CHAMBERS ROBERT WILLIAM

THE FIRING LINE

Robert Chambers

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Chambers R.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
A SKIRMISH

As the wind veered and grew cooler a ribbon of haze appeared above the Gulf-stream.

Young Hamil, resting on his oars, gazed absently into the creeping mist. Under it the ocean sparkled with subdued brilliancy; through it, shoreward, green palms and palmettos turned silvery; and, as the fog spread, the sea-pier, the vast white hotel, bathing-house, cottage, pavilion, faded to phantoms tinted with rose and pearl.

Leaning there on his oars, he could still make out the distant sands flecked with the colours of sunshades and bathing-skirts; the breeze dried his hair and limbs, but his swimming-shirt and trunks still dripped salt water.

Inshore a dory of the beach guard drifted along the outer line of breakers beyond which the more adventurous bathers were diving from an anchored raft. Still farther out moving dots indicated the progress of hardier swimmers; one in particular, a girl capped with a brilliant red kerchief, seemed to be already nearer to Hamil than to the shore.

It was all very new and interesting to him—the shore with its spectral palms and giant caravansary, the misty, opalescent sea where a white steam-yacht lay anchored north of him—the *Ariani*—from which he had come, and on board of which the others were still doubtless asleep—Portlaw, Malcourt, and Wayward. And at thought of the others he yawned and moistened his lips, still feverish from last night's unwisdom; and leaning forward on his oars, sat brooding, cradled by the flowing motion of the sea.

The wind was still drawing into the north; he felt it, never strong, but always a little cooler, in his hair and on his wet swimming-shirt. The flat cloud along the Gulf-stream spread thickly coastward, and after a little while the ghosts of things terrestrial disappeared.

All around him, now, blankness—save for the gray silhouette of the *Ariani*. A colourless canopy surrounded him, centred by a tiny pool of ocean. Overhead through the vanishing blue, hundreds of wild duck were stringing out to sea; under his tent of fog the tarnished silver of the water formed a floor smoothly unquiet.

Sounds from the land, hitherto unheard, now came strangely distinct; the cries of bathers, laughter, the muffled shock of the surf, doubled and redoubled along the sands; the barking of a dog at the water's edge. Clear and near sounded the ship's bell on the *Ariani*; a moment's rattle of block and tackle, a dull call, answered; and silence. Through which, without a sound, swept a great bird with scarce a beat of its spread wings; and behind it, another, and, at exact intervals another and another in impressive processional, sailing majestically through the fog; white pelicans winging inland to the lagoons.

A few minutes later the wind, which had become fitful, suddenly grew warm. All around him now the mist was dissolving into a thin golden rain; the land-breeze freshened, blowing through distant jasmine thickets and orange groves, and a soft fragrance stole out over the sea.

As the sun broke through in misty splendour, the young man, brooding on his oars, closed his eyes; and at the same instant his boat careened violently, almost capsizing as a slender wet shape clambered aboard and dropped into the bows. As the boat heeled under the shock Hamil had instinctively flung his whole weight against the starboard gunwale. Now he recovered his oars and

his balance at the same time, and, as he swung half around, his unceremonious visitor struggled to sit upright, still fighting for breath.

"I beg your pardon," she managed to say; "may I rest here? I am—" She stopped short; a flash of sudden recognition came into her eyes—flickered, and faded. It was evident to him that, for a moment, she thought she had met him before.

"Of course you may stay here," he said, inclined to laugh.

She settled down, stretching slightly backward as though to give her lungs fuller play. In a little while her breathing grew more regular; her eyes closed for a moment, then opened thoughtfully, skyward.

Hamil's curious and half-amused gaze rested on her as he resumed the oars. But when he turned his back and headed the boat shoreward a quick protest checked him, and oars at rest, he turned again, looking inquiringly at her over his shoulder.

"I am only rowing you back to the beach," he said.

"Don't row me in; I am perfectly able to swim back."

"No doubt," he returned drily, "but haven't you played tag with Death sufficiently for one day?"

"Death?" She dismissed the grotesque suggestion with a shrug, then straightened up, breathing freely and deeply. "It is an easy swim," she remarked, occupied with her wet hair under the knotted scarlet; "the fog confused me; that was all."

"And how long could you have kept afloat if the fog had not lifted?" he inquired with gentle sarcasm. To which, adroitly adjusting hair and kerchief, she made no answer. So he added: "There is supposed to be a difference between mature courage and the fool-hardiness of the unfledged—"

"What?"

The quick close-clipped question cutting his own words silenced him. And, as he made no reply, she continued to twist the red kerchief around her hair, and to knot it securely, her doubtful glance returning once or twice to his amused face.

When all had been made fast and secure she rested one arm on the gunwale and dropped the other across her knees, relaxing in every muscle a moment before departure. And, somehow, to Hamil, the unconscious grace of the attitude suggested the "Resting Hermes"—that sculptured concentration of suspended motion.

"You had better not go just yet," he said, pointing seaward.

She also had been watching the same thing that he was now looking at, a thin haze which again became apparent over the Gulf-stream.

"Do you think it will thicken?" she asked.

"I don't know; you had a close call last time—"

"There was no danger."

"I think there was danger enough; you were apparently headed straight out to sea—"

"I heard a ship's bell and swam toward it, and when the fog lifted I found you."

"Why didn't you swim toward the shore? You could hear the surf—and a dog barking."

"I"—she turned pink with annoyance—"I suppose I was a trifle tired—if you insist. I realised that I had lost my bearings; that was all. Then I heard a ship's bell.... Then the mist lifted and I saw you—but I've explained all that before. *Look* at that exasperating fog!"

Vexation silenced her; she sat restless for a few seconds, then:

"What do you think I had better do?"

"I think you had better try to endure me for a few minutes longer. I'm safer than the fog."

But his amusement left her unresponsive, plainly occupied with her own ideas.

Again the tent of vapour stretched its magic folds above the boat and around it; again the shoreward shapes faded to phantoms and disappeared.

He spoke again once or twice, but her brief replies did not encourage him. At first, he concluded that her inattention and indifference must be due to self-consciousness; then, slightly annoyed, he

decided they were not. And, very gradually, he began to realise that the unconventional, always so attractive to the casual young man, did not interest her at all, even enough to be aware of it or of him.

This cool unconsciousness of self, of him, of a situation which to any wholesome masculine mind contained the germs of humour, romance, and all sorts of amusing possibilities, began to be a little irksome to him. And still her aloofness amused him, too.

"Do you know of any decorous reason why we should not talk to each other occasionally during this fog?" he asked.

She turned her head, considered him inattentively, then turned it away again.

"No," she said indifferently; "what did you desire to say?"

Resting on his oars, the unrequited smile still forlornly edging his lips, he looked at his visitor, who was staring into the fog, lost in her own reflections; and never a glimmer in her eyes, never a quiver of lid or lash betrayed any consciousness of his gaze or even of his presence. And he continued to inspect her with increasing annoyance.

The smooth skin, the vivid lips slightly upcurled, the straight delicate nose, the cheeks so smoothly rounded where the dark thick lashes swept their bloom as she looked downward at the water —all this was abstractly beautiful; very lovely, too, the full column of the neck, and the rounded arms guiltless of sunburn or tan.

So unusually white were both neck and arms that Hamil ventured to speak of it, politely, asking her if this was not her first swim that season.

Voice and question roused her from abstraction; she turned toward him, then glanced down at her unstained skin.

"My first swim?" she repeated; "oh, you mean my arms? No, I never burn; they change very little." Straightening up she sat looking across the boat at him without visible interest at first, then doubtfully, as though in an effort to say something polite.

"I am really very grateful to you for letting me sit here. Please don't feel obliged to amuse me during this annoying fog."

"Thank you; you *are* rather difficult to talk to. But I don't mind trying at judicious intervals," he said, laughing.

She considered him askance. "If you wish to row in, do so. I did not mean to keep you here at sea—"

"Oh, I belong out here; I'm from the *Ariani* yonder; you heard her bell in the fog. We came from Nassau last night.... Have you ever been to Nassau?"

The girl nodded listlessly and glanced at the white yacht, now becoming visible through the thinning mist. Somewhere above in the viewless void an aura grew and spread into a blinding glory; and all around, once more, the fog turned into floating golden vapour shot with rain.

The girl placed both hands on the gunwales as though preparing to rise.

"Not yet!" said Hamil sharply.

"I beg your pardon?"—looking up surprised, still poised lightly on both palms as though checked at the instant of rising into swift aërial flight—so light, so buoyant she appeared.

"Don't go overboard," he repeated.

"Why not?"

"Because I'm going to row you in."

"I wish to swim; I prefer it."

"I am only going to take you to the float—"

"But I don't care to have you. I am perfectly able to swim in—"

"I know you are," he said, swinging clear around in his seat to face her, "but I put it in the form of a request; will you be kind enough to let me row you part way to the float? This fog is not ended."

She opened her lips to protest; indeed, for a moment it looked as if she were going overboard without further argument; then perhaps some belated idea of civility due him for the hospitality of his boat restrained her.

"You understand, of course, that I am quite able to swim in," she said.

"Yes; may I now row you part way? The fog is closing in again."

She yielded with a pretty indifference, none the less charming because there was no flattery in it for him. He now sat facing her, pushing his oars through the water; and she stole a curious glance at his features—slightly sullen for the moment—noticing his well-set, well-shaped head and good shoulders.

That fugitive glance confirmed the impression of recognition in her mind. He was what she had expected in breeding and physique—the type usually to be met with where the world can afford to take its leisure.

As he was not looking at her she ventured to continue her inspection, leaning back, and dropping her bare arm alongside, to trail her fingers through the sunlit water.

"Have we not rowed far enough?" she asked presently. "This fog is apparently going to last forever."

"Like your silence," he said gaily.

Raising her eyes in displeasure she met his own frankly amused.

"Shall I tell you," he asked, "exactly why I insisted on rowing you in? I'm afraid"—he glanced at her with the quick smile breaking again on his lips—"I'm afraid you don't care whether I tell you or not. Do you?"

"If you ask me—I really don't," she said. "And, by the way, do you know that if you turned around properly and faced the stern you could make better progress with your oars?"

"By 'better' do you mean *quicker* progress?" he asked, so naïvely that she concluded he was a trifle stupid. The best-looking ones were usually stupid.

"Yes, of course," she said, impatient. "It's all very well to push a punt across a mill-pond that way, but it's not treating the Atlantic with very much respect."

"*You* were not particularly respectful toward the Atlantic Ocean when you started to swim across it."

But again the echo of amusement in his voice found no response in her unsmiling silence.

He thought to himself: "Is she a prude, or merely stupid! The pity of it!—with her eyes of a thinking goddess!—and no ideas behind them! What she understands is the commonplace. Let us offer her the obvious."

And, aloud, fatuously: "This is a rarely beautiful scene—"

"What?" crisply.

And feeling mildly wicked he continued:

–"Soft skies, a sea of Ionian azure; one might almost expect to see a triareme heading up yonder out of the south, festooned with the golden fleece. This is just the sort of a scene for a triareme; don't you think so?"

Her reply was the slightest possible nod.

He looked at her meanly amused:

"It's really very classical," he said, "like the voyage of Ulysses; I, Ulysses, you the water nymph Calypso, drifting in that golden ship of Romance—"

"Calypso was a *land* nymph," she observed, absently, "if accuracy interests you as much as your monologue."

Checked and surprised, he began to laugh at his own discomfiture; and she, elbow on the gunwale, small hand cupping her chin, watched him with an expressionless directness that very soon extinguished his amusement and left him awkward in the silence.

"I've tried my very best to be civil and agreeable," he said after a moment. "Is it really such an effort for you to talk to a man?"

"Not if I am interested," she said quietly.

He felt that his ears were growing red; she noticed it, too, and added: "I do not mean to be *too* rude; and I am quite sure you do not either."

"Of course not," he said; "only I couldn't help seeing the humour of romance in our ocean encounter. I think anybody would—except you—"

"What?"

The crisp, quick question which, with her, usually seemed like an exclamation, always startled him into temporary silence; then he began more carefully:

"There was one chance in a million of your finding my boat in the fog. If you hadn't found it —" He shook his head. "And so I wish you might recognise in our encounter something amusing, humourous"—he looked cautiously at her—"even mildly romantic—ah—enough to—to—"

"To what?"

"Why—to say—to do something characteristically—ah—"

"What?"

"—Human!" he ventured—quite prepared to see her rise wrathfully and go overboard.

Instead she remained motionless, those clear, disconcerting eyes fixed steadily on him. Once or twice he thought that her upper lip quivered; that some delicate demon of laughter was trying to look out at him under the lashes; but not a lid twitched; the vivid lips rested gravely upon each other. After a silence she said:

"What is it, *human*, that you expect me to do? Flirt with you?"

"Good Lord, no!" he said, stampeded.

She was now paying him the compliment of her full attention; he felt the dubious flattery, although it slightly scared him.

"Why is it," she asked, "that a man is eternally occupied in thinking about the effect he produces on woman—whether or not he knows her—that seems to make no difference at all? Why is it?"

He turned redder; she sat curled up, nursing both ankles, and contemplating him with impersonal and searching curiosity.

"Tell me," she said; "is there any earthly reason why you and I should be interested in each other —enough, I mean, to make any effort toward civility beyond the bounds of ordinary convention?"

He did not answer.

"Because," she added, "if there is not, any such effort on your part borders rather closely on the offensive. And I am quite sure you do not intend that."

He was indignant now, but utterly incapable of retort.

"Is there anything romantic in it because a chance swimmer rests a few moments in somebody's boat?" she asked. "Is that chance swimmer superhuman or inhuman or ultra-human because she is not consciously, and simperingly, preoccupied with the fact that there happens to be a man in her vicinity?"

"Good heavens!" he broke out, "do you think I'm that sort of noodle—"

"But I *don't* think about you at all," she interrupted; "there is not a thought that I have which concerns you as an individual. My homily is delivered in the abstract. Can't you—in the abstract—understand *that*?—even if you are a bit doubtful concerning the seven deadly conventions?"

He rested on his oars, tingling all over with wrath and surprise.

"And now," she said quietly, "I think it time to go. The sun is almost shining, you see, and the beauty of the scene is too obvious for even you to miss."

"May I express an opinion before you depart?"

"If it is not a very long or very dissenting opinion."

"Then it's this: two normal and wholesome people—man and a woman, can *not* meet, either conventionally or unconventionally, without expressing some atom of interest in one another as individuals. I say two—perfectly—normal—people—"

"But it has just happened!" she insisted, preparing to rise.

"No, it has not happened."

"Really. You speak for yourself of course—"

"Yes, I do. I *am* interested; I'd be stupid if I were not. Besides, I understand conventions as well as you do—"

"You don't observe them—"

"I don't worship them!"

She said coolly: "Women should be ritualists. It is safer."

"It is not necessary in this case. I haven't the slightest hope of making this incident a foundation for another; I haven't the least idea that I shall ever see you again. But for me to pretend an imbecile indifference to you or to the situation would be a more absurd example of self-consciousness than even you have charged me with."

Wrath and surprise in her turn widened her eyes; he held up his hand: "One moment; I have not finished. May I go on?"

And, as she said nothing, he resumed: "During the few minutes we have been accidentally thrown together, I have not seen a quiver of human humour in you. *There* is the self-consciousness —the absorbed preoccupation with appearances."

"What is there humourous in the situation?" she demanded, very pink.

"Good Lord! What is there humourous in any situation if you don't make it so?"

"I am not a humourist," she said.

She sat in the bows, one closed hand propping her chin; and sometimes her clear eyes, harboring lightning, wandered toward him, sometimes toward the shore.

"Suppose you continue to row," she said at last. "I'm doing you the honour of thinking about what you've said."

He resumed the oars, still sitting facing her, and pushed the boat slowly forward; and, as they continued their progress in silence, her brooding glance wavered, at intervals, between him and the coast.

"Haven't you *any* normal human curiosity concerning me?" he asked so boyishly that, for a second, again from her eyes, two gay little demons seemed to peer out and laugh at him.

But her lips were expressionless, and she only said: "I have no curiosity. Is that criminally abnormal?"

"Yes; if it is true. Is it?"

"I suppose it is too unflattering a truth for you to believe." She checked herself, looked up at him, hesitated. "It is *not* absolutely true. It was at first. I am normally interested now. If you knew more about me you would very easily understand my lack of interest in people I pass; the habit of not permitting myself to be interested—the necessity of it. The art of indifference is far more easily acquired than the art of forgetting."

"But surely," he said, "it can cost you no effort to forget me."

"No, of course not." She looked at him, unsmiling: "It was the acquired habit of indifference in me which you mistook for—I think you mistook it for stupidity. Many do. Did you?"

But the guilty amusement on his face answered her; she watched him silently for a while.

"You are quite right in one way," she said; "an unconventional encounter like this has no significance—not enough to dignify it with any effort toward indifference. But until I began to reprove man in the abstract, I really had not very much interest in you as an individual."

And, as he said nothing: "I might better have been in the beginning what you call 'human'—found the situation mildly amusing—and it *is*—though you don't know it! But"—she hesitated—"the

acquired instinct operated automatically. I wish I had been more—human; I can be." She raised her eyes; and in them glimmered her first smile, faint, yet so charming a revelation that the surprise of it held him motionless at his oars.

"Have I paid the tribute you claim?" she asked. "If I have, may I not go overboard at my convenience?"

He did not answer. She laid both arms along the gunwales once more, balancing herself to rise.

"We are near enough now," she said, "and the fog is quite gone. May I thank you and depart without further arousing you to psychological philosophy?"

"If you must," he said; "but I'd rather row you in."

"If I must? Do you expect to paddle me around Cape Horn?" And she rose and stepped lightly onto the bow, maintaining her balance without effort while the boat pitched, fearless, confident, swaying there between sky and sea.

"Good-bye," she said, gravely nodding at him.

"Good-bye, Calypso!"

She joined her finger tips above her head, preliminary to a plunge. Then she looked down at him over her shoulder.

"I *told* you that Calypso was a *land* nymph."

"I can't help it; fabled Calypso you must remain to me."

"Oh; am I to remain—anything—to you—for the next five minutes?"

"Do you think I could forget you?"

"I don't think so—for five minutes. Your satisfied vanity will retain me for so long—until it becomes hungry again. And—but read the history of Ulysses—carefully. However, it *was* nice of you—not to name yourself and expect a response from me. I'm afraid—I'm afraid it is going to take me almost five minutes to forget you—I mean your boat of course. Good-bye!"

