

THE HIDDEN FORCE

BY
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The Hidden Force

Chapter One

The full moon wore the hue of tragedy that evening. It had risen early, during the last glimmer of daylight, in the semblance of a huge, blood-red ball, and, flaming like a sunset low down behind the tamarind-trees in the Lange Laan, it was ascending, slowly divesting itself of its tragic complexion, in a pallid sky. A deathly stillness lay over all things like a veil, as though, after the long mid-day siesta, the evening rest were beginning without an intervening period of life. Over the town, whose white villas and porticoes lay huddled amid the trees of the lanes and gardens, hung the windless oppression of the evening air, as though the listless night were weary of the blazing day of eastern monsoon. The houses, from which not a sound was heard, shrank away, in deathly silence, amid the foliage of their gardens, with their evenly-spaced, gleaming rows of great whitewashed flower-pots. Here and there a lamp was already lit. Suddenly a dog barked and another answered, rending the muffled silence into long, ragged tatters: the dogs' angry throats sounded hoarse, panting, harshly hostile; then they, too, suddenly fell silent.

At the end of the Lange Laan the Residency lay far back in its grounds. Low and vivid in the darkness of the banyan-trees, it lifted the zig-zag outline of its tiled roofs, one behind the other, against the dark background of the garden, with one crude line of letters and numerals that dated the whole: a roof over each gallery and verandah, a roof over each room, receding into one long outline of irregular roofs. In front, however, rose the white pillars of the front verandah, and the white pillars of the portico, gleaming tall and stately, set far apart, with a large, welcoming spaciousness, making the roomy entrance impressive as a palace doorway. Through the open doors the central gallery was seen in dim perspective, running through to the back, lit by a single flickering light.

A native messenger was lighting the lanterns beside the house. Semicircles of great white pots with roses and chrysanthemums, with palms and caladiums, curved widely to right and left in front of the house. A broad gravel path formed the drive to the white-pillared portico; next came a wide, parched lawn, surrounded by flower-pots, and, in the middle, on a carved stone pedestal, a monumental vase, holding a tall latania. The only fresh green was that of the meandering pond, on which floated the giant leaves of a Victoria Regia, huddled together like round green tea-trays, with here and there a bright lotus-like flower between them. A path wound beside the pond; and on a circular space paved with pebbles stood a tall flag-staff, with the flag already hauled down, as it was every day at six o'clock. A plain gate divided the grounds from the Lange Laan.

The vast grounds were silent. There were now burning, slowly and laboriously lit by the lamp-boy, one lamp in the chandelier in the front verandah and one indoors, turned low, like two night-lights in a palace which, with its pillars and its vanishing perspective of roofs, was somehow reminiscent of a child's dream. On the steps of the office a few messengers, in their dark uniforms, sat talking in whispers. One of them stood up after a while and walked, with a quiet, leisurely step, to a bronze bell which hung high, by the messengers' lodge, in the extreme corner of the grounds. When he had reached it, after taking about a hundred paces, he sounded seven slow, reverberating strokes. The clapper struck the bell with a brazen, booming note; and each stroke was prolonged by an undulating echo, a deep, thrilling vibration. The dogs began to bark again. The messenger, boyishly slender in his blue cloth jacket with yellow facings and trousers with yellow stripes, slowly and quietly, with supple step, retraced his hundred paces to the other messengers.

A light now shone in the office and also in the adjoining bedroom, from which it filtered through the Venetian blinds. The resident, a tall, heavy man, in a black jacket and white duck trousers, walked across the room and called to the man outside:

"Messenger!"

The chief messenger, in a cloth uniform jacket edged with broad yellow braid, approached with bended knees and squatted before his master.

"Call Miss Doddie."

"Miss Doddie is out, excellency," whispered the man, while with his two hands, the fingers placed together, he sketched the reverential gesture of the salaam.

"Where has she gone?"

"I did not ask, excellency," said the man, by way of excuse for not knowing, again with his sketchy salaam.

The resident reflected for a moment. Then he said:

"My cap. My stick."

The chief messenger, still bending his knees as though reverently shrinking into himself, scuttled across the room, and, squatting, presented an undress uniform cap and a walking-stick.

The resident went out. The chief messenger hurried after him, carrying in his hand a long, burning slow-match, of which he waved the glowing tip from side to side so that the resident might be seen by any one passing in the dark. The resident walked slowly through the garden to the Lange Laan. Along this lane, an avenue of tamarind-trees and flamboyants, lay the villas of the more important townsfolk,

faintly lighted, deathly silent, apparently uninhabited, with their rows of whitewashed flower-pots gleaming in the vague dusk of the evening.

