can’t be sure yet how bad the attack really is. I should say now that it is less bad than it seems. But we shall see.”

“If there is anything I can do, you mustn’t hesitate to ask me. I mean if there is anything I can do to help *you*. You probably know that there is no question of money.”

“No,” said Mees Opp. (Perhaps she will help me to get money out of him for the hospital. She seems so nice, so smooth and nice, and so pretty. But why did she stay away from her sick husband until long after midnight?)

Lady Groton opened a gold and platinum cigarette case and offered it to Mees Opp, and Mees Opp, without quite knowing what she was doing, took a cigarette. (She smoked now and then with Mrs. Badoki, who had once lived in Bombay.) Then, as Lady Groton held her tiny onyx and ruby lighter to the cigarette, she said, “It’s very late, I know. I stayed out much longer than I expected to. You see, I met Mr. Dantry. I didn’t know he was coming back.”

Mees Opp, wondering how much she knew, how much of the whole story of Maria, looked at her for a moment in silence and then said, “Yes, I persuaded him to come back. I thought it much better.”

Impulsively Lady Groton said, "That was good of you," and then, as if to cover herself she said, "It's been very boring here with no one I knew very well." But in spite of herself the look in her face said to Mees Opp, "Oh, thank you! You are a good woman and kind! Oh, thank you!"

"He's ill himself."

Then the face of Lady Groton grew still and frightened. She said, "How is he—ill?"

"In the spirit," said Mees Opp. "Perhaps he can be cured." And Lady Groton thought, "He is cured now. If you could have seen him tonight ... how he is changed, how he was like he used to be long ago. If you could only know..." But aloud she said, "I stayed later than I expected because he found an old album of photographs ... full of old friends and old faces."

"It was all right," said Mees Opp. "The manservant was a great help."

She noticed that at the mention of the photograph album a faint shadow came over the face of Lady Groton and she thought, "Then she did know him before. She knew him long ago," and she felt a sudden envy of this woman younger than herself, not now because she was more beautiful and richer and more lucky, but because of the look in her face. Now she was certain of what had happened on the island and she was a little alarmed, thinking, "Perhaps I was wrong to bring him back," but at the same time another voice said, "You were right. There is so little happiness in the world and so much misery. You have helped two people to happiness at least for a few hours, and that is something."

But Lady Groton was saying, "Oh, Bates. You mustn't mind Bates."

“I didn’t mind him.”

“Sometimes he’s bumptious and impossible.” And like a shadow, the memory of the betraying telegram returned to her. For hours now, ever since she had wakened to find Tom there beside her, she had forgotten it.

For a time they both smoked in silence, and then Lady Groton said, “How long do you think it will be before my husband can leave?”

“That’s impossible to say. It depends so much on the patient. But he won’t be able to leave before a fortnight at the earliest.”

“Will it be hotter than this?”

“Sometimes after the monsoon breaks it is hotter. It’s steamy, but for part of the day it seems fresher.”

Then Lady Groton stood up suddenly and said, “I won’t keep you up. You must be very tired. I hope that Rasmussen saw to it that you had a good dinner.”

“A very good dinner,” said Mees Opp, who had not thought about it one way or another.

Lady Groton held out her hand. “Good night,” she said. “Would you like my *ayah* to help you? I’ve almost no work for her.”

“Perhaps,” said Mees Opp. “We shall see.”

She opened the door for Lady Groton, who smiled at her as she went out, and Mees Opp, with a little stab at the heart, was again aware of the look of radiance.

When the door was closed once more, Mees Opp stopped for a moment in front of the mottled glass on the dressing table and then quickly put out the lamp, but before going to bed, she went to the window, feeling somehow that if she

could have a few breaths of air before inclosing herself in the netting, she would be able to sleep. Her heavy body was weary and her feet pained her as they always did during the heat, but her mind was awake with a terrible wakefulness.

It was a little cooler now, although the air was still, and the moon was high in the sky, shedding a pale white light over the channel and the distant island where Lady Groton's "old friend" lived in a house that in the moonlight was no more than a ghost of a house. For a long time Mees Opp leaned on the edge of the window, trying to take the weight of her body off her aching feet, while she breathed the air that smelled faintly of the distant mangrove swamps. She was thinking of Lady Groton and could come to no opinion about her. And then through her thoughts, she saw something moving on the surface of the channel, and fixing her attention, she discovered that the moving thing was a canoe and in it the figure of a woman. It came nearer and nearer, until the palm trees hid it from view. Curious, she waited to see whether it was coming to the hotel pier.

In a little while the moonlight caught the white *sari* of the woman as she came up the path beneath the palms. From the arched doorway below there was still a faint glow from a lamp left burning in the great hall, and Mees Opp waited until the woman came into the area of radiance. Then she saw with surprise that the woman was Léah Rasmussen, and she thought, "What can she be doing out now, a little while before dawn? Where has she been?" And then it occurred to Mees Opp that the woman had perhaps been waiting until the light went out in Mees Opp's room before she returned. "She thinks that I am already in bed where I can't see her return."

A solitary jackal howled somewhere on the mainland, that long-drawn wail which, to Mees Opp, used to it all her life, still seemed like the voice of the dead, and beneath her window the faint light that came through the arched doorway was suddenly extinguished.

By the time Lady Groton had reached her own room, the radiance had gone out of her, and after she had stepped over the *ayah* and had closed the door and bolted it, without quite knowing why, she sat for a long time at her dressing table not troubling even to take off her clothes. There was no reason for haste in going to bed. There was nothing to do all day in the heat but sleep, or try to sleep. In a place like Nivandrum one lived only at night during the monsoon. Going without sleep had not seemed to matter much during these past four days. When she thought of it, she realized that she had not had more than four or five hours of sleep a night and yet, even in the terrible heat, she felt well now, alive, even excited. Now, for the first time since she had wakened on the terrace outside Tom's room, the memory of the four days of misery returned to her, but the memory did not matter now; in an odd way it seemed to her that they had only heightened the beauty and the pleasure of what had happened tonight. Now it seemed to her that for the first time in her life she was alive.

It had not been as it had been long ago during those week ends with Tom; then it had been a kind of frenzy, in which two spoiled and headstrong young people had been caught up and swept along, not unwillingly but without understanding what was happening to them. They had been like all the rest of their generation and that was what had broken the thread of their lives and changed everything afterward muddling it, leaving them both unhappy, aimless and despairing.

Now it was all clear for the first time, and she knew, perhaps out of all the experience which had come to her,

sometimes pleasantly, more often sordidly, in the years between, the value and the significance of what it was that held them together forever, what it was that had set them both to searching for something which neither of them could ever find, save in each other. And all the time, during all those wasted years, if either of them had had the intelligence or the wisdom or the courage, they could have come together and had what they had had tonight.

For Tom was himself again, what he had been long ago, only nicer and more gentle, and more tender. When she thought of his tenderness, which had never existed long ago, she wanted to cry. It was the tenderness which had made her even in the midst of their happiness and ecstasy, ashamed of herself and all she had been, suddenly, without warning. It was not conscience, nor moral precept, nor even the training of childhood, which had made her ashamed of herself and of him, but the tenderness which she had suddenly felt enveloping her. It was as if they had both become children, as if in some miraculous way they had regained their innocence, as if somehow they had shed the evil, the promiscuity of all those years. It was, she thought, still conscious of her old dislike for sentimentality, like being reborn. It was something she had never dreamed was possible.

Now they would never leave each other. She would stay here until Albert was well enough to leave. She would go on playing shabbily the role of wife, and then she would tell him that it was finished forever, and if he refused to give her a divorce it did not matter. It did not matter whether they were ever received by anyone, or whether no one in the world ever spoke to them again. The only thing of importance was that they never lost each other again; everything else seemed to

have slipped away, leaving her with a feeling of freedom and triumph. They might even go away before Albert was well enough to travel, as soon as it was clear that he would not die. And then the thought of his blood pressure occurred to her; perhaps they would not dare risk telling him until he was quite well for fear the news should bring on a stroke. And again she thought, "Why should he care? Why should he want to keep anyone like me?"

And the thought of the telegram and the betrayal returned to her and she felt suddenly sick, physically sick. Now suddenly she knew that it was the worst thing she had ever done in all her life. Until tonight she had felt revengeful and even triumphant, as if at last she had paid Groton back for all the evil he had done her and the evil he had done so many others who were more helpless, less capable of defending themselves, than she had been. But now it was quite different. For a moment she almost felt sorry for Albert, because he was dying without having lived at all, without ever knowing what she had known tonight and would know for the rest of her life. She felt sorry for him because he was dying now like a machine, without soul or feeling, which, worn out, runs down and stops at last because there is no longer any force to keep it going. With all his shrewdness, with all his calculation, Albert knew nothing about tenderness or love or friendship; he knew nothing about anything. The money he had given her did not soften her. "I have earned that," she thought with bitterness, "as sordidly as any Piccadilly whore. I owe him nothing for that."

The thing was that for the first time Albert seemed human to her. "Perhaps," she thought, "that too is because of the tenderness." She was sorry that he should be so miserable a

man. “Perhaps it was not his fault. I have never known what happened to him as a child. He would never speak of his childhood or his brother or his parents. Something must have happened to him to have made him as he is, something which in my world I never knew.”

But there was no going back now. She meant not even to give up so much as one evening on the island with Tom, not one moment of those long hot nights together, because tomorrow, even tonight, one of them might die, and they had so much to get back which belonged to them, and which they had thrown away. With astonishment she understood that it wasn't physical desire which drove her now, as it had driven her on that first night when she came down the stairs to find Tom dressed in a *sarong* like a boatman. It was something else, which she had never known before, even in those wild days when they had been together just after the war. It was something that warmed her and made her feel radiant and—once more she blushed that an idea so sentimental should come to her of all people—almost consecrated. It was a feeling which made her weak and astonished.

And all the time she sat there she was aware of Mees Opp, who was not at all what she had expected. She kept seeing the face with extraordinary clearness, the muddy skin and thin hair, the great fat body. It existed for her more clearly than any face, even Tom's, had existed before. Out of her vague memories of Mees Opp on that first day seated at a table in the dilapidated summerhouse, treating the long line of suffering people, she had expected a commonplace, efficient, perhaps groveling half-caste woman, but she had found something else—a woman with character and dignity and with something in her face which she had never seen

before in the face of any person she had ever known, something which in a strange way was related to the tenderness and which had the same power of shaking her armor of confidence and making her feel ashamed.

She had not been aware of it at first when she stood in the dimly lighted doorway of Groton's room; at that moment Mees Opp had been little more than a silhouette, with a warm and rather pleasant voice, clad in an absurd cotton nightgown. It was only when they had passed Albert's bed, while she turned her head a little so as not to see him, and had gone into Mees Opp's own room, that she understood the quality of the look in the doctor's face.

She was thankful that she had been gracious in the beginning, although her graciousness did her no credit. She thought, "I was taught all my childhood and early youth to be gracious, because there were not many people I was to meet in life who would be anything but my inferiors, and one had to be gracious to inferiors." Being gracious was the easiest and most natural thing she did. From childhood she had been gracious, at village fairs, at bazaars, at balls. It was so easy—that artificial graciousness—when you were born in security, with health and beauty and prestige, when all the world was waiting and eager to be pleasant in return. There was, she told herself, no credit for her in that. With poor Albert perhaps it had been different; he had never had any graciousness, not even the artificial graciousness that was automatic and easy.

But now, sitting before the dressing table, she was thankful for that early training because, afterward, while she sat by the lamp in Mees Opp's bedroom, the graciousness had ceased to be artificial and had become genuine, born not in tradition

and training, but in the heart, and it had brought with it a warm, comforting feeling like stepping into a hot bath on a cold foggy London day.

It was a feeling she had never had before, and how it came to be born she could not discover even now, save that something in the face of Mees Opp made her feel generous, and made her wonder, too, about Mees Opp and what it must be like to be ugly like her and poor and a half-caste. Mees Opp might have minded all those things once, but she did not mind them now; you could tell that from her bearing. If she had minded, if she had thought of her looks and circumstances and been envious, you could have read the dissatisfaction in her face. It was easy enough to do that; all her life she had been reading envy in the faces of other women. In the face of Mees Opp there was no envy, and so, thought Lady Groton, she must have found something which to her was better than beauty or wealth or position, or any of the things she did not have and would never have. Lucky Mees Opp! If she herself did not find something like that there was only misery before her and the horrors of growing thin and wrinkled and tired, and older and older and older until at last she died, glad that the bloody thing was finished. But perhaps she had found it, in Tom and that new tenderness.

