

RUBIES

Louis Moresby



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NOTE

“**LOUIS MORESBY**,” the author of this novel, is really Mrs. L. Adams Beck, who, using the pen-name “E. Barrington,” has become famous for her fictional biographies—*The Divine Lady*, *Glorious Apollo*, *The Exquisite Perdita*, *The Thunderer*, etc.; she is also noted for her romances of the East. *Rubies* reveals a quite different side of her versatile talent; it is a “straight” tale of mystery and adventure, written against the background of Cornwall and Burma.

RUBIES

BY

LOUIS MORESBY

Author of

“THE GLORY OF EGYPT”

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CHAPTER I

RUBIES. The most beautiful stones in the world. What is the cold flash and glitter of the diamond to the concentrated glow of all earth's central fires in the heart of the ruby? It is love's own stone, burning as the lover's passion, and there's none so beautiful on a white bosom or the sway of a delicate hand. If anyone had told me ten years ago that my fate was to be mixed up once and for all with the glorious jewels, I should have laughed in the face of Destiny. Ah, but it never does, though, to chaff that lady! She knows. We do not.

Yet nothing could have seemed more unlikely. My father was a gentleman-farmer, the only one left of a fine old stock, a Pendarvis of Caerlyon. They were rich folk in the old days, and it had been a big property. Now there was only the farm left, but a fine productive one—nothing to grumble at. And if that farm in the wilds of Cornwall had not fallen to his share, rubies and I would never have become acquainted. He had spent his youth in Burma, before his elder brother died and he came in for Caerlyon. My mother was a Scotswoman from the Isle of Skye in the wild Atlantic, and as full of ghostly beliefs and the second sight, as an egg of meat. It is very well known the Cornish folk are that way also, so I got a double dose of it with my blood.

But there was the farm, good land and meant to be my profession and provision, for there was no child but me. And if I did sometimes look back to the days when my people had a great manor-house and were Court cards, generally speaking, still I thought myself a lucky dog. It lay on great sloping downs toward the sea, catching all the south sun, so that, with the salt air and good sunshine and fat rains, our wheat ripened soon and rich, and as for our mutton, there was none so good from Caerlyon to Gwent. We had fish for the taking and oysters for the gathering, and when the sea was all in a silver ripple with the innumerable armies of pilchards, it was tools down on land and out into the bay with every net and basket you could dip over the side. And then came the salting down of the pilchards for the winter—and good food they were, fresh or salted, none better.

A man grows broad and strong on such keep as we got at Caerlyon. The Cornish cream, solid and golden as buttercups, the sweet brown bread my mother and the women turned out in long bannocks, the fish, the oysters from the bed down by the Pillar Reef, the brown, crisp legs of mutton, the smoked hams—Lord, I shall make your mouths water if I go on to apple-pasties and junkets! No, in mercy I'll stop, for no matter where you were raised the food could not come up to Caerlyon on the sea. Perhaps that was why I scaled a good wrestling weight when I was twenty-two, and had a pair of shoulders on me that set off my six feet uncommonly handsomely, as I thought. A good life too. The ploughing, the hay, the lambing—one thing after another to mark the dial of the year like a clock. But I believe my favourite sport was to run my little boat down the shingle of a still evening, and hoist my butterfly sail and out beyond the horns of the bay and watch the evening star trembling in the water and the moonlight making a pattern of diamond scales all glittering away to the Unknown. Then I would sit and dream in the immense quiet—and that was all the romance I wanted.

But there was more, for, believe me who will, the smugglers made their own of Shoal Bay. They had by no means laid aside their trade with the eighteenth century, and there are still fortunes to be made in spirits and other dutiable articles sneaked in past the Customs. And down in Cornwall no one thought it a thing to be ashamed of, though we did not, of course, cry it at the market cross at Gwent! Since the War the coastguard forces have been reduced, and perhaps my lords at the Admiralty might think the Cornish folk such simple rustics that they need never trouble their heads lest we should cheat the King's revenue. Anyhow, we went our own way in peace round about Gwent, and I don't suppose his Majesty wore a coat the less in consequence.

Lord bless me, where had they not their hiding- and meeting-places? In Lord Gwent's park at Clere, four miles inland, were ways mined by bigger than rabbits, leading to cunning little grottoes overhung by broom and fern, where the landmen would come in silent-running motors to carry off the stuff, the chests of coffee and puncheons of rum. And, indeed, if a sharp-nosed, sharp-eyed coastguard officer had stirred the wheat-sacks in many a granary he would have found more than spilt grain behind them.

Surely Shoal Bay itself was made for the very trade and encouragement of smuggling, being honeycombed with caves that would have led the coastguards a dance for a year, and having a sweet landing-place for cargoes—except when the wind blew hard from the south-west. When it did that every sane man who valued his skin made for Trehidy and pretended to be an honest lugger stinking of fish. Nobody saw any harm, not even my father,

though he did not meddle with it himself. There is that in the revenue that gets a man's goat, and he will cheat it when he would give his last sixpence to a needy neighbour and scorn to put a picked-up shilling in his purse. Men are made so, and I own I often had a chat with the skippers of those honest luggers—and why not? They had a fine open-air life of it. They had seen more of the world than I had, and if I filled my tobacco pouch at the same time that was my own affair. Not a creature far or near would have condemned me.

Yes—there was one exception—my Lord Kyriel at Hatton Park. He was not a popular man, though by rank the first in the neighbourhood. He lived almost entirely shut up at the big house with his daughter, going very occasionally to London, and he was known to hold strong opinions about the moonlight gentry. If the law was the law, it must be kept, he said. So the smugglers and their friends gave Hatton Park a wide berth.

And now to my story.

It was a fine night in May, and the roses on the house just out and smelling sweet, when I went after supper to get my boat and go out beyond Shoal Bay into the ocean, seeming to lie as quiet as a sleeping woman that scarcely breathes. As I neared the low cliff above the bay I saw a Penzance lugger dropping her brown wings in the moonlight. I had been working in the home-meadow all day, and she might have been there for hours without my knowing. She had her number, PZ (for Penzance) 4428, painted on her bows and sail according to law, so that when the coastguardsmen shepherded the fishing fleets they would know that particular sheep of theirs. But for all that she was a black sheep, as I knew well, and her cargo was more often dutiable articles than innocent pilchards and herring. I knew exactly how it would be. The cargo would be ashore by this time, and a drove of moorland ponies would be trotting up to Clere, or wherever it was, or possibly a few high-power cars.

On how small a thing hangs our fate! I stood a minute, divided between the wide, moonlit sea beyond the bay and the emptiness of my tobacco pouch, and if the moonlight had won I should have lost—what, this tale will show. But the tobacco had it and the idle lark of the thing, and I went striding away from the cliff and up to where our meadows touched the Gwent Road. I had to look sharp, for, what with willing hands and plenty of them, there was little time between the landing of a cargo and the turn of the Gwent Road. So, looking at my watch, presently I legged it like a hare, and took a toss, I remember, over old Cowslip Queen as she lay dozing in the warm grass in the shadow of the hedge; and there I stood and waited in great

surprise, for there was no train of ponies, but only two men on horseback coming slowly along the road as if deep in talk. The one was a man I knew well, a fellow called Quesnel, agent of one of the French houses that ran liquor and tobacco by the *Bonnibel* and others, and often over our way, and the other was—Lord Kyriel.

Lord Kyriel! A magistrate, no less, and apt to read the lessons in Caerlyon Church on Sundays, while all the small boys ate nuts, cracked beforehand, or sucked peppermint until the time came for the sermon and sleep. I was so completely dumbfounded that I might have tumbled out of the hedge at their feet, but that I was strung up taut with curiosity and determined to see the end, come what would. So I walked quick and light along inside the hedge until I came to the clump of alders where the lane to Hatton Park forks out of the Gwent Road, and there I was rewarded by seeing a fat packet, sealed, pass from Monsieur Quesnel's hand to my lord's, the which I could swear held more than a delicate tobacco that perfumed the air as he drew it out of his pocket with a French flourish. And as he took it, weighing it in his hand a moment, Kyriel said seriously:

“The trust was not one that many men would have accepted, sir, and you have carried it out faithfully. Here is my acknowledgement that it is duly received.”

Very formal, you see. And he took a paper out of his pocket and handed it to Quesnel, who read, folded, and pocketed it, replying, with a bow, in his queer French-English:

“I am happy milord approves thus. If it was dangerous—why, death of my life, danger is a man's business! I have the honour to wish milord good-night.”

On that they parted, and Lord Kyriel turned up Gear Lane that leads to Hatton Park, and Monsieur Quesnel to the bay.

Suddenly, I cannot tell how, I had a startled feeling that I had thrust myself into a dangerous secret, which, heaven knows, I never meant; and the long shadows, like black fingers, which the moon made of the branches, and the dead silence, pointed by the horses' retreating trot, became strange and eerie. I licked home through the grass near as quick as the hares that scuttled before me in the dew, and so in, and nobody the wiser if I had held my tongue.

But there again Fate was too strong for me. I came on my father alone next day in the turnip field, having said nothing at breakfast because of my mother and the maids. He had been hoeing, for it was no way of his to look on with his hands in his pockets, and glanced up when I came, leaning on

the hoe and waiting to see what I would say, because it was so clear there was something on my mind. And it was such a habit with me to open myself with him, he being as good a father as ever stepped, that I said right out:

“Father, what do you suppose Lord Kyriel has to do with Quesnel?”

He let the hoe slip and stooped and picked it up before he looked me in the eyes again.

“And what put that fool’s question into your head, Master Roger, and what have you to do with Kyriel or Quesnel?”

The words were nothing, but when I saw how my father’s eyes darkened I knew there was more in the thing than I suspected, and because he spoke sharp I stumbled in my answer.

“I thought—” I said, and stopped. And after that false start another, “I saw—” and then his eye was so brightly fixed on me that out it all came with a rush, like champagne from a bottle after the cork has bounced out.

He listened, looking at me steadily, and I finished and shifted on my heels like a schoolboy, till at last he said with a kind of sadness:

“If you had stuck to your boat, boy, you would have saved yourself and me some trouble. But since you thrust your foolish nose into another man’s business, look straight at me now and tell me—can you keep a secret? You never had one yet.”

I was twenty-eight, and the question galled me. Why should I not keep a secret like any other man? I did not know then how rare a gift it is. Most men can hold their tongue: few so that none shall guess there is a secret behind it. So I answered with foolish pride that I was certainly able to let it go no farther, and turned, as if to walk off.

But my father stopped me.

“If I tell you that if any living soul knew of the existence of that packet it would bring ruin to more than one, and your father among them, what would you say, Roger? Kyriel must meet Quesnel now and again—worse luck, for it’s a grave risk—but it was fool’s madness to meet on the open road where anyone might pass.”

His look was sad and kind, and something in the quality of it moved me more than I liked to show. I felt I had done wrong and could not tell how.

“Why, Father, nothing you need say would make me shut my jaws the tighter. A look is enough. You can trust me. Let’s forget the whole thing. But look here—if it’s any concern of yours—I don’t care a damn for Kyriel—

and if any message wants taking, let me meet Quesnel, and there won't be a soul to trouble about what half the folks do, and nothing said."

"Why, that might be!" he said, and stopped, gazing earnestly on the ground. Then, recollecting himself, "No, no. I won't have you drawn into it. If I drop, your mother only has you. But if you are willing, Roger—your own free choice, mind!—I see no reason why you should not go setting a trap in Hatton Park to-morrow and give Kyriel a written message from me. It's urgent I should get word to him and hear from him, and if he ran that fool's risk last night I must risk the less."

Now I knew it must be urgent, for if there were two things my father loathed it was a poacher and a trap. The first he thought much below a gentleman, the last below any decent man and vilely cruel. And the confounding part of the whole business was that, to the best of my belief, he had never exchanged a word with Lord Kyriel but at market at Gwent, and we knew nothing of him beyond the countryside gossip, which was not altogether in his favour. He did not mix with the gentry because of an ancient scandal at cards, and his lordship thought himself high above the farmers, so there he hung, like Mahomet's coffin, between heaven and earth.

"Well, of course I could," says I, "if I don't get caught by one of the keepers and handed over to the constable. But I won't balk for that if you think it won't reflect on my upbringing!"

I laughed. I see now how young I was in the way I took this, as if small things could matter—but you are to remember I no more guessed what was to it than the turnips I stood among. My father was solemn as a tombstone.

"As a matter of fact, you must contrive to be caught and brought before Kyriel. It will play the game better than anything yet, if folks think there's bad blood between him and me. I would sooner lose this" (he held out his right hand) "than bring you into it, but the thing is urgent."

"Well, but all this is easy enough," said I; "and no harm can come of it that I can see except being suspected of making too free with Kyriel's hares and pheasants, and, though I don't choose it, a man of my age can stand that kind of gossip if Kyriel doesn't let it go too far. I take it he'll understand that part of the game?"

But still he looked at me steadily.

"You must be prepared for insults, Roger. Kyriel has a rough side to his tongue, and you'll taste it. It will be needful he should treat you like any other, and the world knows he's keen about his game."

I saw the sense of this, and that if he played his part so must I. That part of it I did not like, I own, for, passing the man riding now and again, there was a contempt in the cold, black glance of him that I found stirred my bile, anyhow. But beyond this and a burning desire to acquit myself well of a trust I saw no farther than my nose, and what my father did was right enough for me, and when he sent me off to the barn, saying, "Very well. Let all this be between you and me," I went about my own business as careless a young man as any in Cornwall.

Nothing more was said that day, but the next was Saturday, and at noon the farm hands came tumbling into the huge old outer kitchen where their dinners were served to them. The village was two miles off and time could not be wasted tramping to and fro, and the dinner was considered in their wages. There were four of them, and it would have given a dying man an appetite to see the hearty pot of meat and potatoes and carrots and onions and suet dumplings, all boiled together and giving out such a savoury steam as I could smell half over the meadow, coming up from the pasture, when the wind was that way. And when the covers were off and the two maids flew back and forth, chattering like starlings, and each man brought up his big earthen bowl, and my mother, with a great wooden ladle, filled it with soup and dumplings and lumps of meat and vegetables, all in a heavenly abundance that made the mouth water—why then the man that worked on Squire Pendarvis's land (for so they called my father) felt to the very bottom of his stomach his luck in being with one that fed his men like fighting cocks and grudged them nothing.

I loitered that day at the window of the outer kitchen, for the roast beef was not yet gone into the dining parlour, enjoying the good smell and the men's content, like horses at their manger, and wishing the beef would hurry up, and so it happened I heard their talk between the journeys of their wooden spoons to their mouths.

Says Tom Blean, our teamster, to Dick Stokes, the best ploughman in those parts, "Was you up to the Gwent Road night before last by any chance? The gentry" (as they called the smugglers) "landed as neat a cargo as any this year, and, by the same token, something went adrift with one o' the motor cars and they knocked John Jervis up to fix it."

"Not I. Where was they going to take the stuff?"

"Up to Gwent, same's last time."

A minute's interruption and the sound of comfortably munching jaws, and then Tom Blean started again.

“I see them, and they bursting with liquor and money—a better trade than farming, year in, year out, the Lord knows! The luggermen make a good thing of it, but the men from Gwent get as fat as butter on it, and their wives in silk and di’monds. And then I see the Frenchman up on the Gwent Road by Gear Lane.”

You may judge if I pricked up my ears at this. I knew Tom Blean’s cottage had a view of everything he wanted to see, and he a born talker, his eyes always on the dance for happenings. I forgot the beef, though it was bubbling deliciously on a big spit before the fire, and Nancy basting it and the Yorkshire pudding with rich brown gravy and oozings.

“What Frenchman?” Dick Stokes said at last, licking his spoon affectionately.

“Quesnel,” says Blean, giving it the English *s*. “Him that comes over with the *Bonnibel* every quarter to settle up with the Gwent gentry.”

“And what’s to that?”

“Why, nothing, so far’s I’m concerned. Let the high folks keep their business to themselves, and I’ll keep mine. If anyone was to ask me if I see my Lord Kyriel riding down Gear Lane on the roan mare last night, it’s no business of mine. But I sees what I sees all the same.”

“The less you sees and the more you stops your jaw the better, Tom, my lad,” says Stokes. “You’re a jolly sight too fond of hearing your own noise, and if his lordship got wind of your talk, you’d hear of it.”

“Nay, lad, I didn’t say as I saw him.”

“You didn’t say as you didn’t. Now cork your jaw. I don’t want no more blether. Just want to enjoy them dumplings, as is fair delicious.”

And not a word more, but their heads down like cattle. And presently the beef was too good for me to hold back any longer after my morning among the sheep, so I followed it into the dining parlour, and my father washed his hands and came in, and so did my mother, with her fine, delicate face and still pretty to my eye; and down we sat and had our dinner, with home-made cheese, very unlike the bought article, and gooseberry fool and cream junket to follow it, and right good it tasted.

Before we rose from the table, after, my mother said slowly, “I had my dream last night, John.”

Father was lighting his pipe, but stopped and looked at her. He knew that dream, and so did I, because so sure as she dreamed it something happened to upset us one way or another. Last time a heavy frost, almost unknown in

our parts, came on, and we lost half the lambs; and the time before Father broke his arm. I never liked that dream. I liked it less to-day.

“Yes, I dreamt I heard the horse with the loose shoe, as plain as if I heard it now,” she said, with her Highland rolling *r*’s and her large, wistful eyes on him. “First a long way off, with echoes, like some one riding furiously down a mountain road; far off—near—close, and then it was Lord Kyriell riding along the Gwent Road and the loose shoe clattering.”

Now, it is a most amazing thing, but true as I write this, I suddenly remembered that as the two men rode up to me on that night I had heard the clatter of a loose shoe. I was so flustered at the time that it meant nothing to me, and besides, they were riding slowly and it was not very noticeable. My mind was clearer now. I remembered—and also that after they parted the sound had gone up Gear Lane. But my mother was asleep more than a mile off!

“I saw the moon on his face, and the dark look he gives when he’s vexed to the bone—like all his family,” she added, drumming her fingers gently on the table as if playing a dumb piano.

She came from the Isle of Skye, near the home of the Kyriells, as I shall tell in its place.

My father tried to put it off.

“You never liked them, Elspeth,” says he. “And so, if you have a bad dream you get him into it. But dreams are dreams, and heaven’s above all.”

“I don’t like it. I don’t like it,” she said.

And there we left her, still gently drumming with her fingers on the cloth. Father picked up his gun and went up the pastures after some rabbits she wanted, and I loped after him, eager to get out what I had heard between Blean and Stokes.

When I had told him he sat on a tussock that overlooks Penleigh Headland and the track through the woods to Hatton Park, and says he, “That fixes it. You must go right away. But hold hard, Roger, my boy,” and pulled out his notebook and pencil, tore a sheet out, and scribbled a few words and gave it to me.

“Read it,” says he.

I read and could make nothing of it. It looked like a torn bit of a letter, so that if found blowing about no one would notice it, and was only an unfinished sentence—“and after all the day was so wet that it spoilt our plans for the outing. In hopes—” That was all.

“Now, off with you for an afternoon’s work in Hatton copses. Be bold and go up fairly near the house with as much care as a man who doesn’t want to be seen. And then all your part is to take meekly whatever he says and give him this. Now, off! Time is precious.”

He had a kind of heavy anxiety on his face, very unlike anything I had seen in him before. He gave me a push on the shoulder and bid me run, and I did so, and before I dropped over the knoll looked back and saw him staring after me with the same sombre look. It gave me a notion of the gravity of what I was doing—that and my mother’s unlucky dream—which I had not had before.

She was a McLeod of Dornish, and, three hundred years ago, an ancestor of hers who had killed his man in a bloody murder was riding for his life at midnight past the ruined chapel of Lenie, an awful lonely, forsaken place with the grave slabs all heaved sidewise, she would say, as if the dead men underneath had turned in their sleep. And far down the valley they heard him coming with a loose shoe on the horse, and whether that had anything to do with it they could not say, but suddenly the noise, and the echo that was as loud as the noise, stopped—and their thought was the Great Devil had taken his own.

There was not a man would venture out that night, but next morning they found the horse at the bottom of the cliff that goes down from Lenie and James McLeod’s skean-dhu was lying beside him, but he himself was never seen more. We could do without that dream in peaceful Cornwall!

CHAPTER II

I NEED hardly say it was not through the big handsome gates of Hatton Park that I got in. No, no! The gold dragons atop the old brick pillars were not for me. I understood my business, for though my father would never let me set a trap, I had seen plenty, and in our outer meadow I had got from Wetherall, our hedger, a coil of wire and another of stout twine, and why he had them I did not ask. For my own purpose I had a light rope. I held these carelessly in my hand, and stood a moment some way off the entrance lodge, but in sight of it, to survey the situation.

Now, there is a big wall runs all round Hatton Park, about ten feet high and hard to climb, but with some footing here and there for a nailed boot rightly placed. So up I went leisurely and sat awhile on top, balancing there with ease and looking about me until I saw old Martin Holmes, the lodgekeeper, come out and glance round. He saw me and halted as if he could hardly believe his eyes. Then, with some apparent haste, I dropped the wire into the park and began to get down after it.

Lord! How he bellowed, running toward me!

“Get out, you young swine! I’ll have your life! I’ll get his lordship! Coming trapping in open daylight! If all the men in this parish are not devils’ spawn I don’t know who is!”

He was an Englishman, you see, and the English don’t understand the Cornish folk—nor the other way over—and anyhow the boys led him a dog’s life of it. I won’t give you his talk, for he had learnt his swearing in the Boer War, and no better school anywhere, they tell me.

I did a boy’s trick. I put my thumb to my nose and spread my fingers and waggled them at him, and so mad with fury did it make him that he came prancing at me like a bull; then I turned and was out of sight among the trees in a minute, he following, purple and boiling with rage. I ran through the glades, soft but steady (for I knew Holmes would come up by the drive), until I got up near the gardens—great handsome gardens with spreading lawns mown like velvet abutting on the woods. There were fountains and long rose-walks, and everywhere a kind of sumptuous air, as if money were hiding behind it and pretending to be forgotten. But I did not stay to look, though it was my first sight of that sort of thing, but, choosing a fine beech-tree, smooth and shining in the skin as a woman’s arm, I threw my rope over

the first trustworthy limb, about twenty feet off the ground, and so up with me and waited comfortably in the crook, leaving a tail of rope hanging down for betrayal.

Here I had a fine view of the gardens. It was a lovely day, and so were the sights and sounds from my leafy tower. All over the flower-beds the bees were humming in the wilderness of sweets, and this mingled with the plash of water from two great fountains and a stream contrived to run down a rockery where ferns grew long and moist, so that a very luxury of sound delighted the ear. For the nose's pleasure the whole green world smelt like a queen's posy, to which the gorgeous garden blooms added a fair magnificence of perfume. And for the eye's, what could excel the long reaches of smooth-mown grass, diversified with great clumps of rhododendrons and rose-walks and clumps of blossoming trees and the fountains falling back into basins, where marble girls dreamed among water-lilies, white as lilies themselves against long arcades of black, clipped yew?

On one of the lawns, almost beneath me, was a long chair drawn out luxuriously in the dappled shade, with big cushions, and beside it a wicker table with a silver tankard of cool and refreshing suggestion—so much so that I thought: “Lucky are the rich that don't have to go hoeing turnips in the heat, or sheep-washing, but can lie here dreaming of heaven right in the middle of it.”

For I could see glimpses of the fine old red-brick Hall with its gables, through the trees, mellowed like a velvet coat by wear and the more beautiful, and it seemed to me that such a man need not envy the King on his throne.

The gentleman in the chair was Lord Kyriel. He wore breeches and gaiters, just as he had come in from riding, and a riding-whip had dropped from his long, fine hand on the grass beside him. His head was on the purple pillows, and he was fast asleep, so that I could have a soul-satisfying stare at him as I never had had yet in church or town, for though my father was a gentleman, and the name of Pendarvis as good as any in Cornwall, we had no time or taste for what folks call Society, and Kyriel kept himself to himself, either because he liked or must, since the gentry did not seem to want him and the farmers he thought beneath him.

To a young man like me there is something about a peer of the realm, especially if considered a bit wicked, which strikes a kind of awe, as if he had some mysterious power to make you feel small and out of place where you are, and he looked an extremely fine gentleman. Perhaps I felt it the more because I had no right to be in his beech-tree, and I asked myself

rather anxiously how the interview was likely to turn, for in the far distance I fancied I could hear Holmes puffing up the drive. I began to consider how much I could stand if it came to insults. By my father's instructions I must stand whatever Kyriel might choose to say. But supposing he put it over a little too strongly, with Holmes looking on—and supposing Holmes let himself go too generously before Kyriel! After all, a Pendarvis is not a doormat, and I knew my temper, if smouldering, could blaze. I could not see my way ahead, and would gladly have stepped back to take my father's advice had it been possible.

As it was not, I studied Lord Kyriel. A long man and well made, I should say about fifty-two. I guessed his height at my own. Figure good, face handsome in a dark, dissolute kind of way, a small mouth like a woman's, but cruel—I hate a small mouth in a man—and high nostrils which might dilate like a thoroughbred's if he was moved. I knew his shut eyes were black. I had seen them when at times he passed me, riding in the careless, easy way that made man and horse seem one. And somehow the more I looked at him, the less I liked my errand.

Presently a curious thing. I saw him, without raising his head from the pillows, slide his watch from his pocket and with a skew of the eye take the time and slide it in again, shutting his eyes sharp and lying in the drowsiest possible attitude, like a man drowned in sleep. And at once I knew he had never been asleep at all, and wondered if the quick eyes had seen me climb the beech while I thought myself so clever. This motion of his gave me a feeling of alarm at him, and I cannot tell why, unless it was that the action did not seem to match with his high, clear features and the noble house and gardens. It was a small thing, but like finding a spider in a glass of fine old wine.

But I could hear Martin Holmes grunting and labouring up and then twitching at the latch of the little garden gate. And still Lord Kyriel slept soundly, though I could picture him now with one bright veiled eye like a rat's on the gate.

And as Martin came muffled over the turf, but puffing and the sweat running down his face, my lord stretched himself drowsily like a child, and so woke gently up, though without as yet raising himself.

“What's that?” says he, with a yawn like an oyster, but all most delicately done.

“It's me, my lord—Holmes, from the west gate—and I ask your lordship's pardon if I roused you, but them Cornish villains is more nor flesh

and blood can bear, and the game is ruined with their thieveries, and if I was to let it go on—”

“Thieveries!” The blood was scarlet in my ears. I would not stand for that! I rose up in my crook, rustling like the father of all the rooks, and got ready to slide down—then hesitated. Kyriel yawned again and slowly raised himself, dropping his long legs over the side of the chair.

“You do very right, Holmes, to be on the watch. Those poachers should be hided until they run blood. But what have they been at now, and who is it?”

“Coming into the park, your lordship, over the wall with his wire and twine, and spread out his devil’s claws—so!—when I hailed him, and then away with him into the trees, as if the place was his own. He had a rope over his arm too. And then the gamekeepers are at me for not watching the gates—as if them thieves would come in at the gates, flags flying!”

“A wire?” says his lordship, now standing and looking alertly about him. “The devil! You can’t name the man?”

“Why, my lord, not to swear to, but if I was to be damned for it I believe it was young Pendarvis.”

“Aha! I know something of Pendarvis. Thinks himself a little king because he owns a few beggarly acres! A gentleman should be a gentleman, and a farmer a farmer. Pendarvis is neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring. Do you hear anything against the young man, Holmes?”

The man was too furious to consider his words. I was always consorting and drinking with the fishermen and smugglers—low company for a man whose father held his head so high as Squire Pendarvis. I had made the trip to France in a Penzance lugger—and that was true enough, for my father sent me over to a man he knew there to learn the language, and I was there for the best part of a year—but no harm in that. Out it came, lies and truth tumbling neck and crop, exactly as when the women feed the pigs with bread and turnips and lumps of waste all shouldering each other in a flood of wash.

Kyriel listened in grave silence, gently slashing his boot with his riding-whip, and I declare I was so furious with that old scoundrel and Kyriel’s silence—as if this was to be believed for a moment—that I took hold of my rope and once more was for sliding down it to dash into the talk, when Kyriel spoke again.

“Why, this is a very serious matter for Pendarvis, Holmes, if his son is a smuggler. Can you prove it? Remember, I am a magistrate and bound to

listen. Can you give me time and place, and we can have him up on a much more serious charge than poaching? Is old Pendarvis in with the smugglers? Now, be careful! An oath's an oath, and a libel's a libel—you know the risks."

The old brute halted, confused. And still I delayed to hear more, thinking my father must know precious little of Kyriel if he trusted him at all. I was in a fog of bewilderment.

"Why, no, my lord, not exactly so as to swear, but Shoal Bay is like a hive of bees for smuggling, and Squire Pendarvis's farm runs down to the cliff and—"

"But do you know he harbours them?" very quick and cold. "That's the point."

"Why, no, not to swear it; but if your lordship'd have him watched, him and his limb of a son—"

Holmes made a wry face, as if he'd smelt a dead polecat, and my lord rolled a cigarette delicately, as he did everything—and looked upward at my tree.

"As to the young man— By the way, Holmes, do I see a rope hanging from that beech to the right?"

With a rush and a whirr I came down the rope, scarlet to the tips of my ears with rage. Later I thought he had worked me up on purpose, that I might make a furious entry before Holmes, but that never dawned on me then. I flung the gate open and up to the pair of them, Kyriel holding me off with his eyes and measuring me as I spoke, panting with haste and wrath.

"Sir, I heard what you said, and I say straight that if you listen to this old liar you are as bad as he! What, set him to watch my father—as good a gentleman as yourself? You're a cad and no better!"

And here, to my unspeakable mortification, my voice choked in my throat for anger, and I was afraid they would take it for fear and me no better than a sissy. My lord looked at me as gravely as he had done at Holmes, never turning an eyelash.

"Either this is a very clever young hypocrite, Holmes, or the secret is very well kept in the family. Now, tell me, young man, what is your errand on my property?"

The real truth would have leaped from my lips under the quick, dark flash of his look but that suddenly I remembered my father's injunction, and though, in my confusion, the air was thick with things I could not understand, that one thing loomed out clear. I saw that though I might have

been an angry fool it was possible I had done no harm yet—perhaps even good.

“Sir—Lord Kyriel, I mean,” says I, “I came for a look through your woods, and I must own up that I had twine and wire with me; so far that old scoundrel is right, and no further; and if this offends you, I’ll make it good any way you like—that is, if you’ll take my word.”

I felt like a callow fool under the chilly distinction of his look, as if I could be nothing that mattered one way or another. But I did my best, and I think the circumstances were a bit hard on me. He eyed me with his peculiar, steely glance.

“You seem to have brass enough for a bell foundry! And supposing I tell Holmes to give you the lambasting you deserve, will you take it as you say?”

I felt the blood burn up in my cheeks, but stared hardily at him.

“Why, no, not that! I’ll see him damned first! But any apology to *you*—”

His smile lifted his lip and showed his teeth. Smiling, I did not think him so handsome.

“It seems I must keep a dog and bark myself. Well, I give you your choice. Will you take what I choose to give you, or be prosecuted? You know the law is pretty sharp in defence of fur and feather.”

I had no time to think it out, and I said, “No prosecution for me!” not knowing what he was after.

Swift as a snake strikes he was at me, and a thin, stinging lash of the whip got me across the cheek and another on the hand, and cut me so that the blood burst on the knuckles—and all so quick that the whip made circles in the air, as when a boy plays at curlicues with a burning stick.

Flesh and blood could not stand it. I saw red, and went for him and got him by the arm and flung him off, so that he all but fell against Holmes. And suddenly again I remembered my father and pulled up, with Holmes staring at us with owl’s eyes and dropped jaw, ready to take to his heels for fright.

And judge if I was ashamed of my cut and the fix I was in when I heard a scream and a girl ran out from the rhododendrons, with a woman after her, crying, “Father, Father! What is it? Oh, stop, stop!”

We all pulled ourselves together and the scene was over, and for the soul of me I could not tell whether I had ruined the whole thing or helped it. Anyhow, they all stared at me as if I were a mad dog—I knew that, though I had never lifted my eyes above her grey shoes, but I heard her draw her

breath sharply. She had halted in a kind of horror, and there was I, caught like a thief! What could I say? I knew the blood was oozing from my hand and a weal on my cheek, for the man had put his heart into the blows and had a cruel pleasure in them. How could I look up at women?

Holmes had scuffled off. Lord Kyriel filled the bill and asked imperiously, "What business have you here, Marcia? You and Mrs. Lyon go on with your walk. As for you, sir, come up to the house and wash the blood from yourself, for you're a sight to frighten the crows. Forget what you have seen, Marcia, because though this young man trespassed he has taken his punishment well. Go on, sir."

He spoke like a man that would have his way, and I heard light feet brushing over the grass. I walked the way he pointed with his whip, and he followed me in silence, as if he drove me before him.

CHAPTER III

I REMEMBER how one or two of the women servants stared at me, as if with pity, when we reached the great house, pretending to take no notice, but glancing at me out of the tails of their eyes as they passed quickly. A tall footman, bowing, flung open the library door and closed it upon us, Kyriell advancing to the big writing-table and sitting down in a heavy carved chair.

He had the whip hand of me in that room, because it was so imposing, like a weight upon a man's spirits—as solemn as a church, with a high roof full of shadows, walled with rows of books that gave out a musty smell from leather bindings, which for ever after brought to mind that alarming day. Here and there on pedestals gleamed white busts of angry-faced gentlemen, whom I guessed as Roman generals, with whose abominable tongue I had been daily badgered at school—heaven knows they could never have found time to conquer the world if they had had to master it themselves!

All these things gave me a feeling of desperate discomfort, and, but for my father's message, I thought myself a fool for not having made off in the garden. I had a kind of feeling I had got into an enchanted den, all was so big, silent, and gloomy, and when Kyriell opened a door, covered with books and therefore invisible, it looked as if it might lead to some secret laboratory for turning copper into gold and old men into young.

There was nothing worse, however, than a basin and washing materials, and he ordered me to walk in and clean up—which I did, dowsing my head also, and was much refreshed and clearer in consequence. Then I took the chair he pointed to; but still the gloom of the great room and his dark glance oppressed me.

“Young man,” said he, propping his chin on his hand and piercing me with his look, “what is your name and age?”

“Roger Pendarvis. I'm twenty-eight.”

He seemed to meditate on this a minute, and then said, “Give it to me,” stretching out his hand, in which I put my father's message.

He read it twice with care and without a change of face; then, striking a match, burnt it, and taking the ash in his hand carried it to the window, where a light breeze took it. Returning he made no allusion to his action, but

asked coolly: “And do you bear malice for the pain I put you to, Pendarvis? Or the shame, with women looking on?”

“No,” I said slowly, trying to clear my wits, “I suppose it was all part of the game.”

“Don’t trouble your head about the game. Simply act as your father bids. What did he say about me?”

“He said that I might have the rough side of your tongue and was to stand it. What my father says I stand by in more than this.”

“You are very right—yet you flew at me like a wild cat. That may be for the best, however. Holmes is not likely to think we use you. Your father is not an ordinary man—possibly you take after him.”

I flushed up for pleasure at this. I could not take to the man in my heart, yet, he being what he was, it pleased me after all that had come and gone.

“I shall send a message to your father by word of mouth,” he continued. “Writing is a foolish risk if we can trust our messenger, and of course neither Holmes nor anyone else will suspect you now of running any errand of mine. Your father had written on that paper, ‘Trust bearer.’ Well, I will! That is, so far and no further. I tested you and you did not fail.”

I don’t know that I had any special cause to be thankful, but I was honestly glad I had not failed my father, acting, as I did, more from impulse than reflection. In some ways it is better when a man can trust his impulses rather than his reason, for they will carry him through in a flash when he has no time to think. I believe Kyriel saw what was in my mind. Anyway, he spoke more kindly, though still with the same dropped glance, as if what he meant was far behind all he said. He spoke very low.

“There must be no coming up near the house again, but I’ll show you a way where you can come any evening about half-past six, if your father sends you—nobody about then.”

I nodded, beginning to be a little carried away by the mystery of the thing and amazement at my father and Kyriel being mixed up in any transaction; but suddenly the damping thought struck me—what if the girl with the grey shoes should see me lurking about—the thief at his thieveries again? A whipped hound she must think me already, and rightly served. The picture she must have of me chilled me. And besides, with all her father’s graces (and I must own he looked and talked like the highest of the high), there was something about him that said in a whisper, “Beware!” every time he looked at me.

“Tell this to your father,” he continued in the same low voice. “And now attend carefully: ‘I understand I was seen with Quesnel and it shall not happen again. What you know has been put in safety in the hands you know of, and the rest will be here before long, though I don’t yet know how.’ Repeat this in a whisper, that I may know you have it.”

