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WILD YOUTH

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 2.

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CHAPTER X

THE MOON WAS NOT ALONE

Out on the prairie under the light of the stars a man had fought the first great battle of his life, and had emerged victorious. There are no drawn battles in the struggles of the soul. As Orlando fought, he was tortured by the thought that none would believe the truth to-morrow when it was told; and that there would be penalty though there was no crime.

As for Louise, she could have returned, almost blindly defiant, to her world, hand in hand with Orlando; and yet, when morning came, and her eyes opened on the prairie at day-break, with life stirring everywhere, she was glad of the victory--though the shadow of a great trouble to come was showing in her eyes.

She knew what she had to face at Tralee, and that she had no proof of her perfect innocence. It was of little use for them to call upon Heaven to witness what the night had been; and Joel Mazarine, who distrusted every man and woman, would distrust her with a sternness which guilt only could effectively defy!

Orlando's enforced gaiety as he invited her to a breakfast of a couple of biscuits, left from yesterday's broncho-busting, heartened her; yet both were conscious of the make-believe. They realized they were helpless in the grip of harsh circumstance. It was almost enough to make them take advantage of calumny and the traps set for them by Fate, and join hands for ever.

As they looked into each other's eyes, the same hopeless yet reckless thought flickered--flickered, and vanished. Yet as they looked out over the prairie towards Tralee, to which Louise must presently return, a

rebellious sort of joy possessed them.

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The discord of their thoughts was like music beside what had passed at Tralee. There nothing relieved the black, sullen rage of Joel Mazarine. He had returned to the house where his voice had always been able to summon his slaves, and to know that they would come--Chinaman, half-breed, wife. Now he called, and the wife did not come. On the new chestnut she had ridden away on the prairie, so the halfbreed woman had said, as hard as he could go. He had scanned the prairie till night came, without seeing a sign of her.

His black imagination instantly conceived the worst that Louise might do. It was not in him ever to have the decent alternative. He questioned the half-breed woman closely; he savagely interrogated the Chinaman; and then he declared that they lied to him, that they knew more than they said; and when he was unable to bear it any longer, he mounted his horse and galloped over to Slow Down Ranch. As he went, he kept swearing to himself that Louise had flown thither; and anger made his brain malignant. He could scarcely frame his words intelligibly when he arrived at Slow Down Ranch.

There he was presently convinced that his worst suspicions were true, for Orlando also had not returned. He saw it all. They had agreed to meet; they had met; they had eloped and were gone! His beady eyes were those of serpents watching for the instant to strike, and his words burst over the head of Orlando's mother like shrapnel.

For once, however, the futile, fantastic mother rose higher than herself, and declared that her son had never run away from, or with, anything in his life; that he--Joel Mazarine--had never had anything worth her son's running away with; and that her son, when he came back, would make him ask forgiveness as he had never asked it of his God.

Indeed, the gaudy little lady stood in her doorway and chattered her maledictions after him, as he rode back again towards Tralee muttering curses which no class leader in the Methodist Church ought even to quote for pious purposes.

Joel Mazarine had flattered himself that he had everything life could give--money, property and a garden of youth in which his old age could loiter and be glad; and that he should be defied suddenly and his garden made desolate, that the lines of his good fortune should be crossed, caused him to rage like any heathen. His monstrous egotism made him like some infuriated bull in the arena, with the banderillos sticking in his hot hide.

The two people whom he cursed were in Elysium compared to the place where he tortured himself. There are desert birds that silently surround a rattlesnake, as he sleeps, with little bundles of cactus-heads and their million needles, so that, when the reptile wakes, it cannot escape through the palisade of bristling weapons by which it is surrounded; and

in ghoulish anger it strikes its fangs into its own body until it dies. Just such a helpless rage held Joel Mazarine, and his religion did not suggest seeking comfort at that Throne of Grace to which he had so publicly prayed on occasions.

Night held him prowling in his own coverts; morning found him yellow and mottled, malicious, but now silent. He somehow felt that he would know the truth and the whole truth soon. He ate his pork and beans for breakfast with the appetite of a ravenous animal. He put pieces of the pork chop in his mouth with his fingers; he gulped his coffee; but all the time he kept his eyes on the open door, as though he expected some messenger to announce that Providence had stricken his rebellious wife by sudden death. It seemed to him that Nature and Jehovah must unite to avenge him.

After three hours of further waiting he determined to go into Askatoon. He would have bills printed advertising for Louise as he had done for stray cattle; he would have notices put in the newspapers proclaiming that his wife was strayed or stolen and must be put in pound when discovered. At the moment he decided thus, he caught sight of a wagon approaching from the north. It was near enough for him to see that there was a woman in it; and the eyes of the half-breed hired woman, possessing the Indian far-sight, saw that it was Louise, and told her master so.

Ten minutes later Louise stood in front of the Master of Tralee, and the Master of Tralee filled the doorway. "What you want here?" he asked of her with blurred rage in his voice.

"I want to go to my room," Louise answered quietly but firmly. "Please stand aside."

Now that Louise was face to face with her foe, a new spirit had suddenly possessed her; and standing beside his broncho, a hand on its neck, Orlando almost smiled, for this was Louise with a new nature. There was defiance and courage in her face, not the apprehension which had almost overwhelmed her as they started back to Tralee, having been rescued by the search-party from Slow Down Ranch. The night had done something to Louise which was making itself felt.

"You think you can come back here after what you've done--after where you've been--the likes of you!" Mazarine snarled unmoving. "You think you can!"

Louise turned swiftly to look at Orlando and the three men, one riding and two in the wagon, as though to call them in evidence of her innocence; but there came to her eyes a sudden fire of courage, and she turned again to Mazarine and said:

"I'm your wife by the law--just as much your wife to-day as yesterday. You treat me before strangers as if I were a criminal. I'm not going to be treated that way. I've got my rights. Stand back and let me in--stand back, Joel Mazarine," she said, and she took a step forward, child though she was, as if she would strike him. Something had transformed

her.

To Orlando she seemed scarcely real. The shrinking, colourless child of a few weeks had suddenly become a woman--and such a woman!

"I'll tell you in my own time where I've been and what I've done," she continued. "I want to go upstairs. Stand out of the doorway."

There was a movement behind her. A man in the wagon and the one on his horse seemed to grow angry and threatening. The ranchman dropped from his horse. Only Orlando stood cool, quiet and ominously watchful. Mazarine did not fail to notice the movement of the two men.

Presently Orlando's voice said slowly and calmly: "Stand back, Mazarine. Let her go to her room. This is a free country, and she's free in her own house. It's her house until you've proved she's got no right there." Then he added with sharp insistence and menace: "Stand back--damn you, Mazarine!"

Orlando did not move as he spoke, but there was a look in his face which an enemy would not care to see. Mazarine, in spite of his rage, quailed before the sharp, menacing voice so little in tune with its reputation for giggling, and stepping back, he let Louise pass. Then he plunged forward out of the doorway.

"That's right. Come outside," said Orlando scornfully. "Come out into the open." His voice became lower. There was something deadly in it, boy as he was. "Come out, you hypocrite, and listen to what I've got to say. Listen to the truth I've got to tell you. If you don't listen, I'll horsewhip you, that'd horsewhip a woman, till you can't stand--you loathsome old dog. . . . Yes, he took his horsewhip to her yesterday," he added to the spectators, who muttered angrily, for the West is chivalrous towards women.

Something near to madness possessed Orlando. No one had ever seen him as he was at that moment. Down through generations had come to him some iron thing that suddenly revealed itself in him, as something had just suddenly revealed itself in Louise.

The other three men--two in the wagon and one beside his horse-stared at him as though they had seen him for the first time. They were unready for the passion that possessed him. Not a muscle of his body appeared to move; he was as motionless as the trunk of a tree. But in his eyes and his voice there was, as one of the ranchers said afterwards, "Hell--and then some more."

"Listen to me," he said again, and his voice was low and husky now. "Yesterday I was broncho-busting--"

Thereupon he told the whole story of what had happened since he had seen Louise thrown from her chestnut on the prairie. He told how Louise was too shaken and ill to attempt the journey back to Tralee, and how they had camped where they were, near the dead horse.

As Orlando talked, the old man was seized by terrible hatred and jealousy. "You needn't tell me the rest," he broke in, his hands savagely opening and shutting. "I guess I understand everything."

The words had scarcely left his mouth when from the wagon a man said: "Wait--wait, Mister. I got something to say."

He sprang to the ground, and ran between Mazarine and Orlando.

"This is where I come in," he said, as Louise's face appeared at an upper window, and she listened. "You don't know me. Well, I know you. Everybody knows you, and nobody likes you. I know what happened last night. I'm a brother of your fellow Christian Rigby, the druggist, over there in Askatoon. He's a Methodist. I'm not. I'm only good. I been a lot o' things, and nothing in the end. Well, you hearken to my tale.

"I was tramping with my bundle on my back acrost the prairie to Askatoon from Waterway. I'm a sundowner, as they say in Australia. When the sun goes down, I down to my bed wherever I be on the prairie. I was asleep-I'd been half drunk--when the chestnut threw your wife and broke its leg; but I was awake when he rode up." He pointed to Orlando. "I was awake, and so I watched. I knew who she was; I knew who he was." He pointed to Orlando again. "I guessed I'd see something. I did.

"I watched them two people all night. There was a moon. I could see. I wasn't fifteen feet from her all night, and I jined the others when they come to rescue. I guess I got the truth, and I guess if you want any evidence about me you can get it. Lots of people know me out here. I ain't got any house or any home, and I get drunk sometimes, and I ain't got money to buy meals with, lots of times, but nobody ever knowed me lie. That's what ruined me--I been too truthful. Well, I'm not lying now, Mister. I'm telling you the God-help-me truth. He's a gentleman." He pointed again to Orlando. "He's a gentleman from away back in God's country, wherever that is, and she's the best of the best of the very best.

"You can bet your greasy old boots and ugly face that you've got a bigger fortune in that wife of yours than you've any right to. Say, she's a queen, Mister, and don't you forget it, and"--he drawled out his words-- "you go inside your house and get down on your knees, same as you do in the Meeting House, and thank the Lord you love so well for all his blessings. As my friend here said a little while back"--he pointed to Orlando again--"'Damn you, Mazarine!' Go and hide yourself."

The old man stood for a moment dumbfounded; then, without a word, he turned and hunched inside the house.

"He raised his horsewhip ag'in' a woman, did he?" said one of Orlando's ranchmen. "Ain't that a matter we got to take notice of?"

"Boys," said Orlando as he motioned them to be off, "Mrs. Mazarine can take care of herself. You'll forget what's happened, if you want to play

up to her. If she needs you, she'll be sure to let you know."

A moment afterwards they were all on their way on the road leading to Slow Down Ranch.

"He didn't giggle much that time," said one of the ranchmen of Orlando, as they moved on.

CHAPTER XI

LOUISE

The Young Doctor had had a trying day. Certain of his cases had given him anxiety; his drives had been long and fatiguing; he had had little sleep for several nights; and he was what Patsy Kernaghan had called "brittle"; for when Patsy was in a vexed condition, he used to say, "I'm so brittle I'll break if you look at me." As the Young Doctor drew his chair up to the supper-table and looked at his food with a critical air, he was very brittle.

For one born in Enniskillen he had an even nature, but its evenness was more the result of mental control than temperament. He sighed as he looked at the marrow bones which, as a rule, gave him joy when their turn came in the weekly menu; he eyed askance the baked potatoes; and the salad waiting for his skilled hand only gave him an extra feeling of fatigue.

Most men in a like state say, "I don't know what's the matter with me," and yet many a one has been stimulated out of it, away from it, by the soft voice and friendly hand of a woman.

There was, however, no woman to distract the overworked Young Doctor by her freshness, drawn from the reservoir of her vitality; and that was a pity, because, as Patsy Kernaghan many a time said: "Aw, Doctor dear, what's the good of a tongue to a wagon if there's only wan horse to draw it! Shure, you'll think a lot more of yourself whin you're able to stand at the head of your own table and say grace for two at least, and thanksgiving for manny, if it's the will of God."

The Young Doctor did not know why he was so brittle, but the truth is he was feeding on himself, and that is a poor business. Every dog knows it is good to feed on the knuckle of a goat if he hasn't got a beefbone, and every real man knows--though to know anything at all he must have been married--that any marriage is better than no marriage at all; because whether it's happy or unhappy, it makes you concerned for some one besides yourself, if you have any soul or sense at all.

