

Hume Fergus

A Son of Perdition: An Occult Romance



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NOTE

The Author is indebted for the description of the Star-Worship contained in Chapter XV to Mr. C. W. Leadbeater's articles on "Ancient Chaldea," which appeared in the February, March, and April numbers of "The Theosophical Review" during the year 1900.

CHAPTER I

LOVE IN IDLENESS

"How can any one hope to transfer that to canvas?" asked the artist, surveying the many-coloured earth and sky and sea with despairing eyes.

"Easily enough," replied the girl at his elbow, "those who see twice as vividly as others, can make others see once as vividly as they do. That is what we call genius."

"A large word for my small capabilities, Miss Enistor. Am I a genius?"

"Ask yourself, Mr. Hardwick, for none other than yourself can answer truly."

Outside his special gift the artist was not over clever, so he lounged on the yielding turf of the slope to turn the speech over in his mind and wait results. This tall solidly built Saxon only arrived at conclusions by slow degrees of laborious reflection. With his straight athletic figure, closely clipped fair hair and a bronzed complexion, against which his moustache looked almost white, he resembled a soldier rather than a painter. Yet a painter he was of some trifling fame, but being only moderately creative, he strove to supply what was wanting by toilsome work. He had not so much the steady fire of genius as the crackling combustion of talent. Thus the grim Cornish country and the far-stretching Atlantic waters, so magically beautiful under an opalescent sunset, baffled him for the moment.

"I have the beginnings of genius," he finally decided, "that is, I can see for myself, but I cannot pass the vision on to others by production."

"Half a loaf is better than none," said Miss Enistor soothingly.

"I am not so sure that your proverb is true, so I reply with another. If indeed appetite comes with eating, as the French say, it is useless to invite it with half a loaf, when, for complete satisfaction, one requires the whole."

"There is something in that," admitted the girl, smiling, "but try and secure your desired whole loaf by sitting mousey-quiet and letting what is before you sink into your innermost being. Then you may create."

Crossing his legs and gripping his ankles, Hardwick, seated in the approved attitude of a fakir, did his best to adopt this advice, although he might well despair of fixing on canvas the fleeting vision of that enchanted hour. From the cromlech, near which the couple were stationed, a purple carpet of heather rolled down to a winding road, white and dusty and broad. On the hither side of the loosely built wall which skirted this, stretched many smooth green fields, divided and subdivided by boundaries of piled stones, feathery with ferns and coarse grasses. Beyond the confines of this ordered world, a chaos of bracken and ling, of small shrubs and stunted trees, together with giant masses of silvery granite, islanded amidst a sea of gold-besprinkled gorse, tumbled pell-mell to the jagged edge of the cliffs. Finally, the bluish plain of ocean glittered spaciouly to the far sharp horizon-line. Thence rose billowy clouds of glorious hues threaded with the fires of the sinking sun, heaping themselves in rainbow tints higher and higher towards the radiant azure of the zenith. No ship was on the water, no animals moved on the land, and even the grey huddle of houses, to which the smooth level road led, appeared to be without inhabitants. For all that could be seen of sentient life, the two on the hilltop were alone in this world of changeful beauty: the Adam and Eve of a new creation.

"Yet," murmured the girl, to whom this stillness suggested thoughts, "around us are nature-spirits, invisible and busy, both watchful and indifferent. Oh, Mr. Hardwick, how I should love to see the trolls, the pixies, the gnomes and the nixies."

"Rhyme, if not reason," laughed the artist lazily, "one must have the eye of faith to see such impossible things."

"Impossible?" Miss Enistor shrugged her shoulders and declined to combat his scepticism beyond the query of the one word. As that did not invite conversation, Hardwick gave himself up to the mere contentment of looking at her. Amidst the warm splendours of the hour, she somehow conveyed to him the sensation of a grey and pensive autumn day, haunting, yet elusive in its misty beauty. He was wholly unable to put this feeling into words, but he conceived it dimly as a subtle blurring of the picture she had bidden him create. His love for her was like a veil before his conception, and until that veil was removed by his surrender of the passion, the execution of the landscape on canvas was impossible. Yet so sweet was this drawback to his working powers that he could not wish it away.

Yet it was strange that the girl should be attractive to a man of his limitations, since her alluring qualities were not aggressively apparent. A delicate oval face, exquisitely moulded, with a transparent colourless skin, and mystical eyes of larkspur blue, were scarcely what his blunt perceptions approved of as absolute beauty. Slim and dainty and fragile in shape and stature, her unusual looks suggested a cloistered nun given to visions or some peaked elfin creature of moonlight and mist. She might have been akin to the fairies she spoke about, and even in the strong daylight she was a creature of dreams ethereal and evanescent. Hardwick was much too phlegmatic a man to analyse shadows. A Celt would have comprehended the hidden charm which drew him on; the Saxon could only wonder what there was in the girl to impress him.

"You are not my ideal of beauty, you know, Miss Enistor," he said in such a puzzled way as to rob the speech of premeditated rudeness; "yet there is something about you which makes me adore you!"

The girl flushed and shrugged her shoulders again. "What a flamboyant word is 'adored'!"

"It is the only word I can use," said Hardwick stoutly. "The Venus of Milo, Brynhild in the Volsung poem, Jael who slew Sisera, Rubens' robust nymphs: these were the types which appealed to me – until I met you."

"How complimentary to my small commonplace looks! What caused you to change your mind, Mr. Hardwick?"

"Something you possess, which is not apparent."

"You talk in riddles. What attracts any one must be apparent."

"Well, that is uncertain. I am not a deep thinker, you know. But there is such a thing as glamour."

"There is. But you are not the man to comprehend the meaning of the word."

"I admit that: all the same I feel its influence – in you!"

"I don't know what you mean," said the girl indifferently.

"Nor do I. Yet the feeling is here," and he touched his heart. "If I could only shape that feeling into words," – he hesitated and blushed.

"Well?"

"I might be able to tell you much – Alice."

"Why do you use my Christian name?"

"Why not? We are man and woman on a hillside, and not over-civilised beings in a drawing-room. You are Alice: I am Julian. It is quite simple."

"But too intimate," she objected, "you have known me only six months."

"Do you reckon knowledge by Time?"

"You have no knowledge: you confessed as much lately."

Hardwick looked at her earnestly. "I have this much, that I know how deeply I love you, my dear!" and he took her hand gently between his palms.

Alice let it lie there undisturbed, but did not return his pressure. For a few moments she looked straightly at the sunset. "I am sorry to hear you say that," was her calm remark when she did decide to speak.

"Why?"

"Because I can never love you!"

"Love can create love," urged Julian, again pressing her hand and again receiving no answering caress.

"Not between you and me. You may be fire, but I am not tow to catch alight." The flush had disappeared from her face, leaving it pure and white and calm to such a degree that the man dropped her hand. It was like holding a piece of ice, and he felt chilled by the aloofness of touch and look. "But you are a woman," he said roughly in his vexation, "you must know what love means."

"I don't: really I don't." Alice hugged her knees and stared with the sublime quietness of an Egyptian statue at his perturbed countenance. As he did not answer, she continued to speak in a deliberate way, which showed that his proposal had not touched her heart in the least. "My mother died when I was born, and I had Dame Trevel in the village yonder as my foster-mother until I was ten years of age. Then my father sent me to a Hampstead boarding school for eleven years. I returned only twelve months ago to live at Tremore" – she nodded towards a long low grey house, which basked on a neighbouring hilltop like a sullen reptile in the sunshine.

"But your father – ?"

"My father," interrupted the girl in a melancholy tone, "has no love for any one but himself. At times I think he hates me for causing the death of my mother by being born."

"Surely not."

"Well, you have seen my father. I leave you to judge."

Hardwick was puzzled how to reply. "He is not a man who shows his feelings, you know," he said delicately.

"I don't think he has any feelings to show," replied Alice indifferently. "I am used to his neglect, and so have schooled myself to be quietly agreeable without expecting any demonstrations of affection."

Hardwick nodded. "I have noticed, when dining at Tremore, that you are more like well-bred acquaintances than father and daughter. Perhaps," he added in a dreamy tone, "that is what first made me fall in love with you."

"I see," said Miss Enistor ironically, "you have come across the line of Shakespeare which says that pity is akin to love."

"I have never read Shakespeare's plays," admitted Mr. Hardwick simply. "I'm not a clever chap, you know. But you looked so forlorn in that dismal house, and seemed so starving for kind words and actions, that I wanted to take you away with me and make you happier. Yes," the artist quite brightened at his own perspicuity, "that is what drew me to you – a desire to give you a really good time."

Alice looked at him gravely, but with a suspicion of a smile on her pale lips. "Do you know, Julian, that I believe you to be a good man." The artist blushed again: he had the trick of blushing on occasions, which showed him to possess still the modesty of boyhood. "Oh, I say," he murmured almost inaudibly; then to cover his confusion added: "You call me Julian."

"Yes," Alice nodded her head in a stately way. "Henceforth let us be the greatest of friends."

"Lovers," he urged, "true honest lovers."

"No, Julian. We would be neither true nor honest as lovers. Our marriage would not be one of those made in heaven."

"Are any marriages made in heaven?" he asked somewhat cynically.

She looked at him in surprise. "Of course. When one soul meets another soul capable of blending with it, that is a heavenly marriage."

"Well then," he cried impetuously, "my soul and your soul?"

Alice shook her head. "We don't strike the same note: we are not in harmony, Julian. As friends we can esteem one another, but as lovers, as man and wife, you would end in boring me as I should finally bore you."

"One would think you were fifty to hear you talk so," said Hardwick crossly.

"Do you reckon knowledge by Time?" she asked, harking back to the phrase he had used earlier in the conversation.

He had no reply ready. "Still it is odd to hear a girl of twenty-one talk as you do, Alice."

"You are speaking of my new suit of clothes. I am as old as the world."

"Oh, that is the queer stuff your father talks. He believes in reincarnation, doesn't he?"

"He does, and so do I."

"I wonder that you can. A sensible girl like you – "

"My dear Julian, you speak without knowledge," she interrupted placidly.

"That can't be knowledge which can't be proved."

"I think you must be a reincarnation of Nicodemus," retorted Miss Enistor.

"That is no answer."

"Now how can I give you an answer, when you have not the capability of grasping the answer, Julian? If a peasant wanted a mathematical problem proved to him, he would have to learn mathematics to understand it."

"Yes, I suppose so. But you mean – "

"I mean that you have to live the life to understand the doctrine. Christ said that two thousand years ago, and it is as true to-day as it was then."

With his slow habit of thinking Hardwick had to revolve this speech in his mind before replying. Alice, with an impish look of mischief on her face, laughed also to prevent his answering. "I am taking you into deep water and you will be drowned," she said lightly, "suppose you begin your picture."

"No," said the man soberly. "I don't feel like painting the picture. I don't believe I ever could," and he looked at the fading glories of sea and land regretfully.

"Next time you are born you will be a genius," said Miss Enistor cheerfully, "as you are building up in this life the brain required by a master-painter. Meantime I wish you to be my friend."

"Well, it is hard to decline from love to friendship, but – "

"No 'buts.' Friendship is love from another point of view."

"Not my point of view."

Alice raised an admonitory finger. "You mustn't be selfish," she said severely.

"Selfish? I? How can I be?"

"By wishing me to give for your gratification what I cannot give for my own. I cannot love you as you desire, because there is not that spiritual link between us which means true love. Therefore to make me happy, if you really love me, you should be prepared to sacrifice yourself to the lower feeling of friendship."

"That is too high for me," murmured Hardwick despondingly, "but I see that you won't have me as your husband."

"Certainly not. I want a man to love me, not to pity me."

"It isn't exactly pity."

"Yes it is," she insisted, "you are sorry for me because I live in a dull house with a neglectful father. It is very nice of you to think so, and it is still nicer to think that you are willing to help me by tying yourself to a woman you do not really love. But I can't accept that sacrifice. You must be my friend, Julian – my true honest friend."

Hardwick glanced into her deep blue eyes, and unintelligent as he was in such subtle matters read his answer therein. "I shall do my best," he said with a deep sigh; "but you must give me time

to cool down from passion to friendship. I want you to be my wife, and like all women you offer to be a sister to me."

"Or I will be your cousin if the relation will suit you better," said the girl, laughing outright at his rueful looks.

Julian took offence. "You don't pity me?"

"Not at all, since your feeling is not one of genuine love," was the cool response. "I would if it were."

"One would think you were a hardened woman of the world to hear you speak in this way."

"Perhaps I was a woman of the world in my last incarnation, Julian. I seem to have brought over a great deal of common sense to this life. You are a dear, sweet, placid thing, but although you have seen more of human nature and worldly existence this time than I have, you don't know half so much."

"Alice, you are conceited."

"Ah, that speech shows you are yet heart-whole, Julian. If you were really in love you would never dare to speak so to your divinity."

"Well, I daresay I shall get over it. But it's hard on a fellow."

"Not at all. Hard on your vanity perhaps, but vanity isn't you. Come," Alice sprang to her feet and took up her smart silver-headed cane, "the sun will soon go down and I must get home. We are friends, are we not?" she held out her hand smiling.

"Of course we are." Hardwick bent to kiss her hand and she snatched it away swiftly.

"That isn't friendship."

"Oh, with you friendship means: 'You may look, but you mustn't touch.'"

"Exactly," said Miss Enistor lightly, "consider me if you please as a valuable Dresden china ornament under a glass shade."

Julian heaved another sigh and began to collect his painting materials. "I must if I must," he admitted grudgingly; "there isn't another man, I suppose?"

The face of the girl grew grave. "There isn't another man whom I love, if that is what you mean," she said, reluctantly. "I have not yet met with my Prince, who will wake me to love and beauty. But there is a man who wants, as you do, to be the Prince."

"Oh hang him, who is he?"

"Don Pablo Narvaez!"

"That old mummy. Impossible!"

"It is both possible and disagreeable. He hinted the other day that he –"

"Loved you? What impertinence!"

"No," said Alice dryly, "he did not commit himself so far. But he hinted that he would like me to be his wife. My father afterwards told me that it would be a good match for me, as Don Pablo is wealthy."

"Wealthy be blessed, Alice," rejoined Hardwick with great heat. "You don't want to take your husband from a museum."

"I don't and I won't," she replied with great determination, "and for that reason I wish you to be my friend."

"Why, what can I do?"

"Stand by me. If my father insists upon my marrying Don Pablo, you must say that I am engaged to you, and this will give you the right to interfere."

Hardwick packed his traps, and swung up the hill on the home-path alongside the girl. "How can you ask me to take up such a position when you know that I love you, Alice?"