I listened carefully, connecting it entirely with Quesnel and the smugglers, then whispered it twice, and he was satisfied.

“Now go, and I shall dismiss you angrily, but I say on parting, you behaved well. Tell your father I said so.”

He was about to ring the bell, but I hung back, and he saw it.

“What is it? Anything I can do for you in reason I will.”

“Sir,” I said, with a tingle all through me and yet driven to speak; “there is one thing. I shall be obliged if you will let Miss Ruthven know I am no thief. She can scarcely think I was anything better, and I don’t like it.”

I forget if I have said their family name was Ruthven. The Honourable Marcia Ruthven. I knew that much. I might have spoken of a stranger, he looked so perplexed. Ever after that I knew how little account he made of her.

“Miss Ruthven? Oh, I see! Well, but what does it matter what women think?” Then suddenly, as he saw my look, “Certainly, if you think it matters a straw one way or another. Yes, you can rely on me—she shall know.”

I believed him and was satisfied, but he never kept his word, as I knew later.

He then rang, and in a flash the door was open and the footman at it.

“Show this young man out of the gardens. I have examined him, and he refuses the name of the gang that infests my woods. But I warn you, young man, that though I don’t now believe you are actually guilty, you have laid yourself open to suspicion and had better change your company in future. Tell your father I warned you as a magistrate.”

He looked so pale and angry, standing there like a hawk about to pounce, that under the black, darting fire of his look I could not believe he had ever softened. I am not sure now that he did. The man was a finished actor.

I pulled myself up, bowed stiffly, and walked out before the footman, looking as sullen as I could, chock-full of perplexed feelings, and perhaps the clearest a kind of assurance that the man was no gentleman at bottom. Yet, a peer of the realm—what could he be but a gentleman?

He called after us: "And, Symons, if he shows himself in the park again Holmes or the keepers are to telephone up to me at once, remember."

The door slammed between us, and I walked, very straight, through the echoing, marble-paved hall. I was in a horrid tingle of shame, for he spoke loud and I heard a voice like little silver bells on the first landing where the stairs turned, and the thought got me that she was looking down and saying to the lady with her, "There goes the thief!" And suddenly there was a silence above, as if some one were watching.

When I got outside I could almost swear I never looked back at the house—why should I? Then how did I know that at one of the windows upstairs was a light figure, as if some one dressed all in white were watching some one below? But I did know it—with the back of my neck, I suppose. And I went my way, sore and most bitterly ashamed.

When I was out of sight I ran. The trees were magnificent: lovely beeches dipping their boughs in grass, as though bathing them in the shining green that flowed like water all about them. And many a pheasant rose with chattering scream as I ran, indignant to be disturbed among his ladies. I was burning to get to my father and unload all that had happened and hear his opinion, and pelted along through the meadows and up to the house, to find my mother sitting calmly in the window of her sitting room with the news that my father had been called off to Gwent half an hour after I saw him, and he would be away a couple of days.

"But, Roger—your face! What in the world has happened? You have a cut like the whip of a branch. And your hand!"

I caught at that notion of hers and left it at the whip of a branch, which, indeed, I had got smartly enough in the thickets before then. I sat down by her. She had been spinning, an old fashion become new, and did it most beautifully. All our new damask table linen, or 'napery,' as she called it, was of her weaving, and gleamed like satin. She was as placid as a picture, sitting there in her spinning chair with a big bowl of dead rose-leaves and spices beside her, as delicious as a lady's perfumed presence, and the fresh roses looking in at the window, curled and dewy like pink sea-shells, and she began her spinning again and it continued like the humming of a giant bee. The homeliness and sweetness of it all crept into my heart after the gloomy magnificence of Hatton Park, and seemed as wholesome as a spring dawn, so that I leaned against the window revelling in it.

"But, Mother," said I, "who called him? He goes so seldom. Did he take the car?"

“Yes. He was in a hurry. I think he said something about selling the wool clip. You know he thinks it’s a fine one.”

“Maybe,” I said absently, and twice I repeated Kyriel’s message to myself to be sure I had it. Then aloud, “I was in Hatton Park a bit of the way, and old Holmes roared at me for trespassing. An ill-conditioned old brute!”

“Don’t let Kyriel catch you, Roger!” she said, looking up in quick alarm. “Keep out of Hatton Park. He’s smooth-spoken and polite enough, but I wouldn’t have you or anyone I cared for in his clutch for diamonds! You didn’t see him?”

“I saw him, but what harm? What have you against him? He reads the lessons in church and goes regularly—bad men don’t do that.”

“Just what a bad man would do to hide his badness!” said she. “And I have always the fancy that if we could see into his high oak pew he would be grinning and mocking and showing his teeth without a sound.”

“More likely asleep!” I said, laughing, but still mighty uncomfortable, for I had a great opinion of my mother’s insight, and the very thought of the man grinning silently to himself while the others were praying gave me the creeps.

“I wish I hadn’t dreamt of him last night,” she said, with wistful eyes. “That clatter of the loose shoe—and now you’ve seen him to-day and your father’s off and away—I wish I could forget it.”

“But do you know anything against him, Mother? All this is as empty as the white sea fog that creeps in like a pack of fleeces and the sun behind it all the time. Is there anything *real*?”

“Why, yes and no!” she said, still spinning softly in a smooth whirl of sound. “He’s all on his best behaviour down here in England, but my people didn’t think quite the same of him in his big castle in Skye, up by Loch Ruinart.”

I pressed her to tell me. Everything about the man interested me now. It was as if he had burst his way into my life, and the least word about him filled me with curiosity. I had never cared the snap of a finger before.

“What is Loch Ruinart like, Mother?”

“A great black sheet of water with splintered rocks about it and Castle Ruinart perched high upon them, with huge black towers to match—or they always looked black to me against the sky. And all the windows stare down into the loch. Very picturesque, they call it, but I never liked it. The Black Douglas built it in the year thirteen hundred and something.”

The whirring wheel grew slower, the noise subsided, she slackened foot and hand and was dreaming herself back to the island in the Atlantic waves. I touched her arm.

“But what were the Kyriels like, Mother?”

“In my young day it was old Lord and Lady Kyriel and the two sons, Malcolm Ruthven, the elder, and this man, James. James was a young man and had been an officer in Burma under his uncle, General Ruthven. He was home on leave then. And one day, when the two were out fishing in the river that runs into the loch, a most awful storm came on suddenly, as it does among the mountains, and Malcolm was drowned. James was in great danger, and had to spend the night on a little island in the loch before they could rescue him. He went back to Burma after that, but when his father died he became Lord Kyriel and came back for good.”

I digested this in silence. Then, “Who did he marry?”

“A beautiful Russian woman, daughter of some prince or other, before the country was turned topsy-turvy. She died when the daughter was born. I never saw her.”

“Have you seen the daughter?”

“Once, riding. But you know she’s seldom here and not long out of school. Dark and pale, like a foreigner.”

This did not sound bewitching, but I could offer no objection. The only image on my mind was a pair of small, high-heeled grey shoes.

“Castle Ruinarth is full of ghosts,” she said abruptly. “When James Ruthven was born there was a thundering roll of wheels to the great hall door, and nothing there when they looked out in bright moonlight. That always happens when a Ruthven of Ruinarth dies, they say, but to have it happen when a child is born—could you wish for worse luck?”

“Mother, Mother!” I said, trying to laugh. “With a telephone at your elbow and wireless that gives you every trombone in Plymouth, I declare it sounds like a lunatic asylum to hear you talk of ghosts and dreams. I don’t think you really believe a word of it!”

But I knew she did, and it was not pleasant talk for a man who had just got mixed up with Kyriel and knew his father was still worse mixed up. I laughed my best, but she would not smile. Her eyes were wide with fear.

“Why is it that Kyriel never has house-parties and great folk to stay with him, either here or at Castle Ruinarth? Men of family and riches don’t live alone for choice, do they? And I know there was ugly talk about his cheating

at cards, though they couldn't prove it. But why do I talk of him, when to dream of him is bad enough!"

She rose as she spoke and pushed the wheel from her and went out to see about the tea, leaving me stuck there. And I had never felt so uncomfortable in my life before. It was truly as if the sea fog were creeping up and up and blotting out the earth and sky, leaving nothing to breathe or see but its own white, cold billows.

But tea came steaming in and the brown rolls and new bread, and fresh honey from the hives by the honeysuckle hedge, and thick cream from Damson Plum's milk (as thick as cream can be), and brown eggs and what not—a royal spread—and my fears did not affect my appetite, be sure, for I loved my home and the good victuals. Yet at the back of it all lay a horrid doubt of Kyriel, and all he had said and done moved monstrous behind the haze of it, like a thing seen in a nightmare dream that strangles you to silence while it eludes you.

I asked one question more.

"Did father know Lord Kyriel in Burma?"

"How should I know? He never talks about Burma, as you know. And why should he have met Kyriel there? It's a big place. And if he had, they would be either friends or enemies now, instead of nothing to each other. That stands to reason. Now, I won't talk of the man any more!"

What she said was true, as far as it went. But my father and Kyriel were very much more than nothing to each other, if she had known it!

CHAPTER IV

FOR two nights I did not sleep well. I suppose my father being away, together with the other things, worried me, for as a rule I sleep like a dormouse. On the second night I dreamed of the horse with the loose shoe—a mountain road and a horse thundering down it, clattering a loose shoe. My mother's dream, and for the first time in my life! And the odd thing is that though the dream is nothing frightening in itself, I woke in a cold sweat and shaking from head to foot. And lo and behold, the wind was screaming like mad all round the house, and one of the worst Channel storms was upon us. The south-westers spring up very suddenly in these parts, as many of the smugglers and better men know to their cost, and often Shoal Bay would be strewn with profitable litter that the people round came and carried off like ants—there again, the coastguards should have stopped it, but it was a saying with us that God and the coastguards turned a blind eye on Shoal Bay.

Thinking of this when my senses came awake, I jumped out of bed and into my duds, meaning to find out if the men were off and away to the bay, for I never knew it blow so hard in all my born days. I met Nancy in the kitchen, she having got up all in a fright, thinking the house would be about our ears, and from her I made out (and no easy matter for the yelling of the wind) that two of the hands had gone down toward Shoal Bay with lanterns. I got the hall door open, with the gale flat against it, and, telling her to keep a fire up until I got back, slipped out, making myself small, and so after them.

Through the meadows, the long, wet grass whipping my legs, and to the cliff's brow. And there I halted a minute, for there came an awful sound on the wind—a gun! A ship's last cry in the death agony! Far out at sea, one—two—and then only the answering thunder of the gale. That Cornish coast, with its cruel rocks, the hopes that have gone down off it, the anguish it has witnessed! I struggled over the brow of the low cliff and down through the clinging gorse bushes, and to the beach and the little knot of men with lanterns.

They huddled together, half in pity, half in expectation. They could do nothing. Giants could not have launched a boat against the yelling wind and thundering billows that crashed on the shore and rolled up white and hissing

to our feet. We could see nothing of the ship; the night was black as hell. She might have weathered the horns of the bay, but if not, we all knew her doom. There was a long reef or rock ran out from the left, ending in a jag we called the Pillar, that stood up about six feet at springs, and the wind and sea together would drive any mortal thing in the bay straight on the Pillar Reef that night.

“Lord save us!” muttered Blean, the words blown from his lips. “I wish to God the Squire was here to-night. He might have a thought to help the poor devils, but it’s beyond me. I’ll warrant they’re all at their prayers by now.”

“And well they may!” shouted Stokes. “Look at the Pillar!”

The whole reef was one milk-white confusion of broken water, the more awful because the moon was hunted from rift to rift of black cloud and gleamed and gloomed upon it in turn. But the Pillar! The billows broke upon it like a boiling pot, and it caught the foam and spray and dashed them heavenward in wild wrath. The moon stared out, dazed, for a moment, and suddenly we saw a phantom shape driving on the Pillar—a black ghost on milky waters.

“What’s this? D’ye know her?” shouted a man, hooping his hands to carry his voice. “No English ship, I’ll swear!”

“You’re right, Saunders. A Frenchman, I’ll be bound, God help her!”

And as she wallowed, upheaving her glittering side in the moonlight, the sullen boom of a gun rent the storm once more.

“A gun! What can she be?” I cried, forgetting how many ships were armed during the War.

Not a man to be seen nor cry heard, save that one lion-roar of agony. It moved the stoniest heart, and the men who would rob her later were silent now, for Death stood white and beckoning on the reef and she plunged toward him as a woman to her lover. I saw her drawn quicker and quicker like a match into the vortex, until finally a mighty billow caught and cast her on the reef. There was a crash. God grant none that reads this page may ever hear the like! But not a human sound. Not one.

Presently, for more men had come running down to join us, there was a cry of “Take hands,” and we were making a line that ran out shoulder-deep into the furious surf. They put me at the outer end because of my height and strength. I know big Saul Bland’s hand, gripping mine, felt like hot iron. We had a rope about our waists and knew exactly where the wash would bring them. Collins, next but one to me, was the first to scream out, “A man!” and

I stooped and was buried in a smother of racing water and got him, and we passed him along to the sands beyond reach of the white lash of the waves. And this time it was I who shouted, "Another!" and we got him too, and so with four more. And that was all we tore from the raging sea's jaws, and of these three had the life beaten out of them and two were doubtful salvage. She bared her teeth that night in good earnest, and for weeks after the woeful tale went up and along the coast of lives lost in the storm.

We did what we could for the living and covered the four dead over (for one died under our hands), and I pass over the rest until the two stood up, and with the help of ready arms began to climb the cliff. The one they took to Saul Bland's house.

"And take the other to our house, Tom Blean," I said. "My father's from home, but I'll speak for him, and I'll run on ahead and get ready."

They nodded, supporting the poor wretch, and I ran hell for leather, the wind thrusting me on like hands the way I had come. There was a cheerful light in the big kitchen and the dancing of a good fire, for my mother was up and doing and all was ready.

I dashed in all dripping, raining Channel water on the floor, and she caught me in her arms as if it were I who had escaped drowning.

"Only one," I said, and sank, half done, into a chair.

Twenty minutes later came the flotsam and jetsam, painfully supported by Blean and Stokes, his left foot in a bloody bandage and wrapped in some odd-come-short garments on the beach, a man behind carrying his dripping clothes in a bundle under his arm. He stopped at the door and tried to bow to my mother, and she, all in a flutter of pity, could scarcely bear it.

"Oh, don't mind me, you poor thing!" she cried, her eyes brimming over. "Nancy, fetch a cushion. Phoebe, the stool for his feet and a hot drink."

And for a minute there was such a flurry of hot drinks and pity that I could not get a look at the stranger at all. She had a roll of clean linen fetched and her huswife, and dressed his foot with delicate fingers, kneeling before him to do it.

"Indeed, madam, you are most angel-kind," he said, in a moved, uncertain way. "If I could help it I would never allow you to take so much trouble—but your fingers are like heaven about me."

He spoke in a voice that struck me as very pleasant, in spite of a marked foreign accent which I could not place. The English was perfect, but clipped, with a soft rolling of the letter 'r' and raising and lowering of the note, and he used his hands as a Britisher never can, not even when he is play-acting.

Mother whispered to me as she came to the cupboard for her scissors:

“Not a Frenchman—what is he, Roger? But I like the look of him.”

And so did I. Not that he was handsome, you understand. I have no use for frontispiece beauty in a man. But courteous to a degree, and as if he could not help it and begged you not to be discomposed because he was doing his best for you—I cannot explain it!

“Madam, I must entreat!” raising himself, though his lips were white with pain, as my mother knelt before him again. “See, I will put my foot on a chair, and so you need not kneel.”

Have you never noticed how courtesy draws out the like in others? My mother spoke like a Court lady, though indeed her ways were always graceful.

“Would not your mother kneel to do this? And I am sure she is a greater lady than I,” she said, looking up with moist eyes from the torn foot.

“You say very true, madam, she would. And she would thank and bless you for your goodness.”

He leaned back, closing his eyes, and when she lifted the basin and rose we found he had quietly fainted away. We thought at first he was dead, no less, and though there was no chance for a doctor in such weather, I telephoned to Dr. Bligh to come next day, and we got Tom Blean, and he and I carried him up to the blue room and got him into bed in my pyjamas.

Mother noticed to me that his linen was all of the best, and that he wore about his neck a thin gold chain with a cross on it—but not the cross we all know—one with the points curiously bent and twisted at right angles. I knew it later for the amulet called the swastika.

He hardly had his senses yet, but when his head was on the pillow he put out his hand to feel for the cross. My mother sat up with him for the rest of the night, and said he tossed and moaned in his sleep and talked a language she did not know, very quick and eager.

The morning dawned as blue and innocent as if there were nothing to be ashamed of in the black night’s murder, and the gorged sea was rocking itself asleep when I ran down to have a look before breakfast. Not a sign of the ship. The waves broke gently on the Pillar with a chime lazy and measured like a lullaby, though outside the bay the swell was still heavy. There was scarcely a sound but the mirthless chuckle of the great gulls sweeping low in search of food. Only by one thing could a man tell the mischief. Shoal Bay was full of people, scurrying in by cart and a-foot to have their share of the plunder before the coastguards should come (and

indeed no one was in a hurry to fetch them!) and guard what was left, according to law. I myself, climbing on the reef with the tide out, found wedged among the mussels and weed a brass-bound box, as heavy as I could lift, and took possession of it with a kind of instinct that it might belong to our guest, for it had a fine twisted monogram cut into the brass.

It was far from a pleasant sight to see how the men and women were hurrying to pick up what they could and none caring a curse for the corner where lay stretched and stiff another sort of drift from the cruel sea. The night before, not one there but would have done his best to save them. Now it was over, and catch as catch can.

It sickened me, and I hoisted my box and back to the house, and at the door I met Mother. Dr. Bligh had been and said he could not better her dressing, and our guest would be a prisoner some days, but was improving hand over hand. I put the box under my bed until I could talk it over with her.

“And now come along, Roger, and sup your porridge.”

The guest had rejected that dish, but made a good breakfast otherwise. He had given his name—Ivan Vandaloff. Russian. I must confess that had chilled my mother a little, and did me, for every Russian seemed a possible Bolshevik, and heaven only knew what troubles it might bring about our ears. I wished my father had been there to deal with it, but, telephone as I would, I could get no news of him in Gwent. We consoled ourselves by reflecting that with such manners Mr. Vandaloff could scarcely be one of the rabble running Russia to the precipice—and why might he not be a refugee? She warmed to him again directly I suggested that.

I was sitting in the porch after breakfast, having my before-work cigarette and wondering what Father would think of all this, when I heard the sound of a stick come clumping down the stairs and got up to meet it.

“Won’t you take my arm, Mr. Vandaloff? It’s pleasant here with the roses and sunshine, and here’s a chair. But ought you to be up?”

I got him into the long chair, and he lay back weakly.

“This is heavenly,” he said with a long sigh.

All we had learned of the wrecked ship was that she was the *Belle Aurore*, but where from and where bound not a soul knew as yet, so I was keen to hear, but would not hurry him because of good manners.

As he lay back I liked the look of him even better than the night before. I have seldom seen a face which better expressed a cheerful temper and good humour with himself and all the world. His features were clean-cut, with a

good straight nose and rather full but well-shaped lips, hair and eyes black as midnight and noticeable with full black brows, his colour reminding me of an old ivory box in the parlour, a relic of my father's Burmese days, the complexion being of a slightly yellowish tint like old lace. He was extremely slight, and his fingers long and slender—I am one who notices hands, which I think betray birth and breeding more clearly than the face. But the charm was the man's look of simple good nature. That was captivating and gave me the same kind of pleasure as a child's or dog's trusting approach. His clothes had been dried and looked a little the worse for sea water, but were of the best.

Presently he opened his eyes upon me.

“Thank you, Mr. Pendarvis, for all your goodness. You and your mother must want to know more about the guest the sea has forced upon you, and yet you are too polite to ask.”

“No hurry,” I said, laughing. “Get well first, and then time enough to tell us what you like.”

“Then—but will you call Mrs. Pendarvis, if she can spare us a few minutes?”

I did so, and she came along all in a flutter. Crippled as he was, he bowed and tried to reach out to pull a chair for her. He spoke earnestly.

“If I could only thank you, madam, I might speak till to-morrow and still leave unsaid all I feel. But when I tell my mother her gratitude will repay even you if you could know it.”

His English was like a book, much more correct than most people talk, and as if he had learnt it with care, but so foreign, so oddly clipped! It was the only unattractive thing about him, and had a cheap sound—I can't tell why. He would not let her answer, but went on:

“My name is Ivan Vandaloff, of St. Petersburg—I should say, Leningrad, though the change does not please me. My father lost his land and money and met his death in distressed circumstances, and I was on my way on board the *Belle Aurore* to France, intending then to come to England to see a nobleman who is a cousin through his wife, who, I hope, will help me to some honest work. And here I am in England where the waves have landed me! But I think he cannot be far, as this is Cornwall.”

Even before he had finished Kyriel shot into my mind. His Russian wife—of course. I was as certain as if he had said it. I interrupted my mother.

“This is Shoal Bay, and Lord Kyriel's place, Hatton Park, is only an hour's walk from here.”

Being weak, the little surprise brought the blood to his temples, and he opened his eyes on me, but controlled himself.

“Certainly I mean Lord Kyriel. His wife and my mother were cousins. How strange! It seems the sea has brought me to the place I wanted. I was to have landed at Gwent and come by rail. Then will you add to your kindness by sending a message to his lordship? It is serious for me, having lost all my valuables in a box which went down with the ship.”

I had another inspiration.

“Was it a box of foreign wood, bound with brass—for I found one on the rocks this morning?”

“Yes, yes!” he cried joyfully. “Oh, lucky house this has been to me! For all the good you have brought me I thank you a thousand times! Bring it here this moment, my friend!”

He became more foreign in his excitement, face flushing as a British face never does nor can. His foreignness and the fresh mix-up with Kyriel made my heart misgive me. Life was getting so extraordinary. A week ago, not a ruffle in our placid life and the daily round of farming, riding, fishing, and now—heaven only knew what was upon us! And there was my father away—I was fairly puzzled with it all.

And when I brought the box, there he was, talking like an old friend to my mother, and her face alight with interest.

“The very one!” he cried in a kind of rapture. “Well, that makes all the difference between hope and misery to me. Presently I will show you some of what is in it. And now, Mr. Pendarvis, will you do me the favour of sending word to Lord Kyriel that I am here, hindered by a wounded foot from going to him?”

You may guess that this request gave me something to think of. How on earth could I go to Hatton Park in the light of day? And as to writing from our house I could not see my way. And then Mr. Vandaloff might not be welcome, for all I could tell. So there I stood, wishing with all my heart I had never heard of Kyriel nor he of me.

After a minute’s pause I suggested the telephone, but he looked doubtful on that.

“I am very anxious to send him a written word, if possible. There is a reason. You see, he has no expectation of my coming.”

I must own it seemed to me I was fast becoming Kyriel’s errand-boy, and I did not like it. So again I hesitated and Vandaloff saw it.

“I ask too much,” he said politely. “No matter. No hurry.”

My mother settled it.

“Roger will certainly go. There are reasons why I would not choose to intrude on Lord Kyriel, but that is neither here nor there, when a guest is concerned. You shall have your answer in two hours.”

I went, as unwilling as man could be.

CHAPTER V

IT was, as I have said, a most beautiful morning, and the dew still wet in the long grass, and in spite of myself my spirits mounted as I took the hill. But they faltered again when I reached Hatton Park and its jealous, forbidding wall all about the great demesne. Of course I could not go in by a gate, for at each was a lodge, and in each lodge a man warned against the villainies of any intruder, let alone myself. So there was nothing for it but to scale the wall—and if that sounds a small thing I ask you to try a ten-foot face of stone with no foothold for toes or nails. However, I did it, barking my shins unmercifully, and sat astride the top, considering before I dropped down inside. For I was in no mind to be knocked down again for a play-acting to amuse Kyriel's people. Of that game once is enough and to spare.

I sat for full five minutes to think, for I don't pretend to be a man of quick intuition at any time. It was a place of green quiet, the ferns and grass long, as if they had time to think and grow tall and close with the weight of solitude and stillness, the beech-trees drooping their boughs, heavy with leaves, and a little narrow path cushioned with moss to show none walked there. The very light was green, as if filtered through many layers of shade. I never saw so still a place. It held me for more than a moment, and I could not have made a noise or loud movement any more than in church. There was a little hidden spring, trickling down through deep ferns, that marked the silence, and that was all.

So I let myself down and crept along, noiseless, to some more sunshiny spot; and lo and behold, the tiny path seemed endless, stretching away into bowers of the same still green—and suddenly, my eyes growing more accustomed, I saw not far from me a girl in white, reading, and further back in the shadow a tethered horse, peaceably cropping the grass. Guess if my heart beat then! I needed no telling who it must be. Again I halted and considered. If I stole away and she saw me she would be terrified, remembering the bad name they had given me—unless indeed her father had kept his word given to tell her I was no poaching thief. And if I advanced noiselessly, so much the worse again. The least she could think would be I meant her harm. So it appeared that the best was to go on frankly and confidently. This I immediately put in practice, though thinking shamefacedly of my rubbed breeches and stockings and the bad luck of disgracing myself always before her.

Suddenly she looked up, and I thought as likely as not that she would jump on the horse and gallop off through the green arcade. Not she! She rose, dropping the book, and laying her hand on the mare's withers, gazed at me calm as a picture.

I suppose the moment has come that I must describe her, but though my heart has the image, clean-cut and beautiful, tongue and pen are poor artists in comparison. She might be twenty, or a little more, but had a quiet, assured way with her like that of a woman who knows the world and holds her own in it; a lovely clear pallor like a water-lily, but the lips a beam of coral flushed with health and youth; and—here I come to the strange, arresting part of her beauty—her eyes were green as deep-sea water—I had never seen such before, and they were the more noticeable because set in long black lashes that matched the silky coils framing her face. I have since been told that a mixture of Russian blood not seldom produces these beryl-eyed beauties—none of the grey-green you get with the colder European blood, but obscurely green, intricately deep, like water in shadowy grottoes. Such eyes! Heaven knows, they flowed into mine and took possession. Her face, delicately shaped above a dimple-cleft chin, seemed all eyes and light. It was long before I could get the other details. I know I was so frightened of what impression she might have taken of me with those secret eyes of hers, that I thought her an exquisite little brute, no more. I was not sure that she was even beautiful. All I can say is that many men and women were to call her so one day, so take it at that and forget my bungling.

And as I came near, quaking inwardly and trying to look at her, she said softly: "You are Mr. Roger Pendarvis. I have so wished to see you."

I stammered like a fool and was inarticulate. She looked at me with those eyes.

"I know you must hate me—how could you not after the horrid way you were treated, and for nothing? But I resolved that, since my father won't, I'll tell you I am sorry and ashamed, and ask your pardon. If you *did* take a pheasant or two, they were made for eating, and we have thousands. Perhaps you needed them?"

That unloosed my tongue instantly. I could not take off my hat, for it was on top of the wall, but I bowed my best.

"Your father promised you should know I was no thief nor poacher, and as for pheasants, we have them running everywhere in our own fields and copses. This is the truth. Did your father keep his word?"

"Never!" she said, and was silent a minute, looking down. Then, with a sudden glance that pierced me, "Yet you let him strike you. Why?"

Now, what could I say? Her father had not kept faith with me, which I guessed was very much in his usual way, but I could not do the like by him, for I was not brought up so. And then there was my own father in it too. I was silent. I knew my hesitation had a mean look that would speak against me—as it did.

She busied herself a moment with the buckle of the girth, stepped lightly on a fallen log, and mounted without a word, lighting in the saddle like a butterfly. Then and then only she looked me in the face, her red lip curled in scorn.

“I suppose you were afraid, and so took it patiently—as you would take anything,” said she, and shook the reins to go.

But I gripped them. Could any living soul endure it? A glow blew from her to me; caught us both in a flame!

“Ask your father why I bore it! Let him tell you!”

Our eyes flashed across each other like fencing swords, and hers fell no more than mine. It was a trial of strength, and both knew it and held to our own. But presently hers drooped and her lips trembled. I had conquered and felt myself master.

“You knew that was not true when you said it! And now I’ll give you an errand to your father, Miss Ruthven. Go to him and say Roger Pendarvis is waiting for him here, and say not a word to anyone else. Perhaps he will tell you then whether I was afraid or no!”

Her eyes fixed on her gloved hands she moved slowly away and never looked up, drooping in her saddle; and I knew the fineness in her was ashamed because of her suspicion, and that I had taken the best way, cost what it might. I date my manhood from that moment and cannot tell why.

When the last white flicker had disappeared down the green aisle I stood hidden by the bole of a tree for fear any stray gamekeeper might be spying, and thinking neither of Kyriel nor Vandaloff, but only of the girl. Yes, beautiful, I thought; memory, the perfect painter, drawing her face before me until it floated amid green leaves like a spirit, flowing softly like water, shadowy like mist, unshaping and reshaping in the boughs. She filled my eyes as the sun dazzles them. For she had something more than beauty, a something to be loved, as if you must clasp and protect her and draw her head to your breast to reassure her. And I was sure, without any word said, that her life with Kyriel was a difficult one—which suited very well with my own knowledge of him. Had I been harsh with her? Lord forgive me if I had,

but what could I do? It was love at first sight, and how could I tell what to do with it. It takes a man like a conqueror.

I know and understand now, though I did not then, that the woman who has this quality, and yet behind it all is strong and pliable as wrought steel, is irresistible to a man with the instinct of protection. And I had that strongly. Even if it is praise of myself, still I must say the truth.

How can I know whether it was long or short before Kyriel came—I, who was filled, body and soul, with his daughter? But he did come at last, cantering down the glade, dark, cool and handsome, bowing his head under sweeping branches, a fine gentleman indeed. His secret glance searched me as he pulled up and dismounted.

“Good morning, Pendarvis. Your messenger was faithful, but I don’t choose that my daughter should even guess at our secret understanding.”

I answered, not at all alarmed as I should have been the day before—and this also I cannot explain. I said boldly: “As far as that goes you have broken your word to me. You promised me your daughter should know I was honest. Not too much to ask, I think, as I was there on your business. However, I told her myself just now and she believed me.”

If I thought to shame him I was out in my reckoning. He took it as coldly as a January frost.

“Naturally, I should have chosen my own time. But since your manners are what they are, I must excuse you. What do you want to see me for?”

I knew he found me changed. Indeed, I was very conscious of it myself, for all my shyness and red-eared timidity were gone and he meant no more to me than another, if it were not that something in me said, “Beware!” all the time I talked with him.

He saw, perhaps, that it is not a wise part to insult a useful tool, as he must have thought me, and said with more courtesy and less masterfulness: “I am obliged to you. And now for the explanation.”

I had meant to give him Vandaloff’s paper first, but now I changed my mind.

“The gale last night wrecked a French ship from Riga on the Pillar Reef, and one of two washed ashore was brought to our house. His name is Vandaloff.”

I saw him catch for composure, and, in a voice weighted with some emotion I could not read, “Dead?” he asked, and clearly could say no more.

“Not dead, hurt. Here’s a letter from him.”

I put it in his hand and watched as he read, his face like a mask. But he could not keep it up.

“My God!” he muttered, and dropped his hand like lead on his horse’s neck.

He shut his eyes and his lips moved. I should be the last to connect the notion of prayer with Kyriel, so I leave it at that. I stood waiting.

He turned his horse’s head to go, there being no more to say—but I thought differently and went on, staring at him.

“His foot is hurt, and he has had a bad shaking. The doctor thinks he will be laid up for some days. If you would like to come and see him—as far as we are concerned it would be all right.”

“Your father is away,” he said slowly and thoughtfully. (Now, how did he know that?) “What is this Vandaloff like?”

I described the man as best I could. “Dark and handsome, and looks like a gentleman, but very foreign,” I said. Kyriel listened attentively, but he had pulled the mask over his face again.

“Russian, of course. My late wife’s cousin. A most extraordinary chance,” he said coolly. “He talked of coming from Riga by the first ship he could pick up, and it had to be a tramp, for he has no money to fling about. I must own it rather moved me to think of his meeting a miserable end almost on my own doorstep. Well, tell him I’ll consider if I can come, but anyhow as soon as he can be moved he must be up here. Except for that—I really have an engagement in Gwent which it is very difficult for me to put off. A case of chicken-stealing coming before me.”

His manner angered me, as if he were playing with a child. I can be honest with those who trust me, as he had reason to know already, and I despised his shifts and saw he trusted me not at all.

“We can’t return together, that’s clear!” he said, reflecting. “But will you give my regards to Mr. Vandaloff and tell him I will ride over this afternoon, and trust to find him very much the better for Mrs. Pendarvis’s kind attention. And, since his wardrobe must have gone to the bottom, I’ll bring with me a change or two.” He stopped a moment, then added coldly: “I said when we last met, Pendarvis, that you had behaved like a gentleman. I hope you will see it is the part of a gentleman to keep young ladies apart from all secrets. Of course, you will probably never meet Miss Ruthven alone again—but as a general principle.”

His manner might have worsted me, but that I was so angry with the man.

“Lord Kyriel, if you had kept your word there would have been no need for me to explain that I am not a cowardly thief and will not be taken for one!”

“She said that, the little spitfire?” he said, smiling as if the notion pleased him. “Well, so long as you implicated no one, possibly no harm done. Judging by appearances, you must have scaled the wall. I’ll let you out at a little gate not often used.”

He led the way on his horse, pushing under the boughs with a swish and letting them flick back on me—another little trait of the man’s character—and so to a low gate with three or four trees and a clump of bramble bushes growing before it on the roadside of the wall so that you could not see it from there at all. I must have passed it a thousand times and never known.

“The brambles can scarcely do more harm than is done already,” he said, looking at my breeches. “I recommend you to notice where this gate stands. It might be useful at some time to—your father.”

He closed the gate on me, and I heard the horse inside trot off.

I had much to think of going back, be sure of that, and could not see my way clear at all. Was Vandaloff my lord’s cousin? And whether or no, what could it matter to me? But if it mattered to my father, what then? And why on God’s earth should a young Russian from Riga matter to him or me or anyone beyond himself? I weighed seriously whether the evident mystery could be the smuggling, and whether my father and Kyriel might not be partners in some great venture of the kind.

Miss Katherine Pendarvis, of London, my father’s aunt, had left him four thousand pounds, handsomely invested, so that it might be, for he had the loose capital. But I hoped it was not this—not that I despised the smugglers, for, as I have said, I liked a chat with them now and again and looked upon it as a kind of rough, dangerous amusement—but it was certainly not a thing for men of my father’s and Kyriel’s standing in the country to take seriously. There was danger in it, and we were well enough off without putting our liberty and purses in peril for the profit that might be made. And again, what was Vandaloff’s part in the business? It did not fit the jig-saw puzzle as far as I had got.

So I trudged briskly back. And though I say I revolved all these things, behind and about them like a spring breeze full of perfume was the thought of Kyriel’s daughter, Marcia Ruthven.

Ruthven—there too I had my perplexities! She had a look of her father—that clear-cut, high-bred look. And I remembered my mother’s warning

that the Ruthvens of Castle Ruinart are kittle cattle to deal with.

“The blemish is in them all, like the black pit at the core of the apple, and a worm at the bottom of it.”

Was it possible that that young beauty had a taint in her? And if so would it not be better for me to tell my father once and for all that I could not mix myself into intrigues, smugglers, or otherwise, that were beyond my poor brains, for all my desire was a kind and useful life in the happy homestead.

But why should I dwell on these thoughts, so soon to be dashed into confusion by the dreadful thing that followed? Let me stick to my record and tell it in due course as it happened.

I got home and found Vandaloff lying at ease in the porch, with a glass of mother’s good wine beside him, for the grapes ripen sweet on the south wall. And as I looked at him a new thought flashed on me (a paltry one, as you may say), and that was I hoped Marcia Ruthven would never catch sight of him. I have said he was as winning a fellow as any man has a right to be, and more; and this I always consider as poaching on the women’s preserves, for what need has a man of such charm—we that have all the rights and strength on our side? But this man had also the very gift I saw in her. To look on him was to like him, unless you had some very strong reason to the contrary. Why? How can I say? Who can describe this charm? Was it the melancholy sweetness of his expression when he looked up at you? Or the gay glitter I was to know later? Or the air of truth, as if he would put his life in your hands and think it safe with such an honest fellow? Or the look of pride, softening into good fellowship, and the most sunshiny smile I ever saw in my life? I can’t paint it any more than I can paint the sweetness of Marcia Ruthven, but it was there, and made capture of all about him. I saw Nancy and Phoebe peeping to see he had all he wanted, and my mother could not keep away, but was like a hen with a chicken, and I myself—but you shall see.