Whenever she thought of him her blood ran a little faster and she felt for a moment like a schoolgirl discovering the world for the first time, thinking how wonderful it was and what romantic and incredible things could happen in it. And she felt a little proud, too, that she had won and changed him, that she had been shameless on the morning he went away, when she ran after him to say what her heart had been crying

out to say. Because tonight he *was* changed; he had forgotten all his worrying and self-torment, all his weakness and indecision; for a little time she had persuaded him to live in the moment, in the precious moments that were left to them. He had been reckless and gay and tender with her, free of all those barriers which always before had shut him away from her, even when they were in each other's arms.

At last she began slowly to undress, and presently, just as the sky began to turn crimson and gold beyond the high mountains, she fell asleep, feeling somehow clean and redeemed and free, now that everything was settled and there would be no more muddling and no more searching. She fell asleep thinking, "In a little while after I wake, it will be evening again and I shall be able to cross over to the island and be with him alone, no one there but the two of us"—for Dantry, she knew, had sent Silas away for good because the eyes of the boy, which were so like the eyes of Maria, were unbearable to him.

On his island Dantry too slept at last, peacefully, luxuriously, as he had not slept since he was a boy, long ago before the war, because he had come at last to the end of things, and coming to the end had brought him release. The monotony, the dreariness of soul which had afflicted him during the long journey back to Nivandrum, vanished in the second he discovered her there asleep on the Indian bed. In that moment something inside the tired head had snapped and suddenly he was free, thinking, “Nothing matters now! Nothing save enjoyment! Nothing save life! Nothing matters for the two of us ... neither Maria nor Groton nor anyone in the world!”

Afterward nothing existed for them, and the whole world became simply the house and island, bathed in moonlight, where they were together. There was no food in the house so, like Adam and Eve, they went into the garden, and in the moonlight they gathered coconuts and papayas and passion fruit, and then on the terrace they sat by a little table and ate the fruit and drank champagne, drawn, up from the bottom of the deep well of sweet water dug long ago by some Dutch or Portuguese trader. It was a little as Tipton Farm had been long ago when they went there as boy and girl to cook their own food and do their own housework. Only then they had sat in the little garden in front of the cottage above the sea instead of on the terrace of this haunted old baroque house, with the sound of drums and jackals in the distance.

Watching her across the table, he had thought, “This is better than anything I had ever dreamed of. It is far better than it was long ago, because now we know everything there

is to know of each other, both good and bad. There are no longer any mysteries or any misunderstandings. There is no ambition and no worldliness and no world outside to distract and weary us and fray our nerves. Perhaps in the end we are luckier than most lovers, because now that we have gone such a long way and know so much and are so tired, there is nothing we want from the outside because we know what is there, all of it, too much of it.”

And again it struck him that there must always have been some power of destiny which brought him to the island in the beginning, that perhaps all along, each thing that had happened, each misery and disillusionment, had occurred in some mysterious order or succession simply to bring about this unbelievable moment.

They did not talk much, but were content to sit there now and then looking at each other, almost shy and in the glory of their happiness. Once she said, “I am ashamed and afraid,” and when he asked, “Why?” she said, “Because we are having what we do not deserve.”

Puzzled, he said, “It is you who always reproached me for thoughts like that.”

“I know,” and without saying it she thought, “perhaps happiness is changing me—the happiness which I never took into account.”

He laughed and said, “You’re not going to be Thaïs and try to convert me back again?”

“No,” and she laughed, too, because the idea was funny and because she was happy.

“Let’s not speak of it ... forget it.”

“I promise not to speak of it again.”

But there was a little silence, painful and filled with thoughts which went unspoken. They both had the same thoughts and knew it well enough, so there was no need of their being uttered. And afterward he brought out the little photograph album which he had kept with him through all his wanderings (her own was gone, lost somewhere in the dusty attics of the great house in Hill Street), and they looked at the pictures of themselves, taken long ago, when as children they had thought themselves so wild and so worldly. There was a picture of herself on a stile and one of him on the top of a hayrick, and one of the two of them on bicycles which must have been taken by some friendly passer-by they had encountered in the Devonshire lanes. Oddly enough they seemed only funny now and did not move her to tears, partly because the boy in the pictures and the girl in very, very short skirts seemed to be photographs of people who were strangers, and partly because they both knew that what they had now, this thing born out of so much seeking and adventure, was better than the thing they had had then.

They talked for a long time making plans as to where they would go when Groton had recovered and had gone from their lives. They planned to find a place like Nivandrum if such another place existed, where they would have a house to return to from journeys. They would travel a great deal to strange and exotic places like Omaha and Toronto and Buenos Aires, in a world newer than the one they knew too well, and in all their talk there was a strange greediness, as if there lay before them too much of joy and delight to be savored before they were old and finished. Now that they had found each other at last there would no longer be any doubts or quarrels or unfaithfulness.

At the hour when the drums had begun to die away, he took her in his arms and they made love again with a satisfaction, a completeness, a kind of voluptuous peace which neither of them had ever known before.

Long after midnight, she said, suddenly, "I should go back now. They'll begin to talk in the hotel."

He laughed. "Don't imagine they haven't been talking ever since you came here that first night."

"Don't talk about that night."

"Why not?"

"I don't like thinking of it."

It wasn't necessary, she knew, to give the reasons, for he knew them as surely as herself—that there had been something neurotic and greedy and perverse about that first encounter, something sordid because they both brought to it ugly, cynical overtones of all the reckless and promiscuous searching they had gone through. It was as if those two people who had met and fallen in love again that first night beneath the stars of Nivandrum were strangers to them now, like the boy and the girl in the faded photographs.

He said, "What does it matter? Why not stay here ... all the night ... forever?"

Then she grew serious and a look of pain came over her face and she said, "No, that's what we've always done. We mustn't spoil everything now—just when we've found each other again. We've always ruined everything by being spoiled and greedy. We were too lucky in the beginning. We always thought we could have everything just for the taking."

At last after many false starts they descended the stairway to the water and he took her back across the channel to the

hotel, and there on the pier he left her after holding her close to him for a long time in the scented darkness. And as he kissed her for the last time he said, "Some day, some time we shall be free to do as we like. We shall live somewhere where no one will know us or care what we do."

All day Mees Opp sat by the bed of Lord Groton and at night she slept lightly in the stifling room adjoining that of Lord Groton, waking every hour, as if there were an alarm clock by her side, to go in and have a look at him. He was quieter now than he had been under Bates's care, for the fever had weakened him, and only twice in the three days before his death did he recover consciousness for a little time and begin to rave against Dantry. Mees Opp, far stronger than Bates, was able to hold him in bed until the moment of raving passed and he fell back again exhausted.

After the first day and the second her patient began to take on the proportions of a crusade. He was better and then worse and then better again, and once he became almost calmly conscious for a time, staring at her out of his pale blue eyes with a look of wonder, and then losing himself once more in fever. It was not easy ... the fever *and* the heat—but Mees Opp had made up her mind that she would not, she could not, let him die. The decision came from a number of motives, all mixed and none of them very clear. She did not know what sort of man he was, but she did not like the way in which he had been neglected before she came, because Mees Opp believed that you could not neglect even the devil himself if he were ill. After he was well, there would be time enough to send him packing.

And she was determined to defeat the woman Léah, for the more she watched her, the more she talked to her, the more certain she was that Léah *had* been giving him something, some herb or drug which would have been certain to kill him in the end. A second time she caught Léah returning just

before dawn, but now the strange nocturnal excursions of the woman did not trouble her because she had taken care to go down to the kitchen herself for Lord Groton's broths and to taste them all, ostentatiously, in Léah's presence. If Léah were simply going off to some island incantation or to consult a witch doctor, she did not mind; that never killed anyone, least of all a man who was unconscious with fever, a European who could not be touched in his imagination.

But the motive still puzzled her, and the nearest she came to it was a remark made by Léah one night when Mees Opp came to the kitchen for the broth. She asked whether Lord Groton was improving, and when Mees Opp said that the fever was down and that he was a little better each day, Léah said suddenly with an extraordinary intensity, "He is a bad man."

Mees Opp, curious, asked, "Why do you say that?"

"Why does he come here? We were all happy in Nivandrum. What does he want here?"

By now Mees Opp had divined the reasons for Groton's visit, but she only said, "I don't know."

"After him will come other men like him. If he has his way he will send them here and everything will be changed and miserable." And then suddenly she said, "I don't think he will ever leave here." And there came into her brooding face a terrifying look of evil and malice.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because the River God is against him. The River God closed the harbor. He wants it kept closed."

To which Mees Opp only said, "Nonsense," and left the room with the broth.

She was used to talk like this among the women of the villages, and it did not alarm her, so long as she was there to protect her patient. Once he was well, he could protect himself. Once he was well, he would go away. She was not frightened of Léah, but the woman made her uneasy, because she knew that women like Léah were quite capable of lending a hand to the River God in case he did not act quickly enough.

But what troubled her more than Léah was the thought of the moment when Lord Groton would emerge from the coma and ask for his wife, and when she considered what she would do, she knew that she would protect Lady Groton, lying, if necessary, as Bates had done so many times. The ethics of the situation did not trouble her very profoundly, because long ago she had abandoned standards of ethics and morals and come to trust her instinct and her sense of humanity. Long ago she had learned that it is better to be human than to obey any code to the letter, and her instinct told her that of the two it was the wife who must not be betrayed.

She liked Lady Groton; she had liked her from the moment she opened the door and saw her standing in the dim light of the hall. There was something nice about her and easy and there was an honesty too, a way of looking things straight in the face, which Mees Opp liked. She did not pretend that the man on the island was not her lover; she made no excuses and no evasions, and so in her own mind (thought Mees Opp) she must have weighed it all and found her conscience clear. Mees Opp did not pretend to understand the ins and outs of the situation; she was simply willing to bet on Lady Groton.

By the second night they had come to an arrangement. When Lady Groton returned she was to open the door of Mees Opp's room gently, and if Mees Opp happened to be awake she would tell her about her husband's condition. If she were not awake, Lady Groton refused to waken her and waited until morning. In the mornings when she came in they sometimes talked, and Mees Opp was a little astonished to find that a woman like Lady Groton was so interested in her, that she asked so many questions about her past and her hospital and her work, because Lady Groton seemed to her to belong to a world as different from her own as the sun from the moon. But she was not displeased, because if Lady Groton was so interested, then it was quite possible that she would induce her husband to make a rich gift to the hospital.

On the second morning, while they were sitting together in wrappers in Mees Opp's room, Lady Groton said, after a little silence, "I should think you were very happy."

"I don't know," said Mees Opp, "I've never had time to think about it. I suppose I am."

"It must be a wonderful feeling when you save a life or help someone who is suffering."

"It is," said Mees Opp, quite simply. "It's like ... like ..."
She felt for words and found none, finishing the sentence limply by saying, "I don't know what it's like."

Lady Groton said nothing more that morning, but went away. Nevertheless, the image of Mees Opp's homely face remained with her all the morning, and before she went to sleep again she thought, "Once Albert is well and this mess is all cleared up I shall give her some of the money Albert settled on me for her hospital. I shan't miss it. I shan't want clothes any more or jewels or any of those things," and then

it occurred to her that she was free, really free for the first time in her life; not only of Albert and all his money, but of all those things—the clothes, the jewels, the parties, the yacht, the house in Hill Street—which once she had thought she could not do without. It wasn't only because of what had happened to her and Tom; Mees Opp had something to do with it too, not exactly Mees Opp, perhaps, but the thing she had seen in the face of Mees Opp on that first night.

It was Bates who told her of the arrival of Mr. Clapton. She wakened slowly about five in the afternoon to the sound of a knock, and when she said "Who is it?" Bates answered and came in.

She said, still half-asleep but angry, "I did not tell you to come in," and Bates answered, "I beg your pardon. I misunderstood," but she knew by the sly look on his face that he was lying. He was being insolent, for he permitted her to know by his very expression that he was lying. But she was awake enough to think, "He's presuming too much. I'm free now. He can tell Albert about Tom and all the others for all I care. Perhaps it would clear matters up if he did."

Then he said, "He's here, me lady. I thought you'd like to know."

"Who's here?"