The resident first passed the secretary's house; then, on the other side, a girls' school; then the notary's house, an hotel, the post-office, and the house of the president of the Criminal Court. At the end of the Lange Laan stood the Catholic church; and, farther on, across the river-bridge, lay the railway-station. Near the station was a large European store, which was more brilliantly lighted than the other buildings. The moon had climbed higher, turning a brighter silver in its ascent, and now shone down upon the white bridge, the white store and the white church, all standing round a square, treeless, open space, in the middle of which was the town-clock, a small monument with a pointed spire.

The resident met nobody; now and then, however, an occasional Javanese, like a moving shadow, appeared out of the darkness; and then the messenger waved the glowing point of his wick with great ostentation behind his master. As a rule, the Javanese understood and made himself small, cowering along the edge of the road and passing with a scuttling gait. Now and again an ignorant native, just arrived from his village, did not understand, but went by, looking in terror at the messenger, who merely waved his wick, and, in passing, sent a curse after the fellow, behind his master's back, because he, the village yokel, had no manners. When a cart or trap approached he waved his little fiery star again and again through the darkness and made signs to the driver, who either stopped and alighted or squatted in his little carriage, and, so squatting, drove on along the farther side of the road.

The resident went on gloomily, with the smart step of a resolute walker. He had turned off to the right of the little square and was now walking past the Protestant church, making straight for a handsome villa adorned with slender, fairly correct Ionian plaster pillars and brilliantly lighted with paraffin lamps set in chandeliers. This was the Concordia Club. A couple of native servants in white jackets sat on the steps. A European in a white suit, the steward, passed along the verandah. But there was no one sitting at the great gin-and-bitters-table; and the wide cane chairs opened their arms expectantly but in vain.

The steward, on seeing the resident, bowed; and the resident, raising his finger to his cap, went past the club and turned to the left. He walked down a lane, past dark little houses, each in its own little demesne, turned off again and walked along the mouth of the river, which was like a canal. Proa after proa lay moored to the banks; the monotonous humming of Maduran seamen crept drearily across the water, from which rose a smell of fish. Past the harbour-master's office the resident made for the pier, which projected some way into the sea and at the end of which a small lighthouse, a miniature Eiffel tower, stood like an iron candlestick, with its lamp at the top. Here the resident stopped and filled his lungs with the night air. The breeze

had suddenly freshened, the north-east wind had risen, blowing in from the offing, as it did daily at this hour. But sometimes it suddenly dropped again, unexpectedly, as though its fanning wings had been stricken powerless; and the roughened sea fell again, until its curdling, foaming breakers, white in the moonlight, were replaced by smooth rollers, slightly phosphorescent in long, pale streaks.

A mournful and monotonous rhythm of dreary singing approached over the sea; a sail loomed darkly, like a great night-bird; and a fishing proa with a high, curved stem, suggesting an ancient galley, glided into the channel. A melancholy resignation to life, an acquiescence in all the small, obscure things of earth beneath that infinite sky, upon that remote, phosphorescent sea, was adrift in the night, conjuring up an oppressive mystery....

The tall, sturdy man who stood there, with straddling legs, breathing in the loitering, fitful wind, tired with his work, with sitting at his writing-table, with calculating the duiten-question, that important matter, the abolition of the duit,¹ for which the governor-general had made him personally responsible: this tall, sturdy man, practical, cool-headed, quick in decision from the long habit of authority, was perhaps unconscious of the mysterious shadow that drifted over the native town, over the capital of his district, in the night; but he was conscious of a yearning for affection. He vaguely felt a longing for a child's arms around his neck, for shrill little voices about him, a longing for a young wife awaiting him with a smile. He did not give definite expression to this sentimentality in his thoughts; it was not his habit to give way to musing upon his individual needs; he was too busy, his days were too full of interests of all kinds for him to yield to what he knew to be his moments of weakness, the suppressed ebullitions of his younger years. But, though he did not reflect, the mood upon him was not to be thrown off; it was like a pressure on his sturdy chest, like a morbid tenderness, like a sentimental discomfort in the otherwise highly practical mind of this superior official, who was strongly attached to his sphere of work, to his territory, who had its interests at heart, in whom the almost independent power of his post harmonized entirely with his authoritative nature, and who was accustomed with his strong lungs to breathe an atmosphere of spacious activity and extensive, varied work, even as he now stood breathing the spacious wind from the sea.