Before he could speak again she went overboard, rose swimming with effortless grace. After a dozen strokes or so she turned on one side, glancing back at him. Later, almost among the breakers, she raised one arm in airy signal, but whether to him or to somebody on the raft he did not know.

For five minutes—the allotted five—he lay on his oars watching the sands. At moments he fancied he could still distinguish her, but the distance was great, and there were many scarlet head-dresses among the bathers ashore and afloat.

And after a while he settled back on his oars, cast a last glance astern, and pulled for the *Ariani*, aboard of which Portlaw was already bellowing at him through an enormous megaphone.

Malcourt, who looked much younger than he really was, appeared on the after deck, strolling about with a telescope tucked up under one arm, both hands in his trousers pockets; and, as Hamil pulled under the stern, he leaned over the rail: "Hello, Hamil! Any trade with the natives in prospect? How far will a pint of beads go with the lady aborigines?"

"Better ask at the Beach Club," replied Hamil, laughing; "I say, Malcourt, I've had a corking swim out yonder—"

"Go in deep?" inquired Malcourt guilelessly.

"Deep? It's forty fathoms off the reef."

"I didn't mean the water," murmured Malcourt.

CHAPTER II
A LANDING

The *Ariani* was to sail that evening, her destination being Miami and the West Coast where Portlaw desired to do some tarpon fishing and Wayward had railroad interests. Malcourt, always in a receptive attitude, was quite ready to go anywhere when invited. Otherwise he preferred a remunerative attention to business.

Hamil, however, though with the gay company aboard, was not of them; he had business at Palm Beach; his luggage had already been sent ashore; and now, prepared to follow, he stood a little apart from the others on the moonlit deck, making his adieux to the master of the *Ariani*.

"It's been perfectly stunning—this cruise," he said. "It was kind of you, Wayward; I don't know how to tell you how kind—but your boat's a corker and you are another—"

"Do you like this sort of thing?" asked Wayward grimly.

"Like it? It's only a part of your ordinary lives—yours and Portlaw's; so you are not quite fitted to understand. But, Wayward, I've been in heavy harness. You have been doing this sort of heavenly thing—how many years?"

"Too many. Tell me; you've really made good this last year, haven't you, Garry?"

Hamil nodded. "I had to."

He laid his hand on the older man's arm. "Why do you know," he said, "when they gave me that first commission for the little park at Hampton Hills—thanks to you—I hadn't five dollars in all the world."

Wayward stood looking at him through his spectacles, absently pulling at his moustache, which was already partly gray.

"Garry," he said in his deep, pleasant voice that was however never very clear, "Portlaw tells me that you are to do his place. Then there are the new parks in Richmond Borough, and this enormous commission down here among the snakes and jungles. Well—God bless you. You're twenty-five and busy. I'm forty-five and"—he looked drearily into the younger man's eyes—"burnt out," he said with his mirthless laugh—"and still drenching the embers with the same stuff that set 'em ablaze.... Good-bye, Garry. Your boat's alongside. My compliments to your aunt."

At the gangway the younger man bade adieu to Malcourt and Portlaw, laughing as the latter indignantly requested to know why Hamil wasted his time attending to business.

Malcourt drew him aside:

"So you're going to rig up a big park and snake preserve for Neville Cardross?"

"I'm going to try, Louis. You know the family, I believe, don't you?"

Malcourt gazed placidly at him. "Very well indeed," he replied deliberately. "They're a, good, domestic, mother-pin-a-rose-on-me sort of family.... I'm a sort of distant cousin—run of the house and privilege of kissing the girls—not now, but once. I'm going to stay there when we get back from Miami."

"You didn't tell me that?" observed Hamil, surprised.

"No," said Malcourt carelessly, "I didn't know it myself. Just made up my mind to do it. Saves hotel expenses. Well—your cockle-shell is waiting. Give my regards to the family—particularly to Shiela." He looked curiously at Hamil; "particularly to Shiela," he repeated; but Hamil missed the expression of his eyes in the dusk.

"Are you really going to throw us over like this?" demanded Portlaw as the young men turned back together across the deck.

"Got to do it," said Hamil cheerfully, offering his hand in adieu.

"Don't plead necessity," insisted Portlaw. "You've just landed old man Cardross, and you've got the Richmond parks, and you're going to sting me for more than I'm worth. Why on earth do you cut and run this way?"

"No man in his proper senses really knows why he does anything. Seriously, Portlaw, my party is ended—"

"Destiny gave Ulysses a proud party that lasted ten years; wasn't it ten, Malcourt?" demanded Portlaw. "Stay with us, son; you've nine years and eleven months of being a naughty boy coming to you—including a few Circes and grand slams—"

"He's met his Circe," cut in Malcourt, leaning languidly over the rail; "she's wearing a scarlet handkerchief this season—"

Portlaw, laughing fatly, nodded. "Louis discovered your Circe through the glasses climbing into your boat—"

"What a busy little beast you are, Malcourt," observed Hamil, annoyed, glancing down at the small boat alongside.

"'Beast' is good! You mean the mere sight of her transformed Louis into the classic shote," added Portlaw, laughing louder as Hamil, still smiling through his annoyance, went over the side. And a moment later the gig shot away into the star-set darkness.

From the bridge Wayward wearily watched it through his night glasses; Malcourt, slim and graceful, sat on the rail and looked out into the Southern dusk, an unlighted cigarette between his lips.

"That kills our four at Bridge," grumbled Portlaw, leaning heavily beside him. "We'll have to play Klondike and Preference now, or call in the ship's cat.... Hello, is that you, Jim?" as Wayward came aft, limping a trifle as he did at certain times.

"That girl had a good figure—through the glasses. I couldn't make out her face; it was probably the limit; combinations are rare," mused Malcourt. "And then—the fog came! It was like one of those low-down classical tricks of Jupiter when caught philandering."

Portlaw laughed till his bulky body shook. "The Olympian fog was wasted," he said; "John Garret Hamil 3d still preserves his nursery illusions."

"He's lucky," remarked Wayward, staring into the gloom.

"But not fortunate," added Malcourt; "there's a difference between luck and fortune. Read the French classics."

Wayward growled; Malcourt, who always took a malicious amusement in stirring him up, grinned at him sideways.

"No man is fit for decent society until he's lost all his illusions," he said, "particularly concerning women."

"Some of us have been fools enough to lose our illusions," retorted Wayward sharply, "but you never had any, Malcourt; and that's no compliment from me to you."

Portlaw chuckled. "We never lose illusions; we mislay 'em," he suggested; "and then we are pretty careful to mislay only that particular illusion which inconveniences us." He jerked his heavy head in Malcourt's direction. "Nobody clings more frantically to illusions than your unbaked cynic; Louis, you're not nearly such a devil of a fellow as you imagine you are."

Malcourt smiled easily and looked out over the waves.

"Cynicism is old-fashioned," he said; "dogma is up to date. Credo! I believe in a personal devil, virtuous maidens in bowers, and rosewood furniture. As for illusions I cherish as many as you do!" He turned with subtle impudence to Wayward. "And the world is littered with the shattered fragments."

"It's littered with pups, too," observed Wayward, turning on his heel. And he walked away, limping, his white mess jacket a pale spot in the gloom.

Malcourt looked after him; an edge of teeth glimmering beneath his full upper lip.

"It might be more logical if he'd cut out his alcohol before he starts in as a gouty marine missionary," he observed. "Last night he sat there looking like a superannuated cavalry colonel in

spectacles, neuritis twitching his entire left side, unable to light his own cigar; and there he sat and rambled on and on about innate purity and American womanhood."

He turned abruptly as a steward stepped up bearing a decanter and tray of glasses.

Portlaw helped himself, grumbling under his breath that he meant to cut out this sort of thing and set Wayward an example.

Malcourt lifted his glass gaily:

"Our wives and sweethearts; may they never meet!"

They set back their empty glasses; Portlaw started to move away, still muttering about the folly of self-indulgence; but the other detained him.

"Wayward took it out of me in 'Preference' this morning while Garry was out courting. I'd better liquidate to-night, hadn't I, Billy?"

"Certainly," said Portlaw.

The other shook his head. "I'll get it all back at Miami, of course. In the mean time—if you don't mind letting me have enough to square things—"

Portlaw hesitated, balancing his bulk uneasily first on one foot, then the other.

"I don't mind; no; only—"

"Only what?" asked Malcourt. "I told you I couldn't afford to play cards on this trip, but you insisted."

"Certainly, certainly! I expected to consider you as—as—"

"I'm your general manager and I'm ready at all times to earn my salary. If you think it best to take me away from the estate for a junketing trip and make me play cards you can do it of course; but if you think I'm here to throw my money overboard I'm going back to-morrow!"

"Nonsense," said Portlaw; "you're not going back. There's nothing doing in winter up there that requires your personal attention—"

"It's a bad winter for the deer—I ought to be there now—"

"Well, can't Blake and O'Connor attend to that?"

"Yes, I suppose they can. But I'm not going to waste the winter and my salary in the semi-tropics just because you want me to—"

"O Lord!" said Portlaw, "what are you kicking about? Have I ever—"

"You force me to be plain-spoken; you never seem to understand that if you insist on my playing the wealthy do-nothing that you've got to keep me going. And I tell you frankly, Billy, I'm tired of it."

"Oh, don't flatten your ears and show your teeth," protested Portlaw amiably. "I only supposed you had enough—with such a salary—to give yourself a little rope on a trip like this, considering you've nobody but yourself to look out for, and that *I* do that and pay you heavily for the privilege"—his voice had become a mumble—"and all you do is to take vacations in New York or sit on a horse and watch an army of men plant trout and pheasants, and cut out ripe timber—O hell!"

"*What* did you say?"

Portlaw became good-humouredly matter of fact: "I *said* 'hell,' Louis—which meant, 'what's the use of squabbling.' It also means that you are going to have what you require as a matter of course; so come on down to my state-room and let us figure it up before Jim Wayward begins to turn restless and limp toward the card-room."

As they turned and strolled forward, Malcourt nudged him:

"Look at the fireworks over Lake Worth," he said; "probably Palm Beach's welcome to her new and beardless prophet."

"It's one of their cheap Venetian fêtes," muttered Portlaw. "I know 'em; they're rather amusing. If we weren't sailing in an hour we'd go. No doubt Hamil's in it already; probably Cardross put him next to a bunch of dreams and he's right in it at this very moment."

"With the girl in the red handkerchief," added Malcourt. "I wish we had time."

"I believe I've seen that girl somewhere," mused Portlaw.

"Perhaps you have; there are all kinds at Palm Beach, even yours, and," he added with his easy impudence, "I expect to preserve my notions concerning every one of them. Ho! Look at that sheaf of sky-rockets, Billy! Zip! Whir-r! Bang! Great is Diana of the Ephesians!—bless her heart!"

"Going up like Garret Hamil's illusions," said Portlaw, sentimentally. "I wonder if he sees 'em and considers the moral they are writing across the stars. O slush! Life is like a stomach; if you fill it too full it hurts you. What about *that* epigram, Louis? What about it?"

The other's dark, graceful head was turned toward the fiery fête on shore, and his busy thoughts were with that lithe, dripping figure he had seen through the sea-glasses, climbing into a distant boat. For the figure reminded him of a girl he had known very well when the world was younger; and the memory was not wholly agreeable.

CHAPTER III
AN ADVANCE

Hamil stood under the cocoanut palms at the lake's edge and watched the lagoon where thousands of coloured lanterns moved on crafts, invisible except when revealed in the glare of the rushing rockets.

Lamps glittered everywhere; electric lights were doubly festooned along the sea wall, drooping creeper-like from palm to palmetto, from flowering hibiscus to sprawling banyan, from dainty china-berry to grotesque screw-pine tree, shedding strange witch-lights over masses of blossoms, tropical and semi-tropical. Through which the fine-spun spray of fountains drifted, and the great mousy dusk-moths darted through the bars of light with the glimmering bullet-flight of summer meteors.

And everywhere hung the scent of orange bloom and the more subtle perfume of white and yellow jasmine floated through the trees from gardens or distant hammocks, combining in one intoxicating aroma, spiced always with the savour of the sea.

Hamil was aware of considerable noise, more or less musical, afloat and ashore; a pretentious orchestra played third-rate music under the hotel colonnade; melody arose from the lantern-lit lake, with clamourous mandolins and young voices singing; and over all hung the confused murmur of unseen throngs, harmonious, capricious; laughter, voice answering voice, and the distant shouts as brilliantly festooned boats hailed and were hailed across the water.

Hamil passed on to the left through crowded gardens, pressing his way slowly where all around him lantern-lit faces appeared from the dusk and vanished again into it; where the rustle of summer gowns sweeping the shaven lawns of Bermuda grass sounded like a breeze in the leaves.

Sometimes out of the dusk all tremulous with tinted light the rainbow ray of a jewel flashed in his eyes—or sometimes he caught the glint of eyes above the jewel—a passing view of a fair face, a moment's encountering glance, and, maybe, a smile just as the shadows falling turned the garden's brightness to a mystery peopled with phantoms.

Out along the shell road he sauntered, Whitehall rising from tropic gardens on his right, on his left endless gardens again, and white villas stretching away into the starlight; on, under the leaning coco-palms along quays and low walls of coquina where the lagoon lay under the silvery southern planets.

After a little he discovered that he had left the bulk of the throng behind, though in front of him and behind, the road was still dotted with white-clad groups strolling or resting on the sea-wall.

Far out on the lake the elfin pageant continued, but now he could scarcely hear the music; the far cries and the hiss of the rockets came softly as the whizzing of velvet-winged moths around orange blossoms.

The January night was magnificent; he could scarcely comprehend that this languid world of sea and palm, of heavy odour and slow breezes, was his own land still. Under the spell the Occident vanished; it was the Orient—all this dreamy mirage, these dim white walls, this spice-haunted dusk, the water inlaid with stars, the fairy foliage, the dew drumming in the stillness like the sound of goblin tattooing.

Never before had he seen this enchanted Southern land which had always been as much a part of his mother-land as Northern hill and Western plain—as much his as the roaring dissonance of Broadway, or the icy silence of the tundras, or the vast tranquil seas of corn rippling mile on mile under the harvest moon of Illinois.

He halted, unquiet in the strangeness of it all, restless under its exotic beauty, conscious of the languor stealing over him—the premonition of a physical relaxation that he had never before known —that he instinctively mistrusted.

People in groups passed and repassed along the lagoon wall where, already curiously tired, he had halted beside an old bronze cannon—some ancient Spanish piece, if he could judge by the arms and arabesques covering the breech, dimly visible in the rays of a Chinese lantern.

Beyond was a private dock where two rakish power-boats lay, receiving their cargo of young men and girls—all very animated and gay under the gaudy electric lanterns strung fore and aft rainbow fashion.

He seated himself on the cannon, lingering until both boats cleared for the carnival, rushing out into the darkness like streaks of multi-coloured flame; then his lassitude increasing, he rose and sauntered toward the hotel which loomed like a white mountain afire above the dark masses of tropic trees. And again the press of the throng hemmed him in among the palms and fountains and hedges of crimson hibiscus; again the dusk grew gay with voices and the singing overtone of violins; again the suffocating scent of blossoms, too sweet and penetrating for the unacclimated, filtered through and through him, till his breath came unevenly, and the thick odours stirred in him strange senses of expectation, quickening with his pulses to a sudden prophecy.

And at the same instant he saw the girl of whom he had been thinking.

She was on the edge of a group of half a dozen or more men in evening dress, and women in filmy white—already close to him—so near that the frail stuff of her skirt brushed him, and the subtle, fresh aroma of her seemed to touch his cheek like a breath as she passed.

"Calypso," he whispered, scarcely conscious that he spoke aloud.

A swift turn of her head, eyes that looked blankly into his, and she had passed.

A sudden realisation of his bad manners left his ears tingling. What on earth had prompted him to speak? What momentary relaxation had permitted him an affront to a young girl whose attitude toward him that morning had been so admirable?

Chagrined, he turned back to seek some circling path through the dense crowd ahead; and was aware, in the darkness, of a shadowy figure entering the jasmine arbour. And though his eyes were still confused by the lantern light he knew her again in the dusk.

As they passed she said under her breath: "That was ill-bred. I am disappointed."

He wheeled in his tracks; she turned to confront him for an instant.

"I'm just a plain beast," he said. "You won't forgive me of course."

"You had no right to say what you did. You said 'Calypso'—and I ought not to have heard you.... But I did.... Tell me; if I am too generous to suspect you of intentional impertinence, you are now too chastened to suspect that I came back to give you this chance. That is quite true, isn't it?"

"Of course. You *are* generous and—it's simply fine of you to overlook it."

"I don't know whether I intend to overlook it; I was surprised and disappointed; but I *did* desire to give you another chance. And I was so afraid you'd be rude enough to take it that—I spoke first. That was logical. Oh, I know what I'm doing—and it's particularly common of me—being who I am—"

She paused, meeting his gaze deliberately.

"You don't know who I am. Do you?"

"No," he said. "I don't deserve to. But I'll be miserable until I do."

After a moment: "And you are not going to ask me—because, once, I said that it was nice of you not to?"

The hint of mockery in her voice edged his lips with a smile, but he shook his head. "No, I won't ask you that," he said. "I've been beastly enough for one day."

"Don't you care to know?"

"Of course I care to know."

"Yet, exercising all your marvellous masculine self-control, you nobly refuse to ask?"

"I'm afraid to," he said, laughing; "I'm horribly afraid of you."

She considered him with clear, unsmiling eyes.

"Coward!" she said calmly.

He nodded his head, laughing still. "I know it; I almost lost you by saying 'Calypso' a moment ago and I'm taking no more risks."

"Am I to infer that you expect to recover me after this?"

And, as he made no answer: "You dare not admit that you hope to see me again. You *are* horribly afraid of me—even if I have defied convention and your opinions and have graciously overlooked your impertinence. In spite of all this you are still afraid of me. Are you?"

"Yes," he said; "as much as I naturally ought to be."

"*That* is nice of you. There's only one kind of a girl of whom men are really afraid.... And now I don't exactly know what to do about you—being, myself, as guilty and horrid as you have been."

She regarded him contemplatively, her hands joined behind her back.

"Exactly what to do about you I don't know," she repeated, leisurely inspecting him. "Shall I tell you something? I am not afraid to; I am not a bit cowardly about it either. Shall I?"

"If you dare," he said, smiling and uncertain.

"Very well, then; I rather like you, Mr. Hamil."

"You *are* a trump!" he blurted out, reddening with surprise.

"Are you astonished that I know you?"

