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# MARIVOSA

By

**BARONESS ORCZY**

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*To*
ROBERT CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

In token of admiration of that marvellous book *A Brazilian Mystic*, without which this romance would never have been written.

EMMUSKA ORCZY

*La Padula,*
*Lerici, Italy.*

# CONTENTS

# *Book One*
# THE PRELUDE TO THE ADVENTURE

## I

In the closing years of the last century there arose in the wooded highlands of Brazil a prophet whose name was Antonio Maciel. Of mixed Portuguese and Indian blood, this Maciel had been a store-keeper in his father's business, had totted up accounts of black beans, tobacco and coffee, and had made entries for so many milreis in his ledger. Had it not been for matrimonial troubles Antonio would probably have ended his days peaceably and monotonously in the small provincial town of Quisceramobim, with no excitement to disturb the even tenor of his ways, save an occasional cock-fight on a Sunday, or a mock combat in the market-place.

Unfortunately, in the backwoods of Brazil, as everywhere else, love has its comedies and its tragedies; and even in the Sertao, surely the most desolate, the most isolated, the most abandoned corner of God's earth, the same dramas of love, jealousy and hate are enacted as in the stately homes of England, or the boudoirs of Paris. It is only the *mise-en-scène* that is different. Antonio Maciel had the misfortune to marry a woman of no morality and an ungovernable temper, who indirectly became the cause of the most sanguinary religious conflict of modern times. Her intrigue with a police official of Bahia, a friend of her husband's, became the turning-point in the career of the peaceable store-keeper. It roused the hot Portuguese blood in his veins. He came of a stock that had always held human life very cheap—especially that of an enemy—and coming upon the treacherous police official at a moment when his embittered soul was thirsting for revenge, he fell upon the betrayer of his honour with holy fury, and though he did not succeed in killing him, he inflicted grave bodily injury upon the traitor.

For this he was imprisoned, and from prison he escaped. Whither? No one knew. For ten years he disappeared and was duly forgotten. But ten years later he reappeared, no longer however as a simple-minded, hard-working storekeeper, but as a visionary and a prophet, preaching the Word of God, the Second Advent of the Lord, the Antichrist and the coming Day of Judgment.

Now the *vaqueiros* of the Sertao, cattle-raisers most of them, primitive, illiterate and wild, have a strong vein of mysticism and superstitious religious fervour in their veins. Catholics nominally, but in reality professing what amounts to the simplest form of theism, they know nothing and care less for the hierarchy of their Church. They are intensely devout, and religion plays a very important part in their lives; but as far as sacerdotalism is concerned, all they trouble about is the one curé of their district, who will absolve them of their sins, baptize them, marry and bury them; of Pope, hierarchy, and articles of faith they have only vaguely heard. Side by side, however, with their outward acceptance of the curé's teachings, they keep up all the old beliefs of their mixed ancestry—the power of the snake-charmers, the Gri-gri men and devil-dancers from Africa, some Moorish practices, and Indian fetishes and totems, any superstition in fact that appeals to their imagination and to their mystic tendencies.

Suddenly then, in the midst of these primitive men, there appeared—coming God knows whence—this tall, emaciated, unkempt creature, clad in a loose robe, with prematurely grey hair and beard fluttering around his parchment-coloured face, loudly proclaiming the imminent destruction of the world by the sword of the Antichrist, and the coming of the Kingdom of God, to which only the elect would presently be called. The appeal was immediate. Men flocked around the prophet like flies around a honeypot. Casting aside their lassoes and their goads, they followed him in their hundreds and their thousands with their wives and their children; they looked upon him as a new John the Baptist, of whom they had only vaguely heard, but who, they believed, must have looked just like this prophet with the flashing eyes and the tall pastoral staff. They followed him; they obeyed him; they echoed his prophecies that the world was now coming to an end, and that therefore, deeds—whatever they were, good or evil—no longer mattered; only prayer mattered, incessant prayer and abstinence which would help to open the portals of the Kingdom of God to His elect.

Led by the erstwhile store-keeper, whom they now called Antonio Conselheiro—Antonio the Counsellor—they

trekked as far as the shores of the Vasa Barris River; here they settled, and on a height overlooking the valley they started building an immense church, with their own homes and huts clustering on the surrounding slopes. They did no manner of harm to anyone, beyond consigning in their minds to everlasting damnation all those who did not hold the same beliefs as themselves. They spent their time in chanting hymns, listening to the prophet and building their church.

Why the Brazilian Government should have looked upon them as rebels and revolutionaries, why it should have decreed the death of the prophet and the destruction of his followers, it is impossible to say. Antonio Conselheiro was a religious fanatic, as misguided as you like, probably with mind unhinged, but he was not out to make political trouble. He firmly believed that the world was shortly coming to an end, and that therefore it mattered not what men did, so long as they 'kept in communion with God.' This meant fasting and praying and chanting hymns. There was no occasion to give alms to the poor, to love your neighbour as yourself, to be faithful to your wife and provide for your children, because there was really no time to bother about such things. The world was coming to an end, and naturally the Almighty was only going to trouble about people who were in constant communication with Him—who never, as it were, allowed Him to forget them.

Well! there might have been a good deal of harm in such a theory if preached in London, say, or New York, or Monte Carlo, but out there, where never foot of stranger treads, where never a word from the outside penetrates, where men live on horseback and have no thought of other occupations save cattle-rearing, what in the world did it matter what further superstitions made happier the lives of a few thousand ignorant vaqueiros? It must have been obvious to any sane official that these men knew nothing about politics, that the words 'Republic' and 'Empire' had no meaning whatever for them, and that 'Dom Pedro' or 'President X.Y.Z.' were all the same in their sight. But, of course, when the Government sent a military expedition against them, with Krupp guns and other engines of war, they fought stubbornly, violently, cruelly. Some of their deeds rivalled the worst atrocities committed during the religious wars in mediæval times, but had they been left alone they would not have interfered with anyone; they would have remained content to chant their hymns and to build their church, a law unto themselves perhaps, but as they were so far away from anywhere and had little, if any, intercourse with the rest of the world, the State could not possibly have suffered at their hands.

No fewer than four military expeditions—each one of vastly-increased strength—were sent out against these so-called rebels before they were finally subdued ... annihilated would be the more correct word ... and even then they were not subdued by force of arms, but by hunger and disease. They fought relentlessly to the last, giving no quarter, asking for none. Their women, wrapped in their blankets, starved to death with Indian stoicism. Their leaders were killed to a man. At last the prophet himself succumbed. He was found one morning, at early dawn, within the crumbling walls of the half-finished church, lying on the floor face downwards, a crucifix gripped tightly in his hand.

To the last they chanted their hymns; and when the last of the walls of the church fell crashing over the prostrate body of their prophet, when their homes were nothing but a handful of smouldering ashes, the soldiers of the Government encamped upon the heights could still hear through the stillness of the night a murmur rising from the valley below—long, mournful cadences that rose and fell like the soughing of the wind through the scrub. It was the song of the dying warriors, still trusting in their God, still waiting to enter into His Kingdom, and content in the belief that those who had brought them down were speeding to eternal damnation.

The author is indebted to R. Cunninghame Graham's *A Brazilian Mystic* for all the facts relating to the life and death of Antonio Conselheiro.

## II

All this occurred little more than fifty years ago. Nothing for years was heard of the little band of fanatics who had given the Republican Government so much trouble at the time; only a very few of them could have survived the final suppression of that so-called rebellion, and they presumably went back to their hard life and their peaceful avocation of cattle-rearing.

But, strangely enough, some twenty-five years later, a new turbulent element had sprung up in the Sertao. It seemed all of a sudden as if the strange events of the late 'nineties were being repeated, though in a different form. Again there arose a mystic leader with power to gather round him a band of enthusiastic and devoted followers recruited from among the half-civilized dwellers of these rocky fastnesses. Unlike Antonio Conselheiro, however, this new prophet—or whatever one chooses to call him—was not a religious enthusiast. He preached neither the coming of the Kingdom of God nor the end of the World and the Advent of Christ. In fact, he did not preach anything at all. He left this part of the business to his enthusiastic lieutenants. Nor was his life as ascetic or his aims as disinterested as those of the great Antonio. Who he was, or whence he came, no one knew. Everything was mere conjecture. But those of his followers whom the exigencies of business or labour brought into contact with the outside world spoke with bated breath of the man whom they called the Great Unknown.

*Vaqueiros*, farmers, herdsmen, as well as outcasts of every sort, Negroes, Indians, half-breeds, and a few gaol-birds, made up the sum total of the followers of this new prophet. The illiterate, uneducated, primitive, declared that he was Antonio Conselheiro come to life again: whilst those who were more enlightened, those who occasionally consorted with their fellow-men and who came from time to time to Bonfim or Joazeiro to sell their cattle or their hides, averred that the Great Unknown was the grandson of Dom Pedro II, the last Emperor of Brazil, come to claim the throne of his forebears. How they worked that out nobody could quite make out: certain it is that a political atmosphere as well as a religious one hung over this new version of an old story. The Sertao appeared now like a second Vendée where men loyal to the old dynasty rallied round the person of their dispossessed sovereign and were apparently prepared to fight and die in his cause. The fact that the grandsons of the late Emperor over in France cared nothing about these fanatical upholders of their cause, nor for the throne of Brazil for that matter, would not have obtained credence in the Sertao for one moment. Nor did these new Vendéans worry their heads as to the exact genealogy of the man they had decided to champion. They stood for a principle and a dynasty, not for an individual, and they believed in the Great Unknown. Heroes like Lescure and La Rochejaquelin were to find their counterpart in men like Gamalleria and Ouvidor, the fierce and fearsome lieutenants of the Great Unknown.

At first nothing very serious happened to throw disquiet into the minds of the Government up at Rio. The only fact that could be called disquieting was that the number of recruits to the banner of the mysterious leader was growing with amazing rapidity. The two men, Gamalleria and Ouvidor, well known to the police as lawless marauders, escaped gaol-birds in fact, were daily pushing their way to outlying villages, farms, and even small towns, loudly heralding the Second Advent of the Lord and the last Day of Judgment, whilst proclaiming the Great Unknown as the prophet Antonio Conselheiro resurrected from the dead or, alternatively, as Dom Pedro III of Bragança, rightful Emperor of Brazil.

It was a clever way of rousing superstitious enthusiasm and allying it with supposed loyalty to the dispossessed dynasty. The more ignorant crowd took up with fervour the idea of the mysterious leader being the resurrected prophet, whilst to the more educated amongst them the thought of overthrowing the present Government, which insisted on levying and collecting taxes, made a strong appeal.

And, generally speaking, the personality of the Great Unknown made an appeal stronger still to the mystically inclined minds of the Sertanejos. His band soon rose to a horde. He collected them about him and presently established his headquarters at Canudos, the spot where Antonio Conselheiro had built his mammoth church. Here he built himself a dwelling-house, using for the purpose the very stones which for over twenty years had stood, a crumbling mass, as a mausoleum over the body of the sacred Counsellor; and here he had dwelt for the past four or five years in barbaric splendour, with half a hundred women to serve him and half a thousand men to scour the country round, robbing, looting, stealing from peaceable farmers and town dwellers the food which he needed for his table and the luxuries which he required for his house.

His face was never seen save by an intimate few—a dozen lieutenants, his body-guard—wild, marauding outlaws and escaped convicts with tempers more fierce than the rest, voices more authoritative and powers to compel obedience through ruthlessness and cruelty. They alone were privileged to see the face of the Great Unknown who, when he walked abroad, kept his head wrapped in a veil. He wore a long flowing robe which reached to his ankles; his feet were encased in sandals; his hand was often stretched out for greeting or benediction. Half a dozen Negroes walked before him to beat down the scrub and thorns in his path.

Within the past year or two bitter complaints had reached Bahia of numberless depredations carried on with savage

impudence on outlying farms and cattle ranches, of hold-ups—not only on the roads, but even on the railway north of Queimadas—of petty larceny and highway robbery. The police of the province, not being numerous, were powerless, and Bahia sent the complaints up to Rio. The Government, after saying 'Damn!' once or twice through the mouth of its officials, found itself compelled to give the matter more or less serious consideration.

'We must do something about it, I suppose,' one important gentleman said between two yawns.

'Must we?' said another.

It was very, very hot—even in Rio. Great Lord! what must it be like in that God-forsaken hole, the Sertao? And on the road between the railhead and Canudos, where there is not a single tree to afford shade to panting mule or man, where every drop of water has to be carried for miles and invariably falls short of the needs of the moment, where ... but what is the good of talking about it all when it is so hot?

'Must we?'

'Really! Must we?'

Which is just what English Government officials would say in similar circumstances. Some there were here who had grown hoary in the service of their country and who remembered the many ill-fated expeditions that were sent out in the far-back 'nineties against Antonio Conselheiro.

'We must not underestimate,' they said, 'the strength of these fellows. They are tough. They know every inch of their God-forsaken country, and they have stolen enough arms to equip three regiments. Do not let us repeat,' they said, 'the mistakes of the past.'

They swore that they would not—but they did.

They sent a couple of hundred men who, after indescribable sufferings, parched with thirst, half-dead with fatigue, their skin ravaged by insects, their clothing torn to shreds in the scrub, finally reached one of the outlying townships some forty kilometres from Canudos, in a condition that left them quite unfit to meet even the most despicable enemy, let alone a lot of wild men from the bush, well equipped with stolen rifles and other weapons, inured to every kind of hardship, burning with enthusiasm, and to whom a kind of guerrilla warfare was as easy as drawing breath.

Disaster, complete and hopeless, overtook the first expedition. Disaster, even more complete and even more hopeless, overtook the second—one composed this time of five hundred men under the command of a colonel of Teuton descent, who was believed to be a genius in military tactics.

The Great Unknown and his followers were unconquered still, and the two victories had enhanced their prestige and fanned their impudence.

'They are invincible,' said the ignorant and the superstitious; and while the Government busied itself in a desultory way with organizing yet another expedition against the brigands, recruits to the banner of the mysterious leader came in in shoals. The Sertao had become a La Vendée in very truth, and an unconquered one at that. And as, previously, Antonio Conselheiro had preached the Second Advent of Christ, the Kingdom of God, and the destruction of the World, so now the followers of the Great Unknown prophesied the return of Dom Pedro III to the throne of his forebears, the fall of the Republic, and the re-establishment of the Empire of Brazil.

It was time the Government up at Rio got a serious move on, or some of these prophecies might be coming true.

There was a talk of sending out Colonel Perraz with two thousand men. Two thousand well-armed, well-trained, disciplined Government troops against a handful of uneducated, semi-savage cattle-raisers! It had to be done, of course, but in secrecy—or the rest of the world would laugh.

No laughing matter, this Great Unknown and his fanatical hordes!

# Book Two
# THE ODYSSEY

## I

Timothy O'Clerigh, known to all his pals and his messmates as Tim O'Clee, stood by the open window polishing his boots, and he sang—sang in a full-throated baritone, gloriously out of tune—a song of the old country:

I know not, I ask not
If guilt's in thy heart...
Tum, tum, tiddlee tum tum...

Then a long pause while the note, a full half-tone flat, rose in an ascending *vibrato*:

Whatever thou art...

And this last phrase he gave forth so lustily that the full-throated baritone seemed like a detonation out of a gun which went echoing and reverberating across the port and the bay from horn to horn, and away over the purple sea.

'Listen to him!' the little barefooted urchins said down below; and they looked up, gaping and wide-eyed, at the open window where a massive torso appeared above the sill, white and glistening from recent ablutions, with two powerful arms, one hand wielding a brush, the other buried inside a boot that had obviously seen many a better day.

Come rest in this boo-zum my own stricken deer....

'The Englishman,' was the dry comment made by a dark-skinned shock-headed youth who until this moment had been the centre of admiration of the crowd of street urchins. 'They are so white—pah! ... always washing themselves ... and they are mad.'

Leaning against the railings, he was busy with a pocket-knife scooping out the inside of a luscious pomegranate, which he then transferred to his mouth. His star performance consisted in spitting out the many pips, some to an incredible distance, by an indrawing and outpouring of the breath: a skill which could obviously only be attained by the elect, and then only after considerable practice.

'Measure that one,' he commanded. 'No, not that one ... the last.'

And obediently one of the young scamps grovelled on the road and with a long stick carefully measured out the distance that lay between the toe of the star performer and the last expectorated pip.

'Three and a half!' he gasped, awestruck with the magnitude of the feat.

'I have done five,' the star said negligently, and prepared for a repetition of the unheard-of feat.

But somehow the attention of the public had wandered. That mad, shiny, white fellow up there, whose voice rose above the rattle and the squeaking of the tramcar up the street, and who took the trouble on this hot afternoon to do something to his boots with a brush, was a greater, because a more novel attraction.

And now he put down boot and brush, and disappeared within the room, whence repeated sounds of splashing water and indeterminate snatches of song further roused the contempt of the local idol.

'They must be dirty,' he said, 'or they would not wash so often. I don't like those English.'

One of the urchins, a knowing-looking little chap with small round eyes like a ferret and a sharp uptilted nose, ventured on contradiction.

'He is not English,' he said.

'Not English. I tell you...'

'Fra Martino says he is Irish.'

'Irish? What's that?'

And this time, to mark contempt still more complete and more withering, the star performer expectorated lustily. The next moment a basinful of soapy water drenched his tousled head and soaked through his dun-coloured shirt.

'I'll have you know, my young friend,' came, with a stentorian laugh, from up above in somewhat halting Portuguese, 'that an Irishman—a real, fine, none-o'-your-mongrel Irishman—is the most magnificent product of God's creation; and if you don't believe me, you just come up here and we'll have an argument about it, which will leave you with eyes so black that your own mother won't know you.'

Timothy O'Clerigh, with the empty basin in his hands, his face and body glistening with moisture, his brown hair an unruly shock above his laughing face, waited at the window for a moment or two, not really in order to see whether his challenge would be accepted—for he knew it would not—but because he liked to watch the keen, fox-like faces of those little urchins grinning, yet hardly daring to grin, at the discomfiture of their idol.

'So much for the loyalty of the public,' he murmured to himself, put the basin down again and proceeded with his toilet.

## II

The very first event in the thirty-two years of Timothy O'Clerigh's life that left a lasting impression on him—in more ways than one—was when at the age of three he chanced to toddle as far as the stable yard, unattended by his nurse, and caught Pat Mulvaney in the act of thrashing Sheilagh, the lovely Samoyed, who was one of Tim's most adored playmates. Pat had fastened a rope to Sheilagh's collar and tied this to a big hook in the wall, and he was lamming into her with a big stick. And, oh, horrors!—there was a dead chicken tied to Sheilagh's collar and another to her tail—at least Tim supposed that these chickens were dead.

Sheilagh was making no sound as blow upon blow rained upon her poor back, but the look in her eyes crouching there, with those dead chickens tied to her, was more than Tim could stand. He was very, very small and he was only three, whilst Pat was old—at least twenty—and very, very big, but Tim's blood boiled at the sight. For the first second or two he had stood as if transfixed with horror, then head down he charged into Pat's legs. Now Pat had neither seen nor heard him; he was not prepared for the assault, being intent upon punishing Sheilagh. Anyway, he lost his balance, tripped and fell on the cobblestones of the yard, and of course Tim fell on the top of him.

What happened after that was in Tim's recollection rather more vague—he was picked up by his nurse and carried, dumb and terrified, into the house. His misdeed was duly reported to Uncle Justin, who gave him a severe thrashing, and he was put to bed and deprived of his rice pudding. The next day Uncle Justin explained to him that Sheilagh had well deserved her punishment, because she had dug her way into the chicken-run when nobody was about, and had deliberately killed thirty-six young pullets; and this was a misdeed which had to be punished in a stern and exemplary way, lest it should occur again. On the other hand, Pat Mulvaney, the stud-groom, who had only done his duty in this

painful matter, was now very, very ill, in consequence of Tim's assault upon him, and as soon as he was a little better Tim would have to go and see him and apologize to him for what he had done. Several days went by, and both Sheilagh and Tim had completely recovered from the effects of the chastisement which they had respectively endured, for they were having a glorious romp with a ball on the lawn, when Uncle Justin came and fetched Tim away and took him to a place in which there was a bed, and in this bed there was Pat Mulvaney, who had something white tied round the top of his head, and whose cheeks and nose were no longer of that nice, bright red colour with which Tim had been familiar—in fact they were almost as white as the pillow and sheet on the bed.

'Here, Mulvaney,' Uncle Justin said in his big, big voice, 'I have brought Master Tim to see you. He wishes to tell you how sorry he is for what he did the other day. He acted like a thoughtless little boy and had no idea that he would hurt you——' or words to that effect. Tim didn't cry, though he was very sorry indeed, for he liked Pat very much, almost as much as Sheilagh. He shook hands with Pat, and was very glad when Uncle Justin took him home again.

Uncle Justin was never lenient to Tim's misdeeds, certainly not to those which, as he said, were unbecoming to an Irish gentleman; so faults were never condoned, and punishments as Tim grew older were apt to be severe. But Tim nevertheless adored Uncle Justin. A very little time after the painful incident of Sheilagh and Pat, Uncle Justin bought a little tubby white horse and gave it to Tim for his fourth birthday, and it was Pat and Uncle Justin who taught Tim to ride—it was on his fifth birthday that he was first allowed to ride to hounds on his pony without her being on the lead, and on his ninth that he first rode a real Irish hunter.

'Elbows closer, Tim, look at your feet—damn it, boy, you look like a blasted dago on that horse.'

And Tim would grip the saddle with his little thighs, and square his young shoulders, trying to look as magnificent on a horse as Uncle Justin himself; and if at the end of a hard day's hunting Uncle Justin would say to him: 'You took that fence well, Tim, my boy!' or 'I liked the way you picked yourself up after that fall,' Tim's little heart would swell with pride and determination to do better still.

For twenty-six years Tim had adored Uncle Justin. Born a posthumous child, his mother, too, had died before he ever knew he had one. But Uncle Justin had been for him father, mother, brother, friend—in childhood, in school days, during those terrible years of the war. When Tim lay wounded, almost dying in hospital in France, it was Uncle Justin who watched at his bedside more devotedly than any mother could have done, who cared for him when he was convalescent, who lavished all that money and thought could provide to hasten his complete recovery to health.

Uncle Justin was for Tim the embodiment of everything that a gentleman should be—generous to a fault, and if quick-tempered, always just and kind; a magnificent horseman, a hard rider; a splendid all-round sportsman; a great admirer of the fair sex; fond of his glass and of good cheer. And of all the places in the wide, wide world, there was none in Tim's eyes to equal Castle Traskmoore, the stately Irish home on the hills above the lake, with the age-old elms and oaks mounting guard over the majestic grey pile, the crenellated towers and ivy-covered battlements that had seen the whole history of the country unfolded beneath their walls.

'It will all be yours some day, my lad,' Uncle Justin would say, with that cheery laugh of his which masked a deep emotion, whenever Tim 'enthused' more than ordinarily over the beauties of Traskmoore.

'I love it because you are here, Uncle,' Tim replied. After which nothing more was said, because these two understood one another as no other friends in the world had ever done.

Tim had sent in his papers after the Armistice, and since then had become his Uncle's right-hand man on the estate, in the stables, the stud-farm, the kennels. A busy life and a cloudless one. And then there were the equally happy, if somewhat more hectic days in London. Lord Traskmoore had a fine house in Grosvenor Square and he always went up to town for the season; this meant Epsom and Newmarket, Ascot and Goodwood; it meant Lord's and Henley. Tim joined him when he could, spent a few joyous days in London with Uncle Justin, and returned to Traskmoore to carry on the work on the estate.

But Tim had one great weakness, one grave disappointment in life; he was under the impression that he had a fine voice, and that, given good tuition, he would become a great singer—not a professional singer of course, but one who

could give his friends an infinity of pleasure. The trouble was that he had no ear, and not one true note came out of his lusty throat. A great teacher of singing in London, consulted on the subject, declared that nothing could be done for Major O'Clerigh. An ear for tune was a gift of God which had been denied him.

Tim was offended with the great musician, called him 'a blighter,' took a few lessons from a more accommodating personage and continued to delight Uncle Justin—who had no more ear than he had—by singing Irish ballads to him gloriously out of tune, to the accompaniment of the gramophone.

## III

It had indeed been a happy life for Tim O'Clee until that spring of 1924, when the crash came. It was a catastrophe such as Tim, even in the wildest possible nightmare, could never have conceived.

He ran up to town at the end of May, hoping to spend a month with Uncle Justin in Grosvenor Square for the Derby, Ascot, and so on. The very first day had not yet gone by before he realized that an extraordinary change had come over the old man. Something of his cheeriness had gone; he seemed at tunes strangely absent-minded and, when called to himself, equally strangely embarrassed. With Tim he appeared constrained, with occasional outbursts of devil-may-care joviality which were obviously forced. Tim, vaguely disturbed by what he felt was a presage of evil, groped in vain at first for the key to the mystery; but friends soon put him in possession of it. A man always has enough friends to do that job for him. Hadn't he heard? Didn't he know? Why, it was the talk of the town!

'Great God! What?' Tim exclaimed.

'Hold-Hands Juliana! A positive infatuation, my dear fellow! Didn't you know?'

If Tim had been told that the heavens had fallen into the middle of Hyde Park, he could not have been more dumb-founded than he was at this moment. Hold-Hands Juliana! Heavens above! And it was the talk of the town that old Traskmoore was infatuated with her! Oh! Tim knew the woman well enough. A Roumanian (or something of the sort) by birth, she was the widow of that eccentric fellow Dudley Stone, who before the war had been a good deal in the public eye through a series of wild and foolhardy adventures in which he had embarked at different times. He had flown from London to Vladivostok, had spent three months in Tibet disguised as a wandering fakir; at one time he fitted out an Antarctic expedition, at another he commanded a division of Bulgarian *comitadjis* during the Balkan War. It was said that he had seen the inside of eighteen different foreign prisons, including one in Siberia, all on a charge of spying. His great idea was the search for hidden treasure: he fitted out various expeditions for that purpose and went off to find the buried treasures of the Armada, of Captain Kidd, of the cities of Arabia. The ambition of his life was to find one day the land of El Dorado in the wastes of Brazil, where lay hidden the priceless treasures of the Incas of Peru.

Of Dudley Stone himself the public had heard quite a good deal in those pre-war days, but of his wife—nothing. She was not Hold-Hands Juliana then, and but few people had ever seen the pale-faced, wide-eyed young girl whom that 'lunatic, Stone,' had married somewhere out in the Balkans. He was in Bulgaria when the war broke out, and after that there were some very ugly stories current about him in connection with the rout of the Serbian army, due, it was said, to the machinations of an English spy. Be that as it may, Stone was never again seen in England. What became of him nobody knew and certainly nobody cared.

And then one fine day Hold-Hands Juliana appeared upon the scene—no longer pale, no longer thin—with pearls round her neck and diamonds in her ears. She gave it out that her husband had gone out to Brazil after the Armistice to find the treasure of the Incas. He had succeeded apparently, though Juliana didn't actually say so, but she threw money about with a lavish hand in London, Deauville or Monte Carlo. Hardly a day had gone by during the last season or two without some mention of her in the Society columns of the *Continental Herald*. Tim had often heard her referred to by men of a certain set as 'Hold-Hands Juliana.' She was no longer young: she was coarse, and loud and common. She had huge, goggled dark eyes, strongly-marked eyebrows and long, curved black lashes. Her mouth was very full and her teeth

very white, like a row of marble tombstones. Her hair was black and glossy; she wore it parted very much on one side with a big, unnatural-looking wave falling over her left eye. Her dresses always looked too short, and her corsets too tight. Her fingers, short and thick, were smothered in rings. When Timothy first met her—somewhere or other in London—she had appeared to him like the true presentment of a cinema vamp.

Oh, yes! Tim knew all about her. But that Uncle Justin should——

The old man had met her, apparently, somewhere this season—it didn't much matter where—and, according to Club gossip, had at once fallen a victim to her wiles in the way that old men do when a clever adventuress sets a trap for them. Unfortunately, there was no doubt about it. Club gossip had not even exaggerated. With a sinking of the heart, which at times made him almost physically sick, Tim stood by and watched the growth of this fateful senile passion. He could note its every phase, whilst he himself was powerless in face of the coming catastrophe, which he would have given the best years of his life to avert.

It came even sooner than he expected. By the end of June, Hold-Hands Juliana gave it out that her husband had died of malarial fever at Monsataz in Brazil, the small seaport town south of Pernambuco from whence he had been on the point of starting for the land of El Dorado, where lay buried the most marvellous treasures of the earth. She was seen shopping in Bond Street clad in deepest mourning. Later on, the Society columns of the daily Press announced that Mrs. Stone would sail from Cherbourg on the French steamer *Duguay-Trouin* for Pernambuco, and would not be back in London before the autumn. Tim was at Traskmoore when he read of these various social events in the London papers; his hopes rose at a bound. Absence, he argued with himself, might work wonders with Uncle Justin's infatuation for that blatant adventuress. Pity, he thought, that the hunting season was not yet on, but there was the fishing—Uncle Justin might try Norway this year—and the 12th was not so very far off now.

Tim went to bed that evening happier than he had been for weeks. He had already made up his mind to go up to London at once. But the next morning he had a letter from Uncle Justin telling him that his beloved friend Juliana, the widow of Dudley Stone, had made him the happiest of men by promising to become his wife as soon as the period of mourning was over and she could return to England from her pilgrimage to the grave of her late husband.

Well! The conventional period of mourning was apparently over the following October, for on the tenth of that month the Earl of Traskmoore was married at the registry office of St. George's to Juliana, relict of Dudley Stone, Esquire, and daughter of Dr. Brailescu of Bucharest. Hold-Hands Juliana was now Countess of Traskmoore. Heavens above!

To Tim O'Clee the catastrophe meant the loss of that friendship which for twenty-six years had been the light of his life. For even during the three or four months preceding his marriage to Juliana, Uncle Justin had been a changed man; but at first, especially while the woman was still in Brazil, the change had been very subtle. No one would have noticed it except Tim. But Tim knew. Lord Traskmoore was no longer Uncle Justin to him.

It was after the marriage—and when the bridal pair returned to London—that the change appeared devastating. Uncle Justin, who had been Tim's beau-ideal of a sportsman and a gentleman, was a very different man now. For one thing, he drank harder than he used to, and when in his cups was morose and irritable. Tim would hearken in vain for that cheery laugh which was wont to raise the echo of the old grey walls of Traskmoore.

Juliana, of course, hated Traskmoore. It was dull, she said, and gave her the creeps. Hunting did not appeal to her—she did not know how to ride, so it was London all the time now—theatres, dinner-parties, night-clubs. Tim carried on at the old place for a time for Uncle Justin's sake, but presently the hunters were sold, then several of the farms. What was the good of carrying on? It was London—London all the time, or else Deauville or Monte Carlo.

Never again the meets on a cold frosty morning, with the keen air whipping your face, and a satin-skinned, iron-sinewed Irish hunter between your knees; never again the horn of the huntsman or the cry of hounds, the tramping of hoofs on the ploughed fields, the five-barred gates, the smell of earth and stables and woodland! Never again the cheery 'Well done, lad!' which had thrilled so that it almost hurt! Never again the Irish ballads sung out of tune to the accompaniment of a gramophone! Uncle Justin had taken to tennis and even to dancing! The gramophone these days only turned out the newest jazz tunes.

## IV

When it was that Tim first had the conviction that the woman had told a lie about her widowhood and the death of Dudley Stone, he could not have told you. But the Gaelic temperament is always more or less psychic, and resentment had sharpened Tim's perceptions.

His first meeting with Uncle Justin after the return of the bridal pair from their honeymoon was, perhaps, the most miserable moment in the whole of the miserable affair. Tim longed to take that vile adventuress by the throat and force her to confess to the trickeries and the sortilege wherewith she had brought the noblest Irish gentleman that God ever put on the map down to a state bordering on degradation. Far, far sooner would he have thought of that fine sportsman meeting his death on the hunting-field than of seeing him as he now was, the wreck of his former self, both mentally and physically, with eyes bleared, and unsteady hand, and that furtive look which so pathetically avoided meeting Tim's glance. Whenever Tim caught that look he felt just as he had done when, at three years old, he caught Pat Mulvaney lamming into Sheilagh. He wanted to charge into Hold-Hands Juliana and trip her up, morally and physically, as he had done to Pat then. And gradually he realized what a shameless liar the woman was. From the first she told him lies—trifling ones for the most part, her age, the provenance of this or that jewel, an obviously false account of Dudley Stone's adventure—and when Tim taunted her, she only laughed, shrugged her fat shoulders and showed her large white teeth. And, as she lied over this or that, Tim became more and more convinced that she had lied when she gave him a circumstantial account of the death of Dudley Stone over at Monsataz, on the Brazilian coast, of malarial fever, in May, 1924.

'I don't believe a word of it,' Tim said boldly, when she had finished her story. And again she just laughed and showed her big white teeth.

The following year a boy was born of the marriage—quite a fine child, so people said. And thus was Tim O'Clee robbed of title and inheritance in addition to the great loss of Uncle Justin's affection. And he could do nothing save grind his teeth in an agony of resentment. The conviction had now taken deep root in his mind that some mystery hung over the supposed death of Dudley Stone, but while Uncle Justin was alive nothing could be done. To break the old man's heart by unmasking the adventuress who had cast her spells over him was not to be thought of, especially as obviously, alas!—he had not many more years to live.

Indeed, he died very soon after that at Traskmoore, whither he had begged to be moved as soon as he felt that his end was nigh. Juliana fortunately refused to go with him, declaring with her accustomed flippancy that he had nothing serious the matter with him; she, herself, she said, was much more ill and could not leave London or the doctor who attended her. So Tim was alone with Uncle Justin when he died, and alone he walked behind the farm wagon which conveyed the grand old sportsman to his last resting-place beside his forebears in the sanctuary of Traskmoore church.

Tim's grief for many weeks and months transcended other emotions, so that for the time being he even ceased to think of the adventuress who had exercised such a baneful influence over his life. Only a year later did the reaction set in. The baby son of Hold-Hands Juliana had, in the natural course of events, slipped into the title, estates and immense wealth of the O'Clerighs. She herself slipped equally naturally into her position as sole executrix under the will, and as guardian of her boy, with the magnificent jointure bestowed on 'my adored wife, Juliana,' by the over-fond, over-trusting old man. Tim's name was not even mentioned in the will. This neither surprised nor upset him; he knew that Hold-Hands Juliana would have seen to that. And in a way he was glad. The greater the wrong that she did him, the more relentless would he be when the hour of retribution struck at last.

For he never doubted for a moment that that hour would come one day, and for this reason: the day before Uncle Justin died he placed a set of old diaries, which he had kept regularly for years, in Tim's hands. Why he did it Tim could not say, but anyway, Uncle Justin had then said, with a wan smile:

'You'll find many entries that will amuse you, my lad. You remember the day fat Mrs. Benham came out in a pink

coat and brass buttons and then the rain came down ... and ... and ... You can read the things right through ... they'll remind you of some jolly runs we had, you and I ... together....'

He rambled on for a time—already he was very weak; the immediate past seemed to have slipped out of his enfeebled brain; only the happy past came back with its pictures of huntsmen and hounds, of his favourite hunters, and Tim's first pony.

'You may read every word, my lad,' he murmured feebly, 'there never were any secrets between us until...'

The sentence was never completed, and it was nearly a year later when, in an idle and melancholy mood, Tim turned over the pages of the old diaries, intending to consign them after that to the flames. They were mere records of a simple, uneventful, straight and clean life. A phrase here and there brought a smile to Tim's lips and a tear to his eyes, for the entries so often concerned him:

'Tim rode out on Wibbles. The boy has already a fine seat....'

Or:

'Had a grand run to-day. Killed twice. Tim took Farmer McBride's fence in fine style....'

Or again:

'I don't know what that blighted piano-thumper can mean by saying that Tim can't be taught to sing. The boy has a splendid voice....'

It was in the fateful year 1924 that Juliana's name first cropped up in the diary:

'Sat next Mrs. Stone at dinner. A charming woman.'

And again:

'With Mrs. Stone to dinner at the Berkeley, afterwards to see the new play at Drury Lane....'

Or:

'I have never in my life met a more beautiful or more intelligent woman. If I were not so old...'

A few references to her past history, violent abuse of the unknown husband, Dudley Stone, ever-growing admiration for Juliana's beauty, charm and fascination, together with expressions of passionate adoration, made up the entries for April and part of May. And then came the fateful words:

'My beloved is free. That blackguard, Stone, is dead. Thank God....'

Followed soon after by:

'My beloved tells me she must go to that outlandish place to see that the blackguard's grave is properly tended....'

But there was one entry which set Tim's blood on fire and caused him to break into stentorian song:

'I have made a free gift to my beloved of the £50,000 she wanted. I have asked no questions. Why should I? She knows that I would lay my entire fortune at her feet....'

A free gift of £50,000 in the year 1924—just before Hold-Hands Juliana started for Brazil, having given it out that Dudley Stone had died there of malarial fever! That £50,000 had been used—for what? She went to Brazil ostensibly to visit her husband's grave; she did not require £50,000 for mere travelling expenses. Already she had tricked Traskmoore into a formal promise of marriage.... What was £50,000 to her, then, when the whole of the O'Clerigh fortune was already as good as hers?

Armed with Uncle Justin's diaries, Tim went to consult one of the foremost lawyers in London and laid the whole case before him. He declared his belief that when the Roumanian woman went through the formality of marriage with the late Earl of Traskmoore she had furnished no proof of the death of her lawful husband, Dudley Stone; that, presumably, that same Dudley Stone was still alive when the second marriage was contracted, and that therefore this second marriage was illegal, the child born of it illegitimate and he, Timothy O'Clerigh, the rightful Earl of Traskmoore. Immense sums were then paid out in fees for the opinion of the most eminent Counsel at the Bar, and subsequently an action was entered in the High Court.

But discoveries revealed the existence of affidavits proving the death of Dudley Stone at Monsataz, in Brazil, of malarial fever in May, 1924, five months before Juliana's marriage to Lord Traskmoore. These affidavits had been sworn to before the British Consul at Pernambuco by persons of unimpeachable reputation, all of whom were ready to attest in the English courts of law that they had known Dudley Stone, and either been present at his death or otherwise known about it. There was the priest who had heard his last confession and conducted the burial service; there was the doctor who had attended him; and there was his intimate friend out there, Dom Manoël da Lisbao, a gentleman of high social position, formerly an officer in the Brazilian army and at one time military attaché at the Brazilian Ministry in Paris.

Of course, in such circumstances the action was bound to fail: the lawyer advised its immediate withdrawal before further expense was incurred. But Tim was unconvinced, and even while he took his lawyer's advice, he swore to himself that this would not be the end of this monstrous conspiracy. There was something in Juliana's blatant show of triumph that proclaimed not virtue victorious, but anxiety happily overcome. The lawyers did not see that, but Tim did. He knew.

Fifty thousand pounds! What did Hold-Hands Juliana want with £50,000 save to bribe three dagoes out there to swear the affidavits that enabled her to become Countess of Traskmoore? The lawyers had pooh-poohed the idea. The whole thing was fantastic, they said; and, in view of the affidavits, could not possibly be proved; but Tim was not an Irishman for nothing.... He had registered a vow that he would carry on the fight; and carry it on he did from that hour—not dreaming then of the amazing series of adventures which caught him up, as in a whirlwind, and tossed him hither and thither like a leaf in a tornado.

His father had left him a few thousands. He had no one to consider but himself. Half his small fortune had gone in futile legal expenses: he put the other half in his pocket and started out for Brazil.

## V

And now here he was, actually and indubitably in Monsataz, standing at the window of a respectable hotel which

had been recommended to him by the captain of the small coasting steamer which had brought him north from Rio. The hotel overlooked the wide bay and the beautiful harbour with the huge rocks that guard its entrance like giant sentinels, rising a hundred feet and more out of the water. Beyond the bay the ocean glistened smooth as a purple mirror, with the haze of the setting sun slowly spreading over the still, calm waters like a veil that held within its folds all the secrets and all the mysteries which Tim O'Clee had come all this way to probe.

Brazil! Monsataz! Those two names had been eating into his brain ever since the day when he swore to himself that, in spite of what the lawyers said, he would prove them wrong and Hold-Hands Juliana a liar and a thief. So here he was.

A strange coincidence, which Tim at once put down to luck, had come to pass already. He had been shown into his room by one of the hotel servants. His luggage had been disposed about the room, and the coffee-coloured servant busied himself with undoing the straps of the valise. Tim had been studying Portuguese steadily for the past year. Already on the coasting steamer he had taken every opportunity of talking to the captain and exchanging words with the petty officers and the crew. He did not speak very correctly perhaps, but he made himself readily understood. His mind intent upon the one all-important subject, he remarked casually to the coffee-coloured valet:

'It is not often, I suppose, that you have foreign visitors here?'

'But yes, senhor,' the man replied, 'many Americanos.'

'Oh, I don't mean them. I mean Europeans—English, for instance.'

The man shook his head.

'No, senhor,' he said, 'not many English, they mostly go to the Hotel Americano. But there have been some who stayed here for a day or two, reverend gentlemen—mostly Protestants.'

'Seen any lately?'

'Yes, senhor, last year. A reverend gentleman, he came with a lady who said she was his wife, but as he also called himself a priest, we could not understand how he could have a wife.'

Tim did not happen to hold any views one way or the other on the subject of the celibacy of the clergy, but he allowed the man's tongue to run away with him and listened with half an ear to his dark-skinned friend's opinion of reverend gentlemen who travelled about in the company of ladies. It seems that all the reverend gentlemen, both English and Americanos, who had ever come to Monsataz had a lady with them, but what was very strange was that the lady never was beautiful, which perhaps made the matter all right from a moral point of view.

It was all the more astonishing, was the man's final comment on the situation, that the two English gentlemen who had come to this hotel—and who were *not* reverends—did travel alone.

'The two English gentlemen?' Tim asked; 'who were they?'

'Well, there is yourself, senhor.'

'Yes. Who was the other?'

'A nice tall English gentleman like yourself, senhor. His name was Stone.'

Of course Tim had expected this answer, and yet when it came it seemed to be like a hammer-blow hitting at his brain. Dudley Stone had actually stayed in this hotel, perhaps slept in this very room. If that was not a piece of the most stupendous luck, then he, Tim O'Clee, didn't know what luck was!

Dudley Stone here—in this very room, probably! The man whose life, or the date of whose death, might mean home, title, riches, everything that a man could possibly wish for in this world, to impecunious Timothy O'Clerigh!

And Tim, brandishing a button-hook in the fashion of a shillelagh, executed a jig to the tune of the one and only Irish ballad which he knew:

'Come rest in this boo-zum—tiddly hi, tiddly hi—tum ti——'

Nor did he desist when he caught the great black eyes of his friend fixed in a kind of wondering awe upon him.

'I am so glad you think I'm English, my friend,' he said, solemnly, 'because otherwise you might go about saying that Irish gentlemen are mad.'

But undoubtedly the adventure had begun well; the thing to do now was not to waste time, tropical grass must not be left to grow under the feet of Tim O'Clee.

Knowing well that in every country, in every town and in every village throughout the world, the local clergy are the great channel for social intercourse, Timothy, in further conversation with another coffee-coloured employee of the hotel—the waiter this time who served him at dinner—inquired which was the principal church of Monsataz, and who was its incumbent. He learned that there were no fewer than two hundred churches in the city, but that of these the most important one was undoubtedly the church of Sao Felice, of which Fra Martino, a reverend gentleman of great eminence, was the incumbent.

Unfortunately, when Tim further inquired of his informant whether the latter knew anything of the church of Santa Fé and its vicar, Fra Bartolomeo, he was told that that venerable priest had died some four years previously, leaving a comfortable fortune which he had amassed to his devoted friend and confessor, Fra Martino. Now Fra Bartolomeo was the man who had sworn an affidavit that he had heard the last confession of Dudley Stone and had subsequently buried him in the *cemiterio* of Santa Fé, and the worthy priest must have died less than a year after that affidavit which had helped to shatter O'Clerigh's hopes of regaining his inheritance.

Thus did Tim stand on the very first day after his arrival in Monsataz, with two tricks to the good. Fra Martino he had already put down as his trump card. Fra Bartolomeo was dead; but here was his friend and confessor, the man to whom he had bequeathed a comfortable fortune, the provenance of which must have been known to its recipient, the incumbent of the fashionable church frequented by the *élite* of the city, who must, of course, have been in touch at one time with the English gentleman, Dudley Stone.

A trump card, indeed!

Besides him, and of equal importance for Tim's purpose, there was the doctor who had sworn that he attended Dudley Stone in his last illness, and who had signed the death certificate which Hold-Hands Juliana had triumphantly produced.

The waiter knew the senhor doctor very well by name; he was, according to him, a very distinguished gentleman indeed, a member of the aristocratic Club Nacional and an intimate friend of Dom Manoël da Lisbao who was, as everyone knew, the President of the Club and the acknowledged leader of the fashionable world of the city.

Those three men, then, formed the pivot round which Tim's adventure in search of Dudley Stone must revolve. He wished to God he had been endowed with diplomatic skill, with the art of gleaning information without seeming to ask a single question. All he had to rely on was just mother wit, which, as it came from Old Oireland, should give a good account of itself even when measured against the subtle brains of these dagoes.

Seven days had gone by since Tim had landed at Monsataz—seven days spent in running the Reverend Fra Martino to earth. The worthy abbé was from home when he called; regretted most ardently that the exigencies of his parish work prevented his hastening at once to return the gracious visit of the distinguished Major O'Clerigh, but the very first minute of leisure that the good God would grant him, he would give himself the infinite pleasure of coming to pay his respects at the hotel. And thus a week went by.

Then, this afternoon, had come a note, couched in florid language, in which Fra Martino conveyed to the most distinguished Major an invitation from the President and prominent members of the Club Nacional to dine with them at

the Club that evening. Being Thursday, it was a ladies' night at the Club, Fra Martino went on to explain, and some of the most beautiful and most distinguished ladies of the city would grace the dinner with their presence. He, Fra Martino, would, moreover, give himself the pleasure of calling for the distinguished Major and taking him round to the Club.

Tim's excitement had found vent in various ways, chief among which being his natural aptitude to break into song, despite his total inability to produce a single note that was not out of tune. But Tom Moore's ballad, set to music by the immortal Patrick McDougall, had the effect of steadying his nerves.

Leaning out of the window, he looked down the length of the promenade with its row of tall, crested palm-trees and its sun-baked pavement. The star performer of a while ago had taken his pomegranate and other appurtenances of his star turn elsewhere, and one by one the crowd of admiring urchins had followed him. And now, stumping along on the cobbled road, on short, somewhat bandy legs, came Fra Martino himself—very much in the flesh, a figure such as an artist like the late Stacy Marks would have loved to depict.

Tim watched his coming with ill-controlled delight. The old priest wore a black straw Trilby hat, very much the worse for constant baking in the sun, tilted far back above his domed, perspiring forehead. His soutane of black alpaca was hitched up around his waist, allowing for a generous display of two fat legs in black cloth trousers which he had tucked into a pair of stout, short Wellington boots. He carried a thick, gnarled stick which he brandished with much effect whenever a street urchin poked an impudent nose in his way.

A real figure of fun—almost a caricature—yes, but that obese creature over there held, perhaps, in his fat, podgy hands the destiny of the last of the O'Clerighs.

Ye gods and little fishes, do not desert Tim O'Clee now!

## VI

While Fra Martino came stumping up the short flight of stone steps which led to the front entrance of the Hotel d'Angola, Tim suddenly remembered that he had not finished dressing. He turned to the mirror and busied himself with a recalcitrant collar-stud.

'Come in, my holy friend,' he called, in response to a knock at his door; 'one more struggle with this d—— save your reverence!—stud, and I am entirely at your service.'

Tim was airing his best Portuguese, but Fra Martino, it seemed, spoke English fluently, with a throaty accent which would have been unpleasant had it not been so comical. He loved to hear it and, above all, to air his knowledge of it. It reminded him of the days of his youth, when in the seminary he had made friends with two young Irish students. He pushed open the door and halted for a moment under the lintel. The room felt almost cool as it faced east, and outside the heat had been unbearable. Fra Martino mopped his damp, expansive forehead with a gaudy red-and-yellow handkerchief. Then he came forward and extended a large and very sticky hand to Tim, who shook it cordially.

'Good of you to come, Padre,' he said.

'A pleasure, Major O'Clerigh, I assure you,' the old priest responded pleasantly. He had put down his amazing hat, and his stiff white hair under the action of the cooler air slowly rose from his cranium until it stood up like a round mop encircling a pink bald place which was all that was left of his tonsure.

'Sit down, Padre, while I finish dressing,' Tim went on; 'and let me get you a drink and a cigarette—or would you prefer a cigar?'

Fra Martino preferred a cigarette. He sat down and beamed on the whisky and soda which Tim carefully mixed for

him.

'Your very good health, my friend,' he said jovially, raising his glass, 'and may your stay in our city be a long and happy one.'

He insisted on Timothy drinking too, and on the clicking of glasses:

'Wish me luck, Padre,' Tim said with a slight touch of earnestness in his cheery voice.

'But of course I wish you luck,' the old priest responded, after he had taken a long drink, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. 'You cannot want much more,' he said, with a short sigh, 'neither here nor elsewhere; you have all the best luck in the world, I'm sure. You are young. You are very handsome. The ladies will always be on your side.'

No man dislikes being told that he is handsome, and Tim O'Clee was no exception to the rule. But as he was not lacking in humour he was without personal vanity; nevertheless the frank admiration of the old priest pleased him. Amiability—the power to please—was going to be one of his most important assets in the adventure.

'You look splendid in that black coat,' Fra Martino continued with that naïve flattery which passes for courtesy among several Latin races, 'and what a lovely white shirt! You will not see another like it in Monsataz, not even at the Club Nacional.'

Tim looked politely incredulous.

'Ah, no!' the old priest continued with a sigh. 'What would you? The people here—what do they know of style or fashion? Even the young men—— The officers perhaps, sometimes. But these others—— Municipality? Government?' And Fra Martino shrugged his shoulders and sniffed. Sniffed again and said with solemn emphasis, as if stating an indisputable and all-important fact: 'Plebeians, my friend. That's what they are. All of them. You will see. No manners. No style. No what the French call *tenue*.' (He pronounced it *tenoo*.)