"Clapton is his name, I believe. Lord Deakin's man."

Then she felt suddenly sick. That was why Bates was insolent. She wasn't free after all. He could still blackmail her if he chose. "I should have known Bates wasn't so stupid," she thought. "He knew all along that I didn't mind his telling Albert about Tom or the others, but he does know that I mind about this." And again she knew that the telegram of betrayal was the worst thing she had done in all her life. She hadn't expected results so soon; she had even hoped that they might escape from Nivandrum before an agent of Hugo Deakin put in an appearance.

"He came very quickly," she said, determined not to give herself away to Bates.

“I believe he came by plane to the capital and from there in a launch sent up from the south.”

“Has he a launch? I didn’t hear it.”

“Perhaps you were asleep, me lady. It’s noisy enough.”

She knew by the expression on his face what he was thinking—that the sound of the launch would be the first thing Groton would hear when he wakened, and that he would know at once what the sound meant. The sound of a launch could kill him and then ... murder could be accomplished in many ways.

“He was wiser than His Lordship,” said Bates.

“How?”

“He’s been to the Ranee. He has leased the best of the water front and bought options inland.”

“Oh!” Then she said, “But how do you know all this?”

For the fraction of a second Bates did not answer. Then he said, “Oh, just talking. It just came up.” There was a shadow of confusion in his face, as if he were commanding it to do something which it could not do. “He was so pleased, I suppose he wanted to tell someone.”

“Where is he staying?”

“Here, me lady. There isn’t any other place.”

She thought for a moment and then said, “What is he like?”

“Rather a common fellow, me lady,” and suddenly she felt a wild desire to laugh, hysterically, without restraint. For a desperate second it seemed to her that to laugh thus was the only thing that could save her, and in the same second it seemed to her that they were all mad—Albert with his ambitions, herself and her triviality, Bates and his disloyalty,

Tom married to a native woman, even Mees Opp. It was all mad and distorted and without balance, that she should find herself in a room in a place like this, parrying with her husband's manservant, attempting to keep him in his place. A part of her mind kept asking, "How did I get here? What have I done? It was not I who sent that telegram but someone else. None of it is true. Perhaps I have not even seen Tom and gone to him night after night. Perhaps I am mad and have imagined all these things," and she felt a cold sense of terror, but she managed to say, "Thank you, Bates. That's all."

When he had gone, she got out of bed and bathed and began to dress herself quickly, thinking, "I must see this agent, I must talk to him. I must stop him and send him away. Perhaps I can buy him off with my own money, with jewelry I don't want any longer. Perhaps ... perhaps...." For a moment her thoughts scrambled wildly, melodramatically, "Perhaps if I let him sleep with me," but that was too naïve, and anyway now she could not do it. A week ago it could have happened, but not now.

Then almost at once she saw that all this was hysterical. If he had already taken leases and options the thing was not to be undone. Suddenly she was frightened as she had never been frightened before, because never before in all her life had she been trapped.

When she came down the stairs he was sitting in the far end of the big vaulted room, near the doorway, drinking whisky and soda and looking out across the harbor, and she knew the moment she saw the back of his head that it was no good. It was rather square and flat, the fleshy neck burned red by years of sun in the East. It was like the back of Albert's head, which was the part of him she hated most because it

seemed to her that there was centered all the stubbornness, the brutality, the lack of sensibility. For years she had avoided looking at the back of Albert's head.

But she meant to talk to him, to discover at least what sort of person he was, and so she crossed the floor as if to go past him into the garden, but as she reached the table he turned and she smiled at him. At once he sprang to his feet and she thought, "He *is* like Albert, only younger. I suppose Albert at his age sprang to his feet in the same way whenever the aristocracy put in an appearance."

She said, "Good afternoon," and Clapton, in an oily way, said, "You're Lady Groton, I suppose."

"Yes," and she felt a sudden wild desire to laugh again at the memory of Bates's speech, "Rather a common fellow, me lady."

"Will you have something with me?"

"With pleasure."

He was bouncing and full of animal vitality, like Albert had been once; on the make, too, as Albert had been. "He's Deakin's man," she thought. "But he thinks it a good idea to be in well all around. His motto very likely is, 'You never can tell what may happen.' " But this was only a sprawling cub, the old lion was tired now, and ill and perhaps dying in the teakwood bed abovestairs.

She ordered gin and tonic and then said, "Well, what do you think of the place?"

"Too hot. You've been here quite awhile, but it doesn't seem to trouble you much."

"No."

He grinned. "I guess we're here for the same reasons."

“Probably you know more about that than I do. You see, I don’t know why you’re here.”

Rasmussen, tired and white in his waiter’s costume, brought the gin and tonic and went away again, sour in his manner as if he had had enough of all these strange, disrupting, demanding people and longed again for the simple trade of the sailors who came in winter.

Clapton grinned again and said, “I’m here for the same reasons as your husband.”

“Oh!”

“I hear he has been ill. Is he better?”

“A lot.”

“He won’t be very pleased to find me here.”

“No, it will make him very angry. How did you find out he was here?”

Clapton looked at her shrewdly and then said with a certain smugness, “We businessmen have ways of finding out things.”

“I know that. I’ve been married to one for a great many years.”

“And a shrewd one, too.”

Into the coarse face of the man there came a look of admiration that father sickened her. She thought, “He can be bought, only I haven’t enough money to buy him, not with all my jewelry and the money Albert settled on me, because he’s gambling on the future—that some day people will address him too as Your Lordship.”

She said, “Are you planning to stay for a long time?” (He might go away before Albert recovered consciousness and then I would escape the worst.)

“I don’t know. Until I’ve done everything I have to do.”

His eyes narrowed a little and again she wanted to laugh, thinking, “He believes I’m trying to vamp him to gain information for Albert in the best cinema style.” The naïveté of men like Albert and Clapton always astonished her. It was always new and incredible that with all their villainy they were like children. Real villainy, like her betrayal of Albert, was something beyond their imagination, something which to them was unbelievable. And she felt a quick sense of superiority and of contempt for the man. But all this, she knew, was getting her nowhere, and by now she knew that any number of conversations would produce no further progress, because he was on his guard against her, thinking of her in terms of cinema vamps.

Suddenly he said, “Do you know this man Dantry who lives here ... a kind of English beachcomber?”

She thought, “He knows that I know him. He knows everything,” and she said, betraying herself a little by anger, “I know him, but he’s not a beachcomber. He’s a gentleman living on an income.”

“A remittance man then?”

“No, not that either.”

Then it occurred to her what he was doing. The tables were turned and he was trying to use *her*. But he had hit on the wrong thing, because she did not mind now who knew that Tom was her lover. It puzzled her that he did not use the telegram against her, but, after all, he might be holding that as a final card.

“He should know a good deal about the place. He ought to be useful, but very likely your husband has thought of that before me.”

“No, my husband hasn’t even seen him. Anyway, it wouldn’t do any good. Mr. Dantry doesn’t want the harbor opened. He’d do everything to prevent it.”

Clapton’s jaw grew sharp with contempt and determination. Then he laughed and said, “A lot of good it will do him. Will you have another drink?”

“No thanks. I’m going out in a moment in the boat to have some air.”

“That Cockney Sandy told me the same thing. He said Dantry was a queer bloke and there wasn’t any use going to him. He’s married to Sandy’s daughter, you know.”

She felt her face stiffen as she had seen Bates’s face stiffen a little while before when it refused to do what he had asked of it. “Yes, I know,” she said, and a wild, fantastic idea struck her. Perhaps it was Bates who had done the betrayal before she had had time to do it. Perhaps he had been there all along, manservant to Albert, but in reality a spy for Deakin. It was fantastic, but somehow the idea had a ring of truth about it. It explained other leakages that had happened over a period of years. And Bates’s face and manner. And a manservant would be the last to be suspected. Albert had discharged typists and secretaries and even broken with partners, but the leakage had gone on. Again and again he had come into her room to storm about it.

She tried to control her face, to pretend that she was listening to what he was saying, but her brain was on fire with the idea of Bates. Then she heard him saying, “This place is full of gossip,” and she thought, “No, you don’t catch me that way. You can’t blackmail me about that.”

“Yes,” she said, “most small places are. I don’t know really. I haven’t had much contact with the people.”

“Well, that’s part of my business out here. It’s one of the reasons I’ve been able to pull out of things when others failed. I always say, get next to the natives first and the way will be easy. I don’t go in much for this color bar thing. It doesn’t pay in business out here.”

She did not answer him, and then he said, “The latest I heard is that this Dantry has deserted the Cockney’s daughter and that she’s gone potty.”

“That’s something I know nothing about.”

“Yes, quite off her head. They’ve been trying native cures. The wife of this fellow Rasmussen has been saying hocus-pocus over her. Seems she is some kind of witch doctor.”

“What a lot you find out.”

“Well, that’s my business.” He lighted a cigarette and leaned back in his chair. As if she took this as an excuse to escape, she rose and said, “Thank you for the drink, I must go now,” but instead of continuing on her way to the landing stage, she turned and went back again up the stairs, aware that she was hurrying and that she must not hurry because if he noticed it he would think he had perhaps achieved what he wanted. Trying to go slowly and calmly, it seemed to her that she would never reach the top of the open stairway with the lovely wrought-iron rail. But at last she was there at the turn, out of Clapton’s sight, still thinking what a loathsome man he was. “There are worse than Albert perhaps, or was Albert really as bad as that when I first married him?”

She was not sure of anything now. It was as if she were changing, as if she were becoming another woman. Was it the heat or the illness or was it Tom, or was she losing her wits or going insane? How had she come to find herself, to whom nothing had ever happened, in so melodramatic a mess?

Going along the broad hall she thought again, "I wanted something to happen to me. It's happened all right, with a vengeance!"

At the door of Mees Opp's room she knocked, and then, without waiting for an answer, stepped inside. Mees Opp was there, standing by the window, preparing some sort of drink for her patient. She was peering at it through her thick spectacles and stirring it. At the sound of the opening door, she turned and said, "Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon. How is he?"

Mees Opp smiled, a great warm enveloping smile that changed the ugly face and made it almost beautiful. "A great deal better. His fever has gone down a point and a half."

"Is he still delirious?"

"He's sleeping now. When he wakes I think he'll be all right."

"Have you seen Bates?"

"He's in the other room. Some laundry of His Lordship's has just come and he's getting it in order. He said His Lordship wouldn't like it if he wakened and found the room any way but in perfect order."

That was a lie. It was just one of Bates's tricks for poking his nose in where he was no longer wanted.

"Would you ask him to come to my room for a moment?"

"Of course, Lady Groton."

Before she went out the door she took a long last look at Mees Opp. She had turned back to her stirring and peering. There was something calm and eternal about her, nothing mad or fantastic or exaggerated, as there was about everyone else in the hotel, every one of them, even Lansbury, pink,

decadent, collapsed and useless in the heat. Mees Opp was sanity. She was solidity. She was genuine virtue. She must not go away. She must stay there even after Albert got well again, until she and Tom could leave Nivandrum together.

While she waited for Bates, she walked up and down the room, thinking all the while, "I must not be hysterical. I must not again do something like sending that foul telegram. I must be calm inside. I must pretend to act a role, as if I were in the cinema, facing down the villain ... or one of the villains, only there are so many ... Albert and Clapton and Tom and myself and that woman Léah. There are so many villains. It's all so complicated." And for the first time it occurred to her how loathsome the human race could be, how loathsome she could be and Tom, and so many other people who thought of themselves as nice and attractive.

Then there was a knock on the door and Bates came in, closing the door behind him, his face wearing the blankest of his many expressions. The moment she saw him she thought, "It's true. Now I've got to bluff him. He knows I've talked to Clapton and he's afraid."

She began abruptly by saying, "Bates, did you send the telegram I gave you?"

"Yes, me lady, it went at once. It must have gone at once for Mr. Clapton to have arrived so soon."

The last sentence he should not have spoken, for it gave her a clue. Very quickly she said, "He arrived so quickly, it occurred to me that you might have sent the telegram before I gave it to you."

The face was still blank, but he did not answer at once. There was a silence of a second, but a silence long enough to

make her know that the thrust had struck home. She thought, "I'm enjoying this. It must be fun to play melodrama."

"I don't understand, me lady."

"Mr. Clapton never got it."

"He must have got it, me lady, to be here now...."

Again she tried a shot in the dark, saying, "He got a telegram, but it wasn't my telegram. I've just been talking to him."