The Young Doctor was under the delusion that he loved his lonely table and the making of a simple salad for a simple man, but then he came from Ireland and had imagination; and that is always a curse when it isn't a

blessing, for there is nothing between the two. At the end of his troubled day he almost cursed the salad as it crinkled in the dish just slightly rubbed with garlic. He was turning away in apathy from it--from the bones with the marrow oozing out of the ends, from the bursting baked potatoes, from the beautiful crusts of brown bread, when he heard the door-bell ring. At the sound his face set as though it were mortar. He wanted no patients this night; but from the peremptory sound of the bell he was sure some one had come who needed medicine or the knife, and he could refuse neither; for was he not at everybody's beck and call, the Medicine Man whose door was everybody's door!

"Damnation!" he said aloud, and turned towards the door expectantly.

Then he bitted himself to wait; and he did not wait long. Presently he heard a voice say, "I must see him," and the door opened wide, and Louise Mazarine stepped into the room. Her face was pale and distraught; her blue eyes, with their long, melancholy lashes, stared at him in appealing apprehension. Her lips were almost white; her hands trembled out towards him.

"I've come--I've come!" she said. It had the finality of the last chapter of a book.

The Young Doctor closed the door, ignoring for the instant the hands held out to him. After all, he was a very sane Young Doctor, and he had the faculty of keeping his head, and his heart, and his own counsel. Also he knew there was an inquisitive old servant in the hallway.

When the door was closed, he turned round on Louise slowly, and then he held out his hands to her, for she was shrinking away, as though he had repulsed her. He pressed her trembling hands in the way that only faithful friendship shows, and said:

"Yes, I know you've come, but tell me what you've come for."

"I couldn't bear it any longer," she said brokenly. "I'm not made of steel or stone. It's been terrible. He doesn't speak to me except to order me to do this or that. I haven't done anything wrong, and I won't be treated so. I won't! When he made me kneel down by him in the trail and tried to make me pray to be forgiven of my sins, I couldn't stand it. I don't know what my sins are, and I won't be converted if I don't want to. I'm not a slave. I'm of age. I'm twenty."

There was no sign of fatigue now in the Young Doctor's face. Something had called him out of himself, and this human need had done what a wife's hand might have done, or the welcome of a child.

"No, you're not twenty," he declared, with a friendly smile. "You aren't ten. You are only one. In fact, I think you're only just born!"

He did not speak as lightly as the words read. In his voice there was that compassionate irony with which men shield those for whom they care. It means protection and defence. Somehow she seemed to him like a small

bird on its first flight from the nest, or, as Patsy Kernaghan would have said, "a tame lamb loose in a zoolyogical gardin."

"So because you won't pray and can't bear it any longer, you run away from him, and come to me!" the other remarked with a sorry smile, pouring out a glass of wine from a decanter that stood on the table.

"Drink this," he said presently, pushing her down gently into a chair with one hand and holding the glass to her lips. "Drink it every drop. As I said, you've only run away from one master to fall into another master's hands. You're a wicked girl. Drink it--every drop. . . . That's right."

He took the empty glass from her, put it on the table, and then stood and looked at her meditatively, fastening her eyes with his own. More than her eyes were fastened, however. Her mind was also under control: but that was because she believed in him so.

"Yes, you're a wicked girl," he said decisively.

She shuddered and shrank back. In her eyes was a helpless look, very different from that which she had given not so many days before when, with Orlando Guise behind her, she had defied her aged husband in his doorway, and her defiance had moved him from her path. Then she had been inspired by the fact that the man she loved was near her, that she had been wrongfully accused and was ready to fight. Afterwards, however, when she was alone, the sterile presence of Joel Mazarine, his merciless eyes, his hopeless religious tyranny, had worn upon her as his past violence had never done.

"Wicked!" Did this man, then, believe her guilty? Did he, of all men, think that the night upon the prairie alone with Orlando had been her undoing? Had not the brother of Rigby the chemist borne witness with his own eyes to her complete innocence? If the Young Doctor disbelieved, then indeed she was undone.

"You don't think that of me--of me!" she gasped, her lips all white again. She got to her feet excitedly. "You shall not believe it of me."

"No, I did not say I believed that," the other remarked almost casually. "But if I did believe it, I don't know that it would make much difference to me. Fate, or God Almighty, or whatever it was, had stacked the cards against you. When I said it was wicked, I meant you did wrong in rushing away from your husband and coming to me. I suppose you have definitely left your husband--eh? You've 'left' him, as they say?"

He had an incorrigible sense of humour, as well as an infinite common sense. He wanted to break this spell of tense emotion which possessed her. So he pursued a new course.

"Don't you think it's rather hard on me?" he continued. "I'm a lone man in this house, with only one old woman to protect me, and I'm unmarried. I've a reputation to lose, and there are lots of mothers and daughters

hereabouts. Besides, a medical practice is hard to get and not easy to keep. What do you mean by making a refuge of me, when there's nothing for me in it, not even the satisfaction of going into the Divorce Court with you? You wicked Mrs. Mazarine!"

"Oh, don't speak like that!" Louise interjected. "Please don't. Don't scold me. I had to come. I was going mad."

The Young Doctor had the case well in hand. He had eased the terrible tension; he was slowly reducing her to the normal. It was the only thing to do.

"What did Mazarine do or say to you that made you run away? Come now, didn't you first make up your mind to go to Slow Down Ranch--to Orlando?"

She flushed. "Yes, but only for a minute. Then I thought of you, because I knew you could help me as no one else could. Everybody believes in you. But then Li Choo--"

"Oh, Li Choo! So Li Choo comes into this, eh? So he said fly to Orlando, eh? Well, that's what he would do. But why Li Choo--a Chinaman? Tell me, what does Li Choo know?"

Quickly she told him the story of the day when Joel Mazarine had almost surprised her in Orlando's room; how Li Choo had saved the situation by falling down the staircase with the priceless porcelain, and how Mazarine had kicked him--"manhandled" him, as they say in the West.

"Chinamen don't like being kicked, especially Chinamen of Li Choo's station," remarked the Young Doctor meditatively. "You don't know, of course, that Li Choo was a prince or a big bug of some sort in his own country. Why he left China I don't know, but I do chance to know that if another Chinky meets Li Choo carrying a basket on his shoulders, or a package in his hand, he kow-tows, and takes it away from him, and carries it himself. . . . No, I don't know why Li Choo is here in Askatoon, or why he's such a slave to Mrs. Mazarine; but I do know that he's a different-looking man when a Chinky runs up against him than when he's choring at Tralee. A sick Chinaman told me only a week ago that Li Choo was 'once big high boss Chinaman in Pekin.' . . . And so the mandarin advised you to fly to Orlando, did he? I wonder if it's a way they have in China."

"But I wouldn't go. I've come to you--Patsy Kernaghan brought me," Louise urged.

"Yes, I see you've come to me," remarked the Young Doctor dryly, "and you've stayed about long enough for me to feel your pulse and diagnose your case. And now you're going back with Patsy Kernaghan to your own home."

She trembled; then she seemed to strengthen herself in defiance. What a change it was from the child of a few weeks ago--indeed, of a few moments ago! The same passionate determination which seized her when she faced

Mazarine with Orlando, possessed her again. With her whole being palpitating, she said: "I will not go back. I will not go back. I will kill myself first."

"That would be a useless sacrifice of yourself and others," the Young Doctor answered quietly. Seeing that the new thing in her was not to be conquered in a moment, he quickly made up his mind what to do.

"See," he continued, "you needn't go back to Tralee to-night, but you're not going to stay here, dear child. I'll take you over to Nolan Doyle's ranch, to Mrs. Doyle. You'll spend the night there, and we'll think about to-morrow when to-morrow comes. You certainly can't stay here. I'm not going to have it.

"Bless you, you're neither so young nor so old as all that!"

Suddenly he grasped both her arms and looked her in the face. "My dear young lady," he said gently, "I'm not your only friend, but I'm a stout friend--so stout that there isn't a mount can carry us both together. When you ride, I walk; when I ride, you walk--you understand? We don't walk or ride together. I'm taking care of you. Your life is too good to be ruined by rashness. You're in a 'state,' as my old housekeeper would say, but you'll be all right presently. As soon as I've made a salad, and had a marrowbone, you and I and Patsy Kernaghan are going to Nolan Doyle's ranch. . . . My dear, you must do what I say, and if you do, you'll be happy yet. I don't see how, quite, but it is so; and meanwhile, you mustn't make any mistakes. You must play the game. And now come and have some supper."

She waved her hand in protest. "I can't eat," she said. "Indeed, I can't."

"Well, you can drink," he answered. "You shall not leave this house alive unless you have a pint of milk with a little dash of what Patsy calls 'oh-be-joyful' in it."

He left the room for a moment, while she sat watching the door as a prisoner might watch for the return of a friendly jailer. He had a curious influence over her. It was wholly different from that of Orlando. Presently he returned.

"It's all right," he said. "Patsy and you and I will be at Nolan Doyle's ranch in another hour. I've sent word to Mrs. Doyle. I've ordered your milk-punch too, and now I think I'll make my salad. You never saw me make a salad," he added, smiling. "I've done some successful operations in my day; I've played about with bones and sinews, proud of my work sometimes, but the making of a perfect salad is the proud achievement of a master-mind." He laughed like a boy. "'Come hither, come hither, my little daughter, and do not tremble so,'" he said so cheerfully as to be almost jeering.

His cheerfulness was not in vain, for a smile stole to her lips, though it only flickered for an instant and was gone. For all that, he knew he

had saved the situation, and that another chapter of the life-history of Orlando and Louise had been ended. A fresh chapter would begin tomorrow; but sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof.

CHAPTER XII

MAN UNNATURAL

Mazarine discovered the flight of Louise soon after she had gone. He had not been five hundred yards from the house since she returned with Orlando after the night spent upon the prairie, save when he had been obliged to go in to Askatoon and had taken her with him, dumb and passive. She had been a prisoner, tied to the stirrups of her captor; and he had berated her, had preached at her. As Louise had said, once on the way to Askatoon, he had even tried to make her kneel down in the dust of the trail and plead with Heaven to convict her of sin.

On the evening of Louise's flight, however, he had been forced to go to a neighbouring ranch, and had commanded Li Choo to keep a strict watch at the windows of her room to see that she did not attempt escape. She could not escape by the door of the room because he had the key in his pocket. Li Choo was not a stern jailer, however. Mazarine had not been gone three minutes before the Chinaman had touch with Louise. He did more; he threw up into the open window of her room a screw-driver, with which she took the old-fashioned door off its hinges, after half an hour's work. Then, leaving a note on the table of the dining-room, to say that she could not bear it any longer, that she would never come back, and that she meant to be free, she summoned Patsy Kernaghan and fled to the Young Doctor.

When Mazarine returned and found her note, he plunged up the stairs to her bedroom, his pious wrath gurgling in his throat, only to find the door locked; for Li Choo had promptly restored it to its hinges after Louise had gone, afterwards dropping from the high window like a cat, without hurt.

Li Choo, blinking, opaque, immobile, save for his piercing and mysterious eyes, had no explanation to give. All he said was, "Me no see all sides house same time"; so suggesting that, as the room had windows on all three sides, Louise must have escaped while he made his supposed sentry-go, slip-slopping round the house. Mazarine showed what he thought by spitting in Li Choo's face, and then rushing into the house to get the raw-hide whip with which he had punished the Chinaman before, and with which he had threatened his wife.

When he returned a moment afterwards, Li Choo was nowhere to be seen; but in his place were two other Chinamen who had, as it were, fallen from the skies, standing where Li Choo had stood, immobile, blinking and passive like Li Choo, their hands lost in the long sleeves of their coats, their pigtails so tightly braided as, in seeming, to draw their slanting

eyelids still to greater incline, and to give a look of petrified intentness to their faces.

Something in their attitude gave Mazarine apprehension. It was as though Li Choo had been transformed by some hellish magic into two other Chinamen. The rage of his being seemed to stupefy him; he could not resist the sensation of the unnatural.

"What do you want? How did you come here?" he asked of the two in a husky voice.

"We want speak Li Choo. We come see Li Choo," answered one of the Chinamen impassively.

"He was here a minute ago," answered Mazarine gruffly.

Then he turned away, going swiftly toward the kitchen, and calling to Li Choo. As he went, he was conscious of low, cackling laughter, but when he turned to look, the two Chinamen stood where he had left them, blinking and immobile.

The uncanny feeling possessing him increased; the thing was unnatural. He lurched on, however, looking for Li Choo. The Chinaman was not to be found in the kitchen, in the woodshed, in the cellar, in the loft, or in his own attic room; and the half-breed, Rada, declared she had not seen him. He could not be at the stables, for they were too far away to be reached in the time; and there were no signs of him between the house and the stables. When Mazarine returned to the front of the house, the two Chinamen also had vanished; there were no signs of them anywhere. Search did not discover them.