"If I thought that you did I should not ask for your help, Julian. But in your own heart you know that you really do not love me. It is only what you call the glamour of my personality that has caught you for the moment. It is not improbable," she went on musingly, "that there may be

some slight link between us dating from our meeting in former lives, but it is not a strong enough one to bring us together this time as man and wife!"

"Oh, this mystical talk makes me tired," cried the painter in quite an American way, "it's silly."

"So it is from your point of view," said Miss Enistor promptly, "let us get down to what you call common sense in your robust Anglo-Saxon style. I want you to stand between me and Don Pablo in the way I suggest. Will you?"

"Yes. That is – give me a day or two to think the matter over. I am flesh and blood, you know, Alice, and not stone."

"Oh, nonsense, you deceive yourself," she retorted impatiently. "Don't I tell you that if I thought your feeling for me was really genuine I should not be so wicked as to risk your unhappiness? But I know you better than you do yourself. If you loved me, would you have chatted about this, that and the other thing so lightly after I had rejected you?"

"There is something in that," admitted Hardwick, as Alice had done previously with regard to his whole-loaf argument. "Well, I daresay I shall appear as your official lover. Don Pablo shan't worry you if I can help it."

"Thanks, you dear good boy," rejoined the girl gratefully and squeezed the artist's arm. "Don't you feel fire running through your veins when I touch you, Julian?"

"No," said Hardwick stolidly.

"Doesn't your heart beat nineteen to the dozen: haven't you the feeling that this is heaven on earth?"

"Not a bit."

Alice dropped his arm with a merry laugh. "And you talk about being in love with me! Can't you see now how wise I was to refuse you?"

"Well," said Hardwick reluctantly, for he felt that she was perfectly right in her diagnosis; "there may be something in what you say."

"There is everything in what I say," she insisted; "however, I shall give you another chance. Catch me before I reach Tremore and I shall be your wife."

Before Hardwick could accept or refuse, she sprang up the narrow winding path as lightly as Atalanta. More out of pique than absolute desire the artist followed. Although he now began to see that he had taken a false Eros for the true one, he resolutely sped after the flying figure, if only to have the pleasure of refusing the prize when he won it. But he might as well have attempted to catch an air-bubble. Alice was swifter than he was, and ran in a flying way which reminded him of a darting swallow. Down the declivity she dropped, following the twists of the pathway amongst the purple heather, and sprang across the brawling stream at the bottom of the valley before he was half-way down. Then up she mounted, with an arch backward glance, to scale the hill whereon Tremore gloomed amidst its muffling trees. At the gate set in the mouldering brick wall he nearly caught her, for pride winged his feet. But she eluded his grasp with a laugh and disappeared amongst the foliage of the miniature forest. When next she came in sight, he beheld her standing at the sombre porch of the squat mansion binding up her tresses of black hair, which had become loose with her exertions.

"You don't love me," panted Alice, who had scarcely got her breath, "if you did I should have been in your arms by this time."

"Pouf!" puffed Hardwick, wiping his wet brow. "Pouf! pouf! pouf!"

"Is that all you have to say?"

"It is all I am able to say. Pouf! Pouf! Well, my dear girl, Saul went to look for his asses and found a kingdom. I went to look for a kingdom of love and find an ass – in myself."

"Oh no! no!" protested Alice, rather distressed.

"Oh yes! yes! The love-mood has come and gone in the space of an afternoon, Miss Enistor."

"Alice to you, Julian," and she held out her hand.

The artist did not attempt to kiss it this time. "Brother and sister," he said, giving the hand a hearty shake, "and official lover when necessary."

"It's a bargain," replied Miss Enistor beaming, and so it was arranged.

CHAPTER II

THE PROPHECY

From the hilltop where Alice and her rejected lover had conversed, the house called Tremore could be plainly seen in its grey nakedness. But on the other side, in front and at the back, it was screened from the salt Atlantic winds by a dismal wood of stone-pines, yews, cypress-trees and giant cedars, planted by various Enistors in the long-distant past, when they had first set up their tent on the waste moorland. The gloomy disposition of the race could be seen, not only in the funereal types of trees chosen for sheltering the mansion, but in the grim look of the mansion itself. Never was there so dreary a place.

Tremore means "great dwelling" in the Celtic tongue, but the name could only apply to this particular house from the unusual space of ground it covered, since it was only one storey high. Built of untrimmed granite blocks and roofed with dull hued slates, it stretched in a narrow line towards the rear of the hill on which it stood. Here it divided into two other narrow lines, forming on the whole the exact shape of the letter "Y." One of the forks contained the kitchen, the servants' sleeping apartments and the domestic offices: the other held the bedrooms of the gentry, while the main stem of the letter was made up of drawing-room, library, sitting-room and dining-room. It was an odd place quaintly planned and curiously built: but then the Enistors were odd people.

One markedly strange thing amongst others was the absence of vegetation about the house, since nothing would grow near it. Flowers were conspicuous by their absence, turf was wanting, and not even weeds would flourish. The very trees stood aloof in sulky darkness, leaving the building isolated in an arid space of beaten earth. There it stood on the bare ground with its heavy porch, its thick walls and many small windows, bleak in its nakedness for want of draping ivy. True enough there was a kitchen-garden and a small orchard at the back, beyond the screen of trees, which flourished tolerably, but round the house greenery was wanting, as if the place was cursed. Perhaps it was, as the Enistors had borne a sinister reputation for generations. But whatever the reason might be, Tremore might have been built in the desert from the way in which it lay like a sullen snake on the barren earth. And a two-headed snake at that, like some demon of a fairy tale.

The interior of this undesirable mansion was desperately gloomy, as all the rooms were small with low ceilings, and for the most part panelled with black oak dull and unpolished. The kitchen and servants' rooms were more agreeable, as here Mr. Enistor had conformed to modern ideas of cheerfulness so far as to paper and tile the walls brightly. But his own particular portion of the house he would not allow to be touched, and although it was comfortable enough, it was decidedly depressing, with its sombre tints and stuffy atmosphere. Often did Alice leave its dark chambers and its dismal surroundings to breathe freely on the vast spaces of the moors. East and West and North and South stretched the treeless lands, covered with heather and dangerous with the shafts of worked-out mines. The village of Polwellin below belonged to the Enistors, and over it and its inhabitants the present head of the old family exercised a feudal sway. But beyond this particular collection of dwellings, containing one hundred people, more or less, there was no house or hamlet for some leagues. Perchton, a watering-place haunted by artists, was the nearest town, and that was ten miles distant. Tremore would have suited a misanthrope, but it was not a place wherein Alice cared to live. She was young and inclined to mix with her fellow creatures, but never did any chance come by which she could enter society. It was no wonder that the girl was peaked and pining, and could see things invisible to the ordinary person. Isolation was unhealthy for one of her temperament.

Seated at the heavy mahogany table, whence, in old-fashioned style, the cloth had been removed for dessert, Alice almost regretted that she had not accepted Hardwick's proposal to

remove her from such sad surroundings. The dull carved panelling of the walls, the sombre family portraits, the cumbersome furniture, together with the lowness of the ceiling and the limited space of the room, stifled her and depressed her spirits to such a degree that she could scarcely eat. Mr. Enistor and Don Pablo – the latter dined at Tremore on this particular night – were in accurate evening dress, and the whole apartment bore an aspect of good-breeding and stately ceremonial. The host was attached to the customs of his ancestors, and his meals were always served with quite royal etiquette. And by the light of the many wax candles in silver holders which illuminated the room – Mr. Enistor would have nothing to do with lamps – Alice looked curiously at the two men, whose want of vitality, as she vaguely thought, drew the life-power from herself.

She was wrong as regarded her father, for Korah Enistor was a handsome, healthy man in the prime of life, and had plenty of vitality in his robust frame. He looked somewhat austere with his dark hair, scarcely touched with white, his dark eyes and powerful face, which lacked colour as much as her own did. Like Hardwick, the man resembled a soldier, as he was tall and lean, well-built and active. Also, he possessed the imperious manner of one accustomed to command men, and spoke in a slow deliberate manner with compelling glances of his dark eyes. The most casual observer would have noted that here was a strong personality given to dominate rather than to obey. All the same, Alice noticed that her strong-willed father pointedly deferred to Don Pablo Narvaez, in a way which argued that he rendered *him* obedience. It was strange that she should entertain this idea seeing that the Spaniard was as frail as Enistor was strong, and did not at all look like one who could, or would, rule so aggressive a personality. This odd deference had puzzled her on previous occasions, but to-night the feeling that her father was thrall to Don Pablo was particularly strong.

A breath, she thought, could have blown the guest away like thistledown, so frail and weak did he appear. What his age was she could not guess, but conceived that he was an octogenarian. His scanty white hair, his shrunken figure, his small wrinkled face, and the false teeth which showed when he smiled, all favoured this belief. Don Pablo was like an expiring flame, which the slightest breath might extinguish, and the only thing, hinting to the girl's mind at enduring life, were his eyes. These were of a brighter blue than her own, extraordinarily large and piercing, so that few could bear their direct gaze. The idea entered Alice's head at the moment that here was a bunch of blooming flowers in a cracked vase of great age, or to be less fanciful, she told herself that Narvaez had a weak body dominated by a powerful will which kept the life intact. She could imagine him stepping out of that fragile shape, and still be alive, more powerful and more vitalised in another. His brain was clear, his speech was incisive, and always he used his dominating eyes to compel all those he gazed at to surrender to the spell of his powerful mind. There was something sinister about his interior youthfulness and exterior senility.

The girl both hated and dreaded him. Being sensitive she was responsive to influences which a coarser nature – say that of Hardwick – would never feel. Don Pablo impressed her as something terrible in spite of his weak looks. His frail body was only the jungle, as it were, that concealed the tiger, and she could imagine him putting forth powers whose force would shatter the aging tenement. What such powers might be she did not know, as he revealed nothing of his dominating nature to her. But she vaguely felt that what force he possessed was deadly evil, and would be used for purely evil purposes. Therefore, warned instinctively by her pure soul, she kept out of his way as much as possible. The stealthy attempts of her father to bring youth and age together, Alice resisted as best she could. But it was difficult to fight against two such commanding natures, and all the time there was the insistent feeling of being drawn into darkness. Alice often blamed herself for thinking in this hostile way of her father, but could never get rid of her doubts. It was firmly rooted in her mind that Narvaez and Enistor were dwelling in an atmosphere of evil, which they wished to extend so as to include herself. At the moment the pressure was particularly strong, and she sighed with weariness as the invisible forces came up against her. Hardly had the sound left her lips when Don Pablo glanced swiftly at his host.

"You are tired, Alice," said Enistor, rising to open the door. "The heat is oppressive to-night. Take a turn in the garden and you will feel better. Is your head aching?"

"Yes, father," replied the girl almost inaudibly, and glided out of the room like an unquiet ghost to seek the life-giving moorland air.

Her father returned to the table in his stately fashion, and poured himself out a fresh glass of water. On the shining mahogany there were no decanters of wine: only dishes of fruit, crystal jugs of water, and the three empty coffee-cups. Neither Narvaez nor his host drank any alcoholic liquor: they did not indulge in smoking and were extremely temperate in eating. An ordinary man would have missed the smiling good-fellowship which is usually to be found at a dinner-table. Had these two even laughed outright they would have appeared more human. But they did not, and throughout their conversation maintained a sinister calmness disconcerting in its aloofness from the chatter and merriment of commonplace mortals. Yet somehow this profound quietness seemed to suit the room with its menacing atmosphere.

"It is difficult," murmured Don Pablo, with a glance at the door.

"But not impossible," returned Enistor, answering the thought rather than the words. These two were versed in mind-reading beyond the ordinary.

"That is as it may be, my friend!"

Enistor frowned. "You mean her innocence?"

"Is it necessary for you to put that into words?" demanded the older man in a mocking way; "of course I mean her innocence. That very purity which makes the girl so valuable to me is the wall which protects her from the influence I wish to exercise over her."

"Constant dropping of water wears away a stone, Master."

"That proverb does not apply in every case," retorted the other darkly. "I tell you that I am helpless before your daughter. I am too old for her to love me, therefore her heart is safe. She is not greedy for money, or admiration, or position, or dress, or for half a dozen things which would tempt an ordinary girl. There is no foothold to be obtained."

The host cast an uneasy glance round, and his eyes grew piercing, as if he would force the invisible to become apparent. "She is guarded, we know!"

Narvaez' wrinkled face grew even darker than before. "Yes, she is guarded. I am aware of the power that guards her."

"So you have said several times, Master. Why not explain more fully?"

"The time has not yet come to explain. If you were advanced enough to read the Akashic Records, then you might see much that would explain things."

Enistor nodded gloomily. "I understand. The present situation is the outcome of the past."

"Everything in life is an outcome of the past," said Narvaez, "even a neophyte such as you are should be certain of that. Cause and effect govern all things."

"But if you would explain the cause, I might see how to deal with the effect, Master."

"I daresay," returned the other dryly, "but in spite of my superior knowledge, I am not yet omnipotent, Enistor. I can read a trifle of the records, but not easily. There are veils before my eyes which prevent me from knowing the exact state of affairs which has brought things to this pass in this set of lives. All I can say is that you and I and your daughter, together with two other people, were in Chaldea over five thousand years ago, and the lives then are linked with the lives now. The Karma of that period has to be worked out while we are all in the flesh to-day."

"Do you know who the other two people are?" asked Enistor eagerly.

"I know one. He is powerful, and hostile to you and to me!"

"He does not follow the Left-hand Path then?"

"No. He is a White Magician. You will see him some day when the hour strikes. I am teaching you all I can so that you may be able to confront him."

"I am not afraid of any one," snapped Enistor sharply.

"Oh, you have courage enough," admitted Narvaez, "but knowledge must be added to that, if you are to be victorious. As to the other person who has to play a part in the working out of this Karma – "

"Well! Well! Well?"

"I don't know who or what he is," confessed the other.

"He is a man then?"

"Yes, I know that much!" Narvaez drank a glass of water, and rose with an effort as if his bones pained him. "We had better understand the situation." In spite of his mind-reading Enistor could not understand and said as much with a puzzled air. Narvaez laughed softly for a moment and then became his usual calm self. "I refer to the position on the physical plane of you and myself and those surrounding us – the flesh and blood puppets I mean with which we have to deal."

"Are they puppets?" demanded Enistor dubiously.

"One is not. You can guess that I mean our powerful adversary. But the others – bah!" he swept the air with one lean hand. "I think I can deal with them, if you give me your assistance."

"I have promised to give it – at a price," said Enistor tartly.

