**The Fall of Edward Barnard**

## W. Somerset Maugham

BATEMAN Hunter slept badly. For a fortnight on the boat that brought him from Tahiti to San Francisco he had been thinking of the story he had to tell, and for three days on the train he had repeated to himself the words in which he meant to tell it. But in a few hours now he would be in Chicago, and doubts assailed him. His conscience, always very sensitive, was not at ease. He was uncertain that he had done all that was possible, it was on his honour to do much more than the possible, and the thought was disturbing that, in a matter which so nearly touched his own interest, he had allowed his interest to prevail over his quixotry. Self-sacrifice appealed so keenly to his imagination that the inability to exercise it gave him a sense of disillusion. He was like the philanthropist who with altruistic motives builds model dwellings for the poor and finds that he has made a lucrative investment. He cannot prevent the satisfaction he feels in the ten per cent which rewards the bread he had cast upon the waters, but he has an awkward feeling that it detracts somewhat from the savour of his virtue. Bateman Hunter knew that his heart was pure, but he was not quite sure how steadfastly, when he told her his story, he would endure the scrutiny of Isabel Longstaffe’s cool grey eyes. They were far-seeing and wise. She measured the standards of others by her own meticulous uprightness and there could be no greater censure than the cold silence with which she expressed her disapproval of a conduct that did not satisfy her exacting code. There was no appeal from her judgment, for, having made up her mind, she never changed it. But Bateman would not have had her different. He loved not only the beauty of her person, slim and straight, with the proud carriage of her head, but still more the beauty of her soul. With her truthfulness, her rigid sense of honour, her fearless outlook, she seemed to him to collect in herself all that was most admirable in his countrywomen. But he saw in her something more than the perfect type of the American girl, he felt that her exquisiteness was peculiar in a way to her environment, and he was assured that no city in the world could have produced her but Chicago. A pang seized him when he remembered that he must deal so bitter a blow to her pride, and anger flamed up in his heart when he thought of Edward Barnard.

But at last the train steamed in to Chicago and he exulted when he saw the long streets of grey houses. He could hardly bear his impatience at the thought of State and Wabash with their crowded pavements, their hustling traffic, and their noise. He was at home. And he was glad that he had been born in the most important city in the United States. San Francisco was provincial, New York was effete; the future of America lay in the development of its economic possibilities, and Chicago, by its position and by the energy of its citizens, was destined to become the real capital of the country.

“I guess I shall live long enough to see it the biggest city in the world,” Bateman said to himself as he stepped down to the platform.

His father had come to meet him, and after a hearty handshake, the pair of them, tall, slender, and well-made, with the same fine, ascetic features and thin lips, walked out of the station. Mr Hunter’s automobile was waiting for them and they got in. Mr Hunter caught his son’s proud and happy glance as he looked at the street.

“Glad to be back, son?” he asked.

“I should just think I was,” said Bateman.

His eyes devoured the restless scene.

“I guess there’s a bit more traffic here than in your South Sea island,” laughed Mr Hunter. “Did you like it there?”

“Give me Chicago, dad,” answered Bateman.

“You haven’t brought Edward Barnard back with you.”

“No.”

“How was he?”

Bateman was silent for a moment, and his handsome, sensitive face darkened.

“I’d sooner not speak about him, dad,” he said at last.

“That’s all right, my son. I guess your mother will be a happy woman to-day.”

They passed out of the crowded streets in the Loop and drove along the lake till they came to the imposing house, an exact copy of a ch #226;teau on the Loire, which Mr Hunter had built himself some years before. As soon as Bateman was alone in his room he asked for a number on the telephone. His heart leaped when he heard the voice that answered him.

“Good-morning, Isabel,” he said gaily.

“Good-morning, Bateman.”

“How did you recognise my voice?”

“It is not so long since I heard it last. Besides, I was expecting you.”

“When may I see you?”

“Unless you have anything better to do perhaps you’ll dine with us to-night.”

“You know very well that I couldn’t possibly have anything better to do.”

“I suppose that you’re full of news?”

He thought he detected in her voice a note of apprehension.

“Yes,” he answered.

“Well, you must tell me to-night. Good-bye.”

She rang off. It was characteristic of her that she should be able to wait so many unnecessary hours to know what so immensely concerned her. To Bateman there was an admirable fortitude in her restraint.

At dinner, at which beside himself and Isabel no one was present but her father and mother, he watched her guide the conversation into the channels of an urbane small-talk, and it occurred to him that in just such a manner would a marquise under the shadow of the guillotine toy with the affairs of a day that would know no morrow. Her delicate features, the aristocratic shortness of her upper lip, and her wealth of fair hair suggested the marquise again, and it must have been obvious, even if it were not notorious, that in her veins flowed the best blood in Chicago. The dining-room was a fitting frame to her fragile beauty, for Isabel had caused the house, a replica of a palace on the Grand Canal at Venice, to be furnished by an English expert in the style of Louis XV; and the graceful decoration linked with the name of that amorous monarch enhanced her loveliness and at the same time acquired from it a more profound significance. For Isabel’s mind was richly stored, and her conversation, however light, was never flippant. She spoke now of the *Musicale* to which she and her mother had been in the afternoon, of the lectures which an English poet was giving at the Auditorium, of the political situation, and of the Old Master which her father had recently bought for fifty thousand dollars in New York. It comforted Bateman to hear her. He felt that he was once more in the civilised world, at the centre of culture and distinction; and certain voices, troubling and yet against his will refusing to still their clamour, were at last silent in his heart.

“Gee, but it’s good to be back in Chicago,” he said.

At last dinner was over, and when they went out of the dining-room Isabel said to her mother:

“I’m going to take Bateman along to my den. We have various things to talk about.”

“Very well, my dear,” said Mrs Longstaffe. “You’ll find your father and me in the Madame du Barry room when you’re through.”

Isabel led the young man upstairs and showed him into the room of which he had so many charming memories. Though he knew it so well he could not repress the exclamation of delight which it always wrung from him. She looked round with a smile.

“I think it’s a success,” she said. “The main thing is that it’s right. There’s not even an ashtray that isn’t of the period.”

“I suppose that’s what makes it so wonderful. Like all you do it’s so superlatively right.”

They sat down in front of a log fire and Isabel looked at him with calm grave eyes.

“Now what have you to say to me?” she asked.

“I hardly know how to begin.”

“Is Edward Barnard coming back?”

“No.”

There was a long silence before Bateman spoke again, and with each of them it was filled with many thoughts. It was a difficult story he had to tell, for there were things in it which were so offensive to her sensitive ears that he could not bear to tell them, and yet in justice to her, no less than in justice to himself, he must tell her the whole truth.