Mingled anger and fear now possessed Mazarine. He would search no longer. No doubt the other two Chinamen had joined Li Choo in his hiding-place, wherever it was. Why had the Chinamen come? What were they after? It did not matter for the moment. What he wanted was Louise, his bad child-wife, who had broken from her cage and flown from him. Where would she go? Where, but to Slow Down Ranch? Where, but to her lover, the circus-rider, the boy with the head of brown curls, with the ring on his finger and the Cupid mouth! Where would she go but to the man with whom she had spent the night on the prairie!

Now he believed altogether that she was guilty, that everybody had conspired to deceive him, that he was in a net of dark deception. Even the two Chinamen, mysteriously coming and going, had laughed at him like two heathen gods, and had vanished suddenly like heathen gods.

A weakness came over him, and the skin of his face became creased and clammy like that of a drowned man; his limbs trembled, so desperate was his passion. He stumbled into the house and into the dining-room, where he kept a little black-bound Bible once belonging to his great-grandfather. He had thumbed it well in past years, searching it for passages of violence and denunciation. Now holy superstition seized him in the midst of the work of the devil, surrounding him with an almost

medieval instinct. He seized the ancient book, as it were to deliver its incantations against everyone destroying his peace, stealing from him that which he prized beyond all earthly things.

Take this woman away from him, this child-wife from his sixty-five years, and what was left for him? She was the garden of spring in which his old age roamed at ease luxuriously. She was the fruit of the tree of pleasure. She was that which made him young again, renewed in him youth and the joys of youth. Take her away, the flower that smelled so sweet and luscious, the thing that he had held so often to his lips and to his breast? Take away what was his, by every holy right, because it was all according to the law of the land and of the Holy Gospel, and what was left? Only old age, the empty house bereft of a fair young mistress, something to smile at and to curse, if need be, since it was his own by the laws of God and man.

Take her away, and the two wives that he had buried long years ago, with their gray heads and lank, sour faces, from which the light of youth had fled with the first child come to them--their ghosts would seek him out. They would sit at his table, and taunt him with his vanished Louise, asking him if he thought she was anything more than one of the trolls that tempted men aforetime; one of the devil's wenches that lured him into the secret garden, only at last to leave him scorned and alone.

Where had she gone, his troll, with the face of an angel? Where had she gone? Where would she go, except to her devil's lover at Slow Down Ranch?

He had just started for Slow Down Ranch armed with his greasy, well-thumbed Bible like a weapon in his pocket, when he heard a voice call him. It was full of the devil's laughter. It was the voice of Burlingame, the lawyer, on his horse. Burlingame had had a weary day and was refreshing himself by a canter on the prairie.

"Where are you going?" asked Burlingame, as he cantered up to Mazarine's wagon.

"To Slow Down Ranch?"

He saw the look of the drowned man in the face of Mazarine, over whom the flood of disaster had passed, and he guessed at once the cause of it; for Burlingame had the philosophy of a Satanic mind, and he knew the things that happen to human nature.

"So, she's gone again, has she?" he added deliberately, with intent to put a knife into the old man's feelings and to turn it in the thick of them. He wanted to hurt, because Mazarine had only a short time before dispensed with his services as a lawyer, and had blocked the way to that intimacy which he had hoped to establish with Tralee and its mistress. Besides, his pride as a professional man had been hurt, and he had been deprived of income which now went to his most hated professional rival. Mazarine's jealous soul had cut him off, on coming to know Burlingame's dark reputation. He had not liked the look Burlingame had given Louise when they met.

"Gone again, has she?" Burlingame repeated sarcastically. "Well, you needn't go to Slow Down Ranch to find her. She isn't there, and you won't find him there either, for I saw him come by the Lark River Trail into Askatoon as I left, and a lady was with him. He booked this morning for the sleeper of the express going East to-night; so, if I were you, I'd turn my horse's nose to Askatoon, Mr. Mazarine. I don't know why I tell you this, as you're not my client now, but I go about the world doing good, Mr. Mazarine--only doing good."

There was a look in Burlingame's face which Heaven would not have accepted as goodness, and there was that in his voice which did not belong to the Courts of the Lord. Malice, though veiled, showed in face and sounded in voice. Even as he spoke, Joel Mazarine turned his horse's head towards Askatoon.

"You're sure a woman was with him? You're sure she was with him?" he asked in chaos of passion.

"I couldn't see her face; it was too far away," answered Burlingame suggestively, "but you can form your own conclusions--and the express is due in thirty minutes!"

He looked at his watch complacently. "What's the good, Mazarine? Why don't you say, 'Go and sin no more?' Or why don't you divorce her with the evidence about that night on the prairie? I could have got you a verdict and damages. Yes, I could have got you plenty of damages. He's rich. You took her back and condoned; you condoned, Mazarine, and now you'll neither have damages nor wife--and the express goes in thirty minutes!"

"The express won't take Mrs. Mazarine away tonight," the old man said, a look of jungle fierceness filling his face.

Burlingame laughed unpleasantly. "Yes, you'll foul your own nest, Mazarine, and then bring her back to live in it. I know you. It isn't the love of God in your heart, because you'll never forgive her; but you'll bring her back to the nest you fouled, just because you want her --'You damned and luxurious mountain goat,' as Shakespeare called your kind."

With another laugh, which somewhat resembled that of the two strange vanished Chinamen, Burlingame flicked his horse and cantered away. A little time afterwards, however, he turned and looked toward Askatoon, and he saw the old man whipping his horse into a gallop to reach Askatoon railway station before the express went East.

"It's true, Mazarine," he said aloud. "Orlando booked for the sleeper going East in thirty minutes; but the sleeper was for one only, and that one was his mother, you old hippopotamus. . . . But I wonder where she is--where the divine Louise is? She hasn't levanted with her Orlando. . . . Now, I wonder!" he added.

Then, with a sudden impulse, he dug heels into his horse's sides, and galloped back towards Askatoon. He wanted to see what would happen before the express went East.

CHAPTER XIII

ORLANDO GIVES A WARNING

Askatoon had never lost its interest for Mazarine and his wife since the day the Mayor had welcomed them at the railway station. Askatoon was not a petty town. Its career had been chequered and interesting, and it had given haven to a large number of uncommon people. Unusual happenings had been its portion ever since it had been the rail-head of the Great Transcontinental Line, and many enterprising men, instead of moving on with the railway, when it ceased to be the rail-head, settled there and gave the place its character. The town had never been lawless, although some lawless people had sojourned there.

It was too busy a place to be fussing about little things, or tearing people's characters to pieces, or gossiping even to the usual degree; yet in its history it had never gossiped so much as it had done since the Mazarines had come.

From the first the vast majority of folk had sided with Louise and denounced Mazarine. They knew well she had married too young to be self-seeking or intriguing; and, in any case, no woman in Askatoon or yet in the West, could have conceived of a girl marrying "the ancient one from the jungle," as Burlingame had called him.

Burlingame could never have been on the side of the Ten Commandments himself, even with a sure and certain hope of happiness on earth, and in Heaven also, guaranteed to him. Nothing could have condemned Mazarine so utterly as the coalition between the "holy good people," as Burlingame called them, and himself; and between the holy good people and himself were many who in their secret hearts would never have shunned Louise if, after the night on the prairie with Orlando, release had been found for her in the Divorce Court. Jonas Billings had put the matter in a nutshell when he said:

"It ain't natural, them two, at Tralee. For marrying her he ought to be tarred and feathered, and for the way he treats her he ought to be let loose in the ha'nts of the grizzlies. What he done to that girl is a crime ag'in' the law. If there was any real spunk in the Methodists, they'd spit him out like pus."

That was exactly what the Methodist body had decided to do on the very day that Louise had fled from Tralee and the old man pursued her in the wrong direction. The Methodist body had determined to discipline Mazarine, to eject him from their communion, because he had raised a whip against his wife; because he had maltreated Li Choo; and because he had

used language unbecoming a Christian. They had decided that Mazarine had not shown the righteous anger of a Christian man, but of one who had backslided, and who, in the words of Rigby the chemist, "Must be spewed out of the mouth of the righteous into the dust of shame."

That was the situation when Joel Mazarine drove furiously into the town and made for the railway station. Men like Jonas Billings, who saw him, and had the scent for sensation, passed the word on downtown, as it is called, that something "was up" with Mazarine, and the railway station was the place where what was up could be seen. Therefore; a quarter of an hour before the arrival of the express which was to carry Orlando Guise's mother to her sick sister three hundred miles down the line, a goodly number of citizens had gathered at the station-far more than usually watched the entrance or exit of the express.

Mazarine's wagon and steaming horses were tied up outside the station, and inside on the platform Moses-not-much, as Mazarine had been called by Jonas Billings, marched up and down, his snaky little eyes blinking at the doorway of the station reception-room. People came and some of them nodded to him derisively. Some, with more hardihood, asked him if he was going East; if he was expecting anyone; if he was seeing somebody off.

A good many asked him the last question, because, as the minutes had passed, Burlingame had arrived. He had also disclosed his great joke to those who would carry it far and near, together with the news that Louise had taken flight. The last fact, however, was known to several people, because more than one had seen the Young Doctor and Patsy Kernaghan taking Louise to Nolan Doyle's ranch.

It was dusk. The lamps of the station were being lighted five minutes before the express arrived, and as the lights flared up, Orlando entered the waiting-room of the station, with a lady on his arm, and presently showed at the platform doorway, smiling and cheerful. He did not blench when Mazarine came towards him. Mazarine had seen the flutter of a blue skirt in the waiting-room, and his wife had worn blue that day!

Orlando saw the heavy, offensive figure of Mazarine making for him. He, however, appeared to take no notice, though he watched his outrageous pursuer out of the corner of his eye, as he quietly gave orders to a porter concerning a little heap of luggage. When he had finished this, he turned, as it were casually, to Mazarine. Then he giggled in the face of the Master of Tralee. It was like the matador's waving of the scarlet cloth in the face of the enraged bull. Having thus relieved his feelings, Orlando turned and walked to the door of the reception-room, but was stopped by the old man rushing at him. Swinging round, Orlando almost filled the doorway.

"You devil's spawn," Mazarine almost shouted," get out of that doorway. I want my wife. You needn't try to hide her. You thief! You lecherous circus rider! Stand aside--leper!"

Orlando coolly stretched out his elbows till they touched the sides of the door, and as the crowd pressed, he said to them mockingly:

"Get back, boys. Give him air. Can't you see he's gasping for breath." Then he giggled again.

The old man looked round at the crowd, but he saw no sympathy--only aversion and ridicule. Suddenly he snatched his little black-bound Bible from his pocket, and held it up.

"What does this Book say?" he thundered. "It says that a wife shall cleave unto her husband until death. For the seducer and the betrayer death is the portion."

The whistle of the incoming train was heard in the distance.

The old man was desperate. It was clear he meant to assault Orlando. "You will only take her away over my dead body," he ground out in his passion. "The Lord gave, and only the Lord shall take away." He gathered himself together for the attack.

Orlando waved a hand at him as one would at a troublesome child. At that instant, his mother stepped up behind him in the reception-room.

"Orlando," she said in her mincing, piping little voice, "Orlando, dear, the train is coming. Let me out. I'm not afraid of that bad man. I want to catch my train."

Orlando stepped aside, and his mother passed through, to the consternation of Mazarine, who fell back. The old man now realized that Burlingame had tricked him. Laughter went up from the crowd. They had had a great show at no cost.

"'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again,' Mr. Mazarine!" called someone from the crowd.

"It's the next train she's going by, old Moses-not-much," shouted a friend of Jonas Billings.

"She's had enough of you, Joel!" sneered another mocker.

"Wouldn't you like to know where she is, yellow-lugs?" queried a fat washerwoman.

For an instant Mazarine stood demused, and then, thrusting the Bible into his pocket, he drew himself up in an effort of pride and defiance.

"Judases! Jezebels!" he burst out at them all. Then he lunged through the doorway of the reception-room; but at the door opening on the street his courage gave way, and hunched up like one in pain, he ran towards the hitching-post where he had left his horses and wagon. They were not there. With a groan which was also a malediction, he went up the street like a wounded elephant, and made his way to the police-station through a town which had no pity for him.

During the hour he remained in the town, Mazarine searched in vain for his horses and wagon. He looked everywhere except the shed behind the Methodist Church. It was there the two wags who had played the trick on him had carefully hitched the horses, and presently they announced in town that they did it because they knew Mazarine would want to go to the prayer-meeting to lay his crimes before the Mercy Seat!