The guest stared at him with a sphinx-like expression. "I know your price and you shall have your price," he dropped into his chair again with an air of fatigue, and his eyes grew brighter than ever. "Listen, my friend. I came here from Spain three years ago in search of you, as I learned by my arts that you would be useful to me. You have the blood of my race in your veins, as you know, since that Spanish sailor, who was wrecked on these coasts in a galleon of the Great Armada, married your ancestress from whom you are descended."

"I know all this, Master."

"Quite so, but I wish to refresh your memory. I found you here a poor man – "

"Which I am still," interrupted Enistor gloomily.

"Of course. The time is not yet ripe for you to gain your wish!"

"My wish! my wish!" the host rose and raised his arms, with a fierce look on his powerful face. "When will it be gratified? I want money – a large amount – thousands of pounds, since money means power."

"And power is the real thing you desire. The money, as we know, is only the means to obtain that power. You wish to influence men at all costs; to rule the masses; to be famous as a leader!"

The sneer with which Narvaez made this speech irritated Enistor, although he was sufficiently educated in mystic lore to be aware how important absolute self-command is to those who deal with occultism. That is, he knew such was the case, more or less, but could never attain to the necessary calm. "It is not a contemptible ambition," he snarled savagely.

"Our adversary of the Right-hand Path would say so," rejoined Narvaez coolly, "since you desire power and rule and money in order to gratify Self."

"I never knew that you worked for other people, Narvaez," sneered Enistor.

The Spaniard smiled coldly. "I don't, I never shall. I strive, as you do, for power, and, thanks to my knowledge, I have more than you, although it is not enough to content me. It is because your aims are the same as mine that we can work together. But Alice does not desire anything and that is what baffles both of us."

"In that case, she is useless to you, Master, and therefore it is no good your marrying her."

"Once she is my wife, I can influence her more easily, Enistor. As you know, I have no feeling of love for either man or woman. That philanthropic sentiment of sacrifice for humanity is disagreeable to me. In black magic, as in white, one must live like what is called a saint to be powerful. To be absolutely free you should never have married."

"Yet you propose to make the same mistake."

"There is no mistake about the matter," said Narvaez calmly, "my marriage with your daughter will be no marriage in the accepted sense of the word. I simply wish to bind her to me,

so that I can train the clairvoyance she possesses which is so valuable to me. I can give her plenty of money – "

"You won't give it to me," interposed the other hastily.

"Of course not. Why should I? Nothing for nothing is the rule of the Left-hand Path. But that I require your services and cannot dispense with them I should not waste my time teaching you my knowledge. However, the situation stands thus. I am to marry your daughter, and when I train her clairvoyantly – waken her sleeping powers, that is – we may learn from her reading of the Akashic Records what danger threatens."

"There is a danger then?"

"Yes, and a very real one, which has to do with this adversary I told you about. A desire to defeat him brought me to you, and as he is your enemy as well as mine, you are wise to obey me in all things."

"Yet I know that when you have no further use for me, you will cast me aside as of no account," said Enistor bitterly.

"Why not?" rejoined the other coolly. "You would act in the same way."

"I am not so sure that I would."

"Ah. You have still some human weakness to get rid of before you can progress on the path along which you ask me to lead you. I have no use for weaklings, Enistor. Remember that."

The host drew himself up haughtily. "I am no weakling!"

"For your own sake, to-morrow, I hope you are not."

"Why to-morrow?"

"Because a blow will fall on you."

Enistor looked uneasy. "A blow! What kind of a blow?"

"Something to do with a loss of expected money. That is all I can tell you, my friend. You keep certain things from me, so if you are not entirely frank, how can you expect me to aid you?"

Enistor dropped into his chair again, and the perspiration beaded his dark face. "A loss of expected money," he muttered, "and Lucy is ill."

"Who is Lucy?"

"My sister who lives in London. A widow called Lady Staunton. She has five thousand a year which she promised years ago to leave to me, so that I might restore the fortunes of the Enistor family. I had news a week ago that she is very ill, and this week I was going up to see her in order to make sure she had not changed her mind."

"It is useless your going to see Lady Staunton," said Narvaez leisurely, "for she *has* changed her mind and has made a new will."

Enistor scowled and clenched his hands. "How do you know?"

"Well, I don't know details," said the Spaniard agreeably, "those have to be supplied by you. All I am certain of is that to-morrow you will receive a letter stating that you have lost some expected money. As the sole money you hope to receive is to come from Lady Staunton, it is logical to think that this is what will be lost. You should have told me about this and I could have worked on her mind to keep her true to you."

"But it is impossible," cried Enistor, rising to stride up and down in an agitated way. "Lucy is as proud of our family as I am, and always said she would leave her fortune to restore us to our old position in the country."

"Lady Staunton is a woman, and women are fickle," said Narvaez cruelly. "I fear you have lost your chance this time."

"You may be wrong."

"I may be, but I don't think so. I was looking over your horoscope last evening, Enistor, and from what I read therein I made further inquiries, which have to do with invisible powers I can control."

"Elementals?"

"And other things," said the magician carelessly; "however I learned positively that you will get bad news of the nature I explained to-morrow. It is too late to counteract what has been done."

"The will – ?"

"Exactly, the will. From what you say I feel convinced that my knowledge applies to Lady Staunton and her fortune. See what comes of not being frank with me, Enistor. You are a fool."

"I don't believe what you say."

"As you please. It does not matter to me; except," he added with emphasis, "that it makes my hold over you more secure."

"What do you mean by that?"

"My poor friend!" Narvaez glanced back from the door towards which he had walked slowly. "You are losing what little powers you have obtained, since you cannot read my mind. Why, I mean that with five thousand a year you might not be inclined to give me your daughter in marriage. As a poor man you are forced to do so."

"It seems to me," said Enistor angrily, "that in any case I must do so, if I wish to learn the danger which threatens me as well as you."

"Why, that is true. You are clever in saying that."

"But perhaps this possible loss of money is the danger."

"No. The danger is a greater one than the loss of money. It has to do with your life and my life in Chaldea; with our adversary and with the unknown man, who is coming to take part in the drama of repayment. I have a feeling," said Narvaez, passing his hand across his brow, "that the curtain rises on our drama with this loss of money."

"I don't believe Lucy will cheat me," cried Enistor desperately.

"Wait until to-morrow's post," said Narvaez significantly, "you will find that I am a true prophet. Our bargain of my marriage with Alice must continue on its present basis, as the want of money will still prevent your becoming independent. I might suggest," he added, opening the door, "that you forbid your daughter to see too much of young Hardwick. She might fall in love with him and that would in a great measure destroy her clairvoyant powers. She will be of no use to either of us then. Good night! When you sleep we shall meet as usual on the other plane!"

Narvaez departed chuckling, for disagreeables befalling others always amused him. He was absolutely without a heart and without feelings, since for ages in various bodies he had worked hard to rid himself of his humanity. Enistor was on the same evil path, but as yet was human enough to worry over the inevitable. Until he slept he did his best to convince himself that Narvaez spoke falsely, but failed utterly in the attempt.

CHAPTER III

FULFILMENT

Next morning Enistor was gloomy and apprehensive, for he had slept very badly during the hours of darkness. He tried to persuade himself that the Spaniard prophesied falsely, but some inward feeling assured him that this was not the case. Before the sun set he was convinced, against his inclinations, that the sinister prediction would be fulfilled. Therefore he picked up his morning letters nervously, quite expecting to find a legal one stating that Lady Staunton was dead and had left her five thousand a year to some stranger. Fortunately for his peace of mind there was no letter of the kind, and he made a better breakfast than he might have done. All the same he was morose and sullen, so that Alice had anything but a pleasant time. Towards the end of the meal he relieved his feelings by scolding the girl.

"I forbid you to see much of that young Hardwick," he declared imperiously, "he is in love with you, and I don't wish you to marry a pauper painter!"

Aware that her father wished her to accept Narvaez, it would have been wise for the girl to have held her tongue, since a later confession of a feigned engagement to the artist was her sole chance of resisting the loveless marriage. But Enistor was one of those people who invariably drew what was worst in a person to the surface, and she answered prematurely. "Mr. Hardwick proposed yesterday and I refused him. Therefore I can see as much of him as I want to, without running any risk of becoming his wife."

Enistor ignored the latter part of her reply, proposing to deal with it later. "You refused him? And why, may I ask?"

"He is not the man I want for my husband. He does not complete me!"

"Are you then incomplete?" sneered Enistor scornfully.

"To my mind every woman and every man must be incomplete until a true marriage takes place!"

"What is a true marriage, you silly girl?"

"A marriage of souls!"

"Pooh! Pooh! That foolish affinity business."

"Is it foolish?" queried Alice sedately. "It appears to me to be a great truth."

"Appears to you!" scoffed her father. "What does a child such as you are know about such things? At your age you should be healthy enough not to think of your soul and even forget that you have one. Nevertheless I am glad that you have refused Hardwick, as I have other views for you."

"If they include marriage with Don Pablo, I decline to entertain them."

"Do you indeed? Rubbish! You are my daughter and shall do as I order."

"I am a human being also, and in this instance I shall not obey."

Enistor frowned like a thunderstorm. "You dare to set your will against my will?" he demanded, looking at her piercingly.

"In this instance I do," replied Alice, meeting his gaze firmly. "I am quite willing to be an obedient daughter to you in all else. But marriage concerns my whole future and therefore I have a right to choose for myself."

"You have no rights, save those I allow you to have! In refusing Hardwick you have shown more sense than I expected. But Don Pablo you must marry!"

"Must I, father? And why?"

"He is wealthy and he adores you."

Alice in spite of her nervousness laughed outright. "I am woman enough to see that Don Pablo only adores himself. He wants a hostess to sit at the foot of his table and entertain his friends:

he has no use for a wife. As to his wealth, I would sooner be happy with a pauper than with a millionaire, provided I loved him."

"Silly romance: silly romance."

"Perhaps it is. But that is my view!"

Enistor frowned still more darkly, as he saw very plainly that, frail as she was, he could not hope to bend her to his will. In some way he could not explain the girl baffled his powerful personality. Yet it was necessary that she should become the wife of Narvaez, if the danger which the old man hinted at was to be known and conquered. "Alice, listen to me," said the man entreatingly, "we are very poor and Don Pablo is very rich. If you marry him, you will soon be his wealthy widow, as he cannot live long. Then with the money you will be able to restore the fortunes of our family and marry whomsoever you desire. Be sensible!"

"I refuse to sacrifice myself to a loveless marriage for your sake," said Alice doggedly, and standing up like a weak lily against the force of a tempest. "You don't love me, father: you have never loved me, so why –"

"I am not going to argue the point with you any longer," stormed Enistor, rising hastily; "I shall force you to marry Don Pablo."

"In that case I shall marry Julian Hardwick and ask him to protect me," said the girl, rising in her turn, shaking and white, but sullenly determined.

"Protect you! Who can protect you against me? I can deal with Hardwick and with you in a way you little dream of."

"What you can do to Mr. Hardwick I do not know," said the girl steadily, "but me you cannot harm in any way, nor can you compel me, else you would long ago have used your boasted power."

"Are you aware that you are speaking to your father?" demanded Enistor, astonished at her daring.

"Perfectly! I wish to be a good daughter to you, father, but in a matter which concerns my whole life I must decline to yield either to your commands or prayers!"

Enistor could have struck her pale face in his wrath, but, sensitive to invisible things, he became aware that there was a barrier around her which kept him at arm's length. He knew instinctively that the powerful influence pervading the room had to do with the unknown individual whom Narvaez called "Our Adversary," and felt that he was not prepared to measure his strength against such a force. So uncomfortable and daunted did he feel, that his one desire was to leave the room, and he began to back towards the door. Alice was astonished to see the perspiration beading her father's forehead and watched his departure in dismay. Unaware of what was taking place, she looked upon the withdrawal as a declaration of war, and believed, with some truth, that she would have to suffer for opposing resistance to the marriage with Narvaez. Yet she still held out, as she felt a singular sense of security. The same power which weakened Enistor strengthened her, but not being a trained occultist, she wondered how she could dare to face her father so boldly.

"I shall talk to you later," breathed Enistor with an effort, so hostile was the atmosphere. "Meanwhile you may as well know that if you decline to become Don Pablo's wife, you will ruin me."

The Squire – that was his title as the owner of Polwellin village – left his obstinate daughter in the room, and went to the library, which was his own particular domain. Here the opposing influence did not follow him. Sitting down heavily, he began to breathe more freely, and wondered why he had been so craven as to fly from the field of battle. Although he had been anxious all his life to acquire forbidden lore, he had only learned something of the practical side of occultism since the arrival of Narvaez, some three years ago. That ancient sinner was accomplished in black arts, and for his own ends was willing to impart something of his knowledge to Enistor. A considerable amount of sinister teaching had been given to the Squire, but as yet he was but a neophyte, and ignorant of many things. Narvaez withheld much purposely, as he was keenly aware of Enistor's

powerful will and unscrupulous greed for power. The Spaniard did not so much desire to instruct his host as to make use of him. Those servants of Christ, who walk on the Right-hand Path, are possessed entirely by the Spirit of Love, and are only too anxious to teach to the ignorant all that they may be capable of assimilating. But the Brothers of the Shadow are too inherently selfish to be generous, and merely give out sufficient knowledge to render their pupils useful servants and docile slaves. Narvaez had no intention of cultivating Enistor's latent powers to such a strength that they might be dangerous to himself. Consequently, although the man was on the threshold of power, he had not yet crossed it, and therefore was unable to deal with the force in the dining-room, the strength of which he could not calculate. To influence Alice to work for self in a way which would lure her from behind the barrier of the protecting power required more knowledge than Enistor possessed. Yet Narvaez likewise professed fear of the Adversary, and could only use cunning instead of command. The Squire smiled grimly to himself as he reflected that the Master himself would have been ignominiously driven from the dining-room in the same way, had he been present.

Of course Enistor did not wish to injure his daughter in any way at which the world would look askance. He merely desired her to make a loveless marriage so as to acquire the wealth of Narvaez, and so that she might be educated in clear-seeing for the purpose of averting a possible danger. What that danger might be Enistor did not know, and so far as he could guess Don Pablo was equally ignorant. Therefore it was absolutely necessary that the latent clairvoyant powers of the girl should be brought to the surface and trained, if the safety of the Black Magician and his pupil was to be assured. Enistor was aggressively selfish, and to save himself was ready to sacrifice his daughter and a dozen human beings if necessary to the Dark Powers. Her body, her fortune, her honour, would not be injured, but – as Enistor very well knew – her soul would be in danger. For this however he cared nothing. Better that the girl should perish than that he should be balked of his daring ambition. But he did not intend to surrender Alice to Don Pablo unless his price was paid, and that price included unlimited wealth together with unlimited power over weaker mortals. Narvaez alone could instruct him in the arts which could command such things.

