EDITH MAUDE HULL

THE SHADOW OF THE EAST

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Содержание

E. M. Hull

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"The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."
Ezekiel xviii 2.

CHAPTER I

The American yacht lying off the harbour at Yokohama was brilliantly lit from stem to stern. Between it and the shore the reflection of the full moon glittered on the water up to the steps of the big black landing-stage. The glamour of the eastern night and the moonlight combined to lend enchantment to a scene that by day is blatant and tawdry, and the countless coloured lamps twinkling along the sea wall and dotted over the Bluff transformed the Japanese town into fairyland.

The night was warm and still, and there was barely a ripple on the water. The Bay was full of craft—liners, tramps, and yachts swinging slowly with the tide, and hurrying to and fro sampans and electric launches jostled indiscriminately.

On board the yacht three men were lying in long chairs on the deck. Jermyn Atherton, the millionaire owner, a tall thin American whose keen, clever face looked singularly youthful under a thick crop of iron-grey hair, sat forward in his chair to light a fresh cigar, and then turned to the man on his right. "I guess I've had every official in Japan hunting for you these last two days, Barry. If I hadn't had your wire from Tokio this morning I should have gone to our Consul and churned up the whole Japanese Secret Service and made an international affair of it," he laughed. "Where in all creation were you? I should hardly have thought it possible to get out of touch in this little

old island. The authorities, too, knew all about you, and reckoned they could lay their hands on you in twelve hours. I rattled them up some," he added, with evident satisfaction.

The Englishman smiled.

"You seem to have done," he said dryly. "When I got into Tokio this morning I was fallen on by a hysterical inspector of police who implored me with tears to communicate immediately with an infuriated American who was raising Cain in Yokohama over my disappearance. As a matter of fact I was in a little village twenty miles inland from Tokio—quite off the beaten track. There's an old Shinto temple there that I have been wanting to sketch for a long time."

"Atherton's luck!" commented the American complacently. "It generally holds good. I couldn't leave Japan without seeing you, and I must sail tonight."

"What's your hurry—Wall Street going to the dogs without you?"

"No. I've cut out from Wall Street. I've made all the money I want, and I'm only concerned with spending it now. No, the fact is I—er—I left home rather suddenly."

A soft chuckle came from the recumbent occupant of the third chair, but Atherton ignored it and hurried on, twirling rapidly, as he spoke, a single eyeglass attached to a thin black cord.

"Ever since Nina and I were married last year we've been going the devil of a pace. We had to entertain every one who had entertained us—and a few more folk besides. There was

something doing all day and every day until at last it seemed to me that I never saw my wife except at the other end of a dining table with a crowd of silly fools in between us. I reckoned I'd just about had enough of it. Came on me just like a flash sitting in my office down town one morning, so I buzzed home right away in the auto and told her I was sick of the whole thing and that I wanted her to come away with me and see what real life was like—out West or anywhere else on earth away from that durned society crowd. I'll admit I lost my temper and did some shouting. Nina couldn't see it from my point of view.

"My God, Jermyn! I should think not," drawled a sleepy voice from the third chair, and a short, immensely stout man struggled up into a sitting position, mopping his forehead vigorously. "You've the instincts of a Turk rather than of an enlightened American citizen. You've not seen my sister-in-law yet, Mr. Craven," he turned to the Englishman. "She's a peach! Smartest little girl in N'York. Leader of society—dollars no object—small wonder she didn't fall in with Jermyn's prehistoric notions. You're a cave man, elder brother—I put my money on Nina every time. Hell! isn't it hot?" He sank down again full length, flapping his handkerchief feebly at a persistent mosquito.

"We argued for a week," resumed Jermyn Atherton when his brother's sleepy drawl subsided, "and didn't seem to get any further on. At last I lost my temper completely and decided to clear out alone if Nina wouldn't come with me. Leslie was not doing anything at the time, so I persuaded him to come along

too."

Leslie Atherton sat up again with a jerk.

"*Persuaded*!" he exploded, "A dam' queer notion of persuasion. Shanghaied, I call it. Ran me to earth at the club at five o'clock, and we sailed at eight. If my man hadn't been fond of the sea and keen on the trip himself, I should have left America for a cruise round the world in the clothes I stood up in—and Jermyn's duds would be about as useful to me as a suit of reach-me-downs off the line. Persuasion? Shucks! Jermyn thought it was kind of funny to start right off on an ocean trip at a moment's notice and show Nina he didn't care a durn. Crazy notion of humour." He lay back languidly and covered his face with a large silk handkerchief.

Barry Craven turned toward his host with amused curiosity in his grey eyes.

"Well?" He asked at length.

Atherton returned his look with a slightly embarrassed smile.

"It hasn't been so blamed funny after all," he said quietly. "A Chinese coffin-ship from 'Frisco would be hilarious compared with this trip," rapped a sarcastic voice from behind the silk handkerchief.

"I've felt a brute ever since we lost sight of Sandy Hook," continued Atherton, looking away toward the twinkling lights on shore, "and as soon as we put in here I couldn't stand it any longer, so I cabled to Nina that I was returning at once. I'm quite prepared to eat humble pie and all the rest of it—in fact I shall

relish it," with a sudden shy laugh.

His brother heaved his vast bulk clear of the deck chair with a mighty effort.

"Humble pie! Huh!" he snorted contemptuously. "She'll kill the fatted calf and put a halo of glory round your head and invite in all the neighbours 'for this my prodigal husband has returned to me!'" He ducked with surprising swiftness to avoid a book that Atherton hurled at his head and shook a chubby forefinger at him reprovingly.

"Don't assault the only guide, philosopher and friend you've got who has the courage to tell you a few home truths. Say, Jermyn, d'y'know why I finally consented to come on this crazy cruise, anyway? Because Nina got me on the phone while you were hammering away at me at the club and ordered me to go right along with you and see you didn't do any dam foolishness. Oh, she's got me to heel right enough. Well! I guess I'll turn in and get to sleep before those fool engines start chump-chumping under my pillow. You boys will want a pow-wow to your two selves; there are times when three is a crowd. Good-bye, Mr. Craven, pleased to have met you. Hope to see you in the Adirondacks next summer—a bit more crowded than the Rockies, which are Jermyn's Mecca, but more home comforts—appeal to a man of my build." He slipped away with the noiseless tread that is habitual to heavy men.

Jermyn Atherton looked after his retreating figure and laughed uproariously.

"Isn't he the darndest? A clam is communicative compared with Leslie. Fancy him having that card up his sleeve all the while. Nina's had the bulge on me right straight along."

He pushed a cigar-box across the wicker table between them.

"No, thanks," said Craven, taking a case from his pocket. "I'll have a cigarette, if you don't mind."

The American settled himself in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, staring at the harbour lights, his thoughts very obviously some thousands of miles away. Craven watched him speculatively. Atherton the big game-hunter, Atherton the mine-owner, he knew perfectly—but Atherton the New York broker, Atherton married, he was unacquainted with and he was trying to adjust and consolidate the two personalities.

It was the same Atherton—but more human, more humble, if such a word could be applied to an American millionaire. He felt a sudden curiosity to see the woman who had brought that new look into his old friend's keen blue eyes. He was conscious of an odd feeling of envy. Atherton became aware at last of his attentive gaze and grinned sheepishly.

"Must seem a bit of a fool to you, old man, but I feel like a boy going home for the holidays and that's the truth. But I've been yapping about my own affair all evening. What about you—staying on in Japan? Been here quite a while now, haven't you?"

"Just over a year."

"Like it?"

"Yes, Japan has got into my bones."

"Lazy kind of life, isn't it?"

There was no apparent change in Atherton's drawl, but Craven turned his head quickly and looked at him before answering.

"I'm a lazy kind of fellow," he replied quietly.

"You weren't lazy in the Rockies," said Atherton sharply.

"Oh, yes I was. There are grades of laziness."

Atherton flung the stub of his cigar overboard and selecting a fresh one, cut the end off carefully.

"Still got that Jap boy who was with you in America?"

"Yoshio? Yes. I picked him up in San Francisco ten years ago. He'll never leave me now."

"Saved his life, didn't you? He spun me a great yarn one day in camp."

Craven laughed and shrugged. "Yoshio has an Oriental imagination and quite a flair for romance. I did pull him out of a hole in 'Frisco but he was putting up a very tidy little show on his own account. He's the toughest little beggar I've ever come across and doesn't know the meaning of fear. If I'm ever in a big scrap I hope I shall have Yoshio behind me."

"You seem to be pretty well known over yonder," said Atherton with a vague movement of his head toward the shore.

"It is not a big town and the foreign population is not vast. Besides, there are traditions. I am the second Barry Craven to live in Yokohama—my father lived several years and finally died here. He was obsessed with Japan."

"And with the Japanese?"

"And with the Japanese."

Atherton frowned at the glowing end of his cigar.

"Nina and I ran down to see Craven Towers when we were on our wedding trip in England last year," he said at length with seeming irrelevance. "Your agent, Mr. Peters, ran us round."

"Good old Peters," murmured Craven lazily. "The place would have gone to the bow-wows long ago if it hadn't been for him. He adored my mother and has the worst possible opinion of me. But he's a loyal old bird, he probably endowed me with all the virtues for your benefit."

But Atherton ignored the comment. He polished his eyeglass vigorously and screwed it firmly into position.

"If I was an Englishman with a place like Craven Towers that had been in my family for generations," he said soberly, "I should go home and marry a nice girl and settle down on my estate."

"That's precisely Peters' opinion," replied Craven promptly with a good-tempered laugh. "I get reams from him to that effect nearly every mail—with detailed descriptions of all the eligible debutantes whom he thinks suitable. I often wonder whether he runs the estate on the same lines and keeps a matrimonial agency for the tenants."

Atherton laughed with him but persisted.

"If your own countrywomen don't appeal to you, take a run out to the States and see what we can do for you."

The laugh died out of Craven's eyes and he moved restlessly in his chair.

"It's no good, Jermyn. I'm not a marrying man," he said shortly.

Atherton smiled grimly at the recollection of a similar remark emphatically uttered by himself at their last meeting.

For a time neither spoke. Each was conscious of a vague difference in the other, developed during the years that had elapsed since their last meeting—an intangible barrier checking the open confidence of earlier days.

It was growing late. The sampans had nearly all disappeared and only an occasional launch skimmed across the harbour.

A neighbouring yacht's band that had been silent for the last hour began to play again—appropriately to the vicinity—Puccini's well-known opera. The strains came subdued but clear across the water on the scent-laden air. Craven sat forward in his chair, his heels on the ground, his hands loosely clasped between his knees, whistling softly the Consul's solo in the first act. From behind a cloud of cigar smoke Atherton watched him keenly, and as he watched he was thinking rapidly. He was used to making decisions quickly—he was accustomed to accepting risks at which others shied, but the risk he was now contemplating meant the taking of an unwarranted liberty that might be resented and might result in the loss of a friendship that he valued. But he was going to take the risk—as he had taken many another—he had known that from the first. He screwed his eyeglass firmer into his eye, a characteristic gesture well-known on the New York stock market.

"Ever see *Madame Butterfly*? he asked abruptly.

"Yes."

Atherton blew another big cloud of smoke.

"Damn fool, Pinkerton," he said gruffly, "Never could see the attraction myself—dancing girls—almond eyes—and all that sort of thing."

Craven made no answer but his whistling stopped suddenly and the knuckles of his clasped hands whitened. Atherton looked away quickly and his eyeglass fell with a little tinkle against a waistcoat button. There was another long pause. Finally the music died away and the stillness was broken only by the soft slap-slap of the water against the ship's side.

Atherton scowled at his immaculate deck shoes and then seized his eyeglass again decisively.

"Say, Barry, you saved my life in the Rockies that trip and I guess a fellow whose life you've saved has a pull on you no one else has. Anyhow I'll chance it, and if I'm a damned interfering meddler it's up to you to say so and I'll apologise—handsomely. Are you in a hole?"

Craven got up, walked away to the side of the yacht and leaning on the rail stared down into the water. A solitary sampan was passing the broad streak of moonlight and he watched it intently until it passed and merged into the shadows beyond.

"I've been the usual fool," he said at last quietly.

"Oh, hell!" came softly from behind him. "Chuck it, Barry. Clear out right now—with us. I'll put off sailing until tomorrow."

"I—can't."

Atherton rose and joined him, and for a moment his hand rested on the younger man's shoulder.

"I'm sorry—dashed sorry," he murmured. "Gee!" he added with a half shy, half humorous glance, wiping his forehead frankly, "I'd rather face a grizzly than do that again. Leslie keeps telling me that my habit of butting in will land me in the family vault before my time."

Craven smiled wryly.

"It's all right. I'm grateful—really. But I must hoe my own row."

The American swung irresolutely on his heels.

"That's so, that's so," he agreed reluctantly. "Oh damn it all," he burst out, "have a drink!" and going back to the table he pounded in the stopper of a soda-water-bottle savagely.

Craven laughed constrainedly as he tilted the whisky into a glass.

"Universal panacea," he said a little bitterly, "but it's not my method of oblivion."

He put the peg tumbler down with a smothered sigh.

"I must be off, Jermyn. It's time you were getting under way. It's been like the old days to have had a yarn with you again. Good luck and a quick run home—you lucky devil."

Atherton walked with him to the head of the gangway and watched him into the launch.

"We shall count on you for the Adirondacks in the summer,"

he called out cheerily, leaning far over the rail.

Craven looked up with a smile and waved his hand, but did not answer and the motor boat shot away toward the shore.