I told him of Kyriel, and he said sadly: “Kindness—always kindness! And what return can I make? Here has the sea thrown me on your doorstep, and your dear mother cossets me, and you run my errands, Mr. Pendarvis, and Lord Kyriel discomposes himself to come—and I bring nothing but trouble and annoyance, and may bring worse!”

I said what was in my heart, namely that he was welcome. And suddenly, as if he had scarcely heard me, he asked: “Has not my lord a daughter? But I know he has. What is she like?”

I know I reddened. It came so suddenly, and I was still not set as a man.

“Why, yes, he has. But you must understand Lord Kyriel considers himself a great man, and my father, though a gentleman and a well-to-do farmer, a little one. I have only seen her once.”

“And what is she like?” he persisted languidly.

“It was only for five minutes, if that, and I’m a better judge of a sheep than a lady. She looks about twenty, with dark hair and a pleasant way of talking. I know no more of her.”

And that was not true, but I could not bring myself to speak of her eyes. It was they that haunted me—unlike any that I had ever seen in my life. Wonderful eyes, and clear, in their thick fringe of black lashes.

“Quite ordinary, in fact? Yet they tell me her mother was a beautiful woman, with the loveliest eyes. She was my mother’s first cousin. A man is curious about his cousins. Then she is not handsome?”

“I wouldn’t call her *handsome*,” I answered coolly, and did not add that I thought the word cold, brazen, soulless, compared with the sweet loveliness that she shed about her like a flower its perfume.

He yawned gently.

“A woman who is not handsome at twenty— for what is she born? Mr. Pendarvis, if you would have the generosity to give me your arm to my room I believe I could sleep, after your mother’s excellent dinner.”

I helped him upstairs, and went off to eat my own with what appetite I could. I own it was a little dashed by one thing and another.

CHAPTER VI

THAT afternoon, at four o'clock, I saw two horses at the spot where the plantation joins the big outer meadow. There is a right-of-way, and they took that. It was too far for me to say who or what they were, and I went on with my business, which was seeing to the marking of the lambs with Blean and Stokes and another hand or two. The house was very quiet, Vandaloff lying in the porch reading an old novel for want of better, and my mother and the maids busy somewhere in the distance.

Suddenly, over the rise of the little hill I have spoken of, I saw the two horses' heads jogging, Kyriel on one, and on the other—you have guessed. I say no more.

I never thought he would have brought her—the last notion to have crossed my brain—and I to be caught with the hot marking-irons and the lambs bleating about me and my clothes all over fleece, and no escape! Not that I was a bit ashamed of my work—let that be clearly understood. I know none better nor more natural than farming in all the universe, but the look of it seemed just then to get me leagues away from the notice of a Society girl (hateful word, I thought and think) with her riding-coat and breeches and gaiters and general look of a fashion picture. I was angry with her, furiously angry for the moment. Men can be quite as unreasonable as women when it comes to the point—I never found a hair to choose between them! It galled, too, that I knew Kyriel would be pleased to find me looking like a farm boy. It gave him the pull. My luck was against me in these matters, it must be allowed.

They rode up slowly, and Kyriel called aloud to me. I knew it was done so that the men might hear. They stood gaping like loons to watch what would happen.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Pendarvis. I hear you have given kind hospitality to a young gentleman who nearly lost his life in the late wreck, and has some acquaintance with my family. I have come to see if I can be of service. My daughter, Miss Ruthven.”

He introduced us carelessly with a wave of the hand, and though my mind was all of a confusion I answered properly, and then: “Mr. Vandaloff is in the porch. Let me show you the way. Blean, take the horses.”

She slid off before I could offer to help her, slim and straight as a boy, and I sent Stokes on to tell my mother. I knew my mother would like to get into her new grey gown, so that came first, and I made an excuse for the pickle I was in as I led the way up the garden to the house.

I make no comparison with the grand gardens of Hatton Park, but wandering artists had asked to paint ours, with its masses of bloom and splendid colour. Some of the winding walks were grass, some cracked slate paving and the little plants pushing up between, and roses, roses everywhere. For those that look to grandeur, Hatton Park. For those who would choose a companionable, home-like beauty, ours. And of the house too I had no call to be ashamed. It was the old Caerlyon manor-house once upon a time, and though much was gone to wrack and ruin and carted away for barns, what was left was beautiful. It lies fair and open to the south and the sea, with red-tiled roofs of different heights frosted with gold lichens like little overlapping coins, and the gabled, latticed windows broad and kind to the sun. In my mother's parlour, long and low, great men have sat in the old chairs and great ladies looked at themselves sidelong in the narrow gilt mirrors. A man feels his roots deep in the soil when he looks at a kindly house like this, though fallen from its ancient estate. Hatton Park, again, for pride, Caerlyon for home.

Why did I in spite of myself make those comparisons that day? I know well, and those who read may guess. I saw her look about wonderingly more than once.

In the porch, a bower of roses and honeysuckle, lay Vandaloff, sound asleep, the long black lashes like a woman's on his white cheek. I went up and touched his arm.

"Mr. Vandaloff, visitors!"

In an instant he opened his eyes and sat up, and I caught a look of recognition which I was not meant to see, pass between him and Kyriel, then immediately they masked.

"My lord," said he, "I wish I could rise to acknowledge your kindness and the lady's in coming, but I am something of a cripple, and—"

"Pray, say no more," said Kyriel, bowing and taking a chair. "Though this is the first time we meet, I see the likeness to my late wife's family, and I want no better letter of introduction. Marcia, this is your cousin, Ivan Vandaloff, from Leningrad. I hope you are improving under Mrs. Pendarvis's care?"

She bowed slightly, as if not much concerned. He, very low, with his eyes on her.

“And if you prefer to speak French, my daughter and I are equal to the occasion,” Kyriel added.

I had the jealous thought that he wanted to shut the farmer out of the talk, and rejoiced to feel that I could hold my own there at all events. But Vandaloff waved it off.

“I am rather proud of my English. But don’t accept me so generously, Lord Kyriel. I have letters to put me beyond doubt.”

Here I got up to go, as was but manners—and besides, I had the notion to change my coat and get rid of the wool. So I left them, with the box beside them, and an invitation to return as soon as I could; but would not hurry for all that, nor let Mother, much to her relief, for she was all tangled up in the new grey gown, with Phoebe hooking her in haste, and both as red as peonies.

“Let’s give them twenty minutes,” I said. “And take the hooks easy, Mother. Just look at the state I’m in with the lambs!”

But she tossed her head like a war-horse, though commonly the gentlest of women.

“If my son isn’t good enough for them in weekday worst or Sunday best, then let them stay away! What!—a Pendarvis of Caerlyon not good enough for a Ruthven of Ruinar? Don’t change, Roger. And yet—your brown suit—it may be no harm. Get on, Phoebe you stupid thing!”

She reached over Phoebe and gave me a kiss with all her heart in it; and I went and changed, and when she came downstairs I was proud of her.

I introduced her first to Miss Ruthven, and here is where good manners show. She made as much of my mother as if she were a queen. Kyriel was cool and insufferably polite, as though to show us poor farmer-folk our distance.

“I have to thank you, madam,” he said, with extreme elegance, “for your goodness to Mr. Vandaloff, who turns out to be a distant connexion of my late wife’s family. He had very bad luck in the shipwreck, but more than made up to him by your hospitality. May I not have the pleasure of thanking Mr. Pendarvis himself?”

“Unfortunately he has been at Gwent for three days, and, expecting him home every minute, we did not let him know Mr. Vandaloff was here.”

I could see the watchful look in her eye as she answered, but he fell into a polite rapture.

“I am sure I can’t be wrong in thinking our kind hostess a Scotswoman? There’s just the faintest touch of the Highlands in your charming speech, Mrs. Pendarvis—enough to make a true John Hielan’man like myself feel at home. Inverness way, may I ask?”

She looked him steadily in the face now.

“I was a McLeod of Dornish.”

There was a minute’s silence between them. Vandaloff was talking to the girl. Then again I saw that steely, concentrated look which had diffused itself before in the warm glow of general amiability.

“Dornish? A daughter of McLeod of Dornish? Then you come from near Castle Ruinar?”

“Quite near. I was born and brought up there.”

Another pause. He laughed with would-be cordiality.

“I might well say I knew the talk!” said he. “It was by my cradle, and I hope will be round my death-bed. And to think we have been neighbours so long and I did not know it!”

With such a grace he said it that if she had not known so much about him I think he might have won hers or any woman’s romantic liking. They can generally tune in with a man dark and slight and all fire and melancholy and a voice like honey, and Kyriel had all that and more. Who knows? I might have liked him myself, but that I never could forget the look in his face as he raised that riding-whip.

But my mother was not open either to flattery or romance from him. Phoebe brought out tea—and there again I must own I was proud of her housekeeping. The tea-table was an old Pendarvis oak gate-leg, polished till the china seemed to swim on black water, and made when craftsmen took pride in their work. In it was reflected the old Worcester set, all gold and dull red and royal blue, that came from Grandmother Pendarvis’s mother. The thin silver cream-ewer, worn by generations’ use, brimmed with Cowslip Queen’s thickest cream, and a bowl of the same scalded, and strawberries from the southern slope where they ripen a fortnight before the rest, and jam and crisp cakes and noble shortbread on the Skye recipe, and brown bread with crust crisp as pastry. I would exalt my mother beyond any housekeeper in Cornwall, and she outshot her own mark that day.

The company did justice to their fare, and judge if it pleased me to see Marcia Ruthven enjoying our cream and bread and making friends with my

mother.

“I don’t know how it is we can’t get such good things as these!” said Kyriel, helping himself again to the Cornish cream. “I warn you, Vandaloff, it will be Lent at Hatton Park in comparison with Mrs. Pendarvis’s housekeeping.”

“Are you leaving us soon?” I asked, turning to our guest, surprised.

“I hope to rid you of your cripple in two days. Lord Kyriel will send a car for me. But never while I live shall I forget all the goodness I have had at Caerlyon. And I think it is due to my kind Mrs. Pendarvis that she should read these letters and know who the stranger is who owes her his life.”

He said it with a smile to charm the birds off the boughs and reached down to the open box beside his chair. It appeared to be full of papers.

“Please read aloud, so that your son may hear.”

She did it clearly and well.

“My Lord,

“I have the grief and pleasure of introducing the late Lady Kyriel’s cousin, Mr. Ivan Vandaloff. It is grief because his father, my husband, no longer lives to acknowledge your kindness, having met his death at the hands of the Bolsheviks in Moscow on the 12th March of this year, and pleasure because you will find in him a grateful heart and ready obedience to your wishes. We are now so poor that it is necessary he should earn his bread, my late husband having lost all his property in the troubles. Therefore I send him to you in the hope that some way of earning his living may be found for him in England, which has always been the refuge of the persecuted. I could not have had the courage to do this but for your former kind promises. Remember, I beg of you, that he is his mother’s only hope, and that your wife and I were girls together. And so I pray the blessing of God on you and him.

“Your affectionate, humble servant and cousin,

“Nathalie Vandaloff”

It was un-English in tone, but beautifully written.

“The poor lady!” cried Mother, melted to pity. “To lose all and then to part with her only son! But you will prosper and make a home for her here one of these days.”

The other letter was from a man of business in Riga, and was also in English. And lastly there was a passport, which gave his age as twenty-

eight. She laid them down.

“Indeed, I needed no assurances, but perhaps these papers are necessary elsewhere. We shall not forget our guest when you go. I hoped you would have stayed till your foot was healed.”

“But surely, Mrs. Pendarvis, you’ll come to see us at Hatton—and to see that we take care of him?” Marcia Ruthven said it earnestly.

Kyriel seconded her.

“Of course, we take that for granted. And now, good-bye, Vandaloff. Just give me the copy of your father’s will, if you want me to look through it.”

Vandaloff dived into the box and pulled out a long, sealed letter—but more—something which I am sure he never intended, a long and most magnificent ornament for the front of a woman’s dress, as I thought, a gorgeous open-work breastplate of rubies, all loops and chains and rosettes, and as a pendant to it an Oriental cross or swastika like the one he wore himself and which I had found was used in religion and magic and was very sacred. If I had known more it might have surprised me to see it as a feminine ornament, but I knew little then—not even enough to be sure they were rubies, for I was too ignorant to distinguish between carbuncles and garnets and what not. All precious stones were pretty much alike to me. But I saw Marcia Ruthven’s eyes fix and open with pleasure, as a woman’s will, and that confirmed me in my notion of the value of the thing. It seemed to me an astounding object to come from the box of a young man going out into the world to make his living. I write with later knowledge now.

Kyriel was equal to the occasion.

“The finest imitation ever I saw,” he said, picking it up and fingering it. “I’ll wager this comes from old Isaac at Kief. I have seen work of his before, and always of the Oriental type. But you did very wisely to bring it, for it might sell for quite fifty pounds.”

“I hoped for a little more than that,” cried Vandaloff, laughing. “And I only wish that they were real and that I might offer them to my cousin!”

If I had known then what I know now I would have wished him and his rubies awash on the Pillar Reef before they had entered our house. Even then I suspected a double meaning in his words and struggled like a man in a waking dream to find it.

He tossed the ornament carelessly into the box again. Kyriel rose.

“Then on Wednesday I’ll send the car, and we’ll do our best to complete Mrs. Pendarvis’s cure at Hatton.”

He overdid the patronage in his silky tone as he bowed toward my mother, but his daughter made amends. She took her two hands in hers most sweetly, saying: "I know our dreary house is a very poor exchange for Mrs. Pendarvis's nursing and all this loveliness and sunshine, but we'll do our best—though I'm afraid it's a poor one."

It touched my mother, and no wonder. I can't tell why, but those simple words seemed to speak of dark things behind the grandeur of Hatton Park, and I know they made me more thankful than ever for my kind home and people. There was envy of our good, simple life and love of one another in what she said. I felt it, and thought of Hatton Park drowned in the great silent woods, and of Castle Ruinart frowning dark and dangerous into the black deep loch below, silently guarding its mysteries.

So they went off together, I attending them to the garden gate, where they mounted and took the way through the meadows.

Now, I have written nothing of any words Marcia said to me because she said none, but nevertheless speech passed between us. And first her eyes pleaded thus: "I am sorry and ashamed that I spoke so hastily in the park. Do you, can you, forgive me?" And mine answered, "I forgive you. But don't despise me for a farmer's lad in my working gear." And hers (this was as I offered her a seat), "Why should I? A gentleman's a gentleman, wear what he will. I know you are that." There was more, but this much is a part of my story, so I tell it. In a word, she had the heart as well as the manners of a great lady and made noble amends for a paltry suspicion.

My mother said as we walked back to the porch: "A beautiful young woman, and in the hands of a bad man. I am much mistaken in him if he doesn't use her in some wily, crooked game of his own. I like Mr. Vandaloff, Roger, but I shall be the easier when anything to do with Lord Kyriel is out of our house. Mercy, what rubies! If they had been real I could not have slept for thinking what riches were near me. A man might have his throat cut for one of them. Thank heaven they are glass!"

I agreed, and walked on, thinking many thoughts I could not share even with her. When we reached the porch Vandaloff was all grace and gaiety.

"I am lucky in my grand relations, madam, yet I do assure you it will be a dark day for me when I leave this kindly house and yourselves. If you and your son will not promise to come and see me at Hatton, not even the car shall drag me from you. Here I take root and grow, and you shall engage me as chief shepherd under my friend Roger's orders!"

And much more to the same effect that pleased my mother extremely. But though he said nothing of his lady cousin I had grown suddenly skilful

in reading eye-language, and I knew well his had said to her, “You beauty—you beauty—you most astonishing witch,” and yet there was something cold which had no personal interest in her at all, but was as if he were pricing her like a thing you would barter for or with if you could—a look not like what I thought I knew of him and altogether beyond my understanding. The more I thought of him at Hatton Park the uglier the thought was to me. I felt the air full of intrigue like fine, invisible cobwebs spinning about my eyes and blinding them. And she—God help her!—that should live in sweet air and sunshine was worse involved than I—a beautiful shining fly with a spider sitting at the heart of the cobweb and watching her with all his glittering eyes. And that was her father.

CHAPTER VII

THAT night after supper—no late dinner for us at Caerlyon—I 'phoned to Gwent, to Mr. Hasleden's house, where my father always put up when he went over, and asked a word with him. Hasleden answered. It was a long-distance call, and a noise in the streets, and at first I could not make him out. Presently I found he was telling me that my father had left him that morning for Caerlyon. At first it did not startle me. He might have had business on the way home, and no man had more friends.

“Did he say when he would be here?”

“He saw an account of the shipwreck in the *Gwent Herald*, and of some man saved and taken to his house. He said some one had 'phoned him about it, and I thought it was you. Anyway, he said he must hurry back, and off he went. He told me to ring you up, and I forgot to.”

“He has never come. When did he leave?”

“Directly after breakfast. He should have been back by two in the afternoon.”

“Was he coming straight here?”

“I think so. Hold hard—he said he was going to stop at Trewiss for a sack of fertilizer I recommended him.”

We talked a few minutes more, and then I hung up the receiver with fear like a knife at my heart. It was as certain to me as truth itself that if my father had stayed anywhere for the night he would have 'phoned up, because he would have believed Hasleden had let us know he was coming, and when I remembered how he thought for my mother in everything, I knew he would no more have let her lie awake all night in doubt than he would have died. I rang up Trewiss, but he had never called. I could not say a word to my mother and it was most frightfully difficult to be secret, for the telephone was inside the hall door and every one passing must hear.

I halted, almost knocked silly for a moment with trying to think in a hurry. Vandaloff was singing some foreign song with queer, whining music softly to himself on the verandah. I waited, then, hearing my mother go upstairs, tried to get Kyriel. I had noticed there was a telephone on his writing-table in the gaunt old library. He answered, quick as a breath.

“Yes? You, Batu? Be careful. That was an awful break you made about the— Hold on! Is it you?”

His voice was coarsened, urgent, very unlike the one for public consumption. I cut him short for both our sakes, and in half dozen words told my story.

“Do you know anything of him? You and he had secret business. Had it anything to do with this? He has been lost all day.”

His voice was silky again.

“You don’t say so? Impossible! No, I know nothing. Surely you should get in touch with the police at once? Don’t lose a moment. If possible don’t mention any connexion between him and me without seeing me, because there are things he would not like ripped up. But neither that nor anything else must stand in the way if you get no news. I’ll communicate with you later.”

That was all.

You may imagine my position, with Vandaloff, whom he had called Batu, in the porch, and my mother altering a dress upstairs, and the house as quiet and cheerful—I could hear the maids laughing in the kitchen.

Well, I rang up the police at Gwent and our village constable at Caerlyon (the latter a country bumpkin with a head like a turnip), and all the good I got was that he would be certain to be traced because of the car. A car, numbered and plated, cannot vanish as a man may, and would be traced in a day. That was my hope, such as it was, and with an inward groan I went and told Vandaloff, asking him to keep it to himself because of my mother. I shall never forget his ready kindness. He sat up, pale and eager but speaking very low, and, I believed, sincerely troubled about her.

“No, no. Give her a good night’s sleep, and then, if nothing is heard by to-morrow morning— But it will be, it will be! Can I do anything?”

I forgot the “Batu,” which, after all, might be a Russian familiarity for all I knew, and felt the touch of sympathy. But what was there to do?

It was darkening now, and I was afraid to leave the house lest news might come and I away. I rang up friend after friend at Gwent and on the road out, until at last my mother leaned over the banisters to ask whether I was dictating a novel over the telephone. Then I dropped it, and sitting down with my head in my hands began to consider the road and its possibilities.

Gwent is a compact little town in a basin, and almost directly you leave it the road jumps up sharply into the hills and moors, as lonely as can be—but then we Cornish folk are law-abiding people; except for a trifle of

smuggling and poaching, and I would have said a woman might have driven from Gwent to Caerlyon in the dark and no danger. Here and there are rich valleys in the hills, full of fine trees and great acreage of parks and manors, for the few wealthy landowners about us snapped these up centuries ago for themselves. Three of these lay along the road at long distances: Gwent House, Clere, and (near us) Hatton Park; and in any of these, with their hills and dales and woods and crags, a man's body—no! the word was too much for me—might be hidden for years, and perhaps never found. And then there was Gwent Fall, where the road skirted the sea, running high over the cliffs until it dipped near us into Shoal Bay, and there, on that road, not so much as a four-foot wall between the road and the drop to the rocks below. A swerve of the car, a plunge— There had once been a horrid accident of the kind—and at spring tides the sea was deep under the cliff. There were many parts beside this where a man might disappear, for ours is a lonesome country, but there was always the car. Ours was a big Gessner, very long in the chassis. That could not be hidden under a fern or pebble.

I lay down at last and tried to sleep, for I knew I should want every ounce of my strength next day, and the night went by black and velvet-shod, not a sound anywhere. In the end I fell into a hot, disturbed sleep, and dreamed. Clattering down a mountain road where the echoes rebounded from walls of rock that reached the stars, came a man, riding furiously upon a gigantic raw-boned grey. He leaned forward as if to urge him on when he was already stretched to his utmost, and I could not see his face. But I could hear the loose shoe rattling as he went by, and a kind of horror came with it and ran down the backs of my hands and clutched my throat and got me in the strangle-hold of a nightmare. It was a nightmare—but that is only a word, and what is in reality the horror that walks by night? One is a man no longer—a slave, an animal. I lay there bound hand and foot, lost and drowned in blind and senseless fear.

Of course, it wakened me. I have heard it said a man would die if he had to endure a nightmare for more than a flash. And so I found myself sitting up with the cold sweat running off my face like drops on a window-pane. And the night about me was deathly still.

I sat, drawing my breath in gulps until it quieted down, listening to the stillness that made its own little sounds in my ears, sounds such as you might hear in the moist depths of a grave, shut away from everything. But was it so still? For as sense came back to me I fancied I could hear an almost soundless footfall on the stair. I strained my ear-drums until they almost seemed to crack. Yes. It was there. It had crept a few steps further. By this time I was broad awake and thinking. It might be a maid stealing out to a

lover—but Phoebe and Nancy were not of the fly-by-night sort, and both engaged to decent men in the village. And my mother, Vandaloff, and I were the only others in the house.

Then the word “Batu” came back to me. *Who* was he? *What* was Kyriel’s part in all the mystifications? I must hold hard and watch. I slipped out of bed and to the door as gently as I could—but I am a heavy man and our floors were old and creaky.

The little sounds stopped, as if some one were listening, and I stopped too, with my ear to the keyhole. There was a long wait, and then, reassured, they continued on down the stairs. Meanwhile, I had been working out a plan.

On the landing, two doors away from me, are the backstairs that the maids use for their work. If I could gain that I could go down quietly and reach the door that opens into the hall not far from the kitchen. What I should do then depended on what I was following, but at all events I should be in the lower part of the house. A newcomer might very well not guess the existence of those backstairs, the door being a swing door and never open. Ten to one Vandaloff had not seen it.

I opened my door, light as a butterfly’s wing, and crept barefooted by my mother’s and Vandaloff’s. The maids’ were a floor higher. In a moment more I was in the harbourage of the backstairs with the door shut on me.

It was easy then to get down, and luck favoured me so far that the lower door was not tight shut. It had swung to but not caught. I could not look out into the hall, but could hear very fairly. There was dead silence first, then a very low, clear voice at the telephone, giving a number I did not catch. Then, French. Vandaloff, of course. He had come without stick or help down the stairs with his wounded foot!

“*Mais doucement, mon ami—*”

Cautioning the person at the other end. It was wonderful how low he spoke to be heard at all, but every word came clear-cut.

“Send for me to-morrow with the car. This fuss is a good excuse. You might come over to sympathize, and I’ll go back with you. Did you see the Squire?”

The Squire? They called my father that all over the countryside—but Vandaloff! I froze into listening. Of course, it was a one-sided talk for me. I would have given gold to get the answers!

Then Vandaloff again: “If you have to see the young man, and I think you should, then send for him and let the girl see him after. I saw the way he

looked at her. A beautiful woman can do what a man can't."

A half-minute's interval, then the last words: "The money and any stones left over must be sent to the Capital Bank. Not a word more. I daren't risk it. To-morrow." All in French.

The receiver was delicately replaced, and I scarcely heard the soft foot climb the stairs again. A mouse might have made more noise about it. Practically all I heard was the infinitesimal sound from the closing of the door upstairs. I sat down on the lowest step, for I would not risk anything, and pondered as well as my weary brain would let me. Tabulated it.

Vandaloff and Kyriël knew each other far better than I had guessed.

Vandaloff knew my father was in some entanglement with Kyriël.

Marcia Ruthven was to keep me quiet. She was in it.

No, my mind rejected that—or rather, I should say, my heart. The mind can believe much that the heart refuses. The one is a sceptic, the other a true believer. My mind certainly granted that Kyriël's daughter might be—anything. My heart looked into the green deeps of black-fringed eyes, slumbrous with content that covered all sorts of hidden sweetnesses, and was assured. It asked no better reason than the upward look of them, the lift of her lip when she smiled, a kind of wistfulness—even then I gave a moment to memory, the heart's servant, and loved what she showed me.

One thing emerged clearly: not a word yet to Kyriël and Vandaloff of my new knowledge, not a word yet to the police. I knew those country police and how they bungled at every turn! This was a case for the keenest brain from Scotland Yard, and he should come when I had a little more to lay before him. Vandaloff had not guessed I knew French. They thought me a mere country lout, to be played with. I would watch—watch.

I sat there a long time, thinking these thoughts. The dark had thinned when I crept up the stair again and past Vandaloff's door, and I had clear demonstration that he was asleep. I closed my door and tried hard to get the sleep-bird to perch on my pillow, for I was dog-tired. No use. It fluttered within reach and out of it until I gave up and lay staring at the greying window.

In the morning, first thing before my mother came down, I rang up the Gwent police. No news of man or car. So, after breakfast, facing the inevitable, I told my mother. I pass that over.

But I cannot pass over Vandaloff's delicate sympathy, which so staggered me with wonder and fury that I could hardly keep the mask on. Who would believe, looking at his gentleness and earnestness, that he had

been lurking at that telephone in the dead of night like a thief, discussing the lost master of the house that had received him so kindly? I won't speak in my own favour, but I had done my best for him. My hand had dragged him from the sea, had fed him, and my mother had nursed him—and yet here he was, plotting against me with a man my instinct told me was a villain. I own it cut me.

But I mastered myself, and it was natural enough for me to be silent and preoccupied, and besides, I had much business. After breaking the news to my poor mother I raced into Gwent, and when I got back was at the telephone all the time. There were inquiries, sympathy, from people calling. The chief constable from Gwent came over, and I spent a long time asking and answering questions that led nowhere. Yes, my father had gone about the sale of the wool to Hasleden. He had slept there, but had been out a good deal in the day, which was nothing unusual, for he had many people to see. And he had dined out one night, Hasleden did not know where, but thought at the time it was at the Swan Hotel in Gwent. He had not been there for dinner, however, though he had called in the afternoon to see a Mr. Murdoch, who was said to be from London and on his way to Penzance. He could not be traced to Penzance, and had gone back, they thought, to London, from one of the intermediate stations, but that was two days ago and impossible to follow up, for he might have taken any of the cross-country branch lines leading to little, out-of-the-way towns, and on to Liverpool, Manchester, anywhere, and so back to London. This Murdoch appeared to have no particular business in Gwent, and was not known to have seen anyone but my father. They had met in the hall of the Swan, had shaken hands, and gone up to Murdoch's room. After about an hour—but no one had taken special notice—my father came down alone and went back to Hasleden's. In the evening he had gone out, returning late. Otherwise every movement of his was known.

My mother insisted on being present at this talk, and of course was asked if she had ever heard of Murdoch. At first she said no, then remembered that one day, two years since, a man of that name had motored over from Gwent and dined with them in the middle of the day, and my father and he had strolled about the fields together. I was away at the time. Could she remember him? Unluckily she was very bad at remembering faces and would not know him again, but thought he was dark and had slightly projecting teeth.

Hasleden came over, a kind, ruddy-faced friend of years' standing. But I skip the useless false trails and blind alleys for what was of consequence.

That afternoon a big Hatton Park car pulled into our drive. A note for Vandaloff and one for me. Mine was in the politest terms. Kyriel was sure that a stranger in the house, and one who required such care, must add very greatly to our anxiety, and therefore he had sent the car for Mr. Vandaloff, hoping, etc. And at the end: "If you would be so good as to come over with Mr. Vandaloff I believe a little talk might be useful. Not that I know anything about the matter, but points may sometimes come out in discussion. Anyhow, it will give me much pleasure to see you, for there is another matter I wish to speak of—and the sooner the better."

Vandaloff called me presently in his most dulcet tones to the porch where he was lying as usual, and put the other note in my hands. It was to the same effect, and very pleasant and cordial.

"And will you come along with me, my dear Pendarvis, for you see he says he is eager to see you, and I should be glad of your arm? My cursed foot is dreadfully painful. I can scarcely put it to the ground."

I agreed. I would have agreed to anything which would bring me any news, for the suspense was sickening, and more and more I believed that Kyriel held the key to the mystery.

There was no packing to be done for Vandaloff. The sea had attended to that matter. Only a good-bye to my mother, in which he excelled himself in sweetness and almost moved her to tears by his gratitude, and then we were both in the big car and rolling smoothly to Hatton Park.

CHAPTER VIII

WE purred in at the gate Martin Holmes guarded, and I saw his eye, lack-lustre as a fish's, fix on me in astonishment as I swept by in Kyriel's car. The ways of the quality were altogether beyond him. Last time a cut with the whip, to-day the honoured guest. I own it was quite as great a puzzle to me as to him—and a much more dangerous one.

Reaching the house, Vandaloff tottered out with the help of two footmen, a third carrying his brass-bound box after him. I had never seen him so lame and never believed in it so little. He was supported to his room and I shown into the library, where the spider sat awaiting the fly. With what different feelings I marched in this time, looking all my height as I very well knew! I felt it too. It is difficult to say why, but a cloud of perplexity seemed to have rolled off me—though heaven knows there was enough left. Perhaps it was because a telephone had revealed his lordship to me as a shabby plotter, perhaps—I said I was a grown man after that day in the park and the meeting with Marcia. But the reason was not clear to me yet. Anyhow, I could face her father.

He was sitting at the writing-table and got up to meet me. The sun was shining in at the window and struck gorgeous on an object which I had not noticed on my first visit—a beautiful pinnacled shrine, richly gilded, with a little door ajar to show the image of some Oriental god sitting inside it with folded hands and feet. The hot sun made it almost dazzling—a flame of fire. But our business was too important for art. I took the chair opposite to him and came straight to the point.

“Lord Kyriel, do you know anything of my father?”

If I had hoped to startle him into admissions I failed. He looked at me in calm and kindly astonishment.

“I wish with all my heart I could say I did. I had a very high opinion of your father.”

“Had.” The word struck chill on my heart. I pulled myself together.

“Do you mean you think he is dead?”

“I know nothing, but surely such an absence must have put the same fear into your head?”

“Not yet,” I said resolutely. “Nor shall until everything has been gone into by the most skilled men in London. Now, what I want from you is an explanation of the business between you and my father. The mystery shows it was of consequence. I must have the whole thing. His disappearance may turn on that.”

He eyed me steadily.

“Of course, I knew this must come, and that was my reason for bringing you here to-day. I have all the papers ready. But I am sorry to say you must prepare yourself for a shock I would willingly have spared you. Seven years ago, after the War, your father speculated heavily in a company formed for exploiting certain—as a matter of fact, Levantine interests. Many people were drawn in. The company directors believed it was going to be a splendid thing, and it certainly would have been so but for the disastrous peace and nonsense of ‘self-determination’ which has more than half ruined Europe. Anyhow, he lost heavily. I lost some money myself. It ended in his coming to me and asking for a loan, and *that* ended in a mortgage on his property, which I hold. I have reason also to think he borrowed from a London money-lender named Murdoch. But he could not keep up payments. His affairs were very involved, and my explanation of his disappearance is, I am sorry to say, suicide.”

I could not think at first, much less speak. I cannot even write of that dreadful moment when all I had ever valued was torn from me. I hope I took it like a man to all outward appearance. Within, I think, it broke some spring of hope and youth in me that life could never mend. I don’t know how much time went by, I only know he respected my silence and sat looking out into the dazzling green and colour of the garden.

At long last I found my voice.

“Have you the papers?”

“Certainly. I have put them all ready for you, and if you will notify your father’s solicitor (I think he is Collins, of Gwent), he shall go through them all. I wish to be perfectly open in the matter and leave no stone unturned. I would entrust them to you now, this moment, but that the interests concerned are so large and affect others. Why not ring up Collins now and make an appointment with him here to go through the papers together? Then he shall do whatever he thinks necessary. You will understand this was why I wished to see you before you began serious investigations.”

Like one in a dream I spoke, using the telephone on the writing-table, and heard Collins’s sharp, business-like voice arranging day and time. I asked but one question of him.

“Mr. Collins, did you know my father’s property was mortgaged to Lord Kyriel?”

“Certainly. He could foreclose at any moment.”

I said “Thank you,” and hung up the receiver.

As I stood up Lord Kyriel rose too.

“I can’t talk any more to-day. You’ll understand that. I’ll come tomorrow with Collins and—” I could say no more. I was turning to the door when he stepped before me.

“I wish you to understand that every consideration shall be shown your father’s son, Pendarvis. I am a rich man, and anything I could gain by harrying and hurrying you would be nothing to me in a money way. Also I should object to it on other grounds. Rest easy, take your time, and if you can prove to my solicitors that there is a fair hope of your paying off the mortgage no one will be better pleased than I. Now, don’t add that trouble to your others.”

What could I do but thank him? Written, the words read like kindness itself, but something in his manner spoiled them—I can’t tell what—like a rock under a calm summer sea. I could not name it, but it struck a chill. We shook hands and I hated the touch of his. He offered me the car to get back, but I chose to walk and have time to still the bitterness rising in me before facing my mother in the house that was ours no longer. I heard Vandaloff’s voice calling cheerily to me from some room as I passed, but I took no notice and went on blindly.

I left the gardens and went through the woods to the shaded alley leading to the little door in the wall that Kyriel had shown me, and there I flung myself under a beech, glorious in shining green above its dead leaves, laid my face on my arms, and lay still. I will trouble no one with my thoughts, for at times they did not spare even my father—if he had but told me!—and yet all complicated with a pity that brought the tears welling to my eyes.

Had I lain there long in the warmth and quiet and lengthening shadows when presently light steps rustled the leaves? I lay dead still, thinking no one could see me under the boughs, but they paused and a trembling voice said: “Mr. Pendarvis.”

Still I lay with my face hidden, praying to God she might pass on and leave me to my misery, but again, like a bird’s note: “Mr. Pendarvis.”

She was kneeling beside me and touched my shoulder with her hand, most gently.

“I am so grieved to hear of your dreadful sorrow. What can I do to show you? Oh, just look up one moment and tell me you don’t lose hope! And your kind mother—I never slept all night for thinking of it. And I have something to tell you, too—something that may be important.”

I stood up and looked at her, laying my arm on a branch to support myself, for at the moment I was quivering from head to foot. She stood too. How beautiful she was, with the low sun dappling through the leaves over her white dress and lighting up the deeps of her eyes, unfathomable, mysterious as the sea in a calm, the lovely gloom of black lashes about them in her pale face! I could only look at her. Speech was impossible at first. She understood, and went on.

“I was riding on the moor above Gwent Fall this morning, and I found this. Of course I don’t know whether it has anything to do with it, but I had looked up the Pendarvises in *Debrett*, and seen their crest was the crossed arrows, so I told no one until I could show you.”

She laid on the bough between us a gold cuff-link. Yes, it had the Pendarvis crossed arrows on it and had belonged to my father’s father. I stared at it in astonishment, and then at her.

“It was about a quarter of a mile from where the road runs along the cliff, and the grass and heather were trampled about it—not much, but trampled. I got off and looked round carefully, but could see no more. I watched you down from the house and came after you, and have been sitting near until you stirred, but I dared wait no longer.”

The warm, human goodness of her tone pierced me. She did care—she was sorry. I could have kissed the little hand that lay beside mine on the bough. I held myself back with difficulty, and only because I feared to take advantage of her pity. I said slowly: “With all my heart I thank you. Have you told this to Lord Kyriel?”

“I never tell anything to my father. No one has seen it. I kept it for you. I was going to Caerlyon if you had not come to-day.”

A sunbeam like those about us seemed to shine into my misery. She was on my side, not on her father’s! And yet at the same time I pitied her, as she did me. A girl of twenty, and motherless, who could tell nothing to her father—I was not so selfish but that I could guess something of what those words must mean.