She had the upper hand now, and she knew that there would be no more insolence from Bates for the moment. He was attempting to look puzzled, all the cockiness gone out of him.

"I can't understand it, me lady. Perhaps Your Ladyship misunderstood Mr. Clapton."

"He's not very difficult to understand." She thought, "Now I must clinch it. I must make one more shot." So she said, "Do you remember about the South American business and the Mittel Europa Bank affair and one or two other things?"

This time he did not answer her at all for a long time. Then a faint sickly grin spread over the sallow face, a sardonic grin which suddenly made her like him again in spite of all his villainy. Then he said, "I understand, me lady. May I go now?"

"Yes, Bates."

She thought, "That's fixed him. In his heart he's a coward and afraid of Albert. Now I shan't have any more trouble with him."

He went out, closing the door behind him, and outside the door he took out his pocket handkerchief and wiped his forehead. It was not the heat this time, but the strain of trying

to make his face do what it did not want to do. He had tried to keep it blank when all the time it wanted to break into a grin of admiration. He said to himself, “You can always tell a lady. Not many women could have done that. If all the rich was like her there wouldn’t be no revolutions. There wouldn’t need to be any. A thoroughbred is a thoroughbred, no matter where you find them. Only she’s the last of her kind. They’ve gone out of date.”

And what made it funnier was the certainty in his heart that she had never for a moment discussed the telegram with Clapton, and if she had, the certainty that Clapton was the last one to give anything away.

Slowly he went back to Lord Groton’s bedroom, thinking, “Yes, things are drawing to a close. The old man isn’t going to die after all, but he’s finished, and for him that’s worse than being dead.”

About midnight Lord Groton opened his eyes and *saw* the room for the first time since that evening long ago, years ago it seemed, when he had gone to bed feeling seedy. But when he first looked about he could not make out where he was. In one corner of the room there was a dim light and the room was filled with ugly teakwood furniture, and near the light he made out the bulky figure of a woman all in white standing with her back to him shaking down a thermometer; that made him know that he must be ill. His body felt extraordinarily light, as if it had no substance at all, and the sensation confused him, taking him back a long way, more than thirty years, to the time he had malaria in Samarang. So for a moment he experienced again the precious sensation of youth, mingled with the sound of the drums from the islands, the drums he had first heard, as a boy of twenty-one, one still, hot night in Macassar. And for a moment he felt again that all the world was before him, waiting to be conquered, waiting to deliver into his hands the money and power he meant to have from it. But he was not altogether young because somehow he was someone else looking back on himself. He was himself at twenty-one, but he was himself watching himself—an old man watching a boy. He tried to lift his head, and almost at once the sensation of lightness left him and his whole body seemed leaden, pressing into a bed that was drenched with sweat.

He thought, “Who am I? Where am I?” and for one terrifying moment he thought, “I am dead.” For even in his weakness and confusion the terror of death was still haunting and keen. Then clarity came to him for a moment and he thought, “I know who I am. I’m Groton, and Groton can’t be

dead. Groton couldn't die at fifty-four. I must get this bloody thing straight."

So he opened his eyes and called out, "Who are you?" but the voice was not the voice of Groton but of a man who was weak and old and ill. Nevertheless, it was loud enough to startle the woman in white standing by the light. Turning quickly, she said, "I am the doctor, Mees Opp."

Even in his weakness, the reply made him angry. Why was she trying to take him in? She was the nurse and the nurse couldn't be the doctor and the doctor the nurse, all at the same time. But the word "doctor" made him think of Harley Street and he said, "Where is Sir Sidney?"

"Who is Sir Sidney, sir?"

"Sir Sidney, my physician. Where am I? Where is Bates?"

"You are in Nivandrum, sir," said Mees Opp. "You mustn't talk now. You've been ill."

"Nivandrum?" The word echoed and then he said, "Is Deakin here also?"

"What Deakin, sir?"

"Hugo Deakin. Lord Deakin."

"No. There is no one here by that name ... Bates has gone to bed. I'm taking care of you. Now be quiet and I'll fetch you something to drink, and then you must go to sleep again and you'll feel much stronger when you wake."

He was silent and resentful at being treated like a child, and puzzled until she returned. Quietly he drank what she gave him. Then after a little silence, he asked, "Where is my wife?" and Mees Opp, put to the test, lied. She said, "She has gone out in the boat for a little air. The heat has been very hard on her."

For a long time he considered this, then he said, “She must take care not to get lost among the islands.”

“She has very good boatmen, sir.”

“When will she be back?”

“I don’t know, sir.”

“What time is it?”

“A little before midnight.”

“I want to speak to her. She shouldn’t be out alone in a place like Macassar. You can’t trust these Malays. She’s not able to look after herself.”

“This isn’t Macassar, sir. She’s quite safe here. It’s Nivandrum.”

“Oh, yes, Nivandrum,” and then after a pause, “How long have I been ill?”

“Eight days, sir.” She did not wait for him to speak again, but said, “Now I’ll go out and you try to sleep.”

“I don’t want to sleep. I haven’t time to sleep. There’s too much to be done.”

“You won’t be able to do any of it unless you go to sleep and get strong again. The more you sleep the stronger you’ll be.”

Slowly Mees Opp, with the instinct which amounted almost to genius, was beginning to understand him, to reconstruct his personality and his character out of those fragments of speech which emerged weakly from his confusion. What his wife had said was true. His vitality was immense—that he should be able to speak thus even in a weak voice, that there should be any coherence whatever in what he said.

For the first time he looked at her quite directly as if he saw her for the first time. Then he said, "Perhaps you are right, but I wish you could stop those damned drums. I hate them."

"I'm afraid that's not possible, sir," she said patiently. "In a little while you won't hear them. I'll leave you now to sleep. I'll be in the next room. If you want anything, I've put the bell inside you here on the bed. It's tied to your wrist by a string so that you can't lose it. You've only to ring and I'll come in."

Then he closed his eyes and she went out of the room until she knew that he was asleep, for she had no intention of sleeping herself until Lady Groton came in. And she knew that he would sleep, because she had made the draught almost double to make certain that he would not wake again before morning and ask whether she had come in.

So she was still awake when Lady Groton returned a little after three. She had been sitting by the window, as idle as she ever was, thinking about the money which she would be paid for saving the life of Lord Groton and what she would do with it back in the capital at the hospital. Even a moderate amount would pay for new floors and a new roof over the ward where the maternity cases were sheltered. And she thought for a time about the crippled woman, pleased that she had had no word from Mrs. Badoki, who was to send a message if things went badly. Then just before she saw the canoe with Dantry and Lady Groton in it push off in the late moonlight from the island opposite she saw another canoe leave the landing stage—the woman Léah setting off to do her hocus-pocus with a witch doctor somewhere among the islands. Well, she had defeated Léah. Lord Groton had passed

the worst and with his vitality he was certain now to recover. Then came the knock and Lady Groton came in, and once again she thought how pretty she was and, a little wickedly, that women as pretty as that shouldn't be hampered. They should have what they wanted, because they were the blessed of the gods.

She rose and closed the door between the two rooms as she always did so that they should not disturb the patient, and Lady Groton only smiled at her without speaking until the door was closed. Then she said, "How is he?"

"All right. He wakened and talked a little."

"Did he ask for me?"

"Yes, I put him off."

For a moment there was a silence while the two women looked at each other, Lady Groton thinking, "Does she know? Of course she does. Dare I to talk as if I assumed that she knew? She knows so much—everything." Aloud she said, "What did you tell him?"

"That you had gone out in the boat for air."

"What did he say?"

"To send you in when you returned." Mees Opp hesitated and then said, "But I gave him a sleeping draught ... a rather large dose to make sure he would sleep. What you said is true. His vitality is immense."

"That was kind of you." It was a noncommittal remark, which might be interpreted in many ways, but she rather fancied that Mees Opp would understand how it was meant.

She did, for she said, "I thought that would be the best thing to do under the circumstances."

"You are a wonderful woman."

“No, I try to understand things. I don’t know much about the world. It isn’t easy sometimes the way people behave ... so complicated and everything.”

Then Lady Groton plunged. She said, “I’m never going back to him.”

In a low voice Mees Opp answered, “I guessed that.”

“How?”

She smiled. “By the look in your face. When I first came I knew there was something wrong, but I didn’t know what it was. Then I began to understand.”

“You don’t think I’m a horrible woman?”

“I don’t know. How could I judge when I know so little? What is he like—Mr. Dantry, I mean?”

“Bad, like me ... only like me he never meant to be bad. He never really meant to hurt anyone.”

“Yes, that happens sometimes,” but uncompromisingly Mees Opp continued, “that makes it understandable, but it doesn’t make it any easier for the others.”

“You’re thinking about his wife.”

Mees Opp hesitated for a moment. Then she said, “You see, I brought his wife into the world long ago. I’ve known her always. He should never have taken up with her. That may be his fault or it may not. That woman Léah sent her to his house to wait for him in his bedroom—to catch him.” She looked directly at Lady Groton and added, “You mustn’t think the girl is a bad girl. She was in love with him. She still is. I suppose she always will be. You see, the trouble is that she’s a half-caste. If she had been a pure native, it wouldn’t have made so much difference. He shouldn’t have married her. I don’t know why he did.”

Lady Groton looked at the bracelets on her wrist. “He thought it was all finished when he married her ... he thought he was staying here forever. He thought he would never see me again.”

“Then he *was* a very old friend?”

Lady Groton was silent for a moment, still looking at the bracelets as if somehow they fascinated her. Then she said, “Yes, very old. In a way the only friend I’ve ever had ... the only friend in that way. I’m not superstitious but it does seem as if it was meant to be, as if it would be wrong if we tried to change it. Can you understand that?”

“Yes.”

“It’s all so complicated.”

“Things like that always are. Sometimes, out here, the complications are worse.”

“I don’t know much about it here. I’ve never been out until this visit.” Quickly she looked up from the bracelets and said, “I’m not boring you, am I? When you ought to be sleeping?”

“No, you’re not boring me,” and as she spoke Lady Groton thought, “No, no one ever bores you. Everyone is human and interesting and in need of sympathy and help. How lucky you are! That’s something you can never lose, something that has nothing to do with love or money or anything.”

“Don’t think too badly of me,” she said.

“I’m not judging you,” said Mees Opp quite simply. “That’s not for me to do. Besides, in order to judge, one needs to know so much.”

Lady Groton, with a nod of her head, indicated the closed door and said, “I shouldn’t tell him yet, should I ... that I’m never going back to him?”

“No, I shouldn’t tell him yet. It might undo a lot of what we’ve been trying to do.”

“And there’s one more thing we oughtn’t to tell him ... about this Mr. Clapton, who has arrived. You see, he found out why my husband was here and has come to get in ahead of him. Even if my husband hears the sound of his motor launch you mustn’t tell him. Say it’s the revenue cutter belonging to the Ranee.”

“I understand.”

“Later, when he is stronger, we can tell him. It will be bad enough then.”

“I see.”

She rose and said, “Now, I’ll go and let you sleep.” She took the fat hand of Mees Opp that looked so clumsy and was so delicate and said, “It was good of you to stay awake until I came in, and it was good of you to listen to me. I’ve never talked to anyone like that before.” She looked directly at Mees Opp and added, “And it was good of you to lie for me.” Then an idea came to her, and turning away a little she unfastened the two wide bracelets from her wrist and held them out to Mees Opp. “Here,” she said. “Take these,” and as she did it she knew that this was a melodramatic gesture and that it made her feel self-conscious, but she thought too, “That’s how I feel now. Tomorrow I might change. And I want her to have them.”

“No,” said Mees Opp, “I couldn’t.”

“Please take them. They’re not for you. They’re for your hospital.”

For a moment Mees Opp, her heart beating wildly, said in a low voice, “Well, if it’s that, I could take them.” Tears came

into her pale eyes and in a low voice she said, "Thank you."

Lady Groton, shy and a little ashamed, ran out of the room.

When she had gone Mees Opp stood for a long time with the bracelets in her hand looking at the door, astonished, puzzled that in Lady Groton, of all people, she had discovered a kind of childishness, an innocence. When she turned away she held the bracelets under the light moving them this way and that so that the emeralds and diamonds caught the light and gave back gleams of red and blue fire. Then she seated herself, still holding the bracelets now close to her near-sighted eyes, now far away, now pressing them against her fat, sallow cheeks. They were beautiful, but it was not of their beauty she was thinking; to her they meant new floors and a new roof, an electrical plant and an X-ray machine.