"I don't see how you found out—"

"Found out! What perfectly revolting vanity! Do you suppose that the moment I left you I rushed home and began to make happy and incoherent inquiries? Mr. Hamil, you disappoint me every time you speak—and also every time you don't."

"I seem to be doomed."

"You are. You can't help it. Tell me—as inoffensively as possible—are you here to begin your work?"

"M-my work?"

"Yes, on the Cardross estate—"

"You have heard of that!" he exclaimed, surprised.

"Y-es—" negligently. "Petty gossip circulates here. A cracker at West Palm Beach built a new chicken coop, and we all heard of it. Tell me, do you still desire to see me again?"

"I do—to pay a revengeful debt or two."

"Oh! I have offended you? Pay me now, if you please, and let us end this indiscretion."

"You will let me see you again, won't you?"

"Why? Mr. Hamil."

"Because I—I *must*!"

"Oh! You are becoming emphatic. So I am going.... And I've half a mind to take you back and present you to my family.... Only it wouldn't do for *me*; any other girl perhaps might dare—under the circumstances; but *I* can't—and that's all I'll tell you."

Hamil, standing straight and tall, straw hat tucked under one arm, bent toward her with the formality and engaging deference natural to him.

"You have been very merciful to me; only a girl of your caste could afford to. Will you forgive my speaking to you as I did?—when I said 'Calypso!' I have no excuse; I don't know why I did. I'm even sorrier for myself than for you."

"I *was* hurt.... Then I supposed that you did not mean it. Besides"—she looked up with her rare smile—"I knew you, Mr. Hamil, in the boat this morning. I haven't really been very dreadful."

"You knew even *then*?"

"Yes, I did. The Palm Beach News published your picture a week ago; and I read all about the very remarkable landscape architect who was coming to turn the Cardross jungle into a most wonderful Paradise."

"You knew me all that time?"

"All of it, Mr. Hamil."

"From the moment you climbed into my boat?"

"Practically. Of course I did not look at you very closely at first.... Does that annoy you? It seems to … or something does, for even in the dusk I can see your ever-ready blush—"

"I don't know why you pretend to think me such a fool," he protested, laughing; "you seemed to take that for granted from the very first."

"Why not? You persistently talked to me when you didn't know me—you're doing it now for that matter!—and you began by telling me that I was fool-hardy, not really courageous in the decent sense of the word, and that I was a self-conscious stick and a horribly inhuman and unnatural object generally—and all because I wouldn't flirt with you—"

His quick laughter interrupted her. She ventured to laugh a little too—a very little; and that was the charm of her to him—the clear-eyed, delicate gravity not lightly transformed. But when her laughter came, it came as such a surprisingly lovely revelation that it left him charmed and silent.

"I wonder," she said, "if you can be amusing—except when you don't mean to be."

"If you'll give me a chance to try—"

"Perhaps. I was hardly fair to you in that boat."

"If you knew me in the boat this morning, why did you not say so?"

"Could I admit that I knew you without first pretending I didn't? Hasn't every woman a Heaven-given right to travel in a circle as the shortest distance between two points?"

"Certainly; only—"

She shook her head slowly. "There's no use in my telling you who I am, now, considering that I can't very well escape exposure in the near future. That might verge on effrontery—and it's horrid enough to be here with you—in spite of several thousand people tramping about within elbow touch.... Which reminds me that my own party is probably hunting for me.... Such a crowd, you know, and so easy to become separated. What do you suppose they'd think if they suspected the truth?… And the worst of it is that I cannot afford to do a thing of this sort.... You don't understand; but you may some day—partly. And then perhaps you'll think this matter all over and come to a totally different conclusion concerning my overlooking your recent rudeness and—and my consenting to speak to you."

"You don't believe for one moment that I could mistake it—"

"It depends upon what sort of a man you really are.... I don't know. I give you the benefit of all doubts."

She stood silent, looking him candidly in the eyes, then with a gesture and the slightest shrug, she turned away toward the white road outside. He was at her elbow in two steps.

"Oh, yes—the irony of formality."

She nodded. "Good night, then, Mr. Hamil. If circumstances permitted it would have been delightful—this putting off the cloak of convention and donning motley for a little unconventional misbehaviour with you.... But as it is, it worries me—slightly—as much as the episode and your opinion are worth."

"I am wondering," he said, "why this little tincture of bitterness flavours what you say to me?"

"Because I've misbehaved; and so have you. Anyway, now that it's done, there's scarcely anything I could do to make the situation more flagrant or less flippant—"

"You don't really think—"

"Certainly. After all is said and done, we *don't* know each other; here we are, shamelessly sauntering side by side under the jasmine, Paul-and-Virginia-like, exchanging subtleties blindfolded. You are you; I am I; formally, millions of miles apart—temporarily and informally close together, paralleling each other's course through life for the span of half an hour—here under the Southern stars.... O Ulysses, truly that island was inhabited by one, Calypso; but your thrall is to be briefer than your prototype's. See, now; here is the road; and I release you to that not impossible she—"

"There is none—"

"There will be. You are very young. Good-bye."

"The confusing part of it to me," he said, smiling, "is to *see* you so—so physically youthful with even a hint of almost childish immaturity!—and then to *hear* you as you *are*—witty, experienced, nicely cynical, maturely sure of yourself and—"

"You think me experienced?"

"Yes."

"Sure of myself?"

"Of course; with your cool, amused poise, your absolute self-possession—and the half-disdainful sword-play of your wit—at my expense—"

She halted beside the sea-wall, adorably mocking in her exaggerated gravity.

"At your expense?" she repeated. "Why not? You have cost me something."

"You said—"

"I know what I said: I said that we might become friends. But even so, you have already cost me something. Tell me"—he began to listen for this little trick of speech—"how many men do you know who would not misunderstand what I have done this evening? And—do *you* understand it, Mr. Hamil?"

"I think—"

"If you do you are cleverer than I," she said almost listlessly, moving on again under the royal palms.

"Do you mean that—"

"Yes; that I myself don't entirely understand it. Here, under this Southern sun, we of the North are in danger of acquiring a sort of insouciant directness almost primitive. There comes, after a while, a certain mental as well as physical luxury in relaxation of rule and precept, permitting us a simplicity which sometimes, I think, becomes something less harmless. There *is* luxury in letting go of that live wire which keeps us all keyed to one conventional monotone in the North. I let go—for a moment—to-night. *You* let go when you said 'Calypso.' You couldn't have said it in New York; I couldn't have heard you, there.... Alas, Ulysses, I should not have heard you anywhere. But I did; and I answered.... Say good night to me, now; won't you? We have not been very wicked, I think."

She offered her hand; smooth and cool it lay for a second in his.

"I can't let you return alone," he ventured.

"If you please, how am I to explain you to—the others?"

And as he said nothing:

"If I were—different—I'd simply tell them the truth. I could afford to. Besides we'll all know you before very long. Then we'll see—oh, yes, both of us—whether we have been foolishly wise to become companions in our indiscretion, or—otherwise.... And don't worry about my home-arrival. That's my lawn—there where that enormous rubber-banyan tree straddles across the stars.... Is it not quaint—the tangle of shrubbery all over jasmine?—and those are royal poincianas, if you please—and there's a great garden beyond and most delectable orange groves where you and I and the family and Alonzo will wander and eat pine-oranges and king-oranges and mandarins and—oh, well! Are you going to call on Mr. Cardross to-morrow?"

"Yes," he said, "I'll have to see Mr. Cardross at once. And after that, what am I to do to meet you?"

"I will consider the matter," she said; and bending slightly toward him: "Am I to be disappointed in you? I don't know, and you can't tell me." Then, impulsively: "Be generous to me. You are right; I am not very old, yet. Be nice to me in your thoughts. I have never before done such a thing as this: I never could again. It is not very dreadful—is it? Will you think nicely of me?"

He said gaily: "Now you speak as you look, not like a world-worn woman of thirty wearing the soft, fresh mask of nineteen."

"You have not answered me," she said quietly.

"Answered you, Calypso?"

"Yes; I ask you to be very gentle and fastidious with me in your thoughts; not even to call me Calypso—in your thoughts."

"What you ask I had given you the first moment we met."

"Then you *may* call me Calypso—in your thoughts."

"Calypso," he pleaded, "won't you tell me where to find you?"

"Yes; in the house of—Mr. Cardross. This is his house."

She turned and stepped onto the lawn. A mass of scarlet hibiscus hid her, then she reappeared, a pale shape in the dusk of the oleander-bordered path.

He listened; the perfume of the oleanders enveloped him; high under the stars the fronds of a royal palm hung motionless. Then, through the stillness, very far away, he heard the southern ocean murmuring in its slumber under a million stars.

CHAPTER IV
RECONNAISSANCE

Hamil awoke early: long before breakfast he was shaved, dressed, and hungry; but in the hotel late rising appeared to be fashionable, and through the bewildering maze of halls and corridors nobody was yet astir except a few children and their maids.

So he sauntered about the acres of floor space from rotunda to music room, from desk to sun parlour, through the endless carpeted tunnel leading to the station, and back again, taking his bearings in this wilderness of runways so profusely embowered with palms and furniture.

In one wide corridor, lined like a street with shops, clerks were rearranging show windows; and Hamil strolled from the jewellers to the brilliant but dubious display of an Armenian rug dealer; from a New York milliner's exhibition, where one or two blond, sleepy-eyed young women moved languidly about, to an exasperating show of shells, curiosities, and local photographs which quenched further curiosity.

However, beyond the shops, at the distant end of an Axminster vista flanked by cabbage-palms and masterpieces from Grand Rapids, he saw sunshine and the green tops of trees; and he made toward the oasis, coming out along a white colonnade overlooking the hotel gardens.

It was early enough for any ambitious bird to sing, but there were few song-birds in the gardens —a palm warbler or two, and a pair of subdued mocking-birds not inclined to be tuneful. Everywhere, however, purple and bronze grackle appeared, flying or walking busily over the lawns, sunlight striking the rainbow hackle on their necks, and their pale-yellow or bright-orange eyes staring boldly at the gardeners who dawdled about the flowery labyrinths with watering-can and jointed hose. And from every shrub and tree came the mildly unpleasant calling of the grackle, and the blackbirds along the lagoon answered with their own unmusical "Co-ca-*chee*!—Co-ca-chee-e!"

Somehow, to Hamil, the sunshine seemed to reveal more petty defects in this semi-tropical landscape than he could have divined the night before under the unblemished magic of the stars. For the grass was not real grass, but only that sparse, bunchy, sun-crisped substitute from Bermuda; here and there wind-battered palmetto fronds hung burnt and bronzed; and the vast hotel, which through the darkness he had seen piled up above the trees in cliff-like beauty against the stars, was actually remarkable only for its size and lack of architectural interest.

He began to wonder whether the inhabitants of its thousand rooms, aware of the pitiless clarity of this semi-tropical morning sunlight, shunned it lest it reveal unsuspected defects in those pretty lantern-lit faces of which he had had glimpses in the gardens' enchanted dusk the night before. However, the sunshine seemed to render the little children only the lovelier, and he sat on the railing, his back against a pillar, watching them racing about with their nurses, until the breakfast hour at last came around and found him at table, no longer hungry.

A stream of old ladies and gentlemen continued toddling into the breakfast rooms where an acre or two of tables, like a profuse crop of mushrooms, disturbed the monotony of the hotel interior with a monotony still more pronounced. However, there was hazy sunshine in the place and a glimpse of blessed green outside, and the leisurely negroes brought him fruit which was almost as good as the New York winter markets afforded, and his breakfast amused him mildly.

The people, too, amused him—so many dozens of old ladies and gentlemen, all so remarkably alike in a common absence of distinguishing traits—a sort of homogeneous, expressionless similarity which was rather amazing as they doubtless had gathered there from all sections of the Republic.

But the children were delightful, and all over the vast room he could distinguish their fresh little faces like tufts of flowers set in a waste of dusty stubble, and amid the culinary clatter their clear,

gay little voices broke through cheerfully at moments, grateful as the morning chatter of sparrows in early spring.

When Hamil left his table he halted to ask an imposing head-waiter whether Miss Palliser might be expected to breakfast, and was informed that she breakfasted and lunched in her rooms and dined always in the café.

So he stopped at the desk and sent up his card.

A number of young people evidently equipped for the golf links now pervaded hall and corridor; others, elaborately veiled for motoring, stopped at the desk for letters on their way into the outer sunshine.

A row of rather silent but important-looking gentlemen, morning cigars afire, gradually formed ranks in arm-chairs under the colonnade; people passing and repassing began to greet each other with more vivacity; veranda and foyer became almost animated as the crowd increased. And now a demure bride or two emerged in all the radiance of perfect love and raiment, squired by *him*, braving the searching sunshine with confidence in her beauty, her plumage, and a kindly planet; and, in pitiful contrast, here and there some waxen-faced invalid, wheeled by a trained nurse, in cap and cuffs, through sunless halls into the clear sea air, to lie motionless, with leaden lids scarcely parted, in the glory of a perfect day.

A gentleman, rotund of abdomen, wearing a stubby red moustache, screwed a cigar firmly into the off corner of his mouth and, after looking aggressively at Hamil for fully half a minute, said:

"Southern Pacific sold off at the close."

"Indeed," said Hamil.

"It's like picking daisies," said the gentleman impressively. And, after a pause, during which he continued to survey the younger man: "What name?" he inquired, as though Hamil had been persistently attempting to inform him.

Hamil told him good-naturedly.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Hamil. My name is Rawley—probably the name is familiar to you?—Ambrose Rawley"—he coughed—"by profession a botanist."

Hamil smiled, recognising in the name the most outrageously expensive of New York florists who had made a fortune in cut flowers.

"Have a drink?" persisted Mr. Rawley. "No? Too early for you? Well, let's get a couple of niggers and wheel-chairs."

But Hamil declined with the easy good-humour which characterised him; and a few moments later, learning at the office that his aunt would receive him, followed his negro guide through endless carpeted labyrinths and was ushered by a maid into a sunny reception-room.

"Garry!—you dear boy!" exclaimed his amazingly youthful aunt, holding out both arms to him from the door of her bedroom, partly ajar. "No—don't come near me; I'm not even in complete negligée yet, but I will be in one minute when Titine fastens me up and makes the most of my scanty locks—" She looked out at him with a laugh and gave her head a little jerk forward, and her splendid chestnut hair came tumbling down in the sunshine.

"You're prettier than ever," said her nephew; "they'll take us for bride and groom as usual. I say, Constance, I suppose they've followed you down here."

"Who, Garry,"—very innocently.

"The faithful three, Colonel Vetchen, Cuyp, and old—I mean the gracefully mature Courtlandt Classon. Are they here?"

"I believe so, dear," admitted his aunt demurely. "And, Garry, so is Virginia Suydam."

"Really," he said, suddenly subdued as his aunt who was forty and looked twenty-five came forward in her pretty chamber-gown, and placed two firm white arms around him and kissed him squarely and with vigour.

"You dear!" she said; "you certainly are the best-looking boy in all Florida. When did you come? Is Jim Wayward's yacht here still? And why didn't he come to see me?"

"The *Ariani* sailed for Miami last night after I landed. I left my card, but the office people rang and rang and could get no answer—"

"I was in bed! How stupid of me! I retired early because Virginia and I had been dissipating shamefully all the week and my aged bones required a rest.... And now tell me all about this new commission of yours. I have met the Cardross family; everybody at Palm Beach is talking about the magnificent park Mr. Cardross is planning; and your picture has appeared in the local paper, and I've told everybody you're quite wonderful, and everybody now is informing everybody else that you're quite wonderful!"

His very gay aunt lay back in her great soft chair, pushing with both fair hands the masses of chestnut hair from her forehead, and smiling at him out of her golden brown eyes—the jolliest, frankest of eyes—the sort even women trust instinctively at first glimpse.

So he sat there and told her all about his commission and how this man, Neville Cardross, whom he had never even seen, had written to him and asked him to make the most splendid park in America around the Cardross villa, and had invited him to be his guest during his stay in Florida.

"They evidently are nice people from the way Mr. Cardross writes," he said. "You say you know them, Constance?"

"I've met them several times—the way you meet people here. They have a villa—rather imposing in an exotic fashion. Why, yes, Garry, they *are* nice; dreadfully wealthy, tremendously popular. Mrs. Carrick, the married daughter, is very agreeable; her mother is amiable and dreadfully stout. Then there's a boy of your age—Gray Cardross—a well-mannered youth who drives motors, and whom Mr. Classon calls a 'speed-mad cub.' Then there is Cecile Cardross—a débutante of last winter, and then—" Miss Palliser hesitated, crossed one knee over the other, and sat gently swinging her slippered foot and looking at her nephew.

"Does that conclude the list of the Cardross family?" he asked.

"N-no. There remains the beauty of the family, Shiela." She continued to survey him with smiling intentness, and went on slowly:

"Shiela Cardross; *the* girl here. People are quite mad about her, I assure you. My dear, every man at Palm Beach tags after her; rows of callow youths sit and gaze at her very footprints in the sand when she crosses the beach; she turns masculine heads to the verge of permanent dislocation. No guilty man escapes; even Courtlandt Classon is meditating treachery to me, and Mr. Cuyp has long been wavering and Gussie Vetchen too! the wretch!… We poor women try hard to like her—but, Garry, *is* it human to love such a girl?"

"It's divine, Constance, so you'll like her."

"Oh, yes; thank you. Well, I do; I don't know her well, but I'm inclined to like her—in a way.... There's something else, though." She considered her handsome nephew steadily. "You are to be a guest there while this work of yours is in hand?"

"Yes—I believe so."

"Then, dear, without the slightest unworthy impulse or the faintest trace of malice, I wish to put you on your guard. It's horrid, but I must."

"On my guard!" he repeated.

"Yes—forearm you, Garry. Shiela Cardross is a rather bewildering beauty. She is French convent-bred, clever and cultivated and extremely talented. Besides that she has every fashionable grace and accomplishment at the ends of her pretty fingers—and she has a way with her—a way of looking at you—which is pure murder to the average man. And beside that she is very simple and sweet to everybody. As an assassin of hearts she's equipped to slay yours, Garry."

"Well?" he inquired, laughing. And added: "Let her slay. Why not?"

"This, dear. And you who know me will acquit me of any ignoble motive if I say that she is not your social equal, Garry."