“Will you give it to me? And as there must be some sort of inquiry will you much mind saying how you found it?” I asked.

She laid the link instantly in my hand.

“I’ll tell all I know anywhere. But I must tell my father some time soon. You see that? Shall I say I met you?”

Every moment was drawing us nearer together. We had our secret. We must act in concert.

“Yes, of course you must. It won’t harm you. He won’t be very angry.”

“I don’t know. But I must tell him.”

I pondered a moment over that.

“I think, if you don’t mind, it will be better if you say nothing about it to any living soul until I tell you. This is why I think I should speak to the lawyers first.”

She did not hesitate a moment.

“Yes, I see. I promise. I give you my word I shall say nothing to anyone until you allow me.”

I thanked her with all my heart. Every minute was heaven to me, but I knew she must not delay.

“Shall I go back part of the way with you?” I asked.

“No—better alone. I must go now quickly. But—”

A pause, then she said with the most extraordinary gentleness, like the softest note of a dove: “Mr. Pendarvis, if—if anyone tries to make you believe your father committed suicide on that cliff, don’t believe it. He never did.”

I could only stare at her in astonishment. She went on eagerly.

“If he did, could his car commit suicide too? It’s neap tides now, and if she had gone over the cliff there she would be. There hasn’t been enough water the last week to cover the Outer Rock, much less a big car.”

Her good sense and firmness recalled me as nothing else would have done.

“Of course, you’re right, Miss Ruthven. I bless and thank you with my heart. I was in despair when you found me. Everything seemed gone—but now I have hope. You have made me a man again.”

I could not say less. My heart would have said very much more.

“Shake hands,” she said, “and cheer up. I believe you’ll find him yet, and I’ll watch out in all my rides. You may be sure I’ll help you again if I can. But you were always a man. You couldn’t be less if you tried.”

I knew it was said to help me then and out of sheer kindness, and it did all she meant and more. It went to my brain like a draught of sparkling wine

and made me strong and firm. I could face the situation once more, could think and size it up. Even with her I would not delay a minute longer. I took her small, strong hand in a firm grip like a comrade's, and at the moment needed no more. Then she slipped into the green shadows and was gone. To what wretchedness? But my mind must not follow her now. I must think out the problem which, for all I knew, might involve her as well as myself.

No, a car could not commit suicide. It must be somewhere, and on that all turned. It must be found. But many questions stood up to be answered now, and having got out of the park, and inside our own boundaries, I sat down under a hedge and noted them in my pocket-book that I might think them out at leisure. For the first time in days my brain felt like a well-oiled threshing machine in the best going order, and I could separate the wheat from the chaff.

I began at the beginning.

Kyriel's meeting with Quesnel, which had so affected my father. The packet passed to Kyriel. Query: Were the smugglers in this business? Then, my father's dispatching me to Kyriel with a private message, so private that I must stand any usage from him as a blind. How could that be needful in a mere money transaction of which Collins, my father's solicitor, was aware? Why had Kyriel burned my father's message with such care? I repeated mentally the message he had sent my father, studying every word of it:

"I understand I was seen with Quesnel, and it shall not happen again. What you know has been put in safety in the hands you know of, and the rest will be here before long, though I don't yet know how."

I did not need to write that down. It was stamped on my memory. I went on to the next point.

Why had my father gone to Kyriel for help in his money troubles—a man who, to all appearance, he scarcely knew? Why? Here a question I had asked my mother and utterly forgotten rose up in answer. Burma! Had my father known Kyriel in Burma? If, so, it might account for it, though not for the secrecy which covered their intercourse. I cudgelled my brains to recall the little I had heard about that part of my father's life. It was very little indeed.

As a younger son he had gone out as secretary to a friend of my grandfather's, a Sir William Parker, to a place called Mindun, and he might have stayed on and done very well there but for his elder brother's death, which gave him Caerlyon and brought him home. It struck me that so far

there was a curious likeness between his career and Kyriel's. Both had been younger sons, both had started in Burma, both had become elder sons unexpectedly. But my father had succeeded to a Cornish farm, Kyriel to a peerage and wealth.

That was all I knew of Burma, and my grandfather and Sir William Parker were dead. I knew no way of discovering what my father had never spoken of, and Kyriel might not choose to, but my mind fixed on the word Burma and hovered about it before passing on.

In Kyriel's story all the obligation and secrecy were on my father's side. In my memory the balance of secrecy and caution was quite as much on Kyriel's side, if not more. But what could I prove? It came only to his word against mine. And all this might have nothing on earth to do with my father's disappearance.

Murdoch. He, of course, must be traced, and probably could be now. Kyriel had seemed to make no secrecy about that, and it might all be a very natural meeting in the circumstances.

There was more, of course—long chains of thought which ended in nothing. I think I have set down all that really mattered, and when I had done that in my notebook also, in words unintelligible except to myself, I got up and went slowly back to the house—a changed house now, with the black pall of sorrow over it, and a bitter sight to me in the gold of the western sky as I came over the brow of the rise—ours no longer, but a stronghold of the man whom I had come, rightly or wrongly, to believe was a dangerous enemy. The very beauty and peace of it were like a dagger in my heart.

And so two more days of dark suspense went by. That evening my mother, who had kept her room since the fear was upon us, came down to share my meal, not wishing me to be more alone than could be helped now Vandaloff was gone. She was pale as death and her eyes enlarged and dimmed by the black shadows under them. She looked indeed very ill.

It was when we were sitting alone and silent after the things were taken away, and the soft dusk settling down over the garden, that I asked her suddenly: "Mother, I know Sir William Parker is dead. Is there anyone living that was at Mindun when my father was there?"

She looked at me dully, too wearied to take any interest.

"No, not that I know of. Oh, yes—I remember now—Sir William Parker's son, Sir Hugh, who lives in London. He was there as a young man. But he never kept up the acquaintance and your father never talked of

Burma. There was some kind of family connexion far back, but it's all dropped and dead. What does it matter when we have real troubles to think of? Oh, my dream—my dream!”

I said no more. I could not trace Sir Hugh from that, and the less we talked of her dream the better. I took her upstairs presently, and sat alone in the gathering dusk. It was clear as daylight in my mind now that the Burmese clue must be followed up, that the scope of the case was enlarging with every hour, that the local police were quite unfit to deal with it, that it was entirely beyond my own powers, and that I must put it in the most skilful hands I could find.

In one word I must go up to London, see Sir Hugh Parker, and tell my story to the best detective available. Where the money was to come from I could not tell as yet, but we had furniture and silver we could sell if the worst came to the worst. I thanked my stars I had bound Marcia Ruthven to secrecy, and I knew with all the strength of certainty in me that I could trust her. For all her beautiful womanly eyes and sweet mouth she gave the impression of quiet, reserved strength, tested very likely in a harder school than mine. I have known big, blustering giants of men whom I would have matched against that girl with the sure faith that she was the stronger in all that makes real strength. How did I know this of a woman I had only seen three times? Some fellow says somewhere that you have to love a woman before she can seem worthy of your love. Was that the explanation? I did not know, but I knew her very well indeed.

Four days after, for I could not manage it sooner, there being so much to settle one way or another, I passed through Gwent, and, leaving my address with the police, I empowered Collins to go through the papers and report as to all connexion with Hatton Park, and so went up to London.

CHAPTER IX

I PASS over the interviews in Gwent and pick myself up next in a little hotel off the Strand, in London, which my father had used on his rare visits. I had the *London Directory* before me, and in less than half an hour after my arrival I was on the way to Sulgrave Crescent where Sir Hugh Parker lived, having telephoned my wish to see him and secured an appointment.

It was a fine curve of houses facing Regent's Park, with the lake and acres of green trees before it, pretty in its way but very confining, according to my Cornish notions. In five minutes more I was in Sir Hugh's library, waiting for him.

It was my first taste of Burma. The sofa was covered with some handsome stuff in yellow silk, the cushions shining with Burmese gold. Pictures of palms and temples hung on the walls. Delicate carvings in wood and ivory were everywhere. I thought it more in a woman's taste than a man's, though I could see the beauty of the display too after my own fashion. And then, suddenly and strangely, I caught a gleam of gold, and there in a dark alcove was a most beautiful gilded shrine of some Oriental god, with nearly closed doors, the very image of the one I had seen on that bitter day in Kyriel's library. There it stood and seemed the twin brother. There was the same pinnacled roof, the arched swinging doors glittering with gold, all rough with magnificence. It startled me for a moment, and then I considered how natural it was that visitors to Burma should be attracted by the same sort of splendid curiosities. I supposed the natives turned them out by the hundred to catch the European eye. Little did I know in my ignorance the value of what I looked at. I was to learn that later.

The door opened and Sir Hugh came in, very stooped and leaning on a stick. He limped as he walked, and his small white face had the lines of pain stamped on it and the bleached colour that speaks of ill health. But a most remarkable-looking man for all that, and one not to pass unnoticed anywhere. He had the brightest, keenest pair of eyes I ever saw in a human head, and they gave him the look of quick intelligence a dog has when he takes your meaning and likes it. A little man and frail, but then, of course, he lost a couple of inches and more, through his stoop. Nothing could have been kinder than the way in which he met me.

“Sit down, Pendarvis. Sincerely glad to see you. I knew your father ages ago in Burma, and have been truly sorry to see in the papers the dreadful anxiety you are in. My father thought a lot of yours. Any more news?”

I told him none, and then put all the facts before him, excepting only the cuff-link and, of course, anything which concerned my father’s private understanding with Kyriel. I did mention, however, that his affairs had been embarrassed. He listened with the most friendly attention, offering me cigarettes and smoking himself in a meditative way as though he were carefully taking it in, with bird-like, sidelong glances of his bright, quick eyes. I was as brief as I could be and as clear, and when I had finished my story he had the details plain in his mind.

“And no clue anywhere. And now what can I do for you, for whatever it may be it is at your service. You would not have come here unless there had been something—and I am glad you came.”

That was cordial and heart-cheering to a weary man, and I said as much gratefully.

“But, Sir Hugh, just because there are no definite clues, I think we should follow up every trail of my father’s life. We never know what may start the game. The part I know nothing about is Burma. Will you please tell me everything you remember?”

He agreed, and, thinking a minute, went to a bookcase and pulled out from the lower shelf a big morocco book.

“My Burmese diary,” he said. “Your father comes into it often,” and he opened it before him, laying his finger in it, and began to explain. “My father was Commissioner of Revenue in the district of Mindun, and owing to the family connexion your father was his private secretary for four years. I know he felt it a loss when personal business took Pendarvis home. So did I. We were about the same age, and friends. I was in a regiment stationed in Burma at the time. My father’s headquarters were in the city Arathan, and he had to visit all about the district, which is immense. Pendarvis always went with him. I had my military work and seldom could. Mindun is a most interesting part of Burma, full of jungle ruins of lost, ancient cities and magnificent golden pagodas and carved and gilded monasteries, and, of course, in my father’s position he went where he would and had elephants and horses and all the world at his disposal. Through the district runs that gigantic river, the Irawadi, which is the highway of Burma. But you have to look out in the jungle! A tiger lamed me for life, and would have finished me but for your father. I’ve never paid my debt for that, so I’ll owe it to the next generation, if you’ll allow me!”

His whimsical, kind smile set me at ease at once. The very air about a friend is warming, and I felt it then. I listened with the deepest interest to this unknown chapter of my father's life.

He took down a great volume of sketches and showed me the Parker house and even the window of my father's room with fine palms about it and brown servants, like a picture in a story. It was all very strange and foreign. He told me a great deal more which I need not give, making the life more understandable, and then I began with the first question in my mind.

"Was my father always with Sir William? Did he never go away alone?"

"Certainly, and I have been on many a trip with him, and very interesting they were. We used to make parties to visit the ruins and see all the sights—the native boat-races on the Irawadi and so forth."

"Had my father any special friends? People he used to go about with?"

"Yes, he was a man with many friends. I remember two. A man who used to come over from India on leave—Hobson, by name, and a man called Ruthven, afterwards Lord Kyriel. He was in my regiment."

I caught my breath sharply. Many events had conspired to make that bit of news startling though not unexpected. Could it be that the darkness was beginning to thin? I asked at once if I might put my questions and note the answers, to which he agreed with his curiously intent look. So I started in, and with a beating heart.

"What kind of character had Kyriel in the regiment?"

"Difficult to answer that. He had plenty of courage; he gave his proofs in some hand-to-hand encounters with Burmese dacoits, or bandits. A splendid shot and sportsman. But somehow not a man that made friends, except with your father, and he, of course, was not in the regiment. Kyriel had the misfortune of being a poor man for his rank and in a rich regiment. That's a hard billet for any young man. The peerage has always been a poor one, and his father was in the moneylenders' hands."

"Why, he's rolling in riches!" I exclaimed in great astonishment. "You should just see Hatton Park, sir! And there's Castle Ruinart as well. Kyriel bought Hatton Park from the Bassetts, and it cost a mint of money."

He looked at me, perplexed.

"Sure it's the same man? My man succeeded not long after his elder brother was drowned. Old Lord Kyriel was so poor that he wanted cousins of my own to buy Castle Ruinart, and he always let the shooting. My Kyriel married a Russian girl, no money but a perfect beauty."

“The same. But then, where did the money come from?”

“Lord knows!” said he. “Anyhow, the want of it led to great trouble in the regiment, for after my encounter with the tiger, which obliged me to chuck soldiering, there was a bad scandal over cards which obliged Kyriel to chuck it too, but for a very different reason. He was lost, so to speak, in Russia for some years, and then came home with this beautiful wife. It was kindly said that no woman of his own race would have married him. And I believe he’s boycotted more or less still.”

“I believe so. But my father? Where did they go? What did they do?”

He fluttered over several pages of his diary and read aloud:

“ ‘Pendarvis at mess to-night with Ruthven. They were full of talk about a pagoda they had seen at Taung, about fifty miles beyond the Nat jungle and the river. They declared it was magnificently gilded, and the golden ornament or umbrella at the top had chains hanging from it with dangling rubies. It was solid, as the pagodas here, as distinguished from the temples, are, and in an external arch a fine statue of the Buddha, and all about it they counted nearly a thousand little pagodas before they stopped. I couldn’t swallow that and questioned the story and the number of pagodas, and Pendarvis looked up his notes and told us that at Pagan there are 9999, so a thousand more or less would be nothing out-of-the-way—not hard to believe, for the principal industry of Burma seems to be pagodas, and highly picturesque they are, like flames of fire everywhere among the trees.’ ”

Rubies! Of course, it had nothing to do with what we were talking of, but in a flash I was back in the verandah at Caerlyon, and in Vandaloff’s hand was the great breast-plated ornament of glowing jewels, fiery in the sun. I did not interrupt, and Sir Hugh went on.

“ ‘Annesley said it must be an extraordinary country where rubies could hang out in a lonely place like that and no one touch them, to which Kyriel replied that there wasn’t a Burman from Rangoon to Bhamo who would lay a finger on one of them if he were dying of want, and besides, there was a “sayah” or wizard king in the hills that had put a charm of ill-luck on them. This led to talk about Burmese sorcerers and wonder-workers. Quite interesting. They discussed also the possibilities of lost cities in the jungle.’ ”

“But why rubies?” I asked. “Are rubies very plentiful in Burma?”

“Lord bless my soul!” said Sir Hugh. “Have you never heard of the most famous ruby-mines in the world, the great mines at Mogok? Why, since the sixteenth century they have been known in Europe, and rubies of the pure ‘pigeon-blood’ colour that excel all the rest come from there. We all bought the inferior kind called spinels (and very pretty they are) and sent them home to our wives and sweethearts, but the pigeon-blood ruby is for kings and plutocrats—they’re worth more than diamonds.”

“And the spinels?” I asked, wondering whether the splendour I had seen in Vandaloff’s box could have been on the cheaper lines.

“Beautiful little stones, and the jewellers make up handsome things of them, but dirt-cheap in comparison with the others. We used to buy little cotton bags of them about three inches high for something like four pounds, and you took your chance of size and colour. But, I say, isn’t this leading us rather far afield? You want to know about your father and Ruthven.”

I apologised.

“But you see, I don’t know what may turn out to be a clue and what not. Could my father and Ruthven have bought up rubies and traded in them?”

“Certainly not honestly unless on a scale which would have required immense capital. The Ruby Mines Company has a lease and works the mines and levies royalties. Most interesting place to see! Well, go on with your questions.”

I thought for a minute before I asked my next.

“Is it possible there are any ruby-mines known only to the Burmese?”

“That’s impossible to say. Remember how much of the country is jungle and wild hills, almost mountains—overrun with tigers and elephants and deadly snakes. The Burmese may have their little secrets, but I know of none, and they would keep them from the whites. Of course there’s always talk of lost cities.”

“Were my father and Kyriel often away?”

“As often as they could work it. I see what you’re trying to get at. You think Hatton Park and Kyriel’s riches may have come from Burma. But what has that to do with your father? I gather he was far from a rich man.”

“Far,” said I, and fell to thinking again. Could I trust Sir Hugh? Would his opinion be worth having? My mind worked quickly to a decision. I think I have always known the people I could trust.

“Sir Hugh,” I said, “I haven’t told you all my story, and it’s so complicated that I don’t know whether I ought. I may be walking in the dark

along a road of pitfalls, and I believe I am. But I trust you absolutely, and it's just possible the key of the mystery may be in Burma. Shall I tell you?"

"Wouldn't you like to take till to-morrow to consider?" he asked with his whimsical smile. "But while you're deciding remember it's safe with me. I'd like to help you if I could."

He stretched out his delicate veined hand and laid it for an instant on mine.

"Your father saved my life," he said.

I needed no more time for thinking after that. I told him the whole thing as quick and straight as I had it in my mind. I read him the notes in my pocket-book. It did not take long. I never saw a keener attention than in his white, intelligent face turned on me with fixed eyes, listening and piecing things together as he heard. When I had finished there was a moment's silence; then he said: "Rubies. Strange! Describe that ruby ornament of Vandaloff's as closely as you can."

I did so, dwelling particularly on the swastika pendant, the strange Oriental cross of magic which yet is found in so many unexpected Christian sculptures in Europe and elsewhere.

"And now describe Vandaloff."

I did that also, and better because, as I have said, the man interested me. Another pause and he rose painfully to his feet, leaning on his stick.

"Look here," he said, and limped across the room to the alcove where I had seen the shrine. He opened the winged doors gently, with all the care their delicacy demanded, for indeed they were a most beautiful open-work like gold lace. The whole thing might stand about four feet from the table, or rather its pedestal. Inside the open doors, on a great golden flower like a water-lily, stood a golden Buddha, one hand upraised as if he were speaking, and about his neck, set into the golden surface like little sparks of fire, the very replica of the ornament I had seen in Vandaloff's hand—not separate from the figure, you understand, but set into the substance of it. It more than half covered the body from throat to waist.

"Was it like that?" he asked.

"The same."

We stood looking at it together until he closed the doors as gently and limped back to his seat. I cannot express how this excited me—so much so that my heart hammered in my breast for a minute. Yes, I had been right! Burma was taking a hand in the game—and a decided one!

“Now, before I speak of this, another question. Was the foreign strain in Vandaloff anything you could place? Not French, you say? Possibly Italian, German, Spanish, Levantine, mulatto?”

I shook my head each time, and he said quickly: “By the way, have you ever seen a Eurasian?”

“You mean the mixture of Hindu and European? Yes, once. Vandaloff was not like that.”

“The mixture of any Asiatic race with a European is Eurasian—the word itself tells you that—and so they are very different. Look here!”

He turned to his sketch-book again and showed me a large and handsome native house on the banks of the river, by Mandalay. Outside was a group of three beautiful girls in Burmese dress and three young men as handsome. They had a foreign look, yes, unmistakable, but might almost have been from the Mediterranean if you had put them in European clothes instead of the gay folded silk Burmese skirt and short cotton jacket. I never doubted when I had looked at them carefully.

“That’s the Vandaloff type, jolly good-natured expression and all,” I said. “Then if—” He interrupted.

“These are the children of an English friend of mine who fell under the spell of life out there and took up with the fascinating little Burmese women. He married one of them as safe as the law could make it, and settled down to live the lazy, delicious tropical life on the banks of the great river—and regretted it to the longest day he lived.”

“Why?”

“Because these things are madness. The two civilisations and races cannot mix, and the children are more or less doomed. It should not be, one can see no reason for it, but I’ve seen it many times and the end is always the same. But now, confidence for confidence. Can I trust you?”

“Absolutely.”

“Then Ruthven, while he was in Burma, set up house with a Burmese beauty from beyond the river, up among the hills—a very back-of-beyond place, and her people with a none too savoury reputation. There was no pretence of marriage, and any children would be bastards. Would that explain Vandaloff?”

I struck my hand on the table.

“By Jove, it would, and a good deal besides.”

Sir Hugh interrupted me gently.

“You say Kyriel called him ‘Batu.’ That means ‘Like his father.’ It is a common Burmese name.”

“Thank the Lord I told you!” I exclaimed. “Every word seems to clear the situation a little. What happened to the Burmese? What was she like?”

“A beautiful girl in her way. We used often to go to the house he had for her, and she would receive us with great grace and charm. I knew there was a child. She died of cholera, poor thing—a common end then in a Burmese village. I know nothing more of her and the child than that, but I think it’s pretty clear that it might be useful to trace exactly where Vandaloff comes in. You say he spoke of her as living. That certainly was not true—probably said to work up your mother’s sympathy.”

“I see the need for investigation,” I said eagerly. “But what we want is the missing link. How does it connect up with my father? And there’s Quesnel too. Where does he come in?”

“Just listen a minute.” He ticked off each point on his thin fingers. “Suppose Vandaloff needs to communicate secretly with Kyriel, to send something of importance, what better way than a man accustomed to risks and secrecy like Quesnel? But in Kyriel’s position he couldn’t see him often, and once observed it must stop. That packet you saw passed from Quesnel to Kyriel must have been something of the utmost consequence, and evidently more was expected, for your father thought he might use you at a pinch.”

“My father—but *why*? That’s the link I want.”

“How can I say? But I suppose he and Kyriel had been trading in rubies through Vandaloff. Kyriel’s story of your father’s loss of money must be true or he would never have proposed your solicitor looking into it. If true, you have your father’s motive. Vandaloff was to slip in quietly with some big consignment, but that unlucky shipwreck tripped him up.”

As we spoke I sat lost in doubt and amazement, and yet, as when a window-pane grows grey when the dark thins at dawn, I began to see shapes mistily, dim and indistinct, where before there was nothing. Indistinct, mind you—there was much I could not fit in yet—but it might be, it *might* be! I ventured another question.

“But why should they be secret? Ruby-trading, if it was that, isn’t illegal.”

“It may be a very dangerous and illegal trading. That depends on things we don’t know. Suppose it was mine- or temple-robbing? Or a lost city in the jungle. That’s coming in on Government preserves.”

Another silence. My thoughts were whirling like straws in a mill-race.

“Do you connect this with my father’s disappearance?”

“Can I say? It may very easily connect up. It may not.”

I could see there was more in his mind than he said, but I dared not probe into it yet. Things were bad enough. Better not know the worst until I must.

We had a long talk after that, ranging over much information about Burma and my father’s and Kyriel’s doings there, and he offered to lend me his diary for the night that I might look it through. And then a very surprising thing happened. He said suddenly: “Do you see your way clear ahead at all? What are you going to do next? Suppose Kyriel forecloses? Suppose the investigations cost money, which is no supposition at all, for they most certainly will. How do you stand?”

It brought me back from vague speculation to stern common sense.

“He offered me time and the house,” I said. “But I wouldn’t stay in that man’s house for all the world could give me. I’d sooner sweep a crossing. I’ll get back and clear out and—”

“I don’t think I should accept Kyriel’s hospitality. But your mother?” he suggested.

Ah, that was the pinch, the misery! How could she bear to lose not only my father but everything else? What should I do with her while I followed up the trail? I felt the blood run cold about my heart when I realised what she had to face. For a moment I had forgotten.

“I don’t know—I don’t know—but some way will come!” I said. “Anyhow, I know her. She would not stay a day under a roof of Kyriel’s. She knew too much of him in Scotland.”

He made me tell him that part of the story too, and then sat drumming his fingers softly upon the table in a way that reminded me of my mother’s trick when she was thinking very hard. At last he came out with it.

“I’m going to tell you a little about myself, Pendarvis. We’re distant cousins, as you know, for a Pendarvis married a Parker fifty years ago. I never could marry—the tiger saw to that, and the only woman I would have married turned up her nose at a cripple. So I’m alone in the world, but for my collections of Burmese art and my books. I haven’t the health to go out into society. And I’m a rich man. Now, your story interests me. I owe your father a life that hasn’t been altogether useless in spite of disabilities. I’ll finance you through this business. I should like to see the outcome myself. I’ll ring up Scotland Yard for the best man they have, and we’ll discuss it with him and put him on sentry-go, and you shall do what he advises. Then

I'll pay off the mortgage on Caerlyon, and you shall pay me that back when you see your way."

I must skip what immediately followed that speech, for it moved me more than I should like to tell. And yet why? Should a man be ashamed if a fine and generous motion like this brings a lump to his throat and tears to his eyes—and at a time when he is almost at his wits' end with grief and bewilderment? Of course I protested; I said all a man could say and showed him my two strong hands, ready for any work, from heaving a hod to swabbing a deck. He put it all aside in his own queer, whimsical way, and would hear nothing.

"My good fellow, I gave six thousand pounds for that shrine, and I would buy Kyriel's at the same price if it were on the market—as it may be yet. The money matters *that* to me!"

He gently snapped his fingers in the air with a weird, elfin smile, more like a mocking child's than anything else I could think of.

"And I'm as curious as a woman—damned if I'm not!—to find out what the turns are in this business. Remember, I saw the start in Burma. Let me be in at the death. And I'll use Caerlyon when I want sea air and Cornish cream and an appetite, and your mother shall look after me and you shall go to Burma."

It came to the point when I was so dazed by the turn of affairs that I could only sit and stare at him. He grew on me every minute. He was so small and white and queer, like a grey moth you could crush between your fingers and yet the heart of him as big as a mountain—you could see that—and as sensitive and eager as a woman. I never saw anyone at once so young in heart and so old and intelligent in mind, as if he knew all the world and laughed at it. I had a notion that the hermits that lived in caves and trees must have been something like him, knowing everything and chucking it away like a sucked orange. In all my life I had never seen anyone like that, and I thought the woman who turned him down because he was a cripple the worst kind of fool, and yet in a way I understood her too, for she would have had a man unlike anyone else in the wide world, and it takes a wise woman to register the points in that.

When he saw he had got me completely he rang up Scotland Yard and told them to send him the best man on their books, and asked me to stay to dinner and to put up with him while I was in London. I fell in with this at once. I felt alone in my fight no longer.

But it had been a day of staggering surprises. Vandaloff, Kyriel's son, Marcia's half-brother! Had he known it? Yes. I recalled the look of

admiration mixed with cool inquiry he had cast upon her. He was wondering whether such a sister could be made use of as a pawn in the deep game he was playing with his father. And he had decided—yes. They could use her. I remembered the secret talk with Kyriel on the telephone— “A beautiful woman can do what a man can’t. I saw the way he looked at her.”

She was to be played off on me, to hold me while they crawled their way through their intricacies. And she—but I trusted her; I trusted her! The water-lily grows from black mud, lifting its white flower to the sky, and Marcia’s pride—for she was proud as Lucifer with that haughty little head of hers—was of another kind than Kyriel’s for all she was his daughter. No doubt of her could ever trouble me, past or future.

But a lost city!—that began about this time to be a kind of background for my guesses. I think I connected it vaguely with the old Burmese box of yellow ivory at home—a thing that kings might have handled, and so lonely, lost and out of the picture on the rough Cornish shore where fate had stranded it. I remembered the elephants cut deep on it, the palace in the background, the prostrated figures as the king came out, the air of ancient splendour. Strange things might be possible in a country like that. And then there was my father’s dead silence about it all.

The wheel of mystery had caught me and was whirling me away—to where?

CHAPTER X

I LIKED Sir Hugh better and better as time went on. At dinner he made as much of a penniless young man like me as he could have done of a prince; kind and quick and talking of all my affairs down in Cornwall with a sort of warm interest and give and take that led me on until I found myself telling him all my little hopes and notions about raising crops and the best breeds of sheep, and the way we managed the men, as if he had been a farmer himself and a man of my own standing. And this was very surprising to me when I thought of it going to bed, because I am no talker and had been brought up to listen to my elders, as is but right. But he liked to win people's confidence. I think he prided himself a bit on it as a faded beauty might in her power to charm, and indeed I heard afterward that as a young man he had been thought one of the most attractive you could meet in a day's march—and all the women running after him in a mad scramble. I could easily believe it. That queer bright look and smile of his were oddly winning—and his manners—Lord, what a gift that kind of courtesy that seems all kindness is! I wish I had it. I know it won me once and for all.

When we were alone after dinner he said suddenly: "I've looked up Kyriel and his girl in the Peerage. Marcia Nathalie Ruthven. Is she like the lovely mother?"

One moment I hesitated and then said candidly: "I never saw her mother, sir, but I think she's the most beautiful thing I ever saw in my life. I'm no judge, for I've seen so few, but I believe you'd say the same."

"What is she like?"

I described her as well as I could. Judge what a bungle I made of it, saying too much and too little and all an injustice to her. He listened with interest.

"She must be like her mother, but her eyes were the loveliest hazel. The Kyriel mixture gives the colour you describe. The most beautiful woman I ever saw was a Russian gipsy with green eyes—like the inmost curl of a breaking wave."

His words were the very reflection of those eyes of Marcia's. For a moment I saw them and nothing else. Then with his elfin smile and unearthly shrewdness he said: "Forgive me. Of course you're in love with her? What else could you be?"

It brought the blood flaming to my face like a fool. Was I? I had asked myself that question and left it unanswered. It answered itself now. He had struck me awake and face to face with the future at a blow.

“I can’t tell how you knew, but I suppose I am,” I said despairingly. “And the very last thing I’d have chosen—a regular unholy complication.”

“It is a complication,” he agreed, and sat drumming gently on the table. “The father is such a very bad egg!” he added. Then presently: “I knew, of course, by the way you looked when you talked of her. I wish I could see the young woman. I always know what they are. They hoist their danger signals or the reverse for me at once. Don’t let it go further until I give her a clean bill of health.”

“I know that for myself,” I said sternly. “*There* I don’t need advice, sir, though I want it every other way. *That* was not the complication. It’s that I am plotting against her father while I’d give the world for her. I don’t like it!”

“You are right. Don’t see her until it’s all cleared up one way or another. But would Kyriel hear in any case of his daughter marrying a penniless farmer, even with blood as good as his own?”

“Not he! But she’s the kind who if she loved me would come to me.”

“And does she?”

His look was as keen as the splintered flash of a diamond. There I was sure at least and could answer on the spot.

“Not she! Why should she? But she was sorry for me, and that was something.”

The door opened, and a footman appeared with a card on a small waiter.

“‘Mr. H. Hampton,’ ” Sir Hugh read aloud. “Show him into the study.”

I own my heart quailed a little as I followed him to meet the first detective of my acquaintance. I had an ideal, of course, based on all the famous sleuths of fiction—no need to describe it.

He rose to meet us, and my confidence fell like the mercury in a January thermometer. No—that placid, genial, rosy-gilled churchwarden could not be the great unraveller! This was the sort of man that likes three lumps of sugar in his tea and to sit placidly stirring it and ruminating. This would be the messenger. The real man would follow.

But it was he. He announced himself pleasantly and in an easy, educated voice as Mr. Henry Hampton, and then sat down again, looking expectantly from one to the other of us like a particularly bright robin in hopes of a

crumb. The thing hardly seemed serious business; he took it so genially. There were no preliminaries. Sir Hugh waved to me, and I told my story shortly and clearly. I had got it straightened out in my head by this time. He made notes as I proceeded, and I had a horrid feeling that I was in a doctor's waiting-room and in for an unpleasant diagnosis, though he remained perfectly calm and genial as if such things happened every day in the best families.

"Kyriel?" he said to himself, but aloud as I finished. "He was in a nasty card scandal twenty-four years ago. He left his regiment in consequence. Nothing else against him that I know of."

I never knew a man so pleasant and so precise. He sat a little while revolving it all as if it were some agreeable memory (that is the only way I can describe the impression he gave) and then said cheerily:

"Well, now, what I think, Sir Hugh, is this. We'll just have Lord Kyriel watched a bit, and meanwhile if Mr. Pendarvis wants a nice little run he can go and make a few notes in Burma. The connexion between Kyriel and Mr. Pendarvis Senior is certainly here. Now, about this ornament. Can I see the image?"

Sir Hugh limped to the shrine, and Hampton followed and stood looking at it reflectively. "Handsome!" he said, and with that quite inadequate word made a note in his book and sat down again.

"Do you know for a fact, Sir Hugh, that your and Lord Kyriel's images are duplicates?"

"To a hair. The only two in England. But his is in trance, with closed eyes. Mine, as you see, is speaking."

"And how did you get yours?"

"At Christie's sale rooms, eight years ago. The seller was unknown. The head man there told me they had not a notion who it was, but a French firm was the intermediary. I paid six thousand pounds."

"And how did Kyriel get his?"

"In Burma, when he was there with his regiment. Pendarvis and he used to talk a lot about those things out there, but I never heard anything definite or saw anything beyond the ordinary curios that enterprising people pick up."

"You know nothing more?"

"Nothing. Will you smoke?"

He accepted a cigar buoyantly.

“Getting on—getting on!” he said. “You and Mr. Pendarvis, sir, might be trained observers, you put your facts so neatly. May I take possession of the cuff-link, Mr. Pendarvis?”

That was a pinch in more ways than one, but I surrendered it. He turned it over and over.

“I must run down to Caerlyon, of course, and be there some time, but I don’t recommend getting in touch with the country police. Worthy souls, but apt to muddle a bit and mortally afraid of the gentry.”

I agreed eagerly, but it startled me, for in a tiny place like that any newcomer would be spotted and the neighbourhood bristling with curiosity, especially in view of what had happened. I suggested this, thinking he might have overlooked the risk.

“Well, that happened to occur to me,” he said brightly, “and when I got your message four hours ago, Sir Hugh, I looked up a Gwent paper and found a nice little general business for sale, in Caerlyon village—small odds and ends and a tobacco licence.”

I stared in astonishment. Dodds was dead, of course, and the business to be sold, but it seemed like witchcraft that Hampton should know it.

“I made my little offer by wire and go down to-morrow to look after it. Two rooms above the shop, and the widow would look after me if we come to an agreement.”

I gaped at him.

“But you never would pass for a man like Dodds! Your voice, your accent— You couldn’t possibly!”

“Wha-y, as to that, I’m not a man as is too good for his comp’ny, any’ow. And if the little ’ouse is good and the business ’ummin’ along, I don’t ask no more,” said Mr. Hampton, and spat composedly into the fireplace.

The transition to the Cockney was so swift and complete that it had the effect of magic. I saw the man coarsen before my eyes; his very jowl and lips grow heavy and common.

“A little uncertainty about the collar and tie and a striking shirt-pin—and there you are!” he said gaily, resuming himself, if I can so describe it, with such suddenness that it left me gasping. “No, no, Mr. Pendarvis, that’s all in my way of business. I wish we had no worse snags ahead than that! But I shall hear a good bit when I’m settled in Dodds’ shop.”

“You don’t mean to say you’re going to buy the business and stay there — The expense—”

But here Sir Hugh fielded me.

“The expense is my business, not yours. Shut up, Pendarvis!” he said.

“Why, as to that, the whole show can probably be bought, lock, stock, and barrel for fifty pounds. Far cheaper than me eating my head off at a country hotel, not to mention my driving a roaring trade into the bargain! *That’s* all right. I’ll go down to-morrow. Any other points, Mr. Pendarvis? Is Miss Ruthven the only child?”

I can never express how I loathed hearing her name brought into this sorry business in any way whatever. It struck me like a blow in the face. And yet what could I do? I have asked myself that question many a time since, and never found an answer. Seeing my silence, Sir Hugh broke in again.

“Pray understand, Mr. Hampton, that we want Miss Ruthven kept out of this in every possible way. The position will be bad enough for her, and there’s no object in making an innocent girl suffer one ounce more than she need. Will you safeguard her?”

Hampton laughed genially.

“Why, of course, Sir Hugh! I have no reason to injure the young lady, though if I had any cause to think she was in the picture she would be the one to get the spot-light on. But she isn’t. She cleared herself when she brought that cuff-link to Mr. Pendarvis. No woman working with the other side would have done that. No, she’s all right. But, naturally, if a woman’s father has involved himself, she stands to lose, and we can’t save that.”