It had all begun long ago when he and Edward Barnard, still at college, had met Isabel Longstaffe at the tea-party given to introduce her to society. They had both known her when she was a child and they long-legged boys, but for two years she had been in Europe to finish her education and it was with a surprised delight that they renewed acquaintance with the lovely girl who returned. Both of them fell desperately in love with her, but Bateman saw quickly that she had eyes only for Edward, and, devoted to his friend, he resigned himself to the role of confidant. He passed bitter moments, but he could not deny that Edward was worthy of his good fortune, and, anxious that nothing should impair the friendship he so greatly valued, he took care never by a hint to disclose his own feelings. In six months the young couple were engaged. But they were very young and Isabel’s father decided that they should not marry at least till Edward graduated. They had to wait a year. Bateman remembered the winter at the end of which Isabel and Edward were to be married, a winter of dances and theatre-parties and of informal gaieties at which he, the constant third, was always present. He loved her no less because she would shortly be his friend’s wife; her smile, a gay word she flung him, the confidence of her affection, never ceased to delight him; and he congratulated himself, somewhat complacently, because he did not envy them their happiness. Then an accident happened. A great bank failed, there was a panic on the exchange, and Edward Barnard’s father found himself a ruined man. He came home one night, told his wife that he was penniless, and after dinner, going into his study, shot himself.

A week later, Edward Barnard, with a tired, white face, went to Isabel and asked her to release him. Her only answer was to throw her arms round his neck and burst into tears.

“Don’t make it harder for me, sweet,” he said.

“Do you think I can let you go now? I love you.”

“How can I ask you to marry me? The whole thing’s hopeless. Your father would never let you. I haven’t a cent.”

“What do I care? I love you.”

He told her his plans. He had to earn money at once, and George Braunschmidt, an old friend of his family, had offered to take him into his own business. He was a South Sea merchant, and he had agencies in many of the islands of the Pacific. He had suggested that Edward should go to Tahiti for a year or two, where under the best of his managers he could learn the details of that varied trade, and at the end of that time he promised the young man a position in Chicago. It was a wonderful opportunity, and when he had finished his explanations Isabel was once more all smiles.

“You foolish boy, why have you been trying to make me miserable?”

His face lit up at her words and his eyes flashed.

“Isabel, you don’t mean to say you’ll wait for me?”

“Don’t you think you’re worth it?” she smiled.

“Ah, don’t laugh at me now. I beseech you to be serious. It may be for two years.”

“Have no fear. I love you, Edward. When you come back I will marry you.”

Edward’s employer was a man who did not like delay and he had told him that if he took the post he offered he must sail that day week from San Francisco. Edward spent his last evening with Isabel. It was after dinner that Mr Longstaffe, saying he wanted a word with Edward, took him into the smoking-room. Mr Longstaffe had accepted good-naturedly the arrangement which his daughter had told him of and Edward could not imagine what mysterious communication he had now to make. He was not a little perplexed to see that his host was embarrassed. He faltered. He talked of trivial things. At last he blurted it out.

“I guess you’ve heard of Arnold Jackson,” he said, looking at Edward with a frown.

Edward hesitated. His natural truthfulness obliged him to admit a knowledge he would gladly have been able to deny.

“Yes, I have. But it’s a long time ago. I guess I didn’t pay very much attention.”

“There are not many people in Chicago who haven’t heard of Arnold Jackson,” said Mr Longstaffe bitterly, “and if there are they’ll have no difficulty in finding someone who’ll be glad to tell them. Did you know he was Mrs Longstaffe’s brother?”

“Yes, I knew that.”

“Of course we’ve had no communication with him for many years. He left the country as soon as he was able to, and I guess the country wasn’t sorry to see the last of him. We understand he lives in Tahiti. My advice to you is to give him a wide berth, but if you do hear anything about him Mrs Longstaffe and I would be very glad if you’d let us know.”

“Sure.”

“That was all I wanted to say to you. Now I daresay you’d like to join the ladies.”

There are few families that have not among their members one whom, if their neighbours permitted, they would willingly forget, and they are fortunate when the lapse of a generation or two has invested his vagaries with a romantic glamour. But when he is actually alive, if his peculiarities are not of the kind that can be condoned by the phrase, “he is nobody’s enemy but his own,” a safe one when the culprit has no worse to answer for than alcoholism or wandering affections, the only possible course is silence. And it was this which the Longstaffes had adopted towards Arnold Jackson. They never talked of him. They would not even pass through the street in which he had lived. Too kind to make his wife and children suffer for his misdeeds, they had supported them for years, but on the understanding that they should live in Europe. They did everything they could to blot out all recollection of Arnold Jackson and yet were conscious that the story was as fresh in the public mind as when first the scandal burst upon a gaping world. Arnold Jackson was as black a sheep as any family could suffer from. A wealthy banker, prominent in his church, a philanthropist, a man respected by all, not only for his connections (in his veins ran the blue blood of Chicago), but also for his upright character, he was arrested one day on a charge of fraud; and the dishonesty which the trial brought to light was not of the sort which could be explained by a sudden temptation; it was deliberate and systematic. Arnold Jackson was a rogue. When he was sent to the penitentiary for seven years there were few who did not think he had escaped lightly.

When at the end of this last evening the lovers separated it was with many protestations of devotion. Isabel, all tears, was consoled a little by her certainty of Edward’s passionate love. It was a strange feeling that she had. It made her wretched to part from him and yet she was happy because he adored her.

This was more than two years ago.

He had written to her by every mail since then, twenty-four letters in all, for the mail went but once a month, and his letters had been all that a lover’s letters should be. They were intimate and charming, humorous sometimes, especially of late, and tender. At first they suggested that he was homesick, they were full of his desire to get back to Chicago and Isabel; and, a little anxiously, she wrote begging him to persevere. She was afraid that he might throw up his opportunity and come racing back. She did not want her lover to lack endurance and she quoted to him the lines:

“*I could not love thee, dear, so much,*

*Loved I not honour more.”*

But presently he seemed to settle down and it made Isabel very happy to observe his growing enthusiasm to introduce American methods into that forgotten corner of the world. But she knew him, and at the end of the year, which was the shortest time he could possibly stay in Tahiti, she expected to have to use all her influence to dissuade him from coming home. It was much better that he should learn the business thoroughly, and if they had been able to wait a year there seemed no reason why they should not wait another. She talked it over with Bateman Hunter, always the most generous of friends (during those first few days after Edward went she did not know what she would have done without him), and they decided that Edward’s future must stand before everything. It was with relief that she found as the time passed that he made no suggestion of returning.

“He’s splendid, isn’t he?” she exclaimed to Bateman.

“He’s white, through and through.”

“Reading between the lines of his letter I know he hates it over there, but he’s sticking it out because....”

She blushed a little and Bateman, with the grave smile which was so attractive in him, finished the sentence for her.

“Because he loves you.”

“It makes me feel so humble,” she said.

“You’re wonderful, Isabel, you’re perfectly wonderful.”

But the second year passed and every month Isabel continued to receive a letter from Edward, and presently it began to seem a little strange that he did not speak of coming back. He wrote as though he were settled definitely in Tahiti, and what was more, comfortably settled. She was surprised. Then she read his letters again, all of them, several times; and now, reading between the lines indeed, she was puzzled to notice a change which had escaped her. The later letters were as tender and as delightful as the first, but the tone was different. She was vaguely suspicious of their humour, she had the instinctive mistrust of her sex for that unaccountable quality, and she discerned in them now a flippancy which perplexed her. She was not quite certain that the Edward who wrote to her now was the same Edward that she had known. One afternoon, the day after a mail had arrived from Tahiti, when she was driving with Bateman he said to her:

“Did Edward tell you when he was sailing?”