Timothy was intent on tying his tie. A black one, new from Bond Street, as was the soft-fronted exquisitely pleated and laundered shirt, the high collar slightly winged, not to mention the perfectly-cut smoking suit—fourteen guineas, and cheap at that—made in Savile Row.

In the glass he could see the pot-bellied figure of the old priest, sipping whisky, his short fat legs, the huge feet encased in those awful Wellington boots, and his round forehead exuding moisture.

'No *tenoo*!' Tim murmured. 'Oh, my God!' and turned to look elsewhere. The sight of Fra Martino perspiring copiously, and sniffing, was certainly not encouraging. Tim hoped that it was not customary in Brazil—as it is in some outlandish countries—for men to salute one another with a kiss. But now he stood up, ready, as straight and clean a figure of a man as ever came out of the Creator's hands. Irish eyes, blue, grey, sometimes green as the varying moods of a mercurial temperament swayed him. Crisp, brown hair inclined to be unruly. A clear skin, splendid teeth. No features to speak of, for the nose too was Irish, as was the upper lip, distinctly too long for classical taste, effectually disguised, however, by a small tooth-brush moustache. But the mouth below it redeemed every defect of the face, for it appeared always ready for a smile. Fra Martino looked at him with approval, and then drew a short sigh. Of regret? Perhaps. He, too, had been young once—and handsome—at any rate in some women's eyes.

'Senhor da Lisbao,' he said presently, 'is sending his car round. As I already had the honour to tell you, he hopes that you will do him the honour, Major O'Clerigh, of dining with him at our Club Nacional.'

'That is more than kind. I had thought of getting some dinner at the Hotel Americano and then——'

'No, no. We will dine with Senhor da Lisbao. He is the president of our club. An influential man in the social world of Monsataz. You would like to know him. Not?'

'Of course I should. I do not intend to lead the life of a hermit.'

'You will stay here long, my dear Major?'

'Some considerable time. Yes! Unless——'

'Unless?'

'I have come here on business, Padre,' Tim said, 'private business. If I get through with it quickly, I should not be here long.'

'Ah, you have business here, my friend?'

He spoke quite lightly as if the matter did not greatly concern him; but to Tim's perceptions, which just now were so very much on the *qui vive*, it seemed as if an invisible hand had, in the last moment or two, passed over the old priest's face, blotting out every expression. In its way, and so it had appeared to Tim when first Fra Martino had entered the room, that face was an intriguing one, full of contradictions. The small beady eyes revealed keen intelligence; but the mouth, loose and fleshy with heavy lines drawn down from the corners of nose and lips, the flaccid cheeks and cleft chin, betrayed venality, indolence and sensuality. But in spite of all these defects, there was a distinct trait of kindliness lurking somewhere in the florid face: kindliness born probably of weakness of character, and of indolence—the line of least resistance; nevertheless the old priest gave one the impression that in most circumstances of life he would try and help a lame dog over the stile.

For the moment, then, all these traits had vanished. The lines of intelligence as well as of kindliness had all been merged in a smooth aspect of complete vagueness. Fra Martino did not wait for a reply to his last question; he said nothing for a minute or so, and then gradually his former expression of urbanity and friendly courtesy spread once more over his face. Once more he became suave and voluble, full of protests of unbounded hospitality. He and his presbytery, his servants, his friends and his parishioners were all at the disposal of the most distinguished Major O'Clerigh, and all the while he spoke he did not ask another question that might seem indiscreet. It was a pleasure and an honour, he kept repeating, to have so distinguished an English gentleman in Monsataz.

'Not English, Padre,' Tim put in whenever the volubility of the old man allowed; 'Irish.'

But the difference held no meaning for Fra Martino. He certainly paused a moment as if to recapture the lost threads of his eloquence and then went on placidly, dolefully shaking his head:

'We see very few English gentlemen out here. Rio? Yes! Pernambuco, even Bahia, but not in Monsataz.'

'You like to see them, when they come?'

'Ah! But yes! The great world—you understand—one is so shut away in this poor hole——'

'A beautiful city, Padre.'

'Yes!'

'And the port seems very active——'

The priest gave a slight shrug. 'All Americanos. The English who come here are all reverends—Protestants, alas! It is so sad that that beautiful country should still be blind to the truth.'

'Englishmen who come here are not all missonaries, Padre—for I suppose that is what you mean by "reverend". Many have come here on business and some in search of adventure.'

Fra Martino puffed away for a time at his cigarette; then he had a long drink, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and said finally: 'Maybe; I don't know.'

'I was thinking of a man I knew something about, who came out here quite a good deal,' Tim said, with well-

assumed carelessness; 'a man named Dudley Stone.'

Tim, being the creature of impulse that he was, had suddenly made up his mind that he would fire off the name abruptly to see what effect it would have on the old priest. He tried his hardest not to appear to be watching the other's face. But Fra Martino did not flinch. His fleshy eyelids never quivered. He was holding the glass of whisky and soda up to the light, watching its sparkle with unconcealed delight. There was a lump of ice in the glass: it did not so much as click once. But that very indifference sent Tim's fancy wondering in the land of conjecture: 'You are playing a part, my friend,' he said to himself, 'no one could be as unconcerned as you now look.'

Fra Martino took another long drink, put down his glass, smacked his lips, and then said lightly: 'Ah! you knew Mr. Stone?'

'Only by reputation,' Tim replied. 'Didn't you, Padre?'

'No, my dear Major,' the priest rejoined lightly. 'No; I cannot exactly say that I did know Mr.—er—Stone—only like yourself, by reputation.'

'Now, isn't that funny?' was Tim's dry comment on this; 'I should have thought that you'd know every stranger who comes to Monsataz.'

Said Fra Martino: 'I do, mostly; but Mr. Stone didn't happen to come my way.'

And Timothy decided within himself that this was a lie. A puzzling lie. Seemingly a useless lie, but a lie nevertheless.

However, he left it at that, only said casually: 'How funny; now, as I say, I should have thought——'

It was at this point that the honk-honk of a motor-car in the road below sounded a second time. Fra Martino struggled to his feet with marvellous alacrity, drained his glass to the bottom, and flung away the stump of his cigarette. He was not a very good actor, this obese old man, and though his florid, round face looked for the moment more like a bladder of lard than a human countenance, there was something in his manner as he picked up his hat and stick and said: 'There is the car, my dear Major,' which more than suggested relief.

'We must not be late for dinner,' he went on jovially. 'You will find our *cuisine* at the club excellent, I may tell you. Our *Papa à Bahiana* is succulent. You will see ... you will see! We are not so behindhand in luxury and civilization as you Europeans imagine. And then, the ladies, my dear Major! The ladies...!' He kissed the tips of his podgy fingers and made a gesture as of a butterfly on the wing. But his joviality now appeared forced, and his haste to get away evident. He gathered up his amazing hat and stick and turned to the door. A few more florid compliments and gestures, and he led the way out of the room. Timothy followed him downstairs.

## VII

A high-powered American car was outside, with a dark-skinned chauffeur in immaculate livery. Timothy, as soon as he landed in Monsataz and caught the first glimpse of the fine city with its magnificent custom-house, post-office, railway station and so on, buildings which would have put the London or Paris ones to shame, had already made up his mind that nothing here would astonish him. Monsataz, except for its cobble stones and the narrow streets of the old town, was just as much an up-to-date seaport city as Marseilles or Genoa. Neither the latest model Chrysler, therefore, nor the chauffeur's perfectly tailored livery caused him so much as to lift an eyebrow.

He entered the car on the heels of Fra Martino, and the Chrysler went bumping along the cobbles until it turned into the beautiful wide Avenida, bordered with fine trees, with private houses on either side, and the handsome Hotel

Americano with its outdoor café occupying a large portion of the sidewalk.

Fra Martino's talk was chiefly of the people whom Timothy was to meet this evening; their host, Dom Manoël da Lisbao, one of the most popular as he was one of the richest members of the fashionable set in Monsataz; 'and kind and generous, my dear Major! You haven't an idea! Speaks English like a native, better than I do, and French or German—anything you like. And a great favourite with the ladies—a wealthy bachelor, you see, so the mammas with marriageable daughters are all after him—but, so far, nothing—although there is talk that his engagement to Teresa da Pinto, the daughter of the senhor *doutor cavalheiro*, will shortly be announced. Oh! a lovely girl, the reigning beauty of Monsataz, and none of your modern young women who think they know everything. She has no mother, poor dear! And her father—well! well! He has led a rough life, in a remote province—only vaqueiros and peasants and half-breeds for company. But Teresa was educated in the Convent of the Visitation in Sao Paolo. And then the doctor had a great piece of luck ... Dom Manoël da Lisbao got to know him, took a liking to him and brought him to Monsataz, where he soon became the fashionable practitioner—still very rough in his ways, but some people like that in a doctor, the brusque manner, don't you know?'

And while Fra Martino's talk meandered on and on in mellifluous tones Timothy's thoughts harked back on the business that had brought him to this far-away corner of the civilized world, where everything was strange, every man and woman a foreigner to him; their views of things, their ideas, their political and religious ideals as far removed from him as these tropical shoes from the mist-bound coasts of his beloved Ireland.

What chance would he have to get to the bottom of things? To the bottom of this amazing conspiracy which had deprived him of wealth and of home? That it was a conspiracy he felt somehow more convinced than ever before. He had not met anyone yet who had been directly connected with it, had spoken to no one on the subject, and yet he felt it in his bones that there was something—Fra Martino's name had never been mixed up with the affair; nevertheless, Tim O'Clee was absolutely certain that the old priest knew something about the mysterious life or death of Dudley Stone. And as the car sped along from the old city to the new, from cobbled pavements to smooth tarred roads, Timothy seemed to see the enigmatical figure of Dudley Stone mocking him with its fancied appearances and swift evanescence at every street corner, under the awnings of the cafés, in crowded tramcars or elegant motors. And, through the dust of the streets and the fast-gathering twilight, he saw the no less elusive and still more provocative face of Hold-Hands Juliana, grinning at him through the windows of the car, and taunting him with full, red lips that laughed, and gleaming white teeth ready to bite. 'Trace Dudley Stone?' she jeered. 'Find out when he died? Bah! You are a fool, Timothy O'Clerigh. Six years is a long time, and those who swore affidavits then are ready to swear again. Their wits are sharper than yours, my friend, and they are not likely to give themselves away for any Irish blandishments you may try upon them. The motive, my friend, was a strong one, remember.'

The motive? Yes! That was it. The entry in Uncle Justin's diary: 'I gave my beloved the fifty thousand pounds she wanted.' Uncle Justin's money had bought those perjurers, and there was nothing in the balance, save Irish wit, to force them to disgorge.

## VIII

The impression which Timothy retained of that evening at the Club Nacional always remained rather vague. He remembered the smart club servant, who took his hat and stick when he arrived. He remembered being ushered into the lounge, a room level with the busy street and with great windows—something like Harrods' or Whiteley's—right down to the ground. He had a swift impression of large arm-chairs, small tables, ash-trays and cuspidors, of a bar groaning under an army of bottles of every colour, shape and size, and adorned with small flags of all nations, and large dolls fantastically dressed, such as he had seen and cordially detested in all the fashionable resorts in Europe; of a room full of people, terribly hot and airless, the atmosphere heavy with the scent of powder and perfume; of a crowd of men and women, of white-coated barmen flitting in and out amongst them, of the glitter of diamonds, the buzz of conversation interspersed with shrill ejaculations and ear-piercing bursts of laughter.

It was the same impression that one invariably receives when entering the parrot-house at the Zoo, with the gay macaws and parakeets chattering and shrieking.

Of the dinner itself, Tim's impressions were equally elusive and dim. The host, Dom Manoël da Lisbao, was cordiality and hospitality personified. He introduced Timothy to all his friends. There was the Senhor This and the Conde That; there was Fra Martino, whom the dear Major already knew, and above all, there were the ladies: the dowager Marqueza Guimarães, a bony image—smothered in diamonds which appeared too heavy for her meagre shoulders—but obviously the greatest power in this tiny social world. Whenever she raised her shrill high-pitched voice the younger people stopped talking and listened with deference to what she had to say. Her husband, the Marquez, was there; an insignificant, silent old man, whose most conspicuous characteristic was a huge blond beard, and a single stone diamond the size of a thrush's egg on his little finger.

Two other ladies flashed dark eyes at Timothy as he was introduced to them; handsome, both of them, with perfectly shingled and water-waved hair, and the latest Paris creations that accentuated rather than veiled the somewhat full curves beneath. They were very cordial, very engaging, rattled off a whole series of questions at Timothy about the latest social events in Europe—Paris, London, Deauville, and especially Monte Carlo which they had both visited and liked extremely. They each had a husband—nice, gentlemanly-looking men, in well-tailored dress-suits, very amiable; and one had a son who had been up at Oxford and spoke English with a perfect Oxford drawl.

But all these impressions remained vague, blurred; the people themselves like characters in a dream or in a play. Only four of those who were there that night left the impress of their personality on Tim's consciousness. There was the host, of course, pleasant, convivial, hospitable, speaking perfect English with just enough hint of foreign intonation to make it attractive. Well read and well informed too. Had travelled a great deal. Knew England well and had hunted in Ireland. Seemingly not a complicated character, with nothing sinister about the pleasant, rather prominent dark eyes, the sensuous mouth and somewhat fleshy jaw. Everyone at the table, even the ladies, drank freely and so did he; but obviously, he held his liquor well, for though he, like all the rest, became very hilarious towards the end of dinner, he never forgot his good manners, and his conversation as well as his gestures remained well within the bounds of propriety.

An altogether different personage was the senhor *doutor* da Pinto, the man who, according to Fra Martino, had been an obscure practitioner in an outlying provincial city, and then had the good fortune to attract the attention and gain the friendship of Dom Manoël da Lisbao, and forthwith became a fashionable consultant among the *élite* of Monsataz. Da Pinto was in every respect the antithesis of his friend and patron. In appearance he was more like one of his former patients—a *vaqueiro* rather than a doctor. His evening suit had very obviously not been cut by a London tailor, and sat ill upon his large, stocky figure. His shirt was already creased when he first entered the room; it was adorned with three large diamond studs. He wore a soft collar of Byronic shape, which gave free play to his thick neck, and displayed the powerful throat with its prominent Adam's apple. He wore patent-leather Oxford shoes of which the laces had turned green with age, red cotton socks and a voluminous black tie.

His hair, once coal-black, now of a pepper-and-salt mixture, was cropped quite short and stood up like a stiff brush above his large, florid face. He had very small, deep-set black eyes, a nose shaped like the ace of spades, a stubbly beard, no moustache, and an immense square jaw.

Certainly an ugly customer to have to deal with, thought Timothy, say in a street fight, or a quarrel over a card table. As for having him by your bedside when you were sick, he, Tim, was quite sure that for his part he would far sooner die. It was difficult to associate him in a parental capacity with the lovely Teresa. Of her, Timothy retained a very vivid impression, even on that first night, when everything was so blurred. She came into the lounge rather late, when the little party had already assembled round one of the tables and was drinking cocktails. She had had an accident with her dress, she explained, and had to run into the cloak-room to have a stitch put to the damage. She was small and thin and exquisite, with a perfect oval of a face, delicate features, and glossy dark hair which she wore in the old-fashioned mode in a loose knot at the nape of her neck. But it was her eyes that were arresting, for they expressed so many emotions all at one and the same time. All through dinner Timothy could not make up his mind whether those eyes were tender and feminine and appealing, or whether they were masterful and passionate. She had a trick of veiling her eyes without closing them, drawing an invisible veil over them so that all expression vanished from them and only a kind of mysterious light remained.

She had adorable manners, girlish and graceful, without any shyness or self-consciousness. Though she entered the crowded room all alone and must have felt a whole battery of eyes turned upon her, she walked across to her host without any affectation or swagger. She kissed the hand of the old Marqueza, bobbed a little curtsy to Fra Martino, greeted the others with smile, nod or handshake, and paid very little heed to the newcomer; but to Dom Manoël she just gave a glance, which revealed a whole romance to the observant Irishman. He recollected what Fra Martino had told him in the car—the engagement between Dom Manoël and the pretty girl soon to be announced—but, in that one glance, Timothy had guessed which of the two it was who was still holding aloof—and put Dom Manoël down for a fool.

The dinner went off splendidly; it was excellently cooked and excellently served. There was plenty of champagne and liqueurs, and the coffee was beyond praise.

Throughout the dinner there was no mention of Dudley Stone.

## IX

After dinner most of the company, including the ladies, went off to the Hotel Americano, where it seemed there was a good floor and a good band. Timothy managed to refuse the many invitations that were showered upon him to join one party or the other. He wanted to be alone and sort out his confused impressions. Fra Martino had gone some time ago, pleading parochial duties; but some of the men had remained behind, sitting in groups of twos or threes about the table, still sipping brandy. Timothy rose and took leave of his host.

'I have to thank you...' he began.

'For nothing, my dear fellow. We are only too delighted to welcome you. The advent of a stranger in Monsataz is quite an event for us poor provincials.'

Timothy made a second attempt at taking his leave.

Said Dom Manoël casually: 'By the way, my dear Major, Fra Martino tells me that you knew my old friend, Dudley Stone.'

'Only by reputation,' Tim replied.

'He was an interesting personality.'

'Very.'

'But terribly reckless ... that last illness of his ... you know...?'

'Yes?'

'He would go shooting up the river and stayed out too late in the evenings. Doctor da Pinto often warned him, but he would not listen. It was a certain way of catching malarial fever. He didn't believe, I suppose, what the doctor said. Many of us are like that. It was such a pity. I liked Stone very much.'

'Yes?'

'And he was genuinely fond of me. I was with him when he died.'

'Were you?'

'He had been staying, funnily enough, at the hotel you are at—the Angola.'

'So I understand!'

'But about a month before he died he came and stayed at my house. I was very glad afterwards that he did. It would have been terrible for him, poor fellow, to have had the discomfort—the misery, really, of a long illness in an hotel.'

'It would, indeed.'

Dom Manoël did not appear to be disconcerted by Tim's laconic comments. It seemed as if, having embarked on the subject of Dudley Stone, he could not again tear himself away from it. He talked and talked about the Englishman—his dear friend, as he called him—and seemed as if he could not say enough about his charm, his courage, his interesting personality.'

'I first knew him in London,' he said, at one time. 'I was a young attaché there for a few months, the year before the war. Stone had just returned from Bulgaria, where he had fought like the devil against the Turks. He must have been a wonderful fighter, I imagine, for he knew no fear.

'Of course,' Dom Manoël went on, after a slight pause, during which he puffed away dreamily at his cigar, 'I don't know what happened during the war. I understand that poor old Stone fell very much into disfavour, but I never knew why.'

'I never knew, either,' Tim put in simply. 'I was only a schoolboy at the outbreak of the war. Something occurred then —but I only knew it from hearsay, some time afterwards.'

'Poor old Stone! I am confident, O'Clerigh, that he never did anything shabby in his life. Isn't that so, doctor?' he went on, half turning to da Pinto, in order to draw him into the conversation.

But the senhor *doutor* was by now midway to the land of Nod. He had drunk copiously and talked a great deal; sipping cognac and smoking an excellent cigar, he had gradually become silent and detached. Dom Manoël's mellow but authoritative voice called him back to the realities of life for a moment or two. He looked round, somewhat bleary-eyed, and passed his hand through his grey thatch.

'Eh?' he queried vaguely. 'What?'

'You knew Dudley Stone? Do you think that he was capable of doing anything so mean as to be a traitor during the war?'

The doctor shook his big head with much energy.

'No, no!' he said, thickly. 'Fine fellow, Stone—knew him intimately—attended him when he had malaria....'

'You were with him to the end, weren't you?'

'Eh—what?'

'You were with Stone when he died?' the other insisted; and to Tim's sensitive ear, strained to note every inflection in the man's voice, the words, that had been obviously intended as a query, sounded more like an emphatic statement of fact, not to say a command.

'Yes, yes, of course,' the doctor said, roused for a moment out of his fuddled condition; 'when Stone died ... I was with him ... I said so ... I swore on my oath ... Yes! yes! of course....'

Dom Manoël gave a contemptuous shrug.

'Pity, isn't it?' he said, turning again to O'Clerigh and indicating the doctor, who had once more lapsed into semi-somnolence. 'He had a splendid practice and a fine position here until he took to drink. But, as you were saying, my dear Major...'

'I didn't say anything, but I was thinking that it is fully time I took my leave....'

'Oh! but not yet ... I really cannot allow...'

'I must thank you and all the other members of the club for your marvellous kindness to me. I had heard something of Brazilian hospitality before, but had no idea...'

'My dear fellow, the pleasure was ours, you may be sure. But won't you change your mind and come along with me? I'd like to show you some of our night-life over here—and I can promise you that you won't be dull. Come and have supper with me at the Americano—I can introduce you to one or two more charming ladies, and I am sure you are fond of dancing....'

'That's awfully good of you, but not to-night, if you don't mind. I've a lot of letters to write, and if I don't get through some of them to-night, when it's cool, I shall never do them at all.'

It would have been bad form to insist and Dom Manoël never did or said anything that was bad form. Timothy took his leave of those who had remained to the last, including the doctor, who by this time didn't know who it was who was bidding him good night and thanking him for a most pleasant evening. All the others were apparently intent on going on to some more lively form of entertainment. Night-life in the cities of Brazil is always of the gayest, and dancing goes on in every hotel, restaurant or café, big or small. Tim had all a young, healthy animal's love of exercise and jumping about, but he already felt rather ashamed of having accepted hospitality from these men, among whom there were at least three whom he looked upon as perjurers, forgers and thieves, and whom he had every intention of unmasking and bringing to book. This evening's affair had been necessary, of course, for the success of his venture, but by no possible standard of morality or honour could the acceptance of further hospitality from Dom Manoël be condoned.

## X

In the days and weeks that followed, Timothy, strolling about the quay, the cafés and places of amusement of the city, had entered into conversation with scores of men in every station of life; with soldiers and sailors, with stevedores and barmen, with half-breeds and *vaqueiros*, shop-girls and women in the streets. Discreetly, tactfully, always leading up by easy stages to the subject of past and present foreign visitors in Monsataz, he would put in a question presently about an Englishman—Dudley Stone. Quite a number of people knew about him, but more or less vaguely; he had not remained in Monsataz very long; an English senhor, who was not a reverend, had, it was admitted, visited Monsataz some six years ago, but he had not apparently remained long enough to leave his mark on the minds of those with whom he had not come into personal contact. But there were some here and there who had known him, spoken to him. At the bar of the Hotel Americano he had often been served with drink. A dancer at the Conquistador music-hall had lived with him for a month or two. He had hired a car at one of the garages and driven himself about all over the neighbouring country. These and various other traces of Stone's passage through Monsataz had been easy to pick up. But his stay here had only been a passage: coming one day by steamer from Pernambuco, he went off again some few months later—no one knew whither or how.

When Timothy suggested that this Mr. Stone had died of malaria some time in May, 1924, they shrugged their shoulders and said that that was very likely—many people died of fever in Monsataz, especially in the old town, every year. There was a mound in a corner of the *cemiterio* of Santa Fe, with a broken wooden cross stuck at the head of it. The cross had once had a coat of white paint on it, with a name painted on in black, but both white and black paint had long since been washed off by the tropical rains. The girl from the Conquistador music-hall took Timothy thither one day and told him that she had been made to understand that her English lover was buried there. But there was nothing to prove that. Tim ran Fra Martino to earth and plied him with questions, but, as usual, the old priest had extraordinarily little to say on the subject. It might be; he did not know; he himself was away from Monsataz in the spring of 1924, and he had never taken any special interest in this Mr. Stone. On the other hand, the old verger at the church of Santa Fé shook his head most emphatically at the suggestion that a foreign senhor had been buried in the *cemiterio*, either six

years ago or at any time—and he had been verger of the church for the last forty years. The mound beneath which the foreign senhor was supposed to be buried was one of a number in which rested the bones of the many victims of a severe epidemic of yellow fever, which had carried away no end of people in the spring of 1924. A corner of the *cemiterio* had been set apart for the purpose, because burials had to be done very quickly by order of the Government. But a foreign senhor? No! no! Old Hermanos was quite sure about that—no foreign senhor lay buried in the *cemiterio* of Santa Fé. All this, then, left the puzzle more acute than ever; for if Dudley Stone did not die of malarial fever in May, 1924, what then had become of him?

The general opinion was that the English senhor, Mr. Stone, had gone up-country either on a shooting expedition or in search of adventure, and that in either case he had been killed and eaten by a jaguar.

## XI

There was a café on the confine between the old and modern city called the Café Bom Genio; a promising sign. It was frequented mostly by commercial travellers and dealers of all sorts, men who traded with cattle-drovers and farmers up-country, who were pleasant and loose-tongued, and over a bottle of white rum discussed politics and the incidents of their trade.

The girl, Inez, she who had lived for a time with Dudley Stone and was a dancer at the Conquistador music-hall, took Tim there one evening. 'There are a lot of foreigners always there,' she said, 'who go about all over the country. They may have heard something; one never knows. Their tongues are loose for they drink a lot of rum. They are not like us Brasilheiros, for we are silent people; we only talk to friends, because we are cautious—but they...' She shrugged her pretty shoulders in very obvious contempt of the foreigner.

The place was gaily enough lighted. There was nothing sinister about it. True, the atmosphere was so rank that it was almost solid; it reeked of spirits and stale food, of garlic and humanity and black tobacco. There were seats all round the room which had once been covered with leather; there were trestle tables and a few benches. The room was crowded and the sounds were deafening. Men were sitting at the tables, drinking and smoking, some were playing cards, others dominoes; there were only a very few women, four or five at most. They all greeted Inez with a cheery 'Allo!' as she entered, and eyed Tim with blatant curiosity.

To Tim it seemed as if everyone in the room talked at once, while nobody listened. All the voices appeared jumbled, and that first evening he heard and saw nothing of interest. But he remembered what Inez had said: 'They go about all over the country and they may have heard something; one never knows'; and he went again and again to the Café Bom Genio. He got to know all its regular customers: rascals, most of them, so he soon found out. Unblushing rogues, too, for one tale capped another of how the *vaqueiros* up in the Sertao district were induced to sell hides from which the branding mark had been carefully cut out, or cattle which had obviously been stolen.

Nevertheless, Tim made friends with them all, got them to talk to him about their affairs, their business; they were certainly loose-tongued, as Inez had told him, and an extra glass or two of rum would render most men there loquacious. There was a Dutchman who came regularly to the Bom Genio. His name was Van Smeet. He was a large, fat, florid rascal, whose clothes would have been a joy to a caricaturist. He seemed to be dressed just in what he happened to have; breeches or trousers, more or less patched, a khaki shirt which allowed of a generous display of a pink blond chest, a coloured handkerchief loosely knotted below a collar of Byronic amplitude, and a belt which seemed to wage constant warfare on his bulging waistline. Then there was a Portuguese cattle dealer, rather morose and taciturn, with fingers thickly stained with tobacco juice, hair and beard as black and shiny as anthracite coal, and eyes very close together over a beaky nose which gave him the appearance of a condor sitting pondering in his cage at the London Zoo. There were a couple of Germans who dealt in precious stones—illicit diamond buying, most probably—but were careful to avoid conflict with the law; and a few more of doubtful nationality and origin, touched more or less with the tar-brush, some gay, some taciturn, but all apparently engaged in the agreeable business of cheating with equal impartiality the man from whom they bought and the customer to whom they sold.

But it was Van Smeet, the Dutchman, whom Tim liked best. He was so comfortable in his rascality. 'Why not make use of rogues if they are willing to take risks?' he would say, beaming at his friends whom he had just treated to real Jamaica all round. 'I buy my hides cheap, not? ... then what do I care where they come from?'

One of the friends demurred: 'If you get found out?'

'Well! I am covered. I buy the hides in good faith, not?'

'I suppose you know where they come from?'

'Of course I do—but it's no business of mine.'

Such was invariably the commencement of a conversation which then, equally invariably, drifted into one of two channels—either politics and a general damning and cursing of the Government, taxes and so on, or the mysterious doings up in the Sertao.

'There is bound to be a row about it soon,' the Portuguese would remark sententiously, and this remark made regularly every evening in a gloomy, sepulchral voice would then start the favourite topic of conversation.

'The Great Unknown!' one of them would say in the same tone of voice as if he were referring to a terrible and awesome god. After which there would be a silence for a moment or two until someone—a newcomer, like Tim, to these parts—would ask the inevitable question: 'Who is he, exactly?'

Opinions varied as to that. It seemed that some thirty odd years ago there had arisen in the desert land of the Sertao a prophet, a seer, call him what you will, whom the *vaqueiros* and their like had named Antonio Conselheiro, and had looked upon as a second John the Baptist; and some would have it that this prophet had now come to life again, and that in the desert he was called the Great Unknown.

'Funny for a resurrected prophet to become the greatest cattle thief in Brazil,' the Dutchman then remarked dryly, but with a humorous twinkle in his eye and a wink at his friend Tim.

But this did not upset the faith of those who chose to look on the Great Unknown with awe. Tim soon noticed that the foreigners and even the Brasilheiros were inclined to treat the story of the risen prophet with contempt, but that those of mixed blood—and there were many of those among the frequenters of the Bom Genio—appeared seized with a kind of religious fervour whenever there was mention of the Great Unknown.

The Portuguese dealer put in a sententious word or two as a rebuke to the Dutchman's flippancy.

'He is no cattle thief. It is his army who scour the country—and they do it, too. Why, the other week...'

Whereupon would follow endless stories of the depredations carried on by this army of bandits, who owned no allegiance save to the mysterious prophet, and in his name descended on the villages around, robbed, stole anything they could lay their hands on. And latterly, it seemed they had become insolent in their daring and their defiance of the law. Ranch owners on the fringe of the Sertao were no longer safe, their cattle and their horses were driven off; their stores stolen, their tills robbed. And with it all the army grew in numbers week by week—almost day by day. The mysticism which surrounded the personality of the Great Unknown, as well as the free life of looting and pirating, appealed to these semi-savage dwellers of the Sertao, and the fair-haired Sertanejos, the dark Mesticos, the coffee-coloured Mamalucos, the innumerable mixtures of Indian, Negro and white blood in the desert all went to swell this horde who knew no law, save its desires and the word of the Great Unknown.

'It is his army—not himself....'

'Well,' the Dutchman would argue, 'he benefits, doesn't he?'

'Of course he does,' remarked one of the Germans; 'they say he is richer than any New York millionaire.'

'But what is he going to do with all that money? He can't spend it out there in the desert....'

'Overthrow this d——d Government. He has an army of ten thousand men, armed and equipped....'

'Bah! A lot of half-breeds....'

'Determined men ... I remember thirty years ago that Antonio Conselheiro held out in the desert against four military expeditions sent out by the Government....'

'What became of him?'

'Killed. And every man in his army with him.'

'But then this new man...'

The conversation would then become general. All the same ground gone over every night. Some had one theory, some another; and while the foreigners jeered and made fun of the resurrected prophet, there were those who put their heads together and whispered. Tim caught snatches. A word here and there. It seems that this story of the mysterious Great Unknown had a good deal of political significance. The Portuguese trader who had business dealings direct with the *vaqueiros* on the Sertao insisted on the fact that the Great Unknown was a direct descendant of the last Emperor of Brazil, and that he was collecting all the money he could, and having his army trained by European officers with a view to marching presently on Pernambuco and there proclaiming the re-establishment of the Empire with himself as Emperor.

And this turned the conversation at once into its political channel.

'Good luck to him, I say!'

'What has this d——d Government ever done...?'

'Except taxes—and more taxes—and nothing but taxes.'

'And officials poking their noses in everybody's business.'

Everyone had a grievance, and there were always the secret foreign agents ready to stir up trouble. Tim ceased to be interested. His thoughts had gone roaming to the unknown desert land of the Sertao; he fell to wondering whether by any chance Dudley Stone, the adventurer, had drifted into the army of the Great Unknown. It would be just like him to embark on a career of instructor to a lot of *vaqueiros* and half-breeds, who were destined to upset the existing Government of the country and to restore the Empire of Brazil on the ashes of its young Republic. He had played that sort of rôle in Bulgaria, where he had commanded a troupe of comitadjis during the Balkan War—so why not here and now? It was just the sort of adventure that would commend itself to Dudley Stone.

The fact that his new friend Van Smeet let fall the remark once that he had some business dealings with Dom Manoël da Lisbao, seemed like a link in a new chain of evidence which Tim had begun to forge. 'I take off my hat to Dom Manoël,' the Dutchman had said, with a thick laugh and a jovial smacking of the lips. 'I am only a babe in business compared with him.'

And when Tim asked him how and where this business was transacted, he replied: 'Oh! Up in that God-forsaken district, the Sertao—Dom Manoël has his ranch there—you didn't know? Oh! A magnificent ranch. I buy cattle and hides from him—hides that have no branding mark sometimes—and diamonds which ... But we won't talk about that. Our friend Dom Manoël has very long ears....'

## XII

But there was yet another important personality in this drama of mystery and adventure—and a more than intriguing one at that. This was Teresa da Pinto, the doctor's daughter, whose engagement to Dom Manoël da Lisbao was said to be pending, but had not yet been officially announced.

It was generally understood that the marriage would take place some time before the New Year. Dom Manoël, when twitted on the subject, neither denied nor admitted the impeachment. Teresa was reticence personified. On the other hand, the doctor, when he was sober, talked often and freely about his daughter's forthcoming marriage. 'Such a comfort it will be to me,' he would say, 'to see her happily settled. It was her mother's dying wish that she should marry her old playmate ... she and Manoël were children together....' Which everyone knew to be a lie, but no one took the trouble to contradict. Timothy could not understand why Dom Manoël hung back, for Teresa was very beautiful; she was the only child of a very rich man, who was Manoël's friend—his partner in felony—and, very obviously, she was deeply in love with him. No one could mistake the meaning of her glance when it rested on Manoël da Lisbao; those lovely dark eyes of hers would soften in an exquisite look of tenderness. But equally unmistakable was the indifference—sometimes the good-humoured mockery—with which he responded; and whenever she saw that smile of his—so pleasant and so cool—the look of tenderness vanished, engulfed at times in a spasm of intense pain, at others in passionate resentment which was almost hate. And Timothy would then wonder just how much she knew.

She was very sweet and kind to Tim; prattled away in excellent English, danced a great deal with him, and accepted his obvious admiration as a homage due to her beauty. She had never been in Europe, and liked apparently to hear him talk of Paris, or Rome, or London. She was interested in many things: pictures, theatres, cinemas, or frocks, the gambling at Monte Carlo or the racing at Ascot. Tim even caught himself one day telling her about his beautiful home in Ireland: the old battlemented towers which had seen eight centuries flit by; he told her about the silvery lake and the mist-laden horizon above which peeped the green-sunbathed Irish hills; and about the age-old trees, and the woods that were carpeted with anemones in the spring, or ablaze in the autumn with a glory of russet and gold.

'How you must love it!' she said.

It was at a *thé dansant* at the Americano. Dom Manoël was expected but had not yet arrived; so they danced together a good deal, Tim and she, and then sat down at a small table away from the rest of the crowd and were served with tea.

She had listened to him with her great dark eyes fixed upon him while he talked—eyes, whose expression he tried in vain to fathom. And again he wondered how much she knew. And then Dom Manoël arrived. He strode up to their table, good-humoured, pleasant, full of apologies to Teresa for being late. 'But you have been in such excellent company,' he said graciously. Then, with a polite: 'May I join you?' he sat down at the table and ordered tea.

'I am sure,' he said, in the interval of munching a chocolate éclair, 'that our dear Major has been entertaining you with tales of his lost friend, Dudley Stone. I never saw a man so obsessed with a fixed idea, and as I tell him...' He helped himself to another éclair and continued to prattle on in his pleasant, jovial way, chaffing Tim about his persistent inquiries after Dudley Stone. 'Our dear Major,' he said, 'must be contemplating writing the biography of my late lamented friend. I have told him all there was to know, as I knew Stone intimately. But still he is not satisfied—he must needs go into every disreputable tavern in the old city and enter into conversation with every bad character he comes across. And for what object, I ask you...?'

Tim took up the challenge with equal good humour.

'Perhaps, as you say, I may want to write a life of Stone. He was an extraordinary character, you know....'

Teresa had become unaccountably silent. She appeared chiefly interested in watching Manoël polishing off his third éclair.

Said Dom Manoël: 'You are right there—Stone was an extraordinary character. A trifle *toqué* is, I believe, the correct expression to describe the borderland between sanity and madness. He must, during his lifetime, have often spoken about me to his friends in England, because when a few years ago his widow wished to prove his death, I was approached, along with Teresa's father and the priest, who were with him when he died, with a view to certain affidavits

which were required by the law of your country.... Naturally we all complied—it was a simple request.... You may have heard something of the whole affair?'

'I did,' Tim replied curtly; 'Mrs. Stone subsequently married my uncle.'

'But how interesting! ... Do you hear that, Teresa? ... You remember Mr. Stone? ... But, of course, you were just a child when he died ... I thought the lady had married an English nobleman ... Lord ... Lord ... I forget....'

'Lord Traskmoore was my uncle—he was Irish, not English.'

'Irish ... Irish, of course ... how stupid of me.... We are all so stupid about that, we poor foreigners, not? ... And it is so difficult, too, with your peerage ... the title, and then the family name.... And so Mrs. Stone became your aunt? ... But how interesting!'

'My aunt.... Great God!' Tim had very nearly uttered this exclamation aloud.

The band struck up the opening bars of a tango. Manoël hastily gulped down his tea and, without saying 'by your leave,' carried Teresa off to dance. Timothy watched them with delight. Never had he seen more perfect, more rhythmical dancing. The sensuous movements of the tango suited Teresa's lissom figure to perfection. Manoël held her tightly to him and she looked as if she were gliding along in his arms, her beautiful body seeming at one with his. At times Tim caught sight of her face: her eyes were half-closed, the long lashes throwing a softening shadow over her cheeks. But Manoël was just the male, holding that which was his by right of conquest. He held her so close that her spine was nearly doubled back over his arm; from time to time he touched her hair with his lips. The touch was as subtle, as delicate as that of a butterfly's wing on the petal of a flower, but it reached her consciousness nevertheless: a tremor would go through her body, the blue-veined lids fell over the eyes, veiling them completely, while the moist red lips were parted in an ecstasy of delight.

'What a fool that man is,' Timothy thought; 'and how she loves him!'

This started a new train of thought, and for the first time since the outset of his great adventure, he asked himself if it was all worth while. Was he grasping at a shadow while losing hold of the beautiful realities of life? With the money which his father had left him he might have settled down in the old country to farm his own bit of land. He might have had a simple home, a wife ... children. Life would have been easy....

'It would not, Tim, my lad,' he said to himself. 'Easy? Rather not! ... You would have burst your guts with rage every time Hold-Hands Juliana passed you by in her Rolls-Royce, or you read of the marvellous gown she wore at Ascot.... No, my son! as you've made your bed, so must you lie on it.... But I wish that lovely Teresa had not fallen in love with one of the greatest rascals unhung....'

## XIII

After the tango Dom Manoël was obliged to pay his respects to other ladies present. The old Marqueza detained him in conversation, and once more Tim found himself with Teresa, slightly isolated from the rest of the crowd. She was flushed and breathless after the dance; her beautiful eyes shone dark and luminous in the pure oval of her face. Beautiful she was, and from a man's point of view, infinitely desirable; and though for some unexplainable reason she did not appeal to Timothy in that sense, nevertheless he was conscious of a great feeling of sympathy for her—almost of pity, for she obviously was not happy.

She asked for an iced drink, and Tim got her an orangeade; while she sipped it through the straws she kept her eyes over the glass fixed upon Tim, with a look, so he thought, of anxiety. Presently she put her glass down and asked an abrupt question.

'It isn't all true, is it?'

'What is?'

'That you go about in all sorts of low haunts in the city and talk to disreputable characters...?'

Tim laughed. 'I don't know about "low" or about "disreputable," but being a student of human nature...'

She gave a quaint little smile. 'You need not study human nature in the drinking-booths of the old city....'

'But suppose I say that I find the drinking-booths of the old city more interesting than'—with a glance he indicated the elegant assembly at the *thé dansant*—'than this sort of thing.'

Teresa remained silent for a moment or two. Apparently she was pondering over what he had just said. Then all of a sudden she seemed to make up her mind.

'Don't go about to those places any more, Major O'Clerigh,' she said, with an earnest glance of her dark expressive eyes. 'It isn't safe, you know.'

'Oh!'

'I know. I know. Men are all alike. They think women are cowards just because they are prudent. But foolhardiness is not bravery.'

Tim smiled, with the indulgent contempt of the male at the girl's anxiety.

'There's no question of foolhardiness or of bravery,' he said; 'only curiosity.'

'Then promise me...'

She had spoken abruptly, and then, just as abruptly she paused, the eager sympathy died out of her eyes, and an expression came into them all of a sudden which Tim could not define. It looked almost like fear. He was sitting with his back turned to the rest of the crowd while talking to Teresa, so did not see Dom Manoël, who had worked his way back to their table. It was not until the pleasant, cheery voice struck on his ear that he understood why the expression in the girl's face had changed so suddenly.

'One more waltz, *cara*—then I'm afraid I shall have to go. If our dear Major will excuse....'

Dom Manoël, as before, took possession of Teresa and led her to the dancing floor and Tim was left to ponder over the strange little episode.

He did not see the girl again that day, but the next morning a barefooted urchin brought a small parcel for the senhor Inglez to the hotel. He didn't wait for an answer, but said he had orders to deliver the parcel into the senhor's own hands. Very much intrigued, Tim opened it. It contained a short dagger, with handle and sheath of exquisite Toledo workmanship, and with it a note written in quaint, rather stilted English in an ornate, foreign hand. It said:

'A very dear friend gave me this toy once. I have no use for it, but it will serve you well whenever the study of human nature leads you into trouble. Promise me never to go out into the streets of this city without it. It is safer and more feared than a Browning.'

The note was not signed. Tim took up the dagger, drew it out of its sheath, and looked with admiration on the beautiful Toledo blade and the exquisite silver inlay in the finely-tempered steel. He laid it down upon the table and then re-read the note.

'Funny girl,' he murmured. 'Why she should ... "safer than a Browning"? I suppose she means that it makes no noise.' And then, following a fresh train of thought: 'I wonder how much she does know.'

But that evening when he went to meet his friend the Dutchman, at the Bom Genio, he had Teresa's gift safely stowed away in his hip-pocket.

## XIV

It was a couple of evenings later that Dom Manoël persuaded Tim to join him and Doctor da Pinto at the Hespanha music-hall.

'Not quite so elegant,' he explained, 'as the Conquistador, where your friend, Inez, is the somewhat worn-out star, but far more amusing. Just now there is a Negro dancer—a girl who, I am told, is quite wonderful. Teresa very much wants to see the creature and I would like to take her. We'll have to have old da Pinto for a chaperon. We can have supper there—their *Vatapa à Bahiana* is superb—and, anyway, I can promise you a pleasant evening. You'll come, won't you?'

'Only if you will allow it to be my party. The doctor and the senhorita have been very kind to me—-it would give me a chance of making some return.'

'Very well—just as you like. Will you book a table or shall I? It is better, as the place gets very crowded....'

'I'll see to all that,' said Tim.

The Hespanha turned out to be a small place of the usual pattern of music-hall in that part of the world: a stage, a floor crowded with seats, a balcony on three sides of the hall. On the balcony, trestle-tables with benches and chairs, at which supper was served during the performance. Tim had secured a table for his little party and the evening began gaily enough. The doctor appeared less truculent than usual and Teresa was in one of her happy moods; her eyes sparkled with joy; she prattled away as gaily as a young bird. The Hespanha was evidently one of those Bohemian places which exist in most countries: neither salubrious nor comfortable, offering but a poor entertainment and indifferent food; the haunt, too, of many undesirables in the social world—they have, nevertheless, a strange attraction for fastidious and refined women of the world, such as Teresa da Pinto, and for reasons which they themselves could not explain. Is it that they like to rub their dainty shoulders against the coarse fibres of humanity? Is it the novelty of the surroundings? The tasting of fruit which, though no longer forbidden these days, still retains a certain savour of the unusual and the provocative? Who can say? Certain it is that the exquisite Teresa seemed greatly to enjoy the dish of *Vatapa à Bahiana*, the highly spiced national dish, something like an Indian curry, which is the favourite supper dish in these parts, served on a thick earthenware plate by a seedy-looking, chocolate-coloured waiter; and it was with obvious relish that she sipped iced champagne out of tumblers a quarter of an inch thick.

She seemed to have totally forgotten her earnestness of the other day—her anxiety on Tim's behalf—and when, with mock ostentation, he drew the beautiful Toledo dagger from his pocket and placed it beside his plate, she appeared highly amused and pleased. Dom Manoël remarked on the pretty toy: apparently he had never seen it before and did not know that it was a gift from Teresa. She gave Tim a quick look and, unseen by Manoël, she raised a finger to her lips, which he took to mean that the gift and her note were to remain a secret between them.

Neither Tim nor his friends paid much heed to the performance; it was very poor, the dancers were badly dressed and neither very young nor very pretty. The audience was not worth looking at. What Tim did enjoy was to gaze at Teresa. Never had he seen her look more beautiful, because for once she seemed perfectly happy. Dom Manoël was entirely lover-like, attentive, taking every opportunity to whisper in her ear—words unheard by anyone but herself and which had the effect of sending a soft blush up to her cheeks. The doctor made obvious efforts to talk amiably with Tim. He drank more than was good for him, however; more than he had done in public recently. Tim noticed that whenever he

reached out for the bottle of champagne in order to fill his glass, Dom Manoël would give him a stern look, but the power of that look was evidently not great, for, after a shrug and a scowl at his friend, da Pinto would deliberately have yet another glass.

At first there had been a good many free tables on the balcony, but towards midnight several hilarious groups came trooping into the hall. Among these, Tim caught sight of Van Smeet. He had a girl with him and, after some discussion with the seedy-looking waiter, took possession of a table close by. He wanted the table next to Tim's party, but the waiter assured him that that was booked. In the meanwhile, Tim had nodded to him, and Dom Manoël also condescended to give him a look of recognition.

It was just after midnight that a set of very rowdy people invaded the balcony and with a great deal of talking, shrieks of laughter and stentorian commands to the waiter, spread themselves round the table nearest to Tim and his party. There were three men and a couple of girls—rough-looking fellows, whom Tim more than suspected of being some sort of half-breeds: the girls were showily dressed, and the whole party soon began to drink very freely, whilst smoking innumerable cigarettes.

From the first these people made themselves objectionable to Tim and his friends. The girls, shrieking at the top of their strident voices, scrutinized Teresa with blatant impertinence. The men roared with laughter whenever the women made insolent remarks in loud whispers, evidently intended to be overheard. All of them drank and ate noisily and expectorated all over the floor. Tim complained to the waiter, who shrugged his shoulders and declared himself powerless to interfere. Accustomed to the ways of his own country, Tim then demanded to see the manager, who was nowhere to be found. Dom Manoël and the doctor were making very obvious efforts to avoid a row, although both of them—the doctor especially—were fast losing control over their tempers. Tim by now was boiling with rage.

He rose from his seat and went over to the next table to expostulate with the offensive crowd, but the men, contrary to the custom of the country, where courtesy amounts to a virtue, were truculent and aggressive; they used words and gestures which further irritated Tim. The girls did not help matters either, for they went off from time to time into shrieks of hysterical laughter. There were a few angry 'Sh-sh-sh' from the audience, but beyond that no one took much notice. Then suddenly, without any warning, one of the men hit out and struck Tim in the face. Tim, of course, at once returned the blow. The doctor and Dom Manoël jumped up from the table and hurried to his assistance, whilst the men at the other table seemed ready to back up their friend. The two girls remained seated, still laughing, talking and smoking cigarettes.

Something of a scuffle ensued. More angry 'Sh-sh-sh' on the part of the audience; but apparently a row of this sort between the patrons of the hall was not an uncommon occurrence at the Hespanha, and people did not do more at first than turn their heads in the direction whence came all the noise. The band, equally accustomed, probably, to this kind of incident, made a few ear-splitting attempts to drown the sound of the scuffle, while the dancers did their best to keep the attention of the audience concentrated on themselves.

Up in the gallery the row had resolved itself into a bout of fisticuffs. Tim, as soon as he had been so violently and so unwarrantably attacked, landed out right and left with his fists, but with his fists only. He never gave more than a passing thought to Teresa's gift. Being a past-master in the art of self-defence, he was getting on very well, and his three adversaries pretty badly, when all of a sudden he saw da Pinto—who, he thought, had come to his aid—join in the fray against him. And not only that, but he saw the doctor's hand reach out for one of the knives on the table and then raise it with a gesture which could have but one object—murder. The man must have gone raving mad—drunk probably, and homicidal in his cups. But what was more amazing still, Tim suddenly caught sight of Dom Manoël's face leering at him above da Pinto's shoulder, with an expression that was no longer good-humoured and gently sarcastic, as was its wont; the lips were no longer smiling, the lips were drawn back like those of a feline, showing sharp white teeth and the gums above. It was, in fact, a face on which vice, rage and hatred had thrown their hideous imprint. Then Timothy saw red. As in a flash he realized that these two devils had brought him here in order to entrap him, in order to murder him. He hit out savagely at the man in front of him, who was in the way, caught the doctor's wrist in a vice-like grip and forced his hand to open convulsively and drop the knife.

The next moment an amazing—a horrible thing happened: da Pinto's face became distorted in a spasm of agony, a gurgling sound came from his throat, he stretched out his arms, lurched forward, then sideways and fell like a log right across the table.

## XV

'You foreign devil, you've killed him!' Who uttered these words Tim didn't know. He was too dazed for the moment to do anything but stare down at the inanimate body, over which Dom Manoël was now anxiously stooping. The other men had hastily backed away; the girls had bolted down the balcony stairs; and there Timothy O'Clerigh stood staring—staring at that inert, rigid back and at the dark stain which rapidly spread from beneath it over the coarse table-cloth.

And all at once confusion in the hall became chaotic. All the women seemed to shriek at once; the men jumped up from their seats, swore and shouted, tables and chairs were overturned, plates and bottles fell with loud clangs on the floor. After a strident crash of brass instruments, the orchestra was mute: the curtain had been hastily rung down.

There were cries of 'Police!'