“And that is the very reason why I must ask you to consult me before acting, if events seem likely to involve Lord Kyriel,” said Sir Hugh seriously. “I share Mr. Pendarvis’s feeling that Miss Ruthven must be spared in every possible way, and it’s a pleasure in dealing with a gentleman like yourself, Mr. Hampton, that you’ll feel this too.”

Imagine if I loved the man after this, with his little, white, suffering face and the big heart of him! I could only look at him, but he knew what I meant. Hampton rubbed his hands.

“You can depend on me, Sir Hugh; of course you can! In a business like mine we want the velvet glove as well as the steel hand. And now, is there anything more, because I shall go down to-morrow? When do you come, Mr. Pendarvis?”

The talk that followed resolved itself into a discussion of Burma and what I might do there, and here too Hampton showed his curious, all-

embracing knowledge. Why he should have known anything about Burma I cannot tell, for he was mute as a fish about any other cases or experiences and might have come, a new-born detective babe, to the consideration of ours. But if Burma had been his life-study he could not have been more suggestive and helpful. I may truly say his face was his fortune, for behind that ruddy, rather simple and cheery mask no one could ever have suspected the clear, acute mind and searching intelligence of the man. It was like consulting an encyclopaedia—you never turned the page in vain. Sir Hugh would put out some assertion, say, on the ruby-mines, and Hampton would correct him laughingly. Looking up the facts Hampton would be right. He never triumphed, but went on blandly to the next point.

To make a long story short, it was settled that I should take my passage in a British-India boat a fortnight hence to Rangoon; that I might perhaps call once at Dodds' shop to make acquaintance with his successor and once for cigarettes, but outside that we were not to meet—and even this he would have forbidden if I had not assured him that I had been in the habit of passing the time of day with Dodds, as was natural in so kindly a place. I was never to telephone or write. (I may say here that we met once in this way with no other result than that he gave me to understand his real name was Ramsay, and that he had a reason for trusting me with this which would develop later. My head was so crammed with other things that I forgot all about it until that 'later' arrived.)

I gave him a few tips as to the men who might talk usefully, and we parted with so much settled that my brain would have reeled only that I was in the hands of men who never turned a hair. Sir Hugh's lawyer was to pay off the mortgage, and Kyriel to release it without knowing who was his client, and the property to be reconveyed to me by Sir Hugh, the debt at a very low interest (on some sort of interest I insisted)—the relief to me of being in his hands instead of Kyriel's being beyond expression. We were to meet his lawyer next day, and on the following I would go down to Caerlyon and make all arrangements for my mother, and break the news to her that I was about to start on the great adventure.

I must summarise here, for events in Burma crowded on me so thick and fast that they make those two weeks before I started dim and indistinct in memory except for one thing—one only. My mother met me with the news that poor old Dodds' business was likely to be sold to a very decent person named Davids, who had asked if there were a church handy, and had not haggled unfairly about the price. He was a distant cousin of old Miss Rount's, who had died four years ago and left no relatives, as was thought at the time. Naturally this relationship was a recommendation to Mrs. Dodds,

as Miss Rount had been so respectable. How Hampton had unearthed her I never knew, but it was a winning card and established confidence at once, so much so that all the village made a point of streaming into the little shop when he settled in to hear his touching reminiscences of the old lady as a young woman. Tom Blean declared that he was the living spit of her and a tur'ble nice kind o' chap, and so free-spoken that all the folk knew all there was to tell about him the first day ever they seen him.

Hampton insisted that I should keep away from the outside edge of a meeting with Marcia, and of course I knew he was right and I meant to. I could not tell her where I was going. I would not so much as hint her a lie, and I believed in my own soul I could never withhold any confidence if she looked at me with that expression I never could or can describe, proud and sweet and— No, no use! Who can tell the charm of the woman he loves, any more than he can say why a melancholy sunset dying away over the sea wrings something in him that he can never reach, hidden away like bulbs before they flower? Yet I met her and could not help it, as you shall hear.

I was down in the out-field that runs down to the cliff and had been standing a minute, looking down on the Pillar Reef, just awash, and thinking of Vandaloff, when I heard feet moving along the cliff track. I never looked up, because all the village had the liberty of coming that way, and I just turned off as if down to the beach. In a minute I heard her voice. Now, because I could not face her, as I have said, I thought I must run away from her, and I pretended not to hear and made for the down track, with my heart beating as if I had run a mile. She stopped, and I turned and came back instantly, and if it be said that was folly I have no excuse to make. She stood a little above me, looking down and as beautiful as the first spring daffodil when it hangs in a March breeze.

“I want to speak to you,” she said, as if she must give her orders and I take them, but as gently as if it were possible for me to refuse if I would. “Mr. Pendarvis, you have been away or I would have said this before. I have been watching for a chance. I want to tell you that I think you must not trust Mr. Vandaloff. You and your mother were so kind to him that you might think you could, but I heard him say a cruel thing about you.”

Her great goodness so amazed me, as if she really had my trouble in mind, that I could say nothing but just looked up at her. She went on.

“I was passing the library window, and he was saying to some one” (I could see the hot blush that coloured her cheeks then as if she hated to speak of it), “‘As to Pendarvis and the old woman, they’re country bumpkins that will swallow what any man likes to tell them. I’ll run round in a day or two

and find out what the London business was. Collins let drop the other day that Pendarvis had spoken of Canada—showed some sort of interest in land out there.’ That was all I heard, but I saw you must never trust him. I think myself—he’s a bad man, and it terrifies me, for he’s always with my father.”

Then I could speak, for I saw she needed cheering. There was a look about the mouth that should not be there for years—a kind of hopelessness. It strengthened me to take what she gave, yet hide what I ought.

“I wish I could thank you,” I said with all my heart. “This is a most useful warning, for my mother liked the man so much that she might easily say something he could twist wrong; and now, without speaking of you, I can put her on guard. Indeed, I like nothing in him myself, and I have your very feeling there. I needn’t say be on your own guard, for you have an instinct for a stoat or a weasel like a dog’s, and there’s no fear for you. But I want to say this, if there was ever anything you felt for your own sake that I could help in, you would let me know—you would? You *would*?”

I could not keep the prayer out of my voice, do what I could. I loved her so, and, seeing all her fine courage and the high-bred way she took things, it seemed to me a most fearful thing that I should be hunting down her own father and she not know. It gave me a kind of lowness that I despised, and yet what could I do?

She looked down at me with eyes that questioned and then slowly fell before the look in mine, but for all that she answered like herself:

“I would ask you for help before anyone in the world. And why I cannot say, for we know each other very little. Now I must go. I cannot really help you or be a spy on my father and his secretary, for that is what Mr. Vandaloff is now—so perhaps we may never meet again. But I shall hope night and day that you may find your father. Good-bye.”

She put out her hand, and I held it for a second and could say nothing, and she turned away, walking quickly up the path to the road. I had done no harm. She had done good that no words could ever tell, and so it rested. I did not mention that meeting to Hampton nor any. But it stayed in my heart. The only outward result was that I told my mother I had heard something of Vandaloff which made me think we were as well out of the acquaintance, and she took that from me as she took everything else, with perfect trust and asking no questions. When he came two days later he was told she was ill and seeing no one, which was true enough, and that I was up with a sick cow and not to be disturbed, and he took himself off.

With my mother my course was plain. She knew nothing of Hampton (that was judged wise by himself and Sir Hugh), but having first taken her

promise of secrecy I told her simply that I should be obliged to go to Burma on business connected with my father's disappearance. That I would rather it was supposed I was for Canada, and Sir Hugh agreed with my view there and would have steps taken to that end. That she was to write to me through him and I to her in the same way, for what a village post office knows all the world knows. That he would be her friend in everything, being a close friend of my father's, and that he might come down for a month in August with his valet. Of Kyriel I said not a word, of the mortgage not a word. She did not know how near she had been to a ruin which, following on the other, would have broken her heart.

There was something fine in the way in which she took the gaps in my story and trusted me for what I could not tell her. That helped me more than all the reasoning in the world. If I had loved her before I loved her ten times more for the courage she kept up that she might strengthen me.

But the morning I left she had a thing to tell me which struck me into a silence of wonderment and which I was to remember far overseas. I found her sitting in the parlour with her own roses, the white ones, nodding in at the window. There was a thick mist drifting in from the sea and the air was curiously still. I could hear the sheep bleating through it, sounding far away and strange, almost like a plover's cries from the upper air.

"Roger," she said earnestly, "I had a dream last night, and a true one. I know very well when they come up like little bubbles on the water, silly little things, all colour and nothing else to them. It wasn't that—no, not that. I saw you in a place I never saw before, ugly, lion-coloured hills with peaks and yet not mountains, a sandy-looking place. And there was a man lying in a cave. I thought he was dead, but he stirred, and there was another man—you, Roger, you! He offered you something, and I screamed out, 'Refuse it! Refuse it!' but you reached out for it, and then white mist came rolling up and I saw no more. But remember and refuse when the time comes."

"Refuse what, Mother? What's the good of leaving out just the thing that matters?"

I tried to laugh, but it was a bad shot. The shrouding mist, the parting, the uncertainty, made laughing a grim business. She burst into tears and clung to me as if nothing should separate us. But the hour struck, and I had to go, looking back at her as she sat hiding her face. The mist closed up about the house and drew it solemnly into the past, and my car swept by the long wall of Hatton Park and the silent trees, dripping with wet. For one instant I saw a little figure standing inside a gate with a dog against her knees and eyes fixed on the car. I made as if to halt, but she waved me on,

though her face pitied me. A look that met and answered mine. I went and she stayed, but my heart stayed with her and my eyes saw her always, still as death and watching—watching.

CHAPTER XI

BURMA and the wide, muddy estuary of the Irawadi River, where it flows into the sea by the great city of Rangoon, that melting-pot of the nations. My first sight of the Burma I had come to search was the mighty golden flame of the great Golden Pagoda, the Shwe Dagon, rising out of dark green trees in what seemed illimitable distance, like the very soul of Burma's mystery. They told me that it is the very holiest Buddhist pagoda in the world, for it holds the relics of four Buddhas and its splendour is worthy of its holiness.

I could not believe my eyes when I stood by it at last, the voyage over safely, and a passage having been booked for me by one of the Canadian boats to mislead anyone who might have a little healthy curiosity about my movements. I had come on this wonder unprepared as I wandered through the streets and stood before it dazed, looking up and up to try and see where it ended, for from the street I could not see where it began.

The sublime spire, if so I can call it, made a rush to the height of three hundred and seventy feet, gloriously gilded from base to pinnacle, standing on a low hill in overwhelming beauty. From time to time it has been regilded. In 1800 the King of Burma used his own weight in gold for this purpose, and I saw it now, covered with thin plates of gold from base to summit, while at the very apex was the jewelled 'htee' or umbrella of state, whence hung multitudes of gold and silver jewelled bells sounding in the clear air. I give these sober facts lest anyone should think the glitter had driven me off what senses I own.

I stood staring up at the vast spire of the pagoda, until it seemed to swim dizzily in the sky; then, dazed and awed, I made for the great entrance. Two colossal lion-spirits guard it, mighty, mythical creatures, and all about are stone lions, grinning defiance with the bared daggers of their teeth. Between these go up the endless steps and the endless procession of pilgrims from the corners of the earth, with gay little stalls on either side for the sellers of flowers, gold-leaf, and other votive offerings.

The steps are so contrived that you must walk with respectful slowness, and I was following the general example, and glad to do it in the midst of such marvels of colour and richness, when a man overtook me in a little

cluster of devout Burmans who were filling their arms with gorgeous blossoms to be presented at the shrines above.

“May I speak to you, Mr. Pendarvis?” he asked over my shoulder.

I turned with a start to face him. I had thought I was alone and unnoticed in Rangoon, and here, the day after reaching the hotel, I was recognised.

He was a man of about forty, dressed in light-coloured tropical clothes and a sun-helmet; a man with a tanned, pleasant face, grey eyes and light hair, and a tired, washed-out look about him as if life were a bit of an effort out here; a Scotsman for choice. I was right there.

“My name is Ramsay,” he said, motioning me aside from the procession of upward-going feet. “And I had a cable four days ago from Henry Ramsay, who is a cousin of mine and seems to be a friend of yours. Will you read it?”

I thanked him and took it. The strange, beautiful place, the sudden contact with what I had left so far behind, jarred with a discord. Back rushed on me Dodds’ little stuffy shop at Caerlyon and Hampton’s coarse, assumed accent, which he never dropped for an instant after he set foot within our bounds—no, not even when he lowered it, as he did then: “Hampton is my professional name, Mr. Pendarvis. My real one is Ramsay. A secret, and you shall know why I tell you later on.” I read quickly:

“Put yourself at service of Pendarvis, arriving August 1st. He will explain.”

“But I couldn’t dream of accepting. I never heard of such a thing!” I said. “It’s more than kind of Mr. Hampton and I’m delighted to meet you, but all the same—”

“All the same, I’m at your services,” he answered good-humouredly. “And so you may just as well make use of me. I shall get a letter from Ramsay soon, no doubt, explaining, but in the meantime you may as well give me your views. Let me come up with you now to the temple. I’ve lived in Burma for twenty-two years, and know every creek and corner of it. I came out when I was twenty, and I’ve never been home since.”

“But how on earth did you know where to find me?”

“I went to the hotel—the Strand, I guessed it would be, and they said you were out and described you, so then, of course, I knew. The flame of the golden spire draws all the moths. Every man comes here as soon as his feet will carry him. No wonder. It’s one of the greatest sights in the world.”

We were going slowly up the stairs while we talked, and already I was basking in my good luck. Sir Hugh's plan had been that I should get a travelling guide at the hotel, for in my ignorance I could never venture alone off the beaten track in Upper Burma with any hope of success. And he would have to be an unusual guide with knowledge not only of the places, but the spirit of the people, or at least the outward side of their beliefs. And even then would remain the difficulty of language, for the Burman is by no means a prize linguist, and a good many meanings important to me would flow through the sieve of his rendering. And here was the god-sent guide, Hampton's own choice! It might make all the difference between success and failure.

"You speak Burmese, of course?" I asked.

"As perfectly as any foreigner can. The religion, the magic of the country, interest me enormously. I'm a busy man, a solicitor here, and in my spare time I'm collecting notes for the book I mean to write one day. Look here, did you ever see the like of this? It drives me off my head with scent and colour and glitter, as it did when I saw it first!"

We had emerged on the huge platform at the top of the steps, and all round and before us was the splendid upward arch of the golden spire from its eight-sided base, and on every side of the platform golden chapels and image-houses, inlaid with sparkling glass mosaic and what appeared to be jewels. Tall, gilded posts stood about us, fluttering with streamers covered with holy pictures. In every chapel and shrine were images of the golden Buddha, meditating, exhorting, in trance, and with Indian, Burmese, Chinese, Japanese features, according to the taste and nationality of the devout giver. The carvings in rich woods struck me dumb. They beautified everything. It seemed, to my eye, as though they had been flung on everywhere; and together they formed a whole fairy tale, of dancing tree-spirits and merry demons and enchanted animals, elephants, tigers, and what not, carved in deep brown wood, nobly gilded here and there to bring out its rich shadows. Ramsay could not get me past them. He knew the stories of all and sundry, and a more delightful companion for an ignorant sightseer could hardly be imagined. But the riches—such riches!

"Where does it all come from?" I asked at last in astonishment. "Is this the richest country in all the world and the rest nowhere?"

We were standing under an overhanging tree, a little back from the blaze of gold and the brilliant crowds of people in their gay silken garments which made a part of the richness. A lovely little black-haired lady, dressed in silk the colour of a daffodil and yellow flowers to set off the silky blackness of

her hair, looked at me coquettishly through long black lashes. She had golden cylinders in each ear, set with clusters of rubies, and ruby rings on her little amber hands, and in the sunshine was surely the most brilliant person I had ever seen in my life—if there had not been hundreds of her walking all about me on the great circular platform, like a delirium of rainbows.

“Why, as to riches,” Ramsay answered, waving to an acquaintance, “certainly it’s a rich country. There are very few things Burma hasn’t got, if you come to that. But the people don’t care about wealth. I know it sounds incredible, but, except where our cursed civilisation has got them, they don’t trouble about making money. Here in Rangoon they tumble over each other to get it. Up country it’s different. The Buddhist religion makes them absolutely calm and happy, and their only use for money (beyond the necessaries of life) is to build pagodas or give to charity or set up drinking-wells, or something of the sort. It’s incredible to people who only know our discontented, envious nations in the West, but so it is. Enjoy it while you can—we’re spoiling it as fast as we’re able. As to the pagodas, they ‘acquire merit’ in that way. I’ve often wondered, if a census were taken of the pagodas in Burma, how many there would be. Something astronomical.”

“But this gorgeous, golden religion,” said I, looking about me. “Is there anything in it, or is it just idolatry?”

“See and judge for yourself,” he replied. “I have my own opinion. Anyhow, there’s the result. And for riches, yes, Burma is full of gold, cramfull of it, all round the Upper Irawadi, and even the sands of the rivers ‘roll down their golden sand,’ as the hymn says. There are places up there, I give you my word, where, when the people want to have a big beano, they just camp out on the banks of the bigger streams and wash out what gold they want, and quietly trot off home again. Queer, isn’t it? And then, too, amber, jade, green sapphires, tourmalines, and all sorts of beautiful things—Upper Burma is packed with them.”

“The place has the look of all that,” I said, gazing about with bated breath. “And the sight of that vast pagoda actually plated with gold gives one something to think of!”

“I should say so! Of course, the Government is supposed to keep a check of sorts on all that’s dug out, but, as a matter of fact, an immense amount of gold and precious stones is got quietly out of the country by the get-rich-quick men and their agents. There would be a lot more doing but for the place being so unexplored and dangerous up by the Salween River and other parts. Besides, there are cities and pagodas and temples lost in the hills and

jungles that must be mines of wealth if they could be found. Excuse me a minute—I see a friend.”

He walked quickly over to a shrine shadowed by the gilded leaves of a tree representing the sacred tree beneath which the Buddha received the enlightenment which made him the “Light of Asia.” I watched with interest, even though my brain was already working round his last sentences and shaping the questions they suggested. Before the towering, pinnacled shrine stood a Burmese, bare-headed, shaven, clothed in a robe of dull yellow which left one shoulder uncovered. He carried a yellow umbrella in one hand, but shut, and the strong sunlight beat down upon him through the golden leaves of the bo-tree above him. He seemed to be lost in meditation as he looked at the image within—the Buddha standing upon a golden water-lily and teaching, with raised hand, as I had seen it in Sir Hugh’s room, whose shrine this so exactly resembled. I could see the man’s lips moving, as if he were unconsciously praying, undisturbed by the passing of the quiet people. Ramsay drew up behind him and waited respectfully until, with a gesture of deep reverence, the monk (for such even my ignorance recognised him by his dress to be) turned to go. Then, seeing Ramsay, he stooped, bowing gravely before he smiled as friend to friend. I looked on enviously. I wish I could put in words how I envied Ramsay’s familiarity with the country and the people. I was in the position of a man who gazes into a gloriously illuminated and pictured book of fascinating stories in which he cannot read one word—the most tantalising position I ever was in in my life.

They came forward together, talking, and Ramsay introduced me to the Mahati Gunama, a great and well-known Buddhist monk and scholar.

I should have made my best bow anyhow, for I knew that in all countries but our own deference is expected as a mark of self-respect, and the man who does not pay it stamps himself a lout, but the Mahati’s dignity would have exacted it from a king. He was a man in middle life, tall for a Burman and slight, but, for all that, there was a look of strength about him, which showed that the Buddhist rule of preserving the strength of the body was not forgotten in the austerity of the monk’s life. Yet it was his expression that so exacted deference from all—the keen eyes with their look of command and intellect, the searching gaze which seemed instantly to appraise and place me, together with the grave courtesy of his manner, repelling insolence and familiarity with a wall of unapproachable dignity.

To my very great astonishment he spoke English. His dress and manner removed him so far from any world known to me that my own tongue was

startling, though he spoke it with strange inflexions and phrases.

“Sir, I am pleased to see you in our great Shwe Dagon,” he said. “And, being told of my friend that you come to see our land, I hope it may repay you long journey with beauty and peace.”

I told him I was already bewildered with beauty and magnificence, addressing him very carefully as “sir,” according to Ramsay’s example. I added that I intended to travel in the wilds of Upper Burma and hoped to be rewarded by very interesting discoveries among the ruins which I had heard were hidden in the jungle and hills of that astonishing land. I found it difficult to describe my errand, and had fixed upon that statement as the simplest. He replied at once, with the utmost kindness:

“This poor servant of the Perfect One serves in the Monastery of Zetawun, beyond the banks of the Salween River, and it were perhaps that I could help. The monastery is good to guests. You will come, then?”

It was so graciously said, with such a kindly smile, that, alone as I was in a strange land, this hospitality touched me, and I thanked him with all the gratitude I felt. He smiled, turning to Ramsay.

“Tell him where it is, and come also. Do I not know your soul is tired within you with the heat and noise of Rangoon? Lay aside your work and be elder brother to this young man. It is good to taste of repose, and you, my friend, are now a man who sits and eats.^[1] Therefore set yourself to acquire merit thus.”

[1] An independent person.

Ramsay answered, smiling:

“Sir, I have already told this gentleman that I am at his service, and I will very gladly travel with him. You are right. I am very much in need of rest. Do you go up the river by boat, or how?”

“By boat, but I stay at some holy places on the way up the river, at Prome, at the Shwe San-Daw, at the Temple of the Emerald Bed at Magwe, at Pagan, and at the Shwe Zet-Daw, east of Mandalay. Then straight on the way to my home monastery. And there I hope to meet in peace with friends.”

“Sir, may I ask where to find you here in Rangoon if we need your advice?” Ramsay asked, bowing as he turned to go.

“My service here is done in the monastery of Thehoh Teik.”

He bowed, and in a moment was lost in the crowd and among the many monks dressed like himself who stood alone or in groups before the shrine. Yet before he disappeared I saw how all made way for him, with what deep respect they saluted him, and even before Ramsay spoke I understood that my new acquaintance was a man of mark.

“That is one of the most influential men in Burma,” he said seriously. “Not only among the Burmese, either, though there his word goes for law, but among European and Asiatic scholars. He is the Sadaw, or prior of his monastery. There are only eight Sadaws in Burma—the other priors don’t rank so high. He is a great scholar in the ancient tongues of India, and even in Latin, Greek, and English. There’s a wonderful old library in his monastery, and you could not have greater luck than to be put up there—that is, if you want to see the life of the place off the beaten track. By the way, what *do* you want really? What is your errand here?”

I felt I must have time to consider the answer to that, and said hurriedly:

“Will you dine with me this evening? I should like to tell you at leisure.”

“With pleasure. But, to revert to the Mahati—that title means he has been more than twenty years a monk. I could only give his title and name in religion when I made you acquainted, for anything else is thought intrusive, but as a matter of fact no one knows his family, though he is believed to be of the ancient royal blood of Burma. The people all credit him with extraordinary powers, and he is addressed as ‘Payah’ (‘lord’), and as ‘Great Glory,’ as are all the monks—you must always remember the national respect for a monk when you have anything to do with one.”

“I suppose he is enormously rich,” I said, deeply interested and remembering the fat monasteries of the Middle Ages in Europe, and this lavish land.

“Rich? He owns his begging-bowl, in which he begs his food daily, his garments, his girdle, a little axe for firewood, a needle, and a small water-strainer. That is all his worldly wealth. Money he may not touch—it is likely he has never handled a coin in his life. These men are venerated for their poverty, not their riches. But it was the most almighty luck that sent him this way to-day, for he may be invaluable to you in the upper country. I shall know that better when you tell me what you have in your eye. Now, look here—that’s the Chinese shrine erected to the Buddha. Each Buddhist country has done its best here.”

He changed the subject tactfully, would not hurry or press me, and so we moved on among the glittering wonders of the holy place, rich with perfumes of incense and heaped myriads of tropical flowers, which seemed

to complete the magic of its strange beauty. Everything about me appeared unreal and doubtful. Could I trust Ramsay, I who moved among mysteries, who had been the duped of Kyriel and Vandaloff, who could not tell but that their snares might be laid for me in this country where I was a stranger and they so much at home? But meanwhile it was a marvellous delight to have eye and mind full-fed with such a feast of radiant colour as never comes to our cold West, and I wandered like a man dreaming awake until the sudden tropical sunset, when the sun fell, like a shot bird into its nest, and the mellow stars rushed out. The shrines twinkled and glimmered with points of light from innumerable wax tapers, and another day of worship to the Perfect One was done.

We went slowly down the interminable steps, and Ramsay called an auto, and so back to the hotel, through busy streets where perhaps more nationalities than elsewhere in the world jostle each other night and day. He left me at the door, saying he would be back in an hour. Before me on the letter-board waited a fat envelope, a letter from Sir Hugh enclosing two others, one from my mother and one from Hampton. I opened my mother's first and hurried over it: all well but for the stagnant suspense which showed no sign of lifting. My heart bled for her. I took up Hampton's.

“Dear Mr. Pendarvis,

“I hope all goes well with you and that you are making a promising start. It just struck me, after you sailed, that my cousin, Donald Ramsay, who lives in Rangoon, might be able to put you in the way of a few useful things when you begin to look about you, so I decided I'd send him a cable later on. Barring the mention of any criminal implications in the case and of my profession (which he knows nothing about, not having been in England since I took it up), I think you could do no harm in posing as a curio hunter and letting drop that you had heard K. and V. spoken of as successful along those lines. In fact, use your own discretion—but discreetly. He is a trustworthy man, though peculiar, and will, I hope, be useful. No news here, except the piecing together of bits of knowledge, nothing in themselves but useful later on. Constantly hear good reports of Mrs. P. and am driving a handsome trade which may amount to quite £4 a week, possibly a little more! Send all your news without loss of time through our London friend.”

That was all. I turned to Sir Hugh's.

“Dear Boy,

“H. was up for an hour yesterday. No news. The mysterious thing is really the car. Disappeared as if it were a soap-bubble! But he is working steadily on, and, as he says, the last and most insignificant piece of mosaic may finish the picture. He is perfectly at home in his surroundings now and highly popular. I have decided not to go near the place myself, much as I should like to give you home news. There would be strained relations between K. and myself and questions raised, so on the whole I am against it, and H. agrees. He tells me he has put a cousin on to you who will be useful. I have paid £2000 into Chartered Bank at Rangoon to your account, and there is plenty more where that came from, so you must drop no loops because of expense. I get keener about the thing every day, and had such a vivid dream of it last night that I woke up thinking I was in the Thawatti jungle that I haven’t seen for thirty years, and lo, before me was the very pagoda I told you I had heard described by your father. There’s imagination for you! I can hardly wait to turn over the page of ‘To be continued in our next’ so don’t let the grass grow under your feet.”

There was more—a wonderful letter, all grace and gaiety, hiding his suffering and generosity under a smile; exactly himself. It brought him to me there in that strange foreign room, and under its fluttering electric fan, exactly as if he had been sitting before me with his little, pale, whimsical expression that always had a sort of entreaty in it—“Be kind to me, and let me have my little joke—it’s only a little one.” And I touched his letter as if it had been a living thing rather than mere paper as I put it away. It was then I saw a postscript on the back of my mother’s. It lit up the world about me like dawn in spring, when all the birds are singing.

“Miss Ruthven rode over yesterday and spent half an hour in the garden with me. She said she had heard you had left but did not ask where you were, which I liked in her. She asked if she might come in sometimes when passing this way. She spoke so kindly of my being alone and said she knew how I must miss you—she had noticed how gentle you were with me. Oh, my dear, that is true! I miss you day and night! She touched my heart there and I cried. I could not help it, and she put her arms about me and said, ‘I liked your son, too. He is so kind with women, as if he were afraid to hurt them.’ And then, after a while, ‘Life is hard, isn’t it? But there’s a kind of reward in having courage and keeping one’s flag flying. I can’t tell why, but there is.’ We parted friends, I think. I am sure that’s a good girl, whatever her father may be.”

I kissed that page before I put the letter in my breast pocket.

CHAPTER XII

I WILL make the evening's talk with Ramsay as short as I can, but I cannot drop it, for the whole of what happened afterward hinged on it. He stayed till nearly two o'clock in the morning and we parted understanding each other very well. It all amounted to this: Seemingly he had not the least notion of Ramsay's profession, had an idea that he was rose-growing at his little place in Kent, where he had a charming house and garden not far from Orpington. He therefore took his introduction of myself as pure friendship. Under this impression he let drop some interesting items about his cousin, his wonderful memory, clear-headed insight, good heart, and so forth, ending up by saying there never was such a mimic and that he might have made his fortune on the stage.

"Give him ten minutes with any man and he can take him off to the life. His whole face changes. A foreigner, anyone—all the same; he's got them. If it weren't that he's feathered his nest very comfortably he might have turned that to account."

We went on to discuss plans, and there he was quite firm. He meant to come with me. It was nearly six years since he had been in Upper Burma, and of all things he must have a rest. I protested and protested, and he only laughed and shook his head.

"But I'm doing it to please myself. If you only knew the fascinating interest of what you're going to see! I used to go up every spare month I could take, and, as I told you, I'm always adding to my notes. Besides, I do want the change—haven't been home for over twenty years, and that gives a man the jim-jams almost as bad as cocktails, which I never touch—have too much respect for my innards! So I should go somewhere anyhow, and if you really intend to accept the Mahati's invitation and go up to the Zetawun Monastery, that's a place I mean to see some day or other before I die, and none so good as the present. I wonder how he knew I'm thinking of retiring! I am. I've had a long grind of it, and one gets played out sooner here than at home. But I shan't go home. I should always be hearing the

Come you back to Mandalay.

No. A little house out by the Dalhousie Park for me, and my books."

He really meant it. There was no more to be said but the gratitude I felt. For consider the unheard-of chance for a griffin like me! I could hardly believe my luck.

I asked him then about the Mahati.

“He’s a great friend of mine, so far as an insignificant person like myself can call himself a friend of a man whose thoughts and ways are quite beyond him. It came about through a legal service I was able to do the Thehoh Teik Monastery here, where he always stays in Rangoon. They were being most unjustly treated, and I won them the case. His word runs more strictly than the King’s writ in Upper Burma, and even along the Taung-Po, where white men are unknown, and what he doesn’t know of Burma is not worth knowing. A wonderful man indeed!”

After all this it was my turn to declare myself, and I found it very irksome and unpleasant that I could not be as open with Ramsay as he had been with me, but I really had no choice, looking to the interests and reputations involved. So I told him I was curio-hunting, and that was true enough, for Sir Hugh had given me a list of things he would take if I could get them, especially any fine old Buddha images of which he had a noble collection beside the one I had seen. And then, with extreme caution, I tried one toe on the very thin ice.

“There’s a Lord Kyriel in England who has one of the finest Buddha images in the world, and other valuable loot from up-country. Have you ever heard of him? Or a man called Vandaloff? Kyriel was James Ruthven when he was out here.”

Ramsay’s face lit up.

“Kyriel? Yes. There are men up at Taungpen who talk of him to this day. He was said to have collared—but I never knew how—the biggest ruby ever found in the hills where you get the ‘byon.’ That’s the ruby-bearing clay. I heard it was worth £20,000. Others said it was a private adventure in a lost city in the jungle, far north. Lost cities are often floating about in the ‘gup’—that’s gossip—here. Personally I believe they may exist. Anyhow, nothing could be proved or verified and the thing was shelved, though all the world here knew that Ruthven had had a razzle-dazzle of some sort. Do you know him? Vandaloff I never heard of. Russian, of course?”

“Do you happen to know if it was anywhere up near the Taung-Po he was said to have found the city—or the ruby?”

“Well, one story was that he had secret ‘twinlons’ (that’s a square pit for ruby-mining) further north than any white man had ever got, but it was all

gup, and Rangoon reeks with gup. The other story was the lost city. That there was something I don't doubt, and as we're going right up north we may hear some more. Heaven send we find a lost city of our own! Anyhow, it's as plain as mud in a wineglass that you can do nothing down south. Any curios worth talking of, and a lot that aren't, are snapped up by the rich globe-trotters at fabulous prices. You should see the junk they get hold of! Our game is to go up north, keeping our eyes and ears open, get in touch with the Mahati, strike out on our own with his influence to back us—and then—catch as catch can!”

I agreed eagerly, for this just suited my private purpose as well as the surface one. I can pass over nearly all of the rest of our talk, though every word of it was full of hope and use to me. There was only one more question of personal interest which I dared to put.

“My father was secretary to Sir William Parker here rather more than thirty years ago. I believe he was often rambling with Ruthven. Did you ever hear him mentioned?”

“Why, yes! It was always said in connexion with the big ruby that it was he who found it, but Ruthven was financing the show and so it went to him. But mind you, there was none of this gup while Ruthven was out here. It was all raked up after he chucked his commission over the row at cards.”

I ventured no more at the moment, but all this showed me I was on a hot scent. I wrote fully to Sir Hugh that very night, enclosing letters for my mother and Hampton, giving our address at the Zetawun Monastery, but with little hope of letters catching us in the wilds.

I need not relate the events that followed, until we were far up the Irawadi on the comfortable Irawadi flotilla boat in which Ramsay had taken our berths. These boats are the chief connecting link between Upper and Lower Burma, and no man on earth could want a more magnificent trip up that great river, one of the mightiest waterways of the world, than this, trading at all the more important villages and towns which stud the national highway. I was so carried away by the interest of it that there were hours when I could forget I was there as a sleuth, and remember only the marvellous gliding pictures which passed me all day and every day as I lounged in a deck-chair looking on like an audience at the most brilliant and fascinating show in the world.

Oh, the little villages, with the long-legged houses on piles, standing up to their knees in water in the creeks, palms rustling all about them in perfect sunshine, the gay, happy people crowding down to make their market of their small wares with the passengers on the big boat! I bought little silver

figures of dancing devils at Thayetmyo, and tawny lacquer on flexible horsehair at Pagan, and a bag of spinels at Prome, which I saw in dreams I will not write of setting off the beauty of beryl eyes I knew too well. Let any man laugh who likes; I, who had not a grain of hope, not one, to go on, was for ever picking up tiny things to please her—bits of embroidery she might like, a figurine—things here, things there, until I was ashamed of my own folly, yet could not lay it by. I would dream of her in the exquisite morning, when the blue and pearly reaches of the river, miles wide at times, seemed to stretch away in heavenly peace made more intense by the silent gliding of a great carved rice-boat down to Rangoon. Or when the vast, glorious sunsets burned themselves into night in the river in pools of blood and flame. And last thing, when the great stars made their paths of light in quiet water and we sent our broad electric ray before us to search out the muddy shallows, while the Burman on duty cried his soundings as he swung the lead. It was a time of rest before the great adventure began, and I gave all I could of it to a girl who might never send me a thought across the ocean.

Ramsay was a fine comrade—never a better—always on hand when I wanted him, with plenty of his own interests to keep him going when I needed solitude, and many were the good talks we had, day in, day out, while the *Darjiling* ploughed her steadfast way through Fairyland to Mandalay. At Katha we had to change to a smaller boat for the upper river reaches and Bhamo, where is the famous sign-post, “To China,” and Romance, on gaily tasselled and beaded mules, comes riding down from Yunnan, where the Burmese and Chinese frontiers touch, and sells her goods to the Burmans and the Shans, and worships in a strange joss-house with a white image of the Heavenly Buddha like a plucked lily among all the grotesque giants of legend. No, I must not turn the leaves of that tremendous picture-book. I must go ahead, with one final note.

I found the Burmese everywhere the most engaging and fascinating people, open and frank and courteous, and with smiles to disarm all anger, winning to a degree. Women and men alike captivated me, and this led to our often going down on the native deck and enjoying the queer sights there, and to long talks with the people through Ramsay, who was perfectly at home with them, and was on the look-out for a head man to take charge of any expeditions we might make up yonder. We found him—just the man for the billet—Maung Yo, Mr. Honesty (and well he deserved his name, which I always called him by). I never saw so merry a man, nor so quaint, with his elegantly tattooed blue breeches in designs of elephants and tiger-devils, a noble blue parrot on the arm to engage the favour of princes, and a few scattered dots of blue and red as a decoration about the brow and chin. We

could scarcely have had a more highly illuminated frontispiece for the expedition!

So at Katha we said good-bye to the *Darjiling* and her captain, and took the little branch railway which trotted us through deep and awe-striking jungle until we reached waterside Katha and the smaller boat which was to push us on to Bhamo on the Chinese border. Were I to tell all the strange and delightful sights we saw and the odd people we met—American traders going up on business, Germans, French on the same errand, English officers on shooting trips or going back to their out-of-the-way stations, mingled with Burmans, tattooed from waist to knee in the blue breeches pattern, and Shans, Was, and other surprising native tribes—the queerest world! And Ramsay at home in it all, and making room for me.

