

The Daughter of Brahma

The Daughter of Brahma

By I. A. R. Wylie

Author of "The Rajah's People," "My German Year"

FIFTH EDITION

MILLS & BOON, LIMITED

49 RUPERT STREET

LONDON, W.

Published 1912

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

UNDER THE CURSE

“You have read enough,” Mrs. Hurst said. “I am tired, and the light troubles me. Put it out — it will seem cooler in the darkness.”

“Very well — or shall I screen it? Then if you should want anything—”

Mrs. Hurst turned a little and measured her companion from head to foot.

“You are afraid,” she said, a faint note of amusement creeping into her tired voice. “I wonder why. Do you expect that a cobra will take the opportunity to do away with you, or that there is a Thug under the bed? Pray look and see. You will perhaps feel easier in your mind.”

The English nurse bit her lip.

“I am not afraid, Mrs. Hurst,” she said resentfully. “I only thought it would be more convenient. But of course—”

She made a movement as though to turn out the small lamp which stood by the bedside, but her mistress stretched out a detaining hand.

“Wait!” she said. “I thought I heard something—horses’ hoofs—listen!”

The invalid half lifted herself on her elbow, her head raised in an attitude of tense concentration, her brows contracted with the effort. The nurse turned towards the open window sharply, as one expecting a sudden attack.

“It was nothing,” she said in a dry voice. “I heard nothing.”

Mrs. Hurst smiled. She let herself sink back, and her hair hung about her face like a black curtain.

“He will be here in five minutes,” she said decidedly. “You have not learnt to

distinguish sounds.” Then she raised her tired eyes again to the nurse’s face. “Why are you so afraid?” she asked.

Nurse Campden shrugged her shoulders. The movement was rude, and in her own country she had been noted for the suavity of her manners; but her nerve was gone, and the offspring of a cheap London suburb broke through the hard layer of acquired polish. She looked back fearfully at the window.

“I should think there was cause enough, Mrs. Hurst,” she said, almost in a whisper. “Last week a house was broken into and the owner murdered. And only yesterday poor Mr. Harris—who knows whose turn it will be next!”

The smile deepened about Mrs. Hurst’s firm mouth.

“You have been listening to the ayahs,” she said. “There is nothing to fear—” a subtle change of expression passed over her young face, which seemed to make it old and hard “—and if there were, we should not be afraid,” she finished quietly.

Nurse Campden said nothing. She was gazing about her with wide-open, straining eyes, trying to penetrate the shadows that shifted noiselessly in the farthest corners of the room. The silence oppressed her. Whilst she had read aloud her own voice, breaking in upon the absolute hush, had sounded strangely threatening, but this silence was more terrible. It was full of inaudible movement. If she looked towards the open window she knew that, every now and again, something white would flit across the darkness. It should have comforted, but instead it added to her terror. She knew that it was one of the Commissioner’s levies on his way round the compound, but he too seemed unreal a ghostly, intangible something which was all part of the shadows and movements.

She tried to concentrate her attention on familiar objects. Everything was in its place. The silver ornaments blinked at her from the dressing-table; close at hand a small pile of white, delicate linen lay in readiness; a general atmosphere of refinement, almost of luxury, pervaded the low-built room. On the surface quiet; and beneath, the constant noiseless activity. Nurse Campden had little imagination, but she heard it. Suddenly she cried out, with that sharpness which betokens long selfrepression. Mrs. Hurst turned her head.

“Who is there?” she asked quietly. The curtains hanging over the doorway

parted. A woman's dark face peered through the opening.

"Tea for the Mem-Sahib—Mem-Sahib like tea?"

"It is well, Sita. Bring it here. I am thirsty." Nurse Campden drew back. The native woman glided over the uncarpeted floor and placed the tray on the table by the bedside. There was a soft, musical jingle of silver ornaments.

"Pour out for Mem-Sahib?"

"Yes, pour out."

The brown, shapely hands performed their task. Nurse Campden watched them, and her trembling lips were drawn back in uncontrollable abhorrence. The ayah caught the expression, and for an instant her eyes narrowed, then flashed back to the pale face against the pillow.

"Mem-Sahib better soon—little Sahib come," she said softly, and withdrew, the curtains falling with a faint rustle behind her.

Nurse Campden shuddered.

"I hate these black creatures," she said unsteadily. "They frighten me to death with their stealthy ways. You have nerve, Mrs. Hurst—and you so young, too."

"My grandfather was one of the men who made India," was the quiet, almost indifferent answer. "My father was born out here, and is buried in Lucknow. My son will be born, and will die out here, as I shall do. It is in the blood." Then, with a swift yet smooth movement, she drew herself upright and held out her arms. "Walter!" she said, joyfully.

The man who had been standing hesitating on the threshold of the room came quickly forward. The movements of the slight, agile figure seemed to betoken youth, yet, as he removed his pith helmet the pale light revealed the face of a man who had seen more than youth reckons of anxiety, responsibility, perhaps fear. He bent over her and touched her hand.

"I was afraid of startling you," he said, in a low voice, "but I had to have a look in and see how you were getting on. Are you all right?"

“Yes, yes, quite all right. You have had news?”

He nodded.

“Lai Pandra has confessed. There is to be a big meeting to-night at some place outside the village. He is to act as guide. All the ringleaders will be there among them the Chitpaven Brahman, Nana Balagi. That is proof enough that there is more in it all than mere dacoity. It will be a big haul for us—if we are successful.”

“There will be no danger?”

“I hope to get off with a few priestly curses.”

“Is Lai Pandra to be trusted?”

“That’s what none of us know. I am taking thirty Sikhs with me.”

They looked at each other steadily. Mrs. Hurst had sunk back again, but her eyes had never left her husband’s face.

“Is there any chance that you will be back in time?”

Hurst glanced at the nurse.

“In three or four hours if all goes well.”

Nurse Campden nodded. She had recovered something of her self-possession.

“We can expect no change before then,” she said.

“And if things don’t go well?”

He held out his thin, brown hand and his wife took it and pressed it.

“In that case there isn’t much to be said. I should like him to be called David after your grandfather, you know. It would be a good omen. There are no famous names on my side.”

She smiled faintly.

“There is yours.”

“I am one of hundreds.”

“Not after to-night. And supposing it isn’t a ‘he’?”

He laughed.

“We’ve both made so sure, haven’t we? Well, I leave it to you. Anyhow, you will act for the best. Good-bye, dear.”

He bent and kissed her, and she put her arms round his neck and drew him close to her. A sudden exclamation broke from him.

“Jean!”

But she pushed him gently away.

“You must lose no time,” she said. “Come back with glory.”

He nodded, his eyes shining at her from under the straight brows.

“You’re splendid!” he said. “Jean you’re more made for this sort of thing than I am.”

“That’s not true.” There was a vague impatience in her tone. “You ought not to have bothered about me. A wife is always a nuisance. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, Jean!”

He made no attempt to kiss her again, but went to the window. Nurse Campden followed him. His back was turned to the light, but in the part darkness she saw enough of his face to startle even her blunted susceptibilities. The rigid stoicism was gone. His fine, almost too delicate features were working as though in an agony; the perspiration stood out in great beads on his forehead.

“Mr. Hurst,” she said in a rapid undertone, “couldn’t you get some one to take your place? I feel it my duty to tell you that it would be better if you did not leave the house to-night. Any excitement or agitation might have serious results for your wife or the child.”

He looked at her. The mask had slipped back instantly to its place.

“I have spoken to my wife,” he said. “She perfectly understands. She will be neither agitated nor excited. I leave her in good hands. Good night!”

He went down the two steps which led into the compound. Once Nurse Campden fancied he hesitated and looked back at the lighted room, but she could not be sure, and the next instant the darkness had engulfed him. In the absolute quiet the two women could hear the sentry’s challenge, the answer, a word of command, and then the steady tramp of marching feet on the high-road. Nurse Campden shivered and came back from the window.

“You must not allow yourself to be frightened, Mrs. Hurst,” she said, with a weak attempt at professionalism. “You must think of your responsibility.”

Mrs. Hurst smiled, and the smile had become scornful.

“I am not frightened, but I am rather tired. As you do not like to sit in the dark, take the light into the next room. I will call you when I want you.”

Nurse Campden glanced back over her shoulder. Then she took up the lamp. There was panic in the wide-open, colourless eyes.

“Very well, Mrs. Hurst as you wish it.”

She went quickly towards the door and passed out. The room was now in darkness, save for the light which filtered through the thin curtain. It was a red curtain, and the reflection on the opposite wall was red too, like a luminous smear of blood. Mrs. Hurst looked at it and then out into the silent compound. Then her eyes closed. But she did not sleep. She was listening, and her trained ears heard sounds which the nurse had only suspected, steady footfalls, the rustle of some lithe animal through the long grasses, and the sigh of a sudden, short-lived breeze. Though she saw nothing, she knew when the sentry passed her window on his round and when at length he ceased from his vigilance. Of what use? The Sahib was gone. The Mem-Sahib slept, and the night was long. The scornful smile flickered once more about the compressed lips. She stretched out her hand and felt for the revolver on the table beside her. Her fingers glided almost caressingly over the smooth barrel. Then she drew a quiet sigh of satisfaction and lay still.

Thus the hours passed. The red, luminous smear faded from the wall; the unseen and soundless movement sank into a hush that was full of a dread expectancy. In breathless, holy silence, the world awaited the first signal of the dawn. Mrs. Hurst opened her eyes suddenly. She had slept a little, but in her sleep she had heard something which her waking ears could not have heard. Beneath the veil of silence there was again sound, and this time it was not the fall of a footstep, not the movement of some animal in the long grasses, nor the sighing of a breeze. Mrs. Hurst lifted herself on her elbow.

“Walter!” she said aloud.

No answer. But it was as though her voice had torn the veil asunder. In the unreality of things one reality stood out a reality which had brushed against the curtains by the window and then slid slowly, gently to the ground. Mrs. Hurst rose up from her bed. She did not take the revolver or call out. She felt her way across the room towards the grey patch of light which was brightening rapidly along the horizon. At the window she stumbled over something. She bent down. Her hands touched a man’s face. Still she was silent. She knelt, and her fingers passed rapidly over the familiar tunic. Quite suddenly, they stopped in their search. For a moment she knelt there motionless. It was as though she were listening. Then she rose slowly and carefully from her knees.

“Nurse!” she called. “Nurse!”

In the next room, there was the sound of a sudden, startled movement. A chair was overturned. Nurse Campden, dazed with sleep, stood between the curtains. She held the lamp in her unsteady hand and the pale light struggled vainly with the increasing brightness. But the motionless something at Mrs. Hurst’s feet was still in shadow. Nurse Campden took a stumbling step forward.

“Mrs. Hurst,” she mumbled. “You shouldn’t have got up. You—”

Mrs. Hurst raised her hand. She stood with her back to the dawn, upright, commanding, her figure magnified by the grey, uncertain background.

“I want you to arouse the servants,” she said slowly. “My husband has been murdered. No you are not to scream or faint. You will do as I tell you. There is my son to be considered. Now go!”

In the following moment of suspense her willpower closed with the other’s

weakness and predominated. Wordless, hypnotised, Nurse Campden obeyed. The curtains fell in their place there was a sound of running, uncertain footsteps along the corridor and then a low, confused murmur. Mrs. Hurst bent her head.

“My beloved!” she said.

That was all. She went back quietly to her bed and lay there as she had lain there before, tearless, patient, awaiting her hour.

And in the first flush of the Indian morning her son, David Hurst, was given her.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH THE JUDGE HEARS UNPLEASANT THINGS

“No,” said the judge indignantly. “I don’t believe it. Go away! Do you take me for a fool? Go away, I tell you! What I told you? At three o’clock in the afternoon? Nonsense!”

He grunted and rolled over, and there was silence save for the soft, regular movement of the punkah. The native who had taken up his position at the foot of the judge’s improvised couch remained unsmiling and immovable.

“Three o’clock, Sahib,” he repeated solemnly. “Sahib’s horse outside.”

“Go away!” said the judge. “I didn’t expect it in the drawing-room.” He pulled his handkerchief further over his face and feigned sleep. Then, as though conscious that his impassive Nemesis was about to reiterate his information for the third time, he kicked away the chair which supported his nether limbs and sat up. “Now what the devil is the matter?” he demanded.

“Three o’clock, Sahib. Sahib’s horse outside.”

“Yes, yes, I’ve heard all about that. What I ask is, what do I want with a horse at three o’clock in the afternoon. You don’t know? Well, I’m sure I don’t, though you seem to think I ought. Let me see what clothes have I got on? That might give me a hint.”

He got up and inspected himself thoughtfully. “My best breeches, eh? A silk tie and I perceive that my new and most comfortless toppers await me. Son of the Night, there is a lady in the case —_cherchez la femme_, as our French friends say, though with a different accent. There, give me my coat. I shall remember in a minute.” He seated himself again and stretched out a stockinged foot for the boot which the native held in readiness. It was a somewhat tight squeeze, and the judge groaned softly. “It must be an altogether exceptional lady,” he muttered.

“Who the devil—” He stopped, and a slow smile dawned over his face. “I have it! Of course! Son of the Night, you should have been more insistent. I’m going to be late for tea. Now just cast an eye over me and tell me what I look like.”

The native glanced at the massive figure in spotless duck and bowed his head reverently.

The judge chuckled.

“Well, that’s one way of getting out of it, anyhow,” he said. “Now for it!”

He adjusted his sun-helmet carefully, took his riding-crop from the table, and limped out on to the verandah. A wave of dry, lifeless air greeted him, and he stood for a moment in the shadow, evidently more than half inclined to turn back. But the syce with the big, raw-boned horse stood at the bottom of the steps, stoical and unrelenting, and the judge, apparently bowing to the dictates of Fate, crossed the Rubicon into the blazing sunshine and swung himself heavily into the saddle with a groan which the pig-skin echoed. The horse took an involuntary step forward, and the judge repeated his chuckle.

“I’m getting too much for you, Sarah Jane,” he said regretfully. “However, I daresay you’ll bear me as long as I want you. Now then, old lady, make an effort, will you?”

The “old lady ” complied with his request and ambled sedately out through the compound gates and on to the high-road. Without any apparent indication from the judge, she took the turning to the right and broke into a trot which lasted until they had left the last human habitation behind them. No one had witnessed their progress. The European quarter was wrapped in profound slumber and such natives as were visible lay about in the shade of their dirty, tumble-down dwellings and deigned the passerby not so much as a glance.

Nevertheless, as though fearing unseen witnesses, both horse and rider kept up a certain appearance until the last hut was out of sight, when the “old lady” immediately relapsed into her amble, and the judge collapsed in his saddle like a man suddenly deprived of his backbone. He was tall, heavily built, with a figure and a square-cut, ruddy face which seemed to combine to represent strength and a robust goodnature. Irritable, parchment-skinned Anglo-Indians were wont to look upon his apparently blooming health and unimpaired nervous system very much in the light of a personal insult. The fewest were clever enough to see beneath the surface, and those who did were discreet enough to hold their peace. A man who successfully ” keeps up appearances” year after year in a tropical temperature deserves to have his secrets respected, and the judge had never been

heard to complain. He carried himself bravely in the eyes of the world, and if at the present moment he hung in the saddle with bowed shoulders and a white, puffy face which was not good to look on, there was at least no one to note the passing weakness not even the "old lady," though, in any case, she would not have counted. That worthy animal had her own burdens to carry in every sense of the word and plodded on through the blinding heat with a mechanical stoicism which suggested that a brick wall would not have stopped her. Evidently she was well acquainted with the road and her present destiny.

At a sudden bend which revealed a low, white bungalow lying well back amongst a pleasant clump of trees, she jerked her head and resumed her canter with a spirit wholly inconsistent with her previous performance. The judge sat up, like a man aroused from sleep by a well-known signal. He straightened his shoulders, and, as though obeying some command of the will, colour ebbed slowly back into his cheeks. The moment's rest "behind the scenes" was over, and it was as a dashing cavalier that he swung into the compound and drew rein at the verandah steps. A native servant lay curled up in the shade, apparently undisturbed in his slumbers by the sound of horse's hoofs, and the judge bent over in his saddle and tickled him playfully in the ribs with his whip.

"Now, then, Josephus, bestir yourself, will you? No, it's all right, I'm not the tenth Avatar. Just help my mortal remains out of the saddle so, that's better. Ah, then I am expected!" He ran up the steps with the agility of a boy, one big hand outstretched, his square face transformed. "Do you know, I was afraid I had dreamt it!"

His hostess, who had advanced out of the shade of the porch to meet him, smiled faintly.

"I hope it was not a nightmare, Judge!"

"It was a day-dream," he answered, "and, alas, day-dreams have a trick of proving delusive. It took all the eloquence of my boy and my boots to persuade me that your note of this morning was not a pleasant trick of my hopeful imagination."

"Your boots?" she queried.

He looked down at the articles in question and then at her. His expression was ludicrously reproachful.

“My dear friend, can’t you see ?”

“They are certainly very beautiful—”

“And an intolerable tight fit. Do you think I should sacrifice so much for my appearance to please any one?”

She laughed quietly.

“I accept the compliment, but come in. I have ordered tea in the drawing-room. You will be thirsty.”

He followed her, endeavouring to control a grimace of pain, for the patent leather boots, following the laws of their species, had contracted. Once in the shady drawing-room, he chose the first strong chair and sat down with a sigh of relief.

“It will be some time before you get me to move again,” he said conclusively. “I have suffered much, and I claim my just reward.”

She seated herself opposite him, but close to the open window, so that her gaze could wander over the sun-scorched plain which undulated towards the hills. The smile hovering about her straight-cut mouth was contradicted by her eyes, which were grave and preoccupied.

“You need not be afraid,” she said. “I am not so inconsiderate as to ask a busy man like yourself to call on me in the hottest time of the afternoon for the pure pleasure of saying ‘How do you do’— I have something serious to talk to you about, and I wanted to be alone.”

The judge opened his small, blue eyes wide, but made no immediate answer, allowing the entrance of a native with a silver tea-tray to fill up the silence. During the noiseless arranging of the cups he took the opportunity to study his hostess with a frank and uncritical admiration. A critical observer would have admitted that she made a striking but not beautiful picture, though he might have been hard put to it to explain the latter limitation. Perhaps the exceptional about her was too emphasised; for the human taste has erected conventional standards in human beauty, to trespass against which may bring even perfection very near to the repugnant.

The woman seated by the window was, indeed, not perfect, but so nearly did she touch that high ideal that it was difficult to understand why, for many eyes, she was physically almost displeasing. True, it depended on the eyes. The ladies of Kolruna declared among themselves that there was something about Mrs. Hurst's beauty which made them "go cold all over," as they expressed it, but the newly arrived subalterns raved about her and wanted to marry her. Which was an innocent enough form of insanity, for Mrs. Hurst's attitude towards them was scarcely even maternal. As a consequence, they ended by calling her a "hard woman," and their admiration became tinged with a nervous respect. Her very height and bearing seemed to claim that much tribute from them. Her shoulders were broad and straight, like a man's, and suggested strength, though they were perhaps a little too out of harmony with her otherwise slight and fragile figure to be altogether graceful.

On this particular afternoon, her height was accentuated by her dress. The judge, who fancied himself a connoisseur in such things, would have described it as "flimsy," and waved his hand vaguely as a final touch to his description of the indefinable. The ladies of Kolruna would have said, "One of those wickedly expensive tea-gowns, my dear, with real lace!" and exchanged glances which would have given a fillip to many an old, half-forgotten scandal. In reality it was Mrs. Hurst who looked "expensive," rather than the dress. The slim, strong hands lying passively on the arms of her chair were beautiful enough to make the observer believe anything of the laces which framed them; the face turned to the light was a face that might possibly have seen suffering, but never the baseness of the cheap and tawdry. No doubt it was her face which frightened and even repulsed. It was colourless, whiter than marble, and rendered startling by the straight, black brows and the sombre, heavily shadowed eyes. Her hair, which was abundant and arranged with consummate art, was white also, and of that whiteness which alone nature can give. But she was not an old woman. Her face was unlined. Even the hard mouth betrayed no sign of years. Nor was she young. Her bearing and expression denied youth. It was as though a beautiful girl had sprung into middle age without transition perhaps in a single night and had since that one tremendous change remained stationary, indifferent to the behests of Time.

But, as it has been said, the man who watched her was not critical or disposed to discover the whys and wherefores of his own admiration. It was obvious that he looked upon her as something of a riddle a riddle that it was not for him to solve. Suddenly she turned and looked at him, and the colour in his face deepened.

“Pour me out some tea, Judge!” she said. The tone was commanding to the point of abruptness, but he obeyed with an alacrity which proved that it had pleased him. For a big man, his movements were surprisingly dainty, and she smiled at him with a faint pleasure. “I like to have you about me,” she said. “You do not get on my nerves. Now sit down closer. As I told you, I want to talk to you, and no one knows how long we shall be spared before some busybody discovers that we are having tea alone together. Among other things, I want your advice. You are the only friend I have here.”

He bowed his head.

“Surely not!”

“I mean, the only person whom I can trust to be honest and keep my confidence—another thing altogether, no doubt.”

He looked up at her again.

“You can trust me,” he said simply.

“Yes, I know. It’s about David.”

“Ah, yes, about David.” He sat back in his chair with a movement that was almost one of relief. “Is there anything wrong? Has the young beggar been up to mischief?”

“Oh, no, he is never up to mischief.” The corners of her mouth twitched. “But he is twelve years old to-day, and I realise that I cannot keep him here any longer.”

The judge nodded an eager assent.

“I’m glad you have seen that. It has been on my mind for some time. Frankly, he ought to have gone years ago. Anglo-Indians can’t stand this climate long, and David is beginning to show signs of wear and tear.”

“Yes, he ought to have gone years ago,” she repeated; “but there were reasons.” She turned her eyes back to the window. “The first was that I myself did not want to go to England. Here I have lived down the gossip of these amiable people who fancied I was only hunting for a second husband. My return would start their tongues again, and I am old enough now to cherish my peace.”

“Must you return?” he ventured.

“Yes.”

“In the end it will tell upon your health. Why must you return?”

She turned in her chair and measured him. Her eyes had widened and there was an expression of sombre anger in them which made him flinch.

“That is a question which lies outside the sphere of our discussion,” she said imperiously. “That which has made India my home is my own affair.” Then her mood and face softened. “I am very rude. Do you hate me?”

“No,” he said. “I want to help you. Tell me the other reasons. You could send David to school or to relations.”

Her eyes went back to the plain as though drawn there by some irresistible fascination.

“David loves India,” she said. “He has inherited that much at least. And he adores me.”

“Yes.” The judge linked his hands loosely together and stared at the carpet. “I know.”

“He thinks me a sort of supreme being,” she went on rapidly, “and I suppose I kept him with me out of a kind of selfish weakness. I dislike scenes. But there was another reason.” She broke off again. Her white, strong fingers tightened on the arm of her chair. “You have heard of my brother and my husband’s cousin, Sir Lawrence Hurst?”

“Yes. In this part of the world we don’t forget.”

For the first time the faintest possible colour showed itself in her impassive face.

“He has an only son. The son takes after his father and his grandfather. He is handsome and he is clever. He is a boy who will carry on the traditions of our family. My brother wrote to me and suggested that he and David should be educated together.”

“An admirable idea.”

She did not move, but he felt that she had shrunk inwardly as though from the touch of fire.

“You think so? But there is one thing which you must take into consideration. I am ashamed of my son.”

“Jean—Mrs. Hurst!”

“Do not force me to repeat what I have said. It is not pleasant for me to say or for you to hear, and you know I am not given to speaking lightly. Look me straight in the face, old friend. Forget all silly, sentimental, maternal feeling, and answer as you would answer a stranger. What is my son?”

The judge’s face was scarlet, but he rose valiantly to the challenge.

“A decent little chap not like the others, I know—delicate, nervous, a bit of a dreamer, but a thorough upright fellow a—”

“Don’t! You will be calling him a gentleman next. And you are not being honest. You say he is not like the others. That is true. You say he is delicate—he is a weakling. You say he is a dreamer—he is merely stupid. You say he is nervous—he is a coward. He is ugly into the bargain, and a cripple. I hate my son.”

The judge almost bounded from his chair. He put his hand to his collar as though he were choking.

“Mrs. Hurst sometimes you you are rather terrible.”

“No, I am merely sincere. Perhaps that comes to the same thing in this world.”

The judge nodded. “Yes, I think it does sometimes.”

“You blame me. You think me wicked and heartless. Perhaps I am according to the modern code of sentimentalities. But we our family has never cared much for that kind of thing. We have Spartan blood in our veins. Only the fittest can survive among us. Instinctively we cast out everything that is weak and useless. You cannot blame us for that instinct, any more than you can blame David for being as he is. It is just the destiny of our characters if you like to put it in that

way.” She paused, and then went on quietly. “At the bottom we are not very different from the rest of our fellow-creatures. You are looking aghast at me because I have dared to express a general but unaccepted truth. You all shrink instinctively from every form of deformity, and, if the Spartan method of dealing with such cases is out of fashion it is simply because you have become cowards and look upon life no matter how worthless and debased, as the highest good.”

“But hatred!” The judge broke in as though it had been the last word she had spoken. His goodnatured face was still white with distress, but she was not looking at him. She held herself, if possible, more erect, and her voice became sonorous with strongly repressed feeling.

“I hate my son with the same right as that with which I should hate him if he were burdened with some hideous moral vice. The one thing is as much an infirmity as the other. I hate him as I might hate a friend on whom I had built my life and who had betrayed my trust. I gave my soul for my son. On the night that my husband was murdered I killed myself, everything in me, in order that he might live. I meant that he should not suffer through my weakness. You understand me? He was not to be handicapped through any fault of mine. I meant him to carry on the traditions of our family and the race as my husband would have done. He was to be a strong man who would serve his country, perhaps a great man, but at least strong. As it is, he is nothing, and can be nothing.” She got up and stood stately and immovable, with her white face still turned to the light. “I have hoped against hope for twelve years,” she went on quietly, “but it would be absurd to deceive myself any longer. I must face the truth. I have brought into the world one of those mediocrities for which the world has no use. Fortunately, I am rich enough to take the burden upon my own shoulders. But David must go to England.”

The judge scarcely seemed to be listening.

“You are unjust,” he burst out, “and your theories are are—I don’t know what they are but it’s all infernally cruel. You don’t know what is in him yet. And, after all, you are responsible. He is your son and he loves you—”

“Love does not necessarily beget love not in me. Where I love I must respect yes, one can respect a child. I have respected a dog. I once had a foxterrier who attacked a cobra that it found in my room. It hadn’t a chance, and was killed for its daring, but I respected the little animal. I can’t respect my son. I know I am

hurting you. I am sorry. You say I am cruel, but it is life that is cruel, not I. But we have had enough of theorising. I cannot convince you or you me. Our theories are our characters, and we cannot change either the one or the other, especially at our time of life. And now I want your help.”

The judge bowed without speaking.

“David must go to a school in England. As I have said, I do not want to accompany him, and I have no one to help me in my choice. My brother is an Etonian, and would want him to follow in his steps; but that is out of the question. All our family have been at Eton, and David would suffer in the comparison. Besides, he is not strong enough. He must go to some private place where there will be some maternal soul to mother him. Do you know of anything suitable?”

“Do you take me for one of the ‘unfit’?” the judge asked, with a wry smile. “As it happens, I am from Winchester.”

“I know. Any one can see that. I only thought, in your wider experience—”

“I have a brother who interests himself in educational matters. He might advise me. Shall I write to him?”

“I should be immensely grateful. I want the matter decided as soon as possible. Mrs. Chichester is taking her youngest daughter, Diana, to England after Christmas, and has promised to let David accompany her. He will be in good hands. In the holidays he will stay with my brother. I should have preferred it to be otherwise, but their meeting is inevitable. You will really help me?”

“I will do all I can.” He was silent a moment. “And afterwards?”

“You mean when he has left school? That is something which only time can decide. His lameness excludes an army career; he is not clever enough for either the Indian Civil or any of the other services. The choice in our family is limited. Perhaps he will have developed some harmless hobby and end as a country gentleman. He will have money enough. You see, I am conscious of my responsibility. But we have been serious long enough, and you haven’t even had your tea. I have been too absorbed in myself to be hospitable.” She turned towards the neglected tea-table, but he held but his hand.

“Don’t bother—I mean not about me. I don’t want anything. I only came to see you, and now I must be off. I have any amount of work and—”

She looked up at him and smiled, and he stopped short. This time the smile was in her eyes, and the change lent her face a startling fascination. No man or woman had ever seen it without feeling that, in some mysterious way, she had laid her hand on an innermost and unsuspected chord in their being and consciously played upon it. The judge was no exception. He crimsoned like a boy.

“It is unsafe to trust even one’s best friend,” she said. “I have shown you myself and I have made you hate me.”

It was not the first time she had used the word in their conversation together, and she did not use it lightly.

The judge shook his head.

“I couldn’t if I tried,” he answered. “You know I couldn’t.”

“And yet you are the only marriageable man on the station who hasn’t done me the honour to suggest that I should become his wife!” she retorted.

They looked at each other and laughed, and the tension was gone. The judge’s features resumed their normal expression of bluff goodnature.

“My position doesn’t allow for such calls on my store of popularity,” he said. “It’s bad enough to have the natives potting at one at intervals, but if the subalterns started things would get too hot even for me.” He threw back his shoulders. “All the same, I won’t have any tea. I’m upset, and you have upset me, and the best thing I can do is to get Sarah Jane to jolt me for a quarter of an hour. I shall then be too sorry for myself to be sorry for anybody else. You understand? You forgive me?”

“You are sorry for David?” she asked, taking his outstretched hand with the smile still in her eyes.

“Yes, I am. I can’t help it. It must be rough luck to fail a woman like you. And the fact that it isn’t his fault doesn’t make it better. If he had been what you expected—well, he would have been a lucky dog. As it is—”

“As it is?” she interrogated as he broke off.

“He isn’t.”

“I shall do my duty,” she answered.

“Hum, that’s precious little in this world,” he retorted. He went out on to the verandah and beckoned to the syce. “All the same, I shall do what I can for the little chap,” he went on. “I at least shan’t be able to forget that he is your son—hullo, what was that?”

She looked at him in astonishment.

“What is the matter? Did you hear anything?”

“I thought I did a sort of cry. This heat makes one’s nerves hum. Well, good-bye. I’m grateful to you for telling me all that. It has upset me, but I’m glad. Poor little chap!”

She watched him swing himself on to Sarah Jane’s patient back and canter down the short avenue which led into the high-road. At the gate he turned in his saddle and saluted her and she waved back. But her eyes had passed beyond him to the plain and the distant hills, and the smile which had lingered in their depths vanished wholly.

CHAPTER III

THE SPARTAN'S SON

MRS. HURST believed herself alone, and for a long time she stood motionless on the verandah watching the sky change from intense blue to gold and from gold to crimson. Across the broad path a clump of bushes threw cool shadows over the long grasses and offered a pleasant resting-place, but she never looked in their direction. Nothing no instinct warned her. And presently, just as the sun began to sink in an apotheosis of fiery glory behind the hills, she turned with a proud, almost challenging movement and reentered the bungalow. Then the grasses rustled and moved as though a breath of wind had passed over them, and again all was still.

But a boy lay there with his face buried in his arms. He had been there all the afternoon, his chin supported in the palm of his hand, watching her. Not for a moment had his eyes left her face, and there was something in their expression which was almost painful an intense, unchildish understanding, at first full of tenderness and awestruck worship, and afterwards terrible by reason of its completeness. Nobody could have said that he formed a "pretty picture," and there was no denying that he was ugly. He had ain there like a grotesque little brown fawn, and watched, the black, curly hair hanging in disorder over the low forehead, the dark, penetrating eyes staring out from heavy, overhanging eyebrows. The eyes were, indeed, the only possible points of interest in a sallow little face, which was neither pleasing nor even redeemed by the natural charm of youth. And yet it was expressive enough. As he had watched, it had been as though a skilled but unseen sculptor were at work, silently and scarcely perceptibly remodelling the clay beneath his fingers.

At first, as the judge had cantered up the avenue, it had been a boy's face which had peered through the long grasses not, as it has been said, pleasing, but still young, with possibilities of childish humour lurking behind the mask of weariness and ill-health. Then, as a woman had come out on to the verandah, a fire had been kindled. It had burnt brightly behind the ugly features and transformed them, making them not beautiful but pathetic, and for the first time there had dawned that expression of absolute understanding which afterwards was to become terrible. The woman's voice had floated to him on the still air; he

had heard every word distinctly, and his eyes, fixed greedily on her unconscious face, had seemed to drink them straight from her lips. And then, suddenly the light had gone out. He had not moved, nor had great change come over his expression. But the life had gone. It had been as though the sculptor had swiftly cast his work in bronze and left it there without regard for the worth or beauty of his creation. Only the eyes had betrayed that the boy still listened. They had never flinched nor left the stern, white face opposite them, and in their piercing blackness there had been a dumb, bewildered agony.

But he had lain quite still until Mrs. Hurst had gone back into her room, and then he had fallen silently forward on his face. He did not cry only every now and then a tremor passed through him, so convulsive and violent that it shook the frail little body like a vessel in the teeth of a terrific storm. Even that was not for long. Presently horse's hoofs sounded once more on the gravelled avenue and he struggled to his feet. His eyes were dry, but what little childishness there had been in his face was gone stamped out and it was a tired old man that stumbled out from amidst the bushes. A girl, mounted on a tubby but energetic pony, had ridden up to the verandah, and he went hesitatingly to meet her. The movement revealed his hitherto concealed infirmity. One leg was shorter than the other and caused him to limp, not badly, but perceptibly, and his shoulders seemed too broad for the rest of his slender figure. The girl smiled and nodded.

“Hullo, David,” she said.

“Hullo,” he answered. His voice sounded unsteady and rough, and he held his eyes fixed on the ground. “Where's your boy?” he asked, after a moment.

She laughed.

“Oh, I don't know. I left him miles behind. He is so slow and stupid. I came to wish you a happy birthday, David.”

He looked up then, as though he thought she was laughing at him.

“Thank you,” he said. His face had brightened for a moment, and a faint flush showed itself in his sallow cheeks. “You look awfully jolly in that habit,” he said shyly. “I like it.”

“Do you?”

The fact did not seem to create a very deep impression on her, though she glanced down at herself with a sort of objective interest. The habit was of some light, khaki-coloured material, and so cut as to make her look older and taller than she really was. Moreover, she held herself very erect, and only when she had snatched off her helmet with a movement of impatience did she reveal herself as a child scarcely so old as the boy beside her.

But the contrast between them was almost startling. She was pretty, and her prettiness was of a kind that promised more in the future. Her features were small but regular, and her eyes, deep grey and almond-shaped, were unquestionably beautiful. But what distinguished her most from her companion was the youth, the health, and energy which seemed to radiate from her. Her laughter had poured out sparkling from an inexhaustible source of joyousness, and in every movement, in the very poise of the head, there was vivacity, courage, all the insignia of a strong, decided temperament.

But, as yet, her chief charm lay in her unconsciousness. She did not seem to know that she was pretty, or, if she did, the knowledge left her indifferent. Her hair, which was fair, with a decided tendency to waywardness, had become disordered; she tore off the ribbon very much as she had removed the helmet with impatience, as though the inanimate objects had personally annoyed her and tied it up again in a screw, which was vastly unbecoming. Then she shook her head, evidently to assure herself that everything was firmly in its place.

“Mother said I was to come and play with you,” she remarked abruptly, “but I met Dick on the way, and we raced. I won, but it made me late. I suppose I shall have to be getting home now or they will be frightened. Anyhow, I’ve wished you a happy birthday, haven’t I!”

“Yes—thank you.” He turned his face involuntarily towards the red west. “It’s nearly over now,” he said, with a little twisted smile.

“Did you get nice presents?”

“Yes, mother gave me a model engine, and Major Halstone a book on the Indian Mutiny.”

She laughed again.

“How funny!”

“Why funny?”

“Oh, I don’t know. It just struck me you wouldn’t care for those sort of things.” She turned her pony’s head round to the gate. “You are to give mother’s kind something or other to your mother,” she went on. “I’m sorry I haven’t time to play with you.”

“It doesn’t matter —I’ll just go as far as the gate with you.”

He had laid his hand on the saddle, but the impatient pony broke into a trot, and, in his stumbling effort to keep pace, he nearly fell.

She reined in immediately, with a movement that was not without impatience and the blood surged into his sallow cheeks.

“Sorry!” he apologised. “I’m no good at running.” They relapsed into a walk, and suddenly he looked up at her. “I expect you are quite glad you haven’t got to play with me, aren’t you?” he asked.

“Why?”

“Well, you don’t much care for it, do you?”

She replaced her helmet, and adjusted it so that her eyes were shaded from the horizontal rays of sunlight.

“Oh, I don’t mind; but I always win, you see.”

“You only like to be with people who win?”

She nodded emphatically.

“Yes.”

“Dicky, for instance?”

“Oh, I can beat poor old Dicky at most things,” she retorted.

He hung his head.

“I don’t think I shall ever win at anything,” he said, almost inaudibly.

She did not seem to be listening. A sudden flush had come into her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled with some new thought.

“And after Christmas we are going to England,” she burst out impetuously. “Just mother and I. Our berths are already booked. Won’t it be fun?”

“I— I am to come too,” he stammered.

“You with us!” She stared at him, openmouthed.

“Yes—I’m awfully sorry. It would have been more fun if I had been Dicky.” His tone was apologetic. “But mother won’t—can’t go, and I am to be sent to school.”

“How jolly! Where are you going? My father and your father were at Eton. I expect you’ll go there, too.” He made no answer. His small, thin face was stony. “You’ll miss your mother, though,” she went on more seriously. “You’re awfully keen on your mother, aren’t you?”

Just for a moment the fire rekindled then died down.

“She is the loveliest woman in the world,” he said.

She did not deny the statement, but she appeared to ruminate on it. There was a faint pucker between her arched brows.

“It’s funny,” she said absent-mindedly, patting the pony’s sleek neck, “you like lovely things, and I like big things—it ought to be the other way round, I think.”

He let this piece of wisdom pass unanswered. They had reached the gate of the compound, but he still held her saddle, and a look of eager nervousness had come into his face.

“I say, Di,” he began, “you have lessons with Mr. Eliot, don’t you?”

She pulled an eloquent grimace.

“I should just think so,” she said. “I wish I hadn’t. His lessons are as dull as his sermons, and nearly as stupid. Only I suppose he can’t turn arithmetic quite upside down, like father says he does the Bible. He knows I should jolly well

find him out. I hate him.”

Her tone was annihilating, and the hearer felt that Mr. Eliot must have inevitably withered under it.

“He used to give me lessons, too,” David said, “but after a few times he wouldn’t. He said I wasn’t strong enough. So I don’t know much. I wish you’d ask him something for me.”

“What is it? I’ll ask him when I don’t know an answer,”

“Ask him what a Spartan is.”

“A Spartan?” She frowned thoughtfully. “I’ve heard of that. It must be something I liked, or I shouldn’t remember it. Yes, I know. Spartans were people who were fond of sport and exercise and hardship, and never gave in when they had a pain. They hated luxury and all that sort of thing, and when they had babies who were weak or deformed, they just killed them.” She gave a soft chuckle. “I told Mr. Eliot it was a very good idea, but he said it was wicked. I expect he knew they would have drowned him at once.” She was too amused at the idea of Mr. Eliot’s probable end to notice her companion’s face. It had grown very pinched.

“They were a wise people,” he said. “I wonder if their mothers were sorry sometimes.”

“I expect they were ashamed,” she decided. “However, one can always get new babies if the first ones aren’t nice.” She urged her pony a little on one side, as though to free it from the boy’s grasp. “I must go, David. It’s getting quite dark, and father says it isn’t safe to be out after sunset. There are all sorts of horrid natives about just now dacoities and secret sects, and all that sort of thing. I’m not afraid, but mother gets fits. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye—and Di, don’t say anything about my coming to England. Perhaps I shan’t, after all.”

“All right—oh, here, I had almost forgotten!” She put her hand in her pocket, and drew out a battered-looking object that had once been a rose. Unfortunately, it had suffered in its close quarters, and there was little left but the stem and a few crumpled petals. She considered it ruefully. “I am sorry. It was so pretty in

our garden. It's rather faded now, I'm afraid."

He took it from her quickly.

"Never mind—it was awfully good of you to give it me. Thank you!"

He was close to her, and again she looked down into his face and started.

"You do look green!"

He gave a little, unsteady laugh, and the expression, which in an old face would have been passionate, faded.

"I'm tired—I'm nearly always tired," he said. "Good-bye, Di!"

"Good-bye!"

She shook the reins and the pony broke into a smart canter, whirling up the dust under its impatient hoofs.

David waited until the white clouds subsided, and the upright, energetic little figure had disappeared, but even then he did not move immediately. There was something forlorn and helpless in his attitude, as though he did not know where to turn or what to do. His gaze wandered over the yellow cornfields to the jungle-clad mountains, and rested there wistfully and questioningly: they seemed to hold for him some secret, some mystery which he would fain have solved.

"Little Sahib! Little Sahib!"

Still he did not move. The ayah, who had been gazing curiously round from the verandah, came towards him with short, quick steps, which set her silver anklets jungling musically in the stillness. She had a pretty, dark little face, no longer young, and her white teeth gleamed as she touched the boy's arm.

"Little Sahib must come in—Mem-Sahib ask for him. It is not safe here after dark."

He shook his head, but did not look at her.

"That's all right, Sita. I'm glad you've come out. I want to know all about things

—and about the Temple.”

“The Temple?” The smile died, and gave place to a look of blank stupidity.

“What Temple, Little Sahib?”

“You know out there.” He pointed towards the hills. “You told me about it one night when I was ill, and you wanted to send me to sleep. You called it the Buried Temple—the Temple to the Unknown.”

“It lieth in ruins,” she answered, and her dark eyes flashed involuntarily in the direction which he indicated. “Twelve years ago last night the Lord Sahib, thy father, fell beneath the knives of the priests who worshipped there—he and all those who went with him. In the dark he dragged himself through the forest hither to the very doors of his house, and there he died. And on the morning of the next day thou wert born.” She clasped her hands with a gesture of horror.

“The face of the gods was turned from the Mem-Sahib in those hours; the curse of the evil spirits lay upon her. For a little I prayed to Parvati that the soul of thy father might enter into thee to bring her comfort. Ai, I offered incense and sandalwood at the Holy Shrine. But it was not to be. The curse was on her and hers.”

David winced. She had spoken in Hindustani, but he understood her, for it was the language he had heard from his first hours.

“Tell me more,” he commanded.

“Little Sahib, I know no more!” Nevertheless, the dullness had gone out of her face, and she went on rapidly. “In those days it was a great Temple. It stood alone on the high mountain, above the forest, like a god among a million worshippers. And at morning the sun kissed its altars from the east and at evening from the west. Its courts were full of pilgrims holy Yogi who came on their knees from the banks of the Mother Ganges and its priests were wise and powerful. In those days Vishnu was god.” Her voice rang with a suppressed excitement, and then died down. She shook her head impatiently, for she was a Sudra and had been baptized into the Christian faith. “But now all lieth in ruins, and Vishnu is no more,” she finished in a subdued tone.

“You call it the Buried Temple—why?”

“I know not.” The old blank look clouded her face and her eyes sought the

ground. "It is but a name, like many others."

"And it was there they killed him!" the boy said, half to himself. "What had he done to them, Sita?"

He did not see the subtle smile that flashed across her features.

"Little Sahib, the people were angry in those days. They did not love the Feringhi as they do now, and it was said among them that the English missionaries had stolen the son of the High Priest, Nanu Balagi. It may be that it was a falsehood, for Balagi had many enemies; but the Brahmins believed it, and laid plots for their revenge. Lai Pandra, an accursed Mohammedan, betrayed them, but they were warned. When the Lord Sahib came they killed him."

"That was unjust treacherous! He at least had not stolen the child!"

"The secrets of God are holy," she answered, with her eyes still fixed on the ground. "The Lord Sahib had seen what it is not for the unholy to see."

"Are we the unholy? I wonder what Mr. Eliot would say!" He gave a little laugh, and then grew grave again. "But now there are no more priests, no more worshippers, no more sacrifices?"

She drew a little closer. Her voice dropped suddenly to a whisper.

"Little Sahib, it is written in the Veda the altars of the gods shall not go unserved, the sins of the faithless shall not hold from them for ever the homage which is theirs. What should I know? Am I not as the Mem-Sahib, worshipping as she worships? Yet even I hear whispers, and it is said that at night-time, when the moon rises, the unsullied souls return for an hour from Swarga to kindle the dead fires, and pour out sacrifice before the altar. Thus shall the sins of the people be washed pure as the lotusflower." She checked herself. "Such is the superstition of the ignorant," she muttered.

David Hurst shivered.

"Has no one ever seen?" he asked, awestruck.

"Who should dare, little Sahib? Ai, the priests, perhaps, but they hold their peace. They alone know."

“Surely one of us would dare!” he broke in proudly.

Again the same swift, enigmatic smile.

“Little Sahib, thy father was a brave man. He dared. It is death. For who shall look on the eternal and live? Ah—” She gave a quick, dissatisfied gesture. “I talk as one who has never known the truth. I am old. The memory of things past arises at nightfall. Come, little Sahib. It grows dark.”

He shook himself free, gently but firmly.

“No, no, Sita, I want to stay out here. It will do no harm, and my mother will not miss me long.” His lips trembled. “Go, Sita!” In his thin voice there was a note of authority which Anglo-Indian children are quick to learn.

The ayah drew back.

“It is well, little Sahib.”

She turned and glided into the shadows. So soft were her movements that her footsteps made no sound on the loose gravel, and only the delicious tinkle of the silver ornaments betrayed her whereabouts. David Hurst waited until the silence had reclaimed its sovereignty; then he crossed the road and entered on the narrow path which led through the cornfields to the hills.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE BURIED TEMPLE

THE red rim of the sun had already disappeared as David Hurst set out upon his journey, but a fire still burnt in the west, and reflected itself in a sombre glow over the plain and into the face of the lonely traveller. The shadows of the rapid Indian nightfall began to rise. They hovered, delicately lilac, on the outer courts of the sunset, and signalled to their violet and purple sisters who crept up from the east and north, and south, waiting for the moment when they should close in over the drowsy earth. For a fleeting second light and darkness shared their dominion, and in that time of transition David Hurst stood still and waited. He had come fast, and his lips were parted in breathless sobs; his thin face was lifted to the sky, where the first star had risen resplendent, and in his eyes there was a kind of challenge. And suddenly he began to speak aloud. His hands were clenched, rigid at his sides, and his voice rose scarcely above a whisper, but every inflection, every word, was weighed; the frowning brows proclaimed a desperate, incoherent thought struggling for utterance.

“God, I don’t know who you are or where you are. I didn’t even love you until perhaps now. I didn’t love you in the church nor the you Mr. Eliot told me about. You were not beautiful enough. I loved my mother and Di. They are beautiful I never thought of anything else but them. I loved them so. I didn’t know God, they don’t want me I’m not any good to them I’m no good at anything. I’m lame and ugly, and stupid, and a coward. I quite understand. I couldn’t love myself. I hate ugly things. And mother does too. I know how it feels. Take me back! I couldn’t bear it. I should always be thinking people hated me and I should always be alone. Nothing beautiful could ever care for me or or belong to me. And I’m no good. I’ve never prayed properly to you before. I didn’t love you. You were church and Mr. Eliot and dull psalms and Sundays. I didn’t want you. But I want you now. Out here you are different. You are the stars and the sky, and you are beautiful. You are a long way off, but I haven’t any one else but you now. I’m not going on my knees to you worshipping, as Mr. Eliot calls it because I’m sure you can’t care for that sort of thing. I shouldn’t I should much rather people stood up and looked me straight in the face and said what they wanted, and didn’t try to butter me up first. Of course, I know you may not care about me either, but I think you ought to be sorry when you make mistakes and put ugly,

helpless things into the world where they are no good. Take me back to you, if you can, and make me different strong and clever and like my mother, so that she and Di won't hate me and and laugh at me. For Christ's sake—" he broke off, and finished "—because you made me."

For a moment he stood quite still, but gradually the expression of strained concentration passed, the clenched hands relaxed. It was as though all his strength had fought in that effort at self-explanation, and, now that he had succeeded, a kind of peace crept over him. And presently he turned and went on his way. The path widened. The cornfields fell back on either hand like a receding tide, and out of the open space the dark outline of a native dwelling stood out sharply against the background of fading sunset. David Hurst turned a little to the left so as to pass behind it. No lights burned, but he could hear the sound of voices raised in a dull, monotonous chant such as the Brahmans sing at eventide. David Hurst stood and listened, fascinated.

"O Goddess, who dwelleth on the mountains of the west,

Daughter of Brahma, mother of all the world,

Thou child of the lotus-born, from whom cometh joy and sorrow,

Hear us, receive our prayer!

Thou art more lovely than the golden dawn,

Thou art stronger than all gods,

Thou art purer than the lily.

Hear us, receive our prayer.

Illustrious mother, we bring our sacrifice.

It is thou who receiveth and thou who offereth.

We are of thee and thou art of us :

Receive us into thy Paradise!"

The song died into a momentary silence. Then the silver tones of a gong sounded, floating melodiously on the still air to the unseen listener, and four whiterobed figures passed out from the doors of the hut. For a little they stood with their faces raised to the sky in an attitude of solemn contemplation, then turned and followed the path to the hills. David Hurst drew back deeper into the shadow, but he need not have feared detection, for they seemed neither to fear nor suspect the presence of a watcher. He heard their footsteps grow fainter and the soft, full note of the gong, struck at regular intervals, hovered on the stillness like some dreamy memory of sound. Then the distance enveloped it utterly, and there was silence.

David Hurst crept out of his hiding-place. Clumsily but cautiously, he made his way along the edge of the cornfields, his eyes straining through the luminous darkness, his breath coming in painful, smothered gasps. His lame foot dragged, making a curious, shuffling sound, and when he came once more in sight of the four natives, he stopped a moment and waited. But they had not heard him. They went on in stately silence until the cornfields were passed, and the jungle rose before them like a black wall ascending to the stars. Then once more the gong was struck, louder, more emphatically, as though in its sonorous tone it thought to embrace the world.

“We worship thee, O Goddess. Thou art Brahma;

Thou art the Creator and the Created.

From thee poureth forth the light.

To thee the light returneth.

Receive us into thy Paradise.”

The night of the jungle engulfed them. Here the grey, ghostly light which hung over the cornfields faded into impenetrable gloom. Only overhead, through the twisted branches of the trees, the stars flashed down their signals with malicious brightness.

David Hurst hung back, shivering. Panic and a despairing resolve battled over him. For him this was the end, the place of terror from which no man returneth. He looked over his shoulder. Beyond the stretch of silver plain he could see the warm lights of the town, and, standing apart, the solitary beacon of his home. So

might his father have turned and looked back, twelve years ago. He was going along the path his father had trodden but for other reasons not because he was brave, but because he was a coward; not because he was the most worthy to face danger, but because he was worthless. He did not reason it out. Instinct and a blind pain guided him to this desperate self-annihilation. "A weakling a coward," Mrs. Hurst had said, and he knew it was true. His limbs ached with fatigue; fear of the Unknown froze his blood. But just for once for the first and last time he was going to act as though it were not true. Afterwards there was going to be no afterwards but the disgrace would be wiped out. His mother would not have to compare him to those others who bore the name honourably, and be ashamed. He wondered what they would think when they found him there, where it was death to go. Perhaps, after all, she might be a little proud.

He turned back resolutely to the jungle and stumbled on. There was no path now. Thick undergrowth spread itself over the stony ground; the branches of the trees struck him across the face and clutched at him with thorny hands; something moist and slimy writhed under his foot and went hissing into the darkness. The steepness of the ascent caused his breath to come in short, stabbing gasps, and the blood throbbed at his temples; but he never lost sight of the figures which guided him. To his dazed eyes they seemed to float through the gloom like grey ghosts borne by some mysterious wind. A moment later they disappeared. Then terror won the upper hand: the horror of the loneliness, the darkness, the intangible fastened on him like a fanged monster. A scream parted his lips, but was smothered by an effort of the will which left him shaking as with the ague. No not that not to be found because he had cried out like a coward. He felt that the half -uttered scream would have been stamped on his dead face and that his mother would have seen and turned away with scorn in her eyes.

He plunged on blindly through the thicket, hypnotising himself against fear and exhaustion, and suddenly the jungle fell behind like a nightmare and he stood in a vague, half-lighted world that was as the dreamy transition from sleep to wakefulness. Then, little by little, his vision cleared. He saw above him the clear, bejewelled heaven and before him the last ascent, barren of all vegetation and lit by the pale silver of the rising moon. The shadowy figures of his unconscious guides were once more visible but they were no longer alone. From every side others joined them, till it seemed as though a white river flowed up towards the summit, silent save for the reiterated note of the gong, which rang clearer, more compelling in the purer air.

David Hurst waited until the procession had disappeared over the brow of the hill, then followed cautiously. Fear still dogged him. His own shadow, gigantic and misproportioned, seemed to him a silent, gliding enemy who mocked his stumbling movements; in the open space he felt more alone, more helpless. Yet he went on steadily, his will mastering his weakness, a dawning curiosity lending him a new cunning. For he did not want the end to come not yet. There was something for him to see which he had not seen, something wonderful, terrible, the Eternal which Sita had said no unhallowed eye could gaze on unpunished. The punishment was death; his father had been punished and he too would be punished. It was a good thing because he was worthless.

But fear dogged his elbow and called to him to turn back whilst there was yet time, and he went on faster with set teeth until the summit of the hill was reached and the goal lay before him. He crouched in the shadow of a rock and gazed motionless and breathless.

In sheer, passionate wonder, he forgot to be afraid. Out of the bare, arid plateau, a temple arose and stood outlined against the azure sky in towering, majestic solemnity. It was in part roofless, a temple in ruins, yet in that uncertain, magic light magnificent, its tragic disfigurements hidden, the nobility of its contour revealed, magnified, purified. Beyond the first Gopura long rows of stately pillars strove upwards to the stars, and between them David Hurst saw the shimmer of water, a silver mirror in which were reflected the thousand mysterious, swift-moving shadows of the night.

In the second court one central pillar towered above its fellows, and from its summit a flame flickered like a red, twisting tongue, and cast a lurid glare over the dense mass beneath, which moved and swayed as a cornfield sways in a high wind, to the sound of a weird, monotonous music. The wailing tones seemed to rise from the bowels of the earth and swept phantom- , like over the plateau down to the distant jungle which lapped the sides of the mountains in dark, sullen anger.

“Glory to Brahma! Thou art the Veda. Thou art the Truth. Thou art the Supreme Being! Thy face is marvellous. Thou art the face of the world. We offer thee our adoration!”

The loud voice died into silence. David Hurst had stumbled across the intervening space, creeping from pillar to pillar till he reached the entrance of the

second court. The shadow of the Gopura hid him. He saw then that the swaying mass was a serried crowd of men and women who knelt before the altar at the base of the central pillar, their faces bowed to the ground, their hands spread out in an attitude of supplication. One figure alone stood upright, a man's figure, clad in some white, priestly garment which accentuated the dignity and power of his bearing. His face was turned away towards the open space at the west, but his voice rang out sonorously above the discordant music.

“Daughter of Brahma, beloved of the gods, thou who hast deigned to revisit thy altars, appear unto us now, who worship thee!”

Then there was silence, intense and oppressive. As though the wind which had swayed them lulled for a moment, the kneeling crowd remained motionless, their heads lifted and turned towards the low-built sanctuary at the end of the court. Hitherto it had been wrapped in shadow, apparently deserted, forgotten; now, as the Brahman raised his hand, the doors were opened and a flood of torch-light poured out into the semi-darkness, struggling with the white moon-rays and throwing distorted reflections on the mighty pillars. The dark, illuminated faces were tense, frozen with expectancy; but still there was no sound, no ripple of movement passed over the serried ranks of worshippers. Then, swiftly, the torch-light was blotted out, lithe, graceful figures glided out into the open space, their hands clasped above their heads, their bodies moving rhythmically to the soft music of the bells which were fastened to their slender limbs. Moonlight, the flame behind and the grey reflection from the high pillar illuminated them, revealing every feature, every line which the clinging draperies betrayed rather than concealed.

The dancers came on, swaying from the ankles, their steps almost imperceptible, till they stood within a few feet of the altar. There they stopped. Their feet seemed rooted to the ground, but their movements grew swifter; there was a suppressed, terrible violence in their gestures which appalled and fascinated. A band of musicians had followed them out of the sanctuary, but they did not play. In silence save for the tinkle of the bells, the Temple Dancers swayed backwards and forwards, their dark faces lifted unsmilingly to the moonlight which flooded down upon them in cold splendour.

David Hurst shivered; but the fear which possessed him was a new thing. Though he trembled, his blood was on fire. He would have turned and fled, but he was held powerless by a mysterious fascination. There was frenzy in the air. It

had its fierce source in the expressionless women's faces and in the dark eyes raised to the heavens in sombre, unfathomable contemplation. It passed like an electric current through the kneeling, watching crowd; it hung above them like a fiery spectre, waiting for the moment when it should break out in all its maddening, consuming force. It was the spirit of the Horrible, yet mingled with the Sublime, and no man in that moment could have told whether it were God or the devil who had inspired the fantastic scene before him. It was lovely and hideous, like the faces of the dancing girls, who were not beautiful, but transfigured by that same sinister, smothered passion; it intoxicated the senses and benumbed the mind; the order of things, purity, truth, mercy, were swept into a wild, shoreless sea; all thought, all humanity, were lost.

And the boy watching, suddenly forgot his fear either of the real danger or of himself; the spell held him. He waited as one waited for the final scene in some great drama, for the climax in some stormy symphony, breathless, self-forgetful.

“Daughter of Brahma, bride of Siva, appear unto us. who wait in patience for thee!”

The Temple Dancers divided into two lines and fell back on either side; a wailing note of music broke on the palpitating silence, and suddenly a great cry, which might have come from one throat, burst from the multitude:

“Daughter of Brahma, Sarasvati, hear us!”

They fell forward on their faces and David Hurst crouched against the cold stone wall of the Gopura as though swept back by some wild tide of convulsive emotion; but his eyes never left the torch-lit door of the sanctuary. The flaming entrance was once more blotted out; a shadow, immense and loathsome in its outline, passed out into the moonlight, and advanced slowly towards the altar. A dozen staggering natives bore the idol on their shoulders, but in that moment it was more than a mere brazen image: it was the embodiment of the Horror which hung intangible in the oppressive atmosphere, a living fiend whose hideous features, distorted and animated by the flickering light, grimaced at the distant shadows; and whose ruby eyes, behind which burnt a secret fire, glared, blood-shot and hate-filled, over the heads of the worshippers. The symbolic trident was poised aloft by one mighty arm as though awaiting the moment when it should be plunged into the heart of a quivering victim. Cruelty, Frenzy, Devilment had built themselves a monument to all eternity.

“Hail, Siva, Lord of the Worlds.”

It seemed to David that the lips of the idol twisted into a jeering smile, which changed slowly to a straight impassive line of cruel purpose as the bearers placed their burden cautiously on the ground. But still the terrific figure towered above the worshippers, who knelt motionless and silent, and the priest at the altar bowed his head.

“Siva, behold the bride whom the gods give thee!” A deep sigh, rising up from the heart of the earth trembled in the air. A thousand distraught faces were raised in straining expectation. Only the idol remained impassive. And yet in that moment its sinister power wavered. Something had come which changed the course of the seething passions, turning, if only for a little breathing-space, cruelty to pity, horror to an awestruck wonder.

As the fiendish in that strange scene had taken visible shape, so also the sublime, the beautiful, had arisen in tender majesty and for the moment conquered. It was a child's face which gazed out from the gorgeous, bejewelled palanquin over the bowed heads of the multitude. The moon, now at her zenith, sent a full stream of light on to the exquisite features, set in grave, gentle composure, and lent an additional splendour to the magnificence which bore down the childish shoulders. A shawl, of golden thread, covered in part the dark head, and fell in glittering folds to the waist; emeralds clustered across the forehead, hung from the tiny ears, and weighed down the baby hands clasped sweetly upon her knees. There were blood-red rubies in her girdle and about her neck; the stones sent out a reflection which surrounded her in a fiery halo; but it was not their beauty which held the eye. It was, above all, the face, with its perfect innocence, its ineffable sweetness. The tender mouth seemed to smile, but the eyes were fixed far ahead, and were full of a wondrous wisdom which was not the wisdom of earth. They seemed to linger over the memories of things seen not long before in a sphere whence she had come unconscious of the looming future, of life itself. So might the child Madonna have gazed back into her dreams, upheld by the same dignity, the same divine purity and grace.

David Hurst took an unconscious step forwards. He put his hand to his cheek, and found that it was wet with an emotion which lifted him for ever out of his own childhood. He had seen something more lovely than his mother, more lovely than the hungry pictures of his imagination. The barriers which had surrounded his young life had been broken down, and a new, undiscovered world

lay before him, rich in promise. The crushing loneliness was gone; intuitively he recognised a loneliness greater than his own.

“Daughter of Brahma, behold thy consort!”

The full, sonorous voice broke the spell. David Hurst crept back into his hiding-place. The Temple Dancers swayed forward and surrounded the bronze god and the living goddess, who had been placed side by side. Their dance had grown wilder, as though the hideous face that glared upon them had rekindled the smouldering fire of demoniac passion to a blaze; but the child seemed not to see them. The grave eyes still gazed over to the lake, now sinking into shadow, the peaceful smile still hovered about the lovely baby mouth. And suddenly the dance stopped, the wailing music sank to silence. It seemed to David that God and the devil had fought, and that God had again won.

But the pause was short-lived. For priests, bearing in their hands lamps whose four-fold flame added to the uncertain light, advanced and took their stand beside the two raised figures. A brazier had been lighted before the idol, and a sweet smell of incense rose in the heavy, stifling air. The High Priest left his place at the foot of the altar, and, mounting the steps, held in readiness, touched the hand of the god with some golden ornament.

“Siva, thus shalt thou give unto thy bride the sacred tali!”

The blazing, jewelled eyes flashed as the lamps were raised for a moment above the bearers’ heads : it seemed a sinister answer had been given. The priest turned and fastened the emblem about the child’s neck.

“Sarasvati, the tali is bound about thee as a sign for ever. Daughter of Brahma, behold thy Lord!”