Meanwhile, as Enistor needed money, it was necessary for him to attend to practical matters, which had to do with Lady Staunton! For many years Enistor had influenced his sister strongly to leave her entire fortune to him, and until Narvaez had spoken on the previous evening, he had every reason to believe that he would get what he wanted. But the prediction rendered him uneasy, even though the expected letter had not yet arrived. The Ides of March had truly come, but had not passed, and although the fatal epistle had failed to appear in the morning's batch of letters, it might be delivered by the evening post. All that day Enistor was naturally uncomfortable and apprehensive. Positive that his sister would leave him her fortune, he had rejoiced when the news of her illness arrived, and in his fancied security he had not even gone up to London to make sure that all was safe. Certainly he had never dreamed of taking so long a journey to console the old lady on her death-bed; but he deeply regretted for the sake of the inheritance that he had not sought her company during her sickness. Also it might have been advisable to enlist the evil services of Narvaez to clinch the matter, and this omission the Squire deeply lamented. However, it was now too late to do anything save wait for the post and hope for the best. He suffered as only a selfish nature can suffer, and the agonies of a truly selfish man are very great when he is thwarted.

It was close upon three o'clock when he was put out of his misery by the arrival of an unexpected stranger. Enistor, finding that Alice had betaken herself to the safer spaces of the moorlands, had no one to torment, so he busied himself with evil practices in his gloomy library. That is, he used the teaching of Narvaez to concentrate his will-power on Lady Staunton, so that she might still desire to leave him her money. With her visualised image in his mind's eye, he was sending powerful thoughts to her sick-bed insisting that he and he only should benefit by the will. An ignorant person would have laughed at the idea of any one being so controlled from a distance,

but Enistor knew perfectly well what he was doing, and made ardent use of his unholy telepathy. Later when the footman announced that Lady Staunton's solicitor, Mr. Cane, desired an interview, Enistor granted it without delay. It was better, he wisely thought, to know the best or the worst at once, without suffering the agonies of suspense until the evening post.

The new-comer was a bustling, rosy-cheeked little man, well dressed, expansive and voluble. He had no nerves to speak of, and still less imagination, therefore he was not in the least impressed by the grey atmosphere of Tremore. In fact before he condescended to business, he complimented his host on the breezy altitude of the house and the beauty of the surroundings. His courtesy was not at all appreciated, as Enistor soon let him know.

"I don't suppose you came here to admire the view, Mr. Cane," said the Squire irritably. "Your unexpected presence argues that my sister is dead."

Mr. Cane's lively face assumed a solemn expression, and his airy manner became heavily professional. "You are right, Mr. Enistor," he said pompously, "my lamented client, Lady Staunton, passed away to the better land in a peaceful frame of mind at ten o'clock last night."

Enistor frowned and winced as he remembered his wasted telepathy. "I am sorry," he said conventionally, "and I regret greatly that I was not at hand to soothe her last moments. But unexpected business prevented my taking the journey. Still, had I guessed that she was likely to die, I should have managed to be with her."

"Pray do not grieve, Mr. Enistor," exclaimed the solicitor with unintentional irony. "My lamented client's last moments were tenderly soothed by her best friend."

"Her best friend?"

"So Lady Staunton termed Mr. Montrose!"

"I never heard of him," said Enistor abruptly. "Who is he?"

A most unexpected reply took away the Squire's breath. "He is the fortunate young gentleman who inherits Lady Staunton's property."

Enistor rose in a black fury, with clenched fists and incredulous looks. "I don't understand: you must be mistaken," he said hoarsely.

"I am not mistaken," replied Cane dryly. "I was never more in earnest in my life, sir. It is hard on you as my late lamented client's nearest relative, I admit. In fact Lady Staunton thought so too, and asked me to come down as soon as she died to explain her reasons for leaving the money to Mr. Montrose. Otherwise, since your sister, Mr. Enistor, did not encourage legal matters being attended to out of order, you would not have heard the news until the reading of the will after the funeral. As Lady Staunton died last night, the burial will take place in four days. I have no doubt as a sincere mourner you will be there."

"A sincere mourner!" cried Enistor, pacing the room hastily to work off his rage. "How can I be that when my sister has cheated me in this way?"

"Oh, not cheated, Mr. Enistor, not cheated," pleaded the rosy-cheeked little man more volubly than ever. "Lady Staunton's money was her own to dispose of as she desired. Besides, she did not forget you entirely: she has left you the sum of one thousand pounds."

"Really!" sneered the Squire savagely, "and this Montrose creature inherits five thousand a year! It is wicked: infamous, scandalous. I shall upset the will, Mr. Cane!"

The lawyer remonstrated mildly. "I fear that is impossible, Mr. Enistor. My lamented client was quite in her right senses when she signed the will, and as I drew it up in accordance with her instructions, you may be certain that all is in good order. I feel for you: upon my word I feel for you," added Mr. Cane plaintively, "and my errand cannot be called a pleasant one!"

"Oh, hang your feelings: what do I care for your feelings! It is my sister's iniquitous will that I am thinking about. She knew how poor I was: she was proud of being an Enistor, and she faithfully promised that I should have the money in order to mend our family fortunes. What devil made her change her intentions?"

"No devil that I am aware of," said Cane with puny dignity. "Lady Staunton did make a will in your favour. But a year ago she signed a new one leaving her income to Mr. Montrose, who is now my client. I decline on these grounds to hear him spoken of as a devil."

"Oh. Then it was this Montrose beast who made her change her mind?"

"No. Certainly he did not. He is not even aware that he has inherited, as Lady Staunton asked me to see you first. Only when the will is read, after the funeral in four days, will Mr. Montrose learn of his good fortune."

"Montrose does not know," said Enistor, striding forward to stand over the little lawyer in a threatening way. "Then why not destroy this last will and read the old one which is in my favour!"

Cane wriggled beneath Enistor's fiery gaze and slipped sideways out of his chair. "Are you in your right senses to – " he began, puffing indignantly.

Enistor cut him short. "Oh, the deuce take your heroics! You know perfectly well that I should benefit rather than a stranger. I want the money and I intend to get the money. By righting this wrong you will be doing a good act, since it seems you have a conscience of sorts. If it is a matter of money – "

This time it was Cane who interrupted. "You insult me," he vociferated shrilly. "I am an honest lawyer – "

"Rather an anomaly," interpolated Enistor scoffingly.

"An honest lawyer," continued the little man sturdily, "and as such I am bound to consider the wishes of my client. You are asking me to commit a felony, Mr. Enistor. How dare you! How dare you!" he mopped his perspiring brow. "What have you seen in me to lead you to make so infamous a proposition?"

"I thought I saw some vestiges of common sense," said Enistor dryly. "But it seems that you are a fool with a conscience!"

"I have a conscience, but I am no fool, Mr. Enistor! I have a great mind to tell the world at large how you endeavoured to tempt me!"

"If you do, I shall put forth a counter-slander saying that you came down here to tempt *me*."

"To tempt you? To tempt you, sir?"

"Why not? If I say that you offered to destroy the last will and substitute the first provided I gave you a large sum of money, who will refuse to believe the statement?"

"Any one who knows me."

"Ah. But the whole world does not know you, Mr. Cane. Your immediate friends may reject the calumny, but the majority of people won't. My word is as good as yours, you know!"

"You will not dare – "

"Oh yes, I shall dare if you dare!"

"Am I dealing with a gentleman or a scoundrel?" asked Cane, appealing to the carved ceiling.

"Pooh! Pooh!" said Enistor cynically. "What is the use of calling names? Why, a gentleman is only a scoundrel who is clever enough not to be found out."

"I disagree: I disagree entirely."

"I thought you would. You are not strong enough to be original. However, all this chatter will not alter circumstances. My sister has sold me in favour of this – what do you say his name is?"

"Mr. Montrose. Douglas Montrose!" said Cane sulkily. "He is – "

"Won't you sit down and explain? You will be more comfortable."

"No I won't," said Cane sharply and still fretted by the proposition which had been made to him. "I doubt if it would not be better for me to retire after what you have said."

"Oh," said Enistor ironically, "your duty to your late lamented client forbids."

"It does, and therefore I remain to explain. But I shall not sit down again in your presence, nor drink your wine, nor eat your food."

"Better wait until you are asked, Mr. Cane. Go on and tell me about Montrose."

Confounded by his host's disconcerting calm, the little lawyer came to the point, but delivered his explanation standing. "Mr. Montrose is a young Scotchman, poor and handsome and clever. He is a poet and a journalist, who lives in a Bloomsbury garret, ambitious of literary fame. Eighteen months ago he saved Lady Staunton's life when her horses bolted in Hyde Park. He stopped them at the risk of his limbs, and prevented a serious accident!"

"Silly ass," muttered Enistor, "if Lucy had died then, the money would have come to me. Go on."

Appalled by this crudely evil speech, Cane started back. "Are you a man or a demon, Mr. Enistor?"

"You can ask riddles when you have delivered your message. Though, to be sure," said Enistor, sitting down, "there is little need. This handsome young pauper paid court to my sister, who was always weak and silly. His sham heroism and his good looks and effusive compliments worked on her feeble mind, and she made him her heir. Am I right?"

"Lady Staunton made Mr. Montrose her heir certainly," said Cane, shutting up his little black bag and putting on his hat to leave. "But your description of my new client is wrong. He does not flatter any one, and his heroism was not a sham. Nor was your sister feeble-minded, but a very clever –"

"Woman," ended Enistor sharply, "and being so became the prey of this adventurer. Well, Mr. Cane, now that you have delivered your message you can go, and I shall be obliged if you will send me the one thousand pounds as soon as possible."

"Oh, certainly," cried Cane eagerly.

Enistor saw why he spoke so agreeably. "You think that by taking the one thousand pounds I condone the testament of Lady Staunton. Perhaps you are right, but I have more strings to my bow than one. I have been infamously treated and I shall have my revenge."

"You cannot revenge yourself on your sister who is dead," said Cane rebukingly, "and to punish Mr. Montrose, who is perfectly innocent of harming you, would not be the act of a Christian."

"Ah, but you see I am nothing so feeble-minded as a Christian."

"What are you then?" Cane stared.

"A wronged man, who intends to be revenged."

"I shall protect my client," cried the lawyer vigorously.

"Naturally, your fees will be larger if you do. But don't protect him at the cost of my character, or it will be the worse for your own."

"I am not afraid!"

"Indeed you are! Horribly afraid. However, you needn't faint on my doorstep as that would be inconvenient. Good-day: your trap is waiting."

Cane got away at once, quite convinced that Enistor was not wholly in his right mind. His rosy cheeks were pale as he drove away, and his courage was dashed by Enistor's unscrupulous threat.

"He is dangerous," thought the lawyer. "I must hold my tongue!" and he did.

CHAPTER IV

PLOTTING

The prophecy of Narvaez should have softened the blow to Enistor in the moment of its fulfilment. But it did not, for the simple reason that he had tried his best to disbelieve the Spaniard, in spite of his knowledge of the man's powers. Don Pablo, as the result of prying beyond the boundaries of the visible, possessed in active working super-senses latent in the ordinary man, and so he could literally see through a brick wall. Certainly his vision was not invariably clear, and at times the details of his prognostications were incorrect. In the present instance he had foretold that Enistor should receive his bad news by letter, whereas Mr. Cane had come down personally to convey the disagreeable intelligence. But the actual fact that Enistor would lose the money had been proved beyond all doubt, and the Squire found the one undeniable truth so unpleasant that he was careless about minor mistakes.

As soon as Cane, without bite or sup, had driven away in the direction of Perchton, Enistor made his way across the moors to the back-country where Narvaez had his abode. It was impossible that he could keep the knowledge of his bad fortune to himself, and moreover he wanted advice with regard to his future actions. The Squire was clever as men go, and usually decided all matters for himself; but in this instance it was necessary to consult a mastermind. Don Pablo was not only a shrewd and highly educated man, versed in knowledge of the world, but also possessed super-physical information which was both dangerous and useful. That is, the lore was dangerous to any who did not possess the spirit of love, and useful to an unscrupulous and wholly selfish man. Both Enistor and his master thought only of themselves and were prepared to crush without remorse all that stood in their way. At the present moment the unknown Montrose was an obstacle in Enistor's path and he wished Narvaez to assist in his removal. The Spaniard would only give his services if he saw that their use would benefit himself. And as the Squire knew that the wily old man wished him to remain poor in order to retain mastery over him, it was not likely that he would help him to gain a fortune. Enistor therefore was not certain that he would be aided, and more for the sake of talking himself free of care than for any other reason sought the cottage of the magician.

And Don Pablo's abode was really and truly a four-roomed cottage, where he lived along with a simple-minded old Cornish woman of sixty, who attended to his few wants. Enistor knew that Narvaez was immensely rich, and wondered why he should live so penuriously and humbly. But the man was almost wholly devoid of desire for things which mankind covets. He ate and drank sparingly: he cared nothing for society: his dress was plain but neat, and he was too much taken up with study to entertain. Narvaez, as his neighbour soon found out, was consumed by a passion for power: not that kind of power which is displayed openly by royalty or politicians or merchant-princes, but the secret power which sways the destinies of individuals and nations without apparent sign. For this he studied day and night, and crossed constantly the boundaries between the worlds visible and invisible. He obtained no physical benefit from the exercise of such command, but the passion of hidden sovereignty satisfied his soul, and that was all he cared about. He had long since risen above the sphere wherein the virtues and vices of men dispute pre-eminence, and lived above the healthy necessary turmoil of ordinary life to reign in solitude as a cold, calm, intellectual and merciless tyrant, doing evil because it gratified Self. He disobeyed the law of love which is giving, and isolated himself in a kingdom of his own, which his desire for rule had cut off from the great empire of God. His sole connection with men and women was to destroy their protecting will and make them slaves to his whims. In this way he acted with regard to Enistor, else he would not have taught the man anything about dark magic. But Narvaez knew well that Enistor, possessed of as fierce and unscrupulous a nature as his own, and almost as powerful a will, would never be a slave.

Consequently he was obliged to act cautiously in his association with him. Enistor, if he became too learned in forbidden lore, might well become Don Pablo's rival, to dispute the bad sovereignty which the Spaniard loved. As a matter of fact Narvaez would not have meddled with the Cornish squire at all but that he knew that a common danger menaced both, which Enistor, through his daughter, might avert. Narvaez was clever and powerful, and wholly given to self-worship, but he was by no means omnipotent, and at times it was necessary to defend his position. Thus by the offer to teach Enistor how to realise his ambitions, he managed to make the man more or less obedient: but there was always the danger of revolt should Enistor learn too thoroughly the laws of the invisible world, which interpenetrates the visible. Don Pablo, however, was content with the position of affairs, as his pupil was not yet strong enough to measure swords. And before he was, the Spaniard hoped to secure his ends and leave Enistor in the lurch.