“No, he didn’t mention it. I thought he might have said something to you about it.”

“Not a word.”

“You know what Edward is,” she laughed in reply, “he has no sense of time. If it occurs to you next time you write you might ask him when he’s thinking of coming.”

Her manner was so unconcerned that only Bateman’s acute sensitiveness could have discerned in her request a very urgent desire. He laughed lightly.

“Yes. I’ll ask him. I can’t imagine what he’s thinking about.”

A few days later, meeting him again, she noticed that something troubled him. They had been much together since Edward left Chicago; they were both devoted to him and each in his desire to talk of the absent one found a willing listener; the consequence was that Isabel knew every expression of Bateman’s face, and his denials now were useless against her keen instinct. Something told her that his harassed look had to do with Edward and she did not rest till she had made him confess.

“The fact is,” he said at last, “I heard in a round-about way that Edward was no longer working for Braunschmidt and Co., and yesterday I took the opportunity to ask Mr Braunschmidt himself.”

“Well?”

“Edward left his employment with them nearly a year ago.”

“How strange he should have said nothing about it!”

Bateman hesitated, but he had gone so far now that he was obliged to tell the rest. It made him feel dreadfully embarrassed.

“He was fired.”

“In heaven’s name what for?”

“It appears they warned him once or twice, and at last they told him to get out. They say he was lazy and incompetent.”

“Edward?”

They were silent for a while, and then he saw that Isabel was crying. Instinctively he seized her hand.

“Oh, my dear, don’t, don’t,” he said. “I can’t bear to see it.”

She was so unstrung that she let her hand rest in his. He tried to console her.

“It’s incomprehensible, isn’t it? It’s so unlike Edward. I can’t help feeling there must be some mistake.”

She did not say anything for a while, and when she spoke it was hesitatingly.

“Has it struck you that there was anything queer in his letters lately?” she asked, looking away, her eyes all bright with tears.

He did not quite know how to answer.

“I have noticed a change in them,” he admitted. “He seems to have lost that high seriousness which I admired so much in him. One would almost think that the things that matter-well, don’t matter.”

Isabel did not reply. She was vaguely uneasy.

“Perhaps in his answer to your letter he’ll say when he’s coming home. All we can do is to wait for that.”

Another letter came from Edward for each of them, and still he made no mention of his return; but when he wrote he could not have received Bateman’s enquiry. The next mail would bring them an answer to that. The next mail came, and Bateman brought Isabel the letter he had just received; but the first glance of his face was enough to tell her that he was disconcerted. She read it through carefully and then, with slightly tightened lips, read it again.

“It’s a very strange letter,” she said. “I don’t quite understand it.”

“One might almost think that he was joshing me,” said Bateman, flushing.

“It reads like that, but it must be unintentional. That’s so unlike Edward.”

“He says nothing about coming back.”

“If I weren’t so confident of his love I should think.... I hardly know what I should think.”

It was then that Bateman had broached the scheme which during the afternoon had formed itself in his brain. The firm, founded by his father, in which he was now a partner, a firm which manufactured all manner of motor vehicles, was about to establish agencies in Honolulu, Sidney, and Wellington; and Bateman proposed that himself should go instead of the manager who had been suggested. He could return by Tahiti; in fact, travelling from Wellington, it was inevitable to do so; and he could see Edward.

“There’s some mystery and I’m going to clear it up. That’s the only way to do it.”

“Oh, Bateman, how can you be so good and kind?” she exclaimed.

“You know there’s nothing in the world I want more than your happiness, Isabel.”

She looked at him and she gave him her hands.

“You’re wonderful, Bateman. I didn’t know there was anyone in the world like you. How can I ever thank you?”

“I don’t want your thanks. I only want to be allowed to help you.”

She dropped her eyes and flushed a little. She was so used to him that she had forgotten how handsome he was. He was as tall as Edward and as well made, but he was dark and pale of face, while Edward was ruddy. Of course she knew he loved her. It touched her. She felt very tenderly towards him.

It was from this journey that Bateman Hunter was now returned.

The business part of it took him somewhat longer than he expected and he had much time to think of his two friends. He had come to the conclusion that it could be nothing serious that prevented Edward from coming home, a pride, perhaps, which made him determined to make good before he claimed the bride he adored; but it was a pride that must be reasoned with. Isabel was unhappy. Edward must come back to Chicago with him and marry her at once. A position could be found for him in the works of the Hunter Motor Traction and Automobile Company. Bateman, with a bleeding heart, exulted at the prospect of giving happiness to the two persons he loved best in the world at the cost of his own. He would never marry. He would be godfather to the children of Edward and Isabel, and many years later when they were both dead he would tell Isabel’s daughter how long, long ago he had loved her mother. Bateman’s eyes were veiled with tears when he pictured this scene to himself.

Meaning to take Edward by surprise he had not cabled to announce his arrival, and when at last he landed at Tahiti he allowed a youth, who said he was the son of the house, to lead him to the Hotel de la Fleur. He chuckled when he thought of his friend’s amazement on seeing him, the most unexpected of visitors, walk into his office.

“By the way,” he asked, as they went along, “can you tell me where I shall find Mr. Edward Barnard?”

“Barnard?” said the youth. “I seem to know the name.”

“He’s an American. A tall fellow with light brown hair and blue eyes. He’s been here over two years.”

“Of course. Now I know who you mean. You mean Mr Jackson’s nephew.”

“Whose nephew?”

“Mr Arnold Jackson.”

“I don’t think we’re speaking of the same person,” answered Bateman, frigidly.

He was startled. It was queer that Arnold Jackson, known apparently to all and sundry, should live here under the disgraceful name in which he had been convicted. But Bateman could not imagine whom it was that he passed off as his nephew. Mrs Longstaffe was his only sister and he had never had a brother. The young man by his side talked volubly in an English that had something in it of the intonation of a foreign tongue, and Bateman, with a sidelong glance, saw, what he had not noticed before, that there was in him a good deal of native blood. A touch of hauteur involuntarily entered into his manner. They reached the hotel. When he had arranged about his room Bateman asked to be directed to the premises of Braunschmidt amp; Co. They were on the front, facing the lagoon, and, glad to feel the solid earth under his feet after eight days at sea, he sauntered down the sunny road to the water’s edge. Having found the place he sought, Bateman sent in his card to the manager and was led through a lofty barn-like room, half store and half warehouse, to an office in which sat a stout, spectacled, bald-headed man.

“Can you tell me where I shall find Mr Edward Barnard? I understand he was in this office for some time.”

“That is so. I don’t know just where he is.”

“But I thought he came here with a particular recommendation from Mr Braunschmidt. I know Mr Braunschmidt very well.”

The fat man looked at Bateman with shrewd, suspicious eyes. He called to one of the boys in the warehouse.

“Say, Henry, where’s Barnard now, d'you know?”

“He’s working at Cameron’s, I think,” came the answer from someone who did not trouble to move.

The fat man nodded.