But she did not move; the deep eyes saw nothing of the hideous graven face beside her; the tiny hands lay loosely clasped in an attitude of unprotesting helplessness. And there was a dignity in the surrender which made the piteous mockery of it all less pitiable.

“Daughter of Brahma, receive our sacrifices! Flowers and sweet perfumes bring we unto thee. Saffron and sandalwood, rice and betel, are thine. Hear us when we pray. For we have waited long for thy coming, O Holy One. Evil has been done to thy anointed; the undefiled son of thy priesthood has been defiled, and

thy revenge has tarried long. But thy hour cometh, and, when it comes, be strong and strike till the shame be washed out in the blood of thy enemies.”

A murmur arose, at first low, but gathering volume as the Temple Dancers advanced, in their raised hands rich clusters of flowers, whose intoxicating perfume mingled with the incense.

“Sarasvati! Sarasvati!”

The murmur became a shout, a triumphant, passionate outcry, in which the note of frenzy sounded louder and more threatening. The kneeling crowd rose, and, like a sea breaking suddenly through a restraining dam, surged and eddied round the two central figures, their dark, distorted faces raised to the god who mocked at them and the child who saw them not. It seemed to the boy watching from the shadow of the Gopura that she looked at him, and that over the seething multitude they spoke to each other. Then god and goddess were raised on the shoulders of the carriers, and, guided by the priests with the four-flamed lamps, fought their way through the mad tumult to the Sanctuary.

For one last moment David Hurst saw the babyface; a shower of white rosepetals fluttered down through the moonlight and dropped like magic rain into her lap and on the dark, smooth hair. And then, for the first time, she smiled with a wondering, pathetic pleasure. Then it was all over. The terrific, hideous figure of the idol blotted her out, casting over her path a profound and menacing shadow; the gates of the Sanctuary clanged to; the Temple Dancers lost themselves in the crowd. One of them stood near the Gopura where David lay hidden. A Brahman, wearing the triple cord of his caste, forced his way to her side and caught her roughly by the wrist. He was a tall man, noble of bearing and feature, but his expression was that of a fiend. He spoke a few words, and the dancing-girl looked up at him and smiled. Then both disappeared.

David Hurst closed his eyes. He felt nauseated, though he did not know why. Something vile had brushed against him and he strove to shut it out everything but the child who had smiled at the rosepetals. He knew that his own end was close at hand, but he felt neither fear nor despair. His own misery had sunk forgotten into a great sea of pity and tenderness.

And when he opened his eyes again he found that he was alone. The multitude had vanished; the moon had sunk behind the Gopura, and threw an immense

shadow across the empty court; the fire upon the pillar flickered and burnt low. Overwhelmed by the startling change, appalled by the silence, he stood transfixed, waiting for he knew not what. The shadows seemed to live. They moved forward and loosened themselves from the sombre background; they came across the strip of moonlight, and he saw then that they were men, evil-faced, with wild, dishevelled hair and torn, filthy garments, which proclaimed their caste. Their movements were swift and cautious, as though they feared detection, and one among them bore something across his shoulders a something which moaned and then lay still as he flung it roughly at the foot of the altar. For a moment they stood huddled together, then one figure separated itself from the rest and advanced with raised arms.

“Siva, great god of revenge and hatred, destroyer of all, not incense nor flowers nor betel nor the blood of goats bring we thee. Greater far is our gift. May it be well pleasing. Accept it and hear us! Blot out our oppressors who sully thine altars; humble their arrogance to the dust; let the blood of their first-born flow even as the blood of this our sacrifice. For they have exalted themselves above thy power, they have crushed us under an iron heel, and the secret places of their hearts are defiled as with the touch of a Pariah. Hear us!”

There was no reverence, no supplication in the low voice, but rather hatred and something not unlike a threat. The speaker bent over the prostrate figure, and again David heard the sound of a stifled moan. Then, as swiftly and as silently as they had come, the worshippers crept back into the darkness and disappeared. This time the silence and the loneliness was absolute, but many minutes passed before David moved. He felt that some hideous dream had come true; the stories of his ayah crystallised to a terrible reality. He had heard that these things had been and were no more, but the dark stain in the midst of the moonlight seemed to mock the boast. But he was bewildered, not terrified. This, then, was what his father had seen; it was to prevent this, perhaps, that he had laid down his life out of pity to save others, indifferent to himself. Twelve years ago! And now the son, who was a coward, stood before the same scene, before the same trial.

David Hurst came out of his hiding-place. He limped through the broad shadow of the Gopura, and knelt down beside the motionless figure. The altar, with its menacing, disfigured statue of some long-forgotten god towered over him, but he saw only the slender outline of the sacrifice, a native boy, scarcely older than himself, half naked, and bound hand and foot with a thin cord, which bit cruelly into the swollen flesh. David touched him, but there was no answering

movement. The eyes were closed, the dark, well-shaped head was thrown back in an attitude which seemed to express an apathy akin to death. Only when David's unsteady fingers had loosened the bonds a tremor passed over the unconscious face, and the eyes opened for a moment. They gazed up into the rescuer's face, blank and indifferent, but the freed arms stretched themselves out in an involuntary movement of relief, and a thin, dark stream trickled sluggishly from the wrist on to the stony ground. David Hurst saw it and understood. He tore off his drill-coat and ripped it from end to end. In less than a minute he had made a rough bandage, and saw, with a thrill of exultation, that the flow of blood ceased, and that in the dark eyes, still fixed on his face, there had kindled a dawning intelligence. The whole significance of it rushed over him. He was no longer lame and ugly and stupid and helpless. He was not a coward. A human life had hung on his strength and courage, and he had not failed. God had done better than to take him back. He had given him his chance.

"Come," David said in Hindustani, "come!"

The native made an effort to rise, but fell back with a sigh of utter weakness; and, using a strength which seemed to have been given him for that moment, David half dragged, half carried him into the shadow of the Gopura, and set him with his back against the wall.

"We must stay here until the light comes," he panted; "then we shall be safe, and I shall be able to take you home."

He remembered then that, only a few hours before, he had meant never to return; he had been homeless. But between then and now there lay a night and a great event. He knew that he would not again see the biting scorn in his mother's face nor the contemptuous friendliness in Diana Chichester's eyes. He had proved himself. God had been marvellously good. The native at his feet remained silent and motionless, apparently overcome by exhaustion; but the quiet breathing told that he lived, and David made no effort to arouse him. His eyes were fixed on the closed and silent sanctuary and a curious, unfathomable pain crept like a cold shadow into his heart. He thought he saw again a child's face smile across at him over the sea of mad human passion and two babyhands full of the fallen rosepetals.

"But now I shall save you too," he said, under his breath. "I shall never forget."

Thus he watched and waited until the moon sank and the stars died out and the dawn touched the topmost turrets of the temple with her flaming torch.

CHAPTER V

MR. ELIOT PROVES HIMSELF A JUDGE OF CHARACTER

IT was ten o'clock in the morning not a usual time to receive visitors and the expression on the faces of the three men standing about Mrs. Hurst's boudoir, not to mention the condition of their clothes, testified that something unusual explained their presence.

The room was small and feminine, but the femininity was neither typical nor very easy to define. The best one could say was that obviously it was not a man's room. There was a suggestion of the exquisite in every article of furniture, from the silk hangings to the Chippendale writing-table, with its solitary Copenhagen vase as ornament, but the rickety and unsubstantial were wholly absent. The table was made to write on and the chairs to sit in exceptional features in a lady's boudoir.

The judge, who had been standing for a full quarter of an hour, noted the safety of the chairs, and, with a sigh of relief, chose out the nearest for the reception of his bulky frame. He looked tired, and his dusty riding-boots told of recent exertions, but his small blue eyes were very alert as they flashed from Mrs. Hurst, who sat with her back to the light, to her son, who stood in the middle of the room, the object of general attention. It must be confessed that he did not cut an heroic figure. He was coatless. His clothes were ragged and dirty, and his small, sallow face bore a distinct and unromantic smear. There were heavy lines under his eyes, and his head, which at first had been held with a certain resolute dignity, now sank as though beneath some oppressive burden.

"So that is the story of your last night's adventure," Mrs. Hurst said suddenly, breaking the long silence. "It has been very interesting, David."

The judge winced, and even Captain Chichester, a dapper little soldier who prided himself on being "as hard as nuts," twirled the ends of his moustache in evident discomfort. The speaker's face was perfectly impassive, her tone expressed neither scorn nor irony, but nothing could have been more annihilating. David Hurst lifted his head for a moment, his eyes passed quickly from one to the other as though seeking some explanation, then dropped.

“I—I haven’t any more to tell,” he stammered. “I’m sorry if I frightened you, mother—” he broke off.

The fluency with which he had at first spoken had long since broken down beneath the unresponsive silence of his listeners. He had stammered out an incoherent enough account, dully conscious that he was failing utterly to make clear the wonders of all that had happened to him. He had meant to tell his mother everything, even to the conversation he had overheard, and his consequent resolve. He had reasoned that, now he had proved himself, there would be no more barriers between them. They would be able to meet each other with the perfect honesty and confidence of two people who, having misunderstood each other, mutually realise that they have been mistaken. But he could not lay bare the workings of his heart, in themselves tangled and incoherent, beneath the critical eyes of these strangers. That was to come afterwards, when they were alone. At present he could only tell the mere facts, and they were lay figures, without life or power to move. His part silence handicapped him; he held back the vital truth with a clumsiness which aroused no sympathy. The fire of his enthusiasm burnt out. Suddenly he felt very alone.

“And you really have no more to tell us, David?” Mr. Eliot asked. His tone was grave and significant, and David looked up quickly at him with a sullen suspicion.

Mr. Eliot was a big, heavily built man, with a square, clean-shaven face and a bullet head whose close-shorn covering of hair gave his whole appearance something foreign. He had thick eyebrows, but they were too fair to give his features any particular character, and the eyes beneath were small and curiously colourless. In his most violent and rhetorical moments they had never been known to light up or change their expression, and this was more noticeable as he was recognisedly very much in earnest. At the present moment his whole attention was centred on the boy before him. His own attitude was impressive, but the baggy, ill-fitting trousers and the retrousse nose were not, and David Hurst was more conscious of a vague uneasiness than of awe.

“That’s all,” he said briefly and not without a touch of truculency.

“Think, David. Remember, we shall all understand if you have, shall we say, exaggerated a little. At night-time one can so easily imagine things, can’t one?” He had become ponderously sympathetic; the hearer felt that underneath it all he

was saying, “Yes, I too was once a little boy just like you. I understand so well all you are feeling,” and David Hurst’s face should have lighted up at the condescension of this grown man. Instead, he started as though he had been struck.

“I— I don’t understand what you mean, sir,” he answered.

“My dear David, it’s just this the story you have told us is very extraordinary. It is so extraordinary that I and I feel that I confess the opinion of those others who have listened to it hardly know whether I can be sure of its entire correctness. I do not want to hurt your feelings, little friend. We all know what it is to have dreams and nightmares and how they cling to us as realities.”

He was being very kind, very tactful, but David Hurst had taken a stumbling step forward. He was not looking any more at the clergyman, but at his mother. His eyes were fixed on her face with fear and total bewilderment.

“Mother!” he said, “does he mean that he— that you don’t believe me?”

He spoke quite quietly and very slowly, choosing his words. Mrs. Hurst looked at him without the slightest change of expression.

“You had better go and wash your face and get some breakfast, David,” she said. “After so many excitements you will be hungry.”

“Mother!” the cry began in violent protest, ended in pathetic despair.

David’s eyes wandered round the room: they had become perfectly vacant and rather stupid-looking, and he made a little, uncertain movement with his hands as though he were groping for support. The judge remembered Mrs. Hurst’s description and stared out of the window. He was feeling absurdly, grotesquely miserable.

“You had better go, David,” Mrs. Hurst repeated.

The boy turned and limped towards the door. Fatigue made his infirmity painfully apparent, and his mother’s eyes never left him. On his way he passed quite close to the judge and nearly fell over that gentleman’s outstretched legs. A kindly hand was held out to catch him.

“Now then, young man, you’ll be breaking your neck next! And, look here, don’t wolf your breakfast. I’m coming out to see you eat it and have a chat with you. As too compris, as our French friends say?”

David smiled faintly at the judge’s time-honoured effort at facetiousness. Then he gently disengaged himself, and they heard his unequal, lagging step on the corridor outside. An uncomfortable pause followed his dismissal. The three men felt ill at ease in the face of Mrs. Hurst’s impassibility; she upset all their masculine ideas of what a woman should be under like circumstances. During that anxious night she had neither cried nor shown any alarm; she had taken an active part in the search, spending five hours in the saddle, and it was she who had eventually found David and his protege some few miles across the plain. She had picked him up with an unexpected and unfeminine strength and had ridden home with him, Captain Chichester and the half-unconscious native boy bringing up the rear. Afterwards she had listened to David’s story as a judge might have listened, the three men playing the part of a more or less intelligent jury, and, though they were all equally clear that David was romancing, they would have preferred it had his mother either believed or punished him. Her total lack of feeling was uncanny; it caused Mr. Eliot to lose something of his self-confidence, and, contrary to his custom, he left it to some one else to break the silence. But the judge was plunged deep in his own thoughts, and Captain Chichester had never been known to open his mouth except when forced to do so, so that the task fell to Mrs. Hurst herself.

“I have to thank you all three,” she said quietly. “You have been most good in your endeavours to find my son. I am really grateful.”

It was a formal little speech, which called forth a bow from the captain and an inclination of the head from Mr. Eliot. The judge looked at her and thought he had never seen her so extraordinarily beautiful. She was still in her white riding-habit, but her face bore no trace of the recent exertion; she might just have come out of her room, and the judge became uncomfortably conscious of his own dishevelled appearance. She saw him look woefully at his boots, and smiled with so much humour that the judge, who caught the change, felt a veil had been lifted behind which lay endless possibilities. He got up, tempted to make an appeal against his own judgment.

“We ought to be off and let you rest,” he said, “but before I go I should like to be a little clearer about this business. I know David’s account is improbable, but is

it impossible? Surely there is evidence enough to speak in his favour. The temple undoubtedly exists; there is the boy whom he said he rescued, with a nasty cut in the arm to back the story up. Queer and ugly things happen in India things we Europeans never get to see, although we pretend to see everything. As a matter of fact, we never have, and never shall, get to the bottom of the country we govern, and so we can always expect to have our theories upset.”

Mr. Eliot waved his arm. He was in his element.

“My dear Judge,” he said, “I can quite understand your desire to see David’s account in the most favourable light; but, if I may venture to say so, you have not had my opportunities of testing the matter. As you know, I am deeply interested in the customs of the people whose spiritual welfare I have so much at heart, and I can assure you that, according to my investigation, the practices which he says he witnessed are absolutely extinct, thanks to the progress of Christianity. Moreover, I happen to know the temple where these scenes are supposed to have taken place. There is a small building in it, answering to David’s description, but it is far too small to accommodate more than half a dozen persons. The idea of it containing crowds of dancers, let alone a big idol, is absurd.”

“But the boy—” the judge broke in impatiently.

Mr. Eliot sniffed. It was an unconscious mannerism of his which could be intensely irritating, but he had, as he himself said, risen from the ranks, and the habits of his kind had risen with him.

“Ah, the boy is indeed a problem,” he admitted. “No doubt he had been mishandled before David found him—he may even have given the idea of the sacrifice—these Hindus are born liars. But I shall find out, and, in the meantime, unless the parents show themselves, I shall take the boy into my mission home, and make a good Christian out of him. It is an untold joy to me to receive another lamb into the flock—”

Mrs. Hurst got up so suddenly that Mr. Eliot forgot the end of his sentence. Her face expressed a curious mixture of amusement and annoyance.

“You are perfectly right, Mr. Eliot,” she said. “Though I appreciate the judge’s efforts to vindicate David, I confess I have not the slightest doubt that David has yielded to the temptation to make a hero of himself. Unfortunately, he is not cast

in the heroic mould. And now you must come to tiffin. You must all be desperately hungry.”

Neither the judge nor Captain Chichester had had the slightest intention of remaining, but they followed her obediently out of the room, Mr. Eliot bringing up the rear. No sooner had the curtains fallen in their place than a big arm-chair by the window was pushed violently on one side, a fair, dishevelled head made its appearance above the top, and a very flushed face distorted itself into a fearful grimace, evidently intended for the reverend gentleman's back. Then Diana Chichester made her full appearance, and ran out on to the verandah.

“David!” she called.

He was not to be seen, but, having escaped the vigilance of her ayah and walked the whole way from the station, in order to take her share in the excitement, she was not now to be baulked. Eventually, she found the object of her search at the front of the bungalow, leaning with his elbows on the verandah rail.

“David,” she repeated, and shook him by the arm. He did not turn or look at her.

“What is it?” he asked indistinctly.

“I've been hunting everywhere for you. I want to talk to you. I came over first thing this morning, and when I saw them all coming back, I hid. I knew they'd send me home, or something. So I heard everything. David, that was a fine story you told. I didn't know you could tell stories like that. I'd have come oftener to play with you if I had known. But, David, what did you really do?”

He remained silent, and she put her head forward, trying to catch a glimpse of his averted face.

“You might have known they wouldn't have swallowed it,” she went on, determined not to let the conversation drop. “Mr. Eliot noses out a tarradiddle at once — it's a bad sign, I think, when people always find out other people. Anyhow, he's gloating over your little nigger-boy like I did that day I caught that big beetle do you remember? He's looking to take him into his school, and make a good Christian out of him. Won't the little beggar squirm—”

David Hurst swung round suddenly.

“Mr. Eliot’s not to have him,” he said. “He’s mine —I saved him—”

“You saved him? But they don’t believe you— nobody does. And Mr. Eliot’s got hold of him and won’t let him go. Why—” she stopped short and her tone changed “—you didn’t expect them to believe, did you?”

A spasm passed over his face. His lips quivered, but no sound came forth.

“David!” she exclaimed. “It wasn’t true!” She stood staring at him, adjusting herself to this amazing point of view with feminine quickness. The light-hearted excitement had died out of her face: very dimly she realised that here was something which she had not hitherto known — suffering.

“David,” she said slowly, “if you tell me it was all true on your word of honour I’ll believe you. I promise you I will. And I’ll make father believe you.” She held out her hand. “You’ve only got to say.”

He did not take her hand. For one moment she thought he was going to strike it aside. His features were livid and convulsed, his nostrils distended. He controlled himself at last, but his eyes horrified her with their violent misery.

“I shan’t say,” he burst out passionately. “I shan’t ever say— not to you— not to anybody. I don’t care whether you believe, or or what happens. It’s all no good now.”

His voice broke. He turned from her and stumbled down the steps, too blind to know where he was going, too sick with pain to have any plan. His first thought was to get away from the prying, contemptuous eyes, and hide himself from their mockery for ever. But then he seemed to remember something, and, turning down a narrow path, made his way to the servants’ quarters at the back of the bungalow. He found the Hindu boy, seated crosslegged in the shade, an untouched bowl of milk and rice before him, his right arm bound in a sling. His eyes had been closed, but they opened as David approached, and lighted with the frantic distrust of a trapped animal. For a moment the two boys, divided by an unbridgeable gulf of race, but linked in that moment by an equal misery, stared silently at each other. Then David Hurst spoke. His voice was still rough, but the violence had gone, and beneath the roughness there was an anxious note of appeal and pity.

“I saved you,” he said slowly and carefully in Hindustani. “I thought I ought to

—that you would be glad. I thought that that afterwards I would be able to make it all right. I didn't know. I'm very, very sorry. I hope you will forgive me.”

He did not wait for an answer, but turned and limped back the way he had come.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

AFTER TWELVE YEARS

DAVID HURST had arrived in Kolruna. The stifling, exasperating journey from the coast lay behind him, and he stood on the low platform and listened to the confused clamour of tongues as an exile listens to long-lost but familiar music. Excited native bearers, laden with wooden bales, jostled past him, and he showed no annoyance. Passengers, native and European, shouted and gesticulated in the desperate search for their belongings, and he remained tranquilly in their midst, and waited he scarcely knew for what. He felt himself a passive spectator in a scene in which he had as yet no part, but which was in some strange way part of himself. The noise, the vivid colours, the very heat and dust, belonged to his innermost treasurehouse of dreams and memories. The drab years of his English life fell away from him, and he picked up the threads of his existence where they had once been broken off with a strong sense of almost physical comfort and relief. A group of white-clad English officers from a native regiment excited his attention. They were congregated round a returned comrade, a pleasantlooking man, whose fresh complexion spoke of a recent experience of English climate, and the sound of their laughter came to the solitary observer over the heads of the crowd. Presently they drove off in the two carriages which had been kept waiting for them by their native orderlies, and a few minutes later, with a shriek of warning, the train steamed out of the station on its way northwards, leaving behind a sudden and startling quiet. The dust, which had been raised in clouds by the momentary bustle, sank drowsily through the still air, and the few native porters who lingered over their work had the appearance of having been left behind by a miniature cyclone.

David Hurst looked round him and realised that he shared his loneliness with an equally desertedlooking European at the farther end of the platform. He was a tall, stoutly built man, immaculately dressed, and with a certain air of exaggerated alertness which seemed out of place in his sleepy surroundings. David Hurst stared at him with a growing sense of recognition. The stare was frankly returned, and, after a slight hesitation, his companion in distress came towards him.

“It’s David,” he said abruptly, holding out his big hand. “Or, if it isn’t David, I’m making a confounded fool of myself. Not that that would be anything new, but it’s a nasty feeling whose variety custom never seems to succeed in staling; so put me out of suspense. It is David, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s David all right. And you—you’re the judge, aren’t you?”

Hurst spoke with an almost boyish diffidence. He was feeling very young in that moment. The atmosphere, and, above all, the florid-faced man beside him, had swept twelve years out of his life.

“I was the judge,” came the good-humoured answer. “The Lord knows what I am now. But come along! I have my buggy outside, and my syce will look after your things. We have a bit of a drive before us, as perhaps you remember.”

Hurst remembered. As they rattled along the straight white road which led out of Kolruna to his mother’s bungalow, he was conscious of a remembrance that was not without pain. Instinctively he kept eyes turned steadily away from the distant hills.

“I suppose my mother is all right?” he asked presently.

“In the best of health—never ill,” was the laconic answer. “She would have come to meet you this afternoon, but your telegram arrived rather late. She had some friends to tea, and she asked me to fetch you.”

David nodded. He had had no expectations, or, if he had, their constitution had been too feeble for their death to cause him any particular pain.

“It’s very kind of you to bother about me, Judge,” he said gratefully. “I’ve always remembered you best, somehow, and it did me good to see you. It was like meeting an old friend.”

“H’m yes. I’m glad of that—always had a weakness for you, David. Are you pleased to be back?”

“Very.” He answered the abrupt question almost passionately. “I’ve always wanted to come back. I’ve always felt I should be more in my element—less of an outsider here. I seem to belong to it, somehow, you know.”

“Yes, that’s a feeling most people have who fall into her clutches,” the judge observed thoughtfully. “You will notice I give India the feminine pronoun. It’s obviously correct. She’s a woman all over—inscrutable, fascinating, dangerous. Women are dangerous, you know, David infernally dangerous.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“Go on supposing, and don’t try to find out.” The judge flicked his whip carelessly across the horse’s back.

“You’ll miss your friends out here,” he added in his abrupt fashion.

“My friends? I have none to miss.”

“My dear fellow your school chums, college acquaintances, London acquaintances. Good Lord, you don’t mean to tell me you’ve got through twelve years all by yourself?”

“Pretty well.” He met the judge’s amazed questioning with unstudied simplicity. “You see, I’m not very popular.”

“Why the devil not, sir?”

“Oh, I don’t know. As a kid I was delicate—always bad at games and that sort of thing—and afterwards, when I got stronger, I tried to make up for lost time with my books.”

“H’m!” The judge sat grim and silent for a few minutes, then he shot a quick glance at the composed face beside him.

“How do you like your cousin, Harry Hurst?” he asked.

“I admired him. He is a fine type of Englishman—sound of mind and limb. And very chivalrous. He and his father were most good to me.”

“Indeed?” with a touch of sarcasm.

“Yes. I came somewhat as a shock to them. As my mother’s son, they expected something different. But they hid it splendidly. They never showed me what they really felt.”

“David, you’re a d– fool, with hypersensitive feelings that are always getting hurt. I don’t believe a word of it. Mrs. Chichester told me that she had heard from Diana that you were always in the thick of everything—a regular society lion.”

Hurst lifted his head, smiling faintly.

“That was only for a month or two before I began to work,” he explained. “I wanted to try my hand at everything, you see, and to give myself a fair chance all round. Then, afterwards, I felt it was waste—I wasn’t made to loaf, though Heaven knows what I was made for.”

“Don’t be cynical. I’m not cynical, and I doubt if even Heaven knows what my job on this confounded earth consists of. However, *revenons a nos moutons*, as the French say. You know, I suppose, that Diana is arriving next week?”

“Yes.”

“We rather expected you would come over on the same boat.”

“I have not seen Di for two years.”

“Oh!” Then, after another contemplative silence, “How long do you propose staying out here, David?”

“I don’t know. As long as my job lasts.”

“Oh, you mean with our Teutonic neighbour? H’m, you’ll have trying times if you stick to it. He’s the queerest fellow, and his friend is a shade queerer. Kolruna has been trying to puzzle them out for the last two years, and has given them up as a bad job. I suppose you know all about it?”

“I know next to nothing. Professor Heilig apparently wanted a secretary with some knowledge of Hindustani, and my mother told me about it. She knew pretty well I was no good for anything else, and when Professor Heilig wrote to me, I accepted. It gave me some excuse to come out here.”

The judge coughed and glanced sharply at the set and resolute face beside him.

“H’m, yes. Well, I hope you’ll like it. He has a friend Father Romney, as he calls

himself — a Roman Catholic missionary — and between them they set Kolruna by the ears. The Professor snuffles among ruined temples, and Father Romney amongst lost souls. The latter proceeding is especially resented by your old friend Mr. Eliot, who regards soul-snuffling as his special province. By the way, I suppose you remember him?”

“Yes,” David answered. His tone was sharp and repressed, but he went on with a seeming carelessness. “I have often wondered what became of that boy — the one I rescued—in my imagination, at least. Do you know anything of him?”

The judge burst into a short laugh of vexation.

“Rama Pal, you mean? My dear David, there is no chance of not knowing about him. He has turned out a marvel, a sort of enfant prodigue. Mr. Eliot regards him as his best example of the regenerate heathen. He has passed Heaven knows what exams., is going to study the law in England, if he can find some philanthropist to pay his expenses, and goes to chapel twice on Sunday. What more could you want? Personally, I distrust the fellow. But there, you will see him for yourself.”

Both men were silent for some minutes. Unknown to each other, their thoughts had reverted to a certain morning twelve years before, and the judge’s face wore, as it had done then, an expression of vague discomfort. Suddenly he turned to his companion.

“I told Professor Heilig about you and that—that temple affair,” he blurted out. “He was immensely interested. I think it was probably that which made him want to see you. He knows more about the religious part of this country than all our wise-heads put together.”

“Then the workings of my childish imagination will scarcely help him,” was the coldly deliberate answer.

They had left the last huts of the native quarter behind them, and already the white outline of Mrs. Hurst’s bungalow showed itself through the trees. Hurst drew himself upright and his face paled, though with what emotion the judge, who watched him narrowly, could not tell.

“You don’t look very strong, David,” he said with a friendly concern. “You’ll have to take care. This climate plays tricks with one.”

“You have stood it a good number of years,” the young man returned, but with a sudden softening in his tone. “Why do you stay on, Judge?”

“Me? The Lord knows.” He swung his horse between the compound gates with a sure hand. “Anyhow, what do you expect me to do? Settle down in Cheltenham, eh? No, thanks. I’m better here, acting nursery-maid to the youngsters and making myself generally useful. Besides, the place has got an infernal fascination for me can’t shake it off. Queer thing, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know—I can understand. But my mother told me you had been warned —”

The judge interrupted him with a snort of indignation.

“That’s that d doctor again!” he said viciously. “What business is it of his? If I choose to die a few years before he considers I ought to, I shall. It’s my life, I suppose, and my funeral. Anyhow, I have no respect for people who go about nursing their last days in hot-houses. There, get out; there’s your mother.”

They had drawn up at the verandah steps, and David Hurst clambered down clumsily enough from the high dogcart. For an instant a blur obscured his vision, and when it cleared he saw Mrs. Hurst standing in front of him, and behind her what seemed to him a sea of curious faces. But they passed or rather, seemed to resolve themselves into a pale background for the one figure of a woman. She kissed him. He felt the cold pressure of her lips on his cheek, and wondered dully why she had done it. The kiss made him indefinitely ashamed. He knew that it had cost her an effort, although no line in her pale face betrayed reluctance. She drew back from him and looked at him. With her the years had stood still. Their placid, unchanging course had neither softened nor weakened her; but he, her son, had become a man, and he stood before her now, awaiting judgment. But she gave no sign. She took him by the hand and led him up the steps to the verandah.

“This is my son,” she said quietly. “Colonel Chichester, you remember David?”

Colonel Chichester came forward with outstretched hand.

“Of course I remember,” he said briskly. “Pleased to see you.” He had stuck his eye-glass firmly in one bright eye, and his sunburnt, alert face expressed an awkward kindness. “It’s a long time since we saw each other last,” he added.

The remark was not original, but it served to bridge over a threatening silence.

Hurst was conscious that the little group of men and women lounging on the verandah were studying him, not unkindly, but with the aloofness of utter strangers. His mother formed no link between them and him. He saw Mrs. Chichester and went up to her, and, as he went, he knew that they had all seen that he limped, and his self-consciousness sent a wave of hot, unjust resentment to his cheeks. Mrs. Chichester kissed him. The embrace would have surprised him had it come from any other woman, but Mrs. Chichester did things which no one else did, and her acquaintance had given up feeling astonished, as an exhausting practice. She was a small woman, gracefully built, with a pretty face which age had withered but not deprived of a mischievous, monkey-like charm. Her bright, wide-open eyes were rarely fixed on any particular object for long, but their expression could change to an alert attention which could be unpleasantly disconcerting, and the startling acrobatics displayed in her conversation were apt to leave her listeners in a state of breathless confusion. She dressed well, but in a way that suggested that her clothes suited her more by accident than of intention, and, had it been a degree less attractive her mop of wavy grey hair might have been called disorderly. David Hurst was fond of her as fond of her as her erratic temperament allowed and at the present moment her bold welcome acted as balsam on the young man's vanity.

"Delighted, delighted, David," she said in her quick, indistinct way. "I wasn't expecting you, you know. Of course your mother told me you were coming, but I forgot the date. I always do forget dates dates and faces and names, they always slip my memory. So awkward."

There was a general laugh, in which her husband joined somewhat ruefully. It was an old story that Mrs. Chichester had once forgotten her own invitation to the Inspecting General, and at the last moment had regaled that surprised officer with a repast of her own invention. They had got on excellently, in spite of an extemporaneous and original "curry," but the next day at polo she had absent-mindedly cut him and afterwards apologised to the wrong man details which reduced the prim and exact colonel to a state of speechless frenzy. The laugh at her expense left her unmoved.

"You must tell me about Di," she went on. "She wrote to me that she had seen you, and I am so anxious to hear all about her. You know she is going to join us soon. And she has been having such a gay time especially at your uncle's house,

David. A delightful man and his son, too. Isn't he in the army? Somebody told me he was. Why didn't you go into the army, David? Oh no, of course not. How silly of me! It was the civil service, or something, wasn't it? A very good thing, I believe. You must tell me all about it."

Hurst glanced across at his mother. She was talking to the judge, but she was looking at him and he knew that she listened. He drew himself upright.

"I failed twice," he said.

He need not have answered, for Mrs. Chichester was not listening. Questions with her were only a means of leading on her own conversation, and answers were superfluous.

"I'm so glad," she said vaguely. "So nice for you."

"My dear little lady!" Colonel Chichester interposed, tugging nervously at his trim little moustache; but Mrs. Chichester's mind was already roving on faroff pastures, and she paid no attention to the customary protest. David Hurst stood forgotten at her side. She had not hurt him, but he had hurt himself, and he became suddenly aware that he was weary and travel-stained, and that he was out of place among these gay, well-dressed men and women. He went back to Mrs. Hurst's side. No one noticed him now. The slight excitement of his arrival had been swallowed up in the usual local gossip; but his sense of loneliness had increased to an almost physical discomfort.

"I think I'll go and change and make myself a little more respectable, mother," he said awkwardly. "Do you mind?"

She turned and looked at him with a grave attention.

"Of course not. You must be tired—I had meant to introduce you to Professor Heilig, but he appears to have wandered off, and another time will do. Dinner is at seven. I have asked the judge to stay."

"That's nice." The knowledge that he would not have to be alone with her on that first night relieved him, and he knew that it relieved her. "I'll go round to my room by the garden," he added. "I have a trifling headache, and the fresh air may take it away."

“I hope so. Do as you like. You are not a little boy any more.”

Hurst went down the verandah steps. He had caught a glimpse of the judge's face, and the latter's expression of mingled pain and pity had taken him back to the hour when he had first known that the mother he adored despised him. He went down the avenue to the gates of the compound. Evening was close at hand, and long cool shadows stretched themselves across his path. Behind him he heard the murmur of voices and Mrs. Chichester's gay, insouciant laughter; but all around him was the peculiar sleepy hush which heralds nightfall. On just such an evening he had set out on the great adventure of his life. It had ended in grey disillusionment, but it stood out in his memory with all the gorgeous colouring of an Eastern fairy-tale, and now in this atmosphere of subdued mystery it came back to him still as a half-discredited legend of his childhood, but intensely, painfully beautiful. He lifted his face to the distant hills and recognised them; but there was pain also in that recognition. They had remained unchanged. Now, as then, they kept their solemn watch over the wide valley, shutting within their forest-grown walls the secrets of centuries; but he who came back to them no longer answered to their appeal.

The boy who had found God in the sunset had lost the power of worship in a world which called God its own. Something in him had hardened, frozen. The world around him was as the sound of music to a deaf musician. The vibrations of its beauty beat against his physical being, but he heard no sound, though his whole soul listened with the longing of starvation. Yet at least he felt himself at peace. The hills no longer spoke to him, but their silence was majestic, contemplative, without contempt. To his embittered fancy they accepted him uncomplainingly as a part of the eternal, unknown Mother in whom they still had their being; they asked no explanation, no excuse from him; he belonged to them by all the ties of their common origin. Thus he reached the gates, and there paused, conscious for the first time that he was not alone. A man came towards him from out the shadows and stood quietly by his side, laying his fingers to his lips as though to command silence.

“You must be quite—quiet,” he said in an imperative whisper. “Listen and you will hear and see. They like it not when there are watchers. Do you not hear already?”

Hurst listened. In the far distance there was a faint throbbing sound like the regular beating of a drum and the high wail of a pipe. He glanced questioningly

at his companion, but the latter seemed to have forgotten his existence. He had drawn back into the shadow of the gateway, and David could only perceive the short, somewhat thick-set figure and the dim outline of a bearded face. But the stranger showed no inclination to talk, and David waited with the patient acquiescence of mental and physical weariness.

The sounds had grown louder. Along the broad white road a myriad of dancing lights had sprung up in fantastic disorder and come towards the bungalow, rising and falling like fiery insects to the beat of the discordant music. As they approached David saw that they were torches held by a crowd of half-naked natives who came on, now and again breaking into a loud, monotonous chant. In front, apparently leading them, a man marched alone. He walked quietly, with a grave composure which separated him from his noisier followers, and, as he passed, his eyes set immovably in front of him, David caught a glimpse of a face startlingly familiar. Where he had first seen it he did not know, but the clear-cut, even noble features, belonged to his memories as surely as did the hills, the valley, the very torch-light; even their expression, sombrely impassive, was known to him as something which had lain, temporarily forgotten, amongst his mind's pictures of the past. The man passed on, and gradually the throb of the drum died away in the distance, but David's eyes followed the dancing lights until the dusk swallowed them. He had half forgotten his unknown companion, and when he at last turned he was startled to find the broad shoulders almost touching his own.

“You saw that man?” the stranger asked eagerly.

David nodded.

“The leader? yes.”

“A fine face, was it not? An interesting face the face of a fallen Lucifer. Yes, I saw you thought as I do. That proved you are not a fool. But those—those—” He jerked his head towards the balcony with a ferocious contempt which found no words to express itself. “What, think you, do they know of such things? They laugh and they play their mad games, and the devil goes past with a lighted torch in one hand and a powder-cask under the other arm. Ha, do you laugh? I tell you that these half-clothed fanatics are as powder, and he who led them a devil. One day he will wave the torch, and then then you will not laugh, my young friend.”

“I am not laughing,” David said.

His interest was aroused, not only by the words, but by the face of the man beside him. In spite of the growing obscurity and the disguise of a heavy beard, David could still distinguish the stranger’s powerfully intellectual features the high forehead, the aquiline nose, the eyes deep-set under overhanging brows. He was badly, and even slovenly dressed, in a duck suit of doubtful cut, but his bearing, at once aggressive and dignified, silenced criticism. Quite suddenly he threw open the gate.

“I go,” he said. “I haf wasted an afternoon, and that is enough. Greet me your mother, Mr. Hurst. Tell her that I haf seen her son and that he will do. He is not a fool. Good evening.”

“Wait!” David Hurst came out into the road beside him. “You are Professor Heilig?” he asked. “I am, my young friend. And you, I take it, are my secretary to be.”

“Yes, but I don’t know how you recognised me or what reason I should have given you to suppose that I will do. Hitherto I have proved myself useless in every profession, and, beyond a smattering of Hindustani, know next to nothing. It is only right that you should understand that at the beginning.”

The German burst into a loud, deep-chested laugh.

“But, my young friend, your mother told me all I wanted to know. She was most explicit. When I heard that you had failed in your exams. I said in my heart, ‘There is hope for that young man,’ and when I heard that you played neither polo nor tennis, I said, ‘There is more than hope,’ and when I heard that you had seen what I believed only I had seen, and that they had laughed — why, then, I wrote to you. Dear God in heaven! what do I want with clever men or sporting men? I want a man with an immortal soul, who can see and feel below the surface over which these others go galloping in their thick-hided ignorance. Bah! yes, they do their work, but it is not my work. I need none of them. Come to me to-morrow, and we will begin. Good night.”

David Hurst walked quickly at his side.

“You say there are things which only you and I have seen,” he said. “What things?”

Heilig stopped and pointed one square finger to the hills.

“You know,” he said and his voice vibrated. “You haf not forgotten. They laughed at you as fools laugh at the truth, but you knew, and you haf come back. Sarasvati the daughter of the gods—you haf seen her as I haf never seen her—as child. And one day you shall see her as I know her—as woman. Then we will write books together on all we haf seen of the hidden wonders of a great religion and a great people. And then our friends over there will laugh and say that such things are no more in India. But we shall not heed them, for we are sufficient unto ourselves and need neither them nor their praise. What we haf seen is ours.”

He strode on, and Hurst let him go. The last words rang in his ears like the proclamation of a new life, like an appeal to something in him which, years before, would have answered in passionate gratitude. “What we haf seen is ours.” He knew that in that brief sentence lay a proud independence, the noble self-sufficiency of a character freed from all the trammels of the world’s judgment. But he was not free. What he had seen was not his not now. The world in which he struggled for his place had taken his greatest possession from him and thrown it back as an idle fancy, a faded unreality without worth.

And he too had ceased to believe, and the treasurehouse of his inner life stood deserted.

CHAPTER II

THE PROSELYTE

MB. ELIOT led the way into the third class-room of the missionary schoolhouse. It was a pleasant enough apartment, but not particularly commodious, and his visitors who crowded in after him had some difficulty in arranging themselves along the mud walls without treading on his scholars. The scholars, for their part, sat on their heels in nicely regulated rows and stared about them with the alert curiosity of so many monkeys. Their ages varied probably from seven to ten, and they were clad with marked attention to European ideas of decency; but the matter of their morning ceremony of purification was more doubtful, and Mrs. Chichester sniffed questioningly.

“My youngest,” Mr. Eliot said, with an introductory wave of the hand. “All baptized, my lord.”

My lord the bishop adjusted his glasses.

“Very nice very admirable,” he said benignly. “You have done wonders I shall not forget to mention your work when I return home.” He smiled at the rows of dark, unsmiling faces, and his glance passed on to the tall figure of a young man standing beside the teacher’s table. “And this?” he inquired tentatively. Mr. Eliot’s shiny features brightened with conscious triumph.

“My right hand,” he explained. “One of my first proselytes, my lord, baptized into the faith as Rama 6 81 Pal; has passed his examinations brilliantly in Calcutta, and is soon going to England to study for the law. A very encouraging case, my lord.”

“Indeed, yes,” my lord agreed. He drew nearer and nodded a kindly greeting.

Rama Pal answered by a slight inclination of the head. He was dressed in European clothes save for the white turban which set off in sharp relief the classic regularity of his features, and his slight, erect figure seemed to tower above the bent old man before him. Like his pupils, his face was perfectly emotionless, and his dark eyes passed over the small crowd of inspecting visitors with a quiet, unrecognising indifference.

The bishop coughed uncertainly.

“Ah judging from appearances, our young friend belongs to a higher caste than is usual among converts?” he suggested.

“belonged, thank God! “Mr. Eliot interposed, throwing a glance at the unresponsive rows of native babies. “We have no caste distinctions here, my lord. We are all brothers—”

“H’m yes, of course belonged, I should have said. Nevertheless, I fancy my supposition is correct, is it not? You see, I have some experience of the Hindu classes.”

He smiled, and the dark eyes sank to the level of his face.

“I belong to no class I have no caste.”

“But your family?”

“I have no family.”

The answers were uttered in an emotionless monotone which did not encourage. Mr. Eliot came to the rescue.

“Our friend has had rather a peculiar history, my lord,” he began, with the eagerness of a man who has a story to tell. “When he first came into my hands he was scarcely thirteen years old, and entirely ignorant of his antecedents. I might mention that he was found in a pitiable condition by Mr. Hurst, who is at this moment present. Mr. Hurst, I wonder if you remember your whilom protege?”

There was a general stir of awakened interest. Mrs. Chichester, who had been endeavouring to minimise her extreme boredom by distributing French chocolates amongst Mr. Eliot’s spiritual offspring, looked up mischievously into David’s face.

“Now you know why you were asked,” she observed, sotto voce. “Go along and play up nicely, David.”

Hurst took involuntarily a step forward. Not Mr. Eliot’s appeal, but the face of

the young Hindu convert had called him out from among the little crowd of wearied visitors.

“Yes, I remember very well,” he said. He half stretched out his hand, then let it drop limply to his side. Rama Pal did not move, and his expression remained impassively courteous.

“Very interesting quite a romance,” murmured the bishop. “An incident of that kind should bring the races closer.” He repeated his benign smile and passed out of the room, Mr. Eliot and the escort at his heels.

David Hurst lingered. The infantile converts fidgeted restlessly, but the two young men studied each other in silence, comparing, possibly remembering.

“I am glad to have met you,” Hurst said at last. “I have wanted to see you all these years.”

“The lord Sahib honours me. I do not deserve remembrance . ‘ ‘

Hurst sought in the dark and handsome features for the sarcasm which had seemed to glimmer through the veil of Oriental humility, but Rama Pal made no sign. His bearing was irreproachable at once respectful and dignified.

“Of us two it is perhaps I who least deserve to be remembered,” David returned impulsively. “You have done wonders so Mr. Eliot tells me and I have done nothing.”

“Yet I owe the lord Sahib everything life and all the benefits of the Christian faith. May I one day prove my gratitude!”

He bowed his head, but this time Hurst thought he had caught a flicker of light in the unfathomable eyes, and he half turned away, baffled and disconcerted.

“I did not want you to be grateful,” he said. “It was not for that I wished to see you. I have always thought of you as a kind of comrade. We went through danger together danger which no one else believes in. It seemed to me a kind of link. But perhaps the idea was all part of my imagination.”

“The bond between the lord Sahib and his servant is forged in memory,” was the suave answer.

Hurst said no more. The steady gaze, the unsmiling face, silenced him. He nodded curtly, hiding behind a sudden arrogance the bitterness of his disappointment, and went out into the street, where an ear-splitting outburst of shrieks, clashing of cymbals, and wailing wind-instruments had broken in upon the afternoon peace. The cause of the disturbance proved to be a religious procession composed chiefly of half-clothed Sudras who came down the narrow street at a fast trot, whirling up clouds of stifling dust and driving the little English party back against the walls of the mission house like straws before a torrent. A hideous, battered-looking idol swayed precariously on the shoulders of four of the more sober members, but not even its ludicrous ugliness or the clamour of its worshippers could detract entirely from the magic of the scene. It was all part of the surroundings, a living expression of the brilliant colouring, the combined picturesque loveliness and filth which characterised the haphazard native street.

When the procession had passed Mr. Eliot shook himself like a dog which had come out of a muddy pool.

“A festival of the new moon,” he explained in a tone of apology and disapproval. “It is terrible that these things can still be. In such moments a Christian is almost overcome with discouragement.”

“We must be patient and thankful that it has been granted us to help these our brethren as much as we have done,” the bishop returned gravely. “We cannot hope to attain everything in a day.”

Mrs. Chichester, who had overheard part of the conversation, and, according to her custom, turned it upside down and fitted it into her own particular train of thought, nodded delightedly.

“But it’s so nice for you that you should have caught a glimpse of ‘ real India,’ ” she said in her bright way. “The natives are getting so horrid and civilised that I get quite bored with them. I love processions, don’t you?”

The bishop smiled goodnaturedly.

“I’m afraid I look at them too much from my point of view,” he ventured.

“Do you? Oh, yes, I see, of course! But, you know, you could pick up a lot of hints from them. Now, Mr. Eliot, if you went round making a noise like that

you'd get on much faster. What these people like is lots of hocus-pocus and all that sort of thing—”

“My dear little lady “Colonel Chichester broke in hurriedly.

“Don't interrupt, dear. I want the bishop to look at that dear Brahman priest going into the house opposite. Isn't he fine-looking? a regular old aristocrat. I love them all so mysterious, you know. And they look horribly wise, don't you think?”

The bishop fortunately did not fall into the error of supposing that Mrs. Chichester really cared what he thought. His smile was still indulgent, but his eyes had already caught sight of a fresh object of interest. The street was now very quiet. Such natives as had come out to witness the passing of the procession had crept back into the shade of their dirty dwellings, and the man who came slowly towards the mission house stood out like the central figure in some brilliant Oriental picture.

“A remarkable-looking person,” the bishop murmured.

“A medieval saint,” added Mrs. Chichester, with her quick enthusiasm. Mr. Eliot threw back his heavy shoulders.

“Father Romney of the Roman Mission,” he explained, and his tone was ponderous with reproof.

But Mrs. Chichester appeared unscathed, and a curious, somewhat uncomfortable silence fell on the little group of watchers. The priest drew nearer. He carried himself with a simple dignity as though unconscious of hostility or suspicion, and the face which he lifted for a moment seemed to justify Mrs. Chichester's impulsive criticism. It was the face of a dreamer and an idealist. Mrs. Chichester had seen it before, no doubt, in the reproductions of an old master where the Infant Christ receives the worship of the saints and had recognised, with her quick intuition, the qualities which linked the painter's ideal to this living man. He was very bronzed and very emaciated. The brown, clear skin seemed scarcely to cover the sharply cut features and the eyes, deep-set and penetrating, added to his appearance of extraordinary delicacy. But against this physical weakness there was the indomitable strength of mind written on the straight-cut mouth, the powerful jaw, the high intellectual forehead. It was clear that daily, hourly, body and soul fought for the predominance, and that the soul

had never yielded nor lost, in the desperate struggle, her tenderness and humility. Father Romney was dressed in the plain white cassock of his order; a silver crucifix hung suspended from his girdle, and as he approached the little group by the mission house his lean brown fingers felt for it and held it in a nervous clasp.

“I beg your pardon for troubling you,” he said quietly, with a courteous inclination of the head; “but I have a letter for Mr. Hurst which I should be glad to deliver. I understand that he is here?”

David advanced quickly. Everything in the atmosphere a subdued wordless antagonism had driven the blood into his sallow cheeks. He held out his hand, and it was taken and held in a moment’s friendly pressure.

“I am glad I have found you,” the priest added. “The Professor was anxious that you should get his message before nightfall. I fancy he has made one of his discoveries, and wishes to share it with you. Here is the letter.”

Hurst took the neatly addressed envelope.

“Have you come all this way in this heat for me?” he asked regretfully.

“I did not notice that it was so hot,” the priest answered, smiling, “and the way never seems tedious. Besides, I have other things to do, and must not linger. I hope to see you again,” He bowed again, including the silent group in his salutation, and passed quietly on his way.

Only Colonel Chichester and his wife had responded. The bishop was ostentatiously engaged in the study of the architectural beauties of the mission house. Mr. Eliot, his face unusually heated, stared stonily across the street. It was evident that, of the two, the passing of the heathen procession had caused him the least discomfort.

“I think now, if your lordship is willing, we can proceed homewards,” he said stiffly.

His lordship, awakened from his preoccupation, signified his assent, and the carriages were called up. Mr. Eliot took his place at the side of his spiritual superior.

“We have much to contend with,” he said, sighing.

Meanwhile Hurst had helped Mrs. Chichester into her dogcart. That lady had forgotten her boredom in the delighted consciousness that there had been trouble in the air, and her eyes twinkled mischievously.

“I didn’t know you were so intimate with that dear Father,” she said. “I suppose you are not ‘going over, 5 are you, David? That’s the right expression, I believe. Now I come to think of it, I haven’t seen you in church once since you’ve been back. It looks suspicious, doesn’t it?”

“I suppose so. But I’m afraid I shan’t afford you any excitement by * going over.’ I’m what is called an agnostic.”

Mrs. Chichester put up her parasol.

“It sound like a nasty new-fashioned illness,” she said cheerfully.

“Perhaps it is an incurable one.” “Well, never mind so long as it only keeps you out of church I don’t think it’s unbearable. Get in, David. I’m going to drive you home.”

“Thanks, but I have my own cart here, and I have to pick up my mother at the club.”

“We shall see you to-night, then? Di is panting to meet her old playfellow. She says you neglected her disgracefully in England.”

Hurst turned his face away from the scrutiny of the restless blue eyes.

“I was hard pressed with work,” he explained lamely.

“Well, you must come and apologise, anyhow. Duncan, dear, please drive on. Good-bye, David, till this evening!”

Five minutes later the last carriage had passed out of the native quarter. The white figure of the priest had long since vanished into the afternoon haze, and a drowsy peace sank like a veil over the narrow street. Only Rama Pal remained. Throughout the proceedings he had kept his silent watch by the door of the mission house, his face inscrutable, his eyes passing from one figure to another with a passive disinterestedness. No one had noticed him. In the general leave-taking he had been ignored, and no change in his set features betrayed

resentment or mortification. The infant converts had scrambled past him, grateful for release, and he had not seemed to see them. He stood there motionless, and apparently indifferent. Presently he lifted his head. The Brahman priest had come out from the house opposite and now slowly crossed the street, stopping midway as though an invisible barrier barred his passage. For a moment the two men considered each other in silence. The Brahman had thrown the end of his yellow mantle over his shoulder, and with folded arms stood and waited in an attitude of unassumed dignity. He was a tall man, well past the prime of life, peculiarly fair of skin, with handsome and haughty features, and eyes of that piercing grey which can be as Oriental as the darkest brown. The three vertical lines across the high and even noble forehead proclaimed the purity of his caste, and when he at last spoke it was with the arrogance of immeasurable superiority.

“Though thou art an outcast from amongst thy people, I would speak with thee,” he said. “But keep thy place, for thy shadow defileth.”

The convert bowed his head with a languid acquiescence.

“Speak!” he said.

“Thou hast forsaken the gods of thy fathers to follow this English Christ,” the Brahman went on. “Tell me a little of thy new faith. I have heard that His disciples preach joy and universal love and brotherhood. Yet thine eyes are heavy as death, and thy friends left thee without farewell not as brothers leave their brother. And I have seen strange things Christian against Christian, though they call the same Lord master. What love and brotherhood is this?”

“A lie,” came the swift answer.

The Brahman was silent for a moment, his finger placed musingly to his forehead.

“And for this lie thou forsakest thy race and folio west a two-faced God?” he asked.

“I have no God.” The convert threw up his arms with a startling vehemence. “They took my gods from me they took me from my people. They gave me a faith which their lives belie, and a brotherhood of bitterest humiliation. They made me an outcast without people and without God.” He pulled himself up with

a convulsive effort. "What is that to thee?" he demanded sullenly. "Thou wearest the Triple Cord my shadow defiles thee."

The Brahman's face lit with a swift cunning.

"Once was thy shadow pure," he said. "Once was the mark of Vishnu on thy brows the privilege of the highest thine. All was stolen from thee, even as thou wert stolen by those whose crust thou eatest. Is the strong blood in thy veins stagnant, that no thought of revenge lights thy thoughts? Great wrong has been done thee only a Pariah bears in patience eternally."

"I am a Pariah," was the answer; "godless and hopeless."

The Brahman's eyes narrowed.

"The way back to Brahma is long and arduous," he said significantly, "but the way is there. Thou sayest thy old gods are dead. Nay, but there is but one God, the Almighty, all-pervading, all-containing One, thy God and mine is there " he stretched out his arm towards the horizon "and here." He laid his hand upon his own breast.

"Yet at morning and at evening thou bringest sweet offerings to thy wooden idols," Kama Pal returned sneeringly. "Is that too a lie?"

"A lie even as life itself is a lie a delusion, a vision. It is for the people who struggle on through countless generations towards the truth. They make themselves idols out of their desires, and until desire dies their idols must live and we must serve them. But the truth is ours." He drew himself up to his full height. "Not Vishnu nor Siva nor thy Christ is God, but God is all of them and us."

The convert smiled satirically, but the fire of some rising passion smouldered in his eyes.

"Thou art a priest of Vishnu, and speakest to a Pariah," he said in a low voice. "What am I to thee?"

The Brahman appeared not to hear him. His gaze was fixed straight ahead as though on some fearful vision.

“They shot our fathers from the cannon’s mouth,” he said under his breath.

“They tore from us the power and the wealth that was ours by heritage and right of conquest. They forced upon us their faith that we might serve them, bound by their slave’s code. They call us friends and brothers, and spit upon us. Their women shrink from us as from vermin.” His eyes flashed back to the convert’s livid face. “Whom dost thou hate?” he demanded fiercely.

“Those who have robbed me of my heritage India of her glory,” came the suffocated answer.

“What is thy destiny?”

“I know not.”

The priest stretched out his arm with prophetic vehemence.

“India has need of thee and of all such as thou art,” he said. “Thou art her now-born son. Thou shalt go to England. Thou shalt suck this new wisdom from her as a bee drinks honey from the flower. Then return help our mother to throw off her dishonouring shackles.”

“Alone?” Rama Pal interrupted bitterly.

“We who have led the people through ages untold shall stand between thy wisdom and unbelief and their ignorance and faith. For a little while longer we shall call them together by the names of the gods thou hast forgotten. For a little while thou too shalt believe.”

“In whom?” The Brahman hesitated. Then the old cunning replaced the moment’s blaze of enthusiasm.

“A new and living goddess has arisen,” he said. “Sarasvati daughter of Brahma. To-night thou shalt see her in the Temple to the Unknown.”

“And worship?”

“With the countless thousands throughout India who shall answer one day to her call.”

The two men looked each other full in the eyes.

“And that call will come?”

“When India’s sons are ready.”

“And shall I worship a lie?”

“No lie, but a symbol. Let her be to you as the mother thou art destined to rescue.” He pointed to the horizon. “Across the sea, whither thou goest, thou wilt find others such as thou. Steadily, silently they work beneath the surface, fearing neither death nor sacrifice. In them shalt thou find thy true brotherhood. With them thou shalt regain thy birthright.”

Rama Pal took an involuntary step forward.

“Who art thou?” he demanded. “Who am I?”

The Brahman held up a warning hand.

“Approach me not, for still is thy shadow unclean. One day thou shalt know my name and thine, and why I have called upon thee. Until then, work and nourish the hatred in thy heart! The great hour is not far off.”

He turned to go. A dirty-looking yogi, seated in the full blaze of the sun, held out a greedy hand; but the priest passed on his way, majestically indifferent.

Rama Pal had drawn back into the shade of the mission house, and a complete hush fell upon the native village. And presently, apparently wearied of his unprofitable penance, the yogi rose and limped away towards Kolruna.

CHAPTER III

FATE DECIDES

DAVID HURST sat at his writing-table and turned over the heap of manuscript before him. Now and again he made some slight correction in the carefully ruled margin, but it was a mechanical work, and his eyes were more often raised to the figure seated in the chair beneath the lamp. The soft turning of the leaves covered over his inattention, and Mrs. Hurst went on reading, apparently unconscious that she was being watched. She read intently, with the absorption of a mind capable of absolute concentration, and the ponderous-looking book on her knee contrasted curiously with the exquisite delicacy of her dress, and with the white jewelled hands which held the yellow vellum covers apart. Presently, having reached the end of a chapter, she closed the book and sat with her head thrown back against her chair, her eyes lifted thoughtfully to the light. It was as though her beauty defied the closest scrutiny, and, indeed, the years had brought no change to her. There were no lines about the straight-cut mouth nor across the serene forehead. There was no trace of weariness in the proud carriage of her shoulders, and, above all, no softening.

“Are you not coming to-night, David?” she asked suddenly, but without moving. “Diana will be disappointed, and Mrs. Chichester made sure of you.”

His eyes sank to the closely written pages. “I don’t think I should be of much good, mother,” he answered. “I should only be in the way.” He gave a little awkward laugh. “You know, I can’t dance any more than Milton’s prehistoric elephant, and nature did not intend me to ornament even a wall.”

“I know you do not care for that sort of entertainment,” she returned courteously. “I suppose you will spend your evening with the Professor?”

‘ Yes unless I can be of any use elsewhere. Might I fetch you?’

There was a faint, timid eagerness in his tone. She shook her head.

“No, thank you. It’s not necessary. The judge has promised to look after me right to the bitter end.” She was silent a moment, playing with an emerald ring upon her finger. “Do you like your work?” she asked with the same polite interest.

“Yes; Professor Heilig is an unusually clever man and, even if he wasn’t, it would be enough for me to know that I am being of some assistance. It’s a new sensation.” He bent over the manuscript, and there was another silence, broken at last by the rattle of carriage-wheels over the loose gravel.

Mrs. Hurst rose to her feet.

“That’s the judge at last,” she said, drawing on the rich purple mantle which had been hung in readiness. “Good night, David. Don’t let the Professor get you mixed up in any of his dangerous experiments. And don’t wait up for me. I shall be late.”

She came across the room as though to pass out of the open window, and then hesitated at his side. “Poor David!” she said, half to herself.

He looked up; the nearness of her presence seemed to stupefy him, the softer intonation in her voice to shatter something of his self-restraint. With a movement that was as sudden as it was violent he caught the hand resting upon the table and kissed it repeatedly, almost savagely.

“David!”

The hand was withdrawn so sharply that his mouth struck against the corner of the table. Her exclamation brought him to himself. He sank back in his chair, blood on his lips, his face whiter than hers, his eyes sombre with an expiring passion.

“Mother?” he said under his breath.

She recovered herself instantly. The expression of irritation and disgust faded, though something in her bearing betrayed the vibrations of the storm.

“I am sorry, David,” she said, “very sorry. You took me by surprise. I hope I did not hurt you?”

He felt that she was apologising more to herself than to him. He buried his face in his shaking hands.

“Don’t! It was my fault. I forgot. You looked very beautiful I lost control of myself. Beautiful things overwhelm me sometimes, somehow I suppose because

I am such a confounded ugly brute myself. Don't mind it and forget it."

She did not answer. He heard the soft rustle of her dress as she drew away from him and passed out of the window. He got up and crept cautiously after her, hiding in the shadow of the curtains. He saw the yellow lights of the judge's carriage, the white-clad syce at the horse's head; he saw his mother with her back towards him and he saw the judge's face, flooded with the light from the window. He heard the halfsmothered exclamation and understood it.

"I believe you're trying to cut out all the unhappy debutantes," the judge said gaily. "How do you think I'm to find all my protegees partners, with the subalterns swarming round you like so many moths?"

"Is that a compliment?" she retorted. "If it is, it's the first one you have ever paid me."

"You ought to be thankful. Let me help you in. Isn't David coming?"

"No."

"Poor chap, it would do him good. Are you comfortable?"

"Very."

"That's all right. Josephus, give the savage brute her head, will you?"

The "savage brute" from her gait, a direct descendant of the long-deceased Sarah Jane broke into a weary trot, and a minute later the lights of the buggy passed through the compound gates and disappeared. Hurst limped back to the table. He tried to resume his work, but his head ached and a selfloathing that was physical in its intensity lamed his faculties. It was not enough that nature had stamped him "outcast" he had added to his own disgrace. He had thrust himself upon a being who he knew despised him, he had flung aside dignity and selfrepression the poor garments with which he had sought to cover his infirmities and had revealed himself as a cringing, whining beggar, importunate and shameless. And he had gained nothing save a sense of nausea, of utter humiliation.

He got up again and flung his manuscript carelessly into the drawer. It was of no use to fight against his unrest, and in an hour the Professor awaited him. "If you would see your boyhood's dream again, I will show you her before daybreak,"

he had written. Hurst smiled at the recollection of the curt promise. It is as easy to recall the dead as to recall a dream of an ideal, he thought. Nevertheless, he took his helmet from the table and went out into the compound and down the avenue to the road.

Professor Heilig's bungalow lay on the other side of Kolruna, at a good half-hour's walk, and Hurst set off as briskly as his dragging, uneven gait allowed. The darkness, the complete silence, the rapid movement through the soft air calmed him. Shame and bitterness, though they still gnawed at his heart's roots, lost something of their violence. Nature slept in mysterious quiet about him. He had divorced her from his life, had stifled the sound of her voice in his desperate, futile struggle for the world's approbation, but in this hour of humiliation she strove to reclaim him. He lifted his face to the brilliant sky, where already the new moon rose in the stately splendour of rebirth, and forgot for an instant his bitterness in the contemplation of the eternity which encompassed him. It was only for an instant, then a wailing cry recalled him to earth and to himself. Involuntarily he stopped and looked about him. A shadow rose up from the ditch at the side of the road and came crawling through the moonlight stretching out thin arms of supplication. He tried to pass, but claw-like hands gripped his knees; a face of torture lifted itself to his.