It was quite true that it was prayer-meeting night, and as the merciless wags left the shed, the voice of brother Rigby the chemist was narrating for the hundredth time the story of his conversion, when, as he said, "the pains of hell gat hold of him." Brother Rigby loved to relate the tortures of the day when he was convicted of sin; but on this night his ancient story seemed appropriate, as he had dealt with great severity on the doings of the backslider, Joel Mazarine.

When the two wags returned to the front street of Askatoon, they were just in time to see the second meeting of Orlando and Mazarine. Mazarine had not been able to find his horses at any hotel or livery stable, or in any street. It was at the moment, when, in his distraction, he had decided to walk back to Tralee, that Orlando, driving up the street, saw him. Orlando reined in his horses dropped from his buggy and approached him.

There was a look in Orlando's eyes which was a reflection from a remote past, from ancestors who had settled their troubles with the first weapon and the best opportunity to their hands. "The furrin element in him," as Jonas Billings called it, had been at full flood ever since he had bade his mother good-bye. A storm of anger had been raised in him. As he said to himself, he had had enough; he had been filled up to the chin by the Mazarine business; and his impulsive youth wanted to end it by some smashing act which would be sensational and decisive. So it was that Fate offered the opportunity, as he came up the front street of Askatoon, and found himself face to face with Mazarine, over against the offices of Burlingame.

"A word with you, Mr. Mazarine," he said, with the air of a man who wants to ease his mind of its trouble by action. "Back there at the station, I kept my tongue and let you down easy enough, because my mother was present. She is old and sensitive, and she doesn't like to see her son doing the dirty work every man must do some time or other, when there's street cleaning to be done. Now, let me tell you this: you've slandered as good a girl, you've libelled as straight a wife, as the best man in the world ever had. You've made a public scandal of your private home. You've treated the pure thing as if it were the foul thing; and yet, you want to keep the pure thing that you treat like a foul thing, under your rawhide whip, because it's young and beautiful and good. You don't want to save her soul"--he pointed to the Bible, which the old man had snatched from his pocket again--"you don't want to save her soul. You don't care whether she's happy in this world or the next; what you want is what you can see of her, for your life in this world only. You want--"

The old man interrupted him with a savage emotion which Jonas Billings

said made him look like "a satyre."

"I want to save her from the wrath to come," he said. "This here holy Book gives me my rights. It says, 'Thou shalt not steal,' and the trouble I have comes from you that's stole my wife, that's put her soul in jeopardy, robbed my home--"

"Robbed your home!" interjected Orlando quietly, but with a voice of suppressed passion. "Robbed your home! Why, the other day you tried to prevent her entering it. You wanted to shut her out. After she had lived with you all those years, you believed she lied to you when she told you the truth about that night on the prairie; but her innocence was proved by one who was there all the time, and for shame's sake you had to let her in. But she couldn't stand it. I don't wonder. A lark wouldn't be at home where a vulture roosted."

"And so the lark flies away to the cuckoo," snarled the old man, with flecks of froth gathering at the corners of his mouth; for the sight of this handsome, long-limbed youth enraged him.

"Give her back to me. You know where she is," he persisted. "You've got her hid away. That's why you've sent your mother East--so's she wouldn't know, though from what I see, I shouldn't think it'd have made much difference to her."

Exclamations broke from the crowd. It was the wild West. It was a country where, not twenty years before, men did justice upon men without the assistance of the law; and the West understood that the dark insult just uttered would in days not far gone have meant death. The onlookers exclaimed, and then became silent, because a subtle sense of tragedy suddenly smothered their voices. Upon the silence there broke a little giggling laugh. It came from lips that were one in paleness with a face grown stony.

"I ought to kill you," Orlando said quietly after a moment, yet scarcely above a whisper. "I ought to kill you, Mazarine, but that would only be playing your game, for the law would get hold of me, and the girl that has left you would be sorrowful, for she knows I love her, though I never told her so. She'd be sorry to see the law get at me. She's going to be mine some day, in the right way. I'm not going behind your back to say it; I'm announcing it to all and sundry. I never did a thing to her that couldn't have been seen by all the world, and I never said a thing to her that couldn't be heard by all the world; but I hope she'll never go back to you. You've made a sewer for her to live in, not a home. As I said, I ought to kill you, but that would play your game, so I won't, not now. But I tell you this, Mazarine: if I ever meet you again--and I'm sure to do so--and you don't get off the road I'm travelling on, or the side-walk I'm walking on, when I meet you or when I pass you, I'll let you have what'll send you to hell, before you can wink twice.

"As for Louise--as for her: I don't know where she is, but I'll find her. One thing is sure: if I see her, I'll tell her never to go back to you; and she won't. You've drunk at the waters of Canaan for the last time.

For a Christian you're pretty filthy. Go and wash in the pool of Siloam and be clean--damn you, Mazarine!"

With that he turned, almost unheeding the hands thrust out to grip his, the voices murmuring approval. In a moment he had swung his horses round. He did not go beyond ten yards, however, before someone, running beside his wagon, whispered up to him: "She's out at Nolan Doyle's ranch. She went with the Young Doctor and Patsy Kernaghan."

Behind, in the street, a young boy came running through the crowd and shouting: "I know where they are! I know where they are!" He stopped before Mazarine. "Gimme half a dollar, and I'll tell you where your horses are. Gimme half a dollar. Gimme half a dollar, and I'll tell you."

An instant later, with the half-dollar in his hand, he said: "They're up to the shed of the Meetin' House."

"Yes, go along up to the Meetin' House, Mr. Mazarine," said one of the miscreants who had driven the horses there. "They're holding a post-mortem on you at the prayer meetin'. They say you're dead in trespasses and sins. Get along, Joel."

The crowd started to follow him to the shed where his horses were, but after a moment he turned on them and said:

"Ain't you heerd and seen enough? Ain't there no law to protect a man?"

A hoe was leaning against a fence. He saw it, and with sudden fury, seizing it, swung it round his head as if to throw it into the crowd. At that moment a stalwart constable ran forward, raised a hand towards Mazarine, and then addressed the crowd.

"We've had enough of this," he said. "I'll lock up any man that goes a step further towards the Meetin' House. Where do you think you are? This is Askatoon, the place of peace and happiness, and we're going to be happy, if I have to lock up the hull lot of you. I guess you can go right on, Mr. Mazarine," he added. "Go right on and git your wagon."

A moment later Mazarine was walking alone towards the Meeting House; but no, not alone, for a hundred devils were with him.

CHAPTER XIV

FILION AND FIONA--ALSO PATSY KERNAGHAN

Patsy Kernaghan was in his element in the garden with which Norah Doyle had decorated the brown bosom of the prairie. It had verdant shrubs, green turf, thick fringes of flowers, and one solitary elmtree in the centre whose branches spread like a cedar of Lebanon. In the moonlight

Patsy had the telling of a wonderful story to such an audience as he had never had before in his life, and he had had them from Bundoran to Limerick, from Limerick to the foothills of the Rockies.

The seance of love and legend had been Patsy's own idea. At the supper-table spread by Norah Doyle, in spite of the protests of her visitors--the Young Doctor, Louise and Patsy--Nolan Doyle, who had a fine gift for playful talk, had tried to keep the situation free from melodrama. Yet Patsy had observed that, in spite of all efforts, Louise's eyes now and then filled with tears. Also, he saw that her senses seemed alert for something outside their little circle. It was as though she expected someone to arrive. She was in that state which is not normal and yet not abnormal--a kind of trance in which she did ordinary things in a natural way, yet mechanically, without full consciousness.

There was no one at the table who did not realize what, and for whom, she was waiting. To her primitive spirit, now that she was in trouble because of him, it seemed inevitable that Orlando should come. One thing was fixed in her mind: she would never return to Tralee or to the man whose odious presence made her feel as though she was in a cage with an animal.

Jonas Billings had called him "The ancient one from the jungle," and that was how at last he appeared to her. His arms and breast were thick with hair; the hair on his face grew almost up to the eyes; the fingers of his splayed hands were blunt and broad; and his hair was like a nest for things of the jungle undergrowth.

Since she had been awakened, the memory of his hot breath in her face, of his clumsy fevered embraces was a torment to her; for always in contrast there were the fresh clean-shaven cheeks and chin of a young Berserker with honest, wondering blue eyes, the curly head of a child, and body and limbs like a young lean stag.

Orlando's touch was never either clammy or fevered. She could recall every time that he had touched her: when her fingers and his met on the afternoon that Li Choo had thrown himself down the staircase with the priceless porcelain; also the evening of the night spent on the prairie when, after the accident, her hand had been linked into his arm; also when he had clasped her fingers at their meeting in the morning. On each occasion she had felt a thrill like that of music--persuasive, living vibrations passing to remote recesses of her being.

No nearer had she ever come to the man she loved, no nearer had he sought to come. Once, the evening after the night spent on the prairie, when old Joel Mazarine had tried to make her pray and ask God's forgiveness, and he had kissed her with the lips of hungry old age, she had suddenly sat up in bed, her heart beating hard, every nerve palpitating, because in imagination she had seen herself in Orlando's arms, with his lips pressed to hers.

Poor neophyte in life's mysteries, having served as a slave at false altars of which she did not even know the ritual, it was no wonder that,

after all she had suffered, she could not now bring herself into tune with the commonplace intercourse of life. Not that her friends utterly failed to lure her into it. She might well have been the victim of hysterics, but she was only distrait, pensive and gently smiling, with the smile of a good heart. Smiling with her had ever taken the place of conversation. It was an apology for not speaking when she could not speak what she felt.

Once during the meal she seemed to start slightly, as though she heard a familiar sound, and for some minutes afterwards she seemed to be listening, as it were, for a knock at the door, which did not come. Immediately after that, Patsy, happy in sitting down to table with "the quality"--for such they were to him--because he saw that Louise must be distracted, and because he had seen story-telling, many a time, draw people away from their troubles even more than music, said:

"Did you remember the day it is, anny of you? Shure, it's St. Droid's Day! Aw, then, don't you know who he was? You don't! Well, well, there's no tellin' how ignorant the wurruld can be. St. Droid--aw, he was a good man that brought the two children of Chief Diarmid and Queen Moira together. You didn't know about them two? You niver h'ard of Chief Diarmid and Queen Moira and their two lovely children? Well, there it is, there's no sayin' how ignorant y'are if y'are not Irish. Aw no, they wasn't man and wife. Diarmid was a widower and Moira was a widow. Diarmid's boy was Filion and Moira's girl was Fiona, an' the troubles of the two'd make a book for ivry day of the week, an' two for Sunday. An' the way that St. Droid brought them two together Aw, come outside in the gardin where the moon's to the full, an' it's warm enough for anny man or woman that's got a warm heart, an' I'll tell you the story of Filion and Fiona. You'll not be forgettin' the names of them now, will ye? And while I'm tellin' you, all the time you'll be thinkin' of St. Droid, for it's his day. It was nothin' till him, St. Droid, that he lived in a cave, you understan'? Wasn't his face like the sun comin' up over the lake at Ballinhoe in the month of June! Well, it doesn't matter if you've niver seen Ballinhoe--you understan' what I mean. Well, then come out intil the gardin, darlins. Shure, I'm achin' to tell you the story--as fine a love-story as iver was told to man and woman."

So it was that Louise with eyes alight-for Patsy had a voice that could stir imagination in the dullest--so it was that Louise and the others went out into the moonlit garden, the prairie around them like an endless waste of sea. There they placed themselves in a half circle around Patsy, who sat upon a little bench, with his back to the big spreading elm-tree, which by some special gift had grown alone over the myriad years, defying storm and winter's frost, until it seemed to have an honoured permanence, as stable as the prairie earth itself.

As they seated themselves, there was renewed in Louise the feeling she had at supper-time, when she had imagined--or had her senses accurately divined? that Orlando was near, so sure had been the sensation that she had expected Orlando to enter the room where they sat. Now it was on her again, and somehow she felt him there with her. He was Filion and she was Fiona.

Since the day she had first seen Orlando, she had awakened to life's realities. There had grown in her an alertness and a delicate sense of things, which, though natural to one born with a soul that cared little for sordid things, was not common, except in Celtic circles where the unseen thing is more real than the seen; where gold and precious stones are only valued in so far as they can purchase freedom, dreams and desire.