“If you turn to your left when you get out of here you’ll come to Cameron’s in about three minutes.”

Bateman hesitated.

“I think I should tell you that Edward Barnard is my greatest friend. I was very much surprised when I heard he’d left Braunschmidt amp; Co.”

The fat man’s eyes contracted till they seemed like pin-points, and their scrutiny made Bateman so uncomfortable that he felt himself blushing.

“I guess Braunschmidt amp; Co. and Edward Barnard didn’t see eye to eye on certain matters,” he replied.

Bateman did not quite like the fellow’s manner, so he got up, not without dignity, and with an apology for troubling him bade him good-day. He left the place with a singular feeling that the man he had just interviewed had much to tell him, but no intention of telling it. He walked in the direction indicated and soon found himself at Cameron’s. It was a trader’s store, such as he had passed half a dozen of on his way, and when he entered the first person he saw, in his shirt sleeves, measuring out a length of trade cotton, was Edward. It gave him a start to see him engaged in so humble an occupation. But he had scarcely appeared when Edward, looking up, caught sight of him, and gave a joyful cry of surprise.

“Bateman! Who ever thought of seeing you here?”

He stretched his arm across the counter and wrung Bateman’s hand. There was no self-consciousness in his manner and the embarrassment was all on Bateman’s side.

“Just wait till I’ve wrapped this package.”

With perfect assurance he ran his scissors across the stuff, folded it, made it into a parcel, and handed it to the dark-skinned customer.

“Pay at the desk, please.”

Then, smiling, with bright eyes, he turned to Bateman.

“How did you show up here? Gee, I am delighted to see you. Sit down, old man. Make yourself at home.”

“We can’t talk here. Come along to my hotel. I suppose you can get away?”

This he added with some apprehension.

“Of course I can get away. We’re not so businesslike as all that in Tahiti.” He called out to a Chinese who was standing behind the opposite counter. “Ah-Ling, when the boss comes tell him a friend of mine’s just arrived from America and I’ve gone out to have a drain with him.”

“All-light,” said the Chinese, with a grin.

Edward slipped on a coat and, putting on his hat, accompanied Bateman out of the store. Bateman attempted to put the matter facetiously.

“I didn’t expect to find you selling three and a half yards of rotten cotton to a greasy nigger,” he laughed.

“Braunschmidt fired me, you know, and I thought that would do as well as anything else.”

Edward’s candour seemed to Bateman very surprising, but he thought it indiscreet to pursue the subject.

“I guess you won’t make a fortune where you are,” he answered, somewhat dryly.

“I guess not. But I earn enough to keep body and soul together, and I’m quite satisfied with that.”

“You wouldn’t have been two years ago.”

“We grow wiser as we grow older,” retorted Edward, gaily.

Bateman took a glance at him. Edward was dressed in a suit of shabby white ducks, none too clean, and a large straw hat of native make. He was thinner than he had been, deeply burned by the sun, and he was certainly better looking than ever. But there was something in his appearance that disconcerted Bateman. He walked with a new jauntiness; there was a carelessness in his demeanour, a gaiety about nothing in particular, which Bateman could not precisely blame, but which exceedingly puzzled him.

“I’m blest if I can see what he’s got to be so darned cheerful about,” he said to himself.

They arrived at the hotel and sat on the terrace. A Chinese boy brought them cocktails. Edward was most anxious to hear all the news of Chicago and bombarded his friend with eager questions. His interest was natural and sincere. But the odd thing was that it seemed equally divided among a multitude of subjects. He was as eager to know how Bateman’s father was as what Isabel was doing. He talked of her without a shade of embarrassment, but she might just as well have been his sister as his promised wife; and before Bateman had done analysing the exact meaning of Edward’s remarks he found that the conversation had drifted to his own work and the buildings his father had lately erected. He was determined to bring the conversation back to Isabel and was looking for the occasion when he saw Edward wave his hand cordially. A man was advancing towards them on the terrace, but Bateman’s back was turned to him and he could not see him.

“Come and sit down,” said Edward gaily.

The new-comer approached. He was a very tall, thin man, in white ducks, with a fine head of curly white hair. His face was thin too, long, with a large, hooked nose and a beautiful, expressive mouth.

“This is my old friend Bateman Hunter. I’ve told you about him,” said Edward, his constant smile breaking on his lips.

“I’m pleased to meet you, Mr Hunter. I used to know your father.”

The stranger held out his hand and took the young man’s in a strong, friendly grasp. It was not till then that Edward mentioned the other’s name.

“Mr Arnold Jackson.”

Bateman turned white and he felt his hands grow cold. This was the forger, the convict, this was Isabel’s uncle. He did not know what to say. He tried to conceal his confusion. Arnold Jackson looked at him with twinkling eyes.

“I daresay my name is familiar to you.”

Bateman did not know whether to say yes or no, and what made it more awkward was that both Jackson and Edward seemed to be amused. It was bad enough to have forced on him the acquaintance of the one man on the island he would rather have avoided, but worse to discern that he was being made a fool of. Perhaps, however, he had reached this conclusion too quickly, for Jackson, without a pause, added:

“I understand you’re very friendly with the Longstaffes. Mary Longstaffe is my sister.”

Now Bateman asked himself if Arnold Jackson could think him ignorant of the most terrible scandal that Chicago had ever known. But Jackson put his hand on Edward’s shoulder.

“I can’t sit down, Teddie,” he said. “I’m busy. But you two boys had better come up and dine to-night.”

“That’ll be fine,” said Edward.

“It’s very kind of you, Mr Jackson,” said Bateman, frigidly, “but I’m here for so short a time; my boat sails to-morrow, you know; I think if you’ll forgive me, I won’t come.”

“Oh, nonsense. I’ll give you a native dinner. My wife’s a wonderful cook. Teddie will show you the way. Come early so as to see the sunset. I can give you both a shake-down if you like.”

“Of course we’ll come,” said Edward. “There’s always the devil of a row in the hotel on the night a boat arrives and we can have a good yarn up at the bungalow.”

“I can’t let you off, Mr Hunter,” Jackson continued with the utmost cordiality. “I want to hear all about Chicago and Mary.”

He nodded and walked away before Bateman could say another word.

“We don’t take refusals in Tahiti,” laughed Edward. “Besides, you’ll get the best dinner on the island.”

“What did he mean by saying his wife was a good cook? I happen to know his wife’s in Geneva.”

“That’s a long way off for a wife, isn’t it?” said Edward. “And it’s a long time since he saw her. I guess it’s another wife he’s talking about.”

For some time Bateman was silent. His face was set in grave lines. But looking up he caught the amused look in Edward’s eyes, and he flushed darkly.

“Arnold Jackson is a despicable rogue,” he said.

“I greatly fear he is,” answered Edward, smiling.

“I don’t see how any decent man can have anything to do with him.”

“Perhaps I’m not a decent man.”

“Do you see much of him, Edward?”

“Yes, quite a lot. He’s adopted me as his nephew.”

Bateman leaned forward and fixed Edward with his searching eyes.

“Do you like him?”

“Very much.”