"Have mercy, Sahib, have mercy, and I will pray to God that, ere dawn break, He shall give thee thy heart's desire!"

Hurst dropped a coin into the extended palm.

"My heart's desire?" he echoed ironically. "Who is thy God that He should read my heart?"

"Is not the desire of man for ever the same?" came the quick answer. "Fame and the love of woman?"

Hurst freed himself from the detaining hands and passed on, his lips compressed, his face crimson with a sudden rush of blood. He cursed himself savagely and bitterly, but he knew that something in him had answered the yogi's sententious wisdom. "Fame and the love of woman! Unattainable desires scarcely recognised, hideously ludicrous in the light of his utter failure! And yet superstition, sudden-born, ran riot in his veins.

He reached the outskirts of Kolruna and limped through the deserted streets.

Their emptiness left no impression on his mind. But presently he heard the sound of music, and stopped short, caught in the web of awakened longing. He stood at the gates of the Chichesters' bungalow, and the music which had reached his ear was English music, sensuous and melodious. It came to him in broken waves, lending a vague enchantment to the scene before him, to the silence and darkness which lay behind. Lights glittered between the stems of the tall palm-trees. He could see the shadows of moving figures, and once he heard the sound of laughter. He passed through the open gates. He had ceased to reason with himself. Life, warm and pulsating, called to him and he answered, forgetful of everything but his own youth, his own powers of living.

But unbridgeable gulfs separate life from life, and, as he reached the steps of the low verandah, he remembered them, and hid himself in the shadows. The curtains across the wide windows had been drawn aside, and the dancing couples swept past his range of vision like puppets in some gorgeous show in which he played no part. Gay uniforms, lovely dresses, bronzed faces, familiar and hated with all the bitterness of envy and, last of all, a woman's face a profile, clean-cut against the brilliant background. He knew then why he had come. But she was more beautiful than he had remembered her, or perhaps his riper judgment saw in her features that which his boy's eyes had missed character and strength.

She stood by the window, her hand resting lightly on her partner's arm, and once she looked up at him and smiled. Hurst knew the man, and hated him as he hated the rest in that moment, but with a hatred more intense because it had been sown in the bitterest hours of his childhood. The good-looking, intelligent face, the manly figure, represented for him all that he could never be, reminded him of petty humiliations silently accepted, but unforgotten. A trifling incident of his boyhood a race between Diana, this Dick Hatherway, and himself flashed back to his remembrance as something cruelly typical. He had meant to win he had strained his feeble strength till a red veil had crept before his eyes but he had not won. He had stumbled yards before the winning-post, and when they had come back, breathless and eager, they had laughed at him not unkindly, but as at something made for their laughter. The sound rang in his ear now, and he turned away, the brief moment of exhilaration dead. But it was too late. Diana Chichester stepped out on to the verandah. The light was on his face, and she recognised him with a quick, delighted exclamation. Hatherway, who had followed her, peered curiously over her shoulder.

"Why, Hurst!" he said. "What on earth are you skulking there for? Come in,

man, and behave like a civilised being. You're enough to frighten the weak-minded into fits."

Hurst returned reluctantly. The loud, cheerful voice grated on his nerves; the words, goodnaturedly bantering though they were, told him that he stood before them once again as the self-revealed fool.

"I am sorry if I startled you," he said. "I was on my way to the Professor, and wanted to see how you were all getting on. I had no intention of being discovered."

Diana Chiehester considered him, gravely observant.

"It seems to me you are apologising the wrong way round," she said. "You are trying to explain your presence, whereas you ought to be explaining your absence."

"I was not made for these social functions," he returned bluntly.

"Still, for my sake you might have gone against your nature, and, now that you are here, you must remain."

"In these clothes? I should cause a sensation."

"Probably. Do you mind?"

He laughed grimly.

"I am modest, and I should prefer not to see my mother's face. She is not fond of that kind of notoriety."

Diana came down the steps of the verandah.

"It's the case of Mohammed and the mountain," she said. "Dicky, go and find another partner. You can come back in half an hour, if you like. I'm going to talk to David."

"Is that fair?" Hatherway protested. "Besides, people will be asking for you."

"You can tell them I'm in the garden, talking to Mr. Hurst. You can add that I do

not want to be disturbed.”

Hatherway’s face expressed a ludicrous mixture of disappointment and boyish mischief.

“Won’t the old reputation-snatchers rejoice,” he said, chuckling. “Di, I ought to warn you that your conduct is likely to give Kolruna food for nine days’ most delicious scandal-mongering Kolruna, that hasn’t had a scandal for a fortnight.” “Then I shall be doing Kolruna a service,” she retorted. “Please do as I ask, Dick.”

“Of course.” He leant over the verandah and tapped David Hurst on the shoulder. “Next time I want half an hour’s talk with any one, I shall try your dodge, Hurst,” he said, with laughing significance.

He disappeared into the crowded room, and Diana Chichester, moving serenely through the bright patch of reflected light, seated herself on the bench beneath the high palm-trees. The shadows hid her, and Hurst did not attempt to penetrate their protection. He sat beside her, his elbows on his knees, his hands linked loosely before him, striving to quiet the painful beating of his temples. She did not speak to him, and it seemed to him that the silence around them was part of himself, a throbbing, living thing, mysterious, intangible. The music had died away into the far distance. He no longer heard it, nor realised that only a few yards separated him from the overflowing life in which he had no share. For him the world had dwindled to this quiet Indian garden, his whole life to this moment of illusionary happiness. Presently she bent forward as though to look into his face.

“WeU?” she said gently.

He did not answer. Her voice belonged to his dream, but he knew that when he spoke the dream would be shattered, and he clung to it with an unavailing tenacity.

“Well?” she repeated.

He started, realising the ludicrousness of it all, and drew himself up.

“I beg your pardon it was stupid of me I think there is magic in the air.”

“And I have dispelled it? But I have so much to ask you, and our time is short. Do you realise that we have not seen each other for two years?” “Two years to-night,” he answered.

“Do you remember so well?”

“It was at Hurst Court,” he added.

She nodded thoughtfully.

“You sat and talked to me for the whole evening, and the next morning you went away without even saying good-bye. Do you know, David, I have always felt that that incident wanted explaining. I’ve waited two years for the explanation, and I think I have a right to it now.”

“It’s a very simple one.” He turned a little so that she saw the dim outlines of his face. “On that evening I made up my mind to have another try at the Indian Civil. I hadn’t meant to it was almost a disgrace even to think of it at my age but I had to do something after I had been with you.”

“Then you were working all those two years?”

He nodded, his lips drawn into a straight line.

“Yes for eighteen months I put everything else out of my life.”

“And?”

“I failed.”

He looked at her with a directness that was almost brutal. But even though half darkness hid her expression, he knew that she had not flinched.

“It was inevitable,” she said quietly.

“You mean because I am a fool?”

“Perhaps because you were not made for the life of a bureaucrat, at any rate because you were too heavily handicapped.”

“By what?”

“By things beyond your control. I remember even out here in Kolruna you were too delicate to work, and in England you were often ill. If you failed, it was not your fault. You were physically out of the running.”

“Yes, but that was my fault not in the ordinary sense, but in a true sense, nevertheless. Don’t you see that to be a physical weakling is just as bad as being a fool or a good-for-nothing? You can call it bad luck, or Fate, or the will of God, if you like, but it comes to the same thing in the end. If you make a man responsible for his vices or for his talents, you must hold him equally responsible for his deformities.”

“That sounds like one of Mrs. Hurst’s theories,” she observed.

“Yes, it is. My mother is quite clear on the point, and, after the first shock, I learnt to agree with her. She dislikes me as she would dislike me if I had turned out a reprobate, and with the same right. And at the bottom most people feel the same, though it isn’t Christian to admit it.” Suddenly he rose to his feet and stood looking down at her, and she felt that he was trembling. “Di, I want you to think it out for yourself then you’ll see that what I have said is true. Look at me: I am lame, I can’t do any of the physical things people English people admire. And I’m not clever. I’ve failed all round. I’m not good to look at. Di, you wouldn’t marry me, would you?”

“No,” she answered directly.

“You despise me as my mother despises me?”

“No in my own particular way, as I despise hundreds of very admirable people.”

He set his teeth hard. The drumming in his ears had ceased. He heard the music again, and it sounded loud and blatant and trivial. Suddenly she put her hand on his arm.

“David, that sounded horrid—worse than I meant it. I have a nasty, arrogant, exacting character, and I’ve shown you a little bit of it perhaps on purpose. I didn’t want you to spoil things for either of us. Have I hurt you very much?”

He shook his head.

“You have paid me the compliment of being honourably frank,” he said. “It has

done me good. And you needn't be afraid; I shan't spoil things. I won't pretend. If I had been another man yes, perhaps then but I'm not, and there the matter ends." His tone was calm, eminently practical, and he changed the subject without apparent effort. "Are you glad to be back, Di?" he asked.

"Yes." Even in the monosyllable he heard a new note of warmth, almost of passion. "I have always wanted to come back," she went on. "It was as though the East called to me, and never ceased to call, though I tried to stifle its voice in a wild round of English pleasure. That was why I was so glad to see you to-night somehow you belong to all these old memories these old memories, which always seem to be so full of sunshine and bright, warm colours."

"Yes, I know," he said. "It is a world of dreams."

She seemed scarcely to hear him. She was leaning forward with her elbow on her knee, her chin supported in the palm of her hand, and he could see that she was smiling dreamily.

"One thing always stands out in my mind," she went on. "Do you remember the night when you got lost, and all the wonderful tales you told about the Temple and the Hindu baby-girl and the human sacrifices? I shall never forget how you stood there and stammered, and how Mr. Eliot stared at you with his little pig-eyes. I don't know why I was half inclined to believe it all. It appealed somehow to my child's imagination. And to-night out here it seems so possible so real."

He was silent. He did not look at her any more. His eyes were fixed sightlessly ahead into the darkness.

"Won't you tell me what really happened?" she asked suddenly. "What made you think of such strange things, David? Were they all fancy?"

He lifted his head as though he were listening to something beyond her voice and beyond the music.

"I don't think I could tell you," he said. "It lies so far back twelve years back it has gone out of my life—" His voice died away; he seemed to have forgotten that he had been speaking.

"You called her Sarasvati, daughter of Brahma," she went on, still plunged in her recollections. "It was a strange name to have sprung from a boy's brain. Had any

one talked to you about her?”

“No I found hereout all by myself, in a dream.”

He was smiling now, and all the hard, tense lines in his face had vanished, leaving a haggard, pathetic youthfulness. But the darkness hid the change from her.

“Yes, it was a dream,” he went on, half to himself, “but I’m beginning to think that it was the only beautiful thing in my life. I had forgotten it in these twelve years but it has come back to me a little—”

He stopped again. He had heard footsteps, and suddenly he bent over her and took her hand.

“Hatherway is coming,” he said quickly. “I don’t want to meet him again not to-night. You understand, don’t you?”

“Yes, of course. But we shall see you again soon? ”

“Yes. Good-bye and thank you.”

He slipped into the shadow. He heard Hatherway’s voice and her answer, and at the gate he looked back and saw her white, nobly proportioned figure pass, phantom-like, through the shadows, into the light. He saw Hatherway at her side, and suddenly he clenched his fists, grinding his teeth in a storm of fruitless passion.

Outside on the high-road a few Sudras had gathered together in an idle group, watching and listening. For the most part they were dressed in the costume prescribed by Mr. Eliot as Christian, but a woman, scarlet-clothed and hung with tawdry ornaments, came out from their midst and touched Hurst on the arm.

“Lord Sahib, come to the bazaar,” she said hoarsely. “Much fun for Sahib Sahib come?”

He looked down into her face. A torch, held by one of her companions, lit up the evil yet piteous features, and threw flickering points of fire into her upturned eyes. He stared back at her. The sense of his absolute freedom from all bonds of duty, of affection, of responsibility rushed over him with appalling violence. He

stood alone, mentally and physically outcasted from among his fellows, but with all their capabilities of experiencing joy and sorrow, love and hatred. Moreover, the old lassitude had gone; something had been aroused in him there was youth in his blood a suppressed, seething vitality. He took out an English sovereign and spun it, whilst the woman watched him in stupid wonder.

“Tails the Professor; heads the devil!” he said aloud.

The coin turned up heads. But in that moment his eyes passed to the distant outline of the hills; memory swept him back twelve years to another night when he had stood as he stood now alone. He had seen a child held up into the moonlight, and she had smiled at him as she seemed to smile at him now over the wild ocean of ruthless passion. The memory gripped him, held him by the power of its sheer beauty.

He flung the gold piece at the woman's feet, and limped off into the darkness.

CHAPTER IV

SARASVATI

THE Temple to the Unknown lay in shadow. The stars had gone out, passing silently, like sentinels whose watch is done, and the frail sickle of the moon dropped behind the hills, leaving the world to a last hour of rest. The very air slept. No breeze stirred the sacred pool whose surface stretched grey and sullen beneath the deserted sky, and the leaves of the botrees at the water's edge hung silent in the waiting hush which precedes the dawn. Darkness painted itself on darkness. The mighty pillars of the temple threw their deeper shadow against the unlighted heaven and at their base night lingered sable and impenetrable. Only in the midst of the waters a single spark of light shone out amidst the gloom. The pool caught the reflection and drew it into its depths, where it glowed sombrely like the red eye of some monster hidden below the placid surface. Majestic and oppressive, the Gopuras rose up on either hand and watched the distant horizon for the first heralds of the coming day. And at their feet the sanctuary lay wrapped in dreamless slumber.

Two men came out of the black shadows by the great gateway. They crossed the first court, and, without speaking, reached the water's edge, where a barge lay moored. They entered and cast off, and the younger of the two took the oars and rowed towards the island-shrine whose lights signalled to them through the darkness. And still the silence remained unbroken save for the soft gurgle of the water against the gunwale and the splash of the oars as they sent long ripples over the sleeping pool. Presently the rower stopped and rested for a moment, his face lifted to the sky.

"Surely there is no silence like this in the world," he said in a whisper. "It seems a living thing."

"The Spirit of Generations untold broods here at daybreak," his companion returned poetically. "Are you afraid? >:"

The other answered with a laugh.

"Of what? Was I afraid last night when those devils brushed against us? And what is there to fear, after all? Death? WeU, we all die."

He rowed on, and the elder man smiled grimly to himself in the darkness.

“You are young, and the young are always tired of life,” he observed in his guttural tones. “But here it is not death we fear a thing more subtle than death.”

“Fate, perhaps? I feel her very close to me.”

“She is with you always in your own heart. But you know her not. Your soul sleeps, and sees not her greater sister. But in such hours as these she awakes and knows.” The speaker stretched out his powerful arms. “It is good when she awakes if only for a little,” he said. “Then is God in us.”

Hurst nodded absently. The blood-red eye drifted past them, and he watched it in fascinated silence. An icy breath which seemed to rise from the stagnant water brushed his cheek. A moment later the keel grated against the ground. Yet he did not move. He looked across at his companion, whose bearded face had become faintly visible in the new mysterious brightness of the atmosphere. And he laughed again, but the laugh no longer sounded so harsh. There was a note of uncertainty in it which he strove to suppress with an angry impatience.

“I believe after all I am afraid,” he said grimly. “Tell me what you see. What is behind me? I tell you, my nerve’s gone God knows why. This silence this atmosphere is worse than a hundred of those devil’s orgies. What are you looking at?”

Heilig made no answer. He crossed the space dividing them, and took the younger man by the shoulders.

“Look yourself!” he said in a sharp undertone. “Are you a coward?”

Hurst turned slowly. He felt the ghostly light upon his face, and yet for a moment he looked away, fearing he knew not what, overwhelmed by the instinctive recognition of a relentless destiny which stood and waited. Then he raised his head. Immediately before him rose the rocks against which their barge had struck, and above them the graceful outline of the island-shrine. The door stood open. Like a picture painted on a canvas of darkness, he saw the faded golden walls, the low altar upon whose bejewelled table an idol, crosslegged and bearing Siva’s sacred trident, sat in threatening supremacy. A single lamp hung from the centre of the low roof; its subdued light lit up the god’s loathsome features, and sank like a crimson haze upon the altar-steps, where countless

lotusblossoms lay massed in dying loveliness.

Hurst saw these things unconsciously as details in some dream whose central figure held him spellbound, bereft of thought, almost of emotion. Sarasvati knelt before the altar, her back to it, her face turned to the open doorway, her eyes fixed sightlessly on the dark waters beyond. As though the lotusblossoms had exhaled their spirit into a woman's form, she rose from out their midst, white-clad, unadorned save for the flowers which crowned the dark glory of her hair and fell in garlands from about her shoulders into her unconscious hands. Her face was a little raised, her lips, cut in lines of noble sweetness, were a little parted, as though she thirsted. Yet her eyes were dead. They stared out from the perfect oval of her face like lamps whose flame has been extinguished, and only the glow beneath the olive skin and the soft rise and fall of the silken scarf across her breast spoke of the warm, flowing life beneath.

Hurst sat motionless, his elbows on the gunwale, his chin supported in his hand, and watched her. Thought above all, memory flooded back to him as though somewhere in his brain a tiny yet fatal clot of blood had melted, setting free a long-thwarted tide. The morbid rage against his kind and against himself passed like an evil dream. All existence, even to his own, seemed glorified in this one perfect being, and with this recognition of perfection, of the supremely beautiful, came a deep sense of freedom, of release from a crushing, stupefying burden. Without turning, he felt for Heilig's hand and grasped it feverishly.

"Is she asleep?" he whispered.

"She hears and sees us not," Heilig answered. "But also she sleeps not. Her soul is with Brahma, where there is no thought, no passion, no desire, only an endless contemplation."

"Her eyes are lifeless. How divine her eyes would be if she never awake?"

"Not if the dear God is merciful."

Hurst asked no further. He sat on motionless and silent, unconscious that the darkness behind him had melted into the luminous grey of dawn, and that the lamp above the altar had faded. And suddenly a shaft of light fell upon the dreamer's face, and spread about her, enveloping shrine and god in one golden splendour.

“Come,” Heilig said imperatively. “In a little while those devil-worshippers of hers will return. There is danger. Rouse yourself!”

Hurst seemed not to hear him, and Heilig took the oars and carried them to his place. “Thy own soul seems not of the wakefullest,” he muttered in his own language. He began to row vigorously towards the shore, and with an oath the young man at the prow turned upon him, his fists clenched, his black brows contracted.

“Stop!” he said savagely. “What are you doing? Do you mean to leave her there to those fiends?”

Heilig continued to pull stoically at the oars.

“What would you haf me do?” he asked.

“Save her take her with you anything—”

“And set fire to God knows what powder-mine? My friend, do you share Herr Eliot’s complacent belief that Indian fanaticism is dead? And what haf you to offer Sarasvati, the divine daughter of the gods? Will you gif her to your parson to Christianise? Will you let her serve as ayah to your honourable mother? Will you make her as those miserable outcasts whose faith you haf trampled underfoot?” His big voice softened. “No, no; leaf her to her fate such as it is; it is the one to which she was born. Leaf her to her dreams and to this, her world.” Hurst put his hand to his head like a man waking from a long sleep.

“I beg your pardon,” he stammered. “For a moment the thought made me mad but you are right it would be cruel a hell for a hell. And she belongs to this—” He broke off and looked about him, the tense muscles of his face relaxing gradually, as though the beauty of the transformed world sank into his very soul. “It is all part of her,” he added, half to himself.

In silence they reached the rough landing-place. The dawn was passing slowly into day, and, though the phantom night-shadows still lingered in the temple courts, the minarets and pillars bathed their highest points in the golden glory of the sunrise, and threw their proud reflections into the sacred pool beneath them. And life awoke. The waters rippled against the walls of their rocky prison, beating out a soft, melodious music, and the leaves of the solitary botrees rustled a mysterious converse with the breeze. Above, a delicate network of white cloud

drifted to the west, leaving an ever-widening space of turquoise which faded eastwards into gold and amber, and an awakened bird winged her way through the clear air to her nest among the ruins.

Professor Heilig laid his hand upon his companion's shoulder. His rugged, resolute face had softened.

"I haf shared my secret with you," he said. "In part it was yours but tell no one of it, unless you would haf them say that you are as mad as an old German Professor. These things are not for the wise and practical."

Hurst roused himself. He looked back at the island-shrine, now glistening in the full daylight, and his face darkened.

"Perhaps one day the wise and practical will find her," he said with a sudden fear.

"Nefer. In an hour she will haf disappeared. Do your clever friends come at midnight or at daybreak to the Temple of the Unknown? No, no, they are too clever for that. They know that the old Sakti rites are no more, and that Kali has ceased to ask blood as offering. So they come in the cool hours of the afternoon, and talk grave nonsense about dead religion and old civilisations and the progress of Christianity, and the dear God knows what else, until the very shadows mock at them. A mystery? Yes, it is a mystery. An empty sanctuary which at midnight belches out its hundreds, and at daybreak lies dead and silent. Yes, I grant it you, I, too, do not understand; but one day, when I am tired of life, I will try and find out." He gave a grim laugh and began to stride towards the broken gateway of the outer Temple. "But then, perhaps, it will be too late, and the sanctuary will haf opened of herself, and your wise friends will haf found their wisdom a poor thing compared with the folly they despised. I hope I shall lif to see it it would be a fit ending." He glanced sideways at his companion. "You do not listen," he observed, but without resentment.

Hurst stopped and pointed to the carved walls of the Gopura. His face was white and hard.

"I was thinking of last night and Those," he said fiercely. "It was a devil's orgy, and these things are a devil's work."

"They offend you?" Heilig shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, they are not pictures

for an English drawing-room, I admit; but I could show you worse in the southern temples," he added complacently. "But she is a woman," Hurst broke out with a sudden passion. "Scarcely a woman a child, innocent of all evil and one day she will awake from her dreams and see all this. They will drag her into their mire make her one of themselves."

Heilig made no immediate answer. He walked on rapidly until they reached the brow of the hill, from whence they looked over the vast stretch of undulating jungle and forest-land. There he stopped a moment, playing thoughtfully with his short, carefully trimmed beard.

"And you came up out of that at midnight, alone?" he asked abruptly.

Hurst nodded. In memory he traced his own faltering footsteps, and felt a faint vibration of that mingled fear and expectation which had fought their battle in his child's heart. And suddenly the gulf which separated now from then yawned before him, and he knew that he had become a man and that his passion was a man's passion.

"And they laughed at you?" Heilig went on in the same tone of thoughtful curiosity.

"I did not tell a very plausible story," Hurst answered.

Heilig swung round upon him.

"Does one only belief plausible stories? Is life plausible? Come, if I told your friends that herein this apparent pathless jungle there was a secret road wide enough to allow a whole army to pass from here to Kolruna in an hour, what would they do? They would laugh at me. They would say they had nefer seen the road that they had nefer seen any one building a road and that therefore he cannot exist. But come you shall see him and know the value of wise laughter." He turned abruptly to the left and led the way down the smooth side of the hill to the edge of the jungle. There again he changed his course, keeping always on the outskirts until, without a moment's hesitation, he turned into a narrow, scarcely noticeable opening in the thick undergrowth, which after a few steps broadened out to the width of an ordinary road. He glanced back, but the sudden darkness hid his companion's face.

"Na?" he interrogated triumphantly.

“How long has this existed?” Hurst returned. He spoke with the abruptness of an instinctive alarm.

“A year. I helped make him with my own hands.”

“You!”

The German laughed softly.

“Yes, I at midnight and the clever Brahman priest who killed your father, and who has lain in hiding these twelve years, had the plans and gave orders. A wonderful man, Junge! I should like to have known him better.”

“And you let this go on without warning us?”

“Warning you? Adi! yes, I warned the authorities, but they were not grateful, the authorities. They think me a little what we call verworren; and, after all, why should I bother? I am a man of science and a foreigner. It is not my affair.”

He walked on stolidly, keeping to the centre of the road, which began to wind in slight gradations down the hill-side, and Hurst asked no more. Tonguetied by his own crowding fancies and upheld by unnatural exaltation, he followed his guide in passive silence through the jungle. Once he put his hand to his head and found it burnt as though with fever, and his temples throbbed. Yet he felt no fatigue, only an insatiable, restless energy. The sense of this awakening power was new to him; it acted like an intoxicant on his racing blood. But whence it had come he did not know. He stood before the mysterious upheaval of his whole being and found no cause, above all no peace.

An hour passed, and then the road ended as it had begun, suddenly, in a narrow pathway, and they passed out of the gloom into the full sunshine. Before them lay the broad, peaceful valley, and beyond Kolruna, glistening like a white gem in the blaze of midday, the hills rose again and rolled sullenly towards the horizon.

David Hurst stretched out his arms in sudden, passionate relief. He threw back his head and drew in deep draughts of the soft air with the joy of a man who has been suffocating in a foul, unwholesome prison.

“My God, how beautiful she was!” he said aloud.

Heilig seated himself, crosslegged, amidst the long dry grass, and, taking out a carefully made-up parcel in tissue paper, began to unknot the string with deliberate fingers.

“Yes, she is beautiful,” he said complacently; “perhaps the most beautiful woman in India, and I haf seen many. But it will not last. Like her lotusflowers, she will fade before her time.” His parcel was now unpacked, revealing a heap of sandwiches, which he held out hospitably. “Eat!” he said. “I promise you they are good, my sandwiches none of your English flabbinesses. Eat, friend.”

Hurst shook his head.

“I am not hungry,” he said impatiently.

The Professor chuckled in the midst of a substantial mouthful.

“Ach, you are not hungry? You haf seen a beautiful woman and you haf become immortal? And you despise the coarse Teuton that he eats? Do you think that I, who haf risked my life to see her nightly, do not feel how beautiful she is? Do you not think I haf tears of happiness at the sight of her I And yet I eat. Body and soul go together the dear God made it so and he who denies it is a fool.”

Hurst turned with a quick movement of apology.

“Forgive me!” he said. “It is not that but I am full of unrest uneasiness. Don’t you understand? it was all a boy’s dream to me, and now it has become real.” He dropped down into the grass at his companion’s feet and lay at full length with his face supported in his hands. “Tell me who is she 1” he asked.

“How should I know? The child of some Brahman whom they have set up as goddess for their own purposes. They are cunning those priests. They know how to pander to their followers.”

“And she does she know for what purpose she is being used? Does she believe in her own divinity? in that vile devils’ religion?”

Heilig dropped his sandwich, his face scarlet with scorn.

“Vile devils’ religion!” he echoed. “Who are you to criticise a faith that dates its birth centuries before Christ, that taught mercy and love and truth, whilst the

Jews still clamoured for a tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye, that recognised one Almighty God whilst your ancestors worshipped wooden idols? Think you of last night's devilry? What is that but the excrescence which grows on every religion? Look at Christ, and look at His churches, with their cant, their empty ritual, their greed, their bloody persecutions, their heartless bigotry; and then, if you dare, criticise a people who haf fallen away from the high teaching of the Vedas! "He broke off suddenly and the indignation died out of his face. "But abof the churches there is Christ," he said gently, "and abof last night's superstitious wickedness there is Sarasvati, the Spirit of Purity, of Unity with God."

Hurst looked up.

"You talk as though you hated the Christian Church," he said, "and yet your greatest friend is a Catholic missionary."

"Father Romney? He teach his followers the simple truths of justice and love and mercy, as they might find them written in their own Vedas, knowing that when they haf learnt their lesson they will be ready for the greater truth perhaps be nearer it than many so-called Christians. At least he does not turn them into hypocritical atheists, such as haunt Herr Eliot's chapel." Heilig gave a short, contemptuous laugh. "And one day he will be excommunicated," he added bitterly.

A silence fell between the two men. Heilig returned to his sandwich and Hurst lay very quiet, with his face hidden in his hands. Presently he looked up. The black, wavy hair hung disordered over his brows and a feverish fire burnt in his eyes and sallow cheeks.

"And the end what will it be?" he asked hoarsely.

"For her? I do not know, but it will come swift and sudden. Goddesses die not nor grow old they vanish, and no man sees them more."

"My God! You mean they will kill her?"

Heilig shrugged his shoulders.

"If it suited them, why not?"

“And we can do nothing?”

“Nothing. I am a foreigner and haf no right to interfere. You are bound by your conventions, your laws, your very ideals. You cannot free others when you are yourself not free.” He gathered his remaining sandwiches together and put them carefully into his pocket. “Come.” he said. “It is late, and we haf far to go.”

In silence they set off across the burnt and parched fields towards Kolruna. On either hand were the dreaded signs of coming famine, and Heilig nodded significantly.

“Soon there will be trouble,” he said.

It was late afternoon before they reached the white bungalow on the outskirts of the town, and Hurst, responding to the Professor’s invitation, followed him through the pleasant garden and into the library. A writing-table, a few chairs, and a small upright piano constituted the furniture, whilst the whitewashed walls were unadorned save for the engravings of Bismarck and Wagner. Father Romney, who had been preparing a curious meal of tea and the inevitable sandwiches, looked up as they entered and uttered an exclamation of intense relief.

“I am glad you have come,” he said. “I was growing anxious about you. There has been a peculiar unrest in the native quarter to-day, and I feared something had happened.”

“Something always happen,” Heilig answered grimly, “but unless somebody gets murdered no one notices it.”

His keen eyes rested on his friend’s weary face.

“You haf had trouble?” he decided.

Father Romney smiled faintly.

“A little. I had brought some fresh bandages to a poor Pariah woman who had cut her arm, and a rabble set on me. It was a little affair a few stones no more.”

“H’m! Herr Eliot’s followers, no doubt,” Heilig muttered. He pushed the proffered cup of tea aside.

“Bah! no, I cannot drink. I am sick to death.” He flung himself down at the piano and played two violent chords, and then sat, with his hands resting on the keys, scowling in front of him.

Hurst and Father Romney exchanged a smile, and Hurst stepped out into the balcony, knowing by experience what course Heilig’s wrath would take. Presently the Professor began to play. His hot rage still burned, and he burst into the Funeral March in the Gotterdammerung with a fire and force which rang with a double strength in the languid Oriental atmosphere. Hurst leant with his elbows on the verandah rails and listened. His eyes were fixed on the far-off hills, but between them and him Titanic statues of great heroes rose and crossed before his vision, seeming to call to action. They passed. Heilig, soothed and inspired by his own music, struck the first note to Isolde’s love death. All the tenderness and all the divine aspiration of the immortal song drifted out to the motionless listener. The infinite resignation of the opening bars, the rising breathless longing which, as it sweeps heavenwards, halts for a moment to gather strength, came to him in some strange way as a revelation of himself. Stranger still, it mingled with the memories of a woman and of a dimly lighted shrine, and, as the great crescendo died away to silence, he saw her face touched with the first rays of the rising sun. And he knew then that the memory of her had been woven into his life.

He turned, conscious that he was no longer alone, and found Father Romney at his side. The priest laid his hand gently on his arm.

“Forgive me,” he said. “I have been watching you. It seemed to me that you had changed. Is it so?”

“Changed? I do not understand you.”

“Again, forgive me but last night you frightened me. Your face frightened me. It was hard and reckless, like that of a man who has not only lost God but himself. To-night you are different. I am no longer afraid for you.”

Hurst looked into the eager, emaciated face and smiled.

“Why do you trouble yourself about me? I am not of your faith. I have no faith.”

“But you are human, like myself. How can we take no interest in each other, have no sympathy and pity for each other, when we bear the same burdens, and

carry in us the shadow of a final inevitable tragedy which we must bear alone?
What is a creed compared to that 1”

Hurst grasped the extended hand.

“You are more generous than most of those who preach in your Master’s name,” he said, “and you are right. Last night I seemed to have lost everything that I could ever have hoped for success, love, the applause of those among whom I live. I had set my heart on them, and when they failed I had nothing in me to fall back on, no faith, no ideals, not even a poor dream. To-night it is all different. I know there are other things in life than those for which I struggled. They chained me weighed me down. But I have set myself free I no longer desire or need them.”

“Perhaps, then, they will come to you,” the priest said quietly.

Hurst did not hear him. With a curt farewell he passed down the steps into the garden and limped towards the high-road. His own words repeated themselves in his brain with a triumphant persistency. “I have set myself free,” he had said, and had therein proclaimed to himself his own emancipation. The people amongst whom he had been born, whose love and approbation he had striven for, had discarded him as useless he now discarded them. In this hour he flung aside finally the ideals and ambitions to which they had pointed him and stretched out his arms to a world which was his own by right of conquest. He looked towards the hills and knew that the barrier between them was yielding. They had opened to him their secrets, and the dream of his childhood came back to him as a living, splendid reality.

“Sarasvati Daughter of Brahma!” he said aloud, and stood there motionless, with his face turned to the distant outline, until twilight became night.

CHAPTER V

TWO PEOPLE INTERFERE

IT happened shortly afterwards that the Professor's prophecy was fulfilled, and the grim spectre of famine stalked the parched and barren valleys of the Deccan. In Kolruna, as elsewhere, the European inhabitants watched the enemy's progress with an active alarm which was counterbalanced by the fatalistic resignation of the inevitable sufferers. The natives prayed to their gods for a monsoon which never came, and the English officials prepared themselves for the consequences hard and unremitting labour, with the curse of the population as thank-offering. Even Kolruna's native regiment shared in the general activity. Large stores of rice had been smuggled secretly into the town and lay under Colonel Chichester's protection, in anticipation of the day when relief should be doled out to the famine-stricken. Colonel Chichester had himself advised the measure. He knew something of Indian famines, and moreover there were rumours that the gods had declared that the presence of the cow-killing, wine-drinking foreigner was the cause of the monsoon's non-appearance. "After that," as the brisk little soldier expressed it, "you might expect the band to play at any minute."

There was probably only one person in Kolruna or, for that matter, in India to whom the famine came in the guise of a god-send namely, Mrs. Chichester. That little woman, though she had long since exhausted the energies of her friends in countless foredoomed enterprises, was herself inexhaustible, and she viewed the prospective trouble with the delight of an incorrigible philanthropist. Within twentyfour hours of the announcement that the enemy was in the land she had formed a committee, had appointed herself President, and, as a sop to Cerberus, presented Mr. Eliot with the post of secretary. Within fortyeight hours Kolruna was faced with the fact that her "first lady" was on the eve of giving a combined subscription ball and bazaar which everybody had to attend with the option of social ostracism.

Kolruna groaned, but Mrs. Chichester explained her project with an enthusiasm worthy of the cause if not of the means. The subscriptions were to go to the relief-fund, and the idea of the bazaar was that the ladies should present articles for sale self-manufactured, stolen, or bought, Mrs. Chichester in the name of

Charity, was not particular and that their husbands, or brothers, as the case might be, should buy them back at famine prices. The ladies were delighted, the masculine part of the population resigned, and Mrs. Chichester bustled along her path of triumph. She chose Mrs. Hurst's bungalow as the scene of her operations. Mrs. Hurst protested, but Mrs. Chichester, who only heard what she wanted to hear, arrived shortly afterwards with her committee, consisting of her daughter, Diana, two elderly ladies, Mr. Eliot, and the judge, and was so determined and cheerful and vague that her unwilling hostess not only had to surrender but was herself hustled into the select circle as treasurer. The judge witnessed this astonishing spectacle with a shamefaced delight.

"I was frightened out of my life when I heard we had to come here," he whispered, under cover of the general confusion. "I know how you hate fusses, and did my best; but nothing would stop her not even you."

"As though I were a sort of Juggernaut!" Mrs. Hurst laughed. "As a matter of fact, I don't really mind. It's delightful to see some one else so energetic in this heat, and I do not suppose we need do much besides listen."

"I want David," Mrs. Chichester broke in suddenly.

She had been having a sharp passage of arms with her secretary, and had won by sheer force of not listening to his answers. Mr. Eliot, unaccustomed to this method of warfare, sat heated and breathless, conscious of defeat but totally unable to trace its cause. His small dead eyes contrasted amusingly with Mrs. Chichester's big blue-grey ones, which at that moment sparkled with a harmless malice.

"I want David," she repeated. "I must have a useful young man to run errands and see that the natives don't steal things. Jean, where is David?"

"In his writing-room, I expect," Mrs. Hurst answered. "But I'm afraid he is of no use for your purposes, Elizabeth."

"Very well. Di, go and fetch him, please. Say he must come at once." She flashed back to Mr. Eliot, and her daughter, with an amused resignation, went out of the room and across the passage to the familiar library. She knocked, and, after a moment's unwilling silence, a voice answered, and she opened the door and entered.

Hurst sat at his table with his back towards her, apparently reading; but he did not turn, and a sharp “What is it, Sita I ” proved that he had mistaken his visitor’s identity. “It’s I, David,” Diana said meekly. “Can I come in for a minute?”

Hurst sprang to his feet. He was in his shirtsleeves, collarless, with ruffled hair and traces of ink on his hands; but his manner was curiously free from all embarrassment.

“Of course, Di,” he said. “I didn’t know who it was. Wait until I get my coat, will you?”

“Please don’t bother about the coat.” She pushed him back firmly into his chair. “If you fuss, I shall go away. Besides I like you better without it. I think you are one of those people who look nicest when they’re dirty.”

“Thank you. I didn’t know I was actually dirty.”

“But you are. What with your black hair and eyebrows, you look as though you had been dipped in an ink-pot.” She considered him thoughtfully. “What contrasts we make!” she added, as though the fact gave her an artistic and quite impersonal satisfaction.

“Which means that you are feeling particularly fresh and clean and beautiful! I suppose you wanted a set-off, and came to me for it. Now what are you looking at?”

“This room. It was your father’s?”

“Yes; I was just looking through some old papers of his.”

“Oh! “Evidently she was interested, but conscious of being on dangerous ground. She smoothed her fair hair with one hand a trick of hers when not thinking of anything particular and her wide-open grey eyes wandered restlessly around as though in search of something. “I’m trying to remember what I came about,” she explained. Hurst waited patiently. In some ways Diana was like her mother.

She could have fits of absent-mindedness, but, unlike her mother, she was capable of intense concentration when the occasion demanded. “You’re wanted,”

she said with sudden remembrance. "Mother wants you for her bazaar. Mrs. Hurst said you wouldn't come, but of course that made no difference. Will you?"

"Come? No many thanks."

"I have to take part. Won't you help me?"

He looked straight into her face.

"I'd like to help you, of course. But I have my own work and, frankly, I have no room in my life for that sort of thing. Ask her way."

"I think Dick would rather carry coals."

"So would I."

"My dear David!"

He laughed again, with the same easy unconcern.

"It sounds rude, I know, but I have some experience with those sort of functions, and I know I am useless. I would rather give assistance in a more satisfactory form."

Diana was silent for a moment. She stood with her hand resting on the table and gazed out of the window, her profile turned to him, but he could see that her brows were knitted. In that moment she seemed to him more lovely than ever before. The delicate muslin dress suited the simple, graceful lines of her figure, and the careless arrangement of her hair softened the classical severity of her features, which were still somewhat flushed from recent encounters with her mother's vagaries.

"David, do you know something?" she asked suddenly.

"Know what?"

"That I feel I don't know you any more. I feel quite awkward with you, as though you were a stranger."

"We see very little of each other," he suggested.

“Perhaps that is the reason. You never go anywhere. You seem to avoid everybody except the old Professor and ‘that Jesuit,’ as Mr. Eliot calls him. People are beginning to talk about you, David.”

“Are they?”

“You don’t seem very interested, but I’m going to tell you, whether you like it or not. Somebody told father that you spent the nights in the native bazaar, and that you were seen wandering about the country at all hours of the morning. It doesn’t sound a bit nice, David.”

“No, I quite agree. Did Colonel Chichester tell you?”

“No, he told mother. Mr. Eliot has openly hinted that you are going to the devil.”

“Oh!”

There was a moment’s silence. Diana stared at her companion with a grave wonder. He did not flinch, but the mouth under the short black moustache was slightly amused.

“Are you?”

“What?”

“Going to the devil?”

“Perhaps at any rate, I am going my own way.”

“Somehow that sounds like a dismissal. Good-bye, David.”

“Good-bye, Di.”

He held the door open for her with an easy courtesy which she recognised as new in him, and for a moment she hesitated.

“You may find your own way rather a lonely way,” she said, with an earnestness which she had not hitherto shown.

“That is as I wish it.”

“If ever by any chance it should prove unbearable, I should like you to remember that you have one friend who doesn’t care how far you have gone.”

“Where, Di?”

Her eyes filled with laughter.

“To the devil.”

“I believe you rather want me to go,” he observed.

“It might do you good,” she retorted. “At any rate, I would rather you did anything than jog-trot to heaven.”

He waited until the drawing-room door had closed behind her, then he went back to his father’s papers. He had discovered them in a secret drawer, and, from their methodical arrangement, he judged that no one had touched them since the night his father had gone to his death. For the most part they were old receipted bills, but here and there he came across the torn leaf of a diary, covered with a close, faded writing. David Hurst read them carefully, and laid them aside. One sheet bore the date of the day preceding his own birth.

“In a few hours, pray God, Jean will have her son and I my freedom,” Walter Hurst had written with unconscious irony. “No one knows how I have striven to fulfil the destiny she mapped out for me in her loving ambition. I have gone against myself, fought down every instinct. My life has become a pitiable farce in which I play the hypocrite the make-believe hero; but now I am tired and can do no more. When she has her son she will transfer her pride to him and he will carry on for her the traditions of our name. I cannot I was not made great, or even courageous. My imagination never leaves me. I see everything I do before it is done all the consequences, all the possibilities. I am afraid of to-night’s work. But I dare not show her that I am afraid. She would hate me and I love her. My God, how I love her! Her beauty and the strength of her soul upholds me. If I were only worthy of her if I could at least die worthy of her before she finds out the truth—”

This confession, scrawled a few hours before death had answered the writer’s prayer, broke off suddenly. David Hurst reread it many times, as though he were committing it to memory. Then he tore it carefully into a hundred pieces. And his face was set in lines of a grim pity.

That night, contrary to custom, he dined alone with his mother. The occasion was a rare one. By mutual consent they avoided a tete-a-tete in which their total estrangement appeared in all its nakedness, but on this particular evening Hurst's manner changed their relationship. Instead of the old tentative, almost timid, affection he displayed a courteous but distant friendliness. They dined together as acquaintances, and as acquaintances parted for the night. Both retired to their own rooms. Soon afterwards Hurst summoned the servant who watched by his door.

"I am sleeping on the verandah," he said. "Wake me two hours before dawn."

The man salaamed.

"It is well, Sahib."

Hurst changed from his evening clothes into a rough suit of drill, then flung himself down upon the loungechair outside. The night was stifling. Hot waves of air rose from the parched ground and hung like a quivering mist about the tops of the peepul-trees, whose pointed leaves fringed the dark sapphire of the night-sky. The moon had not yet risen. David Hurst lay with his hands behind his head and watched the uneasy flickering of the stars until sleep overtook him. At about three o'clock the native servant glided out of the shadows of the bedroom and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"It is time, Sahib," he whispered.

Hurst rose instantly, and, without a word, went down the steps into the garden. At the gate he collided with a man, who seemed to have been standing waiting, and in the recoil he recognised, by the faint light hanging mysteriously over the valley, the broad shoulders and placid face of the unexpected apparition.

"Judge!" he said sharply. "You here!"

"I believe midnight strolls are free," the judge returned without embarrassment.

"By all means. The time is admirable for those who wish to be alone."

"Do you wish to be alone, David?"

"I confess yes."

The two men considered each other in silence. Hurst's tone had been cold to the point of insolence.

"Nevertheless, I should be glad if you would allow me to accompany you a little on your stroll. I have something I wish to say to you."

"Then you came out here to see me?"

"I came out to see if certain rumours were based on fact."

"In other words, you were spying on me?"

"In a certain sense yes."

Hurst began to walk along the road away from Kolruna. The judge kept at his side. The difference in age, the long-standing friendship, had ceased to play a part between them. A smothered yet fierce antagonism of wills had taken the place of the old understanding. "Might I ask your authority and your object?" Hurst asked with a flash of cold resentment.

The judge coughed. He was breathing hoarsely and irregularly, but he did not slacken his long stride.

"My authority, David? I don't suppose I have any My object is to prevent you making a mess of your life."

"You are very kind. I was not aware that the matter was anybody's concern but my own."

"There is your mother."

Hurst threw back his head and laughed.

"Was it she who set you on your new hobby?"

"No. I took it up on my own behalf. I heard ugly stories about you, and I meant to find out for myself."

"It would have been simpler if you had come to me direct."

The judge laughed grimly.

“If the stories had been without foundation you would have been indignant, and if they had been true you would have lied,” he said.

“Most wise judge! Might I ask how long you have been outside waiting?”

“Since eight o’clock,” was the imperturbable answer.

“Six hours! Good heavens! “Hurst stood still and repeated his short, ironical laugh. “All this for love of the prodigal!”

A shaking hand rested on his arm. In the dim light Hurst caught a glimpse of a face ashy with physical suffering.

“There is your mother, David. You bear her name she is very proud of it. It would break her heart if you dragged it in the mud.”

“It was for my mother’s sake, then!”

The grasp on his arm tightened. The judge’s voice grew suddenly very quiet.

“David Hurst, you are a cur if you mock at something which I have kept hidden for thirty years,” he said simply.

Hurst did not answer for a moment. When he spoke again his manner had undergone a change.

“I have been blind,” he said. “I am young and the young see only their own troubles.”

“Not only the young,” the judge answered.

“But at least I have been discourteous and ungrateful I did not understand. Forgive me.”

“There is nothing to forgive only go home, David. It’s all I ask for her sake.”

Gently but firmly Hurst loosened the hand that held him.

“Do you remember an afternoon some twelve years ago, when my mother told you that she hated me?”

“Good God! you heard?”

“Yes. It has taken me twelve years to digest it all, but now the process is at an end and you’ll understand, Judge I’m infernally indifferent to the wishes of people who hate me. That’s natural, isn’t it?”

The judge nodded. He seemed to have sunk together, like a man who had received a blow.

“Yes, d ned natural, David. I haven’t any more to say except, for your own sake —”

“I don’t care very much for myself either just enough not to wreck my life against a rock, as others have done before me. That’s what I nearly did do but I saved myself in time. I’m free quite free responsible to no one.” He turned and looked about him. “Our ways part here, Judge.”

“Where are you going?” “To a woman.”

“David! Then it’s true—”

“Quite true. But she has never spoken to me or seen me. Tell that to Kolruna, and see what they make of it. Good night.”

He received no answer. The judge stared after him until the night engulfed his shadow.

CHAPTER VI

THE AWAKENING

UNCHANGING as the grim-faced idol which stared over her head into the awakening day, she knelt amidst the flowers, her hands folded upon her lap, her lips parted in the same unspoken, unsatisfied longing. So she appeared to him as he stood quietly at the shrine's entrance, and so she had appeared to him, morning after morning, since that first dawn when he had seen her in all the perfection of her sleeping womanhood. Until now he had never wished it otherwise. In his dreams she had belonged to him as no other human being had ever done or could do. In these silent visits and in his hours of loneliness he had woven his life about her, hugging her reality to his famished soul, warming his half-frozen humanity at the fire of her imagined tenderness. He had known that he, too, dreamed, but his dreams had had for their object a living being who had never shattered his illusion, nor thrust upon him his own utter folly.

Day after day he had stood before her, yet her eyes had never rested upon him with the cold, half-pitying indifference whose remembrance clung like poison to his blood. Her eyes were blank he had painted into them all the warmth of his own imagining. No more than her quiet breath passed her lips, but in his dreams she had spoken to him, and her words had filled the great emptiness of his life. He had put the thought of her waking hours if waking hours she had from him, sick with the pain of his own awakening. For he knew that then she passed out of his possession, ceased to be his creation. What she then was he did not know at best, perhaps, an ignorant Hindu child; at the worst, a woman conscious of her power, indifferent to its possible high uses.

But it was as neither of these that Hurst had seen her only as a lovely vase into which he had poured his dreams and ideals, his whole unsatisfied desire. She had belonged to him. The very water which beat against her rocky shrine separated her from the world and made her more surely his; her passivity, her very helplessness had aroused in him the knowledge of his own strength, and with that a chivalrous reverence and tenderness. And yet, beneath all there had been unrest. He felt it stirring in his blood as he stood there, his arms folded across his breast, watching her, marking with the appreciation of the instinctive artist the exquisite outlines of her features, the noble carriage of the dark head. He no

longer felt the complete peace which the contemplation of her beauty had first given him. His dreams were good, but they were no more than dreams. Behind the smooth forehead there was a brain which dreamed apart from him, beneath the quiet breast a heart which beat its own peaceful measure. The vase was very fair, but it contained something more than his fancy the mystery of a human character.

For the first time the thought took definite form in his mind and with it awoke desire, a reckless, headlong need of the reality. He was weary of lighting her eyes with a warmth he had never seen, of filling the silence with a voice he had never heard. Unknown to him, his egoism faltered; the passive reflection of himself no longer satisfied all that was divine in his love clamoured for the companionship of a being equal to himself, independent of himself, and yet his own. And Reason, stunned by the sudden onrush of desire, relaxed her hold and the name was spoken which had trembled a hundred times on his lips.

“Sarasvati!” he said, scarcely above his breath.

In the absolute quiet the whisper fell like a discordant note of music. Startled, horrified by his own mad act, Hurst recoiled, and for a brief instant his shadow was thrown across the dreamer’s face. He saw it, and drew back against the marble pillar of the entrance, and once more the brightening ray of sunshine flooded back into the shrine. But to Hurst’s dazed eyes the fleeting darkness had wrought a miracle. The air had awakened; life beat past him on golden wings; the dreaming silence vanished like a mist dispelled by the breath of some sudden rising wind, and in the dead eyes of the woman kneeling before the altar a light had dawned more wonderful than his highest fancy had ever painted it.

He stood, leaning against the marble pillar, and watched the wonder of her awakening in scarcely conscious silence. Slowly, like the petals of a flower, her hands unfolded, then rose and laid themselves across her breast, as though in protection of some treasured secret. Many minutes passed thus, in which she seemed to be drawing her soul back from the shadowy country of her contemplation; then suddenly she turned, and the eyes, with their warmth of unutterable tenderness, rested on him in fearless greeting.

“My Lord and God!” she said in the softness of her own tongue.

“Sarasvati!” he answered tonelessly. She rose like some white spirit and came

towards him, her hands outstretched, palm upwards, her face radiant with joy which seemed to him not of this earth. In that instant her divinity was a real thing, and he shrank from her. Then her hands touched him, rested on his shoulders, and all thought, all reason sank engulfed in a flood which in its immensity became passionless. He held her to him and kissed her, not wildly, but as a man thirsting in the middle of a tractless desert drinks of some un hoped-for stream of crystal water. All knowledge of himself, of her, of life, passed. For a time which seemed at once fleeting and immeasurable his innermost being flung off the shackles of mortality, and rose triumphant into a boundless space where there was no thought, no desire, scarcely consciousness. It was a state near death he knew it, and the strong life within fought and conquered. Through a thinning haze he saw her face, the closed eyes, the faintly smiling mouth, and knew that she was a mortal woman and their happiness earthly.

“Sarasvati!” he repeated.

Her eyes opened. They burned, but behind their fire was still the lingering shadows of her dreams.

“My Lord thou hast called me I am here,” she said. “Long have I heard thy voice, long striven against thee. But thy need was greater than my strength and I came.”

“Thou heardest me!” he stammered, in her own tongue. “It seemed that thou wert asleep, and neither saw nor knew when I came and went. Sarasvati, how long hast thou known me?”

“Surely through all the ages,” she answered, in the low warm notes of her voice, “and yet perchance only a little while. In Nirvana there is no time and almost had I attained Nirvana, when thou earnest and calledst to me. I heard thy voice through the great silence, and half did I struggle against thee.” Once more she laid her hands upon his shoulders, and her eyes filled with a deep repentance. “My Lord I know not why I was afraid.”

“Of what?” he asked gently.

“Of earth and earth’s dreams.” He felt her shudder as though at some ugly memory. “I too have dreamed strange, ugly visions of men’s passions but then was the wisdom of the Vedas given to me, and I knew that they were but dreams which hide our unity with the Most High. Through prayer and meditation I

obtained peace.” She lifted her dark, fathomless eyes to his. “On earth there is no peace,” she finished sadly.

He looked at her, marvelling at her pathetic wisdom.

“And I have brought thee back,” he said. “I have done great wrong.”

“Thou art my God,” she answered with a sudden passionate gesture. “Whither thou callest I must follow all my life and love is thine.”

“What dost thou know of love?” he asked her.

She turned a little, pointing out through the open doorway to the sunlit world beyond.

“The word is written in the Vedas,” she said gently. “Oft did I ponder of it, and scarcely knew its meaning. Only when the warm light fell upon me, or when the moon rose and played with the waters, I felt a strange beating at my heart, and it seemed to me that then love drew nearer. But that is long since. In Nirvana there is no love only silence and solitude.” She paused, and then added under her breath, “And yet there love came to me.”

He took her face between his hands and kissed her reverently, for he knew that she was showing him the mystery of a woman’s heart as perhaps no woman had shown a man before.

“Tell me!” he pleaded. “How did love come?”

“As a wind breathing through my loneliness at first softly, then as a great storm which caught me up and bore me earthwards here to thy feet. At first I would not then, when I saw thy face, I knew that thou hadst need of me, and I fought no more.”

“When didst thou first see my face?” he persisted.

“I know not,” she answered dreamily. “For me there is no time. Almost I believe that I have always seen thee in the sunshine and in the stars and afterwards, in my solitude, I seemed to wait for thy coming as a soul waits for its hour of rebirth. Around me was clearness and silence; wishless and dreamless, I meditated on Brahma and on the one Great Truth. But a mist gathered before my

sight, and in the midst I saw thy face, and out of the silence thy voice called upon me ‘ Sarasvati, daughter of Brahma! ‘ And still I strove to think on the All One and on the Sacred Word, but always thy face rose before me. And the wind grew stronger, and my soul awoke and spread its wings, and joy was given me greater than the joy of peace.”

She bent her head against his shoulder and for a moment neither spoke. The sunlight poured in upon them and lit up the face of the watching god as though in warning. But David Hurst had forgotten time and place. More perfect, more wonderful than any dream of her had she revealed herself to him not as a child, nor yet as an empty-hearted woman, but as a soul that had ripened to maturity in its dreams, a being armed with a strange, unchildish wisdom, yet purer, more innocent than the flowers that lay upon her altar. And the love that she had brought him who had hitherto been loveless was as a gift straight from the hands of God.

“My beloved!” he said.

Unconsciously he used his own tongue, and she looked up at him with an untroubled question in her eyes:

“Thou speakest, and I do not understand,” she said. “Who art thou? Art thou not Siva the god my husband?”

He shook his head, smiling, yet struck by a sudden pain.

“I am no god, but a mortal like thyself, Sarasvati. Behold, thy husband is neither god nor man a senseless, lifeless image. What is he to thee?”

No change came into her upturned face. That which he had feared to see scorn or disappointment was not there; only a limitless trust.

“Thou art not as those others whom I saw in my dreams,” she said. “From whence comest thou?”

“From a loneliness greater than thine,” he answered.

“And has love come to thee also?” she asked wistfully.

“Yes, Sarasvati. I think I have loved thee always unknown even to myself. It was

my love that awakened thine.”

“Then art thou surely my husband,” she said with a naive confidence. She laid her hands in his and drew back a step, considering him, and he bore her scrutiny unflinchingly. For the first time in his life love looked at him and found no fault. “Thou art fairer than all men,” she said simply.

“Amongst my own people I am called dark and ugly,” he said, laughing. “Hast thou seen thine own face?” She shook her head.

“When thou hast seen it, thou wilt know that I am but a poor mate for thee, Sarasvati,” he said.

Then, with a quick, impulsive movement, she came back to him and laid her slender arms about his neck.

“What are our bodies but shadows?” she said. “Is it not our souls that love that have found each other? Art thou not mine, as I am thine?”

“Yes,” he answered. And yet, even as he held her to him in a passionate gratitude, his eyes fell on the grinning idol and in the distance he heard the sound of voices raised in loud melodious chant, and knew that the end was at hand.

“Sarasvati,” he whispered, “thy people come for thee. Canst thou not hear them?”

“They sing unto Dyaus, the goddess of the dawn,” she answered dreamily. “What are they to me? Take me to thy people, who are mine. Let me follow thee.”

Very gently he loosened her hands from about his neck. The full measure of his madness had become clear to him. He had called her from her peace, perhaps to death at least to the bitterness of grim reality and loss. Yet in the realisation he felt a calm and strength that were new to him. He led her back to her place before the altar and forced her to her knees. She made no resistance, but looked at him with a dawning fear, her hands outstretched, and he took them and kissed them.

“Sarasvati, death is very near to both of us. Is thy love strong enough to trust me?”

“Have I not trusted thee already?” she answered simply.

“Return to thy peace for a little longer. Then I will come for thee. Canst thou not?” “I can but seem,” she said. “My peace has gone. But since it is for thy life, I will try. Look, my lord.”

Like a child she folded her hands before her and lifted her face to the full sunshine. But the face was no more the same. The breathless longing had gone. The lips were closed in a proud line of determination, and in the dead eyes there burned love and that high courage which is given to women in the hour of need. Again he kissed her.

“Be patient. I will come again!” he whispered. She made no answer. Yet, as he reached the door, he thought he heard a smothered cry, and looked at her. She had not moved. Her eyes were lifted steadily to the light, but he saw that they were dim with tears, and that the first deep line of pain had drawn itself about the rigid mouth.

“Sarasvati,” he whispered.

And suddenly her lips smiled at him with their first radiance.

“I know that thou wilt come again!” she said.

He turned, but already, as he saw the farther bank of the sacred pool, he knew that it was too late. The doors of the sanctuary stood open, and a procession of priests, whose chants had broken the silence, came slowly to the water’s edge. As yet they had not seen him, and he stumbled to the boat and thrust it off, so that it drifted shore wards with the soft morning wind. Then, without hesitation, he slipped noiselessly into the water and struck out for the stone steps beneath the shadow of the Gopura. He swam low, so that only his head was visible, and for some distance at least the shrine hid him from view. But as he reached the shore the chanting ceased suddenly, and he knew that the drifting boat had been discovered. Cautiously he drew himself on the lowest step, and, half hidden by the overhanging embankment, saw that the procession had drawn together in puzzled consultation. An angry hand was raised in command, and presently a young man separated himself from the rest, and, wading out into the shallows, drew the boat ashore. Five priests entered and were rowed out swiftly to the shrine, whilst those remaining took up the interrupted chant whose monotonous melody came with the breeze across the waters.

“Fair shines the light of morning. Behold Dyaus awakens us to toil; along the path of eternal order goeth the goddess, arrayed in glory, and extendeth in the east gleaming till she filleth earth and sky. Praise be to thee, daughter of Heaven!”

Hurst listened, tense and motionless. He saw the whiterobed priests enter the shrine, and ground his teeth in the violence of his suspense. To him who loved her it seemed inevitable that they should see that a change had come upon her, that the miracle of her awakening had been accomplished. But no sign was given. Again the priests came out into the light, and he saw her in the midst of them, walking with the mechanical precision of a dreamer, her hands folded on her breast, her face lifted to the cloudless sky. For a moment, whilst her escort reentered the boat, she stood alone, a slight, pathetic figure, yet regal in unconscious dignity, and the chants upon the shore grew louder as though in greeting. But a new note had crept into the monotony of the priestly song, and in the pure calm of the morning there stirred something that was evil a sultry, ugly breath of Oriental passion.

The man crouching in the shadow heard it, as he heard the words, and he half started upright, his hands clenched, his face black with impotent rage that forgot caution. But though his shadow fell clean-cut upon the water, he passed unnoticed. The procession, bearing Sarasvati upon a golden palanquin, reformed and returned slowly to the sanctuary. Hurst followed it with his eyes; his sight, sharpened by knowledge, saw what she saw the vile and hideous reliefs upon the temple-pillars, the cunning, sensual faces of her priests; his ears heard with her ears of unsullied innocence. And in that moment of loathing and despair he remembered his own question, “Will she awake?” and the Professor’s answer, “Not if the dear God is merciful,” and for the first time understood the full magnitude and significance of the words. He had ignored the warning. In his boundless egoism he had awakened her to this, and to this had left her, in his cowardice and weakness.

Boused by a storm of unreasoning self-contempt and love, he sprang up the remaining steps, with no plan, save the one not to leave her in the hands of these priestly satyrs; but, as he reached the level of the temple courts, the doors of the sanctuary clanged to, and the chanting passed into sudden mysterious silence. The change brought him to his senses; he knew that he was alone and helpless, and that against him were ranged the hatred and religious fanaticism of a whole people. Already he had trespassed against the sacred law of non-interference

which alone safeguarded his race. He dared go no farther, and as he stood there, torn between passion and judgment, the quiet about him was unexpectedly broken.

“The Sahib bathes early in the sacred pool,” a voice said behind him. He turned, recovering his calm instantly as he saw the man standing by the water’s edge. A quick, instinctive recognition of danger warned him, and he drew himself up with the natural hauteur of the white man.

“Rama Pal, the Christian, visits the temple of his fathers,” he said, with the ironic indifference born of his emergency.

The convert bowed his head. He wore the ordinary native costume, and against the background of ruined Oriental splendour his handsome, inscrutable face and graceful figure stood out in harmonious completeness. In the mission house he had been a disturbing, discordant element; here he became the living personification of the temple and of all that for which it stood the spirit of a race and a great religion.

“The Temple to the Unknown is beautiful at dawn,” he said, ignoring the Englishman’s veiled taunt, “and it is well for the Sahib that his faithful servant, and no other, has seen him, else might it have fared ill with the Sahib and with his people.”

“A faithful servant?” Hurst queried significantly.

“Even so, Sahib,” was the smooth answer.

“Whither, then, have they borne her?” Hurst demanded.

“Of whom speaketh the Sahib?”

“Of her whom we have seen carried amidst the priests into the sanctuary.”

Rama Pal’s eyes became blank and lightless.

“Sahib, I have seen no priests. The sanctuary stands surely empty,” he answered.

For a long minute European directness confronted the matchless cunning of the native and yielded. Rama Pal had not flinched. His face retained its stony

intentness, and David Hurst's raised hand fell to his side.

"You have lied," he said. "You have seen what I have seen."

"Surely the Sahib has dreamed old dreams," was the answer.