The cottage was of grey stone, a clumsy rugged-looking habitation set on the side of a purple-clothed hill, beside a grass-grown lane, which meandered down the valley. On the slope of the hill were many disused mining shafts with huge mounds of earth and ruined buildings beside them. The hilltops had been a Roman camp, and the boundaries could still be defined. In the centre and amongst many gigantic stones was a sacrificial altar of the Druids, with grooves cut in its hardness so that the blood of the victims might stream to the ground. Alice never liked this unholy hill, as she was sensitive enough to feel the influence which clung round it. But Narvaez had established his home beside the miniature mountain, because on moonless nights he could perform uncanny ceremonies on the altar, which was given over to the Dark Powers he worshipped and propitiated. Enistor had likewise taken part in these sacrilegious doings and shivered at the memory of certain things, when he sighted the sinister grey monoliths which crowned the hill. Great as was his courage, it was not entirely proof against the deadly influences of the evil beings who haunted the place, although in a lesser degree than Narvaez he could compel them to service by performing certain rites.

Enistor was ushered into Don Pablo's study by the housekeeper, a brown-faced cheery old woman, too simple-minded to understand her master's weird powers. The apartment was of no great size, and the limited space was but sparsely furnished. There were only a table, which served as a desk, two chairs, a well-filled bookcase and a ponderous iron safe, wherein Narvaez stored what valuables he had by him. The walls were draped with dull red cloth, and the floor, oddly enough, was covered with a black carpet. The effect was menacing and impressive. When the visitor entered, a fire-place wherein large logs flamed faced him, while opposite the one window looking out on to the hilltop was a closed door leading to a sealed apartment, which Don Pablo allowed no one to enter into save himself and his pupil. Across the passage was a dining-room together with a tiny kitchen and a bedroom for the housekeeper at the back. The cottage itself was placed in a disorderly uncultivated garden surrounded by a loosely built stone wall. There was no upstairs, and the house being roofed with slate covered with moss presented a sombre appearance. In its greyness it resembled a huge toad squatting amongst the heather.

"How can you bear a fire on this hot day?" asked Enistor, throwing himself into the vacant chair and speaking irritably.

"You are in that kind of humour which seeks any outlet for its relief," was the Spaniard's irrelevant reply. "How often have I told you that it is necessary for you to get complete command of your temper. I have a fire because this body I occupy just now is nearly worn out and requires artificial heat to sustain it."

"Why don't you get a new one?" demanded the visitor still crossly.

"Some day I shall," rejoined Narvaez significantly, "at present this one serves me tolerably well. I control it thoroughly: you do not manage yours properly: it is your master, Enistor. Ah! you have much to learn."

"I have reason to be cross."

"No one has any reason to be cross. To lose one's temper simply shows that one is not yet free from ordinary human limitations. However, at your stage of learning I excuse you. It is hard to lose a large income, as you have done."

"What, you know – ?"

"Not by any super-physical means, Enistor," said Narvaez, coolly leaning back in his chair. "I walked to the top of the hill with a field-glass, and saw that you had a visitor. As so few people come here, it is only logical on my part to assume that the man was some messenger sent to tell you of Lady Staunton's death and your own loss."

"Well, the news did not come in a letter, as you prophesied," snapped Enistor.

"I am not the Pope to be infallible," said Don Pablo dryly, "and the matter is so trivial that I did not examine into things sufficiently to be entirely certain of details."

"Trivial to you: not to me!" said the Squire gloomily.

"Nonsense! Your possession of that income is only delayed. You have not lost it altogether!"

Enistor looked up sharply. "Did you make an invisible third at my interview with Cane?"

"I?" Don Pablo shrugged his aged shoulders. "Do you think that I have nothing to do but to waste my time in that way? No! I only say that you will regain the money, because I shall assist you to get it. You must have your price even though it is but a temporary one."

"What do you mean by temporary?" asked Enistor unpleasantly.

"Any one who works for money, or earthly fame, or earthly power has to surrender what he gains when death comes. But he who labours to acquire super-physical powers as I do – those powers which can dominate men without their knowing, gets what he can never lose, however many the deaths or lives!"

"I shall work for that later, Master. At present I require money so as to take my proper position in the world, and sway men at will."

"A limited ambition," scoffed Narvaez. "However, what you desire you shall acquire, as you won't let me have your daughter without a price."

"Would you do something for nothing yourself, Don Pablo?"

"No," said the magician honestly. "I take what I want if I am strong enough to do so. Otherwise I buy what I require. Nothing for nothing and something for something – if there is no other way of getting it. That is my rule."

"It is the rule of the majority of mankind."

"True, my friend," chuckled Narvaez, settling himself comfortably. "Mankind has a long way to travel before the law of love is learned."

"The law of love?"

"You give all and ask no return! Think of it: how dull life would be then, Enistor! However, we have argued enough, and my time is valuable. What about your interview with this lawyer? I must have details if I am to assist you."

Enistor looked at his master with a sneer. "I should have thought that a man with your powers would have known everything without requiring explanations."

"If it had been worth my while I would have made myself acquainted with all that took place," said the other man blandly; "but your affairs do not interest me save the necessity of paying your price. Well?"

The Squire looked again at Narvaez, and this time with gloomy distaste. It was often borne in upon him how entirely selfish Don Pablo was. But by this time he knew beyond question that those who take the Left-hand Path are forgetful of all save themselves. And Enistor could scarcely blame Narvaez for owning a quality which was almost as highly developed in his own nature. "Might is Right!" is the rule of black magic, and the survival of the fittest is the sole way to attain supremacy. Enistor had fully committed himself to the worship of his own being, yet there was sufficient good in him to struggle at times against the isolating power of selfishness. However it was worse than

useless to argue away accepted facts, so he swallowed his anger and quietly detailed all that had taken place.

"Hum!" said Narvaez, smoothing his wrinkled face when the last word was spoken. "You have made my task more difficult than was necessary."

"In what way?" scowled the Squire, who disliked correction.

"In several ways," was the serene response. "Your idea of threatening Cane was a good one, and had you called me to your assistance I could have worked along those lines. The man – from what you say – is weak, and my power added to yours would have secured the destruction of the second will, and the substitution of the first. Then you would have got the money without trouble. By weakening in your attack, you have simply turned Cane into your enemy."

"He won't dare to say anything, if that is what you mean."

"It is not what I mean, Enistor. Of course, since a lawyer, like Cæsar's wife, should be above reproach, Cane will not speak lest you should accuse him of offering to suppress the second will. But that doesn't much matter. The point is that you had him at a disadvantage and did not press your point. A well-directed thought would have brought me to your house, and I could have compelled the man to yield."

"I am not so sure of that. He is honest."

"What does that matter?" asked Don Pablo, opening his eyes contemptuously. "Honest or not, I should have obsessed him to such a degree that he would have committed himself too far to retreat. Of course if he was guarded my control would have effected nothing. But our Adversary only protects Alice, and in this instance would not have interfered. And yet," Narvaez suddenly looked round, as though aware of some new influence, "he might have prevented my exercise of power. It is necessary for the money to go to Montrose so that the Chaldean Drama should be played out in this set of lives."

"Is Montrose the other man you spoke of at dinner last night?"

Don Pablo threw up his hand to compel silence, closed his eyes to shut out the world of sense and listened intently. As he did so, his face grew dark and angry. "I defy you: I defy you!" he said vehemently, addressing some invisible person, as it appeared to Enistor. "Plot as you will, I can counterplot!" then he was silent for a moment, and opening his eyes lowered his hand. "The Adversary," he said quietly to his guest, but still looked fierce. "He is aware of our schemes, and says they will not succeed, if he can prevent their success. Well, I shall pit my strength against his."

"The Adversary then is not absolutely certain of success?" asked Enistor.

"No. Because man has free-will. If Montrose and Alice are guided by the Adversary, our task will indeed be difficult. But if you and I can make either stumble, the game will end in our favour. As I said, Enistor, this loss of money is the beginning of the drama. You can see for yourself, because by its going to Montrose it brings him on to the stage. And yet," added Narvaez with a furious gesture, "had you called me in to deal with that lawyer, I might have suppressed the second will and have prevented Montrose coming into the matter. The Adversary told me just now that he would have intervened also, but Cane being weak and having free-will – as all men have – could not have stood out against my domination."

"Well," said Enistor gloomily; "it seems that owing to my ignorance –"

"Your folly," interrupted the other sharply.

"Folly if you will then. But owing to my ignorance or folly we have lost the first move in the game. What now?"

Narvaez shrugged. "We must take a roundabout way instead of going by the direct path. That is closed by your not pressing your advantage with Cane. Now Montrose will obtain the money! Very good. He can retain it until I get it back from him to give it to you."

"The money is rightfully mine," cried Enistor vehemently, "and come what may I intend to gain it!"

"You will never gain it if you bluster and fume in that way," said Don Pablo coldly; "keep your temper and self-control, and we shall soon be at grips with the Adversary. He is no mean antagonist, I assure you."

"Well, Master, what is to be done? I leave myself in your hands!"

"I wouldn't assist you otherwise." Narvaez considered for a few moments. "I think it will be best to send Alice to London for a few months. The time of her stay will depend upon her chances of falling in love with Montrose."

Enistor jumped up and stamped. "She doesn't know Montrose," he declared in an angry manner, "she will never know him if I can help it."

"You are unable to help it," said Narvaez frigidly. "The Karma of Chaldea is bound to bring Montrose and Alice together. This much I am sure of, although I am ignorant of the details. Well, let us carry the war into the enemy's camp, Enistor. With this thousand pounds which you inherit, give Alice a few months in London on the plea that she requires a gay life to cheer her up. She will meet Montrose and he will fall in love with her. I am certain of this as his fate and her fate are intermingled. Then you can give your consent to the marriage – "

"What about your desire to marry Alice?" interrupted the Squire, much puzzled.

"That can be gratified later," said Don Pablo coolly. "Don't you see what I mean, Enistor? When Alice desires to marry Montrose, you will naturally invite your proposed son-in-law here to acquaint yourself with his character. Once he is on the spot" – Narvaez smiled cruelly and drew a deep breath – "I think you can safely leave him to me."

"What will you do?"

"Never mind. I have a plan in my head which may or may not succeed. There is no need to tell you what it is. You shall see its results. Your work is to send Alice to London."

"I don't quite understand," said Enistor, trying to read his master's thoughts, but in vain. "But I shall obey your instructions. But if Alice is to meet Montrose in society I fear it will be difficult to induce her to go out for enjoyment so soon after her aunt's death."

"Oh, Montrose as the heir of Lady Staunton will feel the same way. But it is not necessary for the two to meet at public functions. A quiet evening here, a little dinner there, and the introduction is accomplished. You need not trouble about details, Enistor. The accumulated result of good and evil, which we call Karma, will bring them together."

"You are willing to surrender Alice, I see."

"Oh, dear me, no! Montrose can make love to her until he is in my net. Afterwards, when the money comes to you and Montrose comes to the gallows, Alice can be my wife."

"The gallows. You don't mean – "

"I mean nothing at present," interrupted Narvaez impatiently, "but you can't fight battles with squirts. Montrose is in your path and mine, so he has to be removed. The means may be unpleasant, but they will not harm you in any way. I assure you of that emphatically."

"Will they harm Alice?"

"Only through her affections; not otherwise. What a heap of scruples you have, Enistor," sneered the old man; "one would think you were a school-girl instead of a grown man. You don't care for Montrose, or for your daughter."

"Not at all," admitted Enistor selfishly. "All the same, murder – !"

"Oh, if the word frightens you, call it blood-atonement. And the restitution of the fortune may be managed without the sacrifice of Montrose's life, if you will insist upon this silly weakness. If you wish to tread the Left-hand Path, Enistor, you must get rid of scruples. Trample on every one, slay, ruin, devastate: as the stronger you have the right to do so."

The Squire winced at this abominable teaching, although in his innermost heart he subscribed to it. And after all, as he thought, in the world of to-day the weaker is still the prey of the stronger. He was only carrying out more thoroughly what every one did in a lesser degree. Without further

pangs he gave in to the necessity of Montrose being removed by a legal death. "But his hanging will involve the commission of a murder by him," he said suddenly.

"Perhaps," said the other man ambiguously. "But you had better wait and see, Enistor. I can't waste time in arguing down your scruples. If you can't face these things, leave the matter alone and deal with the future danger yourself. But remember that only Alice can describe what that danger is, and she must become my wife to be trained as a clairvoyante."

"You didn't want her to love Hardwick because you said the passion would destroy her powers," said Enistor irrelevantly. "What about her love for this Montrose? Won't that do harm?"

"Unfortunately it will," sighed Narvaez vexedly, "but I can't prevent the blossoming of the love. The great law of Karma is stronger than I am. I can only deal with the free-will of both and warp their natures if possible. I think you had better go now. I have much to do!"

Enistor scowled at the imperious tone and tried – as he often did – to match his will against that of Narvaez. It suddenly came to him that he could find an easier way out of the difficulty and reduce Don Pablo's power over him by acting in the ordinary selfish way sanctioned by custom. "One moment," he said testily. "Montrose has the money, it is true, and legally there is no chance of getting it from him. But if he becomes my son-in-law, I shall be able to keep the income in the family."

"Quite so," assented Narvaez indifferently. "If you want the money for the family – to build up the Enistor fortunes as county people I suppose you mean – your suggestion is excellent. Montrose can take your name and along with his wife will be great in the land. Where you will be I leave you to say."

"I don't want Montrose to be great in the land, and I don't suppose that he has the brains to become so. But he and Alice will probably allow me to handle the income and –"

"And you will use it for your own advancement. Eh?"

"Why not? My advancement as head of the family will mean theirs."

"Probably, if you wish to waste time, energy and cash in building up your decayed race. But Montrose may have his own ideas to carry out, and those may not include consent to your possession of the family purse. Complete ownership of the money makes him stronger than you are."

"Stronger than I am? We shall see," and Enistor laughed at the idea.

"Very likely, when it is too late, you probably will see, and won't be pleased with what you do see. However, it is your business, not mine. I can return to Spain and learn what I wish to learn in other ways."

"But the teaching you are giving me?"

Narvaez sneered. "With an obedient son-in-law possessed of five thousand a year you will not want the teaching."