“But don’t you know, doesn’t everyone here know, that he’s a forger and that he’s been a convict? He ought to be hounded out of civilised society.”

Edward watched a ring of smoke that floated from his cigar into the still, scented air.

“I suppose he is a pretty unmitigated rascal,” he said at last. “And I can’t flatter myself that any repentance for his misdeeds offers one an excuse for condoning them. He was a swindler and a hypocrite. You can’t get away from it. I never met a more agreeable companion. He’s taught me everything I know.”

“What has he taught you?” cried Bateman in amazement.

“How to live.”

Bateman broke into ironical laughter.

“A fine master. Is it owing to his lessons that you lost the chance of making a fortune and earn your living now by serving behind a counter in a ten cent store?”

“He has a wonderful personality,” said Edward, smiling good-naturedly. “Perhaps you’ll see what I mean to-night.”

“I’m not going to dine with him if that’s what you mean. Nothing would induce me to set foot within that man’s house.”

“Come to oblige me, Bateman. We’ve been friends for so many years, you won’t refuse me a favour when I ask it.”

Edward’s tone had in it a quality new to Bateman. Its gentleness was singularly persuasive.

“If you put it like that, Edward, I’m bound to come,” he smiled.

Bateman reflected, moreover, that it would be as well to learn what he could about Arnold Jackson. It was plain that he had a great ascendency over Edward, and if it was to be combated it was necessary to discover in what exactly it consisted. The more he talked with Edward the more conscious he became that a change had taken place in him. He had an instinct that it behooved him to walk warily, and he made up his mind not to broach the real purport of his visit till he saw his way more clearly. He began to talk of one thing and another, of his journey and what he had achieved by it, of politics in Chicago, of this common friend and that, of their days together at college.

At last Edward said he must get back to his work and proposed that he should fetch Bateman at five so that they could drive out together to Arnold Jackson’s house.

“By the way, I rather thought you’d be living at this hotel,” said Bateman, as he strolled out of the garden with Edward. “I understand it’s the only decent one here.”

“Not I,” laughed Edward. “It’s a deal too grand for me. I rent a room just outside the town. It’s cheap and clean.”

“If I remember right those weren’t the points that seemed most important to you when you lived in Chicago.”

“Chicago!”

“I don’t know what you mean by that, Edward. It’s the greatest city in the world.”

“I know,” said Edward.

Bateman glanced at him quickly, but his face was inscrutable.

“When are you coming back to it?”

“I often wonder,” smiled Edward.

This answer, and the manner of it, staggered Bateman, but before he could ask for an explanation Edward waved to a half-caste who was driving a passing motor.

“Give us a ride down, Charlie,” he said.

He nodded to Bateman, and ran after the machine that had pulled up a few yards in front. Bateman was left to piece together a mass of perplexing impressions.

Edward called for him in a rickety trap drawn by an old mare, and they drove along a road that ran by the sea. On each side of it were plantations, coconut and vanilla; and now and then they saw a great mango, its fruit yellow and red and purple among the massy green of the leaves; now and then they had a glimpse of the lagoon, smooth and blue, with here and there a tiny islet graceful with tall palms. Arnold Jackson’s house stood on a little hill and only a path led to it, so they unharnessed the mare and tied her to a tree, leaving the trap by the side of the road. To Bateman it seemed a happy-go-lucky way of doing things. But when they went up to the house they were met by a tall, handsome native woman, no longer young, with whom Edward cordially shook hands. He introduced Bateman to her.

“This is my friend Mr Hunter. We’re going to dine with you, Lavina.”

“All right,” she said, with a quick smile. “Arnold ain’t back yet.”

“We’ll go down and bathe. Let us have a couple of *pareos* .”

The woman nodded and went into the house.

“Who is that?” asked Bateman.

“Oh, that’s Lavina. She’s Arnold’s wife.”

Bateman tightened his lips, but said nothing. In a moment the woman returned with a bundle, which she gave to Edward; and the two men, scrambling down a steep path, made their way to a grove of coconut trees on the beach. They undressed and Edward showed his friend how to make the strip of red trade cotton which is called a *pareo* into a very neat pair of bathing-drawers. Soon they were splashing in the warm, shallow water. Edward was in great spirits. He laughed and shouted and sang. He might have been fifteen. Bateman had never seen him so gay, and afterwards when they lay on the beach, smoking cigarettes, in the limpid air, there was such an irresistible light-heartedness in him that Bateman was taken aback.

“You seem to find life mighty pleasant,” said he.

“I do.”

They heard a soft movement and looking round saw that Arnold Jackson was coming towards them.

“I thought I’d come down and fetch you two boys back,” he said. “Did you enjoy your bath, Mr Hunter?”

“Very much,” said Bateman.

Arnold Jackson, no longer in spruce ducks, wore nothing but a *pareo* round his loins and walked barefoot. His body was deeply browned by the sun. With his long, curling white hair and his ascetic face he made a fantastic figure in the native dress, but he bore himself without a trace of self-consciousness.

“If you’re ready we’ll go right up,” said Jackson.

“I’ll just put on my clothes,” said Bateman.

“Why, Teddie, didn’t you bring a *pareo* for your friend?”

“I guess he’d rather wear clothes,” smiled Edward.

“I certainly would,” answered Bateman, grimly, as he saw Edward gird himself in the loincloth and stand ready to start before he himself had got his shirt on.

“Won’t you find it rough walking without your shoes?” he asked Edward. “It struck me the path was a trifle rocky.”

“Oh, I’m used to it.”

“It’s a comfort to get into a *pareo* when one gets back from town,” said Jackson. “If you were going to stay here I should strongly recommend you to adopt it. It’s one of the most sensible costumes I have ever come across. It’s cool, convenient, and inexpensive.”

They walked up to the house, and Jackson took them into a large room with white-washed walls and an open ceiling in which a table was laid for dinner. Bateman noticed that it was set for five.

“Eva, come and show yourself to Teddie’s friend, and then shake us a cocktail,” called Jackson.

Then he led Bateman to a long low window.

“Look at that,” he said, with a dramatic gesture. “Look well.”

Below them coconut trees tumbled down steeply to the lagoon, and the lagoon in the evening light had the colour, tender and varied, of a dove’s breast. On a creek, at a little distance, were the clustered huts of a native village, and towards the reef was a canoe, sharply silhouetted, in which were a couple of natives fishing. Then, beyond, you saw the vast calmness of the Pacific and twenty miles away, airy and unsubstantial like the fabric of a poet’s fancy, the unimaginable beauty of the island which is called Murea. It was all so lovely that Bateman stood abashed.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” he said at last.

Arnold Jackson stood staring in front of him, and in his eyes was a dreamy softness. His thin, thoughtful face was very grave. Bateman, glancing at it, was once more conscious of its intense spirituality.

“Beauty,” murmured Arnold Jackson. “You seldom see beauty face to face. Look at it well, Mr Hunter, for what you see now you will never see again, since the moment is transitory, but it will be an imperishable memory in your heart. You touch eternity.”

His voice was deep and resonant. He seemed to breathe forth the purest idealism, and Bateman had to urge himself to remember that the man who spoke was a criminal and a cruel cheat. But Edward, as though he heard a sound, turned round quickly.