Hurst shrugged his shoulders and passed on. Rama Pal lifted his hands gravely to his forehead in profound reverence, and remained thus until Hurst had disappeared through the high gates of the Gopura.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. CHICHESTER'S BALL SUFFERS AN INTERRUPTION

WHATEVER Mrs. Chichester undertook was a success; she had not the slightest idea of organisation, and her restless energy was peculiarly ineffectual as far as direct results were concerned; but by some miracle or other her enterprises always arose triumphant out of chaos. Perhaps her luck, touched by her childish confidence, came to her rescue; or, as was more likely, her guests, roused by the hopeless confusion, grew accustomed to smoothing out situations and exerted themselves more than was their wont. As the judge expressed it, "Mrs. Chichester kicked up the dust, and other people had to sweep it away," which metaphor was admirably descriptive.

On the occasion of the "Combined Bazaar and Dance given on behalf of the Famine Fund," the dust had been raised to some effect. A huge marquee had been put up in the colonel's garden, and the elaborate arrangements were such that the most sanguine questioned the possibility of covering so much as the expenses. Everybody had been invited officers and officials from neighbouring stations, whom Mrs. Chichester was "putting up" at the extreme inconvenience of her family; civilians whom nobody knew, and even rich Eurasians whom nobody wanted to know. And in the midst of this heterogeneous, somewhat hostile crowd, Mrs. Chichester moved like an innocent, beneficent spirit, introducing life-long enemies, husbands to their wives, and engaged couples to each other, with a cheerful vagueness which left the victims breathless either with indignation or laughter. Finally, as was always the case, a general good-tempered acceptance of the situation supervened and Mrs. Chichester surveyed the scene with the consciousness of having added another triumph to her list.

The dancing had already begun when Judge Hamilton arrived in his ramshackle buggy. Having thrust the charge of the vehicle and the weary-looking quadruped upon the first available syce, he made his way straight to the drawing-room of the bungalow, where the remnants of the bazaar were still being displayed for the benefit of the unwary. Diana Chichester, who had been left in charge, immediately seized upon him.

"You've got to buy something," she said firmly, "otherwise the family is ruined.

What will you have? a poker-work cigar-box, or a hand-worked table-cloth? both equally fabulous; you can take your choice.”

“Thanks.” The judge looked dismally at the two forlorn articles offered for sale. “I don’t think I care much for them,” he said. “I wanted something handsome expensive.”

“They’re all expensive,” Diana retorted grimly. “What about this?” She produced a fine gold necklace and dangled it in the light. “Mother wheedled it out of some native prince of her acquaintance, and if it isn’t sold he will be offended, so that poor father is faced with the prospect of buying it himself. As he has already to pay a ransom on his own cigar-box, you might come to his rescue.”

“It looks pretty,” the judge admitted. “What’s the damage?”

“Thirty rupees.” She looked laughingly into his face, but he did not flinch.

“It’s a bargain,” he said, and produced his purse. “Diana, where is Mrs. Hurst?”

“Somewhere in the marquee. An old civilian has got hold of her. You had better go to the rescue.”

“Thanks. After that doubtful compliment, I think I will. Won’t you come too?”

She shook her head.

“I must give the poker cigar-box another chance. Besides, Dick Hatherway is coming over for me in a few minutes.”

“Humph!” said the judge. Without further observation he pocketed his purchase and made his way briskly across the path that separated the bungalows from the marquee. In spite of his buoyant bearing, he looked unusually ill and haggard as he stood beneath the artificial light, gazing over the heads of the dancing couples as though in search of some one. The unbroken, stifling heat had told upon him, as it had indeed told upon most of the gay, seemingly unwearied crowd; but, like them, he gave no sign, and his step, as he laved across the floor, was light with vitality. He found Mrs. Hurst seated in a flower-banked alcove which opened out into the garden, and on the judge’s arrival the bald-headed Commissioner who had been entertaining her took a somewhat hasty departure.

The judge's manner, in point of fact, had been courteously discouraging, and he now accepted the vacated chair with an air of conscious victory.

"I have always possessed the knack of getting people to go," he said. "You don't mind, Jean? You see, I'm a privileged person to-day, and consider I have a right to be officious. Say you're pleased to see me."

She nodded, her eyes fixed absent-mindedly in front of her.

"Of course I am. Why are you so late?"

"A crowd of natives stopped me a piteous-looking crowd, and not particularly friendly. There's a whole swarm of them outside in the compound, watching. I wonder what they think of it all."

Mrs. Hurst glanced over the barrier of flowers into the darkness. Everywhere there was a noiseless, indefinable movement, and once a sharp, shrill cry rose above the satiating sweetness of the valse. She winced as though the sound hurt her, but her face returned instantly to its normal composure.

"Think of what?" she asked.

"Of our European ideas of charity," he said. "They are famishing, and they see us dance. The contrast no doubt strikes them."

"You think the business a mistake?"

He nodded.

"It blots out years of self-sacrificing, even heroic labour on their behalf. They are like children. They hate the doctor who cures them, and they have no understanding at all for our European compromises between virtue and pleasure. The fact that we are eating and drinking for their future benefit is not clear to them. They are hungry that is the salient feature in their logic."

Mrs. Hurst remained silent for a moment. A faint, sarcastic smile played about her lips.

"One day their logic will improve," she said; "but I doubt if their opinion of our methods will alter much. They will see that our charity is a mask for pleasure-

seeking or self-glory; that we who teach them Christian love hate each other as cordially as do their hundred and one sects, and when they have made that and a few other discoveries our prestige will not be worth a breath.” She made a little careless gesture. “I live in a glass house and throw stones,” she said. “But I am at least frank about my own fallibility. I am not charitable or particularly Christian.” “No,” the judge admitted. She laughed with a genuine delight. “I ought not to be flattered by such an unqualified agreement. Of whom or of what were you thinking?” “Of David,” was the grave answer. Her face hardened. “What of David?”

“He knows you hate him. He told me the other day that he heard what you said to me some twelve years ago, and I know that it cut deep. He’s your own son, Jean, and I have every reason to fear he is going wrong.”

She drummed impatiently with her fingers on the arm of her chair, but the judge met her frown without wavering.

“What do you expect me to do?” she demanded. “What any woman in your place would do.” “But I am not ‘any woman.’” Suddenly her frown melted, and she laid her hand lightly on his arm. “You want me to control him,” she said. “I can’t it wouldn’t even be fair, and I haven’t the right. I have no feeling which would justify such an interference. He is heavily handicapped, and, since I have no affection to offer, I must at least leave him his entire freedom. Fortunately, I can do so with an easy conscience. Our name does not depend upon him if it did, I should act differently.” The judge sighed.

“I’ve been interfering again *malgré moi*, as the French say,” he observed ruefully. “However, as I’m privileged, I suppose I can indulge in luxuries.”

She looked at him with a quiet amusement.

“What is this ‘privilege’ you are talking about so much ‘?’” she asked. “Is it your birthday?”

“Not my birthday exactly but a birthday.” He drew out the gold chain and laid it clumsily in her hand. “I rescued that for you out of the bazaar as a souvenir,” he said.

“Of what?”

“We met for the first time thirty years ago,” he explained simply.

There was a moment’s silence. She toyed thoughtfully with the gift, and the man beside her watched her, his small blinking eyes very bright. Also there was a smile about his mouth which only a close observer would have noticed as being somewhat too persistent.

“I remember now,” she said, and looked at him with a critical intentness which appeared to note every crease and fold in his round, somewhat puffy face. “It was at the Hunters’ dinner-party,” she went on musingly. “You were different in those days, Judge. I have a recollection of a very fiery young man who said very little but looked unutterable things. In my girlish vanity it never occurred to me that you probably looked the same at every one, and I was terrified that you were going to fall in love with me.”

“Well, by some miracle I escaped the temptation,” the judge returned placidly. Then, as though to change the subject, he indicated Diana Chichester and Hatherway, who were crossing the empty floor in the direction of the exit. “Diana has grown an unusually lovely girl,” he said, “and, of course, Hatherway is head over ears in love. They make a handsome couple—”

Mrs. Hurst rose abruptly. Her eyes had wandered back to the compound, and suddenly the whiteness of her face had become deathly.

“Take me away from here,” she said in a low tone of suppressed excitement. “I don’t know what is the matter with me those natives constantly moving in the dark irritate me—” She saw his face of troubled astonishment and recovered herself with an effort. “I beg your pardon — you were speaking of Diana and Hatherway? What, matchmaking, Judge?” She laughed. “Diana Chichester is like me,” she said. “She will only marry a remarkable man and Hatherway is not remarkable.”

That fact was one which Hatherway himself had begun to realise, and almost at that identical moment. He had danced with Diana Chichester, and he danced well, and, so long as his arm supported her, so long he felt her equal. Like most Englishmen of his class, he excelled in all things physical, taking a sheer, unconscious delight in his own strength and health; conscious, too, in an inoffensive way, of a well-built figure and a handsome face. Nor in the normal course of his life had he ever felt particularly troubled by the knowledge that his

mental abilities did not rise above the average. The matter rarely occurred to him, and never depressed him. He was popular in his regiment, he performed his duties with punctual efficiency, he did not believe in works of supererogation, and amongst men, even clever men, he held his own.

But he was discovering that nothing is more ordinary than an ordinary man in the presence of an unusual woman, and for the simple reason that, whereas men amongst themselves tacitly accept a plane on which their varying intelligences are equally at home, a woman of character never sinks, even for the sake of congeniality, below her own level. This peculiarity, which makes the sex a valuable moral force but an occasionally uncomfortable social factor, was very prominent in Diana Chichester's character. She was gracious and kind. She listened to Hatherway's conversation with an attention which would have deceived most men; but Hatherway was his love, and he knew that she was unconsciously condescending to him.

She stood at his side, fanning herself and watching the moving lights on the road, and when her eyes rested on him for an instant it was always with that expression of friendly vagueness which was the chief point of resemblance between Mrs. Chichester and herself. The expression warned him, but in the half-light of the garden her beauty, and, above all, the charm of her personality, at once vigorous and feminine, swept him off his feet. The touch of romantic sentimentality, which is as English as it is unacknowledged, had been awakened by the music, the soft mystery of the Indian night, perhaps a little by Mrs. Chichester's charity champagne, and suddenly he lost his head, and immediately afterwards his nerve. What he meant to say had been written clearly enough in his mind what he really said was confused and stumbling, a bald and yet pathetic confession of a long-standing devotion.

When the stream of his broken eloquence ran dry, as it did very quickly, he found that he was holding her hand and that she was looking at him with an objective interest, which, had he known it, had once held back David Hurst from a culminating folly. It calmed him, instantly and painfully, but he retained her hand, striving, according to his instinct, to hold physically what his mind and soul had failed to touch.

"I know I have been a fool to say anything," he finished, with a new humility. "I can see by your face what you are going to answer but don't say it, Di! I've quite understood it would only hurt us both, and I would rather think that nothing had

happened and that I had still some hope.” He smiled courageously at her. ‘ ‘ For I shall go on hoping and trying, Di. It would be trite of me to say that I’m not worthy of you I don’t think any man is worthy of a woman like you but my love is an honest, clean thing, and that is perhaps as much as even the best can offer you.”

“I think it is,” she answered gravely. “But you look at things from the wrong standpoint, Dick. You talk as though we women sat on some sort of a pedestal, watching a varying procession of offers pass before us, of which we must inevitably choose one. I don’t want to choose I have not the slightest desire to marry at any rate, not for the pure sake of marrying. I am very interested in life and in myself, and the other interests which some women seem to need are not necessary to me. I have my books and the world. I want nothing more.”

“A woman who does not marry—” Hatherway began doggedly.

“misses her vocation,” Diana concluded, laughing. “I wonder, my dear Dick, how you men would like it if we planted a vocation before you chimney-sweeping, for instance and told you categorically that that was your business in life, and that if you didn’t accept it you were running against your destiny? You would protest vigorously as I protest. The idea takes away all freedom all individuality and turns us into a herd of sheep.”

“Do you mean that you will never marry, then?” Hatherway demanded. He was watching her eagerly, and saw a reflective frown gather on her brows, but no dreaded sign of embarrassment.

“If ever I meet a man whose personality completes my own and who dares to live his own life, I will marry him provided he asks me,” she said.

” Dares to live his own life ‘?’” Hatherway echoed. “What do you mean, dear? Do I not live my own life?”

She shook her head in her decided way.

“You live the life of your kind,” she said. “In your work, amusements, manners, dress, ambitions everything you jog-trot behind custom, and if you had an idea different from that of your fellows you would be ashamed of it and suppress it at once. The ideal of the average man is the hall-marked mediocrity, and I am mediocre enough myself to be heartily sick of the virtue.”

Dick Hatherway flushed under the energy of her scorn, and suddenly, as was her wont, she repented. "You must not mind anything I say, Dick," she said kindly. "I don't know why, but I am always rude to people when they propose to me I suppose, because I hate hurting them."

"That sounds as if it was an every-day occurrence," he said, taking a rueful satisfaction from the possibility.

"It isn't, though!" she retorted. "I have only experienced one other, and to this hour I can't make out whether even that was genuine."

"I wonder who it was!" he meditated.

"You would never guess. And in the meantime, whilst you are trying, we might go down the garden. The heat is stifling, and somehow the music and the people make it worse."

He offered her his arm. Her determined friendliness helped him to master his pain and disappointment, and though it was obvious that what was his first tragedy was to her little more than an episode, already half forgotten, he took comfort. Honest love is often blessed with the confidence of virtue, and Hatherway was intensely honest. Moreover, without being conceited, he knew that he was what Kolruna called "a brilliant match," and as it is constitutionally hard for any man to realise that he is not wanted, it was for the popular young officer almost an impossibility. Nevertheless he was sufficiently depressed to find conversation difficult, and they reached the gates of the compound almost in silence.

The crowd of native watchers had increased. By the light of the two lanterns on either side of the entrance they caught what might have been a glimpse out of Dante's Inferno a sea of faces, hollowcheeked and wild-eyed, which flashed for an instant into the yellow circle, then vanished into the darkness, giving place to others, different of feature, but alike in their expression of fanatic exaltation. And with all this unresting confusion of movement there was scarcely a sound. The music from the marquee alone provided a mocking, incongruous accompaniment. Involuntarily, Hatherway stopped short.

"I don't think we had better let them see us," he said. "I don't much like the look of them. The famine has begun to pinch, and they seem to be excited about something or other. Let us go back."

“I am not afraid,” she said.

“But I am for you,” he retorted. “Besides, our appearance might irritate them, and we haven’t the right to run the risk, if only for the sake of the others.”

She yielded at once to his better judgment, and they were about to retrace their steps when Hatherway himself hesitated, arrested by a sound at once familiar and, in the peculiar stillness of their immediate surroundings, alarming. Diana glanced into his face.

“What was that?” she asked.

He shook his head.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “Some fool or other has let off a squib, or something.” He tried to hurry her pace, but she hung back resolutely.

“Dick, you’re not telling the truth. That was a pistol-shot, and I can hear horse’s hoofs at the gallop—”

“Come!” he commanded with the sharpness of controlled anxiety.

But she wrenched her arm free and faced about* The beat of hoofs was now distinctly audible, and suddenly, as though caught in the grip of a whirlpool, the shifting crowd on the high-road swirled round, then broke and flung itself back on either side. An instant later a horseman burst recklessly through their midst, and, turning into the gateway, drew rein with a sharpness which brought the animal to its haunches.

“Who is there? What! Diana, you! Hatherway?”

Diana Chichester ran to the horse’s side, and laid her hand on the saddle, looking up into the rider’s face.

“David!” she exclaimed.

He was scarcely recognisable. He had lost his helmet, and the black hair lay clotted in blood and dust on his forehead. His eyes stared down at her, and then passed on to Hatherway with a glance of sombre comprehension.

“Go back to the bungalow,” he said curtly. “Hatherway, where is Colonel Chichester?”

“In the marquee.”

“Go and fetch him. Say it is of the utmost importance.”

Hatherway raised his eyebrows. Like most men on the station, he was inclined, if quite unconsciously, to question Hurst’s right to exist. An order from him was intolerable.

“I think you had better go yourself, my dear fellow,” he said coolly.

“Very well, I will.”

Hurst urged his horse forward. The movement was so sudden that Diana Chichester was nearly thrown to the ground, and, with a curse, Hatherway caught her and for an instant held her.

“The boor!” he said between his teeth.

Diana freed herself.

“I’m not sure that the epithet does not apply elsewhere,” she said sharply.

“Didn’t you see that he was wounded? Come.”

They reached the entrance of the marquee only a moment after Hurst had swung himself to the ground. But he did not look at them. He thrust aside the intervening servant and reeled rather than walked into the crowded tent. A dance had just ended. A gorgeous picture of bright uniforms and gay dresses spread itself before him, and he stood there an instant unnoticed. Then Mrs. Chichester, who passed close to him, saw him and uttered a smothered scream. A hundred eyes were turned in his direction. He paid them no heed. He had caught sight of the colonel, and went straight across the floor, his spurs jingling softly in the sudden complete silence. Involuntarily the dancers drew back from him. He was covered in dust, and the blood of the wound on his forehead had begun to trickle slowly down his cheek. Moreover, there was something resolute and ruthless in the carriage of his square shoulders which seemed to thrust aside all interference.

“I am sorry to interrupt, Colonel Chichester,” he said in an undertone, “but I

must speak to you at once.”

The little soldier twisted the end of his moustache. In the first moment he had been inclined to share what was no doubt the general opinion namely, that Hurst was the worse for drink. He had heard enough ugly rumours to make the supposition justifiable; but the sight of blood was for him more eloquent than his suspicion.

“What is it?” he asked. “If there is any trouble we might as well hear it at once.”

“The native quarter has broken out,” Hurst answered. “Some spy must have betrayed the existence of the reserve-stores, and the priests have done the rest. About a thousand armed men surround Kolruna, and they are only waiting for the signal from the hill-temple to begin the attack.”

“How do you know?” Chichester demanded.

“Professor Heilig, disguised as a yogi, was present at a meeting of the leaders. He was discovered and barely escaped with his life. He managed to reach his own bungalow, where I happened to be waiting for him, and lies there at present, badly wounded.”

The colonel glanced sharply round him. There were white faces in the group which had gathered about Hurst, and one woman, new to Indian life, had uttered a little hysterical scream. The colonel’s own face was blank. That same morning his regiment had gone into camp five miles outside Kolruna, and he himself had only come over for the evening. The fact was known to everybody present.

“A message must be sent at once—” he began.

“You will find that next to impossible. Your bungalow is surrounded. The rebels have chosen their moment—”

The colonel interrupted with an oath, and a low murmur of alarm passed from those immediately in the vicinity to the farthest corner of the tent.

“The regiment is on its way,” Hurst finished calmly.

“Who gave the alarm?”

Hurst bowed.

“You? You said it was next to impossible—”

Hurst shrugged his shoulders.

“Damn it, sir,” said the colonel vigorously, “I’m proud of you!” He held out his hand, but Hurst seemed not to see it or to hear the wave of applause which spread around him.

“As far as I know, nothing will be done before midnight,” he said. “Then unless it can be prevented a beacon will be lighted on the hill and the attack begun. But I hope by that time the regiment will have arrived. At any rate, I thought it best to warn you, so that, in case of the worst happening, you would be at least prepared.”

Chichester nodded. His eyes were bright with the joy of battle.

“Gentlemen, I should be glad if you would join me for a few minutes in my bungalow,” he said loudly. “Whilst we are making our arrangements, the ladies will keep up the appearances. There must be no sign that we are afraid. The music can begin again.” He gave a sign to the band-master, and the strains of the latest Viennese valse broke the straining silence. David Hurst touched the colonel on the arm.

“I should be grateful to you if you would lend me your horse,” he said.

“My horse! What the devil for?”

Hurst’s mouth was grim and set.

“My beast is done for, and I have a long way to go,” he said.

“David, my good fellow, are you mad? You are wounded, and—”

“It is nothing—but it is imperative that I should go back. Have I your permission?”

“Yes but in Heaven’s name, wait—”

“I have not a moment to lose.”

He turned on his heel and confronted Hatherway. That young officer’s face was flushed with excitement and honest regret. He, too, held out his hand.

“I owe you an apology, Hurst,” he said, “and I beg of you let me go for you wherever you have to go. I am fresh and unhurt, and—”

David Hurst pushed him gently on one side.

“What I have to do I must do myself,” he said.

He went back the way he had come, and again, though there were many in that crowd of men and women who would have been glad to give him a sign of their gratitude, no one spoke to him or held him back. His utter indifference to them held them paralysed. At the door he passed his mother. She stood almost in his path, a proud, erect figure, yet her too he ignored, and, as he limped out into the darkness, she turned and caught Judge Hamilton by the arm.

“What is it?” she asked sharply. “What has he done?”

“I fancy he has saved Kolruna,” said the judge.

“Where has he gone?”

“God knows,” was the answer.

She looked at him, and for the first time in her life saw that his face was bitter with reproach.

CHAPTER VIII

THE EIGHTS OF FREEDOM

PROFESSOR HEILIG lying on his sofa by the window, alternately drank from the glass which Father Romney had placed beside him, and cursed. He cursed in his own tongue with a fluency and guttural violence which seem to give the lie to his ghastly face, and the wide bandage across his breast. Once he shook his fist, but at whom was not clear, and Father Romney, who had been busy tearing up some white linen, gently intervened.

“You will make yourself worse,” he said reproachfully. “Lie quiet and try not to worry. What must be will be.”

“Infernal fatalist!” Heilig muttered. Nevertheless, his hands dropped to his side, and he contented himself with frowning at the tall white-clad figure seated beneath the lamplight. “Am I dying?” he asked abruptly. Father Romney looked up and a faint smile flashed over his tired face.

“It does not sound like it,” he observed, “but I cannot guarantee anything unless you do as you are told. That chest wound may give trouble.”

“Ha!” Heilig heaved up his broad shoulders. “Had but the accursed dolt hit me on my head I should not lie thus. My head he is thick like a sheep he would not have felt it. Fool, utter fool that I am.”

“If Kolruna exists to-morrow it will be because you are less a fool than most of the inhabitants,” Father Romney remarked.

“You think my interfering a proof of sense? I am not so sure. But that is not the trouble.” He rolled his massive head impatiently from side to side. “Father, beware of young men with poetic temperaments and headstrong tempers above all, keep them from the women-folk. They are more dangerous than fire-brands in a hay-rick, more unmanageable—” He stopped apparently for lack of a simile and pointed to the window. “Draw the curtain!” he commanded imperatively. “I will not be shut up like a rat in a trap.”

“Is it safe?” Father Romney questioned.

“I know not, and I do not care. I will see the hills. What hour is it?”

“On twelve.”

Heilig lifted himself on his elbow.

“In a few minutes they will throw the first torch,” he muttered; “and in half an hour Sarasvati, daughter of Brahma, will have entered Nirvana.”

Father Romney pulled aside the curtains and stared out into the darkness. His haggard face was white with pity.

“It sounds too impossible too awful,” he said. “Why should they do it? it is against themselves.”

“Siva is dead,” Heilig answered. “He has died so the priests say because the Foreigner has desecrated his altar and his wife. That alone is enough to drive a half-starved fanatic people to madness. For the rest they have revived an old custom the widow follows her lord on the funeral pyre, and then the trouble will begin.”

“And Hurst knows?”

“Yes, a thousand curses. I told him I did not realise and now he has gone to save her to his death. Ha! you saw that?”

Against the pitchy blackness a streak of fire shot up, then died down to a sullen glow which burnt high above the line of the horizon like a monster star. Father Romney involuntarily clasped the crucifix to his breast.

“Dear God!” he whispered.

Heilig fell back. He was grinding his teeth, and Romney, turning suddenly, saw that a single angry tear rolled down the German’s cheek.

“She was beautiful,” Heilig muttered thickly; “beautiful yes, and good, like the living spirit of her religion freed from the foulness and dross of human fancy. I loved her not as a woman, but as an inspiration. And now they have killed her as they will kill him.” He groaned. “I loved him too he was not as the others, not clever like them, but with genius the genius of imagination, of intuition. It had

been crushed and warped, but He would have brought it back to life. Do you believe me? Read the chapters he has written in our great book have they not the divine fire, have they not inspiration? Now it is too late too late—”

“With God it is never too late,” Father Romney returned.

“Ha, you believe in miracles? I cannot. But perhaps it is Divine Wisdom, working through character, which brings the end now. What could have become of either of these two lost ones? The world has no place for them.”

The sound of firing interrupted him. Father Romney came back from the window. He held his head with a serene dignity. “The fighting has begun,” he said. “If the defence fails we shall be amongst the last to suffer.”

“But we shall not have long to wait,” Heilig answered. He held out his square hand and took the priest’s long thin one, and pressed it. “I could not wish to die in better company,” he said. “It is a grand seal on our friendship, Romney. I am proud of it. I have loved you much. You have understood my Wagner as no one else in this forsaken hole, and though you are a churchman you have understood the human heart. See you you die with a heathen, but with a heathen who has loved beauty and goodness in all things, even in religion. Think you not if your God exists and is worth anything that He will receive me?”

“If my God exists He will receive you among the first,” Romney answered.

Heilig gave a hoarse, unsteady laugh.

“Assuredly, had you lived you would have been excommunicated,” he said.

“Listen, the firing has ceased. What is that? It sounds like the wind.”

“Like hundreds of running footsteps,” the priest answered. He had turned back to the window, and again his hand tightened upon the silver crucifix. “Heilig,” he said joyfully, “thank God, the rains have come at last, our prayers are answered God has heard us.”

“Too late! What is that?”

“A dark, flying mass it is coming towards us. Heilig, commend your soul to God.”

But the German had struggled to his feet, and, with a revolver in hand, swayed forward.

“God will look after my soul, without my commendation,” he growled, “and if He is worthy of His creature He will like me all the better for giving a good account of myself. Stand back, Romney; I haf no grudge against these poor devils but if I must die will haf my money’s worth.”

The next instant he had fired, but apparently without effect. The shadow which he had seen gliding up the verandah steps took the definite outline of a man who stumbled to Heilig’s feet, and lay there panting with exhaustion. No one followed him. The sound of hurrying feet died away in the distance. Silence enveloped them, unbroken save by the steady splash of the rain upon the parched and arid ground.

Father Romney bent down and touched the crouching figure on the shoulder.

“Who are you?” he demanded. “What has happened? ‘

The half-naked native raised himself upon his elbow, and held out an imploring hand.

“Shoot not, Sahib,” he gasped faintly. “It is I thy servant I have come back to the Sahib.”

“Ha, come back, haf you?” Heilig laughed and reeled to his couch, where he lay for a moment groaning for breath. “That means that you haf been beaten,” he said; “otherwise you would only haf come back to murder me. What has happened, you black scoundrel?”

“A wonder!” the Sudra answered, breaking into his own tongue with the volubility of hysterical excitement. “Lord Sahib, this night has the last Avatar appeared before us even Vishnu, mounted on a white horse, who rushed down upon us amidst fire and thunder. And in that moment the heavens opened and the rain flooded down upon us. The funeral fires died out. Then knew we that we had done evil and our strength was gone.”

“And Sarasvati thy goddess what has happened?” The native lifted his dark, terrified face from the ground and pointed back to the hills, which now stood out dimly in the light of coming dawn.”

“The fires have gone out,” he whispered. “The shrine stands empty Vishnu has taken the goddess with him into his paradise. We shall see her no more.”

“It is thy punishment.” Heilig turned his suffering eyes with a significant glance to the priest. “Tell the fellow to be gone at once back to his work,” he said faintly. “I must not see his face again to-day.”

Romney repeated the order, and, with a profound salaam, the native glided back on to the verandah and from thence into the grey twilight. For a long minute the two men listened intently to the drop of the rain and the soft stirring of awakened nature. Beyond these sounds it seemed to them that they heard a footfall, slow, dragging, and intermittent.

“God has performed a miracle,” Romney said under his breath.

“A miracle of heroic human character,” Heilig retorted. He raised himself with a stifled groan upon his elbow, and peered into the morn daylight which had begun to creep over the drenched garden. “See that the door is locked, and that no one is watching,” he ordered; and then, in a hoarse triumphant whisper, “David thank God!”

The lamp on the low table still burned. Its yellow reflection mingled with the ghostly grey of morning and fell on David Hurst’s face as he staggered into the room. He made no answer to the Professor’s greeting. He knelt down and gently disburdened himself of the slender figure which he had borne in his arms. The dark head rested wearily against his shoulder. He motioned to the Professor.

“One of your pillows!” he demanded briefly.

Heilig threw him one.

“And pull the curtains,” he added.

Romney obeyed. The daylight was now shut out. By the light of the lamp the three men looked down on the peaceful woman’s face and then at each other.

“You saved her?” Heilig asked in a whisper.

“Yes.”

“How?”

“They had lit the pyre when I reached the temple. I was on Colonel Chichester’s white charger, and I fancy I looked more like a devil than a man I felt more like one. I charged at them, I hadn’t any plan, you understand. I was just frantic. It seems frenzy was hi the air, and I set fire to it. I rode down half a dozen of them, cursing at them like a fiend, and at that moment it began to rain. That was too much for them. They turned tail and fled. The rest was easy enough. I made a rush through the flames, which had subsided almost instantly, and managed to escape with her without much damage. Unfortunately my horse had bolted. I had to make my way back on foot, keeping out of the road for fear some of the runaways should discover me a pretty difficult business.”

“Is she hurt?”

“I think not — only overcome by fatigue and alarm.”

Romney bent down, scrutinising the unconscious face with the shy reverence of a child.

“She is very beautiful,” he said wonderingly.

Heilig uttered a strong Teutonic curse.

“She is very wet,” he retorted. “Get her some wine and some dry clothes—” He stopped, overtaken by the impossibility of his own suggestion. “David,” he said slowly and emphatically, “you haf the talent common to genius that of getting yourself and others into difficulties. What are we going to do? There is not a woman on the premises.”

“Fetch the wine first,” Hurst answered. “When she has recovered we shall be able to get together something or other. You have a collection of Indian shawls they will do to replace these wet ones.”

“You haf at least resource,” Heilig admitted grimly. “And afterwards?”

With a gentleness which contrasted strangely with his stern blood-stained face Hurst lowered Sarasvati’s head upon the pillow and for a moment bent over her in silence, carefully smoothing the black dank hair from her face and chafing the small hands between his own. She lay there like a princess out of some Eastern

fairy-tale. All the gorgeous insignia of her divinity had been massed upon her on the occasion of her martyrdom. The emeralds which he remembered clustered about her forehead, and about her waist gleamed the rope of rough-cut rubies. On the slender fingers were rings of priceless antiquity. Cautiously he slipped them off and tossed them on a heap beside him. Then he looked up.

“And afterwards?” he echoed. “What do you mean?”

“The ‘ afterwards ‘ is very close to us and very threatening,” Heilig answered. “You haf saved the girl but to what? If she is discovered here or even in India those to whom she belonged will never rest until she is either dead or back in their hands. And you too will be tracked down. That is the least that can happen. At the most there will be another and more determined rising, headed by the Brahmans whose secret stands the risk of exposure. If the goddess whom they haf set up is proved an ordinary mortal their prestige will be shaken. They know it, and will not stop at the most violent measures.”

“She must leave India,” Hurst answered.

Heilig threw up an exasperated hand.

“Dear Heaven how simple! How shall she leaf India? As what? with whom?”

“With me as my wife.”

There was a petrified silence. Hurst rose to his feet and confronted Father Romney.

“You will marry us now the moment she awakes,” he said. The priest recoiled as though from a blow. Heilig had dragged himself into a sitting position.

“Junge, Junge, you are quite mad!” he burst out.

“Mad? Why mad? I love her I have saved her from a certain death. She is mine.”

Heilig shook his head.

“It’s not that. If you marry her you make yourself an outcaste, you ruin yourself. Think of your family your name mother. The whole world will be against you.”

“The whole world is against me. I am an outcaste — I marry an outcaste. We shall face life together. I am free I am responsible to no one.” He turned with a stern, resolute gesture to Father Romney. “Marry us!” he demanded.

The priest held out a white protesting hand.

“I cannot even if I would,” he said. “You are not of my faith.”

“I am of no faith. Hitherto I have believed in nothing not even in God. But I will believe. You are an honourable man. I have learned to honour you. I will accept your teaching as a child as she shall do. Accept me as a child baptize us both into your church. Father! “He stamped impatiently. “Are you a follower of Christ or of a lifeless rule?” “Of Christ, but you as well as I must have time—”

“I have no time ” he pointed to his forehead “I am wounded. The wound may be poisoned you know these natives. If I am to die I will leave her with my name and with such private means as I possess. Professor, you shall be her guardian promise you will give her your protection!”

Heilig ran his hand through his disordered hair.

“Dear God in heaven yes yes. But it is all impossible utterly impossible.”

“Nothing is impossible to men who have freed themselves from the narrow conventions of their kind. It is your own teaching; you jeered at me for my slavish adherence to the laws laid down for what you called the Dutzendmenschen. You preached freedom. I am free, I have made myself free. I demand the rights of freedom. This is the woman I love to whom I owe the salvation of my soul. Father Romney, you are a priest of that God who has given her to me. I believe in Him I will believe in Him. Accept me! You dare not refuse a convert who comes to you at the hour of death. To all your rules there must be an exception that of emergency.”

The priest looked at him steadily with a curious fire in his dark eyes, but he did not speak and Hurst went on with increased passion :

“You talk of the brotherhood of man, of us as being the children of God. How dare you reject me or this woman because respectively we are not of your blood or faith? You preach what you dare not act. What do I care? But I, at least, will dare to be what I am, and to act as my will, my desire dictates. To me this

woman is my wife. Will you give me the blessing of God, or will you not? If not, then either I shall believe that you are a liar and your God a lie, or I shall believe that you do not know God, and never knew Him.”

“Hush! “Heilig said softly. “She is waking.”

All three were silent. Hurst knelt down by Sarasvati’s side and raised her head gently on his arm. Her eyes opened and she looked up at him without fear or wonder. The smile which dawned about her lips was one of most tender, most trusting recognition.

“I knew that thou wouldst come,” she whispered dreamily. “I was not afraid. When the fire began to rise up about me I was glad, for I knew then that thou wert near.”

“Sarasvati! Where wert thou in all these long days?”

Her eyes closed for an instant.

“In darkness and silence. They knew that thou hadst been with me. They threatened and cursed me. They told me that Siva, my Lord, had died and that I must follow him. They told me that I had brought misfortune on the land. It is not true?”

“It is not true,” he answered.

“And Siva is dead?”

“He never lived can stone images live or die?”

Her eyes darkened with a moment’s thoughtfulness, then she drew herself up with her head against his shoulder.

“I am glad,” she said simply. “His face frightened me. And now thou wilt never have to leave me?”

“Never,” he answered. “Thou art mine my wife.” He looked up and encountered Father Romney’s eyes fixed on him “Sarasvati, wilt thou accept me as thy husband according to the law and faith of my people?” he asked.

She stirred, conscious for the first time that they were not alone, and, freeing herself gently from Hurst's arms, she rose and confronted the two silent witnesses with a grave, untroubled dignity. Longest of all her deep eyes rested on the Professor, whose white face flushed crimson under her steady, questioning gaze.

"Are these thy people?" she asked.

"They are my friends."

"And thy faith?"

"Is in God."

She turned to him.

"Then is thy faith my faith," she said. "For in all the world there is but one God Brahma, the All-One."

"We call Him by another name," Hurst said. He took her hands and drew her to him. "Wilt thou learn to know Him as we know Him, Sarasvati?"

"Surely has God as many names and as many forms as there are stars in heaven," she answered. "Why should I not know thy God, my beloved?"

Hurst threw a glance of fierce triumph at the priest, who stood silently attentive. Heilig dropped back on his pillow with a grim, satisfied laugh.

"Verily, out of the mouth of babes and sucklings " he muttered.

But Hurst paid him no heed. Once again he turned to the woman who watched him in grave wonder, and his voice softened to a compassionate tenderness.

"Once thou saidst that on earth there was no peace," he said. "Sarasvati, I am no god, but a man, and my world is a hard world. Art thou afraid?"

"I love thee," she answered, and said no more.

It seemed as though in those three short words she had given the answer to every question, had laid bare the deepest secrets of her soul. And the three men were

silent, overtaken by the awe which comes to those who stand on the threshold of a beautiful cathedral. Then Heilig brought his fist down with a thump upon his covering.

“Marry them, Romney!” he said. “Marry them, in God’s name. They will break their necks, but what is that? It is good it is beautiful it is worth it. We haf not the right to stop them. Marry them, I say!”

The priest laid his white hand on Hurst’s shoulder.

“You have counted the cost?” he said in English.

Hurst did not turn.

“There is no cost,” he said. “I am free, and I have chosen my own course, that is all. It remains for you to give me your answer.”

“I consent.”

Hurst swung round.

“Your faith must be worthy of you,” he said.

Father Romney made no answer. His face was set and white, but his eyes gleamed with the fiery enthusiasm of the believer who feels the flame of his belief pass on to other souls. He motioned his two strange converts to kneel, and in the quiet of the dimly lighted room the solemn service of acceptance into the Roman Catholic Church began. Shorn of all pure ceremony and ritual, it gained in dignity, and there was something at once tragic and pathetic in the little group beneath the lamplight the haggard, blood-stained man with the dark resolute face, and beside him a woman of an alien race, exotic yet beautiful, still touched with the mystery of her life, her profound and wondering eyes lifted to the whiterobed priest who stood before them, his hands clasped about the silver crucifix, his lips moving in silent prayer.

Heinrich Heilig lay on his couch and watched them. The grimly contracted brows and livid cheeks told that he suffered, but he was also smiling with a curious tenderness free from all mockery. Though weakness constantly threatened to master him, he never shifted his position till the last blessing had been pronounced over the strangely united pair. Then he fell back with a low

gasping sigh and lay still, but apparently fully conscious, for an instant later his eyes opened.

“See that your wife becomes dry clothes,” he muttered. “The shawls are in the top drawer see to it Schafskopfe—”

Then he lay quite still. Romney came quietly to his side and bent over him.

“He is asleep,” he whispered. “Do as he says or will you go straight home?”

Hurst shook his head. His arm still encircled Sarasvati’s shoulders, and she leant against him with eyes half -closed in happy exhaustion.

“With your permission my wife will remain hidden here,” he said. “At the earliest opportunity I shall start with her for England. Until then she will be safest with you. Are you willing?”

“Perfectly.” A faint smile flickered about the priest’s grave mouth. “Having begun the business we must at least be thorough. My room is next door it is at your wife’s disposal. I shall give orders that no one is to enter it.”

Five minutes later when David Hurst returned he found that the curtains had been drawn back, and that the judge stood at Father Romney ‘s side. In the dreary morning light he looked old and weary, and yet he came forward with his buoyant step, both hands outstretched, his pale face lighted with an almost boyish enthusiasm.

“Thank God you’re safe!” he said. “We’ve been in a perfect fever about you. Then somehow it occurred to us that you might be here, and I came on ahead. But your mother is following, David, and Diana and, when they know for certain, the half of Kolruna will be whirling round you. Thanks to you the whole native affair has gone like a pricked bubble. We’re proud of you, David all of us all of us.”

He laid emphasis on the last words, and Hurst understood, but he said nothing. He looked at the judge’s excited face critically, as a stranger might have done, and suddenly the elder man’s expression grew grave.

“But it’s not that I have come about, David,” he went on. “I think it better that I should tell you. I have news it came last night during the ball it’s bad news —

very bad news. Your cousin, Harry Hurst, is dead.”

David Hurst started slightly, but gave no other sign. The judge laid an unsteady hand on the other’s arm.

“It’s been a shock for everybody, David,” he said. “The whole thing was so terribly sudden a hunting accident. We have no details but Sir Lawrence is completely broken he is not even expected to recover. And your mother you know what that means to her. You’re everything now. David you’ve got to be everything. You will bear the name alone. Thank God, it came when it did.” He did not explain what he meant perhaps he felt an explanation unnecessary. Throughout he had spoken in quick, broken sentences, a prey to an excitement which bore more the stamp of hope than sorrow, and now he stopped altogether. He had seen Hurst’s face and his jaw dropped. “David, what the devil is the matter? Are you laughing?” “I beg your pardon, my dear Judge but fate is sometimes very amusing, even in her grimmest moments.”

“I don’t understand. David you’re not going to bear a grudge I mean you’ve got to stand by her. She has suffered, and, however bitter you may feel, you haven’t the right to draw back now when the chance is given you both to come together.”

Hurst interrupted him with a curt gesture.

“I have the right; but, as it happens, there is no question of right. Have you ever heard, Judge, that there is a ‘too late’ in life?”

But the older man made no answer.

A carriage had driven up to the steps of the verandah, and he turned and saw that Mrs. Hurst stood on the threshold. Her son had seen her also, but he made no move to greet her. He drew back from the judge as though intentionally isolating himself and there was a brief painful silence. Professor Heilig had been aroused by the sound of voices; he lifted himself on his elbow, and looked from one face to the other with the intentness of a man conscious that he is witnessing a drama whose course lies beneath the surface, and when he saw Diana Chichester standing in the background he gave vent to a sound that was half a groan and half a laugh.

Mrs. Hurst came slowly forward. She was still in evening dress, but a black cloak had been flung about her shoulders, giving her an appearance of profound

mourning which harmonised tragically with her face. For the first time in his life, David Hurst confronted the woman who had hidden behind the mask of immovable indifference. Grief, deep-rooted and corroding, had been steadily at work throughout these years of seeming placid comfort and content. He saw it now in the lines which in a single night of selfabandonment had drawn themselves about the unsteady mouth; he saw it, above all, in the eyes, heavily shadowed and dim with the long-checked tears which now, in the hour of weakness, could not flow. For him there was something terrible, inexpressibly repugnant in this collapse of her strength and will. She laid her hand on his arm, and he held himself rigid. He did not look at her, but at the door of the adjoining room.

“David ” she began uncertainly, “we have come to see if you were safe. I could not speak to you last night, but I saw that you were hurt. I hope it is nothing serious!”

“I think not,” he answered ” a mere flesh-wound. I believe there is now no cause for alarm.”

Her brows contracted. He felt that she was fighting desperately.

“You did a very courageous thing,” she said in the same stilted way “a thing which any Hurst might be proud of. I am very glad. I feel that the name is in safe hands. It is my only comfort.” She stopped. What she had said was at once a confession and an apology, and very pitiful. Her son did not answer, and she went on falteringly; “You have heard the news? You know that soon you will be the only one left?”

“Yes,” he said. Still he did not look at her, and, aroused by his expression, she turned in the direction in which he was gazing. The door of the next room had been quietly opened, and a woman stood on the threshold. She wore the gorgeous costume of a highcaste Hindu, and, though her features were noble and beautiful, even judged by European standards, Mrs. Hurst saw that they were unmistakably Oriental. Possibly she saw more than that, for she recoiled, and for an instant the two women studied each other in startled, antagonistic silence, arrested by the knowledge that their ways had crossed.

“Who is this?” Mrs. Hurst demanded. Her whole tone had changed it rang with an almost frantic apprehension.

David Hurst pushed past her and took the newcomer by the hand.

“This is my wife, mother,” he said.

Judge Hamilton uttered an irrepressible oath. Then there was again silence. Involuntarily Diana took a step forward. Her eyes never left Hurst’s face, but they expressed neither horror nor disgust only a deep, critical interest.

“Since when?” Mrs. Hurst asked.

“Since this morning.”

“By whom were you married?”

“By Father Romney.”

“You have become a Roman Catholic?”

“Yes, have you any objection to make?”

“None.” She met his stern, significant challenge unfalteringly, apparently unmoved. “You are free, and always have been free,” she said. Then she turned with a blind movement which betrayed her. “Judge give me your arm . David and I have nothing more to say to each other, and it is late. We must be getting home.”

The judge obeyed her. His face was fallow, and he did not raise his eyes from the ground. David Hurst drew his wife closer to him. It was a movement symbolical of their future life. The Rubicon was crossed, and they stood alone. Yet it was at that moment that Diana Chichester came to him.

“You are a man, David,” she said, “a brave man. Remember the promise I made you. I shall keep it.”

“Thank you,” he answered.

They looked each other in the eyes for the first time perhaps with a full recognition of each other’s worth. Then Diana’s lips twitched with a dawning humour.

“I must go now,” she said quickly. “Whatever happens, I must be present when the bomb explodes on Kolruna; but, if there is anything left of me, I shall come this afternoon. You your wife will need a woman.”

“I know,” he said. “It’s been worrying me. God bless you, Di.”

“Which God?” she questioned, a trifle mockingly.

“Our God.”

“Jesuit!” She laughed. “Well, perhaps you’re right. Anyhow, I shall come, blessed or unblessed. Good-bye.”

She did not offer him her hand, but she bent forward and kissed Sarasvati on the forehead, then turned and hurried down the verandah steps.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

THE HOME-COMING

THERE was an unusual stir in the Manor House not a great stir, for that could scarcely have been produced by anything less than an earthquake; but an unusual one in so far that nothing of that kind had been known in the sleepy precincts since the day when the squire, William Morell, J.P., had celebrated his silver wedding with Sarah, whom he was wont to describe in after-dinner speeches by the somewhat tomb-stone-like epithet of "my life's dear partner." Now, as then, the chief manifestations of excitement consisted of clean caps and aprons on the part of the servants, and the reappearance of Mrs. Morell's London gown. This latter garment was invariably bought shortly before Christmas, when the squire and his wife paid their annual visit to the capital, and was afterwards worn with a rarity which made its appearance an event of the first magnitude. In its second year it sank to daily use, and was replaced by some latest creation, and this procedure had been faithfully followed not only by the present Mrs. Morell, but by all the Morells that had ever reigned in the ancestral home.

The squire, for his part, discarded his knee-breeches with their early-morning accompaniment of red leather slippers, and appeared in all the sombre magnificence of what he called a "town suit," enlivened, it is true, by a cheerful waistcoat and a silk tie of many colours. On this particular occasion his manner added to the general atmosphere of mild excitement. He was nervous, and inclined to be fussy; he prolonged the household prayers to an unusual length, to the manifested annoyance of the foxterrier, who, presumably for his soul's benefit, was always forced into the ceremony; he misquoted the Bible, and declined his second cup of tea. Mrs. Morell shook her head at him.

"You should not neglect yourself like that, Will," she said. "You have a long morning in front of you, and there is nothing like tea for keeping up one's strength. Come just half a cup."

Her husband waved aside the offer.

“Sorry, my dear; I really haven’t time. The train arrives at half-past ten, and the parson asked me to help him see that the children and farm-hands were at their places. Jane my boots!”

The housemaid fled on her errand, and the squire leaned back in his chair, drumming with his fingers on the corners of the table. He was a big, floridfaced man, heavily-built and long-waisted, with an habitual expression of goodnatureed self-importance, which was fully justified. He was the first personage in Steeple Hampton, and there is nothing quite so great as a great man in his own village.

“This reception requires considerable tact,” he went on with an air of being confronted by a profound problem. “One must combine welcome with the correct degree of mourning. It would be hypocritical to pretend that the tragedy which brings him here leaves us unaffected. Harry Hurst was exceedingly popular.”

“He was certainly very handsome,” Mrs. Morell agreed.

At that moment her daughter entered the room, and the expression on the elder woman’s face suggested a newly awakened train of thought.

“Daisy, my dear, you should have put on your new cloth dress. We cannot be sure that Sir David will not come round this afternoon. We have always been very intimate with the Hurst family.” She spoke with a harmless complacency, but her daughter, a slight, somewhat angular girl in the early twenties, shrugged her shoulders, and a look of vague irritation passed over her sharp-featured face.

“I doubt very much whether David Hurst even remembers our existence,” she said, helping herself to some toast. “And I am sure I do not care very much whether he does or doesn’t. He struck me as being a peculiarly dull and uninteresting personage, and I do not suppose his title has altered him very much.”

“My dear! “Mrs. Morell protested.

“Mother, you said yourself that he was a mannerless boor, and father called him the ugliest man he had ever set eyes on. I don’t know why you should have changed your opinion.” Her mouth betrayed a faint malice, and the squire cleared his throat.

“Circumstances alter opinions,” he said.

“Titles do,” his daughter retorted.

The squire flushed a brick-red, but he made no answer to this crisp version of the matter. He had sent his daughter to a London Art School to be educated, and she had returned with ideas of her own. He was none the less very proud of her. The ideas were a disadvantage, but then everything has its shady side, and he trusted to a prolonged period of homelife to remove this unfeminine excrescence. His wife was less philosophical.

“You shouldn’t talk like that!” she said sharply. It is extremely disrespectful, and very untrue into the bargain. Really, Daisy, I sometimes think you are turning into a free-thinker, or a Socialist, or something.”

The squire burst out laughing. Nothing amused him more than his ” life’s dear partner ” plunged into matters political. He himself, besides being a Justice of the Peace, was a leading light in the Conservative Union of the division, and he looked upon the affairs of his country as his own personal concern which fact did not prevent him from regarding them as quite beyond feminine understanding, and Mrs. Morell, after one or two earnest but fruitless attempts to follow his interests, had resigned herself to the position of an intellectual kitten, whose harmless gamblings with Serious Affairs caused her husband a kindly if condescending pleasure.

“I don’t suppose Daisy has gone that far,” he now said, as he rose from the breakfast-table. “That reminds me I expect Sir David will be asked to stand for us at the next election. We have always had a Hurst to represent us.”

“Of course,” Mrs. Morell agreed thoughtfully. “I wonder if he is married, or engaged, or anything of that sort. Really, one knows nothing whatever about him.”

“It will be amusing if he turns out to be a Radical,” her daughter observed. “Cripples and these sort of people usually are.”

The squire chuckled.

“Even if he was as you quite rightly said, titles alter opinions,” he retorted, and went out of the room before any one had time to cap his answer. He felt that, for

once in a way, he had got the better of his daughter, and he set off for Hurst Court in a state of unusual complacency, which increased as he drove his dogcart through the village. Although he had reigned in Steeple Hampton since his father's death fifteen years before, he had never lost the feeling of satisfaction and pride caused by the hat-touching and respectful grins of the yokels, whose welfare depended to no small extent on his goodwill. True, the Hursts were the titular rulers of the district, but, although popular, they had always held themselves aloof from the daily life of the villagers, and gradually the squire, acting as intermediary, rose to the position of king de facto. He accepted the position with the quiet conviction that he deserved it, but, being very English, he had, besides the knowledge of his own superiority, an inborn reverence for a title, and consequently, though he was inclined to patronise the Hursts as liege lords by the will of William Morell, J.P., he would never have dreamed of disputing their authority. On this particular morning his mind was very full with the part he was to play in the affairs of the new owner of Hurst Court. He remembered, with regret, that he had ignored David Hurst on the latter's visit to his uncle. In those days it had been impossible to foretell that, by a cruel blow of fate, the way to a great place should have been cleared for the moody, unsociable boy, and the squire trusted to future endeavours to remove the first bad impression that he might have made on the present baronet. He was considering ways and means when, as he turned his horse's head up the long drive which led to the Court, he overtook the vicar, the Rev. James Anderson, and, being in a friendly mood, and perhaps desirous of some moral support, he pulled up.

"You'U be late, Vicar," he said; "get in, there's plenty of room."

The vicar accepted gladly. He was an old man, worn out by a life-long toil in a parish where piety and immorality, subserviency and ingratitude lived side by side, and his kindly, if not very intellectual face, bore the strong impress of bitter disappointment and discouragement.

"I believe the villagers have already arrived," he said; "the train is bound to be late. We shall have plenty of time to arrange things."

The squire shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't know you can never trust them. I suppose you heard that Joe Saunders was drunk again last night."

“Yes, his wife came to me with a black eye. But I believe he is sober enough this morning.”

“H’m, that sort of thing won’t do. I shall speak to Sir David about it. It is most necessary that, being a comparative stranger, he should have a reliable bailiff.”

“Of course,” the vicar agreed.

“Still, Saunders is popular with the villagers,” the squire went on, as though struck by a sudden thought. “He has a lot of influence. I fancy it would be wiser to leave him alone for the present; at any rate, until after the elections. Sir David can’t afford to make enemies.”

“He may not want to stand,” objected the vicar.

“Oh, nonsense; all the Hursts have stood. He’ll probably marry one of the county girls, and she’ll hustle him into it all right.”

“Excuse me,” said the vicar, “but Sir David is married already.”

The squire’s hold on the reins relaxed. He turned and looked at his companion with a face of blank consternation.

“Damn it all, you don’t say so? Who the devil to?”

“I don’t know,” the vicar answered with a touch of dignity in his tone, which seemed to protest resignedly against the sudden outburst of bad language. “Sir David wrote to the housekeeper that she was to prepare for his wife and himself. That’s all any one knows.”

The squire gave vent to a grunt of extreme disapproval.

“Never heard of such a thing,” he muttered. “I hope to heaven it isn’t a chorus-girl or anything of that sort.”

“I met Sir David’s mother some years ago,” the vicar returned. “I do not think she is the sort of person to countenance a mesalliance.”

“No, that’s true still, it would have been better if he had married one of the county.”

The squire's discontent was such that he did not speak again until they passed out of the avenue into the great square before the building which, for generations, had been the home of the Hurst family. It was an immense, grey-faced erection, free from all architectural beauties, but imposing, like the Hursts themselves, by reason of its grand indifference to the poetry of things and its appearance of utmost solidity. That alone which might have reconciled the artistic eye the stretch of velvet lawn surrounding the gravel square was at present marred by an unbroken barrier of school-children and estate-hands, attired in all the atrocious tastelessness of their Sunday garments. There was a general lifting of hats as the squire drove up to the stone steps, and the village schoolmaster, a meek, emaciated-looking individual in a frock coat of ancient cut, came forward to welcome the new arrival.

"Everything is quite ready, Mr. Morell," he said, in answer to the squire's inquiry. "I have heard the children sing their song, and it went very nicely. You see, I have had a little greeting nailed over the doorway."

The squire glanced up and perceived a long white linen strip, stretched over the arch, which bore the inscription, "Welcome," in large, red letters. "I would have added, 'To Sir David and Lady Hurst,'" the schoolmaster went on apologetically, "but the news that Sir David was bringing a wife came too late. I hope it will do."

** Very nicely, very nicely," the squire answered, referring to his watch. "Dear me, close on eleven. They should be here any minute. Vicar, will you stand at my right Mr. Harris at my left. Thank you. Ah, here they are."

A low murmur of excitement had precluded the carriage-and-pair, which passed at a sharp trot out of the shadow of the avenue. A ragged cheer followed; the schoolmaster signalled wildly with his arms and the school-children broke into a high-pitched, wailing noise, which had some faint resemblance to a hymn. Squire Morell descended a step, consciously bringing his fine figure into the foreground. He knew that he had a fine figure. Ever since his late Majesty had picked him out at Yeomanry inspection he had known it, and, in spite of increasing years and bulk, he was still sufficiently convinced of his physical advantages to be entirely absorbed in his own appearance and the role he was to play in the coming reception, and consequently equally oblivious of the fact that the schoolmaster was giving signals of distress. Undoubtedly something untoward had happened to upset that gentleman's calculations. In spite of his

desperate gesticulations Squire Morell hastened officiously down the steps and then suddenly, as though struck by an electric current, he stopped short, and the smile of welcome changed slowly to an expression of incredulous bewilderment.

Sir David Hurst descended from the carriage, but the three men who stood blankly staring scarcely noticed him. They saw only the woman to whom he held out his hand, a woman whose face and dress were alike utterly, repugnantly foreign to them. She wore a dark red sari wound about her, and the face which she turned towards them in wondering expectation was a pale olive and delicately but unmistakably Oriental. For a full minute the full significance of her presence did not dawn on the paralysed spectators. Then David Hurst offered the alien woman his arm, and they understood. Squire Morell shook himself as a man does who tries to throw off a bad dream.

“Good God!” he said aloud.

Hurst heard the exclamation and came to a standstill on the third step. He was a little in advance of his companion, and his attitude was at once protecting and sternly resolute.

“Squire Morell, if I am not mistaken?” he said calmly.

Squire Morell tried to recover his self-possession and failed. He was not accustomed to thinking quickly, and his speech, with its discreet mingling of welcome with regret, was entirely forgotten. He held out an uncertain hand.

“Delighted ah that you should remember me, Sir David,” he stammered. “I that is, we came here to-day to welcome you and your—eh—” He broke off, quite aware that his silence was far from being tactful, but in his opinion the situation was beyond or rather beneath tact. Indeed, out of his frozen horror there was rising an angry conviction that he and the whole community had been insulted.

Hurst turned a little.

“Sarasvati, this is our neighbour, Squire Morell,” he said. “May I introduce you? Squire Morell my wife.”

The blow fell finally and irrevocably. The three men saw a pair of dark, profound eyes raised to theirs; a delicate hand, loaded with rings whose magnificent but barbaric design was as unlike the commonplace and ostentatious

jewels to which they were accustomed as she was unlike their conception of womanhood, was hesitatingly outstretched, then dropped. The squire had ignored the movement, but the vicar had seen it, and, for once forgetful of the self-effacement to which he had been forced to accustom himself, came quickly forward. In truth, his fagged brain had not grasped the full extent of the disaster which had overtaken them, but his heart had heard an unspoken appeal and had answered.

“Lady Hurst, you and your husband are both very welcome,” he said in his timid, kindly way. “I hope you will be happy amongst us.”

“I thank you all,” she answered. Her voice and accent were sweet and foreign, and the smile which dawned about the finely cut mouth was eloquent of a shy yet frank gratitude.

Touched by he knew not quite what the vicar turned nervously to the schoolmaster, who stood behind him in an attitude of utter distraction.

“Won’t you ask the children to sing again?” he said. “Lady Hurst might like to hear them.” “I beg of you not to trouble,” David Hurst interposed firmly. “My wife and I are both tired after the long journey. It was most kind of you to bring us this welcome, which is as unexpected as it is—”

He broke off as though conscious that he was on the verge of discourtesy. “Please convey our thanks to all concerned,” he went on. “We shall hope to have the pleasure of meeting you again soon for the present I am sure you will excuse us both.”

He bowed without offering his hand and passed on. They saw that his arm was placed protectingly about his wife’s shoulders then the door clanged to in their faces. They stared at each other. The squire’s cheeks were purple; the goodnatured complacency of his expression had wholly vanished.

“Good God!” he broke out. “That that Lady Hurst—why, she is a nigger—a black woman—a—a—”

The vicar held out a soothing, restraining hand, and the squire’s rage burst into a new channel.

“Harris, for pity’s sake tell that gaping herd of yokels to move on! Tell them Sir

David is ill—any lie you like—but don't let them stand there like that. For mercy's sake do something, man!"

Either for pity's sake, or mercy's sake, or for the sake of his own skin, Mr. Harris went down the steps and Squire Morell signalled furiously to his groom to bring up the dogcart, and, five minutes later, burst through the groups of retiring and whispering villagers like a veritable storm-god. He had not offered a seat to the vicar, and the latter trudged slowly homewards with the schoolmaster, who had maintained a frightened and horror-stricken silence.

At the gates of the Vicarage both men came to a standstill. The vicar took off his wide-brimmed hat and passed his hand over his scanty white hair.

"It's very sad," he said, "very sad."

Mr. Harris nodded energetically.

"It's more than sad," he said. "It's terrible, to think that the Hursts, who were so proud and respected, should have fallen to this! If old Sir Lawrence had known —"

The vicar interrupted his flow of indignant eloquence with a quiet gesture.

"I was thinking of poor Lady Hurst," he said mildly. "She has come among us civilised Christians God pity her!"

CHAPTER II

ON THE BALCONY

HURST Court faced east; to the west its regular lines of windows stared expressionless over a wide stretch of park whose ancient trees rose proudly to the low skies, and only at rare intervals gave place to a wide roadway, which ran like a ribbon through the sea of dark olive, losing itself at last near the horizon in tangled forest. A balcony leading out of the small room which for generations had served the Lady Hursts as boudoir alone broke the monotony of the Court's grey face. Thither David Hurst conducted his wife on the evening of that first day. The sun had long since sunk behind the distant line which bound in their world, and a veil of grey, ghostlike mist, heavy with the perfumes of early autumn, sank about them.

Sarasvati leant her elbows on the stone balustrade and gazed silently before her, and the man at her side made no attempt to break in upon her thoughts. He stood with folded arms and watched her, studying the pure and noble outline of her face, comparing, dreaming. It was at this hour that she seemed to him most truly herself, yet most unreal. In the quiet and darkness the intangible something which divided her from her surroundings vanished, leaving her in strange harmony with all save humanity. Then a new expression dawned in her eyes; the half-frightened, half-questioning gaze with which she viewed the unknown world revealed to her in the short year of their marriage changed and deepened to intense thought. Then he saw her again as the goddess kneeling before the altar the serene, pure soul in touch with the infinite. Then he loved her most, with the least passion. For indeed he loved her not so much as a woman as a dream, a mysterious, scarcely material wonder which a miracle had allowed him to draw into the empty treasurehouse of his life.

As a gardener watches the opening of some lovely flower, so had he watched the marvel of her development. Swiftly, yet surely, with all the powers of assimilation of her origin, she had acquired his language, a partial understanding for his world. Almost without his knowledge, she had crept into the secret places of his heart, but her own heart remained closed. He stood for ever on the threshold and knocked and for ever she answered with the limitless surrender of her whole self, and for ever he knew in her life there was a sanctuary hardly

known to herself where he would never tread. And he loved her the more. For love is born of mystery, and dies when it is fed on the plain grey truth which is sometimes not quite as true as our dreams.

The darkness deepened, and still he waited patiently, allowing the hallowed evening peace to sink deep into his being; then she turned to him and lifted her face to his.

“My beloved!” she said simply.

He took the slender hand lying on the stone-work and held it and there was again silence. But it was as though the two spoken words continued to vibrate on the still air, like notes of music drawn from an instrument, by the touch of a master-hand. “Sarasvati,” he said at last, “this is our home. Are you happy?”

“Yes,” she answered. He felt that her whole life concentrated itself in that answer, and yet there was always that unconscious reservation. “Why do you ask me?” she said. “Do you not know the answer?”

“I am not always sure,” he returned thoughtfully. ‘ Yes, sure of your answer of you but not of the truth. This morning, when we faced the people together tonight when I feel the cold damp mists rise about us I am afraid. I remember the peace and the warm sunshine out of which I brought you—”

“Out of the loneliness, out of a long sleep full of shapeless dreams into your life into your love.” She turned and laid her hands upon his shoulders. “My husband, I do not see the people who pass us; I do not feel the mist rise; about me all is warmth and sunshine I see no face but yours. I live in you I know no world but you.” Her voice broke and died into a passionate silence.