The Squire looked as alarmed as a self-confident man well could. He had scarcely counted upon this attitude being taken by his master. "I want the teaching more than I want the money," he confessed uneasily.

"You can have both if you will permit me to carry out my plans," said Don Pablo, acidly polite. "Otherwise you must be satisfied to sink back into the ordinary rank and file of humanity. My fee for teaching super-physical knowledge is possession of your daughter as my wife. Therefore your idea of securing the handling of this money by forwarding her marriage with Montrose does not meet with my approval. You can take your choice. I – as you will be pleased to observe – do not coerce you in any way."

"You can't," cried the Squire with sudden fury.

"Let us leave it at that," rejoined the Spaniard amiably.

Enistor stamped, swore under his breath and bit his nails angrily, while Narvaez smiled in a hatefully bland manner. Certainly the marriage of Montrose and Alice would bring back the money

to the family; but it might not – and here the egotist saw danger – put it into his own particular pocket. Lady Staunton's heir might be self-willed, obstinate and foolish – there was no knowing what qualities he might possess likely to thwart his proposed father-in-law's schemes. And should he prove to be recalcitrant, Enistor recognised that the marriage would only make matters worse. He would gain by it neither the teaching nor the fortune, and would have bartered the substance for the shadow. To have the money would be good: to acquire the secret lore would be better: to have both would be best of all. And both he could have for certain if he agreed to allow Narvaez to take command. For the teaching would make him a minor god, while the five thousand a year – even if he got it, which was doubtful – would not even make him a millionaire.

"You remind me," said the tempter, smiling as hatefully as ever, "of an ass between two bundles of hay. With my help I repeat you can have both."

"The money and the teaching: the teaching and the money." Enistor opened and shut his hands, drawing deep breaths and thinking profoundly.

"Exactly! On condition that I marry Alice."

"I agree." Enistor came to the decision swiftly.

"Understand! I am to have a free hand and your obedience."

The other man nodded, not knowing how fatal to himself was that sign of acquiescence. At that moment he stood at the cross-roads, free to choose good or evil, and his fierce greed led him to take the Left-hand Path down which this dark guide beckoned him to destruction. With a little chuckling laugh Narvaez received his victim's allegiance, and turned to his work. Then in the same tone of voice he made exactly the same remark as he had made when Enistor first hesitated. "I think you had better go now; I have much to do."

Enistor thus abruptly dismissed returned home pondering deeply on the way. By this time he was sufficiently infected with the cynicism of Narvaez to accept the situation, and to do what was necessary to turn Alice into a decoy for Montrose. Whether the bird would be lured into Don Pablo's nest he could not be sure, as Cane might warn his client of danger. Enistor now saw how very foolish he had been to make the man his enemy. But he comforted himself with the idea that the little lawyer would not dare to speak in the face of a possible accusation of having offered to suppress the second will. Also, even if he did speak, Montrose being in love would never listen to him. On the whole therefore, Enistor felt confident on reflection that the fortunate young man would appear at Tremore. Then he could be left to the malignant devices of Don Pablo Narvaez.

That evening at dinner Enistor abruptly announced the death of his sister, the loss of the money, and the good fortune of Mr. Douglas Montrose. He listened quietly to Alice's regrets, then informed her that she could go to London for a month in a very short space of time. The girl demurred.

"I can't go out into society when Aunt Lucy is dead," she said.

"There's no need for you to go into society," said her father, who anticipated the objection. "You can stay quietly in town and enjoy yourself in a small way. This place is rather dull for so young a girl as you are. The question is who can chaperon you, seeing that your Aunt Lucy is dead."

"Mrs. Barrast can, father," said Alice eagerly and much flushed, for the prospect of escaping from that gloomy house was delightful.

"Who is she?"

"Julian's – I mean Mr. Hardwick's sister. I met her at Perchton last Christmas, and so did you."

"Oh, I remember; that frivolous little fool of a woman with no more brains than a sparrow. Yes! you can go to her, if she will have you."

"She will be very glad," said Alice eagerly. "She is fond of me."

"Very good." Enistor rose deliberately. "Then that is settled!"

CHAPTER V THE MEETING

Having settled that Alice should go to London in that singularly short and abrupt conversation, Enistor refused to discuss the matter further. He ran up to town himself within the next four days, not so much to appear at his sister's funeral, which he duly attended, as to get the promised thousand pounds. He did not meet Montrose, since he purposely kept out of the young man's way, in spite of Cane's suggestion that there should be a meeting. Enistor, instructed by his master, decided that it would be best to let Montrose fall in love with Alice, and approach him in the character of a proposed son-in-law. Of course the Squire had no doubt but what the affections of the young people would be engaged as Narvaez predicted. The fulfilment of the prophecy concerning the loss of the money had considerably strengthened his faith in the Spaniard's powers.

With Cane the Squire got on much better, as he was anxious to obliterate, for obvious reasons, the bad impression he had made on the little man. Enistor pretended that he had only acted as he had done to see if Cane was honest, and professed himself quite willing to be content with his scanty inheritance. Whether the solicitor believed him or not it was impossible to say, but he feigned a belief and behaved with extraordinary civility to Enistor. Cane even went so far as to pay the thousand pounds out of his private account, so that the Squire should not have to wait for the winding up of Lady Staunton's estate. By the acceptance of this money, it was tacitly understood that Enistor would not contest the will, and Cane drew a long breath of relief when the receipt was given. There certainly was no chance that the second will could be upset, but the lawyer did not wish for any public action to be taken, lest mention should be made of the visit to Tremore. For even though that visit had been authorised by the dead woman, the vague threat of the Squire might come out in open court. Cane was quite innocent of wishing to destroy the will, and could deny the possible assertion on oath. But he knew well that however guiltless a man may be, there are always those who quote the "No smoke without fire" proverb. Therefore Cane was sincerely glad to have the matter settled without dispute, and for that very reason had given Enistor a cheque on his private account. When the Squire departed, the little man felt that all danger was at an end.

Enistor arrived back at Polwellin in very good spirits, as for many a long year he had not handled so large a sum of money. Being of a luxurious nature he bought many unnecessary things, and spent on himself a considerable sum which could have been used for better purposes. However, on the sprat-to-catch-a-mackerel theory, he set aside a certain ample amount for Alice's season in London. Acting the part of a fond father, he told her that she was to spare no expense, but to have all she wanted in the matter of clothes and jewellery and enjoyment. The girl was secretly amazed at this sudden kindness on the part of her usually neglectful parent, but being young, and being a woman, she gladly took advantage of the opportunity to purchase pretty things. In the selection of frocks and hats and feminine frippery she had the benefit of Mrs. Barrast's taste, and the little woman congratulated her on having so lavish a father.

"You will like Amy when you know her better," Hardwick had said to Alice, when the subject of chaperonage was broached; "but you will soon grow tired of her. Her sole idea in life is chiffons. She will be delighted to introduce you into her particular set of frivolous kill-time wastrels, but with your nature, Alice, you will never meet a man at her house likely to appeal to you as a husband!"

This was perfectly true, as in spite of her youth Miss Enistor was a thoughtful girl, who wanted more food for her mind than an endless round of bridge-parties and whist-drives and Cinderella dances and theatre visits, coupled with airy gossip about this person and that. Mrs. Barrast was only too pleased to chaperon a tolerably pretty girl of good family who was possessed of plenty of money, and she did her best to give her guest an amusing time. But what Julian prophesied

soon came to pass. Alice grew weary of the dainty little woman's frivolity and shallow nature. It was like an industrious bee living with a butterfly.

"You are a darling," said Mrs. Barrast when Alice had been a week in the charming house in Hans Crescent; "quite the nicest thing I ever met. And your good looks don't clash with mine. That is so satisfactory, isn't it?"

"I am not good-looking," said Alice soberly.

"Of course not. Good-looking is a word which one applies to a man. But you are lovely in a moonlight, misty kind of vapoury way," babbled the other. "I think you look charming in that mourning, and Madame Coralie has such good taste. I wish you would marry Julian, dear: you are just the sort of romantic head-in-the-clouds darling he loves."

"Julian would not suit me, nor would I suit Julian," said Miss Enistor decidedly. "We have arranged to be brother and sister."

Mrs. Barrast sighed. "Such a dull relationship. Frederick and I live together something in the same way. Of course he's my husband and I'm his wife, although I don't know why I ever married him. But he goes his own way to Blue Books and politics and vestry-meetings and those horridly dull things, while I go mine, seeking for a heart that will understand me."

"That is a dangerous quest, Mrs. Barrast," said Alice seriously.

Mrs. Barrast pounced on her guest with many kisses. "You chilly darling, why don't you call me Amy, as I have asked you to again and again!"

"Well then, Amy, you should not let all these young men make love to you."

"But they will, my dear. There is something about me which draws them in spite of themselves, poor dears. And after all I don't mean anything wrong, you know, Alice. Platonic friendships are my delight."

"That is a dangerous word between a married woman and an unmarried man."

"Dangerous quest: dangerous word. My dear, you talk as if you were one hundred and forty years of age," cried Mrs. Barrast petulantly.

"I have lived much alone and have thought deeply, Amy."

"Oh, my dear, you shouldn't think. It always wrinkles one dreadfully to think, you know. Frederick thinks and just look at him. One would take him to be my grandfather."

"I like Mr. Barrast very much," said Alice quietly, and she did, for the master of the house was the only person to whom she could talk sensibly.

"Run away with him then. No," Mrs. Barrast reflected, "don't do that. After all Frederick is rich and my husband, though I don't know why I married him."

"Would you have married him had he been poor?"

Mrs. Barrast screamed in a pretty playful way. "Of course not, darling. What odd things you say. All Frederick's attraction lies in his money and his brains. He is clever, you know, and is too much taken up with politics to look at any other woman, which is so satisfactory. I was so poor when I met him that I was glad to marry him. And I'm sure I make him a very good wife, Alice," ended Mrs. Barrast in an injured tone, "so you needn't raise your eyebrows in that nasty sort of way."

"I only meant –"

"I know what you mean. It's sure to be something to do with Dr. Watts's hymns, as you are that sort of girl. I wish you weren't so particular about mourning, dear, as then I could take you to heaps and heaps of places where one can have a really good time. We'll go to Hurlingham this afternoon. Now you can't refuse. I've set my heart on your going to Hurlingham."

It was little use Alice refusing, as Mrs. Barrast was one of those desperately persistent people who always get their own way. Miss Enistor, who had been fond of her Aunt Lucy, really wished to go out as little as possible, and but that she was anxious to escape from gloomy Tremore and the attentions of Don Pablo, would never have come to live with the butterfly. However, her hostess was so kind, and Alice was so young, and the contrast between London life and Cornish life was

so great, that she really did enjoy herself immensely. Besides there was always Frederick to talk to, a tall grave man with iron-grey hair, who treated his pretty young wife in a most indulgent manner, and was as amused with her shallow frivolity as Richelieu must have been with the pranks of his kittens. There was really no harm in the dainty little woman and, in spite of her platonic philanderings, she never gave Frederick any serious cause for rebuke. One cannot be angry with a morsel of thistledown, and that is the best description of Mrs. Barrast. Always charmingly dressed and delightfully vivacious, she floated from house to house in a frolicsome fairy kind of way. Dullness fled when Mrs. Barrast entered a room.

It was strange that so airy and nimble-witted a woman should be the sister of a stolid giant like Julian, with his serious views of art and life. But he was very fond of Amy Barrast, although she flouted his advice and told him frequently that he was as dull as tombs, a witticism she had picked up from an American admirer. Hardwick came several times to London while Alice stayed in Hans Crescent, but always returned to his beloved west country, as the frivolity of his sister's circle was altogether too much for him. By this time he had accepted the rôle of Miss Enistor's brother, and the two were most confidential.

"Are you tired of all this, Alice?" asked Julian, after a particularly frivolous luncheon. "This rubbish must bore one of your thoughtful disposition."

Alice, who was looking unusually charming, laughed gaily. "I have left my thoughtful disposition at Tremore," she said in a light tone. "While I am in Rome I must do as the Romans do."

"Do?" said Hardwick; "they don't do anything!"

"But they do, Julian. They work harder than any labourer to kill time. I do not think that I should like to lead this life always, but it is a change from the dullness of Polwellin, you know. The month I have been here has improved my health and spirits. I am sure that I thought too much."

"Possibly! All work and no play is as bad as all play and no work. When do you return?"

"I have no settled time to return. Father says that I can stay as long as I like. Though of course I don't want to outstay my welcome."

"You won't, Alice. Never think that. Amy likes to have you here, and Frederick says that you are the most sensible girl he ever met. You should go with Amy to Cowes later on."

Alice shook her head. "I am not sure. I must go back some time or another, as father won't let me remain away for ever. Besides I really think that I shall grow weary of pleasure. Blue skies and constant sunshine bore one."

"Yes, I quite understand. But remember when you come back you will again be exposed to the attentions of that old mummy."

Alice shuddered. "Don Pablo? Is he as often at Tremore as ever?"

"More often. And when he isn't at Tremore, your father goes to his cottage on the moors. I can't understand why your father likes him so much. There seems to be something evil about Narvaez."

"Oh!" Alice laid a trembling hand on his arm; "have you felt that also?"

"Yes. I'm not a sensitive chap as a rule, but Narvaez makes me uncomfortable – just like Mr. Hyde in Stevenson's story, you know. Whatever you do, don't consent to be his wife, Alice."

"I certainly shall not, whatever my father may say. At the worst I can always marry you."

"That isn't a compliment," murmured Hardwick, mortified.

"Well, you know what I mean. I respect you and like you, even if I don't love you, Julian. And if I did marry you I should never give you cause to complain of coldness on my part."

"Oh, Alice" – his face lighted up.

"No! No! No! The compact still stands. Until I am driven into a corner we are only brother and sister."

"Of course. It's an odd arrangement."

"Well, I admit that, and only a really kind-hearted, sensible man such as you are would understand and keep to such an arrangement. Sometimes I think I am doing wrong in holding you to our compact, but on reflection I don't think that I am doing wrong. If you loved me as a man should love a woman, it would be different and then I should be playing with fire. But you don't."

"No," said Julian honestly, "you are quite right. I like you: I have a deep affection for you, and at all costs would protect your happiness. But I am quite sure now that I don't love you in the way you would like to be loved."

Alice drew a deep breath of relief. "How nice to hear you talk so reasonably, Julian. We quite understand one another, don't we?"

"Quite," he hesitated, and then spoke softly. "Have you seen any one who –"

"Of course I haven't," interrupted the girl hastily; "you said that I should meet with no one to suit me here. Not that I am looking out for a husband, you know, Julian!"