We left Bhamo and its Chinese ways in a delightful river steamer going farther north still and up past the rapids—and a grand sight they were! Fifty miles farther up the last of the white men aboard wished us good luck and trekked off on their various affairs, and only the Burmese and Shans remained, with a smattering of tribes of quite unpronounceable names and a few native peddlars going up to peddle trinkets and gimcracks among the forest village belles. Here the river took a sharp turn to the east, and finally they also dropped off, and we were left with only two days' journey ahead of us and two serene Buddhist monks to whom Ramsay addressed himself. Neither was bound for the Zetawun, but they spoke of it with deep respect, and knew enough of the lie of the land to give us very helpful directions. And then they too disappeared into the mysterious jungle which surrounded the river on both sides with the Unknown, teeming with dangerous life, terrible to man. I cannot explain the strange feeling with which, the night before we left the boat, I saw two wild elephants placidly drinking in one of the reaches and spouting water over each other's clay-baked sides. At last the boat pulled in at a little wooden pier of the roughest, with a few shaky go-downs about it, deposited her remaining goods among a crowd of gesticulating natives more wildly excited and noisy than a flock of parrots, took a few in return, chiefly, I imagine, the pickled tea which all Burma favours, and then, backing water and churning foam, got out into a wider reach, turned, and so began her downward way to civilisation, leaving us to our fate, with Mr. Honesty for our prop and stay, two tents, and the Zetawun Monastery six marches off.

The jungle! I don't know what it may be in India. Here it was amazing and terrifying in its gorgeous drowsy life. We secured all we needed and set out on a trail almost invisible to any but trained eyes. A few days of hot rains would have washed it out into luxuriant tangle. We could never see

more than a few yards before or behind us, green gloom everywhere, dashed with patches of glaring sunlight. Here and there the trees were crowded with gardens of orchids growing in every crook of the branches, wonderful feathery things like flower-spirits of trembling silver or regal purple, poisonously spotted sometimes, but always thick as dandelions in our home fields, and each worth a fortune for rich men's pleasure if the market had not been so far away. About us flitted birds of a magnificence I had only read of, unrealising. Minivets of velvet black and crocus yellow, glorious trogons that had broken up the rainbow for their dress, and in occasional clearings flaming peacocks, sunning themselves in a drowsy blaze of splendour.

There were jungle fowl which we shot for the soup-pot, to the scandal of Mr. Honesty, an unusually devout Buddhist—and in a good-sized lake, which he told us was artificial and the work of some lost king and his people for irrigation purposes, we caught some excellent fish which tasted like grey mullet, and the amazing perch which actually climbs the vines and stays out of the water for long periods. We met a party of these painfully flopping along a short cut known to themselves from one creek to another, and I could not tear myself away from the extraordinary sight.

At night fires were lit to keep off the tigers, but nothing worse happened than the crashing of wild elephants and the light passing and cry of a few barking deer. Once, in the daytime, I saw the coils of a huge python, basking on a sun-baked rock that humped out of the jungle, sluggish in the heat, magnificent and dreadful in the fruit-like bloom playing over his sleepy curves. Imagine all this to me who had never before been out of England! I walked in dreamland and could not believe myself awake.

Now, from all this wilderness I had taken the notion that the monastery of Zetawun would consist of a few hermits' cells thrown together in bleak poverty, and when we came one night to the beginnings of cleared ground and a village or two and palms and plantations instead of the jungle trees and their gorgeous orchids, I expected nothing better. But the astonishing thing was that this poor life and the falling back of the jungle were set among the ruins of a vast and ancient city, very dimly to be guessed in the light of a setting moon. And as I stood outside my tent, in a splendid dawn, with the laughing-thrushes shouting for glee about me, I could scarcely believe that I was not in a yet wilder dream. Ruins of palaces and temples, ranged in rows which bespoke forgotten streets, flaming golden pagodas evidently freshly gilded by reverent hands, shrines with splendid carvings crumbling under the hot sun and the assaults of the roots of cunning vines gripping them in deadly embrace—there it lay beneath plumed palms, seeming to send up a ghostly shimmer into the blue sky—a wonderful place

indeed. Farther off, great groups of trees stood guard beside a sliding river, green and cool, and among them the high-frilled and peaked roof, gleaming with gold, of a most magnificent building.

“And here we are. That’s Zetawun,” said Ramsay, joining me. “Did you ever see such a place?”

“In all my life, never,” I said with conviction. “But what’s the sense of it? Why should men, and educated men, live in such a wilderness? What good can it do? What does it mean? And what was this city?”

“It was the city of Zetawun, and it’s believed it was built by the same strange people who built the splendid ruins of Angkor Wat. No one really knows about them, but once they must have been a tremendous power. These are not Buddhist ruins, for none of the pagodas are more than a thousand years old. The temples are all carved with the stories of Indian gods, and heaven only knows their age!”

I stood and stared, half dazzled with the glitter of the pagodas in the sun and the shining of water in what looked like a lake. I pointed silently.

“That was a tank, an artificial lake where the queens used to bathe. It was in the palace gardens, and that huge ruin was the palace. See, it joins those other two mountains of stones. We have nothing like it now. I’ve never been here before, but of course they have pictures of it in Rangoon.”

I could say nothing, for the sight struck me dumb. I pretend to no fine feelings, being a rough sort of man whose life has shaped him for farming and living among animals, though personally I may think there is little better company than a horse and a dog. But still I had read a bit and had my thoughts, and this brought back all the vanished lives of men spilt like water in the sand and forgotten. What had they ever been? What are they? What is the riddle that mocks at all our guessing? What makes it worth while? For a bit even the solution of my own mystery and my father’s seemed of little importance, and the great castle built by ants, dotted here and there, of as much consequence as all the building of kings, and both only a kind of mirage.

We went slowly down the broken way to the lovely shade of trees where the monastery stood in its ‘parawoon,’ or fence, and there a train of yellow-robed monks, led by a stately figure which I thought I knew, was returning from the morning errand of begging food in the villages. As they walked with eyes fixed on the ground, as alien as the inhabitants of another world, the strangeness that life had become for me so pulled at my heart that I turned away from Ramsay and went back into my tent, trying almost desperately to realise myself and the facts.

Presently I heard him ordering Mr. Honesty to strike the tents. We were to put up at a 'zayat,' an open-sided rest-house under the trees, not far from the monastery—roof for wanderers and no more, raised on a high platform for the discouragement of snakes and scorpions. And there we publicly encamped to the delighted interest of a large crowd of villagers who surrounded us until the cool of the afternoon.

“And now,” said Ramsay, “for our respects to the Mahati, the Great Sadaw, the Vicar-General. A fine-sounding row of titles, isn't it? But not nearly so remarkable as the man himself. And if *he* knows anything of a lost city, I'm game to track it through all the jungles in Burma. Otherwise—'No can do!' as they say in Bhamo. Your friend, Sir Hugh, will have to do without Kyriel's treasures for me.”

But with such a sight of wonder as those ruins before me was it wonderful that anything in the way of romance began to seem possible to me? Ramsay had experience and habit to smother his enthusiasms, but I was new to all this, and I must own it got hold of me in an amazing way as if anything might happen in a country like this—as different from my own as the royal orchids from an English primrose. And then again I doubted, for as to ruins—any wandering native may see them and then the news must spread and the secrecy of the thing vanish. Surely my father's mystery and Kyriel's riches could not have their root there? I had yet to learn what a barrier a Burmese jungle might be.

But it was with a feeling, impossible to describe, half awe, half thrilling expectation, that I followed Ramsay into that unknown and beautiful place.

CHAPTER XIII

THE arrangements took some time, and it was in the sudden dark after sundown that, preceded by Mr. Honesty with a lantern, and carefully tapping the ground to alarm possible snakes, we set out along the well-trodden path to the monastery grove through vast, looming ruins and the golden glitter of pagodas as our light slipped off them. A few faint glimmers shone from the great building as we neared it, and my first impression of the flying roofs and pinnacles was one of height lost among the darkness of trees. It was raised high above the ground to begin with, as if on a pedestal, and the great tiers of winged roofs seemed to touch the stars.

“And yet it’s only one storey,” said Ramsay. “In Burma no one will have anyone above his head, and monks will allow it least of all. They live on the verandahs or in the halls. And now here we are at the parawoon, the sacred enclosure. Every native would go on from this barefoot, but they’ll excuse us if we put on slippers. This has been known as the Royal Monastery for ages, and yet I don’t suppose a King of Burma ever saw it—so far away as it is.”

Farther and farther every moment I was dragged away from the life I knew, into things I could never have imagined. I have no power to describe the splendour which met our sight as we entered the great hall. Even Ramsay, for all his knowledge, was silent a moment and then admitted himself astonished. Every inch was carved like jewellers’ work in rich brown wood and glittered all over to undistinguishable heights with gilding and inset points of looking-glass, and between these a rough network of gold which gave an effect of extreme magnificence. And yet in that glorious hall, so vast that the ends glimmered away into blackness and were lost, I could see no furniture except the great carved chests which Ramsay said held the library. One or two shadowy figures were passing in the dimness, and as we halted at the door a very young monk came forward and took us from our guide, who almost prostrated himself in reverence. So, following as softly as we could after the barefoot brother, we went up the hall into the shadows toward a dim oil lamp flickering faintly among them.

The Mahati sat on a mat by a very low table with a manuscript written on palm-leaves before him. He had a pair of great horn-rimmed glasses astride his nose, and was reading. It added to the strangeness that this book

was the most splendid I had ever seen; palm-leaves covered with red lacquer and enriched all round the border with magnificent scrollwork in golden, flying, dancing figures of spirits. I was told it was Sanscrit, and this had the appearance of each letter hanging from a line—the line being gold and the suspended letters black. Another great book lay open on the ground beside him, and this, Ramsay told me afterward, was made of an ancient royal waist-cloth, the property of some dead king, doubled and coated with paste and wood-oil until pliant as cardboard and stronger. This blazed with gold between its carved covers.

He looked up, gravely saluting as we came near, greeting us with the air at once grand and simple which I had noticed in Rangoon, and we bowed low. The young monk murmured, “Great Glory, the English lords would kiss your feet,” and withdrew behind him, holding his palm-leaf fan above his head. The Mahati motioned us to two cushions, and slowly placed a silk mark in the book.

I am no artist myself, but I have a feeling in me like the pushing of buds in a late spring when a thing is beautiful, something inarticulate and urgent, and I could not but think that a great painter would have given much to sit where I sat and see all this glow of gold and diamond glitter in the dim light that caught it up here and there from the shadowed mosaic of the walls, and most of all to have studied the calm face of the Great Glory in his yellow robe. I felt the power and thought in every line of it while his eyes considered me as if they looked me through and through.

The few other monks in the hall had withdrawn to a respectful distance. With the young monk standing straight and stiff behind him he spoke in good but laboured English.

“You have come far, my friends, and there is room for you beneath the roof of the Perfect One. Go, disciple, see that the belongings and servants of these gentlemen are brought to the Nat rooms beyond the western hall, and that all is well for them.”

The young man melted into the gloom and was gone. There was a moment’s silence; then the Great Glory spoke again; this time directly to me. “My friend, when in the Golden Temple in Rangoon I saw your face there came to my mind a thing I had heard from the Great Glory who was head of this monastery when I was younger. I cannot tell why I think to this when I look at you. Do you object that I have your horoscope made? Then I know, and it is good.”

The word ‘horoscope’ might not have conveyed very much to me, but for the long talks I had had with Ramsay coming up the great river, lounging

on deck with our cigars beneath the low stars and sinking moon, while he told me the strange customs of the country that glided by us in the tropic night like a ghost with all her mysteries wrapped about her.

“All men, all women, have their horoscope drawn at birth,” he said. “And it’s the same all over Asia. All Asiatics more or less believe in the influence of the planets. Is that a belief science will take under her wing one of these days? God knows! But look at all we’re learning of what the sun does for us with its unknown rays. I can tell you, the better one knows Asia, the more one hesitates at cheap certainties. ‘It can’t be so. It isn’t scientific.’ But suppose it *is*, and science as yet only a child at school?”

That was what he had said. Now, in the gloom of the monastery hall, with the Great Glory’s face white as ivory in the dim light, things seemed possible which I might have ridiculed in Gwent High Street. I assented, almost in a whisper, and the Mahati called softly: “U Adehsa!”

Another monk stole up, an old, old man, feeble in body but with eyes like watch-fires, so keen and bright were they among the wrinkles. He stood in an attitude of humility by his superior, with bowed head.

“You must give year, day, hour, minute of birth,” prompted Ramsay at my elbow.

I did so, and they were repeated in sonorous Burmese. The monk bowed, and glided away into the shadow again.

“He is greatly skilful,” said the Great Glory. “And now I ask this of my friends: In what can I help them?”

Ramsay waited for me to answer; I, for Ramsay, for how could I tell my errand before him, and how tell it at all to a stranger? So Ramsay spoke first, according to the little knowledge he had of the truth.

“My friend’s errand is to search for things beautiful and ancient beyond a jungle which he heard of as hiding a lost city. He knows no more than that. There was said to be a charm of ill-luck on anyone who touched the treasures. He is young and likes adventure, and would wish to see this place.”

All this I had told Ramsay from time to time. When he mentioned the city I saw the Great Glory’s eyes, hitherto bent on the ground, dart a sudden glance of surprise and something more at me, but he remained silent. Ramsay continued.

“And, because we hear such a city lies about eighty miles north-east from this abode of peace and virtue, we have thought that your nobility might aid us to discover it, if you so far condescended.”

A brief silence. Then the Great Glory said slowly,

“It is necessary that I speak alone with your friend. You will forgive?”

He bowed slightly, and as the young monk came gliding in to report that his orders had been carried out directed him to take Ramsay to the lower end of the hall and provide him with tea. In a moment we were alone. The Great Glory waited until it was certain that all were out of earshot, and then looked gravely and directly into my face.

“My friend, it is better that you speak true to me. You have said you come for precious things of art. Upon that statement the light of truth does not shine. You come for more. Two men travelled from here many years gone by, and they stole and rifled before the very image of the Perfect One, and ruin will be their reward. When I saw your face in Rangoon that story rose in my mind, and in great surprise I questioned myself and could not know. You shall hear why I ask.”

He called softly to the boy monk, who returned at once. He gave him some directions, and again we were alone and silent. I was bewildered. Of all difficulties I had never imagined this, and how to meet it I could not tell. It might ruin all my hopes to be frank. It might ruin them to be silent, for this man had much in his power. In that interval he never took his eyes from my face, but sat considering me steadfastly, seeming to read my perplexity. It appeared a long time to me before the gliding feet were heard and the monk returned. He laid one of the curious palm-leaf chronicles I have spoken of before the Great Glory and was lost in the shadows again.

The Mahati turned the leaves—literally the leaves, but plain and unadorned—and read aloud, translating.

“And two Englishmen came to the holy monastery, and were hospitably received and entertained in the Peace of the Blessed One. It is said that one was a lord among his people and the other the friend of a British ruler in our country. And what we could do, we did. After a while the lord made many questions about the lost city of Mien; and these we would not answer, for reasons. And on a certain day they left us and set out through the great Nat Jungle, where dwell the evil spirits and dangerous peoples, and we saw them no more; but heard that in a great anger one of them had killed one of the men who followed them, yet where they went and how they returned we never knew, but believed they had perished in the jungle. So, accordingly, we—””

He stopped abruptly there. I was not to know what they had done.

“No man of your country has gone again into that jungle—nor, indeed, of ours,” he said. “You go. And why? Surely, truth between friends is best? And what you say shall not be told. Speak, then, in trustfulness. Are you son to the great lord?”

I was in desperate perplexity. Was it or was it not safe to acknowledge the facts? It was clear there was information and help to be had which might prove priceless, but—a tremendous but—confidence might ruin me. I sat tossing the doubt to and fro.

Suddenly (and again I cannot in the least tell why) it shot through me like an arrow that I must tell this man the truth, that I could trust him, that it was the only way, that if the monastery had interests involved I certainly had none to clash with them as I was not out for gold, but for truth, and if there were riches hidden in the lost city the results to my father and Kyriel had not tempted me to follow their example! It might even save me the journey, save me precious time (for in spite of all the wonders, I craved to be at home for more reasons than one), if only I could get at the connecting link here and now.

I begged his promise of secrecy in words suited to his high rank, and, having received it, told him my story, making it as short and plain as I could for a man who knew little of England except from books and my countrymen in Burma. And there were omissions. Marcia Ruthven did not figure in what I told. He listened with his bright, piercing eyes fixed on me and prompting me here and there with astonishing questions which showed intellect and knowledge at their keenest. Evidently the story interested him profoundly, personally, and he revolved each item swiftly in his mind as I went on to the next. Once or twice he made me repeat what I had said, once he made a written note. When I came to the information as to Kyriel’s Burmese marriage he became human for the first time since I had seen him. He stared at me with the most natural and unfeigned curiosity for a moment, and I felt convinced, somehow, that the circumstances were not entirely new to him, though what exactly he was aware of I never discovered. He swiftly resumed his dignity, however; but ever after I knew the Great Glory was in some aspects a man like myself, and was more at home with him in consequence.

When I had finished I begged for his help. I told him I was lost in a maze of villainy and stratagem, as I firmly believed, and that I saw no way of finding any clue but in the mysterious journey of Kyriel and my father into this part of Burma, adding:

“And I swear to you, sir, on my honour, that I have no thought of gold or riches or rubies if I can only find my father and get out of the net Lord Kyriel has tangled us in. To be free and to live an honest life is all I care for, and if you will help me to that I shall never forget the gratitude I owe you. What is this city of Mien? How could they find riches in ruins?”

He looked at me with so much kindness that for the first time I had real hope in his aiding me. I knew I had spoken strongly, and that he believed me, and this gave me great and honest satisfaction. I had also a kind of feeling that for more reasons than this I might perhaps count on him—that, supposing Kyriel had robbed places sacred to his religion, it might be to his interest to know the facts, for instance.

“My friend, you have suffered,” he said after a pause. “And it is the acquirement of merit in a servant of the Blessed One to help you if it be possible. Hear, now, the story of the city of Mien and its wonders. This is from an old Chinese chronicle (for China, as you know, lies not far from us). But that the city ever existed I cannot say, and it is very possible it was the dream of this old chronicler.”

He laid the magnificently ornamented palm-leaf book, which I have already described, upon his knees and read aloud from it. And I shall henceforward omit his little slips in English, that the strange story may be clearer.

“After leaving the Chinese frontier you ride for a month and a half continually downhill, and then reach very great and terrible woods, abounding in elephants and unicorns and other wild and most dangerous beasts. And the traveller should have food with him, because many of the fruits of these woods are poisonous, nor is it easy to shoot deer or birds, for arrows are foiled by the trees. There are no dwellings and no people. And when you have travelled for thirty days and more through these woods and across the sand and the river, you come to the very great and noble city of Mien among the hills. There was formerly a mighty King here, and when he died he commanded that by his tomb they should make two towers, one at either end, of fine stone. And one is covered with pure gold a finger in thickness, and one with pure silver. And the golden tower has golden bells and the silver tower silver bells, which ring most sweetly. The tomb also is plated with gold. And in the city of Mien are magnificent palaces, decorated with jewels and marble and gold and pinnacles which reach the sky. Now, in this city are also temples containing golden images of the disciples of the Lord Buddha, and golden models of the holy places, and eighty golden images of the

predecessors of the King, of the King himself, and of his family. And as to the golden robes and trappings, there is no end, and vast store of rubies from the mines in the hills two leagues from the city. And there is the great ruby, known as the Light of the World, and the King wears it in his crown. The circular wall of this city is built of tiles blue as turquoise, and is more than sixty miles in circuit. It has twelve gates, and at each corner are golden pagodas. The people are very wise in astrology. They have a hundred monasteries of brick and carved wood, enriched with gold and silver and vermilion. Their trade is with the Chinese. And on their heads they wear golden-flowered hats. The women are most beautiful. They bind their hair with strings of rubies. In attendance on the King is a magnificent white elephant. And on the west side of the city is a great desert of sand, but by the river beautiful gardens and many trees.’ ”

He finished reading and closed the book. I ‘English’ his English.

“We do not know what catastrophe overtook the city of Mien—we do not even know who the people were who built it, nor how it came to be built in such an inaccessible place, which in itself makes its ever having existed improbable, but they must have been Burmese and after the year 1444. All we do know is that, if it ever had any existence, it suddenly disappears from the Chinese chronicle and we have it no more. Now, in this country the strongest force is the jungle. If we abandoned this monastery and the ruins you see, in ten years they would be invisible, unless you knew very well where to look. All would be knotted down with thick-stemmed vines, trees everywhere, and the armies of the jungle would have conquered the work of man. In this way alone it might have disappeared. But these ancient chronicles contain many statements meant only to amuse and astonish, and as time went by it was believed (and I myself believed) that the city of Mien was a dream of the romancer’s. It was forgotten as though it had never been heard of. But thirty years ago a strange thing happened. Two men, wandering after elephants and the single-horned rhinoceros, or unicorn, were lost in the great tracts of jungle north-east of this. One died and one was found by hunters in a dying condition and carried here. He brought with him a small gold drinking-cup which he said he had found near a sandy desert of great hills. To-morrow I will show you the cup. It is Chinese work. The Great Glory who ruled this monastery at that time heard and pondered and read in this book, but even his wisdom could make nothing of it, for it might have been dropped by some noble passing from China into Burma centuries ago. Still, because wisdom neglects nothing of the smallest, he caused it to

be written down where the cup was found, and that record we have. And tonight I will say no more, for the time of evening prayer is now, but tomorrow I will see you again, and, having considered your horoscope (for I know my friend's already), I will speak as I shall find."

He laid the book on the table and folded his hands, looking downward as if waiting. The quiet was broken by the beating of a wooden instrument, and instantly he rose, as the yellow-robed monks came trooping into the great hall. Very quietly they gathered, mere shadows in the gloom, and no gorgeous cathedral service has ever impressed me so much as that scene of quiet. A faint light sprang up before a great golden image with closed eyes and folded hands. Ramsay came and stood beside me, and we remained there, alien and lonely, while all turned toward it and prostrated themselves three times. Then the strong male voices united in a deep chant of praise and thanksgiving:

"I bless the Lord Buddha because he has revealed to me his Law,
By which I may attain heaven and escape the hells."

And as they chanted, great waves of solemn sound filling the dim air most strangely, the hall melted into unreality and I heard and saw sonorous waves falling with regular cadence upon the Pillar Reef in the majestic monotone of the great ocean.

It ended, and all prostrated themselves three times before the divine image, and a young monk standing erect proclaimed the hour, the day, the day of the month, the day of the year. So another grain of sand from the hour-glass of time had slipped into the sea of eternity, and we all went quietly off to rest.

I envied their calm and detachment from worldly troubles, for my own mind was tossing on seas of doubt. And then again I remembered Marcia and marvelled. For all that side of life, so precious and warm and vital to me, was shut from their experience, and they did not even seem to miss it. How could that be? What is the substitute that makes everything else seem worthless? I could not understand then? Shall I ever? I cannot tell. We walk in the twilight.

CHAPTER XIV

IT was strange to sleep that night in the rooms of dark carved wood, opening on a wide verandah, with the rustling of trees about it and a waxing moon shedding glory on the wild, fantastic pinnacles of the monastery, which looked more as if it had been tossed together by fairies from clouds than designed by man as a sober retreat from the vanities of the world. There is no such gaiety and grace anywhere as in the religious buildings of Burma, and, I think, no such happy people either. No doubt they will lose these good things when the lengthening shadow of our very different way of taking the world stretches over their country. That seems to be the unbroken rule as far as I can judge. I am glad I saw it all as it was, before it is only a memory.

I slept very little. Fear and doubt are restless companions, and I had a prevision of evil which lay like lead upon me. Ramsay, in the room opening into mine, slept restlessly too.

“I say, how are you doing about sleep?” he said in the middle of the night, strolling in casually. “I’ve had a beast of a dream. I feel as if all sorts of things are thickening about me that I don’t know the meaning of. You haven’t got any mysteries up your sleeve, eh, Pendarvis? Come out on the verandah and get cool.”

We did, and still I could not sleep.

Yet the atmosphere of the place was quiet itself, except for the school where all the boys were collected for the monks’ classes. We were roused by the sound of a wooden bell just before daylight, about five, and in a short while were summoned to morning prayer before the golden Buddha. All the pupils were there also, so we were a large gathering. Then, after a light meal, lessons were begun in the hall set apart for school.

“The Great Glory can’t see you until after the begging expedition,” said Ramsay resignedly, lighting his cigar and preparing for a stroll among the ruins before it grew too hot.

I, however, waited to see that strangest sight of the Buddhist world. And presently, led by the noble figure of the Great Glory, the whole brotherhood set forth in Indian file to beg the day’s food. No dignity, intellectual or religious, can excuse these monks from that observance, nothing but utter inability of body. It is one of the solemnest injunctions of their faith. And

now, each clothed in the yellow robe, with hands clasped over his begging-bowl, they walked down the middle of the road, eyes fixed on the ground, never stopping unless some one came forward with a gift of rice or vegetables or fruit. No word was uttered, no thanks, for the monks conferred the favour, and, should they not ask, an opportunity for charity would be forever lost to the givers. When the bowl was over-full it was emptied by the roadside for hungry birds and beasts, and the whole round was completed that no giver might be left unbenefited. The sight astonished me. A great faith, great teachers—supported in this way! It seemed incredible. But I thought the more of them for it, very much the more, for reasons I cannot go into here.

After their return, and the offering of a part of the charity before the Buddha, they ate their meal, the last of the day; and when that was done I was sent for.

The Great Glory sat in the same place in the vast hall, now filled with cool dimness and here and there a powdery shaft of sunshine. He waved me to a mat before him and dismissed my guide, directing him to tell Ramsay he would be sent for later. Then he proceeded to unfold the strangest-looking document of palm-leaf paper—my horoscope. It was a more elaborate one than usual, by order of the Great Glory, and a beautiful border had been carefully drawn around it. It has the two identical magic squares, a circle filled with numbers, a pagoda, and what appeared to me like intricacies of numbers beyond unravelling. A quick contempt for the ignorance of people who could set any store by such nonsense gave me a comfortable feeling of indolent curiosity as I laid it down after examining it, and I wondered that such a man should take interest in such folly as the Great Glory began to read aloud, condensing and translating as he went:

“You were born in Cornwall, in England, you have told us. We see it is among the rocks and seas, and our astrologer has seen a long house made of dark red bricks upon a slope that runs down to the cliff over the sea. He beholds a garden, and fields where coolies work, as here. Your mother is a wise woman who can foretell the future in dreams, and you also, by the influence of your planets, have this power. When you believe a dream is true you should act on it—it was in a dream I knew the Englishmen were robbers.”

Much astonished, I ventured to interrupt.

“If a dream is true, from where does it come?”

“From the universal stock of knowledge inherited through many lives. Certain souls at certain stages of development have access to this treasure-

house, others have not. But let us continue. You touched a great danger at the age of ten. You were all but drowned. They thought you dead. And again with a plunging horse you might have lost your life.”

There was no feeling of superiority now! These things were true, and there was no soul within many thousands of miles who knew them. How I cannot tell, but the man had read in the book of my past. I was dumb.

“The first terror of your life was when you struck a schoolmate accidentally on the head and he fell like one dead. The next, when a man pursued you who was mad with drink. The last, when you knew your father had disappeared.”

I had told him the last, but the other two! I listened, breathless, my eyes tingling with strained excitement.

“You have been in danger of your life of late. There is a great man who would willingly put you out of his way if he could, and when you last saw him the influences were in a malign aspect for you.”

“But my father,” I interrupted. “Will he be found? Is he alive or dead?”

“That is his horoscope, not yours,” the Great Glory replied, unmoved. “But for you there is still trouble, and danger also. Beware of the man with the sweet smile like a woman’s! You saved your enemy from death, and in your country it is said that he who saves a drowning man will live to repent it. You will go on a perilous journey and find what you seek at the end of it—but more definitely it is impossible to speak of the future, except that in drawing the horoscope our astrologer had what we call a ‘sight.’ He saw a rocky vault in the mountains (but where he cannot say), and a man lying in great pain and weakness, and he offers you a letter. But when he offers you this, do not take it, for as our wise man saw his heart shaped the words ‘Refuse—refuse!’ so strongly that he wrote them into the horoscope. See here!”

He pointed, but I could not look, for there rushed over me like a wave the memory of my mother’s worn face and her words of entreaty, “Refuse—refuse!” as she told me her dream in the room at Caerlyon, with English roses looking in at the window; and again I was dumb.

“And as to the trouble that is about you like a cloud, it passes, for in life all things pass like clouds and the stars shine again. Cloud and shine—such is your life.”

“And love?” I asked desperately, for he was laying the horoscope aside.

The Great Glory looked at me with a very human look of kindness.

“And love,” he repeated, “as the blinded people of this world count it. Though there is much more in this horoscope, there is not time now, and you will do well to ask others to read it for you. And now I counsel you to tell all to your friend. He is a true man and you can trust him. Return to me when the shadows grow long, and all shall be in readiness for your journey to Mien. I will have your head man instructed, that he may know what is needed. It was made clear to me last night that you would go.”

Before I had left the hall I saw him composed into meditation, calm, abstracted as the golden image at the shadowy end of the hall, and I knew that I and my needs had passed away from his mind like vapour breathed on a glass. The atmosphere at Zetawun made me feel extraordinarily small amid great things:

As men do children at their games behold,
And smile to see them.

That was the interpretation of the Great Glory’s kind, remote smile, and it chilled me, but roused me too. There were times when I envied him.

Briefly I told Ramsay all my story, and asked him to say whether he judged it well to come with me now he knew my errand. I saw, what I had not seen before, that I had had no business to ask him to take risks which he did not fully understand; therefore I was entirely open with him, excepting only any reference to Marcia Ruthven. And I had reason to know that honesty would have been the best policy all through. He listened with the closest attention, and then said seriously:

“I should have known this sooner. It would have helped you. That man Vandaloff, the half-caste—he was arrested at Rangoon four years ago for running rubies out of the country, and could give no account of himself. I recognise your description, for I saw him often. I instructed counsel for the prosecution. He had also been selling some of the perfect specimens of spinel as rubies in Colombo and elsewhere—you can only tell the best ones from rubies by passing a light-ray through them, and then they show a slight tinge of blue, so fraud is easy enough with the average buyer, and in one case alone it was known he sold a spinel worth forty pounds for four thousand.”

“But—my God! Are you sure—are you certain it’s the man?” I gasped.

Not that it so nearly knocked me over about Vandaloff himself as that this revelation opened terrifying possibilities in the history of my father’s connexion with Kyriel. I would not, could not doubt him, yet—I need say no more.

“It can be no other. This was a half-caste, educated in Europe, of exactly the same age and appearance. We could not trace his people; we could not trace where he got his rubies, for though there’s always a slight leakage from the Ruby Mines Company it was nothing beside his loot, and private mining is not allowed in Burma, as you know. It meant death under King Theebaw, and since our Government took over a man must register and pay and account for every stone. And much more so for ancient treasures of art found anywhere under our jurisdiction. There are so many ruins of temples and cities that anything might be found. This half-caste, known as Mu, from the place where we caught him, had been sentenced before to some years in the Andaman Islands as a dangerous criminal, but he killed two warders and escaped. He was sentenced this time to four years in gaol at Mandalay, and behaved himself so well that in four months they allowed him to work in the garden, and again he did a get away. He was never traced. He was the most plausible, fascinating devil you ever saw in your life—but, of course, you know him.”

Yes, I knew him! I saw the white seas foaming over the Pillar Reef and myself risking my life (for it amounted to that) to drag this brute from the death that was his due—and for what? To make him housemate with the woman I loved, who had the misery to be his half-sister, and whom his death would have released from a most wretched and degrading relationship. *Did* it degrade her in my eyes? No, not for one heart beat! But I had the murderer’s wish in me that I had let the waves take him and dash him to pulp on the teeth of the Pillar, for her sake—yes, and my father’s. The Great Glory was right. The ancient, heathenish saying of the Cornishmen had come true indeed: if you save a man from the sea you will live to rue the day.

“I think the story shapes itself pretty clearly,” said Ramsay, lighting another cigar. “Of course, you haven’t told me my cousin is a Scotland Yard man, but I saw it fairly plainly from the first— indeed, I had guessed it before, though I was not certain. And why not? Nature cut him out for that with her sharpest pair of scissors, and I bet you two to one in—rubies that he’s running those scoundrels gently but surely to earth down in your parts! Let us put our mosaic as neatly together at this end, and we shall live to see our friend Mu swinging in Mandalay. But, I say, don’t take it so hard, Pendarvis! Your father has been the victim of two most finished villains. What could an honest man do against them?”

I shook my head. I wanted to silence him—every word was a flick on the raw—and yet how could he keep off it, or I? All our plans necessitated discussion. I bit on the bullet and went on.

“Don’t mind me. It’s got to be faced. Get on with it.”

“I’ll not go on one step further until I tell you what you know yourself better than I. What business have you to doubt your father until you have it in black and white that he’s guilty? And if you don’t doubt him what should it be to you but excellent good work to unearth two scoundrels? Am I right or wrong?”

“Right,” I said, and meant it.

He braced me up there. I could face what was before me now.

He summed up so concisely after that, that I can do no better than follow him. Mien must be investigated and the threads traced, confederates in Gwent, London, and Paris found, and my father’s exact relation to the business determined. It was Ramsay’s conviction that they had either murdered him or spirited him away, but as to that, nothing could be done until he or his body were found, whereas if we could connect Kyriel and Vandaloff with ruby-stealing in Burma they would be held as criminals and the other question be automatically raised.

“But one thing,” he said finally, “prevents the story from hanging together as perfectly as I should like. How is it that Mu, or Vandaloff, has been able to go to and fro in Burma to their treasure *cache*, if they have one? I can imagine nothing more impossible. The man was known all over the country, pictures of him distributed everywhere, and a Government reward offered that would set up any Burman and enable him to go building pagodas and acquiring merit to his life’s end. No, I am inclined to think we haven’t plucked out the heart of the mystery yet. Vandaloff would never venture his skin in Burma. There must be some confederate.”

I saw the force of this, and yet remained certain that Vandaloff was the intermediary. All my knowledge led up to that conclusion. But Ramsay understood Burma, and I did not. He said much more that was interesting, and I appreciated his clear good sense and legal knowledge at every turn. When we went back at the summons of the Great Glory my own mind was clearer and calmer than it had been for many a long day.

We found him sitting on his mat as usual in his own high place. Though a part of the hall, it was treated as an audience room, and the monks came and went on their quiet errands as far from it as they could. Before him, on the little low table, stood a strange and splendid cup of wrought gold, deeply cut with figures and fruit and leaves. As we took our seats the Great Glory put it in my hands.

“Of the city of Mien this is all that remains. And we do not even know for certain such a city ever existed, for in the Chinese chronicle are also marvels such as birds whose wings cover the sky, trees bearing pearls for fruit, queens whose eyes shed pearls when they weep. All we can say is that this cup was found where the city might have stood were the story true. But the ocean-might of the jungle covers the place, and as easy to search for a sunken ship in the depths of the sea as for that lost splendour.”

“And you never searched for it, sir—you of this monastery, which is said to be within reach of it?” asked Ramsay.

“My friend, why should we trouble ourselves? What is the yellow dross to us? In our belief it brings hurt with it wherever it goes. But if you wish to go, it is a friend’s part to help a friend.”

“But has Mr. Pendarvis told you of the images of the Blessed One owned by this Kyriel and Sir Hugh Parker? Could you guess where they come from?”

“I had not heard,” he said. “Tell me.”

I described them minutely, the attitude, the height, the inset rubies. He slowly lifted the gorgeous chronicle on to his knee once more.

“ ‘And in the temples of Mien are most noble images of the Lord Buddha, and it is their custom to overlay them with plates of gold half an inch in thickness, and into these they set jewels so that no thief can steal them (if such a wretch breathes), rubies and green sapphires and the blue stone called the Mirror of the Sky. And this jewellery is nowhere seen but in Mien, for elsewhere they do not put jewels about the Blessed One, he having renounced them when he laid down his kingdom.’ ”

There was a gleam of interest for a moment even in his calm eyes.

“It is most true that in all the countries which follow the Blessed Footsteps there are no images of his presence adorned with jewels, save only in the Lama Temple in Peking, and it is said that that is a relic of the city of Mien (but that was taken for a dream). Now, I cannot tell what to think. Of all that has yet been said this is the strangest. Stay, let me call the oldest Pyit-Shin.”