A longing, a desire, a certain nostalgia filled him more than was usual that evening. He felt lonely, not merely because of the isolation which nearly always surrounds the head of a native government, who is approached either with formality and smiling respect, for purposes of conversation, or curtly, with official respect, for purposes of business. He felt lonely, though he was the father of a family. He thought of his big house, he thought of his wife and children. And he felt lonely and borne up merely by the interest which he took in his work. That was the one thing in

his life. It filled all his waking hours. He fell asleep thinking of it; and his first thought in the morning was of some district interest.

Tired with casting up figures, at this moment, breathing the wind, he inhaled together with the coolness of the sea its melancholy, the mysterious melancholy of the Indian seas, the haunting melancholy of the seas of Java, the melancholy that rushes in from afar on whispering, mysterious wings. But it was not his nature to yield to mystery. He denied mystery. It was not there: there was only the sea and the cool wind. There was only the sea-fog, with its mingled savour of fish and flowers and seaweed, a savour which the cool wind was blowing away. There was only the moment of respiration; and such mysterious melancholy as he, nevertheless, irresistibly felt stealing that evening through his somewhat softened mood he believed to be connected with his domestic circle: he would have liked to feel that this circle was a little more compact, fitting more closely around the father and husband in him. If there was any cause for melancholy, it was that. It did not come from the sea, nor from the distant sky. He refused to yield to any sudden sensation of the uncanny. And he set his feet more firmly, flung out his chest, lifted his fine, soldierly head and snuffed up the smell of the sea and the fragrance of the wind....

The chief messenger, squatting with his glowing wick in his hand, peeped attentively at his master, as though thinking:

"How strange, those Hollanders!... What is he thinking now?... Why is he behaving like this?... Just at this time and on this spot?... The sea-spirits are about now.... There are caymans under the water, and every cayman is a spirit.... Look, they have been sacrificing to them there: bananas and rice and meat dried in the sun and a hard-boiled egg, on a little bamboo raft, down by the foot of the light-house.... What is the sahib doing here?... It is not good here, it is not good here, alas, alas!..."

And his watching eyes glided up and down the back of his master, who simply stood and gazed into the distance: what was he gazing at?... What did he see blowing up in the wind?... How strange, those Hollanders, how strange!...

The resident turned, suddenly, and walked back; and the messenger, starting up, followed him, blowing the tip of his slow-match. The resident walked back by the same road; there was now a member sitting in the club, who greeted him; and a couple of young men were strolling in the Lange Laan. The dogs were barking.

When the resident approached the entrance to the residency, he saw before him, standing by the other gate, two white figures, a man and a girl, who vanished into the darkness under the banyans. He went straight to his office; another messenger came up and took his cap and stick. Then he sat down at his writing-table. He had time for an hour's work before dinner.

Chapter Two

A few of the lamps had been lit. Really the lamps were burning everywhere; but in the long, broad galleries it was only just light. In the grounds and inside the house there were certainly no fewer than twenty or thirty paraffin-lamps burning in chandeliers and lanterns; but they yielded no more than a vague, yellow twilight glimmering through the house. A flood of moonshine poured into the garden, making the flower-pots gleam brightly and shimmering in the pond; and the banyans were like soft velvet against the luminous sky.

The first gong had sounded for dinner. In the front verandah a young man was swinging up and down in a rocking-chair, with his hands behind his head. He was bored. A young girl came along the middle gallery, humming to herself, as though in expectation. The house was furnished in accordance with the conventional type of up-country residencies, with commonplace splendour. The marble floor of the verandah was white and glossy as a mirror; tall palms stood in pots between the pillars; groups of rocking-chairs stood round the marble tables. In the first inner gallery, which ran parallel with the verandah, chairs were drawn up against the wall as though in readiness for an eternal reception. The second inner gallery, which ran from front to back, showed at the end, where it opened into a cross-gallery, a huge red satin curtain hanging from a gilt cornice. In the white spaces between the doors of the rooms hung either mirrors in gilt frames, resting on marble console-tables, or lithographs—pictures as they call them in India—of Van Dyck on horseback; Paolo Veronese received by a doge on the steps of a Venetian palace, Shakespeare at the court of Elizabeth and Tasso at the court of Este; but in the biggest panel, in a crowned frame, hung a large etching, a portrait of Queen Wilhelmina in her coronation-robcs. In the middle of the central gallery was a red satin ottoman, topped by a palm. There were also many chairs and tables, and everywhere great chandeliers. Everything was very neatly kept and distinguished by a commonplace pomp, an uncomfortable readiness for the next reception, with not a single home-like corner. In the half-light of the paraffin-lamps—one lamp was lit in each chandelier—the long, wide, spacious galleries stretched in tedious vacancy.