"What! I thought you said—"

"Yes—about the others. But it is not the same with Shiela Cardross. I—it seems cruel to say it—but it is for your sake—to effectually forestall any possible accident—that I am going to tell you that this very lovely girl, Shiela, is an adopted child, not a daughter. That exceedingly horrid old gossip, Mrs. Van Dieman, told me that the girl was a foundling taken by Mr. and Mrs. Cardross from the Staten Island asylum. And I'm afraid Mrs. Van Dieman knows what she's talking about because she founded and still supports the asylum."

Hamil looked gravely across at his aunt. "The poor little girl," he said slowly. "Lord, but that's tough! and tougher still to have Mrs. Van Dieman taking the trouble to spread the news. Can't you shut her up?"

"It *is* tough, Garret. I suppose they all are dreadfully sensitive about it. I begged Mrs. Van Dieman to keep her own counsel. But she won't. And you know, dear, that it would make no difference to me in my relations with the girl—except that"—she hesitated, smiling—"she is *not* good enough for you, Garry, and so, if you catch the prevailing contagion, and fall a victim, you have been inoculated now and will have the malady lightly."

"My frivolous and fascinating aunt," he said, "have you ever known me to catch any prevailing —"

"O Garret! You know you have!—dozens of times—"

"I've been civilly attentive to several girls—"

"I wish to goodness you'd marry Virginia Suydam; but you won't."

"Virginia!" he repeated, astonished.

"Yes, I do; I wish you were safely and suitably married. I'm worried, Garry; you are becoming too good-looking not to get into some horrid complication—as poor Jim Wayward did; and now he's done for, finished! Oh, I wish I didn't feel so responsible for you. And I *wish* you weren't going to the Cardrosses' to live for months!"

He leaned forward, laughing, and took his aunt's slim hands between his own sunburned fists. "You cunning little thing," he said, "if you talk that way I'll marry you off to one of the faithful three; you and Virginia too. Lord, do you think I'm down here to cut capers when I've enough hard work ahead to drive a dozen men crazy for a year? As for your beautiful Miss Cardross—why I saw a girl in a boat—not long ago—who really was a beauty. I mean to find her, some day; and that *is* something for you to worry about!"

"Garry! *Tell* me!"

But he rose, still laughing, and saluted Miss Palliser's hands.

"If you and Virginia have nothing better on I'll dine with you at eight. Yes? No?"

"Of course. Where are you going now?"

"To report to Mr. Cardross—and brave beauty in its bower," he added mischievously. "I'll doubtless be bowled over first shot and come around for a dinner and a blessing at eight this evening."

"Don't joke about it," she said as they rose together and stood for a moment at the window looking down into the flowering gardens.

"Is it not a jolly scene?" she added—"the fountain against the green, and the flowers and the sunshine everywhere, and all those light summer gowns outdoors in January, and—" She checked herself and laid her hand on his arm; "Garry, do you see that girl in the wheel-chair!—the one just turning into the gardens!"

He had already seen her. Suddenly his heart stood still in dread of what his aunt was about to say. He knew already somehow that she was going to say it, yet when she spoke the tiny shock came just the same.

"That," said his aunt, "is Shiela Cardross. Is she not too lovely for words?"

"Yes," he said, "she is very beautiful."

For a while they stood together there at the window, then he said good-bye in a rather subdued manner which made his aunt laugh that jolly, clear laugh which never appealed to him in vain.

"You're not mortally stricken already at your first view of her, are you?" she asked.

"Not mortally," he said.

"Then fall a victim and recover quickly. And *don't* let me sit here too long without seeing you; will you?"

She went to the door with him, one arm linked in his, brown eyes bright with her pride and confidence in him—in this tall, wholesome, clean-built boy, already on the verge of distinction in his rather unusual profession. And she saw in him all the strength and engaging good looks of his dead father, and all the clear and lovable sincerity of his mother—her only sister—now also dead.

"You *will* come to see me sometimes—won't you, Garry?" she repeated wistfully.

"Of course I will. Give my love to Virginia and my amused regards to the faithful three."

And so they parted, he to saunter down into the cool gardens on his way to call on Mr. Cardross; she to pace the floor, excited by his arrival, her heart beating with happiness, pride, solicitude for the young fellow who was like brother and son to her—this handsome, affectionate, generous boy who had steadily from the very first declined to accept one penny of her comfortable little fortune lest she be deprived of the least luxury or convenience, and who had doggedly educated and prepared himself, and contrived to live within the scanty means he had inherited.

And now at last the boy saw success ahead, and Miss Palliser was happy, dreaming brilliant dreams for him, conjuring vague splendours for the future—success unbounded, honours, the esteem of all good men; this, for her boy. And—if it must be—love, in its season—with the inevitable separation and a slow dissolution of an intimacy which had held for her all she desired in life—his companionship, his happiness, his fortune; this also she dreamed for his sake. Yes—knowing she could not always keep him, and that it must come inexorably, she dreamed of love for him—and marriage.

And, as she stood now by the sunny window, idly intent on her vision, without warning the face of Shiela Cardross glimmered through the dream, growing clearer, distinct in every curve and tint of its exquisite perfection; and she stared at the mental vision, evoking it with all the imagination of her inner consciousness, unquiet yet curious, striving to look into the phantom's eyes—clear, direct eyes which she remembered; and a thrill of foreboding touched her, lest the boy she loved might find in the sweetness of these clear eyes a peril not lightly overcome.

"She is so unusually beautiful," said Miss Palliser aloud, unconscious that she had spoken. And she added, wondering, "God knows what blood is in her veins to form a body so divine."

CHAPTER V
A FLANK MOVEMENT

Young Hamil, moving thoughtfully along through the gardens, caught a glimpse of a group under the palms which halted him for an instant, then brought him forward, hat off, hand cordially outstretched.

"Awf'lly glad to see you, Virginia; this is very jolly; hello, Cuyp! How are you, Colonel Vetchen—oh! how do you do, Mr. Classon!" as the latter came trotting down the path, twirling a limber walking-stick.

"How-dee-do! How-dee-do!" piped Courtlandt Classon, with a rickety abandon almost paternal; and, replying literally, Hamil admitted his excellent physical condition.

Virginia Suydam, reclining in her basket chair, very picturesque in a broad hat, smiled at him out of her peculiar bluish-green eyes, while Courtlandt Classon fussed and fussed and patted his shoulder; an old beau who had toddled about Manhattan in the days when the town was gay below Bleecker Street, when brownstone was for the rich alone, when the family horses wore their tails long and a proud Ethiope held the reins, when Saratoga was the goal of fashion, and old General Jan Van-der-Duynck pronounced his own name "Wonnerdink," with profane accompaniment.

They were all most affable—Van Tassel Cuyp with the automatic nervous snicker that deepened the furrows from nostril to mouth, a tall stoop-shouldered man of scant forty with the high colour, long, nervous nose, and dull eye of Dutch descent; and Colonel Augustus Magnelius Pietrus Vetchen, scion of an illustrious line whose ancestors had been colonial governors and judges before the British flag floated from the New Amsterdam fort. His daughter was the celebrated beauty, Mrs. Tom O'Hara. She had married O'Hara and so many incredible millions that people insisted that was why Colonel Vetchen's eyebrows expressed the acute slant of perpetual astonishment.

So they were all cordial, for was he not related to the late General Garret Suydam and, therefore, distantly to them all? And these men who took themselves and their lineage so seriously, took Hamil seriously; and he often attempted to appreciate it seriously, but his sense of humour was too strong. They were all good people, kindly and harmless snobs; and when he had made his adieux under the shadow of the white portico, he lingered a moment to observe the obsolete gallantry with which Mr. Classon and Colonel Vetchen wafted Virginia up the steps.

Cuyp lingered to venture a heavy pleasantry or two which distorted his long nose into a series of white-ridged wrinkles, then he ambled away and disappeared within the abode of that divinity who shapes our ends, the manicure; and Hamil turned once more toward the gardens.

The hour was still early; of course too unconventional to leave cards on the Cardross family, even too early for a business visit; but he thought he would stroll past the villa, the white walls of which he had dimly seen the evening before. Besides his Calypso was there. Alas! for Calypso. Yet his heart tuned up a trifle as he thought of seeing her so soon again.

And so, a somewhat pensive but wholly attractive and self-confident young opportunist in white flannels, he sauntered through the hotel gardens and out along the dazzling shell-road.

No need for him to make inquiries of passing negroes; no need to ask where the House of Cardross might be found; for although he had seen it only by starlight, and the white sunshine now transformed everything under its unfamiliar glare, he remembered his way, étape by étape, from the foliated iron grille of Whitehall to the ancient cannon bedded in rusting trunnions; and from that mass of Spanish bronze, southward under the tall palms, past hedges of vermilion hibiscus and perfumed oleander, past villa after villa embowered in purple, white, and crimson flowering vines, and far away inland along the snowy road until, at the turn, a gigantic banyan tree sprawled across the sky and

the lilac-odour of china-berry in bloom stole subtly through the aromatic confusion, pure, sweet, refreshing in all its exquisite integrity.

"Calypso's own fragrance," he thought to himself—remembering the intimate perfume of her hair and gown as she passed so near to him in the lantern light when he had spoken without discretion.

And suddenly the reminiscent humour faded from his eyes and mouth as he remembered what his aunt had said of this young girl; and, halting in his tracks, he recalled what she herself had said; that the harmless liberties another girl might venture to take with informality, armoured in an assurance above common convention, she could not venture. And now he knew why.... She had expected him to learn that she was an adopted daughter; in the light of his new knowledge he understood that. No doubt it was generally known. But the child had not expected him to know more than that; and, her own knowledge of the hopeless truth, plainly enough, was the key to that note of bitterness which he had detected at times, and even spoken of—that curious maturity forced by unhappy self-knowledge, that apathetic indifference stirred at moments to a quick sensitive alertness almost resembling self-defence. She was aware of her own story; that was certain. And the acid of that knowledge was etching the designs of character upon a physical adolescence unprepared for such biting reaction.

He was sorry he knew it, feeling ashamed of his own guiltless invasion of the girl's privacy.

The only reparation possible was to forget it. Like an honourable card-player who inadvertently sees his opponent's cards, he must play his hand exactly as he would have in the beginning. And that, he believed, would be perfectly simple.

Reassured he looked across the lawns toward the Cardross villa, a big house of coquina cement, very beautiful in its pseudo-Spanish architecture, red-tiled roofs, cool patias, arcades, and courts; the formality of terrace, wall, and fountain charmingly disguised under a riot of bloom and foliage.

The house stood farther away than he had imagined, for here the public road ended abruptly in a winding hammock-trail, and to the east the private drive of marl ran between high gates of wrought iron swung wide between carved coquina pillars.

And the house itself was very much larger than he had imagined; the starlight had illuminated only a small portion of its white façade, tricking him; for this was almost a palace—one of those fine vigorously designed mansions, so imposing in simplicity, nicknamed by smug humility—a "cottage," or "villa."

"By jingo, it's noble!" he exclaimed, the exotic dignity of the house dawning on him by degrees as he moved forward and the southern ocean sprang into view, turquoise and amethyst inlaid streak on streak to the still horizon.

"What a chance!" he repeated under his breath; "what a chance for the noblest park ever softened into formality! And the untouched forests beyond!—and the lagoons!—and the dunes to the east—and the sea! Lord, Lord," he whispered with unconscious reverence, "what an Eden!"

One of the white-haired, black-skinned children of men—though the point is locally disputed—looked up from the grass where he squatted gathering ripe fruit under a sapodilla tree; and to an inquiry:

"Yaas-suh, yaas-suh; Mistuh Cahdhoss in de pomelo g'ove, suh, feedin' mud-cat to de wile-puss."

"Doing *what*?"

"Feedin' mud-fish to de wile-cat, de wile lynx-cat, suh." The aged negro rose, hat doffed, juicy traces of forbidden sapodillas on his face which he naïvely removed with the back of the blackest and most grotesquely wrinkled hand Hamil had ever seen.

"Yaas-suh; 'scusin' de 'gator, wile-cat love de mud-fish mostest; yaas, suh. Ole torm-cat he fish de crick lak he was no 'count Seminole trash—"

"One moment, uncle," interrupted Hamil, smiling; "is that the pomelo grove? And is that gentleman yonder Mr. Cardross?"

"Yaas-suh."

He stood silent a moment thoughtfully watching the distant figure through the vista of green leaves, white blossoms, and great clusters of fruit hanging like globes of palest gold in the sun.

"I think," he said absently, "that I'll step over and speak to Mr. Cardross.... Thank you, uncle.... What kind of fruit is that you're gathering?"

"Sappydilla, suh."

Hamil laughed; he had heard that a darky would barter 'possum, ham-bone, and soul immortal for a ripe sapodilla; he had also once, much farther northward, seen the distressing spectacle of Savannah negroes loading a freight car with watermelons; and it struck him now that it was equally rash to commission this aged uncle on any such business as the gathering of sapodillas for family consumption.

The rolling, moist, and guileless eye of the old man whose slightly pained expression made it plain that he divined exactly what Hamil had been thinking, set the young man laughing outright.

"Don't worry, uncle," he said; "they're not my sapodillas"; and he walked toward the pomelo grove, the old man, a picture of outraged innocence, looking after him, thoughtlessly biting into an enormous and juicy specimen of the forbidden fruit as he looked.

There was a high fence of woven wire around the grove; through scented vistas, spotted with sunshine, fruit and blossoms hung together amid tender foliage of glossy green; palms and palmettos stood with broad drooping fronds here and there among the citrus trees, and the brown woody litter which covered the ground was all starred with fallen flowers.

The gate was open, and as Hamil stepped in he met a well-built, active man in white flannels coming out; and both halted abruptly.

"I am looking for Mr. Cardross," said the younger man.

"I am Mr. Cardross."

Hamil nodded. "I mean that I am looking for Mr. Cardross, senior—"

"I am Mr. Cardross, senior."

Hamil gazed at this active gentleman who could scarcely be the father of married children; and yet, as he looked, the crisp, thick hair, the clear sun-bronzed skin which had misled him might after all belong to that type of young-old men less common in America than in England. And Hamil also realised that his hair was silvered, not blond, and that neither the hands nor the eyes of this man were the hands and eyes of youth.

"I am Garret Hamil," he said.

"I recognise you perfectly. I supposed you older—until my daughter showed me your picture in the *News* two weeks ago!"

"I supposed *you* older—until this minute."

"I *am*!"

Looking squarely into each other's faces they laughed and shook hands.

"When did you come, Mr. Hamil?"

"Last night from Nassau."

"Where are you stopping?"

Hamil told him.

"Your rooms are ready here. It's very good of you to come to see me at once—"

"It's very good of you to want me—"

"Want you, man alive! Of course I want you! I'm all on edge over this landscape scheme; I've done nothing since we arrived from the North but ride over and over the place—and I've not half covered it yet. That's the way we'll begin work, isn't it? Knock about together and get a general idea of the country; isn't that the best way?"

"Yes, certainly—"

"I thought so. The way to learn a country is to ride over it, fish over it, shoot over it, sail around it, camp in it—that's my notion of thoroughly understanding a region. If you're going to improve it

you've got to care something about it—begin to like it—find pleasure in it, understand it. Isn't that true, Mr. Hamil?"

"Yes—in a measure—"

"Of course it's true," repeated Cardross with his quick engaging laugh; "if a man doesn't care for a thing he's not fitted to alter or modify it. I've often thought that those old French landscape men must have dearly loved the country they made so beautiful—loved it intelligently—for they left so much wild beauty edging the formality of their creations. Do you happen to remember the Chasse at Versailles? And that's what I want here! You don't mind my instructing you in your own profession, do you?"

They both laughed again, apparently qualified to understand one another.

Cardross said: "I'm glad you're young; I'm glad you've come. This is going to be the pleasantest winter of my life. There isn't anything I'd rather do than just this kind of thing—if you'll let me tag after you and talk about it. You don't mind, do you?"

"No, I don't," said Hamil sincerely.

"We'll probably have rows," suggested Cardross; "I may want vistas and terraces and fountains where they ought not to be."

"Oh, no, you won't," replied Hamil, laughing; "you'll understand things when I give reasons."

"That's what I want—reasons. If anybody would only give me reasons!—but nobody does. Listen; will you come up to the house with me and meet my family? And then you'll lunch with them—I've a business luncheon at the club—unfortunately—but I'll come back. Meanwhile there'll be somebody to show you about, or you can run out to the Inlet in one of the motor-boats if you like, or do anything you like that may amuse you; the main thing is for you to be amused, to find this place agreeable, to like this kind of country, to like us. *Then* you can do good work, Mr. Hamil."

A grinning negro shuffled up and closed the gate as they left the grove together and started across the lawn. Cardross, cordial in his quick, vigorous manner, strolled with his hands in his coat pockets, planting each white-shod foot firmly as he walked, frequently turning head and shoulders squarely toward his companion when speaking.

He must have been over fifty; he did not appear forty; still, on closer and more detailed inspection Hamil understood how much his alert, well-made figure had to do with the first impression of youth. Yet his expression had nothing in it of that shadow which falls with years—nothing to show to the world that he had once taken the world by the throat and wrung a fortune out of it—nothing of the hard gravity or the underlying sadness of almost ruthless success, and the responsibility for it.

Yet, from the first, Hamil had been aware of all that was behind this unstudied frankness, this friendly vigour. There was a man, there—every inch a man, but exactly of what sort the younger man had not yet decided.

A faded and very stout lady, gowned with elaborate simplicity, yet somehow suggesting well-bred untidiness, rolled toward them, propelled in a wheeled-chair by a black servant.

"Dear," said Mr. Cardross, "this is Mr. Hamil." And Mrs. Cardross offered him her chubby hand and said a little more than he expected. Then, to her husband, languidly:

"They're playing tennis, Neville. If Mr. Hamil would care to play there are tennis-shoes belonging to Gray and Acton."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cardross," said Hamil, "but, as a matter of fact, I am not yet acclimated."

"You feel a little sleepy?" drawled Mrs. Cardross, maternally solicitous; "everybody does for the first few days." And to her husband: "Jessie and Cecile are playing; Shiela must be somewhere about—You will lunch with us, Mr. Hamil? There's to be a tennis luncheon under the oaks—we'd really like to have you if you can stay."

Hamil accepted as simply as the invitation was given; Mrs. Cardross exchanged a few words with her husband in that perfectly natural drawl which at first might have been mistaken for languid

affectation; then she smiled at Hamil and turned around in her basket chair, parasol tilted, and the black boy began slowly pedalling her away across the lawn.

"We'll step over to the tennis-courts," said Cardross, replacing the straw hat which he had removed to salute his wife; "they're having a sort of scratch-tournament I believe—my daughters and some other young people. I think you'll find the courts rather pretty."