There came at his summons one of the most venerable-looking men I have ever seen—worn to a shadow amongst shadows, beautiful, frail as delicately carved old ivory, the flesh melting to nothingness as the winged thing within struggled to be free of its light fetters. Even the Sadaw rose as he came, and Ramsay and I stood respectfully before his moving presence.

“Great Glory,” said the Sadaw, “is it known to you that anywhere in the kingdom of the Lord can be found his image with jewels inset, against his own express teaching? Do the chroniclers record such a disobedience?”

Leaning on his staff, he answered in a voice faint as a whisper:

“Great Glory, it is unknown save only in the Lama Temple of Peking, where is a jade image of the Perfect One set with pearls. These eyes have seen it.”

“And its history?”

“Great Glory, it is said to have come from the lost city of Mien.”

“And why?”

“Because the chroniclers record that in that city, in the very vanity of riches, they adorned the Perfect One with the jewels he scorned, and therefore a great condemnation fell upon them, and the world remembers them and their city no more. They did this because the people of India thus adorned their gods with gems, and from them they took that evil and worldly practice, so that the jewelled Buddhas were known as the Idols of Mien.”

“Great Glory, do you believe that this city existed?”

“Great Glory, I believe. Yet no other such images have been seen in the world. I know.”

“They have been seen,” said the Sadaw in English to Ramsay. “Repeat the likeness of them.”

I watched his fixed attention as he listened, and knew that things of moment were in the air, but understood nothing, for Ramsay answered in fluent Burmese. Yet even I could read the light that shone in the eyes of the beautiful, wan face before me as he heard.

“Then it is true!” he cried. “And if they find the great temple there lies in it the scripture cut on plates of ivory, which gives the first copy of the Diamond Scripture and the words of the Blessed One. May I live to see it!”

The pale glow of enthusiasm had caught the face of the Mahati also.

“If this be so—” he said in English, and paused.

When Ramsay had interpreted I said eagerly: “If it be so, sir, I swear to you that through all dangers and difficulties I will bring back that treasure to you, as a token of my gratitude! Rubies and riches are nothing to me—you know, for I have opened my heart to you—but I will work to find this treasure as earnestly as for the truth I am hunting. It will be a proud day for me if I can lay it at your feet.”

“No, on the altar!” he corrected, and bowed devoutly toward the flower-laden shelf at the feet of the Perfect One. “It will bring a blessing on your search, as the theft of the others brought shame to those who took them. And now, go in peace. Before dawn to-morrow all will be in readiness. You must leave while the shadows are long and the sun has no power. And our blessing go with you.”

We left the two men standing side by side in the dimness, a very memorable picture, and from all sides the monks came trooping to evening prayer. Presently their strong chanting filled the air and shook my soul with a sense of great things far beyond me. We stood by the door until it ended, and then went quietly away.

CHAPTER XV

BEFORE the sun showed over the tree-tops the 'lugalay' (waiting-boy) laid in my room two letters which had come up by boat from Bhamo and then by the monastery runners—the last letters I should see for many a long day. Sir Hugh, of course, and dated a fortnight after my leaving. I believe that man never willingly let a friend drop in his life, and this tenderness in him the more strengthened my terror that there must have been some powerful reason connected with my father which had forced him to break with him so completely after the friendship there had been between them. That was one of the black ghosts in my heart. A man could never be on intimate terms with Sir Hugh unless he knew he had a clean hand to shake his with. There was a cleanness of intention about the man. He never talked about it, but one could never mistake that he held by the best things in life, the fine, free, generous, honourable things. If he had never said a word there could be no mistake as to what he stood for. Had things happened to make my father himself feel that friendship with men who ran straight was a luxury out of reach for him? I sat looking at the letter with confused thoughts of Marcia and how all this affected my friendship with her, for what could I make of that if I had nothing but a tainted name at my back? She was Kyriel's daughter, true, but all the more I felt she must have things clean about her as far as I could compass it.

I read on through Sir Hugh's letter before I opened my mother's, trying to brace myself with Ramsay's kindly and sensible words, "After all, what business have you to doubt your father until you *know*?" and I was certain the man whose letter I held would have endorsed that to the full. It read thus:

MY DEAR PENDARVIS,

I have not much news for you, but what there is is hopeful. H. has traced V. to a most disreputable case in Paris—spinel traded off as rubies to a woman who lost all she possessed in the venture. She could not prosecute when it came to the point, and he got off. The mere connexion with such a man puts K. in the hollow of our hand when the time comes for closing it. Meanwhile, H. is winning all hearts at C. and a new era is setting in at H.P., in that visitors (and of a decent sort) are beginning to come there—especially men. K. evidently wishes to retrieve himself and open out in the world again. We have got nothing definite on

the main point of your search, but H. says that when the net has closed on the others that will follow as a matter of course. He has not the faintest doubt of the connexion between the two. He goes with the more caution because your long absence is bound to give rise to suspicion in that quarter. The readiness with which K. gave release of the mortgage made it clear to H. that he felt he had no more to fear from that direction, and therefore he is inclined to augur badly as to the likelihood of your father's eventual return. I am quite decided to keep away from the place. My going would raise all sorts of inconvenient questions in K.'s mind. H. tells me your mother is perfectly well, and Miss R. visits her from time to time. All letters are posted in Gwent.

There was much besides, but this was all that concerns my story. A delightful letter, full of humorous kindness playing round everything he thought likely to interest me in his own inimitable way, remarks about Burma, slight but full of insight, and opening my eyes to the weird beauty about me.

At the end he wrote this:

Have no anxiety about money. Act freely. To him that hath shall be given, and since you left an investment which my wise lawyers condemned has turned out a gold mine. By the way, Jurgesen, the big art-dealer in Swanson Square, wrote me yesterday that another bejewelled Buddha, like mine, but sitting in repose, is privately on the market. Price eight thousand pounds. Now, what do you make of that?

I made so many things of it that I will not set them down. I opened my mother's letter, and of that too I will give only what immediately concerns my story:

No news, my dear, no news. The days and nights are long, and I bear your absence very badly, but I won't dwell on that. The neighbours are very kind, and it will surprise you to hear that Miss Ruthven comes when she can. Gay days, she tells me, at Hatton Park, and Mr. Vandaloff much liked. It seems his acting as secretary to Lord Kyriel works very well. Yet I think she does not like him. She is a dear girl, as honest as the day, and I can't help pitying her, her life is so lonely now Mrs. Lyon has left. A girl like that is not in her place among men only. I said nothing about you except that you were well, and even that I did not know, God help me. My own dear Roger, I had that same dream again last night. The man in a cave looking up at you and "Refuse! Refuse!" It has been

beating in my brain all day, so that I must write it now. But this time the dream seemed to melt into sunlight and trees bathing in it, and a lovely quiet like dawn, and I saw your father and you holding hands and smiling at each other. It comforted me.

Me also, but there were things in her letter that knifed me. There was the thought of gay visitors, especially men, and Marcia's beauty worse than without guard, for that she was a queen card in her father's and brother's game I never doubted. I see now how little I knew her. Without guard? She had an armed defence; her own wholesome pride and clear sight and hatred of the creeping things she saw on all sides. No, when I came to think of it I saw I had some reason to be ashamed of the little shabby jealousy that she should be among the grand folk and I a mere farmer. That was at the bottom of much.

It was my farewell to civilisation. An hour afterward our march had begun.

I pass over that wild journey through the jungle, though it was an experience that, waking or sleeping, will never be forgotten. Well might the chronicle speak of the "very great and terrible woods"! It made me think of wading beneath deep-sea water, so green, profound, impenetrable, so alien to any life of man that I could imagine, so haunted by dangers impossible for any but the most experienced to foresee and guard against. We lost two men, one carried off by a tiger, one pounded to death by a rhinoceros sprawling in a small swamp that we never saw until we were on it in the dusk of the awful trees. Ramsay was snake-bitten, but either by the non-poisonous variety or else our remedies acted, for he got off with a badly swollen arm and a deadly weariness that obliged us to call a halt for two days. To this moment I cannot tell how the men found their way through that trackless, enchanted sea of green, but Mr. Honesty achieved it somehow, and with a cheeriness and alacrity that never faltered. When at last the mighty forest began to thin a little I respected that man with all my might.

And Ramsay and I were friends. I say it advisedly. You may go round the world with a man, and yet be acquaintances. We were friends. And my determination was to make him a friend of Sir Hugh's also, for I thought them worthy of each other.

When at last we emerged, and the trees fell back and left us free, a very different prospect confronted us. We looked out upon a wide, sandy plain and beyond that on what seemed to be fortress after fortress of jagged, saw-edged peaks, rising to a height of perhaps two to three thousand feet at the highest, and desolate as the mountains of the moon. We saw no water, but

here and there among the hills a puff of steam which suggested hot springs, such as are common in parts of Burma. After a careful survey it seemed best to trek on straight to the hills. There was nothing else to do in any case, but it corresponded also with the description of the chronicle: "Across the sand and the river you come to the very great and noble city of Mien among the hills," though of a river there was no trace.

All that day we pushed steadily on in the awful heat, across grey, sparkling sand which tortured our eyes and those of the poor beasts so cruelly that at last we bound the ponies' heads with wet rags and shaded our own in the same way under our sun-helmets—and a pretty sight I dare say we looked, if there had been anyone there to see.

Near sundown we had crossed the sandy expanse (which Ramsay declared must have been either a sea or a lake in prehistoric days), and began to make our preparations to camp. We were serving out our water with the utmost care, when Mr. Honesty distended his nostrils like a horse and looked about him.

"Hot water!" he said. "Hot water very good—if no cold, we cool him!"

He led the way, and we all followed with what vessels we had—and lo and behold, a few hundred yards off a spring clear as crystal and blue as a sapphire! It suggested clear cold, delicious to sight and taste, but woe betide the man that drank in a hurry, for it was boiling and bubbling all over and a vile smell of sulphuretted hydrogen came from it. We stared at one another in dismay, but again Mr. Honesty pointed like a dog.

"Good water! Not poison-water—good!" he ventured, sniffing strongly.

And again he was right. Only a few feet away from its boiling sister was a spring of ice-cold water bursting from the rock, where men and ponies drank their fill. I discovered afterward that it is not uncommon in volcanic formations thus to find boiling and icy water side by side.

After we had eaten Ramsay and I climbed a crag to take our bearings, and a queer sight it was that met our gaze—tossing peaks and precipices, with here and there a rocky valley, and all as desolate as could be.

"No room for a city here, unless they had wings as well as feet!" Ramsay commented, handing me the glasses. "And the want of water would be fatal too. No, it couldn't have been here. It may have been among the continuations of these hills, but nearer to China, where there are again trees and jungle. It'll be uncommon difficult travelling. I'd sooner have real mountains than these nasty, fussy little hills, all ups and downs and stones and beastliness and nothing to respect."

I had been peering steadily through the glasses. Now I laid them on a rock.

“Don’t you think,” I said, “that Mien might be accounted for in another way beside the Great Glory’s? It could never have been lost in the jungle—too dry for that—but what about an earthquake or a volcanic outburst?”

He caught up the glasses. Presently he turned to me.

“Oho! I hadn’t thought of that little possibility! But now you mention it—I shouldn’t be surprised. Just you take a squint at all those puffs of steam dotted about.”

I did.

“That’s why I think it,” I declared. “And, if I’m not mistaken, that defile up between the hills was once a road, though it’s tumbled over now with rubble and rocks and—is it lava? I’ve never been shipmates with lava, and don’t know.”

“By Jove, it *is* lava!” proclaimed Ramsay in a voice of glee like a crowing cock’s. “It is, and we’re here, and I’ll swear that’s Mien! But where, for the love of Mike, did they pitch the place?—unless it was in terraces, which seems a little too like the hanging gardens of Babylon.”

I caught him by the arm.

“Look at that scooped-out valley to the north-east! Why couldn’t it have been ten times the size before that mean little peak above it burst out with stones and lava and half tumbled on to it? I’ll stake anything it could, and was. Now, if there’s any river within speaking distance, that’s Mien.”

How long we should have stayed there arguing, I don’t know, for the excitement drove everything else out of our heads, but the sun plunged among the western hills and shut down for the night, so we returned, still arguing, to camp. And arguing we still were over breakfast next morning, and the minute it was swallowed we struck the tents, and with the patient ponies trekked forth to the defile I had called by courtesy a road. It looked a day’s journey and was four, and devilish bad going, hopping along over and round the great boulders which strewed it as if the careless gods of that wild place had been playing pitch and toss for centuries.

At four o’clock on the fourth day we came to what I called the neck of the valley, where it opened out to the defile, sloping upward to a huge semi-circular amphitheatre backed by unimpressive little peaks. It was certainly a strong and naturally defended place, for in pre-gun days the only point to guard would have been the bottle-neck entrance, and, supposing the valley

free of stones and boulders, there would be a site for a very fine city indeed if (a very large 'if') they had anything to drink.

"This is Mien," I said, and sat down with conviction on a boulder at the entrance.

"Then produce your river!" retorted Ramsay obstinately. "And also have the goodness to tell me why anything but ants should have troubled to build in a place with no way to anywhere or anything, and how they lived except by taking in each other's washing?"

He was right. That was the problem. But we were both too tired and irritable after cracking our shins and our ponies' on the burning stones all day to solve it then with anything like the clearness it demanded. We ate our supper as soon as we could and went to sleep, which was the best thing to be done.

Next morning, while he was still sleeping and the sky was changing from grey to apple-green oceans and opalescent splendours, I waked in the dry, cool air and crept out of the tent into the wonder-world of dawn and up the narrow neck of the valley. Once within I took my way to the left, and, threading through boulders big as houses and little as foot-stools, I came on a thing that startled me as Robinson Crusoe was startled when he saw Man Friday's footmark in the sand. It was a very narrow, very faintly trodden trail, and it led up a steep, breakneck ascent between two overhanging rocks. I took it instantly. On and up through the stones, slipping and stumbling and swearing, until I came out on a little plateau and looked about me. A fine and far-reaching view if there had been anything to admire. No—but there were things to wonder at! Behind me was a cave as high-arched and wide-ribbed as a fine room, say twelve feet in height and forty in width and length. The floor was clean sand, and in one corner rose a little spring which murmured musically away into the rocks, finding its unseen outlet. And in four places were marks of extinct fires. It had been occupied, and not so very long ago—and a better, snugger retreat no man with a secret to keep could wish. I need not say what an effect this discovery had on me. I had scarcely time to analyse it then. I marked it all and went on, for still the track led higher.

About a hundred feet up I reached another plateau, so high that I could look over the shoulder of a nosing, copper-coloured crag before me—and there I saw two things which I tell badly because no words will express how my heart pumped and the blood flew to my face as I realised them. I sat down to think it out clearly. Below me, far below in a great hollow of the hills, was a deep mountain tarn, blue and motionless, and from it to the plain

beneath was a calm river flowing serenely from that unseen reservoir in the heights—nothing huge and grand, like the Irawadi river or its kind, but a river on which boats could easily ply. About it the land was flat on either side for a quarter of a mile or so, and there were trees and grass and fair, soft country all along its course as it flowed away from the sandy region through which we had approached, running nearly due south-east as far as I could tell, and in the far, far distance I saw a blue streak crossing it, which was undoubtedly water.

At once I knew what had happened: I had found the true approach to Mien, the approach from far-off China, and the manner of the city's communication with the outer world! I could not wait, I could not digest it. I scrambled and stumbled and fell down through the stones and rubble to get back to camp, in as mad a hurry as though the whole thing might blow away like a mirage at dawn before I got there.

When I hounded Ramsay up after breakfast there was no more argument, there were only things to be done. He agreed at once that I was right. This was the valley of the city of Mien, and the last proof wanting was a great opening leading gently down the slopes to the river. We found that too, so walled up with fallen rocks that without the other clues we could never have guessed its existence, but there all the same, a glorious, wide way through which the city must have sloped magnificently down by gentle declivities and terraced gardens and fine buildings to the water below. My imagination peopled it with fleets of pleasure boats and barges, and roads beside it leading to the world beyond the horizon. We sat down and got out our maps and proceeded to take our bearings.

"I have it! I have it!" cried Ramsay at last, smiting triumphantly on his thigh. "I've got this little game, I swear! That river beyond—the one the Mien river joins—is the Mekong, and it runs down into Siam and into the China Sea—and *that's* how the rubies have been got to Europe! They never came down through Burma at all, because the police would be on the watch there. No, no, they knew a trick worth two of that! Vandaloff's route was down the Mekong into Cambodia, and he sailed from Saigon with a fortune in his breast pocket every time."

"Good Lord, you're right!" I gasped. "But then—"

He interrupted ruthlessly.

"Wait, there's more, much more! The people who built Mien were Khmers, and they went down that river route by the Mekong and they built Angkor Wat in Cambodia, and I'm double damned if we haven't solved one of the world's problems. They came this way from India before Buddhism

was dead there. O! blast, blast, *blast* that earthquake! We might have found another Angkor Wat here, and now—all lost!”

When I could calm him we looked round for any sight of a building, or the remains or hint of one—nothing.

“Yet the secret’s here,” I said, “and from this place I don’t budge until we’ve gone over every inch of ground. We have stores for four weeks, and I tell you what, Ramsay, I’m strongly inclined to think we may find a *cache* of food here near the cave. If Vandaloff has been to and fro here, nothing more likely.”

Ramsay agreed eagerly.

“We’ll camp in the cave. That green dish of valley below will suit the ponies to a dot, for it slopes right down to the lake. We’ll have Mr. Honesty and the men up and set them *cache*-hunting.”

He fired me.

“And why not a *cache* of treasure too?” I asked. “And perhaps something more than treasure to give us our clue! Hail them, man alive, hail them! and tell Mr. Honesty to bring the whole box of tricks up here!”

We were like hounds hot on the scent. I never in my life saw a man in such a state of excitement as Ramsay, all his tastes and instincts fusing into one white heat of ardour. We got the men up and they let the ponies loose in the heavenly grass by the water. They got our camp-chairs and beds into the cave and fixed their own shelter upon the green plateau outside, and then like sleuths they went *cache*-hunting, in and about the cave, with all a Burman’s quick wit and experience. In less than an hour they found it, cunningly hidden outside and below the cave, in a tumble of rock so artistically untidy that anyone would have fathered it on the earthquake. There were canned ham and beef and soup and vegetables and biscuits, and Lord knows what, beside some very decent tippie to keep out the chill in case such a blessed change should happen along to abate the fiery heat. They had done themselves proud and forgotten nothing, for there were even big sacks of rice for the men in attendance. And these welcome tinned articles were all by English makers, which I thought spoke for itself. I surveyed them with delight, for, what with the wild plantains and other jungle fruits at our command, it meant we could stay on at Mien until we had looked round every boulder in the place, and either won out or got tired of the job.

“Oh, my gosh, my sainted gosh, what magnificent, what unearthly luck!” jubilated Ramsay, standing over it. “My nerves are all twittering like a maiden aunt’s! I shan’t close an eye this night. Fried ham for dinner, Maung

Yo, and plum pudding to follow! I know it isn't hot-weather food, but it's *home*, and I'll dine or I'll bust for it!"

We spent the rest of that day in carefully blocking out the site of the city for search purposes, both of us now as firmly believing in the treasure *cache* as in the food find. We slept that night in the luxury of the great dry, airy cave, with the stars shining in at the opening in such a glow of hope and joy as I thought I had lost the secret of since the evil hour when I saw Kyriel in talk with Quesnel. And sleeping and waking I dreamed of Marcia, and it seemed that she dreamed of me, and that our two dreams bridged the sea between us. Even if the dawn laughed at my folly, still it lay in my heart of hearts. She helped and steadied me as if she had held my hand during the days that followed, and I took that help even if she had forgotten me and it were in spite of her. Still, there were times too when I did not think she would grudge it.

CHAPTER XVI

NEXT morning Ramsay and I and Mr. Honesty and a trusted man named Maung Hkin each took a quarter of one of the squares we had marked out for search and started to go over every stone. Cut off as I was from home news I should never have given the time which I foresaw this search would take if it had not been that I knew matters in England were in far more capable hands than mine, and I realised the necessity of linking up the chain of evidence out in Burma. For time it would certainly take and plenty of it.

When the sun got too hot on the rocks for anything but salamanders to keep going we had each done what seemed an infinitesimal bit, working outward and downward. And then, for four hours, work was impossible, and a siesta by the bubbling spring in the cave more than flesh and blood could resist. The men dozed outside in their shelter, and the happy ponies were at rest in the mountain meadow or standing up to their fetlocks in the edge of the lake.

And at such times my heart was in Cornwall in a thought, with a longing I could never describe. Again I walked softly through the green alley at Hatton Park, afraid to startle her as she sat reading, and always she laid aside the book and without a morsel of fear looked up at me with the mingled pride and shyness that conquered me at first sight. Amazing how a girl of whom he knows nothing can take possession of a man and persuade him that he has been waiting for her only since eternity! I tried to think it out to myself with some show of reason, and failed. What has reason to do with such things?—and that must not be said scornfully, for are not all the best things in us above and beyond reason? Could I ever forget, should I ever know again the tense, almost fierce expectation before her coming, and then the calm joy of her presence, like the soaring of a rocket, rushing up in tense energy to relax and expand softly in floating, coloured stars when joy can go no higher? I would sit and brood thus for hours.

But not on that only. What hope could there ever be for me if her father had ruined and perhaps murdered mine? What bridge could cross that sea of horror? Would it check me when the truth was known for certain and hope dead? I never asked if it would check *her*, for hope never reached that stage—why should she ever give me a thought?—now less than ever, with the house full of men of her own standing, eager to win the beautiful daughter

of the rich Lord Kyriel. Would they be faithful to her, I wondered, if the axe suspended by a hair above him fell and disgrace was a part of her portion? They little knew that the jovial seller of tobacco in Caerlyon, going so pleasantly to and fro, was her fate as well as Kyriel's!

I make no excuse for writing of these thoughts, for they kept me steady to the task when even Ramsay's energy flagged a bit under the tremendous heat and vain labour. For a month went by and we had found nothing in Mien except a great tumble of ancient bricks in a ravine, evidently some building of considerable size which appeared to have stood alone in the wilds about us, and what were undeniably the slabs of a flight of giant steps. But that kept us going over the lean days that followed, and in the late afternoons I would sit on a crag over-looking the sad, uncoloured waters of the lonely lake, testing my muscles, so to speak, and feeling in myself an energy nothing could tire. For Marcia's sake too. What could her life be with Kyriel and Vandaloff? There were times when even a letter with the news of her marriage with any decent fellow would have been a relief, to such a pitch did my fears for her reach.

It was one afternoon when we had been at it for eight weeks, finding no more traces of the lost city, that I was sitting on a ridge of this same crag, sheltered from the sun by the hills. I began thinking most seriously over our plans, for I knew the rainy season was not far off and the mild western rains are very little training for the Oriental. And as I sat I noted idly that the watermark on the rocky basin below was far higher than the level of the lake; and then, connecting this with the rains, I reflected that there must have been a much longer dry spell than usual for the lake to be so low, and that much would be laid bare which ordinarily would be covered. It was plain to me that when the rains came they would over-brim the lake and send a spate down the river, which would then float very much larger boats between here and the Mekong, and we had estimated that at sixty miles distant. I realised further that we should have to down tools during that season, and that while Ramsay and I, with Mr. Honesty in attendance, would be comfortable enough in our cave dwelling, we ought certainly to find caves for the men and ponies, and that it would also be well to lay in a store of plantains and other keeping fruits to carry us over the bad time. And as these notions crossed my mind I wondered if Vandaloff had ever sat there planning in the same way in the thievish heart of him.

Now, as I sat, lazily watching the little white clouds like homing birds about the peaks, I put myself unconsciously in his place. Suppose I had to go away during the rains (as well we might), and had treasure to hide (as I hadn't), where would I leave it? Any chance wanderer coming along would

see the signs of work, hide them how you would. Indeed, the places where we had been scratching and pulling the blocks about were very perceptible. And the thought darted into my mind, as when one broods idly over a puzzle. Why, of course, I would hide it somewhere below the high-water mark I saw in the lake and trust the water to keep my secret for me until I came back after the rains and it obediently uncovered it again. "Put yourself in his place," is a wise game to play alike with friend or enemy, and the minute I had done it I saw the notion was worth cross-examination. I had it in the witness-box at once, and, though I won't inflict the heckling on anyone else, I came to the conclusion that it was worth practical trying out—and no time like the present.

The sun was behind the mountain, so it was cooler. Ramsay was snoring, done in with heat and hard work. I began sliding down over short grass, brittle and slippery as glass, and a long time it took me, and my trousers were a sight for heaven and earth when I reached the water-level and there stood considering. And here a word of description of this lake.

I should say it might measure six miles in length, winding irregularly through the peaks, and at its greatest width might be two. At the farther end was marsh, where we had found first-rate duck-shooting, and beyond that a range of low, ugly hills. Perhaps a dozen streams flowed into the lake, draining from them and the nearer peaks (indeed, there might be more, for we had not had time to explore all round it). The depth in the middle we never could tell, having no boat.

Now, at our end (that is, beneath me) the brim of the basin was a mere tumble of rocks, which I suppose the earthquake had broken down in that direction, enormous blocks which hid everything else from view. And when I got down among them and stood cogitating, it certainly appeared more likely the *cache* would be thereabouts where it was so handy for shipping aboard a boat, and so to the river and down to the Mekong. What could be simpler? And then began events.

The first thing I found, hunting in and out among the rocks, was a boat, just at the high-water mark of the rains, most effectively hidden in a natural house made of three great blocks, the one thrown atop the others for a roof—the sort of place one might scramble past daily for a year, suspecting nothing. It was a Burmese boat, with the high, ornamental stern I had seen daily on the Irawadi, and a tiny cabin underneath and seats for eight rowers. And then, to tell the honest truth, I was as unreasonably sure I was 'hot,' as the children say, and the *cache* within reach, as if I had it under my hand.

And my certainty was right. With me, such things always happen in that natural, unimpressive kind of way, as much as to say, "You fool, why wasn't this the very first thing you thought of? An owl might have reasoned it out." For there, forty feet nearer the water-level than the boat, I noticed a huddle of rocks as like twenty others as two peas, the top of which (but no more) would be above water during the rains, and noticeable because of a peaked, extinguisher-shaped rock which crowned it. The thing was that it would be submerged, which fitted in with my speculations. And when I stumbled up closer, I saw that it, like the rest, formed a natural chamber, roughly flung together by the upheaval; and something inside my brain ticked off, "You have it, you have it!" and even before I scrambled in I stood and marvelled that none of us had guessed its existence before.

It had every reason on its side. It was down by the water. They could keep it under watch and ward from above without exposing themselves. It had the most inconspicuous little trail imaginable leading up to it, and it was within easy distance of the stored boat. More—directly the rains came the lake would rise and so make a complete defence and hiding-place of a spot nature had already disguised so cunningly. Before I climbed round the lake front I knew what I should see. There, too, though it was screened by fallen rock, it was quite easy to get into, and nothing to see actually incriminating till you were within. Then, with plenty of light through crevices, I found myself on a floor of smooth shingle, with all kinds of shelves contrived and fitted high up in juts of rock—shelves roughly made and hammered into position out of reach of the water, many and large enough to accommodate a king's treasury of splendid objects—as indeed they did.

I stood and gazed up and about, and could scarcely believe my senses. On a ledge above me, gleaming in the uncertain light, were two images corresponding exactly with Kyriel's and Sir Hugh's, completing the four traditional poses of the Buddha, one seated in the 'expounding' attitude, the other in meditation. I climbed, balancing hand and foot, up to a rock to examine them, and they were inlaid with jewels in the way peculiar to Mien art, their shrines of lace-like gold laid beside them. It will be easily believed that I had to sit down and collect my ideas before I could go further. But I gave myself no more time than I needed, for it was four o'clock, and in Burma all the year round sunset is pretty regularly at six.

I remember I disturbed a big purple and black snake coiled on a box, and gave him a most respectfully wide berth as he glided off into safety through a crevice. That made me careful to beat about first with my stick, and decide too on having Ramsay with me before further investigation. It would have been a poor end to finish off with a snake-bite and lie beside the treasure

until the rains took me or Vandaloff returned. Snakes in Burma must be reckoned with. But, apart from that, Ramsay must know. I went leaping up the faint trail through the rocks and found him smoking on the plateau in front of the cave, watching Mr. Honesty and two of the other fellows, in a little dish of rock below, overturning and searching like patient ants. I sat down before him on a tussock and announced sumptuously:

“I’ve found it!”

He turned sun-tired eyes on me, the pupils like pin-points, a knot between the brows. We all knew that look in the tropics.

“What then? More rubble?”

“The *cache*.”

I said no more—just hurled it at him like a stone, and sat elate. He looked at me narrowly.

“Touch o’ the sun, old man?”

Then I could hold in no longer. I believe I did a kind of war-dance on the plateau, in extreme risk of falling over the edge—I don’t exactly know what *did* happen. Anyhow, he believed me at last, and in two minutes we were both slipping and sliding down to the lake’s edge. I shall never forget his face when he stood inside and saw the golden glimmer of the Buddhas on the shelf above our heads. It solemnized him. It gave him the awed appearance of being in church, only rather more so. At last!

“We’ve done it,” he said. And presently, “The fools, the utter, blighted, blithering jackasses we were not to think of this before! Of course it would be near the water!”

“I felt that way myself,” I said. “But come on. Let’s look about us.”

I can only say there was not an art or antique collector in New York, London, or Paris who would not have given ten years of his life to be with us. For our find was not mere vulgar slabs of gold and handfuls of jewels, but beautiful, wonderful objects, relics of a dead magnificence of civilization which, had they survived only in pictures, would have set the world talking. There were necklaces, armlets, and girdles of the Khmer ladies, nobly set with great rubies and strange green sapphires, as well as ones of deep-sea blue. There were religious ornaments which my ignorance vaguely supposed to be Buddhist, until Ramsay explained that Buddhism has never put its faith in jewels, and these represented Hinduism in its most gorgeous aspect. Of this creed we found relics which he asserted would give a new bent to all the accepted views of Indian art. One was a dancing Shiva in gold with diamond eyes—a wild, beautiful figure, casting abroad its arms

in a rapture of frantic motion that haunted me. I wanted it for my own, for it suggested the dance of the universe about its myriad suns. But how shall I tell of the fascinating toys of splendour we unearthed in those dark shelves and rifts of rock? One thing thrilled us both: a box, a rough wooden box with something inside it folded in Burmese cloth of waste silk. I opened it, and lo! plate after plate of thinnest ivory, transparent when held to the light, yellow with age, carved with patient care into lovely sign after sign of what to me was hidden writing—a book graved on ivory, with little corner holes that the plates might be held together, as they were, with chains of slender gold.

“It’s Pali, the ancient sacred language,” Ramsay said in a hushed kind of voice. “This is what they talked of at Zetawun, and I’m damned if this may not be the most valuable thing in the whole show. The ‘Diamond Scripture’—why, Pendarvis, the bidding for this by the museums and the Buddhist world alone will raise it to a king’s ransom! We must bring it up to the cave. Lord save us, I’m almost afraid to touch it! Gently, for heaven’s sake! We must get back ourselves. The sun is just on the horizon.”

We clambered out, I holding the box and book to my breast like a baby, and away up the track as hard as we could leg it. It was dark when we got to the plateau, and the weary men were beginning to cook their rice. But what a home-coming! The incredible was done, the unattainable reached, and we held Kyriel and Vandaloff’s secret in our hands.

“It’s a serious business for them,” said Ramsay, after we had eaten almost in silence, and sat in the opening of the cave to watch the moon rise over the eastern peaks. “They’ve been cheating the Government for years in the most outrageous way. Penal servitude, my friend—how about that for the peerage? And Mr. Vandaloff has some heavy arrears to make up, into the bargain!”

His words jarred me from head to foot, set me shuddering. If that was Kyriel’s position, what was my father’s? The horrible thing was that I could rejoice at nothing until I knew where *he* stood. But there was no checking Ramsay. How could I regret myself that we had found what I had come to look for? He went on, exultant.

“We must go over every inch down there to-morrow and make a regular sweep out into the boat. And then down to Cambodia *via* the Mekong! Suppose the rightful or wrongful owners come back to Ali Baba’s cave? No time to lose! I must say it’s distinctly uplifting to think what our friend Vandaloff will say when he runs up this way again and finds his *cache* rifled. I should like to see his face!”

“Do you mean to say that we can carry off these treasures on a wild, dangerous journey like that and not have our throats cut twenty times over on the way?”

“Why not? Pack them in biscuit tins—our pockets, anything! I’ll take the risk. Hide the Buddhas till we can send for them.”

“I won’t,” I said. “No, no! And we might have difficulties at Saigon with the French. We’ll keep in British country, and we’ll take our loot back to Zetawun, and I’ll keep my promise to the Great Glory about the ivory scripture.”

The jungle journey was a facer, and no mistake, and the prospect of gliding down a languid blue river in luxurious ease so delicious that there were moments when it nearly conquered, but for all that Ramsay knew I was right. Better keep the things in British territory, where we could call on the aid of lawful subjects, and leave them safe in Zetawun while we went on to Rangoon to explain matters to the powers. They would be safe there. The Burman who would attack a monastery has yet to be discovered.

We went down again at peep of day. The Buddhas, of course, had already identified the find with Kyriel, but we found more. There were small boxes ranged along the upper shelves in unseen corners where they might easily escape notice even when the rest had been discovered. In one we found two ritual necklaces of rubies, exactly resembling the one I had seen in Vandaloff’s possession. Ramsay declared they were put upon the images of the Hindu Trinity on certain ceremonial occasions. The extraordinary pattern and the swastika cross made it quite clear where Vandaloff’s had come from. In another box we found a hundred fine rubies, unset, which Ramsay was certain had been picked out of gold settings by some barbarian who had then destroyed them. That could not have been Vandaloff, I think, from the way the other works of art had been respected.

“Look here!” called Ramsay suddenly.

He had been stooping and groping about in dark corners while I scrambled into the higher regions of the treasure-house. He held up something white—a torn half-sheet of paper which had fluttered to a high ledge of rock and there rested. It was a little discoloured by weather, but no worse, and was easily legible. As thus:

. . . and, of course, make a point of meeting Quesnel . . . for supposing . . . And if, what is most unlikely, inquiry should be made, you could . . . But take every precaution and . . .

No more was decipherable. We both read, copied, and went on with our labours. The clue was not needed, but it made the meshes of the net smaller.

Again Ramsay stopped work and wiped the sweat from his forehead. It was furiously hot in there.

“You know, I can’t believe we’ve got to the bottom of this yet! Where did Kyriel and Vandaloff find this treasure? We’ve pretty well quartered this valley, and seen no sign of digging or excavating. And doesn’t it seem incredible he should leave them here, even hidden so cleverly? Of course, I quite see he could only take a little at a time with him down the Mekong and into Europe for fear of discovery and of overloading his market. It’s a thing that has got to be done bit by bit. But still, to have his *cache* at the end of the earth like this—I don’t feel we understand it yet. My guess would be that he has some fellow who hangs out somewhere about here and comes down and meets him at Saigon—but who, and how?”

I felt his point, and we sat down and discussed it from every possible angle, and could make nothing of it. To search the whole range of hills was out of the question, and besides, there were ominous signs of the coming of the rains, and the very prospect of the journey through the jungle in that season was terrible. It was his opinion that we should stow all we could into pockets and boxes, have the two Buddhas packed for slinging on the ponies, and be off as soon as we could. And there and then we made an inventory and crammed each pocket with rubies, taking away all the smaller articles and leaving only the Buddhas. We settled that we would come down next day with Mr. Honesty and one of the men and finish the packing, making it known that the sacred objects were especially consigned to the Great Glory. That would secure them better than guns and vaults of steel. This done, we climbed again to the cave and dinner, well satisfied with the day’s work.

CHAPTER XVII

I WENT down next day in the grey dawn before breakfast for a swim in the lake, going, as men do unconsciously, to keep tryst with one of the supreme moments of my life. I had never swum there before, because Ramsay had got up a scare about crocodiles, but since Mr. Honesty and all our men declared that the mountain lakes were completely free of them, and the heat was thunderous, I thought I would risk it. I stripped and swam out well into the middle, luxuriating in the fresh coolness, and then turned to make for the shore.