He landed on the big pier and lingered for a moment to watch the launch speeding back to the yacht. Then he walked slowly down the length of the stage and at the entrance found his rickshaw waiting. The two men who were squatting on the ground leaped up at his approach and one hurriedly lit a great dragon-painted paper lantern while the other held out a light dustcoat. Craven tossed it into the rickshaw and silently pointing toward the north, climbed in. He leaned back and lit a cigarette. The men sprang away in a quick dog-trot along the Bund, and then started to climb the hillside at the back of the town. They wound slowly up the narrow tortuous roads, past numberless villas, hung with lights, from which voices floated out into the quiet air.

The moon was brilliant and the night wonderfully light, but Craven paid no attention to the beauty of the scene or to the gaily lit villas. Atherton's invitation had been curiously hard to decline and even now an almost overpowering desire came over him to bid his men retrace their steps to the harbour. Then hard on the heels of that desire came thoughts that softened the hard lines that had gathered about his mouth. He pitched his cigarette away as if with it he threw from him an actual temptation, and resolutely put out of his mind Atherton and the suggestion of flight.

Still climbing upward the rickshaw passed the last of the

outlying European villas and turned down a side road where there were no houses. For a couple of miles the men raced along a level track cut on the side of a hill that rose steeply on the one hand and on the other fell away precipitously down to the sea until they halted with a sudden jerk beside a wooden gateway with a creeper-covered roof on either side of which two matsu trees stood like tall sentinels.

Waiting by the open gate was a short, powerful looking Japanese dressed in European clothes. He came forward as Craven alighted and gathering up the coat and hat from the floor of the rickshaw, dismissed the Japanese who vanished further along the road into the shadows. Then he turned and waited for his master to precede him through the gateway, but Craven signed to him to go on, and as the man disappeared up the garden path he crossed the road and standing on the edge of the cliff looked down across the harbour. The American yacht was the biggest craft of her kind in the roads and easily discernible in the moonlight. The brilliant deck illumination had been shut off and only a few lights showed. He gave a quick sigh. Atherton's coming had been like a bar drawn suddenly across the stream down which he was drifting. If Jermyn had only come last year! The envy he had felt earlier in the evening increased. He thought of the look he had seen in Atherton's eyes and the intonation of his voice when the American spoke of the wife to whom he was returning. What did love like that mean to a man? What factor in Atherton's strenuous and adventurous life had affected

him as this had done? What were the ethics of a love that rose purely above physical attraction—environment—temperament; a love that grew and strengthened and absorbed until it ceased to be a part of life and became life itself—the main issue, the fundamental essence?

And as Craven watched he saw the yacht steam slowly down the bay. He drew a deep breath.

"You lucky, lucky devil," he whispered again and swung on his heel. He paused for a moment just within the gateway where on the only level part of the garden lay a miniature lake, hedged round with bamboo, clumps of oleander, fed by a little twisting stream that came tumbling and splashing down the hillside in a series of tiny waterfalls, its banks fringed with azalea bushes and slender cherry trees. Then he walked slowly along the path that led upward, winding to and fro through clusters of pines and cedars and over mossy slopes to the little house which stood in a clearing at the top of the garden surrounded by fir trees and backed by a high creeper-clad palisade.

From the wide verandah, built out on piles over the terrace, there was an uninterrupted view of the harbour. He climbed the four wooden stairs and on the top step turned and looked again down on to the bay. The yacht was now invisible, but in his mind he followed her slipping down toward the open sea. And Atherton —what were his thoughts while pacing the broad deck or lying in his cabin listening to the screw whose every revolution was taking him nearer the centre of his earthly happiness? Were they

anything like his own, he wondered, as he stood there bareheaded in the moonlight, looking strangely big and incongruous on the balcony of the little fairylike doll's house?

He shrugged impatiently. The comparison was an insult, he thought bitterly. Again he stared out to sea, straining his eyes; trying vainly to pick up the yacht's lights far down the bay. It was very still, a tiny breeze whispered in the pines and drifted across his face the sweet perfume of a flowering shrub. A cicada chirped in the grass at his feet.

Then behind him came a faint rustle of silk. He heard the soft sibilant sound of a breath drawn quickly in.

"Will my lord honourably be pleased to enter?" the voice was very low and sweet and the English very slow and careful.

Craven did not move.

"Try again, O Hara San."

A low bubble of girlish laughter rippled out.

"Please to come in, Bar-ree."

He turned slowly, looking bigger than ever by contrast with the slender little Japanese girl who faced him. She was barely seventeen, dainty and fragile as a porcelain figure, wholly in keeping with her exquisite setting and yet the flush on her cheeks —free from the thick disfiguring white paste used by the women of her country—and the vivid animation of her face were oddly occidental, and the eyes raised so eagerly to Craven's were as grey as his own.

He held out his arms and she fluttered into them with a little

breathless murmur, clinging to him passionately.

"Little O Hara San," he said gently as she pressed closer to him. He tilted her head, stooping to kiss the tiny mouth that trembled at the touch of his lips. She closed her eyes and he felt an almost convulsive shudder shake her.

"Have you missed me, O Hara San?"

"It is a thousand moons since you are gone," she whispered unsteadily.

"Are you glad to see me?"

Her grey eyes opened suddenly with a look of utter content and happiness.

"You know, Bar-ree. Oh, Bar-ree!"

His face clouded, the teasing word that rose to his lips died away unspoken and he pressed her head against him almost roughly to hide the look of trusting devotion that suddenly hurt him. For a few moments she lay still, then slipped free of his arms and stood before him, swaying slightly from side to side, her hands busily patting her hair into order and smiling up at him happily.

"Being very rude. Forgetting honourable hospitality. You please forgive?"

She backed a few steps toward the doorway and her pliant figure bent for an instant in the prescribed form of Japanese courtesy and salutation. Then she clasped both hands together with a little cry of dismay. "Oh, so sorree," she murmured in contrition, "forgot honourable lord forbidding that."

"Your honourable lord will beat you with a very big stick if you forget again," said Craven laughing as he followed her into the little room. O Hara San pouted her scarlet lips at him and laughed softly as she subsided on to a mat on the floor and clapped her hands. Craven sat down opposite her more slowly. In spite of the months he had spent in Japan he still found it difficult to adapt his long legs to the national attitude.

In answer to the summons an old armah brought tea and little rice cakes which O Hara San dispensed with great dignity and seriousness. She drank innumerable cupfuls while Craven took three or four to please her and then lit a cigarette. He smoked in silence watching the dainty little kneeling figure, following the quick movements of her hands as she manipulated the fragile china on the low stool before her, the restraint she imposed upon herself as she struggled with the excited happiness that manifested itself in the rapid heaving of her bosom, and the transient smile on her lips, and a heavy frown gathered on his face. She looked up suddenly, the tiny cup poised in her hand midway to her mouth.

"You happy in Tokio?"

"Yes."

It was not the answer for which she had hoped and her eyes dropped at the curt monosyllable. She put the cup back on the tray and folded her hands in her lap with a faint little sigh of disappointment, her head drooping pensively. Craven knew instinctively that he had hurt her and hated himself. It was like

striking a child. But presently she looked up again and gazed at him soberly, wrinkling her forehead in unconscious imitation of his.

"O Hara San very bad selfish girl. Hoping you very *un*happy in Tokio," she said contritely.

He laughed at the naive confession and the gloom vanished from his face as he stood up, his long limbs cramped with the uncongenial attitude.

"What have you been doing while I was away?" he asked, crossing the room to look at a new kakemono on the wall.

She flitted away silently and returned in a few moments carrying a small panel. She put it into his hands, drawing near to him within the arm he slipped round her and slanted her head against him, waiting for his criticism with the innate patience of her race.

Craven looked long at the painting. It was a study of a solitary fir tree, growing at the edge of a cliff—wind-swept, rugged. The high precipice on which it stood was only suggested and far below there was a hint of boundless ocean—foam-crested.

It was the tree that gripped attention—a lonely outpost, clinging doggedly to its jutting headland, rearing its head proudly in its isolation; the wind seemed to rustle through its branches, its gnarled trunk showed rough and weather-beaten. It was a poem of loneliness and strength.

At last Craven laid it down carefully, and gathering up the slender clasped hands, kissed them silently. The mute homage

was more to her than words. The colour rushed to her cheeks and her eyes devoured his face almost hungrily.

"You like it?" she whispered wistfully.

"Like it?" he echoed, "Gad! little girl, it's wonderful. It's more than a fir tree—it's power, tenacity, independence. I know that all your work is symbolical to you. What does the tree mean—Japan?"

She turned her head away, the flush deepening in her cheeks, her fingers gripping his.

"It means—more to me than Japan," she murmured. "More to me than life—it means—you," she added almost inaudibly.

He swept her up into his arms and carrying her out on to the verandah, dropped into a big cane chair that was a concession to his western limbs.

"You make a god of me, O Hara San," he said huskily.

"You are my god," she answered simply, and as he expostulated she laid her soft palm over his mouth and nestled closer into his arms.

"I talk now," she said quaintly. "I have much to tell."

But the promised news did not seem forthcoming for she grew silent again, lying quietly content, rubbing her head caressingly from time to time against his arm and twisting his watch-chain round her tiny fingers.

The night was very quiet. No sound came from within the house, and without only the soft wind murmuring in the trees, cicadas chirping unceasingly and the little river dashing down

the hillside, splashing noisily, broke the stillness. Nature, the sleepless, was awake making her influence felt with the kindly natural sounds that mitigate the awe of absolute silence—sounds that harmonized with the peacefulness of the little garden. Tonight the contrast between Yokohama, with its pitiful western vulgarity obtruding at every turn, and the quiet beauty of his surroundings struck Craven even more sharply than usual. It seemed impossible that only two miles away was Theatre Street blazing and rioting with all its tinsel tawdriness, flaring lights and whining gramophones. Here was another world—and here he had found more continuous contentment than he had known in the last ten years. The garden was an old one, planned by a master hand. By day it was lovely, but by night it took on a weird beauty that was almost unreal. The light of the moon cast strong black shadows, deep and impenetrable, that hovered among the trees like sinister spirits lurking in the darkness.

The trees themselves, contorted in the moonlight, assumed strange forms—vague shapes played in and out among them—the sombre bushes seemed alive with peeping faces. It was the Garden of Enchantment, peopled with a thousand djinns and demons of Old Japan. The atmosphere was mysterious, the air was saturated with sweet heavy scents.

Craven was a passionate lover of the night. The darkness, the silence, the mystery of it appealed to him. He was familiar with its every phase in many climates. It enticed him for long solitary rambles in all the countries he had visited during the

ten years of his wanderings. Nature, always fascinating, was then to him doubly attractive, doubly alluring. To the night he went for sympathy. To the night he went for inspiration. It was during his midnight wanderings that he seemed to get nearer the fundamental root of things. It was to the night he turned for consolation in times of need. It was then that he exorcised the demon of unrest that entered into him periodically. All his life the charm of the night had called to him and all his life he had responded obediently. As a tiny boy one of his earliest recollections was of slipping out of bed and, evading nurses and servants, stealing out into the park at Craven Towers to seek the healing of the night for some childish heartache. He had crept down the long avenue and climbing the iron fence had perched on the rail and watched the deer feeding by the light of the moon until all the sorrow had been chased away and his baby heart was singing with a kind of delirious happiness that he did not understand and that gave way in its turn to a natural childish enjoyment of an adventure that was palpably forbidden. He had slid down from the fence and retraced his steps up the avenue until he came to the path that led to the rose garden and eventually to the terrace near the house. He had trotted along on his little bare feet, shivering now and then, but more from excitement than from cold, until he had come to the long flight of stone steps that led to the terrace. He had laboriously climbed them one foot at a time, his toes curling at the contact with the chill stone, and at the top he had halted suddenly, holding

his breath. Close to him was a tall indistinct figure wrapped in dark draperies. For a moment fear gripped him and then an immense curiosity swamped every other feeling and he moved forward cautiously. The tall figure had turned suddenly and it was his mother's sad girlish face that looked down at him. She had lifted him up into her arms, wrapping her warm cloak round his slightly clad little body—she had asked no questions and she had not scolded. She had seemed to understand, even though he gave no explanation, and it was the beginning of a sympathy between them that had developed to an unusual degree and lasted until her death, ten years ago. She had hugged him tightly and he had always remembered, without fully understanding in his childhood, the half incredulous, half regretful whisper in his ear, "Has it come to you so soon, little son?"

The hereditary instinct, born thus, had grown with his own growth from boyhood to manhood until it was an integral part of himself.

And the lure of the eastern nights—more marvellous and compelling even than in colder climates—had become almost an obsession.

Little O Hara San, firm believer in all devils, djinns and midnight workers of mischief, had grown accustomed to the eccentricities of the man who was her whole world. If it pleased him to spend long hours of the night sitting on the verandah when ordinary folk were sensibly shut up in their houses she did not care so long as she might be with him. No demon in Japan

could harm her while she lay securely in his strong arms. And if unpleasant shadows crept uncomfortably near the little house she resolutely turned her head and hiding her face against him shut out all disagreeable sights and slept peacefully, confident in his ability to keep far from her all danger. Her love was boundless and her trust absolute. But tonight there was no thought of sleep. For three long weeks she had not seen him and during that time for her the sun had ceased to shine. She had counted each hour until his return and she could not waste the precious moments now that he had really come. The djinns and devils in the garden might present themselves in all their hideousness if it so pleased them but tonight she was heedless of them. She had eyes for nothing but the man she worshipped. Even in his silent moods she was content. It was enough to feel his arms about her, to hear his heart beating rhythmically beneath her head and, lying so, to look up and see the firm curve of his chin and the slight moustache golden brown against his tanned cheek.