Afterward, long afterward, whenever the horror of that day returned against her will to Lady Groton, it seemed to her that there had been something hurried and unreal about it, as if Fate, like a playwright aware of the climax ahead, had hurried everything so that none of the effect would be lost. There was something overintense about everything connected with that day; the heat seemed more terrible, the colors more brilliant; the hours seemed to race ahead.

She wakened late, not as usual about ten o'clock to go back to bed again to sleep until five, but a little before noon with a sensation of heavy weariness and of having lost something out of her life. Then while she was bathing, Mees Opp knocked at the door and said, "Your husband is awake. He seems much better. He asked to see you," and after she had said she would come at once, she thought, "He is really extraordinary—Albert. He will be well enough to go away in a week and then I shall be free."

She did not want to see him again. Not so long ago she would have gone away, perhaps leaving a note, and never have seen him again, but now it was different. She would have to go to him and be kind and patient, and in the end she would have to break things off tactfully and gently, hurting him as little as possible. She *had* to do all this.

So reluctantly she went, thinking of him as he had been on that first day of the illness, moaning, sodden and helpless, but when she opened the door and went in, it was quite different. The purple, apoplectic look, as if with the least show of bad temper he might burst, was gone, and he lay now in the teak wood and mother-of-pearl bed, weak and pale, so weak that

as she came in he only turned his eyes toward her instead of his whole head, and all at once she felt sorry for him again, but in a new way, not sorry for him as Albert Simpson, Lord Groton, whose spectacular life had been so barren and empty, but simply as a man, any man, a particle of the human race, ill and suffering and weak, and helpless. There was something shameful in the spectacle—that man, the all-conquering, the braggart, the brute, could be so fragile, so easily destructible.

And when he spoke the sound of his voice shocked her by its weakness. It had a curious reedlike quality. She understood, almost at once, that he expected her to kiss him, casually, lightly on the cheek as she had often done because it seemed to reassure him and put him off from boring her with questions and conversation and because a casual embrace cost her nothing. For a moment she struggled to gain control of herself, thinking, “I can’t do it now. I can’t. But I must. It means so much to him,” and bending down she kissed him on the forehead, and he looked pleased, so wistfully pleased for the great Lord Groton, that she felt a little sick and thought, “A Judas kiss if ever there was one.”

Then brightly she said, “Well, everything’s all right. You were very ill but now you’re going to be well again. Everything is going to be all right.”

The weak voice said, “Sit here on the bed near me.” And she sat down on the edge of the bed although she would have preferred sitting in the farthest corner of the room. He took her hand and it was cool, almost cold in the heat, and a little clammy.

“It must have been boring for you,” he said, “in this heat with nothing to do. What did you do to amuse yourself?”

She answered him quite honestly, “I slept during most of the day and in the evening I dined with Tom Dantry. Thank God he was here. It made all the difference.”

He looked away from her scowling, and after a moment he said, “That damned midwife won’t say when I’ll be strong enough to get out of here and finish my job.”

“She told me a fortnight at the earliest, but it depends on you—how well you obey orders and behave yourself.”

Suddenly he closed his eyes and a curious shiver ran through the whole heavy body; it was a curious animal, physical thing like the effort of a great bull to shake off a terrier. She understood what its meaning was. He found it insupportable to be chained thus by weakness to his bed when there was so much to be done, so much that had to be accomplished.

“I should think she was a very good doctor.”

A little of the old spirit returned to him and he said, scornfully, “A woman and a half-caste!”

“She’ll keep her mouth shut and she’s making you well. What more can you ask? I think you’ve been very lucky to have her.”

“She’s so ugly I have to close my eyes when she comes near me.”

How like him that was! That he should see, as he always did, only the exterior of things, that he could appreciate best something that was pretty and trivial and brainless. Perhaps that is why he took to me ... that and because I was a queen’s goddaughter.

Aloud she said, “I don’t think she’s ugly at all. And besides, she’s a very remarkable woman.” She wanted to add,

angrily, “Worth fifty of you,” but he was too weak for her to wound him with wits that were so much sharper than his.

He said, “Would you like to get out of this heat?”

“No, not now ... not, at least, until you’re quite well.”

The shadow of a grin came across his face and he said, “No, it wouldn’t look well if you went away and then I died. It wouldn’t look very well under the circumstances.”

“What do you mean by that? You might as well be frank.”

But she never heard his answer, for at that moment from near at hand just by the little landing stage there came a series of sputtering explosions, the unmistakable sound of the engine of a launch being started. He heard it at once. She saw from his eyes that he forgot her, he forgot Dantry, he forgot everything save the menace to the great coup he had planned. Looking at her with the old sharp glance of the shrewd businessman, he said, “What is that?”

She knew the look. He had looked at her so many times in that way when she lied to him and discovered nothing. But now it was different and it seemed to her terribly difficult to lie to him with success. But she made a valiant effort.

She said, “It’s a launch. It’s the revenue cutter.”

He raised himself with an effort on one elbow straining a little as if he meant to get out of the bed and go to the window. And below the window he would see Clapton standing by the launch, healthy and sunburned and vigorous as he himself had once been, Hugo Deakin’s agent, stealing everything from him just at the moment of accomplishment. If she permitted him to go to the window the sight of Clapton might kill him. She might help him out of bed and across the floor to the window and then he would be dead, and she

would be free forever. It all went through her head, even the picture of him dying of bafflement and rage. The sense of guilt weighed on her too. It was not, she knew now, *her* telegram that had brought Clapton here, but it might have been. It was only an accident that she was not guilty. And here was Albert, struggling, and she pushing him back into the bed to save him. Why was she saving him? Nobody wanted him saved. Even that brother she had never seen would want him dead, because then he would have all the money which until now had been doled out to him in bits and pieces.

She was astonished a little to find herself stronger than he, to discover that she could push him back into the bed. She tried to behave quietly, naturally, without any sign of strain or emotion.

She kept saying, "No, Albert, you mustn't. You're too weak. I tell you it's nothing but a revenue boat." Then she found herself calling "Mees Opp! Mees Opp!" and the door opened and Mees Opp came in.

But by then he was weak and exhausted and lay back mumbling to himself, his face wet with sweat. The sound of the motor went on sputtering and then halting and she thought wildly, "Will it never go away? I must tell Clapton not to bring it here because the noise disturbs the patient." To Mees Opp she said, "He heard the revenue cutter and thought it was something else. I told him he mustn't try to get out of bed."

Mees Opp bent over him urging him to be quiet, but he would not look at her but only at his wife. Presently he managed to say, "Are you telling the truth?"

"Of course I'm telling the truth. Why should I lie?"

Then he was quiet again, and Mees Opp said, "You mustn't excite yourself like this. If you do, you won't be able to see your wife. Now you must rest again. Your wife will go away and let you sleep."

But he answered stubbornly, like a small child, "No, I want her here by me till I go to sleep."

The motor was going now and suddenly the sound changed and it moved off, with Clapton aboard, on his way among the islands to find the best sites for piers and warehouses and petrol tanks. The sound of the motor had a kind of horror for her.

She said, "It's all right, Albert. I'll stay till you're asleep," and to Mees Opp, she said, "It's all right. He'll be quiet. I'll keep him in order."

Once he opened his eyes and looked at her simply, frankly, in a way that was new to her, and she thought, "It is awful. It's horrible." For she saw suddenly that with the clairvoyance of illness and perhaps of death he saw and understood things which he could not have known otherwise. He knew somehow that he was betrayed, that he was alone, and he had chosen to turn to her.

Closing his eyes he reached out with one hand to touch her hand, and she remained there seated on the edge of the bed, uncomfortable, hot, miserable, wanting to escape as much from her own sense of shame as from the sight of Groton who made her conscious of it. It was not that he had become a good man or that he had changed now in illness with death so near at hand, but that the imminence of death had given him a kind of dignity which he had never had before and turned him human as he had never been. And now she saw herself very clearly for the first time as she had been through

the years of their life together; she saw herself with all her shallowness and triviality, her passion for luxury and sensation, her faithlessness and neurotic searching. Alone in that room she saw herself and Albert not as Lord and Lady Groton with money and prestige and importance, but simply as a man and a woman, stripped of everything, simply two human creatures who had failed miserably in everything, and that, somehow, brought him nearer to her than he had ever been.

She did not know how long she remained there, but she knew that once when quietly she tried to escape from him and so from herself, he had opened his eyes and looked at her and she had been forced to pretend that she was only going to the window to adjust the shutter so that he might have more air. She returned to the bed and again his hand reached out to touch hers, not to clasp it, but simply to touch it. The contact of his flesh to hers was full of pain as if his touch burned her and she thought, "Even now with all he knows. With everything he suspects, he still thinks me better than I am," for at that moment it seemed to her that it was impossible to sink lower than she had been through all the years they had spent together.

And then after a long time he seemed to sleep and the hand slipped away from hers and quietly, terrified lest she disturb and waken him, she slipped from the side of the bed and went softly out of the room into the room where Mees Opp was.

On the broad face of Mees Opp there was a new look which had not been there before as if she too had suddenly divined that he was to die in spite of anything they could do for him.

Lady Groton said, "I knew it would be bad for him."

“It would have been worse if you had not seen him. He would have fussed without resting all day. You mustn’t reproach yourself with that.” Without speaking, but by something which passed between them, they conveyed to each other that they both knew he was finished.

Mees Opp said, “I think he will sleep now for a time, perhaps for the rest of the day.”

“I will tell that Mr. Clapton not to bring the launch here beneath the window.”

“That’s difficult,” said Mees Opp. “He will be able to hear it even far away among the islands. If he wakens again I will give him something to make him sleep. His heart is very sound and it’s better that he be quiet.”

So she left Mees Opp and went back to her own room, and even though she took a sleeping draught she slept only fitfully, waking and falling asleep again, frightened and filled with dread of something she could not define. Certainly it was not the death of Albert, for during the time she had sat there by him on the bed she had come to understand that it was better for him to die than to go on living, surrounded by betrayals and disappointments. He should die now when his power was absolute and his wealth immeasurable. That was what he would have wanted if he had had the choice.

Late in the afternoon when the sun was already sinking into the Indian Ocean, she was awakened by the sound of shouting and confusion which came from somewhere belowstairs and almost at once she leaped out of the bed thinking, “Something terrible is happening! Perhaps something terrible is happening to Tom!” and throwing a wrapper about her, she ran into the hallway to the head of the great stairs, and at the same time there came from the great

hall below the sound of a pistol shot. From the top of the stairs she saw the whole scene. On the floor lay Groton, dressed in pyjamas and near him a revolver. Rasmussen was there and Mees Opp and Léah and the *ayah* and two of the bearers.

Mees Opp was calling out to Rasmussen, “Help me to get him upstairs again.”

She ran down the stairs, and as she reached the bottom, Mees Opp, who was still struggling to raise Groton, turned and said, “It is all right. Nothing has happened.”

Together Mees Opp and Rasmussen managed to get the sick man up the stairs. He was shaking now with a chill and he kept muttering incoherent speeches of which only a word was distinguishable now and then ... words and names ... like “betrayal” and “Deakin” and “Dantry.” He tried to struggle and escape, but he was too weak now and too impotent. There was a kind of sickening horror in the scene of which Lady Groton was acutely aware ... the horror of the staring terrified eyes of the bearers, of Rasmussen’s sullen anger over this new confusion and disturbance, of Groton’s helplessness, and the greedy, gloating evil look in the eyes of Léah who followed them all the way to the very side of Groton’s bed. It was Mees Opp who discovered her, and turning, she said, “Go away, Léah, there is nothing for you to do here.”

Léah looked back at her with hatred and then she said, vindictively, “He is evil. He will never go away,” and vanished from the room.

When he was quiet once more in the bed, Mees Opp sent the others away all save Lady Groton. To her she said, “I

thought Bates was with him. I was lying down for a little time. I don't know where he got the revolver.”

“He always has one with him wherever he goes. What did he mean to do?”

“I don't think he knew what he meant to do. It was delirium, anger, about everything. He'll be all right now. I won't leave him. You can go back to your room. It will be all right.”

But Mees Opp did know what he meant to do. She knew that he had got a muddled idea that it was Dantry who had betrayed him to Lord Deakin and in delirium he had set out to kill him.