Louise had not been thrilled without cause. Orlando, the real material Orlando, had driven out to Nolan Doyle's ranch, but having come, could not at first bring himself to enter. Something in him kept saying that it was not fair to her; kept admonishing him to let things take their course; that now was not the time to see her; that it might place her in a false position. Blameless though she was, she might be blamed by the world, if he and she, on the night that she fled from Joel Mazarine should meet, and, above all, meet alone--and what was the good of meeting at all, if they did not meet alone! What could two voiceless people say to each other, people who only spoke with their hearts and souls, when others were staring at them, watching every act, listening for every word. His better sense kept telling him to go back to Slow Down Ranch.

But there she was inside Nolan Doyle's house, and he had come deliberately to see her.

He stood outside in the garden near the great spreading elm-tree, torn by a sense of duty and a sense of desire; but the desire was to let her see by his presence that he would be a tower of strength to her, no matter what happened. It was not the desire which had possessed him whom Patsy Kernaghan had called the keeper of the "zoolyogical" garden.

He had just made up his mind that courage was the right thing: that he must see her in the presence of others for one minute, whatever the issue, when she came out with Patsy Kernaghan, the Young Doctor, and Norah and Nolan Doyle. None saw him, and, as they seated themselves, he stepped noiselessly under the spreading branches of the elm-tree. He would not speak to them yet; he would wait. In the shade made by the drooping branches he could not be seen, yet he could hear and see all.

There was silence for a moment, and then Patsy began the tale of St. Droid--"whoever he was," as Patsy said to himself; for he was going to make up out of his head this story of St. Droid and St. Droid's Day, and Queen Moira, Filion and Fiona. It was a bold idea, but it gave Patsy the opportunity of his life.

His description of Black Brian, the rich, ruthless King, to whom Queen Moira gave her daughter Fiona, despite the girl's bitter sorrow, was a masterpiece. It was modelled on Joel Mazarine. It was the behemoth transferred to Ireland, to the cromlechs and castles, to the causeways, the caves, and the stony hillsides; to the bogs and the quicksands and the Little Men; but it could not be recognized as a portrait, though everyone felt how wonderful it was that a legend of a thousand years should be so close to the life of Askatoon.

Patsy had no knowledge of what the mother of Louise was like, but the likeness between her cruel, material, selfish spirit and Queen Moira, in the sacrifice of their offspring, provoked the admiration of the Young Doctor, whose philosophical mind had soon discovered that Patsy was making up the tale.

That did not matter. Having got the thing started, Patsy gave reins to his imagination; and storm, terror, danger, and the capture of Fiona by Filion, from Black Brian's castle in the hills, was told with primitive force and passion. But the most wonderful part of the story described how a strange dwarfed Little Man came out of the hills in the East, across the land, to the Western fastness of Black Brian, and there slew that evil man, because of an ancient feud--slew him in a situation of great indignity, and left him lying on the sands for the tide to wash him out to the deep and hungry sea. Even here Patsy had his inspiration from real life; and yet he disguised it all so well that no one except the Young Doctor even imagined what he meant.

Under the tree Orlando listened with strained attention, absorbed and, at times, almost overcome. His long sigh of relief was joined to the sighs of the others when Patsy finished. The Young Doctor rose to go, and the others rose also.

"That's a wonderful story, Patsy," said the Young Doctor to him; and he added quizzically: "You tell it so well because you've told it so often before, I suppose?"

"Aw, well, that's it, I expect," answered the Irishman coolly.

"I thought so," responded the Young Doctor. "Now, how many times do you think you've told that story before, Patsy?"

"About a hundred, I should think; or no--I should think about two hundred times," answered Patsy shamelessly.

"I thought so," said the Young Doctor, but before turning to go into the house, he leaned and whispered in his ear: "Patsy, you're the most beautiful liar that ever come out of Ireland."

"Aw, Doctor dear!" said Patsy softly.

They all moved towards the house, save Louise. "Please, I want to stay behind a minute or two," she said, as she held out a hand to the Young Doctor. "Don't wait for me. I want to be alone a little while." Once more the Young Doctor felt the trembling appeal of her palm as on the first day they met, and he gripped her hand warmly.

"It will all come right. Good-night, my dear," he said cheerfully. "Have a good sleep on it."

Louise remained in the garden alone, the moon shining on her face lifted to the sky. For a moment she stood so, wrapped in the peace of the

night, but her body was almost panting from the thrill of the legend which Patsy Kernaghan had told. As he had meant it to do, it gave her hope; although before her eyes was the picture that Patsy had drawn of Black Brian with his great sword beside him lying on the sands, waiting for the hungry sea to claim him.

Presently there stole through the warm air of the night the sound of her own name. She did not start. It seemed to her part of the dream in which she was. Her hand went to her heart, however.

Again in Orlando's voice came the word "Louise," a little louder now. She turned towards the tree, and there beside it stood Orlando.

For an instant there was a sense of unreality, of ghostliness, and then she gave a little cry of pain and joy. As she ran towards him, with sudden impulse, his arms spread out and he caught her to his breast.

His lips swept her hair. "Louise! Louise!" he whispered passionately. For an instant they stood so, and then he gently pressed her away from him.

"I had to come," he said. "I want you to know that whatever happens, you may depend on me. When you call, I will come. I must go now. For your sake I must not stay. I had to see you, I had to tell you what I had never told you."

"You've always told me," she murmured.

He stretched out his hand to clasp hers. He did not dare to open his arms again. The lips which he had never kissed were very near, and ah, so sweet! She must not come to him now.

One swift clasp of the hand, and then he vaulted over the fence and was gone. A few moments afterwards she heard the rumble of his wagon on the prairie--he had tied up his horses some distance from the house.

As the Young Doctor drove homeward with Patsy Kernaghan, he also heard the rumble of the wagon not far in front of him. Then he began to wonder why Louise had waited behind in the garden. He put the thought away from him, however. There was no deceit in Louise; he was sure of that.

CHAPTER XV

OUTWARD BOUND

Joel Mazarine did not take the trail to Tralee immediately after he found his wagon and horses in the shed of the Methodist Meeting House. As he drove through the main street of Askatoon again, his lawyer--Burlingame's rival--waved a hand towards him in greeting. An idea suddenly possessed the old man, and he stopped the horses and beckoned.

"Get in and come to your office with me," he said to the lawyer. "There's some business to do right off."

The unpopularity of a client in no way affects a lawyer. Indeed, the most notorious criminal is the greatest legal advertisement, and the fortunate part of the business is that no lawyer is ever identified with the morals, crimes or virtues of his client, yet has particular advantage from his crimes. So it was that Mazarine's lawyer enjoyed the public attention given to his drive through the town with Mazarine. He could hear this man say, "Hello, what's up!" or another remark that the Law and the Gospel were out for war.

Just as they were about to enter the office, however, Jonas Billings, who had a faculty for being everywhere at the interesting moment, said, so as to be heard by Mazarine and his lawyer, and all others standing near.

"Goin' to leave his property away from his wife! Makin' a new will--eh? That's it, stamp on a girl when she's down! When you can't win the woman, keep the cash. Woe is me, Willy, but the wild one rageth!"

Jonas' drawling, nasal, high-pitched sarcasm reached Mazarine's ears and stung him. He lurched round, and with beady eyes blinking with malice, said roughly: "The fool is known by his folly."

"You don't need to label yourself, Mr. Mazarine," retorted Jonas with a grin.

The crowd laughed in approval. The loose lower lip of the Master of Tralee quivered. The leviathan was being tortured by the little sharks.

Presently the door of the lawyer's office slammed on the street, and Mazarine proceeded to make a new will, which should leave everything away from Louise. After he had slowly dictated the terms of the will, with a glutinous solemnity he said:

"There; that's what comes of breaking the laws of God and man. That's what a woman loses who doesn't do her duty by the man that can give her everything, and that's give her everything, while she plays the Jezebel."

"I'll complete this for you, and you can sign it now," remarked the lawyer evasively, not without shrinking; "but it won't stand as it is, or as you want it to stand, because Mrs. Mazarine has her legal claims in spite of it! She's got a wife's dower-rights according to the law. That's one-third of your property. It's the law of the land, and you can't sign it away from her, Mr. Mazarine."

The old man's face darkened still more; his crooked fingers twisted in his beard.

"I see you forgot that," added the lawyer. "There's only one way to dispossess her, and that's to put her through Divorce--if you think you can. Of course this document'll stand as far as it goes, and it's

perfectly legal, but it isn't what you intend, and she'd get her one-third in spite of it."

"I'll come back to-morrow," said the old man, rising to his feet. "You make it out, and I'll come back and sign it to-morrow. I'll make a sure thing of so much, anyway. The divorce'll settle the rest. You have it ready at noon to-morrow, and you can start divorce proceedings to-morrow too. There's plenty of evidence. She run away from me to go to him. She stayed with him a whole night on the prairie. I want the divorce, and I can get the evidence. Everybody knows. This is the Lord's business, and I mean to see it through. Shame has come to the house of a servant of the Lord, and there must be purging. In the days of David she would have been stoned to death, and not so far back as that, either."

A moment afterwards he was gone, slamming the door behind him. His blood was up-a turgid, angry flood almost bursting his veins. He now made his way to the house of the Methodist minister. There he announced that if he was disciplined at Quarterly Meeting, as was talked about in the streets, he would go to law against every class-leader for defamation of character.

By the time this was done the evening was well advanced. He did not leave Askatoon until the moment which coincided with that in which Orlando left Nolan Doyle's garden and took the trail to Slow Down Ranch. Orlando would strike the trail from Askatoon to Tralee at a point where another trail also joined.

Mazarine drove fast through the town, as though eager to put it behind him, but when he reached the trail on the prairie he slackened his pace, and drove steadily homewards, lost in the darkest reflections he had ever known; and that was saying much. The reins lay loose in his fingers, and he became so absorbed that he was conscious of nothing save movement.

The heart of Black Brian, the King, of whom Patsy Kernaghan told his mythical story in Nolan Doyle's garden, had never housed more repulsive thoughts than were in Mazarine's heart in this unfortunate hour of his own making. No single feeling of kindness was in his spirit. He heard nothing, was conscious of nothing, save his own grim, fantastic imaginings.

A jealousy and hatred as terrible as ever possessed a man were on him. An egregious self-will, a dreadful spirit of unholy old age in him, was turned hatefully upon the youth long since gone from himself--the youth which, in its wild, innocent ardours, had brought two young people together, one of them his own captive for years.

The peace of the prairie, the shining, infant moon, the kindly darkness, were all at variance with the soul of the man, whose only possession was what money could buy; and what money had bought in the way of human flesh and blood, beauty and sweet youth he had not been able to hold. To his mind, what was the good of having riches and power, if you could not also have love, licence and the loot of the conqueror!

He had wrestled with the Lord in prayer; he had been a class-leader and a lay-preacher; he had exhorted and denounced; he had pleaded and proscribed; yet never in all his days of professed religion had a heart for others really moved Joel Mazarine.

He had given now and then of gold and silver, because of the glow of mind which the upraised hands of admiration brought him, mistaking it for the real thing; but his life had been barren because it had not emptied itself for others, at any time, or anywhere.

He had been a professed Christian, not because of Olivet, but because of Sinai. It was the stormy authority of the sword of the Lord of Gideon of the Old Testament which had drawn him into the fold of religion. It was some strain of heredity, his upbringing, the life into which he was born, pious, pedantic and preposterously prayerful, which had made him a professional Christian, as he was a professional farmer, rancher and money-maker. For such a man there never could be peace.

In his own world of wanton inhumanity, oblivious of all except his torturing thoughts, he did not know that, as he neared the Cross Trails on his way homewards, something shadowy, stooping, sprang up from the roadside and slip-slopped after his wagon--slip-slopped--slip-slopped--catching the thud of the horses' hoofs, and making its footsteps coincide.

All at once the shadowy figure swung itself up softly and remained for an instant, half-kneeling, in the body of the wagon. Then suddenly, noiselessly, it rose up, leaned over the absorbed Joel Mazarine, and with long, hooked, steely fingers caught the throat of the Master of Tralee under the grayish beard. They clenched there with a power like that of three men; for this was the kind of grip which, far away in the country of the Yang-tse-kiang, Li Choo had learned in the days when he had made youth a thing to be remembered.

No convulsive effort on the part of the victim could loosen that terrible grip; but the horses, responding to the first jerk of the reins following the attack, stood still, while a human soul was being wrenched out of the world behind them.

No word was spoken. From the moment the fingers clutched his throat Joel Mazarine could not speak, and Li Choo did his swift work in grim and ghastly silence.