And now by the side of Dom Manoël, who had succeeded in turning the body over and was trying to undo the fallen man's tie, collar and waistcoat, Tim saw Teresa da Pinto. She, too, was stooping over the body of her father, but at the moment that Tim caught sight of her she raised her head and their eyes met. To his dying day Tim never forgot the expression of her face just then. It appeared rigid and grey, as if carved in stone; there was not a drop of blood in her cheeks or her lips; and the eyes—those beautiful, dark, luminous eyes of hers—stared and stared vacantly, as if suddenly struck with blindness. Like an automaton she stood there, her back half-bent, one hand resting on the dead man's shoulder; and like an automaton she now raised the other hand and pointed to the top of the stairs. Through the white frozen lips came a half-articulate sound and, presently the words: 'Go—go ... at once ... go!'

As soon as the words were uttered Dom Manoël looked up. Evidently he had not realized that she was still there, for the first thing he said was:

'For God's sake, Teresa, stand aside. I'll see you home as soon as...'

By handling the dead man's clothes, his own, as well as his hands, had become stained: except for that, he might have been turned out of a bandbox. He looked up at Tim, and while Teresa still murmured like an automaton repeating a lesson: 'Go—it is better—go!' Dom Manoël said, quite coolly:

'Don't do anything so foolish, Major—unless, of course...'

Tim, indeed, had no intention of doing anything of the sort. After the first moment of bewilderment he was regaining all his self-possession. The incident was tragic in the extreme: horrible in view of Teresa's presence here. It was also inexplicable to a mind, ignorant of medical facts, why there should be all that blood, as it seemed obvious now to Tim that the doctor had suddenly died of heart failure, brought on by over-excitement. He did not feel in any way remorseful, as he certainly was not responsible for the catastrophe.

A couple of gendarmes now appeared upon the scene, accompanied by a little dark man in a black frock-coat, who evidently was a medical man. They had forced their way through the crowd up the staircase, asking no questions, guided to the scene of the disaster by a dozen eager hands. An over-curious group of newsmongers gathered round them, awed and silenced by the magnitude of the tragedy. The rest of the hall was being rapidly cleared by two or three more gendarmes. All the noise and confusion had subsided; soon the hall, save for that compact group on the balcony, appeared dark and deserted. It seemed as if those that remained up there had been struck dumb.

The man in the black coat was busy with the lifeless body. The gendarmes asked what had happened; and one of them produced pocket-book and pencil, while the other did the interrogating. He turned first to Tim, who, quite cool and unruffled now, did his best to give a clear and concise explanation.

He had objected, he said, to the behaviour of some men and women at the table next to his: they had been very

offensive to the lady in his party. He expostulated. One of the men struck at him, and he struck back. Then, all of a sudden, to his utter astonishment, Doctor da Pinto, whom he knew well in society and who was his guest this evening, seized a knife and would undoubtedly have struck at him had not he, Tim, grabbed him by the wrist and forced him to drop the knife; whereupon, without the slightest warning, the doctor seemingly fell dead.

There were a few murmurs in the crowd, either of astonishment or incredulity, followed by a kind of shiver of excitement when Dom Manoël, respectfully questioned by the gendarmes—since he was a person of much consequence in the city—gave his version of the tragedy. As usual he was very self-possessed, very urbane, above all very helpful.

'I think,' he said, 'in fact, I am sure that my friend, Major O'Clerigh, is entirely wrong in one particular. Doctor da Pinto most obviously never raised his hand against him. If he did seize a knife, which I suppose he did, since the Major says so, it could only have been in order to defend our kind host of to-night, and not to attack him.'

'Where is the knife?' the gendarme asked, and a dozen eager eyes immediately searched the floor. Unfortunately this by now was littered with debris of china, of glasses and bottles, with knives, forks and spoons: all scattered pell-mell when the dying man clutched at the cloth before falling prone across the table.

'I am quite certain of one thing,' Tim was saying meanwhile, 'that Doctor da Pinto's mind was in a very confused state. He had been drinking a great deal all the evening and I don't suppose he had the least idea what he was doing.'

'Can the senhorita give any other detail? It is very sad and very regrettable to have to ask you questions, senhorita ... but if you could help me...?'

'I saw nothing,' Teresa replied, with extraordinary selfpossession. 'I heard the dispute going on, but preferred to look another way ... I was regretting that I had ever thought of coming here when...'

'Quite so,' the gendarme said kindly, and then turned to the black-coated doctor.

'The immediate cause of death, senhor *doutor*?'

'A knife thrust,' the little man replied, 'in the neck, severing one of the jugular veins. Doctor da Pinto died instantaneously.'

'Impossible!' Tim exclaimed, involuntarily.

'Why impossible, senhor?'

'I was at grips with him at the moment. I should have seen if anyone had...'

'But someone—we'll say someone unknown—did, senhor Inglez—and with this unpleasant looking little instrument.' And the doctor held out to the gendarme a small dagger with an exquisitely inlaid blade and hilt of Toledo workmanship.

'My God!' Tim exclaimed, 'that is mine.'

'Is it?' the doctor queried, with a smile. The gendarme took the dagger from him and showed it to Tim.

'You recognize it?' he asked.

'Why, yes!'

'Then how do you account for what the senhor *doutor* has just told us?'

'I can't account for it—the knife is mine—I have carried it about with me lately. To-night, during supper, I took it out of my pocket and put it on the table beside my plate. Senhor da Lisbao would remember....' And he turned to Dom Manoël, who at the moment was intent on persuading Teresa to drink a glass of champagne. At the sound of his own name he turned.

'My dear fellow—is there anything I can do?'

'Yes—you remember this knife? I put it on the table—you remarked on it.'

'I remember—yes. What about it?'

'Senhor *doutor* has just told us,' the gendarme said, 'that senhor *doutor* da Pinto was stabbed in the neck with this knife.'

'Good God!'

'But the knife was on the table—you remember?'

'Of course I do. I've said so.'

'When did you last see it, senhor?' the gendarme asked. 'I mean at what moment during the dispute?'

Dom Manoël shrugged his shoulders till they almost touched his ears and threw out his hands with an expressive gesture.

'That I am afraid I can't tell you. I know that at one time the knife was on the table. Major O'Clerigh took it out of his pocket and laid it down beside his own plate, but what became of it afterwards I really couldn't say.'

'There is the sheath, at any rate,' somebody from the crowd remarked and pointed to the table, where, amidst the remnants of the supper party, among the forks and the spoons and glasses, lay the Toledo sheath.

The two gendarmes were evidently embarrassed. It was the first time in their lives that they had been called upon to suspect a person of high social standing of being concerned in an ugly business of this sort. They did not quite know how to act. In cases like this, one just took the delinquent by the scruff of the neck and marched him off to the cells, pending inquiry before the justices of the peace. But to drag an illustrious stranger, who was a major in the King of England's army, through the streets of Monsataz, and to thrust him into the police cells along with a lot of vagabonds and half-breeds, was out of the question. And it was too late to telephone the Town Hall for instructions: on the other hand, the matter was terribly serious. If what the senhor *doutor* had said turned out to be a fact, then...

Instinctively they turned for advice to Senhor da Lisbao: a prominent citizen, friend of the Governor of the province and of all the dignitaries of the city, he would better than anyone know just what to do. Dom Manoël was as usual most helpful.

'I will be guarantee for the senhor Inglez,' he said, in answer to the mute question put to him by the perplexed gendarmes. 'The whole thing is, of course, a tragic mistake. I don't pretend to know, but I'll guarantee that the cavalheiro Inglez will go straight back to his hotel now, and that he will be ready to appear before the magistrate in the morning, whenever you come for him. I'll see the Governor myself and explain; you won't be blamed, I promise you—so if you are satisfied...'

They were. Not only satisfied, but much relieved.

'That's all right, isn't it, Major?' Dom Manoël asked in English.

'I suppose so. It's very kind of you, of course, but I have no intention of running away. There's some ghastly muddle here which I don't understand—against that I don't mind in the least spending the rest of the night in a police cell rather than...' He had been on the point of saying: 'rather than owe anything to you,' but thought better of it. This was not the time for giving way to any sudden impulse, and any ill-considered speech might have unpleasant consequences.

A couple more gendarmes had now turned up, and between them the four men jostled the crowd in order to make way for Senhor da Lisbao and the senhorita. Teresa had made almost superhuman efforts not to give way under the

terrible strain; and Tim in his heart, and despite worry over his unpleasant position, gave ungrudging tribute to her marvellous pluck and endurance. Everything had been so sudden and was so terribly bewildering that he did not know what impression she had gathered of the awful catastrophe. Surely she did not believe him guilty of murdering her father: such a purposeless crime must to any sane person appear impossible, and Teresa was more than ordinarily sane—except where Manoël was concerned. That that smooth-tongued devil had a hand in the whole tragic incident Tim did not doubt for a moment; exactly what rôle he did play in it was difficult as vet to determine. But somehow Tim already had the impression that Teresa knew certain things, which had brought that look of frozen horror upon her face and forced the words: 'Go!—go at once!' from her lips. In view of what followed, those words, which had sounded like a command, were more than puzzling. Tim tried to meet her eyes once more as Manoël guided her through the crowd, but she was looking straight before her, leaning heavily on Manoël's arm, and despite the heat holding her shawl wrapped closely round her shoulders.

'Shall I send the motor back for you?' Manoël asked, as he brushed past Timothy.

'No, thanks. I'd sooner walk.'

He followed down the stairs, the crowd closing in behind him; there was still a lot to see; the fourth act of the drama—the body to be conveyed to the mortuary—the *pièces de conviction* to be carefully collected, and so on. At the door of the hall Tim waited long enough to see Teresa and Manoël get into the motor and drive away. He supposed that she would go straight home, where probably she had a kind maid or nurse who would look after her. What a strange enigma was this whole affair! Tim, walking down the cobbled streets of the old city in these small hours of the morning, with the waning moon casting her mysterious light over this remote corner of God's earth, felt as if he were dreaming, as if all these events had not really occurred—not to him, Timothy O'Clerigh, Major in the Irish Guards, whose life hitherto had been so easy, so simple and straightforward, with every action mapped out and directed by convention. How could it be he himself who had just been led to the very edge of a precipice, made to gaze into an abyss wherein life or honour might conceivably have been wrecked?

What did it all mean, anyway? What were the meshes of the net into which he had been driven and in which he might so easily have been caught? Had it been a *guet-apens* with a view to his receiving a casual knife thrust in a scrimmage? Were those men mere bravoes hired by Dom Manoël to get rid of him? And had one of them struck the doctor by mistake? That was, perhaps, the most likely explanation of the affair. And yet the longer did Tim think over every moment of the fateful evening, the more did a certain vision—a flash that did not last longer than a few seconds—thrust itself before his mind's eye. As he walked through the ill-lighted streets he saw that vision, marvelling if it was real; wondering if, at the very instant when da Pinto seized the knife and brandished it, he, Tim, had really caught a sudden glimpse of Manoël's face, distorted with rage and with passion, immediately behind the doctor's uplifted arm—or if he had dreamed it. But the longer he thought of it the more he was sure—although reason fought against the suggestion, for, in very truth, what object could one devil have in killing his partner in crime?

And yet there was Teresa's frozen look of horror. She most certainly had seen something, which had filled her whole soul with a withering despair. Terribly tragic as would, in any case, have been the death of her father in such circumstances, there was something more desperate than mere affliction or even anguish in her attitude. She wanted Tim to go—to go away at once, lest he should hear or know—what? Lest he should be embroiled in a net of infamy, which she knew had been spread for him—and not only for him, but also for her father.

God! What a tangle! Again Tim was assailed with doubts. Was the whole thing worth while? Whither would his mad desire for right and justice to himself lead him after this?

When first he set out on his adventure he knew that he would have enemies to deal with, unscrupulous blackguards who would be prepared to commit any crime in order to conceal their past felonies. Well! here he was now in the midst of it all. The Irish fly had walked into the dago spider's parlour—and probably here he was, too, without a friend in the world to show him the way out again.

Not that Tim felt any anxiety with regard to his own future over this affair. His conscience was so absolutely clear, his actions had been so entirely straightforward, that he had no fear of a flagrant miscarriage of justice. After all, he was in a civilized country, and Timothy O'Clerigh was one of those who still clung to the belief that there was some kind of

magical power in being a citizen of the British Empire.

*Civis Romanus sum.*

## XVI

Nor was there any flagrant miscarriage of justice. Even at the moment when Timothy heard the magistrates' decision and realized that it meant the ruin of all his hopes, he could not, in the bitterness of his heart, do more than curse himself for his folly—for his senseless idiocy in walking straight into the trap so cunningly laid for him.

Cunning? Of course it was cunning. A masterpiece of devilish craftsmanship. He, Timothy O'Clerigh, had to be got out of the way—by some means more or less foul. Murder might have proved inconvenient with a British Consul not so many miles way, so there must be something else. He had come here intending to unmask two rogues, who were not mere vagabonds and ruffians, but important members of a civilized community, rich and influential—therefore, away with him. What more easy for a resourceful brain, like that of Dom Manoël da Lisbao, than to devise a scheme whereby this meddlesome Irishman would be involved in a brawl in a low-class music-hall, get mixed up in an affray which would end in the death of a prominent citizen of Monsataz and be expelled from the country as an undesirable alien?

For that is how the anxiety, the mental torture of the past few weeks culminated in the end. Expelled from the country! Ordered to quit Monsataz within forty-eight hours, as his presence there was undesirable! How often in the past few years had Tim read in his *Daily Mail* that this or that alien had been ordered by the magistrate to be sent back to his own country as an 'undesirable.' And here he was—Major O'Clerigh, D.S.O., of the Irish Guards, an undesirable in the opinion of the provincial magistrate of this country, ordered to clear out within forty-eight hours.

The British Consul—so kind and considerate—took a cheerful view of the situation.

'It might have been much worse,' he said.

'How—worse?'

'Two or three years' imprisonment—in a Brazilian prison....'

'Bah! No worse than banishment....'

For this was the end of all Tim's hopes, of all his schemes. God! What a fool he had been! And yet—how in the world could he have guessed? The whole tragedy had been so magnificently planned and everything went as smoothly, as naturally as if he himself had helped to construct the drama until the final fall of the curtain—the sentence of banishment.

Everyone had been most kind, most helpful. Bail was granted without demur, though the charge was serious; an advocate of renown in the province was at his disposal and burned the midnight oil to collect evidence in his client's favour. Medical evidence went to prove that Doctor da Pinto had died of heart failure, consequent on over-excitement, and that the knife-thrust had been delivered either at the very moment or immediately after the collapse.

Dom Manoël did his best to be of service to the accused, who was his friend, just as the deceased had been. But as a matter of fact he had seen nothing really—nothing that would be of any use to the defence. He recognized the dagger, remembered its lying on the table at one time, but after that...? No! He could not in conscience recollect anything more. The shock he had experienced on seeing his friend fall so suddenly had almost unmanned him ... he had hurried to his side as quickly as he could. He did not realize that the doctor was dead until he ... oh! it was all very, very horrible. Senhor da Pinto had been one of his greatest friends. And the whole tragedy had been all the more horrible from the fact that the Senhorita Teresa had been there, not a dozen paces away from the scene. Fortunately, she had seen nothing—nothing. Dom Manoël could swear to that, because, although he had, from the first, tried to intervene between the

accused and his opponents, he had never ceased to keep an eye on the senhorita to make sure that she was not being molested. No—no—there was no occasion to call her ... she had seen nothing, and it would be cruel to drag her into the affair. Dom Manoël, who throughout was a witness such as any examining magistrate would delight in—calm, lucid, ready to help in every way—concluded his deposition by reiterating his firm belief that Major O'Clerigh was mistaken when he thought that Doctor da Pinto was threatening him with a knife.

'It was an unfortunate mistake, as it turned out,' were the words the witness used, 'perhaps a natural one, under the circumstances, but I owe it to the memory of my friend to vindicate his character in this. Besides, what possible object could the unfortunate man have for attacking Major O'Clerigh, whom he hardly knew and with whom he had no cause for quarrel?'

Senhor da Lisbao was warmly thanked by both sides for the impartial way in which he had deposed. He stepped down from the witness-box, looking the perfection of well-groomed, well-bred manhood, anxious only for the truth, but ready to vindicate the honour of both his friends—the living and the dead. As he passed close to the accused, he gave him an encouraging nod. Tim, consumed inwardly with rage, nevertheless gave ungrudging admiration to the skill of his enemy. His was a complete triumph, for his name and reputation remained unscathed. The three ruffians whom he had paid to start the row at the Hespanha had served him well. Never for a moment had Senhor Manoël da Lisbao been involved in the affair, save as a sympathetic looker-on. They themselves played their rôle of impartial witnesses to perfection. The accused, they said, had sought quarrel with them and they had been forced to use their fists in self-defence. They swore that they did not see Doctor da Pinto lift an arm against the cavalheiro Inglez. But then they were facing the accused, so could not have seen what went on behind their backs.

Indeed, at one time during the inquiry, which lasted close upon a month, things looked very black for Tim. The general trend of evidence led to the conclusion that he had drunk too much champagne, that he became truculent and aggressive, assaulted three inoffensive persons at a neighbouring table—and they were the principal witnesses against him—and then, for no apparent reason, thrust at Doctor da Pinto with murderous intent. Timothy, very reluctantly, had put his advocate in possession of a few facts—not all—connected with his own life, which he thought might help his case: his right to a great peerage, the rôle played by Doctor da Pinto and others in defrauding him of his heritage, his reasons for coming out to Monsataz. But the advocate—very wisely—came to the conclusion that such evidence would only be prejudicial to the defence; for, thought it might presuppose a motive for da Pinto's desire to be rid of Timothy, it might also turn out to be a two-edged sword and demonstrate that the accused, not having succeeded in proving that the affidavit sworn by the doctor was perjury, had the strongest possible motive for assassination—namely, revenge; a motive, by the way, most readily understood in this country.

And thus did the inquiry pursue its wearisome way. The British Consul and Dom Manoël had gone bail for Tim and, though he hated the very thought of being beholden to his worst enemy for anything, he could not find any reasonable ground for refusal. And he passed his days in the dreary room of the Hotel Angola, gazing out over the sun-lit bay and the towering, sun-baked rocks that appeared now like two Titanic sentinels at the gates of this implacable prison. The pitiless sun, the harsh blue of the sky, the searing glare of the ocean, the tropical heat, all tended to aggravate the tension on his nerves, until he began to wonder whether he would not sooner be dead and have done with it all.

In the end it was his friends from the Bom Genio who saved him from a really cruel fate. Van Smeet and the two Germans, who had been sitting at a table close by and had stood up in order to watch what they thought was just an amusing row, were quite positive that the deceased was brandishing a knife a few seconds before he fell. They had seen Tim's hand clutching da Pinto's wrist and the knife dropping out of the latter's hand. After that, persons and things intervened and they did not see exactly what happened, but their evidence enabled Tim's advocate to seize on the question of self-defence. This plea the examining magistrate accepted, but he held that a quarrelsome foreigner like this Major O'Clerigh, who was evidently over-fond of champagne and then became aggressive in his cups, was an undesirable visitor to these peaceable shores, and had better be returned to his own country.

The accused was ordered to quit the country within forty-eight hours.

# XVII

Tim, sitting in the hotel, staring at his luggage, wondered if there had ever been on earth a bigger fool than himself, or a man more absolutely done in by a clever scoundrel. Manoël da Lisbao had indeed triumphed in the most thorough, most complete manner. He had even in one swoop rid himself not only of Timothy, his enemy, but also of his partner, da Pinto, who in all probability was becoming inconvenient.

The more he thought the whole tragedy over, the more convinced he was that it was Manoël who had struck the doctor, that it was his face he had seen, distorted with rage and a sardonic grin, just above da Pinto's shoulder before the unfortunate man fell dead across the table. But what was the good now of brooding over that? What was the good of eating out one's heart in regret and bitterness? He had been enmeshed and had fallen a victim. He was the foreigner, unknown, unconsidered; Manoël the native, with riches and influence. It was all inevitable. Fate and his own folly had brought about the catastrophe. He might have done this or that; he should not have gone here or there; said one thing rather than another. All futile now. He was ordered to clear out of the place, and the last chance of probing the mystery of Dudley Stone would sail with him across the ocean.

Late that evening Fra Martino came to see him. He appeared panting, breathless, and perspiring profusely, as if he had hurried through the streets.

'My dear friend,' he began, as soon as he had put down his amazing hat and stick, and fell with a sigh of relief into the arm-chair which Tim offered him.

'Bad luck, isn't it?' said Tim with a smile. He had taken a liking to the old fellow, who, during the last wearisome month, had often been to see him, and had done his best to cheer and comfort him. His grudge against Fra Martino had soon died away. If the old priest had been the recipient of Fra Bartolomeo's confession, he was entirely within his rights —it was his sacred duty, in fact—to keep the secret of that confession inviolate. True, he had benefited through Fra Bartolomeo's crime, but would it have been in human nature to refuse a legacy, which meant a fortune to him, because he knew its provenance to be corrupt? There had been something in the priest's attitude towards him during the terrible ordeal of the inquiry which had been a real comfort—something kindly, sympathetic. He seemed to be the one friend Tim had in this crowd of enemies and callous lookers-on.

He got the old man a whisky and soda, and said ruefully: 'The last I shall be mixing for you, Padre.'

The priest had a long drink; after which he evidently felt better physically. But there was something on his mind. Tim knew the symptoms well: a troubled look, and then a blank expression, a steady avoidance of the other's gaze, and the thick, red hand fidgeting the cigarette.

'It might have been much worse, my dear Major,' he said at last.

'Not much, Padre.'

Tim sat down beside the old man. The window was wide open, and they had before them a picture of the noble bay with the huge rocks, and the water, smooth as a mirror, reflecting in shades of rose and purple the marvel of the setting sun. And Tim gazed across that ocean which seemed so tranquil and yet to him so pitiless, since in a very few hours it would roll on forever between him and his vanished hopes. And suddenly the desire seized him to speak once more of those hopes and of his despair. He did not really know just how much the old priest knew of the affair which had brought him, Tim O'Clee, to these shores. Like the beautiful Teresa, Fra Martino had always remained something of an enigma. His share in the profits derived from Hold-Hands Juliana's suborning hands was undoubted, but how much did he know of the whole conspiracy which had ousted Tim from his rightful inheritance?

'Did I ever tell you, Padre,' he began, rather abruptly, 'why I came to Monsataz?'

Fra Martino hesitated; for a second or two it almost seemed as if there was nothing he longed for so much at this moment as to run away. At last he said tentatively:

'No ... my dear friend ... that is—no—I don't think you ever...'

'I came here, Padre, because I hoped to discover something which would have given me back what is rightly mine.'

'And what may that have been, my dear Major?'

'Whether a certain man named Dudley Stone did really die in Monsataz in May, 1924.'

'But why should that...?'

'Because if Dudley Stone really did die on that date, then the marriage of a common, vulgar woman with my uncle, who was an Irish peer, was a legal one, and her son born of the marriage has a perfect right to the title and estates which I claim to be mine.'

'And if this Dudley Stone did not die on the day you name?'

'Then the woman who went through the ceremony of marriage with my uncle had a husband living at the time: the marriage was illegal, the child illegitimate, and I the sole and rightful heir to one of the finest names in Ireland.'

'But why should you think...?'

'That the woman is a liar? I can't tell you why, but I know it. I am as sure of it as that I am alive. Three men over here swore an oath that Dudley Stone died six years ago—and I know that that oath was false.'

Tim paused a moment or two: he was watching the old man intently. But up to now Fra Martino's face had remained an expressionless mask.

'And I came here, Padre,' he resumed, 'in order to find out exactly what had become of Dudley Stone. I had already made some progress. I held a thread—a very slender one—but a thread nevertheless. I know that in the end I should have succeeded. God is not always on the side of the wicked.'

'My dear friend!'

'I know—I know. Forgive me, Padre, one does blaspheme sometimes. I know it is wicked, but just now I haven't any goodness in me. I was succeeding—I know I was succeeding—and now I'm being kicked out of the country and have to throw up the sponge. The wicked do prosper, you see, Padre. They even did so in the Bible, or David wouldn't have said so.'

Fra Martino had another drink before he spoke again, and there was genuine sympathy in the tone of his voice:

'I am really sorry, my dear Major. You never told me....'

'How could I?' Tim retorted, somewhat roughly. 'The perjurers were your friends.'

'Oh!' came in protest at this from Fra Martino.

'I think you know that, too, don't you, Padre?'

To this the old priest made no reply. He thought it better to give this confidential conversation another turn—a less unpleasant one.

'When you are back in your own country...' he began.

'When I'm back?' Tim retorted. 'I'm never going back to my own country, Padre—never!'

'But why?'

'Only because in Ireland there happens to be an old, old grey house—a wonderful old pile it is, too—it has towers covered with ivy, and the oaks and beeches in the woods around have stood there centuries before this place over here was even dreamed of. I was born in that house, Padre, and so was my father, and his father before him, and grandfather and great-grandfather. You don't know about such things, Padre, do you? And what I say sounds idiotic, doesn't it? But to us a house like that means everything we hold most sacred.'

'Religion, my dear friend...'

'It is a part of our religion, too. To me, that house, the woods, the lake, mean ... Well! they just mean my life, for God knows that they are mine, and I have been deliberately robbed of them by a lying wanton woman, who now sits in the arm-chair by the fire where my old granny used to sit; she sleeps in her bed; she eats off the old china plates; and pours her tea out of our old Irish silver teapot. I know you don't understand, Padre; but even that old Irish teapot means as much to me as the altar in your Lady Chapel perhaps means to you. Well! by coming here I thought I could unmask her trickery. With money which she got—wheedled out of a doting old man—she bribed three men to swear the false oath which enabled her to do me out of my rights. I know—and you know, Padre—who those three men are, or rather were, for two of them are dead. The third, the vilest of the lot, has got the better of me. He has triumphed, and I am down and out. I can do nothing once I am turned out of here. And I was so near succeeding. I shall become a wanderer now on the face of the earth, but I couldn't go back to Ireland. It would break my heart to see the old place again, now that I have failed so lamentably.'

Tim was sitting opposite Fra Martino, his elbows resting on his knees, his hands sometimes clasped together, sometimes his fists supporting his chin. All the time that he spoke he stared straight out before him into the corner of the room where stood his luggage ready packed: the outward sign of his dismal failure. The old priest let him talk on. He had seen so much in his day of shipwrecked humanity: had, in his funny, rough way, comforted so many broken fortunes that instinctively he knew that the best solace for this man's trouble at the moment was to let him put all the bitterness of his heart into words, and just to listen in silence. To show neither sympathy, nor even understanding, only to remain the mute recipient of words—that meant a measure of comfort.

It was only when, after a time, words were lost in a spasm of soul agony, and Timothy jumped to his feet and strode to the window in order to hide the tears which despite his every effort forced themselves into his eyes, that Fra Martino made up his mind to speak; and this he did, after he had very noisily blown his nose and cleared his throat.

'Why, my young friend,' said he,' should you accept failure so easily?'

Tim swung round on his heel.

'Easily? Great God! Haven't I got to clear out of this place within forty-eight hours?'

'The magistrate ordered it—yes! But...'

'But what?'

'There are ways, you know.'

'What ways?'

'So long as you disappear from Monsataz—go away for a time ... a long time even....'

'But what would be the good of that, Padre? I should anyhow...'

'Wait one moment, my dear Major. What I meant was that the magistrate ordered you to quit the country. Good! But he did not say which way you were to go.'

'What in the world do you mean?'

Tim came and sat down beside Fra Martino. A strange excitement had suddenly crept into his blood, making his

finger-tips tingle and his temples throb.

Fra Martino went on placidly: 'You can go which way you like, not?'

'Yes. But where to?'

'That is your affair. To obey the magistrate you can just as well go north to Pernambuco as south to Rio.'

That the old priest had something definite at the back of his mind was, of course, evident. Tim by now was too excited to talk clearly: all he could do was to try by monosyllabic words to jog Fra Martino's slow diction along. Could he have dragged the words through the old man's mouth with his fingers, he would have done it. The trouble was that Fra Martino was still hesitating. Apparently he had begun to speak on impulse, but was now on the very verge of regretting what he had already said. And Tim was terrified lest a false move on his part, a mere word spoken at the wrong moment, would send the old man into one of his slippery moods—when nothing more could be got out of him.

'Of course, Padre,' he said, as calmly as he could, 'I can go to Pernambuco by the coasting steamer.'

'Not all the way, my dear friend—not necessarily all the way.'

'But what else can I do?'

'You need not go all the way to Pernambuco. You might, for instance, land at one of the ports of call—there are two or three on the coast—and then ... the steamer might go on without you, eh? And you might find yourself...'

'Where? In God's name, Padre, try and tell me just what you mean or my head will burst.'

'It is very simple what I mean. You have been given your passport, not? It is possible that to-morrow when you are ready to start they will ask you how you intend to travel. You say to Pernambuco by the steamer, and from there to New York, or Europe—I don't know. Good! The authorities will be satisfied. Probably they will escort you to the steamer. And, of course, if you thought of returning, they would make it unpleasant for you. But you go—you go—you are on board the steamer with your luggage, bound for Pernambuco. But at San Christovao, where the steamer calls, you go on shore; and then you lose count of time; the steamer goes—and you are left behind.'

'All very pretty, Padre!' And Tim sighed, bitterly disappointed. He had begun to think that Fra Martino really had a scheme for helping him: he hardly knew what; it seemed impossible, of course, but still he had hopes. And now this futility! 'If I come back here, they'll only turn me out again. Dom Manoël would see to that.'

'But you need not come back here. You mustn't come back here. It is not here that you will find—what you seek.'

'Padre! In God's name, what do you mean?'

Fra Martino took a long drink. He looked terribly perplexed—unhappy even. Some kind of mental struggle was evidently disturbing his usual indolent complacency. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, took a long pull at his cigarette, while Tim felt as if during these few seconds he was living through eternity.

Said Fra Martino at last: 'I should advise, you, my dear friend, after you have missed your steamer at San Christovao—eh?—to take a train up-country....'

'Yes?'

'It is a dreary journey—ten or twelve hours—a slow train—many wayside stations—till it gets to Bomfin.'

'Bomfin? Where is that?'

'A long way—a long, long way—on the confines of the desert.'

'The desert?'

'We call it a desert because it is so dry, so lonely.... Yes ... the desert ... the Sertao.'

'The Sertao? But what should I be doing there?'

The priest did not reply. He appeared absorbed in thought: sipping the whisky and soda and taking long pulls at his cigarette. He avoided meeting Timothy's searching, inquiring eyes; and as Tim gazed on that large, florid, bloated face, it ceased to appear ugly to him. It seemed to him transfigured, like the face of a seer who had drawn aside for his benefit, and for one moment only, the veil which had fallen over his hopes. The 'Sertao!' Gradually the word found its way to his inner consciousness. The vision of that dreary court-room, where he had sat day after day while the inquiry pursued its weary course, slowly faded from his ken. It had haunted him incessantly for these four miserable weeks; he could see nothing else, waking or dreaming, but those whitewashed walls, the tall bench where sat the overworked, perspiring magistrate, and the chink in the *persienne* with that one glint of sunshine which at a certain hour of the day struck him in the face and seared his eye-balls. But now at the magic word 'Sertao' that ugly vision faded away. In its stead he saw the cheerful interior of the Bom Genio café: the jovial Dutchman, the fat-headed blond Germans, the surly, silent half-breeds. He heard again their murmuring voices talking of the mysterious desert, the resurrected prophet, the Great Unknown, who was such an audacious cattle-thief and the rightful emperor of Brazil, with the huge army of half-savage *vaqueiros* trained to arms by European officers. Tales! tales! He had heard them dozens of times, and paid little heed to them: only at times he used to wonder vaguely whether in that army of the Great Unknown he would one day come across the English adventurer, Dudley Stone.

And suddenly, with Fra Martino's tentatively uttered words, it all came back to him: the tales whispered by the half-breeds, laughed at by the Europeans, and the wonder which had seized hold of him when he heard about this army commanded by European officers.

'The Sertao, Padre...?' he murmured.

'Yes!' Fra Martino replied. 'It is a strange, lonely, desolate place, but you could find shelter there for a time until...'

'Only shelter?'

Fra Martino ignored what the question implied. He had apparently fallen back on his favourite policy of 'back-pedalling.' Having gone so far, timidity had seized on him; his natural indolence rebelled against this attempt at giving a hand to the foreign under-dog, because of the worry, the anxiety it would bring in its train. He had resumed that air of complacent bonhomie which became him so well and which in the past had so often been a source of irritation to O'Clerigh. He drank and smacked his lips, and did not in any way hurry himself or take the slightest notice of poor Tim's impatience.

'I have a friend,' he said, 'a colleague, a saintly man, who is the priest in charge of the district round the Sertao. The villages, you understand, are so scattered, the population is sparse: the Church cannot afford to have a minister of God in every village, so there is one for a whole district, and my friend...'

'Does he live in Bomfin?'

'No, no, some way up the Sertao district—on the way to Canudos—you understand?'

Tim had got hold of a note-book and was jotting down all these names.

'And how shall I get to him?'

'Oh! at Bomfin anyone will tell you ... you will find Esteban, the local carrier ... he has mules ... he acts as guide if a foreigner wants to go up-country ... you will find him outside the station ... with his mules, or his cart ... Esteban, the carrier.... You won't forget?'

'No, Padre. I won't forget.'

'You just tell Esteban you want to find Fra Federico Evangelista: he will take you—he always knows where

Federico is to be found. It will be another horrible journey ... the country is miserable....'

'And will Fra Federico help me to find...?'

'He is a saintly man. He will look after you—you will find shelter in his house. But there, I am staying too long. You have much to do to get ready. You must excuse an old man gossiping and taking up your time.'

He struggled to his feet. It was always a great effort for Fra Martino to get out of a comfortable chair. It took a lot of puffing and blowing and regaining of balance. On this occasion, as he finally steadied himself on his fat, stumpy legs, he found his hands imprisoned in Tim's firm, warm grasp.

'Padre, I am not going to attempt to thank you....'

'To thank me, my friend? Whatever for? Fra Federico Evangelista is a saintly man, but he is very poor. Your stay with him will be a help, and it will cheer him.'

'I know. I know all that, and as I say, I am not going to attempt to thank you, because there are no words in any human language that would express what I feel. I know that the members of your Church think that we of the English community are not even Christians, but I can assure you that we do believe in God, and that it is from the bottom of my heart that I will always pray to Him to bless you and reward you for what you have done to-day.'

'If I have comforted you a little...'

'A little? Heavens above!'

'But here am I gossiping again, and I have work to do to-night—no end of work, mine is a big parish.'

He was ostensibly looking for his hat and stick, and doing so was snorting like a porpoise.

'Shan't I see you again, Padre?'

'Alas—no, my dear Major O'Clerigh. To-morrow is a feast day, and you know how busy I always am.'

'But I may write to you?'

'Better not—better not. You see, the authorities must believe that you have left the country ... and sometimes in the post letters get opened and read by officials who...'

'Perhaps Fra Federico will find a way of letting you know that I have arrived.'

'Perhaps—perhaps. That would be capital, and then...'

'Oh! I will contrive to let you know if I have succeeded in finding—shelter, eh?'

'When you are back in Ireland—yes—then you can write, but...'

'I'll be most careful, don't be afraid.'

'Then good-bye, my friend. God bless you, and ... you have money?'

'Oh, yes! In cash—a few thousand milreis.'

'Capital! Capital! And don't forget ... Bomfin ... Esteban ... Fra Federico Evangelista.... Good-bye.'

He was gone: and Tim remained for a long while gazing at the door through which that quaint, obese old scamp had just passed out of his sight. Old scamp? Who would dare call him that after this spontaneous act of unprecedented kindness? Of course, Fra Martino was a scamp in a way; his life and morals had been none too clean; he was living on

the proceeds of an abominable act of perjury, and enjoying all the luxuries which it had showered into his lap, without a tinge of remorse. By his tacit silence he aided and abetted the crime of perjury every day of his life, and with it all was a minister of God and preached the gospel of purity and truth to a lot of ignorant peasants, who looked upon him as the pattern of all the virtues. But in his heart he had kept a feeling of pity for the downtrodden and the shipwrecked: his hand was stretched out to help a lame dog over a stile. And pity being akin to love, who shall say but that this venal and profligate priest would not find a full measure of mercy at the foot of the Throne of Him Who said that the greatest of all the virtues is Charity?

# *Book Three*
# THE GREAT ADVENTURE

## I

It was with very mixed feelings that Tim O'Clee set out on this last phase of his life's adventure. Somehow he knew that it was going to be the last phase. He felt it in his bones and, with a careless laugh, would at that time have assured you that those same bones would probably in the course of time become one with the dust of the desert.

He was going into a country absolutely unknown to him—unknown even to most Brazilians. God alone knew what he would find if he ever got there, which was more than doubtful. But, heavens above!—what an adventure! And this was the point where his feelings got mixed. He was itching to go, certain of success, confident that out there in the wilds he would suddenly come nose to nose with Dudley Stone. What he would do with him when he did find him was rather more problematical. There was no collaring a man by the scruff of the neck and dragging him through a hundred miles of arid, waterless country. Dudley Stone—such as he was, such as he had become out there—would have to be a consenting party to Tim's desire to prove him still alive.

And Tim O'Clee began to think of himself as a kind of male Alice going down a well into Wonderland; and when he embarked on the coasting steamer which plied between Monsataz and Pernambuco he quite thought that the crew and his fellow passengers might suddenly turn into a large mad tea-party over which he, as the maddest of them all, would naturally preside. The authorities, though firm, had been quite kind. His passport and papers were handed back to him as he stepped on board, and so farewell to Monsataz and all the preliminary excitements it stood for.

Tim thought over the events of the past two months with a grim smile. He had not done badly so far as adventures were concerned. Teresa, Dom Manoël, the murdered doctor, even Fra Martino, had proved to him that even the twentieth century could provide exciting adventures that vied successfully with those invented by the fertile brain of Jules Verne, or old Dumas.

According to plan, and carrying his gun and a small suitcase, Tim went ashore at San Christovao. He duly missed the boat, where apparently and fortunately nobody missed him, and found his way to the station. Here he had to wait four hours for the first train that would take him up-country.

A ten hours' journey by rail—over the miseries and discomforts of which he never afterwards cared to dwell—and, finally, Bomfin, where he had no difficulty in finding Esteban the carrier; a well-known figure, Esteban, owner of two pack-mules and a couple of horses, the man who was the intermediary between the fringe of the desert and this outpost of civilization. (Bomfin was not much more than that, and civilization a mere comparative term.) And Esteban knew Fra Federico Evangelista, and he contracted for the modest sum of ten milreis to convey the crazy Englishman to Cumbe, where Fra Federico had a house.

And ever since then, these two, Tim O'Clee and Esteban, had jogged along on the hard-baked sandy track which marked the initial stage of their journey. Three days! They seemed like three years to Tim. They had eaten their provisions by the road-side; at night they had pitched their tent in the centre of the most convenient village they came across; and morning and evening they had ambled along, and at midday had taken their *siesta* wherever a clump of thick thorny palms gave them the necessary shade.

One hundred kilometres, it seems, lay between the railhead and the village of Cumbe, where Fra Federico Evangelista had his dwelling-house. The road was a mere cattle-track, baked dry by the sun, rough and stony; at times it was non-existent save to the experienced eyes of Esteban. This was October and the nights were chilly, while the days were beginning to be insufferably hot. The water they found on the way was tepid and brackish; the approaches to it trodden into a sea of mud by the cattle brought hither by the *vaqueiros* for drink.

Of human habitations there were only a few; a village here and there, bare, sandy; a few houses, little better than huts; women, gaunt-looking and dark-skinned; a few naked children all staring, as the mules and the horses, Tim and Esteban, ambled by. There were never any men to be seen in the villages; they were all out in the scrub looking after the cattle. A smell of coffee and of peat pervaded the atmosphere around the villages; clouds of dust obliterated the distance. Desolation, indescribable desolation, seemed to Tim the very keynote of this desert land.

But in spite of this utter loneliness, perhaps because of it, Tim's spirits rose higher and higher as he followed his guide up the mountain trail; more and more did he become convinced that Fra Martino had not spoken mere idle words nor sent him on a fool's errand to this dreary land. Fra Martino knew something of the secrets of the desert, and knew it in connection with Dudley Stone.

And, as weary even beyond definite sensation, saddle-sore, and eyes aching with the perpetual glare, Tim's gaze wandered across the thorny scrub and stunted palms to the elusive distance forever hidden behind a cloud of dust, his fancy peopled the dreary Sertao with a weird and fantastic multitude. The *vaqueiros* and *jagunços*, of which the patrons of the café Bom Genio were wont to talk almost with bated breath, seemed to have come to life now beneath the magic wand of this utter solitude; and with his mind's eye Tim saw them, centaur-like creatures at one with their horses, dressed in their panoply of leather, their only protection against the cruel thorny vegetation.

They all seemed real to Tim now, as did their dead prophet, Antonio Conselheiro, with the flowing locks and the sandalled feet, preaching the Second Advent of the Lord and the coming Day of Judgment, whilst his centaurs rode before him, wielding their lassoes and iron-shod goads, like beings from that far-off region where the Valkyries ride and where Titans and demi-gods hold sway.

The farther Tim plunged into the solitude, the farther he left behind him civilization and modern thought, the more real did those legend-like tales appear. The prophet! Why not? A kind of super-revivalist, with only the minds of ignorant, primitive people in which to kindle a semi-religious, semi-political fanaticism! Why not, indeed? Here, in this wilderness, miles away from the nearest outpost of civilization, with mile upon mile of desolate country entirely unknown to nine-tenths of the inhabitants of the very province in which it is situated: here, anything might happen—the most fantastic events at once appeared not only possible, but natural.

And now the Great Unknown, with his alternate claim of resurrected prophet or heir to the throne of Brazil, highway-robber and cattle-thief—what had seemed beyond the bounds of credibility over in Monsataz was quite feasible in this mountain-girt desert. Civilization here was put back several centuries. Tim felt that he was back in the days of the robber-barons, who raided their neighbours' castles, stole their cattle, and successfully defied king and government. And what more likely than that an adventurer like Dudley Stone should elect to link his fortune with this mysterious Brazilian, half-breed or whatever else he might be?

Tim tried to get as much information as he could out of Esteban, but the carrier was one of those unimaginative creatures, rare enough in this part of the world, who know nothing except what goes on under their very noses. The Great Unknown? Yes! he would say, the resurrected prophet who was the grandson of Dom Pedro, late Emperor of Brazil. Yes! he was going to overthrow the present Government and place himself upon the throne of his forebears. How this was going to be done, Esteban had only the vaguest notion. The Great Unknown had a huge army, all armed to the teeth, that much he did know; and, also, that in the surrounding district what was left of the inhabitants of the villages and so on, had over and over again petitioned the provincial Government to protect them against the depredations of this army of robbers. The Government did on two or three occasions send troops out to restore order, but every time these expeditions failed lamentably: the troops were decimated, hundreds of men perished, and the prestige as well as the impudence of the Great Unknown grew to immense proportions. Cattle ranches were constantly raided, live-stock driven wholesale, and the hides shamelessly sold to the foreign traders who bought them cheap and asked no questions. On the other side of the Sertao, where lay the diamond mines, matters were even worse: whole villages had been laid to the dust, mine-owners been massacred or driven away. Esteban had it for a fact that practically all the diamond mines west of the Sertao had been acquired by force by the Great Unknown: that he owned gold mines and ruby mines, and all the land where had lain buried for centuries the treasures of the Incas of Peru.

Allowing for exaggeration, and the timidity of the narrator, the whole story was not unlikely—at least it no longer seemed so to Tim; and undoubtedly the whole affair—robbery, pillage, untold wealth, Great Unknown, and all the rest of

the bag of tricks—was just what would appeal to the greedy and adventurous spirit of Dudley Stone.

## II

Three days of this terribly wearisome climb to the arid upland and then on the fourth day, in the late afternoon, Esteban turned in his saddle and pointed northward.

'Cumbe,' he announced laconically.

Had he pointed to a new Garden of Eden, Tim could not have been more elated. Nor was he disappointed when he came in sight of the village, for it was neither better nor worse than those through which he had passed before; a couple of dismal-looking streets, lined with squalid huts, leading up to the usual kind of market-place, deserted just now, but which perhaps on certain days in the year might look lively enough—and that was all. On one side of the square was the inevitable 'Commandacia,' with the Republican flag hanging limp and caked with dust on its post; opposite to the Commandacia a stuccoed building, which had once been painted but from which most of the plaster had long since fallen away; the presence of a bell surmounting the sloping roof, and of a large wooden cross on the wall beside a door that hung loosely on its hinges, suggested that this broken-down building might possibly be a church. Immediately by the side of it there was a square hut, with a kind of wooden veranda in front of it, to which a couple of broken steps gave access.

To this Esteban pointed and said in his usual laconic way: 'Fra Federico Evangelista's house.'

Over the whole place there hung at this hour a thick cloud of dust. A few stunted palms grew in a clump round the priest's house; another group flanked the tumble-down little church. The smell of peat and coffee was very pronounced. But none of these unpleasant aspects affected Tim's spirits in the least. Weary beyond expression, stiff and saddle-sore, his throat dry as a lime-kiln, his eyes smarting with the heat and the dust, his skin sore with stings of innumerable insects and flies—nevertheless he forgot all his troubles at sight of that miserable hovel to which Esteban had just pointed.

Though the village had appeared deserted when they approached, it soon became alive with a crowd of dark-skinned women and children, who crowded round the strangers in silent wonder. The women, wrapped in blankets, all appeared to have reached the age of Methuselah, their coffee-coloured skins looked like old parchment; the children, large-eyed and pot-bellied, gazed open-mouthed, clinging to their mothers. As in all the other villages, there were no men to be seen.

Esteban, seemingly, was well known in Cumbe. Several among the crowd of women greeted him with a dismal show of welcome. The first disappointment came when he asked whether Fra Federico was at home, and was told that his Reverence had been at Cumbe a week or so ago, but had gone on to some other village since then and would not be back for some time.

Esteban turned inquiringly to Tim.

'What will you do, senhor?' he asked. 'There is no one in the house when his Reverence is away.'

This sounded cheerful and comforting. Tim, with true Irish light-heartedness, could not help laughing at what seemed an impossible situation. To have travelled three hundred kilometres by rail, and one hundred on horseback, only to find that the man whom he had come all this way to seek was from home and would not be back for days, was an eventuality that would have seemed absolutely tragic did it not savour of the ridiculous.

'Isn't there anywhere I can get a bed?' he asked.

'Oh, yes, senhor. The store.'

The store occupied the main portion of that side of the square which was opposite the church. It was a low stuccoed

house, which had once been painted yellow, and had a red roof set askew upon it. Apparently it served the double purpose of village store and drinking-bar, with the possibility of a bed for a stranger thrown in. Esteban, the carrier, had brought some goods over on his pack-mule for the store-keeper of Cumbe. Taking Tim's acquiescence for granted, he now led the four beasts across the square, leaving Tim to come along or not, as he chose. The crowd of dark-skinned lookers-on did not attempt to move: they remained standing where they were, following with large, dark, melancholy eyes the movements of the carrier as he brought the animals to a halt outside the store and tethered them to the hitching-posts. Not a sign of life came from inside the building. Through the iron-grated windows Tim caught sight of various unsavoury-looking provisions hanging on strings, and as he neared the door the usual atmosphere of coffee and peat was supplemented by other scents, just as strong but far less pleasing.

The door stood invitingly open. Tim allowed Esteban to precede him, and in his wake entered the low-raftered room. Only a dim afternoon light found its way through the grated windows, and Tim's eyes took some time in focusing the interior of the room. Stretched out upon his back on a rough-hewn bench a man was snoring loudly. Esteban's peremptory voice woke him from his slumbers, and he turned a lazy head in the direction of the intruders. At sight of them he blinked his eyes as if unwilling to trust in the reality of what he saw. Esteban he knew well enough, but the other one—the stranger! How often in a year did he, Filippo Vanzea, owner of the one and only store of Cumbe, see a stranger? And how many years was it since he had seen one so fine and clean as this one?

He struggled to his feet with alacrity. Already the carrier, conscious of added importance as the guide, philosopher and friend of this wonderful stranger, had, in a lordly manner, demanded supper and beds for himself and the noble senhor whom he had escorted hither.

As far as his own recollections of that evening were concerned, Timothy O'Clerigh could not have written a book about them—not even a single chapter. All that he could have told you about it subsequently was that he ate what was put before him, and drank a good deal of white rum and black coffee. After sunset the men came back to the village, in straggling groups of twos and threes. Later on, some of them drifted to the store and sat round the bar, sipping rum and coffee, and smoking their long-stemmed pipes: all in absolute silence. Some of the men played cards, or dominoes, others looked on, but not one of them spoke more than three or four words on end. Nor did they take much notice of Tim. He was for them some kind of foreign trader who had drifted out here in order to purchase stolen hides. They certainly did not enter into conversation with him, but responded politely, if always laconically, to his greeting.

Tim asked no questions. He saw at once that they would have been useless and would remain unanswered; also, he was too utterly weary to think coherently of anything. The men he only saw dimly: they seemed like the dream creatures whom in his mind he had seen peopling the thorny desert. How he ultimately got to bed he couldn't have told you, nor whether the bed in which he presently went to sleep was hard or downy, or even clean. But with only the third of a century behind one, what matter the bed, when dreams not altogether unpleasant haunt the watches of the night!

Timothy dreamed that he wandered through the rocky fastnesses of the Sertao, and that in a deep defile he came face to face with Dudley Stone. Though he had never seen the man, he knew in his dream that this was Dudley Stone right enough. And somehow or other the scene in his dream immediately changed, and he was back in Old Ireland, in the old house which overlooked the lake, and he was lord of the house and of all the land around: and a dim figure, whom he could not clearly see, was pouring out tea for him from the old Irish silver teapot.

And Hold-Hands Juliana, in cap and apron, was scrubbing the floor of the hall.

## III

And the next morning Tim said to Esteban: 'Esteban, my friend, this is not the end of our journey. You've got to take me on to Canudos.'

Whereupon the carrier, who at the moment was engaged in doing nothing at all over a cup of black coffee and a

long-stemmed pipe, said with firm emphasis:

'To Canudos? No, senhor, I do not take you to Canudos. Not I.'

'Why not?'

'Because, senhor—because no one goes to Canudos who values his life or his purse.'