She stirred slightly in his arms with a little sigh of happiness, and the faint movement woke him from his abstraction.

"Sleepy?" he asked gently.

She laughed gaily at the suggestion and sat up to show how wide awake she was. The light from a lantern fell full on her face and Craven studied it with an intensity of which he was hardly aware. She bore his scrutiny in silence for a few moments and then looked away with a little grimace.

"Thinking me very ugly?" she hazarded tentatively.

"No. Very pretty," he replied truthfully. She leaned forward and laid her cheek for a second against his, then cuddled down into his arms again with a happy laugh. He lit a cigarette and tossed the match over the verandah rail.

"What is your news, O Hara San?"

She did not speak for a moment, and when she did it was no answer to his question. She reached up her hands and drawing his head down toward her, looked earnestly into his eyes.

"You loving me?" she asked a little tremulously.

"You know I love you," he answered quietly.

"Very much?"

"Very much."

Her eyes flickered and her hands released their hold.

"Men not loving like women," she murmured at length wistfully. And then suddenly, with her face hidden against him, she told him—of the fulfilling of all her hope, the supreme desire of eastern women, pouring out her happiness in quick passionate sentences, her body shaking with emotion, her fingers gripping his convulsively.

Craven sat aghast. It was a possibility of which he had always been aware but which with other unpleasant contingencies he had relegated to the background of his mind. He had put it from him and had drifted, careless and indifferent. And now the shadowy possibility had become a definite reality and he was faced with a problem that horrified him. His cigarette, neglected, burnt down until it reached his fingers and he flung it away with a sharp

exclamation. He did not speak and the girl lay motionless, chilled with his silence, her happiness slowly dying within her, vaguely conscious of a dim fear that terrified her. Was the link that she had craved to bind them closer together to be useless after all? Was this happiness that he had given her, the culminating joy of all the goodness and kindness that he had lavished on her, no happiness to him? The thought stabbed poignantly. She choked back a sob and raised her head, but at the sight of his face the question she would have asked froze on her lips.

"Bar-ree! you are not angry with me?" she whispered desperately.

"How could I be angry with you?" he replied evasively. She shivered and clenched her teeth, but the question she feared must be asked.

"Are you not glad?" it was a cry of entreaty. He did not speak and with a low moan she tried to free herself from him but she was powerless in his hold, and soon she ceased to struggle and lay still, sobbing bitterly. He drew her closer into his arms and laid his cheek on her dark hair, seeking for words of comfort, and finding none. She had read the dismay in his face, had in vain waited for him to speak and no tardy lie would convince her now. He had wounded her cruelly and he could make no amends. He had failed her at the one moment when she had most need of him. He cursed himself bitterly. Gradually her sobs subsided and her hand slipped into his clutching it tightly. She sat up at last with a little sigh, pushing the heavy hair off her forehead wearily,

and forcing herself to meet his eyes—looked at him sorrowfully, with quivering lips.

"Please forgive, Bar-ree," she whispered humbly and her humility hurt him more even than her distress.

"There is nothing to forgive, O Hara San," he said awkwardly, and as she sought to go this time he did not keep her. She walked to the edge of the verandah and stared down into the garden. Problematical ghosts and demons paled to insignificance before this real trouble. She fought with herself gallantly, crushing down her sorrow and disappointment and striving to regain the control she had let slip. Her feminine code Was simple—complete abnegation and self-restraint. And she had broken down under the first trial! He would despise her, the daughter of a race trained from childhood to conceal suffering and to suppress all signs of emotion. He would never understand that it was the alien blood that ran in her veins and the contact with himself that had caused her to abandon the stoicism of her people, that had made her reveal her sorrow. He had laughed at her undemonstrativeness, demanding expressions and proofs of her affection that were wholly foreign to her upbringing until her Oriental reserve had slipped from her whose only wish was to please him. She had adopted his manners, she had made his ways her ways, forgetting the bar that separated them. But tonight the racial difference of temperament had risen up vividly between them. Her joy was not his joy. If he had been a Japanese he would have understood. But he did not understand and she must hide both joy and sorrow.

It was his contentment not hers that mattered. All through these last months of wonderful happiness there had lurked deep down in her heart a fear that it would not last, and she had dreaded lest any unwitting act of hers might hasten the catastrophe.

She glanced back furtively over her shoulder. Craven was leaning forward in the cane chair with his head in his hands and she looked away hastily, blinded with tears. She had troubled him —distressed him. She had "made a scene"—the phrase, read in some English book, flashed through her mind. Englishmen hated scenes. She gripped herself resolutely and when he left his chair and joined her she smiled at him bravely.

"See, all the djinns are gone, Bar-ree," she said with a little nervous laugh.

He guessed the struggle she was making and chimed in with her mood.

"Sensible fellows," he said lightly, tapping a cigarette on the verandah rail. "Gone home to bed I expect. Time you went to bed too. I'll just smoke this cigarette." But as she turned away obediently, he caught her back, with a sudden exclamation:

"By Jove! I nearly forgot."

He took a tiny package from his pocket and gave it to her. Girlishly eager her fingers shook with excitement as she ripped the covering from a small gold case attached to a slender chain. She pressed the spring and uttered a little cry of delight. The miniature of Craven had been painted by a French artist visiting Yokohama and was a faithful portrait.

"Oh, Bar-ree," she gasped with shining eyes, lifting her face like a child for his kiss. She leaned against him studying the painting earnestly, appreciating the mastery of a fellow craftsman, ecstatically happy—then she slipped the chain over her head and closing the case tucked it away inside her kimono.

"Now I have two," she murmured softly.

"Two?" said Craven pausing as he lighted his cigarette. "What do you mean?"

"Wait, I show," she replied and vanished into the house. She was back in a moment holding in her hand another locket. He took it from her and moved closer under the lantern to look at it. It hung from a thick twisted cable of gold, and set round with pearls it was bigger and heavier than the dainty case O Hara San had hidden against her heart. For a moment he hesitated, overcoming an inexplicable reluctance to open it—then he snapped the spring sharply.

"Good God!" he whispered slowly through dry lips. And yet he had known, known intuitively before the lid flew back, for it was the second time that he had handled such a locket—the first he had seen and left lying on his dead mother's breast.

He stood as if turned to stone, staring with horror at the replica of his own face lying in the hollow of his hand. The thick dark hair, the golden brown moustache, the deep grey eyes—all were the same. Only the chin in the picture was different for it was hidden by a short pointed beard; so was it in the miniature that was buried with his mother, so was it in the big portrait that hung

in the dining-room at Craven Towers.

"Who gave you this?" he asked thickly, and O Hara San stared at him in bewilderment, frightened at the strangeness of his voice.

"My mother," she said wonderingly. "He was Bar-ree, too. See," she added pointing with a slender forefinger to the name engraved inside the case.

A nightbird shrieked weirdly close to the house and a sudden gust of wind moaned through the pine trees. The sweat stood out on Craven's forehead in great drops and the cigarette, fallen from his hand, lay smouldering on the matting at his feet.

He pulled the girl to him and turning her face up stared down into the great grey eyes, piteous now with unknown fear, and cursed his blindness. Often the unrecognised likeness had puzzled him. He dropped the miniature and ground it savagely to powder with his heel, heedless of O Hara San's sharp cry of distress, and turned to the railing gripping it with shaking hands.

"Damn him, damn him!"

Why had instinct never warned him? Why had he, knowing the girl's mixed parentage and knowing his own family history, made no inquiries? A wave of sick loathing swept over him. His head reeled. He turned to O Hara San crouched sobbing on the matting over the little heap of crushed gold and pearls. Was there still a loop-hole?

"What was he to you?" he said hoarsely, and he did not recognise his own voice.

She looked up fearfully, then shrank back with a cry—hiding her eyes to shut out the distorted face that bent over her.

"He was my father," she whispered almost inaudibly. But it sounded to Craven as if she had shouted it from the housetop. Without a word he turned from her and stumbled toward the verandah steps. He must get away, he must be alone—alone with the night to wrestle with this ghastly tangle.

O Hara San sprang to her feet in terror. She did not understand what had happened. Her mother had rarely spoken of the man who had first betrayed and then deserted her—she had loved him too faithfully; with the girl's limited experience all western faces seemed curiously alike and the similarity of an uncommon name conveyed nothing to her for she did not realize that it was uncommon. She could not comprehend this terrible change in the man who had never been anything but gentle with her. She only knew that he was going, that something inexplicable was taking him from her. A wild scream burst from her lips and she sprang across the verandah, clinging to him frantically, her upturned face beseeching, striving to hold him.

"Bar-ree, Bar-ree! you must not go. I die without you. Bar-ree! my love—" Her voice broke in a frightened whisper as he caught her head in his hands and stared down at her with eyes that terrified her.

"Your—love?" he repeated with a strange ring in his voice, and then he laughed—a terrible laugh that echoed horribly in the silent night and seemed to snap some tension in his brain. He

tore away her hands and fled down the steps into the garden. He ran blindly, instinctively turning to the hillside track that led further into the country, climbing steadily upward, seeking the solitary woods. He did not hear the girl's shriek of despair, did not see her fall unconscious on the matting, he did not see a lithe figure that bounded from the back of the house nor hear the feet that tracked him. He heard and saw nothing. His brain was dulled. His only impulse was that of the wounded animal —to hide himself alone with nature and the night. He plunged on up the hillside climbing fiercely, tirelessly, wading mountain streams and forcing his way through thick brushwood. He had taken, off his coat earlier in the evening and his silk shirt was ripped to ribbons. His hair lay wet against his forehead and his cheek dripped blood where a splintered bamboo had torn it, but he did not feel it. He came at last to a tiny clearing in the forest where the moon shone through a break in the trees. There he halted, rocking unsteadily on his feet, passing his hand across his face to clear the blood and perspiration from his eyes, and then dropped like a log. The next moment the bushes parted and his Japanese servant crept noiselessly to his side. He bent down over him for an instant. Craven lay motionless with his face hidden in his arms, but as the Jap watched a shudder shook him from head to foot and the man backed cautiously, disappearing among the bushes as silently as he had come.

The breeze died away and it was quite still within the moonlit clearing. A broad shaft of cold white light fell directly on the

prone figure. He was morally stunned and for a long time the agony of his mind was blunted. But gradually the first shock passed and full realization rushed over him. His hands dug convulsively into the soft earth and he writhed at his helplessness. What he had done was irremediable. It was a sudden thunderbolt that had flashed across his clear sky. This morning the sun had shone as usual and everything had seemed serene to him whose life had always been easy—tonight he was wrestling in a hell of his own making. Why had it come to him? He knew that his life had been comparatively blameless. Why should this one sin, so common throughout the world, recoil on him so terribly? Why should he, among all the thousands of men who had sinned similarly, be reserved for such a nemesis? Why of him alone should such a reckoning be demanded? Surely the fault was not his. Surely it lay with the man who had wrecked his mother's life and broken her heart, the man who had neglected his duties and repudiated his responsibilities and who had been faithful to neither wife nor mistress. He was to blame. At the thought of his father an access of rage passed over Craven and he cursed him in a kind of dull fury. His fingers gripped the ground as if they were about the throat of the man whom he hated with all the strength of his being. The mystery of his father had always lain like a shadow across his life. It was a subject that his mother had refused to discuss. He shivered now when he realized the agony his perpetual boyish questions must have caused her. His petulance because "other fellows' fathers" could be produced

when necessary and were not shrouded away in unexplained obscurity. He remembered her unfailing patience with him, the consistent loyalty she had shown toward the husband who had failed her so utterly, the courage with which she had taken the absent father's place with the son whom she idolized. He understood now her intolerant hatred of Japan and the Japanese, an intolerance for which—in his ignorance—he had often teased her. One memory came to him with striking vividness—a winter evening, in the dawn of his early manhood, when they had been sitting after dinner in the library at Craven Towers—his mother lying on the sofa that had been rolled up before the fire, and himself sprawled on the hearthrug at her feet. Already tall and strong beyond his years and confident in the full flush of his adolescence he had launched into a glowing anticipation of the life that lay before him. He had noticed that his mother's answers were monosyllabic and vague, and then when he had broken off, hurt at her seeming lack of interest, she had suddenly spoken —telling him what she had all the evening nerved herself to say. Her voice had faltered once or twice but she had steadied it bravely and gone on to the end, shirking nothing, evading nothing, dealing faithfully with the whole sex problem as far as she was able—outraging her own reserve that her son might learn the pitfalls and temptations that would assuredly lie in wait for him, sacrificing her own modesty that he might remain chaste. He remembered the vivid flush that had risen to his face and the growing sense of hot discomfort with which he had listened to

her low voice; his half grateful, half shocked feeling. But it was not until he had glanced furtively at her through his thick lashes and seen her shamed scarlet cheeks and quivering downcast eyes that he had realized what it cost her and the courage that had made it possible for her to speak. He had mumbled incoherently, his face hidden against her knee, and with innate chivalry had kissed the little white hand he held between his own great brown ones—"Keep clean, Barry," she had whispered tremulously, her hand on his ruffled hair—"only keep clean."