It did not take long. When the vain struggles had ceased and the fingers were loosened, Li Choo's tongue clucked in his mouth, once, twice, thrice; and that was all. It was a ghastly sort of mirth, and it had in it a multitude of things. Among them was vengeance and wild justice, and the thing that comes down through innumerable years in the Oriental mind --that the East is greater than the West; that now and then the East must prove itself against the West with all the cruelty of the world's prime.

For a moment Li Choo stood and looked at the motionless figure, with the head fallen on the breast; then he put the reins carefully in the hands

of the dead man, placed the fallen hat on his head, climbed down from the wagon, patted a horse as he slip-slopped by, and disappeared towards Tralee into the night, leaving what was left of Joel Mazarine in his wagon at the crossing of the trails.

As Li Choo stole swiftly away, he met two other figures, silent and shadowy, and somehow strangely unreal, like his own. After a moment's whisperings, they all three turned their faces again towards Tralee.

Once they stopped and listened. There was the sound of wagons. One was coming from the north--that is, from the direction of Tralee; the other was coming from the south-east-that is, Nolan Doyle's ranch.

Li Choo's tongue clucked in his mouth; then he made an exclamation in Chinese, at which the others clucked also, and then they moved on again.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CROSS TRAILS

Like Joel Mazarine on his journey from Askatoon, Orlando, on his journey from Nolan Doyle's ranch, was absorbed, but his reflections were as different from those of the Master of Tralee as sunrise is from midnight; indeed, so bright was the light within Orlando's spirit that the very prairie around him seemed aflame. The moment with Louise in the garden lighted by the dim moon, the passing instant of perfect understanding, the touch of her hair upon his lips, her supple form yielding to his as he clasped her in his arms, had dropped like a curtain between him and the fateful episode in the main street of Askatoon.

That wonderful elation of youth on its first excursion into perfumed meads of Love possessed him. He had never had flutterings of the heart for any woman until his eyes met the eyes of Louise at their first meeting, and a new world had been opened up to him. He had been as naive and native a human being with all his apparent foppishness, as had ever moved among men. What seemed his vanity had nothing to do with thoughts of womankind. It had been a decorative sense come honestly from picturesque forebears, and indeed from his own mother.

In truth, until the day he had met Louise, or rather until the day of the broncho-busting, and the fateful night on the prairie, he had never grown up. He was wise with the wisdom of a child--sheer instinct, rightness of mind, real decision of character. His giggling laugh had been the undisciplined simplicity of the child, which, when he had reached manhood, had never been formalized by conventions. Something indefinite had marked him until Louise had come, and now he was definite, determined, alive with a new feeling which made his spirit sing--his spirit and his lips; for, as he came from Nolan Doyle's ranch to the Cross Trails, he kept humming to himself, between moments of silence in which he visualized Louise in a hundred attitudes, as he had seen her.

There had come to him, without the asking even, that which Joel Mazarine, had he been as rich as any man alive or dead, could not have bought. That was why he hummed to himself in happiness.

Youth answering to youth had claimed its own; love springing from the dawn, brave and bright-eyed, had waved its wand towards that good country called Home. Never from the first had any thought come into the minds of either of these two that was not linked with the idea of home. Nothing of the jungle had been in their thoughts, though they had been tempted, and love and the moment's despair had stung them to take revenge in each other's arms; yet they had kept the narrow path. There was in their love something primeval, that belonged to the beginning of the world.

Orlando had almost reached the Cross Trails before he saw Mazarine's wagon standing in the way. At first he did not recognize the horses, and he called to the driver sitting motionless to move aside. He thought it to be some drunken ranchman.

Presently, however, coming nearer, he recognized the horses and the man. Standing up, Orlando was about to call out again in peremptory tones, when, suddenly, the spirit of death touched his senses, and his heart stood still for an instant.

As he looked at the motionless figure, he was only subconsciously aware of the thud of horses' hoofs coming down one of the side-trails. Springing to the ground, he approached Mazarine's wagon.

The horses neighed; it was a curious, lonely sound. For a moment he stood with his hand on the wheel looking at the still figure; then he reached out and touched Mazarine's knee.

"Hi, there!" he said.

There was no reply. He mounted the wagon, touched the dead man's shoulder, and then, with one hand, loosened the waistcoat and felt the heart. It was still. He examined the body. There was no wound. He peered into the face, and saw the distortion there. "Dead--dead!" he said in an awed voice.

The husband of Louise was dead. How he died, in one sense, did not matter. Louise's husband was dead; he would torture her no more. Louise was free!

Slowly he got down from the wagon, vaguely wondering what to do, so had the tragedy confused his brain for the moment. As he did so, he was conscious of another wagon and horses a few yards away.

"Who goes there?" called the voice of the newcomer.

"A friend," answered Orlando mechanically. Presently the new-comer sprang down from his wagon and came over to Orlando.

"What is it, Mr. Guise?" he asked. "What's the trouble? . . . Who's

that?" he added, pointing to the dead body.

"It's Mazarine. He's dead," answered Orlando quietly.

"Oh, good God!" said the other.

He was an insurance agent of the town of Askatoon, who, that very evening, had heard Orlando threaten the Master of Tralee--that if ever he passed him or met him, and Mazarine did not get out of the way, it would be the worse for him. Well, here in the trail were Orlando and Mazarine --and Mazarine was dead!

"Good God!" the new-comer repeated. Scarsdale was his name.

Then Orlando explained. "It's not what you think," he said. Then he told the story--such as there was to tell--of what had happened during the last few moments.

Scarsdale climbed up into the wagon, struck a light, looked at the body of Mazarine, at his face, and then lifted up the beard and examined the neck. There were finger-marks in the flesh.

"So, that's it," he said. "Strangled! He seems to have took it easy, sittin' there like that," he added as he climbed down.

"I don't understand it," remarked Orlando. "As you say, it's weird, his sitting there like that with the reins in his hands. I don't understand it!"

"I saw you getting down from the wagon," remarked Scarsdale meaningly.

"Say, do you really believe--?" began Orlando without agitation, but with a sudden sense of his own false position.

"It ain't a matter of belief," the other declared. "If there's an inquest, I've got to tell what I've seen. You know that, don't you?"

"That's all right," replied Orlando. "You've got to tell what you've seen, and so have I. I guess the truth will out. Come, let's move him on to Tralee. We'll lay him down in the bottom of the wagon, and I'll lead his horses with a halter. . . . No," he added, changing his mind, "you lead my horses, and I'll drive him home."

A moment afterwards, as the procession made its way to Tralee, Scarsdale said to himself:

"He must have nerves like iron to drive Mazarine home, if he killed him. Well, he's got them, and still they call him Giggles as if he was a silly girl!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE SUPERIOR MAN

Students of life have noticed constantly that moral distinctions are not matters of principle but of certain peremptory rules found on nice calculations of the social mind. In the field of crime, responsibility is most often calculated, not upon the crime itself, but upon how the thing is done.

In Askatoon, no one would have been greatly shocked if, when Orlando Guise and Joel Mazarine met at the railway-station or in the main street, Orlando had killed Mazarine.

Mazarine would have been dead in either case; and he would have been killed by another hand in either case; but the attitude of the public would not have been the same in either case. The public would have considered the killing of Mazarine before the eyes of the world as justifiable homicide; its dislike of the man would have induced it to add the word justifiable.

But that Joel Mazarine should be killed by night without an audience, secretly--however righteously--shocked the people of Askatoon.

Had they seen the thing done, there would have been sensation, but no mystery; but night, secrecy, distance, mystery, all begot, not a reaction in Mazarine's favour, but a protest against the thing being done under cover, as it were, unhelped by popular observation. Also, to the Askatoon mind, that one man should kill another in open quarrel was courageous, or might be courageous,--but for one man to kill another, whoever that other was, in a hidden way, was a barbarian business.

It seemed impossible to have any doubt as to who killed the man, though Orlando had not waited a moment after the body had been brought to Tralee, but had gone straight to the police, and told what had happened, so far as he knew it. He stated the exact facts.

The insurance man, Scarsdale, would not open his mouth until the inquest, which took place on the afternoon after the crime had been committed. It was held at Tralee. Great crowds surrounded the house, but only a few found entrance to the inquest room.

Immediately on opening the inquest, Orlando was called to tell his story. Every eye was fixed upon him intently; every ear was strained as he described his coming upon the isolated wagon and the dead man with the reins in his hands. It is hard to say if all believed his story, but the Coroner did, and Burlingame, his lawyer, also did.

Burlingame was present, not to defend Orlando, because it was not a trial, but to watch his interests in the face of staggering circumstantial evidence. To Burlingame's mind Orlando was not the man to kill another by strangling him to death. It was not in keeping with his character. It was too aboriginal.

The Coroner believed the story solely because Orlando's frankness and straightforwardness filled him with confidence. Also men of rude sense, like Jonas Billings, were willing to take bets, five to one, that Orlando was innocent.

The Young Doctor had not an instant's doubt, but he could not at first fix his suspicions in a likely quarter. He had examined the body, and there were no marks save bruises at the throat. In his evidence he said that enormous strength of hands had been necessary to kill so quickly, for it was clear the attack was so overpowering that there was little struggle.

The Coroner here interposed a question as to whether it would have been possible for anyone but a man to commit the crime. At his words everybody moved impatiently. It was certain he was referring to the absent wife. The idea of Louise committing such a crime, or being able to commit it, was ridiculous. The Coroner presently stated that he had only asked the question so as to remove this possibility from consideration.

The Young Doctor immediately said that probably no woman in the hemisphere could have committed the crime, which needed enormous strength of hands.

The Coroner looked round the room. "The widow, Mrs. Mazarine, is not here?" he said questioningly.

Nolan Doyle interposed. "Mrs. Mazarine is at my ranch. She came there yesterday evening at eight o'clock and remained with my wife and myself until twelve o'clock. The murder was committed before twelve o'clock. Mrs. Mazarine does not even know that her husband is dead. She is not well to-day, and we have kept the knowledge from her."

"Is she under medical care?" asked the Coroner. Nolan Doyle nodded towards the Young Doctor, who said: "I saw Mrs. Mazarine at the house of Mr. Doyle last evening between the hours of eight and ten o'clock. To-day at noon also I visited her. She has a slight illness, and is not fit to take part in these proceedings."

At this point, Scarsdale, who had come upon Orlando and the dead man at the Cross Trails the night before, told his story. He did it with evident reluctance.

He spoke with hesitation, yet firmly and straightforwardly. He described how he saw Orlando climb down from the wagon where the dead man was. He added, however, that he had seen no struggle of any kind, though he had seen Orlando close to the corpse. Questioned by the Coroner, he described the scenes between Orlando and Mazarine in the main street of Askatoon and at the railway-station, both of which he had seen. He repeated Orlando's threat to Mazarine.

He was pressed as to whether Orlando showed agitation at the Cross

Trails. He replied that Orlando seemed stunned but not agitated.

He was asked whether Orlando had shown the greater agitation at the Cross Trails or in the town when he threatened Mazarine. The answer was that he showed agitation only in the town. He was asked to repeat what Orlando had said to him. This he did accurately.

He was then asked by counsel whether he had arrived at any conclusion, when at the Cross Trails or afterwards, as to who committed the crime; but the Coroner would not permit the question. The Coroner added that it was only the duty of the witness to state what he had seen. Opinions were not permissible as evidence. The facts were in possession of the Court, and the Court could form its own judgment.

It was clear to everyone that the jury must return a verdict of wilful murder, and it was equally clear that the evidence was sufficient to fix suspicion upon Orlando, which must lead to his arrest. Two constables were in close attendance, and were ready to take charge of the man who, above all others, or so it was thought, had most reason to wish Mazarine out of the way. Indeed, Orlando had resigned himself to the situation, having realized how all the evidence was against him.

Recalling Orlando, the Coroner asked if it was the case that the death of Mazarine might be an advantage to him in any way. Orlando replied that it might be an advantage to him, but he was not sure. He added, however, that if, as the Coroner seemed to suggest, he himself was under suspicion, it ought to appear to all that to have murdered Mazarine in the circumstances would have put in jeopardy any possible advantage. That seemed logical enough, but it was presently pointed out to the Coroner that the same consideration had existed when Orlando had threatened Mazarine in the streets of Askatoon.

Presently the Coroner said: "There’s a half-breed woman and a Chinaman, servants of the late Mr. Mazarine. Have the woman called."

It was at this moment that the Young Doctor and Orlando also were suddenly seized with a suspicion of their own. Orlando remembered how Mazarine had horsewhipped and maltreated Li Choo. The Young Doctor fixed his eyes intently on the body, and presently went to it again, raised the beard and looked at the neck. Coming back to his place, he nodded to himself. He had a clue. Now he understood about the enormous strength which had killed Mazarine practically without a struggle. He had noticed more than once the sinewy fingers of the Chinaman. As the inquest went on, he had again and again looked at the hands and arms of Orlando, and it had seemed impossible that, strong as he was, his fingers had the particular strength which could have done this thing.