"I do know. All the same you are sure to come across Prince Charming some day, and then I shall surrender my guardianship to him. You are certain to choose some nice fellow, who won't mind our continuing our brother and sister arrangement when you are Mrs. Somebody."

"H'm!" said the girl dubiously; "if Mr. Somebody loves me, he may object to a triangle of that sort. Besides, you may marry yourself, Julian."

"I may," said Hardwick in his stolid way, "but at present I am at your service as a stop-gap husband if Don Pablo and your father drive you into a corner, Alice."

"How dreadfully immoral a stop-gap husband sounds!" laughed Miss Enistor, but appreciated the offer all the same. It was impossible to combat alone two strong natures like those of her father and Narvaez; therefore to have Hardwick on her side was a great gain. Nothing would ever induce her to marry Don Pablo. Alice was certain of that.

But as speedy events proved it was not necessary for Julian to hold himself at Miss Enistor's disposal in this loyal way. Six weeks after Alice was in London, circumstances brought about the meeting with Montrose. The girl knew that this young man had inherited her aunt's money, but as Enistor, when informing her of the fact, had said nothing very bitter, she had no grudge against the fortunate legatee. Certainly she regretted the loss for her father's sake, but decided with instinctive fairness that Lady Staunton had a right to do what she would with her own. Alice had seen but little of her aunt in past years, although the old lady had sometimes invited her to pay a visit. Consequently she had heard nothing of Montrose, and wondered what he was like. When Mrs. Barrast mentioned the name, Alice was curious to see the young man. And there was every chance that she would, as it appeared that Mrs. Barrast's doctor wished to bring him to dinner.

"And Dr. Eberstein is such a delightful man that any friend of his is certain to be a darling," babbled the little woman. "You haven't met my doctor, have you, dear. He attends me for nerves! I am a great sufferer from nerves, and I'm sure if those Christian martyrs they make such a fuss over suffered as much as I do, I quite understand them being praised. But I am sure they never did."

"Have you ever met Mr. Montrose?" asked Alice anxiously, for she wanted to have a sketch of the young man beforehand.

"No, my dear. Dr. Eberstein says he is very handsome and very nice, and has a lot of money!"

"That is quite true, Amy. Mr. Montrose inherited my aunt's money."

"Oh, my dear, what a disagreeable thing for you. I shall write to Dr. Eberstein and say that I can't ask him and his friend to dinner."

"Why not?" asked Alice bluntly.

"Well, you don't want to meet a man who has robbed you of –"

"He has not robbed me."

"Your father, I mean, Alice."

"Nor my father, Amy. Lady Staunton had a perfect right to do what she liked with her money. My father is not at all annoyed, nor am I."

"What a perfect, Christian feeling!" exclaimed Mrs. Barrast; "and how odd that you shouldn't be angry! How much money have you lost?"

"None at all," said Miss Enistor rather impatiently; "but my aunt left Mr. Montrose five thousand a year."

"Oh, how dreadful! My dear, if I were in your shoes I should scratch his eyes out. Of course your father is rich – "

"My father is very poor. I only had this season in town because my aunt did leave him a little money."

"Your father is poor! That makes his conduct and yours the odder, if there is such a word. I think it's very unjust, a sister not leaving her money to a brother and keeping it in the family. My dear," added Mrs. Barrast impressively, "this wrong must be put right. You shall marry this young man, if he is nice and agreeable. Then the money will come back to you."

"Don't make such plans, Amy. I don't want to marry any one."

"My dear, that's quite immoral."

"Oh, nonsense! If you begin to be a match-maker I shall refuse to meet Mr. Montrose."

"Then you don't want me to ask him to dinner?"

"Ask him if you like: only don't expect me to fall into his arms."

"As if I expected you to do anything so silly," said Mrs. Barrast, and withdrew to pen her invitation to the doctor and his friend. By this time, in her own mind, she was quite determined to arrange a match between Montrose and Alice, being one of those busybodies who will meddle with what does not concern them in the least. But Mrs. Barrast did not look at her proposed scheming in this light. She thought she was behaving very kindly to Alice.

The girl herself was really anxious to meet Montrose now that there was a chance of doing so. Never having felt the want of money, she had not given much thought to the loss of the inheritance, and did not know how vexed her father was to see Montrose get the income. Enistor had particularly refrained from expressing his vexation, since he did not wish Alice to be biased against the fortunate youth. Therefore Alice was quite prepared to be just towards Montrose, and to like him, if his personality appealed to her. A very unsophisticated maiden was Miss Enistor. In a similar position Mrs. Barrast would have schemed to recover the lost fortune by marriage, if the man had been as ugly as a Cyclops, and indeed, as can be seen, really did intend to right things in this way. But Alice was quite content to let Montrose remain a bachelor and enjoy the money after his own fashion.

Mr. Barrast had to attend to his political duties on the evening appointed for the dinner, which was perhaps the reason why his frivolous wife selected that special evening. Frederick was a kill-joy, she said, and moreover she did not wish to ask an extra woman to dinner. Mr. Montrose could attend to Alice and she, as the hostess, could attend to Dr. Eberstein. They would enjoy a pleasant meal, and afterwards could chat and have music in the drawing-room. Also Dr. Eberstein might be induced to tell their fortune, or prophesy events, or do wonderful things which, according to Mrs. Barrast, he was capable of doing when willing. As a matter of fact, Eberstein had the reputation of being a psychic doctor, and of knowing more about the unseen than most people. But in spite of Mrs. Barrast's babbling, he never by any chance performed the wonders which she spoke about. All the same, with the pertinacity of her nature Mrs. Barrast intended to ask him to give an exhibition of his powers, and as Frederick did not approve of such things, this was another reason why she chose an evening when he would be engaged. "Frederick is quite a heathen, you know, dear," said Mrs. Barrast, when the two ladies were in the drawing-room waiting for the two guests, "he says that to help poor people is better than being religious."

"To help the poor *is* to be religious," said Alice quietly.

Mrs. Barrast made a grimace and looked in a near mirror to see that her hair was in good order. "Oh, I know you are that sort of person also, dear. Julian tells me that you are hand in glove with your vicar."

"The vicar of Polwellin is a good man, Amy."

"How dull! I never did like good people, who are fond of the ragged poor and starving children and all that slum sort of thing. Though I'm sure I have helped dozens of times in bazaars and charity dances to get money for them. And I really needed the money more than they did," concluded Mrs. Barrast plaintively.

She flitted round the drawing-room in her usual restless manner, arranging the flowers, rearranging the many useless objects of luxury, and generally passing the time in meddling, chattering continuously. The drawing-room was suggestive of her brainless nature, as it was filled with costly things of no possible use; frivolous rubbish that had taken her fancy for the moment and then had been more or less forgotten. There was ample space, plenty of light and colour, and all the appliances of civilisation for an easy, luxurious existence. But repose was lacking, as the hostess had communicated to the room some of her abnormal restlessness. Mrs. Barrast was always screwed up to concert pitch and never gave herself, or any one in her vicinity, a single moment of peace. This incessant desire to say something or to do something, however silly, was gradually forcing Alice to consider seriously the necessity of cutting short her visit. There was an excess of oxygen in the atmosphere of Mrs. Barrast that disturbed the girl's serene nature.

"Oh, here they are at last," cried the hostess with another glance into the mirror, as her quick ear caught a sound outside the door. "I am so glad, as I am so hungry. Then you see, dear – oh, Dr. Eberstein, how are you? So very glad to see you. And Mr. Montrose! It *is* Mr. Montrose, isn't it? How do you do? So pleased to meet you. Dr. Eberstein, this is Miss Enistor, who is staying with me for a few weeks. Mr. Montrose, Miss Enistor. And now we can go to dinner. I am sure you are both dying for food!"

The doctor bowed gravely to Alice and remained somewhat in the background talking, or rather listening, to the voluble Mrs. Barrast. It seemed as if he had stepped back to be a spectator of the meeting between the younger people, for Alice felt, rather than saw, that his eyes were upon her. But she was too much taken up with Montrose to consider this for a moment. The young man advanced silently, a tall slim figure, graceful and virile. His dark eyes were fixed on Alice in a puzzled sort of way, as if something about her perplexed him greatly. On her part, the girl rose from the chair to meet his gaze more directly than was consistent with the first introduction of a youth and a maiden. She did not know why he appeared to be familiar to her. It was not his looks, for these were new to her. But in his eyes there was something which hinted that he was less a stranger than a very dear friend. Of course, what knowledge of reincarnation she had gained from her father told her that the body was nothing and the soul was everything. Certainly she had never seen Montrose before in the flesh, but through his eyes there looked a soul which she knew. All this flashed through her troubled mind in a second and the blood crimsoned her face as she impulsively held out her hand.

With a soft quick indrawn breath the young man took it. He was evidently as perplexed as she was. Only by an effort did he release the girl's slim hand and find his voice.

"I am glad to meet you, Miss Enistor!"

His voice broke the spell, and Alice became aware – at least she thought as much – that she had been acting foolishly. Of course he would be confused to meet the niece of the lady whose money he had inherited. That was the reason of his odd look and strange silence. But she would put him at his ease at once, since there was nothing to be gained by being stiff with a perfectly innocent person. And then – here came in the momentary memory again – she liked him at sight more than any one she had ever seen. She repeated his words.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Montrose!" and then the two smiled at one another in a somewhat embarrassed way.

"There's the gong," cried Mrs. Barrast gaily, "your arm, doctor. We shall have a pleasant dinner and a delightful evening!"

"I am sure of that, Mrs. Barrast," said the other positively. "The evening has commenced most auspiciously."

Alice asked herself what he meant and laid her hand on Montrose's arm. She did not get an answer to her mental question until much later.

CHAPTER VI

A CONVERSATION

Dinner was served, not in the large dining-room, used on high days and festivals, but in a small octagonal apartment, reserved for such minor occasions. Its walls were of polished white wood, gaily painted with wreaths of flowers bound with knots of blue ribbon and held by naked cupids, dimpled and rosy. There was a blue-tiled fire-place in which stood a brass cradle for the flaming coals, though at present, the weather being warm, this was filled with ferns and bulrushes. The ceiling was painted with sunset clouds, the carpet was moss-green sprinkled with bunches of daisies, and the furniture was of cream-coloured wood. In the centre stood a round table of no great size, at which the hostess and her guests took their seats. Two smart parlour-maids attended to their wants, as Mrs. Barrast preferred to dispense with footmen and butler, save when she gave a state dinner to people she did not care about.

"Frederick's friends, you know," she explained airily, when unfolding her napkin. "The people who like things-as-they-ought-to-be. I think things-as-they-ought-not-to-be are more amusing myself. More of a surprise, you know."

"If you pushed that theory to extremes, Mrs. Barrast," said Dr. Eberstein in a dry way, "you would find the world excessively disagreeable."

"Oh, I don't know, doctor. People in society all say the same things and do the same things and think the same things. I adore originality myself."

"If originality made you uncomfortable you would change your mind."

"I daresay. But that would be no novelty. I am always changing my mind!"

"Consequently your nervous system gets out of order and you have to come to me to have it set right."

"If I and others did not come to you where would your practice be?" asked Mrs. Barrast, accepting fish from the parlour-maid. "If one didn't change one's mind the world would stand still."

Dr. Eberstein laughed. "That is a deeper remark than you guess, Mrs. Barrast," he said quietly. "But there is one change of mind and another change of mind."

"Of course," the frivolous little woman opened her eyes widely, "if there were not another change of mind there would be no change at all."

"True, O Queen! You speak wiser than you know."

"Tell Frederick that, doctor. He says I have no ideas, and what I have aren't ideas at all. No! I don't mean that! But he says – well, I don't know exactly what Frederick says. Nobody ever does, especially when he gets up to make a speech in the House. But he's a dear fellow all the same, and do try that hock, doctor. It is particularly good!"

Eberstein smiled and refused, as he drank nothing but water. He looked on Mrs. Barrast as an irresponsible delightful child, who had everything to learn, yet who could not be taught, as it was impossible for her to concentrate her attention for one whole minute. A butterfly herself, she chased other butterflies and danced along a sunny path careless of whither she was going. The doctor knew that in the nature of things she would have to learn what life meant some day: but did not tell her so. Mrs. Barrast would not have understood him if he had.

While eating and listening to the remarks of Montrose, the youngest member of the party stole frequent looks at Eberstein. He was not very tall, rather stout, some years over fifty, and had a healthy clean-shaven face. Alice by no means considered him handsome, but when he smiled there was a kind and helpful look in his grey eyes which drew her to him. She felt that he was cool, wise, tolerant, and anxious to aid his fellow mortals. Mr. Montrose – so ran her thoughts – was very fortunate to have such a friend. In the hour of need Eberstein would prove staunch.

Alice was positive of this although she had no experience of the man's nature. But added to the ordinary feminine intuition she possessed a subtle clairvoyant instinct, undeveloped though it was, and without any positive proof she would have staked her existence on Eberstein's being a really good and helpful man. One in a thousand.

But as a woman her feelings inclined to Montrose, since he was extremely handsome and likewise fascinating. The unusual combination of auburn hair and dark eyes was striking, and his clearly cut features of the Greek type impressed her with a sense of belonging to a thoroughbred stock. His shapely body, his slim hands and feet, his lithe active strength, suggested a racehorse perfection. A well-formed head showed that he had brains, and a resolute chin revealed courage and decision. Altogether Miss Enistor was favourably impressed with the looks of the young man who had inherited Lady Staunton's money, and thought that he would make good use of it. As to her other feeling, of his soul being familiar to her, she had not yet reasoned that out in a way to satisfy herself. At present all she knew was that she and Montrose seemed to be old acquaintances, and they chatted as if they were friends of many years' standing. Mrs. Barrast remarked this.

"You two get on very well together," she said shrewdly, when the dessert was placed on the table, and Eberstein smiled when she made the remark.

"We seem to suit one another," was Montrose's reply: then added, to avert personal remarks on the part of Mrs. Barrast: "I wonder how it is that one is repelled by some people and drawn to others at first sight."

"Ask Miss Enistor for the explanation," said Eberstein quietly.

Alice was startled by the directness of his speech. "How do you know that I can explain, doctor?"

"Oh, Dr. Eberstein knows all manner of things other people don't know," chimed in the hostess. "I am quite afraid of him sometimes. He is as wise as the sea and as deep!"

"And as useful, I hope," said the doctor, smiling genially. "However, Montrose has not yet asked Miss Enistor for a reply to his question."

The young man laughed and looked at the flower-like face of his neighbour with great admiration. "How is it some people repel while others attract?"

"The doctrine of reincarnation explains," replied the girl, forced to answer plainly while the doctor's calm, grey eyes were on her. "Those people who repel have done one an injury in some previous life: those who attract have done good, or at least have been friendly."