And later on in the same evening she had spoken to him of the woman who would one day inevitably enter his life. "Be gentle to her, Barry-boy, you are such a great strong fellow, and women, even the strongest women, are weak compared with men. We are poor creatures, the best of us, we *bruise* so easily," she had said with a laugh that was more than half a sob. And for his mother's sake he had vowed to be gentle to all women who might cross his path. And how had he kept his vow? Tonight his egoism had swallowed his oath and he had fled like a coward to be alone with his misery. A great sob rose in his throat. Craven by name and craven by nature he thought bitterly and he cursed again the father who had bequeathed him such an inheritance, but as he did so he stopped suddenly for a soft clear voice sounded close to his ear. "No man need be fettered for life by an inherited weakness. Every man who is worthy of the name can rise above hereditary deficiencies." He lay tense and his heart gave a great throb and then he remembered. The voice was inward—it was only another

memory, an echo of the young mother who had died, ten years before. Overwhelming shame filled him. "Mother, Mother!" he whispered chokingly, and deep tearing sobs shook his broad shoulders. The moon had passed beyond the break in the trees and it was dark now in the little clearing and to the man who lay stripped of all his illusions the blackness was merciful. He saw himself as he was clearly—his selfishness, his arrogance, his pride, and a nausea of self-hatred filled him. The eagerness with which he had sought to lay on his father the blame of his own sin now seemed to him despicable. He would always hate the memory of the man whose neglect had killed his mother, but the responsibility for this horror rested on himself. He had made his own hell and the burden of it lay with him only. That he had never known the manner of his father's life in Japan and that during the time he had himself been living in Yokohama he had cared to make no inquiries was no excuse. He alone was to blame.

The air seemed suddenly stifling, his head throbbed and he panted breathlessly. Then as suddenly the sensation passed and he rolled over on his back with a deep sigh, his limbs relaxed, too weary to move. For a long time he lay until the first pale streaks of early dawn showed above the tree tops, then he sat up with a shiver and looked around curiously at the silent trees and bamboo clumps that had witnessed his agony. His head ached intolerably, his mouth was parched and the cut in his cheek was stiff and sore. He staggered to his feet and stood a moment holding his head in his hands and the thought of O Hara San persisted urgently.

He shivered again as the image of the girl's distraught face and pleading eyes rose before him—in a few hours he would have to go to her and the thought of the interview sickened him. But he could not go now, his appearance would terrify her, she might be asleep and he could not wake her if nature had mercifully obliterated her sorrow for a few hours. In his mad flight he had lost all sense of distance and locality, but as the dawn grew stronger he recognised his surroundings and started to tramp to his own bungalow at the top of the Bluff. He stumbled through the woods, hurrying wearily to reach home before the full light. It was still dusk when he arrived and crossing the verandah went into his bedroom and flung himself, dressed as he was, on to the bed. And the stealthy footsteps that had tracked him through the night followed softly and stopped outside the open doorway. The Jap stood for a few moments listening intently.

CHAPTER II

Craven woke abruptly a few hours later with a spasmodic muscular contraction that jerked him into a sitting position. Half dazed as yet with sleep he swung his heels to the floor and sat on the edge of the bed looking stupidly at his dusty boots and earth-stained fingers. Then remembrance came and he clenched his hands with a stifled groan. He drank thirstily the tea that was on a table beside him and went to the open window. As he crossed the room the reflection of his blood-stained haggard face, seen in a mirror, startled him. A bath and clean clothes were indispensable before he went back to the lonely little house on the hillside. He lingered for a few minutes by the window, glad of the cool morning breeze blowing against his face, trying to pull himself together, trying to brace himself to meet the consequences of his folly, trying to drag his disordered thoughts into something approaching coherence. He stared down over the bay and the sunlit waters mocked him with their dancing ripples sliding lightheartedly one after the other toward the shore. The view that he looked upon had been until this morning a never-failing source of pleasure, now it moved him to nothing but the recollection of the hackneyed line in the old hymn—"where only man is vile," and he was vile—with all power of compensation taken from him. To some was given the chance of making reparation. For him there was no chance. He could do nothing to

mitigate the injury he had done. She whom he had wronged must suffer for him and he was powerless to avert that suffering. His helplessness overwhelmed him. O Hara San, little O Hara San, who had given unstintingly, with eager generous hands. His face was set as he turned from the window and, starting to pull off his torn shirt, called for Yoshio. But no Yoshio was forthcoming and at his second impatient shout another Japanese servant bowed himself in, and, kowtowing, intimated that Yoshio had already gone on the honourable lord's errand and would there await him, and that in the meantime his honourable bath was prepared and his honourable breakfast would be ready in ten minutes.

Craven paused with his shirt half off.

"What errand?" he said, perplexed, unaware that he was asking the question audibly.

The man bowed again, with hands outspread, and gravely shook his head conveying his total ignorance of a matter that was beyond his province, but the pantomime was lost on Craven who was wrestling with his shirt and not even aware that he had spoken aloud. It was the first time in ten years' service that Yoshio had failed to answer a call and Craven wondered irritably what could have taken him away at that time in the morning, and concluded that it was some order given by himself the day before, now forgotten, so dismissing Yoshio and his affairs from his mind he signed to the still gently explaining servant to go.

His brain felt dull and tired, his thoughts were chaotic. He saw before him no clear course. Whichever way he looked at it the

horrible tangle grew more horrible. There was a recurring sense of unreality, a visionary feeling of detachment which enabled him to view the situation from an impersonal standpoint, as one criticises a nightmare, confident in the knowledge that it is only a dream. But in this case the confidence was based on nothing tangible and the illusion faded as quickly as it rose and left him confronted with the brutal truth from which there was no escape.

In the dressing room everything that he needed had been laid out in readiness for him, and he dressed mechanically with a feverish haste that struggled ineffectually with a refractory collar stud, and caused him to execrate heartily the absent valet and his enigmatical errand. Another ten minutes was lost while he hunted for his watch and cigarette case which he suddenly remembered were in the coat that he had left at the little house. Or had he searched genuinely? Had he not rather been—perhaps unconsciously—procrastinating, shrinking from the task he had in hand, putting off the evil moment? He swung on his heel violently and passed out on to the verandah. But at the head of the steps a vigilant figure rose up, bowing obsequiously, announcing blandly that breakfast was waiting.

Craven frowned at him a moment until the meaning of the words filtered through to his tired brain, then he pushed him aside roughly.

"Oh, damn breakfast!" he cried savagely, and cramming his sun helmet on his head ran down the garden path to the waiting rickshaw. It never occurred to him to wonder how it came to be

there at an unusual hour. He huddled in the back of the rickshaw, his helmet over his eyes. His nerves were raw, his mind running in uncontrollable riot. The way had never seemed so long. He looked up impatiently. The rickshaw was crawling. The slow progress and the forced inaction galled him and a dozen times he was on the point of calling to the men to stop and jumping out, but he forced himself to sit quietly, watching the play of their abnormally developed muscles showing plainly through the thin cotton garments that clung to their sweat-drenched bodies, while they toiled up the steep roads. And today the sight of the men's straining limbs and heaving chests moved him more than usual. He used a rickshaw of necessity, and had never overcome his distaste for them.

Emerging from a grove of pines they neared the little gateway and as the men flung themselves backward with a deep grunt at the physical exertion of stopping, Craven leaped out and dashed up the path, panic-driven. He took the verandah steps in two strides and then stopped abruptly, his face whitening under the deep tan.

Yoshio stood in the doorway of the outer room, his arms outstretched, barring the entrance. His face had gone the grey leaden hue of the frightened Oriental and his eyes held a curious look of pity. His attitude put the crowning touch to Craven's anxiety. He went a step forward.

"Stand aside," he said hoarsely.

But Yoshio did not move.

"Master not going in," he said softly.

Craven jerked his head.

"Stand aside," he repeated monotonously.

For a moment longer the Jap stood obstinately, then his eyes fell under Craven's stare and he moved reluctantly, with a gesture of mingled acquiescence and regret. Craven passed through into the room. It was empty. He stood a moment hesitating—indefinite anxiety giving place to definite fear.

"O Hara San," he whispered, and the whisper seemed to echo mockingly from the empty room. He listened with straining ears for her answer, for her footstep—and he heard nothing but the heavy beating of his own heart. Then a moan came from the inner room and he followed the sound swiftly. The room was darkened and for a moment he halted in the doorway, seeing nothing in the half light. The moaning grew louder and as he became accustomed to the darkness he saw the old armah crouching beside a pile of cushions.

In a second he was beside her and at his coming she scrambled to her feet with a sharp cry, staring at him wildly, then fled from the room.

He stood alone looking down on the cushions. His heart seemed to stop beating and for a moment he reeled, then he gripped himself and knelt down slowly.

"O Hara San—" he whispered again, with shaking lips, "little O Hara San—little—" the whisper died away in a terrible gasping sob.

She lay as if asleep—one arm stretched out along her side, the other lying across her breast with her small hand clenched and tucked under her chin, her head bent slightly and nestled naturally into the cushion. The attitude was habitual. A hundred times Craven had seen her so—asleep. It was impossible that she could be dead.

He spoke to her again—crying aloud in agony—but the heavily fringed eyelids did not open, no glad cry of welcome broke from the parted lips, the little rounded bosom that had always heaved tumultuously at his coming was still under the silken kimono. He bent over her with ashen face and laid his hand gently on her breast, but the icy coldness struck into his own heart and his touch seemed a profanation. He drew back with a terrible shudder.

How dared he touch her? Murderer! For it was murder. His work as surely as if he had himself driven a knife into that girlish breast or squeezed the breath from that slender throat. He was under no delusion. He understood the Japanese character too well and he knew O Hara San too thoroughly to deceive himself. He knew the passionate love that she had given him, a love that had often troubled him with its intensity. He had been her god, her everything. She had worshipped him blindly. And he had left her—left her alone with the memory of his strangeness and his harshness, alone with her heart breaking, alone with her fear. And she had been so curiously alone. She had had nobody but him. She had trusted him—and he had left her. She had trusted

him. Oh, God, she had trusted him!

His quick imagination visualised what must have happened. Frantic with despair and desperate at the seeming fulfilment of her fears she had not stopped to reason nor waited for calmer reflection but with the curious Oriental blending of impetuosity and stolid deliberation she had killed herself, seeking release from her misery with the aid of the subtle poison known to every Japanese woman. He flung his arm across the little still body and his head fell on the cushion beside hers as his soul went down into the depths.

An hour of unspeakable bitterness passed before he regained his lost control.

Then he forced himself to look at her again. The poison had been swift and merciful. There was no distortion of the little oval face, no discoloration on the fair skin. She was as beautiful as she had always been. And with death the likeness had become intensified until it seemed to him that he must have been blind beyond belief to have failed to detect it earlier.

He looked for the last time through a blur of tears. It seemed horrible to leave her to the ministrations of others, he longed to gather up the slender body in his arms and with his own hands lay her in the loveliest corner of the garden she had loved so much. He tried to stammer a prayer but the words stuck in his throat. No intercession from him was possible, nor did she need it. She had passed into the realm of Infinite Understanding.

He rose to his feet slowly and lingered for a moment looking

his last round the little room that was so familiar. Here were a few of her most treasured possessions, some that had come to her from her mother, some that he had given her. He knew them all so well, had handled them so often. A spasm crossed his face. It had been the home of the enchanted princess, shut off from all the world—until he had come. And his coming had brought desolation. Near him a valuable vase, that she had prized, lay smashed on the floor, overturned by the old armah in the first frenzy of her grief. It was symbolical and Craven turned from it with quivering lips and went out heavily.

He winced at the strong light and shaded his eyes for a moment with his hand.

Yoshio was waiting where he had left him. Craven walked to the edge of the verandah and stood for a few moments in silence, steadying himself.

"Where were you last night, Yoshio?" he asked at length, in a flat and tired voice.

The Jap shrugged.

"In town," he said, with American brevity learned in California.

"Why did you come here this morning?"

Yoshio raised eyes of childlike surprise.

"Master's watch. Came here to find it," he said nonchalantly, with an air that expressed pride at his own astuteness. But it did not impress Craven. He looked at him keenly, knowing that he was lying but not understanding the motive and too tired to try

and understand. He felt giddy and his head was aching violently—for a moment everything seemed to swim before his eyes and he caught blindly at the verandah rail. But the sensation passed quickly and he pulled himself together, to find Yoshio beside him thrusting his helmet into his hands.

"Better Master going back to bungalow. I make all arrangements, understanding Japanese ways," he said calmly.

His words, matter-of-fact, almost brutal, brought Craven abruptly to actualities. There was necessity for immediate action. This was the East, where the grim finalities must unavoidably be hastened. But he resented the man's suggestion. To go back to the bungalow seemed a shirking of the responsibility that was his, the last insult he could offer her. But Yoshio argued vehemently, blunt to a degree, and Craven winced once or twice at the irrefutable reasons he put forward. It was true that he could do no real good by staying. It was true that he was of no use in the present emergency, that his absence would make things easier. But that it was the truth made it no less hard to hear. He gave in at last and agreed to all Yoshio's proposals—a curious compound of devotion to his master, shrewd commonsense and knowledge of the laws of the country. He went quickly down the winding path to the gate. The garden hurt him. The careless splashing of the tiny waterfall jarred poignantly—laughing water caring nothing that the hand that had planted much of the beauty of its banks was stilled for ever. It had always seemed a living being tumbling joyously down the hillside, it seemed alive now

—callous, self-absorbed.

Craven had no clear impression of the run back into Yokohama and he looked up with surprise when the men stopped. He stood outside the gate for a moment looking over the harbour. He stared at the place in the roadstead where the American yacht had been anchored. Only last night had he laughed and chatted with the Athertons? It was a lifetime ago! In one night his youth had gone from him. In one night he had piled up a debt that was beyond payment. He gave a quick glance up at the brilliant sky and then went into the house. In the sitting-room he started slowly to pace the floor, his hands clasped behind him, an unlit cigarette clenched between his teeth. The mechanical action steadied him and enabled him to concentrate his thoughts. Monotonously he tramped up and down the long narrow room, unconscious of time, until at last he dropped on to a chair beside the writing table and laid his head down on his arms with a weary sigh. The little still body seemed present with him. O Hara San's face continually before him—piteous as he had seen it last, joyous as she had greeted him and thoughtful as when he had first seen it.