The grounds were certainly quaint; spaces for four white marl courts had been cleared, hewn out of the solid jungle which walled them in with a noble living growth of live oak, cedar, magnolia, and palmetto. And on these courts a very gay company of young people in white were playing or applauding the players while the snowy balls flew across the nets and the resonant blows of the bats rang out.

And first Mr. Cardross presented Hamil to his handsome married daughter, Mrs. Acton Carrick, a jolly, freckled, young matron who showed her teeth when she smiled and shook hands like her father; and then he was made known to the youngest daughter, Cecile Cardross, small, plump, and sun-tanned, with ruddy hair and mischief in every feature.

There was, also, a willowy Miss Staines and a blond Miss Anan, and a very young Mr. Anan —a brother—and a grave and gaunt Mr. Gatewood and a stout Mr. Ellison, and a number of others less easy to remember.

"This wholesale introduction business is always perplexing," observed Cardross; "but they'll all remember you, and after a time you'll begin to distinguish them from the shrubbery. No"—as Mrs. Carrick asked Hamil if he cared to play—"he would rather look on this time, Jessie. Go ahead; we are not interrupting you; where is Shiela—"

And Hamil, chancing to turn, saw her, tennis-bat tucked under one bare arm, emerging from the jungle path; and at the same instant she caught sight of him. Both little chalked shoes stood stockstill —for a second only—then she came forward, leisurely, continuing to eat the ripe guava with which she had been occupied.

Cardross, advancing, said: "This is Mr. Hamil, dearest; and," to the young man: "My daughter Shiela."

She nodded politely.

"Now I've got to go, Shiela," continued Cardross. "Hamil, you'll amuse yourself, won't you, until I return after luncheon? Shiela, Mr. Hamil doesn't care to play tennis; so if you'll find out what he does care to do—" He saluted the young people gaily and started across the lawn where a very black boy with a chair stood ready to convey him to the village and across the railroad tracks to that demure little flower-embowered cottage the interior of which presents such an amazing contrast to the exterior.

CHAPTER VI
ARMISTICE

The young girl beside him had finished her guava, and now, idly swinging her tennis-bat, stood watching the games in the sunken courts below.

"Please don't consider me a burden," he said. "I would be very glad to sit here and watch you play."

"I have been playing, thank you."

"But you won't let me interfere with anything that—"

"No, Mr. Hamil, I won't let you interfere—with anything."

She stood swinging her bat, apparently preoccupied with her own thoughts—like a very grave goddess, he thought, glancing at her askance—a very young goddess, immersed in celestial reverie far beyond mortal comprehension.

"Do you like guavas?" she inquired. And, closing her own question: "But you had better not until you are acclimated. Do you feel *very* sleepy, Mr. Hamil?"

"No, I don't," he said.

"Oh! You ought to conform to tradition. There's a particularly alluring hammock on the veranda."

"To get rid of me is it necessary to make me take a nap?" he protested.

"So you refuse to go to sleep?"

"I certainly do."

She sighed and tucked the tennis-bat under her left arm. "Come," she said, moving forward, "my father will ask me what I have done to amuse you, and I had better hunt up something to tell him about. You'll want to see the groves of course—"

"Yes, but I'm not going to drag you about with me—"

"Come," she repeated; and as he stood his ground obstinately: "Please?"—with a rising inflection hinting at command.

"Why on earth don't you play tennis and let me sit and watch you?" he asked, joining and keeping step with her.

"Why do you ask a woman for reasons, Mr. Hamil?"

"It's too bad to spoil your morning—"

"I know it; so in revenge I'm going to spoil yours. Our trip is called 'Seeing Florida,' so you must listen to your guide very attentively. This is a pomelo grove—thank you," to the negro who opened the gate—"here you see blossoms and ripe fruit together on the same tree. A few palmettos have been planted here for various agricultural reasons. This is a camphor bush"—touching it with her bat—"the leaves when crushed in the palm exhale a delightful fragr—"

"Calypso!"

She turned toward him with coldest composure. "*That* never happened, Mr. Hamil."

"No," he said, "it never did."

A slight colour remained in his face; hers was cool enough.

"Did you think it happened?" she asked. He shook his head. "No," he repeated seriously, "I know that it never happened."

She said: "If you are quite sure it never happened, there is no harm in pretending it did.... What was it you called me?"

"I could never remember, Miss Cardross—unless you tell me."

"Then I'll tell you—if you are quite sure you don't remember. You called me 'Calypso.'"

And looking up he surprised the rare laughter in her eyes.

"You are rather nice after all," she said, "or is it only that I have you under such rigid discipline? But it was very bad taste in you to recall so crudely what never occurred—until I gave you the liberty to do it. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do," he said. "I've made two exhibitions of myself since I knew you—"

"*One*, Mr. Hamil. Please recollect that I am scarcely supposed to know how many exhibitions of yourself you may have made before we were formally presented."

She stood still under a tree which drooped like a leaf-tufted umbrella, and she said, swinging her racket: "You will always have me at a disadvantage. Do you know it?"

"That is utterly impossible!"

"Is it? Do you mean it?"

"I do with all my heart—"

"Thank you; but do you mean it with all your logical intelligence, too?"

"Yes, of course I do."

She stood, head partly averted, one hand caressing the smooth, pale-yellow fruit which hung in heavy clusters around her. And all around her, too, the delicate white blossoms poured out fragrance, and the giant swallow-tail butterflies in gold and black fluttered and floated among the blossoms or clung to them as though stupefied by their heavy sweetness.

"I wish we had begun—differently," she mused.

"I don't wish it."

She said, turning on him almost fiercely: "You persisted in talking to me in the boat; you contrived to make yourself interesting without being offensive—I don't know how you managed it! And then—last night—I was not myself.... And then—*that* happened!"

"Could anything more innocent have happened?"

"Something far more dignified could have happened when I heard you say 'Calypso.'" She shrugged her shoulders. "It's done; we've misbehaved; and you will have to be dreadfully careful. You will, won't you? And yet I shall certainly hate you heartily if you make any difference between me and other women. Oh, dear!—Oh, dear! The whole situation is just unimportant enough to be irritating. Mr. Hamil, I don't think I care for you very much."

And as he looked at her with a troubled smile, she added:

"You must not take that declaration *too* literally. Can you forget—various things?"

"I don't want to, Miss Cardross. Listen: nobody could be more sweet, more simple, more natural than the girl I spoke to—I dreamed that I talked with—last night. I don't want to forget that night, or that girl. Must I?"

"Are you, in your inmost thoughts, fastidious in thinking of that girl? Is there any reservation, any hesitation?"

He said, meeting her eyes: "She is easily the nicest girl I ever met—the very nicest. Do you think that I might have her for a friend?"

"Do you mean this girl, Calypso?"

"Yes."

"Then I think that she will return to you the exact measure of friendship that you offer her.... Because, Mr. Hamil, she is after all not very old in years, and a little sensitive and impressionable."

He thought to himself: "She is a rather curious mixture of impulse and reason; of shyness and audacity; of composure and timidity; of courage and cowardice and experience. But there is in her no treachery; nothing mentally unwholesome."

They stood silent a moment smiling at each other rather seriously; then her smooth hand slid from his, and she drew a light breath.

"What a relief!" she said.

"What?"

"To know you are the kind of man I knew you were. That sounds rather Irish, doesn't it?…" And under her breath—"perhaps it is. God knows!" Her face grew very grave for a moment, then, as she turned and looked at him, the shadow fell.

"Do you know—it was absurd of course—but I could scarcely sleep last night for sheer dread of your coming to-day. And yet I knew what sort of a man you must be; and this morning"—she shook her head—"I couldn't endure any breakfast, and I usually endure lots; so I took a spin down the lake in my chair. When I saw you just now I was trying to brace up on a guava. Listen to me: I am hungry!"

"You poor little thing—"

"Sympathy satisfies sentiment but appetite prefers oranges. Shall we eat oranges together and become friendly and messy? Are you even *that* kind of a man? Oh, then if you really are, there's a mixed grove just beyond."

So together, shoulder to shoulder, keeping step, they passed through the new grove with its enormous pendent bunches of grape-fruit, and into a second grove where limes and mandarins hung among clusters of lemons and oranges; where kum-quat bushes stood stiffly, studded with egg-shaped, orange-tinted fruit; where tangerines, grape-fruit, and king-oranges grew upon the same tree, and the deep scarlet of ripe Japanese persimmons and the huge tattered fronds of banana trees formed a riotous background.

"This tree!" she indicated briefly, reaching up; and her hand was white even among the milky orange bloom—he noticed that as he bent down a laden bough for her.

"Pine-oranges," she said, "the most delicious of all. I'll pick and you hold the branch. And please get me a few tangerines—those blood-tangerines up there.... Thank you; and two Japanese persimmons—and two more for yourself.... Have you a knife? Very well; now, break a fan from that saw-palmetto and sweep a place for me on the ground—that way. And now please look very carefully to see if there are any spiders. No spiders? No scorpions? No wood-ticks? Are you sure?"

"There *may* be a bandersnatch," he said doubtfully, dusting the ground with his palmetto fan.

She laughed and seated herself on the ground, drew down her short white tennis-skirt as far as it would go over her slim ankles, looked up at him confidently, holding out her hand for his knife.

"We are going to be delightfully messy in a moment," she said; "let me show you how they prepare an orange in Florida. This is for you—you must take it.... And this is for me. The rind is all gone, you see. Now, Ulysses. This is the magic moment!"

And without further ceremony her little teeth met in the dripping golden pulp; and in another moment Hamil was imitating her.

They appeared to be sufficiently hungry; the brilliant rind, crinkling, fell away in golden corkscrews from orange after orange, and still they ate on, chattering away together between oranges.

"Isn't this primitive luxury, Mr. Hamil? We ought to wear our bathing-clothes.... Don't dare take my largest king-orange! Yes—you may have it;—I won't take it.... Are you being amused? My father said that you were to be amused. What in the world are you staring at?"

"That!" said Hamil, eyes widening. "What on earth—"

"Oh, that's nothing—that is our watchman. We have to employ somebody to watch our groves, you know, or all the negroes in Florida would be banqueting here. So we have that watchman yonder —"

"But it's a *bird*!" insisted Hamil, "a big gray, long-legged, five-foot bird with a scarlet head!"

"Of course," said the girl serenely; "it's a crane. His name is Alonzo; he's four feet high; and he's horridly savage. If you came in here without father or me or some of the workmen who know him, Alonzo would begin to dance at you, flapping his wings, every plume erect; and if you didn't run he'd attack you. That big, dagger-like bill of his is an atrocious weapon."

The crane resembled a round-shouldered, thin-legged old gentleman with his hands tucked under his coat-tails; and as he came up, tiptoeing and peering slyly at Hamil out of two bright evil-

looking eyes, the girl raised her arm and threw a kum-quat at him so accurately that the bird veered off with a huge hop of grieved astonishment.

"Alonzo! Go away this instant!" she commanded. And to Hamil: "He's disgustingly treacherous; he'll sidle up behind you if he can. Give me that palmetto fan."

But the bird saw her rise, and hastily retreated to the farther edge of the grove, where presently they saw him pretending to hunt snails and lizards as innocently as though premeditated human assassination was farthest from his thoughts.

There was a fountain with a coquina basin in the grove; and here they washed the orange juice from their hands and dried them on their handkerchiefs.

"Would you like to see Tommy Tiger?" she asked. "I'm taming him."

"Very much," he said politely.

"Well, he's in there somewhere," pointing to a section of bushy jungle edging the grove and around which was a high heavy fence of closely woven buffalo wire. "Here, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy!" she called, in her fresh young voice that, at times, broke deliciously in a childish grace-note.

At first Hamil could see nothing in the tangle of brier and saw-palmetto, but after a while he became aware of a wild-cat, tufted ears flattenend, standing in the shadow of a striped bush and looking at him out of the greenest eyes he had ever beheld.

"Pretty Tom," said the girl caressingly. "Tommy, come and let Shiela scratch his ears."

And the lynx, disdainfully shifting its blank green gaze from Hamil, hoisted an absurd stub of a tail and began rubbing its lavishly whiskered jowl against the bush. Nearer and nearer sidled the lithe grayish animal, cautiously the girl advanced, until the cat was rubbing cheek and flank against the woven-wire fence. Then, with infinite precaution, she extended her hand, touched the flat fierce head, and slowly began to rub it.

"Don't!" said Hamil, stepping forward; and at the sound of his voice and step the cat whirled and struck, and the girl sprang back, white to the lips.

For a moment she said nothing, then looked up at Hamil beside her, as pale as she.

"I am not hurt," she said, "only startled."

"I should not have spoken," he faltered. "What an ass I am!"

"It is all right; I ought to have cautioned you about moving or speaking. I thought you understood —but please don't look that way, Mr. Hamil. It was not your fault and I am not hurt. Which teaches me a lesson, I hope. What is the moral?—don't attempt to caress the impossible?—or something similarly senseless," she added gaily. And turning on the crouching lynx: "Bad Tommy! Wicked, treacherous, *bad*—no! *Poor* old Tom! You are quite right. I'd do the same if I were trapped and anybody tried to patronize me. I know how you feel—yes, I do, Tommy Tiger. And I'll tell old Jonas to give you lots and lots of delicious mud-fish for your dinner to-night—yes, I will, my friend. Also some lavender to roll on.... Mr. Hamil, you are still unusually colourless. Were you really afraid?"

"Horribly."

"Oh, the wire is too strong for him to break out," she observed coolly.

"I was not afraid of that," he retorted, reddening.

She turned toward him, smilingly remorseful.

"I know it! I say such things—I don't know why. You will learn how to take them, won't you?"

They walked on, passing through grove after grove, Alonzo tiptoeing after them, and when, as a matter of precaution from time to time, Shiela looked back, the bird pretended not to see them until they passed the last gate and locked it. Then the great crane, half flying, half running, charged at the closed gate, dancing and bounding about; and long after they were out of sight Alonzo's discordant metallic shrieks rang out in baffled fury from among the trees.

They had come into a wide smooth roadway flanked by walks shaded by quadruple rows of palms. Oleander and hibiscus hedges ran on either side as far as the eye could see, and long brilliant flower-beds stretched away into gorgeous perspective.

"This is stunning," he said, staring about him.

"It is our road to the ocean, about two miles long," she explained. "My father designed it; do you really like it?"

"Yes, I do," he said sincerely; "and I scarcely understand why Mr. Cardross has called me into consultation if this is the way he can do things."

"That is generous of you. Father will be very proud and happy when I tell him."

They were leaning over the rail of a stone bridge together; the clear stream below wound through thickets of mangrove, bamboo, and flowering vines all a-flutter with butterflies; a school of fish stemmed the current with winnowing fins; myriads of brown and gold dragon-flies darted overhead.

"It's fairyland—the only proper setting for you after all," he said.

Resting one elbow on the stone parapet, her cheek in the hollow of her hand, she watched the smile brightening in his face, but responded only faintly to it.

"Some day," she said, "when we have blown the froth and sparkle from our scarcely tasted cup of acquaintance, you will talk to me of serious things sometimes—will you not?"

"Why—yes," he said, surprised.

"I mean—as you would to a man. You will find me capable of understanding you. You once said to me, in a boat, that no two normal people of opposite sex can meet without experiencing more or less wholesome interest in one another. Didn't you say that? Very well, then; I now admit my normal interest in you—untinged by sentiment. Don't disappoint me."

He said whimsically: "I'm not intellectual; I don't know very much about anything except my profession."

"Then talk to me about it. Goodness! Don't I deserve it? Is a girl to violate precept and instinct on an ill-considered impulse only to find the man in the case was not worth it? And how do you know what else I violated—merely to be kind. I must have been mad to do it!"

He flushed up so vividly that she winced, then added quickly: "I didn't mean that, Mr. Hamil; I knew you were worth it when I did it."

"The worst of it is that I am not," he said. "I'm like everybody who has been through college and chooses a profession for love of it. I do know something about that profession; outside of it, the least I can say for myself is that I care about everything that goes on in this very jolly world. Curiosity has led me about by the nose. The result is a series of acquired smatterings."

She regarded him intently with that clear gaze he found so refreshing—a direct, fearless scrutiny which straightened her eyebrows to a fascinating level and always made him think of a pagan marble, with delicately chiselled, upcurled lips, and white brow youthfully grave.

"Did you study abroad?"

"Yes—not long enough."

She seemed rather astonished at this. Amused, he rested both elbows on the parapet, looking at her from between the strong, lean hands that framed his face.

"It was droll—the way I managed to scurry like a jack-rabbit through school and college on nothing a year. I was obliged to hurry post-graduate courses and Europe and such agreeable things. Otherwise I would probably be more interesting to you—"

"You are sufficiently interesting," she said, flushing up at his wilful misinterpretation.

And, as he laughed easily:

"The horrid thing about it is that you *are* interesting and you know it. All I asked of you was to be seriously interesting to me—occasionally; and instead you are rude—"

"Rude!"

"Yes, you are!—pretending that I was disappointed in you because you hadn't dawdled around Europe for years in the wake of an education. You are, apparently, just about the average sort of man one meets—yet I kicked over several conventions for the sake of exchanging a few premature words with you, knowing all the while I was to meet you later. It certainly was not for your beaux yeux; I

am not sentimental!" she added fiercely. "And it was not because you are a celebrity—you are not one yet, you know. Something in you certainly appealed to something reckless in me; yet I did not really feel very sinful when I let you speak to me; and, even in the boat, I admit frankly that I enjoyed every word that we spoke—though I didn't appear to, did I?"

"No, you didn't," he said.

She smiled, watching him, chin on hand.

"I wonder how you'll like this place," she mused. "It's gay—in a way. There are things to do every moment if you let people rob you of your time—dances, carnivals, races, gambling, suppers. There's the Fortnightly Club, and various charities too, and dinners and teas and all sorts of things to do outdoors on land and on water. Are you fond of shooting?"

"Very. I *can* do that pretty well."

"So can I. We'll go with my father and Gray. Gray is my brother; you'll meet him at luncheon. What time is it?"

He looked at his watch. "Eleven—a little after."

"We're missing the bathing. Everybody splashes about the pool or the ocean at this hour. Then everybody sits on the veranda of *The Breakers* and drinks things and gossips until luncheon. Rather intellectual, isn't it?"

"Sufficiently," he replied lazily.

She leaned over the parapet, standing on the tips of her white shoes and looked down at the school of fish. Presently she pointed to a snake swimming against the current.

"A moccasin?" he asked.

"No, only a water snake. They call everything moccasins down here, but real moccasins are not very common."