'I value both, my friend; but I'm going to Canudos, all the same.'

'Then you will have to go alone, senhor Inglez, for I will not take you.'

And Esteban, by way of emphasizing the finality of his decision, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, finished his coffee and rose from the small trestle-table at which he had been partaking of his frugal breakfast.

'I stay here a day,' he said, 'to rest the mules; then I go to Joazeiro. You said you would like to buy the horse.'

'I will buy the horse and one of your mules,' Tim said, 'and you can rest the other two beasts, and presently you can go to any other God-forsaken place you choose. But to-morrow you are going with me to Canudos.'

Esteban shook his head vigorously.

'Not I, senhor; ask someone else.'

'I'd rather go with you, for I know you are honest. And you are coming with me because when we've reached Canudos I will give you one hundred milreis.'

'Not for five hundred.'

'With one hundred milreis,' Tim insisted, 'you can purchase a couple more mules and another horse; with four mules and two horses you can do twice the business you are doing at the moment; then, presently, instead of carrying a few cheap goods backwards and forwards to these out-of-the-way villages, you could set up for yourself in one of the big towns—Bahia, perhaps, eh? You would soon become a rich man, Esteban. All you've got to do is to take me to-morrow to Canudos.'

Gradually, while Tim unfolded these rosy prospects, the look of obstinacy began to fade from Esteban's face. He was wavering. Greed, or perhaps the thought of a little chocolate-coloured family over in Bomfin, had already shaken the firm determination of a while ago.

'But it isn't safe, senhor,' he argued; 'it isn't safe.'

'Why not?'

'Strangers are not made welcome in Canudos.'

'I'll take my chance of that.'

'Then you can take it, senhor—alone.'

'One hundred milreis, Esteban,' Tim urged.

'What are one hundred milreis to a dead man?' Esteban retorted. He remained silent for a little while after that—pondering apparently. One hundred milreis might be no good to a dead man, but they would be mighty acceptable to a poor one.

'Look here, senhor,' he said at last, 'Canudos is a hundred kilometres from here. I will take you along the trail to within twenty kilometres of it. We shall be on the height and you will look down on the city in the valley. If you want to

go farther than that, you will do it at your risk and peril of your life, but you couldn't lose your way after that.'

'Good man!' was Tim's only comment, and he gave the carrier a vigorous clap in the middle of the back, which sent poor Esteban coughing and spluttering across the veranda floor.

Filippo Vanzea now appeared in the doorway of the bar. He was wielding a toothpick with much energy and sucking his teeth audibly.

Esteban, who had picked himself up and shaken himself free of dust, like a frowsy old dog, turned to him and said: 'Did you hear, Filippo?'

Filippo had heard every word: thought the stranger a complete fool—a crazy Englishman—but it seems would have thought Esteban a greater fool if he had refused the hundred milreis. He also had an eye to business, had Filippo Vanzea, and promptly fell to discussing with the carrier what provisions the store should supply for the expedition.

Tim no longer listened: as he was going to have his way, he didn't care what arrangements Esteban chose to make. 'We start as soon as the heat of the day has gone,' he announced.

And Esteban gave a final shrug, as much as to say: 'Well! if you like to go and get massacred it's no longer my affair.'

And suddenly while the two men were talking with unusual volubility—for they are silent men, these Sertanejos—they let fall a name which caused Tim to prick up his ears.

Something was said about the supply of dried meat for the expedition, and Vanzea said: 'I have a good stock in hand. I bought some about five weeks ago from the Madre de Dios ranch.'

'Oh!' Esteban remarked, 'has the Senhor da Lisbao been up here lately?'

'I saw him, as I say, about five weeks ago, when I went down to the ranch for some goods I wanted.'

Tim turned abruptly to the men.

'Are you,' he asked, 'by any chance speaking of Dom Manoël da Lisbao?'

'Why, yes, senhor,' one of them said. And Esteban at once added: 'Now, if you happen to know the Senhor da Lisbao...'

'Why, what good would that do me?'

'All the good in the world. He is hand in glove with the Great Unknown and...'

It was Esteban who had spoken. But he suddenly paused, the sentence remained unfinished, and the man's face was distorted with a quick spasm of physical pain. What had happened was that Filippo Vanzea had suddenly given his friend a violent punch in the ribs. Tim saw it, and noted that Esteban did not pursue the subject but went off at a tangent, talking once more of provisions for the journey.

All of which gave Tim O'Clee furiously to think. Being a native of Ireland he had a ready faculty for jumping to conclusions—not always at the right ones, although his intuition did not often lead him astray. In this case, it was not difficult to put two and two together. Manoël da Lisbao, with the huge fortune mysteriously acquired, who owned a ranch in the immediate vicinity of the stronghold of the Great Unknown, could be no other than the middleman, the trader who bought from the resurrected prophet and his robbers the loot which he afterwards re-sold at an immense profit. Surely this was the key to the whole enigma. It also explained Manoël's attitude with regard to Dudley Stone—Dudley Stone, his partner and his tool—now probably the agent or emissary of the Great Unknown, sworn to as dead, erased off the face of the earth in order to evade any inquiries about him that might at the time have been set on foot. Tim felt that he held the key of the enigma at last, and his excitement gave itself vent in snatches of song from his limited repertoire. In a

thunderous baritone, entirely out of tune, he sang:

'Come, rest in this boo-zum...'

The two men listened open-mouthed, deeply impressed. A crowd of small dark-skinned picaninnies, their little pot-bellies draped in rough shirts of brilliant hue, came running out of the huts and stood gaping at this amazing phenomenon of Nature which emitted sounds such as they had never heard before. And the women, already busy with their cooking-pots, gazed with dark, melancholy eyes on this curious product from the great world outside, of which they had only vaguely heard.

## IV

They did not start the same afternoon, but on the following morning at early dawn. And once more they ambled up the mountain trail, Tim and Esteban, the two horses and the two mules. They carried provisions of water and food for man and beast for six days, and Tim had been duly rigged out at the store in the panoply of leather, which, with the tan on his face, made him as like a *vaqueiro* as made no matter.

'You leave me in sight of Canudos,' he had said to the guide. 'After that I shall need nothing more.'

'But on the way back, senhor...' Esteban urged.

'The Great Unknown shall pack a hamper for me—a Christmas hamper, it shall be, my friend, with all the best that he himself feasts on....'

But Esteban shook his head dolefully. He had taken a fancy to the crazy Englishman and was quite convinced that he would never see him alive again.

All day horses and mules plodded on with hot sand up to their knees. Two nights they bivouacked in the scrub: they were icy cold; against that the days were baking hot, rendering a halt at noontide imperative. Pasture, such as it was, became more scarce as they neared the upland; fortunately, it was still moderately early in the season and the water-holes were not yet dry. There were very few habitations along the trail, or indeed within sight; those they did come across were deserted. Tim remarked on this, and Esteban, with his habitual shrug of indifference, said laconically: 'All gone to join the army of the Great Unknown.'

'The army of brigands, you mean,' Tim retorted.

But at this Esteban's face seemed to close up as with a snap. The nearer he came to the kingdom of the Great Unknown the more taciturn did he become. At one time, when Tim pressed him with questions, he turned quite nasty in his fright and threatened to leave the crazy Englishman to his fate then and there, as he himself had no cause for quarrel with the prophet and had no desire to molest him.

After that brief but harrowing episode, there was nothing left for Tim but to possess his soul in patience and, above all, to hold his tongue on the one subject which absorbed all his thoughts. As Esteban did not offer any other subject, conversation necessarily flagged.

After the second night, they had still some thirty or forty kilometres ahead of them.

'You are sure of the way, Esteban?' Tim asked his guide.

'I know every inch of it, senhor,' Esteban replied.

'You come here sometimes, then?'

'I have bought—various things from the *vaqueiros*—I sell them to the stores in the villages....'

It was Tim's turn to shrug. Everyone apparently bought the loot from the army of brigands, and no one wished to molest them or to ask questions. Obviously it paid best to be friends with the robber-chief and his hordes.

The trail now became very stony in places, and at times it was safer to walk and lead one's horse than to ride. There were several patches of forest land to traverse: of meagre palms, thorny bushes and thick undergrowth, where the path was narrow, and in one or two places the two wayfarers were obliged to set to and hack and cut and beat down the scrub in order to enable the beasts to get through.

Tim, who at one time had the idea that he could find his way to Canudos without a guide, was thankful that Esteban had relented and decided to come with him, for this part of the journey presented difficulties with which no one unacquainted with the desert could have grappled successfully. The trail itself almost disappeared at times in the intricate defiles around the foot-hills: at others it was crossed and re-crossed again by cattle-tracks, so that the inexperienced eye could easily have lost the right direction.

It was obvious that Esteban's eye was not inexperienced, for presently they came out into the open once more and, pointing to the high table-land on ahead, he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness: 'Nearly there now, senhor.'

This last stage of the journey was very trying, for the water-holes on the upland had become few and far between, and Esteban was unwilling to encroach too far on the water supply which he had brought along, as he wanted it, he said, for the journey home. Also, the vegetation became more and more scrubby and stunted, and there was little, if any, shade against the sun, whilst the sun-baked dust under foot was like a welter of hot ashes, through which they and their beasts plodded wearily.

But, as a matter of fact, of all these discomforts and all the minor annoyances of flies and insects and prickly thorns Tim was hardly conscious. In his own mind he was riding towards the conquest of the patrimony that had been filched from him, and the final undoing of the thieves and liars who had done the nefarious deed.

In the late afternoon of the third day they reached the summit of the table-land.

'That is as far as I can take you, senhor,' Esteban said, as he made preparations for bivouacking for the night. 'Canudos lies the other side of that mountain yonder. I will put you on the right path, which winds round the foot of it; when you are the other side, you will see Canudos in front of you.'

'The mountain yonder,' to which he pointed, appeared strangely menacing. It seemed like a gigantic fortification guarding the approach to the mysterious city, with battlements and towers carved in the rock by Titanic hands.

To Tim it was the land of mystery—the land of promise. In his folly he had thought at one time that he held the key to the enigma which those arid mountains kept wrapped in their stony bosoms. Folly, of course! Now that from the table-land he looked across that barren valley, with the yellowish ribbons of the two streams meandering through the dun-coloured earth, he felt a sinking of the heart, a presentiment of something abnormal, strange, monstrous even, perhaps—yet not altogether evil—which would happen to him over there in the city of the Great Unknown.

When, guided by Esteban around the foot of the mountains he did at last obtain the first glimpse of the mysterious city, he could have laughed at these presentiments. What he saw was not calculated to strike awe into any Irish heart. Was that the land of rapacious brigands, the stronghold of strange and enigmatic personalities, the city wherein dwelt a mystic Cabalist whose sway over the multitudes was akin to that of a prophet? That agglomeration of mud huts and stony dwellings, all of a dull brown hue—the huts brown, the vegetation brown, the earth brown, and the dust—oh! the dust!—which made even the horizon appear brown?

'Won't the senhor Inglez come back with me?' Esteban murmured in a kind of hoarse whisper. Apparently that brown mass of teeming life tucked away in the midst of this arid desert filled the worthy guide with a kind of religious awe.

Tim couldn't help laughing. 'Not I,' he said. 'Believe me, my good friend, there is nothing very fearsome about those mud huts over there. The only evil thing about the whole place is this abominable climate.'

'Ah! the climate?' said Esteban with a sigh. 'Yes! Terrible! The cold! And the heat! Only the natives can endure it. Come back with me, senhor.'

'Away with you, you old croaker!' Tim cried; and, breaking into song, he helped Esteban to transfer a few special necessities from the one mule to his own pack. 'You will see me back at Cumbe before very long.'

'God and the Virgin grant it, senhor,' was Esteban's final comment, as he dolefully shook his head, before he finally took leave of this mad foreigner. Even the hundred milreis which Tim now thrust into his hand failed to bring a smile to his furrowed face.

Then he turned his own beasts and started ambling along on the dusty road back the way he had come.

Tim did not watch him go. His eyes were fixed on the dun-coloured horizon, on the barren mountains that guarded this land of mystery, still a dozen miles or more away; already in the east the sun with swift darts of gold had overcome the dawn, whilst in the west the night still lingered secure in rocky fastnesses. In a moment now the brown molecules of dust turned to myriads and myriads of glittering atoms; a cloud of vaporous gems, veiling the life that teemed below. And all around—an ocean of mountains and rocks, of dull earth and sparse vegetation, and the mud huts and stone buildings that clustered around and atop of the table-land which was Canudos.

Tim threw out his arms with a gesture of passionate longing for success. Through almost incredible adventures he had come thus far, almost unscathed. The scene of the last phase lay there behind those clouds of dust; the man who could be the means of restoring to him what he held dearer than anything on earth, lived, breathed, toiled, robbed and pillaged on this desert land. And Tim was here now to wrest that man's secret from him, to force him back into civilization and drag the truth out of him, even if life was to be the forfeit in the end.

## V

The track, such as it was, wound in and out and round about the undulating rocky ground; anon it plunged abruptly into a thicket of scrub and dwarf palms and thorny aloes. Waterholes, as Esteban had indicated, became very scarce, and as far as Tim could judge he would have some twelve miles or so to get over before he came to the outskirts of the desert town. Of these twelve miles, at least five would be through the forest into which he now plunged, after recommending his soul to God, for he was indeed beginning to wonder if Esteban had not been right after all when he said that no one but a madman would venture alone within the precincts of the mysterious city.

The trail which led through the forest was easy enough to follow, for cattle had trodden down the scrub, and signs of the passage of men and beasts were apparent all along the track. Tim had dismounted and led his horse, whilst the mule ambled along in the rear. He walked as fast as the roughness of the ground would allow, treading rock or hard-baked earth, up or down the incline, with weary, aching feet.

His thoughts went roaming back to Old Ireland and stately Traskmoore, to Uncle Justin, that prince of sportsmen. What would he think of Tim now and this wild adventure, the end of which was still on the knees of the gods? From roving thoughts his brain switched off to day-dreams, and thence to a state of semi-consciousness, akin to sleep, peculiar to tired humans when wandering through the hot, damp atmosphere of the tropics.

And Tim dreamed on until sudden contact with a prickly thorn-bush dragged him with a rude shock out of his meditations. He looked about him, surprised to see how the trail had widened, until some distance on ahead it finally curved out into a broad plateau, stony and scrubby as the rest of the landscape and hedged in at its farther boundary by bush, seemingly more impenetrable than any that Tim had traversed as yet.

Hallo! Tim had advanced up the incline, confident now that on the plateau he would find one of the brackish lakes, or at any rate a water-hole, where his poor patient beasts could get a drink and a rest in the shade, when suddenly he saw at the farther limit of the plateau a herd of cattle, lean and wide-eyed, massed together around a pool of water, too muddy to mirror the deep blue of the sky.

As Tim drew nearer, the beasts ceased drinking one by one, and looked up—more scared than savage—at the intruder. A kind of human Robot on horseback, a creature apparently made up of steel and leather—the usual panoply of the *vaqueiros*—appeared to be in charge. For the moment, he turned leisurely round in his curved saddle and gave Tim a careless glance. There was nothing threatening or even challenging in the glance, but a stranger being a rare sight in these parts, the *vaqueiro* did look twice at this one. The next minute, however, something—anything—scared his beasts; there was a sudden whirling of dry mud and stones, a padding of cloven hoofs, a snorting like that of a dozen engines letting off steam, a quick shout from the *vaqueiro*, a stampede—and in less than three minutes herd and *vaqueiro* disappeared as if the bush had swallowed them up.

And Tim remained standing there, vaguely listening to the multitudinous sounds as they gradually faded away. The whole scene had appeared and then flitted away so quickly that he could scarcely believe that he had actually seen those lean, wide-eyed, frightened creatures and the Robot-like, leather-clad centaur, whose shouts had now turned to a quaint, soothing, melancholy song, which grew fainter and fainter—more and more like the murmur of wind through leaf-laden trees—and then died away altogether.

And when the last of the murmur became softer than the whispering of ghosts, a strange, unaccountable silence descended on this corner of the wilderness. Silence, and a kind of expectant hush, with the distant, unknown city, screened from view by the bush, and all sounds stilled of that human life which must be teeming over there round the stronghold of the mysterious robber-king. The heat had become intense, but Tim was hardly conscious of that. His shirt clung to his chest and his back, and, at first, the sight of that brackish water had given him a longing for its embrace. But even that longing seemed to die away with the *vaqueiro's* song, and all that he was conscious of was just the immensity of the desert and of its absolute stillness.

His eyes remained fixed upon the distant thicket: there, where far away a quivering of thorny branches, receding now farther and even farther, betrayed the pathway of moving cattle. At last, even that quivering ceased. Nothing stirred. No sound of bird or beast broke this Infinity of Silence.

And suddenly, as Tim gazed out into the blue horizon far away, there rose in the distant haze a palace of cool white marble, with slender colonnades and wide terraces, mirrored in a lake that was crystal clear. He could not take his eyes off that fairy vision, although he knew it to be but a mirage: he had never seen such an exquisite one before. Coming on the top of that vivid picture of frightened cattle, on the top of that snorting and stampeding, this picture of clear water and cool marble was to him like the beauty of peace after the roar of strife.

And while he gazed on this unreal vision he forgot all about his aims and his quest, about Dudley Stone and Hold-Hands Juliana: they no longer seemed real to him. Indeed, he did not seem real even to himself: so much so, that when presently he saw something exquisite, something that was both enchanting and bewildering, moving along his line of vision, he thought that this was just another manifestation of his dream state.

The mirage had faded from the sky: the table-land lay arid and sun-baked. On one side a tallish clump of thorny palms, with pallid flowers drooping in the heat, threw a sheet of densely purple shadow upon the reddish earth. And out of this shadow a slender girlish figure moved towards Tim O'Clee. Hair in colour like burnished copper framed a small oval face out of which shone a pair of dark, mystery-filled eyes. Some sort of dress, of a russet tint, fell straight and rather stiff from the slim shoulders, screening the figure and the limbs: feet and legs were encased in leather, only the hands were bare. On one of them a kind of leather cap hung by a strap. But of all this Tim was not, at first, aware. He only saw what he thought was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in all his life, with a face like mellow ivory, and lips, full and cherry-red, parted in a smile. No wonder he did not think that she was real, but only a vision come to him in a dream.

'Were you frightened?' spoke the vision in Portuguese. And then the cherry-red mouth widened into a laugh. 'I think you are frightened now,' were the words that accompanied the laugh, which to Tim's ears sounded like the tinkling of a

silver bell.

He had not moved. The sun was scorching his shoulders, his back, his chest, and now, with the instinct born in courteous Old Ireland, he raised his hand and took off his hat. The vision had come to a halt in the purple shadow of the scrub and stood there, with one arm gently swinging the leather cap to and fro.

'Put your hat on again, quick—or you'll get a sunstroke.'

Tim would not have cared if he had got a sunstroke, but, nevertheless, he obeyed and put his hat on again. So far he had not spoken one word. The vision had carried on the conversation entirely on her own.

'Come along here. It is nice and cool in the shade.'

And again Tim obeyed like an automaton.

'You understand what I say?' the vision went on. 'Then why don't you speak?'

'Because I don't believe that you are real, and I am afraid that, now I have spoken, you will vanish like a sprite.'

Tim said this in English, chiefly because he did not want the sprite to understand: as perhaps in that case she would not vanish away.

But seemingly, and most amazingly, the sprite did understand, for the great mysterious eyes opened very wide and the cherry-red lips murmured: 'Oh!'—and then went on at once—'so you are English?'

'Very nearly,' Tim stammered, 'that is ... no, I'm not ... I'm Irish—if you know what that means.'

The sprite did know, for she nodded sagely and smiled. Smiles were never long absent from that cherry-red mouth. Then suddenly they emitted a peremptory command:

'Come and sit down.'

There was a large flat stone close by: it was covered with parched moss and well screened from the sun. The vision sat down and beckoned to Tim to sit beside her. It certainly was moderately cool in the shade. Tim removed his hat and threw it on the ground. He had suddenly realized two great facts: one was that he was tired, footsore, dirty and unkempt; and the second, that he was no longer dreaming, and that a beautiful woman—and a real woman at that—was sitting within a few yards of him and actually commanding him to sit beside her. Now Tim O'Clee had never been shy of a woman before. He would have thought his beloved Ireland disgraced were he tongue-tied when a beautiful woman was by, but even his hot-blooded Celtic ancestors would, I think, have forgiven him his clumsy shyness on this occasion. The situation was, to say the least, distinctly novel. How could any man, even an Irishman, be expected to fall into casual conversation with this exquisite being who had descended upon him from heaven knew where, and who looked about as incongruous in this inhospitable land as a bird of paradise would in a London slum?

And suddenly she spoke again. Said she: 'My name is Marivosa da Gloria. What is yours?'

Tim couldn't recollect for the moment what his name was, so he said: 'Marivosa da Gloria! What a perfectly ripping name.'

But she insisted: 'What is yours?'

'Timothy,' he contrived to reply. 'Timothy O'Clerigh.'

'Timothy? Timothy? What a funny name!'

'It is Irish, you know.'

'Yes! you said you were Irish and I believed you. But what in the name of the Holy Virgin are you doing here?'

Tim for the life of him couldn't remember, so he said vaguely: 'I am travelling, you see—er—exploring.'

But she shook her head.

'No one travels in this wilderness,' she said—and just for once the smile faded from her mouth—'there is nothing to explore. Blue sky, ugly vegetation, dust and stones. Nothing else. Why, then, did you come here?'

She turned large inquiring eyes upon him, and Tim caught himself wishing that she would not look at him like that, for he felt that he was in danger of losing his head, and this impossible desert-land was not a place—he knew that—where an Irish gentleman could conveniently spare that commodity. However, with those eyes gazing inquiringly upon him and those lips smiling with such provoking challenge, what could he do but come a step or two nearer?—which he did, and then half-sat on the moss-covered stone, with one knee almost touching the ground.

'I think,' he said, 'it must have been because the hosts of Heaven came down to me once in my sleep and whispered to me that I should find you here.'

But at this, and perhaps at the glance in his eyes, which were grey, she edged slightly away from him, and an almost imperceptible shadow fell over her face, like an ethereal veil.

'Who taught you to lie so readily?' she asked, dryly.

He laughed and said: 'No one. It is a natural gift.'

This brought the smile back to her lips, but only for a second or two: the next moment she became serious once more and her voice had a note of sharpness in its ring.

'You are not a Government spy?' she asked; 'are you?'

'Great Lord, no!' he exclaimed. 'What made you think...?'

'There have been a few about lately,' she said; then paused a moment, and added: 'But they have been no use to the Government....' She paused a second time, and then continued coolly: 'There is a corner in the burial ground set apart for them—it is only a ditch.'

She said this just as simply as if she wished to convey the fact that a couple of seats were reserved for some friends at a theatre; and now she plucked a drooping, pallid flower from the palm branch close to her, and Tim, puzzled, enchanted, bewitched, watched her slender fingers as they plucked the parched-up petals and then allowed them to drop to the ground one by one. She was extraordinarily beautiful: not so much a question of features as of marvellous colouring, the exquisite mellow look of sunset in the spring, a golden glow over her whole personality, and with it all that indefinable thing called *charm*, which no man has ever been able to define even whilst acknowledging that it fascinates him more than any other womanly attribute.

It was not the tropical heat that made Tim's pulse beat at fever speed, or caused his temples to throb and his eyes to ache; it was just this girlish beauty and its nearness, the loneliness of this desert spot where, like a new Paul and Virginia, they might, if she so willed, dream away the rest of their lives together, forgetful of the world.

How long the silence lasted between them, how long those perfect lips remained set with a curious air of determination and wilfulness, Tim couldn't say. He had gradually become conscious, even in the midst of his enchantment, of a feeling of wonder and puzzlement. Who and what was this extraordinarily beautiful girl? Not that he cared. She was just she—the eternal feminine—for the moment the one and only woman for him—but he did wonder. For the first time since first she had spoken, it struck him as strange that she spoke English—and such good English. He hadn't thought of this before, being spellbound, but now that she was silent, and he longing to hear her voice again, he asked, somewhat clumsily:

'How is it you speak English so well?'

'I have spoken it all my life,' she replied.

'But who taught you?'

'My father.'

'But you don't live in this God-forsaken hole, do you?'

And she replied quietly: 'I live here, yes.'

'Why do you?'

'Because my father wishes it.'

'The devil he does! What on earth for? He must be crazy to...'

And then he paused, tongue-tied all at once, gazing on her, wide-eyed, for she had suddenly become absolutely transformed. All the winsomeness, the laughter, went out of her face. She threw back her head; her figure seemed to have grown taller, more majestic; she sat on the lichen-covered stone as if on a throne.

'How dare you talk like that?' she asked coldly. 'Do you not know that my father is the direct descendant of Dom Pedro of Bragança, the last Emperor of Brazil? He is the rightful emperor of this great country, and only waits for a fitting opportunity to enter into his own empire again.'

'The deuce he does!' Tim stammered in complete bewilderment.

'The people about here,' she went on, still speaking in a cold and detached voice, like some sibyl instructing the ignorant, 'call my father the Great Unknown. No one has seen his face save his few privileged lieutenants; but there are five thousand men in Canudos to-day ready to fight to the death in his cause and mine.'

'Yours?'

'I am my father's only child and after him the rightful Empress of Brazil.'

She paused, and turning her graceful head she gazed out over the sea of low scrub to the quivering blue ether beyond: and it seemed to Tim O'Clee as if she saw there the golden mirage of rich palaces and stately terraces which had dazzled his eyes a short while ago, but which to her were very real indeed. He gave a long low whistle, which he devoutly hoped that she had not heard, because its flippancy, though unintentional, would jar upon the romanticism of the moment.

What a situation! No wonder that poor Tim's aching head did not take it in, all of a piece. This adorable creature, this rose of the desert, the daughter of that mysterious charlatan in whose camp he hoped to find the elusive Dudley Stone! And she the deluded offspring of a highway robber, of a shameless pirate whom sooner or later an outraged Government would lay low, together with all his followers, whilst she—poor, lovely, helpless little pawn in this game of lying and of cheating—would be thrown as a sop to appease the wrath of an outraged countryside! The whole thing was unthinkable! After that one flippant whistle Tim could only groan and, resting his elbows on his knees, he buried his face in his hands, so that she should not catch the look of horror and distress in his eyes.

Evidently she mistook this gesture for one of awe at this stupendous revelation, for she went on gently and more lightly: 'Perhaps you wonder why I am here alone, but I come most days to this silent and lonely spot. I love the solitude and the silence, for all about the city there is so much bustle and noise, and I like to dream sometimes. Do you sometimes dream, Mr. Timothy?' And she turned once more her large inquiring eyes upon Tim.

He looked up quickly.

'Sometimes,' he replied, and had the joy of seeing the faintest possible tinge of pink rise to her ivory cheek.

'I love dreaming,' she said simply, 'here especially, because some days, when it is very hot, there is a beautiful Fata Morgana in the sky, and the pictures which I see, although I know, of course, that they are not real, always seem just the right background for my dreams. Have you ever seen a mirage, Mr. Timothy?'

'Yes,' he replied, truthfully, 'to-day.'

'There was a beautiful one to-day. I don't know when I have seen it so clear and so lovely.'

'Nor I. That is why I'll come again—to-morrow, in the hope of seeing it once more.'

But at this she put up her thin small hand, with one finger up in a peremptory gesture:

'No! No!' she reiterated several times vehemently, 'you must not come here again. This is my place—my solitude. I cannot allow you to....' She checked herself and after a second or two continued more quietly: 'It was nice, of course, to see you. I am not a savage, you know. I like my fellow-men—better than the women: though I like the women also. And it was nice to speak English. I never speak English otherwise, except with my father.'

There was a certain something about her now which gave him the impression that she was on the point of going away. Perhaps she was a sprite after all and would vanish as she had come—melt away in the purple shadows. Tim had the feeling that if she went something of his very life would go with her; that if he saw her pass out of his sight he would just draw his last breath and become one with the stony soil of the desert. He had an idea that while she spoke to him, answered his questions, she couldn't very well go away. It wouldn't be polite to go—or to vanish—and leave, say, a leading question unanswered. So he put an eager question to her, asked her whether she had ever been in England, which obviously was ridiculously out of the question. She said that she never had—not to her recollection—although when she was very small her father and mother had travelled about a great deal in different parts of Europe. Her father's nearest relations, she explained naïvely, were the sons of the late Emperor of Brazil and they lived in Europe, so she supposed that she had been taken sometimes to visit them.

'I was a long time in the convent school at Sao Paolo,' she said, 'while my mother was alive. But now she is dead, and my father had to devote himself to his country and to regaining his Empire. He brought me out here with him so that his people might get to know me, too.'

'How long ago was that?'

'Some years ... I'm not sure....'

Again that intangible feeling that she was going. Tim racked his brains for something to say that would keep her here. He felt like one of those characters in fairy books who either must guess unsolvable riddles, or be forthwith transformed into a dragon or a bear. His gaze, for once, was withdrawn from the exquisite daughter of the biggest rascal unhung, and he allowed it to roam, unseeing at first, over the sunbaked plateau. And sure enough, far away, coming from the direction where the stampeding cattle and their Robot herdsman had disappeared, he saw three or four moving black specks which, drawing nearer, were gradually taking shape. He put them down as a group of centaurs with, among them, an ordinary horse carrying the small curved saddle usual in these parts.

This, then, was the end. Obviously. Inevitably. Unless he could think of a question that would take her hours—days—to answer, she would be gone within the next five minutes. The centaurs had come—this he knew—to take her away to that abominable dust-laden city, where dwelt the arch-robber, the consummate charlatan and liar—her father. How and under what circumstances he would see her again, he could not as yet conjecture.

In desperation he asked her a question which he felt at once was not very tactful: 'You said just now that no man is allowed to see your father's face save a privileged few. Why is that?'

'Because he is a man above all other men on this earth: a being almost sacred. In him there lives the reincarnated soul of our great prophet, Antonio Conselheiro. His life is spent in prayer for the liberation of his country from its vile oppressors, and for the day when the Archbishop Primate of Brazil will place the imperial crown upon my head. Did I not tell you that my devoted father has given up his right to the throne in my favour? Unseen, unheard, he wanders through

the wilderness like the prophet, drawing men to him, and through him up to God. And the people venerate him. There is not a man in the Sertao who would not lay down his life for the Great Unknown.'

Well! That was that. Tim O'Clee had his answer with a vengeance, and he had just heard through the most exquisite lips in the world the *exposé* of a situation so insane, so fantastic, and—since he knew the underlying truth—to him so ridiculous, that words for once in his life completely failed him. The centaurs were quite close now. They came to a halt on the fringe of the shadow. They turned out to be men on horseback—*vaqueiros* such as his wanderings through these desert lands had rendered familiar to him. Two of them dismounted. They were swarthy of face, with very dark eyes and sharp, beak-like noses that betrayed their mixed blood. And now they waited, silent, solemn, like statues cast in bronze; their stolid faces, haughty and detached in expression, did not betray the slightest perturbation at seeing the Empress of Brazil in close conversation with a stranger.

And within a very few minutes the girl had risen from the whinstone and was up in the curved saddle in the midst of her Robot attendants. One of them, before remounting, had helped her on with a long-sleeved leather coat and adjusted her leather cap over her head. She did not once turn her head to look at Tim; indeed, she seemed to have forgotten his existence. As the little cavalcade started off she took the lead, the men following some little way behind her. Soon horses and riders were mere black specks at the far end of the table-land. A few moments later they plunged into the scrub on the very spot where the stampeding cattle had disappeared a little while ago. Tim, with aching eyes, watched the spot as he had done before; he saw the quiver of the thorny palms as the horses passed beneath their boughs. The ground sloped away very gradually and so he could follow—or thought that he could—-the progress of the cavalcade for some considerable distance. But anon the scrub was merged in a sea of impenetrableness. Nothing more moved. No sound emerged out of the thicket. The wilderness was, indeed, as the girl had described it, silent and infinitely lonely. 'Perhaps,' thought Tim O'Clee, 'I am really awake now at last. This past hour—or day—or an æon of time—cannot have been real.'

Indeed, this beautiful girl with the inquiring eyes and the cherry-red mouth, and all her wild talk of a saintly father and the crown of Brazil, did not belong to the world of everyday life. She was a being from another sphere altogether—from the world of Romance, of Poesy, and of Love.

'My God!' sighed Tim, 'what would any man give for just one kiss?' Tim felt that his blood was on fire; he ached in every limb with an intensity of longing for just another glimpse of her. Fool that he had been to let her go like that—unkissed! Fool not to have seized her in his arms, touched those exquisite lips with his own—lived, in fact—lived as he had never done before. Perhaps those centaurs would have risen from the ground after such sacrilege, seized him and crushed the life out of him for his daring. Well! why not? This was not reality: this was romance—and in the days of romance men before now had died for a kiss.

Fool that he was! Fool to have let her go! The heat oppressed him: his temples throbbed, his lids, aching with the heat, fell over his eyes. It was close on noontide and he longed for sleep. The purple shadows still lay over the brackish pool. Tim remembered the two beasts. What would Uncle Justin say to a man who could forget his horse because of a woman? Tim smiled to himself. How far—how very far away did Traskmoore seem now: the silvery lake, the shady trees, the Irish walls and five-barred gates! Where was Hold-Hands Juliana? And what did she matter now?

'I'll join the army of the Great Unknown,' Tim murmured to himself, 'and set Marivosa da Gloria on the throne of Brazil—see if I don't! ... Marivosa! ... Marivosa ... Even her name is music and romance....'

'Marivosa! ... Marivosa!...' He kept repeating the name over and over again, rolling it on his tongue as the sweetest sound it had ever uttered. And he remembered a song—one of his favourite ones—which he used to sing to Uncle Justin at Traskmoore to the accompaniment of the gramophone:

Oh! if to lo-love thee more,
    Each hour I number o-o-o'er,
If this a pa-hash-hashion be
    Worthy-hee of thee.
Then be ha-happy, for thus
    I adore thee-hee-hee.

And surely never did the echo of these rocky fastnesses respond to more lusty song. Whether Tim had the vague idea that it would reach the ears of his lady fair it was impossible to say, or whether she in her turn would echo:

If pleasure's truest spell
Be to love well,
Then be happy, for thus
I adore thee.

Tim led the two beasts to the pool and watched them drink; then he cast off his clothes and plunged into the water. He had to cool his blood somehow. The water, though muddy and none too sweet, gave a sense of comfort to his skin and limbs. He let the sun dry him and then resumed his clothes; after which he made his way back to the hallowed spot where first he had beheld his vision. He lay down on the hard ground, put his head on the parched moss as near as possible to the place where she had sat, closed his eyes, and presently dropped off to sleep.

Just before he did drop off he remembered that the one question which interested him most, and which he had never thought of putting to Marivosa, was whether among her saintly father's proselytes there was a stranger—an Englishman—named Dudley Stone.

## VI

It was late afternoon before Tim O'Clee emerged out of the belt of forest land and scrub, and the city of Canudos burst in upon him like a scene on the stage when the curtain goes up.

A background of towering, irregular mountain-tops, a valley watered by two streams, between them a gently sloping hill on which clustered a conglomeration of rudely-built houses and huts intersected by clumps of prickly palms and dwarf trees, and bare patches of rough grass; and towering on the summit of the hill a low outspreading building of rough stone, which gleamed mysterious and golden through a veil of dust in the glow of the setting sun.

There was no beauty in the scene, no colour, no line; but it had a touch of grandeur in its very ugliness, its isolation, its amazing defiance of Nature in her most stern moods. Tim stood up in his stirrups and raised his hat, welcoming the sight. He and his beasts had had a rest; he himself had even had a wash in the brackish water, and he had succeeded in taking off a two days' stubbly growth of beard from his chin. The last phase of his adventure found him refreshed and ready.

'This,' he said to himself, 'is Canudos; you, Tim, my lad, have come to the end of your wanderings at last. Over there, inside that ugly city which you were beginning to think was only a legend, you may find the man whose existence would be the means of giving you Traskmoore and all it stands for. But, apart from that, inside that city there lives the most beautiful woman God ever made. She may be Empress of Brazil or she may not. Her father may be a saintly prophet, or the greatest blackguard unhung, but one thing is certain—she will one day be Countess of Traskmoore, or you Tim, my lad, are a damned fool and an unworthy son of Erin.'

He rode on past the first habitation he had encountered for days. It was the usual haphazard construction of poles and laths and muddy plaster, a wooden outside staircase, a veranda, a stockade around the courtyard, and several sheds; but in the courtyard there were a couple of dogs and they barked. Chickens, lean and mangy, strutted about and clucked; pigs over by the sheds grunted as they buried their snouts in their troughs; and all these sounds put further heart into Tim and assured him that he was not dreaming, that he was still on the familiar planet known as Earth—and not in Uranus, or Neptune, as he might otherwise have feared.

As he neared the outskirts of the city, teeming life greeted him at every turn: *vaqueiros* driving their cattle home;

rudely-constructed carts creaking on the dusty road; large-eyed, gaunt women wrapped in blankets sitting by the roadside guarding a herd of goats; naked, dark-skinned children darting out of the huts at sound of the horses' hooves. So far nothing hostile had greeted him. The men, busy with their cattle, passed him by without a second glance—the women did not even appear curious.

And suddenly the delicious odour of hot coffee struck his nostrils, and round the bend of the road he came on a long, low building with a tiled roof and the usual wooden veranda along one side of it. The welcoming word: 'Hospedaria'—half-obliterated by the sun—and a weather-worn sign with the legend 'Bom Viagem' gave promise of shelter and rest. A number of men stood about in the front yard, smoking and leaning against the veranda posts. There were a few horses, too, some of which were tethered to hitching-posts, others just hobbled; there were a couple of hooded carts, two or three curs unworthy the name of *dog*, and the all-pervading succulent scent of coffee. These men, gaunt of mien and very dark of skin, had probably been talking before Tim came into view, but as soon as he turned into the stockade and drew rein they became silent and, for the first time, Tim thought that he detected an inimical suspicious glance in their eyes. However, he greeted them all comprehensively in quite good Portuguese. They nodded in reply, and he then asked whether this was a house where he could get food and shelter for himself and his beasts; again they nodded, and Tim dismounted and entered the house.

It seemed almost a replica of that other place over at Cumbe; flecks of dim afternoon light struggling in through chinks in the walls or narrow grated windows; the rough-hewn benches and tables lined up against the plastered walls; the smell of coffee and rank tobacco, the sacks of beans and farinha, the miscellaneous store of matches and cigarettes, goads, lassoes, tin pots, leather hats—even to the owner of this princely store stretched out on one of the benches snoring lustily. Some half-dozen men, all dressed in the usual panoply of leather, were sitting round the room drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. They hardly glanced at Tim when he entered, for the place was dark and he looked at first sight like one of themselves. It was only when he sat down at one of the tables and rapped on it with the palm of his hand, demanding attention, that they realized he was a stranger. But, beyond staring stolidly and unblushingly at him, they did not molest him in any way.

The store-keeper, or whatever he was, roused from his slumbers, also did some staring at Tim before he asked him what he wanted. Tim demanded supper and hot coffee, and as he did this in their own tongue the men withdrew their gaze from him for a moment or two in order to consult mutely with one another as to this amazing situation. Here was a stranger who was not a stranger since he spoke their language. What did that mean?

The store-keeper, a lean fellow of immense height and very little breadth, with large hook nose, copper-coloured skin and very black hair, rolled his long lean body from off the bench, stretched out his arms so that they nearly touched the ceiling, and, without comment or second glance at Tim, sauntered off to an inner room. Tim waited patiently and in silence, returning the men's persistent stare with one equally unashamed. A few more men strolled in from time to time till the place was quite full, and when every seat was occupied the late-comers sat on the tables, or some of them on the hard-baked floor. A few stood about in and around the doorway, with arms folded, smoking cigarettes and staring. No one spoke. They were a silent lot, these *vaqueiros* of the desert; the Indian blood in them tending to introspection and a kind of coma of the brain.

Presently the tall Indian returned, he had a wooden bowl in one hand and a platter in the other. These he placed in front of Tim, together with a wooden spoon and a tin fork. The platter was well heaped up with strips of dried meat stewed in rice, and in the bowl there was the ubiquitous mixture of black beans and bacon powdered over with farinha. To a capricious palate the food would have been uneatable, but Tim was young, he had an iron constitution, and he was hungry. He, also, had become used to these native concoctions by now and did not really dislike them. What was more, the coffee was excellent.

By dint of dragging out a few words from his taciturn host he learned that he could get a bed for the night and stabling for his beasts.

It was all very like Cumbe. He was dog-tired, and again could not have told you what kind of bed he slept in that night. Unlike Cumbe, however, his dreams were neither of Ireland nor Traskmoore, nor of Hold-Hands Juliana, nor even Dudley Stone; they were all of an exquisite vision carved in ivory and clad in gold, who looked at times like a beautiful woman with bright-red lips and disturbing eyes, at others like an image with an immense jewelled crown on its head,

and surrounded by huge centaurs, half-men, half-beasts, who twitched lassoes above their heads and threw them at Tim and invariably missed him—until one of them, who was the thinnest and blackest thing Tim had ever seen, caught him round the shoulders and dragged him to the ground; whereupon Tim woke up with a yell, to find himself on the hard-baked floor in company with half a dozen cockroaches. But even so, he was so tired and sleepy that he contentedly rolled himself in his rug again and went once more fast—and this time dreamlessly—to sleep.

## VII

Tim stayed eight days at the Bom Viagem, trying with all his might to enter into the life of the place by mingling freely with the habitués of the inn. It was very difficult, for they were a taciturn lot. They would sit about or stand, sip their white rum and their coffee, or else play cards or dominoes, and stare at Tim—stare by the hour. Over and over again he would meet a fusillade of dark eyes, all directed at him at one and the same time, or else furtive glances above a hand of cards. But no one asked him any questions: when he volunteered information, they listened, but he could not for the life of him say whether they believed him or not.

He had given his name as Tim O'Clee, thinking it would be easy for them to pronounce. They translated it into *Timocla* and left it at that. There were two factors, fortunately, which stood Tim in good stead during his first acquaintance with the dwellers of this strange desert land: one was his working familiarity with their language, and the other his sound knowledge of cattle and horses. He could not be a real stranger, so these *vaqueiros* seemed to argue: this man who spoke their language and who appraised the points of a horse with unerring judgment.

Without venturing on any definite statement, Tim let fall hints that he came from the other side of the Sao Francisco river, being attracted by the tales he had heard of fortunes to be picked up in the Sertao by trading hides and cattle with foreigners. On the whole, he hoped that they were taking him at his own valuation; certain it is that he detected nothing hostile in the men's attitude towards him, and as day succeeded day they stared less frequently and less persistently at him.

But the news of his arrival at the Bom Viagem had apparently spread about the town, for evening after evening now there were strange faces to be seen among the habitués. Of these strange faces some gave Timothy plenty of food for thought. On the whole a villainous lot. Men who apparently had ascendancy over the rest of the crowd. His Indian host whom, in despair at obtaining information in any other way, Tim took to questioning with untiring obstinacy, did inform him curtly and with bated breath that these were the Lieutenants of the Great Unknown, the privileged guardians of his sacred person. After which, Tim studied the appearance of those men, marvelling if the fantastic clothes, the long hair and beard, the tan and the dirt, did not by chance conceal the personality of Dudley Stone. But they were every one of them half-breeds: mamalucos, mestizos, mulattos of every conceivable hue and cast of countenance. They went by curious names, which Tim tried to commit to memory. Flat-Face, Black-Fang, Lean-Shanks were some of them. They seemed to have been selected by the Great Unknown principally for their ferocity, probably for unavowed and unpunished crimes which had forced them into exile in the desert and allegiance to his cause. They were less taciturn than the common crowd, but their conversation consisted chiefly of highly-coloured accounts of their own prowess in the field of crime and their ruthlessness in face of their enemies.

Tim, not being a fool, knew well enough that he was completely at the mercy of these men, who, according to their own showing, revelled in crime and took pride in savagery. They were not likely to spare him should they presently prefer to see him dead rather than alive. He was just Daniel in a den of ferocious lions. Yet it was this very sense of perpetual danger that thrilled Tim O'Clee's adventurous spirit, but for this spice in his life he ran the risk of becoming an amorous dreamer. Thoughts of Marivosa haunted him day and night. Every day he rode out through the forest to the table-land where first he had met her, and there waited for hours, hoping for the sight of her. And while he waited he made plans for the future—all sorts of extravagant plans; he would, of course, succeed in finding Dudley Stone, through him he would regain possession of his Irish heritage, and end by laying his wealth and his life at his beloved lady's feet. It wouldn't, he thought, be difficult to persuade her that to be Countess of Traskmoore was a finer thing than to be crowned Empress of Brazil.

Not only did Tim dream of this future by day in the solitude of the table-land, but in the evenings, with nothing to do in the coffee-room of the Bom Viagem, he would still dream on, and forget that at the moment he was no nearer to finding Dudley Stone than he had been over at Monsataz—until his wandering eyes caught one of those suspicious glances which warned him that it was not good to dream in the presence of these fearsome Lieutenants; an unguarded word, a look, even, might result in a knife-thrust and the ditch which the lovely lady of his dreams had described as reserved for traitors and Government spies.

The most acute danger lay in a possible quarrel over cards, or dominoes, for the men were all gamblers: but as there was not much loose money about, the stakes over these games of hazard were never very high. Tim had been very careful to keep his small store of milreis concealed from prying eyes. Not that the men were thieves in the European sense of the word: to raid a farm, to drive a herd of cattle, to pillage a township, was their *métier*; but to put their hands in another man's pocket, or rob a stranger of a few milreis did not appeal to their virile nature. Living as they did in a community of pirates and highway robbers, and in an entirely democratic spirit, they had not much use for petty cash.

To all appearances this Timocla was an out-at-elbows vagabond, who, like themselves, had been forced into exile by some misunderstanding with the laws of the country. A highly-coloured version which Tim gave one night of what actually took place at the Hespanha music-hall in Monsataz, including the murder of Doctor da Pinto—but with the names of places and persons carefully disguised—was received with much approbation. It was the kind of autobiography that the Lieutenants understood. As a fellow-criminal, driven to seek service with the Great Unknown as an alternative to the gallows, the newcomer was no longer an object of suspicion. He had at once become a man and a brother.

His health was drunk in white rum. He was even slapped on the back by one man and embraced by another. His stock had risen a hundred per cent that night.

While he told that tale, he had been aware of the presence and the attention of one man who in general appearance was unlike any of the others. He was small and spare, and though his skin was dark it had become so through the action of sun and weather, and was not the outcome of mixed blood. His face was thin and almost ascetic-looking, his hair was scanty and lank, of a nondescript colour. He had gentle, watery grey eyes. But, in spite of obvious physical weakness, amongst this crowd of stalwarts he seemed to be a person of authority. Whenever he spoke the others listened; and Tim had already noticed that when he entered the crowded *hospedaria* a chair was at once vacated for him, and the host hastened to attend to his wants.

While Tim told his highly-coloured tale, this little old man gazed on him with an expression of indulgent irony which presently changed to one of gentle pity.

'Have I found a friendly lion in this den?' thought Tim.

It seemed so indeed, for when his story was ended and he had received the accolade from Lean-Shanks, Black-Fang and the others, and the company began to disperse, the strange old man beckoned him to his side and offered him coffee, which seemingly was a great honour, for the others all retired and left the two men isolated and free to talk together in whispers. Tim drank the coffee, conscious that the strange old man was scrutinizing him very closely.

'Since you came from the other side of the river, Senhor Timocla, how do you come to know so accurately what occurred in the Hespanha music-hall at Monsataz that night, a couple of months ago?'

The voice was gentle, cultured, slightly ironic. Tim, on whom the question so tersely and quietly put had the effect of a sudden shock from a powerful battery, tried to meet the glance of the gentle, watery eyes with one equally frank.

'I might retort with the same question, senhor,' he said.

'Would your answer be as truthful as mine?'

'Try me,' said Tim boldly.

'I had the story from my friend and brother, Fra Martino, curé of Sao Felice in Monsataz.'

'Heavens above!' Tim exclaimed, 'then you are...?'

'I am Fra Federico Evangelista, curé of the district which embraces this city.' Then, as Tim, bewildered and silent, stared at him in amazement, he went on, with a smile: 'It is your turn to reply to my first question—truthfully, remember.'

'I need not do that,' Tim murmured, 'your reverence will have guessed....'

The old man nodded. 'I am not "your reverence" here,' he said, with his gentle, ironical smile. 'They have not much use for religion over here. But it is my duty to visit this place, which is in my district, and so I come from time to time. I say Mass occasionally, though there is only a derelict hut in which to perform the holy office, and though the men go as readily to the Gri-gri man, or the witch-doctor, as they do to me. But there are just a few souls who have seen the truth and have not forgotten it, and I minister to them. On the whole they all respect me, for I know something of the lore of simples, and when I come I bring a few medicaments with me, which I apply for the relief of their bodies when they are racked by fever. For this they are grateful in their rough way. My predecessor tried to show them the wickedness of their superstition—the Great Unknown, the resurrected prophet, and all that folly—but they would not listen and drove him out of the place, and they threatened to kill him if he ever dared set foot in Canudos again. Then our Archbishop sent for me and gave me the curé of these poor lost souls. I do what I can for them, but without the ministrations of the Church it is very difficult. So I just trust in God's mercy, for they are ignorant!'

The gentle, tired voice died away. Tim was hardly conscious whether Fra Federico had really ceased speaking. His whole personality seemed so incongruous, his simple autobiography so out of place in this savage *milieu* of men and beasts. One by one the fearsome Lieutenants and the *vaqueiros* had gone. The Indian innkeeper was snoring on one of the benches: the whole of the *hospedaria* was silent, dark, and deserted. How like a dream it all was!

'It is getting late,' Fra Federico resumed after a little while, 'though I daresay you have noticed that we do not mark time in Canudos.'

Tim partially woke out of his dream.

'Have you far to go, your reverence?' he asked.

'Less than a league. It is nothing.'

'You will let me escort you...?'

'Not only that. You will pack up your valise and come with me to my house. It is not much, but it is better than this.'

'But, your reverence...'

Fra Federico put up a warning finger: 'Sh-sh! Did I not tell you that I am no "reverend" here? You will come with me, senhor, and your company will be a solace to me while I am here. When I go, you will come with me, for this is no place for Europeans.'

Tim shook his head.