The second gong sounded. In the back-verandah, the long table—too long, as though always expecting guests—was laid for three persons. The native butler and half-a-dozen boys stood waiting by the servers' tables and the two sideboards. The butler at once began to fill the soup-plates; and two of the boys placed the three plates of soup on the table, on top of the folded napkins which lay on the dinner-plates. Then they waited again, while the soup steamed gently. Another boy filled the three tumblers with large lumps of ice.

The girl came in, humming a tune. She was perhaps seventeen, and resembled her divorced mother, the resident's first wife, a good-looking half-caste, who was now

living in Batavia, where she was said to keep a discreet gaming house. The young girl had a pale olive complexion, sometimes just touched with a peach-like blush; she had beautiful black hair, curling naturally at the temples and wound round her head in a heavy coil; her black pupils and sparkling irises swam in humid bluish-whites, over which her thick lashes flickered up and down, and up again. Her mouth was small and a little full; and her upper lip was just shadowed by a dark, downy line. She was not tall and was already too fully formed, like a hasty rose that has bloomed too soon. She wore a white piqué skirt and a white linen blouse with lace insertions; and round her throat was a bright yellow ribbon that accorded well with her olive pallor, which sometimes flushed up, suddenly, as with a rush of warm blood.

The young man came sauntering in from the front verandah. He was like his father, tall, broad and fair-haired, with a thick, fair moustache. He was barely twenty-three, but looked quite five years older. He wore a suit of white Russian linen, but with a shirt-collar and tie.

Van Oudijck also came at last: his firm step approached as though he were always busy, as though he were now coming just to have some dinner in the midst of his work.

"When does mamma arrive to-morrow?" asked Theo.

"At half-past eleven," replied Van Oudijck; and, turning to his body-servant behind him, "Kario, remember that the mem-sahib is to be fetched from the station at half-past eleven to-morrow."

"Yes, excellency," murmured Kario.

The fish was served.

"Doddie," asked Van Oudijck, "who was with you at the gate just now?"

"At ... the gate?" she asked slowly, in a very soft accent.

"Yes."

"At ... the gate?... Nobody.... Theo perhaps."

"Were you at the gate with your sister?" asked Van Oudijck.

The boy knitted his thick, fair eyebrows:

"Possibly.... Don't know.... Don't remember...."

They were all three silent. They hurried through dinner: sitting at table bored them. The five or six servants, in white cotton jackets with red linen facings, moved softly on their flat toes, waiting quickly and noiselessly. Steak and salad was served, and a pudding, followed by dessert.

"Everlasting rumpsteak!" Theo muttered.

"Yes, that cook!" laughed Doddie, with her little throaty laugh, clipping her sentences in the half-caste fashion. "She always gives steak, when mamma not here; doesn't matter to her, when mamma not here. She has no imagination. Too bad though!"

They had been twenty minutes over their dinner when Van Oudijck went back to his office. Doddie and Theo sauntered towards the front of the house.

"Tedious," Doddie yawned. "Come, we play billiards?"

In the first inner gallery, behind the satin portière, was a small billiard-table.

"Come along," said Theo.

They played.

"Why am I supposed to have been with you at the gate?"

"Oh ... tut!" said Doddie.

"Well, why?"

"Papa needn't know."

"Who was with you? Addie?"

"Of course!" said Doddie. "Say, band playing to-night?"

"I think so."

"Come, we go, yes?"

"No, I don't care to."

"Oh, why not?"

"I don't want to."

"Come along now?"

"No."

"With mamma ... you would, yes?" said Doddie, angrily. "I know very well. With mamma you go always to the band."

"What do you know ... you little minx!"

"What do I know?" she laughed. "What do I know? I know what I know."

"Huh!" he said, to tease her, fluking a cannon. "You and Addie, huh!"

"Well ... and you and mamma!"

He shrugged his shoulders:

"You're crazy."

"No need to hide from me. Besides, every one says."