When Lady Groton had gone, Mees Opp sent one of the bearers for hot water, but in a few moments the boy returned saying that there were no servants in the kitchen, because they had been terrified by the sight and sound of the pistol and had all run away. And Léah too had disappeared. Rasmussen had looked everywhere for her but could not find her. He himself was downstairs in the kitchen preparing the hot water. It would be ready in a few minutes. Rasmussen, the boy said, had sworn at him and driven him from the room.

A little later when Mees Opp sent for Bates, the boy returned saying that he too had disappeared, that no one had seen him for hours, and when she sent Rasmussen himself to find Bates, the hotelkeeper, sullen and glowering, returned to say that he was nowhere on the island.

In her own room Lady Groton realized that it was already long after the usual hour when she crossed to Dantry's house, and she thought, “He will be wondering why I have not come.” And then she saw that after all it was impossible for

her to join him tonight. With Albert dying she could not go away leaving him alone with Mees Opp. Already, in her happiness, she had behaved shabbily enough; there were, after all, things which she could not do. So she decided to send him a note explaining why she had not come, but even while she was writing it she thought, "No, a note is no good. He will want to see me. I will go myself for a little while and explain what is happening and then come back again. That will do no one any harm." Even to see Tom for a few moments had become to her a pleasure, a necessity, worth all the years of her life that had gone before.

So she tore up the note and while she was dressing there was a knock at the door and Mees Opp came in.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," she said, "but have you seen Bates?"

"No, isn't he here?"

"The bearer tried to find him and then Rasmussen went to look himself. Rasmussen says that he is nowhere on the island and that nobody has seen him for hours."

For a moment Lady Groton was silent and again she was frightened, for now it seemed to her that anything at all might happen in this strange place. Then she said, "It's very odd. I don't think he's been off the island since we came here. Did you look in his room?"

"Yes. I went myself. He wasn't there. There wasn't even any baggage."

At twilight Dantry went to the cookhouse to start making the supper for the two of them. He worked for a long time preparing the vegetables and mixing the complicated curry as Silas had taught him to do. In the heat and stillness he worked, waiting for the moment when she would come along the path to join him, and presently when she did not appear he grew alarmed and went twice to the landing stage in the hope of seeing the *wallum* boat poled by the decrepit boatmen on its way from the hotel to the island, and at last when there was no sign of her he went to the terrace and lighted the lantern which was, he knew, visible from the hotel.

He had no desire to cross the channel, to go to the hotel in search of her. He did not want to see Rasmussen or that snob Lansbury, or even Mees Opp, and so he waited, thinking, "Perhaps he has wakened and forbidden her to leave. Perhaps he has been abusing her," and he told himself that if she did not appear in ten minutes he would go to the hotel and bring her back himself, by force if necessary, this time for good and always, never to return. It did not matter if Groton died; it did not matter what scandal followed. For he was changed now; he had been changing ever since that night when he had returned to find her asleep on the Indian bed.

Then while he stood peering across the channel he noticed something metallic which glittered among the cushions in the light from the old lantern, and crossing to the Indian bed he picked up the pistol which Maria had left behind. He knew it at once as Sandy's old-fashioned lugger and at once he divined how it had come there, at least that it must have been

brought there by Maria. Perhaps the act was a part of some hocus-pocus which Léah had taught her. And at the same time he was alarmed because the sight of the pistol brought back to him the uneasy feeling of dread which he had forgotten in the happiness of the last four days. And he thought, "There is some dirty work about! Anything might happen to her in this bloody place!" and leaving the pistol on the table he went down the stairs to the edge of the water, and there in the hot stillness he heard the sound of water rushing past the prow of a boat, and in a moment out of the blackness against the glow of light from the Grand Oriental Hotel appeared the silhouettes of her boat and its two ancient boatmen.

She had seen him standing on the little landing stage before her own boat emerged from the darkness, and at sight of his straight form against the glow from the old lantern the feeling of depression left her and she was wildly, hysterically happy, thinking, "He is all right! Nothing has happened to him. If anything had happened to him now I would be as bad as possible ... really bad. I would destroy myself and everyone else with evil."

He leaped aboard the boat to help her ashore saying, "Where have you been? What has happened? Why are you late?" and she answered, "I'll tell you all that. There is so much to tell."

And as the *wallum* boat drew away into the darkness again she tried to explain to him about Groton, about the arrival of Clapton, about the scene in the great hall. She said, "I can't stay tonight. I must go back at once."

"Why?"

"Because he is dying."

“Did Mees Opp say so?”

“No, but I know he is dying....”

“I don’t want you to leave me ever again. It doesn’t matter whether he dies or not. It doesn’t matter what happens.”

The speech brought her a wild sense of happiness, but she knew too that she must go back. She thought, “I mustn’t be a fool. I mustn’t lose my head now.” And she said, “I shouldn’t have come at all. I meant to send you a note. But I couldn’t help myself. I had to come.” And then she saw the pistol lying on the table and thought, “Now I shall have to tell him about her.”

In the excitement and delight of the first night she had forgotten the whole incident, and then afterward she had not told him because she did not want to alarm him and because the story would bring the figure of the girl once more between them. She picked up the pistol and he said, “It’s mine. I was just cleaning it to take along when we go away.”

At that she smiled and said, “It’s nice of you not to want to alarm me, but it isn’t your pistol. I know who it belongs to and how it came here,” and she told him the whole story of Maria’s visit, and when she had finished he said, looking at her with wonder, “Weren’t you afraid?”

“No, because then it didn’t matter whether I lived or not. You had gone away I thought forever.” And after a little silence she said, “Clapton says she has gone mad,” and a silence fell between them and she thought, “Perhaps it will always be like this. Perhaps she will always be there between us no matter where we go.”

Then he put his arm about her and said, “She isn’t mad. That isn’t true and you mustn’t think it. I went off today in

the canoe to find out....” Then quickly he released her and said, “What you need is a drink. I’ll fetch some champagne.”

“I can’t stay,” she repeated. “I have to go back ... just tonight. I’m afraid he may waken and ask for me. I talked to him today.”

“What did he say?”

“Nothing. He was confused and afraid.”

“How afraid?”

For a moment she did not answer him and then she said, “Afraid of weakness, of illness, of defeat, of death....” And as she spoke her eyes filled with hysterical tears.

“You can’t be sorry for him.”

“I don’t know whether it’s because I’m sorry for him. It’s something deeper and wider than that. It’s as if I couldn’t help crying because we’re all such bloody fools ... you and me and that ass Lansbury and even Bates and the *ayah* with her fisherman ... everybody in the world but....”

“But who?”

“Mees Opp.”

Mockingly he said, “You and your Mees Opp. She’s getting to be an obsession. I’m beginning to think it’s Mees Opp and not that hag Léah who has the evil eye. What has she been doing to you?”

“I don’t know, only she’s made me ashamed. I can’t explain or understand anything any more.”

“Probably it’s the heat.”

“The heat doesn’t get inside of you,” and she thought, “I must go back, but I want to stay. I want to stay here forever.” She felt weak and helpless now for the first time. She had never loved him so much as now that he had changed.

It was true that Léah had disappeared from the island. In the confusion that followed the scene with Lord Groton in the great hall, she slipped away in the twilight in her canoe across the lagoons to that island bordered by mangrove swamps where the bloody image of the River God was hidden. There, alone, she sacrificed to him the last goat that remained. By the time the ceremony was finished it was quite dark, and in the darkness she said a prayer asking the god to bring her courage and strength and success in overcoming the charms of the white men and most of all the charms of Mees Opp who was making the great *burra sahib* well again, for in her heart she believed that the magic of Mees Opp was even stronger than that of the River God.

Then in the darkness she made her way back again through the mud to the canoe, and once away from the dark island she turned toward Sandy's compound on the mainland. Her canoe she kept moving in the shadow of the shore where the light from the fire in Sandy's compound or the light from the moon would not reveal it, black against the water. When she had come within a few feet of the landing stage she stopped the canoe with a single stroke, and after waiting for a moment, she raised her head and began to howl like a jackal. Three times she howled and then waited, watching the compound and the figures seated about the fire gossiping and playing drums. When none of them showed any signs of alarm she howled again three times and again waited, and then in the shadows of the palm trees on the shore she saw the figure of Maria approaching, moving from clump to clump of bougainvillea and bamboo, always on the side away

from the little group about the fire. Then slowly she moved her canoe inshore and Maria stepped into it.

The girl was trembling, and Léah said in a voice of authority, in the language of the place, “You must not be frightened. You must not tremble,” and the girl answered, “I’m not frightened.”

Then before they moved off from the shadow of the shore, Léah took up a parcel wrapped in newspaper from the bottom of the canoe and tearing open the paper she took out a revolver. Carefully she explained to the girl how it worked, and when Maria understood, Léah took cartridges and loaded the revolver and then said, “Leave it here beside me until the time comes,” and taking up the paddle she turned the canoe and set out again back toward the islands, moving always in the shadow of the land. In front of her Maria sat very still, quiet now, no longer trembling, as if hypnotized by the narrow black eyes of Rasmussen’s wife.

On the terrace Lady Groton stayed on and on. She ate none of the curry but took a little fruit and drank champagne, aware that long ago she should have returned to the hotel. With each moment she grew more troubled, and now and then in the midst of their talk she would sit quite silent for a moment filled with dread. The drums no longer sounded romantic but a little sinister. The heat, that still damp heat of the night, pressed down upon her with the feeling of solid weight. And presently she said "I'm frightened. I'm afraid now to go back to the hotel."

"Why? There is nothing to be afraid of."

"I don't know why. Something awful is going to happen."

"It's only the heat and your nerves. You never need be afraid again. You're safe so long as you're with me."

"Oh, it isn't that anything is going to happen to us. We're lucky. We've always been too lucky."

In silence, he put his arm about her and drew her close to him, and in silence they remained like that listening to the drums, and slowly she began to feel less taut, less frightened, as if she drew strength from him. She found herself thinking, "Maybe it is nerves. If only it would rain. If something would only break the terrible heat." And she imagined floods and torrents of water descending, bringing with it coolness and peace. Presently she said, "I am serious about going back now. What time is it?" He leaned back a little to see the awful noisy old clock inside the door of his bedroom, and at the same moment there was the sound of two explosions in quick succession. The sound came to them muffled by the heavy air, from the direction of the Grand Oriental Hotel. She felt

his body stiffen suddenly, and she said, "It's only Clapton's launch," and after a second he answered, "That wasn't a launch. It was a revolver shot."

Before he finished speaking the sound of two more shots came to them from across the water, and then the sound of excited voices calling and then again silence. For a long time they listened without speaking and then quietly she said, "What is it? For God's sake, what is it?"

He stood up, saying, "Perhaps we'd better go over there," and hysterically she said, "No, you mustn't." And at the same time she thought, "Bates has shot Clapton to cover up his villainy," but immediately she knew that Bates was not like that. He was a coward and there was no violence in his villainy.

Dantry said, "You stay here. I will go over. Something has happened."

"No, if you go, I'll go with you."

Then he said, "There is someone coming across the channel in a canoe," and together they stood peering over the rail of the balcony, and suddenly out of the darkness, above the sound of the drums, a voice came toward them from the canoe, "*Sahib! Sahib!*" The high-pitched voice of an islander shrill now with fear like the voice of a frightened animal.

In the language of the islands Tom called out, "I'm here. What is it?" And the voice came back, "The *burra sahib* has been shot."

She understood the words "*burra sahib*," and in a whisper she said, "Albert. Why Albert? It couldn't be Albert."

Back across the water went Dantry's voice. "Tell them I am coming."

Turning to her, he said, “Will you stay here?”

“No, that is out of the question.”

“Then come along.”

Together they hurried down the stairs to the canoe, never saying a word. All the way across the channel while Dantry paddled frantically they were silent, because there was nothing to say, because whatever there was to say had no need of being spoken. She thought, “I was right. I knew it! Poor Albert! Why should he have shot himself? Why should he have done it when he was going to die anyway?” And she was aware of a kind of horror at the sound of the shots, two isolated reports and then two more, as if he had had to finish what he had begun messily. Yet she could not quite believe that Albert had tried to kill himself. He was not the sort. He was the kind that went on fighting even after everything was lost.

At the landing stage he helped her out of the canoe. There in the shadows stood one of Groton’s boatmen. As they passed him he said, in his own tongue, “She is shot too.”