“Here is my daughter, Mr Hunter.”

Bateman shook hands with her. She had dark, splendid eyes and a red mouth tremulous with laughter; but her skin was brown, and her curling hair, rippling down her-shoulders, was coal black. She wore but one garment, a Mother Hubbard of pink cotton, her feet were bare, and she was crowned with a wreath of white scented flowers. She was a lovely creature. She was like a goddess of the Polynesian spring.

She was a little shy, but not more shy than Bateman, to whom the whole situation was highly embarrassing, and it did not put him at his ease to see this sylph-like thing take a shaker and with a practised hand mix three cocktails.

“Let us have a kick in them, child,” said Jackson.

She poured them out and smiling delightfully handed one to each of the men. Bateman flattered himself on his skill in the subtle art of shaking cocktails and he was not a little astonished, on tasting this one, to find that it was excellent. Jackson laughed proudly when he saw his guest’s involuntary look of appreciation.

“Not bad, is it? I taught the child myself, and in the old days in Chicago I considered that there wasn’t a bar-tender in the city that could hold a candle to me. When I had nothing better to do in the penitentiary I used to amuse myself by thinking out new cocktails, but when you come down to brass-tacks there’s nothing to beat a dry Martini.”

Bateman felt as though someone had given him a violent blow on the funny-bone and he was conscious that he turned red and then white. But before he could think of anything to say a native boy brought in a great bowl of soup and the whole party sat down to dinner. Arnold Jackson’s remark seemed to have aroused in him a train of recollections, for he began to talk of his prison days. He talked quite naturally, without malice, as though he were relating his experiences at a foreign university. He addressed himself to Bateman and Bateman was confused and then confounded. He saw Edward’s eyes fixed on him and there was in them a flicker of amusement. He blushed scarlet, for it struck him that Jackson was making a fool of him, and then because he felt absurd-and knew there was no reason why he should-he grew angry. Arnold Jackson was impudent-there was no other word for it-and his callousness, whether assumed or not, was outrageous. The dinner proceeded. Bateman was asked to eat sundry messes, raw fish and he knew not what, which only his civility induced him to swallow, but which he was amazed to find very good eating. Then an incident happened which to Bateman was the most mortifying experience of the evening. There was a little circlet of flowers in front of him, and for the sake of conversation he hazarded a remark about it.

“It’s a wreath that Eva made for you,” said Jackson, “but I guess she was too shy to give it you.”

Bateman took it up in his hand and made a polite little speech of thanks to the girl.

“You must put it on,” she said, with a smile and a blush.

“I? I don’t think I’ll do that.”

“It’s the charming custom of the country,” said Arnold Jackson.

There was one in front of him and he placed it on his hair. Edward did the same.

“I guess I’m not dressed for the part,” said Bateman, uneasily.

“Would you like a *pareo* ?” said Eva quickly. “I’ll get you one in a minute.”

“No, thank you. I’m quite comfortable as I am.”

“Show him how to put it on, Eva,” said Edward.

At that moment Bateman hated his greatest friend. Eva got up from the table and with much laughter placed the wreath on his black hair.

“It suits you very well,” said Mrs Jackson. “Don’t it suit him, Arnold?”

“Of course it does.”

Bateman sweated at every pore.

“Isn’t it a pity it’s dark?” said Eva. “We could photograph you all three together.”

Bateman thanked his stars it was. He felt that he must look prodigiously foolish in his blue serge suit and high collar-very neat and gentlemanly-with that ridiculous wreath of flowers on his head. He was seething with indignation, and he had never in his life exercised more self-control than now when he presented an affable exterior. He was furious with that old man, sitting at the head of the table, half-naked, with his saintly face and the flowers on his handsome white locks. The whole position was monstrous.

Then dinner came to an end, and Eva and her mother remained to clear away while the three men sat on the verandah. It was very warm and the air was scented with the white flowers of the night. The full moon, sailing across an unclouded sky, made a pathway on the broad sea that led to the boundless realms of Forever. Arnold Jackson began to talk. His voice was rich and musical. He talked now of the natives and of the old legends of the country. He told strange stories of the past, stories of hazardous expeditions into the unknown, of love and death, of hatred and revenge. He told of the adventurers who had discovered those distant islands, of the sailors who, settling in them, had married the daughters of great chieftains, and of the beach-combers who had led their varied lives on those silvery shores. Bateman, mortified and exasperated, at first listened sullenly, but presently some magic in the words possessed him and he sat entranced. The mirage of romance obscured the light of common day. Had he forgotten that Arnold Jackson had a tongue of silver, a tongue by which he had charmed vast sums out of the credulous public, a tongue which very nearly enabled him to escape the penalty of his crimes? No one had a sweeter eloquence, and no one had a more acute sense of climax. Suddenly he rose.

“Well, you two boys haven’t seen one another for a long time. I shall leave you to have a yarn. Teddie will show you your quarters when you want to go to bed.”

“Oh, but I wasn’t thinking of spending the night, Mr Jackson,” said Bateman.

“You’ll find it more comfortable. We’ll see that you’re called in good time.”

Then with a courteous shake of the hand, stately as though he were a bishop in canonicals, Arnold Jackson took leave of his guest.

“Of course I’ll drive you back to Papeete if you like,” said Edward, “but I advise you to stay. It’s bully driving in the early morning.”

For a few minutes neither of them spoke. Bateman wondered how he should begin on the conversation which all the events of the day made him think more urgent.

“When are you coming back to Chicago?” he asked, suddenly.

For a moment Edward did not answer. Then he turned rather lazily to look at his friend and smiled.

“I don’t know. Perhaps never.”

“What in heaven’s name do you mean?” cried Bateman.

“I’m very happy here. Wouldn’t it be folly to make a change?”

“Man alive, you can’t live here all your life. This is no life for a man. It’s a living death. Oh, Edward, come away at once, before it’s too late. I’ve felt that something was wrong. You’re infatuated with the place, you’ve succumbed to evil influences, but it only requires a wrench, and when you’re free from these surroundings you’ll thank all the gods there be. You’ll be like a dope-fiend when he’s broken from his drug. You’ll see then that for two years you’ve been breathing poisoned air. You can’t imagine what a relief it will be when you fill your lungs once more with the fresh, pure air of your native country.”

He spoke quickly, the words tumbling over one another in his excitement, and there was in his voice sincere and affectionate emotion. Edward was touched.

“It is good of you to care so much, old friend.”

“Come with me to-morrow, Edward. It was a mistake that you ever came to this place. This is no life for you.”

“You talk of this sort of life and that. How do you think a man gets the best out of life?”

“Why, I should have thought there could be no two answers to that. By doing his duty, by hard work, by meeting all the obligations of his state and station.”

“And what is his reward?”

“His reward is the consciousness of having achieved what he set out to do.”

“It all sounds a little portentous to me,” said Edward, and in the lightness of the night Bateman could see that he was smiling. “I’m afraid you’ll think I’ve degenerated sadly. There are several things I think now which I daresay would have seemed outrageous to me three years ago.”

“Have you learnt them from Arnold Jackson?” asked Bateman, scornfully.