"Let them say."

"Too bad of you though!"

"Oh, go to the devil!"

He flung his cue down in a temper and went towards the front of the house. She followed him.

"I say, Theo ... don't be angry now. Come along to the band."

"No."

"I'll never say it again," she entreated, coaxingly.

She was afraid that he would continue to be angry and then she would have nothing and nobody, then she would die of boredom.

"I promised Addie and I can't go by myself...."

"Well, if you won't make any more of those idiotic remarks...."

"Yes, I promise. Theo dear, yes, come then...."

She was already in the garden.

Van Oudijck appeared on the threshold of his office, which always had the door open, but which was separated from the inner gallery by a large screen:

"Doddie!" he called out.

"Yes, papa?"

"Will you see that there are flowers in mamma's room to-morrow?"

His voice was almost embarrassed and his eyelids blinked.

"Very well, papa ... I'll see to it."

"Where are you going to?"

"With Theo ... to the band."

Van Oudijck became red and angry:

"To the band? But you might have asked my leave first!" he exclaimed, in a sudden temper.

Doddie pouted.

"I don't like you to go out, without my knowing where you go. You were out this afternoon too, when I wanted you to come for a walk with me."

“Well, doesn’t matter then!” said Doddie, bursting into tears.

“You can go if you want to,” said Van Oudijck, “but I insist on your asking me first.”

“No, I don’t care about it now,” said Doddie, in tears. “Doesn’t matter! No band.”

They could hear the first strains in the distance, coming from the Concordia garden.

Van Oudijck returned to his office. Doddie and Theo flung themselves into two rocking-chairs in the verandah and swung furiously to and fro, skating with the chairs over the smooth marble.

“Come,” said Theo, “let’s go. Addie expects you.”

“No,” she pouted. “Don’t care. I’ll tell Addie to-morrow papa so unkind. He spoils my pleasure. And ... I’ll put no flowers in mamma’s room.”

Theo grinned.

“Say,” whispered Doddie, “that papa ... eh? So in love, always. He blushed when he asked me about the flowers.”

Theo grinned once more and hummed in unison with the band in the distance.

Chapter Three

Next morning Theo went in the landau to fetch his step-mother from the station at half-past eleven.

Van Oudijck, who was in the habit of taking the police-cases at that hour, had made no suggestion to his son; but, when from his office he saw Theo step into the carriage and drive off, he thought it nice of the boy. He had idolized Theo as a child, had spoilt him as a lad, had often come into conflict with him as a young man; but the old paternal fondness still often flickered up in him, irresistibly. At this moment he loved his son better than Doddie, who had maintained her sulky attitude that morning and had put no flowers in his wife's room, so that he had ordered Kario to see to them. He now felt sorry that he had not said a kind word to Theo for some days and he resolved to mend matters at once. The boy was scatter-brained: in three years he had been employed on at least five different coffee-plantations; now he was once more without a berth and was hanging around at home, looking out for something else.

Theo had not long to wait at the station before the train arrived. He at once saw Mrs. van Oudijck and the two little boys, René and Ricus—two little half-castes, as compared with himself—whom she was bringing back from Batavia for the long holidays, and her maid, Oorip.

Theo helped his step-mother to alight; the station-master offered a respectful greeting to the wife of his resident. She nodded in return with her queenly smile. Still smiling, a trifle ambiguously, she allowed her step-son to kiss her on the cheek. She was a tall woman, with a fair complexion and fair hair; she had turned thirty and possessed the languid dignity of women born in Java, daughters of European parents on both sides. Something about her attracted attention at once. It was perhaps her white skin, her creamy complexion, her very light fair hair, her strange grey eyes, which were sometimes a little pinched and always wore an ambiguous expression, or it might be her eternal smile, sometimes very sweet and charming and often insufferable and tiresome. One could never tell at the first sight of her whether she concealed anything behind that glance, whether there was any depth, any soul behind it, or whether it was merely her look and her laugh, both of them slightly equivocal. Soon, however, one perceived an observant indifference in her smiles, as though there were very little that she cared for, as though it would hardly matter to her should the heavens fall, as though she would watch the event with a smile.

Her gait was leisurely. She wore a pink piqué skirt and bolero, a white satin ribbon round her waist and a white sailor-hat with a white satin bow; and her summer travelling-costume was very smart, compared with that of a couple of other ladies on the platform, lounging in stiffly starched washing-frocks that looked like night-dresses, with tulle hats topped with feathers! And, in her very European aspect,

perhaps that leisurely walk, that languid dignity was the only Indian characteristic that distinguished her from a woman newly arrived from Holland.