He held her to him, and through the gathering gloom their eyes met in wordless communion. The mysterious bond which had come between them in that first silent meeting revealed itself again in all its strength, in all its spiritual purity. And yet he knew, even though the darkness hid the expression of her face, that there was trouble written there, the vague, haunting trouble of which he had caught glimpses in moments whose close resemblance to each other worried him. He had seen it on board ship when some trivial valse had called the pleasure-loving Anglo-Indians, homeward bound, to their evening business. He had seen it when some beautifully dressed English woman, leaning on the arm of her partner, had brushed past them as they sat together hidden in shadow near the

prow of the vessel. He had seen it in the Corso at Rome, when inadvertently their carriage had been caught in the stream of wealth and brilliancy which flowed towards the Villa Borghese. He had felt the pain which shot through her, and, without understanding, had instinctively drawn her closer to him and had borne her quickly to some lonely spot whither the voices and laughter of men could not penetrate. To-night if unclearly he understood.

“Nevertheless, I have taken you from your dreams,’ he said. “I have drawn you into a world of realities. And the realities are grim, ugly things.”

“Are they indeed the realities?” she questioned thoughtfully. “To me they are still as shadows which flit between us and the light. I see them. They have faces which they turn to me they are mocking faces, full of cruel curiosity and scorn, but they do not hurt me or blind me to the light not yet not yet—”

“Sarasvati!” he exclaimed. “Am I not also a reality?”

She shook her head.

“I love you,” she said almost beneath her breath, “I love you so that you have become the light itself. But it is not this I love ” she laid her hand on his shoulder and passed it softly over his breast “that is the shadow, husband. I love the reality which I saw in my sleep, which called to me before your tongue uttered my name. It is not this face I see, but the face of your soul which I saw before my eyes were opened. I love you as others cannot love you, for they have never seen you. A shadow passes before them, and, behold! they cry to each other that there are more lovely shadows. But I have seen the light, and I know that it is great and strong and beautiful.” “Sarasvati!” he said tenderly, “you are still not of this world. Will you never be?”

“Perhaps.” She turned her head away from him, and he felt that a faint shudder passed through her. “Perhaps one day I shall have to be and then and then the light will go out.”

There was a new inflection in her voice. He drew her closer to him.

“My wife, of what are you afraid?” he questioned.

“Of the shadows,” she cried, and clung to him with a passion rare in her. “Now you belong to me, but one day they may claim you; you may become one of

them—” she caught her breath “—then I shall have to choose.”

“Between what?”

“That I cannot tell, I do not know. I only know that a choice will be put before me.”

Again he felt himself carried to the border of that untra veiled country of her inner life, and, as always, an invisible, intangible barrier rose before him and barred the way. Prophetic, like some Eastern Cassandra conscious of a secret power at work in the depths of her dark soul, she stared before her and he sought no further. Only he freed himself gently from the clasp of her hands and held her so that she faced him.

“Listen,” he said quietly. “You are afraid of shadows, my wife. You are afraid that, one day, I shall see them with other eyes than yours, and that I shall hunger after them. It is true, for me they are realities; the world is real and I belong to it. But, Sarasvati, I have lived in it. I know it, not as you know it, as the creation of a man’s diseased, unhappy fancy, but as a great, monstrous structure, a machine grinding remorselessly on its never-ending round. It frightened me I learnt to know that I was handicapped beyond hope. I knew that all I had to offer would be flung upon the great rubbish-heap for useless, warped material. And yet I hungered after it all after the love of my fellow-creatures, after their approbation. I wanted to be one of them, to share my life with them. I was like a beggar, a whining beggar who ran from house to house offering my half-formed ideals, my timid affections, in exchange for their love. They would have none of me. They grew impatient, and I knew they despised me. But the begging had degraded me, made me into a weakling and a coward. That is the worst of begging it drags down everything, the beggar and the giver; it is like a poison which paralyses will and energy. I went on my cringing, pitiful way until, one night, I was twice stung to madness. And I found that a devil had crept into my heart and that I had neither faith nor love nor ideals left to save me. In the whole world, which you fear, there was not one who would have held out a rescuing hand. I stood on the brink of God knows what utter degradation when I remembered you, Sarasvati.”

He stopped, and she drew back against the stone parapet and watched him breathlessly. A last faint shimmer of evening light fell on his face; its stern, inflexible resolution softened for a moment, but his bearing was inexpressibly,

fiercely scornful. It was as though he lived over again the hours of bitter introspection, of impotent revolt against creation.

“I remembered you,” he went on with restrained force. “You were then little more to me than a picture out of some child’s fairy-tale, but you were beautiful, you were the only beautiful thing of my boyhood. I called upon you there was magic in your name for all that I had thought dead in me awoke afresh to new life. I flung the devil out of my heart, and that night I saw you.”

“And that night I heard your voice,” she answered in a whisper.

“And from that night onwards my freedom began,” he continued, still in the same low, passionate voice. “You set me free. I ceased to be a beggar when you gave me your love. God knows why you gave me your love it was like a miracle but you made me a man, you gave me back confidence, the command over myself and over my fate, Sarasvati. Can’t you understand now? I owe you everything, everything that I am.” Suddenly his voice broke under the strain of painful self-repression. He stretched out his arms towards her, and she came to him and drew his head down to her shoulder. For a moment there was silence, then he stood erect.

“Neither you nor I need fear the world,” he went on quietly. “It gave me nothing, I owe it nothing. I have defied its laws, disregarded its customs. If it comes to me now, it is because I have grown rich, have had power thrust upon me. I have shut my door in the faces of those who pretend to seek me out either in kindness or friendship. After a little while they will cease to trouble us. I will build a wall round our lives, Sarasvati, my wife, and no one, no shadow shall enter to spoil our peace. Look ” he pointed out into the coming night ” that is our world,” he said triumphantly.

A servant entered the room behind them and presently a stream of warm light flooded on to the balcony. Hurst looked down into his wife’s face and saw that it was wet with tears.

“Sarasvati!” he uttered.

She drew closer to him; she clung to him, and a strange mingling of radiant happiness and fear shone out of her eyes.

“I love thee!” she said in her own language. ** I love thee, my lord, my god. If

ought should come between thee and me, I could not live.”

Her voice died into silence. He felt her shiver.

“Sarasvati!” he said, half reproachfully, “are you still afraid?”

“It is cold,” she whispered back, “so cold.”

A breath of night-wind, already touched with the sharpness of coming winter, brushed against their faces. David Hurst put his arm about his wife’s shoulders and drew her gently into the lighted room behind them.

CHAPTER III

AN INTRUDER

THREE months had passed since David Hurst had laid down the programme of his life. They had been cold, dreary months, sunless and dank as only English winter months can be. The low, grey skies which had seemed to hang to the tops of the leafless trees had broken scarcely for an hour to let through the pale, uncertain sunshine, and bleak winds, heavy with rain, had swept over the wide sweeps of level country. Yet Hurst counted that short period as the happiest of his life. At first there had been a brief, sharp struggle with tradition. County magistrates, as well as village pettifoggers, swallowed their pride and indignation, and impelled, partly by courtesy and still more by curiosity, had made official calls, and been refused. With grim amusement Hurst had watched their carriages, or pony-carts, as the case might be, turn reluctantly on the homeward road and had guessed, by the eloquent shoulder-shruggings and head-shakings of the owners in what tone their conversation was being carried on. Shortly afterwards he had politely intimated to the world in general that he neither sought social intercourse nor desired it, and a hitherto unknown peace and quiet entered into Hurst Court.

Curiously enough, there had been few difficulties at home, none at least that he had seen. The housekeeper, an old family retainer who had added some of the family characteristics to her own, had promptly given notice, and her place had been taken by a gently nurtured woman, badly battered in life's battle and too weary of the struggle to indulge in prejudice. After that there had been no further trouble. Hurst's manner indeed forbade it. No servant or equal who ventured to cross him had sought to repeat the experience, for somewhere in that year of independence he had changed both physically and in character. The look of moody distrust had gone out of his face, which had gained in strength; but his expression was severe to the point of relentlessness, and his bearing was that of a man constantly at warfare with his kind.

But with Sarasvati he laid down the weapons of defence. With her he returned to the self which he had inherited. All the chivalrous tenderness, the almost feminine power of intuition which had once been crushed beneath dislike and contempt sprang up side by side with energy and self-reliance beneath the

sunshine of her absolute love. Above all, her need of him, free as it was from either servility or weakness, revealed to him who had always believed himself a fool unsuspected possibilities. In the simple round of his daily life with her his own mind expanded, spurred by the incentive of an intelligence which, though it sought from him, rose so swiftly to his level. At eventide, when the heavy curtains were drawn and she sat before the fire, a picturesque figure in her richly embroidered sevi, her dark head thrown back against the high back of the leather chair, her thoughtful eyes bright with the reflected firelight, he read to her and poured out to her his store of fantastic wisdom, grown where honours in Civil Service examinations are never gathered. And she listened thirstily, and sometimes she too taught him, with a sudden colour rising beneath her olive skin, of the Vedas, of Brahma, of the great pantheistic creed of her race. Sometimes, too, she sang to him strange chants to Night and to the Goddess of the Dawn; but when he asked her to sing the song of Sarasvati, daughter of Brahma, she was silent and grew grave. Thus the three months had passed in solitude and happiness. Then, one evening, shortly after the lights had been lit, Hurst received a letter. The envelope bore an Indian stamp-mark, and he was conscious of a quickening of the pulses as he recognised the strong, somewhat angular writing. Involuntarily he glanced across at his wife's slight figure by the fireside, and found that her eyes were fixed on his face.

"It is from her," she said in her quaint foreign way, and the certainty of her tone startled him.

He knew to whom the pronoun referred. For in her memory there was but one woman, and she the one who, in those days of suspense, when Sarasvati had laid hidden in the Professor's bungalow, had stood by her with wisdom and a fiery devotion defying though this Sarasvati did not know the wrathful protest of her father and mother and the indignation of all Kolruna.

"Yes it is from Diana Chichester," Hurst said, and opened the letter. The first line was curt and typical of the writer.

"Thank you for your last long letter," Diana had written in goodnatured irony. "Going by the adage that no news is good news, I suppose I ought to be well content, but unfortunately I have heard rumours from other quarters which make me doubtful. I confess that the rumours did not exactly fly to me unsought. I have been making inquiries. The Professor, who is at present engaged in discovering some deep-laid plot which is going to blow us out of India, was

worse than useless. All he seemed to know was that your English translation of the book which he compiled with you has been a tremendous success in the anthropological world which means, I suppose, no royalties. Father Romney was delirious at the time the result of a stone thrown by one of Mr. Eliot's most ardent followers and consequently was not to be interviewed. Your mother and I are only on bowing terms, so that source of information was closed, and I was on the point of writing to you myself when, behold, a certain Miss Daisy Morell of the Manor, Steeple Hampton, who has the doubtful wisdom of admiring me beyond all things earthly, supplied me in one long letter with all details each detail marked with an exclamation mark.

“Well, David, you are going your own way with a vengeance. From all accounts you have figuratively speaking blacked the parson's eye and kicked the squire downstairs. Nor have you been seen once in church I beg your pardon, I remember that you have ‘gone over,’ as mother calls it, but this is a fact of which Steeple Hampton is still happily ignorant. All this is very commendable, David, and shows character an article which this progressive generation seems to find difficult in supplying, but I wonder if you are not going too far. I put it to you timidly, as one who has no right, save that of respect, to interfere. What does that old Sir David Hurst hanging over your library mantelpiece think about it? After all, you have to consider him a little and, even if you didn't, there is another point of view. Wasn't it Milton who talked about a ‘cloistered virtue’ with some disapproval? At any rate, whatever Milton did, I despise a cloistered anything, especially courage. You have been very brave braver than any man I know and I think it is a pity for you to go and sit down behind your castle walls and rest on your laurels. It looks dangerously as though you were enjoying the benefits of a ‘fluke,’ and, as I know it wasn't a fluke, I should like you to go out again into the world and defy a few more of those fat aldermen, Prejudice, Humbug & Co. Won't you? I think you will when the occasion comes. And big men always make the occasion.

“So much for my chief reason for writing. As for my own affairs if they interest you, there is not much to relate. I am getting rather weary of froth and frothy people. I know they are all very brave and good at the bottom, and that, if anything dreadful happened, they would prove the heroes and heroines they really are; but this fact does not prevent them from being demoralisingly superficial. I know this sounds priggish and superior, but if I were really superior I should not mind. As it is, I feel myself too much of a feather not to realise that it is high time I found something better to do than dancing into the small hours

of the morning. Mother, of course, agrees and disagrees alternately as the mood takes her. She is getting up some theatricals, and consequently is in excellent health. Mrs. Hurst does not look well, but she refuses to go either to the Hills or home. I'm afraid the death of her brother and his son, besides other things, have made more difference than one would have thought possible in a woman of her character. The family was her fetish, and now I suppose she thinks it broken beyond repair. If I wanted to be trite I should say that we make our life unnecessarily cruel for ourselves and others with our prejudices.

The judge looks desperately ill, and is not so cheerful as of old, but he clings heroically to his part whatever that may be.

“And now you have all my news in a nutshell. Write to me and tell me about your wife. Do not give her my love one does not present such commonplace offerings to a princess out of fairy-land but tell her, and above all, remember, if she needs a woman to help her, as only a woman can, against the backbitings of your enlightened neighbours, I will come by the next boat. I am spoiling for a fight. Good-bye, and take my advice: follow the example of your namesake, and smite the Philistines another glorious blow. By the way, was Goliath a Philistine? I have forgotten. At any rate, your Goliath is a very respectable person called Brown, or Robinson, or even Morell, and by his righteousness shall you know him. And so farewell.

“Your affectionate

“DIANA CHICHESTER.

“P.S. By the way, Mr. Eliot's convert, Rama Pal, has disappeared. It is said that he has gone to England, but with what means no one knows. Professor Heilig has an idea and his ideas are usually good that our young Christian brother was closely connected with last year's little excitement, or at any rate, with the Brahmans who started it. The Professor has asked me to warn you to keep out of his way, as he would undoubtedly recognise your wife, and no one knows what course he might take. I have only allowed myself one postscript, but you see it is an important one.”

For some time after he had finished reading Hurst sat quietly gazing into the fire. What he saw there he himself did not know, but he was conscious that, out of the restless changing flames pictures were struggling to form themselves against his

will and desire. Presently he looked up. The great oil-painting which hung over the mantelpiece attracted his attention. Until now he had scarcely noticed it. A typical old family portrait, it had little enough to recommend itself to any but the confirmed ancestor-collector, and hitherto Hurst had thrust the thought of his family resolutely out of his life. Through the early years of his boyhood he had listened to veiled, half unconscious comparisons, and out of his suppressed bitterness had grown up a sullen hatred for those heroes whose glorious mantle had been flung upon his unworthy shoulders. He hated them, as he might have hated living enemies; when he passed through the long hall, lined with their portraits, he felt that they stared at him from their high places in cold contempt, and, like an outsider, striving to mask his wounded pride with indifference, he passed them by unnoticed. But to-night he studied this faded picture until the sunken colours regained their original brightness, and the face and figure stood out against the sombre, unreal background of a poorly conceived battle-field with all the plastic clearness of life. The portrait represented a colonel in the Indian Army of fifty years ago. The quaint uniform, the stiff, uncompromising pose of the tall, square-shouldered figure, suggested nothing very heroic, but the face arrested and held Hurst's attention. Poor craftsman though the artist had been, he had managed to catch a glimpse of his subject's individuality. The dark, sombre features revealed the man of action, the eyes the dreamer and the idealist. They stared down at the man by the fireside, and gradually it seemed to him that they lost their expression of grave, unchanging condemnation, and became alive with a significance and look of appeal and unsatisfied desire which was painfully familiar.

Hurst passed his hand over his own eyes and then remembered. The memory forced an audible laugh from his lips. Between the Sir David of these brave days and the Sir David Hurst of now there was a gulf which no flattering but fancied resemblance could bridge. Hurst sprang impatiently to his feet, and suddenly became aware that Sarasvati's eyes had never left his face.

"Your letter has brought you trouble," she said gravely. He shook his head and laughed again with sincere light-heartedness.

"How could it, dear? Nothing that happens in a world outside my own can affect me very closely. Would you like me to read the letter to you?"

"Might I try to read it myself?" she asked shyly. "I think if I touched her letter I should feel her nearer to me."

He handed her the folded sheets without answering. Her unaffected attachment to the Englishwoman who had befriended her touched him and drew her closer to him. For there is nothing we value so much in those dear to us as their appreciation of our friends, and justly, since it is an appreciation of ourselves and our innermost needs. Hurst sank back into his chair and watched his wife as she read. She read slowly, for the Latin letters had always been a stumbling block in her intellectual progress, and he knew by her eyes that one or two sentences were returned to with an unsatisfied inquiry. When she had at last finished she did not look at him, but at the portrait above the mantelpiece. There was a moment's silence, then she came to him and laid the letter gravely in his hand. "Our friend is wise and good," she said. "She loves you well, husband."

"Loves me!" Hurst echoed. "Why, Sarasvati, Diana and I were children together, we played together, we grew up together. Which fact does not prevent her looking upon me as a very inferior sort of individual whom she takes an interest in for the sake of old times that is all." He looked up smiling into his wife's dark and lovely face, but still her eyes were fixed on the old portrait, and she shook her head.

"She writes because she fears for you," she said. "Does a woman do that who does not love?"

"You do not understand Englishwomen such as Diana Chichester," he returned. "You cannot understand friendship between a man and a woman."

"Friendship between a man and a woman?" she repeated thoughtfully. "Can that really be?"

He got up to disguise a sudden impatience. Her unconscious wisdom, born of an elemental simplicity of feeling, startled him to a sense of danger. He looked at her and saw that she was standing in an attitude of childish wonder, her hands crossed upon her breast as he had often seen them. This momentary impatience passed. Before her absolute sincerity he was conscious of a rising remorse, a sudden recognition of his own disloyalty. With no other woman would he have counted himself disloyal. The tacit understanding that neither is of necessity the first in the other's life is usually included in the marriage contract, and the woman who honestly believes herself a unique episode may be counted a Victorian curiosity. But David Hurst's wife had been brought straight into the world from an incomparable solitude. For her, love was simply this one man.

Could she be made to realise that for him there had been another woman? and, if she realised it, would it not break her heart? David Hurst became afraid, and the confession which had risen to his lips was held back. He came to her side and took her hands gently in his.

“Friendship between men and women exists,” he said. “It exists between Diana and myself. Had we not proof of it in those days at Kolruna?”

“Yes,” she answered simply, “but I did not know that that was friendship.”

They said no more. At that moment the door of the library had opened and the butler, followed directly by a short, wiry individual in a tremendous overcoat, entered the room. The butler apologised with a gesture which eloquently described his inability to cope with the situation.

“If you please, Sir David, this this gentleman—”

“Smith is my name,” came the interruption from the unexpected visitor. “It is not an unusual name, but well known in these precincts. Permit me to give you my card, Sir David.” He bustled forward and laid a piece of white pasteboard on the table, then performed a ceremonious bow, addressed this time to Sarasvati. “I am quite aware that I am intruding,” he went on, with a gesture that finally dismissed the butler, “but it is well known that visitors who try the ordinary way are not received, and my business is important enough to justify any means, good or bad. I hope I am excused?”

“That depends,” Hurst returned. “Judging by ordinary standards, I should call this—”

“—an impertinence,” finished the little man, with the greatest amiability, “Quite right, Sir David. It is an impertinence, but impertinence is my best stock-in-trade it belongs, in fact, to my business. I simply couldn’t get on without it. In a word I am a politician.”

He brought out the word with a gravity which was denied by the twinkle in his small bright eyes, and then went on, without giving his unwilling host any opportunity to speak: “I want half an hour of your time, Sir David. I claim it not on my own behalf, but on the behalf of your country. It would be a charity to listen to me. Are you a patriot?”

“It depends on your definition of patriotism,” Hurst returned, with increasing amusement.

“Patriotism,” said the little man, and rubbed his chin, “is a supreme admiration for yourself and an equal contempt for your neighbour—that is, in the ordinary way. At election time, however, it becomes ‘the noblest emotion burning in the heart of man.’ Personally, I call it a reasonable desire to keep one’s own house in order.”

“Then I am a patriot,” Hurst admitted.

“May I sit down?”

“By all means—have you any objection to Lady Hurst taking part in this interesting interview?”

“On the contrary—” another deep bow “Lady Hurst’s presence is most necessary, I might say essential. A man in my position depends more on the ladies than any one else.” He seated himself stiffly in the chair to which he had been motioned, and undid his overcoat. “And now, may I get to business?”

“I should be grateful.”

“In the first place,” said Mr. Smith, referring to a notebook, “I should like to mention that I am a member of the Unionist Association of the Division, and that for the last ten years I have served the Hurst family as electioneering agent and general business man. You know, of course, that the late baronet was a Member of Parliament?”

Hurst bowed.

“You are also aware, perhaps, that we are on the eve of a general election. The seat will be strongly contested by a Socialist and a Liberal candidate, who fancy the situation favourable for knocking down our majority. Unless we can find a man who can count on all the old voters, we are bound to lose in a threecornered contest. That is our position, Sir David. We must have a good man, and a popular man and, frankly, the only one we can think of is yourself.”

Hurst started slightly. The blood had rushed to his face, and he glanced at Sarasvati, who was seated in her place by the fire. Her features were composed;

she seemed scarcely to be listening.

“What you appear to suggest is impossible,” Hurst said sharply. “I have no political experience.”

“I have enough for half a dozen,” Mr. Smith retorted, with a significant grimace.

“I have no political convictions.”

“That doesn’t matter. They can be supplied. All you have to do is to make your choice and stick to it.”

“And the choice lies between what?”

Mr. Smith shrugged his shoulders.

“Politicians are divided into two camps,” he said. “On the one side are the Haves, and on the other the Want to Haves, and between them is the great ass, the Public. The game consists in trying by all means possible to cajole and bully the animal into running to one or other of the players. The means consist usually of promises and threats. The one side promises sixpence for a shilling, and the other talks of Empire and invasion and God knows what else. As a matter of fact, there isn’t much difference between ‘em, bless you. They both lie, and call each other liars; they both love the ass tenderly before the elections, and themselves afterwards when they vote themselves incomes at the ass’s expense; most of ‘em cease to be gentlemen the minute they put their noses into a committee room. If they continue to have nice manners, they get called ‘philosophers,’ or something else equally useless, and get kicked out. The best thing is to dip your tongue alternately in oil and vinegar, and hit out hard. If you hit your opponent below the belt so much the better. The great thing is to wind him, and by the time the referee has made up his mind you’ll be elected.”

The little man stopped breathless. Though he had spoken with apparent enthusiasm, his mouth was drawn into a bitter, sarcastic line, and his eyes gleamed anger. Hurst shrugged his shoulders.

“And this is the business into which you suggest plunging me?” he asked with an uneasy laugh.

“Yes,” said Mr. Smith.

“Then I am sorry to say I must refuse.”

“Why?”

“Because I have no desire to enter into public life. Moreover, I should be worse than useless. I am not popular—”

“You are a Hurst,” the agent interrupted curtly. “That counts more than anything. I know that you’ve set the country by the ears, but that can be easily remedied. Your uncle’s recent death will amply account for your retirement and other difficulties—” he hesitated for the first time, and his eyes dropped “—can be managed with a little tact.”

“Nevertheless, I refuse finally.”

Mr. Smith rose suddenly to his feet. His whole manner had undergone a complete change. Indignation and a genuine enthusiasm rendered him almost majestic.

“You haven’t the right to refuse, Sir David,” he said.

Hurst rose also. His face was dark, but not with anger.

“What do you mean?” he demanded.

“What I say, Sir David. You are an Englishman, and you have no right to shrink from your duty because it is inconvenient to you. God knows, we are beset enough by place-seekers and cheap-jacks, seeking publicity at the cost of their country’s welfare. There are few enough of the old stock left who served without thought of their own gain; but if these few are going to turn back because the job is too dirty for them, then we’re done for then we might as well shut up shop and let the Socialists tear our honour and our glory to pieces and divide the spoils between them. I admit it is a dirty job. It makes a man sick to have to fight against a devilish egoism which calls itself democracy, but it makes a man sicker still to see those who could win fold their hands and say that they weren’t made for public life. Sir David, I don’t know what your convictions are, but I’ll be bound they’re those of an honourable, unselfish gentleman, and that you’ll stand for the old traditions. We need you, and you’ve got to come. There isn’t a man who won’t vote for you for the old name’s sake, and for all you represent. You owe it to your country and you owe it to your family.”

“What do you mean?” Hurst repeated in the same suppressed tone.

Smith lifted his eyebrows.

“I did not mean to tell you, Sir David, but the Socialist fellow, Grey, has started his campaign with the natural supposition that you will stand, and he has already circulated some pretty ugly stories about your Indian affairs. He seems to have got hold of some Hindu fellow to back his lies, and, by Heaven, sir, you’ve got to come out to choke them down his greedy throat. You must for your own sake, and the sake of your—” He stopped awkwardly, and there was a tense silence. Hurst’s glance had passed from his wife to the portrait over the mantelpiece. The lines of his face were grim and hard.

“I refuse,” he said. “I am sorry but it is impossible.”

“I beseech you—” A hand was laid on his arm.

He turned. Sarasvati stood at his side. “I beseech you!” she repeated.

“Sarasvati!” he exclaimed.

“I do not understand all,” she answered gently, “but I understand the words ‘country and family.’ I understand that the world has need of you. Is it not so?” She turned her dark eyes to the agent in grave appeal.

Mr. Smith nodded. The expression on his lean, clean-shaven face betrayed both admiration and uneasiness.

“Yes, that’s true, Lady Hurst,” he answered briskly. “We want your husband. He has a big career before him.”

“David!” she pleaded.

“You don’t know what you ask!” Hurst said almost violently. “You are forcing me into a life which we have both renounced—”

“—to which you belong, husband,” she answered. “You must go out and fight as she said. I—I— was wrong. One has no right to peace not here.”

Mr. Smith cleared his throat. He was not a man given to sentiment outside his

profession, but he was dimly conscious that something was passing between this strangely assorted couple which it was not for him to see.

“I tell you what, Sir David,” he began, in businesslike tones. “My address is on the card. Think it over, and let me know as soon as you can. But remember our time is precious.”

Sarasvati turned to him. Her hand rested on her husband’s arm, and afterwards the little agent described her attitude as ” queenly.”

“My husband will write to you,” she said. “But tell those that sent you he will do what it is right for him to do.”

“Thank you, Lady Hurst,” Mr. Smith bowed. He wanted to say more he would have been glad to have apologised. He had regarded her as an enemy, and a stumbling-block, and she had won his battle for him. But for once his nerve, steeled as it was by much hectoring, failed him. This slight, delicate-looking woman in her strange, heathenish dress looked at him with eyes which seemed to command and y supplicate. He murmured something unintelligible, and bowed himself out of the room.

For a long time after he had gone husband and wife did not speak to each other. David Hurst had dropped back into his chair. His pulses were beating with an emotion which he dared not recognise. In the firelight the pictures were forming fast, and he could not break them. Presently she came and knelt beside him. He felt her soft arms about his neck; the vague, mysterious perfume which clung to her rose to him like a sweet yet wordless reminder. He caught her to him almost roughly.

“It must not be,” he said. “What have I to do with these people? What do I want with them?”

“They need you,” she said steadily.

“Do you not need me?” She was silent, and he forced her to look at him. “Do you not need me?” he repeated.

“Do I not need my heart to live?” she answered.

He caught his breath, startled by the stifled, yet passionate earnestness of the

simple words, and she went on gently.

“I have not understood but now I understand. You are a great man, and I have tried to keep you. For me the world is shadow, but to you it has become real it calls you, and you must go!”

“Sarasvati,” he exclaimed, painfully moved, “there is no ‘ must ‘!”

“Fate has spoken,” she returned.

He clenched his fist in a movement of stern protest.

“There is no fate—”

“Only the fate of the will which has been given you.”

And this time he made no answer. She bent her head so that her cheek rested on his hand, and he felt that it was wet with tears.

CHAPTER IV

SHADOWS

“NEVER,” said Mrs. Morell solemnly, “never could I have believed it possible that I should enter the house under the present circumstances. If my husband had not put it to me as a solemn duty wild horses wouldn’t have dragged me over the threshold.”

Her companion, Lady Salby, stared out of the window of her brougham and considered the dreary winter landscape with an expression of polite acquiescence on her fat and florid face.

“That is exactly how I feel,” she approved, and drew her furs closer about her. “It’s a shame that we women who have to bring such sacrifices of pride should not at least have the benefit of a vote. By the way, has no one ever seen this person?”

“Not since their arrival, when Sir David behaved so badly. They have just remained on the estate. Of course, it was the one thing they could have done. If she had been seen in the village she would have had all the school-children after them. Imagine!” Mrs. Morell’s voice rose a semitone with indignation. “She still wears some extraordinary native costume so the servants say. I consider it positively indecent.”

“Terrible,” said her ladyship. “If only she were an Indian princess or something. But no one seems to know who she is.”

Mrs. Morell nodded significantly.

“I have heard that she had something to do with a temple,” she said. “Of course, you know, dear Lady Salby, the temple-dancers—are—were—” She stopped; the two ladies looked at each other.

“Good heavens, is it possible?”

“I fear so.”

“How terrible!” her ladyship repeated. She sat up more stiffly, as though long lines of respectable ancestors stood behind her instead of one small but diligent diamond-merchant of Hebraic origin. “The one thing we can do,” she continued as the muchbecrested vehicle drew up at the entrance to Hurst Court, “is to keep her absolutely in the background, and hope the electors will forget her existence. Of course, the other two candidates won’t. I know that dreadful Grey man has already started some scandalous story about her. Oh, these Socialists!”

“Indeed, yes!” murmured Mrs. Morell. “I’m sure they are capable of anything. Only the other day my husband told me—”

But the door stood open and the bowing footman’s information that “Her ladyship was at home,” put the squire’s anecdote temporarily in the background. On the way to the drawing-room Lady Salby bent her thick lips to Mrs. Morell’s ear.

“Leave her to me,” she whispered. “I shall manage. A little tact, you know!”

And Mrs. Morell, flushed with the triumph of an association with so high a personage, nodded an understanding agreement.

Sarasvati had been standing by the window; she turned as the two women entered, but she did not at once advance to meet them. Indeed, it seemed as though she half recoiled, like some frightened child, and her eyes passed from one face to the other in dumb question. Lady Salby coughed delicately. She felt complete master of the situation, and could afford to be gracious.

“Dear Lady Hurst,” she murmured, swaying ponderously forward. “So pleased that we should have met at last.”

Sarasvati came to meet the outstretched hand. Her movements were lithe and graceful as a panther’s, and the beautifully embroidered sevi which was draped about her figure with classic perception for the poetry of line became her as perfectly as the wild mass of furs and waving feathers became her visitor ill. And yet she trembled visibly, as though this revelation of European taste overwhelmed her with a sense of fear.

“You are kind to say so,” she said, in an English which faltered. “I have been so frightened.” She touched Mrs. Morell’s reluctant hand and seemed to take comfort from that lady’s dowdy simplicity. “So very frightened,” she repeated,

with a note of unconscious appeal in her soft voice.

Lady Salby laughed melodiously. She sank uninvited in the most comfortable chair by the fireside, and motioned to Mrs. Morell to follow her example.

“Frightened?” she said, raising her fine eyebrows. “Frightened of us, dear Lady Hurst?”

“Of every one,” Sarasvati answered. She stood between the two women, her hands folded before her, and they studied her, the one through her lorgnettes, the other through her pince-nez, and both through the haze of their prejudices. Lady Salby repeated her carefully studied ripple.

“You must have more confidence,” she said encouragingly. “I know foreigners are inclined to look upon us English people as terrible bears, but we really are quite nice when one gets to know us aren’t we, Mrs. Morell?”

Mrs. Morell acquiesced awkwardly. Lady Salby’s constant reference to ‘us English,’ was an all-betraying weakness which she had never been able to overcome partly because she did not realise its damaging effect.

“Won’t you sit down?” she went on graciously, as their hostess remained standing. Sarasvati started. “I thank you,” she stammered. “I was thinking would you not be glad of something to eat? I believe it is usual—”

“Oh no, not at all, don’t mention it,” Mrs. Morell interrupted stiffly. “We had our tea before we left.” “Indeed, our chief object in coming was to tell you how delighted we all are that you and your husband are coming out of your seclusion.” Lady Salby added: “The Hursts have always been so popular, and Sir David is proving such a brilliant speaker. He is sure to get in; we are working our hardest for him.”

Sarasvati looked at her visitor in grave wonder. “Work for him?” she repeated. “How can you work for him?” And in her tone and words there was at once pride and an unconscious disparagement.

Lady Salby threw back her plumed head with the amusement of superior wisdom.

“It is very easy indeed,” she said. “Nowadays a man who hopes to get in without

the help of women is utterly lost. Though he is too masculine to want women on the stage, he likes them to do all the dirty work behind the scenes, and so we help with the meetings and canvassing; write letters, make appointments, lend our motor-cars, our influence. Good gracious! why, we are so many unpaid agents.”

“And can I do nothing?”

The tone had changed again, had become humble, almost beseeching.

Lady Salby shook her head emphatically.

“I think not. You see, my dear Lady Hurst, you as yet are a stranger to our ways and our people. The people are very foolish very prejudiced in fact, one has to be extraordinarily careful. Really, it is most difficult for me to explain. You are sure you will not be hurt by anything I may say?”

“No,” Sarasvati answered. Her voice and expression were dull. She had as yet understood nothing, but this woman’s manner increased her fear.

“You know it is all for your good,” Lady Salby went on, who had by now found her seat in the saddle. “I want you to feel that I am speaking to you as a friend who would like to help you in the many difficulties of your new position.” She laid her tightly gloved hand on Sarasvati’s knee. “As I was saying, our people are very difficult to manage conservative you know, and they have to get accustomed to foreigners strangers. If you were to come amongst them suddenly you would be certain to damage your husband’s cause.”

“You mean that they hate me?” Sarasvati said simply and directly. The grey light of the winter afternoon fell on her face, which had suddenly grown pinched and wan.

Lady Salby gave an elegant, protesting gesture.

“My dear, certainly not, but they are very slow. They are suspicious. You must give them time.”

“I know quite well,” Sarasvati answered. “Everywhere it has been the same the people have looked at me they have followed me with their eyes, but without kindness. Then I did not mind, for they were not my people. But these are my

people.” She paused, and her expression grew strangely absorbed. “It is perhaps that they know I am not as they,” she finished under her breath.

Lady Salby nodded approval.

“Exactly. They feel that you are of another race. So sensible of you to understand. And now you will be very patient, won’t you?”

“You mean I must do nothing? I may not help him?” There was a hungry pleading in voice and eyes.

Lady Salby considered.

“Well, perhaps in little things if you would allow me to advise you. For instance what a charming dress you have got on! Do you know, I have been admiring it all the afternoon. Let me see, what was I saying? Oh, yes; for instance, there are trifling exterior matters mere conventionalities, you know. We have a saying that when we are in Rome we do as the Romans do, and I think our people would like you better if you took to their ways and dress. Now a nice tailor-made would make all the difference, wouldn’t it, Mrs. Morell?”

“Certainly,” said Mrs. Morell.

Sarasvati rose slowly to her feet. She was scarcely above the middle height, but the slightness of her build and her erect carriage gave her a dignity which for a moment silenced her visitor’s loquacious tongue.

“My husband wishes that I keep to the dress of my caste,” she said proudly. “He cares nothing for the thoughts of the common people.”

“My dear—“Lady Salby flushed with annoyance “you will find that his ideas have changed. The thoughts of the common people have become very important to him indeed, and if you are wise you will ignore all that nonsense. Get yourself some nice evening dresses and surprise him. I can give you the name of an excellent dressmaker, and, once you have shown every one that you mean to be a real Englishwoman they will love you at once.”

“And that will be good for him?” she asked thoughtfully.

“Of course. And, my dear Lady Hurst, there is another thing. I’m sure you won’t

mind my mentioning it, but you know we are all very serious Christians in this part of the world. It's oldfashioned, I daresay " the scion of the house of Goldschmidt & Co. expanded visibly " but I confess I am that way myself, and I think if you could manage to attend St. Stephen's regularly on Sunday it would make a very good impression." She paused a moment and glanced across at Mrs. Morell, who was listening in meek admiration. "Of course, you don't mind my asking, do you? You have been baptized?"

"Yes," Sarasvati answered instantly, "Father Romney—"

"Good gracious a Roman Catholic!"

The exclamation broke from both visitors in the same instant. Sarasvati looked from one blank face to the other. Her own face was full of a grave surprise.

"Yes," she said simply.

"Then then you are a Roman too?"

"I am what my husband is."

"What Sir David too?" Again an exchange of deploring glances. "Most unfortunate, most unfortunate!" murmured Lady Salby. "We are all such staunch Protestants," remarked Mrs. Morell, who evidently felt it was time she said something. "Really, I am afraid it will make a great difference."

"But I we can come to the church," Sarasvati interposed gently. "What can a name matter? Do not we all believe in the One God?"

The two women stared at her. She bore their scrutiny with calm, unconscious that she had struck at the foundation of their Christianity. Mrs. Morell drew herself up.

"Very liberal," she said frigidly. "Very liberal indeed."

"Of course, God is the father of all," murmured Lady Salby gracefully, with the air of having granted a concession. "But I think you had better speak to the vicar about it." Then she stopped, and there was an awkward silence.

Sarasvati's eyes had wandered to the window, and suddenly she clapped her

hands with a childlike excitement which contrasted startlingly with her previous bearing.

“White rain I ” she cried. “White rain!”

Lady Salby glanced over her shoulder.

“Dear me snow at last,” she said. “I always think snow so beautiful, don’t you? so soothing, so pure! I suppose you have seen it before?”

Sarasvati shook her head. She had reached the window and stood watching the slow, heavy flakes as they sank through the grey twilight. After a moment she came back to the fire, shivering.

“It is cold a dead thing,” she said “It falls straight into my heart.” She held out her delicate hands to the flames, and Lady Salby’s quick eyes inherited caught the gleam of gems.

“It is a great change for you, no doubt,” she said, with recovered equanimity. “It is very warm in India, isn’t it?”

“It is all warmth,” Sarasvati answered under her breath. “There God is the sun.”

Lady Salby overheard the last sentence. She had just remembered part of her mission, and her tone changed.

“How your people must miss you!” she said with sympathy.

Sarasvati looked up. Her fine instinct felt the nearness of a new danger, but it could not save her from her own ignorance.

“My people?” she repeated slowly.

“Your father, I mean. Let me see, I think I have heard his name, but these foreign words are so difficult for us poor English to remember. Wasn’t it the Rajah of dear me! I have quite forgotten!”

Sarasvati stood in her favourite attitude, with her hands crossed before her. Her gaze had lost itself in the bright firelight.

“My father is God,” she said dreamily. “Brahma, the AU One.”

There was a long, unbroken silence, of which she was unconscious. Lady Salby rose.

“I think I must be going,” she said, and her voice sounded as though she had been running. “We have been very pleased to meet you, Lady Hurst. For your own sake, as well as for that of your husband, I hope you will consider our advice.”

Sarasvati looked up. She saw that the heavy face of the speaker was flushed, and that the lips were pursed; she looked at the little woman in black and recognised a bleak unfriendliness that was near hatred. And suddenly a wild, nameless fear of these women who came to her as her husband’s friends rushed over her.

“I thank you, I will try,” she said, and her voice rose scarcely above a whisper.

She felt the touch of two limp hands. She heard the rustle of silken petticoats and the heavy clang of the hall-door. She crept to the window and looked out. The lights of a carriage flashed over the thin white covering of snow and disappeared into the avenue. For a long time she stood there, watching one feathery flake follow another, and then she buried her face in a fold of her *sevi* as though to hide from the gathering darkness.

Thus David Hurst found her when he returned, an hour later, from a meeting in some outlying village. It had been a successful meeting. The man who had failed signally on the arid road of lifeless knowledge began to feel the stirring of that power which, through imagination and intuition, touches the hearts and minds of men. The room was in complete darkness when he entered, and until he had switched on the light he believed himself alone. Then he saw her crouching by the window, and called her by name, and she turned and came haltingly towards him. Her face was pinched and haggard, and for the first time it struck him how strange and lost she looked against the background of English modernity.

“Forgive me,” she said humbly. “I think I have slept. The snow crept into here and here.” She pressed her hand to her head and heart. “It froze me.”

For a moment Hurst was conscious of a curious process of readjustment. He had been in the world, in the thick of a real and desperate struggle, and he came back to a shadowy, peaceful existence, to a woman who, compared with the concrete

actualities of the last hour, appeared more like some lovely dream. He closed his eyes. By sheer force of will he drew himself back into the atmosphere to which she belonged, and when he looked at her again the readjustment was complete. She was once more everything to him, the world nothing.

“Sarasvati,” he said. “You have been all alone you have been frightened?”

“A little,” she answered, and clung to him. “But I am safe now, quite safe.” But terror and pain sounded in her unsteady voice, and a deep remorse, a sudden self-disgust, changed the whole course of his thought.

“Shall I give it up?” he whispered. “What do I care for anything but you? Shall I give it up? Shall we go away from here together away from every one? Sarasvati, my wife—” He did not feel the struggle that passed through her. The intuition which is given to those who live in solitude and introspection had already been blunted in him. When she looked up he only saw that her face was grave and calm.

“No,” she said, and then again, more earnestly, “no.”

He kissed her, and a sense of relief crept slowly over him.

“I have good news for you,” he went on suddenly. “The best news possible. Can you think what it is?”

“She is coming,” she answered, without hesitation.

He frowned down at her, taken aback, vaguely uneasy. “Diana Chichester is coming to England,” he said. “How did you know?”

“I saw it in your face,” she said. A tired, wavering smile crossed her lips. “Send for her,” she whispered. “Send for her. I need her,”

CHAPTER V

THE TRUTH-SEEKER

THE Rev. James Anderson sat at his writing-table and prepared his Sunday sermon. He had chosen the text: "Little children, love one another." In view of the high political feeling which was raging through Steeple Hampton, changing the usually torpid inhabitants into venomous, if ponderous, partisans, his choice was singularly appropriate. For the first time for many years he felt again life flowing into his words. He forgot that they would be addressed to rows of heavy-faced Christians who would either fall asleep after the preliminary prayer or carp at the length or brevity of his sermon. He forgot the bitter disappointments which had changed the passionate zealot into a tired, white-headed old man who went about his duty with machine-like punctuality. The text, with its loving simplicity, stirred him to the depths of his gentle character, and the words that he wrote were warm with that love for humanity which had been humanity's best weapon against him. Then, in the middle of a triumphant peroration, the door opened and admitted the red face of his maid-of-allwork, an important person of small attainments and smaller intellect.

"If you please, sir, there's a lady to see ye'," she said.

The vicar ran his fingers through his disordered hair and gave a reluctant glance at his unfinished manuscript. Routine had him in its grip again, and inspiration took instantly to flight.

"Did she give her name?" he asked and ran over in his mind which of the village's many benefactresses was most likely to disturb his peace at this hour.

"She said Lady 'Urst," the girl returned in accents which suggested considerable doubt.

"Show her in at once."

The vicar rose as his visitor entered. He had not seen Sarasvati since that first day, and the legends which circulated round her mysterious personality filled him with distrust. In the first moment he hardly recognised her. She was wrapped in costly sables, and the small face was pinched with cold and so wan-

looking that the vicar forgot all other considerations.

“My dear Lady Hurst,” he said warmly, but there stopped short. The small change which custom had taught him to dole out to his women parishioners failed here. He felt that she would not understand them, that they would be as out of place as she was in the prim little study. He waited awkwardly for her to break the silence.

“I want to speak to you,” she said in a quick, breathless way. “Lady Salby sent me to you.”

“Lady Salby?” he echoed, offering her a chair by the fire. “Well, it does not matter who it was as long as you have come. Won’t you take off your coat?”

The kindly little speech was lost on her, but she seated herself and loosened her wraps with hurried fingers. The fur hood slipped back from the smooth dark hair, and the vicar caught a glimpse of the dull red of the barbaric dress beneath the cloak. The Bight disconcerted him. He felt that there was something incorrect, not to say indecent, about it, and his first distrust regained the upper hand. After all, he had lived thirty years in Steeple Hampton and he who touches pitch must necessarily soil his hands. Then a pair of dark eyes, full of childlike appeal, yet utterly unchildlike in their trouble, were lifted to his face, and he forgot that he represented the virtues of a very Christian community and became a man of much sympathy and human gentleness.

“Tell me what I can do for you,” he said, and seated himself opposite her in an attitude of quiet attention. “I feel that only some difficulty could have brought you to me on such a day,” he added quickly, as though fearing his words suggested a reproof.

Sarasvati nodded.

“I am sorrowfully in doubt,” she said, “and you have looked kindly at me. I have not forgotten.”

“I am glad,” he answered; “but, my dear Lady Hurst, surely if, as you say, you are in any trouble, your husband—”

“No,” she interrupted quickly and with a faint hauteur. “My husband must not know. He has much to do, much to think of; he must not know that I have been

frightened.”

“Frightened toy whom?” he asked.

She pressed her frail hands to her cheeks with a curious foreign movement, and did not answer. Then, with an abrupt change of expression which startled him out of his self-possession, she turned to him again.

“They say that I stand in his way,” she said slowly. “They say that the people hate me because I am different from them is that true?”

The vicar caught his breath. He had never needed to think quickly, and her straight, penetrating gaze bereft him of what little presence of mind he boasted. He passed a nervous hand over his forehead. Had he been less certain of the truth, the answer would have come easier to him. As it was, uncounted, cruel criticisms occurred to him to stifle an impulsive protest.

“Then it is true?” she said.

“Lady Hurst ” he began. Then suddenly he saw that her eyes had filled, and his excuses and explanations died to nothing. She held out her hands in piteous appeal.

“Is there nothing I can do? Would they indeed love me better if I dressed as they did, if I came to your church?”

The vicar suppressed a smile.

“Lady Hurst, prejudice is an ugly, obstinate monster, and not so easily overcome,” he said. “You must remember that in this little English village we do not see a foreigner from year’s end to year’s end, and that we are naturally inclined to look upon them with suspicion. You must have patience with us. Come to church, by all means. It will require courage on your part, but in the end you will win, I am sure of it, as soon as the people realise that you are of their faith.”

She interrupted him with a troubled gesture.

“That is what I cannot understand Lady Salby told me my faith was not theirs and it stood between us.”

“You are a Christian?” the vicar asked.

“Father Romney baptized me and taught me.”

“Ah, a Roman Catholic? Ah—” The vicar pressed the tips of his fingers together. His gravity had increased and his expression became formal. “You see, Lady Hurst, in this part of the world we are all Protestants.”

“Are not Protestants Christians?” she asked naively.

“Of course.”

“And the Roman Catholics—”

The vicar cleared his throat.

“—are Christians also. You are touching on a very difficult and unhappy subject, Lady Hurst. We Christians are but human, and many errors have crept into our faith, dividing us into opposing camps. It is the same amongst all earnest seekers after the truth.”

“We also have our castes,” Sarasvati said thoughtfully.

The vicar’s brows contracted. The comparison troubled him, and for a moment he suspected that it concealed a subtle mockery; but her face, with its expression of almost desperate intentness, banished the thought instantly from his mind.

“Caste is no name for our great Protestant Unity,” he said. “We strive, as our fathers did, to attain God’s truth, and we believe that, more than all others, we have found it, and, with God’s help, we shall hold it in the face of those enemies who would drag us back into the ignorance and superstition of the Middle Ages.”

He spoke with the aroused energy of the partisan, forgetting to whom he spoke; then he saw that her eyes watched him in puzzled question, and he broke off quickly.

“Lady Hurst, forgive me. You have come amongst us too recently to understand the controversy raging around modern Faith. You must content yourself with the simple truths of religion.”

“The truth?” she said. “Where is the truth?”

He looked at her sharply. Was it chance or something deeply rooted in the human character, that had brought a paraphrase of the great eternal question to this woman’s lips?

“It is I who must ask you to forgive,” she went on in her low voice; “but I am in trouble. There was a time when the Truth seemed so near to me, so clear and beautiful. I felt God in the sunshine, in the moon and stars here in my own breast. There was nothing on which my eyes fell but that I said, * This is God.’ Worship was easy, for all was divine; even I, whom they call the daughter of Brahma. Brahma or Jehovah, Christ or Buddha what were they but names to me? rays from the one great light, utterances of the one great truth to which we belong, and to which one day we must return. But that has gone. I have listened since to many teachers, and one has said, ‘ All that you have believed is false. There is but one truth, and that is ours. ‘ And another: c Your teacher has deceived you; the truth is here.’ And so it has come that the light has gone out, and I am in darkness.’ She rose and stretched out her delicate arms in a movement of supreme appeal. ‘ You are good. I feel that you are kind, and will not mock at me. Where is the truth?”

“Here, Lady Hurst.” The vicar had risen also, and laid his hand on the Bible at his side. “You need seek no further.” His uneasiness had passed. He felt as though a strong weapon had been thrust into his hand. But a bitter, weary disappointment passed over Sarasvati’s face.

“So did Father Romney answer,” she said, “and you say that he is not of your faith.”

“Men distort the words of God to suit their theories,” the vicar returned, and his voice had grown cold and hard.

“The words of God!” she echoed. “Are not the Vedas, the < Bhagavad Gita,’ also of God?”

The vicar threw back his white head.

“No,” he said. “They are the writings of false prophets.”

“You know it you are sure?”

“‘Ye shall know them by their fruits,’ ” he quoted with sudden fierceness.

“And that?” she pointed to the great square book under his hand “—that also is the word of God?”

“Yes,” he said. “That is the word of God.”

There was a moment’s silence. The vicar was breathing fast, like a man engaged in a sharp conflict with a detested adversary, and yet, when he looked at her again, he saw that she had not fought against him. Her features had grown haggard in the desperate seeking of her mind, and his voice softened again.

“Read the words that men, inspired by God Himself, have written,” he said. “Then you will find peace, Lady Hurst.”

She raised her eyes to his face.

“Have patience with me,” she pleaded. “I come to you out of another world. What to you is certainty is to me but one of many human dreams. Are you sure of this truth?”

“I am sure,” he answered proudly.

“You can prove it to me?”

He frowned, but the feverish desire in her voice disarmed him.

“We have historical evidence, Lady Hurst,” he began, hesitating on the verge of a long theological display of dates and documents, such as he was wont to dole out periodically for the waverers of Steeple Hampton. Instinct silenced him. With a sudden sinking of the heart he realised that, to this seeker, such ‘ facts ‘ would be as stones offered to a starving man. “And, above all, we have our Faith,” he said, and knew that for once the phrase rang unconvincing.

She turned away from him.

“I too had faith,” she said, “but it is dead.”

“Because you believed in false gods, Lady Hurst.”

She shook her head.

“How should I believe in your God?” she answered.

“Lady Hurst,” he exclaimed, with the impatience of growing uneasiness, “do you expect God to come down from heaven to testify?”

“No,” she turned round on him. “But I have read your Holy Book; I have studied it, as only those who thirst for certainty can do. I have found much that is beautiful and good, much that our own Vedas teach. And I say to you, if you would have us believe that there and there only is the Divine Truth, then you must prove it to us not in your words, for those we have, but in your lives and deeds.”

“Lady Hurst!” he stammered. “We are but human if we fail—”

“Surely, if you truly believed in the Christ who taught you to ‘love one another’ you would not fail so utterly,” she answered.

The vicar recoiled a step. The words of his sermon recurred to him. To the simple man it seemed that God had rebuked him through this woman. She drew her fur cloak closer to her, and the old look of childish appeal crept into her dark eyes.

“I have spoken as I should not have spoken,” she said. “I am very ignorant of the world, but of late I have been much alone, and I have thought long over all that I have seen and heard. I have heard of Christian love, and I have seen that, because I am of another race, I stand in my husband’s way, and people hate and despise me. And I came to you because it seemed to me that you might help me. For if I spoil his life I shall surely die and and if the life of my child is to be spoilt also, then it would be better that we died together.”

She said it so simply, so much as though it were a natural and accepted thing, that the kindly vicar felt an uncomfortable tugging at his heart.

“You must not talk like that,” he protested. “Poor disciples though we may be, we are not wholly bad. In time you will be as loved as any Lady Hurst has ever been I promise you. And then there is your husband who loves you more than the opinion of the whole world.”

She nodded thoughtfully but did not answer, and the vicar came nearer and took her dark slender hand between his own white ones.

“You came to me for help, and I have failed you,” he said humbly. “I am a poor, very simple man, who has toiled many years among his fellow-creatures without thought or question, and who has believed as it was given him to believe. If you had spoken to a clever man he would have convinced you better.”

She shook her head.

“He would have numbed me with many words,” she answered, “and you have helped me, for you have shown me kindness, But one thought I would tell to you perhaps you will remember it should another stranger come to you as I have done I think Faith is as a fragile flower which grows once in the heart, and he who plucks it can never plant it again. Will you think of it?”

“I promise you,” he answered. “I will not forget.”

He led her to the door and watched her frail figure pass between the two rows of weather-beaten shrubs to the waiting carriage, and for the first time in his life the earnest propagandist knew the holy agony of doubt. At the end of the garden path two tall box-trees hid her from him so that he closed the door of the vicarage unconscious that a strange scene was being enacted almost within ear-shot of his study window. In the same moment that he had turned back, sighing, to his unfinished sermon Lady Hurst had come face to face with a stranger, who stood between her and her carriage. He was a tall, slightly built man, poorly dressed, with the collar of his overcoat turned up over his ears so that little more than a pair of black, piercing eyes were visible beneath the shabby golfcap. Sarasvati, vaguely alarmed, made an attempt to pass him, but, with singular adroitness, he slipped before her and caught her by the wrist.

“I have to speak with thee,” he said in her own language.

Then she stood still, staring at him, arrested by a strange mingling of joy and fear which the familiar sounds had awakened in her.

“Who art thou?” she stammered almost inaudibly.

“Another of an unhappy race,” he answered. He lifted his cap, and she recognised the dark skin, the clean-cut and noble features, marred only by a

subtle suggestion of cruelty and sensuality, which were the marks of her caste.

“What wilt thou with me?” she said.

“I would ask a question, Sarasvati, daughter of Brahma,” he returned. “I would ask thee if thou hast utterly forgotten thy people and the land which gave thee birth, or whether thou hast become a willing slave of their oppressors.”

Sarasvati drew back from him.

“I have not forgotten my people nor the warmth and sunshine of my country,” she answered. “Nor have I become the willing slave of an oppressor. Thy words are darkness to me.”

“Look at me!” he said in a low voice, which vibrated with suppressed passion. “Are not my cheeks hollow and my clothes those of a beggar? Ay, a beggar, a pariah, an outcaste have I become, though no drop of pariah blood runs in my veins, and though, were justice done, the sacred sign of Vishnu should be on my brows. Look at me, I say! The greatest princes of India have bowed before my race, and I stand before thee powerless, casteless, faithless.”

“Faithless!” she echoed, as though the word had touched some deeper chord. Then, with a sudden energy, “Who has done this thing to you?”

“The man to whom you have given your life, Sarasvati!”

“It is not true!”

“It is true. I swear it by the gods whom I have forsaken and who have forsaken me. His people stole me and gave me to the missionaries that they might defile me and take from me the faith of my fathers. Well, they succeeded. They taught me to despise all that I had honoured, they taught me their ways and their knowledge, they sought to drive into me their slave’s religion, that I might become their slave, and then he raised his clenched fists with a movement of uncontrollable fury ” then they spat upon me. They told me that, though I had become a Christian, I was not one of them. They patronised and scorned me; they called me brother and would not shake my hand; in their country they shrink from me as from a leper, and in their streets I starve my body for bread, my soul for God and the fellowship of my own people.”

He stopped, panting, his features working in a convulsive grief, and she did not answer. She listened to him as to an inner voice, and her heart ached with pity and a numbing apprehension.

“And so is our country our Mother India,” he went on fiercely, “defiled, ground under heel, disintegrated by the subtle machinations of devils, who would sap our strength by taking from us our faith, sundering our castes, tearing father from son, mother from daughter, husband from wife. And thou, also, daughter of Brahma, to whom the people looked to guide them in the great struggle of the future, thou also—”

He stopped. Unheard by either of them, a horseman had been galloping towards them over ploughed fields, and now broke through the low hedge on to the road. The carriage-horses, startled by the sudden apparition, plunged, and Sarasvati, drawing back involuntarily, found her husband at her side. He did not look at her, but swung himself to the ground and stood between her and her unknown companion. She shrank from him. There was something in his face which made him a stranger to her.

“I think you had better get in,” he said quietly. “It is cold here. John, drive home by the Heath.”

“Yes, Sir David.”

Hurst lifted his wife lightly into the carriage and closed the door. He smiled at her through the window, but the smile was close-lipped and his eyes frightened her. She tried to speak to him to explain; but her tongue failed her, and the next instant the excited horses broke away and it was too late. The two men were left alone. They faced each other, as they had faced each other twice before in their lives. The Hindu had replaced his cap, and his attitude was impassive, almost indfferent. The Englishman studied him in icy silence, then, slipping his foot into the stirrup, swung back into the saddle.

“Rama Pal,” he said, “you have come here as my enemy. Is this your gratitude?”

The Hindu bowed his head.

“This is my gratitude, Lord Sahib,” he said. “I have a debt to pay to the Lord Sahib and his people. I shall never rest until my debt is paid.”

He salaamed in grave mockery, and then turned and strode away in the direction of the village.

CHAPTER VI

DIANA TO THE RESCUE

DIANA CHICHESTER sat in the corner of a thirdclass compartment and watched the drear, snow-covered wastes slip past her window with a joyful interest which only an Anglo-Indian, accustomed to eternal dust and sunshine, could have appreciated. Her train was of necessity a slow one, for no express ever stopped at Steeple Hampton. Three or four times a day a snorting, puffing little engine of antiquated structure jerked to a standstill beneath the pretentious bridge which united the two minute platforms, and even the great folk of the land had to content themselves with a pace of fifteen miles an hour and a regular and lengthy stoppage every few minutes.

But Diana was in no hurry. Hers was one of those natures whose fierce joy in life makes every minute precious, every detail of absorbing interest, and when she was not silently greeting the familiar landmarks, her mind was busy with the past and present and building thereupon a future which was very close to her. She came armed with knowledge culled in many different quarters, for it was a fact that, though she neither scandalised nor indulged in the “Bazaar Gup” common to all Indian stations, she knew everything that the worst gossip knew, and a good deal more besides. The truth was that people came to her, not with their neighbours’ affairs so much as with their own, and her way of accepting their confidences rendered them oblivious to the fact that she never talked about herself. Thus she knew most of the events which had excited Steeple Hampton and was prepared to face a trouble which, on the surface, was not very apparent. All that she had heard had made her afraid, and it was destined that before her journey’s end her fear should be doubly confirmed. One station before Steeple Hampton two men got into her compartment. They were of a type very familiar to her shrewd, hard-headed and unemotional farmers of the better class, and their conversation, evidently the end of a long discussion, immediately caught her attention.

“Well, I don’t quite know what to make of it,” the elder man remarked, unfolding the local paper. “I likes the look of him, and what he says is sense, though it isn’t the sense of most people. But he’s queer. He talks, to my thinking, a bit too free. And then, there’s his wife.”

“Aye, there’s the wife,” echoed the other with a grimace. “That tells against him. We ar’n’t accustomed to that sort of thing in these parts.”

“They do say that she worships wooden idols,*” went on the first speaker with a lowered voice, “and neither of them ar’n’t ever seen in church. Now, that’s what I don’t like. When I gives my vote I want to know that my man is a Hurst and a Christian gentleman. Now this young chap well, if he gets me he gets me in spite of myself, so to speak. He don’t hunt and he don’t go to church, and he’s got a black woman for a wife, and none of them things is much to my liking. My old woman swears she’ll talk the roof off if I votes for him.”

There was a moment’s thoughtful silence. The train began to reduce speed, and Diana Chichester to collect her belongings. As is the way with men of their class, her two companions watched her without noticing her.

“That fellow Grey has got some queer tales about Sir David,” the more loquacious of the two went on. “I happened to hear his last address, and he swore that he was going to bring down a speaker who knew something of Sir David’s doings out in India. I’d like to know the truth about all that before I makes up my mind.”

“Well, if I don’t vote for Sir David, I don’t vote at all,” the other retorted. “To my mind, Grey is a dirty scoundrel, and not one of my folk has ever turned Socialist yet, thank God.”

With an imposing jerk the train came to a standstill, and Diana made for the door. She had a considerable struggle with the handle before either of them realised that she was endeavouring to get out, and she thanked them for their belated assistance with a graciousness which startled them effectually out of their phlegm.

“And, by the way,” she said as she reached the platform, “you can take it from me that those queer stories are very ordinary lies. I know Sir David better than most people, and I promise you that he is a brave and honourable gentleman. As to his wife she is worthy of him, and the man who judges a woman by her colour is a fool.”

And with that she smiled upon them and slammed the door in their faces and left them breathless. Half way down the platform she met Hurst himself. She hardly recognised him. He seemed to her to have grown taller, and, as he lifted his cap,

she saw that he had aged more than the eighteen months of their separation justified. In spite of his years there was already a suggestion of grey in the thick black hair, and his mouth, though it had lost its moody, cynical curves, had narrowed to a straight, repressed-looking line. Yet when he smiled she recognised in him the boy whose dreamy, gentle if ineffectual ways had once roused her childish irritation, and that old expression of awkward, appealing friendliness side by side with the new strength struck her as oddly attractive. She gave him both her hands, and he clasped them with an energy which brought the blood to her cheeks.

“It is so good of you, Di,” he said, and again in his voice she recognised the familiar gratitude for some little service done.

“I hardly dared believe you were really coming. I’ve brought the dogcart. It’s a wretchedly cold day, but I thought you’d like it better than being cooped up in a state carriage. Your luggage can come on afterwards. You’ve brought plenty?”

“Enough to see you safely decorated with the fatal initials,” she returned gaily. “How are things progressing, David?”