'When you go, senhor, I will stay here and wait for your return. Did not Fra Martino tell you why I came out here?'

'No. When he sent me word, I was at Cumbe. He was interested in you: he was sorry you had had such misfortune, but he did not know why you wished to visit this God-forsaken hole.'

'Shall I tell your reverence why I came here?'

'You certainly must. While we amble along to my house on the hill you shall tell me all that you told my Brother Martino—all that caused him to send you out to me, with the thought, I suppose, that I could be of service to you.'

Without waiting for definite acquiescence from Tim, Fra Federico clapped his thin hands vigorously together until

he had succeeded in rousing the Indian from his slumbers.

'Senhor Timocla's mount and my mule,' he commanded; and the Indian, obsequious and alert, rolled off the bench, picked himself up again and straddled out of the room.

'Does your reverence really mean...?' Tim ventured in protest.

'If you say those words again,' the old man retorted, 'I leave you here.'

Happy and excited, Tim hurried across to his room. He felt that with this civilized, kindly friend as a stand-by his star was already in the ascendant. He packed up his few belongings, then ran out and saddled his horse, and hoisted his valise on his pack-mule: the Indian in the meanwhile looked after Fra Federico's mount, a lean, hungry-looking beast, which the old man straddled and set going with gentle words of encouragement. The innkeeper did not seem surprised at this sudden departure of his guest: the milreis which Tim had tendered him in payment of his week's board and lodging were apparently more than he had expected, for he was most profuse in his offer of himself and his house and everything he possessed for the future service of the Senhor Timocla.

And it was while ambling in the moonlight along the dusty track that led up to the mountain city that Tim O'Clee once more recounted the story of Uncle Justin, of Hold-Hands Juliana, and of Dudley Stone. Fra Federico listened. He was obviously interested and very sympathetic.

When Tim had finished his story, he said: 'I still wonder, Senhor Timocla, why my Brother Martino sent you out here to me.'

'But obviously, your rev—— I mean obviously, senhor, because he thought that as you know this place so well you would tell me all you know about Dudley Stone.'

'Certainly I would, senhor, if I knew anything of such a person. But never in my life have I seen the man or ever heard such a name.'

'You don't know if there is a foreigner here, an Englishman ... a foreigner in the service of this ... this Great Unknown?'

'A foreigner? No. Where should he come from? What should he be doing here?'

'But there must be, senhor,' Tim insisted, unwilling to admit even to himself that black despair was hovering near, ready to seize upon his spirit, 'there must be—there is—a foreigner ... an Englishman ... think again, senhor ... one of the Lieutenants, probably—or a member of that charlatan's household ... there must be, I say ... there must be—or Fra Martino would not have sent me....'

But Fra Federico could only shake his head.

'There's no one here, senhor—not in Canudos. I know every man in Canudos—all the important ones, that is—there never was a foreigner near the person of the Great Unknown.'

And still they ambled on, sometimes side by side, and now and then, when the track narrowed, in single file. The old priest had pulled a rosary out of his pocket and, now that Tim had lapsed into silence, he muttered his Aves in a half-audible murmur. His mule needed no guiding: it knew its way through the maze of narrow, intricate streets which formed the city of Canudos. The moon looked down, placid and silvery, on the immensity of this desert land, smiling her wan, cool smile on thatch, or hut, or wigwam, as complacently as she did on stately European homes.

A great patch of silvery light lay over the mysterious mansion of the Great Unknown, lending to the ugly, squalid city nestling in this vast amphitheatre of distant rocky fastnesses, a certain eerie grandeur. Tim rode on in silence, with tightened heart and an aching desolation of spirit. Had he come all this way, ventured so much, hoped so considerably,

only to find failure at the goal? If so, what would be the end of it all? The fortune that he was going to lay at the feet of his beloved, the title that would compensate her for losing an imaginary throne: were they all to end in smoke—be swallowed up in the dust of this stony-hearted desert?

Perish the thought! Perish despair! This was not stuff of which Irish adventurers are made! He had come all these thousands of miles to recover fortune and a title for himself. They had seemed dear then, when he alone would have tasted their joys; but now how doubly precious had they become, now that one unforgettable image filled his heart as it already had stirred his imagination!

Surely, surely God had not led his footsteps all this way only in order to make him taste the bitter fruits of failure. It was unthinkable! Such things did not happen! not, at any rate, to an Irishman in whose lexicon hitherto there had not been such a word as *failure*.

And Tim laughed aloud, a gay, defiant, confident laugh. 'God,' he said, 'does not do such things! He has too great a sense of humour.'

## VIII

The old priest had spoken the truth when he told Tim that though his house was a poor one, it was better than the Bom Viagem. Poor it certainly was, but it was built of stone instead of the usual laths and mud, and, though the floor was only beaten-down earth and the tiny windows were unglazed, the house actually boasted of three separate rooms. In the principal one of these there were chairs and benches, a table and a cupboard, all roughly fashioned of wood; a couple of hammocks were slung in another room, whilst the third was partly a lumber-room and partly a kitchen.

The cupboard in the centre room contained an array of phials and pill-boxes and bundles of dried herbs, together with pestle and mortar, a primitive kind of retort, and various other implements for the pursuance of the old priest's simple pharmaceutics. And piled up on a couple of shelves there were a number of tattered and much-thumbed books. These were principally devotional in character, mostly of a very naïve order; there were several medical treatises and pamphlets, and one or two ancient herbals—one of the sixteenth century—which would have fetched large sums at auction in London. There was an old à Kempis, a New Testament, and the Maximes of La Rochefoucauld, all in Portuguese translation and—wonder of wonders—the plays and sonnets of one William Shakespeare in the original.

Fra Federico met his guest's astonished glance with a gentle self-deprecating smile.

'Ah, yes!' he said, 'we all learn a little English in the seminary; there are always a few Irish students with whom we talk. I used to speak your beautiful language quite fluently at one time—even now I can stumble along and understand most of what is said—but I am old, and I have forgotten ... so much ... so much....'

'And you read Shakespeare, Padre?' Tim remarked.

'The greatest poet the world has ever known, senhor,' the old man replied, with strange fervour. 'The greatest man who ever walked the earth since our blessed Lord.'

The priest made the sign of the Cross, in case what he said might, perchance, be blasphemous; then he added, more lightly: 'At one time I could have recited the whole of Romeo and Juliet to you by heart.'

'And in the intervals, Padre, you studied medicine, and probably knew more about remedies than half the bigwigs in Europe.'

'I have studied herbs and the simples, senhor. I have no means of obtaining drugs in these wilds, so I go to Nature for my potions and she has yielded up to me some very precious secrets.'

With loving hands he fingered the phials and bottles in the cupboard, took up one or two of them and showed them to Tim with some pride.

'It took me days and nights of search,' he said, with reference to one of these, 'to find the one plant which that old herbal over there recommends as the supreme remedy for gangrene—a horrible affection of which these poor people here often suffer through dirt or neglect of wounds. I have used it often and it is infallible. This,' and he held up another bottle to the light, 'I succeeded in concocting after two years' patient search for a herb which only grows the other side of Sao Francisco river: it is a sovereign remedy against infantile croup, or whooping-cough. The formula dates from the sixteenth century.'

He showed Tim a jar which contained a thick brown paste. 'The most perfect cure for every disease of the skin—it never fails in the very worst cases of scurvy or eczema.'

'You are a wonder, Padre,' Tim said, with genuine admiration for the modesty, the charm, the simplicity of his new friend. He could have listened for hours while the old man droned away in his gentle tired voice, recounting to him some of those marvels wherewith Nature, seemingly so cruel to her children, has placed at their disposal all her treasures to palliate the evils which they bring upon themselves.

'And what is this, Padre?' Tim asked, as he picked up a bottle which contained a thick fluid of a deep golden colour. Instead of a Latin, or Greek name, such as the other potions wore upon their labels, it bore the strange legend: 'Romeo and Juliet,' and below that: 'Friar Laurence's potion.'

'That,' Fra Federico replied, 'is the most precious tincture in my collection. I made it up from a recipe in that old sixteenth-century herbal over there.'

'But why that funny label?'

'Because, senhor,' said the old priest, with a return to that quaint earnestness which lent such dignity to his worn, ascetic face, 'because I firmly believe that your great Shakespeare had studied that old herbal, and had this same recipe in mind when he made Friar Laurence give to Juliet the potion which would cause a state closely resembling death. Do you remember his words to her when he gives her the phial?'

He paused a moment as if to collect his thoughts; then, in excellent English, he recited the immortal words:

> 'When presently through all thy veins shall run
> A cold and drowsy humour, for no pulse
> Shall keep his native progress, but surcease,
> No warmth, no breath, shall testify thou livest;
> The roses in thy lips and cheeks shall fade
> To paly ashes; thy eyes' windows fall,
> Like death, when he shuts up the day of life;
> Each part, deprived of supple government,
> Shall, stiff and stark, and cold, appear like death.
> And in this borrowed likeness of shrunk death
> Thou shall continue two and forty hours.
> And then awake as from a pleasant sleep.'

The priest had long ceased speaking, and Tim still stared at him, amazed. Many a time, since he had embarked on his great adventure, had he believed himself to be in a dream-state, but never so much as now when, standing in a squalid hut, in the most forgotten corner of this world, hundreds of miles away from the outposts of civilization, he heard a Portuguese ambulant priest recite, in perfect English, words which he had last heard at the Old Vic in London.

He could only stare at the funny old man with the sparse hair and domed forehead, with the sunken cheeks and trembling hands, and reiterate, with profound conviction: 'You are a wonder, Padre!'

After a moment or two he added: 'And do you mean to tell me that you have actually concocted a draught which will have the effect that Shakespeare talks about?'

'I didn't concoct it, my son,' Fra Federico said with a smile. 'I studied the old herbals and found a formula.'

'And you've actually got it in that bottle?'

'I've actually got it in this bottle.'

'Have you tried it on anyone?'

'On myself.'

'And—was it successful? I mean, what did it feel like?'

'"Like Death, when he shuts up the day of Life,"' the old man quoted.

'And when you woke again...?'

'I felt rather giddy and sick, chiefly from want of food, I believe; but, as you see, I am here to tell the tale.'

'They might have buried you alive.'

'I went out into the scrub; no one knew where I was, so there was no danger.'

Fra Federico said this quite simply, as if that episode in his life had not in its sublime self-confidence and contempt of danger a spark of heroism.

'May I look at the stuff, Padre?' Tim asked, and the priest gave him the bottle. The liquid was of a golden colour, semi-opaque. Tim sniffed it. It had an indefinable, aromatic, intoxicating odour.

'Shall I tell you, Padre, what I'm going to do?' he said, after he had handed back the precious bottle to his old friend. 'I'm going to write an account of everything you've just told me. You shall give me a small draught of the thing—enough, of course, to produce the right effect, say, on a dog—and as soon as I get back to England I shall send it to one of the medical bigwigs in London with a biography of you and of your life here. You shall become famous throughout the scientific world, Padre, as you jolly well deserve to be. And the Pope, or whoever has a say in these things, shall make you a Cardinal, or an Archbishop, or anything else you like. Now do, to please me, decant some of that precious liquid into a bottle small enough to go into this pocket inside my belt, where I keep what money I've got left. I mean every word I say, Padre.... Men have become rich and famous for less than this.'

The old priest shook his head, smiling indulgently.

'I don't care for fame, nor money, my son—not now any longer.'

'Not for yourself, of course. But as a man of science it is your duty to give your discoveries to the world—at least, I've always understood that that was the unwritten law.'

It took Tim a long time to bring Fra Federico over to his way of thinking; but his was a persuasive tongue, and not even in the desert is a man entirely free from vanity. Tim, being Irish, had kissed the Blarney Stone. He knew just what to say and how subtly to flatter his old friend into doing what he wished. Somewhat naïvely, perhaps, he believed that the concoction of an old potion culled from a mediæval herbal was one of the most marvellous discoveries man had ever made; and he had taken such a liking to the old priest, and thought it such a shame that so fine a fellow should end his days in these barbaric regions, that he was determined to do him what he called 'a jolly good turn'.

In the end, Fra Federico, obviously not good at an argument and, equally obviously, not obstinate of character, gave in to him. He filled a small phial with the liquid and gave this to Tim, who stowed it away carefully in the pocket inside his belt.

Little did either of the two men guess what immense significance this simple act would have, not only on Tim's present quest, but on both their lives.

For the moment, the subject was dropped. The priest, with the well-thumbed volume of the great poet's works on his knee, appeared to be living through some half-forgotten dream again. His quivering lips murmured the words which he knew by heart; his pale, watery eyes wandered round this narrow, squalid room, which meant home for him. Tim wondered what picture memory had traced for him on its dingy walls—a face? A smile? A picture out of the past?—which he lived again in the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, and which caused those faded eyes to look a little more sad, a little more resigned than they had been before.

## IX

Quite apart from his erudition and his enthusiasm for Shakespeare, Fra Federico Evangelista proved a delightful companion. Many days went by before Tim had dragged out of him the history of his eventful life; it was a life of disappointment and of resignation, from the time when he was in charge of a fashionable parish in Seville to the day when his superiors sent him as an ambulant priest to minister to the spiritual needs of a horde of savages in the desert. What had brought this cruel exile about, Tim never knew. He could only vaguely guess at a romantic adventure, the recollection of which would at times bring a strange look of yearning to the faded old eyes.

That it was a woman who had played an important part in Fra Federico's life—a part which had wrecked his career—could not be doubted; the old man even now would lend a sympathetic ear to every tale of love and romance; and soon Tim found himself telling his friend of that first never-to-be-forgotten encounter with the mysterious lady of the woods—Marivosa da Gloria, Empress of Brazil.

'What a woman, Padre!' he exclaimed. 'You have seen her, of course—talked to her, perhaps, you lucky dog. She is exquisite! I have seen some beautiful women in my day—Ireland, you know, is famous for them—but never in my life have I seen such eyes, such a skin, and her mouth, Padre...! My gosh! just think of the first kiss from those lips...!'

Thus Tim talked wildly, extravagantly, one day when, after the usual meal of black beans and farinha, he and Fra Federico sat over their cup of coffee. The air on that day was peculiarly oppressive; though Tim did not know much about the climate of the Sertao, he felt that in spite of the clearness of the sky a storm was drawing near. He felt the heat more than he had ever done since he had come to this part of the world: his temples throbbed painfully, and he felt rather light-headed. But the coffee was good and strong, and talking of the one subject which absorbed his thoughts seemed to ease the tension of his nerves.

'I mean to unmask that blasphemous charlatan who calls himself the Great Unknown, poses as a resurrected prophet or whatnot, and is, unfortunately, Marivosa's father ... the abominable mountebank, with his talk of being Emperor of Brazil! ... I shall tear that veil from his ugly face, see if I don't!'

They had gradually got into the habit of talking in English, even when they were alone. Tim's outspoken sentiments might have got his old friend into trouble if spying ears were about. And it was delightful to listen to the elegantly stilted diction of the priest, who had learned most of his English from Elizabethan authors.

He smiled at Tim's vehemence. 'How will you accomplish that, senhor?' he asked.

'I don't know yet,' Tim replied. 'I must see Marivosa again first.'

'She is more closely guarded than a European queen.'

'Nevertheless, I shall take her away from here.'

'Take her away...!' the old man gasped. 'Why in the world should you dream of taking her away?'

'Because she is too pure and too good and far too beautiful to live in this den of brigands, and because...'

He paused, and again the old priest smiled, gently, indulgently, and then spoke as if to a child who is crying for the moon: 'You are nearly two hundred kilometres here, my son, from the nearest railhead.'

'I know that.'

'You don't know the country; and in this city there are ten thousand pairs of eyes to follow her movements wherever she may go.'

'I know all that, Padre,' said Tim, 'but it's going to be done in spite of all that.'

'Even if she were willing....'

'Let me see her once more,' Tim asserted boldly, 'and she will be willing.'

But Fra Federico again shook his old head.

'You forget,' he said, 'that Marivosa da Gloria has been brought up to believe in her own exalted rank. That father of hers may or may not be a descendant of Dom Pedro—I don't know ... I am inclined to think that he is ... but, anyway, his daughter is firmly convinced that she is the rightful Empress of Brazil, and that the welfare of her country is bound up with her destiny. And she worships her father as she does the good God Himself.'

'But, Padre, that story of the throne of Brazil is sheer humbug, I tell you. The only descendants of the last Emperor of Brazil live in Europe. This man has no connection whatever with the House of Bragança: he is nothing but an impostor, and one day that bubble is bound to burst. Marivosa will then find out that her father is an arrant liar. He must know that.... What does he propose to do then? What does he think will happen?'

Fra Federico sighed. 'I don't know how he'll work it,' he said. 'If what you say is right, and I dare say it is, then, of course.... But, in any case, by that time she will be married, I suppose....'

Tim had given such a jump that the bench on which they were both sitting tipped up, and the poor old man rolled down upon the floor. Tim, full of humble apologies, helped him back to his feet, and all the while kept on exclaiming: 'Married! Married, Padre? Are you mad, or am I? Married? To whom?'

'Her father has pledged her to a rich Brazilian whom surely you have met in Monsataz; they all believe here that he will help her to gain the throne. Because of that, I think that she is quite willing....'

'Who is the man?' Tim insisted.

'Dom Manoël da Lisbao, he is called.'

'Great God!'

Tim put his hand to his forehead; he wanted to steady himself, to hold his wits together, which he felt were scattering in all directions. Heavens above! What a tangle! What an inextricable medley of intrigues and of lies! Tim felt as if some Titanic spider had woven a gigantic web which held him captive, and that the Herculean task lay before him of struggling out of this web, of loosening each individual thread, and trying to join it to another which persistently evaded him; whilst outside the web, and free from the spider's trammels, he could see all those others—Dom Manoël, the murdered doctor, Teresa da Pinto, and that arch-charlatan, the mysterious Great Unknown; and they were holding Marivosa captive—Marivosa and Dudley Stone.

Tim's state at this moment was almost like a trance. Ever since he had embarked on this mad Odyssey he had had the feeling that he was leading a dream-life, that he was a wanderer in a kind of Wonderland, and would presently wake to

find himself in the placid and sedate milieu of European capitals; but never had the sense of unreality been so strong as now when this tangled skein of events and intrigues was, as it were, thrust into his hands to be unravelled by dint of foresight, of courage, and of tact. He swung round to see whether the funny old priest was really there, whether he had actually spoken—or whether, like a dream-vision, or a sprite—he had vanished after delivering that stupefying blow.

But Fra Federico was once more sitting placidly on the rickety bench. Tim had, supposedly, been silent for some time, for the old man had taken up his rosary and was filling in time by counting his beads.

'Forgive me, Padre,' Tim said, and sat down beside him, doing his very best to calm his nerves and to speak in an even voice. 'I was so thunderstruck by what you told me that I forgot my manners. I suppose you know that this man, da Lisbao, whom you have just mentioned, is the greatest blackguard unhung?'

'Sh-sh-sh! you must not say that, my son,' Fra Federico put in quickly.

'But I do say it—for I know. Manoël da Lisbao is a liar, a forger, a perjurer, and a murderer; and if you lend a hand in uniting that black scoundrel to the loveliest creature God ever made, then you'll commit a sacrilege.'

'*Ave Maria, gratia plena*,' the old priest murmured, scared like a rabbit at Tim's vehemence.

'Marivosa is a Christian—isn't she?'

'*Madre de Dios!* of course she is: she was brought up at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Sao Paolo—a most pious institution.'

'Very well, then—you have no right to let her wallow in all this abominable superstition over here.... Please, please forgive me, Padre ... it is frightful cheek on my part to talk to you like this ... but I cannot understand how you can contemplate the idea of a sweet Christian girl being perpetually humbugged by a blaspheming father who poses as a resurrected prophet, surrounds her with an army of bandits, and wants—for some nefarious purposes of his own, of course—to throw her into the arms of one of the vilest scoundrels on earth.'

'But what can I do, my friend? I am only a poor priest of God. What can I do except try to save her soul...?'

'You can, at any rate, enlighten her about her precious father; you may think that he has some connection with the last Emperor of Brazil, but you must know that he is not a prophet, either resurrected or otherwise, but just a brigand and a cattle thief.'

But Fra Federico only shook his old head dolefully.

'She would not listen to me,' he said. 'Is it likely? She has been taught to worship that father of hers. If I tried to enlighten her, I should be driven out of this place like my predecessor—and the poor souls whom I am trying to save will be damned for want of guidance.'

Tim gave an impatient sigh. He rose and went to the door to get a breath of fresh air, for the atmosphere in the narrow room had become stifling. What was the good of arguing with this timid old ascetic, whose very existence in this land of brigandage was an incongruity? Nor did Tim wish to scare the old man too much with his vehemence, or to set him against him by arguments and reproaches. He did feel that he had an ally—a friend—in Fra Federico; and though all his senses were on the rack with impatience, he knew that by trying to rush matters, by endeavouring to precipitate a crisis, he might be courting an early and perfectly futile death.

His own life had become a precious thing. He felt that he, and he alone, stood between an exquisitely pure and beautiful girl and the venal passions of a crowd of blackguards, who wanted to use her for their own despicable ends, caring nothing if they wrecked her life, her happiness, even her faith in God. The old priest, absorbed in his orisons, took no further notice of his guest, and Tim was left to the bitter-sweet company of his own thoughts and of his dreams.

Of these, the one that had most absorbed his thoughts and been the mainspring of all his actions, namely, his quest of Dudley Stone, seemed suddenly to have taken a secondary place in his plans for the future. It was not so much of Dudley

Stone that he thought, of Uncle Justin, or Hold-Hands Juliana; whenever his mind conjured up those faces now, a pair of dark, mysterious eyes, ivory cheeks and cherry-red lips would superimpose their loveliness over every other mental vision and blur every image with the radiance of their own.

## X

Tim had wandered out into the open. The air had grown more and more oppressive, and heavy clouds now hung over the rockies in the west. The storm was drawing nearer: it would certainly burst before nightfall.

The priest's house was one of a number situated on a large open *plaça*: a rocky table-land, over half a mile long and equally wide, dominated by a spur, on the summit of which stood the stronghold of the Great Unknown. The houses on the *plaça* were, like that of Fra Federico, of more substantial construction than the bird-cage-like huts in which dwelt the rest of the population: this was evidently the Mayfair of Canudos. Each house had its veranda and its stockade, and commanded a fine view of the jutting rock on which was perched the castle of the veiled prophet.

Tim, oppressed by the heat, stood idly by for a long time, gazing up at that stone construction, which was the prison-house of the most beautiful woman on God's earth. At any rate, he chose to picture her to himself as a prisoner, her lovely eyes perpetually fixed upon the mountain-girt horizon beyond which lay a world which she must be longing to know.

'And I swear that she shall!' Tim registered the vow, in spite of the hundreds of kilometres that lay between the desert and civilization, and in spite of the ten thousand eyes that were set to guard her every movement.

It was after he had stood staring upwards for some time, and had heard the first distant rumblings of the coming storm, that he first became aware of an unusual animation in the city, like the shuffling of hundreds and thousands of feet on the rocky slopes behind him. He looked down the narrow streets which led up to the *plaça* and saw a crowd of people tramping upwards in this direction—men in their full panoply of leather, others just in cotton shirts and trousers, with bare feet caked in mud. Hundreds of people, all tramping upwards. Men and women and children. The women wore cotton skirts; their heads and shoulders were wrapped in woollen blankets. Most of them dragged naked children up with them by the hand; others hugged babies against their breasts.

Up they came, and up, from every street that converged on the *plaça* in their hundreds and their thousands; while Tim, lost in amazement, stood and watched this extraordinary spectacle. Never in his life had he seen anything like it. It seemed as if the earth had suddenly opened and disgorged this crowd of men and women and children out of its bowels.

Up they tramped, and up, and came to a halt on the *plaça*: all in dead silence. Not one man spoke. Not a child cried. The narrow streets were black with this tramping, moving humanity, like ants wandering up their hill. And now the *plaça* itself was black with that moving, oscillating mass: a silent, dun-coloured crowd, that stared with great dark eyes up at the mysterious castle on the hill-top, or at the great rolling clouds that presaged the storm.

And suddenly from the top of the hill there came the rolling of drums—a dull, muffled sound, unlike any other kind of drum Tim had ever heard; a sound that made the silence of the *plaça* seem more eerie, more weird than before.

Fra Federico had finished his prayers. At the first sound of the drums he came out of his hut.

'What have they all come up here for, Padre?' Tim asked of him, thankful for the old man's companionship in the midst of this weird spectacle.

'To take their oath of allegiance,' the priest replied.

'My God! To that charlatan up there?'

'Why, yes!—and also to his daughter.'

'Of course—to his daughter. I suppose I am awake—it isn't a dream, is it?'

'What, my son?'

'This crowd. This awful silence. Those drums....'

The old priest smiled.

'I thought also that it was a dream ... the first time I saw them all ... five years ago....'

'But why to-day?' Tim asked.

'Because the storm is approaching.'

'The storm? What has it got to do with this mummery?'

'A good setting, my son, when the Great Unknown comes out to bless his people.'

'To bless them? Great God! You don't mean to tell me...'

'*Miserere nobis*,' the priest mumbled, '*libera nos a malo* ... God forgive them, poor ignorant sheep....'

'And are you going to stand by, Padre, and lend a hand in this blasphemous rubbish?'

'I lend no hand in any blasphemy, my son,' Fra Federico retorted, with a certain simple dignity. 'The men swear allegiance to Marivosa da Gloria di Bragança, rightful Empress of Brazil, and give up their lives in her cause. I know nothing of politics, nor whether the man up there has any claim to the throne of this country. I dare say that to you it does seem rubbish, but it is not blasphemous.'

'But this business of the resurrected prophet...'

'They are poor, ignorant sheep.... They mean no harm....'

'No harm? But there are thousands of them.'

'Thousands, as you say. And new recruits come in all the time from beyond those mountains, and even from beyond the shores of the Sao Francisco river. The former prophet, Antonio Conselheiro, had an army of twenty-five thousand men; for years they defied the Government up at Rio, until the whole lot was exterminated, or driven back into the jungle and the swamps. This man's aim is to collect an army that will march on Pernambuco. If you are wise, my son,' Fra Federico added, after a moment's pause, 'you will herd with the crowd and take your oath as a new recruit.'

'What? ... I? ... Play that fool's game...?'

'It will be a fool's game for you, perhaps, but if you value your life...'

The hint was significant and the argument unanswerable. If Tim valued his life, there was only one way of safeguarding it—to fall in with the mummery, to merge his individuality as far as possible in this conglomeration of brigands, dagoes and half-breeds. But, heavens above!—what a situation for Major O'Clerigh of the Irish Guards! All he could do was to thank his stars that it was to the lovely lady of his dreams that he was expected to swear allegiance, and this he was ready to do. She was welcome to his oath, to his life, to everything that he could lay at her feet for the furthering of her happiness.

'Prudence is the mother of valour, my son,' Fra Federico added, as if to clinch the argument.

'You are right, Padre,' Tim admitted, with an impatient sigh; 'as I have made my bed so must I lie on it; and there is a

good old Irish proverb which says that: "Whoever has said A, must be prepared to say B.'"

'And if you wish to see the Empress Marivosa, senhor,' the old priest concluded, 'keep your eyes open and you will see her soon.'

With that prospect in view, Tim would have walked straight into Hades.

The crowd in the meanwhile had grown to astonishing proportions. The men were congregated in the centre of the *plaça*; some were bareheaded, others wore large sombreros, others again had on the leather cap affected by the *vaqueiros*; the women formed the outer circle of the throng, mere bundles of shawls and wraps, their dark faces hidden in the folds of their blankets, their bodies huddled up against one another, or else leaning against the surrounding stockades.

The priest had spoken of an army of ten thousand, and this crowd did not fall far short of that number: and yet, on the whole *plaça* hardly a sound. Occasionally the cry of a child quickly suppressed, or else a smothered groan of pain, and from the summit of the hill that roll of drums unlike any sound Tim had ever heard before.

Overhead, heavy clouds came rolling up from behind the rocky heights; a dull, leaden light hung in the sky; the air was terribly oppressive. Tim, though clad in the thinnest cotton shirt and trousers, felt stifled. Taking Fra Federico's advice, he kept close to his side while the old priest threaded his way through the throng. For the most part respectful way was made for them, and occasionally one or other of the men or women would stop and raise the priest's robe to their lips. On the edge of the plateau where the ground rose sharply towards the summit of the hill, there was a kind of rough stone altar, raised on a couple of shallow steps. Around this altar the fringe of the crowd had formed a wide circle, in the forefront of which Tim recognized several faces with which he had been familiar at the Bom Viagem—the fearsome Lieutenants with the significant names that were so reminiscent of Fenimore Cooper and Wild West shows. Black-Fang was there, and so was Lean-Shanks. Tim noticed that the latter threw him a quick, suspicious glance, and then, drawing Fra Federico aside, spoke to him in a quick agitated whisper.

'I suppose,' thought Tim, 'that my engaging friend of the thin legs is hastily making up his mind whether I am to be killed at once or left to die presently in the good cause.'

Apparently Fra Federico had been equal to the occasion. What he said to Lean-Shanks was repeated to Black-Fang and seemed to carry weight, for no more notice was taken of Tim, who was left to mingle with the crowd. The occasion was too solemn to worry over a mere new recruit.

From over the chain of mountains in the west the storm was fast advancing: already one or two distant rumblings presaged the approach of thunder and vied with the monotonous nerve-racking roll of those persistent drums. And suddenly the awesome silence was broken by a sound akin to the soughing of the wind in leaf-laden forest trees. A great sigh had risen to thousands of throats, a sigh that was both joyful and expectant, and yet strangely weird and impish; not only were all eyes turned up now towards the summit of the hill, but thousands of arms were outstretched as if in prayer.

To say that Tim was thrilled would be to put it mildly. He pinched his arms to make sure that he was alive: he sighed and he groaned in sheer excitement. 'Am I mad, or sane—awake or dreaming?' he asked himself over and over again.

Upon the hill-top a group of men now appeared. They filed out of the stockade which surrounded the dwelling-house, and then slowly came down the hill. First came the drummers, with their long cylindrical drums suspended from their necks; then came a number of men armed to the teeth with miscellaneous weapons, guns, rifles, bayonets, sabres, lances; then another group, who carried banners made of coloured rags. Slowly they came down the hill-side, drums rolling, but otherwise in silence. Tim got the feeling that he was in the Pavilion Theatre in London watching one of Mr. C. B. Cochran's revues.

And all at once there appeared the majestic figure of the Great Unknown. Mountebank, cattle thief, brigand he might be, but he was certainly majestic: even Tim felt impressed, and he understood what a tremendous effect this strange personality was bound to have on superstitious, ignorant, and mystic folk. To begin with, in among this sturdy but rather

stocky race, the charlatan appeared very tall, and he had very cleverly accentuated his height by the blue robe which he wore draped about his long, lean figure in the manner of a Roman toga. His head was entirely swathed in a thin cotton material, which only left the nostrils free for breathing. His right arm was outstretched as he walked, with two fingers of the hand and the thumb extended for benediction. It was difficult to imagine how an ignorant cattle dealer—or whatever the man had been originally—could have invented all this mummery.

But soon Tim ceased to contemplate the Great Unknown for, immediately behind him, surrounded by a crowd of women, came Marivosa da Gloria. She was lovelier even than she had been when first Tim saw her in the forest. She no longer wore the panoply of leather which had given her such a quaint, almost boyish appearance. Like her precious father, she wore a kind of draped robe and mantle which made her look like one of those beautiful marbles of Diana, or Artemis, in the Vatican galleries in Rome.

Her head was very small, and her brown hair, which had glints of copper in its waves, was cut quite short at the nape of the neck. Round her brow she wore a straight band of gold. She was taking herself very seriously, the poor darling. Tim just longed to make a wild rush through that crowd of mountebanks, to pick her up in his arms and to run and run and run away with her, through forest and desert lands, over rocks and swamps, and through the jungle, away from this wonderland of unreality where a set of unconscionable blackguards were scheming to break her heart.

Down she came in the wake of her father, walking solemnly, like a lovely little idol. Tim never took his eyes off her; he felt that by the magic of his love he would draw her gaze to him, and that when their eyes met he would convey to her the adoration and the devotion of his soul. She would understand just by virtue of that one glance that here were two arms ready to defend and guard her, to embrace and to cherish, a breast on which she could lay her lovely head and rest, a brain that formulated schemes for her which a man's body could carry through. She looked so sweet and so innocent—so proud, too, the poor darling, unaware that that mummer whom she worshipped would soon lay her lovely head in the dust.

Down she came in the wake of her father. The drummers and the armed men and the banner-bearers had already ranged themselves in a semicircle around the altar. Fra Federico stood there—the poor, timid old man, self-deluded in the belief that this ceremony to which he lent the authority of his priesthood was not a blasphemy. The veiled man had paused beside the altar, with his arm still outstretched. Everyone was prostrate. Tim, in response to a look of appeal from Fra Federico, had perforce to kneel also: this he did facing Marivosa, thus rendering this act of worship to her.

And suddenly a vivid flash of lightning tore the leaden clouds asunder and a terrific crash of thunder shook the rocky foundations of the dream-city, and drowned the roll of drums. After which, it seemed as if the mighty voice of Heaven had loosened ten thousand tongues. The men beat their breasts with their clenched fists, or beat against the ground with their palms; the women shrieked and groaned, all the children started to cry and went on crying unchecked. Overhead, the very heavens seemed to be at war; thunder was almost continuous, one flash of lightning followed another at a mere second's interval; whilst down below the people groaned and shrieked and beat their breasts, and the veiled charlatan stood towering above them as if he were the supreme power that ruled over the storm, or commanded the hurricane to be still, and who at will could hurl this multitude into Gehenna, or raise it by his benediction to Elysian fields.

How long this pandemonium lasted Tim didn't know. It may have been half an hour: for him it seemed like an endless stretch of time. His knees ached, his head ached, his back ached, and he was furious with himself for being an unwilling actor in this idolatrous pageant, and furious with Fra Federico for having thrust him into the rôle. It was only the sight of Marivosa that calmed his nerves: to look at her was compensation for all that he endured in the way of humiliation and impotent rage. She seemed entirely detached from all this mummery, and just stood there beside her father, like an exquisitely carved statue of ivory—a perfect body, from which the soul had departed, gone a-roaming into a land of dreams. Tim imagined that he could read her thoughts—thoughts of her great destiny, of a vast Empire over which she would rule, dispensing faith, hope, and charity to starved and ignorant souls—and he was able to groan with the best of these devil-worshippers in the knowledge that all her beliefs, her own faith, and her every hope were fated to be shattered to dust by the impious hand of the father whom she worshipped.

## XI

Apparently this orgy of shrieks and groans marked the last stage of this amazing pageant. While the uproar gradually died down, the veiled charlatan turned his back on his prostrate worshippers and, preceded by his drummers and his men-at-arms, marched slowly back up the hill.

'The King, the King of France and his forty thousand men,' Tim murmured to himself, 'marched up the hill, up the hill, and then down again.'

But Marivosa da Gloria with her female attendants still remained on the *plaça*, and so did the majority of the fearsome Lieutenants, while the banner-bearers, waving their bits of coloured rags, stood in a semicircle around the lovely Empress.

Slowly, one by one, men and women struggled to their feet and resumed their attitude of passivity and of silence. The storm in the meanwhile had abated and the air was considerably cooler; only from the farther side of the mountains there still came muffled rumblings and occasional pale flashes of lightning. The leaden clouds, chased by a north-westerly breeze, left the sky clear and of a deep azure. In the west, soft tones of emerald and purple heralded the coming sunset. Tim, gazing on the people, had the impression of thousands of dogs shaking themselves after a beating. He also had the impression that the crowd was thinning: after such tempestuous emotions even these tough *vaqueiros* and brigands must be longing for the peace and quiet of their bird-cages and their wigwams and a dish of farinha or a cup of coffee to calm their nerves.

The final tableau of the pageant was of a much more simple order. There were some twenty or thirty men, some of them with their women and children, who came up in single file, each accompanied by a local inhabitant who seemed to act as sponsor, as far as the altar steps, and there, facing Marivosa da Gloria, said a few words which Tim did not understand. He supposed that these were the new recruits, come from different parts of the country to join the army of the prophet, and that they each took some sort of oath in their own native tongue. Some of these men were full-blooded Indians or Negroes: others half-breeds of varying cast of countenance and diversity of colour.

Fra Federico stood by the altar and seemed to be the one to administer the oath. Marivosa did not speak; nor did she make a sign until after each man had spoken, when she just bent her beautiful little head, looking every inch the Empress she believed herself to be. While this went on, there was a perpetual roll of drums proceeding from the hill-top, and the standard-bearers shook their ragged banners. The fearsome Lieutenants scrutinized each recruit as he took the oath, whispered with one another, exchanging their views. Sometimes the sponsor would be challenged and there was a long colloquy, while the recruit stood by, trembling with fear, for obviously his life was in the balance.

'It will be my turn soon,' thought Tim. 'Heaven, help me through this mummery!'

He felt that the eyes of the Lieutenants were upon him. Would he pass muster as a desirable recruit?—failing which there was always the ditch reserved for traitors. All sorts of queer thoughts gave chase to one another in Tim's mind: 'Will this Saturnalia end with human sacrifice, and shall I be the first victim?' was one; and then the other: 'While she stands there, I am safe. She won't allow me to be butchered. But then she'll go away presently and I shall be left at the mercy of these savages.'

Finally, he wondered what would have been Uncle Justin's attitude in these circumstances. The prince of sportsmen! What would he have done?—struggled for his life, one against ten thousand, or accepted the inevitable?

Fra Federico's voice roused him from this state of mental confusion.

'Come hither, my son.'

And then the man who was called Lean-Shanks asked an abrupt question: 'Who is this stranger?'

'He comes,' said the priest, 'from the shores of the great river. He will swear to devote his life to the House of Bragança.'

'Do you sponsor him, then, Federico Evangelista?' another man asked.

'I do.'

This seemed to allay some of the Lieutenants' worst suspicions: but still one of them was not quite satisfied.

'What language does he speak?' he asked.

'He speaks our language,' Fra Federico replied, 'and also his native tongue.'

'Speaks our language, does he? The same that they speak in Pernambuco? What does that mean?'—and he promptly answered his own question—'That he has been in Pernambuco and consorted with our enemies—the Government?'

There were ominous murmurs. Fra Federico protested: 'It is I who sponsor him.'

'But how can you know that he is not a spy of the Republicans?'

More ominous murmurs, more dark suspicious glances directed at Tim; and then suddenly, like a silver bell, came the words from Marivosa's lips: 'The stranger is no spy. He will serve me devotedly, and I welcome him in my father's name.'

That settled the matter. Fra Federico beckoned to Tim, who stepped boldly up to the altar. His excitement was intense. Marivosa's clear, bell-like voice, speaking the soft-toned Portuguese, had obscured his vision of everything but herself. He saw nothing but her. Drawn to her by invisible and irresistible bonds, he came forward and then stood still, facing her, with only the stone altar between her and him. Conscious of the imperative necessity of safeguarding his life as far as possible, he repeated mechanically the words suggested to him by Fra Federico.

'I swear obedience, loyalty and devotion to Marivosa da Gloria of the House of Bragança, rightful Empress of Brazil'—and so on through the farce, which had in it now so much of reality. 'My life for her service, and in her cause I am prepared to shed my blood.' All very true. While he spoke the extravagant words he held Marivosa's glance as surely as a hypnotist holds that of his medium, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the faintest possible tinge of colour mount up to her cheeks and her eyelids flutter like a butterfly's wing.

Having become a personage of some consequence, he was permitted to go round and kneel at the Empress's feet.

'You may kiss Her Majesty's robe,' he of the lean-shanks commanded, with lofty condescension.

How gladly does a man perform such an act of humility towards the woman he loves! Tim would as soon have grovelled in the dust to feel her tiny foot upon his neck.

'I adore you,' he murmured in English, which, except for his friend, Fra Federico, she alone could understand. 'You are the loveliest being God ever made, and He made you for me.... Before long I shall take you in my arms, and with my lips on yours I will give you your first lesson in love.'

There was something impish in this situation which tickled Tim's fancy so that he could have shrieked with laughter. How he forbore to put his arms round her then and there was a miracle of self-control. But it was the strength and the reality of love that controlled his actions now. His life, he felt, had suddenly, by virtue of his love, become one of the most precious things on earth. It alone stood between her—his ideal, his beloved—and the band of brigands who had power over her very soul. This day of strange events had brought him close to her at last. She had ceased to be a dream, and had become a woman—the one woman on earth: and Tim was fatalist to the extent of believing that all this would never have happened—his quest after the elusive Dudley Stone, his journey to this land of sortilege—if this flower of the desert had not been created for him.

That being so, he was content to wait. Apparently the Lieutenants had accepted him as one of the great army and had cast off all suspicion of him, at any rate for the present. And now the mad pageant was over: what was left of the crowd was only waiting, seemingly, until the Empress finally turned her back upon them. This she did presently, and preceded by the banner-bearers, with a bodyguard of armed Lieutenants about her, she marched slowly up the hill. Soon she and her escort disappeared within the stockade. But to Tim it seemed that in the end her last look had been for him.

After her departure the crowd dispersed rapidly, and Tim soon found himself almost alone on the wide *plaça*—the scene of the most amazing spectacle he had ever witnessed in all his life. All he could do was to pass his fingers through his hair, to hold on to his brains as it were, for they were threatening to scatter in all directions. 'Well, I'm dashed!' was the most rational thing he could say. It had all been so ridiculous and yet he could not laugh: it had all been so abnormal, so mad, and yet he knew that it was real, that he had not dreamed it all.

'Well! I'm dashed!'

Fra Federico, timid and gentle, touched him lightly on the shoulder: 'Take care, my son, all may not yet be well.'

Tim looked down at the quaint ascetic face, with the pale eyes so like those of a rabbit. To himself he said: 'Thank God for this one rational, sane human being'—and then aloud: 'All is bound to be well, Padre, for Marivosa loves me.'

'God forbid!' the old man ejaculated piously.

'God is not going to do anything of the sort. He has brought me to this hellish place so that Marivosa should see me, love me, and come away with me.'

'Come away with you? Heavens alive! my son, you are mad!'

'I know I am—or I shouldn't be here.'

'I have heard tell that in other countries men have learnt how to fly,' the old man said, with a dubious shake of the head. 'I call it impious, because God never intended men to fly or He would have given them wings ... but unless you have learnt the impious art, my son, you cannot escape unseen from Canudos.'

'The impious art of flying! Do say that again, Padre. It is the most refreshing thing I've heard said in all my life. But joking apart, let me assure you that the impious art can certainly not be practised in this God-forsaken land.'

'Well, then...?'

'Let's go in, Padre,' Tim said irrelevantly. 'I am sick of this place now Marivosa has gone. You shall read your Shakespeare, and I'll make plans for kidnapping the Empress of Brazil.'

## XII

All night there was a rumbling of distant thunder. Tim hardly slept a wink. Just before dawn he rose and, slipping on his cotton shirt and trousers, he wandered barefoot down to the stream to bathe. It was very cold, but he welcomed this change from the oppressive heat of the day. After splashing about in the sweet, clean water, he felt better: his brain was clearer, his nerves were more steady. He slipped back into his clothes, meaning to wander back to the priest's hut, when a stirring in the tall coarse grass lower down the stream arrested his attention. All he thought at the moment was that a kindred spirit had, like himself, come down here to bathe, and as he did not think that many of the inhabitants of Canudos were much inclined that way, he felt rather curious to know who it might be. He tucked up his cotton trousers and waded down the shallow stream, peeping cautiously about him as he went, for he had already realized that in this place one never knew whence an unpleasant arrow or some other flying weapon might unexpectedly come.

Suddenly he paused. He had heard a voice—a woman's voice—a laugh that was the most delicious music mortal ears could possibly hear. There were other voices, too—women's voices—but what did they matter? What did anything matter except the fact that the woman he adored was now within a few yards of this clump of tall grass behind which he, Tim, crouched like a criminal. In his school days he had been taught the story of the chaste goddess who struck a man with blindness because he had seen her in her bath. He quite felt that in this land of sorcery something like that might very easily happen to him. But that didn't matter either. All he knew was that he was not going away from here without seeing her, or without a word.

Now, Tim O'Clee believed in his luck, and in this instance luck did favour him. He waited for a time until there was no more splashing in the water and certain words, dropped at random, suggested that the Empress and her ladies were putting on their clothes. Then he peeped out cautiously from between the grasses. At some little distance a dozen or so young women, some of them of a deep coffee-colour, others almost white, were busy with clothes and blankets or whatnot. Isolated from them, and not more than twenty yards from where Tim was crouching, there was Marivosa, looking more like an Image of carved ivory than ever: for she had draped a white cloth all about her exquisite body. She was doing nothing in particular, only gazing at the water, or now and then at the sky.

Tim made a sound like the plaintive cry of some little beast in pain. The girl heard it: she turned her head and listened. The others were too far: they had not heard. Tim repeated the cry, a little more loudly this time, and gently stirred the grasses around him. Again she listened—paused—listened again: then when the cry fell for the third time upon her ear, she came slowly, cautiously, in the direction where the clump of grass still quivered in Tim's hand. He thought that his heart would burst with excitement. It was pounding away in his breast like a sledge-hammer. And now she was quite close. The first thing he saw was one exquisite little hand, as she pushed the grass aside, and then her foot.... Then she saw him, and uttered a cry—not a loud one, fortunately. The others didn't hear. She would have stepped back, and probably run away before Tim had the chance of freeing himself from the reeds, but he was too quick for her. He had her in his arms before she could move, and if she did intend to call to the others she could not do it, because he held her cherry-red mouth imprisoned with a kiss.

Of course, she struggled. Of course, she was furious, indignant—hated him no doubt, at this moment, and would as soon have killed him as not. But it was the first kiss she had ever received; it was the first time that strong arms had held her close; the first time that between two hot kisses words came tumbling out, words she had never heard before: 'My divine lady, I adore you!' And then those strong arms encircled her closer and she felt a heart-beat right against her own. The arms at first were round her shoulders, her arms were pinioned with inseverable bonds, and hot kisses seared her neck and throat; that was the moment when she felt most indignant; when, had her arms been free, she would have struck that arrogant male in the face. But now the steel-like bonds were around her knees, and the man's head was down in the very roots of the grass, and his hot lips were pressed against her foot.

'My divine lady ... kill me if you wish ... I have lived I my life ... I wish for nothing now!'

He remained there crouching at her feet for a long, long time; and somehow her wish to kill him died away. She was still indignant, of course. Very indignant. And furious, because her cheeks were as if they had been scorched in front of the fire. She put her hands up to her face. Just for a moment she wanted to cry. But he looked up just then, and there was such a look in his eyes that all she could do was to turn her head away.

'I worship you!' he murmured. And he stretched out his arms and put his two hands around her head, and drew it down, down, so that she lost her balance and fell right up against his breast, with her head nestling upon his shoulder and her face quite close to his.

'I will not steal another kiss, *madonna mia*,' he whispered: 'but give me your lips....'

Nor did he steal that kiss the rapture of which made her not only forget how indignant she had been a short while ago, but also ashamed that she was no longer indignant now.

Primitive man had gained the victory. Captive of his bow and spear, captive of his love and passion, the mysterious flower of the desert lay passive upon his breast.

## XIII

They both woke from their love-dream with the sound of voices quite close to their sheltering arbour of grass. Tim was more scared than she was; womanlike, having taken the plunge, she cared not one jot what happened after this.

'Your maids, or whatever they are,' Tim whispered; 'they might come round.'

'Let them,' she retorted, smiling with lofty unconcern; 'they don't count.'

'You adorable thing! If they don't count, so much the better. The day is young—I have not even begun to make love to you yet.'

But, like a woman again, she back-pedalled at this.

'There are plenty of other days,' she said, 'and I must go now.'

'Must you?'

'I always go to my father at this hour. He likes to see me early in the morning.'

'What do you do when you go to him?'

'We talk.'

'What about?'

'The affairs of the country—our plans for the future——'

She paused, and suddenly a cloud seemed to fall over her face; its gaiety died down, there was a troubled look in her eyes.

'The future,' she reiterated vaguely.

Obviously she had forgotten, in this new experience which had come into her life, what kind of a future her father had planned for her. She was standing close to Tim at this moment, while he still squatted upon the bed of grass: he held her two little delicate hands, and looked up at the exquisitely moulded face and into those dark, mysterious eyes in which he had kindled the first glow of love.

'Your future, my divine lady,' he said slowly and earnestly, 'is no longer in your father's control. God has given you to me. Your future rests with me.'

She shook her head slowly.

'We are not masters of our own destiny, senhor.'

'My name's Tim,' he said. 'Say it, my dear, just like that—Tim.'

She smiled. It was a wan little smile this time, and tears gathered in her eyes. Now, to a lover like Tim O'Clee there is a great deal of joy to be got out of tears that may be dried with a kiss, and Marivosa quickly learned the lesson that crying may be very sweet under certain circumstances. As a matter of fact, she soon came to the conclusion that she had never hated anyone so much as she did those women over there who were looking for her and calling her by name.

'I must go,' she said, and sighed; and then she added softly, 'Tim!'

'I'll only let you go if you'll promise to come to that place—you know—where first I saw you.'

'When?' she asked naïvely.

'You adorable thing! Why not to-day?'

She shook her head.

'It is difficult for me to go so far—alone!'

'Anywhere else, then. I don't care, so long as I see you.'

'I go to the chapel sometimes, to pray.'

'The chapel?'

'Fra Federico Evangelista knows. He will tell you. He says Mass there sometimes.'

'He never told me.'

'Perhaps he thinks you are a pagan, or a heretic. The English are heretics, I know, so perhaps——'

'At this moment I am nothing but a pagan, for I am worshipping you.'

'If Fra Federico says Mass to-morrow I shall know, and I will come.'

'But heavens alive! How am I going to live until to-morrow?'

'Well,' she said naïvely, 'sometimes he has Benediction—that is at sunset—and perhaps to-day——'

'If the old reprobate does not have Benediction to-day, I'll kill him!'

'Good-bye, Tim!'

'Not yet!'

'Good-bye. Ask Fra Federico to have Benediction in the chapel to-day. You can let go my hands now.'

'No! I swear I can't.'

'Good-bye ... Tim!'