"And rattlesnakes?"

"Scarcer still. You hear stories, but—" She shrugged her shoulders. "Of course when we are quail shooting it's well to look where you step, but there are more snakes in the latitude of Saint Augustine than there are here. When father and I are shooting we never think anything about them. I'm more afraid of those horrid wood-ticks. Listen; shall we go camping?"

"But I have work on hand," he said dejectedly.

"That is part of your work. Father said so. Anyway I know he means to camp with you somewhere in the hammock, and if Gray goes I go too."

"Calypso," he said, "do you know what I've been hearing about you? I've heard that you are the most assiduously run-after girl at Palm Beach. And if you are, what on earth will the legions of the adoring say when you take to the jungle?"

"Who said that about me?" she asked, smiling adorably.

"Is it true?"

"I am—liked. Who said it?"

"You don't mean to say," he continued perversely, "that I have monopolised the reigning beauty of Palm Beach for an entire morning."

"Yes, you have and it is high time you understood it. *Who* said this to *you*?"

"Well—I gathered the fact—"

"Who?"

"My aunt—Miss Palliser."

"Do you know," said Shiela Cardross slowly, "that Miss Palliser has been exceedingly nice to me? But her friend, Miss Suydam, is not very civil."

"I'm awfully sorry," he said.

"I could tell you that it mattered nothing," she said, looking straight at him; "and that would be an untruth. I know that many people disregard such things—many are indifferent to the opinion of others, or say they are. I never have been; I want everybody to like me—even people I have not

the slightest interest in—people I do not even know—I want them all to like me. For I must tell you, Mr. Hamil, that when anybody dislikes me, and I know it, I am just as unhappy about it as though I cared for them."

"It's absurd for anybody not to like you!" he said.

"Well, do you know it really is absurd—if they only knew how willing I am to like everybody.... I was inclined to like Miss Suydam."

Hamil remained silent.

The girl added: "One does not absolutely disregard the displeasure of such people."

"They didn't some years ago when there were no shops on Fifth Avenue and gentlemen wore side-whiskers," said Hamil, smiling.

Shiela Cardross shrugged. "I'm sorry; I was inclined to like her. She misses more than I do because we are a jolly and amusing family. It's curious how much energy is wasted disliking people. Who is Miss Suydam?"

"She's a sort of a relative. I have always known her. I'm sorry she was rude. She is sometimes."

They said no more about her or about his aunt; and presently they moved on again, luncheon being imminent.

"You will like my sister, Mrs. Carrick," said Shiela tranquilly. "You know her husband, Acton, don't you? He's at Miami fishing."

"Oh, yes; I've met him at the club. He's very agreeable."

"He *is* jolly. And Jessie—Mrs. Carrick—is the best fun in the world. And you are sure to like my little sister Cecile; every man adores her, and you'll do it, too—yes, I mean sentimentally—until she laughs you out of it."

"Like yourself, Calypso, I'm not inclined to sentiment," he said.

"You can't help it with Cecile. Wait! Then there are others to lunch with us—Marjorie Staines—very popular with men, and Stephanie Anan—you studied with her uncle, Winslow Anan, didn't you?"

"Yes, indeed!" he exclaimed warmly, "but how did you—"

"Oh, I knew it; I know lots about you, you see.... Then there is Phil Gatewood—a perfectly splendid fellow, and Alex Anan—a dear boy, ready to adore any girl who looks sideways at him.... I don't remember who else is to lunch with us, except my brother Gray. Look, Mr. Hamil! They've actually sat down to luncheon without waiting for us! What horrid incivility! Could your watch have been wrong?—or have we been too deeply absorbed?"

"I can speak for one of us," he said, as they came out upon the lawn in full view of the table which was spread under the most beautiful live-oaks he had ever seen.

Everybody was very friendly. Gray Cardross, a nice-looking boy who wore spectacles, collected butterflies, and did not look like a "speed-mad cub," took Hamil to the house, whither Shiela had already retired for an ante-prandial toilet; but there is no dust in that part of the world, and his preparations were quickly made.

"Awfully glad you came," repeated young Cardross with all the excessive cordiality of the young and unspoiled. "Father has been checking off the days on the calendar since your letter saying you were coming by way of Nassau. The Governor is dying to begin operations on that jungle yonder. When we camp I'm going—and probably Shiela is—she began clamoring to go two weeks ago. We all had an idea that you were a rather feeble old gentleman—like Mr. Anan—until Shiela brought us the picture they published of you in the paper two weeks ago; and she said immediately that if you were young enough to camp she was old enough to go too. She's a good shot, Mr. Hamil, and she won't interfere with your professional duties—"

"I should think not!" said Hamil cordially; "but—as for my camping—there's really almost nothing left for me to do except to familiarise myself with the character of your wilderness. Your

father tells me he has the surveys and contour maps all ready. As a matter of fact I really could begin the office work at once—"

"For Heaven's sake don't do that! and don't say it!" exclaimed the young fellow in dismay. "Father and Shiela and I are counting on this trip. There's a butterfly or two I want to get at Ruffle Lake. Don't you think it extremely necessary that you go over the entire territory?—become thoroughly saturated with the atmosphere and—"

"Malaria?" suggested Hamil, laughing. "Of course, seriously, it will be simply fine. And perhaps it is the best thing to do for a while. Please don't mistake me; I *want* to do it; I—I've never before had a vacation like this. It's like a trip into paradise from the sordid horror of Broadway. Only," he added slowly as they left the house and started toward the luncheon party under the live-oaks, "I should like to have your father know that I am ready to give him every moment of my time."

"That's what he wants—and so do I," said young Cardross.... "Hello! Here's Shiela back before us! I'd like to sit near enough to talk to you, but Shiela is between us. I'll tell you after luncheon what we propose to do on this trip."

A white servant seated Hamil on Mrs. Cardross's right; and for a while that languid but friendly lady drawled amiable trivialities to him, propounding the tritest questions with an air of pleased profundity, replying to his observations with harmlessly complacent platitudes—a good woman, every inch of her—one who had never known an unkindly act or word in the circle of her own family—one who had always been accustomed to honor, deference, and affection—of whom nothing more had ever been demanded than the affections of a good wife and a good mother.

Being very, very stout, and elaborately upholstered, a shady hammock couch suited her best; and as she was eternally dieting and was too stout to sit comfortably, she never remained very long at table.

Gray escorted her houseward in the midst of the festivities. She nodded a gracious apology to all, entered her wheel-chair, and was rolled heavily away for her daily siesta.

Everybody appeared to be friendly to him, even cordial. Mrs. Acton Carrick talked to him in her pretty, decisive, animated manner, a feminine reflection of her father's characteristic energy and frankness.

Her younger sister, Cecile, possessed a drawl like her mother's. Petite, distractingly pretty, Hamil recognised immediately her attraction—experienced it, amused himself by yielding to it as he exchanged conventionally preliminary observations with her across the table.

Men, on first acquaintance, were usually very easily captivated, for she had not only all the general attraction of being young, feminine, and unusually ornamental, but she also possessed numberless individualities like a rapid fire of incarnations, which since she was sixteen had kept many a young man, good and true, madly guessing which was the real Cecile. And yet all the various and assorted Ceciles seemed equally desirable, susceptible, and eternally on the verge of being rounded up and captured; that was the worst of it; and no young man she had ever known had wholly relinquished hope. For even in the graceful act of side-stepping the smitten, the girl's eyes and lips seemed unconsciously to unite in a gay little unspoken promise—"This serial story is to be continued in our next—perhaps."

As for the other people at the table Hamil began to distinguish one from another by degrees; the fair-haired Anans, sister and brother, who spoke of their celebrated uncle, Winslow Anan, and his predictions concerning Hamil as his legitimate successor; Marjorie Staines, willowy, active, fresh as a stem of white jasmine, and inconsequent as a very restless bird; Philip Gatewood, grave, thin, prematurely saddened by the responsibility of a vast inheritance, consumed by a desire for an artistic career, looking at the world with his owlish eyes through the prismatic colors of a set palette.

There were others there whom as yet he had been unable to differentiate; smiling, well-mannered, affable people who chattered with more or less intimacy among themselves as though

accustomed to meeting one another year after year in this winter rendezvous. And everywhere he felt the easy, informal friendliness and goodwill of these young people.

"Are you being amused?" asked Shiela beside him. "My father's orders, you know," she added demurely.

They stood up as Mrs. Carrick rose and left the table followed by the others; and he looked at Shiela expecting her to imitate her sister's example. As she did not, he waited beside her, his cigarette unlighted.

Presently she bent over the table, extended her arm, and lifted a small burning lamp of silver toward him; and, thanking her, he lighted his cigarette.

"Siesta?" she asked.

"No; I feel fairly normal."

"That's abnormal in Florida. But if you really don't feel sleepy—if you really don't—we'll get the *Gracilis*—our fastest motor-boat—and run down to the Beach Club and get father. Shall we—just you and I?"

"And the engineer?"

"I'll run the *Gracilis* if you will steer," she said quietly.

"I'll do whichever you wish, Calypso, steer or run things."

She looked up with that quick smile which seemed to transfigure her into something a little more than mortal.

"Why in the world have I ever been afraid of you?" she said. "Will you come? I think our galley is in commission.... Once I told you that Calypso was a land-nymph. But—time changes us all, you know—and as nobody reads the classics any longer nobody will perceive the anachronism."

"Except ourselves."

"Except ourselves, Ulysses; and we'll forgive each other." She took a step out from the shadow of the oaks' foliage into the white sunlight and turned, looking back at him.

And he followed, as did his heroic namesake in the golden noon of the age of fable.

As they came in sight of the sea he halted.

"That's curious!" he exclaimed; "there is the *Ariani* again!"

"The yacht you came on?"

"Yes. I wonder if there's been an accident. She cleared for Miami last night."

They stood looking at the white steamer for a moment.

"I hope everything's all right with the *Ariani*" he murmured; then turned to the girl beside him.

"By the way I have a message for you from a man on board; I forgot to deliver it."

"A message for *me*?"

"From a very ornamental young man who desired to be particularly remembered to Shiela Cardross until he could pay his respects in person. Can you guess?"

For a moment she looked at him with a tremor of curiosity and amusement edging her lips.

"Louis Malcourt," he said, smiling; and turned again to the sea.

A sudden, still, inward fright seized her; the curious soundless crash of her own senses followed—as though all within had given way.

She had known many, many such moments; one was upon her now, the clutching terror of it seeming to stiffen the very soul within her.

"I hope all's well with the *Ariani*" he repeated under his breath, staring at the sea.

Miss Cardross said nothing.

CHAPTER VII
A CHANGE OF BASE

February, the gayest winter month on the East Coast, found the winter resorts already overcrowded. Relays and consignments of fashion arrived and departed on every train; the permanent winter colony, composed of those who owned or rented villas and those who remained for the three months at either of the great hotels, had started the season vigorously. Dances, dinners, lawn fêtes, entertainments for local churches and charities left little time for anything except the routine of the bathing-hour, the noon gathering at "The Breakers," and tea during the concert.

Every day beach, pier, and swimming-pool were thronged; every day the white motor-cars rushed southward to Miami, and the swift power-boats sped northward to the Inlet; and the house-boat rendezvous rang with the gay laughter of pretty women, and the restaurant of the Beach Club flashed with their jewels.

Dozens of villas had begun their series of house-parties; attractive girls held court everywhere —under coco-palm and hibiscus, along the beach, on the snowy decks of yachts; agreeable girls fished from the pier, pervaded bazaars for charity, sauntered, bare of elbow and throat, across the sandy links; adorable girls appeared everywhere, on veranda, in canoes, in wheel-chairs, in the surf and out of it—everywhere youth and beauty decorated the sun-drenched landscape. And Hamil thought that he had never before beheld so many ornamental women together in any one place except in his native city; certainly, nowhere had he ever encountered such a heterogeneous mixture of all the shades, nuances, tints, hues, and grades which enter into the warp and weft of the American social fabric; and he noticed some colours that do not enter into that fabric at all.

East, West, North, and South sent types of those worthy citizens who upheld local social structures; the brilliant migrants were there also—samples of the gay, wealthy, over-accented floating population of great cities—the rich and homeless and restless—those who lived and had their social being in the gorgeous and expensive hotels; who had neither firesides nor taxes nor fixed social obligations to worry them, nor any of the trying civic or routine duties devolving upon permanent inhabitants—the jewelled throngers of the horse-shows and motor-shows, and theatres, and night restaurants—the people, in fact, who make ocean-liners, high prices, and the metropolis possible, and the name of their country blinked at abroad. For it is not your native New Yorker who supports the continual fête from the Bronx to the sea and carries it over-seas for a Parisian summer.

Then, too, the truly good were there—the sturdy, respectable, and sometimes dowdy good; also the intellectuals—for ten expensive days at a time—for it is a deplorable fact that the unworthy frivolous monopolise all the money in the world! And there, too, were excursionists from East and West and North and South, tired, leaden-eyed, uncomfortable, eating luncheons on private lawns, trooping to see some trained alligators in a muddy pool, resting by roadsides and dunes in the apathy of repletion, the sucked orange suspended to follow with narrowing eyes the progress of some imported hat or gown.

And the bad were there; not the very, very bad perhaps; but the doubtful; over-jewelled, over-tinted of lip and brow and cheek, with shoes too shapely and waists too small and hair too bright and wavy, and—but dusty alpaca and false front cannot do absolute justice to a pearl collar and a gown of lace; and tired, toil-dimmed eyes may make mistakes, especially as it is already a tradition that America goes to Palm Beach to cut up shindies, or watch others do it.

So they were all there, the irreproachable, the amusing, the inevitable, the intellectual, the good, and the bad, the onduléd, and the scant of hair.

And, belonging to one or more of these divisions, Portlaw, Wayward, and Malcourt were there —had been there, now, for several weeks, the latter as a guest at the Cardross villa. For the demon

of caprice had seized on Wayward, and half-way to Miami he had turned back for no reason under the sun apparently—though Constance Palliser had been very glad to see him after so many years.

The month had made a new man of Hamil. For one thing he had become more or less acclimated; he no longer desired to sleep several times a day, he could now assimilate guavas without disaster, and walk about without acquiring headaches or deluging himself in perspiration. For another he was enchanted with his work and with Shiela Cardross, and with the entire Cardross family.

The month had been a busy one for him. When he was not in the saddle with Neville Cardross the work in the new office and draughting-room required his close attention. Already affairs were moving briskly; he had leased a cottage for his office work; draughtsmen had arrived and were fully occupied, half a dozen contractors appeared on the spot, also a forester and assistants, and a surveyor and staff. And the energetic Mr. Cardross, also, was enjoying every minute of his life.

Hamil's plan for the great main park with its terraces, miles of shell and marl drives, its lakes, bridges, arbours, pools, shelters, canals, fully satisfied Cardross. Hamil's engineers were still occupied with the drainage problem, but a happy solution was now in sight. Woodcutters had already begun work on the great central forest avenue stretching straight away for four miles between green jungles topped by giant oaks, magnolias, and palmettos; lesser drives and chair trails were being planned, blazed, and traced out; sample coquina concrete blocks had been delivered, and a rickety narrow-gauge railroad was now being installed with spidery branches reaching out through the monotonous flat woods and creeping around the boundaries where a nine-foot game-proof fence of woven buffalo wire was being erected on cypress posts by hundreds of negroes. Around this went a telephone and telegraph wire connected with the house and the gamekeeper's lodges.

Beyond the vast park lay an unbroken wilderness. This had already been surveyed and there remained nothing to do except to pierce it with a wide main trail and erect a few patrol camps of palmetto logs within convenient reach of the duck-haunted lagoons.

And now toward the end of the month, as contractor after contractor arrived with gangs of negroes and were swallowed up in the distant woodlands, the interest in the Cardross household became acute. From the front entrance of the house guests and family could see the great avenue which was being cleared through the forest—could see the vista growing hour by hour as the huge trees swayed, bent, and came crashing earthward. Far away the noise of the felling sounded, softened by distance; snowy jets of steam puffed up above the trees, the panting of a toy locomotive came on the breeze, the mean, crescendo whine of a saw-mill.

"It's the only way to do things," said Cardross again and again; "make up your mind quickly that you want to do them, then do them quickly. I have no patience with a man who'll dawdle about a bit of property for years and finally start to improve it with a pot of geraniums after he's too old to enjoy anything except gruel. When I plant a tree I don't plant a sapling; I get a machine and four horses and a dozen men and I put in a full-grown tree so that I can sit under it next day if I wish to and not spend thirty years waiting for it to grow. Isn't that the way to do things, Hamil?"

Hamil said yes. It was certainly the way to accomplish things—the modern millionaire's way; but the majority of people had to do a little waiting before they could enjoy their vine and fig-tree.

Cardross sat down beside his wife, who was reading in a hammock chair, and gazed at the new vista through a pair of field-glasses.

"Gad, Hamil!" he said with considerable feeling, "I hate to see a noble tree go down; it's like murder to me. But it's the only thing to do, isn't it? The French understand the value of magnificent distances. What a glorious vista that will make, four miles straight away walled in by deathless green, and the blue lagoon sparkling at the end of the perspective! I love it, I tell you. I love it!"

"It will be very fine," said Hamil. His voice sounded a trifle tired. He had ridden many miles since sunrise. There was marl on his riding-breeches.

Cardross continued to examine the work in progress through his binoculars. Presently he said:

"You've been overdoing it, haven't you, Hamil? My wife says so."

"Overdoing it?" repeated the young man, not understanding. "Overdoing what?"

"I mean you've a touch of malaria; you've been working a little too hard."

"He has indeed," drawled Mrs. Cardross, laying aside her novel; and, placidly ignoring Hamil's protests: "Neville, you drag him about through those dreadful swamps before he is acclimated, and you keep him up half the night talking plans and making sketches. He is too young to work like that."

Hamil turned red; but it was impossible to resent or mistake the kindly solicitude of this very large and leisurely lady whose steadily increasing motherly interest in him had at times tried his dignity in that very lively family.

That he was already a successful young man with a metropolitan reputation made little or no impression upon her. He was young, alone, and she liked him better and better every day until that liking arrived at the point where his physical welfare began to preoccupy her. So she sent maids to his room with nourishing broths at odd and unexpected moments, and she presented him with so many boxes of quinine that their disposal became a problem until Shiela took them off his hands and replaced them in her mother's medicine chest, whence, in due time, they returned again as gifts to Hamil.