“You don’t like him? Perhaps you couldn’t be expected to. I didn’t when I first came. I had just the same prejudice as you. He’s a very extraordinary man. You saw for yourself that he makes no secret of the fact that he was in a penitentiary. I do not know that he regrets it or the crimes that led him there. The only complaint he ever made in my hearing was that when he came out his health was impaired. I think he does not know what remorse is. He is completely unmoral. He accepts everything and he accepts himself as well. He’s generous and kind.”

“He always was,” interrupted Bateman, “on other people’s money.”

“I’ve found him a very good friend. Is it unnatural that I should take a man as I find him?”

“The result is that you lose the distinction between right and wrong.”

“No, they remain just as clearly divided in my mind as before, but what has become a little confused in me is the distinction between the bad man and the good one. Is Arnold Jackson a bad man who does good things or a good man who does bad things? It’s a difficult question to answer. Perhaps we make too much of the difference between one man and another. Perhaps even the best of us are sinners and the worst of us are saints. Who knows?”

“You will never persuade me that white is black and that black is white,” said Bateman.

“I’m sure I shan’t, Bateman.”

Bateman could not understand why the flicker of a smile crossed Edward’s lips when he thus agreed with him. Edward was silent for a minute.

“When I saw you this morning, Bateman,” he said then, “I seemed to see myself as I was two years ago. The same collar, and the same shoes, the same blue suit, the same energy. The same determination. By God, I was energetic. The sleepy methods of this place made my blood tingle. I went about and everywhere I saw possibilities for development and enterprise. There were fortunes to be made here. It seemed to me absurd that the copra should be taken away from here in sacks and the oil extracted in America. It would be far more economical to do all that on the spot, with cheap labour, and save freight, and I saw already the vast factories springing up on the island. Then the way they extracted it from the coconut seemed to me hopelessly inadequate, and I invented a machine which divided the nut and scooped out the meat at the rate of two hundred and forty an hour. The harbour was not large enough. I made plans to enlarge it, then to form a syndicate to buy land, put up two or three large hotels, and bungalows for occasional residents; I had a scheme for improving the steamer service in order to attract visitors from California. In twenty years, instead of this half French, lazy little town of Papeete I saw a great American city with ten-story buildings and street-cars, a theatre and an opera house, a stock exchange and a mayor.”

“But go ahead, Edward,” cried Bateman, springing up from the chair in excitement. “You’ve got the ideas and the capacity. Why, you’ll become the richest man between Australia and the States.”

Edward chuckled softly.

“But I don’t want to,” he said.

“Do you mean to say you don’t want money, big money, money running into millions? Do you know what you can do with it? Do you know the power it brings? And if you don’t care about it for yourself think what you can do, opening new channels for human enterprise, giving occupation to thousands. My brain reels at the visions your words have conjured up.”

“Sit down, then, my dear Bateman,” laughed Edward. “My machine for cutting the coconuts will always remain unused, and so far as I’m concerned street-cars shall never run in the idle streets of Papeete.”

Bateman sank heavily into his chair.

“I don’t understand you,” he said.

“It came upon me little by little. I came to like the life here, with its ease and its leisure, and the people, with their good-nature and their happy smiling faces. I began to think. I’d never had time to do that before. I began to read.”

“You always read.”

“I read for examinations. I read in order to be able to hold my own in conversation. I read for instruction. Here I learned to read for pleasure. I learned to talk. Do you know that conversation is one of the greatest pleasures in life? But it wants leisure. I’d always been too busy before. And gradually all the life that had seemed so important to me began to seem rather trivial and vulgar. What is the use of all this hustle and this constant striving? I think of Chicago now and I see a dark, grey city, all stone-it is like a prison-and a ceaseless turmoil. And what does all that activity amount to? Does one get there the best out of life? Is that what we come into the world for, to hurry to an office, and work hour after hour till night, then hurry home and dine and go to a theatre? Is that how I must spend my youth? Youth lasts so short a time, Bateman. And when I am old, what have I to look forward to? To hurry from my home in the morning to my office and work hour after hour till night, and then hurry home again, and dine and go to a theatre? That may be worth while if you make a fortune; I don’t know, it depends on your nature; but if you don’t, is it worth while then? I want to make more out of my life than that, Bateman.”

“What do you value in life then?”

“I’m afraid you’ll laugh at me. Beauty, truth, and goodness.”

“Don’t you think you can have those in Chicago?”

“Some men can, perhaps, but not I.” Edward sprang up now. “I tell you when I think of the life I led in the old days I am filled with horror,” he cried violently. “I tremble with fear when I think of the danger I have escaped. I never knew I had a soul till I found it here. If I had remained a rich man I might have lost it for good and all.”

“I don’t know how you can say that,” cried Bateman indignantly. “We often used to have discussions about it.”

“Yes, I know. They were about as effectual as the discussions of deaf mutes about harmony. I shall never come back to Chicago, Bateman.”

“And what about Isabel?”

Edward walked to the edge of the verandah and leaning over looked intently at the blue magic of the night. There was a slight smile on his face when he turned back to Bateman.

“Isabel is infinitely too good for me. I admire her more than any woman I have ever known. She has a wonderful brain and she’s as good as she’s beautiful. I respect her energy and her ambition. She was born to make a success of life. I am entirely unworthy of her.”

“She doesn’t think so.”

“But you must tell her so, Bateman.”

“I?” cried Bateman. “I’m the last person who could ever do that.”

Edward had his back to the vivid light of the moon and his face could not be seen. Is it possible that he smiled again?

“It’s no good your trying to conceal anything from her, Bateman. With her quick intelligence she’ll turn you inside out in five minutes. You’d better make a clean breast of it right away.”

“I don’t know what you mean. Of course I shall tell her I’ve seen you.” Bateman spoke in some agitation. “Honestly I don’t know what to say to her.”

“Tell her that I haven’t made good. Tell her that I’m not only poor, but that I’m content to be poor. Tell her I was fired from my job because I was idle and inattentive. Tell her all you’ve seen to-night and all I’ve told you.”

The idea which on a sudden flashed through Bateman’s brain brought him to his feet and in uncontrollable perturbation he faced Edward.

“Man alive, don’t you want to marry her?”

Edward looked at him gravely.

“I can never ask her to release me. If she wishes to hold me to my word I will do my best to make her a good and loving husband.”

“Do you wish me to give her that message, Edward? Oh, I can’t. It’s terrible. It’s never dawned on her for a moment that you don’t want to marry her. She loves you. How can I inflict such a mortification on her?”

Edward smiled again.

“Why don’t you marry her yourself, Bateman? You’ve been in love with her for ages. You’re perfectly suited to one another. You’ll make her very happy.”

“Don’t talk to me like that. I can’t bear it.”

“I resign in your favour, Bateman. You are the better man.”

There was something in Edward’s tone that made Bateman look up quickly, but Edward’s eyes were grave and unsmiling. Bateman did not know what to say. He was disconcerted. He wondered whether Edward could possibly suspect that he had come to Tahiti on a special errand. And though he knew it was horrible he could not prevent the exultation in his heart.