How she managed to get away he didn't know, but suddenly she was gone, and only the trembling of tall grasses showed which way she went. Tim's first impulse was to struggle to recapture her; the thought of the hours which lay before him until sunset was in itself a kind of mild torture. But the cackling of the women brought a glimpse of common sense into his disordered brain.

It were perhaps indiscreet to pry now into the secrets of Tim O'Clee's soul. Alone between earth and sky he lay, with face buried in the grassy bed on which the exquisite body of Marivosa had rested. The love that had come to him in this desert land was the strongest and purest emotion of which a man's soul is capable: to him, Marivosa was a perfect flower, the delicate petals of which he had caressed with rapturous ecstasy. She had lain against his breast, pure and innocent as a child, whilst with his lips on hers he had kindled in her the first spark of passion.

For the moment he had no thought of the future: he had taught her to kiss, and in time she would learn to love—two things that are co-equal and yet are a world apart. She, the half-civilized child of the desert, would one day grace his home in Ireland with her presence; and never for a moment could he doubt that she would be just as perfect in the stately

surroundings of Traskmoore as in the mysterious solitude of Canudos.

The remembrance of Traskmoore came to him while he lay in the grass dreaming of Marivosa ... Traskmoore! ... Between him and his home there still hovered the elusive personality of Dudley Stone. His love for this desert child, born as it were in a mirage, had certainly for the time being weakened his ardent desire to run that mysterious personage to earth. In this God-forsaken land, far from the haunts of men, surrounded by customs, spectacles, personalities that might as well have belonged to a prehistoric age, life over in Europe, Traskmoore, Hold-Hands Juliana were fading into insignificance. So entirely absorbing had been his desire to see Marivosa again, to speak to her of love and to kindle response in her heart, that nothing else in the whole wide world seemed to matter any more; and as day had followed day without another glimpse of her, and she remained as intangible as a dream, he had been ready to bargain with fate—had been, in fact, prepared to throw in his lot with all these brigands, and to swear allegiance to any mountebank, or unclean spirit even, if possession of Marivosa had loomed ahead as his ultimate reward.

But those days were now past. Marivosa was no longer a dream product: she had materialized, lain in his arms, with her warm red lips clinging to his. He had conquered her, won her: she was his already by virtue of her love for him. Thoughts of home, of civilization, of Ireland, were the natural outcome of his victory. The knowledge, too, that she was the innocent pivot round which revolved every conceivable ghoulishness and crime: that, in fact, for some secret purpose of his own her abominable father was throwing her into the arms of that arch-scoundrel, Manoël da Lisbao, set Tim's imagination stirring for the means—the prompt means—of fleeing with her out of this Gehenna. Fra Federico might talk as he would of difficulties—of impossibilities even—in a lover's lexicon is there ever such a word as *impossible*? Tim, lying there in the grass, with the vision of his beloved still so vivid, that with closed eyes he could trace every line of her loveliness, laughed at obstacles, at rocky strongholds and fastnesses, at the trackless wilderness, and at the army of ten thousand brigands.

'She belongs to me, and I'll have her,' he declared. 'God gave her to me. He brought me here that I should take her away out of this hell. He won't go back on His purpose. God does not do such things.'

## XIV

The little chapel—it was hardly worthy of the name—was situated on the *plaça*, not far from Fra Federico's house. Tim had not noticed it before. It certainly was undistinguished. A square box-like construction, which had once been plastered over and painted, but from which the paint had long since faded and the plaster peeled away. The tiled roof was surmounted at one angle by a roughly carved stone cross.

It was in this desolate little hole that Fra Federico ministered to the souls of a few Christianized barbarians. From time to time he would say Mass, and a hundred or so men and women would congregate round him and hear with due reverence the age-old words in a language they did not understand. Perhaps it was because they did not understand the words which Fra Federico mumbled at the improvised altar that they held him in such respect, and concealed from him the fact that they alternated attendance at the Mass with visits to their Gri-gri man. They would confess their sins—or such actions as they considered were sins—to Fra Federico, and take Holy Communion in much the same spirit as they swallowed a decoction of lizard-blood and toad spittle or other abomination brewed for them by the witch-doctor.

Fra Federico did his best with them, and in some cases succeeded in inculcating Christian civilization into these barbaric minds. But it was a difficult task, for often after a morning spent in confession and atonement there would come an order from the Great Unknown to start off on an expedition which had for its goal the looting of some distant village store that had lately been supplied with provisions, or the driving of a herd of bullocks that had excited the charlatan's cupidity.

The uphill task had its compensations, however, in the few simple souls that tried to keep away from the savage life of this desert community. Fra Federico in his naïve way had taught them the elements of Christianity, had administered to them the Holy Sacraments: and when he saw a small crowd of these humble folk kneeling inside the tumble-down chapel

he felt indemnified for all the heartache which he endured in this perpetual fight against superstition and idolatry. Marivosa gave him endless joy. She had been thrust into a convent at Sao Paolo when she was little more than a child. Pious, cultured women had brought her up and taught her all they knew. She had proved responsive and had absorbed eagerly all the knowledge which the nuns had been able to impart. True that knowledge of the world had not been part of the curriculum, and that the books which she had been allowed to read were only those that her father confessor had approved; but, even so, she had imbibed a great deal of general information and not a little of literary and artistic culture. She was not yet sixteen when that arch-reprobate, her father, dragged her out of the shelter of the Sao Paolo convent after he had made the discovery that he had an exquisitely beautiful daughter who would be a valuable asset to him in his many tortuous schemes. Since then her intercourse with Fra Federico had been the one bright spot in her lonely life. She worshipped her father because his mysterious personality had captured her imagination when she was at a most impressionable age, but she had nothing in common with him; she looked up to him, perhaps not as to a resurrected prophet, but certainly as to a man endowed with supernal powers and a scion of the Imperial House of Brazil. But intellectually he was no companion: he despised all books as the product of effeminate brains—nothing appealed to him but action and virile physical force.

At the same time he did not object to his daughter's friendship with the old priest: he had, in fact, a certain amount of respect for Fra Federico, chiefly because Fra Federico knew how to cure him of his bodily aches and pains. It was because of his rudimentary medical knowledge, and not because of his priestly calling, that the old man enjoyed immunity among this tribe of brigands; if he chose to perform what the Great Unknown and his Lieutenants called *hocus-pocus* in his tumble-down little barracks—well! that was his affair. What he did there was no worse than what the Gri-gri man did over by the river bank, or the witch-doctor in front of his dog-hole. It was only the warriors of the Great Unknown, his fighting force, who were forbidden to take part in the *hocus-pocus*. It was all right for women, that sort of thing: even the Empress could listen to Federico's mumbo-jumbo if she chose; but any man who lent himself to that rubbish was little better than a woman, and there was no room for women in the army of the Great Unknown.

With the result that in Canudos religious services could not be held very often during Fra Federico's brief visits to the place. Opportunity had to be snatched when the Great Unknown and his fearsome Lieutenants were either in a conciliatory mood or busy with other things: otherwise unpleasant interruptions, desecrations, even sacrilege might break in on the peace and solemnity of the service. But when an opportunity did arise, then the word would quickly go round and Mass in the early dawn, or Benediction at sunset, would see a procession of worshippers winding its way slowly up the hill. Were it possible to analyse the mentality of these mystic barbarians, it would probably be found that their attitude towards Fra Federico's form of worship was that it could not do any harm, Federico Evangelista being a good and learned man, who knew how to cure ague and subdue a fever: and there might, after all, be something in it, in which case it was best to be on the safe side.

And so some came to worship and some just out of curiosity. There was room for about a hundred inside the chapel, but usually a couple of hundred and more would stand outside on the *plaça* listening to the thin, quaking voice of Fra Federico as he intoned the Latin words. A good many came also in order to catch sight of the Empress. She would come down from her castle with half a dozen women; and though some of these men were not far removed from savagery, though they lived a life of brigandage, with their cattle for chief company, and though their own womenfolk had nothing left of feminine charm, Marivosa's beauty had a strange power over their minds. For them she was not quite earthly: and though they did not believe in angels, they felt that she belonged to a spiritual world that was beyond their ken. As the daughter of the resurrected prophet she was in their opinion endowed with supernatural powers; and often as she passed the men would bow their heads down to the ground, and the women would push their piccaninnies forward so that they might lay their baby hands on her robe.

Marivosa, who had remained ardently a Christian, knelt devoutly throughout the service. As a rule her thoughts never wandered from the holy texts expounded by Fra Federico, nor did her eyes stray from her book or from her reverently clasped hands. But to-day, during Benediction, she had the feeling that there was something at the back of the chapel which distracted her from her prayers: she had, in fact, the feeling that an invisible power got hold of her head and forced it to turn round and look behind her. This was at a very solemn moment of the service, when her eyes should have been riveted on the altar: instead of which, she turned and saw Tim. She only had a very brief glimpse of his dark head and of his blue eyes which seemed to shine through the gloom: for the next moment she was down on her knees, prostrate, begging the Holy Virgin to forgive her for this sin. It was strange how long the service lasted to-day: surely Fra Federico had interpolated several new prayers. It was very hot, too, and her knees ached: and it was with a real—

though a sinful—feeling of relief that she knelt down for the final benediction.

When it was all over, she called Fra Federico and begged him to tell the people to go.

'Tell them not to wait for me, father. I am tired and want to be alone.'

Fra Federico did his best. He transmitted the Empress's wish to her subjects as if it were a command. Obediently they dispersed. The chapel, too, was soon clear. The Empress's maids had been ordered to wait outside, for Her Majesty would now make her confession and it would be an hour or more before she would be ready to return to the castle. And Marivosa asked Fra Federico to let her pray and meditate alone. Her father had told her certain things, spoken to her of marriage: and she wanted to ponder over it all.

It must be supposed that Fra Federico's eyes were dim and that he did not see that dark head vaguely outlined in the gloomiest corner of the little chapel: certain it is that in answer to Marivosa's desire for privacy all he said was: 'Very well, my daughter. God bless you. Remember the Holy Virgin and your guardian angel never cease to watch over you.'

A pious admonition which caused Marivosa to blush. Her guardian angel, she thought, must have been rather startled this morning while he was watching over her in the grassy arbour. Fra Federico picked up her rosary which had slipped to the ground and placed it in her hands: then he softly stole away.

The next moment Tim was by her side, his arm round her, her head upon his shoulder. The more sacred the place, the more holy the deed—if the deed be one on which God does not frown. And who shall dare say that God frowns on a kiss?

'I am so ashamed,' Marivosa murmured.

'Ashamed of what, you angel? Not of this, surely?' And the recreant kissed her again.

'It is a sin,' she whispered.

'You get that out of your darling head. There is no sin in love—not in love like ours—and what would be the good of love if there were no kisses?'

'This will be the last time I shall ever see you, Tim,' she said presently.

'It is not,' he answered. 'That is another thing that you must get into your darling head: that you belong to me, and that I am going to take you away from here.'

'You know that that is impossible,' she sighed.

'Nothing is impossible, my sweet, when one loves.'

'I never take a step without I'm seen.'

'Then we must steal away when it is so dark that not even a cat's eyes could follow us.'

'My father's eyes are sharper than any cat's. He has spies everywhere: and we don't know the way.'

'It's going to be done, nevertheless, my dear.'

'How?'

'Don't ask me. I don't know yet. Since I've seen you I've thought of nothing but your beauty. But reason will come along presently, and then we'll make plans and go.'

'I wish I could believe you. But...'

'There is no *but*, my sweet. We are going away together, I tell you.'

She looked up at him. He was smiling with such sublime confidence in himself, and his Irish eyes flashed such power and so much resolution that, like a bird that has been frightened and now feels reassured, she edged nearer still to him and nestled closer still in his arms.

'You are quite sure?'

'Quite sure.'

'Where shall we go?'

'At first, no farther than a place called Queimadas. We'll take Fra Federico with us. There is a real consecrated church in Queimadas, so he told me once, and we'll get married there, and Fra Federico will perform the ceremony.'

'I have read the service for holy matrimony in my prayer book,' she said naïvely. 'It is very beautiful.'

'You are adorable! My God! what a lovely time we'll have!'

'After we are married, what shall we do?'

'We'll make straight for Pernambuco and sail for Europe.'

'Europe? I was in Europe when I was a child. I told you, I think. My mother was alive then. I think she is dead now.'

'How do you mean? You think she is dead? Don't you know?'

'Not for certain. I haven't seen her for years and years. I used to ask my father about her, but he never seemed to care to say very much, so after a little while I gave up asking.'

'Do you remember her at all—or were you too young?'

'I do remember her—she was very beautiful.... Would you like to see her picture?'

'I would—very much.'

'I always carry it about with me—my mother's photograph, I mean—also my dear father's picture, and the few letters they wrote to me from time to time while I was at the convent.'

While she spoke she drew a small flat packet from inside her gown; it was carefully tied up with a faded piece of blue ribbon and wrapped in a piece of thin silk. Marivosa undid the precious little parcel very carefully. It contained a few old letters and a couple of photographs. She took one of these and held it out to Tim.

'I think,' she said softly, 'she must have been lovely, don't you?'

Tim took the photo and looked at it. Only a feeble light came through the tiny grated window, but he saw the picture well enough: the shock of dark shingled hair, with the one heavy wave falling over the left eye, the full lips and huge white teeth, and the large goggled eyes. *Hold-Hands Juliana!*

Marivosa's tiny hand came to rest upon his coat sleeve, her eyes turned to his and then back to the photo, mutely reiterating the query: 'Don't you think she must have been lovely?'

Tim could not speak; all he could do was to stare down at the photo. Hold-Hands Juliana! Marivosa's mother! It seemed to him as if the ground had suddenly opened and that unless he held himself very stiff and erect he would fall headlong into a yawning abyss. Hold-Hands Juliana! The mother of this exquisite woman whom he adored. Surely there was laughter both in Heaven and Hell at this stark, naked fact. Why, he himself could have laughed and laughed, but for this feeling that he must hold himself stiff and erect for fear of tumbling headlong into a yawning abyss.

'I haven't seen her for years and years. Perhaps, when we go to Europe, you will help me to find her.'

Her voice recalled Tim to himself. He blinked his eyes and had another good look at the photo. He turned it over and looked at the back of it; there was an inscription, written in English in a handwriting he had often seen before: 'Your loving mother, Juliana Stone.'

Juliana Stone? Why, of course! Amazement had addled his brain for the moment, but now it all came back to him. The stark, naked fact that must have provoked laughter both in Heaven and in Hell.... 'Your loving mother, Juliana Stone.' Then ... then—or was he going mad?—then, in that case, her father, the arch-charlatan, the mountebank, the Great Unknown, was Dudley Stone, and ...

'Tim, are you ill? Is it the heat?'

'No, dear—why?'

'You are so silent—so funny....'

'Thoughts, sweetheart, thoughts—all sorts of queer thoughts.'

'But you are all right?'

'Perfectly all right. Let me kiss you once—no, never mind about the chapel and the altar—just one kiss, and I shall feel better ... I shall be ill if you don't kiss me....'

Then a pause—and Tim felt better.

'Show me your father's photograph now.'

But she shook her head. 'I mustn't do that,' she said, in that quaint artificial manner she always assumed when she spoke of her father. 'No one is allowed to see his face. He is the Great Unknown.'

She was adorable. But, God in Heaven! What a situation! Dudley Stone, the Great Unknown! Alive! Here in the desert! Playing the fool for all sorts of reasons, each more nefarious probably than the other—loot, piracy, treasure-hunt: all this mummery to keep his band of brigands tied to his fortunes by dint of mysticism and superstitious fear.

Dudley Stone! And this adorable woman his daughter! And away in beloved Ireland, Hold-Hands Juliana enjoying life and fortune, not knowing that the house of cards which she had built up on the foundations of lies and perjuries was on the point of tumbling about her ears.

'My beloved one,' Tim said at last—and then again: 'My beloved one!' All he could do was to put his arms round her and to press her closely to his heart. No more trouble, no more fear now; and she would have no reason to regret the imaginary crown of Brazil, for he was in a position now to offer her a real sovereignty amongst his people at Traskmoore—far more brilliant, more stable, and more desirable than what she had been taught to expect.

Indeed, the world went very well for Tim O'Clee during this happy hour which he spent in this tumble-down barn with his beloved. Dudley Stone was found—he was alive! 'God's in His Heaven! All's right with the world!'

Though Marivosa refused to show her lover the photograph of her mysterious father, she allowed him to look through some old letters which he had written to her while she was still a little girl at the convent of Sao Paolo. They were all signed: 'Your loving father, Dudley Stone.' The last two or three referred to his going over to Sao Paolo to fetch her from the convent and take her to live with him in his new home in Canudos: 'Where,' he said, 'a glorious and splendid life awaits you, worthy of your rank.' These letters were dated 1925, nearly a year after his supposed death at Monsataz which had been sworn to by Hold-Hands Juliana and her accomplices.

Holding Marivosa clasped in his arms, Tim talked to her of Ireland and of his home, of the stately elm trees, with their cool shadows in which it was so good to lie on hot summer afternoons: and of the chorus of nesting birds in the

spring when the morning air shook with the melody of thousands of bird throats. He told her of the silvery lake and the plumed reeds upon its shores which sang such tender songs when the summer breeze stirred their stately heads, and of the water-lilies with the great shiny leaves on which little frogs sat and croaked; of the woods through which they would soon wander together—his arm round her, her head against his shoulder.

And then about the satin-skinned Irish hunter on which she would ride, the meets in Traskmoore courtyard on a cold winter's morning, the fences and the water-jumps and the gallops across country and ploughed fields, the horn of the huntsman, the find—the kill; and about Uncle Justin, and the stables and the kennels, and the quiet evenings after a day's hunting—tired and happy—just the two of them alone in the snug boudoir at Traskmoore.

'And then,' he concluded, 'I'll turn on the gramophone and sing to you the sweet Irish ballads which Uncle Justin loved.'

'Oh, Tim!' she exclaimed, and turned great worshipping eyes upon him. 'Can you sing?'

'Can I sing?' he retorted. 'You shall hear me—not now, perhaps, because it might attract a crowd; and there's Fra Federico at the door, come to break up the happiest hour of my life.'

'Yes! you must go now, Tim ... but to-morrow we will meet again.... And you are sure, quite sure, Tim, that you can take me away from here without annoying my father?'

'I am quite sure,' he replied, with sublime self-confidence, 'that your father himself will elect to come with us.'

She shook her head and sighed. 'Not to Europe. In Europe they would not understand the Great Unknown.'

'You are right there, sweetheart; they would not,' and Tim was conscious of a swift vision of the veiled prophet arriving in the boat-train at Victoria Station with his fearsome Lieutenants—'so perhaps,' he added reassuringly, 'we'll persuade him to assume the disguise of an English gentleman.'

And in this mood they parted: she to dream of this newly-found happiness of which she had not even heard the nuns in the convent speak—it was unknown to the pious sisters seemingly—and she, Marivosa, thought it so wonderful that it should come to her; and he, Tim, to plan his interview with Dudley Stone which must come about on the morrow. Would the charlatan be amenable to reason? Was he sick of all this play-acting and only too ready to re-enter civilization again? Tim was prepared with munificent offers: the Traskmoore fortune was large enough to satisfy the greed of any adventurer, and after all said and done, the chief reason for this mummery was loot and brigandage—Dudley Stone himself could not believe in the possibility of a political revolution which would place his daughter on an ephemeral throne.

'He is not such a blithering ass as all that,' argued Tim to himself, 'and I can make it worth his while to give up his fool's paradise for a life of luxury.'

And for the first time for many a day he ceased to think of Marivosa for at least half an hour.

## XV

'No one allowed to enter!'

These were the words which greeted Tim O'Clee when on the following morning he made his way to the top of the hill to the castle of the Great Unknown. It stood entirely isolated, perched on the extreme summit of the hill, and surrounded by arid rocks and clumps of stunted palms and dwarf bushes. It consisted of a roughly-constructed stone dwelling, with a tiled roof: the whole built in the shape of a capital L. A high stone wall surrounded its extended courtyard. That much could be seen from the *plaça* below, but once past the belt of scrub and palms only the encircling

wall was visible, with heavy wooden gates hermetically closed. Nor did any amount of pounding and hammering on the gates bring the slightest response, although the sound of people moving about, of men's voices, and even the clatter of arms and pawing of horses' hoofs, proved conclusively that there was plenty of life going on, on the other side of the stone wall.

Since hammering on the gate was no use, Tim decided to enter the fortress by stratagem, recommending his wits to Saint Patrick for an inspiration. Safely hidden behind a clump of dwarf bushes he waited patiently for some event to favour him, but nothing happened for close on half an hour. No one came through the scrub, the gates remained closed, and the sound of men and horses still went on inside the courtyard.

It was still early morning and the heat not too great. Tim, flat on his stomach peeping from behind the bush, waited, trusting in Saint Patrick's help. And presently he heard a steady tramping coming up the hill. 'Thank you, Saint Patrick,' he murmured and waited, on the alert. A few minutes later he saw a number of *vaqueiros*—a hundred or so—come straggling up the incline. Some of them were in their leathers, but quite a number were dressed the same as Tim, in cotton shirts, and trousers tucked into their high boots. They came up in groups of ten or a dozen at a time, silent as usual, and swinging their arms as they walked. And Tim, coming out boldly from his hiding-place, joined up with one of these groups and walked up with them, silent, and swinging his arms.

The men all came to a halt by the gate; and when the last of the stragglers had assembled, they set up a call, which sounded not unlike the howl of a wolf. In response to this the gates were opened and the men filed in, with Tim among them.

'Well! I've got that far, anyway,' he murmured to himself with self-satisfaction.

He found himself in a wide courtyard, with the castle in front of him. Along one side of the building was the usual wooden veranda, to which a flight of wooden steps gave access from the courtyard. A number of small barred windows and a number of doors gave on the veranda.

The courtyard was already full of men—*vaqueiros* in their leathers who appeared to be on parade. Lean-Shanks and Black-Fang had seemingly inspected them. They stood at what might pass for attention, and Tim noticed that they all carried very modern-looking rifles. Their eyes were fixed upwards, all staring in one direction; and Tim, glancing up also, saw that the veiled mountebank was on the veranda. At the moment he was making a gesture of dismissal; and the men who had been on parade broke ranks and hastened out of the courtyard, whilst the new contingent took their place.

Major O'Clerigh of the Irish Guards had no intention of submitting to inspection by these bandits. He stepped boldly across the courtyard in the direction of the building, but was brought to a sudden halt at the foot of the wooden staircase by a vice-like grip on both his shoulders, and a couple of bayonets pointing at his lower chest, while a voice from somewhere or other called loudly:

'No one allowed to enter.'

Tim offered no resistance; only said in a voice loud enough to reach the ears of anyone up on the veranda:

'I have an urgent message for the Great Unknown.'

'Give me the message. I will take it.'

This time Tim recognized the rasping voice of Lean-Shanks—a huge, loose-limbed half-breed, with a grip like steel, a cruel mouth, and furtive, piercing eyes.

'My orders are to deliver the message to no one save to the Great Unknown.'

This was greeted with a sneer from Lean-Shanks and a derisive laugh from the other Lieutenants, who had strolled across the courtyard in order to have a closer look at this impudent intruder.

'Ah! your orders are to deliver the message to no one save to him who is lord over us all,' the half-breed said with

insolent deliberation. 'And who has dared to give you such orders, I would like to know,' he added with sudden violence. 'Where does he live?'

'In Monsataz,' Tim replied. 'I come from there with an urgent message from one who is known to your lord.'

It is to be supposed that the followers of the Great Unknown were not often caught speaking with such self-confidence; certain it is that the mulatto, as well as the other Lieutenants, appeared doubtful at this point as to what they had better do. Two of them still held Tim tightly by the shoulders, and the bayonets were still pointed at him; but Lean-Shanks did start a whispered consultation with one of his colleagues, and Tim, through the corner of his eye, saw them looking up at the veranda as if waiting for orders, whereupon an impish idea seized him, and he said aloud in English:

'I have an urgent message for you. You'll be sorry if you refuse to see me.'

The fact that Tim spoke in a language that they did not understand did not worry the Lieutenants. They were used to men coming from all over the country, each speaking his own dialect. But apparently the Great Unknown had made them a sign, for suddenly the grip on Tim's shoulders was lifted, the ominous bayonets raised. Lean-Shanks and his pal continued their whispered conversation, wherein Tim felt that his fate was being discussed. For the first time since he had embarked on this final project of his, Tim realized that he had very effectually run his head into a noose and that at this moment his life was only worth a wave of the hand from that veiled charlatan up there. He certainly passed a few minutes of very unpleasant suspense, during which, for the umpteenth time in his life, he cursed himself for an impetuous fool. Then suddenly a peremptory voice from above called to Lean-Shanks, and there followed an animated conversation between the Great Unknown and his Lieutenant in a language which Tim did not understand. The conversation presently drifted into a one-sided oration from above, Lean-Shanks merely nodding his head from time to time and showing his large white teeth in an unpleasant-looking grin.

However, the upshot of this was that the grip was lifted from Tim's shoulders and the bayonets vanished from his line of vision. Lean-Shanks then said: 'Follow me!' and led the way up the wooden stairs, Tim immediately following. Down in the courtyard a hundred pairs of eyes followed Tim's progress upwards; obviously the admittance of a mere nobody into the great presence had never been witnessed before.

When Tim and Lean-Shanks reached the veranda, the veiled figure was no longer there. Lean-Shanks led the way through one of the doors, and as soon as Tim had followed in his wake, he closed that door behind him. Tim found himself in a small square room, with a grated window set high up in the wall facing him, through which he only caught a tiny glimpse of the sky. Lean-Shanks curtly ordered him to wait and then disappeared through another door on the left. While he waited, not without a feeling of nervous excitement, Tim heard again the peremptory voice speaking some dialect or other; and, after a moment or two, Lean-Shanks returned, held the narrow door open, and beckoned to him to enter.

Tim walked in; the door was closed behind him, and he stood alone in the presence of the Great Unknown. He sat on a chair with a high back; there was a table in front of him littered with papers. His head was swathed in a veil, but he wore fairly ordinary clothes: flannel shirt and trousers, and a wide sash round his waist, and he had on a pair of brown shoes, and wore a wrist-watch—two things which added a strange note of incongruity to the surroundings. There was a carpet on the floor and several chairs ranged against the walls. All the furniture looked as if it had come out of a good cabinet-maker's hands. Tim had not seen any like it since he left Monsataz.

'You claim to have a message for me?' the Great Unknown said in Portuguese, after the first few moments of silence during which Tim felt that a pair of piercing eyes were scrutinizing him from behind the veil.

'If you don't mind, we'll talk English,' Tim retorted firmly, and, without waiting to be asked, he dragged a chair nearer to the table and sat down facing the veiled man.

Rather to his surprise the latter replied in English also.

'By all means,' he said, and then added: 'What is your message?'

'Let me begin by introducing myself to you. My name is Traskmoore. I am a Major in the Irish Guards, acting

Brigadier-General during the War, now retired. Until I succeeded to the title on my uncle's death two years ago I was Timothy O'Clerigh—you have heard the name when last you were in England.'

The veiled man did not take up the challenge; and after a few seconds he asked, speaking very slowly and still in English: 'And why have you come here?'

Tim answered boldly: 'To find you.'

After which there was absolute silence in the room.

The veiled man had not made the slightest sign nor uttered the faintest exclamation: he sat there, in his high-backed chair, like some strange and ghostly image. Tim kept his eyes fixed upon the veiled face before him, trying with all his might to guess at what went on behind those folds; but though he could vaguely discern the outline of a prominent nose and long, hard chin, and felt, rather than saw, the fixity of a searching gaze which rested upon him, he could not gauge how this sudden revelation had affected the mountebank. After a while the silence got on his nerves; it had become so tense that he almost thought he could hear the ticking of the other's wrist-watch, and the stertorous breathing of someone —Lean-Shanks probably—the other side of the door.

When he could stand the silence no longer he said: 'Would you like me to lay my cards down on the table? We are Europeans, both of us—not half-civilized barbarians. Shall I tell you the purpose of my coming to this God-forsaken hole?'

'If you please,' the veiled man replied curtly.

This attitude of aloofness on the part of the charlatan was certainly disconcerting. Tim wondered what he was playing at. He had already made it pretty clear to this play-actor that he, Tim, had no doubt as to his identity, and also that he was approaching him now in an entirely friendly European spirit.

'Would you mind taking off that veil?' he asked good-humouredly. 'I should find it easier to talk sense if you would.'

'You will have to talk sense, nevertheless, Mr.—er—Major—I forget your name....'

'Traskmoore is my name, Mr.—er—Dudley Stone.'

No! the man did not wince. He certainly had nerve. All he said was: 'You'll have to be brief, too, I have no time to waste'—which nearly caused Tim O'Clee to lose his temper. Fortunately he had tight hold over himself. His whole fortune and that of the woman he loved depended on this man's good will—not altogether, perhaps, because there were those photographs and the old letters which Marivosa had shown him, but difficulties could be got over so much more smoothly if only this abominable charlatan would be amenable to reason.

'Look here, Mr. Stone,' Tim said firmly, 'let us, in heaven's name, understand one another like two decent civilized Europeans. I have travelled thousands of miles for the sole purpose of finding you—alive, I hoped. God only knows what I haven't been through before I got here; but now here I am, and, thank heaven—here you are also. If you won't take off that stupid veil, you won't, and that's that; but do let me assure you, on the word of honour of an Irish gentleman—and you still remember what that means, don't you?—that my feelings towards you are entirely friendly, and that my greatest hope at the present moment is that when I go back to Europe it will be in your company and that of your—adorable daughter.'

The veiled man leaned forward in his chair and rested his arms on the table.

'You really interest me,' he said, 'Mr.—or should I say Lord Traskmoore?'

'The latter, if you please,' Tim replied cheerily. 'As a matter of fact, your being alive at this moment, sitting opposite to me, has made it possible. So you see ... But for God's sake take off that awful veil, or I shall begin to think that you are a leper, or something horrible.'

'Suppose you get on with what you have to say, Lord Traskmoore'—and to Tim's sensitive ear there appeared to be an ironical emphasis on his name—'I have already told you that you interest me.'

'There isn't much more,' Tim went on, in a harsh, rather rasping voice, for his nerves by now were getting frayed. 'I have already told you that I came to this God-forsaken hole in order to find you. I sincerely hoped that you were still in the land of the living, but if you had gone west, I wanted a solid proof that you, Dudley Stone, were still alive in the month of October, 1924, when your wife, Juliana, went through a ceremony of marriage with my uncle, the Earl of Traskmoore, whose legitimate heir I had always held myself to be.'

'Very interesting—but I don't quite see...'

'You will in a moment. I am taking it for granted that you, as an Englishman, still have that sense of justice and fair play for which your country, and mine, too, are famous. I don't want to pry into your affairs. They are no business of mine, but I am not such a fool as not to guess that you have amassed an immense fortune in this unhallowed spot. But, hang it all, man, you must be sick of it all by now, with no one but niggers to talk to! Well now!—what do you say? Come back to Europe with me: give me a hand in seeing justice done to my poor self. It is a big fortune that you will help to throw into my lap and all you have to do is to name your own price. You won't regret it, I swear you won't. I do believe, once you are back in England, and have met one or two of your old friends, you'll never want to get back here—you'll be far happier as plain Mr. Dudley Stone than as the mysterious over-lord of this horde of savages. Millionaires have a very good time in Europe these days....'

Tim paused, chiefly because he was out of breath—he had never made such a long speech in all his life—but also because he felt that his nerves were getting more and more on edge, and that his voice grew more and more rasping, almost shrill; while the veiled man made no sign, nor uttered a word, only kept that veiled face of his turned fixedly upon him.

'For God's sake, man, say something!' he cried out at last, driven to exasperation by the silence, the statue-like stillness of that veiled and mysterious image. 'Surely,' he went on, with a forced laugh, 'I haven't talked all this time without making some impression upon you.'

'What impression did you expect to make?'

'I have appealed to your sense of fair play and justice, for one thing.'

'Not to mine—to that of an imaginary person whom you named Dudley Stone.'

Tim gave a long, low whistle. So that was the game, was it? The rascal wanted a big price probably—bigger than he imagined Tim was prepared to pay, and thought that a little more of this mummery would prove the right kind of thumbscrew to apply in order to gain his own ends. Aloud, he said: 'Put it that way if you like. But anyway, I am now offering you—whatever you choose to call yourself—one-third of my entire fortune, which was sworn for probate two years ago at three million English pounds, if you will accompany me on a trip to Europe.'

'A million English pounds! A princely offer!'

This time there was more than a suspicion of irony in the man's voice.

'Which means, I suppose,' Tim said dryly, 'that you count your wealth by the million and that one more or less does not tempt you—any more than an appeal to your sense of justice.'

No answer. Silence. Fixity. And now, in the atmosphere of the narrow room, the first sense of approaching danger. The man's statue-like calm had become ominous. Tim was conscious of a weird foreboding, a presage of something evil and mysterious which threatened him at the hands of this veiled, impenetrable image. But his mercurial temperament would not allow him to give way to any such fancies; fear for his own safety had never been a part of his character, and as soon as he felt the silence weighing his spirits down, he broke it with what might pass for a light-hearted laugh.

'That being the case,' he said, 'you had best hear my final argument. I admit that it is the strongest of all, but it means

so much to me that I hardly like to speak of it at all ... I have seen your daughter ... I have spoken with her ... I love her beyond everything on earth....'

Tim paused. For the first time since the beginning of the interview he had seen the statue-like figure give a distinct start. 'At last,' Tim thought, 'I have touched a vulnerable spot.' Aloud, he said: 'I am not a vain man, but I do know that Marivosa loves me—she is a mere child and perhaps does not quite understand, but ... Well!—never mind about that. I know that she adores you, that she believes you, and that, poor darling!—she believes in all that rubbish about her being Empress of Brazil.... Now, I cannot imagine that you, her father, can fail to worship such an exquisite creature as Marivosa: therefore I put it to you, as one civilized man to another, do you really think it fair to go on hoodwinking her like this? She will have to be undeceived presently, and if she has nothing else to fall back on in the way of happiness, the poor darling will break her heart.'

Once more silence and absolute calm.

'My finding you here alive,' Tim went on earnestly, 'has made me a rich man. I can give Marivosa all the luxury—everything, in fact, that any woman can desire, not to mention love and loyalty.... Well! never mind about that. She'll soon forget all this business over here. After a bit it'll seem like a dream, for she's not happy now. You know she is not, but I swear that as my wife she shall never know one moment's unhappiness. Now do you see why I just beg you to come to Europe and help me put everything right over there—for Marivosa's sake? If you don't...'

'Well!'—and the voice from behind the veil came loud and peremptory—'why do you hesitate?'

'I don't. I don't see why I should not tell you straight that I am not really dependent on your good will for getting my rights. I came to you with a sporting offer, as man to man, and you refuse to listen to me. Well! you may have your reasons for that. I don't know what they are and I don't care. Just answer me one straight question and I won't trouble you again. Will you allow Marivosa to come away with me? I swear to you that she loves me. Will you let me take her away from here and make her my wife?'

'No.'

The answer had, at any rate, the advantage of being straight and to the point. The veiled man had not moved: he only spoke the word in a hard and peremptory tone.

Tim rose, and said quietly and with a very good assumption of light-heartedness: 'Very well! then there's nothing more to be said. I'm sorry you've taken it that way. I hoped we might have been friends, for we have both of us suffered at the hands of the same woman—though each of us in a different way. However—now I shall have to fight my battles myself, which is all to the good as far as I am concerned. Don't vent any spleen on Marivosa, will you? It wouldn't be fair, would it? She loves me, and she's going to be my wife—that is a fact which is as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.... Well! s'long, old man! We won't shake hands on it, will we?'

With a light laugh he turned and went to the door. Still the veiled man did not speak. Tim pushed open the door and stepped out. The next moment a loud oath broke from his lips: 'You devil! You treacherous devil!'

Lean-Shanks and three of his colleagues had been waiting for him. Two pairs of hands seized hold of his arms and twisted them backwards with a violent jerk; two more were entwined round his legs, so that he lost his balance and came down on his knees. He struggled fiercely, desperately, but already his arms were being tied behind his back with a rope; then, when he knew that it was a four-to-one fight and that the game was up, he threw back his head and laughed.

'Tim O'Clee,' he said to himself, 'you are the biggest fool that ever walked on God's earth.' But he said nothing aloud, because one of those damned niggers was forcing his head back so that he thought his neck would break, whilst he stuffed a thick wad of something soft into his mouth.

The last thing he was conscious of was the tall figure of the veiled charlatan standing over him and of his sepulchral voice saying slowly in English: 'Fool! you utter, damned fool! You thought by chucking a few miserable pounds at me you would persuade me to give up wealth such as you with your silly brain never dreamed of ... and you dared make love to my daughter, did you? Well! she's not for you—see....'

Then he spoke to his Lieutenants:

'Throw this garbage away,' he said. 'If he's still alive to-morrow morning, you may shoot him or do anything else you like with him.'

Tim was just conscious enough to hear those beastly niggers chortle; then one of them struck him a violent blow on the head, and the last thing that reached his fading senses was a derisive laugh and an ironical voice calling: 'S'long, old man!'

## XVI

An eternity had gone by since Tim had regained partial consciousness. He was lying on a mud floor: his arms were tied behind his back and a thick rope was wound round his legs. His head ached furiously, and he was terribly hungry and still more thirsty.

Eternity had been spent in vain, bone-breaking, nerve-shattering struggles to get his arms free—all in vain; those damned niggers knew how to truss a man securely. Once or twice Tim fainted: partly through the pain in his head, partly through the foul atmosphere and filthy exhalations from dank walls and earthen floor. The place was in total darkness: never since it had been built had any outside air penetrated within its walls.

It was while he was slowly returning to his senses after one of these syncopes that a familiar voice came to his ears. At first he only caught a few disjointed sentences.

'There were rumours on the *plaça* ... I feared it might be you ... Holy Virgin and all the Saints...! What incredible rashness...!'

Tim slowly opened his eyes. The voice was Fra Federico's. Heavens alive! How welcome! A door somewhere had been left open and a streak of faint, grey light revealed the vague outline of the old priest bending over Tim.

'Well! I'm in for it this time, Padre,' said Tim ruefully.

The old man woefully shook his head.

'Whatever induced you...?' he began.

'To beard that cursed charlatan in his den?' Tim broke in, with a shrug of his aching shoulders; 'I thought he was a white man, you see—and never dreamed he would be such a damned traitor.'

'If only I could do something for you....'

'I suppose you can't?'

'No man alive can help you, my son.'

'Could you, at any rate, undo these cursed ropes, Padre? It is so awful being trussed like a bally fowl.'

The old man's weak and trembling fingers fumbled for a long time with the cords, but at last he succeeded in loosening them, and with a final effort Tim got his arms and legs free. He stretched them with a sense of ease, though his limbs still ached furiously. He sat on the mud floor, with legs stretched out, since there was no attempt at furniture in the dank cell. The old man squatted on his heels.

'You must think me such a blithering fool, Padre,' Tim said, with a shamed laugh.

'Rash, my son,' the priest replied, 'very rash. Your story is all over the town—a stranger, so they say, a spy of the Government of Rio come to assassinate the Great Unknown, and was caught in the act. He is to be shot in the morning.'

'Shot or worse, Padre,' Tim said dryly. 'I have no illusions on that score, and I wouldn't care—much, because such a fool as I am has really no business to live. But it is on her account....'

'I know.'

'When you see her, Padre, tell her that I ... tell her ... No; never mind, don't say anything to her. She'll understand, I think.' He paused a moment, and then added: 'There will only be you now to look after her. And though I have behaved like the biggest fool outside Bedlam, I did just have sense enough not to carry what money I still possessed about with me when I went to visit that scurvy brigand. You will find a few thousand milreis in my pocket-book, Padre—you know, the old black one under my pillow in the hammock. Will you use that for the purpose of getting the poor darling into a convent? She will be better there, now that I can't...'

But the old man only shook his head dolefully.

'You attribute powers to me, my son,' he said, 'that I don't possess. I no more can stay the course of events in this place than I can, like Joshua, bid the sun to stand still. It was by the greatest miracle that I got here at all. One of the sentinels in charge of you had bad colic last night. I brought him some pills—they did him good and he was grateful—so I persuaded him to let me have a look at the prisoner ... I pretended it was curiosity ... and so...'

While the old man meandered on in a sad and dreary voice a strange change had come over Tim. Tired and stiff, he had struggled to his feet and started to pace up and down his murky prison cell; the habits of a lifetime caused him to re-adjust his shirt and trousers about his person, for they had been much damaged during his futile struggles with the Lieutenants. By the same token he unhitched and then re-buckled his belt, and it was while he did this that this sudden change came over him. He no longer listened to the old man's well-intentioned talk: actually, he forgot his aches and pains, the hopelessness of his position, his shame at his own folly ... his fingers had come in contact with a small phial which a few days ago he had tucked into the small pocket in his belt.

And now, when Fra Federico ceased speaking, trying to find the right words with which to introduce a subject that lay very near his heart, Tim paused in his restless pacing and squatted down beside his old friend. Had the light been a little less dim the priest could have seen a smile—a real, happy smile—hovering round the condemned man's firm lips; nor would he have failed to note a twinkle and a glimmer of hope and self-confidence in the Irish blue eyes.

'As you were saying, Padre?'

Even the voice was clearer, fresher: with a ring in it that to Fra Federico's sensitive ears almost sounded like triumph and joy. 'Though, alas! he is a heretic,' thought the old man, 'God has touched him with His grace: he does not fear death, and has hopes of eternal life.'

Aloud, he said: 'I spoke too much of earthly things, I fear, my son, when my sole object in coming to see you was to try and help you to turn your thoughts now to God.'

'You are the kindest friend man ever had, Padre,' Tim said, still with that happy smile upon his face. 'Would it comfort you if I told you that my whole train of thought has changed, all within the last two minutes?

'I can see that God's grace, Padre—and—and—something else.... No! I'm not blaspheming—I feel humble and thankful.... Oh! you can't think how thankful ... and I'll listen to any sermon you like to preach to me. You can recite the prayers for the dying, if you like, and I'll listen to them most reverently ... and I'll hum the "Dead March" to you—I know most of it—and if you want me to confess my sins to you, I'll even try to do that....'

'You mustn't scoff, my son. Remember...'

'I wouldn't scoff for the world. I swear that I have never been so earnest or so reverent in all my life.'

'If you feel that you have a grievous sin upon your conscience...'

'Lots and lots, Padre ... lots of sins, but none very grievous, unless you'd call a longing to strangle that damned mountebank a sin ... and there are at least two other human fiends I would murder to-morrow if I got the chance.'

The prisoner was obviously getting light-headed. Fra Federico captured his hands, and spoke kind, soothing words to him. In his soft tired voice he said the things that lay nearest his heart: the brevity of this miserable life, the freedom from sorrow only to be found in death, the felicity of eternal life. Tim would sooner have choked than interrupt the old man. To this pious ascetic, pitch-forked by the most amazing fate into this lair of brigands and savages, to talk to a fellow-Christian was an infinite joy and comfort; and reaction had set in as far as Tim was concerned: after hours of nerve-strain, sleeplessness, physical pain and mental anguish, this soft droning of a sympathetic voice acted as a soporific; his eyes closed, his head fell forward, and, still squatting on his heels, his hands imprisoned in the kindly grasp of his friend, he slept.

When he woke again, after a very few minutes, he was once more in total darkness, and Fra Federico had gone.

His fingers at once returned to the small pocket in his belt: they found the small phial and drew it out cautiously. With his teeth he loosened the cork, and holding the phial to his nose he sniffed it. Some of the last words which the veiled mountebank had spoken came ringing back to his ears.

'Throw this garbage away. If he's still alive to-morrow morning you may shoot him.'

And what he, Tim, thought at this moment amounted to this: 'It is a chance, anyway.'

He was still smiling. That Celtic, optimistic temperament was not playing him false: nor did the Irish sense of humour. He kept thinking of the Old Vic in London. Fancy thinking of the Old Vic in London while squatting in this pitch-dark, filthy hole, waiting to be shot—or something—on the morrow!

But he did think of the Old Vic and of a performance he had seen there of *Romeo and Juliet*: of Juliet taking the draught given her by the Friar, which was to simulate death for her, so that she need not marry Paris and could remain faithful to her Romeo. And he also thought of Fra Federico as another Friar, dispensing the precious liquid, showing him the row of little bottles and saying in his gentle, tired voice: 'It interested me to gather all the herbs which your great Shakespeare mentions in his plays, and to concoct those potions which play such an important part in some of his tragedies.' Then Fra Federico had talked of Romeo and Juliet, and recited the piece when the Friar gives Juliet the precious phial:

> 'No warmth, no breath, shall testify thou livest....'

And then again:

> '... thy eyes' windows fall,
> Like death, when he shuts up the day of life.'

And Tim had been so interested: the whole thing had so fired his Irish imagination that he had begged the old man to give him a small bottle of what he called 'Juliet's cold poison.' He had not really believed in it then—just an old dreamer's hobby, he thought—and he did not altogether believe in it now.... It was just a chance—and Tim, being Irish, liked to take his chance, especially with the prospect before him of being handed over to Lean-Shanks & Co., to do what they liked with him.

Well!—old Shakespeare, who knew most of what there is to know of human nature, did not make Juliet a coward. She took her chance; and Tim O'Clee, tossing down the contents of the phial at a draught, took his also.

## XVII

There are moments in the life of every adventurer worth his salt that he would give years of his life not to have gone through: moments when manhood is at its lowest ebb, when humiliation begets shame, and the wish to die becomes so strong that it is akin to despair. There is no brave man living who has not had his moments of cowardice: who has not once in his life felt the pangs of physical fear, or shrunk from facing the horrors of an unforeseen doom.

Tim, when he woke out of the coma into which Fra Federico's potion had thrown him, went through such an experience—felt the cold sweat, not of fear, but of unspeakable horror. He woke, at first only to semi-consciousness, to find himself lying on his back, under the clear star-lit canopy of night, on a bed, the feel of which he could not define. What he was chiefly conscious of was the awful stench that poisoned the midnight air and brought about a violent fit of nausea. He was frankly and horribly sick; and it was when he turned over on his side that he realized what the bed was on which he lay. It was composed of hundreds of corpses in a varying state of decomposition. A nightmare, such as Dante in his wild imaginings could alone have dreamed! And he, Tim, was lying on the top of these dead men; and as he turned over on his side, pieces of rotted flesh fell away from the bones, and skeletons rattled beneath his weight. A pale moon issuing from behind a veil of clouds shed a dim light over this Inferno, and Tim, luckily, fell into a swoon before its full horror was thus revealed to him.

When he awoke, the first streak of lemon-coloured light had rent the banks of clouds in the east. It was bitterly cold. Tim, clad only in cotton shirt and trousers, shivered until his teeth chattered, and his limbs felt as if they were encased in ice.

Dawn! What dawn? Was it only an hour ago that he had been thrown out like offal into this ditch?—the ditch reserved for traitors, and spies of the Government—or had he laid here two days and two whole nights, the only living thing in this open, unclean sepulchre? Had he been left here as dead, and as dead been left to rot, or become the prey of carrion?—or would the bodyguard of the Great Unknown come round presently to see whether among this heap of garbage there was still a spark of life extant which it was their duty to quench?

This was the moment in the adventurer's life to escape which he would have bartered all his best years: the moment when an overwhelming shame deprived him of the very desire to live, when the wish to die killed the very sense of hope. To be dead before these fiends returned: to close his eyes in the last long sleep before the rosy dawn drove away the night.

The rest is silence. Who shall dare probe the secrets that lie hidden with a brave man's soul? Horror, despair, a nameless, numbing fear: and, above all, the bitter humiliation, the shame of folly and of failure—Tim O'Clee knew them all during this agonizing hour, and shared the knowledge only with his Maker.

Then came the reaction. It came with the sudden lighting up of the desert by the risen sun, by the torrid heat of day that came instantly on the top of the iciness of the night, and turned the shivers of cold that shook Tim's spine into an ague-like fever. With the fever came a rush of blood to the head: a certain light-headedness, followed by a sense of bravado, a defiance of fate and a contempt of self, all of which are peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon and the Celtic temperament. Had Tim been really and fully conscious, he would probably have put his feelings into some such words as: 'I am dashed if those savages are going to get the better of me.'

As it was, he took his bearings, set his teeth, and crawled out of the noisome ditch. Fortunately it was neither deep nor precipitous: hands and knees did all that was required. Again, fortunately, the rascal who had robbed him of his boots, and of his leather belt, had not thought it worth while, apparently, to take his shirt and trousers: at least he was not naked and could dare to creep out into the open. But he proceeded cautiously before he ventured to glance over the top. There was no one about—no reason, of course, to mount guard over the dead, and the ditch of traitors was a long way out of the city, facing the north and in the rear of a rocky promontory, which Tim presently tried to scale.

'I must look a disgusting object,' he said to himself, when after much effort, much scraping of hands and knees and considerable damage to cotton trousers, he reached the stony eminence, from whence he was able to survey his own

position and the lie of the city. It lay before him like a map; the narrow streets, the bird-cage huts, the stone habitations of the *élite* in this land of brigands, the *plaça* where he had witnessed the most astounding spectacle of superstition and sorcery, and the so-called castle where dwelt that mighty charlatan, that arch-traitor, mountebank, devil incarnate, whom Tim now cursed up and down with all the forceful language which his state of weakness had left at his command.

When he had done cursing, he felt again very sick; the sun was blazing down upon him, his skin was burning, and he felt icy cold; his legs would hardly bear him. Spying a clump of scrubby palms, he crawled into their shade.

'Something has got to be done, Tim, my lad,' he said to himself. 'And to begin with, food of sorts and drink must be got somehow.'

He knew by now something of the Sertao, and his brief but close friendship with Fra Federico had revealed to him some of the secrets of this arid land. He had learned how to look for water-holes, and where these were most likely to be found: and where there was a water-hole, there also would the deep-rooted *patatas* be found. Naked, monotonous, inhospitable as was this desert-land, it furnished food and drink for cattle, and what was good for cattle was in Tim's present desperate condition good also for him.

Throughout the ages the greatest incentive for man's enterprise and courage has been the necessity to feed himself, and Tim found that he had quite a good deal of strength left in him to go in search of a water-hole. When he found one, he drank of the water first, and washed himself in it afterwards: then, having found a clump of *patatas da Vaqueiro* close by, he pulled some up and ate, recommending his digestion to the tender care of Saint Patrick. After which sumptuous meal, he stretched out his aching body in the shade and went to sleep.