"Dear Mrs. Cardross," he said, taking a vacant chair beside her hammock, "I really am perfectly well and perfectly acclimated, and I enjoy every moment of the day whether here as your guest or in the saddle with your husband or in the office over the plans—"

"But you are always at work!" she drawled; "we never see you."

"But that's why I am here," he insisted, smiling.

"Neville," she interrupted calmly; "no boy of his age ought to kill himself. Listen to me; when Neville and I were married we had very little, and he began by laying his plans to work every moment. But we had an understanding," she added blandly; "I explained that I did not intend to grow old with a wreck of a man. Now you may see the result of our understanding," nodding toward her amazingly youthful husband.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" observed Cardross, still looking through his field-glasses. "There's a baby-show next week and I'll enter if you like, my dear."

Mrs. Cardross smiled and took Hamil's hand flat between her fair, pudgy palms.

"We want you here," she said kindly, "*not* because it is a matter of convenience, but because we like you. Be a little more amiable, Mr. Hamil; you never give us a moment during the day or after dinner. You haven't been to a dance yet; you never go to the beach, you never motor or sail or golf. Don't you like my children?"

"Like them! I adore them," he said, laughing, "but how can—"

"I'm going to take him camping," observed Cardross, interrupting. "I want some duck-shooting; don't you, Hamil?"

"Of course I do, but—"

"Then we start this week for the woods—"

"I won't let you," interposed his wife; "you'll talk that boy to death with your plans and surveys!"

"No, I'll promise to talk shooting every moment, and do a little of it, too. What do you say, Hamil? Gray will go with us. Are you game?"

"I'd love to, but I promised Malcourt that—"

"Oh, nonsense! Louis can wait for you to go North and lay out Mr. Portlaw's park. I've the first call on you; I've got you for the winter here—"

"But Portlaw says—"

"Oh, bother Mr. Portlaw! We'll take him along, too, if he can tear himself away from the Beach Club long enough to try less dangerous game."

Since Malcourt's arrival he and Portlaw had joyously waded into whatever gaiety offered, neck-deep; Portlaw had attached himself to the Club with all the deliberation of a born gourmet and a hopeless gambler; Malcourt roamed society and its suburbs, drifting from set to set and from coterie

to coterie, always an opportunist, catholic in his tastes, tolerant of anything where pretty women were inclined to be amiable. And they often were so inclined.

For his own curiosity he even asked to be presented to the redoubtable Mrs. Van Dieman, and he returned at intervals to that austere conservatory of current gossip and colonial tradition partly because it was policy, socially, partly because, curiously enough, the somewhat transparent charms of Virginia Suydam, whom he usually met there, interested him—enough to make him remember a provocative glance from her slow eyes—very slow, deeply lidded eyes, washed with the tint of the sea when it is less blue than green. And the curious side of it was that Malcourt and Virginia had met before, and he had completely forgotten. It was difficult to tell whether she had.

He usually remembered women who looked at him like that, tucking them away in his mental list to be investigated later. He had quite a little list in his mental archives of women, wedded and otherwise, who interested him agreeably or otherwise. Neither Mrs. Carrick nor Cecile was on that list. Shiela Cardross was—and had been for two years.

Hamil, sitting on the terrace beside Mrs. Cardross, became very busy with his note-book as soon as that languid lady resumed her book.

"If you're going to import wild boar from Germany," he said to Cardross, "you'll have to fence in some ten miles square—a hundred square miles!—or they'll take to the Everglades."

"I'm going to," returned that gentleman calmly. "I wish you'd ask McKenna to figure it out. I'll supply the cypress of course."

Hamil leaned forward, a little thrilled with the colossal scheme. He never could become quite accustomed to the vast scale on which Cardross undertook things.

"That will make a corking preserve," he said. "What do you suppose is in there now?"

"Some bears and deer, a few lynx, perhaps one or two panthers. The boar will hold their own—if they can stand the summer—and I'm sure they can. The alligators, no doubt, will get some of their young when they breed. I shall start with a hundred couple when you're ready for them. What are you going to do this afternoon?"

"Office work," replied Hamil, rising and looking at his marl-stained puttees and spurs. Then he straightened up and smiled at Mrs. Cardross, who was gently shaking her head, saying:

"The young people are at the bathing-beach; I wish you'd take a chair and go down there—to please me, Mr. Hamil."

"Come, Hamil," added Cardross airily, "take a few days off—on yourself. You've one thing yet to learn: it's only the unsuccessful who are too busy to play."

"But what I'm doing is play," remonstrated the young man good-humouredly. "Well—I'll go to the beach, then." He looked at the steam-jets above the forest, fumbled with his note-book, caught the eye of Mrs. Cardross, put away the book, and took his leave laughingly.

"We go duck-shooting to-morrow," called out Cardross after him.

Hamil halted in the doorway to protest, but the elder man waved him away; and he went to his room to change riding-clothes for flannels and sponge the reek of horse and leather from his person.

The beach was all ablaze with the brilliant colours of sunshades, hats, and bathing-skirts. Hamil lost no time in getting into his swimming-suit; and, as he emerged, tall, cleanly built, his compact figure deeply tanned where exposed, Portlaw, waddling briskly toward the ocean, greeted him with the traditional: "Come on! it's fine!" and informed him furthermore that "everybody" was there.

CHAPTER VIII
MANOEUVERING

Everybody seemed to be there, either splashing about in the Atlantic or playing ball on the beach or congregated along the sands observant of the jolly, riotous scene sparkling under the magnificence of a cloudless sky.

Hamil nodded to a few people as he sauntered toward the surf; he stopped and spoke to his aunt and Colonel Vetchen, who informed him that Virginia and Cuyp were somewhere together chastely embracing the ocean; he nodded to old Classon who was toddling along the wet sands in a costume which revealed considerable stomach; he saw Malcourt, knee-deep, hovering around Shiela, yet missing nothing of what went on around him, particularly wherever the swing of a bathing-skirt caught his quick, handsome eyes.

Then Cecile stretched out an inviting hand to him from the water and he caught it, and together they hurled themselves head first into the surf, swimming side by side out to the raft.

"It's nice to see you again," said the girl. "Are you going to be agreeable now and go about with us? There's a luncheon at two—your fair friend Virginia Suydam has asked us, much to our surprise—but after that I'm quite free if you've anything to propose."

She looked up at him, pink and fresh as a wet rose, balanced there on the edge of the rocking raft.

"Anything to propose?" he repeated; "I don't know; there's scarcely anything I wouldn't propose to you. So you're going to Virginia's luncheon?"

"*I* am; Shiela won't." She frowned. "It's just as it was two years ago when Louis Malcourt tagged after her every second. It's stupid, but we can't count on them any more."

"Does—does Malcourt—"

"Tag after Shiela? Haven't you seen it? You've been too busy to notice. I wish you wouldn't work every minute. There was the jolliest sort of a dance at the O'Haras' last night—while you were fast asleep. I know you were because old Jonas told mother you had fallen asleep in your chair with your head among a pile of blue-prints. On my way to the dance I wanted to go in and tie one of Shiela's cunning little lace morning caps under your chin, but Jessie wouldn't go with me. They're perfectly sweet and madly fashionable—these little Louis XVI caps. I'll show you one some day."

For a few moments the girl rattled on capriciously, swinging her stockinged legs in the smooth green swells that rose above her knees along the raft's edge; and he sat silent beside her, half-listening, half-preoccupied, his eyes instinctively searching the water's edge beyond.

"I—hadn't noticed that Louis Malcourt was so devoted to your sister," he said.

Cecile looked up quickly, but detected only amiable indifference in the young fellow's face.

"They're-always together; *elle s'affiche à la fin*!" she said impatiently. "Shiela was only eighteen before; she's twenty now, and old enough to know whether she wants to marry a man like that or not."

Hamil glanced around at her incredulously. "Marry Malcourt?"

But Cecile went on headlong in the wake of her own ideas.

"He's a sort of a relative; we've always known him. He and Gray used to go camping in Maine and he often spent months in our house. But for two years now, he's been comparatively busy—he's Mr. Portlaw's manager, you know, and we've seen nothing of him—which was quite agreeable to me."

Hamil rose, unquiet. "I thought *you* were rather impressed by Shiela," continued the girl. "I really did think so, Mr. Hamil."

"Your sister predicted that I'd lose my heart and senses to *you*" said Hamil, laughing and reseating himself beside her.

"Have you?"

"Of course I have. Who could help it?"

The girl considered him smilingly.

"You're the nicest of men," she said. "If you hadn't been so busy I'm certain we'd have had a desperate affair. But—as it is—and it makes me perfectly furious—I have only the most ridiculously commonplace and comfortable affection for you—the sort which prompts mother to send you quinine and talcum powder—"

Balanced there side by side they fell to laughing.

"Sentiment? Yes," she said; "but oh! it's the kind that offers witch-hazel and hot-water bottles to the best beloved! Mr. Hamil, why can't we flirt comfortably like sensibly frivolous people!"

"I wish we could, Cecile."

"I wish so, too, Garret. No, that's too formal—Garry! There, that ends our chances!"

"You're the jolliest family I ever knew," he said. "You can scarcely understand how pleasant it has been for me to camp on the edges of your fireside and feel the home-warmth a little—now and then—"

"Why do you remain so aloof then?"

"I don't mean to. But my heart is in this business of your father's—the more deeply in because of his kindness—and your mother's—and for all your sakes. You know I can scarcely realise it—I've been with you only a month, and yet you've done so much for me—received me so simply, so cordially—that the friendship seems to be of years instead of hours."

"That is the trouble," sighed Cecile; "you and I never had a chance to be frivolous; I'm no more self-conscious with you than I am with Gray. Tell me, why was Virginia Suydam so horrid to us at first?"

Hamil reddened. "You mustn't ask me to criticise my own kin," he said.

"No," she said, "you couldn't do that.... And Miss Suydam has been more civil recently. It's a mean, low, and suspicious thing to say, but I suppose it's because—but I don't think I'll say it after all."

"It's nicer not to," said Hamil. They both knew perfectly well that Virginia's advances were anything but disinterested. For, alas! even the men of her own entourage were now gravitating toward the Cardross family; Van Tassel Cuyp was continually wrinkling his nose and fixing his dead-blue eyes in that direction; little Colonel Vetchen circled busily round and round that centre of attraction, even Courtlandt Classon evinced an inclination to toddle that way. Besides Louis Malcourt had arrived; and Virginia had never quite forgotten Malcourt who had made one at a house party in the Adirondacks some years since, although even when he again encountered her, Malcourt had retained no memory of the slim, pallid girl who had for a week been his fellow-guest at Portlaw's huge camp on Luckless Lake.

"Virginia Suydam is rather an isolated girl," said Hamil thoughtfully. "She lives alone; and it is not very gay for a woman alone in the world; not the happiest sort of life.... Virginia has always been very friendly to me—always. I hope you will find her amusing."

"I'm going to her luncheon," said Cecile calmly. "It's quite too absurd for her to feel any more doubt about us socially than we feel about her. That is why I am going. Shall we swim?"

He rose; she clasped his offered hand and sprang to her feet, ready for the water again. But at that instant Malcourt's dark, handsome head appeared on the crest of a surge close by, and the next moment that young gentleman scrambled aboard the raft, breathing heavily.

"Hello, Cecile!" he gasped; "Hello, Hamil! Shiela thought it must be you, but I was sceptical. Whew! That isn't much of a swim; I must be out of condition—"

"Late hours, cards, and highballs," observed Cecile scornfully. "You're horridly smooth and fat, Louis."

Malcourt turned to Hamil.

"Glad to see you've emerged from your shell at last. The rumour is that you're working too hard."

"There's no similar rumour concerning you," observed Cecile, who had never made any pretence of liking Malcourt. "Please swim out to sea, if you've nothing more interesting to tell us. I've just managed to decoy Mr. Hamil here and I'd like to converse with him in peace."

Malcourt, arms folded, balanced himself easily on the raft's pitching edge and glanced at her with that amiably bored expression characteristic of him when rebuffed by a woman. On such occasions his eyes resembled the half-closed orbs of a teased but patient cat; and Cecile had once told him so.

"There's a pretty rumour afloat concerning your last night's performance at the Beach Club," said the girl disdainfully. "A boy like you, making himself conspicuous by his gambling!"

Malcourt winced, but as the girl had apparently heard nothing to his discredit except about his gambling, he ventured an intelligent sidelong glance at Hamil.

The latter looked at him inquiringly; Malcourt laughed.

"You haven't been to the Beach Club yet, have you, Hamil? I'll get you a card if you like."

Cecile, furious, turned her back and went head first into the sea.

"Come on," said Hamil briefly, and followed her. Malcourt took to the water leisurely, going out of his way to jeer at and splash Portlaw, who was labouring like a grampus inshore; then he circled within observation distance of several pretty girls, displayed his qualities as a swimmer for their benefit, and finally struck out shoreward.

When he emerged from the surf he looked about for Shiela. She was already half-way to the beach, walking with Cecile and Hamil toward the pavilion; and, starting across the shallows to overtake her, he suddenly came face to face with Virginia Suydam.

She was moving hip-deep out through the seething tide, slim, graceful, a slight flush tinting the usual delicate pallor of her cheeks. Gussie Vetchen bobbed nimbly about in the vicinity, very busy trying to look at everybody and keep his balance at the same time. Miss Palliser was talking to Cuyp.

As Malcourt waded past, he and Miss Suydam exchanged a pleasantly formal greeting; and, for the second time, something in her casual gaze—the steadiness of her pretty green-tinted eyes, perhaps—perhaps their singular colour—interested him.

"You did not ask *me* to your luncheon," he said gaily, as he passed her through the foam.

"No, only petticoats, Mr. Malcourt. I am sorry that your—fiancée isn't coming."

He halted, perfectly aware of the deliberate and insolent indiscretion of her reply. Every line of her supple figure accented the listless, disdainful intention. As he remained motionless she turned, bent gracefully and laid her palms flat on the surface of the water, then looked idly over her shoulder at him.

He waded back close to her, she watching him advance without apparent interest—but watching him nevertheless.

"Have you heard that anybody and myself are supposed to be engaged?" he asked.

"No," she replied coolly; "have you?"

A dark flush mantled his face and he choked.

For a moment they stood so; her brows were raised a trifle.

"Well?" she asked at last. "Have I made you *very* angry, Mr. Malcourt?" She waded out a step or two toward the surf, facing it. The rollers breaking just beyond made her foothold precarious; twice she nearly lost her balance; the third time he caught her hand to steady her and held it as they faced the surges, swaying together.

She did not look again at him. They stood for a while unsteadily, her hand in his grasp.

"Why on earth did you say such a thing to me?" he asked.

"I don't—know," she said simply; "I really don't, Mr. Malcourt."

And it was true; for their slight acquaintance warranted neither badinage nor effrontery; and she did not understand the sudden impulse toward provocation, unless it might be her contempt for Shiela Cardross. And that was the doing of Mrs. Van Dieman.

"I'm sorry," she said, looking up at him, and after a moment, down at their clasped hands. "Are we going to swim out, Mr. Malcourt?—or shall we continue to pose as newly married for the benefit of the East Coast?"

"We'll sit in the sands," he said. "We'll probably find a lot of things to say to each other." But he dropped her fingers—gently.

"Unless you care to join your—care to join Miss Cardross."

Even while she spoke she remained calmly amazed at the commonness of her own speech, the astonishing surface streak of unsuspected vulgarity which she was naïvely exhibiting to this man.

Vetchen came noisily splashing up to join them, but he found neither of them very attentive to him as they walked slowly to the beach and up to the dry, hot sand.

Virginia curled up in the sand; Malcourt extended himself full length at her feet, clasped fingers supporting his head, smooth, sun-browned legs crossed behind him; and he looked like a handsome and rather sulky boy lying there, kicking up his heels insouciantly or stretching luxuriously in the sun.

Vetchen, who had followed, began an interminable story on the usual theme of his daughter, Mrs. Tom O'Hara, illustrating her beauty, her importance, and the incidental importance of himself; and it was with profound surprise and deep offence that he discovered that neither Malcourt nor Miss Suydam were listening. Indeed, in brief undertones, they had been carrying on a guarded conversation of their own all the while; and presently little Vetchen took his leave with a hauteur quite lost on those who had so unconsciously affronted him.

"Of course it is very civil of you to say you remember me," Virginia was saying, "but I am perfectly aware you do not."

Malcourt insisted that he recalled their meeting at Portlaw's Adirondack camp on Luckless Lake two years before, cudgelling his brains at the same time to recollect seeing Virginia there and striving to remember some corroborative incident. But all he could really recall was a young and unhappily married woman to whom he had made violent love—and it was even an effort for him to remember her name.

"How desperately you try!" observed Virginia, leisurely constructing a little rampart of sand between them. "Listen to me, Mr. Malcourt"—she raised her eyes, and again the hint of provocation in them preoccupied him—"I remembered you, and I have sometimes hoped we might meet again. Is that amends for the very bad taste I displayed in speaking of your engagement before it has been announced?"

"I am not engaged—to be married," he said deliberately.

She looked at him steadily, and he sustained the strain of the gaze in his own untroubled fashion.

"You are not engaged?"

"No."

She straightened up, resting her weight on one bare arm, then leisurely laid her length on the burning sands and, face framed between her fingers, considered him in silence.

In her attitude, in her very conversation with this man there was, for her, a certain sense of abandonment; a mental renouncing of all that had hitherto characterised her in her relations with an always formal world; as though that were necessary to meet him on his own level.

Never before had she encountered the temptation, the opportunity, or the person where the impulse to discard convention, conviction, training, had so irresistibly presented itself. Nor could she understand it now; yet she was aware, instinctively, that she was on the verge of the temptation and the opportunity; that there existed a subtle something in this man, in herself, that tempted to conventional relaxation. In all her repressed, regulated, and self-suppressed career, all that had ever been in her of latent daring, of feminine audacity, of caprice, of perverse provocation, stirred in her now, quickening with the slightest acceleration of her pulses.

Apparently a man of her own caste, yet she had never been so obscurely stirred by a man of her own caste—had never instinctively divined in other men the streak which this man, from the first interchange of words, had brought out in her.

Aware of his attraction, hazily convinced that she had no confidence in him, the curious temptation persisted and grew; and she felt very young and very guilty like a small child consenting to parley with another child whose society has been forbidden. And it seemed to her that somehow she had already demeaned herself by the tentative toward a common understanding with an intellect and principles of a grade inferior to her own.

"That was a very pretty woman you were so devoted to in the Adirondacks," she said.

He recalled the incident with a pleasant frankness which left her unconvinced.