That first time—the memory of it rose vividly before him. He had been in Yokohama about a month and was settled in his bungalow. He had gone to the woods to sketch and had found her huddled at the foot of a steep rock from which she had slipped. Her ankle was twisted and she could not move. He had offered his assistance and she had gazed at him, without speaking, for a few

moments, with serious grey eyes that looked oddly out of place in her little oval face. Then she had answered him in slow carefully pronounced English. He had laughingly insisted on carrying her home and had just gathered her up into his arms when the old armah arrived, voluble with excitement and alarm for her charge. But the girl had explained to her in rapid Japanese and the woman had hurried on to the house to prepare for them, leaving Craven to follow more slowly with his light burden. He had stayed only a few minutes, drinking the ceremonial tea that was offered so shyly.

The next day he had convinced himself that it was only polite for him to enquire about the injured foot. Then he had gone again, hoping to relieve the tedium of her forced inactivity, until the going had become a habit. The acquaintance had ripened quickly. From the first she had trusted him, quickly losing her awe of him and accepting his coming with the simplicity of a child. She had early confided to him the story of her short life —of her solitude and friendlessness; of the mother who had died five years before, bequeathing to her the little house which had been the last gift of the Englishman who had been O Hara San's father and who had tired of her mother and left her two years after her own birth; of the poverty against which they had struggled—for the Englishman had left no provision for them; of the faithful old servant, who had been her mother's nurse; of O Hara San's discovery of her own artistic talent which had enabled her to provide for the simple wants of the little household. She

had grown up alone—apart from the world, watched over by the old woman, her mind a tangle of fairy-tales and romance—living for her art, content with her solitude. And into her secluded life had come Barry Craven and swept her off her feet. Child of nature that she was she had been unable to hide from him the love that quickly overwhelmed her. And to Craven the incident of O Hara San had come merely as a relief to the monotony of lotus-eating, he had drifted into the connection from sheer ennui. And then had come interest. No woman had ever before interested him. He had never been able to define the attraction she had had for him, the odd tenderness he had felt for her. He had treated her as a plaything, a fragile toy to be teased and petted. And in his hands she had developed from an innocent child into a woman—with a woman's capacity for devotion and self-sacrifice. She had given everything, with trust and gladness. And he had taken all she gave, with colossal egoism, as his right—accepting lightly all she surrendered with no thought for the innocence he contaminated, the purity he soiled. He had stained her soul before he had killed her body. His hands clenched and unclenched convulsively with the agony of remorse. Recollection was torture. Repentance came too late. *Too late! Too late!* he words kept singing in his head as if a demon from hell was howling them in his ear. Nothing on earth could undo what he had done. No power could animate that little dead body. And if she had lived! He shuddered. But she had not lived, she had died—because of him. Because of him, Merciful God, because

of him! And he could make no restitution. What was there left for him to do? A life of expiation was not atonement enough. There seemed only one solution—a life for a life. And that was no reparation, only justice. He put no value on his own life—he wished vaguely that the worth of it were greater—he had merely wasted it and now he had forfeited it. Remained only to end it—now. There was no reason for delay. He had no preparations to make. His affairs were all in order. His heir was his aunt, his father's only sister, who would be a better guardian of the Craven estates and interests than he had ever been. Peters was independent and Yoshio provided for. There was nothing to be done. He rose and opening a drawer in the table took out a revolver and held it a moment in his hand, looking at it dispassionately. It was not the ultimate purpose for which it had been intended. He had never imagined a time when he might end his own life. He had always vaguely connected suicide with cowardice. Was it the coward's way? Perhaps! Who can say what cowardice or courage is required to take the blind leap into the Great Unknown? That did not trouble him. It was no question of courage or cowardice but he felt convinced that his death was the only payment possible.

But as his finger pressed the trigger there was a slight sound beside him, his wrist and arm were caught in a vice-like grip and the weapon exploded harmlessly in the air as he staggered back, his arm almost broken with the jiu-jitsu hold against which even his great strength could do nothing. He struggled

fruitlessly until he was released, then reeled against the table, with teeth set, clasping his wrenched wrist—the sudden frustration of his purpose leaving him, shaking. He turned stiffly. Yoshio was standing by him, phlegmatic as usual, showing no signs of exertion or emotion as he proffered a lacquer tray, with the usual formula: "Master's mail."

Craven's eyes changed slowly from dull suffering to blazing wrath. Uncontrolled rage filled him. How dared Yoshio interfere? How dared he drag him back into the hell from which he had so nearly escaped? He caught the man's shoulder savagely.

"Damn you!" he cried chokingly. "What the devil do you mean—" But the Jap's very impassiveness checked him and with an immense effort he regained command of himself. And imperturbably Yoshio advanced the tray again.

"Master's mail," he repeated, in precisely the same voice as before, but this time he raised his veiled glance to Craven's face. For a moment the two men stared at each other, the grey eyes tortured and drawn, the brown ones lit for an instant with deep devotion. Then Craven took the letters mechanically and dropped heavily into a chair. The Jap picked up the revolver and, quietly replacing it in the drawer from which it had been taken, left the room, noiseless as he had entered it. He seemed to know intuitively that it would be left where he put it.

Alone, Craven leaned forward with a groan, burying his face in his hands.

At last he sat up wearily and his eyes fell on the letters lying

unopened on the table beside him. He fingered them listlessly and then threw them down again while he searched his pockets absently for the missing cigarette case. Remembering, he jerked himself to his feet with an exclamation of pain. Was all life henceforward to be a series of torturing recollections? He swore, and flung his head up angrily. Coward! whining already like a kicked cur!

He got a cigarette from a near table and picking up the letters carried them out on to the verandah to read. There were two, both registered. The handwriting on one envelope was familiar and his eyes widened as he looked at it. He opened it first. It was written from Florence and dated three months earlier. With no formal beginning it straggled up and down the sides of various sheets of cheap foreign paper, the inferior violet ink almost indecipherable in places.

"I wonder in what part of the globe this letter will find you? I have been trying to write to you for a long time—and always putting it off—but they tell me now that if I am to write at all there must be no more *mañana*. They have cried 'wolf' so often in the last few months that I had grown sceptical, but even I realise now that there must be no delay. I have delayed because I have procrastinated all my life and because I am ashamed—ashamed for the first time in all my shameless career. But there is no need to tell you what I am—you told me candidly enough yourself in the old days—it is sufficient to say that it is the same John Locke as then—drunkard and gambler, spendthrift and waster!

And I don't think that my worst enemy would have much to add to this record, but then my worst enemy has always been myself. Looking back now over my life—queer what a stimulating effect the certainty of death has to the desire to find even one good action wherewith to appease one's conscience—it is a marvel to me that Providence has allowed me to cumber the earth so long. However, it's all over now—they give me a few days at the outside—so I must write at once or never. Barry, I'm in trouble, the bitterest trouble I have ever experienced—not for myself, God knows I wouldn't ask even your help, but for another who is dearer to me than all the world and for whose future I can do nothing. You never knew that I married. I committed that indiscretion in Rome with a little Spanish dancer who ought to have known better than to be attracted by my *beaux yeux*—for I had nothing else to offer her. We existed in misery for a couple of years and then she left me, for a more gilded position. But I had the child, which was all I cared about. Thank God, for her sake, that I was legally married to poor little Lola, she has at least no stain on her birth with which to reproach me. The officious individual who is personally conducting me to the Valley of the Shadow warns me that I must be brief—I kept the child with me as long as I could, people were wonderfully kind, but it was no life for her. I've come down in the social scale even since you knew me, Barry, and at last I sent her away, though it broke my heart. Still even that was better than seeing her day by day lose all respect for me. My miserable pittance dies with me and

she is absolutely unprovided for. My family cast off me and all my works many years ago, but I put my pride in my pocket and appealed for help for Gillian and they suggested—a damned charitable institution! I was pretty nearly desperate until I thought of you. I know no one else. For God's sake, Barry, don't fail me. I can and I do trust Gillian to you. I have made you her guardian, it is all legally arranged and my lawyer in London has the papers. He is a well-known man and emanates respectability—my last claim to decency! Gillian is at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Paris. My only consolation is that you are so rich that financially she will be no embarrassment to you. I realize what I am asking and the enormity of it, but I am a dying man and my excuse is—Gillian. Oh, man, be good to my little girl. I always hoped that something would turn up, but it didn't! Perhaps I never went to look for it, *quien sabe?* I shall never have the chance again...."

The signature was barely recognisable, the final letter terminating in a wandering line as if the pen had dropped from nerveless fingers.

Craven stared at the loose sheets in his hands for some time in horrified dismay, at first hardly comprehending, then as the full significance of John Locke's dying bequest dawned on him he flung them down and, walking to the edge of the verandah, looked over the harbour, tugging his moustache and scowling in utter perplexity. A child—a girl child! How could he with his soiled hands assume the guardianship of a child? He smiled bitterly at the irony of it. Providence was dealing

hard with the child in the Paris convent, from dissolute father to criminal guardian. And yet Providence had already that morning intervened on her behalf—two minutes later and there would have been no guardian to take the trust. Providence clearly held the same views as John Locke on charitable institutions.

He thought of Locke as he had known him years ago, in Paris, a man twenty years his senior—penniless and intemperate but with an irresistible charm, rolling stone and waster but proud as a Spaniard; a man of the world with the heart of a boy, the enemy of nobody but himself, weak but lovable; a ragged coat and the manners of a prince; idealist and failure.

Craven read the letter through again. Locke had forced his hand—he had no option but to take up the charge entrusted to him. What a legacy! Surely if John Locke had known he would have rather committed his daughter to the tender mercies even of the "institution." But he had not known and he had trusted him. The thought was a sudden spur, urging him as nothing else could have done, bringing out all that was best and strongest in his nature. In a few hours he had crashed from the pinnacle on which he had soared in the blindness of egoism down into depths of self-realisation that seemed bottomless, and at the darkest moment when his world was lying in pieces under his feet—this had come. Another chance had been given to him. Craven's jaw set squarely as he thrust Locke's dying appeal into his pocket.

He ripped open the second letter. It was, as he guessed, from the lawyer and merely confirmed Locke's letter, with the

additional information that his client had died a few hours after writing the said letter and that he had forwarded the news to the Mother Superior of the Convent School in Paris.

Craven went back into the sitting-room to write cables.

CHAPTER III

Owing to a breakdown on the line the boat-train from Marseilles crawled into the Gare du Lyon a couple of hours late. Craven had not slept. He had given his berth in the waggon-lit to an invalid fellow passenger and had sat up all night in an overcrowded, overheated carriage, choked with the stifling atmosphere, his long legs cramped for lack of space.

It was early March, and the difference between the temperature of the train and the raw air of the station struck him unpleasantly as he climbed down on to the platform.

Leaving Yoshio, equally at home in Paris as in Yokohama, to collect luggage, he signalled to a waiting taxi. He had the hood opened and, pushing back his hat, let the keen wind blow about his face. The cab jerked over the rough streets, at this early hour crowded with people—working Paris going to its daily toil—and he watched them hurrying by with the indifference of familiarity. Gradually he ceased even to look at the varied types, the jostling traffic, the bizarre posters and the busy newspaper kiosks. His thoughts were back in Yokohama. It had been six weeks before he could get away, six interminable weeks of misery and self-loathing. He had shirked nothing and evaded nothing. Much had been saved him by the discreet courtesy of the Japanese officials, but the ordeal had left him with jangling nerves. Fortunately the ship was nearly empty and the solitude he sought obtainable.

He felt an outcast. To have joined as he had always previously done in the light-hearted routine of a crowded ship bent on amusements and gaiety would have been impossible.

He sought mental relief in action and hours spent tramping the lonely decks brought, if not relief, endurance.

And, always in the background, Yoshio, capable and devoted, stood between him and the petty annoyances that inevitably occur in travelling—annoyances that in his overwrought state would have been doubly annoying—with a thoughtfulness that was silently expressed in a dozen different devices for his comfort. That the Jap knew a great deal more than he himself did of the tragedy that had happened in the little house on the hill Craven felt sure, but no information had been volunteered and he had asked for none. He could not speak of it. And Yoshio, the inscrutable, would continue to be silent. The perpetual reminder of all that he could wish to forget Yoshio became, illogically, more than ever indispensable to him. At first, in his stunned condition, he had scarcely been sensible of the man's tact and care, but gradually he had come to realize how much he owed to his Japanese servant. And yet that was the least of his obligation. There was a greater—the matter of a life; whatever it might mean to Craven, to Yoshio the simple payment of a debt contracted years ago in California. That more than this had underlain the Japanese mind when it made its quick decision Craven could not determine; the code of the Oriental is not that of the Occidental, the demands of honour are interpreted and satisfied differently.

Life in itself is nothing to the Japanese, the disposal of it merely the exigency of a moment and withal a personal prerogative. By all the accepted canons of his own national ideals Yoshio should have stood on one side—but he had chosen to interfere. Whatever the motive, Yoshio had paid his debt in full.