'Nothing to be done till nightfall,' he murmured, as he slipped away into the Land of Oblivion. 'After that, we shall see.'

## XVIII

Fra Federico's time at Canudos had come to an end, and to-morrow would see him on his way to another less strenuous scene for his activities. He felt very sad because there were one or two strong sentimental ties that bound him to this arid, inhospitable spot. There was Marivosa for one—a pure, sweet soul, whom he implored the Holy Virgin to take under her protection: and there were, perhaps, a score of Christian souls, who he hoped had learned to resist the many temptations to sin and crime which were so constantly thrown in their way. As for that nice rash young heretic—Fra Federico caught himself shedding a tear over his terrible fate. He had been too defiant, too sure of himself: had not been content to follow humbly in God's Will. Thank God! he, Fra Federico Evangelista, had had the privilege of receiving his last confession and had spoken the comforting words of absolution in his ear.

And Fra Federico busied himself packing up his books, and his phials and pill-boxes; and in the interval, when he was tired, he recited his rosary, and asked God to bless the Christian souls who lived in the Sertao—with special reference to the nice young heretic who at the last had no doubt seen the truth—and to forgive all those who sinned against His laws.

And suddenly the open doorway of his humble abode was darkened by the appearance of a figure, which caused the pious old priest to throw up his arms and to fall upon his knees, praying God to have mercy on his soul, for he beheld a ghost.

'Go, Satan, go!' he ejaculated, 'in the name of the Father, and of...'

But a whole-hearted if somewhat harsh laugh broke in upon his orisons.

'It isn't Satan, Padre; only a miserable shred of humanity.'

The voice was unmistakable—and surely a ghost neither laughed nor talked. It was the young heretic, no doubt; but had he risen from the dead, or...?

Tim was already by the side of the old man, and his arms were round the thin, bent shoulders.

'Let me help you up, Padre,' he said, 'you are all of a tremble.'

With Tim's aid, Fra Federico struggled back to his feet.

'My son!' he exclaimed feebly, for his fright had upset his weak old heart, so that it pounded away in his chest and deprived him of breath, 'where in heaven's name do you come from?'

'From the grave, Padre,' Tim replied seriously. Then, seeing that the old man's cheeks had become the colour of ashes and that his poor thin lips were quivering, he went on more lightly: 'They thought I was dead, and did not waste either their time, or powder and shot on me, but just treated me like hog-wash and threw me into a ditch, on the top of decaying corpses and rattling skeletons.'

'Sit down, my friend,' Fra Federico said more calmly, 'and tell me more clearly ... I am a little bewildered ... that is, I don't really understand.... You say that...?'

Tim O'Clee embarked upon a succinct narrative of everything that had befallen him from the time when his old friend left him alone, fast asleep in the murky prison cell, until the happier moment when, unable to contain his impatience any longer, he had braved detection and made his way, with infinite precautions, to the door of Fra Federico's abode. Long after he had finished his story the old man sat with clasped hands entwined in his rosary, murmuring his Pater Nosters and Ave Marias. Tim was loath to break in on his meditations; but at last the priest drew a long, deep sigh, and he said: 'Ah!, he is a wonderful man, your great Shakespeare. Next to the good God Himself, it is he who saved your life.'

'Next to God and you, Padre,' Tim said earnestly. 'Do you remember giving me that little bottle?'

'Yes, I do. But I never thought...'

'Nor did I. I meant to take it back with me to England and send it to the bigwigs of the medical profession, with notes about you, Padre, and what a wonder you really are ... and now I have drunk it all, and I can swear what a wonderful thing it is ... so you will have to give me another bottle.'

'You make fun of me, my dear young friend. My poor experiments wouldn't interest the great ones of the world.'

'Wouldn't they just? You give me another bottle, Padre, of your wonderful liquor and I'll guarantee that your fame will be all over the world in no time. You'll have to come to Europe, and they'll give you a splendid appointment—something to do with the Pope in Rome—with lots of money and a beautiful house.'

Tim babbled on, half-intoxicated with his own eloquence, and his jaded nerves taking the form of excited loquaciousness. He felt light-headed, very sick, very giddy, and had but little idea of what he was talking about.

Fra Federico smiled indulgently, and passed quivering fingers over his precious phials.

'I am too old, my son, for splendid appointments, for money, or beautiful houses,' he said, 'but...'

'Is that the bottle?' Tim said, as the old man paused and with loving eyes gazed on a small phial which rested in his hand almost as if it were alive.

'Yes! This is it. The last draught I possess.'

'Will you trust me with it, Padre?'

'Of course I will, my son. Not for my sake—I care no more for fame now—but for the honour of your great

Shakespeare, to prove that in this, as in everything else, he was always learned and always right.'

He handed the small phial to Tim, just as if he were parting from something more precious than life. Tim took it and clasped it tightly in his hand. It was with a tightening of the heart that he watched his old friend tottering about among his few belongings; the poor old knees were very shaky, and the thin, frail hands trembled all the while that they fingered the books and the phials that had been the solitary ascetic's only source of joy.

After a little while Tim rose and said: 'A wash and a shave is what I need most now, Padre, and with your permission...'

'And you must be hungry, too. How remiss of me not to have thought....'

'When I am clean I'll eat, my friend. Just for the moment I feel as if I could never touch food again.'

'Then you must refresh yourself as best you can. You are young, and physical troubles with the young are soon past and forgotten. You know the poor resources of this small house, but I have a nice supply of fresh water just now from yesterday's rain.'

'Oh! It rained yesterday, did it?'

'A storm, my son ... you didn't know?'

'How could I, Padre? I was a dead man, lying on a mattress of corpses. I don't even know how long I lay there, dead to the world.'

'Two days and two nights have gone by since I said farewell to you in your prison cell.'

'Good Lord! What a sight I must look! Where is that water you speak of? I shall want bucketsful before I'm clean.'

'Take all you want, my friend; and when I'm back, you must tell me more fully just how you felt when you took the draught.'

'You're going out, Padre?'

'To say farewell to my flock.'

'Then ... you will see her?'

'Most likely.'

The old man's reply came half-hesitatingly and obviously troubled. He fidgeted, too, looking for his hat and stick, and avoided meeting Tim's glance.

'There is something on your mind, Padre,' Tim said abruptly, and seized hold of the priest's wrists. 'Out with it!'

'There is much on my mind, my son.'

'Then, tell me....'

'The Great Unknown leaves Canudos to-morrow....'

'What? For good?'

'No, no! He often goes on great expeditions, with his Lieutenants and an escort—a different escort every time. No one knows his destination, nor the day of his return.'

'The old devil! And he goes to-morrow ... you are sure?'

'Quite sure. I go part of the way with them.'

'Then, while he is gone, I shall see Marivosa!' Tim exclaimed, his voice quivering with excitement.

The old man shook his head.

'She goes with her father,' he said softly.

'Goes? ... goes? ... where?'

'No one knows.'

'But you go with them.'

'Part of the way. I go on to Cumbe, where I have a house.'

'You can guess, though'—and Tim's hold tightened on the old man's wrists—'you can guess ... you know!'

Fra Federico made no reply. Tears gathered in his dim eyes and rolled slowly down his withered cheeks.

'Tell me, Padre,' Tim said calmly. 'You needn't be afraid. It is just possible that I have already guessed; and, in any case...'

'Her father,' the old priest said slowly, and his voice was half-choked with the sorrow that he felt, 'her father is taking her to the *quinta* of Dom Manoël da Lisbao, whom she is to marry almost immediately.'

Tim allowed Fra Federico's hands to fall from his grasp. He stood quite still for a few seconds, meeting his old friend's sorrowful gaze with a firm glance; then he said slowly: 'I swear by God that she is not.'

Fra Federico shook his head dolefully.

'You cannot prevent it, my son. She is guarded day and night now; and what are you among these thousands?'

'You ask me that, Padre,' Tim retorted impulsively, 'you, the minister of God! I am the minister of His will,' he went on boldly, and threw back his head with a superb gesture of self-confidence and defiance, 'and His will is that Marivosa shall not be thrown to the wolves, but be given to me, to love and to cherish, and to cause her to forget this abominable life of brigandage and cruelty. She is mine, Padre, I tell you. God gave her to me. She is mine, and I'll not give her up to ten thousand devils, or to that arch-fiend, Dom Manoël. Now then,' he said more calmly, 'what you've got to do, Padre, is to bring her here. I must see her ... talk to her...'

Fra Federico sighed. 'She will not listen to you, my friend. They have poisoned her mind against you ... they've persuaded her that you tried to assassinate her father ... half a dozen of them have sworn that they caught you in the act, and killed you as you struck at the Great Unknown.'

'The lying devils! But all the more reason, Padre, why I should see her.'

'She wouldn't come if she thought you were here.'

'Don't tell her. Say nothing. Don't name me. Don't speak of me. But for God's sake, bring her here, or I swear I'll scale the walls of that damned palace of hell and carry her off in my arms—and then let all those devils do their worst with us both.'

Fra Federico had already experienced some of these wild moods of his friend. He had put them down to the Irish temperament, and realized before now that nothing he could say or do would check them. Frankly, also, some of the young adventurer's enthusiasm had fired his dormant imagination. Perhaps he remembered the day when he, a young theological student, had laughed at bars and bolts, and penetrated to the very presence of the woman he loved, regardless of husband, brother, father, or the disgrace which, in consequence of his audacity, had fallen upon him and blighted his

career. Because of the velvety eyes of a lovely Andalusian, he had lost all chance of benefice, of preferment, or of consideration. By orders of superior authorities he had been relegated to this distant corner of the earth, where ambition could find no scope and where temptation could not hold sway. And remembering all that, his atrophied heart went out in affection and hope to this young lover, who, like himself, was prepared to hazard everything for a woman's sake.

'I'll see what I can do,' he murmured softly. 'Wait for me here. Promise you'll wait, and not venture out ... for my sake....'

'I promise.'

Fra Federico picked up his hat and stick. It was late afternoon: the hot sun was sinking down behind the range of mountains in the west. In this land, where there is no twilight, darkness treads hard on the heels of light.

And there would be no moon to-night, for the sky was heavy with clouds.

## XIX

And Tim waited for what seemed an eternity. He washed and he shaved; fortunately he did possess another belt to replace the one which had been stolen from him: into his pocket he reverently stowed the precious phial given to him by Fra Federico. Then he brewed himself some coffee and drank that, though he could not force himself to eat.

The veil of night had fallen over the *plaça* when he heard Fra Federico's voice outside the hut.

'Will you honour my poor house?' the priest was saying; 'your Lieutenants can wait outside.'

There followed a certain clatter and din which more than suggested that the Empress of Brazil was under an armed escort. However, the priest's house had always been looked upon, even by the worst of these brigands, as something akin to holy ground. There was not one man among this crowd of semi-savages who would dare to cross the threshold unbidden. From what Tim could hear, the Lieutenants who accompanied Marivosa settled themselves down on the *plaça*: probably one or two of them mounted guard outside the door. He drew back into the darkest corner of the room and waited. A second or two later she came in, closely followed by Fra Federico.

She came in, and stood quite still and expectant while the old man busied himself with lighting the small oil-lamp, and then placing it in the centre of the roughly hewn table in the middle of the room. This still left the corner where Tim was standing in darkness, though he could see the priest's glance wander timorously round the room. But Tim made no movement: he just feasted his eyes on his beloved. By a happy chance she had on the same quaint leather suit which she was wearing when first he saw her coming towards him in the forest clearing. Since then she had completely absorbed his thoughts; her beauty had captured both his senses and his imagination, and her personality had thrust itself within the innermost recesses of his heart. With unappeasable hunger his eyes devoured her loveliness: the small head, with its crown of auburn hair, the dark, unfathomable eyes, the cherry-red lips that were fashioned for kisses, and the straight slimness of her beneath the tough leather, the skin like ivory, the slender hands that he had held imprisoned while her small head nestled upon his shoulder.

As she stood there with the feeble light of the oil lamp outlining her beautiful profile, she appeared so young, so innocent, so unprotected, that an immense tenderness for her welled up in the adventurer's heart—a tenderness greater than the intense physical longing for another touch of her lips and hands. And when she turned suddenly to Fra Federico and asked: 'Is anyone else here?' he came forward out of the shadow and, with head bent, knelt down at her feet.

She saw him before he had sunk on his knees and at once she stepped back, as if she was afraid of contact with something ugly and obnoxious; and again she turned to Fra Federico, and she asked: 'What is this man doing here?'

But the old priest had already tiptoed out of the room.

Marivosa looked around her with an expression on her face as of a trapped young animal. The next moment she would obviously have turned and fled from the room, but that Tim was the quicker of the two and already held her imprisoned in his arms. She had entire mastery over herself and made no effort to free herself; bred as she was amongst a race of strong men she had a very clear knowledge of what physical force could do, and was, moreover, far too deeply conscious of her own dignity to attempt the impossible. But she did look Tim squarely in the face, and what he saw in her eyes and the curl of her lips caused a hot flush of mingled shame and anger to rise to his forehead.

'Heavens alive!' he murmured, 'what have I done? Why do you look at me like that?'

'Because,' she said coldly, and with complete self-possession, 'I am wondering at this moment whether I hate you or despise you most.'

'But, God in Heaven!—what for?'

'You came like a miserable sneaking thief to this place, where no one wanted you ... God knows why you came, or who paid you to spy on us all.'

Even then he did not let her go: in fact, he held her tighter than ever. Fortunately Fra Federico had prepared him for her attitude of mind, or he might have thought that something had unhinged her brain.

Now, when she paused, obviously—alas!—because tears were choking her voice, he said, with all the gentleness, the tenderness that he could command: 'My beloved one, Fra Federico has already warned me that those devils up there have told you lies about me.'

'Fra Federico was mistaken,' she interrupted calmly, 'there are no devils up there and no one has told me lies. It is from my dear, dear father's own lips that I heard what happened at the castle three days ago.'

'And what did he tell you?'

'The truth.'

'What did he tell you?' Tim insisted.

'That with subtle cunning you wormed yourself into his presence and there raised your murdering hand against him.'

'The wicked old liar!'

The words had escaped before Tim could check them. Marivosa heard them without flinching, only the look in her eyes became harder, more fully charged with contempt than it had been before.

'My God!' thought Tim, 'but she knows how to hate,' and manlike, he added to himself: 'She would not hate me so if she did not love me.'

'What do you think you will gain by blasphemy?' she asked him coolly.

'Whoever told you that I raised as much as a finger against your father,' Tim retorted, 'lied—lied abominably. I went to him as one white man to another. I put a proposal before him which was fair and straightforward. I told him that I worshipped you. He listened to me, and then treacherously let his beastly niggers seize me and throw me into a filthy dungeon. He ordered me to be shot—or worse than shot.... How can you say that there are no devils up there?'

'They told me that you were dead: that God had been good to you and allowed you to escape the punishment that you deserved.'

'Would you rather I had been tortured to death by those unclean niggers ... I, a white man—and your lover?'

For the first time she struggled, and, as he was taken unawares, she succeeded in freeing herself, and turning to the door would certainly have run away only that Tim, quick as lightning, forestalled her and stood firm as a rock between her and the door. Just for the space of a few seconds he wondered if she would call for help, in which case, of course, the game would have been up; but she had not done it yet, and all she did now was to draw herself up to her full height and to give him another dose of her withering, contemptuous glance. It seemed to sweep him up and down, as if such contempt as she felt must annihilate anything that dared to go on living. After which, she said, with a shrug and in a tone of bitter irony:

'My lover....'

'Yes!' Tim retorted coolly. 'I am your lover, and you are mine. We belong to one another as surely as the moon does to the night and the sun to the day.... We belong to one another: you to me and I to you, because of that wonderful hour when you lay in my arms by the bank of the stream, and your lips received and gave that first kiss. Do you think that after that I would allow any power on earth or in hell to take you from me? ... that after that I would stand by and see you married—married, my God! to that disgusting swine, da Lisbao?—now that I know what it feels like to hold you to my heart, to see the light of love kindled in your eyes, to taste the sweetness of your kiss ... that I should ... Great God! I would be a miserable fool...!'

'A fool, or a madman, I think,' she said, still apparently with absolute self-possession.

'That's it—a madman. But, my dear, how can I help going crazy now that I have found out just how much you love me?'

'Love you?' she exclaimed. 'I?'

'Yes, you! you beautiful, adorable, worshipped woman, you love me....' He came a step or two nearer to her: 'If you do not love me—if you hate and despise me as you say you do, why do you not call to those beastly niggers out there and let them drag me out of your sight ... let them mete me the punishment which you say I deserve? ... Call to them, my dear, if you hate me—for if you hated me really, I would as soon be dead.'

His voice had sunk to a whisper, so soft and so low that it scarcely rose above the sound of the distant murmuring stream, or the mumbling of Fra Federico's orisons in the next room. He came nearer to her and nearer, and suddenly seized her once more in his arms, and hungrily his lips sought hers, her eyes, her hair, her throat and chin. Nor did he let her go till he had had his fill. When his arms fell away from her, he threw back his head and gave a low, triumphant laugh. 'Now send any dirty nigger in here, and tell your precious father that I am alive—very much alive—and let him do his damnedest with me.... Go, for God's sake, my dear, as I might forget that I am a white man and that the dream of my life is still to make you my wife.'

He stood away from the door, and, like a man dazed or dreaming, went slowly back into the gloom. He no longer looked at her. What gesture she made then, or how she looked, he never knew: all he did know was that presently he heard the soft patter of her feet upon the floor, the opening and closing of the door, and then nothing more.

She had gone; and Tim, crouching in the gloom, buried his burning head in his hands, and a queer kind of sob rose to his throat and nearly choked him. A moment or two later, Fra Federico came shuffling back into the room. The old man seemed to bring an atmosphere of peace and common sense back into the place. Tim, after a while, watched him moving about the room, once more sorting out his phials and pill-boxes ready for packing for the coming journey: and the sight comforted and soothed his nerves.

After a few minutes he asked his old friend: 'What about this expedition to-morrow, Padre? You start with them, don't you?'

'Yes, my son. We start as soon after dawn as possible. The Great Unknown and his daughter ... some of his Lieutenants, a mounted escort, and the carriers with the pack mules.'

'You don't know the destination?'

'No. But I can guess.'

'That swine, da Lisbao, has a ranch somewhere in the Sertao...?'

'Yes!'

'And that is where they are going?'

'I think so.'

'Do you go with them as far as there?'

'Yes. And from there I go to Cumbe.'

'How do you travel, Padre?'

'Like they all do—on horseback.'

'I see.'

Tim said nothing more, but sat musing in the darkness, while Fra Federico muttered a few Aves in the interval of collecting his scanty possessions.

Suddenly the old priest spied something that was lying on the ground. He stooped, picked it up, and held it to the light to see what it was. It was a small packet wrapped up in a piece of silk and tied together with a bit of faded ribbon.

'Sua Excellençia must have dropped this,' he said, and turned the packet over and over between his trembling fingers.

Tim, at once impelled by curiosity, came out of his corner and looked over the priest's shoulder. He recognized the packet which Marivosa had undone for his benefit one day: it contained photographs and letters which meant the possession of Traskmoore to him. Without saying 'by y'r leave,' he took the packet out of the old man's hand.

'It is mine as much as hers, Padre,' he said quietly, in response to Fra Federico's protest. 'Your finding it here is the greatest proof of all that God is on my side in this business.'

'I shall have to give it back to Marivosa da Gloria, my son,' the old man objected.

'So you shall, Padre. With your own kind hands you shall give it to her on her wedding-day.'

And in spite of Fra Federico's reiterated protests, he broke open the packet and examined the contents. Once more the goggling eyes of Juliana seemed to jeer at him from the photograph; but it was not on her face that he gazed so intently, as on that of a man with narrow, hatchet face and hollow cheek, with deep-sunk, penetrating eyes, a beak-like nose, and large, protruding chin. 'From your loving father, Dudley Stone,' was inscribed on the back, with the date 1926—two years after the marriage of Uncle Justin to that woman with the large teeth and goggling eyes.

The letters were there, too—the last one dated 1925, all signed 'Dudley Stone'; which went to prove that in that year the adventurer had not yet embarked on his career of charlatanism, and had not yet thought of burying his identity in a maze of blasphemous appellations.

'I wonder,' thought Tim, 'if these proofs would appear absolutely conclusive in a court of law.'

He did up the packet carefully once more and hid it in the pocket of his belt. Leaving his old friend still fussing over pill-boxes, he went out on the *plaça*. The night was very dark. He climbed to the top of a rock, from which he had a good view of the castle on the summit.

'If there is anything in thought transference,' he murmured to himself, 'my lovely one up there must know that her

precious packet is in my hands now, and that, please God, she'll be Countess of Traskmoore before the month is out.'

After that, as his nerves were still very much on edge, he went for a long tramp along the bank of the stream.

## XX

Slowly, through dust and sand, over stony tracks and winding bush paths, the company of *vaqueiros* detailed to guard the sacred person of the veiled prophet in his travels wound its way eastward. There were about a score of these men, magnificent riders, knowing every inch of this desert land, and inured to its pitfalls and dangers; dressed in their leather panoply, they looked more than ever like centaurs, at one with their splendid horses, which, but for the want of grooming, could have more than held their own at any European horse show.

The Great Unknown himself, with the Empress of Brazil beside him, rode in the van, with his bodyguard of fearsome Lieutenants both in front and behind him. With them rode Fra Federico Evangelista.

In the rear came a couple of covered wagons drawn by mules, and laden with provisions and all the paraphernalia necessary for the night's encampment. It was under the hood of one of these wagons that Tim had scrambled at the last moment of departure, when the multitude assembled on the *plaça* was down on its knees receiving the final blessing of that abominable mountebank, who had used this opportunity for the display of some of his most blasphemous bits of play-acting.

Fra Federico alone knew what Tim's intentions were, and had spent most of the night in prayer for the safety of this young adventurer whom he had learned to love as a son. As soon as Tim had finally assured himself that his beloved would indeed ride away with that limb of Satan, her father, he carried out the plan which he had devised in the night. He joined the crowd which was massed around the horses and the wagons, and boldly lent a helping hand to the carriers, who were busy loading and packing. No one took any notice of him. That was one of the most salient characteristics of this amazing place: the rank and file of the army of the Great Unknown, and the mass of the population, neither knew nor cared about one another. They were so introspective, so detached and mystical, that they had no knowledge—nor desire for knowledge—of their fellow-desert-dwellers. It was only the immediate bodyguard of the veiled prophet who kept a sharp look out on strangers or possible spies: the others, in spite of their disconcerting habit of staring, and staring hard for hours at a time, did not seem to be memorizing the person, or thing, on which their dark, melancholy eyes had rested for so long.

Tim had not been in Canudos much longer than a month. He had never become a prominent member of this community of brigands: and in Canudos Nature provides all the black mud necessary for effectual make-up and disguise. Tim, unrecognizable even to Fra Federico, with a coating of grime over his face and hands, the rest of him encased in his leather suit, worked stolidly with the carriers—who took him for one of themselves—until the moment when the final order for departure was given and the cavalcade set in motion, when, along with two or three half-breeds, he scrambled into the rearmost wagon. Marivosa, riding beside her father, passed so close to him that he could have touched her stirrup with his hand.

It seemed strange to go over the ground again which he had traversed such a little while ago with Esteban the carrier. From where he sat, as the mule-drawn wagon went jolting over the stony track, he saw receding slowly from his sight the landmarks which a very few weeks ago had appeared to him like portents of triumph. The mysterious city, dominated by the castle on the hill-top, with the houses and huts massed below seeming to stretch upwards like human arms extended in an eternal appeal—the panorama became smaller and smaller, more and more lost in that cloud of dust which hung over it like a drab shroud, masking for ever all the cruelties, the superstitions, and the crimes which were the life of that city of dreams.

'Dante, on his way home from the Inferno,' Tim said to himself, as the vista slowly faded from his sight.

The cavalcade had gone past the Bom Viagem which had been Tim's first halt in sight of Canudos; the Indian storekeeper was in his doorway—staring; one or two of his usual clients trooped out into the compound to see the horses and wagons go by. Landmarks all. Tim saw them go by with a faint sense of regret. Please God, he never would see this terrible place again; but there is always something sad in absolute finality ... and, after all, this God-forsaken hole was also the hallowed spot where he had met the one woman in the world, and where he had learned, even while teaching her, the first lesson of love.

The vanguard side-tracked before the road plunged into the scrub where Tim had beheld that wonderful mirage out of which Marivosa had come towards him like an angelic vision out of a dream. He was glad in a way not to have to jog along through it, sandwiched as he was between two niggers, and needing all his wits not to come in too close contact with their filthy bodies. By this time the sun was high in the heavens, and soon the halt was called for the midday *siesta*.

Tim, fated to feed and sleep with a lot of half-breeds, did his best to gulp down his own feelings and to appear normal in his behaviour. Fortunately they were a taciturn lot and took no notice of Tim's silence and abstraction. After a meal of black beans, followed by the ubiquitous farinha, he found a bit of shade under a clump of rough palms: and there, stretched out upon his back, his clasped hands under his head, he gazed upwards into nothingness and dreamed of Marivosa da Gloria.

## XXI

Though the road was different from the one along which Esteban had guided Tim on his way to Canudos, it was every bit as dreary, every bit as monotonous, as dusty, and as stony as the other. Three days and two nights of this awful monotony. Tim, who was inured to many hardships since first he landed in this southern hemisphere, did feel at times, while the wearisome jogging of the wagon lulled his senses into a state of semi-consciousness, that he had never suffered physically so much as he did now. After the second day he lost count of time: felt as if he had gone on like this since æons of time and would still go on throughout eternity.

He never once caught sight of Marivosa.

It was on the third day, after the midday *siesta*, that the whole landscape appeared to wake up as if from a cataleptic sleep: the road widened, stones were less to the fore, there was less dust, and water-holes were more frequent. In the distance, large patches of coarse grass became visible in the foot-hills, and immense herds of cattle could be seen grazing on the slopes. From time to time on the road the cavalcade would encounter a *vaqueiro* on his way home to his village, or even a cattle-dealer with pack-mule and a guide. Whenever this happened, Tim noticed that the traveller, whoever he might be, dismounted, uncovered his head, and stood respectfully by the roadside till the vanguard had gone by. The fame of the Great Unknown, his supposed miracles and reputation of sanctity, apparently extended even beyond the confines of the desert, and Tim remembered how, in the native quarters of Monsataz, even a few of the foreign traders spoke of the so-called prophet with bated breath.

Just before the sunset great excitement prevailed. The end of the journey was in sight. The half-breeds in charge of the wagons set up a chattering like a herd of monkeys, all the more marked after their habitual taciturnity. It seemed as if with this exit out of the desert most of these men were ready to follow Nature's lead, to shed their churlishness, and to don a new garment made up of good-fellowship and good-humour.

The *quinta* was in sight. All was well with the world. As soon as Tim understood this, he jumped down from the wagon, thankful to be able to walk a mile or two, and stretch himself out as it were both mentally and physically.

Soon he caught sight of the house where lived the man whom he hated most in all the world. Memories, which during the past hectic months had become somewhat dim, crowded in upon him once more, thick and fast. A number of faces flitted quickly past his mental vision: Dom Manoël, the thief and perjurer; Doutor da Pinto, victim of abominable treachery; Fra Martino, the genial rascal who had been his best friend; and amongst these, the sweet, sad face of Teresa,

bending over the dead body of her father, her great dark eyes filled with unuttered horror. Memories of the days at Monsataz: his search for Dudley Stone, the Café Bom Genio, the Dutchman, the Portuguese, the fantastic tales of the Great Unknown, who turned out to be Dudley Stone after all.

Ah, well! the Odyssey was ended: the mad adventure was drawing to a close. Would the play finish on a tragic, or a happy note? Would all that knavery, that blasphemous play-acting, triumph in the end, or would God stand by the adventurer who, single-handed, meant to outwit it all?

When Tim O'Clee in the wake of the last wagon finally turned into the stockade, the night had already closed in. The horsemen had dismounted and were leading their horses to the rear of the house, where supposedly the stables were situated. Tim only took a cursory glance at his surroundings: noted that the principal dwelling-house was large and substantially built on the brow of a hill, with verandas running along the outside walls, that two smaller houses nestled close by, that there were a number of outhouses and huts all inside the stockade, and that the whole group of buildings was backed by a grove of palms and acacias, beyond which stretched out as far as the distant range of hills innumerable cattle-pens, with cottages interspersed among them here and there.

But he was in no mood to study the landscape. He was only vaguely conscious of the beauty of the night: a clear, starlit, moonless night. Gradually the noise and bustle inside the stockade had subsided. Every man was busy with his own affairs, and Tim, after he had helped with the unloading of the wagons, was left to do very much as he pleased. He could only bless the happy disposition of these *vaqueiros*, with their habit of lounging against anything that was convenient, smoking endless cigarettes, and staring without comprehension, or desire to interfere.

He took a leaf out of their book, and, taking his stand against the shafts of an empty wagon, he, too, lounged and stared. He had chosen a position from whence he had a good view of a row of doors and windows which gave on the veranda. Three of these windows were brilliantly illuminated from within: they were wide open. Behind a thin mosquito-net stretched across the windows Tim caught sight of a table spread out obviously for supper. Places were laid for four, and there was a profusion of flowers and of silver. A couple of coffee-coloured servants in white coats, immaculately turned out, were putting the final touches to what was obviously the table of a rich man accustomed to European luxury.

'Strange that we should meet here, senhor!' The voice came to Tim out of the gloom—a familiar voice. He turned quickly, and met a pair of dark eyes that gazed with an expression of astonishment rot unmixed with respect into his face.

'Esteban!' he exclaimed.

'At your service, senhor.'

'Great God! what are you doing here?'

'My business, senhor, is as it always was.'

'Of course. Stupid of me. But how did you know me?'

'I couldn't forget you, senhor, even though you have changed—greatly changed. But good times came to me after I had the privilege of escorting you to Canudos.'

Esteban spoke in a whisper. He had, moreover, taken a good look round to make sure that there were no prying eyes about.

'You have done well, have you?' Tim remarked; 'I am glad.' Then he added, with a short laugh: 'You see, I have come back alive after all.'

'So far, senhor,' the guide remarked dryly.

'You shall take me to Queimadas to-morrow, Esteban,' Tim rejoined lightly. 'You have a cart now, perhaps?'

'Two, senhor. I do twice the business I used to before I met you, and it grows week by week. This is one of my wagons,' he added, and struck the shaft with the palm of his hand. 'I have four good horses now ... half a dozen mules.... To-morrow I have contracted to take Fra Federico Evangelista as far as Cumbe—you remember Cumbe, senhor?'

'Of course I do. Rather!'

'I can go round by Cumbe,' the carrier went on, 'it is not much out of the way. If you agree, senhor.... You see, I have contracted with Fra Federico....'

'Fra Federico will come to Queimadas with us, Esteban. So have your wagon ready, for we start at dawn. Plenty of provisions, you know ... blankets ... everything for the journey ... and no halt on the way.'

'At your service, senhor.'

'And remember, my friend ... no questions ... not a word ... not even to Fra Federico.'

'Oh, senhor...!' the guide uttered in protest.

And Tim knew well that Esteban had sufficient Indian blood in his veins to be a model of discretion and of silence. Even now, without another word, he seemed to melt away into the gloom: at any rate Tim saw him no more. His eyes were fixed once more upon the lighted window, behind which he now saw the company filing into the room. In they came, these four people around whose life or death Tim's whole existence was entwined. Marivosa da Gloria, exquisite in a European dress that might have hailed from Paris: her sweet face very pale and with an expression of bewilderment, perhaps even of fear, which caused Tim to curse under his breath and to grind his teeth with inward rage. Her little hand rested on the arm of Dom Manoël da Lisbao, faultlessly dressed, just as he would have been for a dinner-party in London or Paris, suave, urbane, making himself agreeable to his beautiful companion, who did not respond with as much as a smile. Behind them towered the tall figure of Dudley Stone. This was the first time that Tim had seen the impudent charlatan unveiled: but there was the hatchet face, the beak-like nose, the deep, penetrating eyes of the photograph: 'From your loving father, Dudley Stone.' Tim's heart was pounding away in his breast like a sledge-hammer. Within the next few hours his wearisome and exciting Odyssey would culminate either in triumph or in death. The man actually stood there, within easy reach of him, the man whose existence meant everything that he, Tim, had ever longed for—his inheritance in Ireland, and the possession of the one woman in the world who could make that inheritance worth while.

The company sat down to table. Then only did Tim recognize in the fourth person Teresa da Pinto. Teresa, with the tragic eyes, the set mouth, the whole beautiful face indicative of burning passion, hatred, vengeance: all that Tim had seen in it that evening in the music-hall at Monsataz when da Pinto fell assassinated, and she, Teresa, alone knew whose was the hand that had struck her father.

It was, indeed, strange to see those two beautiful young girls sitting there, silent, self-absorbed, hardly touching the food that was served them, and each harbouring in her heart a nameless fear and an unspoken sorrow. Teresa from time to time threw a glance across the table at Marivosa, and to the watcher in the night those glances boded evil and danger for his beloved. The two men on the other hand ate heartily, drank copiously, and carried on an animated discussion in English. Only a few snatches of this reached Tim's ears, but he heard enough to know that cattle-driving, loot, brigandage, money, diamonds, and the vast profits made through all these villainies were the sole topic of conversation. The men made no attempt to modulate their voices. No one, they believed, outside the room could understand what they said, and apparently in their eyes the two young girls did not count. Teresa paid no heed to them; probably she had known long ago of this criminal association between Dom Manoël and the English adventurer.

But to Tim the gradual unravelling of a skein which had seemed to him in such a tangle was intensely thrilling. Details of that association, at which he had only vaguely guessed, became clear even though he only heard fragments of conversation. He understood now the reason of the gigantic hoax which had caused plain Mr. Dudley Stone to assume the rôle of a resurrected prophet or, alternatively, of the rightful ruler of Brazil. A band of ignorant savages had to be held together by means of mysticism and superstition; they were made to obey by means of terror of an unknown, deified power, and the veiled prophet—the Great Unknown became part of their religion—the fetish whom they revered and feared.

Given a temperament, hard, cruel, and cynical, and a certain talent for play-acting, such as Stone evidently possessed, the rôle was not difficult to assume or to keep up. There was also his predilection for adventure, and his obsession for the search after buried treasure: all these characteristics made him a willing tool in the hands of that far cleverer scoundrel, Dom Manoël. It was Dom Manoël, obviously, who was the brain of the association: Dudley Stone merely the tool. Monsataz had been the setting wherein the nefarious partnership was first discussed and entered into. Fate had indeed played into the hands of these brigands by sending Hold-Hands Juliana along, with money wrung from an old dotard which she was only too ready to spend in the purchase of false affidavits to prove that Dudley Stone was dead. The disappearance of Dudley Stone off the face of the earth was the keystone of the enterprise. Traskmoore's fifty thousand pounds became the initial capital. Since then these two blackguards had amassed untold wealth: cattle-driving, illicit diamond buying, raids on farms and homesteads, were their chief sources of revenue. Dudley Stone brought the loot to his partner, who disposed of it to the foreign traders who, in their turn, were ready to buy anything and everything and ask no inconvenient questions.

All this and more, Tim O'Clee had guessed during his sojourn at Canudos, and through conversations with Fra Federico. What he overheard now only confirmed what he already knew. It was the effect of all that cynical talk upon Marivosa, of these elaborate plans for more brigandage, more piracy and murder, openly discussed, which wrung her lover's heart till he could have groaned aloud. Gradually he saw the look of bewilderment in her dear eyes turn to horror and loathing; once or twice she tried to speak, but evidently horror of what she heard choked the words in her throat.

Was she not witnessing at this moment the total shattering of the great illusion of her life—the tearing down from a self-raised pedestal of the idol whom she had worshipped? Her father's soul was being laid bare before her in all its hideous nakedness. She saw him at last as he was—cynical, vicious, cruel: and herself as the miserable pawn in this money-making game, thrown across from one partner to the other so as to make the criminal bond more lasting and more secure.

And Tim was forced to get a real stranglehold over himself, lest he should yield to the temptation of rushing across the courtyard, forcing his way into that room and seizing one of those two miscreants by the throat. He felt that this world could hold no greater satisfaction than that of squeezing the life out of those rascals. Unfortunately, Nature had only provided him with one pair of hands, and these were required for guarding his beloved and saving her from those brigands: whilst his own life had become the most precious asset for bringing about her safety and ultimate happiness.

And so he forced himself to remain on the watch and to gaze mutely on the soul-agony of the woman he worshipped. He saw her turn with an expression of pathetic appeal to Teresa da Pinto—a young girl, her own age, who must, she thought, have felt the same horror as she did at what they were both made to hear. But in Teresa's glance she saw nothing but indifference for what she obviously knew already, and when she met her eyes, there was nothing in them but detestation for herself.

With a half-suppressed sob she rose and fled quickly from the room. At a peremptory sign from Dom Manoël, Teresa reluctantly followed.

The two men were left alone, wholly indifferent to the storm of misery which their baseness had provoked. They drank, and smoked excellent cigars, and Tim heard Stone say cynically: 'It's that damned convent education—she'll be all right presently.'

And Dom Manoël retorted, with a suavity far more loathsome than the other's frank brutality: 'Don't worry, my dear fellow. I like 'em like that. I like a woman with some spirit in her. Teresa fawns too much. She adores me—women do as a rule——Your lovely Marivosa's hatred will be refreshing ... while it lasts.'

Tim heard and saw no more for a moment or two, because his gorge had risen and he was seeing red. A mist which was the colour of blood spread before his eyes, and his hand wandered to the place in his belt where an automatic should have been. Fortunately there was none there, or the temptation would have been too strong to resist, and the consequences of such an act would have meant the end of everything—of his last hope of saving the woman he worshipped.

When he looked about him once more, the two men had strolled out upon the veranda. The light was behind them

and Tim could only vaguely distinguish their silhouettes in the gloom; the odour of two excellent cigars came wafted to his nostrils on the evening air, and made him curse with a longing for a good smoke, after the rank tobacco which had been his only solace for the past few weeks.

The conversation between those two villains up there had drifted to the events of the past few days, and Tim heard snatches of the charlatan's version of his own adventures.

Dom Manoël appeared incredulous. 'That fellow O'Clerigh,' he said, 'who would like to be Earl of Traskmoore, was turned out of the country as an undesirable alien nearly a couple of months ago. I had to engineer that, for he was after you, my friend, and was beginning to be troublesome.'

'All I know is,' Dudley Stone rejoined, 'that he turned up at Canudos, and that he was fool enough to seek an interview with me.'

A graphic description ensued of how he, Tim, had died in gaol and been thrown to the carrion in a ditch.

'So that's the last of him,' Stone continued. 'The damned fool thought, I suppose, that I would give up this business for the sake of the few thousands which he promised me.'

'You couldn't very well do that, could you, my friend?' Dom Manoël retorted dryly. 'They have not forgotten in England, I imagine, that little transaction, during the War, with the Austrian High Command which caused the rout of the Serbian Army, what?'

'Forgotten or not, with money one can disprove anything....'

'Except the correspondence on the subject, signed by yourself, which I hold as a guarantee of your loyalty.... But don't let's quarrel, my friend,' Dom Manoël went on glibly, 'I only wanted to remind you that it is out of your power to leave me in the lurch. We work together for our common good, and as yours is the harder task you get the lion's share.'

'I am not going on with it for ever, you know, my friend. I am getting rather sick of my rôle in that God-forsaken desert.'

'For ever? No!' Dom Manoël rejoined, with a shrug; 'but a good many years must elapse yet before we have made our pile and can retire to our respective homes ... then we'll destroy the incriminating correspondence, my friend; and as your lovely Marivosa will be old and ugly by then, I will even return her to your loving arms, and you can then build yourself a palace anywhere you choose, and forget that you ever were a resurrected prophet and potential Emperor of Brazil.'

There was silence after that between the two partners in infamy; and Tim, troubled as he was over the future of his beloved, could not help chortling at thought of these two brigands each holding the other, figuratively, by the throat, threatening one another, each prepared to murder the other, if only he dared.

Then, after a few minutes of this silence, Stone curtly proclaimed that he was tired and wanted to go to bed. Dom Manoël, in the rôle of a polite and attentive host, at once went back into the dining-room with his guest, offered him a last drink, called to his dusky servants to attend on him, and finally bade him a cordial good night.

But for some time after that Tim remained leaning against the shaft of Esteban's wagon, staring up at the house. Somewhere behind those walls the woman whom he worshipped moved and breathed. Perhaps she was crying her eyes out with shame and disappointment: and he, Tim, not there to kiss away those tears and swear to her that all-conquering love would inevitably triumph over treachery and perfidy. Perhaps she was asleep: and he not there to watch over her slumbers. But he had it in his mind that his love and longing were so strong that presently they would pierce those stone walls and reveal to him the room where his beloved lay. And as he stood there, watching, he saw a light suddenly peep through the chinks of a shuttered door at the farthest end of the veranda; and a moment or two later the shutters were thrown open, then the door, and Marivosa stood for a moment under the lintel and looked out into the night. For one minute, not more, she stood there, and even at one moment turned her head in the direction where Tim was on the watch; the next moment she was gone, and the door was closed once more.

But Tim had his wish: he knew where she was, knew the door at which he could stand guard over her and the spot on which her foot had rested. Creeping noiselessly in the shadow, he made his way across the courtyard and up the veranda steps. He found the door which had just closed on that which was dearer to him than life; he pressed his lips against the panel, and murmured the words of love which could not reach her ears.

Then he lay down across the threshold and waited for the dawn.

## XXII

For the rest, it is all so strange, some of it so inexplicable, that it seems at first glance almost impossible to disentangle the truth from the many extravagant versions of what occurred on that fateful dawn—the dawn which followed on the arrival of the Great Unknown and his escort at the *quinta* of Dom Manoël da Lisbao. Of that *quinta* nothing remains to-day but an agglomeration of ruined buildings: only the stone walls, blackened with soot, are left to testify that a prosperous homestead flourished here some time, not so very long ago, with its verandas and stockade, cart-sheds, cattle-pens, stablings and outhouses.

A devastating bush fire, mysterious in its origin, kindled some say by a vengeful hand, laid waste the *quinta* as well as several hundred acres of forest and of cultivated land. This catastrophe was coincident with those other events which have remained more inexplicable and far more mysterious than the destruction by fire of the place where they occurred.

On the whole, I am inclined to agree with those who place the greatest credence on Esteban's version of the affair. The carrier had been at the *quinta* when the Great Unknown arrived there with his daughter and his train of armed men and wagons: and he had actually held conversation with the mad stranger, whom he had, it seems, escorted to within sight of Canudos a month previously.

This he related to a group of sympathetic listeners in the coffee-room of the station inn at Bomfin, when the events of that unforgettable morning were still fresh in his mind.

'I left him at the turning-point,' he said, speaking of the mad stranger—English, he believed he was, though some people said he was something else, equally mad—'at the point from which there is a good view of that accursed city, and I warned him then that if he ventured any farther he would never return alive.'

'But he did return, Esteban,' one of his hearers argued, 'since you spoke with him that night.'

'I did speak with him,' the carrier rejoined. 'He was leaning against the shaft of one of my wagons, staring up at the house, which was all lighted up. I had been busy loading the wagon, because I had engaged to take Fra Federico Evangelista as far as Cumbe on the morrow, when I saw the senhor Inglez. I knew him at once, though he had smeared his face over with dirt to make himself look like a Mamaluco; but I owe all my good fortune to the hundred milreis he gave me when I put him on the way to Canudos; he was good to me, he was genial and not proud, and I never forget a face.'

'So you talked?'

'Only a few words. He made me promise to have a cart and horses ready for him in the early dawn to take him to Queimadas, and I promised, because I could still fulfil my contract with Fra Federico Evangelista by going round the way of Cumbe. I arranged all this with the stranger, and after that I lay down under the hood of my wagon and went to sleep.'

'What did the Inglez do?'

'I left him still leaning against the shafts and staring up at the house, though I told him that if he liked he could get some sleep beside me in the wagon.'

'Then what happened?'

'I had just dropped off to sleep when someone pulled me by the leg. It was Barbosa; you know him, he is Dom Manoël's body-servant. He came to tell me that his master wished to speak with me. So out I scrambled. It may have been half an hour before midnight then, or perhaps more. The waning moon was still low down in the sky. I do not like a waning moon,' Esteban remarked, with a shake of his lean shoulders, 'all the ill-luck I ever had came to me while the moon was on her decline.'

He drank down a glass of rum in order to shake off that sense of superstitious fear, always on the alert in the temperament of a half-breed. The others waited until he had smacked his lips and appeared more content; then they encouraged him to proceed.

'But you have not had ill-luck this time, Esteban, have you? It was Dom Manoël who...'

'That is it, my friends. The cursed moon was bound to bring ill-luck to someone, you see. Well! as I say, I scrambled down from the wagon, ready to follow Barbosa. He was going towards the house, and I just stopped to see if the stranger was still leaning against the shafts. But he was no longer there. I peeped under the wagon, thinking that perhaps he had crawled there to get some sleep, but I saw no trace of him, and seeing that Barbosa was making me signs to hurry up, I ran after him. I followed him up the stairs, and he pushed open the tall window of one of the rooms and told me to go in.

'Dom Manoël was there, sitting at a table where he and his guests had been dining. There were a lot of empty bottles about, I noticed, and I saw at once, that he had been drinking very hard. Well!—that was no business of mine, was it? He began by ordering me to look to the windows and the door to see that there were no eavesdroppers about, and then to come and stand close to him so that he need not raise his voice. And he gave me the most extraordinary orders I had ever received in all my life: "You will have a wagon ready at dawn," he said, "harnessed with three of your best horses, and well supplied with provisions." Imagine my surprise, for these were the same instructions so far that the senhor Inglez had given me; and already I was wondering how I should manage to satisfy both my clients when Dom Manoël went on, and, as I say, he gave me the most extraordinary orders I had ever received in this life. "La Sua Excellençia Teresa da Pinto will travel in your wagon, and you will drive her straight to my house outside Queimadas, which you know. You will drive straight into the courtyard, and directly you arrive you will ask to speak with the Senhor Silva Givareira, and you will give him a letter from me. La Sua Excellençia, I must tell you, will be escorted by a female servant. Two of my own men will accompany you. On the way you must halt only at places where there are no habitations within sight: never in a village, nor near a *quinta*. On no account must Excellençia be allowed to speak to anyone on the road, nor must you take or deliver any message from her to anyone. Is that understood?" I did understand well enough; but, putting my amazement aside for the moment, I just wondered how I could fulfil my obligations at the same time to Fra Federico Evangelista, to the mad stranger, and to Dom Manoël. I certainly had two wagons available. I had horses and mules, but I myself could not possibly drive both. Fortunately I am a man of resource; and, thought I, so long as Dom Manoël does not insist on there being no one else in the wagon except La Sua Excellençia and his servants, he need know nothing about Fra Federico Evangelista and the senhor Inglez until afterwards. For the moment all I did was to assure His Excellency that I was entirely at his service; whereupon he gave me the letter for Senhor Givareira, who is the governor of his estates, and whom I have the honour of knowing, and finally he said: "If you carry out my orders in every respect, and arrive at my house on the third day from this, Senhor Givareira will give you two hundred milreis. And now you can go." He waved his hand. I assured him once more that I was entirely at his service, and then bowed myself out of the room.'

'You must have felt very queer, Esteban,' was the universal comment on this part of the story. But Esteban had more amazing things yet to relate, and after more refreshment he went on:

'I did feel queer, I can assure you, my friends, but I had confidence in myself, and I still thought that I would ultimately find a way to satisfy all my customers. You see, Dom Manoël had promised me two hundred milreis; but I was sure that I could get another two hundred from the stranger; and Fra Federico, though he pays me very little, does give me absolution for my sins and a passport up to Heaven, which is very comforting. As I felt rather troubled and wanted to think rather than go to sleep again, I did not scramble back into the wagon, but followed the example of the stranger and leaned against the shafts, thinking. The moon was well up in the sky now, and the night was very still. There was no one about, for it certainly was past midnight then, and scarcely any sound broke the silence of the night except in the far

distance the snorting of horses in the sheds, or the stirring of the cattle in their pens. I had a good view of the house from where I was standing, and of the veranda with the row of doors and windows opening on it. All of these were closed, but through the chinks of two of the shuttered windows I could see a faint streak of light. One came from the room where I had the interview with Dom Manoël, and the other from another room a good deal farther along the veranda. One strange thing struck me at that moment, and this was that up against the door of that distant room I could see a man lying across the threshold.

'And suddenly I saw Dom Manoël come out on the veranda. The light of the moon was full on him. His beautiful clothes looked all crumpled, and his hair was untidy. He was stooping a little and stumbled in his walk. He crept along the veranda in the direction of that other door against which the man was still lying. Never in my life have I seen such an evil look on any man's face as there was on Dom Manoël's then. And all at once he saw the man who was lying across the threshold, and the man saw him and jumped to his feet, Dom Manoël ordered him to get out of the way, but the man would not budge. He was tall, taller than Dom Manoël; that was all I could see of him, for he was in the shadow caused by an angle of the wall. The next moment those two were at grips with one another. I tell you, my friends, it was terrible. Dom Manoël, of course, was the weaker of the two—he had been drinking, you understand—but the other was unarmed, and Dom Manoël had quickly drawn a dagger out of his hip pocket. At first they fought in silence, and it was that silence which made it all seem so horrible: one heard nothing but a kind of snorting, like two bulls in a fight. But when, after a few moments, Dom Manoël was brought down to his knees and was forced by an iron grip on his wrist to drop the dagger, he gave a terrific cry for help.

'I had been on the point of doing that myself, I can tell you, but I hadn't dared. Of course, in one moment the *quinta* became alive. You heard footsteps, shouting, calls from everywhere. Just for a few seconds I suppose my attention wandered from that terrible scene up on the veranda. When I looked again, Dom Manoël was still down on his knees, but the other now had him by the throat. Down he forced him, my friends, and down, and would have killed him the next minute for sure, but it was just too late, for the house was alive, I tell you, and half a dozen of Dom Manoël's servants were already on the veranda. They rushed to their master's aid: they tried to seize that other man, but he hit about him, fighting like a lion. Still it was six to one, you understand, and more men rushing up the stairs. I was sorry for him in a way; though I am not a brave man myself, I like to see a good fight, and six to one did not seem to be a just one. I deliberately turned my head away then, as I did not wish to see that fine lion brought down. At the moment there had been a terrific din, men shouting, stamping, banging, an awful scramble there was on stairs and veranda; but, suddenly, there was a dead hush, and back I turned to see what had happened.