“Who?” asked Dantry.

“Maria....”

Out of the brief exchange of words, she understood only the word “Maria.” Dantry did not stop but started running along the path. Following him she kept crying out, “What did he say? For God’s sake, what did he say?” But Dantry did not wait. By the time she reached the great arched doorway he was halfway up the stairs, his sandals gone, running in his bare feet. That was something she remembered long afterward—the horror of those bare, hurrying feet just ahead of her on the stairs.

By the time she had reached the top of the stairs he had disappeared, but she went at once to Groton's room. As she reached it the door opened, and the ruddy bulk of Clapton's form blocked the doorway. He said, "Don't come in. He is dead. There is nothing you can do."

"But I want to come in. I must come in."

She did not know what had happened, but she knew that she must enter the room, that she must look at Albert dead, that she must go through the whole horror whatever it was, for which she was responsible, for which in the end she must atone. She had to go through it to the very end, for her own sake and Tom's to atone and save what they had found.

"Please," she said, "I must. I have to.... I must. Don't you understand? I'm not afraid. I have to." And as Clapton gave way to her she said, "What is it? What has happened?"

"That woman ... Maria, shot him and then herself."

Wildly she thought, "She must have believed it was my room. She must have done it by mistake. It is me she must have hated. It must have been me she meant to shoot."

She was in the room then, and by the yellow light of the lamp she saw the figure of Albert lying in the teakwood and mother-of-pearl bed exactly as she had left him, as if he were still asleep. His hand lay outstretched as it had been when he reached out to touch her for comfort; only on the thin cotton sheet there was a small spot of red. Tom was standing by the bed, and just behind him was Rasmussen looking white and shaken, and Lansbury looking effete and ridiculous in Cossack pyjamas of black satin. And one of the coolies was in the room and the *ayah*, the white of her big eyes showing in terror. Behind her Clapton whispered, "He was asleep. He never knew what happened."

“But why? Why?” And then she heard Tom saying, “Where is Maria?” And Clapton, who suddenly seemed officious and horrible to her, said, “In the other room. That half-caste doctor woman is with her. She wanted to speak to you. That’s why I sent to the islands.”

Tom, it seemed to her, had changed into a Tom she had not seen before, ever. The color had gone out of the sun-tanned face so that he looked green and ill in the yellow light from the paraffin lamp, but the jaw had become hard at the angle and the lips drawn and full of determination. Even in the midst of all the horror and confusion she was conscious of how much she loved him, that she had never loved him so much as in this very moment.

He looked at her quickly and said, “You’d better go to your own room.” She started to speak, meaning to refuse, and then she thought, “No, that will only worry him,” so she pretended to go, thinking all the time, “I can’t funk it now. I’ve got to go through it to the very end.” His face softened a little and he said, “I’ll come to you in a moment. I’ve got to clear up this bloody mess,” and then he hurried past her into the room where Mees Opp sat by the side of the wounded Maria.

When he was gone she turned to Clapton and said, “Please go away and take that coolie and the *ayah* with you. I don’t see why they’re here.” Clapton started to protest, but she said, not weak and frightened any more but angry now, because she loathed him for his officiousness and vulgarity, “No, no. Don’t you understand? It’s my husband. I want to be alone here. I’m quite all right. If you have any sense or feeling, get out of here.”

In her voice there was a kind of fury which awed Clapton, overcoming even his feeling that all women and especially

this one, were fools and incompetent. He said to the *ayah* and the coolie, “Clear out of here,” and then went himself, closing the door behind him.

When he had gone she went slowly to the side of the bed, a little frightened, but aware that she must do what she was doing. Gently she sat on the edge where she had sat that very morning while he fell asleep, and then slowly her hand moved toward his until she touched it. Then softly as if he could still hear her, she said, “Why couldn’t we have been decent toward each other? Why couldn’t we have understood each other? Why couldn’t we have known that we were both weak and silly and vain and human? Why was it that we were never even friends?”

She saw everything now, their folly, their madness, their vanity, their weakness; but now it was too late.

In Mees Opp's room Dantry was kneeling beside the bed where Maria lay dying, with her great eyes turned toward him. By the window, turned a little away, as if she were looking out across the islands, stood Mees Opp. She had done her best to save the life of the girl, and he did not mind her standing there now in the room with them. He did not mind even her hearing what Maria was saying to him, painfully, with little gasps, because the moment he saw Mees Opp he knew at once that it was all right. In the strain, the intensity of the moment, he saw with a kind of clairvoyance what it was Alix had seen in her.

Maria was saying, slowly, painfully: "It was because I wanted you to be happy." The eyelids trembled for an instant, and then with a great effort she managed to say, "Léah said you would not be happy unless you were both free ... now you are free ... you are both free ... and no one is to blame ... but me."

Then suddenly she was dead, and he was holding her hand saying, "You mustn't die, Maria, you mustn't. It's going to be all right..." Then he turned to Mees Opp and cried, "You must do something. You must save her," and Mees Opp coming toward him, took the wrist of Maria in her great fat hand and said, "There isn't anything that can be done. There isn't anything that can save her."

Then she crossed the hands of Maria on her breast after the fashion of the Christian people of the country and said to him, "You'd better go in to her. There isn't anything you can do here."

Rising from beside the bed, he asked, “Did you hear what she said?”

“Yes,” said Mees Opp.

Fury colored his voice. “It was that bitch, Léah. It was her doing.”

Mees Opp only repeated, “Go to her. That’s the good you can do now. I’ll stay here.”

He said, “Where is the revolver?”

“There on the table.”

Crossing the room, he picked it up and looked at it slowly, carefully. Then he said, “It isn’t Sandy’s gun. It’s Rasmussen’s. It was Léah who gave it to her. We’ve got to find Léah. She’s the guilty one.”

“I’ll find Léah. You go in to her now.”

And when he had gone, Mees Opp thought, “So Léah *did* help the River God to keep the harbor closed. It was Léah who made her shoot him when I stopped her poisoning him. I should have guessed what she was doing. I should have known because I know these people. It’s my fault too. The others couldn’t have guessed, but I should have known.” And after a long time she thought, “It’s the fault of so many people and so many things. It began so long ago....”

In Groton’s room he found Alix still sitting on the edge of the horrible teakwood bed, touching Groton’s hand, looking down at him with a curious look of wonder in her face, fascinated, as if she were a little mad. She did not even look at him as he crossed the room toward her. Then he raised her gently from the edge of the bed and said, “You mustn’t do that.”

“It’s all right,” she said. “I’m quite calm....”

Then gently he drew the cheap cotton sheet over the dead face of Groton, and she thought, with a sudden hysterical desire to giggle, “It’s true. It’s just like the cinema. They *do* cover the faces of people when they die.”

Then he put his arms about her and they stood thus in silence for a long time, and presently he said, “You mustn’t take it too hard. It was that woman Léah who did it.” And he told her as quietly, as quickly as he could what had happened in the other room. When he had finished, she said quietly, “No, it wasn’t like that. That wasn’t the reason. I know what it was. It came to me while I was sitting here alone with him. It happened because we were the three most selfish people in the world—you and I and Albert. None of us ever thought of anything save what we wanted. And now we’ve had to pay for it. Everything came out of that, and it isn’t finished yet.”

In a quiet voice he said, “It was the worst thing that could have happened ... the very worst. I suppose that we’ll get through it ... somehow.”

“That is part of it.”

And she began to cry suddenly, hysterically almost in silence, her body shaking while he tried to comfort her, and even in the midst of the hysteria which was like a physical illness, she experienced faint intimations of happiness that it was Tom who was comforting her, that now in the crisis and the tragedy, he was strong again. He had changed from the moment the sound of the pistol shots had come to them muffled by the hot damp air across the water.

She thought, “I’m not alone now. I’ll never be alone again, no matter what happens.” But near her, near them both, in the yellow half-light, lay Albert and that poor girl, Maria, dead

now. And they would always be there, quite near to her and Tom, as long as they lived.

Then the door of Mees Opp's room opened softly and Mees Opp came in. She said, "There's no use in staying here. Go to your own room. I'll take care of everything. I'll give you something to take to make you sleep." But Lady Groton thought, "No. I can't do that. It would be cheating. I cannot sleep. I mustn't cheat. I must see it through to the end."

Dantry knew too that there was no sleep for him, so when he had taken her to her own room, through a corridor filled with wide-eyed islanders, he left her, saying, "I'll be back presently. Lie down and try to sleep." She wanted to say, "Don't leave. I can't be left alone ... now." But she only said, "If you need me, come for me ... whatever it is, no matter what."

"I shan't need you. There's Mees Opp."

"You see, I was right about Mees Opp."

But when they tried to find Léah she had disappeared, and when he asked Rasmussen where she was, Rasmussen answered sullenly that he did not know.

“She had been going out every night somewhere among the islands.”

“I know where she has been going, and you do too.”

Rasmussen was silent. “She drove Maria to do it. Maria told me.” It was odd how calm he felt now, how suddenly capable and detached like a Grand Inquisitor.

Sullenly Rasmussen, who once had been his friend, looked away from him and said, “It wasn’t all her fault.”

“It’s enough her fault to be a case for the police.”

“She never wanted him here or you either,” said Rasmussen. “She was right. You didn’t belong here.”

And when he asked for Bates no one could find him either, and then a coolie who listened to the questioning came forward still shaken with terror and said, “White man coolie gone away.”

“Gone away where?” asked Dantry.

“By train ... today ... noontime.”

So that was it. Rats deserting the ship. For a moment he felt a wild desire to get into his canoe and set out among the islands to find Léah and bring her back, but almost at once he knew that finding her would be an impossibility. She knew coves and inlets and lagoons which he had never discovered. By tomorrow she would be in the high mountains, thinking that the death of Groton had saved Nivandrum. She would be in some jungle village where they would never find her until

everything was finished and it was too late to do anything about it. And in his heart he too knew that it wasn't altogether Léah who was to blame. What Rasmussen had said was true. It wasn't any good running Léah to earth. Even she hadn't got what she wanted, because Clapton was here now and the harbor would be opened and they would perhaps pull down his own house and build petrol tanks where it had once stood. It did not matter now, any of that. He and Alix would have to leave Nivandrum and never see it again.

And suddenly feeling baffled and collapsed, he left the great vaulted hall filled with peering islanders, and the sullen Rasmussen and Lansbury in his ridiculous black satin pyjamas hysterically excited and offering asinine advice ... the great vaulted hall where he had seen the lovely island for the first time through the arched doorway and thought, "I have come home. I have found peace."

As he reached the foot of the lovely stairway, he saw Sandy coming through the doorway, a Sandy, collapsed like himself, no longer plump and humorous, but dazed and hurt, and he thought, "He is coming to fetch Maria, whom he loved, who is dead now. And it is my fault that she is dead. That I can never escape or forget so long as I live. No, I can't speak to him now ... not now ... perhaps some day. I'm not yet man enough for that."

Sandy did not see him, because the whole room and all the silent awe-stricken faces in it were blurred and indistinct. Without speaking to them he went up the stairs to find Mees Opp. She would help him. She would know what to do.

In her room Dantry found Lady Groton still awake. She was sitting by the light at her dressing table with a packet of papers in front of her. She was very white and holding in her hand a letter.

When he came in he said, "What are you doing?"

"I couldn't lie in the darkness. I lighted the lamp. Look," and she handed him a note. "Bates has gone away."

"I know."

Then he read the letter. It was short, and said:

Lady Groton,

When Your Ladyship receives this I will have gone away. I am leaving with you some papers which may be of interest. I witnessed the will. His Lordship did not like Mr. Lansbury so he said nothing to him about it. I did not send your telegram because I had already sent one three days before. You were right in what you thought. But what I did was not criminal. I cannot go to jail for it. I am going to retire. If you should want to reach me, send a letter care of the Postmaster, Manchester. I could explain to you why I did a great many things, but perhaps you might not understand. The world is changing and men like His Lordship are finished. The world has had enough of them. By the time he is well enough to persecute me, I will be disappeared. Please believe in my good wishes for yourself.

Herbert Ernest Bates.

When he had finished reading, he looked at her and said, "What does he mean by the telegram?"

Then quietly, like a child at confessional, she told him the whole horrible story of the hysterical betrayal, of her shame, of the wild effort to undo what she thought she had done, of her disgust and loathing of herself. The confession brought her relief, for now he knew everything about her, the very worst, that she could be and had been as horrible as it was possible for a wife to be.