The weeks at sea braced Craven as nothing else could have done. As the ship neared France the perplexities of the charge he was preparing to undertake increased. His utter unfitness filled him with dismay. On receipt of John Locke's amazing letter he had both cabled and written to his aunt in London explaining his dilemma, giving suitable extracts from Locke's appeal, and imploring her help. And yet the thought of his aunt in connection with the upbringing of a child brought a smile to his lips. She was about as unsuited, in her own way, as he. Caro Craven was a bachelor lady of fifty—spinster was a term wholly inapplicable to the strong-minded little woman who had been an art student in Paris in the days when insular hands were lifted in horror at the mere idea, and was a designation, moreover, deprecated strongly by herself as an insult to one who stood—at least in her own sphere—on an equality with the lords of creation. She was a sculptor, whose work was known on both sides of the channel. When at home she lived in a big house in London, but she travelled much, accompanied by an elderly maid who had been with her for thirty years. And it was of the maid as much as of the mistress that Craven thought as the taxi bumped over the cobbled streets.

"If we can only interest Mary." There was a gleam of hope in the thought. "She will be the saving of the situation. She spoiled me thoroughly when I was a nipper." And buoyed with the recollection of grim-visaged angular Mary, who hid a very tender heart beneath a somewhat forbidding exterior, he overpaid the chauffeur cheerfully.

There was an accumulation of letters waiting for him at the hotel, but he shuffled them all into his overcoat pocket, with the exception of one from Peters which he tore open and read immediately, still standing in the lounge.

An hour later he set out on foot for the quiet hotel which had been his aunt's resort since her student days, and where she was waiting for him now, according to a telegram that he had received on his arrival at Marseilles. The hall door of her private suite was opened by the elderly maid, whose face lit up as she greeted him.

"Miss Craven is waiting in the salon, sir. She has been tramping the floor this hour or more, expecting you," she confided as she preceded him down the corridor.

Miss Craven was standing in a characteristic attitude before an open fireplace, her feet planted firmly on the hearthrug, her short plump figure clothed in a grey coat and skirt of severe masculine cut, her hands plunged deep into her jacket pockets, her short curly grey hair considerably ruffled. She bore down on her nephew with out-stretched hands.

"My dear boy, there you are at last! I have been waiting *hours* for you. Your train must have been very late—abominable

railway service! Have you had any breakfast? Yes? Good. Then take a cigarette—they are in that box at your elbow—and tell me about this amazing thunderbolt that you have hurled at me. What a preposterous proposition for two bachelors like you and me! To be sure your extraordinary friend did not include me in his wild scheme—though no doubt he would have, had he known of my existence. Was the man mad? Who was he, anyhow? John Locke of where? There are dozens of Lockes. And why did he select you of all people? What fools men are!" She subsided suddenly into an easy chair and crossed one neat pump over the other. "All of 'em!" she added emphatically, flicking cigarette ash into the fire with a vigorous sidelong jerk. Her eyes were studying his face attentively, seeking for themselves the answer to the more personal inquiries that would have seemed necessary to a less original woman meeting a much-loved nephew after a lapse of years. Craven smiled at the characteristically peculiar greeting and the well remembered formula. He settled his long limbs comfortably into an opposite chair.

"Even Peter?" he asked, lighting a cigarette.

Miss Craven laughed good temperedly.

"Peter," she rejoined succinctly, "is the one brilliant exception that proves the rule. I have an immense respect for Peter." He looked at her curiously. "And—me, Aunt Caro?" he asked with an odd note in his voice. Miss Craven glanced for a moment at the big figure sprawled in the chair near her, then looked back at the fire with pursed lips and wrinkled forehead, and rumpled

her hair more thoroughly than before.

"My dear boy," she said at last soberly, "you resemble my unhappy brother altogether too much for my peace of mind."

He winced. Her words probed the still raw wound. But unaware of the appositeness of her remark Miss Craven continued thoughtfully, still staring into the fire:

"The Supreme Sculptor, when He made me, denied me the good looks that are proverbial in our family—but in compensation he endowed me with a solid mind to match my solid body. The Family means a great deal to me, Barry—more than anybody has ever realised—and there are times when I wonder why the solidity of mind was given to the one member of the race who could not perpetuate it in the direct line." She sighed, and then as if ashamed of unwonted emotion, jerked her dishevelled grey head with a movement that was singularly reminiscent of her nephew. Craven flushed.

"You're the best man of the family, Aunt Caro."

"So your mother used to say—poor child." Her voice softened suddenly. She got up restlessly and resumed her former position before the fire, her hands back in the pockets of her mannish coat.

"What about your plans, Barry? What are you going to do?" she said briskly, with an evident desire to avoid further moralising. He joined her on the hearthrug, leaning against the mantelpiece.

"I propose to settle down—at any rate for a time, at the

Towers," he replied. "I intend to interest myself in the estates. Peter insists that I am wanted, and though that is nonsense and he is infinitely more necessary than I am, still I am willing to make the trial. I owe him more than I can even repay—we all do—and if my presence is really any help to him—he's welcome to it. I shall be about as much real use as the fifth wheel of a coach—a damned rotten wheel at that," he added bitterly. And for some minutes he seemed to forget that there was more to say, staring silently into the fire and from time to time putting together the blazing logs with his foot.

Miss Craven was possessed of the unfeminine attribute of holding her tongue and reserving her comments. She refrained from comment now, rocking gently backward and forward on her heels—a habit associated with mental concentration.

"I shall take the child to the Towers," he continued at length, "and there I shall want your help, Aunt Caro." He paused stammering awkwardly—"It's an infernal impertinence asking you to—to—"

"To turn nursemaid at my time of life," she interrupted. "It is certainly a career I never anticipated. And, candidly, I have doubts about its success," she laughed and shrugged, with a comical grimace. Then she patted his arm affectionately—"You had much better take Peter's advice and marry a nice girl who would mother the child and give her some brothers and sisters to play with."

He stiffened perceptibly.

"I shall never marry," he said shortly. Her eyebrows rose the fraction of an inch but she bit back the answer that rose to her lips.

"Never—is a long day," she said lightly. "The Cravens are an old family, Barry. One has one's obligations."

He did not reply and she changed the conversation hastily. She had a horror of forcing a confidence.

"Remains—Mary," she said, with the air of proposing a final expedient. Craven's tense face relaxed.

"Mary had also occurred to me," he admitted with an eagerness that was almost pathetic.

Miss Craven grunted and clutched at her hair.

"Mary!" she repeated with a chuckle, "Mary, who has gone through life with Wesley's sermons under her arm—and a child out of a Paris convent! There are certainly elements of humour in the idea. But I must have some details. Who was this Locke person?"

When Craven had told her all he knew she stood quite still for a long while, rolling a cigarette tube between her firm hands.

"Dissolute English father—and Spanish mother of doubtful morals. My poor Barry, your hands will be full."

"Our hands," he corrected.

"Our hands! Good heavens, the bare idea terrifies me!" She shrugged tragically and was dumb until Mary came to announce lunch.

Across the table she studied her nephew with an attention

that she was careful to conceal. She was used to his frequent coming and going. Since the death of his mother he had travelled continually and she was accustomed to his appearing more or less unexpectedly, at longer or shorter intervals. They had always been great friends, and it was to her house in London that he invariably went first on returning to England—sure of his welcome, sure of himself, gay, easy-going and debonair. She was deeply attached to him. But, with something akin to terror, she had watched the likeness to the older Barry Craven growing from year to year, fearful lest the moral downfall of the father might repeat itself in the son. The temptation to speak frankly, to warn, had been great. Natural dislike of interference, and a promise given reluctantly to her dying sister-in-law, had kept her silent. She had loved the tall beautiful woman who had been her brother's wife and a promise made to her was sacred—though she had often doubted the wisdom of a silence that might prove an incalculable danger. She respected the fine loyalty that demanded such a promise, but her own views were more comprehensive. She was strong enough to hold opinions that were contrary to accepted traditions. She admitted a loyalty due to the dead, she was also acutely conscious of a loyalty due to the living. A few minutes before when Miss Craven had, somewhat shamefacedly, owned to a love of the family to which they belonged she had but faintly expressed her passionate attachment thereto. Pride of race was hers to an unusual degree. All that was best and noblest she craved for the clan. And Barry was the last of the Cravens. Her

brother had failed her and dragged her high ideals in the dust. Her courage had restored them to endeavour a second time. If Barry failed her too! Hitherto her fears had had no definite basis. There had been no real ground for anxiety, only a developing similarity of characteristics that was vaguely disquieting. But now, as she looked at him, she realised that the man from whom she had parted nearly two years before was not the man who now faced her across the table. Something had happened—something that had changed him utterly. This man was older by far more than the actual two years. This was a man whom she hardly recognised; hard, stern, with a curiously bitter ring at times in his voice, and the shadow of a tragedy lying in the dark grey eyes that had changed so incredibly for lack of their habitual ready smile. There were lines about his mouth and a glint of grey in his hair that she was quick to observe. Whatever had happened—he had suffered. That was written plainly on his face. And unless he chose to speak she was powerless to help him. She refused to intrude, unbidden, into another's private concerns. That he was an adored nephew, that the intimacy between them was great made no difference, the restriction remained the same. But she was woman enough to be fiercely jealous for him. She resented the change she saw—it was not the change she had desired but something far beyond her understanding that left her with the feeling that she was confronting a total stranger. But she was careful to hide her scrutiny, and though her mind speculated widely she continued to chatter, supplementing the home news

her scanty letters had afforded and retailing art gossip of the moment. One question only she allowed herself. There had come a silence. She broke it abruptly, leaning forward in her chair, watching him keen-eyed.

"Have you been ill—out there?"—her hand fluttered vaguely in an easterly direction. Craven looked up in surprise.

"No," he said shortly, "I never am ill."

Miss Craven's nod as she rose from the table might have been taken for assent. It was in reality satisfaction at her own perspicacity. She had not supposed for one moment that he had been ill but in no other way could she express what she wanted to know. It was in itself an innocuous and natural remark, but the sudden gloom that fell on him warned her that her ingenuity was, perhaps, not so great as she imagined.

"Triple idiot!" she reflected wrathfully, as she poured out coffee, "you had better have held your tongue," and she set herself to charm away the shadow from his face and dispel any suspicion he might have formed of her desire to probe into his affairs. She had an uncommon personality and could talk cleverly and well when she chose. And today she did choose, exerting all her wit to combat the taciturn fit that emphasized so forcibly the change in him. But though he listened with apparent attention his mind was very obviously elsewhere, and he sat staring into the fire, mechanically flicking ash from his cigarette. Conversation languished and at length Miss Craven gave it up, with a wry face, and sat also silent, drumming with her fingers on the arm of

the chair. Her thoughts, in quest of his, wandered far away until the sudden ringing of the telephone beside her made her jump violently.

She answered the call, then handed the receiver to Craven.

"Your heathen," she remarked dryly.

Though the least insular of women she had never grown accustomed to the Japanese valet. He turned from the telephone with a look of mingled embarrassment and relief.

"I sent a message to the convent this morning. Yoshio has just given me the answer. The Mother Superior will see me this afternoon." He endeavoured to make his voice indifferent, pulling down his waistcoat and picking a minute thread from off his coat sleeve. Miss Craven's mouth twitched at the evident signs of nervousness while she glanced at him narrowly. Prompt action in the matter of an uncongenial duty had not hitherto been a conspicuous trait in his character.

"You are certainly not letting the grass grow under your feet."

He jerked his head impatiently.

"Waiting will not make the job more pleasant," he shrugged. "I will see the child at once and arrange for her removal as soon as possible."

Miss Craven eyed him from head to foot with a grim smile that changed to a whole-hearted laugh of amusement.

"It's a pity you have so much money, Barry, you would make your fortune as a model. You are too criminally good looking to go fluttering into convents."

A ghost of the old smile flickered in his eyes.

"Come and chaperon me, Aunt Caro."

She shook her head laughingly.

"Thank you—no. There are limits. I draw the line at convents. Go and get it over, and if the child is presentable you can bring her back to tea. I gather that Mary is anticipating a complete failure on our part to sustain the situation and is prepared to deputise. She has already ransacked *Au Paradis Des Enfants* for suitable bribes wherewith to beguile her infantile affection. I understand that there was a lively scene over the purchase of a doll, the cost of which—clad only in its birthday dress—was reported to me as 'a fair affront.' Even after all these years Mary jibs at Continental prices. It is her way of keeping up the prestige of the British Empire, bless her. An overcharge, in her opinion, is a deliberate twist of the lion's tail."