'My friends, it was just a flash: a wonderful sight, I tell you. The door immediately behind the man was suddenly opened from within, and in the doorway appeared the most beautiful lady you ever saw in all your life. Like ivory she was, and her hair was like gilded copper. She put out a hand and grasped the man by his ragged shirt-sleeve, and drew him into the room away from Dom Manoël, who had recovered his breath and was snarling and crouching like a jaguar ready to spring, and away from the crowd who at sight of her had stopped yelling and stamping, and stood there as if they had suddenly been turned to stone. I heard a voice—I think it was Dom Manoël's—cry out hoarsely: "Marivosa!" And I, too, felt then as if I had been turned to stone as I looked for the first time on the daughter of the Great Unknown, the real Empress of Brazil—Marivosa da Gloria.'

'But what had happened to the man?' listeners demanded eagerly, while others added: 'I, too, like to see a brave man fight.'

'I don't know what happened to him,' Esteban replied, 'and I don't know to this day who he was and what became of him. The last I saw of him he was streaming with blood and still fighting with his back to the wall: then I saw the lovely lady and her ivory hand dragging him in by his shirt-sleeve. I think he was so dazed and so exhausted that he did not know himself what had happened. The room behind the lady was all in darkness, but that rascally moon did play the happy trick of lighting up her beautiful pale face, so that she looked like the Holy Virgin. No wonder the men couldn't move: they just stood transfixed. Some of them dropped on their knees. But she ordered them to go, and obediently they all slunk off. You see, some of them were the men from Canudos, and they look upon her as a heavenly being, the daughter of their prophet; even Dom Manoël's servants wouldn't dare to touch her, because for them she is the Empress.

'What I thought was strange at the time was that Dom Manoël let them all go away; in fact, when some of them seemed to want to hang back, he snarled at them and ordered them to go. The beautiful lady would have stepped back

into the room then, but Dom Manoël was too quick for her. The next thing I saw was that he had lifted her off her feet and held her in his arms. My friends, this is where the terrible thing occurred. I saw it all; indeed, I was the only one to see everything, for the men were all slinking back to their own quarters and not one of them seemed to dare to glance back. But I saw it all; I saw another door close by softly open, and the Senhorita Teresa da Pinto come out on the veranda. When she saw Dom Manoël with the Empress Marivosa in his arms, she stood for two seconds like a statue, stiff and stark, and her eyes were like those of a wild cat when it is in a rage, and her white teeth shone like a jaguar's: then, suddenly she darted back into the room and out again. This time, my friends, she had a glistening steel blade in her hand. Dom Manoël had his back to her. She ran to him, and without a sound or cry, she drove that blade into him. Horrible it was, my friends! Horrible, I tell you! and she, the senhorita, no more than a young girl. Jealousy had maddened her, and when she saw Dom Manoël loosen his hold on the beautiful Marivosa, when she saw him reel and fall and heard the death-rattle in his throat, she cried out: "As you did to my father"—or some words to that effect—and she stepped over the still body of Dom Manoël, and with the dripping dagger still in her hand, she stood over the Empress Marivosa. My God!—but I did find my voice then. I gave a cry, I tell you, fit to wake the dead. I suppose it was that cry which brought the unfortunate senhorita to herself. She dropped the dagger and ran back into her room; and it was the Empress Marivosa who, forgetting that Dom Manoël had planned to do her the greatest wrong that any man can do to an innocent girl, ministered to him as best she could until some of his own men had realized what had happened and went back the way they had just come. But, as you know, my friends, Dom Manoël was past all help. They carried him to his room, and he died within the hour!'

'But the Empress?' some of the listeners inquired eagerly.

'The veiled prophet, her father, had come out by then—the Great Unknown. He said no word, but beckoned to his daughter. She came along the veranda to him, and he then took her by the hand and led her away to his own apartments. I saw her no more that night.'

'And the senhorita?' they asked.

'She was in a raging fever for two days and two nights, and could not leave her bed, or the *quinta*. But at noon, following the dawn on which she started on her journey to Monsataz, a terrific fire broke out in the *quinta*. It started in the room where the body of Dom Manoël was lying in state before being conveyed to the family graveyard in Bahia. Some say that it was caused by the upsetting of one of the tall candles, the flame of which caught a corner of the lace coverlet. That's as it may be. All I know is what Barbosa himself told me, which is, that the last person to enter the death chamber, in order to look on him who had been her lover and whom she had sent to face his Maker, was the Senhorita Teresa da Pinto. No one else entered the room after that.'

## XXIII

But, of course, that was not the end of the story. They all wanted to know about the departure of the Great Unknown and of the Empress of Brazil from the *quinta*, where Dom Manoël da Lisbao, the owner and the host, now lay dead, and Teresa da Pinto in a raging fever. And no one could tell that part of the story better than Esteban, the carrier; for he had been there all the time, from the moment when the messenger of evil tidings arrived at full gallop with the alarming news, until that when the Great Unknown himself—the resurrected prophet and mysterious chieftain—deigned to enter into his, Esteban's, wagon and allowed so humble a guide to take him to his destination.

'After that terrible hour,' Esteban resumed, as soon as he had refreshed himself with hot coffee and a drink of rum, 'most of us did not feel much like sleep, I can tell you. The night was bitterly cold—you know what they are like in the Sertao this time of year after scorching hot days—so we lit a fire in the courtyard and squatted round it, smoking and drinking, for one of the men of the house had brought out a jar of rum, and it was welcome, I assure you. But there wasn't much talk between us: it seemed as if what we had seen had stiffened our tongues. The waning moon was smiling down placidly on all the mischief she had wrought, for surely it was she who had muddled the brain of Dom Manoël da Lisbao, and turned the senhorita into the paths of madness.

'I suppose that presently the warmth of the fire outside, and of the rum inside our stomachs, made us all drowsy. I, for one, curled myself up in a blanket and must then have dropped off to sleep. When I awoke, the moon was still up, but the Southern Cross had begun to pale. It must have been an hour, or less, before dawn; the fire was out, and the men round it all fast asleep. I had seen nothing of the English stranger since I left him leaning against the shafts of my wagon, whilst I scrambled inside it. I wondered what in the world had become of him. Some of the men were snoring, and in the distance I could hear the hobbled horses fidgeting and the cattle far away snorting in the pens. I was feeling cold and dazed; the terrible events which I had witnessed seemed unreal, like a horrible nightmare, which I hoped presently to forget. What had roused me, I do not know. I sat up and listened. All the sounds were familiar enough: animals and men breathing, the rustling of leaves, the soughing of the night breeze in the tall grasses—they were all familiar to me. All save one.

'It was a strange sound, my friends, that struck my ear, strange to every dweller in the Sertao when heard in the night. No wonder it had roused me, for I am a light sleeper. It was the sound of a horse's hooves galloping full tilt in this direction. A horse broken loose, I thought at first, maddened, perhaps, by the sight of a jaguar and tearing about in blind fear. But no!—for the sound of those hooves came nearer and nearer, never swerving to right nor left: not like a frightened beast, or a *vaqueiro* rounding up his cattle.

'I had been the first to be wakened by the sound, but gradually one man woke and then another; and presently we were all of us astir, and all of us gazing across the courtyard in the direction from which those thundering hooves were drawing nearer and nearer. Such amazing and terrible events had marked the early part of this night, that in the hearts of most of us there came the dread that this rider galloping in the night was none other than one of the four horsemen of which the Holy Scriptures speak.

'But he turned out to be a huge Mamaluco, riding a white horse—at least, we all put him down as a Mamaluco, for what we saw of his face was of a dark, reddish-brown colour: it was streaming with sweat. He had obviously been riding very hard. His horse, as he drew rein outside the stockade, was snorting and panting like a wild beast and was covered with lather. The man shouted loudly, demanding admittance. By now the whole *quinta* was astir, and the gatekeeper out with his keys. And there were we all, crowding round to see the gates swing open and the horseman enter the stockade. This he did without dismounting, rode to the very centre of the courtyard, and then threw up his left hand and shouted loudly: "Treachery! Where is the prophet?" His poor horse, maddened with the noise and with the lot of us all crowding round, reared and plunged in a way that would have thrown any rider I've ever seen on a horse, but the way that Mamaluco sat that horse, you never saw anything like it. He was dressed like a *vaqueiro* from the Sertao, with leather hat and visor to shield his face, and leather clothes head to heel, which they all wear to protect themselves against the thorny scrub.

'And there he was, my friends, in the very middle of the courtyard, a dark figure on a white horse, holding up one hand and shouting: "Treachery! I must speak with the Great Unknown." This brought Lean-Shanks, the huge Negro whom you all know, and who is one of the chiefs of the prophet's bodyguard, out on the veranda of the house. As soon as the Mamaluco saw him, he swung himself out of the saddle and strode across the courtyard, with all of us close on his heels, eager to know what would happen next.

'Lean-Shanks by this time was half-way down the steps, shouting louder than the Mamaluco: "Silence! What is this noise?" And again: "Silence! The prophet sleeps!" And the Mamaluco raised his voice and yelled louder still: "Wake him! Wake him! There's treachery in Canudos, and I must speak with him."

'"Impossible!" was what Lean-Shanks said, but he ran down the steps and seized the Mamaluco by the arm. "Tell me!" he commanded. "To no one will I speak," the Mamaluco said, "save to the prophet: for treachery is loose in Canudos...." "Impossible!" the Negro declared again. But the other retorted loudly: "I started at sunset yesterday and have not drawn rein since. If I do not speak with the prophet now, Canudos within a week will cease to be."

'I cannot, of course, repeat to you the very words that they both spoke,' Esteban, the carrier, continued; 'but that was the substance of what they said: the Mamaluco insisting on speaking with the prophet, and Lean-Shanks declaring that that was out of the question. The Mamaluco was not shouting quite so loudly now. In fact, his voice got weaker and weaker, and he was gasping for breath—which was not to be wondered at if he had ridden all the way from Canudos without drawing rein. Lean-Shanks was holding him by the arm all the time. I could see the Negro's face turning grey and

his eye-balls rolling in their sockets. He is very full of his own importance as a rule, and they say that he is the right-hand man of the Great Unknown and a monster of cruelty, but I am sure that at this moment he was scared out of his wits. Of course, all of us who had nothing to do with him, and all that horde of brigands over in Canudos, were not sorry to hear that treachery had crept into their camp. We had all hoped for some time that the thing couldn't go on, and that the Government would one day send out sufficient troops to break up that abominable thieving crowd, or else that they would quarrel among themselves and just devour one another like so many caged beasts. This we hoped had happened now: and there was not one amongst us, decent men, who did not rejoice to think that all that looting and plunder and rapine would perhaps find its own punishment at last.

'The Sertanejos who had come over with their Great Unknown jostled us and pushed us about in order to get nearer to those two men, and hear what else the Mamaluco had to say. In the meanwhile that cursed moon, who had already done so much mischief, had hidden herself behind a cloud—and you know how dark that last hour can be just before the dawn: we could only vaguely see the two men now at the foot of the steps. They were still arguing whether the Mamaluco should be allowed to enter the presence of the Great Unknown, and at one moment Lean-Shanks threatened him with a machete if he did not deliver his message then and there. But the Mamaluco was firm: "I will speak with the prophet and no one else," he said. He stood up boldly to the Negro, I can tell you, and to us he appeared tall and fine and lean, while Lean-Shanks, who, as you know, is a giant, seemed more fleshy about the body and with limbs less firm and straight.

'However, there was never any question of a fight between them, and, after a few minutes of all that arguing, Lean-Shanks suddenly turned and ran up the steps, shouting: "The prophet himself shall decide!" At the top of the stairs he turned and loudly ordered the Mamaluco to stay where he was at peril of his life: he alone, he said, was privileged to enter the presence of the Great Unknown. But the Mamaluco was not to be done. He, too, ran up the steps. "There's black treachery in Canudos," he shouted once more at the top of his voice, "and what I have to say is for the prophet's ear alone." And this he bellowed in a voice that resembled a bull's—no doubt in order to attract the attention of the Great Unknown.

'And in this he succeeded, for presently one of the doors was opened, and there stood the tall figure of the Great Unknown in his long flowing robes, his head and face all hidden by a veil. At once the Mamaluco fell on his knees, with his forehead touching the ground. Lean-Shanks began talking very glibly, telling the story of what was happening, but the veiled prophet ordered him to be silent, and then looked down at the kneeling figure, and with one word ordered him to speak. The Mamaluco made no movement; there he knelt, with his forehead touching the ground, and when the prophet repeated the command: "Speak!" he said, in a funny kind of husky voice: "What I have come to say is for the prophet's ear alone!" The Great Unknown said, for the third time: "Speak!" And when the Mamaluco still remained silent and motionless, he turned to Lean-Shanks and said, in a way that made us all shudder: "Take him away and make him speak." For a second or two the Mamaluco still remained motionless, then he put out his right hand towards the prophet, and in his hand there was a murderous-looking dagger. He did not speak, but he pulled the visor of his hat right down over his face, threw back his head, bared his neck, and said the one word: "Strike!"

'We all held our breath, for anything more awful I had never seen, although I have travelled in many places in that desolate part of the country. The veiled man took the dagger and held it for a time in both his hands. Of course, mind you, though he is a prophet and all that, he is no fool, and I daresay he realized that nothing would be gained by threatening this Mamaluco. But I suppose that the habits of years are difficult to shake off, and the Great Unknown had been so accustomed to hedge himself round with bodyguards, and all sorts of paraphernalia, that he had no more pluck left in him to face any man alone; and he must have known that he had so many enemies—desperate men, some of them, whom he had robbed and outraged—that the fear of assassination must always have been present in his thoughts. In the end, he seemed to make up his mind all of a sudden. He turned to Lean-Shanks and said: "Strip him, and search him: then send him in to me." After which, he turned on his heel and went back to his room.'

Esteban, the carrier, was coming to the end of his story. His mouth was very dry and had frequently to be moistened with coffee or white rum. It was marvellous how much of the latter he could imbibe without losing the thread of his narrative, or the clearness of his diction. His listeners, too, were thirsty through sheer excitement and eagerness to know more of the last of the series of events that had marked that unforgettable night.

'How did it all end, Esteban?' some of them cried, while others threatened the carrier with a hiding if he did not

immediately proceed.

'It ended,' Esteban resumed after a moment or two, 'as it had begun, in a most amazing manner. All of us down in the courtyard waited to see what would happen. There were a good many of the Sertanejos there, and a number of men belonging to the *quinta*; we were, so to speak, two camps, getting more and more hostile towards one another. Up on the veranda, the Mamaluco had risen to his feet. Lean-Shanks curtly ordered him to strip, which he began to do by taking off his leather coat. He had a white shirt on underneath, and as soon as his coat was off, Lean-Shanks's huge black hands wandered over his body in search of hidden weapons. And suddenly, all in a flash, the Mamaluco took off his leather hat and clamped it down over the Negro's head right down to his ears; then, with a jerk of his knee he sent him staggering backwards, and before Lean-Shanks could possibly recover from such a sudden assault, he forced him against the balustrade, with his spine bent right over the woodwork. Of course, although the two men were fairly equal in strength, the Negro was handicapped through that tight hat over his eyes, and through his being taken completely by surprise. Moreover, the whole thing had occurred so quickly, in far less seconds than it takes to relate, and Lean-Shanks had not even the time to bellow before the other had him by the legs and just turned him over the balustrade, down into the courtyard below, where his big, fleshy body came down with a thud. Then we heard a door bang, and when we looked up again the Mamaluco had disappeared.

'Now I must tell you that there was not one of us there who was not convinced by this time that the Mamaluco was just an assassin, who had come with the intention of killing that murderous prophet up there, and who in all probability now would succeed; and I can assure you that those of us who did not belong to that gang of pirates rejoiced at the idea that we had seen the last of the Great Unknown, and that, with his death, the murdering horde would in all probability soon be dispersed, and honest farmers be allowed to live in peace for the future. So when the Sertanejos and *vaqueiros* who belonged to the Great Unknown showed signs of going first to the aid of Lean-Shanks and then, perhaps, to swarm up the veranda for the protection of their prophet, we all did what we could to prevent them: and a short, sharp, free fight ensued.

'Our party held the veranda steps against the Sertanejos, who could not fight so freely as our men did because of their stiff, bulky leather clothes, but they were more numerous than we were, and also had more at stake. They fought desperately, I can tell you, and at one time knives were freely used. The battle had commenced in silence—those Sertanejos are always a silent lot—but in the heat and excitement of the fight some of us did begin to shout, and there was the tramping of feet, too, on the veranda steps as the defenders were gradually being forced up the stairs. Our party, I certainly thought, was getting the worst of it. I was watching the fight from a splendid vantage ground—not being a fighting man, you understand—nevertheless I had already rendered our cause signal service, for when Lean-Shanks, after his heavy fall, began to wriggle again, I just stamped on his face first, and then on his hands, and finally sat down upon his chest. And from there I could see everything beautifully. I saw the door upon the veranda open once more, and the veiled prophet standing there in his long robe, as calm as you please. Immediately behind him I caught sight in the gloom of the beautiful Empress of Brazil.

'And there he was, the villain, still veiled and still the Great Unknown. At sight of him the Sertanejos stopped fighting, and all fell on their knees, with their foreheads touching the ground; and I must admit that I could not shake off a feeling of awe, and even of a certain reverence, when I saw that tall mysterious figure extend an arm and raise a hand as for a benediction. The Sertanejos groaned and struck the ground with their foreheads. I felt the Negro's big body wriggling beneath me, so, as he was still helpless and only half-conscious, I gave his thick black throat a good squeeze, just to keep him quiet. And then I heard the Great Unknown say in a kind of hoarse, sepulchral voice: "To horse! We start for Canudos at once." The Sertanejos all struggled to their feet, and off they went to get their horses and wagons. There was a good deal of confusion about the place by that time, I can tell you. Just think of all that had happened in the last few hours. Up in that house its master lay dead; the senhorita who had killed him was in a raging fever, with half a dozen distracted women to look after her, and as I heard later, Fra Federico Evangelista doctoring her with his potions; and one shuddered to think what had happened in that other room, on the threshold of which the veiled prophet still stood, with his lovely daughter by his side. Did the Mamaluco lie in there dead? Had that innocent young girl witnessed yet another murder, a few more horrors? What had she seen? What did she know?

'You know how quickly day follows night in these parts? Well! It was broad daylight by now. I thought that I had best set to work, too, and get my team ready, and my wagon, for the journey to Cumbe and Queimadas. True, I had seen nothing of the English stranger for the best part of the night, but I supposed that, like myself, he was not a fighting man,

and that he had found shelter somewhere, while all that uproar and clamour were going on. However, I had promised him that I would be ready with wagon, provisions, and horses, and in any case I had contracted to take Fra Federico Evangelista to Cumbe; so I was making up my mind to set to work and get things straight, when I heard the Great Unknown call once more in his sepulchral voice: "Lean-Shanks!" The sound of his name caused that filthy Negro to give such a jerk of his big body that I fell off my perch, but I soon recovered myself, and just to teach him a lesson I gave his throat another squeeze, and as the Mamaluco's hat had rolled off his head, and lay close by, I picked it up and clamped it hard over his face.

'The Great Unknown called once more for his faithful Lean-Shanks, and, when one of the men in the courtyard said in reply: "Lean-Shanks is sick and cannot move," he called out loudly: "Is Esteban, the carrier, there?" Imagine my surprise! I can tell you that a bird could have knocked me down. I wished I could have crawled under the hood of my wagon. I do not pretend to be a man of courage, and the idea of being asked for by that awesome creature up there sent a cold shiver down my spine. I kept as still as a mouse. Unfortunately, some busybody had already pointed to me and called out: "Here is Esteban!" I thought I should just have time to creep out of sight, and would have done it, only that the prophet had already seen me. To my amazement what he said was: "Come here, Esteban. Do not be afraid." And what filled me with greater amazement still, I heard a lovely, sweet woman's voice saying: "Do not be afraid, Esteban."

'As I say, I never made pretence to be a brave man, but there was something reassuring about that girlish voice, and after a few more moments of reflection, I got to my feet. I took the precaution of stamping once more on the Negro's face and on his hands, and then I walked boldly across the courtyard and went up the veranda steps. The Great Unknown and the lovely Empress had gone back to their room, but the door stood open and, after a great deal of trepidation, I ventured at last to knock. Someone said: "Enter!" And in I went. The Great Unknown was standing in the middle of the room, and I caught a glimpse of the Empress standing near the window opposite. On a couch in one corner of the room lay what was obviously the body of the unfortunate Mamaluco, covered over with a sheet. It was the Empress who spoke to me. "Go down, Esteban," she said, "and fetch two strong men. They must come here and carry the body of this man down into the yard, and lay him on the floor of your wagon. He is a man of great consideration, and you must treat his body with the utmost respect. Then wait and watch beside it, and allow no one to come near. After that, Esteban, you will be greatly honoured because my father, the Great Unknown, and I, myself, as well as the saintly Fra Federico Evangelista, will travel in your wagon to Cumbe." She waited a moment. I suppose she saw how scared and agitated I was. I did not relish the idea, I can tell you, of driving that king of brigands through places where his men had committed most revolting crimes. But this I would not have said to the lovely innocent girl, who, after all, could not help being the villain's daughter.

'However, she knew well enough, apparently, what was going on in my mind, for she came nearer to me. In her stretched little hand I saw a heavy-looking purse. "Here are a thousand milreis for you, Esteban," she said. "If you are discreet and watchful, if you hold your tongue and obey my father's orders without question, there will be another thousand milreis for you when we reach Cumbe."

'Two thousand milreis, my friends!' Esteban went on excitedly. 'Why! I did not even know before then, that there was such a sum in the whole countryside. I took the purse quickly enough, I can tell you, and would have kissed her hand, only I did not dare. She also gave me ten milreis for each of the men who would come up and fetch the poor Mamaluco's body away. Of course, I knew now that he was no Mamaluco, or the Great Unknown—who is the most cruel and arrogant devil in creation—would not have treated his would-be murderer with so much consideration. Amazed I was, I can tell you. I did not know if I was awake or dreaming, but the purse was real enough, and for two thousand milreis I would have driven Satan from earth back to hell.

'Well! I got two of Dom Manoël's *vaqueiros* to come up and give me a hand with the body. I didn't tell them that the Great Unknown was still up there, or maybe they would have been as scared as I had been. When we got to the room, however, the prophet and the Empress were no longer there. We lifted the body, still wrapped in a sheet, and carried it down the stairs. It was heavy, I can tell you: the body of a large, powerfully-built man. The courtyard, of course, was full of bustle. The Sertanejos were getting to horse, and the carriers had finished loading the wagons: they were all waiting for the order to start. It was a curious fact, which struck me at once, that Lean-Shanks, who was obviously a very sick man now, was left without anyone near him. I think he was hated by all the other brigands, and that they were actually hoping that he was dead.

'Anyway, at the same moment that the three of us, carrying our gruesome burden, reached the foot of the steps, the Great Unknown reappeared upon the balcony. In his deep, sepulchral voice he ordered his men to make way for us, which they did, and we passed quietly between them to my wagon, and laid the body down on the floor on a blanket. I remained there sitting under the hood with the dead man, watching over him and waiting. From the movement in the courtyard, from the noise and the tramping of hooves, I gathered that the order for departure had been given; and sure enough, when, after ten minutes or so, I ventured to peep out from under the hood, I saw the troop of Sertanejos ride out of the stockade, followed by a couple of carts. And "Thank God!" I said to myself when I saw the backs of those brigands, "the air in the *quinta* will be cleaner now!"

'But I still had the greatest ordeal in front of me. As soon as the Sertanejos had all gone, I ventured to get down from the wagon—just in time to see the Great Unknown, with his veil and his robes, come down the veranda steps. The Empress was with him, and Fra Federico Evangelista, whilst Barbosa, and half a dozen of Dom Manoël's servants were hovering round them, very obsequious and offering horses, carriages, all sorts of things in their dead master's name, but at the same time obviously mightily glad to see their unwelcome guests depart. I thought to myself: "There'll be some looting done in the house presently, as good as what the Great Unknown and his pirates have ever done." However, that was no business of mine. I got blankets ready in the wagon for my three distinguished passengers, who evidently meant me to start immediately. What in the world induced that mysterious and wonderful prophet to travel in a humble carrier's cart with his daughter, who, he claims, is Empress of Brazil, I cannot think. But there they were, anyway. I helped the Empress into my wagon, and made her as comfortable as I could, which was not easy with that dead body lying full length on the floor.

'The Great Unknown came next. He tried on some of his benediction business with the crowd of Dom Manoël's servants, but though they were most respectful in their attitude, and not a little scared of him, they did not beat the ground with their foreheads as the Sertanejos had done. However, when I had seen him installed beside his daughter, and Fra Federico also as comfortable as possible, I got up into the wagon, ordered my man to sit beside me, and slowly we swung out of the stockade. We left behind us a dead man, a sick woman, and a lot of scared and distracted servants. I never saw them or that *quinta* of evil again.'

## XXIV

That was as far as Esteban knew of the tragic events of that memorable affair, and that was the substance of the story which he related for the twentieth time to his friends in the coffee-room of the station at Bomfin while waiting for a train. In detail the story varied at times; with reiteration it gained in picturesqueness, but in the main facts, it never varied, and was always listened to with eagerness and deference. For Esteban was a rich man now. He was still a carrier by trade, but what a carrier! He owned a large number of horses and mules, and wagons: and what's more, he had recently acquired a motor lorry, which went lumbering on the impossible roads that led inland as far as the Sertao.

But though he was now a man of consideration, and though his friends and sycophants hung upon his lips when he told his exciting tale, there were one or two points which he had never been able to elucidate to his own satisfaction. The chain of events was there right enough, but there were one or two missing links in it, and Esteban often puzzled his head over those mysteries. This, however, he would not for worlds have admitted to his friends.

Yes! there were one or two things which Esteban did not know: one or two fragments which he never could piece rightly together.

He did hot know, for instance, that when Tim O'Clee, after his fight on the veranda with Dom Manoël da Lisbao, found himself so unexpectedly out of the reach of Dom Manoël's servants who were thirsting for his blood, he had not the least idea at first where he was, nor how he had got there. Marivosa da Gloria had closed the door upon him, and the room was in almost total darkness, and as the stone walls of the house were thick and solid, he heard nothing of what was going on outside—neither Dom Manoël's cowardly attack on Marivosa, nor Teresa's swift act of revenge. Moreover, after the strenuous fight, and the blows which he had received and dealt, his brain was not in a sufficiently

clear state to enable him to think and to recollect exactly what had happened.

But this muddled condition passed away after a few minutes spent in darkness and in solitude. He remembered now that earlier in the evening he had had a brief vision of Marivosa at a certain door which gave on the veranda, that he had crept across the courtyard and up the steps, and then lain down across the threshold to watch unseen over her in the night. He had had his plan already in mind then, but the time had not yet come for putting it into execution. He had taken off his leather coat and used it as a pillow, but he did not sleep. Thank God that he had been able to locate the room where Marivosa lay helpless at the mercy of the most devilish blackguard that had ever defiled God's earth. Then had come the fight, and his unexpected and unexplainable rescue. And, since then, confused sounds of heavy, tramping feet, of thuds, of swinging and closing doors, and a few vague mutterings, had alone reached his consciousness. He wondered what was happening out there. Had he been lucky enough to send Dom Manoël to Hades, or so far injured him that he could do no more mischief for some time to come? He knew not. He waited for some time till the tramping outside on the veranda had subsided: then he opened the door cautiously and peeped out. There was no one on the veranda now except at its farthest end: and there he saw Dudley Stone standing in one of the doorways, with his arm round his daughter's shoulders. Satisfied that his beloved was, at any rate, in safety with her father for the moment, he turned his attention to the courtyard. Vague forms were flitting soundlessly about. The men, after the excitement of the fight, were making ready to light a camp-fire and to snatch a little rest before the dawn.

Tim hesitated. His plan was clear and ready in his mind, but secrecy was his only sure ally, and the more men there were about when he started, the greater the risk of failure. And fail he would not. Not on your life! His beloved. His mate. The better part of his very soul. Out of the jaws of death, out of the clutches of fiends he would snatch her this night, and resting in his arms she would forget the cruel past, the lies, the deceptions—all that she had endured—and learn at last how fair God's earth could be, and how exquisite was love.

Tim looked about him. His eyes were growing accustomed to the gloom, and he saw that exactly opposite the door there was a window. It was shuttered, of course, but he soon had it open and peeped out. It gave on a grove of palms and acacias, and beyond this was the open country: cultivated fields, with a few huts dotted about, some outhouses, stables, and the horse and cattle-pens. The height from the window to the ground was fifteen feet, perhaps, not more. Tim swung himself over the sill and dropped down.

'Now for a bit of luck, and a horse,' he said to himself, as he plunged into the belt of trees. The waning moon was a tiresome enemy, for she shed a brilliant radiance over every exposed bit of ground, but, guided by ear and nostrils, Tim found his way to one of the lean-to sheds where a dozen or more horses were tethered. With a quick and practised eye he adjudged their respective qualities, selected the one most suited to his purpose and saddled it. In one of the stalls there was a pile of leather clothes. He found a coat that was not too small for him, slipped it on, led the horse out to a piece of soft ground, mounted and rode away.

He rode at random. For hours. Over fields and cultivated land, till his horse was covered with lather, and its flanks shook with excitement and exhaustion. Only once did he draw rein and dismount by the bank of a narrow stream, where grew the huge dock-like leaves which yield a dark brown juice. He gathered an armful of these: then stripped to the skin, and rubbed his face and his body all over with the stain. Carefully he did it, and thoroughly. It was one of the many tricks which he had learned from his kind old friend, Fra Federico. All over his body did he rub the juice, for he would take no risks this night.

'I look like a bally nigger now,' he said triumphantly, examining his fine long limbs, his hands, his feet. 'Bless Fra Federico for this and many other things.'

He swung himself up in the saddle once more. Weary? Not a bit of it! And again he rode and rode round and round over fields and cultivated lands. What would Uncle Justin have said to this? 'Always save your horse, boy, never weary him.' And here was he, Tim, riding his horse nearly to death.

And when the waning moon after reaching her zenith began her downward course, he made his way to the stony road which gleamed white and dusty in her light, and rode, still at breakneck speed, back to the *quinta*.

Nothing of this did Esteban guess when he talked of the Mamaluco, of Lean-Shanks, and of the Great Unknown.

How could he guess that the Mamaluco who threw Lean-Shanks over the balustrade down into the courtyard below, and then entered the presence of the veiled prophet, was none other than the English stranger?

'Now speak!' the veiled prophet had commanded, as soon as Tim had followed him into the room. He was standing with his back to a large table littered with papers, and Tim came close to him. 'Stand back!' he added suddenly, but that command came just a second too late, for Tim had learned many tricks from the finest sportsman in Ireland. With the swiftness of lightning his left shot out and caught the charlatan under the jaw; he staggered and fell prone across the table, with Tim all at once on the top of him, squeezing his long, lean throat to the point of unconsciousness. Dudley Stone was no longer a young man. What chance had he against this other, who had everything on his side; youth, training, knowledge, and, above all, incentive—the greatest incentive of all, the safety and happiness of his beloved?

And Tim was of set purpose. He had thought it all out, planned it, and schemed and estimated every eventuality. Marivosa's presence, her non-presence: how he would act in either case. Well! she was not here. Not at the moment. So it was all quite simple. One hand firmly clamped on the old villain's face, finger and thumb holding the nostrils tightly pressed together: then the phial in the pocket of the belt, the precious potion concocted by Fra Federico Evangelista, which had already saved Tim's life—saved it for the means of escape of his beloved from the hell which her own father had prepared for her. And now it would do its work again, finish the great work it had begun. The nostrils held tightly: the phial pressed to the half-conscious man's lips, the precious potion poured into his mouth. Then the convulsive, mechanical movement of the sinews as the fluid slowly trickled down the throat.

A second later Tim looked up. Marivosa had come into the room. At first, probably, she could not make out what was happening; she did not see her father, only Tim's back. But when he looked up and straightened himself out, she recognized him immediately. In spite of the dark stain on his face she recognized him. Had she been for a moment in doubt, she would have called for help. But seeing him, she remained silent, even though she saw her father lying prone right across the table, with the veil torn from his face.

'You have killed him?'

The words came like a hoarse murmur from her throat. Her face was whiter than any ivory, and her eyes dilated in a look of horror.

'I swear that I have not,' Tim replied in a hurried whisper. 'By my love for you, I swear that I have done him no harm. If you trust me—if you love me, help me now, and within the hour you and I will be miles away in safety.'

Then, as for a second or two she still remained motionless, standing there and staring at him, he said once more: 'If you love me, help me now—or else we must both perish.'

Confused sounds came from the outside: fighting, shouting, tramping. Tim knew that he had less than three minutes to spare: three minutes in which to lift the inert body from the table, take off the long robe, wrap it round himself, pick up the veil, and swathe his face and head with it. He had not glanced again on Marivosa. He dared not look at her again. On her trust in him, now, at this supreme moment, depended his life and hers: in her tiny hands she held both their destinies. And the moment of uncertainty was so tense that he dared not look on her and learn what their fate was to be.

There was plenty of noise down in the courtyard: greater and louder did it grow every moment, but it seemed to come from very far away. Here in the room it seemed so still—so still, that Tim thought he could hear the beating of his own heart in his breast. And then, all of a sudden, a sound broke that stillness, a sound so strange that Tim must needs catch his breath and marvel if excitement had not addled his senses: for the sound was not only strange. It was like the most delicious music that comes from a choir of angels—the music of a girlish laugh. A sweet, low, rippling laugh, like the trill from a warbler's throat. And then, the words: 'Oh, Tim! you don't know how funny you look!'

Thus did he learn that all was well. But there was no time now, not even for a kiss. She understood everything. Guessed at what she did not know. She fetched a sheet from the next room and helped him to lay it over her father's body. She also put a wad of milreis into his hand.

'We'll need it,' she said simply.

For a second, then, did he look into her sweet face, and, resting his hand on the body of that cruel mountebank, who was her father, he said earnestly: 'He will sleep for forty-eight hours, as I did once. I swear to you that he is not dead.'

Then he went out on the veranda in full sight of all the men, while Marivosa went to find Fra Federico.

## XXV

But Esteban knew nothing about all that. All he knew was that the Mamaluco had forced his way into the chamber of the Great Unknown—presumably with murderous intent—but that it was the Great Unknown who came out of the chamber unscathed: while he, Esteban, was ordered to lay the dead body of the mysterious Mamaluco on the floor of his wagon.

That the Mamaluco was a mysterious personage was patent to Esteban. Had he not been ordered by no less a person than the Empress Marivosa herself to treat that inert form under the sheet with every care and respect? But Esteban had not done with surprises and puzzlement yet. Indeed, the next few hours were richer in excitement than any that had gone before; for what occurred during the previous night were matters that pertained to man and woman—such men and women as Esteban was acquainted with—wild, primitive, savage natures, with primal instincts of hate, jealousy, and revenge, culminating in outrage or murder: whereas what occurred in the course of the next two days savoured of the supernatural. And although it was all made clear to Esteban subsequently, he never could quite repress a shudder of superstitious awe when he thought over the events of those two days.

That the beautiful Empress of Brazil and her extraordinary father should choose to travel in a carrier's wagon was in itself a strange occurrence. An inexplicable occurrence really: for why did they not go back to Canudos with their own escort of armed brigands? However, there they were, under the hood of Esteban's cart, and whenever Esteban looked over his shoulder at them, the arm of the veiled prophet was round his daughter's shoulders and her little head was resting against his breast. That, of course, was right and proper, and even understandable. Though the man was an arch-pirate and a cattle-thief, he loved his daughter apparently: and even the fearsome mother jaguar cares for her progeny.

At intervals, too, the lovely Empress would stoop over the inert body on the floor of the wagon, raise the sheet, and look down on the face beneath it. And once Esteban caught sight of her face after she had done this, and he saw that there were tears in her eyes. But then the veiled prophet said something in a language which Esteban did not understand, whereupon the Empress smiled through her tears. This, again, was both natural and understandable.

The puzzle came when, on another occasion, Esteban looked over his shoulder and saw that the Great Unknown held the Empress in both his arms, and that he was kissing her in a way that to Esteban's knowledge no man had ever kissed his own daughter before: he kissed her on the mouth, the eyes, and just between her throat and chin; and to Esteban it seemed as if he would never leave off kissing the beautiful Empress of Brazil.

But apparently the sight of those two kissing in that way had no ill effect on Fra Federico's peace of mind. He sat opposite the Empress, with the inert body of the Mamaluco lying between them on the floor. The priest had an open book on his knee, the contents of which he must have known by heart, for despite the jolting of the wagon he kept his eyes fixed upon the book, and went on murmuring words and words and words, not one of which did Esteban understand, and which no man living could possibly have read out of the book, which bumped and bumped on Fra Federico's knee as the wagon went lumbering over the stony road.

What already then struck Esteban as extraordinary was that during this period of kissing, the prophet had drawn aside his veil. Esteban, however, could not see his face, but it struck him as odd that the man's hair should be crisp and brown, like the hair of a young rather than old man. Also what Esteban saw of his hands and arms suggested the hands and arms of a young and vigorous man. Strangely, also, they appeared to have been stained recently with dock leaves: some of the stain had worn off and looked streaky, showing lines of singularly white skin between the dark ones—all of

which gave Esteban a great deal of food for thought.

And suddenly, there came the greatest surprise of all. This was just about midday, when a rest for the horses and men had become imperative, also food and drink. Esteban drew rein in a small coppice, where a few coarse palms, tall scrub, and acacia trees afforded welcome shade from the glaring sun. He knew of a water-hole close by, and, jumping down from the wagon, he ordered his man to do the same, to unhitch the mules and take them for a drink. He was busy for a time with his man, the mules and the wagon-shaft, and it was only after a few minutes that he turned round, with a view to receiving further orders from his exalted passengers.

And that was the moment in Esteban's life when he felt more pious, because more terrified than he had ever been before. All he could do was to try and remember the prayers to his guardian angel and to his patron saint which the curé of his native village had taught him, for he needed protection from Heaven in face of what looked neither more nor less than black art. What did he see? He saw the Great Unknown standing there in the dusty road, busy divesting himself of his flowing robes. His veil he had already cast aside. And a moment later, there stood revealed before Esteban's astounded gaze the face and form of the mad English stranger!

Esteban fell on his knees, and murmured: 'Lord, have mercy on me, for I am but a miserable sinner!' Whereupon the stranger laughed in the happy, hearty way which Esteban knew of old, and he came round to where Esteban was kneeling, raised him to his feet as if he were a child, slapped him on the back with such a thump that the poor man saw a constellation of stars, and said, with another equally loud laugh:

'Didn't I tell you, man, that I would come away from Canudos laden with a hamper provided for me by the Great Unknown? There's the hamper, friend Esteban. Spread out the feast for the loveliest Empress the world has ever known: then go and feed yourself. Eat your fill, and drink your fill, for you see before you the happiest man on God's earth.'

Esteban's senses were positively reeling. How and when had the sortilege occurred? Was the mad English stranger in reality the Great Unknown—the impudent cattle-thief, the hellish brigand and pirate? Was he the Mamaluco, and had he slain the Great Unknown? Was he father or lover of this Marivosa da Gloria, Empress of Brazil? These were puzzles to which Esteban has never found a completely satisfactory answer to this day. All he could do at the time was to obey the commands of the great and mysterious personage, encouraged, and in a way comforted, by the presence and kindly smile of the beautiful Empress.

And while Esteban carefully unpacked the hamper and laid the provisions in the dense shade of a clump of tall scrub, he could see through the corner of his eye the English stranger and the lovely Empress standing under an overhanging acacia tree. He had his arm round her, and every moment she would look up into his face; whereupon Esteban, being a man of discretion, promptly looked another way.

But poor Esteban could not bring himself to eat. Thoughts of that inert body lying on the floor of his wagon worried him into a lack of appetite. If the veiled prophet whom he had seen walking out of the *quinta* and entering the wagon at dawn to-day was the English stranger, whose body was it that he, Esteban, had carried down the veranda steps and laid reverently on the floor of the wagon? That, again, was a puzzle, the true solution of which Esteban has never found to this day. That the man was not dead became, of course, evident as the two days of the long, wearisome journey went by. He just lay there on the floor of Esteban's cart, rigid and still, for a day and a night, and then the whole of the next day. What power on earth, heaven or hell, kept him thus Esteban dared not conjecture. It was comforting to see Fra Federico sitting there so quietly all the time, telling his beads or murmuring orisons at intervals, or else muttering to himself words out of his big book. It made Esteban feel that if the worst came to the worst and Satan had, in very truth, something to do with all that sortilege, then Fra Federico would be there ready to shrive him, Esteban, and his driver from participation in the black art.

It was towards the close of the second day's journey that the inert mass under the sheet first began to stir. Esteban by now had become accustomed to his surroundings. The English stranger, with his laughter and his jokes, had done his best to put him at his ease, Fra Federico had been encouraging and kind, and the lovely Empress gracious and merry. At the first stirring of the man under the sheet Esteban was ordered to halt. His three passengers at once ministered to the revitalized corpse, plied him with drink, then laid him down to rest once more. Esteban did not dare to look round too often. During the remainder of the way to Cumbe he was ordered alternately to halt and to move on, which he did

obediently, smothering his curiosity as best he could. That the inert mass had become a living person was, of course, patent: that he was a man of great consideration was equally so. What puzzled Esteban was that the beautiful young Empress ministered to all his wants with such obvious tenderness and affection.

But the man did not respond: neither by word nor sign did he respond to Marivosa da Gloria's gentleness, nor to the English stranger's solicitude, and he repulsed Fra Federico's attempts at ministration with rude words and contemptuous gestures. He hardly ever spoke: gave no reply when the others spoke to him. Most of the time he still lay on the floor of the wagon, almost as stark and certainly as silent as before. He spent the intervening night on the floor of the wagon, and the best part of the next day. In the afternoon he sat up for a time, but still he did not speak, although the lovely Empress would often look at him tenderly with tear-filled eyes.

Puzzle? Of course it was a puzzle, an unsolvable riddle. Surely it could not be the Great Unknown himself, the mysterious chief of an army of five thousand lawless brigands, the resurrected prophet, the claimant to the throne of Brazil, who had travelled for two days and two nights, still and stark on the floor of a carrier's wagon? No wonder that Esteban no longer knew whether he himself was alive or dreaming.

Cumbe was reached on the evening of the third day. Esteban brought his wagon to a halt in the centre of the village, opposite Fra Federico's dwelling-house. With what wonderful feelings of joy and triumph did Tim O'Clee jump down from the wagon and look once more on the squalid huts, the dusty square, the stuffy store which had been the setting for the first act in his romantic adventure; the old familiar smell of coffee and peat pervaded the atmosphere. The same actors in that scene were still here: the naked, pot-bellied children, the dusky, wide-eyed women. They all gazed on him, on the wagon, on the lovely girl beside him, with the same silent, melancholy wonder as before.

Fra Federico had offered the hospitality of his dilapidated, musty abode to his fellow-travellers. The English stranger and the Empress accepted with gratitude. A woman was pressed into doing some cleaning in the two rooms before the hammocks were slung up for the night. But, as before, the mystery man refused to leave the wagon. He took no food: just lay there like a log, obstinately shutting his ears to every word of hospitality and solicitude; presumably he was already asleep.

By order of the Empress, Esteban placed a few simple provisions inside the cart within easy reach of the sleeper. Then he bade good night to everyone, drew the wagon across the square close to the store, where he and his man, and his horses, found shelter for the night.

## XXVI

At dawn the next morning in the dilapidated little church of Cumbe, far from the haunts of civilization, Fra Federico pronounced a blessing on the Empress of Brazil and the English stranger. Esteban, who had contracted to take them to Queimadas, where they wished to take the train to Pernambuco, declared that he witnessed the simple little ceremony with tears running down his cheeks, and when those two beautiful young creatures subsequently said farewell to the old priest, Esteban sobbed like a child.

Never had he seen anything so affecting. The Empress kissed Fra Federico's old, withered hand, and the English stranger begged him to come away with them.

'Let us make a home for you, Padre, in good Old Oireland,' he said, 'where you can live your life in peace, with your orisons and your books. I promise you that your fame will be spread all over the world, and that the bigwigs from every part will come in pilgrimage just to have a talk with you, and the Pope will make you a cardinal or whatever else you wish to be.'

But all that the lovely Empress said was: 'Come with us, dear Father Federico, and we will love you and care for you, and never cease to be grateful to you for all you have done for us.'

But the old priest only smiled and gently shook his head.

'I thank you both, my dear, dear children,' he said, 'but I want no home on this earth. I look forward very soon to my last home in Heaven. Until then, I have the few books which I love, and there are a few simple souls in these lonely byways whom it has been my privilege to bring a little nearer to God. I could not now leave them to become once more a prey to Satan. What few more years it pleases God to grant me, I will devote to His service.'

Thus they parted, with many more words in a tongue which Esteban did not understand. Their eyes were full of tears: only the old man's face remained serene and irradiated with unuttered happiness.

Together the little group now walked across the square to where Esteban's driver was busy attending to the horses; the storekeeper stood by, staring and offering no assistance. It seemed as if the thought of her father suddenly roused Marivosa out of the sadness which her parting from Fra Federico had brought about. She ran along despite the heat, outdistancing the others.

A cry of alarm from her soon brought Tim to her side.

'He went about an hour ago,' Esteban's driver said in answer to mute looks of anxiety from Tim and Marivosa, 'while you were in there.' He pointed to the little church, and then added, with a careless shrug: 'I thought you knew.'

'An hour ago!' Marivosa exclaimed, and looked appealingly at Tim.

'We wait, then, till the senhor returns?' Esteban asked.

'Of course we wait,' Tim replied; 'but find out at once, Esteban, which way the senhor went.'

Esteban did his best. He interrogated the wide-eyed, melancholy women who sat in front of their huts, stirring their cooking-pots. He also interrogated the biggest of the pot-bellied *pequenos*. All of them agreed that the senhor had got out of the wagon about an hour ago, and that he had wandered out into the scrub. A certain number of coffee-coloured arms were extended to show in which direction the strange senhor had gone.

Tim and Esteban and the driver, as well as one or two of the taller *pequenos*, went off in search of the missing man.

They found him within a few hundred yards of the village. Tim and Esteban found him. He was lying in the scrub, face downwards, with a terrible gash across his throat. The knife, which belonged to one of Esteban's provision baskets, had fallen out of his convulsed right hand and lay near by. Close by, also on the ground, a dirty scrap of paper, held down by a stone, fluttered feebly in the breeze.

Tim lifted the stone. Four words were scribbled on the paper in pencil above the initials 'D.S.'

'*Now do your damnedest!*'

Esteban went back to fetch his driver and a couple of boys. They borrowed the tools from the storekeeper, and they buried the mysterious adventurer on the spot where they had found him. Fra Federico—gentle, understanding, Christian-spirited as always, murmured the prayers for the dead above the lonely grave.

Dudley Stone, cruel, vengeful, arbitrary to the end, had chosen to face his Maker rather than face the complications which his downfall from his proud position of Emperor and Seer, the death of his associate and the loss of his daughter, would bring into his life.

The one man who had defied and outwitted him, the man who had humbled his arrogance and had stolen his daughter, was, like a conqueror of old, taking him captive and in chains to witness his triumph. Well!—the adventurer, after having staked his all, had lost. The story of his capture and of his humiliation, known already to Esteban the carrier, would be all over the countryside very soon. Never again would his prestige as the resurrected prophet rally the scum of humanity round him. Never again could he, with uplifted arm, wander across the desert in the midst of thousands kneeling with heads in the dust at his feet.

To the adventurer it was not the loss of fortune that mattered: that might, no doubt, have been recovered to a very large extent. It was the mummery, the bodyguard of fearsome Lieutenants, the oaths administered while the heavens rolled out their thunders: it was the rôle of Seer and Emperor that had been the breath of his life. Hatred of the man who had robbed him of it all guided the knife which brought about the supreme end.

That, at any rate, was to Tim O'Clee the only plausible explanation of Dudley Stone's dying message to him. But, as a matter of fact, the mystery that brought about the adventurer's death remained as unsolvable as that which had guided his life. The Great Unknown remained the Great Unknown to the end.

## XXVII

Often now Tim and Marivosa talk of those far-off days on the arid lands of the Sertao—the dangers, the mysteries, the horrors of that never-to-be-forgotten time.

And Marivosa da Gloria looks up with a smile at her husband and murmurs the question: 'Was it worth while after all?'

It would be indiscreet to put on record Lord Traskmoore's reply to that question. Suffice it to say that it was not couched in words. 'Was it worth while?' The most glorious adventure that had ever come a man's way, culminating in the possession of the most exquisite woman that had ever come out of the Creator's hands! Was it worth while? Even though, when on landing in England, Tim O'Clee learned that the child born of the illegal marriage of Uncle Justin and Hold-Hands Juliana was dead, and that he, Timothy O'Clerigh, had therefore automatically succeeded to the title and estates of Traskmoore: even though the life or death of Dudley Stone meant nothing more now, it still was very much worth while.

A marriage in the English church at Pernambuco, a year's honeymoon in Italy and France, and Marivosa da Gloria, woman-like, adapted herself as easily to European conditions and the rôle of a great lady in Ireland as she had done to that of potential Empress of Brazil.

Anyway, she was the finest horsewoman in Ireland—a sure passport to the love and admiration of the old country's many gallant sportsmen.

And Hold-Hands Juliana has found her right milieu in Cannes and in Deauville. She is rich, with a superb jointure and the undisputed title of Dowager Countess of Traskmoore—a still surer passport to the love and admiration of cosmopolitan crowds.

For the sake of Uncle Justin's beloved memory, the legality of his marriage was never touched upon after Tim's return from Brazil: though he would have loved to have seen one more dream of his come true—the one which he had dreamed that night at Cumbe, when he saw Hold-Hands Juliana in cap and apron, on her hands and knees scrubbing the floors of Traskmoore.

[End of *Marivosa*, by Baroness Orczy]