Suddenly it came over her that she had had enough of him—more than was good for her, and she sat up straight, primly retying her neckerchief.

"To-morrow?" he was saying, too civilly; but on her way to the pavilion she could not remember what she had replied, or how she had rid herself of him.

Inside the pavilion she saw Hamil and Shiela Cardross, already dressed, watching the lively occupants of the swimming-pool; and she exchanged a handshake with the former and a formal nod with the latter.

"Garret, your aunt is worrying because somebody told her that there are snakes in the district where you are at work. Come in some evening and reassure her." And to Shiela: "So sorry you cannot come to my luncheon, Miss Cardross.—You *are* Miss Cardross, aren't you? I've been told otherwise."

Hamil looked up, pale and astounded; but Shiela answered, undisturbed:

"My sister Cecile is the younger; yes, I am Miss Cardross."

And Hamil realised there had been two ways of interpreting Virginia's question, and he reddened, suddenly appalled at his own knowledge and at his hasty and gross conclusions.

If Shiela noticed the quick changes in his face she did not appear to, nor the curious glance that Virginia cast at him.

"*So* sorry," said Miss Suydam again, "for if you are going to be so much engaged to-day you will no doubt also miss the tea for that pretty Mrs. Ascott."

"No," said Shiela, "I wouldn't think of missing that." And carelessly to Hamil: "As you and I have nothing on hand to-day, I'll take you over to meet Mrs. Ascott if you like."

Which was a notice to Virginia that Miss Cardross had declined her luncheon from deliberate disinclination.

Hamil, vaguely conscious that all was not as agreeable as the surface of things indicated, said cordially that he'd be very glad to go anywhere with Shiela to meet anybody, adding to Virginia that he'd heard of Mrs. Ascott but could not remember when or where.

"Probably you've heard of her often enough from Louis Malcourt," said Virginia. "He and I were just recalling his frenzied devotion to her in the Adirondacks; that," she added smilingly to Shiela, "was before Mrs. Ascott got her divorce from her miserable little French count and resumed her own name. She was the most engaging creature when Mr. Malcourt and I met her two years ago."

Shiela, who had been listening with head partly averted and grave eyes following the antics of the divers in the pool, turned slowly and encountered Virginia's smile with a straight, cold gaze of utter distrust.

Nothing was said for a moment; then Virginia spoke smilingly again to Hamil concerning his aunt's uneasiness, turned toward Shiela, exchanged formal adieux with her, and walked on toward her dressing-room and shower. Hamil and Miss Cardross turned the other way.

When Shiela was seated in her double wheel-chair with Hamil beside her, she looked up through her veil unsmiling into his serious face.

"Did you notice anything particularly impertinent in Miss Suydam's question?" she asked quietly.

"What question?"

"When she asked me whether I was Miss Cardross."

The slow colour again burned his bronzed skin. He made no reply, nor did she await any after a silent consideration of his troubled face.

"Where did you hear about me?" she asked.

She had partly turned in her seat, resting both gloved hands on the crook of her folded sunshade, and leaning a little toward him.

"Don't ask me," he said; "whatever I heard I heard unwillingly—"

"You *have* heard?"

He did not answer.

The remainder of the journey was passed in silence. On the road they met Mrs. Cardross and Jessie Carrick driving to a luncheon; later, Gray passed in his motor with his father.

"I have an idea that you and I are to lunch alone," said Hamil as they reached the house; and so it turned out, for Malcourt was going off with Portlaw somewhere and Cecile was dressing for Virginia's luncheon.

"Did you care to go with me to the Ascott-O'Hara function?" asked Shiela, pausing on the terrace. Her voice was listless, her face devoid of animation.

"I don't care where I go if I may go with you," he said, with a new accent of intention in his voice which did not escape her.

She went slowly up the stairs untying her long veil as she mounted. Cecile in a bewildering hat and gown emerged upon the terrace before Shiela reappeared, and found Hamil perched upon the coquina balustrade, poring over a pocketful of blue-prints; and she said very sweetly: "Good-bye, my elder brother. Will you promise to take the best of care of our little sister Shiela while I'm away?"

"The very best," he said, sliding feet foremost to the terrace. "Heavens, Cecile, you certainly are bewitching in those clothes!"

"It is what they were built for, brother," she said serenely. "Good-bye; we won't shake hands on account of my gloves.... Do be nice to Shiela. She isn't very gay these days—I don't know why. I believe she has rather missed you."

Hamil tucked her into her chair, the darky pedalled off; then the young man returned to the terrace where presently a table for two was brought and luncheon announced as Shiela Cardross appeared.

Hamil displayed the healthy and undiscriminating appetite of a man who is too busy mentally and physically to notice what he eats and drinks; Shiela touched nothing except fruit. She lighted his cigarette for him before the coffee, and took one herself, turning it thoughtfully over and over between her delicately shaped fingers; but at a glance of inquiry from him:

"No, I don't," she said; "it burns my tongue. Besides I may some day require it as a novelty to distract me—so I'll wait."

She rose a moment later, and stood, distrait, looking out across the sunlit world. He at her elbow, head bent, idly watched the smoke curling upward from his cigarette.

Presently, as though moved by a common impulse, they turned together, slowly traversed the terrace and the long pergola all crimson and white with bougainvillia and jasmine, and entered the jungle road beyond the courts where carved seats of coquina glimmered at intervals along the avenue of oaks and palmettos and where stone-edged pools reflected the golden green dusk of the semi-tropical foliage above.

On the edge of one of these basins the girl seated herself; without her hat and gloves and in a gown which exposed throat and neck she always looked younger and more slender to him, the delicate modelling of the neck and its whiteness was accentuated by the silky growth of the brown hair which close to the nape and brow was softly blond like a child's.

The frail, amber-tinted little dragon-flies of the South came hovering over the lotus bloom that edged the basin; long, narrow-shaped butterflies whose velvet-black wings were barred with brilliant stripes of canary yellow fluttered across the forest aisle; now and then a giant papilio sailed high under the arched foliage on tiger-striped wings of chrome and black, or a superb butterfly in pearl white and malachite green came flitting about the sparkle-berry bloom.

The girl nodded toward it. "That is a scarce butterfly here," she said. "Gray would be excited. I wish we had his net here."

"It is the *Victorina*, isn't it?" he asked, watching the handsome, nervous-winged creature which did not seem inclined to settle on the white flowers.

"Yes, the *Victorina steneles*. Are you interested?"

"The generation I grew up with collected," he said. "I remember my cabinet, and some of the names. But I never saw any fellows of this sort in the North."

"Your memory is good?"

"Yes," he said, "for what I care about"—he looked up at her—"for those I care about my memory is good, I never forget kindness—nor confidence given—nor a fault forgiven."

She bent forward, elbows on knees, chin propped on both linked hands.

"Do you understand now," she said, "why I could not afford the informality of our first meeting? What you have heard about me explains why I can scarcely afford to discard convention, does it not, Mr. Hamil?"

She went on, her white fingers now framing her face and softly indenting the flushed skin:

"I don't know who has talked to you, or what you have heard; but I knew by your expression—there at the swimming-pool—that you had heard enough to embarrass you and—and hurt me very, very keenly."

"Calypso!" he broke out impulsively; but she shook her head. "Let *me* tell you if it must be told, Mr. Hamil.... Father and mother are dreadfully sensitive; I have only known about it for two years; two years ago they told me—had to tell me.... Well—it still seems hazy and incredible.... I was educated in a French convent—if you know what that means. All my life I have been guarded—sheltered from knowledge of evil; I am still unprepared to comprehend—… And I am still very ignorant; I know that.... So you see how it was with me; a girl awakened to such self-knowledge cannot grasp it entirely—cannot wholly convince herself except at moments—at night. Sometimes—when a crisis threatens—and one has lain awake long in the dark—"

She gathered her knees in her arms and stared at the patch of sunlight that lay across the hem of her gown, leaving her feet shod in gold.

"I don't know how much difference it really makes to the world. I suppose I shall learn—if people are to discuss me. How much difference does it make, Mr. Hamil?"

"It makes none to me—"

"The world extends beyond your pleasant comradeship," she said. "How does the world regard a woman of no origin—whose very name is a charity—"

"Shiela!"

"W-what?" she said, trying to smile; and then slowly laid her head in her hands, covering her face.

She had given way, very silently, for as he bent close to her he felt the tearful aroma of her uneven breath—the feverish flush on cheek and hand, the almost imperceptible tremor of her slender body—rather close to him now.

When she had regained her composure, and her voice was under command, she straightened up, face averted.

"You are quite perfect, Mr. Hamil; you have not hurt me with one misguided and well-intended word. That is exactly as it should be between us—must always be."

"Of course," he said slowly.

She nodded, still looking away from him. "Let us each enjoy our own griefs unmolested. You have yours?"

"No, Shiela, I haven't any griefs."

"Come to me when you have; I shall not humiliate you with words to shame your intelligence and my own. If you suffer you suffer; but it is well to be near a friend—not *too* near, Mr. Hamil."

"Not too near," he repeated.

"No; that is unendurable. The counter-irritant to grief is sanity, not emotion. When a woman is a little frightened the presence of the unafraid is what steadies her."

She looked over her shoulder into the water, reached down, broke off a blossom of wild hyacinth, and, turning, drew it through the button-hole of his coat.

"You certainly are very sweet to me," she said quietly. And, laughing a little: "The entire family adores you with pills—and I've now decorated you with the lovely curse of our Southern rivers. But—there are no such things as weeds; a weed is only a miracle in the wrong place.... Well—shall we walk and moralise or remain here and make cat-cradle conversation?… You are looking at me very solemnly."

"I was thinking—"

"What?"

"That, perhaps, I never before knew a girl as well as I know you."

"Not even Miss Suydam?"

"Lord, no! I never dreamed of knowing her—I mean her real self. You understand, she and I have always taken each other for granted—never with any genuine intimacy."

"Oh! And—this—ours—is genuine intimacy?"

"Is it not?"

For a moment her teeth worried the bright velvet of her lip, then meeting his gaze:

"I mean to be—honest—with you," she said with a tremor in her voice; but her regard wavered under his. "I mean to be," she repeated so low he scarcely heard her. Then with a sudden animation a little strained: "When this winter has become a memory let it be a happy one for you and me. And by the same token you and I had better think about dressing. You don't mind, do you, if I take you to meet Mrs. Ascott?—she was Countess de Caldelis; it's taken her years to secure her divorce."

Hamil remembered the little dough-faced, shrimp-limbed count when he first came over with the object of permitting somebody to support him indefinitely so that later, in France, he could in turn support his mistresses in the style to which they earnestly desired to become accustomed.

And now the American girl who had been a countess was back, a little wiser, a little harder, and more cynical, with some of the bloom rubbed off, yet much of her superficial beauty remaining.

"Alida Ascott," murmured Shiela. "Jessie was a bridesmaid. Poor little girl!—I'm glad she's free. There were no children," she said, looking up at Hamil; "in that case a decent girl is justified! Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do," he said, smiling; "I'm not one of those who believe that such separations threaten us with social disintegration."

"Nor I. Almost every normal woman desires to live decently. She has a right to. All young girls are ignorant. If they begin with a dreadful but innocent mistake does the safety of society require of them the horror of lifelong degradation? Then the safety of such a society is not worth the sacrifice. That is my opinion."

"That settles a long-vexed problem," he said, laughing at her earnestness.

But she looked at him, unsmiling, while he spoke, hands clasped in her lap, the fingers twisting and tightening till the rose-tinted nails whitened.

Men have only a vague idea of women's ignorance; how naturally they are inclined to respond to a man; how the dominating egotism of a man and his confident professions and his demands confuse them; how deeply his appeals for his own happiness stir them to pity.... They have heard of love—

and they do not know. If they ever dream of it it is not what they have imagined when a man suddenly comes crashing through the barriers of friendship and stuns them with an incoherent recital of his own desires. And yet, in spite of the shock, it is with them instinctive to be kind. No woman can endure an appeal unmoved; except for them there would be no beggars; their charity is not a creed: it is the essence of them, the beginning of all things for them—and the end.

The bantering smile had died out in Hamil's face; he sat very still, interested, disturbed, and then wondering when his eyes caught the restless manoeuvres of the little hands, constantly in motion, interlacing, eloquent of the tension of self-suppression.

He thought: "It is a cowardly thing for an egotist with an egotist's early and lively knowledge of the world and of himself to come clamouring to a girl for charity. It *is* true that almost any man can make a young girl think she loves him if he is selfish enough to do it. Is her ignorance a fault? All her training deprecates any acquisition of worldly knowledge: it is not for her: her value is in her ignorance. Then when she naturally makes some revolting mistake and attempts to escape to decency and freedom once more there is a hue and a cry from good folk and clergy. Divorce? It is a good thing—as the last resort. And a woman need feel no responsibility for the sort of society that would deprive a woman of the last refuge she has!"

He raised his eyes, curiously, in time to intercept hers.

"So—you did not know me after all, it seems," she said with a faint smile. "You never suspected in me a *Vierge Rouge*, militant, champion of her downtrodden sex, haranguing whomsoever would pay her the fee of his attention. Did you?"

And as he made no reply: "Your inference is that I have had some unhappy love affair—some perilously close escape from—unhappy matrimony." She shrugged. "As though a girl could plead only a cause which concerned herself.... Tell me what you are thinking?"

She had risen, and he stood up before her, fascinated.

"Tell me!" she insisted; "I shall not let you go until you do!"

"I was thinking about you."

"Please don't!… Are you doing it yet?" closely confronting him, hands behind her.

"Yes, I am," he said, unable to keep his eyes from her, all her beauty and youth and freshness troubling him, closing in upon him like subtle fragrance in the golden forest dusk.

"Are you still thinking about me?"

"Yes."

The rare sweet laughter edged her lips, for an instant; then something in his eyes checked her. Colour and laughter died out, leaving a pale confused smile; and the straight gaze wavered, grew less direct, yet lost not a shade of his expression which also had changed.

Neither spoke; and after a moment they turned away, walking not very near together toward the house.

The sunshine and the open somehow brought relief and the delicate constraint between them relaxed as they sauntered slowly into the house where Shiela presently went away to dress for the Ascott function, and Hamil sat down on the veranda for a while, then retired to undertake the embellishment of his own person.

CHAPTER IX
THE INVASION

They went together in a double chair, spinning noiselessly over the shell road which wound through oleander and hibiscus hedges. Great orange and sulphur-tinted butterflies kept pace with them as they travelled swiftly southward; the long, slim shadows of palms gridironed the sunny road, for the sun was in the west, and already a bird here and there had ventured on a note or two as prelude to the evening song, and over the ocean wild ducks were rising in clouds, swinging and drifting and settling again as though in short rehearsal for their sunset flight.

"Your hostess is Mrs. Tom O'Hara," said the girl; "when you have enough of it look at me and I'll understand. And if you try to hide in a corner with some soulful girl I'll look at you—if it bores me too much. So don't sit still with an infatuated smile, as Cecile does, when she sees that I wish to make my adieux."

"I'm so likely to," he said, "when escape means that I'll have you to myself again."

There was a trifle more significance in the unconsidered speech than he had intended. The girl looked absently straight in front of her; he sat motionless, uncomfortable at his own words, but too wise to attempt to modify them by more words.

Other chairs passed them now along the road—there were nods of recognition, gay salutes, an intimate word or two as the light-wheeled vehicles flashed past; and in a moment more the tall coquina gate posts and iron grille of Mrs. Tom O'Hara's villa, Tsana Lahni, glimmered under an avenue of superb royal palms.

The avenue was crowded with the slender-wheeled basket-bodied chairs gay with the plumage of pretty women; the scene on the lawns beyond was charming where an orange and white pavilion was pitched against the intense green of the foliage, and the pelouse was all dotted and streaked with vivid colours of sunshades and gowns.

"Ulysses among the sirens," she whispered as they made their way toward their hostess, exchanging recognition with people everywhere in the throngs. "Here they are—all of them—and there's Miss Suydam,—too unconscious of us. How hath the House of Hamil fallen!—"

"If you talk that way I won't leave you for one second while we're here!" he said under his breath.

"Nonsense; it only hurts me, not my pride. And half a cup of unforbidden tea will drown the memory of that insolence—"

She bent forward with smiling composure to shake hands with Mrs. Tom O'Hara, a tall, olive-tinted, black-haired beauty; presented Hamil to his hostess, and left him planted, to exchange impulsive amenities with little Mrs. Ascott.

Mrs. Tom O'Hara, a delicate living Gainsborough in black and white, was probably the handsomest woman in the South. She dressed with that perfection of simplicity which only a few can afford; she wore only a single jewel at a time, but the gem was always matchless.

Warm-hearted, generous, and restless, she loved the character of Lady Bountiful; and, naïvely convinced of her own unassailable supremacy, played very picturesquely the rôle of graciousness and patronage to the tenants of her great estates and of her social and intellectual world alike. Hence, although she went where many of her less fashionable guests might not have been asked to go, she herself paid self-confident homage to intellect as she understood it, and in her own house her entourage was as mixed as her notions of a "salon" permitted.

She was gracious to Hamil on account of his aunt, his profession, and himself. Also her instinct was to be nice to everybody. As hostess she had but a moment to accord him, but during that moment she contrived to speak reassuringly of the Suydam genealogy, the art of landscape architecture, and impart a little special knowledge from her inexhaustible reserve, informing him that the name of

her villa, Tsa-na Lah-ni, was Seminole, and meant "Yellow Butterfly." And then she passed him sweetly along into a crush of bright-eyed young things who attempted to pour tea into him and be agreeable in various artless ways; and presently he found himself in a back-water where fashion and intellect were conscientiously doing their best to mix. But the mixture was a thin solution—thinner than Swizzles and Caravan, and the experience of the very young girl beside him who talked herself out in thirty seconds from pure nervousness and remained eternally grateful to him for giving her a kindly opportunity to escape to cover among the feather-brained and frivolous.

Then, close to him, a girl spoke of the "purple perfume of petunias," and a man used the phrases, "body politic," and "the gaiety of nations."

So he knew he was among the elect, redundant, and truly precious. A chinless young man turned to him and said:

"There is nobody to-day who writes as Bernard Haw writes."

"Does anybody want to?" asked Hamil pleasantly.

"You mean that this is an age of trumpery romance?" demanded a heavy gentleman in dull disdain. "William Dean has erased all romance from modern life with one smear of his honest thumb!"

"The honest thumb that persistently and patiently rubs the scales from sapphire and golden wings in order to be certain that the vination of the Ornithoptera is still underneath, is not the digit of inspiration," suggested Hamil.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.