In the taxi he looked through the correspondence he had received that morning for the lawyer's letter that would establish his claim to John Locke's child. Then he leaned back and lit a cigarette. He had an absurd feeling of nervousness and cursed Locke a dozen times before he reached the convent. He was embarrassed with the awkward situation in which he found himself—just how awkward he seemed only now fully to appreciate. The more he thought of it, the less he liked it. The coming interview with the Mother Superior was not the least of his troubles. The promise of the morning had not been maintained, overhead the sky was leaden, and a high wind drove

rain in sharp splashes against the glass of the cab. The pavements were running with water and the leafless trees in the avenues swayed and creaked dismally. The appearance of the streets was chill and depressing. Craven shivered. He thought of the warmth and sunshine that he had left in Japan. The dreariness of the present outlook contrasted sufficiently with the gay smiling landscape, the riotous wealth of colour, and the scent-laden air of the land of his recollections. A feeling almost of nostalgia came to him. But with the thought came also a vision—a little still body lying on silken cushions; a small pale face with fast shut eyes, the long lashes a dusky fringe against the ice-cold cheek. The vision was terribly distinct, horribly real—not a recollection only, as on the morning that he had found her dead—and he waited, with the sweat pouring down his face, for the closed eyes to open and reveal the agony he had read in them that night, when he had torn her clinging hands away and left her. The faint aroma of the perfume she had used was in his nostrils, choking him. The slender limbs seemed to pulsate into life, the little breasts to stir perceptibly, the parted lips to tremble. He could not define the actual moment of the change but, as he bent forward, with hands close gripped, all at once he found himself looking straight into the tortured grey eyes—for a second only. Then the vision faded, and he was leaning back in the cab wiping the moisture from his forehead. God, would it never leave him! It haunted him. In the big bungalow on the Bluff; rising from the sea as he leaned on the steamer rail; during the long nights on the ship as he lay

sleepless in the narrow brass cot; last night in the crowded railway carriage—then it had been so vivid that he had held his breath and glanced around stealthily with hunted eyes at his fellow passengers looking for the horrified faces that would tell him that they also saw what he could see. He never knew how long it lasted, minutes or seconds, holding him rigid until it passed to leave him bathed in perspiration. Environment seemed to make no difference. It came as readily in a crowd as when he was alone. He lived in perpetual dread of betraying his obsession. Once only it had happened—in the bungalow, the night before he left Japan, and his involuntary cry had brought the watchful valet. And as he crossed the room Craven had distinctly seen him pass through the little recumbent figure and, with blazing eyes, had dragged him roughly to one side, pointing and muttering incoherently. And Yoshio had seemed to understand. Sceptical as he was about the supernatural, at first Craven's doubt had been rudely shaken; but with the steadying of his nerves had come the conviction that the vision was inward, though at the moment so real that often his confidence momentarily wavered, as last night in the train. It came with no kind of regularity, no warning that might prepare him. And recurrence brought no mitigation, no familiarising that could temper the acute horror it inspired. To what pitch of actuality might it attain? To what lengths might it drive him? He dragged his thoughts up sharply. To dwell on it was fatal, that way lay insanity. He set his teeth and forced himself to think of other things. There was ample material. There was primarily the

salvage of a wasted life. During the last few weeks he had been forced to a self-examination that had been drastically thorough. The verdict had been an adverse one. Personal criticism, once aroused, went far. The purposeless life that he had led seemed now an insult to his manhood. It had been in his power to do so much—he had actually done disastrously little. He had loafed through life without a thought beyond the passing interest of the moment. And even in the greater interests of his life, travel and big game, he had failed to exert himself beyond a mediocre level. He had travelled far and shot a rare beast or two, but so had many another—and with greater difficulties to contend with than he who had never wrestled with the disadvantages of inferior equipment and inadequate attendance. Muscularly and constitutionally stronger than the average, physically he could have done anything. And he had done nothing—nothing that others had not done as well or even better. It was sufficiently humiliating. And the outcome of his reflections had been a keen desire for work, hard absorbing work, with the hope that bodily fatigue might in some measure afford mental alleviation. It did not even need finding. With a certain shame he admitted the fact. It had waited for him any time these last ten years in his own home. The responsibility of great possessions was his. And he had shirked. He had evaded the duty he owed to a trust he had inherited. It was a new view of his position that recent thought had awakened. It was still not too late. He would go back like the prodigal—not to eat the fatted calf, but to sit at the feet of Peters

and learn from him the secret of successful estate management.

For thirty years Peter Peters had ruled the Craven properties, and they were all his life. For the last ten years he had never ceased urging his employer to assume the reins of government himself. His entreaties, protestations and threats of resignation had been unheeded. Craven felt sure that he would never relinquish his post, he had grown into the soil and was as firmly fixed as the Towers itself. He was an institution in the county, a personality on the bench. He ruled his own domains with a kindly but absolute autocracy which succeeded perfectly on the Craven estates and was the envy of other agents, who had not his ability to do likewise. Well born, original and fearless he was popular in castle and in cottage, and his advice was respected by all. He neither sought nor abused a confidence, and in consequence was the depository of most of the secrets of the countryside. To his sympathetic ears came both grave offences and minor indiscretions, as to a kindly safety-valve who advised and helped—and was subsequently silent. His exoneration was considered final. "I confessed to Peter" became a recognised formula, instituted by a giddy young Marchioness at the north end of the county, whose cousin he was. And there, invariably, the matter ended. And for Craven it was the one bright spot in the darkness before him. Life was going to be hell—but there would always be Peter.

At the Convent gates the taxi skidded badly at the suddenly applied brakes, and then backed jerkily into position. Craven felt

an overwhelming inclination to take to his heels. The portress who admitted him had evidently received orders, for she silently conducted him to a waiting room and left him alone. It was sparsely furnished but had on the walls some fine old rosewood panelling. The narrow heavily leaded windows overlooked a paved quadrangle, glistening with moisture. For a few moments the rain had ceased but drops still pattered sharply on to the flagstones from the branches of two large chestnut trees. The outlook was melancholy and he turned from the window, shivering. But the chill austere room was hardly more inspiring. The atmosphere was strange to him. It was a world apart from anything that had ever touched him. He marvelled suddenly at the countless lives living out their allotted span in the confined area of these and similar walls. Surely all could not submit willingly to such a crushing captivity? Some must agonize and spend their strength unavailingly, like birds beating their wings against the bars of a cage for freedom. To the man who had roamed through all the continents of the world this forced inactivity seemed appalling—stultifying. The hampering of personal freedom, the forcing of independent minds into one narrow prescribed channel that admitted of no individual expansion, the waste of material and the fettering of intellects, that were heaven-sent gifts to be put out to usury and not shrouded away in a napkin, revolted him. The conventual system was to him a survival of medievalism, a relic of the dark ages; the last refuge of the shirkers of the world. The communities themselves, if he had thought of them at all,

had been regarded as a whole. He had never troubled to consider them as composed of single individuals. Today he thought of them as separate human beings and his intolerance increased. An indefinite distaste never seriously considered seemed, during the few moments in the bare waiting room, to have grown suddenly into active dislike. He was wholly out of sympathy with his surroundings, impatient of the necessity that brought him into contact with what he would have chosen to avoid. He looked about with eyes grown hard and contemptuous. The very building seemed to be the embodiment of retrogression and blind superstition. He was filled with antagonism. His face was grim and his figure drawn up stiffly to its full height when the door opened to admit the Mother Superior. For a moment she hesitated, a faint look of surprise coming into her face. And no antagonism, however intolerant, could have braved her gentle dignity. "It is—*Monsieur* Craven?" she asked, a perceptible interrogation in her soft voice.

She took the letters he gave her and read them carefully—pausing once or twice as if searching for the correct translation of a word—then handed them back to him in silence. She looked at him again, frankly, with no attempt to disguise her scrutiny, and the perplexity in her eyes grew greater. One small white hand slid to the crucifix hanging on her breast, as if seeking aid from the familiar symbol, and Craven saw that her fingers were trembling. A faint flush rose in her face.

"*Monsieur* is perhaps married, or—happily—he has a

mother?" she asked at last, and the flush deepened as she looked up at the big man standing before her. She made a little gesture of embarrassment but her eyes did not waver. They would not, he thought with sudden intuition. For he realised that it was one of his own order who confronted him. It was not what he had anticipated. The Mother Superior's low voice continuing in gentle explanation broke into his thoughts.

"*Monsieur* will forgive that I catechise him thus but I had expected one—much older." Her distress was obvious. And Craven divined that as a prospective guardian he fell short of expectation. And yet, his lack of years was apparently to her the only drawback. His lack of years—Good God, and he felt so old! His youth was a disadvantage that counted for nothing in the present instance. If she could know the truth, if the anxious gaze that was fixed so intently on him could look into his heart with understanding, he knew that she would shrink from him as from a vile contamination.

He conceived the horror dawning in her eyes, the loathing in her attitude, and seemed to hear her passionate protest against his claim to the child who had been sheltered in the safety of the community that he had despised. The safety of the community —that had not before occurred to him. For the first time he considered it a refuge to those who there sought sanctuary and who were safeguarded from such as—he. He winced, but did not spare himself. The sin had been only his. The child who had died for love of him had been as innocent of sin as the birds who loved

and mated among the pine trees in her Garden of Enchantment. She had had no will but his. Arrogantly he had taken her and she had submitted—was he not her lord? Before his shadow fell across her path no blameless soul within these old convent walls had been more pure and stainless than the soul of O Hara San. It was the sins of such as he that drove women to this shelter that offered refuge and consolation, to escape from such as he they voluntarily immured themselves; surrendering the purpose of their being, seeking in bodily denial the salvation of their souls.

The room had grown very dark. A sudden glare of light made Craven realise that a question asked was still unanswered. He had not, in his abstraction, been aware of any movement. Now he saw the Mother Superior walking leisurely back from the electric switch by the door, and guessed from her placid face that the interval had been momentary and had passed unnoticed. Some answer was required now. He pulled himself together.

"I am not married," his voice was strained, "and I have no mother. But my aunt—Miss Craven—the sculptor—" he paused enquiringly and she smiled reassurance.

"Miss Craven's beautiful work is known to me," she said with ready tact that put him more at ease.

"My aunt has, most kindly, promised to—to co-operate," he finished lamely.

The anxiety faded from the Mother Superior's face and she sat down with an air of relief, motioning Craven to a chair. But with a curt bow he remained standing. He had no wish to prolong

the interview beyond what courtesy and business demanded. He listened with a variety of feelings while the Nun spoke. Her earnestness he could not fail to perceive, but it required a decided effort to concentrate, and follow her soft well modulated voice.

She spoke slowly, with feeling that broke at times the tone she strove to make dispassionate.

"I am glad for Gillian's sake that at last, after all these years, there has come one who will be concerned with her future. She has no vocation for the conventual life and—I was beginning to become anxious. For ourselves, we shall miss her more than it is possible to say. She had been with us so long, she has become very dear to us. I have dreaded that her father would one day claim her. She has been spared that contamination—God forgive me that I should speak so." For a moment she was silent, her eyes bent on her hands lying loosely clasped in her lap.

"Gillian is not altogether friendless," she resumed, "she will go to you with a little more knowledge of the world than can be gained within these old walls." She glanced round the panelled room with half-sad affection. "She is popular and has spent vacations in the homes of some of her fellow pupils. She has a very decided personality, and a facility for attracting affection. She is sensitive and proud—passionate even at times. She can be led but not driven. I tell you all this, *Monsieur*, not censoriously but that it may help you in dealing with a character that is extraordinarily complex, with a nature that both demands and repels affection, that longs for and yet scorns sympathy." She

looked at Craven anxiously. His complete attention was claimed at last. A new conception of his unknown ward was forcing itself upon him, so that any humour there might have been in the situation died suddenly and the difficulties of the undertaking soared. The Mother Superior smothered a sigh. His attitude was baffling, his expression inscrutable. Had her words touched him, had she said what was best for the welfare of the girl who was so dear to her, and whose departure she felt so keenly? How would she fare at this man's hands? What lay behind his stern face and sombre tragic eyes? Her lips moved in silent prayer, but when she spoke her voice was serene as before.

"There is yet another thing that I must speak of. Gillian has an unusual gift." A sentence in Locke's letter flashed into Craven's mind.

"She doesn't *dance*?" he asked, in some dismay.

"Dance, *Monsieur*—in a convent?" Then she pitied his hot confusion and smiled faintly.

"Is dancing so unusual—in the world? No, Gillian sketches —portraits. Her talent is real. She does not merely draw a faithful likeness, her studies are revelations of soul. I do not think she knows herself how her effects are obtained, they grow almost unconsciously, but they result always in the same strange delineation of character. It was so impossible to ignore this exceptional gift that we procured for her the best teacher in Paris, and continued her lessons even after—" She stopped abruptly and Craven finished the broken sentence.

"Even after the fees ceased," he said dryly. "For how many years has my ward lived on your charity, Reverend Mother?"

She raised a protesting hand.

"Ah—charity. It is hardly the word—" she fenced.

He took out a cheque book.

"How much is owing, for everything?" he said bluntly.

She sought for a book in a bureau standing against the rosewood panelling and, scanning it, gave a sum with evident reluctance.

"Gillian has never been told, but it is ten years since *Monsieur* Locke paid anything." There was diffidence in her voice. "In an institution of this kind we are compelled to be businesslike. It is rare that we can afford to make an exception, though the temptation is often great. The head and the heart—*voyez, vous, Monsieur*—they pull in contrary directions." And she slipped the book back into a pigeon-hole as if the touch of it was distasteful. She glanced perfunctorily at the cheque he handed to her, then closer, and the colour rose again to her sensitive face.

"But *Monsieur* has written treble the amount," she murmured.

"Will you accept the balance," he said hurriedly, "in the name of my ward, for any purpose that you may think fit? There is one stipulation only—I do not wish her to know that there has been any monetary transaction between us." His voice was almost curt, and the Nun found herself unable to question a condition which, though manifestly generous, she deemed quixotic. She could only bend to his decision with mingled thankfulness and

apprehension. Despite the problem of the girl's future she had it in her heart to wish that this singular claimant had never presented himself. His liberality was obvious but—. She locked the slip of paper away in the bureau with a feeling of vague uneasiness. But for good or ill the matter was out of her hands. She had said all that she could say. The rest lay with God.

"I do accept it," she said, "with all gratitude. It will enable us to carry out a scheme that has long been our hope. Your generosity will more than pave the way. I will send Gillian to you now."

She left him, more embarrassed than he had been at first, more than ever dreading the task before him. He waited with a nervous impatience that irritated himself.

Turning to the window he looked out into the dusk. The old trees in the courtyard were almost indistinguishable. The rain dripped again steadily, splashing the creeper that framed the casement. A few lights showing dimly in the windows on the opposite side of the quadrangle served only to intensify the gloom. The time dragged. Fretfully he drummed with his fingers on the leaded panes, his ears alert for any sound beyond the closed door. The echo of a distant organ stole into the room and the soft solemn notes harmonised with the melancholy pattering of the raindrops and the gusts of wind that moaned fitfully around the house.