The Coroner stood waiting for Rada to come, when suddenly the door opened and a Chinaman entered--one of the two who had appeared so strangely on the scene the day before. He advanced to the Coroner with both hands loosely hanging in the great sleeves of his blue padded coat, his eyes blinking slowly underneath the brown forehead and the little black skullcap, and after making salutation with his arms, in curious,

monotonous English with a quaint accent he said:

"Li Choo--Li Choo--he speak. He have to say. He send."

Holding up a piece of paper, he handed it to the Coroner and then stood blinking and immobile.

A few moments afterwards, the Coroner said: "I have received this note from Li Choo the Chinaman, sometime employed by the deceased Joel Mazarine. I will read it to you." Slowly he read:

"I say gloddam. That Orlando he not kill Mazaline. I say gloddam Mazaline. That Mazaline he Chlistian. He says Chlist his brother. Chlist not save him when Li Choo's fingers had Mazaline's thloat. That gloddam Mazaline I kill. That Mazaline kicked me, hit me with whip; where he kick, I sick all time. I not sleep no more since then. That Louise, it no good she stay with Mazaline. Confucius speak like this: 'Young woman go to young man; young bird is for green leaves, not dry branch.' That Louise good woman; that Orlando hell-fellow good. I kill Mazaline--gloddam, with my hands I kill. You want know all why Li Choo kill? You want kill Li Choo? You come!"

As the Coroner stopped reading, amid gasps of excitement, the Chinaman who had brought the notewith brown skin polished like a kettle, expressionless, save for the twinkling mystery of the brown eyesmade three motions of obeisance up and down with his hands clasped in the great sleeves, and then said:

"He not come you; you come him. He gleat man. He speak all--come. I show where."

"Where is he?" asked the Coroner.

The Chinaman did not reply for a moment. Then he said: "He sacrifice before you take him. He gleat man--come." He slip-slopped towards the door as though confident he would be followed.

Two minutes afterwards the Coroner, Orlando, the Young Doctor, Nolan Doyle and the rest stood at the low doorway of what looked like a great grave. It was, however, a big root-house used for storing vegetables in the winter-time. It had not been used since Mazarine arrived at Tralee. Into this place, nor far from the house, Li Choo and his two fellow countrymen had gone the day before, when Mazarine, in his rage, had come forth with the horsewhip to punish the "Chinky," as Li Choo was familiarly known on the ranch.

As they arrived at the vault-like place in the ground, which would hold many tons of roots, another Chinaman came to the doorway. He was one of the two who, in their sudden coming and going, had seemed like magic people to Mazarine the day before. He made upward and downward motions of respect with clasped hands in the blue sleeves, and presently, in perfect English, he said:

"In one minute Li Choo will receive you. It is the moment of sacrifice. You wish him to die for the death of Mazarine. So be it. It is right for him to die. You will hang him; that is your law. He will not prevent you. He has told the truth, but he is making the sacrifice. When that is done you will enter and take him to prison."

The two constables standing beside the Coroner made a move forward, as though to show they meant to enforce the law without any palaver.

The Chinaman raised the palms of both hands at them. "Not yet," he said. Then he looked at the Coroner. "You are master. Will you not prevent them?"

The Coroner motioned the constables back. "All right," he said. "You seem to speak good English."

"I come from England-from Oxford University," answered the Chinaman with dignity. "I have learned English for many years. I am the son of Duke Ki. I came to see my uncle, the brother of Duke Ki. He is making sacrifice before you take him."

"Well, I'm blasted," said Jonas Billings from the crowd. "Chinese dukes, eh! What's it all about?" "Reg'lar hocus-pocus," remarked the vagabond brother of Rigby the chemist.

At that moment little coloured lights suddenly showed in the darkness of the root-house, and there was the tinkling of a bell. Then a voice seemed calling, but softly, with a long, monotonous, thrilling note.

"Many may not come," said the Chinaman at the door to the Coroner, as he turned and entered the low doorway.

A minute afterwards the two constables held back the crowd from the doorway of the root-house, from the threshold of which a few wooden steps descended to the ground inside.

A strange sight greeted the eyes of those permitted to enter.

The root-house had been transformed. What had been a semi-underground place composed of scantlings, branches of trees and mother earth, with a kind of vaulted roof, had been made into a sort of Chinese temple. All round the walls were hung curtains of black and yellow, decorated with dragons in gold, and above, suspended by cords at the four corners, was a rug or banner of white ornamented with a great tortoise--the sacred animal of Chinese religion--with gold eyes and claws. All round the side of the room were set coloured lights, shaded and dim. Coming from the bright outer sunlight, the place in its shadowed state seemed half-sepulchral.

When the Coroner, Orlando, the Young Doctor and the others had accustomed themselves to the dimness, they saw at the end of the chamber--for such, in effect, it had been made with its trappings and decorations--a figure seated upon the ground. Near by the figure, on either hand, there were

standards bearing banners, and the staffs holding the banners were, bound in white silk, with long streamers hanging down. Half enclosing the banners were fanlike screens. Along the walls also were flags with toothed edges. The figure was seated on a mat of fine bamboo in the midst of this strange scheme of decoration. Behind him, and drawn straight across the chamber, was a sheet of fine white cloth, embroidered with strange designs. He was clothed in a rich jacket of blue, and a pair of sandal-like shoes was placed neatly in front of the bamboo mat. On either side and in front of all, raised a little from the ground, were bowls or calabashes containing fruit, grain and dried and pickled meats. It was all orderly, circumspect, weird, and even stately though the place was small. Finally, in front of the motionless figure was a tiny brazier in which was a small fire.

Before the spectators had taken in the whole picture, the Chinaman who had entered with them came and stood on the right of the space occupied by the mat, near to the banners and the screens, and under a yellow light which hung from the vaulted roof.

The figure on the fine bamboo mat was Li Choo, but not the Li Choo which Tralee and Askatoon had known. He was seated with legs crossed in Oriental fashion and with head slightly bowed. His face was calm and dignified. It had an impassiveness which made an interminable distance between him and those who had till now looked upon him as a poor Chinky, doing a roustabout’s work on a ranch, the handy-man, the Jack-of-all-trades. Yet in spite of the menial work which he had done, it was now to be seen that the despised Li Choo had still lived his own life, removed by centuries and innumerable leagues from his daily slavery.

As they looked at him, brooding, immobile, strange, he lifted his head, and the excessive brightness of his black eyes struck with a sense of awe all who saw. It was absurd that Li Choo, the hireling, "Yellowphiz," as he had also been called, should here command a situation with the authority of one who ruled.

Presently he spoke, not in broken English, but in Chinese. It was interpreted by the Chinaman standing on the right by the screens, in well cadenced, cultured English.

"I have to tell you," said Li Choo--the other’s voice repeated the words after him--"that I am the son of greatness, of a ruler in my own land. It was by the Yang-tze-kiang, and there were riches and pleasant things in the days of my youth. In the hunt, at the tavern, I was first amongst them all. I had great strength. I once killed a bear with my bare hands. My hands had fame.

"I had office in the city where my cousin ruled. He was a bad man, and was soon forgotten, though his children mourn for him as is the custom. I killed him. He gave counsel concerning the city when there was war, but his counsel was that of a traitor, and the city was lost. Now behold, it is written that he who has given counsel about the country or its capital should perish with it when it comes into peril. He would not die--so I killed him; but not before he had heaped upon me baseness and

shame. So I killed him.

"Yet it is written that when a minister kills his ruler, all who are in office with him shall without mercy kill him who did the deed. That is the law. It was the word of the Son of Heaven that this should be. But those who were in office with me would not kill me, because they approved of what I did. Yet they must kill me, since it was the law. What was there to do but in the night to flee, so that they who should kill me might not obey the law? Had I remained, and they had not obeyed the law, they also would have been slain."

He paused for a moment and then went on. "So I fled, and it is many years since by the Yang-tze-kiang I killed my ruler and saved my friends. Yet I had not been faithful to the ancient law, and so through the long years I have done low work among a low people. This was for atonement, for long ago by the Yang-tzekiang I should have died, and behold, I have lived until now. To save my friends from the pain of killing me I fled and lived; but at last here at this place I said to myself that I must die. So, secretly, I made this cellar into a temple.

"That was a year ago, and I sent to my brother the Duke Ki to speak to him what was in my mind, so that he might send my kinsmen to me, that when I came to die, it should be after the manner ordained by the Son of Heaven; that my body should be clothed according to the ancient rites by my own people, my mouth filled with rice, and the meats, and grains and fruits of sacrifice be placed on a mat at the east of my body when I died; that the curtain should be hung before my corpse; that I should be laid upon a mat of fine bamboo, and dressed, and prepared for my grave, and put into a noble coffin as becomes a superior man. Did not the Son of Heaven say that we speak of the end of a superior man, but we speak of the death of a small man? I was a superior man, but I have lived as a small man these many days; and now, behold, I am drawing near to my end as a superior man.

"I wished that nothing should be forgotten; that all should be done when I, of the house of the Duke Ki, came to my superior end. So, these my kinsmen came, these of my family, to be with me at my going, to call my spirit back from the roof-top with face turned to the north, to leap before my death-mat, to wail and bare the shoulders and bind the sackcloth about the head.

"I have served among the low people doing low things, and now I would die, but in the correct way. Once to the listeners Confucius said: 'The great mountain must crumble; the strong beam must break; the wise man must wither away like a plant.' So it is. It is my duty to go to my end, for the time is far spent, and I should do what my friends must have done had I stayed in my ancestral city."

Again he paused, and now he rocked his body backwards and forwards for a moment; then presently he continued: "Yet I would not go without doing good. There should be some act among the low people by which I should be remembered. So, once again, I killed a man. He could not withstand the strength of my fingers--they were like steel upon his throat. As a young

man my fingers were like those of three men.

"Shall a man treat his wife as she, Louise, was treated? Shall a man raise his hand against his wife, and live? also, was he to live--the low man--that struck a high man like me with his hands, with the whip, with his feet, stamping upon me on the ground? Was that to be, and he live? Were the young that should have but one nest to be parted, to have only sorrow, if Joel lived? So I killed him with my hands" (he slightly raised his clasped hands, as though to emphasize what he said, but the gesture was grave and quiet)"--so I killed him, and so I must die.

"It was the duty of my friends to kill me by the Yang-tze-kiang. It is your duty, you of the low people, to kill me who has killed a low man; but my friends by the Yang-tze-kiang were glad that the ruler died, and you of the low people are glad that Joel is dead. Yet it is your duty to kill me. . . . But it shall not be."

He quickly reached out his hands and drew the burning brazier close to his feet; then, suddenly, from a sleeve of his robe he took a little box of the sacred tortoise-shell, pressed his lips to it, opened it, poured its contents upon the flame, leaned over with his face close to the brazier and inhaled the little puff of smoke that came from it.

So for a few seconds--and then he raised himself and sat still with eyes closed and hands clasped in his long sleeves. Presently his head fell forward on his breast.

A pungent smell passed through the chamber. It produced for the moment dizziness in all present. Then the sensation cleared away. The Chinaman at the right of Li Choo looked steadfastly at him; then, all at once, he bared his shoulders and quickly bound a piece of sackcloth round his head. This done, he raised his voice and cried out with a monotonous ululation, and at once a second voice cried out in a long wailing call.

Outside Li Choo’s kinsman, with his face turned to the north, was calling his spirit back, though he knew it would not come.

At the first sound of the voice crying outside, the Chinaman beside Li Choo leaped thrice in front of the brazier, the mat and the moveless body.

At that moment the Young Doctor came forward. He who had leaped stood between him and the body of Li Choo.

"You must not come. Li Choo, the superior man, is dead," he protested.

"I am a doctor," was the reply. "If he is dead, the law will not touch him, and you shall be alone with him, but the law must know that he is dead. That is the way that prevails among the ’low people,'" he added ironically.

The Chinaman stood aside, and the Young Doctor stooped, felt the pulse, touched the heart and lifted up the head and looked into Li Choo’s

sightless eyes.

"He is dead," he said, and he came back again to the Coroner and the others. "Let's get out of this," he added. "He is beyond our reach now. No need for an inquest here. He has killed himself." Then he caught Orlando's hand in a warm grip.

As they left the chamber, the kinsman of Li Choo was gently laying the body down upon the bamboo mat. At the doorway the other son of the Duke Ki was still monotonously calling back the departed spirit.