“I’ll tell you as we drive along.” He helped her up into her seat and took the reins from the waiting groom.

“When did you get my telegram?” he asked.

“Yesterday evening. I only arrived at Southampton yesterday morning, or I would have answered before.”

He glanced sideways at her determined profile. Her erect carriage and the energetic tilt of her finely moulded chin concealed to some extent the lines of weariness which had crept about the eyes and mouth.

“You mean you came straight here without seeing a soul?” “Not so much as an aunt or a cousin. There is a whole clan of Chichesters herded together somewhere in Cheltenham who are at the present moment considering what ineligible person I may possibly have eloped with. It will give them something to talk about for weeks .” She laughed to herself, and her laugh was irresistible, so that Hurst was compelled to join in, though his expression remained troubled.

“I feel I have been abominably selfish,” he said. “I never thought you would

really come so soon.”

“Or perhaps you wouldn’t have invited me?” she interposed maliciously.

“Don’t heckle an already much harassed candidate,” he pleaded. “I sent you a telegram because I thought by that means to get an answer from you in under three weeks that’s why.”

“Men never expect women to keep their promises,” she observed scornfully. * ‘ It’s positively discouraging. I told you I should come when you both felt I might be of some use and here I am, and I hope you are glad to see me.”

“More glad than I can say,” he answered gravely.

By this time they had left the village behind them and a cold blast of winter wind swept over the barren fields and for a moment cut short all conversation. David Hurst drove well. The chestnut was fiery and ill-tempered, yet he controlled her with an absolute confidence which impressed Diana because it was so unexpected in him. Undoubtedly he had changed. She studied him out of the corner of her eyes and wondered at the difference which a development of character can make to an ugly face.

“Tell me about everything,” she commanded, lifting her head to the wind.

“It is a fight,” he answered laconically. “But you are going to win!”

“You think so? I don’t know. I have a great deal against me. But I am glad of that. If I get in, it will be in spite of them and not simply because I am Sir David Hurst.”

“What is against you?” she asked. He was silent for a moment, and she regretted her question. Already she had touched on the trouble which she had suspected the sudden pallor in his dark cheeks betrayed the reality of its existence.

“Many things are against me,” he answered slowly. “Myself in the first instance. I don’t fit in anywhere to their preconceived notions of what I should be I don’t try to. I go my own way. They’re getting accustomed to it, but it’s been a hard pull. And now, of course, there’s Rama Pal.”

“Rama Pal?” she echoed in a puzzled tone. “What has he to do with it?”

“He is here. Grey, the Socialistic fellow, has got him down. As far as I can make out he has been studying law in London, and is mixed up with a whole society of fellow-countrymen whom we allow to drift from bad to worse for want of a little generosity and common sense. It is inevitable that they should grow to hate us, and the Socialists have easy work with them.”

“But what has Rama Pal to do with this election?” she asked, frowning.

“He is working for the Socialistic party. They are not very careful how they choose their weapons, and this is a peculiarly dirty one I am accused of everything, from abducting native children from their parents down to the pettiest acts of oppression.” He gave a short, contemptuous laugh. “No doubt there is more to come.” She was silent a moment, her fine brows knitted in earnest thought.

“I knew that Rama Pal had gone wrong,” she said at last. “The Professor told me. You remember all those gymnasium and physical exercise clubs that the educated Hindus were so eager about? They were and are utter frauds, hot-beds of anarchy and dacoitage, and Rama Pal was one of the chief leaders. When we heard that he had come to England with Brahman money we guessed what part he would play over here, but I never thought he would turn your enemy. After all, you saved his life once.”

“That is why he hates me,” Hurst answered.

She looked at him in surprise, then nodded.

“One has to get accustomed to the Oriental point of view,” she said.

“It is quite a natural point of view, and not a bad one, Di. If you take a man away from his religion and his people and thrust him into a false position he is not likely to thank you much for the mere benefit of living. I gave him his life, as it were; but even at the time I had a glimmering idea that it would have been much better if I had let matters alone. But my apology was not appreciated, and is still less likely to be appreciated now that the acid has done its work. So it’s war to the knife.”

“Take care, David.”

He touched the mare sharply with the whip, so that she bounded forward over

the smooth white road.

“You wouldn’t like me to take care,” he said.

“You’re beginning to know me, David.”

“I know my mother.”

“I’m not like your mother. If I were your mother—” She stopped suddenly, and a wave of colour mounted to the roots of her fair hair.

“Well?” Hurst questioned.

“I would take care of you,” she said.

He laughed again, and for the first time she caught a note of the old bitterness.

“I have learnt to take care of myself.”

“Just for that reason,” she retorted.

After that a long silence fell between them. The hard lines about Hurst’s mouth had relaxed. He scarcely knew it, but the presence of the woman beside him gave him a new sense of rest and content. He turned to her presently with a smile that lent his strength a joyousness that it had hitherto lacked.

“I can’t tell you how thankful I am you have come, Di,” he said. “Sarasvati wants you needs you.”

“Tell me about her,” she pleaded gently.

He did not answer at once. She was watching him, and she thought that his face had saddened; but it was possible that the growing dusk had thrown a shadow over his features.

“It’s rather hard to tell you anything, Di,” he began at last. “It has been wonderful to see how she has grown into everything learnt our ways, our language, and our thoughts. Though I’ve ‘gone over,’ as you call it, I’m not much of a believer; but sometimes I’ve felt I should like to go on my knees to a Creator who has made something so noble, and simple, and pure. It is as though

God had made one being whom He had kept * unspotted from the world.' ' His voice had deepened and softened with rare feeling, and Diana looked straight ahead, knowing that his face betrayed more than she had a right to see. "But that's the tragedy of it all," he went on with a short sigh. "She isn't of this world; she only understands it as a spirit might understand it, and she cannot really live in it or with it any more than a spirit could do. And I'm of the world, Di partly at least. Circumstance has thrust me into life, and one side of my own character. And she can't follow me she tried, but it was beyond her power. So it grows lonelier and lonelier for her, and there is no one to help. Sometimes I wish I had conquered the temptation to take my share in the world's work it comes between us."

"But you are happy in your new life, David."

"Yes," he answered simply and directly. "I have at last found the work which I have been appointed to do, and that alone is something for which any man might be grateful. And besides that I have Sarasvati. I love her as I love my books, my music, and my dreams if I did not love her the best part of myself would be dead. But I am worried, Di. She stands so much alone in this cold, grey country of ours like a princess out of a fairy story in an ugly world of realities." He gave a little rueful smile, "And I am not a fairy prince."

They swung into the long avenue, and the darkness hid them from each other. The lamps on the dogcart threw a yellow reflection on the white snow, and through the trees the lights of the Court flashed like bright will-o'-the-wisps. Hurst stretched out his free hand and drew the rug more closely over Diana's knee.

"Are you cold?" he asked.

"I don't know; very likely. David, tell me: what are they like the other people here, I mean?"

"Typical," he answered trenchantly. "Honest but prejudiced to the last degree. For the sake of my name they have managed to swallow my peculiarities, and they are making a loyal fight for me every one of them. But " he hesitated.

"I understand," she said quietly. "I've had letters, David, and, if you want to know the truth that's why I've come. Kolruna or Steeple Hampton, it's all the same a foreigner is an outsider a native is an outcaste. I am sorry, David. It

sounds brutal, but you and I had better be open with each other, and I know you are brave enough and indifferent enough to bear it. I know that Sarasvati stands quite alone.”

“Quite alone,” he answered, and she saw that he drew himself up straighter. “They’ve patronised her so long as their curiosity lasted and now they ignore her. Perhaps it is best so. She could not understand them nor they her. I think you will understand her, Di. You don’t form your opinions, as most of our race do, by rules.”

She flushed again, as though his confidence pleased her.

“No, you and I are both rather exceptions,” she said. “It is scarcely a matter of self-congratulation, though. The world was not made for exceptions, and the majority takes good care that the minority gets badly jolted. Never mind, David; genius and lunacy are both on our side.”

He laughed, and a moment later drew rein before the stone steps of the Court.

“Sarasvati will be waiting for us,” he said.

But the house was oddly quiet as they entered it.

“Her ladyship is in the drawing-room,” the butler answered in reply to Hurst’s question. “She has been expecting you since four o’clock, Sir David.”

The man’s tone was such as he might have adopted when speaking of a child. It expressed a kindly, almost affectionate and very respectful forbearance. Once it had been supercilious; but that had been at the beginning.

Hurst glanced at his watch.

“Your train was very late, Di,” he observed. “Let us go and find her.”

Diana followed him up the broad, old-fashioned staircase to the familiar drawing-room; but there, too, all was quiet, and no light burned save that of the log-fire whose red reflections danced silently about the quiet corners, and Hurst drew back disappointed.

“She is not here,” he said, and his voice sounded uneasy. Diana laid her hand on

his arm.

“She is here,” she whispered. “Come very quietly.”

She led him on tip-toe to the fireside, and then he saw her. She lay on the white hearthrug, half supported against the low arm-chair, her bare arm curved behind her head, her face turned from the light. Her free hand had dropped limply into her lap and the gems in her strange, barbaric rings caught the red glow into their facets and reflected it back in a hundred changing colours. She wore a white sevi, heavily embroidered with gold, and all her jewels. Like a tired princess, weary of waiting for a belated prince, she lay there with closed eyes, the long lashes resting like shadows on the olive cheeks, a faint, pathetic smile, suggestive of tears, hovering about the tender mouth.

Diana Chichester knelt down. Something ached in her throat. It was all too beautiful too impossible. Here, in this commonplace English drawing-room, haunted with the shades of honourable but stiff and unromantic Englishwomen, this child of Eastern splendour had no place. The firelight and the coming night-shades alone brought her understanding. They bore her like a jewel in a natural and perfect setting, but in a minute an artificial glare and to-morrow the daylight would destroy it, and all the loveliness be lost in glaring, pitiless disharmony. Diana Chichester saw all this and suffered both as a woman capable of passionate sympathies and as an artist who sees a work of art destroyed by ruthless, clumsy Philistinism. She looked up and knew that Hurst suffered with her. His eyes were fixed on the sleeper, and there was a world of tenderness, of reverence and pity, written on his pale, composed features.

“Such things as dreams are made of,” he quoted under his breath.

She nodded, and suddenly he bent towards her.

“Di,” he whispered. “Will you help me help me to keep her?”

Her eyes met his in full and loyal understanding.

“I give you my second promise,” she said.

She stretched out her hand to him over the quiet sleeper and he clasped it. It seemed to them both that in that moment a sacred compact had been made between them. When they looked at Sarasvati again they saw that the peace had

gone out of her face and that she was awake.

CHAPTER VII

PAYING THE PRICE

DIANA CHICHESTER sat in the library and read aloud. In the adjoining room a low murmur played an accompaniment to her own clear melodious voice, and once or twice she lifted her head a little, as though against her will she listened. Sarasvati lay on the sofa, close to the fire, and watched her. There was a gentle, wistful interest written on her face which seemed to have little to do with the subject-matter of their book, and when Diana suddenly looked up, troubled perhaps by the steady gaze, she met the dark eyes with an amused protest not quite free from embarrassment.

“You are not listening,” she said. “I should be inclined to think that you never listen, only that you say things days afterwards which show that you paid more attention than I did. Have you two minds?” “A mind and a heart,” Sarasvati answered, smiling faintly. “My mind listens to your words, my heart to your voice.”

“And what does my voice tell you?”

“All that you are and all that you never say.” Diana closed her book, and, coming over to the sofa, sat down on the edge by Sarasvati’s side.

“That is mysterious,” she said, “as mysterious as yourself. All that I am! Why, that is more than I know. What am I, Sarasvati?”

“Very brave, very strong. Outside you are cold and hard as polished steel, and inside the fires burn burn till almost they consume you. I see them sometimes in your eyes and sometimes I hear them in your voice; but your voice is like a tiger’s, fierce and quick and tender. On your love a man might build his citadel and be safe indeed.” She had spoken dreamily, her eyes half closed, and now, as though overcome by a sudden weariness, her voice died away into silence.

For a moment Diana Chichester made no answer, her mind less occupied by what she had heard as by what she saw. In the full afternoon light which drifted in between the heavy curtains, David Hurst’s wife looked strangely, painfully altered. The exquisite, rounded outlines of her features had sharpened, there was

something pinched and wan about her cheeks that reminded Diana of faces that she had seen in the Bazaar at Kolruna the pathetic, tragic faces of the child-widows and of the older women who were learning to accept their slavery, but with that resignation which demands youth and loveliness in payment. Vaguely alarmed, Diana took Sarasvati's hand between her own and held it with an involuntary, unformed desire to protect and comfort. Sarasvati's eyes opened.

"Are you cold?" Diana asked.

"Yes, very cold." She shook her head as Diana glanced towards the fire. "It is not there the cold but here." She laid her free hand upon her breast. "Here, in your country, the fires must be strong or they die out," she said wistfully.

Diana nodded. She who knew the Indian sunshine, that intense, maddening, yet enervating sunshine which seems to pour down from the brazen skies only to radiate back, laden with the perfume of the flowers and the stench of pestilence, with all the vilest and noblest passions of humanity, knew what this exile suffered. Outside the snow lay in thin, drear patches on the barren soil and a wind, icy yet uninvigorating, swept round the square surface of Hurst Court.

"Are you not happy, Sarasvati?" Diana asked. "Is there anything that troubles you?"

"Nothing now, I thank you. Yes, before you came a great sadness was upon me. I was so alone." She made a little gesture of protest as she saw Diana's face. "Not alone, perhaps, but lonely. I have been taught to need love. And no hand but yours has ever taken mine in kindness."

"Sarasvati!"

She stretched out a slender brown hand, with its many rings, and looked at it thoughtfully.

"It must be a very ugly hand," she said. "Often I have seen how those who came here have shrunk from touching it, as though it was unclean. It was then that I first learnt that I was an outcaste. And yet is it the colour that makes it so ugly? Is it the whiteness only that matters?"

"Yes, only the colour," Diana answered. Her brows had contracted; her eyes shone fiercely bright. "It does not matter how coarse, how shapeless, how

ignoble a hand may be, so long as it is white.” She bent her head and kissed the long delicate fingers with a vehement tenderness. “So much for the fools and Pharisees,” she said. “What do they matter to you? You do not need them. You have love enough.”

She looked up, her fair, lovely fair face flushed with the triumph of an enemy overcome, and her eyes met Sarasvati’s. The flash of exultation died down beneath that all-seeing gaze.

“You are brave,” David Hurst’s wife said gently. “For I know that your heart shrank within you as you kissed me. Do not say that it is not so, for I know.”

Diana made no protest. Before that direct, unfaltering perception of a truth which she would have refused to recognise all denial seemed futile, contemptible. Only another, greater truth remained.

“I despise myself now,” Diana said frankly. “For I care more for you than I have ever cared for another woman, and if I shrank it is because I was born a Pharisee, and the habits of the Pharisee are appallingly tenacious. Sarasvati, if you know so much you must also know how much these days together have taught me to care for you.”

“Yes, I know. You are my friend. You are very good to me. Your friendship is like the sunshine which comes from afar off yet warms the heart.” She drew herself suddenly upright. “But a great river separates us,” she said in a low, broken voice, “and it never can be bridged never, never, never!”

Diana rose to her feet. Something in those scarcely audible desperate repetitions startled her as a revelation of a danger hitherto unsuspected. She knew that she had passed out of Sarasvati’s horizon and that another and dearer figure stood before the eyes that stared with so much prophetic pain into the firelight. Diana put her hand gently on the quivering shoulders.

“Even if it were true,” she said ” and I won’t admit that it is true what does it matter to you? You have David.”

“I have my husband.” It was as though a light had been flashed into the darkness of her thoughts. She lifted her head and smiled with a joyous gratitude which filled the Englishwoman with an odd sense of shame. “I know that he is mine. But it is even for his sake that I grieve. For have I not learnt in these days how

much he needs the friendship of his people? And I cannot help him. You yes, how well you help him! I have seen the gratitude in his eyes, I have heard it in his voice. But I can do nothing I stand between him and his kind, his ambition —”

“No,” interrupted Diana sharply and almost sternly. “That is not true. Love like yours could never hinder any man. You have been discouraged and frightened by a few prejudiced people who would be suspicious of any foreigner. Could they see you as I see you and know you as I know you, they would learn to love you as I have done. But you must not be afraid. You must go amongst them bravely. That is the only way.” She had spoken with a lack of conviction which disgusted her the more because it rang sincere. She realised that she was playing a part the poor, weak part of a futile consoler driven thereto by a fear of a danger whose extent she could only dimly apprehend. Sarasvati raised her eyes, and she bore their expression of dawning hope with the determination of a general who knows that an error of judgment must be atoned for by redoubled energy.

“And if I went among them bravely,” David Hurst’s wife said, “do you think that one day they would forgive me for not being as they are? Do you think that one day the opportunity would be given to serve him as you serve him?”

And suddenly, with those words, the danger took shape. Diana bent and caught the slender figure in her arms.

“I am sure,” she said with a fierce resolve which challenged her own reason. “I am sure. No one could ever serve him better than his own wife as the woman who loves him and whom he loves. Only be brave and patient.”

The door opened and she turned and saw that David Hurst stood on the threshold. He carried his overcoat over his arm and a faint flush in his dark cheeks told her of some suppressed excitement. His glance passed quickly from Sarasvati to Diana and there stopped, with an expression that was familiar enough to her so familiar that she had never realised until this moment how new a thing it was. Now she indeed realised. She understood that it had dawned gradually in these last few weeks of common toil and common ambition. Together they had built a wall of protection around the frail dark woman who bore his name, and in the building they had become comrades. But the woman whom they protected stood in the midst of their protection alone. All this Diana realised in one flash of intuition. Then Hurst spoke.

“Lord Salby has just arrived from South Africa,” he said in the quick, curt way which had become habitual to him. “He has travelled night and day in order to be able to lend me his support, and I am to see him this afternoon at Ashley, where he is to take the chair at the meeting. Mr. Smith has just brought in the news.. Di, you’ll come too, won’t you? I hope that it will be the turning-point in my favour.”

Mr. Smith, who had followed close on his employer’s heels, greeted the two ladies with a profound bow. His bright, clean-shaven face announced an elated presence of coming victory and a certain amount of innocent self-satisfaction.

“Of course Miss Chichester is coming,” he said briskly. “If we pull off this little affair to-morrow, it will be not a little owing to her work, and she’s got to have some of the glory. Miss Chichester, you’ve done more for the party than any other lady in the whole division fairly talked the people’s heads off. Old James, the shoemaker, he swore he was going Socialist this time by way of variety; but he told me yesterday that he’d changed his mind. He said you’d spent the afternoon with him, had been so pleasant and convincing, and made his head so tired that he gave way from pure weariness of spirit. That’s how to do it, Miss Chichester make ‘em tired, stop ‘em thinking at all costs, and the country’s safe.”

Diana laughed, but she was watching the figure by the fireside with an increased apprehension. Sarasvati had risen. Her eyes were fixed on her husband’s face, her lips a little parted, as though she were breathing quickly.

“You are very kind to give me so much credit,” Diana said, “but I think you must excuse me this afternoon. I have had more than enough of meetings of late, and I am tired.”

“Tired! “Hurst interrupted blankly. “I didn’t know you could be tired, Di. Of course, I don’t want to urge you^ you have done enough already; but, frankly, I shall miss you this afternoon. I have grown to look upon you as an indispensable adjutant. I can hardly do without you.”

She tried to signal to him to be silent. In the light of her new understanding each innocent word of his had a painful significance. Perhaps, in his gratitude, he had said more than he felt; but his eyes were earnest, and even troubled. She forced a smile.

“I am really sorry, David, but I don’t think I should make much difference this afternoon. You will have enough to look after—” She stopped.

Sarasvati came to her husband’s side and laid her hand on his arm.

“She refuses for my sake,” she said. “Husband, may I not also accompany you?”

In the brief, scarcely perceptible pause that followed, Diana glanced at Mr. Smith’s face and saw that it had fallen into lines of blank consternation. The flush had died out of Hurst’s cheeks, but he looked down into Sarasvati’s eyes and smiled.

“Do you wish it?” he asked quietly.

“If it would not harm you.”

“Harm me? How should you ever harm me?”

But—” he hesitated “—the people are often rough,” he said slowly. “Hard things are often said, Sarasvati. They might hurt you. For men it is a different thing—”

“Diana is not afraid nor will I be afraid.”

Hurst looked up and met Diana’s eyes. This time her message was understood.

“I know you will not be afraid,” he said. “If you wish it come with me. I will order the Victoria. Dress warmly, for it is very cold.”

“I thank you.” Forgetful of the stranger’s presence, she put up her hands to him in an attitude of humble gratitude. “You are not angry with me that I have asked?”

“I am glad,” he answered steadily, “I want you with me always, my wife. Go and get ready. Diana, you will come with us and keep her company?”

Their eyes met a second time over the dark head. It seemed to Diana Chichester that he was reminding her of a promise given, and that she must answer.

“Of course,” she said, “we will be ready as soon as you.” She came to Sarasvati and took her passive hand. “Come!” she said gently. “We must not keep them

waiting.”

Sarasvati lifted her face with a faint, tremulous smile. Her courage seemed to waver; she looked from one to the other appealingly and nervously, like a child seeking support and approbation. But her husband had turned away, and Mr. Smith’s eye avoided her, and she crept silently from the room.

Mr. Smith waited until the door had closed upon the two women. Then he came quickly across the room.

“Sir David,” he began jerkily, but resolutely, “Sir David, I shouldn’t be doing my duty to you as your agent if I did not warn you against this change in your plans. You know what this afternoon means for us all. We’ve had a hard fight for you, and Lord Salby’s support may make the vital difference. He owns half Ashley, and Ashley will vote with him to a man. Sir David, it’s against my principles, and it’s a confoundedly unpleasant thing to have to do, but I’m bound to tell you the truth. Your your marriage is not popular. It wouldn’t be popular anyhow but Grey and that Indian fellow have well, made the best out of it for themselves. They’ve worked the people up with any number of lies, and I tell you frankly that it may have cost us a few hundred votes. Well, we’ve fought doubly hard that’s all and I believe we’ll win yet. But, for pity’s sake, don’t bring Lady Hurst to the meeting. Lord Salby isn’t the man to carry off a delicate situation, and you know Ashley. They’re a rough mining lot and Grey and his black partner have announced a counter-meeting. There will be trouble anyhow, but if Lady Hurst is there I can’t answer for the consequences.”

Hurst rang the bell.

“Lady Hurst is my wife,” he said simply.

“Heavens above us! I know, Sir David. But what’s going to count most the poll to-morrow, or Lady Hurst?”

“Lady Hurst.”

The little man gave a despairing sigh.

“Well, I’ve said what I had to say, and I know better than to suppose you’ll take any notice of me. You’ve gone your own way all along, Sir David; you’ve gone over hedges and ditches rough-shod most of the time; and I’ve followed you

straight you'll admit that much. But this is too tall. It will break your political neck, Sir David. You can't flaunt your contempt for their prejudices in the faces of people whose votes you want."

Hurst turned and confronted the speaker. His face looked calm enough, and yet there was a nervous twitching about the mouth which betrayed him.

"You're a good fellow, Smith," he said. "You've done splendidly for me you've taught me the ropes, and helped me as a friend might have done. I'm a mere novice at the game I am playing, and hi your eyes I must seem little more than an obstinate boy. But I'd like to ask you one thing. You're married yourself, aren't you?"

"Certainly, Sir David."

"Well, would you accept hospitality from a man who shut his door in your wife's face?"

The agent flushed.

"No, Sir David, I would not."

"Then you understand how I feel. I don't want the vote of any man who does not accept my wife with me."

Mr. Smith groaned.

"You're bringing your private sensibilities into public life," he said. "It isn't done, Sir David; it isn't politics."

"I don't care a brass farthing whether it is politics or not," David burst out with a sudden rage. "It's my way and I'm going it right to the bitter end." He went to the door. "Are you coming, or are you not?" he said over his shoulder.

The little agent buttoned up his overcoat.

"I'm coming," he said.

The drive to Ashley was a long and silent one. Diana and Hurst sat opposite one another, but Diana avoided his eyes. In the last hour her attitude towards him had

changed subtly yet vitally. A secret, which in the weeks of their constant companionship had lain unacknowledged at the bottom of her consciousness had risen in one moment and confronted her. It was a secret no longer. She had recognised it, and in that recognition lay the annihilation of all that had been, the opening out of a new vista. As yet she neither knew by what road she was to travel nor by what name to call the change that had come upon her. Only one thing stood clear, and that thing a promise. She pressed her lips together and glanced at the figure beside her.

Sarasvati sat huddled together in the corner of the carriage. In spite of her furs and the closed windows she was shivering with cold, and there was a blue tinge about her cheeks, which made her old and wan-looking. The lustrous brown had died out of her eyes; they stared dull and colourless out of the window, and all her rich, warm beauty which had once deemed so invincible shrivelled and faded in the pitiless grey light, like a hot-house plant exposed to the cold blast of a winter wind.

Diana glanced quickly away, as though the sight pained her, and for a moment, held by the force of contrast, her eyes rested on the man opposite her. Here lay the other side of the tragedy. In the swift, almost incredible development of the moody, stunted boy into a strong man, freed from the shackles of his own pessimism, lay an irony of circumstances which filled her with pity. He was still young; in certain moments of relaxation his rough-hewn features could look boyish; but they were now set in lines of defiant, implacable decision which made him older than his years and separated him by a broad gulf from the David Hurst of Kolruna, the boy of unformed desires and bitter inertia. Diana knew when he had changed, and how. Love had forced him out into the battle and given him strength, and love now dragged him down, disarmed him for the already unequal fight. She wondered if he knew it.

As they passed the first low-built cottages of Ashley she saw that he drew himself up, and the skin about his jaw whitened with the tension. But he gave no other sign. When the carriage drew up before the schoolhouse where the meeting was to be held, he got out first in order to help his wife to the ground, and a crowd of village yokels cheered him. But the cheer died quite suddenly to silence. It was a silence half hostile, half curious. The members of the Committee who had come out to greet the arrivals seemed oppressed with an extraordinary embarrassment. They shook hands with Diana and with their candidate and bowed to Sarasvati, but their welcome seemed to have frozen on

their faces. Squire Morell, who claimed seniority, broke the silence.

“Lord Salby has not yet arrived,” he said stiffly. “We are expecting him every minute. If the ladies would, take their places perhaps you would wait for him in the committeeroom, Sir David. Mr. Smith, will you show the way?”

The agent obediently elbowed a passage through the crowd, and Lady Hurst and Diana followed him. The schoolroom, transformed for the occasion into a fair-sized hall, was already filled to overflowing, and there were hostile elements in the closely packed assembly, as Mr. Smith knew well enough. His practised nose scented trouble in the close atmosphere, and before he had gone half a dozen steps in the direction of the reserved seats his fears were confirmed. There was an uneasy movement, a craning of necks, a low murmur which broke out here and there into exclamations, laughter, and ” boos ” of open mockery. Mr. Smith kept countenance. He had endured worse things, but at the bottom of his eager, enthusiastic soul he cursed the alien woman at his side.

Sarasvati clung to Diana Chichester’s arm. In the midst of this curious, hate-filled crowd of rough countrymen her courage seemed to fail her utterly. She was trembling, and the fur hood which had slipped back on to her shoulders revealed a face that had lost all trace of loveliness in a paroxysm of fear. In that moment all that was most Oriental in her, most antipathetic in her race, seemed to rise to the surface of her being. The veil of her divine origin had been wrenched roughly from her? and she became what the hostile eyes saw in her a common, native woman, a creature of an inferior and despised race. Mechanically she took her place in the front row before the platform, and the intermittent jeering broke out afresh, mingled this time with half-hearted countercheers.

David Hurst heard them. He stood alone in the committeeroom, where he had been left at his own request. He had feigned a momentary indisposition, and the committee members, themselves ill at ease, had willingly accepted the excuse to await the arrival of Lord Salby. Hurst drew back into the recess of the old-fashioned window from whence he could watch the crowd outside. He felt nauseated, overcome by a disgust with himself, with the coarse-faced men whose favour he was about to crave, on whose goodwill depended his whole future. He hated them with a hatred which seemed like a rebirth of his old laming misanthropy. Now, as then, his whole energy and thought fought for an outlet for the right to serve; now, as then, a barrier rose and cut him off from those to whom his service was dedicated and thrust him back into a deeper

loneliness.

In the world in which he was fighting for place he had no friends. The men who supported him acted out of principle a little perhaps because they saw in him the man of mounting ability; but not out of friendship. There could be no friendship between them. There was the barrier, unnamed but unsurmountable. He had broken the law of caste, and his punishment was inevitable and most logical. He faced it now without flinching. He heard the jeering laughter which had greeted his wife's entrance, and set his teeth. That, too, was part of his punishment. He had forced his way into the world, and she had striven to follow him. Her love had brought the highest sacrifice without complaint. But it had been in vain. She was not of this world. Like a haunting spirit of fancy, she had crept out into the garish reality, and had faded to a poor, piteous shadow of herself. The daughter of Brahma, the child of gorgeous Oriental imagination, had died, he had lost her, with his old dreams, in the fight after the world's rewards, and in her place stood the native, the barrier between him and his kind. He felt no pity for himself. He was paying the just price but he had done wrong to the woman to whom he owed all that he had become. She suffered. He remembered her strange fears of the "shadows" which would one day claim him. They had claimed him, and, as she had prophesied, the light in her had gone out. Yes, he had done wrong; but only in so far as he had brought her into a battle against the narrowhearted prejudices of the world. The battle he had fought was a just one, but he was losing had lost and, as is the way of things, the woman paid the highest indemnity.

A carriage rolled up to the door of the schoolhouse. Hurst saw a tall, fair man step quickly out and respond with a careless goodnature to the hearty reception of the crowd outside. Hurst threw back his dark head with a movement of bitter contempt. This, then, was the popular, fox-hunting lord whose debts so rumour had it were regularly paid by his Hebrew wife, and who had come to patronise him and help him over the disadvantages of his mesalliance. Hurst laughed out aloud. But he was beginning to feel the rise of a violence which was new to him. He heard voices outside a low murmur of greeting and then loud, boisterous tones which drew rapidly nearer.

"Who the devil was that?" David heard. "What, Lady Hurst? Good Lord you don't say so? I didn't know it was as bad as that. Why, man alive, one doesn't marry that sort of thing!"

There was a laugh. David Hurst turned and came out of the alcove. Through an unsteady, shifting mist he saw Lord Salby, standing in the doorway against a background of frock-coated followers, and he went up to him and struck the red smiling face with a calculated, swift precision. There was no impulse in the action. It seemed to him that everything in the last few months had led up to this outbreak, that the torment of the last few minutes had been but the goad to drive him to a final step. When the mist cleared, and he found himself standing alone in the middle of the room, he felt no surprise at what he had done, no regret at most a physical relief, as though some numbing pressure had been lifted from his brain. Lord Salby was leaning against the wall, his handkerchief to his cheek, and thrusting off the solicitor's committee with an impatient hand.

"And who may this blackguard be?" he asked with a forced, ironical calm.

"My name is Hurst," was the quiet answer. "And you are the blackguard not I. Were we in another country I should demand another and better satisfaction than that of merely telling you so. Let me pass!"

They made no attempt to detain him. Outside in the passage he came face to face with Diana Chichester.

"Where is Sarasvati?" he asked.

"I don't know. She disappeared quite suddenly from my side. I thought she had come to look for you."

"Perhaps she has gone home. We will follow her."

"David, but the meeting!"

"There will be no meeting," he said, between his teeth.

After that she followed him unquestioningly. Outside the carriage awaited them, but no one had seen Lady Hurst's departure. Hurst gave the order "Home," and helped Diana to her seat. "We shall overtake her," he said with curt decision. For five minutes they sat side by side in an unbroken silence. Then Diana could bear it no longer. She laid her hand on his knee.

"David," she said. "Tell me what happened?"

He looked at her sightlessly.

“He insulted her,” he said. “I knocked him down. That puts an end to it all.” He spoke very quietly, and turned away from her as though to watch the road. But she saw that his shoulders shook.

“David,” she said, scarcely above her breath. “How much you wanted to win!”

He nodded.

“Yes I wanted to win. But it can’t be helped.”

Then he broke down. He buried his white face in his hands, and, though he made no sound, no movement, she felt all the violence of the silent storm that had broken over him. And in that moment all prudence, all sense of danger was lost in the desire to comfort him. She sought wildly for the means, and, being a woman, found them.

“David,” she said gently, “do you remember a night at Kolruna two years ago when I told you that I despised you?”

He nodded without speaking.

“I want to tell you now that I respect that I honour you more than any man whom I have ever known,” she said.

He did not look up or answer, but he caught her hand and kissed it in passionate gratitude.

CHAPTER VIII

THE POWER OF TRUTH

LADY HURST had not gone home. She had crept out of the schoolhouse, past the little laughing and talking group of new arrivals, and had made her way quickly down the half -deserted street. She had no destination in that moment scarcely a purpose, save that of escaping from the intangible horror which pursued her. At first she felt nothing. The cold had frozen her, and numbed her capabilities of feeling. The noise had beaten against her brain without reaching her understanding, and the crowd around her had been like a tossing, tempestuous sea, flaked with white. Then, quite suddenly, half a dozen words had reached her, and had burnt themselves in her heart, and she had understood. A man standing close to her had called out, "We don't want no dirty niggers in our part," and she had looked up and found his angry, blood-shot eyes fixed on her with savage significance. For a full minute she had looked at him, bewildered, incapable of grasping the brutality of the attack, and there must have been something in her face which shamed her aggressor, for his eyes sank, and he slunk back behind his fellows.

But he had done his work. As though his words had been a releasing spell, the noise had broken into distinct sounds; she had heard the jeering laughter, the taunts coupled with her husband's name. The white flakes had become faces out of which the eyes stared at her like points of living fire, burning their way into her innermost soul. And then panic had come a desperate, headlong panic which had given no time to think or to realise what she was about to do. She had risen unnoticed, and, like a wild hunted animal, fought her way to the door, out on to the street, and, stumbling blindly over the rough cobbles, fled from the malice-laden laughter and the searching, cruel eyes of her tormentors. She had seen nothing. She passed her own carriage, and did not know it. Her inexperience, her instinctive fear of her husband's race broke through the seeming conformity and confidence which her Oriental pliability had allowed her to assume. She was alone in a strange land, amongst a people who had shrunk from her as from a leper. They had cursed her, and she had fled out into the bleak, piercing cold of their winter rather than face them. It was not only fear; something in her something altogether nameless had been wounded and trampled underfoot. Caste, religion, faith in her own divine origin had been torn from her, and yet in

that moment she regained her sanctity and with it the knowledge that she had been wantonly defiled.

Little by little, fear died wholly. The sense of outrage grew overmastering, and as she stopped at last, panting, in the shadow of a cottage doorway, she looked back the way she had come with eyes of scorn and passionate resentment. It was already dusk. A piercing, dank wind swept down the length of the street, and cut through her clothing so that she drew her furs about her, and, with chattering teeth, crept instinctively to the wall. Not once had she thought of her husband, and she did not think of him now. Thought was still stunned. Like a sick man recovering slowly from some frightful bout of pain, she leant back with closed eyes and let the balm of peace pass over her deeply wounded soul. Then the door of her refuge opened, and a rough woman's voice broke in upon her silence.

“Who's there? We don't allow no loafers about here. Move on, will you?”

She made no answer. She did not even look at the speaker, but glided softly away into the darkness. The possibility that, as Lady Hurst, she might have gained the woman's respect and hospitality did not occur to her. The fact that she was Lady Hurst had passed out of her consciousness. She was Sarasvati, once daughter of Brahma, now an outcaste and a wanderer in a foreign land, and she hurried on, her unaccustomed feet tortured by the uneven cobbles, her limbs trembling with cold and exhaustion. At the corner of the village street she stopped. A band of men were coming towards her, bearing flags and red-coloured lanterns which danced lurid reflections on their faces. She turned to fly, but it was too late. They caught her up, and she was swept back against the walls of the low-built houses and carried on a few yards until the crowd came to a standstill, eddying round the cart which formed the centre of the procession. In the uncertain light she passed unnoticed. She drew her fur hood about her face, and strove desperately to find a way of escape from the dense, evil-smelling mass of humanity. But she was wedged in on every side. A rough-looking miner whom she tried to pass cursed at her though without looking at her, and she shrank back, sickened with fear and loathing.

Presently the shifting crowd broke into a cheer. A man had climbed up into the seat of the cart and seemed to be waiting for complete silence before speaking. Two lanterns, held by a couple of hollowcheeked, raggedly dressed youths, lit up his face, which, though Sarasvati did not know it, was typical enough of his class and profession. Bearded, hardfeatured, with a low, lined forehead expressive at

once of energy and bigotry, eyes that, for all their fanatic enthusiasm, were without pity or human kindness such was the man who waited with arrogant impatience for the applause to cease.

‘ You know partly what I have come to say to you to-night,’ he began at last in a loud, rough voice. “Not half a dozen yards from where we are standing some of our people are protesting against the lies by which our opponents are trying to win to-morrow’s struggle. I have come to protest against them here, and, besides that, to fulfil the promise which I made to you at the beginning of this campaign. That is my chief object. I don’t need to repeat to you the principles for which we are fighting they are written in your hearts and mine with the iron of injustice and class selfishness; but you’ve got to know the character of the man who is asking for your support and seeking to force it from you by the influence of the wealthy land-owners and clap-trap appeals to what he calls patriotism and loyalty. Personally, I’ve got no grudge against this man. Sir David Hurst is as much a stranger to me as he is to most of you, but he represents the class for which he is fighting, and it is for that reason that I’m bound to make revelations concerning him in order that you may be able to judge for yourselves, whether you are going to be ruled by such men or by men of your own blood and feeling.”

He paused a moment. The crowd had been augmented considerably by the exodus from the schoolhouse, and the speaker’s eyes flashed over the white sea of faces with smouldering triumph. But he continued to speak in the same tone of matter-of-fact precision.

“We know where Sir David comes from. He has been in India studying the language and the people so we are told. Well, to-night a trustworthy witness will tell you something of Sir David’s genuine occupation and of the life of his kind in that unhappy country which groans under the selfish autocratic rule of our so-called humane government. We call for freedom for ourselves and for our Indian brothers across the seas. How just is our demand you shall see to-night. You’re going to hear of children stolen from their parents to feed the mission-schools hypocritical lethal-houses for the murder of true national feeling and national pride. You are going to hear of brutal tyranny and of wild dissipation. One instance I’ll give you myself. In the days when famine claimed thousands of unhappy Hindu victims their English rulers celebrated the occasion with feasting and dancing. Isn’t that true, brother?”

He turned, fiercely appealing, to some one in the crowd, and a minute later he was joined by a man, whom Sarasvati recognised with a smothered exclamation of fear. Rama Pal stood upright at the first speaker's side. He had taken off his cap and the lantern which had been purposely lifted revealed the traces of ravaging disease and starvation on his still handsome features. As always, his face was impassive; only the eyes passed over the crowd with an expression which for his audience had no significance. They thought if they thought at all that his unaccustomed task frightened him, and cheered him with a heartiness in which there was a trace of goodnatured condescension. The Socialist candidate shook him by the hand, and there was a fresh outburst of applause, as though this outward sign had struck some deep and generous note of unity and sympathy. Rama Pal waited patiently, almost indifferently, for silence. When it came he released his hand and passed it, apparently by chance, over the breast of his coat.

“What has been said is true,” he began. “I have come over here to witness to that, and more. I bear upon me the marks of the tyranny under which my country groans. I speak as one who has suffered and who has seen suffering. I speak the truth. When but a child I was stolen from my people by the English missionaries. I escaped. They caught me. This man, this David Hurst, though but a boy, tracked me down and delivered me over to my enemies. From that hour I was their slave, their chattel. They sought to make me forget my people and the heritage of my birthright; they forced me to serve them in their schools, where others, as unhappy as I, were brought up in misery and shame. Famine came upon us. Thousands I saw who held out their hands for food for the food which then: toil, their land had brought forth, and were refused with contempt and insult. But they who ruled in the high places sat and drank. I saw them with my own eyes. I saw how the beggars, the starving women and children, lingered at the gates. I heard the strains of music and laughter and—”

There were loud cries of “Shame!” “Down with ‘em all,” and clenched fists were shaken in the direction of the schoolhouse. Rama Pal waited with the same unmoved patience. Only once had his voice changed its level note, and that once when he had spoken of his lost birthright. Then it had deepened and vibrated with a sincerity that was tragically convincing.

“What wonder, then, that the hearts of those who loved their country's honour burnt within them?” he went on. “The people rose. Those that had once ruled in the days of freedom took the lead. It was little we asked the rice that lay stored in the English quarters. But we were betrayed by that man who to-morrow, perhaps,

you will send into your Parliament to rule you and us.”

The crowd swayed as though an angry wave of passion had swept over it, and Rama Pal threw back his head with a movement of conscious, powerful, suppressed triumph.

“Think not that he betrayed us out of love of his people. That night, sheltered by the darkness and our defencelessness, he stole Sarasvati, the only daughter of an honourable Brahman, from her father. He held her prisoner, hid her from the broken-hearted searching of her people, and bore her in secret here to be a symbol of our shame and of the tyranny—”

“It’s a lie!”

The clear voice sounded high above the Hindu’s passionless tones and paralysed the restless, moving crowd to a startled attention. Rama Pal’s lips compressed themselves into an iron line, but he remained otherwise unmoved, his black eyes fixed sightlessly ahead. The Socialist candidate had risen to his feet and extended a theatrically declaiming hand.

“Who dares say that it is a lie?” he shouted.

“I—Sarasvati of whom you speak,” was the answer. She came out of the shadow, the crowd shrinking back from her on either side, and stood erect beneath the red glare of the lanterns. All trace of fear had gone out of her face. It was aflame with a joyous purpose, a proud strength, which gave her back her loveliness, and with it a compelling dignity.

Rama Pal saw her and started slightly. Then he bent down and struck her hand from the edge of the cart.

“Be silent!” he said in his own tongue. “Be silent!”

“I will not be silent, for you have lied,” she answered fearlessly, in a sweet unfaltering English. “You and this man have lied against a nobility which is as far from you as is the sun from earth, and what I say is true. I was not stolen from my father, for I, the daughter of Brahma, know no father—”

There was a coarse burst of laughter, which silenced her for an instant, and the candidate Grey seized his opportunity. He thrust the Hindu on one side, and,

advancing to the front of the cart, extended two protesting arms.

“Are you going to listen to an honourable, tried witness, or this woman?” he shouted above the tumult. “This man has come to you as a brother appealing to his brother, he brings you the truth, the story of trials, honourably borne. Will you believe him or an outcaste who has deserted her people and her country to follow her lover into a shameful exile—”

“Is it indeed shameful to be the wife of a white man?” she interrupted bravely. She had laid her hand once more on the shaft of the cart and her lifted face expressed a steadfast, unswerving purpose which contrasted pathetically with her fragile body and delicate, almost childlike features.

Grey pointed down at her. The whole ferocity of his thwarted will broke out in that single gesture.

“You wanton!” he said. “What right have you to call yourself by the name of ‘wife’?”

“The right of any woman who has been wedded by a priest in the faith of God.”

There was a sudden silence. Carried away by anger, the demagogue had used a word which even in that rough, excited crowd struck a jarring discord, and the answer had come back with a compelling simplicity and directness. The men in the foremost row glanced uneasily at each other. An untidy-looking woman with a shawl about her thin shoulders shook her fist into the candidate’s face.

“There ain’t no call to use dirty language to a lady, even if she ain’t our colour,” she said, and there was a low but decided murmur of approval.

Grey swung round to the Hindu at his side.

“Speak, can’t you?” he exclaimed furiously. “Tell them the truth—”

The woman with the shawl snapped her fingers.

“We’ve ‘eard that fine gentleman,” she said. “We knows all ‘e’s got to say and a lot more, per’aps; and now we’d like to ‘ear the other side of the story.” She laid a dirty but kindly hand on Sarasvati’s shoulder. “You go ahead, m’lady,” she said. “I knows a wellplucked ‘un when I sees one, and I’m for a fair fight

anyhow. So you get along and say your say.”

Rama Pal leant down again. His lips were so close to Sarasvati’s face that his breath burned her.

“Have you forgotten who you are?” he whispered.

She shrank back from him. She felt dazed, and the sudden waiting silence frightened her more than the previous clamour had done. A numbing consciousness of her loneliness in the midst of this strange, half hostile crowd crept over her. She was one against hundreds. They enclosed her in a stifling ring, and their eyes seemed to brighten to countless points of light which glittered at her as they elbowed and tip-toed to get a better view of this slight, daring woman. For a moment she faltered losing grasp on the strange tongue which was her one means of communication with the eager, impatient mass about her.

Then she remembered that which had given her the courage to leave her hiding-place and brave the very horror from which she had fled. God that vague, indefinite power, which had become nameless to her had given her the opportunity for which she had prayed. She, David’s wife, who had stood scorned and helpless on one side whilst indifferent strangers had done her work, had been given the chance to do more than all of them. To her it had been granted to guard his name from dishonour, to hold his spotless shield high above the jealous hands of his enemies. “You must go among them bravely,” Diana Chichester had said, and she had obeyed. The woman, who had shrunk from life as from an incalculable evil, from mankind as from unreal yet dangerous shadows, faced this inflamed mob of men and women with that trembling yet unconquerable heroism which is love’s attribute.

“My husband has done no wrong to me or to any man,” she said clearly. “That which has been spoken is without truth, and he that has spoken has broken the law of gratitude. For his life is to him who saved it to my husband, who but a child brought him weak and fainting to his own home and tended him and saved him from the people who would have offered him as a bloody sacrifice. If he be not afraid let him show his right arm, where there is surely a scar to testify to my words.”

Rama Pal folded his arms.

“The woman lies!” he said deliberately. “She says what she has been told to say. Let him who will believe her.”

But the tide had turned against him. Out of her quaintly turned phrases, the crowd had instinctively felt a passionate sincerity, and touched, rough though they were, by her courage, her simple faith in their justice, they tossed the interruption impatiently aside.

“You go on!” encouraged the woman who had constituted herself spokesman. “You tell us about yourself. We’ll believe you don’t you be afraid. I knows a crooked and a straight thing when I sees it.”

“My husband saved this man’s life, and mine,” Sarasvati answered proudly. “That alone is the truth.”

“Well you tell us how it was go ahead don’t you mind no one—”

Sarasvati looked about her. To her disturbed fancy the details of the strange scene had become suddenly indistinct, transformed. The red lights had changed to altar-fires; the questioning, waiting crowd to worshippers silently attendant on her divine will. The bitter, inhospitable cold had softened to a warmth laden with the intoxicating scent of flowers, and for one brief, splendid moment she regained herself, and with it her hold upon the gorgeous past. Yet, distraught as she was, love kept her to her present purpose and lent her a fearless, impassionate inspiration.

“I will tell you all that I know,” she began with a quick-drawn breath. “I will tell you how a town filled with your countrymen awaited a treacherous attack from those who had suffered no more than was the fate of all. I tell you of a man who risked his life, alone and unaided, to bring help to innocent women and children women and children of your race! I tell you how he broke through the encircling enemy and twice returned bearing upon him many wounds, and feared not to risk his life again for a strange woman for a woman not of his kind. See I will show you a burning pyre a helpless woman thrust into the red flames to satisfy a maddened people I will show you a single man who faced them all and bore her in his arms through the darkness of the night and made her his wife before the day broke, so that no hand should point in scorn at her. I will show you a man who feared not the hatred of his people, but called her * wife ‘ before them all. I will show you the man to whom I owe all that I am I will cry upon you help me

to protect him from the slander of evil, poisoned tongues—” She broke off. The pictures out of that dazzling, mysterious past faded into a mist which sank before her eyes and surrounded her in a great darkness. She groped blindly before her and her hand was taken and held in a warm, strong grasp. A voice came to her from afar off:

“It’s the truth—you’d take your Bible oath on it?”

“Should I have loved him so?” she answered scarcely above a whisper.

The man standing on the cart stretched out an angry hand.

“You’ve heard her tale,” he shouted, in the tense silence. “If you’re fools enough to be taken in with such a feeble, political trick—”

“You hold your tongue you!” the woman interrupted crisply. She had her brawny arms round Sarasvati’s half-fainting figure, and her voice was gruff as she turned to the men behind her. “I take it you’re with me, boys!” she said. “She’s a straight ‘un and she’s done her man a better turn than she knows. What d’ye all say to a rouser for ‘er and ‘im we owes it ‘em. A man’s a man, and politics be blowed. Now then make it a good ‘un, boys!”

They cheered as whole-heartedly as they might have all too easily cursed and Sarasvati’s eyes opened. To her failing senses it seemed that the roughfaced men were rushing down upon her to destroy her and that death was near. Instinctively she freed herself from the protecting arms as though to face the coming end alone, and in that moment the crowd broke asunder, giving way to a recklessly driven dogcart. The cheering died into a murmur of recognition.

“It’s Sir David ‘imself,” went from mouth to mouth.

Hurst took no notice of them. His searching glance had encountered Rama Pal’s tall, upright figure, and during a scarcely perceptible pause the two men confronted each other over the heads of the crowd. Then Hurst’s eyes dropped to Sarasvati’s face beneath the light of the lanterns. In that moment no voice or movement was audible. Subdued and awestruck they scarcely knew by what the mine-hands waited for the Unionist candidate to speak. It seemed his great opportunity, half a dozen words from the man whom they had cursed at half an hour before, and they would have taken his horse out of the shafts and borne him home in triumph.

But he said nothing his stern face and utter indifference to them impressed them more deeply with the truth of all that had gone before than any eloquence could have done. He sprang from the driving seat, tossing the reins to the groom, and, elbowing his way to Sarasvati's side, caught her in his arms. She clung blindly to him, and, without a word, he bore her back to the dogcart, and lifted her on to the seat beside his own. Then he swung his horse round in the middle of the road, scattering the crowd to right and left, and a minute later the silent, bewildered meeting was left behind.

All through that drive Hurst did not speak. His jaw was hard set, his eyes fixed on the darkness ahead, and the lines about his mouth had deepened to furrows. As they passed beneath the lamp which marked the village boundary he glanced down into Sarasvati's face. She was leaning with her head against his shoulder, her eyes closed in a stupor of cold and terror, her lips a little parted as though with a half-uttered cry. A kind of bitter compassion relaxed Hurst's features. He slipped the whip into its socket and drew his wife into the shelter of his arm. Thus he held her until Hurst Court was reached, and when he looked at her again he saw that the terror had gone out of her face and that she had passed into a peaceful oblivion.

CHAPTER IX

THE GOAL PASSED

OUT of the darkness shadows began to arise vague indefinite forms, shapeless figures flitted silently against the blank background, then shapes which each instant grew clearer and brighter, more familiar. She watched them as from afar off, like some lost spirit viewing the passing of an old, loved world. Whiterobed priests, tall, majestic pillars reaching upwards to the azure dome, minarets bathed in golden sunshine, and about all a lulling healing warmth, rich with the perfume of the flowers. She held out invisible hands in wordless greeting to this world, which sank beneath her in a haze of dreams whilst she rose upwards, borne by an unknown power, into a limitless space where there was no light, no darkness, no substance, no consciousness, no existence. And out of the silence a voice reached her, breaking like a storm into the emptiness, and called her "Sarasvati daughter of Brahma," and seized and dragged her down, faster and faster, through an icy, merciless wind which cut deep into her soul and aroused her to a dull, numb sense of pain. "Sarasvati daughter of Brahma!" "The voice passed into silence all passed all save the pain and the bitter, penetrating cold. She opened her eyes. As a prisoner awakes from dreams of freedom to find the drear daylight creeping through the barred window, so Sarasvati awoke to

291 the reality of the four walls of the low-ceilinged bedroom, to the melancholy grey twilight which hung ghostlike about the ponderous mahogany furniture. She drew a quick, shuddering breath, and the dank air which not even the blazing wood fire could warm was like a knife piercing through her lungs. She lifted herself weakly on her elbow and immediately a hand pressed her gently back among the pillows. She turned her head and saw that Diana Chichester was seated on a low chair by her side.

"Where am I?" she asked in a whisper. "What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened nothing serious. You fainted, and now you must just lie quite quiet and wait."

"For what have I to wait?" She read the answer in the Englishwoman's grave and tender eyes, and she lay still watching the shadows which the firelight threw on to the drab-coloured walls. "Will it be soon?" she asked tonelessly.

“Very soon, dear.” Diana knelt down by the bedside and drew the smooth dark head against her shoulder. “Are you afraid?” she asked.

For a minute Sarasvati did not speak. She passed her delicate hand over Diana’s with a movement of caress that was indescribably pathetic in its endeavour to console and reassure.

“Not for myself am I afraid,” she said under her breath. “But for him.”

“For whom, Sarasvati? For David?”

“No, not for my husband.” She did not offer to explain, but presently she drew back a little, so that she could look into Diana’s face. “Do you think that I shall die?” she asked timidly.

“I am sure that you will not,” Diana answered, with a faint smile. “Why should you think of such a terrible thing?”

Sarasvati’s eyes closed for an instant. A deep line of pain had drawn itself across the smooth forehead.

“Is it so terrible?” she said half to herself. “I wonder if it can be more terrible than life. Do you think so, Diana?”

“I don’t know no one knows,” Diana answered. “I meant that it would be terrible for David and me. For you one can’t tell what it would be we don’t know what lies beyond.”

“You do not know!” Sarasvati echoed. “Does no one know?”

“They say they know and some believe but life and death are all mysteries.”

There was a little silence. Sarasvati’s brows were knitted in earnest thought, and when she turned again to the fair-haired woman beside her, her face was almost severe in its profound gravity.

“You do not know who God is,” she said. “David does not know, though he has tried hard to believe the teachings of his priests. The search for God has almost broken his heart. But I could have shown him the way, for I knew.”

“You knew? Sarasvati, tell me what you knew.”

“I knew that I was God.”

Diana said nothing. She was conscious that in that short, apparently blasphemous sentence there had lain the whole majesty of a great pantheism, and in the significant past tense a piteous suggestion of irretrievable loss. And what had she to offer? The faith of her childhood a drear faith, replete with heavy dogma, illumined by a gloomy optimism and a cold-hearted charity? She herself looked back upon it with her generation’s half-sorrowful, half scornful incredulity. Her own faith, vague, hard-worn, a belief in one great incomprehensible Power who conceivably might one day offer His creations a just and reasonable explanation for their existence was it not impossible to offer so little with conviction?

“Can you not win back your faith?” she said quietly.

“How should I?” came the low, despairing answer, “you who do not know have told me that my faith is a lie.”

Diana Chichester rose to her feet. She had been brought suddenly and violently face to face with the tragedy of a soul, with the whole mockery of modern proselytism. “You who do not know have told me that my faith is a lie.” It was an accusation against her and her kind, and against a whole system. She took Sarasvati’s hand in hers and held it in a strong grasp, as though she were striving by that touch to reach the very depths of the exile’s unhappy heart.

“Whatever we believe is true so long as our belief lifts us higher than ourselves,” she said earnestly. “Do you think that humanity let alone God can be compassed in one religion, or that God, who has made nature in a million forms, can only show Himself with one face and under one name? Think and believe what you can; our dogma cannot make God other than He is.”

Sarasvati drew herself up on her elbow. A light burnt in her eyes a light of uncertain, yet eager hope.

“And if I could believe again that God was here in my breast in you in every tree and flower in my own child and if I was wrong and God was as they taught me a far-off judge would it separate my lord from me hereafter in death?”

Her words came in broken, disjointed sentences, and in that unconscious return to the old title, Diana recognised a character and a love that beneath the surface had remained unchanged, almost untroubled by contact with the world. Diana bent down and passed her hand over the black smooth hair.

“Do you think God could be so petty?” she said simply.

Sarasvati laid her fingers on her lips.

“Hush, he is coming,” she whispered. “We must say nothing of all this. We must not trouble him we must help him.” She lifted her head in a listening attitude. “I helped him yesterday,” she went on softly. “The chance was given me, and I went amongst them and was not afraid. Is he glad, Diana? Will he tell me that he is glad before he goes?”

“Yes,” Diana answered abruptly. She searched in vain for something to say. The eyes fixed on her face seemed to plead for it, and yet she felt tongue-tied by the piteous hopelessness of it all. The soothing half-truths which come easily enough to most lips were unknown to her, and she felt that every instant was bringing her nearer to self-betrayal. “I will tell David that you are awake,” she said. “He will want to see you.”

She slipped from the room and hurried after the footsteps which she had heard retreating to the library. Her heart ached. That which had been strongest in her her joyous self-confidence sank before the bleak prospect of the future, and, as she laid her hand on the library door she hesitated, frightened of herself and of the man she was about to face. Then she went in, quietly and resolutely.

“David,” she said in a low voice, “Sarasvati is awake and wants to see you.”

He turned from the window where he had been standing. He had on his driving coat, and his expression betrayed a nervous restlessness.

“I am waiting for Smith,” he said. “When he comes I will go to her. How is she?”

“I think she is as well as possible.” She came a step nearer. “David,” she said gravely, “you must never let her know. I want you to promise me I believe it would break her heart. She meant to help you. The thought that she helped you is her one comfort. Don’t take it from her promise me!”

He looked at her. Unconsciously she had come quite close to him, and he could see that her eyes were dim with tears. He stretched out his hand as though to take hers, and let it drop limply to his side.

“You know I won’t take it from her, Di,” he said. “Why should I? It was my fault and, after all, it’s much better as it is. If I were elected, we should have to go on with the fight, and in the end it would kill her. As it is when the business is all over I shall shut this place up and get away right to the other end of the earth somewhere where people will leave us to live our lives in peace.”

“And your work your ambition?” she broke in impulsively.

“That’s all over,” he answered. “It was mad and wrong of me ever to have thought of it. I see that now and I can’t I haven’t the right to make her suffer.” He smiled whimsically as he saw her face. “I am sorry, Di; I know that it’s a disappointment for you. You wanted to make me a great man in spite of myself, but you see I’m a hopeless case. You must just look upon these last few weeks as a bit of charity nursing thrown away on an incurable failure and well, I know what you think of failures.”

“You don’t know,” she broke in with a burst of her old storminess. “You insist on confusing me with your mother, and there couldn’t be a worse mistake. What do you think I care whether you succeed or fail in the eyes of the world! You have succeeded in mine.”

“I should like to know how,” he said. He spoke lightly, with a trace of sarcasm in his tone, but he had flushed under the energy of her glance.

Diana turned away from him. She picked up a silver ornament lying on the table, and played with it in a kind of feverish impatience.

“You have succeeded in being yourself,” she said almost angrily.

“You mean I have gone my own way?” He gave a little movement expressive of doubt. “But going one’s own way does not necessarily mean going to the devil, as you once so cheerfully suggested, Di. It means swimming against the stream, and, though the individual may think the stream is running in the wrong direction, I am beginning to question his right to try and upset the divine order of things. After all, when ninety-nine sheep agree that it is better to stay in the pen the hundredth is wiser if he accepts their verdict, even if he yearns after fresh

pastures. The ninety-nine are the majority, and are bound to be right.”

“You are talking nonsense,” she said gently, “and you know it. The world has been made by its exceptions.”

“Disturbed rather,” he corrected. “* Lucifer was the first exception, and his children have all played the same unhappy part. But all that is beside the point.” His manner changed suddenly. “It’s no use my philosophising. I have chosen my part. I have made up my mind to be in the wrong that is to say, in the minority and I am prepared to take the consequences. There was only one mistake in the declaration of war that I made to you in Kolruna. I ought to have gone my own way alone, Di.”

She started and looked up at him.

“You saved her life,” she said.

“Have I? Or have I broken her heart?”

“David ” she began, but the memory of a pinched wan face silenced her. Her inability to compromise prevented her from entering on a long protest or offering him some cheap and trite consolation. Broken-hearted? yes, that was the one description which suited those hungry, pleading eyes. “Can it be more terrible than life?” Sarasvati had asked respecting her own death, and in that question had betrayed the uncomplaining, scarcely recognised grief which lay at the bottom of her love. “You must take her away from here,” Diana said resolutely. “If anything is breaking her heart it is our outrageous climate. Take her back to her own country she is too delicate a plant to stand so rough a soil.”

“I can’t,” Hurst answered, “it isn’t safe. I heard only this morning from Professor Heilig, and he warns me to keep my wife out of India. The common people believe that she was spirited up to heaven, but by this time the priestly party knows where she is, and will spare no pains to recover her and incidentally put a knife into me.” He gave a short laugh. “Of the latter possibility I am not afraid, but it is my duty—” He hesitated, as though the word displeased him. “My duty to the good folk in Kolruna is to prevent the possibility of a conflagration. You know, I suppose, that things are rather troubled again over there?”

“Yes,” she said. “I heard from my father that there is mischief brewing, It is rather hastening my return.”

He had been standing by the window in impatient expectation, and he started round now, a sound that was like a suppressed cry breaking from his lips.

“Your return Diana you are not going back?”

“Yes,” she said steadily. “I meant to tell you before, but I am going back to my people next month.”

He strode across the room until less than a foot separated them. His face was colourless, his black brows had met over the short straight nose in a threatening line which lent his whole expression an energy akin to violence. She braced herself, facing unfalteringly the moment which she had known since yesterday to be inevitable.

“You are not going back,” he said slowly and distinctly. “You cannot go back. In the present state of things it is not safe for any woman to be in Kolruna.”

“My mother refuses to leave my father, and I refuse to leave them both,” she answered.

“There is another reason,” he said between his teeth.

She felt herself flush under his savage, miserable eyes, but her voice retained its steadiness.

“What other reason should there be?” she asked.

For a period of time which seemed to her endless he studied her, seeming to be searching her to the soul; then only his features relaxed and softened.

“I am sorry, Di,” he said quietly. “Even if there was a reason I should not have the right to ask it. I think all this work has been getting on my brain. You will stay with us until until she is safe.”

“Yes,” she said. Her breath was coming more easily. The moment was over. He had been suddenly brought face to face with a circumstance which she had recognised and fought with hours before, she knew what was passing in him, for she too suffered and she was conscious of a curious pride in his calm and regained gentleness. “I will stay as long as your wife needs me,” she added quietly.

He smiled the old, onesided smile which in that moment hurt her by its unconscious resignation.