In a sudden revulsion of feeling the life he had mapped out for himself seemed horrible beyond thought. He could not bear it. It would be tying his hands and burdening himself with a

responsibility that would curtail his freedom and hamper him beyond endurance. A great restlessness, a longing to escape from the irksome tie, came to him. Solitude and open spaces; unpeopled nature; wild desert wastes—he craved for them. The want was like a physical ache. The desert—he drew his breath in sharply—the hot shifting sand whispering under foot, the fierce noontide sun blazing out of a brilliant sky, the charm of it! The fascination of its false smiling surface, its treacherous beauty luring to hidden perils called to him imperatively. The curse of Ishmael that was his heritage was driving him as it had driven him many times before. He was in the grip of one of the revolts against restraint and civilisation that periodically attacked him. The wander-hunger was in his blood—for generations it had sent numberless ancestors into the lonely places of the world, and against it ties of home were powerless. In early days to the romantic glamour of the newly discovered Americas, later to the silence of the frozen seas and to the mysterious depth of unexplored lands the Cravens had paid a heavy toll. A Craven had penetrated into the tangled gloom of the Amazon forests, and had never returned. In the previous century two Cravens had succumbed to the fascination of the North West Passage, another had vanished in Central Asia. Barry's grandfather had perished in a dust storm in the Sahara. And it was to the North African desert that his own thoughts turned most longingly. Japan had satisfied him for a time—but only for a time. Western civilisation had there obtruded too glaringly, and he had admitted frankly to

himself that it was not Japan but O Hara San that kept him in Yokohama. The dark courtyard and the faintly lighted windows faded. He saw instead a tiny well-remembered oasis in Southern Algeria, heard the ceaseless chatter of Arabs, the shrill squeal of a stallion, the peevish grunt of a camel, and, rising above all other sounds, the whine of the tackling above the well. And the smell—the cloying smell that goes with camel caravans, it was pungent! He flung up his head inhaling deeply, then realised that the scent that filled the room was not the acrid smell of the desert but the penetrating odour of incense filtering in through the opened door. It shut and he turned reluctantly.

He saw at first only a pair of great brown eyes, staring almost defiantly, set in a small pale face, that looked paler by contrast with the frame of dark brown hair. Then his gaze travelled slowly over the slender black-clad figure silhouetted against the polished panels. His fear was substantiated. Not a child who could be relegated to nurses and governesses, but a girl in the dawn of womanhood. Passionately he cursed John Locke.

He felt a fool, idiotically tongue-tied. He had been prepared to adopt a suitably paternal attitude towards the small child he had expected. A paternal attitude in connection with this self-possessed young woman was impossible, in fact ludicrous. For the moment he seemed unable to cope with the situation. It was the girl who spoke first. She came forward slowly, across the long narrow room.

"I am Gillian Locke, *Monsieur*."

CHAPTER IV

On the cushioned window seat in her bedroom at Craven Towers Gillian Locke sat with her arms wrapped round her knees waiting for the summons to dinner. With Miss Craven and her guardian she had left London that morning, arriving at the Towers in the afternoon, and she was tired and excited with the events of the day. She leant back against the panelled embrasure, her mind dwelling on the last three crowded months they had spent in Paris and London waiting until the house was redecorated and ready to receive them. It had been for her a wonderful experience. The novelty, the strangeness of it, left her breathless with the feeling that years, not weeks, had rushed by. Already in the realisation of the new life the convent days seemed long ago, the convent itself to have receded into a far off past. And yet there were times when she wondered whether she was dreaming, whether waking would be inevitable and she would find herself once more in the old dormitory to pray passionately that she might dream again. And until tonight there had scarcely been time even to think, her days had been full, at night she had gone to bed to sleep in happy dreamlessness. The hotel bedrooms with their litter of trunks suggesting imminent flight had held no restfulness. To Gillian the transitory sensation had strained already over-excited nerves and heightened the dreamlike feeling that made everything seem unreal. But here, the visible evidences

of travel removed, the deep silence of a large country house penetrating her mind and conducing to peace, she could think at last. The surroundings were helpful. There was about the room an air of permanence which the hotel bedrooms had never given, an atmosphere of abiding quiet that soothed her. She was sensitive of an influence that was wholly new to her and very sweet, that brought with it a feeling of laughter and tears strangely mingled, that made the room appear as no other room had ever done. It Was her room, and it had welcomed her. It was like a big friendly silent person offering mute reception, radiating repose. In a few hours the room had become intimate, dear to her. She laughed happily—then checked at a guilty feeling of treason against the grey old walls in Paris that had so long sheltered her. She was not ungrateful, all her life she would remember with gratitude the love and care she had received. But the convent had been prison. Since her father had left her there, a tiny child, she had inwardly rebelled; the life was abhorrent to her, the restraint unbearable. With childish pride she had hidden her feelings, living through a period of acute misery with no hint to those about her of what she suffered. And the habit of suppression acquired in childhood had grown with her own development. As the years passed the limitations of the convent became more perceptible. She felt its cramping influence to the full, as if the walls were closing in to suffocate her, to bury her alive before she had ever known a fuller freer life. She had longed for expansion—ideas she could not formulate, desires she could not express, crowded, jostled in

her brain. She wanted a wider outlook on life than the narrow convent windows offered. Brief excursions into the world to the homes of her friends had filled her with a yearning for freedom and for independence, for a greater range of thought and action. Her artistic studies had served to foster an unrest she struggled against bravely and to conceal which she became daily more self-contained. Her reserve was like a barrier about her. She was sweet and gentle to all around her, but a little aloof and very silent. To the other girls she had been a heroine of romance, puzzling mystery surrounded her; to the Nuns an enigma. The Mother Superior, alone, had arrived at a partial understanding, more than that even she could not accomplish. Gillian loved her, but her reserve was stronger than her love. Sitting now in the dainty English bedroom, revelling in the warm beauty of the exquisite landscape that, mellowed in the evening light, lay spread out beneath her eyes, Gillian thought a little sadly of her parting with the Reverend Mother. She had tried to hide the happiness that the strange feeling of freedom gave her, to smother any look or word that might wound the gentle sensibility of the frail robed woman whose eyes were sad at the approaching separation. Her conscience smote her that her own heart held no sadness. She had said very little, nothing of the new life that lay ahead of her. She hid her hopes of the future as jealously as she had hidden her longings in the past, and she had left the convent as silently as she had lived in it. She had driven back to the hotel with a sense of relief predominating that it was all over, breathing deeply with a

sigh of relaxed tension. It seemed to her then as if she had learned to breathe only within the last few days, as if the air itself was lighter, more exhilarating.

From the convent her mind went back to earlier days. She thought of her father, the handsome dissolute man, whose image had grown dim with years. As a tiny child she had loved him passionately, the central figure of her chequered and wandering little life—father and mother in one, playmate and hero. Her recollection seemed to be of constant travelling; of long hours spent in railway trains; of arrivals at strange places in the dark night; of departures in the early dawn, half awake—but always happy so long as the familiar arms held her weary little body and there was the shabby old coat on which to pillow her brown curls. A jumbled remembrance of towns and country villages; of kind unknown women who looked compassionate and murmured over her in a dozen different languages. It had all been a medley of impressions and experiences—everything transient, nothing lasting, but the big untidy man who was her all. And then the convent. For a few years John Locke had reappeared at irregular intervals, and on the memory of those brief visits she had lived until he came again. Then he had ceased to come and his letters, grown short and few, full of vague promises—unsatisfying—meagre, had stopped abruptly. At first she had refused to admit to herself that he had forgotten, that she could mean so little to him, that he would deliberately put her out of his life. She had waited, excusing, trusting, until, heart-sick with deferred hope,

she had come to think of him as dead. She was old enough then to realise her position and in spite of the love and consideration surrounding her she had learned misery. Her popularity even was a source of torment, for in the happy homes of her friends she had felt more cruelly her own destitute loneliness.

When the lawyer's letter had come enclosing a few scrawled lines written by her dying father she had felt that life could hold no more bitterness. She had worshipped him—and he had abandoned her callously. She was bone of his bone and he had made no effort even for his own flesh. He had thrown her a burden on the convent that sheltered her so willingly only for want of will power to conquer the weakness that had devitalised brain and body. The thought crushed her. As she read his confession, full of tardy remorse, her proud heart had been sick with humiliation. She groped blindly through a sea of despair, her faith broken, her trust gone. She hid her sorrow and her shame, fulfilling her usual tasks, following the ordinary routine —a little more silent, a little more reserved—her eyes alone betraying the storm that was overwhelming her. She had loved him so dearly—that was the sting. She had guarded her memory of him so tenderly, weaving a thousand extravagant tales about him, pinnacling him above all men, her hero, her knight, her *preux chevalier.* And now she realised that her memory was no memory, that she had built up a fantastic figure of romance whose origin rested on nothing tangible, whose elevation had been so lofty that his overthrow was demolition. Her god had feet

of clay. Her superman was nothing. All that she had ever had, memory that was delusion, was taken from her. Woken abruptly to the brutal truth she felt that she had nothing left to cling to—a loneliness far greater than she had known before. Then gradually her own honesty compelled her to admit her fantasy. The dream man she had evolved had been of her own making, the virtues with which she had endowed him bred of her own imagination. Of the real man she knew nothing, and for the real man there dawned slowly—though love for him had died—pity. It came to her, passionately endeavouring to understand, that in the sheltered life she led she had no knowledge of the temptations that beset a man outside in the great world. Dimly she realised that some win out—and some go under. He had failed. And it seemed to her that on her had fallen his debt. She must take the place he had forfeited in the universe, she must succeed where he had failed. Her strength must rise out of his weakness. His honour was hers to re-establish, given the opportunity. And the opportunity had been given. She had waited for the coming of her unknown guardian with a feeling of dull revolt against the degradation of being handed over inexorably to the disposal and charity of a stranger. Though she had not been told she had guessed, years ago, that money for her maintenance was wanting. The kindly deception of the Mother Superior had been ineffectual. Gillian knew she was a pauper. The charity of the convent school had been hard to bear. The charity of a stranger would be harder. She writhed with the humiliation of it. She was

nineteen—for two years she must go and be and endure at the whim of an unknown. And what would he be like, this man into whose hands her father had thrust her! What choice would John Locke be capable of making—what love had he shown during these last years that he should choose carefully and well? From among what class of man, of the society into which he had sunk, would he select one to give his daughter? He had written of "my old friend, Barry Craven." The name conveyed nothing—the adjective admitted of two interpretations. Which? Day and night she was haunted with visions of old men—recollections of faces seen when driving with her friends or visiting their homes; old men who had interested her, old men from whom she had instinctively shrunk. What type of man was it that was coming for her? There were times when her courage deserted her and the constantly recurring question made her nearly mad with fear. She was like a wild creature caught in a trap, listening to the feet of the keeper nearing—nearing. She had longed for the time when she could leave the Convent, she clung to it now with dread at the thought of the future. The London lawyer had written that Mr. Craven was returning from Japan to assume his guardianship, and she had traced his route with growing fear as the days slipped by—the keeper's tread coming closer and closer. She had masked the terror the thought of him inspired, preserving an outward apathy that seemed to imply complete indifference. And in the end he had come sooner than she expected, for they thought he would go first to London. One morning she had

learned he was in Paris, that very afternoon she would know her fate. The day had been interminable. During his interview with the Mother Superior she had paced the room where she was waiting as it seemed for hours, her nerves at breaking point. When the Reverend Mother came back she could have shrieked aloud and her desperate eyes failed to interpret the expression on the Nun's face; she tried to speak, a husky whisper that died away inarticulately. Faintly she heard the gentle words of encouragement and with an effort of pride she walked quickly to the door of the visitors' room. There she paused, irresolute, and the low peaceful roll of the organ echoing from the distant chapel seemed to mock her. So often it had comforted, giving courage to go forward—today its very peacefulness jarred; nerve-racked she was out of tune with the atmosphere of calm tranquillity about her. She felt alien—that more than ever she stood alone. Then pride flamed afresh. With head held high and lips compressed she went in. As he turned from the window it was his great height and broad shoulders that struck her first—men of his physique were rare in France—and, in the thought of a moment, the well cut conventional morning coat had seemed absurd, and mentally she had clothed his long limbs in damascened steel. Then she had seen that he was young, how young she could not guess, but younger far than she had imagined. As their eyes met the sombre tragedy in his had hurt her. She divined a sorrow before which her own paled to nothingness and quick pity killed fear. The sadness of his face lifted her suddenly into full realisation of

her womanhood. Compassion rose above self. Instinctively she knew that the interview that was to her so momentous was to him only an embarrassing interlude. Shyness remained but the terror she had felt gave place to a feeling she had not then understood. As quickly as possible he had taken her to the hotel, leaving to his aunt all explanations that seemed necessary. And since then he had remained consistently in the background, delegating his authority to Miss Craven. But from the first his proximity had troubled her—she was always conscious of his presence. Hypersensitive from her convent upbringing she knew intuitively when he entered a room or left it. Men were to her an unknown quantity; the few she had met—brothers and cousins of school friends—had been viewed from a different standpoint. Hedged about with rigid French convention there had been no chance of acquaintance ripening into friendship—she had been merely a schoolgirl among other girls, touching only the fringe of the most youthful of the masculine element in the houses where she had stayed. She had been unprepared for the change to the daily contact with a man like Barry Craven. It would take time to accustom herself, to become used to the continual masculine presence.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.