Theo had given her his arm and she let him lead her to the carriage, the “chariot,” followed by the two dark little brothers. She had been away two months. She had a nod and a smile for the station-master; she had a nod for the coachman and the groom; and she took her seat slowly, a languid, fair sultana, still smiling. The three step-sons followed her into the carriage; the maid rode behind in a dog-cart. Mrs. van Oudijck looked out once or twice and thought Labuwangi unchanged. But she said nothing. She turned away slowly, languidly leaning back. Her face displayed a certain satisfaction, but especially that radiant, laughing indifference, as though nothing could harm her, as though she were protected by a mysterious force. There was something strong about this woman, something powerful in her sheer indifference; there was something invulnerable about her. She looked as though life would have no hold on her, neither on her complexion nor on her soul. She looked as though she were incapable of suffering; and it seemed as though she smiled and were thus contented because no sickness, no suffering, no poverty, no misery existed for her. An irradiation of glittering egoism encompassed her. And yet she was, for the most part, lovable. She was charming and prepossessing because she was so pretty. This woman, with her sparkling self-satisfaction, was loved, whatever people might say about her. When she spoke, when she laughed, she was disarming and, even more, engaging. This was despite, and, perhaps, just because of her unfathomable indifference. She took an interest only in her own body and her own soul: everything else, everything, was totally indifferent to her. Unable to give anything of her soul, she was incapable of feeling save for herself, but she smiled so peacefully and enchantingly that she was always thought lovable, adorable. It was perhaps because of the contour of her cheeks, the strange ambiguity of her glance, her ineffaceable smile, the elegance of her figure, the tone of her voice and her knack of always hitting on the right word. If at first one thought her insufferable, she did not notice it and simply made herself absolutely charming. If anyone was jealous, she did not notice it and just praised, intuitively, indifferently – for she did not care in the least – something in which that other had thought herself deficient. She could admire with the sweetest expression on her face a dress which she thought hideous; and, because she was so completely indifferent, she betrayed no insincerity afterwards and did not gainsay her admiration. Her vital power was her boundless indifference. She had accustomed herself to do everything that she felt inclined to do, but she smiled as she did it; and, however people might talk behind her back, she remained so correct in her behaviour, so bewitching, that they forgave her. She was not loved while she was not seen; but so soon as people saw her, she had won back all that she had lost. Her husband worshipped her; her step-children – she had no children of her own – could not help being fond of her, despite themselves; her

servants were all under the influence of her charm. She never grumbled; she gave an order with a word and the thing was done. If something went wrong, if something was broken, her smile died away for a moment ... and that was all. And if her own moral or physical interests were in danger, she was generally able to avoid the danger and settle things to her advantage, without even allowing her smile to fade. But she had gathered this personal interest so closely about her that she could usually control its circumstances. No destiny seemed to weigh upon this woman. Her indifference was radiant, was absolutely indifferent, devoid of contempt, or envy, or emotion: it was merely indifference. And the tact with which, instinctively, without ever giving much thought to it, she guided and ruled her life was so great that possibly if she had lost everything that she now possessed—her beauty, her position, for instance—she would still contrive to remain indifferent, in her incapacity for suffering.

The carriage drove into the residency-grounds just as the police cases were beginning. The native assessor was already with Van Oudijck in the office; the chief constable and the police led the procession of the accused; the natives tripped along, holding on to the corners of one another's jackets; but the few women among them walked alone. They all squatted in waiting under a banyan tree, at a short distance from the steps of the office. A messenger, hearing the clock in the verandah, struck half-past twelve on the great bell by the lodge. The loud stroke reverberated like a brazen voice through the scorching mid-day heat. But Van Oudijck had heard the sound of the carriage-wheels and let the native magistrate wait: he went to welcome his wife. His face brightened; he kissed her tenderly, effusively, asked how she was. He was glad to see the boys back. And, remembering what he had been thinking about Theo, he found a kind word for his first-born. Doddie, her little mouth still pouting and sulky, kissed mamma. Mrs. van Oudijck allowed herself to be kissed, resignedly, smilingly; she returned the kisses calmly, without coldness or warmth, just doing what she had to do. Her husband, Theo and Doddie admired her perceptibly, and audibly said that she was looking well; Doddie asked where mamma had got that pretty travelling-dress. In her room she noticed the flowers, and, as she knew that Van Oudijck always saw to these, she gently stroked his arm.