I should say here that the point I had plunged in from was out of sight of the cave and our camp, also that the distance I had swum opened up new reaches of shore line. When I turned in the water I saw bights and bays hitherto unexplored. And in one of them, far along, almost at the end of the curve and right inshore, I saw, not the boat we had found hidden in the rocks, but a 'pehn-gaw,' one of the ungainly, barge-like vessels I had seen on the Irawadi coming up, with a cabin like a house on deck, and along the deck on each side a platform for the polers to walk up and down on—a regular river-boat of its type. It startled me more than I can say to see it. Whether it had come in during the night or had been there for days I could not tell, for that part of the lake had never concerned us, except when we went duck-shooting, and for weeks we had been too busy for such expeditions.

I struck out strongly for the shore, knowing the distance would save me from observation, and got into my clothes like lightning, cursing my folly in trusting to the solitude, for I had not so much as a stick with me. As I finished dressing, and stooped to pick up my coat, I heard a step behind the rock, and Vandaloff stood before me.

Now, in the first darting moment I did not know him, so completely Asiatic was he. He had a bright, flowered silk handkerchief tied about his head, native-fashion, and over his khaki breeches a short white cotton jacket, showing his bare breast with a Burmese charm tattooed on it in blue and vermilion. All this brought out the Burmese strain in the man, and the European seemed to have dropped from him like a garment. But I knew him in a second for all that, and he stood there smiling his familiar smile a little strained over the teeth.

“Good morning, Mr. Pendarvis. You won the race to Mien, but it yet remains to be seen who wins the victory!”

I noticed immediately that he kept his hand in his hip-pocket. We both knew the meaning of that. He leaned back against the rock and tried for cool indifference, but I saw his smiling lips twitch at the corners. I steadied myself on that.

“How did you know I was here?”

“A trifling oversight on the part of your advisers. We were naturally interested when we heard Mr. Pendarvis had left Caerlyon, and it occurred to us to watch the sailings. And when we saw ‘Pendarvis’ on board a British-India boat we didn’t trouble any more about Canada, and I took passage as soon as I conveniently could. I certainly thought I should get here first, but, as I say, you won the race. I visited our *cache*, and found you had been busy there. Now we have been here a week watching you. I have twenty men aboard my pehn-gaw, well armed and ready for anything. You have eight, counting yourself and the other white man. In ten minutes, unless our talk has ended up comfortably, you will be seven. Need I say more?”

I leaned against my rock. We eyed each other warily, like two dogs circling each other on tip-toe.

“Give me news before you tell me your terms. What of my father?”

“There is no news. Kyriel’s belief is he did a bolt on account of his money troubles. We thought of suicide first, but he couldn’t have taken the car with him then. Anything else?”

His English was perfect but for the clipped accent, and he was at no pains now to make it foreign and Russian. I was silent.

“Nothing? Then have the goodness to tell me what you propose to do with our stolen property—ours by right of treasure-trove?”

“We propose to take it down into Burma and place it at the disposal of the British Government,” I said.

“You don’t propose, then, to return it to the rightful owners?”

“I think decidedly not.”

There was a moment of silence. I could hear the lake water lapping softly and the reeds sighing. I pretend to no heroism, and certainly thought it was the last earthly sound I might hear. Well, there could be worse!

He drew his gun slowly from his pocket, and looked affectionately at the glittering barrel.

“Still of the same opinion?” he drawled.

“Still.”

“Then stand still!” he shouted, and dropped his hand to his hip to fire.

I stood. I could do nothing else than meet it decently, for I was helpless. There was one instant’s delay of adjustment—a rush, a scuffle, and Mr. Honesty was on him with his ‘dah,’ screaming like a woman with excitement. They fell together in a heap, Vandaloff undermost.

Now, the ‘dah’ is the Burmese weapon, and a terrible one—broad steel sharpened to a razor-edge on both sides, flexible and manageable alike for slashing or driving. And before I could reach them I saw it rise and fall twice and the bursting blood dye the cotton jacket to scarlet. Then I hauled Honesty off, and picked up the gun.

“Mu, Mu!” he screamed. “Praise to the Lord Buddha, the Blessed of Ages! Up and down the Irawadi I hunted Mu, and he is here!”

He kicked the prostrate man savagely and would have run in at him again, but that I snatched the dripping dah.

“Hail the others! Quick, hail!”

He raised a wild, bird-like call, and presently I saw more of our men slipping and dropping down the rocks, and Ramsay after them. He was beside me before I had quite recovered my wits. It had all happened like lightning.

“My sainted gosh! Mu!” he exclaimed.

“Vandaloff,” said I.

I won’t dwell on the scene, a whirlwind of tomcat talk, squealing and shrieking from the Burmese. They all knew Vandaloff, and would have finished him then and there but for Ramsay and myself. They raged for his blood. It was a beastliness I don’t like to think of even now. Vandaloff was perfectly conscious and the wounds were not mortal—a gaping slash across the cheek and a thrust through the arm that must have touched an artery by the steady pumping of blood. I made a tourniquet with a stick and his handkerchief and sent one of our fellows up for a hammock we had, and so we got him up to the cave.

“Mr. Honesty’s a made man,” said Ramsay, as we sweated up after them. “The Government reward is a swingeing one, and furthermore he’ll get some snug little sinecure—if he isn’t too lazy to take it, which he probably will be. But that was a bad slip-up of my cousin’s! Of course they’d have every boat watched! I’m ashamed of him—and of myself too. We’ve been a jolly sight too placid and assured here! Serve me right if you’d gone west just now!”

He just brushed my hand with his, but it was enough.

We laid Vandaloff down in a cool corner of the cave, got the medicine kit out, and did what we could with lint and bandaging, seeing no reason why he should not live. This part of the show escaped the Burmese ethic, and it was easy to read their scornful amazement at our behaviour. The man was a murderer, a black villain—why nurse him, only to hand him over to justice in the end? Better let the carrion rot where it lay. For Ramsay, calling them together, had explained that Mandalay and the gallows were his doom as sure as he lay there before them, and then returned to give him lime-soda to quench his burning thirst. It was beyond them! They shrugged, and went down in a party, full-armed, to bring up the two golden Buddhas which were all we had left in the *cache*.

And not a word from Vandaloff. He watched us observantly, eyes glittering with fever, weak as a rat, yet fiercely alive in every brain cell—not a word. We had been up to a crag which commanded the lake and the motionless pehn-gaw and saw not a stir anywhere.

“We’ll set a watch to-night, but I don’t believe there’ll be trouble,” Ramsay said, yawning. “The Burmese never attack without a leader, though one may run amok here and there. My aunt, what a razzle-dazzle of a day it’s been! We must give to-morrow to winding up our affairs here, and then back to Zetawun. I smell the rains already! But, as sure as I sit here, Pendarvis, I’ll form a company of good men and true and come back and explore this valley. Are you game?”

“If I had finished my business in England and found my father I suppose I might think about it. But I’m no adventurer at heart. I want the meadows and the sheep cropping about me, and the long twilights and quiet life and— and home!” I said, with thoughts beneath those words I could trust to none but my own heart.

After Ramsay had turned in I sat in the mouth of the cave watching the low stars, mellow and golden as dropped honey in the dark blue vault that pressed down upon the mountains, and behind me lay Vandaloff, enduring in fierce silence. Suddenly and startlingly he spoke in a hot whisper.

“You saved my life back in England. You saved it here. I’ve been a fool—a hound. But I never had a chance—never from the first! A cross-breed is doomed. Now, look here: if you’ll call quits, if you’ll forgive me and shake hands, I’ll tell you about your father—I’ll tell you about the treasure. This is not Mien. I’ll tell you—I have a paper. Come here! Forgive me!”

The cave was dark, but by the moonlight I could see he held out a blood-stained paper in a shaking hand. He spoke so low that it was like the pulsing

whisper of a dying man. I pitied him, as one may pity the struggles of a wounded wolf.

“Your father threatened to blow up the show. He only knew we were trading the rubies down from here—nothing of the murders. And Kyriel held the mortgage. But he couldn’t stand it any longer and he threatened us, and Kyriel shot him. But come here—come close! There’s much more to tell, and my voice is going. You must have the paper. My sister—about my sister.”

I came close and knelt beside him, bending my face down to his. If ever I saw the devil look out from a man’s eyes I saw it then—but too late. As a snake strikes, he whipped out a knife and drove at my heart. A burning agony darted through me, and I fell beside him.

When I waked in the grey light of early dawn I was lying in a pool of blood, my own and his. He had dragged the bandages off his wounds and bled to death—and all had happened so quietly that Ramsay was sound asleep at the far end of the cave. When I saw the sight about me, and Vandaloff lying dead I went right off again, and don’t know what happened until I found Ramsay and Maung Yo doing what they could for me.

Ramsay was aghast at the spectacle of his new patient, his face white as milk. I knew I was pretty ghastly too, but after all my wound was a clean one—clear through the shoulder, the blade of the knife sticking out at the back. It was what a clean-blooded, healthy man could take without wincing, and I made nothing of it—perhaps less than was wise. The strength of the thrust amazed us all. I had come as near losing my life as a man well can who keeps it at all.

Ramsay went and looked curiously at Vandaloff, lying as peacefully as if he had dreamed himself asleep like a child.

“The scoundrel was right after all. This is a better end than the gallows. Here, Maung Yo! Get him out of the cave and dig a grave down yonder. And now for the paper!” he concluded.

I was lying, pretty bleached, but comfortable enough, on my shake-down in the corner.

“A blind, as I thought!” he exclaimed, tossing it contemptuously aside.

I fielded it with my sound arm. The blood stains had spared the design, which consisted of such wriggling lines as an idle child might draw, or perhaps more like a doctor’s tracing of a highly irregular pulse when it skips up hill and down dale in fever. I stuffed it into my pocket and fell asleep, while Ramsay attended to Vandaloff’s obsequies and took the signed

evidence of the men as to identity—a point on which Mr. Honesty was naturally anxious.

But next day when I sat at the mouth of the cave, looking idly across the lake and noting the tossing line of insignificant peaks on the other side, my pulse leaping and bounding in alternate stops and jumps, the two things in conjunction brought Vandaloff's paper to my mind, and I fished it out and sat brooding over it. After all, how unlikely that they would have their *cache* side by side with the treasure ground! They must at least have scratched the surface, and that would lead any fool to hunt far and near into every burrow until he unearthed the hoard. But with the lake between and a boat—nothing easier! And suppose this scrawl were a guide in case he had to send, instead of coming himself? I put it to Ramsay when he came back from a climb to the crag which commanded the lake and the pehn-gaw's anchorage.

“I sent the men down to scout, and they found two drowsy Burmans taking it easy aboard and perfectly indifferent to Vandaloff's fate—so the twenty stalwarts were a myth. I don't suppose he trusted a soul. And my belief is he never dreamt we were here until he saw it with his own eyes, else he would have brought a strong party with him. We've burnt the boat, after taking out any useful things, and the two men will trek down with us to Zetawun. So the coast is clear and we'll go over and prospect.”

We did so next day, and by the light of reason (for the paper proved to be a mere blind and perfectly valueless, as Ramsay suspected) found our way to one of the strangest places I am ever likely to see in my life. A valley of great and magnificent ruins, such as abound in many parts of Burma, especially at Pagan, but never so far north. Not one building was intact, for the earthquake had done its work there as on the other side, but there were mountains of rubble. The place had been shaken to bits as a child shakes down its brick castle when the game tires it.

And it was easy to see now why the thing had probably been left untouched since the catastrophe, apart from the immense distance from anywhere—simply because, unless one had some map of the former buildings, one might spend a lifetime searching and searching in vain, among masses of masonry—a thing no one would attempt, anyhow, unless they had certain knowledge of treasure hidden there to make it worth their while.

I confess our search was of the briefest, but we saw no sign of excavation, and our conclusion was either that they had had some unknown plan of the place, or had crept by chance through the fallen brickwork into some gorgeous buried temple which they had plundered.

“All the same, I’m coming back,” said Ramsay. “The romance and wealth of Mien are here for the seeking, and the world will sit up and take notice when we begin in earnest. But again I ask you to consider the fool I am! You’d think a child would have seen they’d not put the dump at a spot where the finding of the one would mean the certain discovery of the other. And such dolts have we been that we should probably never have thought of this side but for the paper, which in itself is nothing—yet if you had refused it we should not have crossed the lake. If that isn’t a paradox, what is?”

Refuse. The word suddenly let loose a whole flood of association in my brain. My mother’s “Refuse it! Refuse it!” after her dream. The strange vision of the astrologer at Zetawun! *What* are these mysterious visitings that come and go? On the verge of what mystery do we live? We move like dogs and cats in a library, amid the stores of knowledge and wisdom decipherable to higher intelligences, but closed to us, there for the reading. It turned me white as a sheet for the minute. I could not speak of it to Ramsay at the time, and when I did so later he was silent. There is nothing to say until a wider door is opened. Was the picture painted up somewhere where both my mother and the monk could see it and warn me? And yet I had forgotten. What is the use—what is the meaning? I dropped my head in my hands and was silent also.

And my father? Was it true, or the dying lie of a dying villain? It sounded the only explicable truth, and yet— As we made the awful return journey to Zetawun through the blinding rains, the whipping, dripping, moaning trees of the jungle, cowering in our sodden tents in the utmost stages of misery, I often discussed that matter with Ramsay. He took it for truth, and discouraged all hope.

“And if he was mixed up in this, as an innocent person might well be, drawn gradually in from some chance of discovery and a boy’s love of adventure, he should be gone now. He could never have guessed into what a business such scoundrels as Kyriel and Vandaloff would develop it, and it would *kill* an honest man to be involved with them in any way. And then he was in their hands as regarded money. One can imagine what the turn of that screw would be, and his desperate efforts to free himself and do the right thing at last. Vandaloff said it to torture you, but you may well be glad.”

He added, after a moment’s thought: “The news of Vandaloff’s death will be in every British newspaper, and Kyriel will do a bolt. He can never face it out. Unless my cousin has his paw on him now, you’ll never see him again.”

Of all this, and the miserable days of rain and fatigue, I will say no more. It was like a foretaste of heaven when at last we saw the lovely, fantastic, pinnacled roofs of Zetawun glimmering through a sheet of rain, and the Great Glory standing like a calm image of the Buddha himself in the doorway to watch our coming and give us his gracious welcome.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN we laid the ivory scripture before the Great Glory I saw the tears stand in his eyes. They rewarded me for much. He touched it as gently as one might brush the golden wing of a butterfly, and stood in silence over it. And as he stood there came to his side the venerable Pyit-Shin, the oldest monk in the monastery, so much nearer the Peace than when I had last seen him that he seemed all spirit now, as though he might rise and dissolve like vapour at dawn. Seeing what lay before the Sadaw, he prostrated himself on the ground and so remained, as though lost in adoration, and no man moved or stirred. At last, "Great Glory, rise," said the Mahati. "Rise and rejoice, for we have seen a great thing! We are found worthy."

Still silence. He lay with one outstretched hand upon the graven ivory. The Sadaw, kneeling now by him, raised the quiet face to his breast.

"Praise to the Perfect One!" he said softly. "My brother, the Great Glory, has entered the Nirvana."

It was as if a beam of light had fallen upon the aged monk and touched him with a releasing finger. I never saw a face that so moved me in its serenity, and never shall. Somehow it helped me in my perplexities, and I left the monastery with more peace and courage to front the uncertainties of life than had ever possessed me yet. There, at all events, I would one day return. It was good to be in that place, and I wanted to know more of the secret of their quiet.

Can I hope to describe the sensation which swept the world at news of the discovery of the lost city of Mien? Impossible, and I was the last person to be fitted for the position of a lion, not to mention my terror, for Marcia's sake and my own, lest the facts lying behind the journey should be dragged out into the light of day. However, it appeared that no less a person than Marco Polo had written it up with its towers, its herds of elephants, and all its glories. When I was privileged to read his remarks I could not see that they threw much light on the matter one way or another, or that his Mien had much likeness to ours. Ramsay thought the same, and both of us were inclined to conclude that his dreamy vagueness accounted for its absence from the lime-light until Kyriel and my father stumbled on it by chance, or more likely from information from the relations of the Burmese wife. For, as I have said, ruined cities in Burma are as common as peas in a pod, it having

been a playful habit of the kings to leave their capitals whenever they got a little bored with them, and Marco Polo's Mien might have been anywhere along the Irawadi. Indeed, the learned men instantly started a free fight in *The Times* on the subject, one partly alleging that he had meant Pagan all the time, and that none but a fool could think our Mien was anything but a side-show. We deposited our treasure with the Great Glory and made our way to Rangoon as quickly as possible, my arm being healed by then. Even there I would not delay, nor would Ramsay. We hurled ourselves on board a British-India boat, and so for London. We had ascertained at Rangoon that, subject to certain rights and royalties, the Government would grant us a concession to explore the ruins and would put in a proper guard until we returned.

But England—England!

Sir Hugh was the first person to greet me, smaller and frailer than ever, but unconquerably gay and glad. He was charged with great news. Kyriel had bolted on the first word of Mien in the papers, and Hampton was coming in that evening to see me and give an account of his stewardship.

“He could not have him arrested until the matter had gone farther and you were in England,” he said, “and then only on the charge connected with the rubies and so forth, for until your father is found alive or dead, we can do nothing there. Can we regret it? When I think of that poor girl of his I declare I wish he may vanish and never be heard of again! Her position is dreadful. My dear boy, what do you feel? Would you hunt the man to the gallows if you could?”

“I would do exactly what you would do,” I said, “if I don't too much exalt myself in saying it. Please don't talk of her. I daren't think of her yet, but I will—I will. Tell me Hampton's results as regards my father.”

“He will tell you himself. Bad news. Your mother arrives this evening. I knew what you would feel about Kyriel. I knew what you would say. We feel alike. We couldn't feel otherwise. Your mother writes she has news for us, but, as it centres on some dream she has had, I fear it will only disturb her mind. Don't let it disturb yours.”

I was silent. My mother's dreams were a subject I could never dismiss with a smile or a sneer. Impossible to explain my feeling about them. They touched on a realm where I was blindfolded, helpless, where she could walk with open eyes—but who could I get to believe this? Not Sir Hugh—not a living creature that I knew except in the far away monastery of Zetawun—and that testimony most men would scorn. What had she seen? I trembled.

An hour after I was in the house with Ramsay, Hampton came in, ruddy and genial, with a cordial greeting for his cousin and a graver one for me,

evidently in view of the news to be told. The four of us sat down, and the gravest conference of my life was begun. Hampton opened, with a sheaf of notes before him. I condense the questions and answers into a statement which he addressed to me.

“The only person to whom I trusted my identity down in the West was Collins, your solicitor, and that was necessary, for I had to know the condition of your father’s affairs. Kyriel put everything at Collins’s disposal in the politest way, and, Murdoch having been located, all that part was plain as a pike-staff. Your father was a ruined man. Except for the stock on the farm he could lay his hands on nothing, and as to the mortgage, Kyriel could foreclose at any moment. He had also lent your father money years before which had not been repaid. He explained all this in the frankest way to Collins. They had been friends as young men, and he had come to your father’s rescue as a matter of course. Asked by Collins if he knew how Pendarvis had got into such deep water, he mentioned unlucky investments, but hinted that a man may often have secret drains he doesn’t speak of—which is true enough. So far as Collins was concerned, there was nothing suspicious about Kyriel’s position. There is no doubt your father was in difficulties, nor that, whoever profited by the Burmese traffic, it was not he—that is, after the start.”

Thank God for that, was the thought in my heart, but I sat rigidly silent.

“Yet he was somehow concerned in it,” Hampton went on. “My conviction grew that they had some hold on him which compelled him to lend a hand when Kyriel needed it. I found by inquiring locally that he had more than once been seen meeting Quesnel, and it was surmised that he had some concern with the smuggling that went on along the coast. I knew better than that. But what could that hold have been? The only solution I can offer is that, having once kept silence about the find in the city of Mien, he had made himself accessory to the crime, very likely in ignorance that it *was* a crime, though he refused to go on with it. And I think this was because—Look here!”

He unfolded a parcel that lay beside him and disclosed a most beautiful replica of the dancing Shiva with diamond eyes which we had seen in the *cache*.

“I found that,” he said, “on the farm, and my attention was drawn to the place where it was buried by your mother, and that in the most singular way. You will hardly believe it when I tell you later. However, I took it up to Jurgesen, the art-dealer in London, and had his opinion. He pronounced it a magnificent piece and said he would give four thousand pounds for it on the

spot, the gold and diamonds being its least value. But—listen to this!—twenty-four years before he had bought its pair, the goddess Parvati, Shiva's wife, also dancing, to the music of a little tree-spirit. He had paid the same price for it, and the man who sold it was your father—no doubt of it. He gave his name as John Gwent, and said he had found it in the jungle in Burma. So, you see, he had once committed himself to that extent, and as we have no record of his trips with Kyriel in Burma, there may have been something Kyriel could twist and turn to his own account. Sir Hugh tells me he heard of some scuffle with the coolies in which a man was killed. Possibly that fits my theory. Anyhow, Kyriel dominated your father. But, you see, he would not sell the Shiva, even when things got desperate with him.”

We all sat in dead silence. Hampton turned over his notes.

“I come to his disappearance. You will remember that it was a day or two before the alarm was given by your telephoning to Mr. Hasleden. A lot happened in that time when nobody missed him. Two of the Hatton Park footmen used to come to my place for tobacco and betting news, and I encouraged them to get talking. I made out that Kyriel went out riding one evening and passed up the steep lane that leads to the moors. It so happened that the footman was up that way, courting a girl in the trees there, and presently your father came along the same way as if to overtake him, driving the car hard and as pale as death. The man said his face frightened him. The other fellow (they were half drunk) swore that your father would never have gone after Kyriel, for he knew he was in fear of his life from him ever since a day when Kyriel threatened to shoot him in the park.”

“That might be a blind,” I interrupted. “Don't forget how he struck me.”

“Not it. Your father had reason to dread the man. He had threatened Kyriel with exposure, and they wanted him away. You'll find that Vandaloff's coming and being in your house precipitated the whole thing. Your father heard of it in Gwent and dared not face him. It all fits in. But to resume. I went over to the place where Miss Ruthven found the cuff-link and studied it. Not a sign. On that springy heather a car can run and leave no trace after an hour—but some miles on I found a trace of petrol, eight miles from the road by the cliffs, and in a declivity which anyone passing would skirt. He wanted to lose the car. The hunt sometimes—very seldom—might go up that way in winter, up to the Barrow, but in summer it's dead alone, miles from anywhere, unless some one should chance to ride up, as Miss Ruthven did. Taking that for my centre I quartered the hills in my spare time, riding on Saturdays and Sundays 'for my health.' And forty miles off,

high up beyond the place called the Otterpool, I found the car, scratched and damaged and punctured, and no wonder after such a road, and swimming with rain. But no sign of your father. And there it might have lain for years, for it's on the road to nowhere. I kept the discovery to myself a bit, waiting to make the trap more secure, and perhaps if I hadn't Kyriel might have seen the game was up and have thrown up his hands instead of bolting. But I gave two days to thinking it out—how I could ease it for the girl, as you asked me, and he did a get away. I can't forgive myself, for the mystery's no mystery now. He got your father on the moors to discuss what was to be done about Vandaloff's being with you. There may or may not have been a struggle, but he murdered him and the body lies in the Otterpool or thereabouts, unless indeed he carried it off in his own car. We must have the pool dragged and get a warrant for Kyriel's arrest."

Not a word was said for a minute. At last I believed. I owed to myself for the first time that hope was over, and that between Kyriel's daughter and my father's son flowed a river of blood that she would never bridge even if I could think of it. I knew her too well. And none of us stirred.

And as we sat the sound of wheels came up the street and stopped at the door, with a knock and ring to follow. Sir Hugh motioned to me, remaining quietly in his place, that I might meet my mother alone. I closed the door behind me.

I pass over that meeting which concerns only ourselves. She was almost a shadow, so pale and worn that my first feeling was one of bitter self-blame for having left her at all. But she had all the old courage and restraint, and the moment I told her what was going forward, and why I could not leave them, begging her to go upstairs and rest, she said firmly: "I must be there too. Take me in."

It was vain to oppose her. I put my arm about her, and we went together. All rose, and Sir Hugh set a chair between his and mine. There she sat in her black dress, and I motioned Hampton to go on, whispering an explanation in her ear. He looked pityingly at her, knowing she could not be spared one pang.

"It is better to be frank even with Mrs. Pendarvis present. I dare not conceal the facts. There is no doubt in my mind that Lord Kyriel is guilty of Mr. Pendarvis's murder. I have evidence to connect up with that when the body is found, and more is certainly forthcoming. Meanwhile a warrant is out against him on the other charge."

My mother looked from face to face as if bewildered. Her voice dropped into the silence, almost a whisper, her cold hand gripping mine.

“But you are wrong, frightfully wrong. My husband is not dead.”

I interrupted, putting my arm more closely about her: “Mother, come away with me. It’s dreadful for you to hear, but Mr. Hampton knows.”

“Who is Mr. Hampton? I know his face, but—he doesn’t know. *I* know,” she persisted with a strange, piteous innocence, reminding me of a child that has no hope of being believed and still protests. “Roger, I tell you I saw him—I saw him last night, and the night before that—many times. He’s in a little town in France—on the slope of a hill—a small inn with a sign hanging out, the Hotel de la— and then I can see no more. I tell you I have seen it again and again. And he’s ill there. Oh, Roger, let us go!”

They pitied her with all their hearts, and that was all. Who could blame them? I could not believe it myself in spite of the things I had known. Can blind men recognize a description from a man who sees? Confronted with Hampton’s facts, she talked a language unknown to them, even to me. But I did my best for her. I told them of her vision of Vandaloff’s death and its corroboration at Zetawun. And I might as well have talked Greek. That had been a strange coincidence, nothing more. I saw the very words shaping on Hampton’s lips as she looked at him with burning triumph.

“There! You hear. It’s true. He’s ill, perhaps dying, and the dreadful thing is that I can’t tell where to go to him. Lord Kyriel’s a black villain. I believed he murdered his brother—I dreamed that long ago—but not my husband. Why, my husband knew nothing of him as far as I know. He was frightened of some one—I guessed that, but it need not have been Kyriel. There was something he dreaded night and day, but—”

“Which fits in with my case,” said Hampton. “You can all see that Mrs. Pendarvis is in utter ignorance of the facts which really point to Kyriel. . . . Of course Mr. Pendarvis dreaded him, and he had reason.”

“But why, why?” cried my mother, doing her case no good by her mingled ignorance and knowledge. Not a soul took her seriously or with anything but pity.

“There are several whys,” answered Hampton, much perturbed by the intrusion of the unexpected. “And I do think, Pendarvis, that, in view of your mother’s most natural agitation, it would be much better if she left us men to discuss the matter and heard of it later from you. If you approve this dream theory we shall have to ask ourselves unanswerable questions—how, for instance, could a well-known man like your father leave that part of the world unseen? He had abandoned his car.”

“As Kyriel did,” she broke in passionately. “With Quesnel.”

There was a dead stop, and for a moment I saw Hampton nonplussed. He had had every port and station watched, and London strained, as you might say, but who could search the luggers at their honest fishing, or guarantee that some small boat might not meet them six miles out and go her way with her cargo? Who could range every nook and cranny of the jagged coast at night and declare the precise place and time when a small boat's nose grated on the shingle and slipped away with a passenger? There was at least as much to be said for the possibilities of my mother's theory as for Hampton's. She looked about her again proudly as she saw doubt in all the faces.

"I tell you it's true, and when he knows Kyriel is in hiding—if it *was* Kyriel he feared—he'll write. He never would before. If I had known it was Kyriel I could have told you that at the beginning, but I never knew. Oh, Mr. Hampton, you have found out a lot, and I thank you, but believe me, believe me! We shall get at the truth sooner if you will. We're all at cross purposes now. He was broken down with terror and misery, and he ran away from it all."

She looked from one to the other, her breath coming and going in gasps. Could she be right? Was it indeed Vandaloff's appearance which had forced him to flight? Hampton too had thought of that possibility. If she were right—?

Hampton began rearranging his notes impatiently.

"He'll write now," she murmured, clasping her hands. "You'll see."

We were sitting in the library, and at that moment the postman's knock resounded through the house. Sir Hugh rose without a word and limped out, closing the door behind him. There was a tremendous silence as we all waited, and when I dared glance at my mother she had a white, exalted look as of one certain of her answer. The door opened again, and Sir Hugh limped back and laid a re-directed letter in her hand. She opened it, and broke down in a storm of tears. The others went out quietly and left her with me.

I must gather up the threads of my strange story. We were in France next day, my mother and I. Hampton came with us to gain the necessary information. It was exactly as he had foreseen, so far as could be gleaned from a dying man, for my father died, worn out with fear and grief, but with the faces he loved about him, and at peace. He had been in Kyriel's toils from the first, owing to the charge of having killed the Burmese coolie of whom I had heard at Zetawun, and his ignorance of the law and the risk

attached to treasure-running did the rest. Of the fraudulent trade in spinels and rubies he had never known. Kyriel had bought Hatton Park partly for its convenient neighbourhood to the sea and the smuggling trade, partly because he could make use of my father. But gradually, as some of the scope of the business and its meaning dawned on him, my father tried to get clear, and then began the era of terror with Kyriel and Vandaloff threatening exposure and finally his life. At last he broke down and fled. That was all.

When it was over I took my mother back to Caerlyon, and Sir Hugh came with us and Ramsay, and life slid slowly back into the normal and unperturbed except for watching for news of Kyriel. We all relaxed into a kind of weariness—all but Hampton. It was difficult for him to reconcile himself to the turn events had taken, for he had not come out of the case with his usual triumph, but it was characteristic of him that he immediately set himself to study the occult and see whether there could be anything in it useful for business. It might have been book-keeping.

“A man can’t afford to neglect anything nowadays, and you bet I’ll get up with the prophets in no time. No doubt there’s a sensible explanation of these things, and when we get it they’ll take their proper place as evidence, though I can’t say I should care to be the man to present this particular show to a British jury. Still, the thing’s there, and I wish it wasn’t. But being there—here goes!”

In a month the subject was at his fingers’ ends. He might have been President of the Society for Psychological Research; how far he was inwardly convinced I have never known.

Time went on. In two months Ramsay would return to Burma and the explorations in Mien, and my mother urged me to go with him. Things had naturally gone back at the farm during my absence, and even from the money point of view it might have been the best thing to do. The Great Glory had written a beautiful letter entreating our return, and dwelling on our services to the Buddhist faith and the ready aid which would be given to our plans by every soul in Burma. That meant success, and all drew me in the one direction, knowing Sir Hugh’s faithful kindness would safeguard my mother—all but the one thing, and that came first and the rest nowhere. I heard that Marcia had come down to Hatton to prepare it for sale, and that it was said she was to go abroad afterward. That girl—alone? Or to Kyriel? I was almost insane with the thought of it, and refused to listen to anyone. If I could see her, if she scorned my friendship and me, then I was for Burma. But I must know her will.

I went to Hatton. I entered the park by the veiled door which Kyriel had shown me, feeling like a ghost revisiting the scene of his torture. Day after day I went and waited in the long green alleys, and saw no one. I could not go up to the house, things being as they were. I dared not write, for then she would consider my letter coldly and reasonably and would answer that we could never meet again. That I knew for certain. At last, braving every chance, I forced myself up to the house, knowing I was doing a wrong thing and a mad one. I had my answer. Miss Ruthven was engaged, and in any case was seeing no one. I went away broken, yet still clinging to the half of a shattered hope. And still I went every day and waited there from morning till evening.

No doubt at last she thought herself safe and that she had tired me out, for the day came that sitting under the shade of great trees I saw her coming slowly down the green alley, a book in her hand as I had seen her before. I had hardly the strength to go and meet her. Her face unmanned me. It was so deathly pale that its beauty shone luminous, unearthly in my eyes. I had the feeling that she was slowly dying of grief and shame.

She stood still when she heard me coming and laid her hand on a bough to steady herself, putting the other out faintly as if to ward me off. It was near sunset, and the low light struck high on the tree trunks and left her in shadow.

“May I speak to you. I’ve tried and tried,” I said. “I entreat you not to be so cruel to me. I’ve had such a lot to bear. Be good to me now.”

That was my cunning to gain her pity. My only chance.

She could not speak, but looked at me with hopeless eyes, her mouth quivering.

“Don’t drive me away. I’ve thought of you night and day. I want to tell you— I went to the house, and they said you wouldn’t see me.”

“I can bear no more,” she said, trembling from head to foot. “Dreadful things have come into my life. No decent person must speak to me or look at me. Tell me nothing more. My father—” She stopped, shuddering at the word. “Oh, let me go. Have pity on me, though I’m part of it. Don’t blame me. Let me be lost for ever and ever.”

Her despair gave me courage.

“I shall never pity you. Never!” I said. “You had nothing to do with it any more than I. That’s being morbid and mad. I love and worship you. I would kiss the ground you walk on. Why am I to suffer even more because of what happened between your father and mine? If you hate the sight of me

I can understand that and I'll go, but if it's only about your father I'll stay until you drive me away like a dog."

Here, I think, my simple ways and little understanding of sentiment, which appeared to me to be grounded on nothing, helped me more than perhaps the most high-flown notions would have done. I took her small, cold hand in mine. I tried to draw her to me, for I was gaining courage every moment. But she broke away.

"My father—" Her voice broke. "Oh, keep away from the ruin I bring with me. His blood is in me—"

"Your mother was a good woman," I said firmly. "You're her child, and you're the woman I love and trust through life and death. Yes, I know I know little of you." For I saw those words on her lips and in the pull of her hand. "But I fixed my heart on you the first day I saw you, and I'll love you till I die. I could no more do without you than I could live without breathing. I knew it from the first. Did you?" She held me with eyes and hands while she answered, gathering her shaking strength to do it.

"I tell you the truth, because after to-day we shall never meet. I could love you. I could live and die for you. I knew that too from the first. Perhaps it was because I had never lived with anyone I could trust, and I trusted you before I knew why. But because I love you I'll never see you again. What? Bring my shame into an honest house? I should deserve my name indeed if I could do that. People would expect that of Kyriel's daughter. No—let me keep my hands clean—my dear. My dear."

I kissed the shrinking hands. I used my strength when she would have fled, for I knew well that if once she left me she would keep her word. I held her. I conquered her, and killed the cruel words on her lips with kisses. And at last I convinced her that the past might bury its dead, that love is stronger than hate, and that we might do better than continue the misery brought by villainy and hatred. We must face it together. That was the only reparation either of us could make. I shall never forget the nobility of her surrender.

"You may be right. Who am I to judge of right and wrong? If you will take a disgraced woman—"

"I'll take the dearest, sweetest woman God ever made, and thank Him for her night and day."

I cannot write more of it. I won my battle. We sat together, speaking and silent by turns, until the dusk was hanging like smoke in the trees and the young moon was dawning, shy as a girl, to see our happiness. Next day my mother came for her, and we brought her from that horrible house to

Caerlyon, and judge if I was proud when I saw how she fell into our ways and made herself at home with all and sundry. If they were a little afraid of the great lady at first, they soon forgot to be when they knew her lovely ways, and how she always understood and made the best of every one. That there is something in birth and breeding I never can deny even when it comes out of a family like Kyriel's. It gave him something that he could have done a good bit with if he had cared to switch off in a very different way of life from the one he chose, and it gave his daughter enchantment that I never yet saw man or woman resist. And it was mine. How could I believe my good luck?

So I could not go then to Mien. I stayed at home to explore instead the secrets of one of the loveliest natures ever hidden in a woman's reserve. Long suffering had trained her into strength and grace, firm as a pine and pliable as a willow. She won Sir Hugh and my mother utterly, and transmuted her griefs into the gold of joy to delight them and me. She was too young, too wholesome, and too much loved for them to cloud her long, and I could forgive even Kyriel when I daily blessed the gift he had thrust into my hand.

Of him we have never heard another word. The deep sea of silence covered him, and his place knew him no more. Not even a rumour reached us, and I often caught myself wondering whether at last some buried instinct of decency had driven him into suicide and the ending of a most worthless life. His money slowly accumulates, for he makes no call upon it, and his death cannot yet be presumed by the courts. But when it comes to my wife it will all pass through her hands to those who need it. We have enough, and what is Sir Hugh's is ours, and in addition we have riches that Kyriel never dreamed of in all his dark days—love and peace and trust, and nothing to come between us and shadow the past or future.

Let me end with a strange word. When I think of the peace which lies beyond all that life can give us it is never bound up with the little parish church at Caerlyon. I see its spire pointing to grey skies. I sit there and hear the old familiar words which comforted my forefathers. But when they speak of the peace that passes understanding, I see the monastery of Zetawun and the serenity of the Great Glory and the face of the brooding, golden Buddha lost in an ecstasy that holds the solution of all the riddles. Some day I shall go back to Zetawun and try to pluck out the heart of their mystery. Some day.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Rubies* by Elizabeth Louisa Moresby (as Louis Moresby)]