The inquest on Joel Mazarine was ended presently, and Nolan Doyle and the Young Doctor set out to tell Louise that a "low man," once her husband, had paid a high price for all that he had bought of the fruits of life out of due season.

CHAPTER XVIII

YOUTH HAS ITS WAY

"Aw, Doctor dear, there's manny that's less use in the wurruld than Chinamen, and I'd like to see more o' them here-away," remarked Patsy Kernaghan to the Young Doctor in the springtime of another year. "Stren'th of mind is all right, but stren'th of fingers is better still."

"You're a bloodthirsty pagan, Patsy," returned the Young Doctor.

"Hell to me sowl, then, didn't Li Choo pull things straight? I'm not much of a murd'ring man meself--I haven't the stren'th with me fingers, but there's manny a time I'd like to do what Li Choo done. . . . Shure, I don't want to be sp'akin' ill of the dead, but look at it now. There was ould Mazarine, breakin' the poor child's heart, as fine a fella as iver trod the wurruld achin' for her, and his life bein' spoilt by the goin's on at Tralee. Then in steps the Chinky and with stren'th of mind and stren'th of fingers puts things right."

"No, no, Patsy, you've got bad logic and worse morals in your head. As you say, things were put right, but trouble enough came of it."

"Divils me darlin', Doctor, it was bound to come all right some time. Shure, wasn't it natural the child should be all crumpled up like and lose her head for a while? Wasn't it natural she should fight out agin' takin' the property the leviathin left her, whin she knew there was another will he'd spoke on a paper to the lawyer the night he died, though he hadn't signed it? And isn't it so that yourself it was talked her round!"

The Young Doctor waved a hand reprovingly, but Patsy continued:

"Now, lookin' back on it, don't ye think it was clever enough what you

said till her? 'Do justice to yourself and to others, little lady,' sez you. 'Be just--divide the place up; give two-thirds of it away to the children of Joel's first two wives and keep one-third, which is yours by law in anny case. For why should it be that you should give iverythin' and get nothin'? He had the best of you-of your girlhood and your youth,' sez you. 'Shure y'are entitled to bread and meat, and a roof over you, as a wife, and as one that got nothin' from your married life of what ought to be got by honest girls like you, or by anny woman, if it comes to that,' sez you. Aw, shure then, I know you said it, because, didn't she tell it all to Norah Doyle, and didn't Norah tell Nolan, and me sittin' by and glad enough that the cleverest man betune here and the other side of the wurruld talked her round! Aw, how you talk, y'r anner! Shure, isn't it the wonder that you don't talk the dead back to the wurruld out of which you help them? I might ha' been a great man meself" --he grinned--"if I'd had your eddication, but here I am, a 'low man' as Li Choo said, takin' me place simple as a babe."

"Patsy, you save my life," remarked the Young Doctor. "You save my life daily. That's why I'm glad you're getting a good home at last."

"At Slow Down Ranch, with her that's to be its queen! Well, isn't that like her to be thinkin' of others? As a rule the rich is so busy lookin' afther what they've got that they're not worryin' about the poor; but she thought of me, didn't she?"

The Young Doctor nodded, and Patsy pursued his tale. "Haven't I see her day in, day out, at Nolan Doyle's ranch, and don't I understan' why it is she's not set foot in Tralee since the ould one left it feet foremost, for his new seven-foot home, housed in a bit of wood-him that had had the run of the wurruld? She'll set no foot in Tralee at all anny time, if she can help it--that's the breed of her.

"Well, it is as it is, and what's goin' to be will plaze every mother's son in Askatoon. Giggles they called him! A bit of a girl they thought him! What's he turned out to be, though he's giggling still? Why, a man that's got the double cinch on Askatoon. Even that fella Burlingame had nothin' to say ag'in' him; and when Burlingame hasn't anny mud to throw, then you must stop and look hard. Shure, the blessed Virgin, or the Almighty himself, couldn't escape the tongue of Augustus Burlingame--not even you."

The Young Doctor burst out laughing. "'The Blessed Mary, or the Almighty himself--not even you!' Well, Patsy, you're a wonder," he said.

"Aw, you're not goin' to get off by scoffin' at me," remarked Patsy. "Shure, what did Augustus Burlingame say of you?--well now, what did he say?"

"Yes, Patsy, what was it?" urged the other. "Shure, he criticized you. He called you 'Squills,' and said you'd helped more people intil the wurruld than out of it."

"You call that criticism. Patsy?"

"Whichever way you look at it, hasn't it an ugly face? Is it a kindness to man to bring him into the wurruld? That's wan way of lookin' at it. But suppose he meant the other thing, that not being married, you--"

"Patsy Kernaghan," interjected the Young Doctor sternly, "you're not fit company. Take care, or there'll be no Slow Down Ranch for you. An evil mind----"

Now it was Patsy's turn to interrupt: "Watch me now, I think that wan of the most beautiful things I iver saw was them two young people comin' together. Five long months it was, afther Mazarine was put away before she spoke with him. It was in the gardin at Nolan's ranch, and even then it wasn't aisy till her. Not that she didn't want to see him all the time; not, I'll be bound, that she didn't say, when you and Nolan first told her the mastodon was dead, 'Thank God, I'm free!' But, there he was, flung out of the wurruld without a minute's notice, and with the black thing in his heart. Shure you'll be understandin' it a thousand times better than meself, y'r anner."

He took a pinch of snuff from a little box, offered it to the Young Doctor and continued his story.

"Well, as I said, whin five months had gone by they met. By chanct I saw the meetin'. Watch me now, I'll tell you how it was. She was sittin' on a bench in the gardin, lookin' in front of her and seein' nothin' but what was in her mind's eye, and who can tell what she would be seein'! There she sat sweet as a saint, very straight up, the palms of her hands laid on the bench on either side, as though they was supporfin' her--like a statue she looked. I watched her manny a minute, but she niver moved. Well, there she was, lookin'--lookin' in front o' her, whin round the big tree in the middle of the gardin he come and stood forninst her. They just looked and looked at each other without a word. Like months it seemed. They looked, and looked, as though they was tryin' to read some story in each other's eyes, and then she give a kind of joyful moan, and intil his arms she went like a nestlin' bird.

"He raised up her head, and-well, now, y'r anner, I niver saw anything I liked better. There niver had been a girl in his life, and there niver was a man in hers--not one that mattered, till they two took up with each other, and it's a thing--well, y'r anner, I'd be a proud man if I could write it down. It's a story that'd take its place beside the ancient ones."

The Young Doctor looked at Patsy meditatively. "Patsy," said he, "the difference between the north and the south of Ireland is that in the south they are all poets--" He paused.

"Well, you haven't finished, y 'r anner," said Kernaghan.

"And in the north they think they are," continued the Young Doctor. "I'd like to see those two as your eyes in front of your mind saw them, Patsy."

"Aw, well then, you couldn't do it, Doctor dear, for you've niver been in love. Shure, there's no heart till ye !" answered the Irishman, and took another pinch of snuff with a flourish.

.....

Flamingo-like in her bright-coloured, figured gown, with a wild flower in her hair and her gray curls dancing gently at her temples, a little old lady trotted up and down the big sitting-room of Slow Down Ranch, talking volubly and insistently. One ironically minded would have said she chirruped, for her words came out in not unmusical, if staccato, notes, and she shook her shrivelled, ringed fingers reprovingly at a stalwart young man.

Once or twice, as she seemed to threaten him with what the poet called "The slow, unmoving finger of scorn," he giggled. It was evident that he was at once amused and troubled. This voice had cherished and chided him all his life, and he could measure accurately what was behind it. It was a wilful voice. It had the insistance which power gives, and to a woman --or to most women--power is either money or beauty, since, in the world as it is, office and authority are denied them. Beauty was gone from the face of the ancient dame, but she still had much money, and, on rare occasions, it gave her a little arrogance. It did so now as she admonished her beloved son, who at any time would have renounced fortune, or hope of fortune, for some wilful idea of his own. A less sordid modern did not exist.

He was not very effective in the contest of tongue between his mother and himself. As the talk went on he foresaw that he was to be beaten; yet he persisted, for he loved a joy-wrangle, as he called it, with his mother. He had argued with her many a time, just to see her in a harmless passion, and note how the youth of her came back, giving high colour to the wrinkled face, and how the eyes shone with a brightness which had been constant in them long ago. They were now quarrelling over that ever-fruitful cause of antagonism--the second woman in the life of a man. Yet, strange to say, the flamingo-like Eugenie Guise, was fighting for the second woman, not against her.

"I'll say it all again and again and again till you have sense, Orlando," she declared. "Your old mother hasn't lived all these years for nothing. I'm not thinking of you; I'm thinking of her." She pointed towards the door of another room, from which came sounds of laughter--happy laughter --in which a man's and a woman's voices sounded. "On the day she comes into this house--and that's the day after to-morrow--I shall go. I'll stand at the door and welcome you, and see you have a good wedding-breakfast and that it all goes off grand, then I shall vanish."

Orlando made a helpless gesture of the hand. "Well, mother, as I said, it will make us both unhappy--Louise as much as me. You and I have never been parted except for a few weeks at a time, and I'm sure I don't know how I could stand it."

"Rather late to think about it," the other returned. "You can't have two women spoiling you in one house and being jealous of each other--oh, you needn't toss your fingers! Even two women that love each other can't bear the competition. Just because I love her and want her to be happy, off I go to your Aunt Amelia to live with her. She's poor, and I'll still have someone to boss as I've bossed you. I never knew how much I loved Amelia till she got sick last year when everything terrible was happening here. I'm going, Orlando--

Two birds hopping on one branch
Would kill the joy of Slow Down Ranch--

"There, I made that up on the moment. It's true, even if it is poetry."

"It isn't poetry, mother," was the reply, and there was an ironical look in Orlando's eyes. "Poetry's the truth of life," he hastened to add carefully, "and it's not poetry to say that you could be a kill-joy."

The little lady tossed her head. "Well, you'll never have a chance to prove it, for I'm taking the express east on the night of your wedding. That's settled. Amelia needs me, and I'm going to her. . . . Your wedding present will be the ranch and a hundred thousand dollars," she added.

"You're the sun-dried fruit of Paradise, Mother," Orlando said, taking her by the arms.

"I heard the Young Doctor call me a bird of Paradise once," she returned. "People don't know how sharp my ears are. . . . But I never stored it up against him. Taste is born in you, and if people haven't got it in the cradle, they never have it. I suppose his mother went around in a black alpaca and wore her hair like a wardress in a jail. I'm sorry for him--that's all."

"Suppose I should get homesick for you and run away from her!" remarked Orlando slyly.

"Run away with her to me," chirruped Eugenie, with a vain little laugh.

Suddenly her manner changed, and she looked at her son with dreamy intensity. "You are so wonderfully young, my dear," she said, "and I am very old. I had much happiness with your father while he lived. He was such a wise man. Always he gave in to me in the little things, and I gave in to him in all the big things. He almost made me a sensible woman."

There was a strange wistfulness in her face. Through all the years, down beneath everything, there had been the helpless knowledge in her own small, garish mind that she had little sense; now she realized that she was given a chance to atone for all her pettiness by doing one great sensible thing.

Orlando was about to embrace her, but she briskly, turned away. She

could not endure that. If he did it, the pent-up motherhood would break forth, and her courage would take flight. She was something more than the "parokeet of Pernambukoko," as Patsy Kernaghan had called her.

She went to the door of the other room. "I want to talk to the Young Doctor about Amelia," she said. "He's clever, and perhaps he could give her a good prescription. I'll send Louise to you. It's nicer courting in this room where you can see the garden and the grand hills. You're going to give Louise the little gray mare you lassooed last year, aren't you? I always think of Louise when I look at that gray mare. You had to break the pony's heart before she could be what she is--the nicest little thing that ever was broken by a man's hand; and Louise, she had to have her heart broken too. Your father and I were almost of an age--he was two years older, and we had our youth together. And you and Louise are so wonderfully young, too. Be good to her, son. She's never been married. She was only in prison with that old lizard. What a horrible mouth he had! It's shut now," she added remorselessly. Opening the door of the other room, she disappeared.

A moment later, Louise entered upon Orlando.

The vanished months had worked wonders in her. She was like the young summer beyond the open windows, alive to her finger-tips, shyly radiant, with shining eyes, yet in their depths an alluring pensiveness never to leave them altogether. Knowledge had come to her; an apprehending soul was speaking in her face. The sweetness of her smile, as she looked at the man before her, was such as could only be distilled from the bitter herbs of the desert.

"Oh, Orlando!" she said joyously, as she came forward.

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