The resident went back to his office, where the assessor was waiting; the hearing began. Pushed along by a policeman, the accused came one by one and squatted on the steps, outside the office-door, while the assessor squatted on a mat and the resident sat at his writing-table. During the first case, Van Oudijck was still listening to his wife's voice in the middle gallery, when the prisoner, defending himself, gave a loud cry of:

"No, no!"

The resident knitted his brows and listened attentively....

The voice in the middle gallery ceased. Mrs. van Oudijck had gone to take off her things and put on her native dress for lunch. She wore the dress gracefully: a Solo sarong, a transparent kabaai, jewelled pins, white leather slippers with a little white bow. She was just ready when Doddie came to her door and said:

“Mamma! Mamma!... Mrs. van Does is here!”

The smile died away for a moment; the soft eyes looked dark.

“I’ll come at once, dear....”

But she sat down instead; Oorip, the maid, sprinkled some scent on her handkerchief. Mrs. van Oudijck put up her feet and lay musing, after the fatigue of her journey. She found Labuwangi desperately dull after Batavia, where she had spent two months staying with relations and friends, free and untrammelled by obligations. Here, as the wife of the resident, she had certain duties, though she delegated most of them to the secretary’s wife. She felt tired in herself, out of sorts, dissatisfied. Despite her complete indifference, she was human enough to have her silent moods, in which she wished everything at the bottom of the sea. At one time she suddenly longed to do something mad, at another she vaguely longed for Paris.... She would never let any one see all this. She was able to control herself; and she controlled herself now, before making her appearance again. Her vague Bacchanalian longings melted away in her fatigue. She stretched herself out at greater ease. She mused, with eyes almost closed. Through her almost superhuman indifference a curious fancy sometimes crept, hidden from the world. She preferred to live in her bedroom her life of fragrant imagination, especially after her month in Batavia. After one of those months of perversity, she felt a need to let her vagrant, rosy imaginings rise like a whirling mist before her half-closed eyes. There was in her otherwise utterly barren soul as it were an unnatural growth of little azure flowers, which she cherished with the only feeling that she could ever experience. She felt for no living creature, but she felt for those little flowers. It was delicious to dream like this of what she would have liked to be if she were not compelled to be what she was. Her fancies rose in a whirling mist: she saw a white palace, with little cupids everywhere....

“Mamma ... do come! Mrs. van Does is here, Mrs. van Does, with two stoppered bottles....”

It was Doddie, at the door. Léonie van Oudijck stood up and went to the back verandah, where the Indian lady was sitting, the wife of the postmaster. She kept cows and sold milk. But she also drove other trades. She was a stout woman, rather dark-skinned, with a prominent stomach; she wore a very simple little kabaai with a narrow band of lace round it; and she sat stroking her stomach with her fat hands. In front of her, on the table, stood two small phials, with something glittering in them.

What was it, Mrs. van Oudijck wondered: sugar, crystals? Then she suddenly remembered....

Mrs. van Does said that she was glad to see her again. Two months away from Labuwangi. Too bad, Mrs. van Oudijck! And she pointed to the bottles. Mrs. van Oudijck smiled. What was inside them?

With a great air of mystery, Mrs. van Does laid a fat, double-jointed forefinger on one of the jam-pots and said:

"Diamonds!"

"Oh, really?" said Mrs. van Oudijck.

Doddie, wide-eyed, and Theo, greatly amused stared at the stoppered bottles.

"Yes ... you know ... that lady's, of whom I spoke to you.... She doesn't want her name mentioned. Poor thing, her husband once a great swell ... and now ... yes, so unfortunate; she has nothing left! All gone. Only these two little bottles. Had all her jewels unset and keeps the stones in the bottles. All counted. She trusts them to me to sell. Know her through my milk-business. Will you look at, Mrs. van Oudijck, yes? Lovely stones! The residen he buy for you, now you back home again. Doddie, give me a bit of black stuff: velvet best...."

Doddie sent the seamstress to fetch a bit of black velvet from a cupboard of odds and ends. A boy brought glasses with tamarind-syrup and ice. Mrs. van Does, holding a little pair of tongs in her double-jointed fingers, laid a couple of stones carefully on the velvet:

"Ah!" she cried. "Look at that water, mevrouw! Ser-per-len-did!"