“What will you do if Isabel writes and puts an end to her engagement with you?” he said, slowly.

“Survive,” said Edward.

Bateman was so agitated that he did not hear the answer.

“I wish you had ordinary clothes on,” he said, somewhat irritably. “It’s such a tremendously serious decision you’re taking. That fantastic costume of yours makes it seem terribly casual.”

“I assure you, I can be just as solemn in a *pareo* and a wreath of roses, as in a high hat and a cut-away coat.”

Then another thought struck Bateman.

“Edward, it’s not for my sake you’re doing this? I don’t know, but perhaps this is going to make a tremendous difference to my future. You’re not sacrificing yourself for me? I couldn’t stand for that, you know.”

“No, Bateman, I have learnt not to be silly and sentimental here. I should like you and Isabel to be happy, but I have not the least wish to be unhappy myself.”

The answer somewhat chilled Bateman. It seemed to him a little cynical. He would not have been sorry to act a noble part.

“Do you mean to say you’re content to waste your life here? It’s nothing less than suicide. When I think of the great hopes you had when we left college it seems terrible that you should be content to be no more than a salesman in a cheap-John store.”

“Oh, I’m only doing that for the present, and I’m gaining a great deal of valuable experience. I have another plan in my head. Arnold Jackson has a small island in the Paumotas, about a thousand miles from here, a ring of land round a lagoon. He’s planted coconut there. He’s offered to give it me.”

“Why should he do that?” asked Bateman.

“Because if Isabel releases me I shall marry his daughter.”

“You?” Bateman was thunderstruck. “You can’t marry a half-caste. You wouldn’t be so crazy as that.”

“She’s a good girl, and she has a sweet and gentle nature. I think she would make me very happy.”

“Are you in love with her?”

“I don’t know,” answered Edward reflectively. “I’m not in love with her as I was in love with Isabel. I worshipped Isabel. I thought she was the most wonderful creature I had ever seen. I was not half good enough for her. I don’t feel like that with Eva. She’s like a beautiful exotic flower that must be sheltered from bitter winds. I want to protect her. No one ever thought of protecting Isabel. I think she loves me for myself and not for what I may become. Whatever happens to me I shall never disappoint her. She suits me.”

Bateman was silent.

“We must turn out early in the morning,” said Edward at last. “It’s really about time we went to bed.”

Then Bateman spoke and his voice had in it a genuine distress.

“I’m so bewildered, I don’t know what to say. I came here because I thought something was wrong. I thought you hadn’t succeeded in what you set out to do and were ashamed to come back when you’d failed. I never guessed I should be faced with this. I’m so desperately sorry, Edward. I’m so disappointed. I hoped you would do great things. It’s almost more than I can bear to think of you wasting your talents and your youth and your chance in this lamentable way.”

“Don’t be grieved, old friend,” said Edward. “I haven’t failed. I’ve succeeded. You can’t think with what zest I look forward to life, how full it seems to me and how significant. Sometimes, when you are married to Isabel, you will think of me. I shall build myself a house on my coral island and I shall live there, looking after my trees-getting the fruit out of the nuts in the same old way that they have done for unnumbered years-I shall grow all sorts of things in my garden, and I shall fish. There will be enough work to keep me busy and not enough to make me dull. I shall have my books and Eva, children, I hope, and above all, the infinite variety of the sea and the sky, the freshness of the dawn and the beauty of the sunset, and the rich magnificence of the night. I shall make a garden out of what so short a while ago was a wilderness. I shall have created something. The years will pass insensibly, and when I am an old man I hope that I shall be able to look back on a happy, simple, peaceful life. In my small way I too shall have lived in beauty. Do you think it is so little to have enjoyed contentment? We know that it will profit a man little if he gain the whole world and lose his soul. I think I have won mine.”

Edward led him to a room in which there were two beds and he threw himself on one of them. In ten minutes Bateman knew by his regular breathing, peaceful as a child’s, that Edward was asleep. But for his part he had no rest, he was disturbed in mind, and it was not till the dawn crept into the room, ghostlike and silent, that he fell asleep.

Bateman finished telling Isabel his long story. He had hidden nothing from her except what he thought would wound her or what made himself ridiculous. He did not tell her that he had been forced to sit at dinner with a wreath of flowers round his head and he did not tell her that Edward was prepared to marry her uncle’s half-caste daughter the moment she set him free. But perhaps Isabel had keener intuitions than he knew, for as he went on with his tale her eyes grew colder and her lips closed upon one another more tightly. Now and then she looked at him closely, and if he had been less intent on his narrative he might have wondered at her expression.

“What was this girl like?” she asked when he finished. “Uncle Arnold’s daughter. Would you say there was any resemblance between her and me?”

Bateman was surprised at the question.

“It never struck me. You know I’ve never had eyes for anyone but you and I could never think that anyone was like you. Who could resemble you?”

“Was she pretty?” said Isabel, smiling slightly at his words.

“I suppose so. I daresay some men would say she was very beautiful.”

“Well, it’s of no consequence. I don’t think we need give her any more of our attention.”

“What are you going to do, Isabel?” he asked then.

Isabel looked down at the hand which still bore the ring Edward had given her on their betrothal.

“I wouldn’t let Edward break our engagement because I thought it would be an incentive to him. I wanted to be an inspiration to him. I thought if anything could enable him to achieve success it was the thought that I loved him. I have done all I could. It’s hopeless. It would only be weakness on my part not to recognise the facts. Poor Edward, he’s nobody’s enemy but his own. He was a dear, nice fellow, but there was something lacking in him, I suppose it was backbone. I hope he’ll be happy.”

She slipped the ring off her finger and placed it on the table. Bateman watched her with a heart beating so rapidly that he could hardly breathe.

“You’re wonderful, Isabel, you’re simply wonderful.”

She smiled, and, standing up, held out her hand to him.

“How can I ever thank you for what you’ve done for me?” she said. “You’ve done me a great service. I knew I could trust you.”

He took her hand and held it. She had never looked more beautiful.

“Oh, Isabel, I would do so much more for you than that. You know that I only ask to be allowed to love and serve you.”

“You’re so strong, Bateman,” she sighed. “It gives me such a delicious feeling of confidence.”

“Isabel, I adore you.”

He hardly knew how the inspiration had come to him, but suddenly he clasped her in his arms, and she, all unresisting, smiled into his eyes.

“Isabel, you know I wanted to marry you the very first day I saw you,” he cried passionately.

“Then why on earth didn’t you ask me?” she replied.

She loved him. He could hardly believe it was true. She gave him her lovely lips to kiss. And as he held her in his arms he had a vision of the works of the Hunter Motor Traction and Automobile Company growing in size and importance till they covered a hundred acres, and of the millions of motors they would turn out, and of the great collection of pictures he would form which should beat anything they had in New York. He would wear horn spectacles. And she, with the delicious pressure of his arms about her, sighed with happiness, for she thought of the exquisite house she would have, full of antique furniture, and of the concerts she would give, and of the *th #233;s dansants*, and the dinners to which only the most cultured people would come. Bateman should wear horn spectacles.

“Poor Edward,” she sighed.