“It was only a mistake that I was not to blame. I had meant to betray him. I had meant to ruin him. I hated him ... or at least I hated him until yesterday.”

“What changed you then?”

“I don’t know.... It was you partly ... and Mees Opp too, I think.”

“You were right about Mees Opp. She has the good eye just as that bitch Léah has the evil eye.”

She turned again to the dressing table and said, “But that’s not all. He knew everything. He must have known. But he never said anything all those years.... He never did anything until the night before he was ill. We had a quarrel then and I hurt him, deliberately. He must have gone back to his room and written those names.”

She handed him a sheet of note paper on which was written:

Packy (Boxer)
Sir Henry Leatham
Pierre de Couloisy
Deauville 1931 (?)
Monte Carlo (Tom Burchard)

He looked away from the list down at her and she said, “He was right about some of them. He may have guessed, or

Bates may have hinted. Bates knew too much. It's all true. I was trying to find what I never found until now." The tears came into her eyes and she said, "Now you know. If you never want to see me again, it doesn't matter. I'll understand. There isn't anything more that I can tell you, except that I've been mean and trivial and selfish and vain and a cheat."

He looked at her for a long time and then said, "We're pretty much of a cut, my dear ... and anyway, whether we like it or not, we're chained together now for the rest of our lives by what has happened. Wherever we go, whatever happens to us, the story will follow us, and it won't get any better because it's confused and mixed up, and it won't improve with retelling. It'll grow worse and worse."

Then there was a knock at the door and when Dantry called out, "Who is it?" Mees Opp answered, and Lady Groton whispered, "Tell her to come in."

When she saw Lady Groton sitting by the light, she said, "You should be in the bed." Then firmly she said, "You mustn't have silly ideas. You're doing no one any good by sitting up, reproaching yourself. I've brought you this. Take it and rest, and then tomorrow we shall see."

Dantry said, "She's right. You must take it," and Lady Groton obeyed him, too weary, too weak to resist any longer.

Then Mees Opp said, "And now I'll leave you both. I can manage everything. You had better stay with her until she is asleep. And if you need anything come to me."

She went out and Lady Groton lay on the bed while Dantry sat beside her, stroking her forehead until presently she closed her eyes. The murmur and confusion had died away belowstairs and there was only the distant sound of a drum or two among the islands. Just before she went to sleep she

opened her eyes and said, taking his hand and pressing,
“We’ve got to climb out of it somehow, Tom....”

In the morning when Mees Opp came in she found them there together, Lady Groton on the bed, Dantry asleep sitting up in the chair by her side.

When she wakened it was dark, and the only light came through the window from a fire somewhere outside, near at hand. Confused, she looked about her and in the shadows discovered Tom sitting beside her, and then hazily she remembered all the horror of the night before, where she was, and why Tom was there in her room in the Grand Oriental Hotel.

She heard him saying, "That's better now. You've slept for hours ... the whole of a day."

"Have you been here?"

"Nearly all the time. I slept too."

"Where is the fire?"

"It's a funeral pyre. It's Groton's."

Then, feeling strangely embarrassed, she was silent, and he said, "Mees Opp took charge of it. She's managed everything."

"It was good of her, but I've had enough of that."

"Of what?"

"Of having people do things for me. It's always been like that. Someone has always done the unpleasant things."

"I know what you mean."

"We've got to get clear of that ... the first thing of all."

"We're going away tomorrow."

"Where are we to go?"

"To the capital. You see, there has to be a kind of inquest. It isn't as if Groton were just a beachcomber who came to a violent end."

She wanted to say, "I won't go, they can't make me. I can't stand any more," but she knew that it was no good saying that. The thing had to be faced to the very end. She would have to go through it all, even if it went on forever, until she died. In a way it was only beginning. Coldly now, her nerves rested, she considered what lay ahead of them ... the horrible inquest and the newspapers which, pray God, they would never see, and all the stories that would go the rounds of London, New York and Paris, Deauville and Cannes and Monte Carlo. Bitterly she thought, "Well, it's made the summer for a lot of people. What a lot they'll have to talk about!" And as Tom had said, the stories would grow more and more complicated and evil and decadent. Then quite clearly she saw that never again could they go back into that world, that never again would she enter a hotel or a restaurant or step aboard a ship, even here in the East, without knowing that all about her people were saying, "That is Lady Groton. You remember the awful story? And that's the man with her, who was her lover at the time. It was his native wife who did the shooting." Maybe it was better that both of them die too, because it wasn't only the story that would always follow them, but the memory of that horrible night with Albert dead on the teakwood bed and the girl Maria dying in the next room.

Outside in the stifling heat the flames of the pyre faded a little and she thought, "What shall I do with his ashes? I can send them to his brother—that brother he never allowed me to see."

And then she was aware of a roaring sound, strange and terrifying. It came suddenly without warning, and at the same time the light from the distant flames went out and the room

was in darkness. Beside her Tom pressed her hand and she heard him saying, "It's the rain. The monsoon has broken."

It was a wonderful sound which eased her nerves and seemed suddenly to envelop them both, shutting out all else. They sat thus hand in hand for a long time, and presently Tom said, "I've been thinking what we'll do."

"Yes."

"I talked to Mees Opp. We must hide away."

"Forever. For always," she said.

"We can go to her."

"She has enough troubles without us."

"She wanted it.... D'you know what she said? She said that there were illnesses of the spirit as well as of the body. She said people sometimes died when the spirit was ill. She said it often happened out here."

"I know," she said. The freshness of the rain had come into the room now, changing everything. The heat no longer seemed to bear down like a heavy weight and through the windows drifted a fine mist. Then there was a knock at the door and Mees Opp came in quietly. She said, "I've brought you some port and some broth. It will be a little cooler now that the rains have broken."

She went away again, and presently against the horizon over on the mainland near Sandy's compound a new fire appeared, leaping up suddenly, undefeated even by the downpour of the monsoon rain. The light from the flames was at once reflected and diffused by the falling rain so that the glow seemed to fill all the sky and force its light even in the rooms of the Grand Oriental Hotel. Dantry turned his head slowly and sat watching it, thinking, "It will always be

there, for the rest of my life, haunting me ... the light of those two fires.”

They took three days to make the journey by lagoon and across country to the capital, going in easy stages because of the heat and the rains, sleeping the night in the huts of the island people. It was a dreary journey. Even the healthy cheerfulness of Mees Opp who accompanied them, made it no better, but only a little worse, for the cheerfulness of one so active, who occupied herself only with the troubles of others, only made their weariness and despair the more powerful. There were moments when the optimism of the half-caste doctor seemed almost obscene, and moments in the darkness when Lady Groton and Dantry, each lying awake and alone with the sound of the pouring monsoon rain on the thatched roof, wanted no longer to live, when they would have died but for the fact that God had given them everything, including bodies that were healthy and strong in spite of all their dissipation and recklessness. To her it seemed a kind of punishment that she should be forced to live when she preferred fever and death. They had each other now perhaps forever, but each was as ashamed now of the other as of himself. That was the worst of all, and the best too.

It was Mees Opp who proposed that they should stay with her at the hospital.

“It won’t be luxurious or even comfortable,” she said, “and I suppose the Magistrate will want you to stay in his house. You might be happier there.”

But they both rejected the idea of staying with any European now, to be pitied and discreetly questioned, to be patronized and made the butts of morbid curiosity. Anything

was better than that ... even hard beds and rains and insects and fever.

The news of Mees Opp's return went before them, and when they arrived at last at the hospital compound they found the place decorated with flowers and paper garlands and banners, all dripping in the rains, and a waiting crowd of men and women and small children which sang for no apparent reason, since Mees Opp was a half-caste of Dutch origin, "God Save the King" to the accompaniment of an awful brass band. The crowd hung garlands on Mees Opp until her heavy figure was hidden beneath jasmine and marigold and temple flowers. They cheered and danced, and Dantry and Lady Groton behind her, jostled and ignored, watched in silence. And presently Mees Opp and the swarthy Mrs. Badoki took them into Mees Opp's little house which was to be theirs until the whole ugly business was finished and they went away.

The Magistrate made the inquest as easy as possible, but Lord Groton had been a great and powerful man in the West, and his death by violence, even for the sake of his wife and her lover, could not be passed over lightly. And so the torture had to be gone through again, all the hideous questions about Lady Groton's rendezvous each night with Dantry, the questions about Maria, about Lord Groton's illness and the sinister Léah; and with each question, in spite of anything the Magistrate could do to soften the answers, the case became more and more clear against them, not of guilt or at least of direct guilt in the actual death of Groton and Maria, but of their own weakness and selfishness, their own ruthlessness and self-indulgence. And in spite of anything the Magistrate

could do, each question, each answer made it clearer that it was they who had killed Groton and Maria.

The awful business was over at last, and when it was finished the Magistrate shook hands with them and again offered them the hospitality of his own house until they were ready to leave. But again, thanking him, they refused and together left the court and set out for the hospital compound.

As they came down the steps the rain ceased for a little time, and the sun, coming out, turned the drops of water on the drenched trees to quicksilver. Along the narrow road from the Magistrate's court to the hospital they walked slowly in silence, half-suffocated by the terrible heat. It was Lady Groton who spoke first. She said, "And now ... what are we to do? Where are we to go?" They could not go now to Bombay or Singapore or Madras or Colombo, to be pounced upon by journalists, to be stared at by every passenger on the ship, by every man and woman in every hotel and bar. They could board no train, no ship.

Almost shyly Dantry said, "We could stay here."

"That's what I want to do."

"Perhaps that's the best of all." And after a moment he added, "I don't mean for a day or two."

"No, longer then, for weeks...."

They would stay here hidden away until they were rested and the story had grown dim. Neither of them believed that it would ever be altogether forgotten, any more than they believed that they would themselves be able to forget what had happened in that hideous *chambre de luxe* of the Grand Oriental Hotel. But the memory of it might grow dim, as things did with time.

They were silent for a time, walking side by side, close to each other in the hot sun, and presently ahead of them far down the long avenue of Java fig trees the bedraggled arch of welcome erected to celebrate the return of Mees Opp came into sight. At the same time they both became aware that they were no longer alone. Behind them at a little distance a crowd followed, a crowd made up of islanders, naked urchins, and old men and women and among them a half-dozen half-castes. It was the crowd which had waited outside the office of the Magistrate during the hearing, squatting on its haunches under the banyan trees in the rain, chewing betel nut and gossiping and turning over and over the bits of news passed out to it from time to time by the scarlet-clad *chuprassi*. At each house, from out of each pathway, new individuals came out to swell its numbers. It seemed to be a quiet and orderly crowd: the only sound which came from it was an occasional laugh raised by a gibe or quip in a dialect which Dantry knew too slightly to be able to understand.

For three or four minutes the two of them walked in silence, each pretending to the other that he was unaware of the disorderly troop of natives which followed them. Then from behind them there arose a solitary howl of derision and then another, and unconsciously, against their wills they walked a little more rapidly. But the rabble behind them walked faster too, keeping always just a little way off. Still neither of them looked at the other, and Dantry thought, "Not even here ... we can't even stay here."

Then he felt something strike his shoulder a glancing blow and a half-rotten mango fell between them. Then another and another and an over-ripe papaya struck him full in the back,

the rotten pulp spreading over his shirt, and between his teeth he said fiercely, "Run! Go ahead! I'll follow you."

But she would not leave him, and there was nothing to do now but to turn and face the mob. This he did, threatening them in the tongue of the Nivandrum islanders. But he spoke with an awkward accent and the dialect sounded strange here in the capital, and although the crowd halted its advance as he turned, his threats were only answered by jeers and shouts of laughter. Among the tormentors he recognized suddenly two of Sandy's boys, and then among the dark faces, one stood out clearly, apart from all the others. He knew the close-set black eyes and the long nose. It was Léah.

Then a mango struck Lady Groton's hat, and his nerves gave way. Hysterically, he turned and shouted at her, "Go on. For God's sake, go on and stop being a heroic ass!"

She looked at him for the fraction of a second with an expression of hurt astonishment in her blue eyes. Another rotten mango struck her and then she turned and ran. And as she ran she saw waddling toward her on tired, sore feet through the bedraggled flowers and garlands of the arch of welcome, the heavy, ugly figure of Mees Opp who had been born with nothing, coming out to rescue them.

[The end of *Bitter Lotus* by Louis Bromfield]