“That will be a long time, Di,” he said. “You have been such a splendid friend to her. She will miss you more than she knows. But it can’t be helped. Others have more claim on you.” He took out his watch. “The doctor has promised to be here with the nurse by six,” he went on. “He told me there was nothing to to fear for the next few hours. But I am glad you are staying with her. One can’t tell and you would let me know at once, wouldn’t you?”

“Of course, David.”

He stood hesitating at the door.

“I think I’ll go and see her now. Tell Smith when he comes to wait downstairs for me. I shan’t be long. Good-bye.”

She felt that he was looking back at her. The desire to go to him and take his hands, to offer him, if only in that silent farewell, her understanding and sympathy, broke over her with a violence that frightened her. She fought it down and nodded to him with a cheerful courage.

“Good luck, and a big majority!” she said.

“Thank you.” He closed the door softly after him and went down the corridor to his wife’s room. He was not conscious of any particular sensation. After that sudden, violent flash of pain a kind of numbness had crept over him which hid him mercifully from himself. He scarcely knew whence the pain had come. Diana was going. Well, that was inevitable. She would marry Hatherway. That was almost as inevitable as the rest. Dick had always kept his place in the running. He was a good fellow. Diana would be safe with him. But he wished she had not said that about the ” big majority.” It was almost as though she had laughed at him. And he had fought hard as hard as he had once run in those children’s races when he had always been beaten, and when her goodnatured laughter had stung him to an impotent frenzy. But that had been in the days when he had loved her. It was strange that time seemed closer to him, more real than the present.

He opened his wife’s door and entered on tip-toe. She lay in the centre of the great fourposter, her small dark head thrown back upon the dead white of the

pillows, the two plaits of black hair hanging over either shoulder in symmetrical order. The delicate arms lay stretched out on the coverlet, and she seemed to sleep.

Hurst drew closer, but he did not touch her, or speak. He stood at the foot of the bed and watched her. She might almost have been a child, so pathetically small and fragile did she appear in the wide, old-fashioned bed, and yet her face was that of a woman who had suffered. He saw the lines of pain about her mouth, and the hollow cheeks, but he felt no tenderness, no pity. He only knew that he was glad that she was asleep. In that moment he could not have played the comedy of gratitude. He could not have thanked her for a misdirected zeal which had put the seal upon his failure. He felt no bitterness, but a frozen indifference which ached dully, persistently, like an old reopened wound. It hurt him. He strove to shake it off to arouse himself to a normal natural feeling. He called to mind that this was his wife, and that she stood on the borderland of death. But he felt nothing. She was a total stranger to him. He could not place her in his life. It was difficult for him to understand how she came to him in this solemn, dreary English bedroom, where generations of his race had first seen the light. Only when he shut his eyes and recalled the memory of a Temple Shrine lying in the midst of the waters beneath a sky of unchanging blue did she become real to him as a vivid dream is real to the dreamer. But it was no more than a dream, and when he looked at the motionless figure lying before him it faded wholly. She was only the shadow of that half-divine being who had knelt before the altar in the midst of the dying lotusblossoms, and she had become a shadow in his life.

He turned and left the room as quietly as he had come. A kind of mental weariness shielded him from the remorse which had been stealthily creeping over him, keeping measure with the fading of her image from his mind. He realised that to-day is inevitably the child of yesterday, and that this disease had not come upon him suddenly but subtly and imperceptibly. Or was it a disease? Was it not rather the awakening of his abilities, stunted by discouragement and his own diffidence, the natural desire to enter the world's lists and leave the unreal world of dreams behind him? The dreams had been a temporary refuge a phase of his development and she who belonged to them, who was a stranger to the world, had been a stepping-stone to what? to whom? He shut his mind sternly against the answer. Stronger than either remorse or love was the sense of his responsibility. He owed her his life and that she should have to the last hour. To-day was to see the end of his brief part upon the world's stage. To-morrow the waters would close over him and her, and life narrow down to the old

dimensions.

He faced it calmly, resignedly, and Mr. Smith, who waited for him in the hall, was struck by something new in his manner, a certain aloofness, as though what was to come was for him already a part of the past. The two men took their places in the carriage, and for a long time the loquacious little agent hesitated to break the silence. He had intuition enough to know that this man beside him, young and inexperienced politician though he was, had passed out of his control. Presently he ventured to ask if Lady Hurst was doing well, and, receiving a courteous affirmative, he grew bolder.

“Any number of the Ashley folk have been inquiring after her ladyship,” he said. “One of the pit hands as dirty a fellow as you can fancy came after me this morning and told me he had changed his ticket. It had struck him that a man who had a wife like that must be worth more than a ranting demagogue with a black liar to back him.”

Hurst glanced at the clean-shaven face, suspecting a clumsy consolation.

“Well, that will be one vote anyhow,” he said, smiling. “I’m afraid, though, that yesterday has settled my fate.”

Mr. Smith raised one eyebrow.

“One never knows,” he said. “Of course, Lord Salby is against you and a lot of high dignitaries are sitting on the fence too shocked to get down, bless you but still, a good knock-out blow appeals to the dear B.P. almost as much as a bit of romance, and they got both yesterday. No, one never knows.” “What do you mean?” Hurst demanded.

“Just what I said,” Mr. Smith retorted, taking a revengeful satisfaction in being mysterious. “One never knows.”

They reached the outskirts of Great Hampton. On the way they had passed a long, straggling procession of dogcarts, brakes and drays gaily beribboned with the colours of the three candidates and packed with vociferous partisans, to whose cheers and goodnatured “boos” Hurst had responded with the same smiling equanimity. Here he unconsciously stiffened and set his teeth. The crowds which filled the narrow streets of the old-fashioned town were in another and less good-tempered mood, and he knew it. He felt the atmosphere of

excitement and aroused passions and the proximity of that intangible force which makes a gathering of respectable citizens into an unmanageable, brutal mob. Here the jeering was sharpened to animosity and the cheering to an answering and defiant war-cry.

From the walls where usually innocent advertisements announced the superlative virtues of soaps and baking-powders, gaudy and satirical posters strove to reach the buried intelligence of the electors by means of flamboyant appeals and crisply assertive phrases. Hurst sought out his own with a boyish curiosity which custom had not staled. He knew that, by comparison, they were not effective "too gentlemanly," Mr. Smith had styled them and yet he was glad that he had kept to his own way and his own methods. It was his one consolation in defeat that he had fought with his own weapons and that they had been clean.

At the corner of the High Street a little knot of women mine-hands judging from their appearance cheered him, and the gust of shrill, harsh voices whipped the blood for the first time into Hurst's cheeks. Mr. Smith, who saw the change, suppressed a chuckle.

"Not quite so indifferent after all, my dear sir," he thought, and then added aloud: "They like you, Sir David politics apart. You're young and a trifle Byronic, shall I say? and you appeal to the women. There's nothing women of all classes like better than a figure round which they can weave a romance. The sterner and blacker and more indifferent you look, the more they'll love you. At the bottom of her heart a woman loathes a lady's man."

Hurst nodded inattentively to this piece of wisdom. The carriage had broken through the crowd and now drew up smartly against the kerb. Here also a decided cheer greeted him and he yielded to a transitory sensation of success, which died down suddenly and completed as he entered the committee-room. On the faces of his official supporters he read the unmistakable presages of disaster, and there were more absentees than he cared to count. Squire Morell came forward to meet him, his florid face expressive of that cheerful melancholy which laments somebody else's misfortunes.

"The great day come at last!" he said as they shook hands. "Hope for the best, Sir David, but our news isn't of the brightest. There's been a lot of falling off since yesterday. I'm afraid Lord Salby has eh refused his support." The last sentence was spoken in an undertone.

Hurst answered aloud.

“I did not wish or expect him to do otherwise,” he said.

Mr. Smith coughed to cover over what he considered as unparliamentary folly, and Hurst passed on to receive the funereal hand-shakes of his remaining adherents. They hovered about him like birds of ill-omen, disheartened and disheartening, and out of their words and suppressions he read reproach not unmixed with malice. They had supported him because he headed their party, but his conduct in alienating his strongest friends had betrayed their cause, and his defeat gave them a bitter triumph.

11 After yesterday there isn't a vestige of hope! Mrs. Morell remarked in a stage whisper to a friend. “Lord Salby's action has turned all Ashley against us, and Lady Hurst's conduct has sent all the waverers over to the Liberal side. No one wants to vote for a candidate who uses those sort of tactics.”

Hurst overheard the observation, but gave no sign. He had schooled himself to an appearance of indifference if only for his wife's sake. He went out on to the balcony and there the agent joined him. That astute and alert personage had wrapped himself in cheerful mystery.

“I'll just run across to the Town Hall and see how soon the results may be expected,” he said. “You wait here, Sir David, and don't let these good folk get on your nerves more than you can help.”

“I'll do my best,” Hurst answered, smiling.

He remained alone on the balcony. Immediately beneath him the crowd eddied in increasing excitement and occasionally faces were raised to him in noncommittal interest. Was he or was he not the man whom in a few minutes they would cheer as victor? The tide had been against him in the last twentyfour hours, and there had been rumours of sweeping changes in the electorate. It seemed to Hurst that they eyed him with suspicion and a little pity as a more than possible failure. One face he recognised. He had never seen it otherwise than expressionless, but in that brief instant he saw it light up with a hatred, a triumph that was more tigerish than human. He stared back, steadily and calmly, but his teeth were ground together. Those dark, impassive features seemed to haunt his life; they had appeared to him at every critical moment, threatening with calamity, and he knew that now they pronounced his defeat. And still he gave no sign. He had

grown very calm, and the sudden silence in the crowd beneath seemed to have its birth in his own brain.

His glance wandered aimlessly across the Square. From the balcony of the Town Hall a man in official robes was apparently giving out some notice, but the significance of his presence, like the sound of his voice, was lost to Hurst. He had ceased to think, to calculate, even to desire, and the roar of cheering which came rolling across the Square like the wave of a suddenly released flood left him unmoved. He looked about him, expecting to witness the arrival of a rival candidate, but he saw only the white sea of faces he heard only his own name. He turned unsteadily, and confronted the little crowd of dazed and puzzled supporters.

“What has happened?” he asked.

Squire Morell shook his head, and came out on to the balcony.

“What is it?” he shouted to the crowd. “What are you cheering for?”

A brawny woman raised her arm.

“Sir David you’re in!” she called shrilly. “It’s Ashley that’s done it, and you can thank your good lady for the best turn that’s ever been done you and don’t you forget it—”

She was swept away in a surging sea of excited men and women, and the squire turned to the white-faced man beside him.

“It seems—” he began, clearing his throat, and torn between annoyance, bewilderment, and satisfaction, “it seems positively that you have been elected, Sir David!”

Hurst gripped the rail of the balcony.

“There is some mistake,” he said with dry lips, and fought down the wild hope which had risen out of his numb resignation.

As though in answer the door of the committee room burst open, and Mr. Smith, red-faced and for once hi his life beside himself, elbowed his way respectlessly through the intervening group of silent and uncertain supporters.

“We’ve done it!” he said, endeavouring to speak with professional calm and failing signally. “We’ve done it, Sir David! The results are out it was Ashley that turned the tide they came over like one man, upset every one’s calculations, but not mine I told you one never knew.” He struggled with himself, and then, seizing Hurst’s hand, shook it. “Greatest triumph of my life, Sir David! Go out and speak to ‘em straight from the heart; for, by the Lord, it was the people’s vote that did it a popular victory right off your and Lady Hurst’s bat. Go on, sir they’re shouting for you. A three hundred majority is something to be thankful for under the circumstances.”

Impetuously Hurst sprang back on to the balcony. Not till now had he known how desperately he had wanted to win. The iron self-control which he had mustered to meet defeat threatened to desert him in this swift revulsion from resignation to the certainty of success. The gates to his chosen career stood open to him, and hope beckoned. His mother would hear to-morrow by cable, and Diana to-night. Diana! Diana! He wanted to stretch out his arms in immeasurable relief and gratitude. The goal was passed he had won the right to serve. The curse of failure had been taken from his life, and something new in him, a fierce joy in his own existence, a smothered fire of consuming ambition, blazed into flame. He stood for a moment looking down on the now silent, eagerly waiting crowd. He was smiling unconsciously, with a frank exultation which gave him back his youth and all the joyousness of youth. It was easy to be eloquent now easy to thank this people who had chosen him as their representative in the greatest of the world’s Parliaments. They had given him some thing inestimable the right to his existence.

Yet, even as the first words fell from his lips, some one touched him on his arm and he turned and found a servant, wearing the Hurst livery, beside him.

“If you please, Sir David,” the man began breathlessly, “will you come at once? Miss Chichester sent me after you an hour ago, but the crowd delayed me. Her Ladyship has been taken ill quite suddenly just after you left—”

“A speech—a speech!” sounded loud and imperative from the street.

“Speak to ‘em, Sir David!” the little agent demanded almost angrily. “Now is the time to prove what you’re made of!”

Hurst passed his hand over his forehead. The momentary exultation was gone,

leaving him terribly calm, terribly clear of perception. The woman to whom he, at least in part, owed this burning hour of success had been forgotten. He had not once thought of her. He had thought of Diana Chichester, of his mother, but the frail, pathetic figure of his wife had faded wholly from his horizon. She had fought for him, and in his heart of hearts he had reviled her; by her simple pleading she had won his battle and what had he to give her but this one fact that he had not thought of her? Remorse, too, was silent. Something more terrible than his own guilt confronted him. Fate, that predestinating force which is no other than a man's own character, had once more revealed herself with all her sense of tragic irony, inevitable, cruelly consequent.

“Hurst—Hurst—a speech!”

He recovered himself without an apparent effort.

“See that the carriage is brought round to the side door,” he said quietly. “Mr. Smith will you address the people for me? Lady Hurst has been taken seriously ill.”

He pushed aside the detaining, remonstrating hands. It was as though a shadow of the past had overtaken him in the full-blooded reality of the present. It stood between him and his world, a pale yet insurmountable barrier, and he knew that, of all his dreams, this dream of ultimate success had been the most chimerical.

An hour later he knelt beside the great fourpost bedstead with his face buried in his hands. Sarasvati was lying almost as he had left her, very quiet now, very pale, with a line of physical suffering drawn about the compressed mouth. Something dark lay protected in the curve of her arm, and now and again a faint, whimpering sound broke the tense, oppressive silence. Presently Diana Chichester, who stood, white and exhausted, by the window, saw the heavy, lightless eye open and rest for an instant on her own face and then pass on to the kneeling figure at the bedside. For a long minute there was no movement. Then Sarasvati laid her hand on her husband's head and over the wan features there spread a light of ineffable pity.

BOOK IV CHAPTER I

THE SAPPERS

BETWEEN Hampstead and Maida Vale there is a pleasantly situated street flanked on either side by neat villas, dear to the English heart by reason of their tenacious adherence to uniformity, and stamped by the carefully trimmed box-hedges which marked the boundary of the minute lawns as eminently respectable. Stock-brokers, business gentlemen whose names, ending euphonically in "heim" and "stein," suggested consanguinity, widowed ladies of youthful appearance keenly interested in church-work, and inexhaustible on the subject of "my late dear husband," an occasional star in the theatrical world, half tolerated, half lionised by the rest such were the types that domiciled in the red-brick walls and lived elsewhere. The villas had numbers, but these were rarely referred to, and for the most part irate cabmen were instructed to discover "Forest Lodge," "Malplaquet House," or "The Pines," as the case might be, by the light of "new art" lamps whose radiance was more artistic than effectual.

At the corner one house had had the temerity to differentiate from its companions. Doubtless it had been built before the golden age of toy turrets, weathercocks, latticed windows and gables, for it was uncompromisingly simple in structure and disgraced the rest of the "Park" by its indifference to the prettinesses of lace curtains and symmetrical flowerbeds. Like the rest, however, it rejoiced in a name, and "Indra House" was written in stiff black letters on the gate-posts. Nobody knew very much about the inhabitants. It was vaguely understood that a few select Hindu gentlemen belonging to the legal profession had united to form a suitable home for students of their own nationality, and colour was lent to this supposition by the regular appearance, towards dusk, of respectably dressed individuals undeniably Oriental in feature and complexion, who passed noiselessly into the gloomy and unexplored precincts.

At first the tenants of "Malplaquet House," "Forest Lodge," and "The Pines" protested against what they called the "ruining of a select neighbourhood," but little by little the obvious inoffensiveness of the new neighbours silenced the most sensitive, and Indra House was allowed to sink into mysterious oblivion.

On a certain evening, about three weeks after the opening of Parliament, a young

Hindu entered the uncared-for garden, and, after having glanced sharply round him, rang the bell which was marked by the harmless injunction "Tradesmen only." There was no immediate response, and he waited patiently, his eyes travelling meanwhile in keen search down the pathway, dimly lighted by the street-lamp. There was no one to be seen, however. The characterless drizzle which polished the neat paving-stones to silvery reflectors of the gas-jets kept even the servant-girls within doors, and, satisfied that he was alone, the visitor repeated his summons, this time ringing three times and allowing a brief but apparently calculated interval between each peal. Then the door opened, and he stepped into the bare, poorly lighted hall.

"Swaraj!" he said to the dark-skinned servant, and, receiving the low answer "Kali!" he nodded and passed on.

The room which he now entered faced the doorway, and, by a curious construction, ended the passage, leaving only a small space for the narrow, winding staircase. It was a very ordinary apartment, plainly furnished and suggesting the reading-room of a thirdclass club. A few papers lay scattered on the table The Times, The Daily News, an illustrated Monthly, a law journal a miscellaneous but inoffensive collection. A Hindu youth stood by the fireside. He was of the type more commonly seen in the low resorts of the East End a miserable figure, destined from birth to go under in the struggle. His clothes were threadbare, and confirmed the silent testimony of the hollow cheeks and wild, sunken eyes. An object for pity or of fear. As the door opened his hand had slipped to an electric-bell on the mantelshelf, then, perceiving who the newcomer was, his arm dropped limply to his side.

"Swaraj!" the elder man said quietly.

"Kali! "The youth by the fireside glanced towards the second door. "They are all there," he added. "They await you."

"Do you keep guard?"

"Until I am needed."

There was an underlying significance in the answer, of which the new arrival seemed fully aware. He glanced keenly at the emaciated yet still agile figure, and at the eyes, with their smouldering blaze of fanaticism.

“You are indeed among the chosen ones, brother,” he said, and crossed the room.

The second door opened stiffly, and revealed yet a third, which was apparently locked from the inside. A twice-repeated tap, however, caused the key to be turned. He passed into the adjoining room, pausing a moment on the threshold with a graceful gesture of salutation. A party of twentyfive men seated at the long table returned his greeting, and he took the vacant place near the centre. His companions were all of his race, though not all of the same branch of that race. Both in the cut of their features and in their general appearance they were divided into two distinct groups, of which the Hindu seated at the head of the table represented the more important. He was unusually fair-skinned, and that peculiarity, together with the cold grey eyes and regular, handsome features, stamped him unmistakably as a Chitpaven Brahman. He was carefully, even elegantly dressed, and his haughty bearing contrasted with that of his vis-d-vis, a small, delicate-looking man whose restless movements and swift-changing expression associated him with the youth in the adjoining room. At the one end calculating cunning at the other, intelligence, weakness, and incalculable fanaticism. As the newcomer took the seat the Brahman turned to him with a slight inclination of the head.

“We have waited for you, Rama Pal,” he said. “The general arrangements have been made, but I understand that you also have your suggestion, and in that case preferred to wait before despatching the final orders.”

Rama Pal glanced sharply down the length of the table. Of all the men present he was unquestionably the youngest, and a dull glow of triumph burnt up in his hollow cheeks.

“I am proud of your confidence,” he said in his low musical voice, “but it would be better that I should first know what has happened. My proposition concerns only the signal.”

“Our news is of the best.” The Brahman drew a sheet of paper towards him and referred to it with a stately satisfaction. “Our agents have arrived without mishap, and the weapons are safely concealed both in the Temple of Kali in Calcutta and in the vaults of Kolruna. The Press has been urged to adopt a more conciliatory tone in order that suspicions may be lulled; but the various associations, schools, and gymnasiums are in full possession of the facts and are hard at work. On the second of March the following manifesto will be issued in

every State of India.”

He took up a harmless-looking English novel lying on the table, and, opening it somewhere about the middle, read out aloud in his own tongue :

“Brothers, children of one Holy Mother, the hour has at last struck when the yoke of slavery shall be cast off and the oppressor driven from your gates. Arise, and in the name of Durga use your weapons until no single demon defiles our holy soil! In freedom alone is our salvation. Behold, the gods who witness our weakness and cowardice turn from us, but to every man who dips his hand in the blood of a white goat it shall be counted more than all the virtues. Arise! The power which holds you subject is but a myth an evil dream which beclouds your vision. Truth, religion, greatness were yours before your tyrants had won the wisdom of children. Reconquer what is lost. Unite, and, with the help of our gods, the Holy Mother shall be for ever cleansed from shame. Act as one man, and the power of her enemies shall be for ever broken.” He stopped, and there was a low murmur of applause. The Brahman glanced about him. He had spoken in a voice which rang metallic, like the clash of steel; but there was a faint cynicism about the finely cut, cruel mouth which harmonised better with his now complete change of tone.

“On the second of March the signal will be given from the Temple in Calcutta, and as soon as the city is in our hands the call to action shall be transmitted to every State in India. There is scarcely a possibility of failure if we act together. We are a hundred to one, and we are armed.”

“And the first act?” The Bengalee leant forward eagerly.

“Will be the assassination of the Viceroy. Ghose has the bombs ready, and five proved men will be placed along the route so that he cannot escape. At the same hour in England an attempt on the life of the Prime Minister a more dangerous and difficult matter; but it is essential to prove our strength and determination to ourselves and to our enemies.”

The Bengalee lawyer passed his nervous hand over his mouth.

“Has he consented?” he asked, with a glance towards the door of the adjoining room.

“How should he do otherwise? He has, at most, a few months to live, and gladly

chooses the patriot's death.”

“Is there any hope that we shall receive assistance from our friends over here?”

The Brahman's lips twisted scornfully.

“A few Socialist papers may offer ‘sympathy’ for our aims, which they do not even understand. They fancy we believe in their dog's creed of equality, and it is better that we should appear to conform. Afterwards, when the battle is won by our own means, the power will return to the ruling castes, and remain there.”

The Bengalee lifted his eyes. For a brief, significant moment of silence the two men measured each other. Then, as though deferring an inevitable hour of reckoning, the Brahman turned to Rama Pal.

“You have heard the general outline of our plans,” he said. “The details are in reliable hands and have been carefully considered. In eight weeks the war of independence will have begun it behoves us, therefore, to weigh every suggestion. We have learnt to trust you, Rama Pal, and Nana Balagi has spoken of your reinstatement into our caste. Prove yourself worthy, and it shall surely be done.”

Rama Pal bowed his head.

“My suggestion concerns only a detail,” he said; “but over details the greatest projects have come to ruin. You say rightly that if we hold together we are irresistible; but we have never held together, and that threatens us now. We need a rallying cry which will appeal to all alike. Patriotism? Patriotism is as yet the watchword of the few. What do the common people, without whom we cannot hope for victory, know of patriotism? For generations they have been ground under heel by aliens, and their own soil has become foreign to them. Call them by a name which will arouse their fanaticism, and the lowest Sudra may become a hero.”

“By what name, since patriotism is dead?”

“Faith remains.”

“In what God? Has not faith died also beneath the hand of the oppressor?”

“Amongst us surely in the hearts of the people it still glows. One great call and the ember will burst to a consuming flame.”

The Brahman smiled with mingled bitterness and satire.

“In the name of what God, I ask you? Has not each village its own god, whom each other village denies?”

“There is one goddess in whom all India believes to-day. This generation has seen her with their own eyes, and with their own eyes saw her caught up to heaven in the midst of flames. Pilgrims have carried her name from end to end of India. Legends have woven themselves around her. There is no heart which does not stir at the name ‘ Sarasvati.’ ” .;

“Sarasvati?” There was a murmur, half of amusement, half of incredulity. Rama Pal sprang to his feet with a fiery gesture which was like the outbreak of a long-suppressed passion.

“You laugh?” he cried. “I tell you that that night at Kolruna, if she had spoken the words which had been put into her mouth, no earthly power could have saved the Englishmen. And I tell you that, if she were to appear again in the temple and call our people to arms in her name, the miracle would spread over India like a fire over dry stubble. No hand that could hold a sword would hang idle. The Englishmen and the traitor princes would be blotted out. Do not think that I dream. At the heart of our country there is a force which we dare not neglect a weapon which we must use before the accursed ones have blunted it —”

“You are right,” the Brahman interrupted, “but you forget one thing the daughter of Brahma, as she is called, has become an Englishwoman. She has followed an English husband. Our power over her is at an end.” Rama Pal leant across the table.

“In three days I will bring her to you,” he said.

“By force? that is too dangerous. It is not our policy to create suspicion.”

“I do not speak of force. She shall come to you of her own free will of her own free will pronounce the great call to the country of her birth.”

There was a stir of smothered excitement. The Brahman's eyes had narrowed.

"You promise much," he said.

"No more than I can perform."

"Her husband this David Hurst will follow her if need be, to India."

"That is as I wish it. We shall meet."

"And then?"

The outcaste's face grew stiff once more perfectly impassive.

"Then a debt will be paid," he said simply.

CHAPTER II

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

“AND so it’s good-bye for a few months,” Diana Chichester said. “Shall I greet India for you, Sarasvati? Is there anything I can bring you when I come back?”

Sarasvati turned her head a little. She was huddled together in an arm-chair by the fireside, and the reflections deepened the shadows beneath her eyes, and on the hollows of her cheeks.

“Greet the sun and the sky for me,” she said weakly. “And bring me back no, no bring me back nothing.”

“Good-bye, then. And God bless you.”

A wan smile passed over the parched and colourless lips.

“I thank you. Will you not say good-bye to my son?”

“Of course I will.” Diana crossed to the cradle which stood near the window and bent over it. She saw a sleeping child, whose dark features were already stamped with a terrible, unchildlike knowledge of suffering. Despite the difference of years, she was reminded of a man’s face as she had once seen it in the mysterious half-light of an Indian night. In miniature, there were the same features the same look of inarticulate pain only the skin was darker, and the curved line of the mouth was foreign to her memory. This was David Hurst’s son the heir to power and a noble English name. She kissed the veined forehead, and a tear fell on the closed eyelids.

“When I come back he will be quite grown up,” she said, with an unsteady laugh. “How proud you will be of him!”

“Proud? Oh no, my son is going to die.”

Diana Chichester started. The quiet words had expressed a thought which she had not dared even to formulate. She turned round schooling herself to an expression of indignant protest.

“How do you come to think of such a thing?” she exclaimed. “The worst is over the doctor said so.”

“The doctor does not know. But I know. He is my son. It is well so.”

Diana smothered an exclamation.

“Well so?” she echoed. “What do you mean?”

“Yes.” Sarasvati’s thin hand dropped apathetically in her lap. “It is well so.” Then, with a sudden change of tone: “Did not Lady Salby tell you I have ruined David’s life? all his hopes?”

Diana came back to the fireside. Her brows were knitted.

“No,” she said. “She would not have dared, because it is not true. It was you who saved David at the elections he has told you so a hundred times.”

“Yes, yes, he tells me so; but Lady Salby tells me the truth too not as you would do, but in her own way. And I have understood. I saved him; but it was by a chance by a chance that easily might not have come, and that will never come again.” An expression of sudden, complete exhaustion passed over her features. “Oh yes, it is well that my son should die. He must not suffer and in this world there is no place for him. Good-bye, Diana, you have been very good to me.”

“Don’t dear! It’s been so terribly little—”

Impulsively the Englishwoman knelt down, clasping the almost powerless hands in her own. She felt oppressed by a prescience of disaster; the atmosphere, in spite of the damp cold which hung about the corners of the great square room, stifled her. The rattle and roar of the traffic outside came to her ears like the threatening rumble of distant thunder. Had she done wrong? Was there anything in all this dumb misery which could be laid at her door?

“It has been terribly little,” she repeated brokenly. “Sometimes I feel that it has been worse than nothing that it would have been better that I had never come into your life.”

Sarasvati freed her hand and laid it gently on Diana’s shoulder. A light had crept into the dark suffering eyes which was very tender, almost compassionate.

“You have asked your God to bless me,” she said in her low tired voice, “and I too would bless you, beautiful Englishwoman. But I have lost God. Should I find Him once again I will ask Him to surround you and him you love in all the warmth of His sunshine. I will ask Him to thank you as I thank you for your love and pity. Remember that always that I blessed you.”

Diana stumbled to her feet. She could not bear the steady gaze of those eyes. They seemed to penetrate to the secret which she would have given her life to hide. They threw their light into the darkest places of her heart and forced her to look on and see that which was concealed there.

“Sarasvati!” she cried out.

And suddenly a pair of thin, weak arms was thrown about her neck, and for a long minute the two women held each other in an embrace which bridged every gulf. Race, prejudice, the inheritance of generations, dropped below the horizon of their lives. In that last moment of farewell they rose triumphant above the mists of human blindness, and recognised in each other the humanity common to them both.

“Remember!” Sarasvati whispered. “Promise to remember!”

“I promise!” Diana answered brokenly.

And thus they parted. Diana Chichester stumbled down the wide staircase, past Hurst’s library. She knew that he was there only a door separated them and it was perhaps the last chance she would have of seeing him for many years; yet she crept on her way stealthily, like a thief who fears detection. Then the door was violently opened, and through the gloom he saw and recognised her.

“Diana!” he exclaimed. She came back mechanically, against her will, and they looked at each other for a moment in unsmiling silence. “I did not know you were in the house,” he went on.

“I have come to say good-bye.”

“But not to me, as it seems.” He motioned her to pass him into the room. “Surely we have the right to say good-bye to each other,” he said with a short, unsteady laugh.

She did not answer him. He did not invite her to sit down, nor did it occur to her to do so. The feeling of suffocation had become torturing. The dismal London fog which hung about the room stung her eyes and throat, and seemed to distort the ponderous furniture into shapeless and threatening shadows. Even Hurst had changed. He had gone to the mantelpiece, and, with his lame foot on the fender, was staring sightlessly in front of him. It seemed to Diana that he had grown bigger, and that there was a brutal force in the set of his square shoulders and in the lines of his dark face.

“You start to-morrow?” he began abruptly, without looking at her.

“Yes, to-morrow. I am travelling with Mrs. Jameson, who is rejoining her husband at Calcutta.”

“I am glad that you will not be alone. You are going in the midst of some danger, if Heilig says true. There is mischief brewing out there.”

She nodded.

“I am rather glad glad that I shall be in the midst of it, I mean. The inactivity tires me I feel that I need danger, even privation. The life of a woman in London is like the constant whirl of a wheel in mid-air it goes on, but it brings you nowhere, and sooner or later the purposeless motion sends you mad, or turns you into a chattering fool.” She clenched her hands with an involuntary movement of impatience. ‘ Yes I am glad to be going,’ she said between her teeth.

He lifted his eyes to her face.

“I can understand that so well I wish to God I was going into the midst of a fight.”

4 You, David!” she forgot her momentary flash of anger hi an instinctive alarm. “You have your work and your fighting here,” she said with a forced cheerfulness. “My uncle told me that the Prime Minister as well as your own leader has congratulated you publicly on your maiden speech, and who knows that it will not be the seed which will grow to a great reform in our treatment of our Indian subjects?”

“It may be the seed,” he returned, “but I shall not watch its growth.” “Why not?”

“Because in a few weeks my career as a Member of Parliament will have come to an end.”

“David!”

He turned a little, his back to the fire, his elbows supported on the mantelshelf.

“Yes, it’s been a mere flash in the pan,” he said steadily, “I often remind myself of a bad rocket that splutters and kicks before it is induced to go off, and then, after an ineffectual exhibition, comes down like a stick. There are many of my kind, Di, and it’s no use being bitter about it.”

“How dare you!” she broke in with a fierce gesture. “How dare you, David?”

The gloomy eyes lit up with a momentary gleam of satirical amusement.

“Dare, Diana? Has one not the right to say the truth at least about oneself?”

“You have not the right to throw unjust taunts at yourself or any one,” she retorted quickly. “Every taunt is aimed at somebody’s faith.”

“Who believes in me?” he broke in.

“I do.”

He threw back his head so that his eyes escaped hers. He had grown very pale, and the knuckles of his clenched fists were white as polished ivory.

“Thank you,” he said, “but, as I have said it can’t be helped, Di, and my little outbreak just now was only a weak, spiteful kick at fate. You see, the doctor was here yesterday. The child—” he passed his hand over the thick black hair with a movement that belied the quiet, matter-of-fact voice. “There isn’t much hope indeed, none. He never was fit and now the climate has broken the little vitality he had. That has to be faced; then there is Sarasvati herself. Dr. Meadows warned me that she must either be taken back to her own country or go south. England is killing her.”

Diana’s eyes rested blindly on the book whose leaves she had begun to turn over in an increasing fever of uneasiness. She dared not look at the man opposite her. He had spoken with a dangerous, unnatural indifference which warned her at

what degree of repression his emotions were being held, and presently he went on in the same level tone.

“You understand what that means. Even if I would, I couldn’t let her go alone. And so there is no choice. I shall resign my seat as soon as I decently can, and then then that’ll be the last of dear old England and my feeble endeavours to render her a service. I expect it is better as it is.”

“David!” she broke out. She looked up at him now with eyes dim with tears. “Oh, David it’s too sad. I want to comfort you but I can’t. There is nothing that I that any one can do. That is the awful, hopeless part of it. If one could only give a few years of one’s life in payment “She stopped abruptly. She had seen the dark flush spread over his drawn face and suddenly the abyss yawned between them, and she knew that another moment, another impulsive word, and the disaster would be there. She drew herself up, her fine brows unconsciously contracted. “But one can’t,” she went on. “And words are almost an insult. I know that you will be strong enough. You will find your place yet, David, and my faith will be justified. Good-bye.”

He ignored her tremblingly outstretched hand. He did not leave his place, but the violence which quivered beneath the surface seemed to take hold of her. She felt herself weaken a kind of faintness crept over her limbs, and only by a supreme effort of the will did she retain her outward composure.

“Good-bye, David,” she repeated.

“Wait! “His voice shook, then steadied to a monotonous level, “There is something I want to ask you before you go, Diana. It is quite likely that we shall not see each other for many years probably not again, and I have the right to take some little consolation with me some token of our friendship. You said at Ashley that you respected me more than any other man. Did you mean that, or was it said out of pity to console me?”

“No,” she said. “I said it because it was true.”

One step nearer ^and yet she could not have lied under these searching, desperate eyes.

“Why do you respect me now? In Kolruna you despised me. I have not changed.”

“You have changed and I have changed. You have awakened to the possession of your own powers, and I have suffered. Then I was blind in conceit, my young arrogance. I saw in you only another of those others whom I despised men who looked upon their sport and the opinion of their conventional world as their only end in life. From the moment that you dared to marry as you did I knew that I had misjudged you. But it was too late.”

“Too late!”

In one vivid flash she saw how he had interpreted her words. Panic, fear of herself and him, seized upon her, and yet, with a last effort she turned towards the door.

“Good-bye—David—”

He lurched forward. She felt rather than saw him pass her, and when she looked up he barred her way, his face bloodless, his eyes savage and distraught.

“Diana!” he said between his teeth. “You can’t go no not if to stay were my own damnation—”

She recoiled, struggling to free her hands from his wild clasp. The disaster was there, sweeping down before them both like a terrible, black, annihilating flood. And in that crisis she regained her strength. She looked him steadily, significantly in the face.

“Is your or my damnation the worst evil?” she said.

He stared at her. Unconsciously his hands released her, and fell to his side. The madness in his face burnt down to an ashy calm.

“Have you forgotten the compact on which we built our friendship?” she persisted.

He understood her then. The tense muscles relaxed. He turned away, and, limping to the table, sank down, his head supported on his hand. In the long, unbroken silence that followed she watched him with a tenderness free from all fear, all remorse. The storm had broken over them, and they had battled through victoriously. The waves which had threatened to engulf them had borne them to a barren safety, and here for one short breathing-space they were free to face each other and in the sanctity of farewell acknowledge the truth which filled

their lives.

“David!” she said, scarcely above a whisper. He stirred, but did not lift his face.

“Have I forfeited your friendship too?” he asked brokenly.

“No, my dear one. How should you? It was and is my fault. No, let me speak, David. Were we other than we are I would not dare say what I am going to say. If we regulated our conduct by human law, which we are sometimes pleased to call the law of God, it wouldn't be safe. It's not in either of us to care much for the one or believe in the other, and if that was the only barrier between us we should be over it in a minute. But there is something else ourselves. We're rather alike in that, David we set up our own standards, and we have to keep to them. If we sought our happiness at the cost of another of some one whom we love and have sworn to protect then we should be deliberately denying our own characters, and the punishment would be inevitable. At the same time one thing I believe myself free to do and that is to part from you with the truth outspoken between us. I love you, David.”

He half rose, but she motioned him back with a movement of such dignity that he sank down again, watching her in fascinated silence.

“I know that the world would blame me for telling you so,” she went on, “but the world is hypocritical, and the world is not my judge. I am not ashamed of caring for you as I do and if I feel remorse gnawing at my heart it is not because I have learnt to love you, but because I have learnt to love you too late. I understand now in my arrogant, childish blindness I would not look below the surface of your disabilities I would not see that in you was the thing for which I had searched vainly in others. I let you go and it was granted to another and worthier to do what it would have been my glory to do to set you free and waken you to your own strength. It is my punishment, and that I do not bear it alone makes it worse. I have not only hurt myself, but you and her. That is the curse that I shall carry with me always.”

He rose slowly to his feet. The haggard face which he turned to her was illuminated by a high resignation.

“No curse rests on you, Di,” he said quietly. “You have not hurt me, at least I have hurt myself. I am just an unsatisfactory character I think, perhaps, a little like my father. We both wanted success, and we went against ourselves to win it.

But it wasn't for the sake of success itself. There was, for both of us, some one to whom it was to have been a kind of offering. My father tried to bring it to my mother and I to you."

"David!" she interposed sadly, "did you think that it was only outward success I cared for?"

He passed his hand wearily over his forehead.

"I don't think I thought much about it at all, Di. I have only just realised that it was for you that I have worked and fought as I have done. You see, I have been brought to look at things from that point of view success has been the only standard I have ever been judged by and instinctively I have always striven to clear myself from your contempt. I didn't know that it was love for you that made the recollection of that night in Kolruna so bitter. But I know now, and I too am not ashamed. I do not think the love that I bear you could ever be shameful. But I wish—" he caught his breath almost imperceptibly "I wish you didn't care, Diana."

"Why?" she asked.

"It makes it worse to think that you are unhappy."

She smiled at him, though the deadly pain half blinded her.

"I am not unhappy. I never meant to marry, because I did not believe I should ever meet a man worthy of me, and now I never shall marry, because, having met him, I can't have him. But I'm glad I've met you, and glad I love you, David. It lifts me a little above myself, you know."

"Will you write once when you get to Kolruna?"

"No, dear, better not. But remember we shall be working together all the same we shall be keeping our compact—"

"to make her happy?"

"Yes and our success shall be the sign that we are forgiven the justification of our love."

“Yes, I understand.”

“Good-bye, David.”

“No don’t shake hands it’s such an empty form and it would hurt—”

Without a backward glance she left him. He waited until the clang of the outer door told him that she was gone, then he stumbled back to his place by the table, and lay there motionless, with his face buried in his arms.

CHAPTER III

BETRAYED

IT was very quiet in the great room. The figure kneeling by the cradle might have been a statue, so rigidly did it retain its bowed attitude, and the baby on the white-laced pillow had not moved since it had cried out an hour before. Now it lay very still its eyes half opened, its tiny dark hands tight clenched, as though in pain. But after that one faint cry it had made no sound. The French clock on the mantelpiece chimed the half-hour, and presently the hour. The yellow gloom of the fog deepened to an early twilight, and the lights from the street began to throw their dim reflections on the painted ceiling.

And still Sarasvati did not move. The noise of the passing traffic sounded afar off, so absolute and deathlike was the silence which enclosed her. Presently a loose board cracked as though beneath a quick, stealthy tread, and there was a rustle of curtains pushed softly aside. She lifted her head and listened. For the moment there was no further movement. She took the two powerless hands and chafed them between her own mechanically, with a kind of unreasoning persistency that was more tragic than the wildest lament. Then, overtaken by exhaustion, her hands dropped limply on the quilt and she lay still with her forehead resting against the bar of the cradle.

“Sarasvati!”

The whisper was so low that it seemed to lose itself almost before it reached her. She started slightly, but did not turn.

“David!” she answered tonelessly. “David—”

The door clicked to. The footsteps drew nearer. She could not hear them, but to her they were unmistakable. They seemed to beat upon her brain like a vibration from some old memory. She had heard them before, when they passed through her dreams, as mysterious and noiseless; she had heard them long ago, in half forgotten ages; they were inexplicably part of herself and her life. Then suddenly, with a smothered scream, she sprang to her feet and faced about.

“Who are you how have you come here?” she whispered.

In the drear halflight she saw at first only that the man who stood within a few feet of her was not her husband. Without answering he came closer to her, so that his dark set face almost touched her own.

“Hast thou forgotten thine own tongue?” he said softly in Hindustani. “Hast thou so utterly forgotten thine own people that only the dogs’ language comes to thy lips?”

“How hast thou come here?” she repeated in stony terror.

He laughed almost inaudibly.

“There are always ways and means for those who will. For jingling gold the strongest doors will open, the most faithful servants become traitors. But enough of that. My time is short, and I have much to say to thee.”

“I will not listen. I am afraid thou art my husband’s enemy and mine.”

She struggled to pass him, but swiftly and silently he caught her and forced her back, one hand pressed tightly upon her mouth.

“Sarasvati!” he whispered, “thou wouldst do well to listen to me. I have not risked so much not to dare more. What I have to say to you concerns life and death perhaps the world’s history. And I have a right to speak, for there is a bond between us which no hand can sever. Wilt thou listen?”

For a minute they stared into each other’s faces . Her wild, starting eyes hung on his with the helpless terror of an animal caught in the toils. Then she made a feeble movement, and he released her, so that she stumbled back, gasping, against the cradle.

“Thou hast asked me who I am,” he began in the same low, incisive accents. “My name, as it was given me by my English missionaries, is Rama Pal, and by birth I am a Brahman. My father, Nana Balagi, is a priest of Vishnu. Two children were born to him of one wife one was stolen, so it is said, by the English missionaries, in reality by the lowest Sudras. Afterwards he fell into English hands, and from that hour he was more lost to his own people than if death had taken him. The other child was a girl. They called her the daughter of Brahma.” He bent a little forward, studying every line of her drawn face with a keenness that was half -cruel, half -pity ing.

“Much has changed, oh my sister, since we wandered together beneath the temple pillars,” he went on. “The priest’s son, with the mark of Vishnu on his brows, became a beggar and an outcaste. His faith and his heritage were stolen from him, suffering and poverty haunt him all that remains is the hope that one day he may plunge his hands deep in the blood of those who have wronged him and his brethren. And thou, Sarasvati, my sister, thou too hast changed. Have I not seen thee kneeling amidst the lotusflowers, thyself more lovely than their tenderest blossoms? Have I not seen thee held high above the heads of an adoring multitude, bedecked with all the gems of India, thyself more precious, more desired than the purest emerald? Have I not seen the eyes of millions turned to thee for the signal which would set them free? But thou, too, wast granted dishonourable life, and the curse of them that forsake their faith and kind is on thee. For what hast thou become?”

He caught her roughly by the wrist and dragged her to the looking-glass, where the reflections of their faces stared back at them in grey ghostliness.

“Look at those cheeks, once round and smooth as a peach in its first ripeness; look at those eyes, that were once brighter than the stars; look at the hair, once dark and lustrous as the night-sky, more luxuriant than the foliage of the jungle. Where is now thy beauty, oh my sister? Thou hast become old and withered, thy loveliness has passed like the loveliness of a flower that has been plucked and flung into the dust by the wayside. Thy heart is broken, Sarasvati, my sister. No wonder that the love for which thou gavest all has grown cold and passes on to other and fresher—”

“It is a lie!” she broke in wildly. She tried to free herself. The horrid, distorted reflection of her own face mocked her helpless efforts.

“A lie? Art thou, then, blind to what others see hourly? Art thou deceived by a friendship which is no more than a mantle for a disloyal love? Thy very servants pity thee. But what is that against the greater wrong? Thou art doubly betrayed, Sarasvati, my sister. The ring upon thy finger is a lie, the ceremony which bound thee to thy betrayer was an empty form. Thy marriage was unlawful thou art an outcaste in the country of thy birth and in the country of thy adoption thy son is born in dishonour—”

“Be silent! “She wrenched herself free and sprang like a tigress to the cradle, where she turned and faced him in royal fury. “My son has passed beyond

dishonour,” she said. “My son is dying.”

He stared at her, and then, in the heavy silence, he crept across the room and peered down at the grey suffering face upon the tiny pillow.

“Dying!” he repeated. “It is well. He is spared much.”

“Rama Pal—my brother—if brother thou art— it is not true, it is not true.”

She held out her hands in piteous supplication, and he caught them and drew her to him. Fiercely pitying, he half carried, half supported her to the fireside.

“It is true. I swear it.” He knelt down and thrust his clenched fist full into the flames. “By water and by fire I swear that thou hast been doubly betrayed,” he cried loudly. “If I have lied may the fire testify against me.” He withdrew his hand and showed it her. It was uninjured. His face blazed with a fanatical triumph, which hid from him as well as from her the success of a common Hindu juggler’s trick.

“It is the truth, my sister. What I know I know from those who would not lie and who know the law—”

She interrupted him. For a space she had found firm ground in the midst of the shifting sands; in this final disaster which shook the foundations of her world one thing remained steadfast.

“Shall I not know light from darkness, gold from base metal?” she said clearly. “I will not believe that my husband has betrayed me no, not till his own lips have answered thy accusation.”

Rama Pal considered for a moment in keen, watchful silence.

“It is possible probable that he whom thou callest husband is also ignorant of what I have told thee,” he said at last. “What difference does that make? He loves thee no more. Thy little hour in his life is over. His own blood, his own race, call him. Wilt thou plead with him to reknit the bonds which have grown odious to him? Wilt thou chain him, unwilling, at thy side and watch how a white man’s passion crumbles to hatred and contempt? Or wilt thou see him seize the offered outlet to escape to leave thee scorned and mocked, at the mercy of his world? Sarasvati”

He sprang up and held her as she reeled against him. Her head dropped powerlessly against his shoulder, and he bent his lips to her ear, speaking with a swift change of tone.

“All is not lost, Sarasvati; not despair but hope do I bring thee. Thy part in this cold, unlovely land is played. Those to whom thou hast turned in trust have shrunk from thee, have heaped contempt upon dishonour to-morrow, perhaps, will spurn thee from their doors. But thy land, thy people, call thee, Sarasvati. Millions who in secret and silence have armed for the great day of deliverance do but wait for the signal from Heaven that their hope is blessed. The gods are silent but thou, divine daughter”

“Divine?” She drew herself up, her hands raised above her head in a movement of inarticulate despair. “Thou knowest that I am human. In all the world there is no divinity.”

“Thou art divine!” he broke in with a fierce elation. “Thou art a goddess, a living symbol of an Idea an Ideal. We who have lost our faith in graven images will worship thee and obey thee as the personification of what is most divine in us. Throw aside for ever this base earthliness, Sarasvati, my sister. Become that which thou wast born and made to be the inspiration, the salvation of thy country.”

She stared at him through the increasing darkness, half-hypnotised.

“How to what end?” she whispered.

“To the end that India shall be free and the blotch of shameful slavery washed away in the blood of her oppressors—”

“I cannot!” she wailed. “I cannot! Is not my husband of their race?”

“Not thy husband thy betrayer. Or hast thou still love for the man who has dragged thee down into shame and sorrow?”

She faced his furious scorn with a piteous humility.

“I cannot otherwise am I not but a woman?”

Somewhere in the quiet house a door was banged sharply to. Kama Pal started

and listened. His impassivity had returned and his Oriental eloquence changed to a sharp, businesslike precision.

“To-night thy husband attends a theatrical performance in aid of Indian charity,” he said in a low voice. “Thou wilt accompany him. I shall be close at hand. With thy handkerchief thou wilt give me a signal. To-morrow, at daybreak, I shall await thee with a carriage at the corner of the street. By evening we shall be on our way to Calcutta.” He raised his hand in solemn warning. “Should the signal not be given I swear to you that I shall shoot Sir David down like a dog this very night or, if he escapes me, I will not rest till my debt is paid. I swear it thou knowest that I swear not vainly.” He turned and crept noiselessly to the door. “Nor think to betray me,” he added. “Sir David is already marked, and when I fail a dozen will take my place. To-night or to-morrow. The end will be the same.”

He was gone. She took a stumbling step towards the door as though to follow him, then swayed and subsided slowly on her knees beside the cradle. The minutes passed, and she did not move. The twilight deepened to night and only the reflections on the ceiling and the red glow of the fire broke through the gathering gloom. Unconsciously her hand began to feel over the silken quilt which covered the child’s quiet form, instinctively she sought for the one living comfort that was left her, and instead touched something that was cold cold, and harder than stone.

Yet another minute passed. Realisation, like a pale light breaking through a mist, came to her slowly. Then she started up, her hands searching in feverish silence through the darkness, and suddenly she moaned and stood still, arrested by the frightful, annihilating thing which she had touched. She did not cry out after that. Her conception of life, half-childish, halfmystic as it was, left her crushed and helpless before these grim realities of death and dishonour. All reasoning, almost all feeling, sank engulfed in a chaos of hideous, formless suffering. Not for her were the consolations of religion nor the stoic behests of intellect.

Religion, as much as drifted back to her in that moment, was to her a vague, shifting substance to which it was vain to hold out hands of supplication; and death itself, that last refuge, opened out before her eyes an endless vista of future lives filled with the same agony in lower, meaner forms. Even now her child’s soul, tainted with the dishonour of its birth, had passed on into some foul body, to begin the frightful cycle of its transmigrations. For it and for her Nirvana, that

state of contemplative, measureless peace, was lost, and out of her numb despair there arose a fierce, sombre resentment against the forces which dragged her from her divine state. A smouldering hatred burnt up among the ashes of her grief a hatred that scarcely knew itself nor its object, but called out to the unknown powers a passionate vindication of its own existence. Wronged, betrayed beyond all measure, she beat wildly against her invisible taunters, seeking vengeance, above all escape.

She rose, shivering in every limb, and crept nearer to the fire. Escape? Was there none? In the days when evil dreams had risen before her had not she had the power to lift herself above them into endless spaces of peace and silence? Her bewildered brain sought after the sacred formulas, her lips formed them but no change came to her. The dreams, shaped as dead children, as men and women who mocked and threatened her, as cold, dank mists and yellow darkness, closed her in and suddenly, like some tortured, frenzied animal, she screamed aloud.

“Sarasvati!”

The door had opened. A flood of light fell upon her, and, as though awaking from some awful trance, she turned a little and saw David Hurst standing in the doorway. He was in evening dress and his square broad-shouldered figure stood up massively against the bright background.

“Sarasvati!” he repeated, “I thought I heard you call. Are you there?”

“I am here.” He switched on the red shaded lights over the mantelpiece and she saw his face.

“I came to say good-bye,” he said. “The carriage is waiting. I wish I hadn’t to go, but I’ve promised. Good-night, my wife.”

“You are going.” She passed her feeble hand over her forehead. “Yes I remember to-night.” He watched her in silence, vaguely alarmed. And suddenly she came towards him on tip-toe, as in the days of her lost beauty, her fingers to her lips, a curious, painful laughter in her eyes. Lithe, graceful, almost feline, she crept up to him and laid her hands upon his shoulders. “Take me with you,” she whispered. “Take me with you. I am so tired of the darkness I want the light and music and people—”

He looked down at her. She had spoken rapidly, mechanically, and fever burnt in

her hollow cheeks.

“The child,” he began; “is it safe for you to leave him, dear?”

She laughed a low, toneless little laugh.

“Oh, he is so much better. He sleeps. I have sat and watched over him, and he has not cried or stirred. Now the nurse can care for him. Let me come?”

He bent and kissed her tenderly with a grave solicitude.

“As you wish it, you shall come,” he said. “Henceforth you must be always with me, Sarasvati. I want you. The shadows have come between us a little of late. We will put them out of our lives and go back into our own world.”

“Yes, back into our own world,” she repeated monotonously. “But to-night for the last time we will go together.”

Still he hesitated, oppressed by he knew not what. There was something in the quiet room which was like a breath of cold, dank air, causing him a keen physical discomfort. He looked about him, and his eyes encountered the white painted cradle.

“Let us say good-night to our son,” he said.

But she clung to him with the same wild laughter in her eyes.

“Oh no, you must not look at him, or touch him. He is asleep. You must not wake him. It is well that he sleeps. The doctor said so did he not? And he sleeps so softly. Come go gently.”

Hurst allowed himself to be drawn unresisting to the door. He dared not protest. There was something frenzied in her bearing that warned him.

“We will send the nurse to him,” he said.

She nodded and looked back over her shoulder.

“Oh yes, we will send the nurse to him. How well he sleeps! He has not heard us. Good-night come, my husband come quickly come quickly—”

She closed the door, and, ghostlike, glided noiselessly before him down the corridor.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHOICE

THE Belvedere had opened its doors to charitable enterprise. The famine and plague-stricken in far-off India had aroused the elegant English world to a sense of their solemn responsibility as citizens of the Empire, and, beside the usual Mansion House Fund, it had been decided to organise an immense entertainment, the proceeds of which should be devoted to the sufferers. Altruism had become rife. The management of the Belvedere had presented their building free of all charge; for the evening, various music-hall turns had offered their services and Society had pledged its support. Consequently, the event promised to be a brilliant one, and no doubt, had they known of the sacrifices being brought in their behalf, the distant recipients would have felt their lot more tolerable.

Cabinet ministers, so-called Indian authorities, M.P.'s, with their wives, a sprinkling of the nobility, and a mighty gathering of that resplendent and proud clan whose resplendency is based on bottled pickles and meat extracts and other such useful commodities, and whose pride is legitimised by "connections" amongst the latter-day peerage such were the chief ingredients of the crowd that swarmed about the Belvedere's handsomely decorated couloirs. The women were gorgeously dressed, probably no other feminine assembly in the world could have boasted of having spent as much money on its attire; and their partners had groomed themselves with such blind obedience to the prevailing masculine fashion that their appearance was disconcertingly uniform.

In the whole theatre there was probably only one man who had dared to defy the latest sartorial edict. He blocked up the narrow gangway which led to the lower boxes, and the cut of his evening clothes, together with his whole massively uncompromising appearance, caused one or two immaculate representatives of the jeunesse doree to regard him with a not wholly unjustified suspicion. In dress, in bearing, and above all in expression, he discorded with his surroundings. Among the delicately built men whose thin, clean-shaven faces portrayed a weary amusement he stood out like an ungainly Titan, his arms folded, his bearded chin lifted in an attitude of unconscious aggression.

More than one woman glanced at him, but less with suspicion as with a certain unreasoned interest. For women instinctively recognise strength, and in that atmosphere of effete pleasure-seeking the outsider exhaled an energy which was actually uncomfortable. None of the attendants, however much inclined to do so, cared to question his right to be present, and it was left to an elderly, distinguished-looking man to touch him on the shoulder.

“Excuse me, will you let me pass? This is my box.”

The stranger started round.

“Yours? Ha! I was told that Sir David Hurst—”

“Sir David is sharing the box with my party,” was the suave explanation. “Might I ask if you are one of his guests?” “Guests? Good Heavens no! “The stranger’s manner expressed impatience. “I only arrived from India a couple of hours ago. But I am his friend, and I haf a wish to see him.”

The owner of the box considered the intruder with an awakened interest. The obvious retort that this was neither the time nor place for the proposed meeting did not occur to him in the face of the man’s earnestness, and after a moment he began in a more cordial tone :

“In that case I shall be delighted if you would take my place meanwhile. Sir David should be here in a minute. My name is Langley, and I am in some measure Sir David’s friend.”

“Langley his party leader?” The stranger glanced keenly into the astute face beside him. “Ha, yes, he wrote to me about you. He even advised me to address myself to you. My name is Heilig, Professor Heilig, late of the Leipziger University.”

“The Hindu expert? I am delighted to meet you.” Langley held out nis hand. “My young supporter has often spoken of you as the inspirer of his most able pamphlets on the Indian Question. I congratulate you on your scholar. He will make his way in his own way.”

Both men laughed, but a flush of satisfaction had darkened the German’s forehead.

“Yes, I discovered him,” he admitted proudly. “I knew what was in him. Does he do well indeed?”

“He gives every promise of going far,” was the cordial answer. “He is already what is commonly called an ‘ Indian Light.’ I have reason to believe he will bring about a great reformation in our methods of handling the educated Hindu masses.”

“And his wife?” Heilig interrupted almost roughly.

The politician passed his hand over his chin. The question appeared to trouble him.

“There we are on more difficult ground, my dear sir. You know Lady Hurst?”

“I was present at her marriage.”

“And, if I judge correctly, you are desirous of ascertaining how she has influenced her husband’s career?” was the shrewd interrogation.

“You judge correctly,” Heilig admitted, though with a slight contraction of the brows.

“If you wish me to be frank I must confess that Lady Hurst’s influence has been unfavourable. Du reste, the fact is an open secret. It is true that she is supposed to have helped in the election some rather clap-trap appeal to public sentimentality, I believe but that kind of thing does not go down with the middle classes, and, in spite of his ability, Hurst only got his seat by a narrow majority. You know, perhaps, how much we unhappy politicians owe to the social standing of our feminine supporters, and Lady Hurst is, frankly, impossible in her present position.”

“Why?” Heilig blazed out so suddenly and violently that a few bystanders turned to look at him.

Langley shrugged his shoulders.

“My dear Professor, as a student of racial differences, you must be able to answer your own question,” he said. Heilig made no answer to this. The band had struck up some patriotic air, and Langley opened the door. “If you would

take a seat we should be out of the crush, and I should be delighted to hear a little of your news," he said courteously. "You come from the scene of action."

Heilig jerked his head over his shoulder.

"The scene of preparation," he retorted.

"Do you mean—" "I mean that following an historical example, you fiddle your cheap tunes and the earth is being mined under your feet."

Langley smiled.

"That is Hurst's old theme," he said philosophically. "I allow myself to believe, however, that old England is safe enough for the present. I beg your pardon? Did you speak?"

For Heilig, whose keen eyes had continued to search the crowd, had started slightly, and his powerful hands had clenched themselves with a movement of suppressed excitement. He turned, however, smilingly to his companion.

"I? No, I haf not spoken. But I saw an old acquaintance, whom I did not think to meet here. You say old England is safe enough? Oh yes, you are quite right very safe! "He gave a short, sardonic laugh. "You would be surprised if this whole grand erection blew up under your feet, would you not? but I would not be surprised at all. Ach du lieber Gattt—"

The exclamation had evidently burst from him in spite of himself, and Langley turned with a slight gesture of impatience. Hurst's friend was, without question, a somewhat troublesome and turbulent guest, and Langley was relieved to see Hurst himself wending his way towards them. But Heilig's face had grown colourless.

"Is that what you haf made of her?" he said, and his voice was like an angry growl. "No, I thank you, I will not meet him yet. I have had a shock I go. Tell Hurst that I will come again." And, before the puzzled politician could intervene, the Professor had made his escape, elbowing his way to the back of the crowd with more energy than his obstacles appreciated. From his point of vantage on the steps leading up to the second tier, he saw Hurst and his wife approach the box which he had just vacated. Lady Hurst clung to her husband's arm. Had it not been for her dress and complexion, Heilig would not have recognised her.

This Sarasvati? this haggard, withered Hindu woman, the daughter of Brahma, the lovely child of the lotusflowers and warm sunshine and blue skies? He cursed aloud, and his neighbours, who had stopped for a moment in their listless chatter to stare at the new exotic arrival, turned and stared at him with the same expression of cold, half-insolent surprise. But Heilig had forgotten his surroundings. His eyes burnt with pity, and resentment made his rugged face almost savage. For an instant before the door of the box closed upon her Sarasvati turned, and Heilig fancied that her hunted, terrified glance had encountered him, and the possibility gave him a grim consolation. In reality Sarasvati had seen nothing. In vain she had striven to focus her onind on particular objects. Her eyes were blurred, she was dimly conscious of massed brilliant colouring broken by marring patches of black; a smudged impression of white faces all turned to her with that one familiar expression of cold animosity imprinted itself on her numbed brain. Even when she sat huddled hi her seat in the front of the box the same impression remained. This pageant of a cultured nation's wealth and refinement translated itself, to her, into a raw, ruthless brutality directed against her existence. This world of delirious dreams, conceived in the brain of a humanity that had lost touch with its God, stood like a black wall between her and the light. She had felt its restless stirring in the past she had fled from it up into the heights of silence, but it had followed her, it had dragged her down into its fever-swamps, it had shut her in and now was stifling her in its self-conceived shadows of false ideals, false humanity, false faith. She crept back among the curtains of her box, but her eyes continued to wander sightlessly over the packed rows of men and women.

David Hurst was seated close beside her. His arm rested on the back of her chair, and he was speaking in an undertone to the other occupants of the box. A tall, elegant woman, the wife of Hurst's leader, sat opposite him and nodded an occasional assent, whilst her passionless English eyes passed from Sarasvati to the brightly lit stage, and on to crowded stalls immediately beneath. Sarasvati felt the significance of the glance, though she had not heard the whispered comment to a friend in a neighbouring box.

“Yes that's Lady Hurst. Terrible, isn't it? A youthful folly, of course such a pity! Not even beautiful. A very nice man clever too would make his way—”

A blaze of music put an end to the colloquy. A woman in pink tights with a Union Jack in either hand and a crown of ostrich feathers nodding from the summit of false curls had strutted on to the stage, and in a loud, strident voice

broke into a thinly tuned topical song. Sarasvati shrank back into the shadow. Frightful physical sickness crept over her. She felt filthy hands seize her and drag her down into the mud the dreams had become degrading, horrible nightmares.