"Likewise in other lives?" questioned the doctor.

"Of course. Although I do not know if you believe in reincarnation?"

"Oh," Mrs. Barrast uttered a little shriek and dabbled her fingers in the bowl of rose-water at her elbow. "He believes in all manner of dreadful things, my dear. How he can do so I cannot understand, when he is so clever. I think reincarnation is rubbish myself."

"Oh, no! no!" protested Montrose.

"What! You believe in our having lived before also? Really it is very odd and queer of you. Alice too. My dear, where did you learn such awful nonsense?"

"From my father," said Miss Enistor dryly; "and if you met him, Amy, you would not think he was the man to teach nonsense!"

"Then he's got a bee in his bonnet."

"He doesn't wear a bonnet."

"Oh, Alice, you know perfectly well what I mean. He's crazy!"

Miss Enistor laughed. "I think my father is the sanest person I have ever met, Amy. Why shouldn't reincarnation be a great truth?"

"It isn't in the Bible," said Mrs. Barrast pettishly, for the conversation being beyond her was somewhat boring to her small intellect. "And what isn't in the Bible is wrong."

"You are of the Caliph Omar's opinion with regard to the Koran when he ordered the library of Alexandria to be burnt," observed Eberstein; "but if you will read St. Matthew, verse 14, chapter xi, you will find that reincarnation is plainly acknowledged. Also in St. John's Gospel, chapter ix, verses 2 and 3, it is plainly hinted at. Origen, the most learned of the Christian Fathers, believed in the law of rebirth and –"

"Oh, it's all nonsense," interrupted Mrs. Barrast, weary of the explanation.

"So be it," admitted the doctor quietly, "it is all nonsense. *Your* brain is the measure of the universe."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean. Frederick says that I haven't any brain to speak of: as if I could live if I haven't," said Mrs. Barrast incoherently. "Let us have coffee here while you gentlemen smoke. Oh, I forgot: you don't smoke, doctor. Mr. Montrose?"

"Thank you," and the young man accepted a cigarette from Mrs. Barrast's own particular case. "You smoke yourself, I see."

"Oh, yes." Mrs. Barrast lighted her little roll of tobacco. "It soothes me. I am all nerves, you know. Alice, will you –?"

"No, thank you. I am not all nerves!"

"I'm sure I wonder you aren't, living in Cornwall with sea-gulls and moors and those sort of things. You will like this coffee, Dr. Eberstein. There is a vanilla bean in each cup, which makes it so nice."

"Very good coffee," said the other, sipping gravely, and wondering if Mrs. Barrast was aware of the rubbish she talked.

The little woman apparently was not, as she conversed volubly, darting from this subject to that after the manner of a swallow. She mentioned several novels which had attracted her frivolous attention, talked of some musical comedies she had seen, criticised the fashions, told one or two tales dealing with scandals concerning various people, and in every way monopolised the conversation, until it was time to return to the drawing-room. Alice, who wished to converse with Montrose, was pleased when this move was made, as it appeared to be the only chance of ending Mrs. Barrast's airy nothings. For a few moments she was alone with her hostess and seized the chance of asking if Dr. Eberstein was a German.

"I suppose he is," said Mrs. Barrast gravely, "his name sounds like it. But I can't say what he is. He talks all languages as well as he talks English, and never says anything about his father and mother. But he's very nice, isn't he, Alice? A kind of soul-doctor, you know, who tells his patients that mind is stronger than matter. Not exactly Christian Science, but something like it. He has never come to dinner before. I'm sure I don't know why, as I have asked him dozens of times."

Alice thought that she knew the reason, which had to do with Mrs. Barrast's frothy chatter, but was too polite to put her idea into words. "What do you think of Mr. Montrose?" she asked, anxious for a second opinion.

"Good-looking but stupid," was Mrs. Barrast's verdict; "not a second idea in his head. However, he has money – your money, dear, so you ought to marry him."

"He has not got my money," said Miss Enistor tartly, "and even if he had I certainly should not marry him for his wealth."

"I daresay: you are such a funny girl. Not at all like a human being. It's silly not to eat a pear that has fallen into your mouth."

"Mr. Montrose being the pear?"

"Of course. He is head over ears in love with you already. I'm not his style evidently. Not that I care," ended Mrs. Barrast, caring very much indeed. "Go in and win, Alice, and let me design the bridesmaids' dresses. Pink silk and white –"

Mrs. Barrast's chatter about chiffons was put a stop to by the entrance of the gentlemen. As if it had been arranged, Dr. Eberstein walked over to Mrs. Barrast and engaged her in conversation.

Montrose hesitated, then came to the corner wherein Alice was seated. He looked extremely handsome and attractive; she was more than ever taken with his appearance. Smiling amiably, she made room for him to sit down beside her on the ottoman, but waited for him to begin the conversation. He did so with an abruptness which startled her.

"I hope you are not my enemy," said the young man earnestly.

Alice raised her eyebrows. "Why should I be?"

"Well, you see Lady Staunton left me her money!"

"Why not, Mr. Montrose? It was her own money!"

"Yes. But do you think it was right that she should leave it away from her relations?"

"If she wished to. Why not?"

"You don't regret the loss?" He looked at her very directly.

"Not at all. I have never given the matter any consideration."

"And your father?"

"He is quite satisfied with the legacy left to him by Aunt Lucy," said Alice unhesitatingly, for she knew nothing of Enistor's wrath about the loss.

Montrose drew a long breath of relief. "I am glad to hear you say that," he said thankfully. "I don't mind telling you, Miss Enistor, that, when I heard of my good fortune, it was my first intention to surrender the money to your father. I was persuaded not to do so by Dr. Eberstein."

"He is a friend of yours?" she asked carelessly.

"The best friend a man ever had: the best friend a man could have. He cares for nothing save to do good. I see you raise your eyebrows, thinking of how he advised me to keep Lady Staunton's money. But he did so, because it was necessary."

"Why?" demanded Alice point-blank.

"I can't tell you. He said it was necessary, so I obeyed him."

"Would you have obeyed him if he had told you to give my father the money?"

"Yes," said Montrose truthfully and unhesitatingly. "And to put it plainly, Miss Enistor, it is harder for me to keep the money than to surrender it. I don't require so large an income."

"Yet my father heard from Mr. Cane that you were poor."

"Very poor. I was starving when I first made Lady Staunton's acquaintance, Miss Enistor. My parents died when I was a child, and I was brought up by an old aunt in Edinburgh. When I was eighteen years of age she passed away, leaving me what little she had. I came to London with the idea of writing poetry and plays. But my work would not sell, and when my money came to an end, I starved until I managed to drift into journalism. Even then I only managed to keep body and soul together in a Bloomsbury garret. When I saved your aunt's life, she gave me employment as her secretary to deal with her many charities. But I assure you that she never expressed any intention of leaving her money to me. If she had, I should have objected, since her brother was alive. However, she did leave me this large income, and I was ready to give it up, until Eberstein told me it was necessary to keep it."

"I wonder why?" said Alice thoughtfully, and greatly interested in the story he had told.

"Eberstein will not tell me. But he has a good reason for what he says and I always obey him, knowing his true friendship. A few years ago I was dying of starvation and pneumonia in my attic, and he saved my life. Since then I have been with him constantly. As you believe in reincarnation, Miss Enistor, I may as well tell you that there is some tie between you and me dating from former lives. What it is I cannot say, as Eberstein refuses to explain. He brought me here to-night to meet you."

"Oh!" Alice darted a swift piercing look at the young man's earnest face and wondered if he was as guileless as he appeared to be. "How did he know that I was here?"

"He is Mrs. Barrast's doctor, you know," said Montrose simply.

The girl did not reply immediately. She was considering if there was not some conspiracy on foot to entangle her in a marriage bond. Dr. Eberstein looked kindly and sympathetic, yet for his own ends he might have brought herself and Montrose together. Was he an honest man, or a schemer? Was Montrose his victim, or his accomplice? And what had she to do with either of the two men? As she thought thus, there came a wave of that same overpowering influence which she had felt in the Tremore dining-room. It seemed to sweep away the suggestion of evil with which she had almost unconsciously credited Eberstein and his young friend. "I don't understand," she said faintly and turned white.

"Are you ill?" asked Montrose, alarmed. It was plain that he did not feel the influence as she did.

"No! No! I shall be all right soon. The heat –" here she broke off with a surprised look. "Why, I *am* all right. I never felt better in my life. Did you feel anything just now?"

"Feel anything?" Montrose looked puzzled. "What do you mean, Miss Enistor?"

"Nothing at all," she replied quickly and evasively, for she decided that it would not do to be too frank with this young man until she knew more of him. "Only the heat, you know, and these dinners. I am a quiet country girl, Mr. Montrose, and am not accustomed to London life."

"I like the country myself, Miss Enistor," sighed the young man wistfully. "I have long since wanted to live in the country, as London in some ways worries me. I can't explain myself more fully."

"I know what you feel like," said Alice, nodding wisely. "You are sensitive as I am. To be in the country is like being in clean water, while London is like bathing in a dirty pool."

"Oh," Montrose's face flushed and brightened. "How did you guess?"

"Because I feel as you do. It is the evil thoughts that are in London which affect you. My father knows something about psychic matters and has taught me a little. That is why I believe in reincarnation."

Montrose nodded in his turn. "Eberstein first spoke to me on the subject and placed life in a new light before me. I used to wonder why I had such a bad time, and complained greatly about my lot. But he made all things plain to me. I can bear life's burdens now with a serene heart."

Alice was amused when she reflected on his position. "You have health and wealth, good looks and a good friend. It is easy to bear such burdens."

"Ah, but you forget that I went through many a long year of sorrow and bewildered pain, Miss Enistor. Besides, money does not bring happiness. I never can be enthusiastic over money."

"People with large incomes can afford to say that," said Alice cynically.

"Is that a hit at me?" retorted Montrose good-humouredly; "if so it misses its mark, I assure you. I am quite willing to give back the money to your father if Eberstein tells me to."

"Why should you obey him?"

"Because he knows more than I do. I look upon him as a guide."

Alice shook her head. "Every man should think for himself."

"So Eberstein says," replied Montrose unexpectedly; "and all he does is to give me hints, leaving me to take them or reject them as I choose. Fortunately I know how little I do know, and I am glad to have a more experienced man to help me."

"Experienced?"

"Yes. In the things of this world and the next."

"Is Dr. Eberstein religious then?"

"Not in the narrow sense in which the word religious is used. But he is a wonderful man, as you will learn when you see more of him. I don't want you to think me weak and without will-power, Miss Enistor, because I constantly quote Eberstein. But the most accomplished general is glad to obey the guidance of a man who knows the lie of the land when marching through the enemy's country."

"The enemy's country?"

"You might call the world so."

Miss Enistor moved restlessly. "What an odd conversation we are having!" she said in a nervous way. "We have only met to-night for the first time, and yet we are quite confidential."

"It is better to talk as we are doing than to gossip," said Montrose sententiously. "And how do you know we have met for the first time to-night?"

"I have never seen you before," said the girl sharply.

"You have not seen Douglas Montrose, nor have I seen Alice Enistor," was the reply. "But in other bodies, in other lives, we have been friends: the very best of friends."

"How do you know that?" asked Alice, wilfully dense, although her heart endorsed every word the young man said.

"Need I explain?" He stared at her hard.

"No," she answered after a short pause. "I can guess your meaning. When we shook hands we were drawn together by – well, I can't say."

"By the friendship of the past!"

"Yes," she hesitated; "I suppose so! But other people would think we were talking sad nonsense, Mr. Montrose."

"What does it matter what other people think?" said the young man calmly.

"Not much. But one has to consider the world in which one lives."

"Mrs. Barrast?"

"No! No! No!" Alice laughed outright and rose, as she felt that he was getting on altogether too fast. "She is very tolerant."

"That is something in her favour, considering how narrow people are as a rule in this world." Montrose got on his feet also. "Before we join her and Eberstein, let me hear you assure me that you do not look upon me as a grasping enemy who has taken your father's money."

"I assure you of that certainly," said the girl frankly, and gave him her hand with a smile. "If you had not mentioned the subject I should never have referred to it. Keep the money, Mr. Montrose, and make what use you will of it. Both my father and myself are quite content," and she said this about Enistor once more, entirely unaware of its falsity.

"You are good," said Montrose impetuously. "Few people would take a loss so kindly."

"Well, like yourself I cannot get up any enthusiasm about money. Come, let us join Mrs. Barrast."

"One moment. Shall I see you again?"

"If you like. I am staying here for a few weeks!"

"If I like." The young man's face was eloquent and the look in his eyes betrayed his heart to Alice in a moment. With a laugh to hide her confusion she turned away to join her hostess, and came face to face with Dr. Eberstein.

"Well met, Miss Enistor," said the elder man in a genial manner and staring at her very directly. "I was just coming to take Montrose away."

"Yes," called out Mrs. Barrast, "he is going, and at eleven o'clock too. So very early. What can we do with the rest of the evening?"

"I advise bed," said Eberstein pointedly.

"Bed for me," endorsed Alice gaily. "I feel rather tired."

"I don't think you do," said the doctor calmly: and to Miss Enistor's surprise on consideration she did not. But as he spoke she again felt a wave of that strange uplifting influence and drew back, startled to find that it emanated from the doctor. Eberstein smiled quietly, "Good-night!"

"Good-night, Mr. Montrose," said Mrs. Barrast pointedly. "Next time you come, talk to me as well as to Miss Enistor!"

"I apologise for my bad manners," said Montrose quickly.

"What a compliment to me!" laughed Alice, shrugging her shoulders.

"Oh, you understand me, I think, Miss Enistor," he looked at her straightly.
She returned his look flushing. "I think I do," was her low reply.
"Such nonsense," said Mrs. Barrast irritably: for her the evening had not been a success.

CHAPTER VII BEHIND THE SCENES

It was a delightfully warm summer night when Eberstein and his young friend left the house. For some little distance they walked on in silence, as Eberstein was never voluble and Montrose felt disinclined to speak at the moment. Oblivious of his surroundings, more or less, he moved mechanically by the doctor's side, dreaming of Alice and of the love which existed between them. Considering he had met her for the first time an hour or so previously, it seemed ridiculous, even in a dream, to think that she had any such tender feeling for him. But something in the depths of his own nature was struggling to the surface to assure him that his dream was truth. Much as he valued Eberstein's company, he wished him away at the moment that he might puzzle out the meaning of this strange intuition.

"But that is impossible, just now," said the doctor quietly. "I wish you to come to my house, as I have much to say, and something to show."

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