“Good old England is the top dog yet!” shouted the singer, and at the end of each verse a round of self-satisfied applause greeted her as she swaggered round the stage, the flags fluttering triumphantly over each fat shoulder. And suddenly the sickness passed, and, like the turning-point in some violent disease, a hatred, primitive in its ferocity, burnt up in Sarasvati’s tortured breast. For this painted, vulgar harridan she had been slighted and despised by the men and women who now roared and clapped their applause; for this blatant vanity, called patriotism, her country groaned in the dust of subjection. For this she had sacrificed her beauty, her faith, the peace of her temple for this, that she might belong to this crowd, to this great people who cheered the degradation of their own greatness. The excuses and explanation which might have satisfied another mind failed her. The veneer of European culture crumbled. She was the Oriental now seeing with the Oriental’s eye, suffering with the Oriental’s intense sensitiveness, burning with the Oriental’s inherited stealthy passions of hatred and revenge.

She leant forward, and for the first time the purpose for which she had come rose out of the chaos of her sensations. She saw Rama Pal’s face lifted to hers. He was seated in the third row of the stalls and an empty space, scarcely two yards’ wide, separated them. She could see the white of his eyes, the hand hidden significantly in the pocket of his coat. His face was quiet, expressionless, and yet, as their eyes met, she read his message. Here, in this vast concourse, she was no longer alone. In this dark-faced man was the active embodiment of her own emotions. A sign from her and the sullen, rising tide of racial hatred would find its outlet in one swift, annihilating act. She was past all thought. The sting of a hundred petty injuries and the aching wound of her dishonour and betrayal crushed out everything but that one thirst for a deadly retaliation. She turned her head a little, instinctively seeking a last glimpse of the man who, in the next few minutes, would pay the last great penalty.

David Hurst was leaning forward, his eyes fixed on the stage. The black brows were contracted, and the line about the mouth was bitter, proudly contemptuous. And, with an illuminating flash, she understood. He too suffered. Whatever evil he had done her he was not one of these laughing, jeering, triumphant demons who were hounding her to her destruction. He turned and met her glance, and the

disgust and pain which lay half-hidden behind his softened expression of tenderness aroused in her the memory of all that had been with a terrible, laming pity.

“In a few hours all this will be over,” he whispered. “To-morrow we shall leave all this behind us we shall be free thank God.”

To-morrow? In a few minutes! Two vast primitive passions of love and hatred, equal in strength, equal in justification, mastered her. Revenge yes, but not against him not against him, for she loved him; but against the pitiless, grinding machine which had made him too its instrument. A primeval woman now, unmodified by civilisation, she turned to him with one great all-comprehending, all-forgiving tenderness. As in the golden sun-lit temple-shrines, so here also he was the man who had led her to the highest pinnacle of life’s grand mountain-range of passions, and thus he remained for her, indissolubly, a very part of her own being. Love demanded of her that she should save him from the quiet waiting death beneath, and hatred clamoured for its satisfaction. She bent forward with her hand over the edge of the box, and something white fluttered down through the darkness.

“You have dropped something, Sarasvati,” Hurst whispered.

She nodded. Rama PaPs hand had slipped from his pocket and he was staring impassively at the stage where the patriot in tights, at the salute, proclaimed the triumphant refrain for the last time

“Good old England—”

“Yes,” Sarasvati answered in a whisper, “A handkerchief.”

“We can send an attendant afterwards to fetch it,” Hurst said. Some one touched him on the shoulder and he rose and quickly left the box. Outside in the empty couloir Professor Heilig faced him.

“I did not know you were in England,” Hurst began, but his proffered hand was impatiently ignored.

“I only arrived a few hours ago. At your club they told me I should most probably find you here, and I wanted to arrange a meeting with you at once. I was waiting for you to come out of that rabbit-hutch when an excited female

arrived with this letter for you, and I promised to see that you got it without delay. You had better look at it before you go into ecstasies over me good news rarely comes so out of breath.”

Hurst took the letter and opened it. His dark face stiffened as he read, and, without a word, he turned and went back into the box.

“Sarasvati,” he said, in an undertone, “we must go home at once. The child—”

“Is dead,” she interrupted. “I know.”

She rose. Her cowering weakness had gone. Erect, the slender figure in the gold-embroidered sew drawn to its full height, her dark head lifted in an attitude of haughty aloofness, she gazed steadfastly into the

93 great dimly lit theatre. The singer had just appeared before the curtain to receive the plaudits of her audience and a fat hand wafted a kiss in the direction of the crowded box. A smile of infinite contempt hovered round the Hindu woman’s curved lips, then, with a last glance which swept the whole theatre, she turned and followed her husband into the lighted corridor.

CHAPTER V

IN PURSUIT

THAT night David Hurst did not sleep. A futile attempt to lose himself in that merciful oblivion had driven him back to his library, where a feeble firelight alone broke through the darkness. He had drawn up his chair, and, against the sullen red background, memory marshalled the grey pageant of his life. Distinct, yet linked together by an invisible chain of cause and effect, the pictures represented to him a tragedy not of circumstance but of character. He saw himself as child, now lying on the long grasses weaving his dreams into the dying Indian sunset, now grasping at visible success with weak, desperate hands. He saw himself, as boy, now beating his tortured brains against the profession which tradition had ordained, now hungering after the world of imagination which he had lost. He saw himself as man, his challenge uttered, stepping out on the lonely path of his own will. Whither had it led him? He had lived according to his own character, and the disaster that followed was as inevitable as it was complete. The inevitableness crushed him. "A house divided against itself." The words occurred to him with a painful persistence, and he knew that they described him and prophesied the end.

His challenge to the world had been useless, for his greater enemy lay behind the locked door of his own soul, where two forces opposed one another in silent daily conflict. To his distraught fancy two figures represented them, the vague shadow of the father he had never known, but whose confession was engraved on his memory, and on the other side his mother, a clear definite personification of a boundless ambition and inexhaustible energy. And of these two he was the outcome, the inheritor. Strength coupled with weakness, the dreamer with the man of action what wonder that such a union had failed! For David Hurst looked failure in the face. He had lost the one woman who might have bridged the cleft in his own nature, and with her the place for which he had striven doggedly, tenaciously. The dreams remained faded unreal flowers of fancy, whose fragrance had been destroyed in the heat of battle. He leant forward with his face buried in his hands, striving to animate them with something of their first beautiful life; but a pale ghost, clasping the body of a dead child in its feeble arms, arose before his mental vision as though in piteous mockery.

Outside the rain beat with hard fingers against the window-panes, a lump of coal crashed down into the grate, startling him from his painful introspection. He looked up and saw that he was no longer alone. Half lost against the background of shadows, Sarasvati stood and watched him. She was fully dressed; her black hair lay smooth on the small shapely head which was thrown back slightly so that her heavily-lashed eyes seemed closed, and her hands lay crossed on her breast. So noiselessly had been her entrance, so strange, almost sinister was her attitude, that for a moment Hurst sat motionless, watching her with the petrified fascination of a man who sees his dreams take shape before him. And in that brief space of time he recalled her as he had first seen her asleep amidst her lotusflowers with the golden figure of the god towering over her in hideous majesty; and, as she came towards him, glidingly, with scarce perceptible steps, he saw her again in that wondrous moment of awakening when she had come to him with the one complete surrender of herself.

“Sarasvati!” he exclaimed under his breath. Swept back on the tide of memory, he realised the ruin which had been wrought. He sprang to his feet, his arms outstretched in an impulsive, passionate pity; but something in her wan face checked him. “Sarasvati?” he repeated with a note of interrogation.

She laid her hands on his shoulders, and for a moment they looked each other steadily in the eyes. The golden sunshine which had once lit up the pure glory of her beauty was changed to the dull reflection of the firelight; the beauty had gone, and the earthforgetting love become a tragic, tearless recognition of a mutual sorrow.

“My lord and God!” she said solemnly.

He knew then that she too had remembered. He held her to him, instinctively seeking to shield her from some invisible danger, but she released herself with a quiet decision.

“I have come to say good-night to you and to my son,” she said.

“Now?” he questioned, painfully moved.

“I cannot sleep until I have said good night,” she answered tonelessly. Without protest he lit a candle, and led the way out of the room and across the corridor. At the closed door which shut in their dead child, he turned as though to support her, but she drew back with a slight restraining gesture.

“I will go alone.” She took the candle from his hand, and he opened the door for her to through.

By the dim flickering light he saw the cradle amidst the walls of white heavy smelling flowers; he saw Sarasvati take her stand at the foot and gaze down on the pitiful thing that had been her child. Then, moved by a sudden sense of his own unfitness, he closed the door and stood alone in the profound darkness of the passage. Five minutes passed. The door opened again and she passed out. He saw no change in her quiet face, save that its expression of solemn purpose seemed to have deepened, and in silence he accompanied her to the foot of the stairs. There she turned, and once more her thin hands rested on his shoulder.

“Good night,” she said softly, and in her own tongue. “May thy God and my God watch over thee and keep thee, my beloved.”

He bent his head, and he felt her lips touch him. The impulsive desire to shield, to enclose her in the shelter of love had given place to an awestruck recognition of a great change. Not the daughter of Brahma, the woman-child of mysticism and dreams, nor yet the broken cowed product of his world’s system stood before him, but a being whom he had never known, an aloof and inscrutable spirit. And suddenly the great evil he had done her took shape before him, and a pent-up longing for absolution broke from his compressed lips.

“Forgive me!” he said hoarsely.

And again she kissed him.

“I have forgiven.”

She passed on up the stairs, rising in her trailing garments like some ghost into the deeper shadows, and he watched her until a bend in the staircase hid her from him. Then he felt his way back to his place before the dying fire and there, as though released from some evil spell, he slept dreamlessly until daybreak. He was aroused then by the entrance of the nurse. Instantly, fully awake, he saw by her expression that her unusual appearance in his room was caused by some fresh trouble. She was white to the lips, and for the first moment incapable of speech. Possessed by a swift prescience of misfortune, he sprang to his feet.

“What has happened?” he demanded roughly.

His peremptory tone recalled her to some measure of calm.

“I beg your pardon, Sir David -” she stammered. “I wouldn’t have ventured, but we thought you might know Lady Hurst is missing—”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, Sir David, that this morning we found her bed empty it had not even been slept in and she is nowhere in the house. We have looked everywhere and we were afraid her ladyship has been in great trouble—”

Hurst pushed the frightened woman on one side and hurried out of the room. He knew now that, whatever disaster had befallen, it had not come upon him without warning. It had hung heavy in the atmosphere he had seen it written on Sarasvati’s face, he had felt its dark force gathering about him, slowly, invidiously, yet with all the inevitableness of Fate. Downstairs he was met by Heilig. Early as it was, the Professor’s appearance caused him no surprise. He was vaguely aware that the warning had first become manifest with Heilig’s sudden reentry into his life the day before, and that now he belonged essentially to the crisis. For a moment the two men stared at each other with a reasonless antagonism. Then Heilig made a curt gesture of apology.

“I regret to haf come upon you like this,” he said, “but I had to see you at once. If I had had my own way, I would have told you last night—”

“I cannot listen not now,” Hurst interrupted sternly. “My son is dead.”

“I know.”

“That’s not all, Sarasvati, my wife—”

“I know that too.”

Hurst, with his hand on the telephone, swung round.

“You know? How do you know?” he demanded.

“I guessed at the possibility yesterday, when I saw her face. I knew for certain when I heard the child had died. Rama Pal was in the theatre last night.”

“Well? For God’s sake, Heilig, tell me what you know what you suspect. Every minute is precious.”

“My young friend, do you think I haf travelled a few thousand miles to warn you, and do not know how precious time is? But I haf come too late, and now we must act swiftly it is true, but not recklessly. Leave that telephone. It cannot help us.”

Hurst led the way into his wife’s sitting-room, and there faced about with a hard-won calm.

“At least tell me where Sarasvati is,” he said. “That is all that matters just now.”

“By this time I believe your wife to be on her way to India.”

“Good God alone?”

“No with her brother Rama Pal.”

Hurst recoiled. Then, recovering himself, walked across the room to the writing-desk. The drawers stood open. All that his wife[^] possessed in letters a few written by his own hand in days of unavoidable absence had gone. Four bank-notes lay on the table, spread out with pathetic neatness, and on top of one Hurst saw the minute gold circle of his wife’s wedding-ring. He picked it up and slipped it on to his own finger. His face had grown old-looking.

“I did not know that Rama Pal was her brother,” he said dully.

“Nor did Rama Pal know probably until a short time ago. His father and hers, Nana Balagi, kept the secret until it suited him to use it. You will remember Nana Balagi murdered your father, David. Your father knew too much, and you know too much. There is a double feud between you, my young friend.”

“What do I care? If Rama Pal has decoyed—”

“There is no question of decoying,” was the quick interruption. “Sarasvati went, I believe, of her own free will. You do not believe me?” The Professor came across the room, and faced the younger man in an outbreak of passion. “You saw her daily, and you do not know what you you and your narrowhearted, blind, bigoted people have done? But I knew, though I saw her face only for an instant,

and when I saw Rama Pal I knew that his opportunity had come. Her heart was broken, David Hurst, and you you haf broken it!”

For an instant Hurst’s brows contracted, then he saw something in the blazing eyes which caused him to turn away, disarmed, silenced by a grief as bitter as his own. Heilig shrugged his shoulders.

“Why, yes I lufed her,” he said simply, and with a sudden gentleness. “Why not? In a sense she was my child. I found her I grew to luf her as the most divine thing in my life. I would haf given my life for her if it would haf helped. I am an old man but old men haf their dreams. I trusted my most lovely one to you, and you haf destroyed her. Perhaps I was wrong to blame you what we call civilisation is too strong for most of us and now is no time for reproach. I haf told you that Sarasvati’s heart was broken. That was as a weapon in your enemy’s hand, David. But there was something else something worse.” He hesitated, and then added, slowly and distinctly: “Sarasvati was not your wife, and she knew it.”

“Heilig, are you mad?”

“Intolerably sane, David. Your marriage was invalid.”

“Father Romney married us,” Hurst exclaimed proudly. “In the eyes of God—”

The Professor stamped in a sudden fit of rage.

“Cant, cant, David! Do you think people care what God thinks of marriage? If they did, many an unhappy woman whom they have cast out in disgrace would call herself * wife.’ No, no, the world is against you. At the present moment, no doubt, Kolruna is discussing legalities in general your marriage in particular. A visiting Roman Catholic Bishop started it. He had heard rumours of the affair, and made investigations. As a result, Father Romney has been suspended.”

“In pity’s name why?”

“Because he performed a ceremony that in the eyes of his church was illegal. You were both doubtful converts. You had no proper witnesses. I did not count I am a heathen. It’s no use cursing at facts, David. When you go to a firm, you haf to let them manage your business in their own way. We were all a little mad that night, David a little outside ourselves, as the saying goes. Your enthusiasm swept

us off our feet. And afterwards well, it never occurred to us to think about it; it would have seemed sacrilegious to have doubted anything so sacred.”

He stopped a moment. Hurst was staring sightlessly out on to the rain-swept street. Sarasvati’s last words recurred to him with a double tragic significance. “I have forgiven,” she had said, and had gone from him believing in her own dishonour and in his. He turned quietly to his companion.

“Well?” he said.

Heilig repeated his impatient shrug.

“When we realised what had been done I came post-haste to England. I hoped to reach you before the scandal, so that you could put things straight. I was too slow. Rama Pal must have heard, and used his knowledge for his own purposes.”

“What is his purpose?” in the same level tone.

Heilig came across the room, and caught the younger man by the arm.

“Do you not remember the first evening we met, David? We saw him then the pious Hindu convert at the head of his band, and I told you that he was a devil, and one day would set his torch to the powder. That day has come. The mine of religious fanaticism is prepared, and by the word of Sarasvati, the daughter of Brahma, it shall be lighted. Before another month all India will be ablaze. I know, I have seen. I have been down in the secret vaults beneath the temple. I have seen arms piled upon arms. I have warned the Government, but I know not if they have listened to me. If indeed the daughter of Brahma should return to the temple Kolruna at least, will be lost.”

Hurst threw up his head. He had thought of Diana on her way already of his mother. The primitive forces of his nature were awake. Despair was forgotten in a thirst for action.

“Every port in England and in India must be informed,” he said between his teeth. “We shall stop them it is impossible that they should get through.”

“You underestimate, like all your race,” Heilig retorted. “Rama Pal is well served, and he will not take the ordinary route. No doubt you are right no stone must be left unturned but—”

Hurst crossed the room and rang the bell.

“I shall start overland for India to-night,” he said. “I may be able to catch the boat at Marseilles. Whatever happens, I must be with them. If I could see her, only for a moment—” He stopped, deep in thought. Heilig shook his head.

“Much good you will do. *Trotzkopf I*” he muttered, “she is lost to you.”

“Lost to me? She is my wife yes, in my eyes my wife, Heilig, and I loved her, and, in spite of all, she loved me to the end. I shall win her back, Heilig. India those dear to me my own honour are at stake.”

For the first time Heilig’s grim face softened with the old friendship.

“I am glad, David. I was afraid I am ashamed now of my own fears. I will come with you. We will do what we can; but I know too much to hope much.”

“You know!” Hurst exclaimed half impatiently. “You surmise you can prove nothing.”

Heilig’s brows knitted themselves.

“Perhaps not. But I haf a fancy to you a strange fancy a superstition call it. May I see your son?”

With a brief nod Hurst led the way out of the room. His mind, working in a fever of impatience, had carried him already far into a future of swift, decided action, and his eyes, blinded to the present by troubled visions of what was to come, saw at first no change in the quiet, pitiful little figure lying amidst the flowers. Heilig bent down, and, with a tender hand, pushed aside the stray blossoms from the baby forehead. Then a low exclamation broke from him.

“A surmise!” he said; ” more than that, David! Look the mark of Vishnu! I was right the daughter of Brahma has gone back to her temple Sarasvati is lost to you and to us for ever.”

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH HISTORY THREATENS TO REPEAT ITSELF

IN Kolruna there was a great silence. The cheery drums and pipes of the regimental band were still, no light woman's laughter came down with the slowmoving air, and Death, travelling under the grim name of Cholera, alone danced at nightfall in the shadows of the empty gardens.

It was near four o'clock on the third day of the outbreak. A blinding, sickening heat laden with pestilence still hung like a cloud over the station, and the sound of footsteps on the deserted street brought one or two hollow, terror-stricken faces to the doors of the native hovels.

"The Lord Sahib has drunk of the vine," an old shrivelled Sudra woman whispered to her son. "Let not his denied shadow fall upon thee, else shall the curse come to us." And they shrank back further into the filth and darkness of their home.

The judge went on his way. He reeled, lurching from side to side, and keeping to the centre of the road more apparently by instinct than with any clear intention. He was not a pretty object. He had not grown thinner, but his flesh hung loosely about his heavy frame, and his face was purple and blotchedlooking. Even his clothes, once so immaculate, had gone the way of ruin. They were tattered and dirty, and the high boots whose lustre had been the pride of his leisure years were caked with a week's dust. But in spite of it all he swaggered a little as he saw the dark faces of his watchers; he pulled himself upright and readjusted his helmet and retained a certain wavering dignity until he reached the Chichester bungalow. There, having negotiated the half a dozen steps which led on to the balcony, he collapsed on to the wicker lounge. Attracted by his hoarse breathing, Diana Chichester came out of the drawing-room. The strain of anxiety and physical hardship had already begun to leave its impress on her features, but compared to the man before her she looked splendidly well and vigorous. The judge nodded at her.

"Nice afternoon, Di," he said with sarcastic cheerfulness. "I've just strolled over to ask if you'd extend your hospitality to Mrs. Hurst. She's knocked up, and her servants have left her in the lurch. As she has stuck to the station through thick

and thin I thought you'd do the neighbourly."

Diana passed her hand over her fair hair.

"Of course," she said. "How is she coming?"

"My Sarah Jane is making a last journey with her," the judge returned. "Sarah Jane, being more like a clothes-horse than a genuine quadruped, I thought it kinder not to overburden her. After this last service she will receive the reward of a gentle quietus." He patted his hip-pocket significantly. "What's the latest, Di" "he then asked. "How are things going?"

"Badly," she answered. "There are a hundred men down, and the whole regiment ought to be in quarantine; but of course we can . do nothing. It's certain that we're in for trouble again. No train arrived from Asra this morning, and father believes the lines have been pulled up. He has just sent Hatherway down to telegraph." "Humph." The judge looked up at her with a faint twinkle of his eye. "It's a good thing most of the pretty ladies have gone up to the hills, isn't it? Don't you wish you'd stopped in merry England, Di?"

"No. I'm thankful for action. Besides, what would my mother have done?"

"That's true. Who's helping her?"

"Every one Father Romney and Mr. Eliot chiefly. They work together like brothers. Father Romney knows almost as much about cholera as Dr. Helstone himself, and Mr. Eliot is getting quite thin in his apprenticeship." A faint smile crept into her steady grey eyes. "It's funny what a little difference creed makes when it comes to a common danger."

The judge pushed back his helmet and mopped himself.

"Not so funny after all, Di. * Grattez le Russe, et vous trouverez le Tartare,' as our French friends say, and I venture to paraphrase ' Grattez la religion, et vous trouverez l'homme.' I hope I am talking sense, but in this heat one can hardly be sure even of one's brains. Ah I hear Sarah Jane's footsteps." He rose with almost youthful alacrity and had reached the bottom of the verandah steps before the shabby buggy and the emaciated horse had come to a standstill. He held out an unsteady hand to Mrs. Hurst, who, taking it, descended slowly and with difficulty from her seat. Diana, who had not seen her since her return, was

horrified by the change which the last few months had wrought in the once beautiful woman. The beauty had gone, and the one feature which linked her with the past was the unconquerable resolution which burnt out of the sombre eyes. She accepted Diana's welcome with a grave courtesy.

"It is good of you to have me," she said. "My servants have left me, and, but for your hospitality, I should be in danger of starvation."

She followed Diana into the drawing-room, motioning the judge to remain behind, and for a moment the two women studied each other in silence. There was a long-standing feud between them, but, face to face with this indomitable pride, Diana forgot her own bitterness in a generous admiration. She drew forward a comfortable chair.

"You must sit down and rest, Mrs. Hurst," she said gently. "I'm afraid we haven't much to offer, but you must look upon this as your home as long as as this trouble lasts. Mother will be round shortly, but just now she is in the hospital."

Mrs. Hurst sank down with an irrepressible sigh of relief.

"I thank you," she said. She was silent for a little while, drumming with her fingers on the table next her, her eyes fixed ahead, then she glanced up sharply. "I understand that you saw a good deal of David when you were in England?" she said.

"Yes I stayed with them until their son was born."

"Then—" She hesitated, openly struggling with herself. "Then you will know if it's true that David—my son—is doing as well as is reported. He is very silent about himself."

"David has already made his name," Diana answered coldly. She offered no further information. Whatever revengefulness she had in her character took pleasure in seeing this woman beg for that which she would have once despised.

Mrs. Hurst seemed to understand her companion's silence, for she smiled faintly.

"No doubt you have heard rumours concerning his marriage?" she went on. "Do you believe what some people say? namely, that he knew?"

“Whoever believes David capable of a vile, dishonourable action is a fool,” Diana returned hotly; and then realised that she had been out-manoeuvred.

Mrs. Hurst leant back. The smile on the colourless face had deepened with a genuine touch of humour.

“I am glad you say so,” she said. “I did not want to believe my son dishonourable, and you know him better than I do.” She held out her hand. “I have been very angry with you, Diana—unreasonably angry because you were too good for David, and reasonably angry because you sided with him in what I considered his disgrace. I have grown to see that I have misjudged you both. I shall not be able to tell David so it is not likely, as you must be aware, that many of us will come out of this alive but I should be glad if if—”

“—if I would accept your forgiveness?” Diana suggested.

The two women looked each other in the eyes. Mrs. Hurst’s suffering mouth twitched.

“I think that is about what I mean,” she said with imperturbable gravity. “And now, if you have no objection, I should be glad of something to drink. Judge!”

The massive figure hunched on the verandah chair immediately rose and lumbered heavily into the room.

“I want a glass of water, Judge,” she commanded. “Fresh water not that brackish stuff which has been making a wreck of me. And don’t try to make me drink anything else. I am tired to death of champagne and lime juices and other civilised compounds. In illness one turns to a primitive state, and requires primitive nourishment.” She spoke with a faint querulousness which was new to her, and betrayed, more than her white face, how profoundly her strength was undermined.

The judge rubbed his hands.

“Water?” he said. “Why, that’s modest enough. Where is the supply, Diana?”

Diana followed him to the door. Her face had grown very grave.

“I think you must go round to father’s office,” she said in an undertone. “There

is some trouble about the water. Father will tell you. Do what you can. I think it is more than a wish she is very ill.”

The judge glanced over his shoulder at the half recumbent figure.

“Yes I’ll do what I can,” he said. “Look after her, Di.”

He found Colonel Chichester, in his shirtsleeves, engaged in making out a map. The little soldier looked up, started as he saw his visitor’s face, and then resumed his occupation.

“You’ve come at a nice time, Judge,” he grunted. “I’ve just heard that the telegraph-wires are cut. Can’t get a word through to Asra or anywhere else. ‘Pon my word, after twenty years of these little incidents, one gets rather fed up with them. Now, what the devil is to be done?”

“I don’t know,” the judge retorted cheerfully. “I’m not a fighting man. Tell me where you keep your family water-butt, Chichester, there’s a good fellow. I want a glass.”

The colonel showed his teeth in something like a snarl.

14 You want a glass, do you? Well, you can have a glass and all the damned whisky in the house, but you don’t get any water, my son. I’ve measured the stuff, and, doling it out at a pint per head, we’ve enough for the next three days. Run along and think that over.”

The judge rubbed his chin.

“I am thinking it over. What about the river? Has it dried up in the night?”

“Possibly, I can’t say, and it doesn’t matter much. We’re cut off, my optimistic water-seeker. There are a few hundred armed devils squatting on their heels between us and the river, and I haven’t more than a hundred men whom I could spare to make the attempt to get through. The Bazaar is restless, and if the Bazaar breaks out we shall have hot work. So there is nothing for it but to sit tight and hope that the Powers that be have listened to old Heilig’s warnings. If you want any more information you’ll find Hatherway in the compound somewhere peeling potatoes.”

“Thanks.” The judge rocked thoughtfully on his heels. “I suppose there are no advances made in your water-corner, are there? I mean if I offered a spoonful’s interest could I have my to-morrow’s portion now?”

“No, you couldn’t. There’s many a poor devil shrieking for water out there in the hospital, and a law isn’t made to be broken.”

“Not even for a lady?”

“What lady?”

“Mrs. Hurst is here. She is asking for water.”

Colonel Chichester began to sharpen his pencil.

“Tell her it’s a matter of life and death,” he said quietly. “She comes of a fighting stock. She won’t ask for water again.”

“H’m, that’s true.”

The judge considered a moment. Then he made his way round to the servants’ quarters. They were deserted. Under the shade of a peepul-tree he found Hatherway, also in shirtsleeves and Mrs. Chichester in an enormous apron. Both looked up Mrs. Chichester with her vaguely cheerful smile.

“All our servants have gone,” she said. “They say we have the evil eye or something, and so we have to look after ourselves. It’s quite amusing. I’ve never peeled a potato before.”

“And you’re not peeling one now,” Hatherway put in with a gay laugh. “You are merely committing a brutal assault. Anything I can do for you, Judge?”

“Thanks eh yes. I’m on the look out for an empty bottle or, in fact, anything water-tight. Can you give me an idea where such a commodity is to be found?”

“Try in the shed over there.”

“Thanks.”

The judge came back after five minutes, an empty champagne -bottle stuck out

of each side-pocket, and he was smiling a little as though at some grim joke of his own.

“Coming to help?” Mrs. Chichester asked, interrupting the valse which she had been crooning softly to herself.

“Sorry, Mrs. Chichester; I am going for a little stroll. When I come back I shall endeavour to make myself useful. By the way, my son of Mars, if I shouldn’t happen to turn up again in the next few hours you might put a spare bullet through Sarah Jane’s head, would you? She’s on her last legs, poor soul, and I shouldn’t like her end to be more uncomfortable than necessary.”

Hatherway glanced up from his potato-peeling. His sunburnt, somewhat haggard face had lost its gaiety. The two men looked each other steadily in the eyes.

“I won’t forget,” Hatherway said, and then added, in a lower tone: “It is possible that I may be going for a stroll myself some day soon. We may meet.” “Better luck! Good-bye, Mrs. Chichester.”

The last thing he heard was Mrs. Chichester’s voice humming a refrain from the latest operetta. He looked back, and, seeing that Hatherway was watching him, he waved his hand and then set off briskly down the high-road.

The great heat of the day was broken, and he walked more easily, with something of his old buoyancy. The native bazaar was deserted, and he skirted round by the station, running into a little party of returning railway officials. They saluted him with the cheerful confidence which his inexhaustible goodnature had won from every class of Englishman.

“Heard the latest?” one man called. “Lines torn up for a mile, wires cut, water-supply cut, cholera rampant, and a rumpus of the old-fashioned type ahead. What price next year’s leave, eh?”

“All in the day’s work,” said the judge, and passed on.

They looked after him and the spokesman shook his head.

“Has a nasty colour,” he said. “Heart, I suppose. I wonder what the devil has kept him in this hole so long?”

The only man who could have answered the question went on his way, undeterred by the fact that he had passed the outskirts of Kolruna. He was now quite alone in the enemy's land, and beyond the protection of his own people. Like a speck against the brightness of the evening sky, he saw the solitary sentinel who watched the high-road leading to Asra; but the man had not noticed him, and he took the opportunity offered by the undulating land to drop quickly out of sight. A quarter of a mile farther on he reached the narrow irrigation canal which in better days helped to supply Kolruna with water from the river. It was now empty.

The judge peered cautiously round. It was now close on nightfall. The hills stood out black against the pale emerald sky, rising like a shadow above the fringe of forest which separated Kolruna from the river, and a sound of wailing, chanting voices drifted down on the faint breeze. The judge calculated, then slid down to the bed of the canal. Here it was night. Looking up, he could see the stars breaking through the quivering veil of heat. He turned river wards. The thick clammy mud rose above his ankles, and after the first dozen yards he had to ease his hoarse, broken breathing. After that he went on with a tenacious steadiness. The voices had grown louder, throwing a mysterious charm over the evening, and one or two words came distinctly to the listener's ears.

“Sarasvati, daughter of Heaven!”

To a man less intent on his purpose there would have been something terrifying in the repressed passion of the appeal, but the judge had ceased to notice even the laboured beating of his own heart. The walls of the canal dipped slightly, and against the light he had seen the upright figure of a native. The man was armed, and he stood with his face lifted to the hills as though waiting some signal. The judge measured his distance then sprang forward. He was big and heavily built, and the attack was unexpected. Beyond one half-uttered groan and the dull thud of a falling body there was no sound, and the judge did not loosen his grip of the slender brown throat until a convulsive movement, followed by a relaxation of the straining muscles, told him that he had no more to fear. After that he crawled on his hands and knees. His progress was slow, and once, overcome by faintness, he fell forward with his face in the mud. The sheer horror of the thing revived him, and, with an irrepressible grunt of disgust, he pushed on.

Five minutes' persistent effort brought him within bearing of the water, and the last few yards were done at a record speed. Groaning, half unconscious, but still

upheld by his purpose the judge stumbled against the rough dam which cut off the canal from the river, and, with a heave lifted himself on the other side. There he collapsed. The water at the edge was not more than a few inches deep, and the cool moisture flowing against his wrists brought him to his senses.

Mechanically, beating back weakness by pure strength of will, he filled his two bottles, corked them, and placed them back in his pockets. Then he tried to rise. But there is a limit even to the human will, and the judge dropped back with a groan of agony.

“Done done at the winning-post too, by God!” he muttered and lay still.

Presently he lifted his face to the sky. The stars were out in their full brilliancy, and he watched, half fascinated, a sardonic little smile about his open mouth.

“A condemned man gets a last wish granted,” he whispered thickly. “Lord God get me back with these infernal bottles give me a last sight of her for—”

His head rolled over on one shoulder. For what might have been an eternity blackness encompassed him, thinning at last into a mist through which he heard the lapping of the water against the mud-banks. He listened to it with the intentness of a man striving to concentrate his wandering thoughts, and then, suddenly, with a jerk, he pulled himself up. Something had broken the monotony of sound a steady swish growing rapidly nearer, a low, quick breathing. Guided by the instinct of self-preservation the judge crouched down against the dam and a moment after two shadows rose out of the water and came walking towards the bank. The judge watched them, petrified, less by fear as by a wild, reasonless expectation of some coming wonder. A low English oath fell on his sharpened ears, and he bent forward.

“Who’s there?” he whispered.

“Hurst who’s there?”

“Hamilton Judge Hamilton merciful God David!”

He tried to rise, but lost his footing, and stumbled into Hurst’s arms. For a moment no one spoke. Heilig was leaning panting against the dam, his eyes turned to the hills, his hands instinctively endeavouring to press the water out of his sodden clothes.

“David what the devil are you doing here?” the judge muttered. “You fool you perfect young fool to come into this mare’s nest.”

“Never mind about that. You’ll know later why I’ve come. Our train was stopped at Asra the place is surrounded, and the Professor and Iran the gauntlet per boat. We had to swim the last mile for safety’s sake. Are we too late? what are you doing here?”

The judge understood the fear which underlay the question. He gave a low, broken chuckle.

“They’re all right all right,” he whispered. “I’m not a survivor, David. I’m t’other thing. You cut along the canal, my son. You’ll find a nigger half way, but he won’t bother you. I squeezed the life out of him half an hour ago. And, look here give these these confounded bottles to Mrs. Hurst, will you? Tell her no no don’t tell her anything just cut

I’m done David my son—”

“Don’t be a fool, Judge! You don’t think we’re going to leave you? Put your arm over my shoulder. We’ll get along somehow, and if we don’t—” He stopped. The chanting had broken off, and a loud, piercing cry rang through the stillness. The three men looked at each other.

“Sarasvati Sarasvati daughter of Brahma!”

Victorious, palpitating with a frenzied joy, the call was taken up and repeated till it lost itself like an echo in the far distance. Heilig pointed to the hills. A red star had burnt close to the summits.

“We haf no moment to lose,” he said in a rough whisper. “The fires in the temple are alight Sarasvati has returned. In another hour it will be too late. Come!”

The judge made no further resistance. He did not understand a kind of blur had settled on his mind but he had become endowed with an unnatural strength. He allowed himself to be half dragged, half lifted over the dam, and in silence the three men started on the road back to Kolruna.

CHAPTER VII

HARVEST

“WALTER Walter! “Mrs. Hurst started, and looked about the dark quiet room, then sank back among her pillows. “I thought I heard some one calling,” she said wearily. “Did you not hear it, Diana?”

“You were speaking in your sleep,” Diana answered. “You must have heard your own voice.”

“Probably. I have been dreaming a good deal of my husband. The circumstances recall his memory. He was killed on just such a night. In India the accidents of life and death repeat themselves like the turning of a wheel. But the morning after my husband’s death David was born, and I shall not see David again.”

Diana turned from the verandah, where she had been watching the shadows deepen over the valley. She thought she had heard a note of regret in the quiet voice, but the years had hardened, not softened the proud heart. Mrs. Hurst’s face was composed and gravely satisfied.

“I am glad I did not pander to David’s sentimentality,” she went on, as though divining Diana’s thought. “I have made him a man and now I am proud of him. Tell him so.”

“I shall not see him again.”

Mrs. Hurst turned her white, sunken face to her companion. “You are so sure that this is our last night? Well, you are right to be prepared. Still, there is always hope—”

“In any case, I shall not see David again.”

The keen eyes narrowed.

“I understand. I am sorry. It was my great wish. But characters that develop too late are usually unfortunate. Ah, did you hear that cry?”

Diana nodded. Involuntarily her hands clenched themselves, and she turned to the window, obeying the instinct which compels us to face danger.

“What is it?” she asked quietly.

“A signal no doubt. Give me my revolver out of the drawer there. I am against giving these people the satisfaction of killing a European. You see it is double loaded. I will leave the second ‘bullet for you if you like.”

“Thank you.”

Some minutes passed in silence. Then the curtains were pushed quietly on one side and Mr. Eliot entered. He looked questioningly at Diana, and, answering to her nod, he drew near the extemporary couch. The last few days had changed him more than all the years of his life. Self-satisfied, self-sufficient, and dogmatic as he had been, he was but a shadow of his former self. His proud, pompous bearing and insufferable righteousness had been broken, and his small, redrimmed eyes were those of a man who has seen the most terrible of all things the vision of his own soul.

“Colonel Chichester sent me to you,” he said in an undertone. “The Bazaar has broken out, and no one knows whether they will attack us direct, or join the rebels outside. In the latter case Colonel Chichester means to let them through, but you must be ready to move over to the barracks at any time. The other civilians are there already. You are not safe here.”

Mrs. Hurst assented with a slightly impatient movement.

“If we are not safe here we are not safe anywhere,” she said. “How are the patients?”

“Ten more cases.” He hesitated, then added slowly: “Father Romney is stricken.”

Diana uttered an exclamation of genuine grief, and the missionary nodded.

“We have little hope,” he said. “He has used all his strength in the service of others. He dies as a martyr. He has given me his crucifix. He asks me to give you all his blessing.” He spoke in quick, disjointed sentences, as though he were out of breath, and the heavy red hands trembled. Mrs. Hurst bowed her head.

“I thank you,” she said. “If I believed in nothing else, I should believe in the blessing of a brave man. Is there any news?”

“Judge Hamilton is missing.”

“Ah! “The exclamation expressed neither surprise nor distress. Mrs. Hurst pulled herself up higher, and the still beautiful white hand caressed the butt of her revolver. “I hear talking in the colonel’s room,” she said suddenly, with a complete change of tone. “Who is it?”

“Some message from the outposts,” Diana suggested. “I know the voice —” Then she stopped, and the two women looked at each other.

“Go and see!” Mrs. Hurst commanded.

But Diana, obeying her own instinct rather than the imperious order, had not half crossed the room before the curtains were pulled sharply on one side, admitting a man dressed in the rough garments of a Sudra, who stared at her through the part darkness. “Diana!” he said in an undertone.

She made a mechanical gesture towards the couch.

“Mrs. Hurst is there,” she jerked out.

“Thank you.”

He came forward and the light fell on his face. The black, disordered hair and dark features harmonised so perfectly with his dress that the missionary, with a smothered cry of alarm, sprang in front of Mrs. Hurst as though to shield her. Mrs. Hurst motioned him on one side. Her eyes were bright, she looked at the newcomer unsmilingly, but for that brief moment she had regained her youth.

“Well, David * ” she said. She held out her hand and he caught it and held it for a moment and then kissed it. “We thought you were in England, improving English politics,” she added lightly.

“Heilig and I have just arrived from Asra,” he answered. “We had to swim the last part. I just came in to see you before I went on.”

“Where?”

“To the temple.” He spoke as she had spoken as though his appearance had been the most ordinary thing in the world, and his future movements of the slightest possible import.

Mr. Eliot struck the first note of alarm.

“It is impossible!” he blurted out. “We are surrounded, and in any case the temple will be a deathtrap.”

Hurst pointed out into the darkness.

“Do you hear what they are chanting over there?” he said. ” ‘ The daughter of Brahma is in her Temple.’ Sarasvati, my wife ” and here he laid a stern stress on the word ” was decoyed from me in London by a convert of yours, one Rama Pal. Our child had died, and he used the cruel scandal connected with our marriage to win her. We followed him to Calcutta, but there lost trace of them. Unless unless a miracle happens, she will be used as a kind of religious inspiration for a fresh outbreak. Not only Kolruna and Asra are in danger. If Kolruna falls all India will be alight. Thanks to Heilig, the authorities are warned, and the ringleaders have been arrested in London; but, once started, the trouble will be no less desperate and bloody.”

There was a brief silence. Mr. Eliot’s flaccid face was livid not wholly with fear. He was remembering an incident fourteen years before, when he derided the temple and its goddess as myths and patronised the dark, ugly boy as a fantastic liar. The man’s selferected edifice was crumbling fast. Mrs. Hurst bent a little forward, and her eyes held her son’s with their victorious confidence.

“You will prevent it?” she said quietly.

“I shall do my best, mother.”

“Then you must not waste time. Good-bye.” She put her arms round his neck and kissed him for the first time since his marriage. “You are like your father, David,” she went on. They were her last words to him, but they bridged the gulf of years. He stood and looked at her a moment, grim, resolute, yet with an expression in his eyes that she remembered, then turned and limped to the door.

“Good-bye, Diana,” he said. Her hand held the curtain as though to prevent him from passing, but he saw that it trembled. He smiled at her, the onesided, half

wistful smile of the old days. "I think it's more than a mere form to-night," he said.

She gave him her hand then, and he held it silently.

"Is it only to save us?" she asked, scarcely above a whisper. "Why do you ask?"

"Because then it would be a useless sacrifice of life. You can do nothing."

"I believe I can."

"I shall not let you run the risk." She met his frowning eyes with quiet resolution. "I have that right. I, at least, have no ambition to satisfy."

"There is another reason," he said. He freed his hand, and on the fourth finger she saw the dull gleam of a ring. "Sarasvati left that behind," he went on. "I am going to give it back to her. She sacrificed faith and happiness and people to follow me, and she believes I have betrayed her. You understand at whatever cost I must give it back?"

"Yes I understand."

"If I fail I shall not return," he went on rapidly. "In that case trust yourself to Hatherway."

He had her hand again now, and her eyes answered him.

"I too shall go my own way to the end, David."

"I know you are brave."

"I am trying to be worthy of your faith in me."

He hesitated.

"If only I were more sure of things I would say, ' God keep you! '"

"Say it, David. One day we shall be sure. And I know all that you mean."

"God keep you, then."

He was gone. She groped across the room to the verandah and stood there staring out into the darkness. A red fire burnt from the summit of the hills. It seemed to her the warning signal of the Death that the lonely man had gone to meet, and she too faced it steadily, her hands folded on the verandah rail, her face lifted to the sky. But no prayer passed her lips.

Hers was too strong a nature to change faith in the hour of danger. Nevertheless, that night, guided by her own love, Diana Chichester, the sceptic, set out on the true quest of God.

Behind her in the little room all was quiet. Mr. Eliot had gone back to his duty, and Mrs. Hurst sat huddled amongst her pillows, her gaze fixed ahead as though she saw something only visible to herself. There was a little arrogant smile about the thin, tightly compressed lips and the eyes under the black brows were keen and vigilant, denying all knowledge of the coming shadow. Presently, when the curtains moved again, she drew herself up with a stern mustering of her strength.

“Judge?” she said, half questioningly, half angrily.

He came lurching across the room, a bottle in one hand, a tray with a glass in the other. His clothes were saturated with mud that had resisted all attempts at removal, but his hands were scrupulously clean.

“Sorry, Jean,” he said. “Chichester Mrs. Chichester told me you wouldn’t mind old friend and unusual circumstances. Must celebrate dear old David’s return you know. Brought you the water you asked for a bit late, Jean always a bit late, eh? But it’s good, fresh water.” He poured out a glassful, spilling some on the floor, and she watched him with frowning impatience.

“Give it to the others,” she said. “I don’t want it.”

The hand with the glass wavered.

“You don’t want it Jean?”

“I mean I don’t need it as badly as the others. I have not long to live. It was only a whim of mine.*”

“Ah a whim.” He leant against the foot of the couch, watching her with a curious, twisted smile on his blotched face. “I tell you what, Jean,” he began

thickly. “You don’t need to think of the others. You’re not taking it from them. It’s my property and a little present to you, so to speak. Drink a little just to please me.”

Suddenly her expression changed.

“You went down to the river?” she said, under her breath.

“What? River? Yes, nice stroll. Nice cool evening—”

“Don’t lie to me, Geoffrey! Give me that glass!”

He obeyed, and she drank avidly. When she looked at him again he had dropped down on the edge of the couch.

“It’s good water,” she said. “I feel better.”

“That’s first class.” The light that dawned over his face made him seem almost young. “First class, Jean after thirty-two years to have been of use that’s something to be grateful for eh—”

She caught his arm.

“Geoffrey, what is it?”

He had slipped slowly to his knees his hand groped over the sheet.

“Nothing dear nothing at all une petite affaire du c&ur, as our French friends say it happens in the best families—”

“Geoffrey! “She took his face between her hands and forced him to look at her. “Geoffrey you’re not going to leave me—I wanted you to see me through, old friend—”

Again the same radiance fainter this time.

“My dear I wish I could I’d go with you. The spirit’s willing but the the flesh infernally weak—”

He tried to smile. Then his head dropped heavily forward, and there was silence.

When Diana turned back from the verandah she saw that Jean Hurst slept. One hand rested on the shoulder of the man huddled on the floor beside her, the other gripped the butt of the revolver. Her brows were knitted, and the white, noble head was thrown slightly back, as though in defiance of an unseen enemy.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DAUGHTER OF BRAHMA

“SARASVATI! SARASVATI!”

The cry, following on a long silence, released the restless, tossing hordes in the Bazaar from a restraining spell. Narrow, filthy streets belched out a lavastream of maddened humanity which swept across the valley, crushing aside every obstacle, trampling underfoot those who for a moment stumbled in the headlong race. Unarmed, half-naked, and strewn with ash and mire, the inspired yogis led their demon army towards the beacon which burnt upon the Temple Hill. They danced ahead, weird, fantastic figures in the ghastly luminousness of the Indian night, their matted hair streaming out over their shoulders, their thin arms raised aloft as though in constant malediction. Intermittently a scream went up into the night and a clanging gong beat out a monotonous rhythmic music to the procession's headlong progress.

Midway across the valley, there where a narrow bridge traversed the river, Hurst awaited the onrush. From where he stood he could see the lights of Kolruna, He picked out the colonel's bungalow, and the room in which he had bidden Diana Chichester a last farewell. His fancy, strangely calm in that moment, pictured her again as she had stood defiantly against the curtain then a black flood swept over the vision of her face, and, throwing up his arms, he was swung round and caught like a straw in the vortex of a whirlpool. For one agonising moment of suspense he felt his senses waver. The nauseating stench, the terrific impetus of the force which held him in its clutches, shook his strength and seemed to thrust him down into a bottomless abyss. Automatically he gripped his neighbour's shoulder. The man turned and struck out with a blind fury. Hurst felt the sting of the blow as it grazed his forehead, and the pain was a strong intoxicating wine to his reeling senses. He regained his footing, and his clenched fist fell like a sledge-hammer on the distorted face. Without a sound the man went under, and the tide swept on mercilessly in its course.

After that Hurst's consciousness passed into a mere instinct of self-preservation. His very purpose, highfixed as it was, lost its clearness in that raging storm of fanaticism. Time and distance sank into the general chaos. He was dimly aware

of old landmarks, familiar and linked with a hundred tender and terrible memories. Then the dense jungle growth of the secret path closed over all, shutting out the distant peace of the stars, charging the atmosphere with foetid, suffocating heat. At intervals a torch, held aloft by some gaunt, fleshless arm, threw a streak of unsteady light down the serried lines and faces, frantic with hysterical ecstasy, starting for a moment out of the darkness like illuminated glimpses of a delirious nightmare.

Hurst fought like the rest. That madness which transforms a crowd of ordinary individuals to a single devil, animated with a devil's spirit, was in his blood, and goaded him to a superhuman effort. Others fell in that struggle, and their stifled screams mingled with the monotonous droning chant of the yogis, but he pressed on, resolutely, savagely, holding to his course, indifferent alike to his own sufferings and the sufferings of those who fought beside him.

“Sarasvati! Sarasvati!”

The cry came down the narrow cutting like a gust of wind and Hurst unconsciously repeated it. Here in this hell the name became a curse, conveying nothing to him but the idea of a diabolical force directed against his race and against civilisation. The dreaming woman among her lotusflowers was the personification of a blood-thirsty heathenism of a religion replete with hideous cruelty and his purpose, all that had been, sank beneath the waves of a stern hatred.

Then suddenly the darkness passed. A great, involuntary sigh burst from the stifled breasts, and, looking up, Hurst saw that the stars were once more above them. And in that instant the veil of passion was lifted from his soul. Beneath that great vault of heaven, in sight of that infinity which is beyond comprehension, the desperate, ruthless struggle of the last hour became a tragic symbol. Through a tangled jungle of falsehood, bigotry, and folly, a poor humanity fought its way upwards towards God, killing and hating, only to find at the summit of their Pisgah the unfathomable mystery of the stars. And many had fallen by the wayside, many had suffered to no purpose. The ruins of a great temple rose up in stern reminder of time's passage and the finiteness of man's knowledge. The stones of the courtyard were worn away by worshippers who had passed, with their faith, into the shadows of forgotten things and in the distance new faiths, new creeds rolled on to the same end.

A momentary hush had fallen on the tumultuous crowd. Like a boiling torrent that has been freed suddenly from its rocky boundary, the pilgrims had spread out over the brow of the hill, swerving together again as they passed through the mighty Gopura, and in the solemn majesty of the night even the chant of the yogis had died to silence. Hurst came on slowly. His strength, born in the heat of battle, forsook him now and his heart beat faster with an emotion which was half-painful, half-joyous. It seemed to him that, with that sudden change from the blackness of the jungle to this holy twilight, a miracle had taken place in his own life. He was not the man who had wrested success from an unwilling fortune. He was not the man who had sacrificed a Dream to an ambition. He was David Hurst, the outcaste, who came now to see, for the last time, the hidden treasure of his own soul. He passed beneath the arch of the Gopura. Before him lay the slumbering silver surface of the sacred pool, and in the midst the red reflection of the beacon which burnt from the highest pillar gleamed out of the water.

The multitude had poured down towards the sanctuary, and Hurst followed without resistance, knowing that now fate alone had hold upon the threads of the future. The doors of the sanctuary stood open. Those who went in came not out again, and, armed with Heilig's knowledge, Hurst felt no wonder. He allowed himself to be caught once more in the mighty stream which, narrowing as it reached the low building, poured through with irresistible force. Then Hurst saw with his own eyes. The stone floor had disappeared, and massive stone steps led down into the sombre depths.

“Sarasvati! Sarasvati!”

The shout seemed to come from the heart of the earth, and those fighting with grim fanatic tenacity for a place upon the steps caught up the cry and plunged recklessly into the darkness. In the hideous melee of the descent Hurst kept his foothold. Half carried by the crush on either side he passed helplessly over the mangled bodies of those who had fallen beneath the juggernaut of human fury. Their last feeble groans seemed to him louder than the shouting of the multitude, for he was strangely calm now, and the madness had gone out of his blood.

“Sarasvati! Sarasvati!”

The bottom of the steps was reached at last. For a moment Hurst and those in the foremost ranks were swept forward by the onrush from behind, then, as though at some given signal, the swerving, struggling mass dropped to their knees, and a

silence as of death hung in the sultry atmosphere. Half hidden by a pillar against which he had been thrown in the final struggle, Hurst alone remained standing. Dazed, sickened, and half blinded by the blood which trickled from his forehead, he was at first only conscious of a moving, tangible darkness, then, little by little, as his vision cleared, the Buried Temple arose from out of the mist of legend and became an immense reality, a stupendous realisation of his childhood's wildest dreams. Tall, slender pillars, carved with the history of the nine Avatars and lit at their base by the light of innumerable torches, lifted their graceful capitols to the dome which, invisible yet imaginable, shrouded itself in perpetual night. Shadows deepening from violet to the sable hung in the side aisles and hid behind their veil the dimly outlined figures of the temple servants, and down the nave one long flood of delicate light poured from the altar.

All this Hurst saw, though to his knowledge his eyes never left the glittering splendour which rose star-like against the firmament of darkness. Throne or altar he could give it no name. He realised only the figure which sat between the jewelled arms, the dark head, crowned with one string of priceless rubies, resting half proudly, half wearily against the high back of the golden chair. Beneath, a whiterobed priest fed the altar-fires with incense, and a man crouching on the lowest step of the dais hid his face as though in worship.

“The Daughter of Brahma is in her temple!”

The priests' chanting tones vibrated through the silence, and, like an echo thrown back a thousand-fold, the kneeling worshippers took up the triumphant announcement and repeated it till it rose in sonorous waves of passion into the vaulted heights of the temple. Then the tide, checked for a moment, rolled forward and its black waves beat against the altar-steps.

Hurst, shielding his face from the blinding light, looked up. He had fought his way to the foremost rank, and not half a dozen feet separated him from that strange, motionless figure upon the altar. He saw the face and a cry, lost in the tumult, broke from his lips. The divine, flower-like loveliness had gone; gone too were the white robes which had once enclosed her in emblematic purity. The scarlet cloth, encrusted with rubies, which revealed the slender dignity of her frame, the heavy blood-red gems weighing down the hands clasped loosely about the carved arms of the throne, the unsheathed sword glittering at her feet all seemed but a sinister reflection of the eyes which stared out over the heads of the kneeling crowd. Cruelty, devilish, insatiable, yet not without a certain awful

majesty, lay in that sombre, inscrutable gaze. The lips of the once lovely mouth were parted, but no longer in the old tender, breathless longing.

To Hurst's tortured imagination it seemed that the spirit of a dying faith, grand, beautiful in its mystic aspiration, had passed away with the Sarasvati of his dreams, and that with this withered, terrible beauty rose the personification of a soulless devilworship a religion that had lost its hold on God. Better that she should have died better that the flames of her destiny should have carried her to the Nirvana of her prayers, than that she should have become this through him and through his race.

Above him the priest's voice rang out like the full note of an organ.

"Daughter of Heaven, behold thy people. Long have they waited for thee, Sarasvati, and despair has eaten at their courage and bent their necks in Shameful submission. With anguish have they seen thy altar deserted, thy faith rooted out from the heart of their children. Anarchy, faithlessness, discord, have been sown by thy enemies, and no man has risen to hold their hand. But thou hast returned, and the weak arm grows strong, and the fearful heart bold. Speak, Sarasvati! Thou art from Heaven, and thy curse shall destroy the strongest foe, thy blessing shall make the dullest blade sharp as a scythe."

"My curse is on them."

Hurst lifted his head. Motionless, with that same hungry cruelty about the curved mouth, she stared out into the darkness. Pitiless as fate, her voice had sounded in the tense stillness.

"See the sword lies at my feet. Shall it be with the sword?"

"It shall be with the sword."

"In the blood of the oppressors shall the sins of thy people be washed out?"

"In the blood of the oppressors."

"Sarasvati! Sarasvati!"

The tempest of fanatic passion, lulled for a moment by that still, passionless voice, broke out afresh. Hurst felt it rise up behind him like a demonic force, and

his eyes, drawn irresistibly from the living idol, encountered the worshippers who still crouched at the foot of the altar. Hellish in its triumph, its revengeful ecstasy, tragic in its unconscious suffering, Rama Pal's face was raised now to the light. He smiled, but in the sunken eyes there was that prescience of death which is never without its pathos, its terrible appeal. And between his brows was the mark of Vishnu. Hurst sprang to his feet. He tore the disguising turban from his head and leapt on to the first step of the altar.

“Sarasvati! Sarasvati!” he called imperatively, as one crying to a sleeper.
“Sarasvati!”

As a still sombre pool is broken into a hundred lights by the first ray of the rising sun, so the ruthless hatred in the once lovely face broke and passed, changing from the innocent wonder of an awakened child to an immeasurable tenderness. Slowly, as though lifted from a stupor by some power outside herself, she rose, her arms outstretched in a movement of blind seeking, her eyes still turned to the shadows.

“Sarasvati! “Hurst repeated. “Look at me recognise me for the sake of all that was and is between us Sarasvati, my wife—”

He had spoken in English, consciously, purposely. A silence, appalling in its suddenness, had fallen on the paralysed multitude behind him. Rama Pal had also risen, and Hurst felt his presence like an overshadowing destiny. He felt the full significance of the slow, waiting smile which had dawned over the dark features, but he had lost the knowledge of fear. He had weighed the material against the ideal, and the material had been found wanting. The mere facts of life and death had become insignificant. To regain her, to save her from the damnation of a hideous cruelty, to restore to her the treasures of her faith in him and his the divine origin of herself and of all life that alone remained to him as a last and crowning ambition.

“The Lord Sahib has given his life to no purpose,” Rama Pal said gently. “The Daughter of Brahma knows him not.”

Hurst brushed aside the interruption with the decision of a man who knows the very seconds are numbered for him.

“Sarasvati,” he cried in her own tongue, “if I have wronged thee I am ready to bear the punishment. But I have not dishonoured thee. Thou art my wife no man

shall take that from me all I am I am through thy love and mine. Sarasvati, believe! I have given my life that thou shouldst believe.”

Her eyes met his at last. He felt the recognition pass through her like an energising fire. Then suddenly she smiled, no longer with the old, childlike diffidence, but with the majestic tenderness of a woman.

“My beloved—I believe—my beloved—see, the shadows pass—”

In that moment Rama Pal caught up the unsheathed weapon lying at the foot of the altar. Hurst saw the movement, and held out his arms in last appeal.

“Sarasvati take back thy faith—thy divinity— but believe love is more worthy of thee than hate. Daughter of Brahma we also are of God! Shall divine life, struggling back to its source be destroyed by thy hand in thy name?”

“There shall be no life destroyed in my name.” And her voice was full of a gentle wonder.

He knew then that the spell was broken, and that the evil had gone out of her. He turned, and, with a steadfastness free from either hatred or despair, awaited the end. He had witnessed the resurrection for which he had paid the price, and he was content that the end should come. It was an instant of blurred impressions, unconsciously gathered as his last of earth a sea of faces grown suddenly still, a darkness through which death glided down on a silver streak of light. He wondered that it came so easily. He wondered too at the shadow which flitted between him and that narrow, descending flash, and at the scream, shrill with terror and agonised incredulity, which broke the stillness. Then, when the shadow passed, he understood. Death had not come to him.

Sarasvati lay quite quiet, her head thrown back against the topmost step of the altar, one arm flung across her breast as though in an involuntary movement of protection. The string of rubies which had bound her forehead had snapped, and the red stones glittered on the marble like luminous drops of blood. Hurst saw her and the man who knelt beside her as in a hideous fantasy of the brain. He tried to push the kneeling figure on one side, but the finality of all that had come to pass lamed his strength, and a minute after it was too late. Freed from the spell of consternation, the worshippers had wheeled round now, and, panic stricken, fought their way back to the steps. Their sweeping circle brushed the altar and, helpless, half indifferent, Hurst was caught and carried back in the awful debacle

of the return.

“Dead dead the curse is on us! Dead Sarasvati is dead her blood is on the altar!”

The cry reached the distant station. It lingered on till daybreak, like a child’s disconsolate wailing then died into the leaden silence of despair. The day broke very perfectly over the quiet temple. The beacon fires had long since died out, and unruffled peace brooded on the sacred waters of the pool. Over the Gopuras the violet dome softened to the palest sapphire, and from the west golden heralds of the morning rode gaily on the wings of the breeze.

From the island shrine a boat was pushed off and allowed to drift slowly, almost imperceptibly, shorewards. No hand held the dragon-headed rudder, and the oars lay unused in the rowlocks, their slender blades breaking the still mirror of the waters. The man seated in the prow looked back over the widening space to where the shrine’s delicate minaret rose up amidst the reflected shadows of the temple. His chin resting in his hand, he seemed to be unconscious of all things but the scene before him, and long after the keel had grated against the stones he remained motionless, like some statue of Meditation. Then he rose and faced the shore. No surprise or fear showed itself on his impassive features. He waded through the shallow water and confronted the man who awaited him. Silently they measured each other through the twilight which still lingered in the Temple Court.

“We are quite alone,” Hurst said simply. “I have waited for you for three long hours, Rama Pal, and you, perhaps, have waited many years for me let us settle our account now.”

The Hindu raised his hand with a movement of stern dignity, infinite resignation.

“Our account is settled, Lord Sahib. Pass on. My hours are few, and the curse is on me. I have stained my hands in my own blood. If indeed the God of my fathers lives I am thrice damned if not—” he smiled and the smile was very terrible ” then is all life vain.” He raised his hand in solemn farewell to his forehead, and Hurst saw that the sacred mark had been washed away. They looked each other in the eyes. For the last time the subtle tragedy which underlies all life bridged the gulf of hatred, and in silence Rama Pal passed on into the shadows.

Through the increasing brightness David Hurst rowed out over the still waters.

No light burnt out to meet him. All life seemed to have sunk into abeyance. The grating of his boat against the shore sounded loud and harsh in the holy stillness. He passed on slowly, a pale stream of sunshine marking his path, and, as once before in that first meeting, he stood at the shrine's entrance and saw the wonder of the divine dreamer.

The Daughter of Brahma slept. Peacefully, her dark head pillowed on a white heap of fresh lotusblossoms, she lay beneath the shadow of the great idol, and no trace of the darker shadow clouded the serene loveliness which in that hour had been given back to her. David Hurst drew nearer, and, on the lowest step of the altar, knelt. A simple reverence had placed flowers over the stain upon the breast and in the clasped hands. The insignia of that hour of sinister majesty lay upon the altar. In her own beauty alone the Daughter of Brahma had gone forth in the search of God.

Gently David Hurst lifted one frail hand and slipped the ring of their short union back on to the empty finger. It was to him the symbol of a greater unity. The turmoil of life into which he had drawn her had hidden her from him now he saw her as she was, as she would remain to him to the end of time as the mirror of his soul. The ideal had been re won. The Daughter of Brahma was in her temple.

He bent and kissed her. Her lips were faintly parted, no longer in breathless longing, but very peacefully, and that same peace was in his own heart. Grief sank submerged in the recognition of a divine purpose fulfilled. Here, in the heathen temple of the Unknown God, the vain shadows of man's arrogant knowledge vanished, and David Hurst faced God Himself.

“Daughter of Brahma!”

And when he looked at her again, he saw that the sunlight surrounded her in golden majesty.

He rose and turned. A slight sound on the path outside had warned him, and he felt no surprise when he saw Heilig standing on the threshold. The broad shoulders were bowed. In the clear light of the morning the determined face looked old and haggard.

“I thought to find you here,” Heilig said gently. “I took the priest's barge and rowed across. I thought you would forgive me if I, too, came to bid farewell.”

David Hurst nodded, and in silence the two men gazed down upon the quiet sleeper.

“A dream—” Heilig said under his breath “—an inspiration.” Then he took Hurst’s arm. “Come, let us leave her,” he said. “God will take care of her better in her temple.”

They rowed across the sacred pool. From where the bo-tree threw its delicate shadow on to the quiet water, David Hurst looked back. It seemed to him, in that last moment, that a light burned within the island shrine, and brightening, even as he gazed, poured forth to meet the rising of the sun.

Then he turned resolutely, and followed Heilig down into the valley.