Mrs. van Oudijck looked on. She gave her most charming smile and then said, in her gentle voice:

"That stone is not real, dear mevrouw."

"Not real?" screamed Mrs. van Does. "Not real?"

Mrs. van Oudijck looked at the other stones:

"And those others, mevrouw," stooping attentively: then, in her most charming tones, "those others ... they too are paste."

Mrs. van Does looked at her with delight. Then she said to Doddie and Theo, archly:

"That mamma of yours ... oh, so shrewd! She sees at once!"

And she laughed aloud. They all laughed. Mrs. van Does returned the stones to the bottle:

"A joke, yes, mevrouw? I only wanted to see if you understood. I give you my word, of course: I should never have sold them to you.... But there ... look!..."

And now solemnly, almost religiously, she opened the other little phial, which contained only a few stones, and placed them lovingly on the black velvet.

"That one would be splendid ... for a pendant," said Mrs. van Oudijck, gazing at a very large brilliant.

"There, what did I tell you?" said the Indian lady.

And they all gazed at the diamonds, at the real ones, which came out of the "real" bottle, and held them up carefully to the light.

Mrs. van Oudijck saw that they were all real:

"I really have no money, dear mevrouw!" she said.

"This big one ... for a pendant ... six hundred guilders.¹ ... A bargain, I assure you, mevrouw!"

"Oh, mevrouw, never!"

"How much then? You are doing a charity if you buy. Poor thing, her husband once a great swell, Indian Council."

"Two hundred."

"Oh dear! What next? Two hundred guilders!"

"Two hundred and fifty, but no more. I really have no money."

"The residèn!" whispered Mrs. van Does, catching sight of Van Oudijck, who, now that the cases were finished, was coming to the back verandah. "The residèn ... he buy for you!"

Mrs. van Oudijck smiled and looked at the sparkling drop of light on the black velvet. She liked jewels, she was not altogether indifferent to diamonds. And she looked at her husband:

"Mrs. van Does is showing us a lot of beautiful things," she said, caressingly.

Van Oudijck felt an inward shock. He was never pleased to see Mrs. van Does in his house. She always had something to sell: at one time, richly embroidered counterpanes; at another time, a pair of woven slippers; at another, magnificent but very expensive table-slips, with golden flowers in batik on yellow glazed linen. Mrs. van Does always brought something with her, was always in touch with the wives of erstwhile "great swells," whom she helped by selling their things for a very high commission. A morning call from Mrs. van Does cost him each time at least a few rix-dollars and very often fifty guilders, for his wife had a calm habit of always buying things which she did not need but which she was too indifferent to refuse to

buy of Mrs. van Does. He did not see the two bottles at once, but he saw the drop of light on the black velvet and he understood that the visit would cost him more than fifty guilders this time, unless he was very firm:

"Mevrouw!tje!" he exclaimed, in dismay. "It's the end of the month: there's no question of buying diamonds to-day! And bottles full too!" he added, with a stare, when he now saw them glittering on the table, among the glasses of tamarind-syrup.

"Oh, that resident!" laughed Mrs. van Does, as though a resident were bound to be always well off.

Van Oudijck hated that little laugh. His household cost him every month a few odd hundred guilders above his salary; and he was living beyond his income, was in debt. His wife never troubled herself with money matters; for these more especially she reserved her most smiling indifference.

She made the diamond sparkle in the sun and shoot forth a blue ray.

"It's a beauty ... for two hundred and fifty," said Mrs. van Oudijck.

"For three hundred then, dear mevrouw...."

"Three hundred?" she asked, dreamily, playing with the gem.

Whether it cost three hundred or four or five hundred was all one to her. It left her wholly indifferent. But she liked the stone and meant to have it, at whatever price. And therefore she quietly put the stone down and said:

"No, dear mevrouw, really ... it's too expensive; and my husband has no money."

She said it so prettily that there was no guessing her intention. She was adorably self-sacrificing as she spoke the words. Van Oudijck felt a second inward shock. He could refuse his wife nothing.

"Mevrouw," he said, "you can leave the stone ... for three hundred guilders. But for God's sake take your bottles away with you!"

Mrs. van Does looked up delightedly:

"There, what did I tell you? I knew for certain the resident would buy for you!..."

Mrs. van Oudijck looked up in gentle reproach:

"But, Otto!" she said: "How can you?"

"Do you like the stone?"

"Yes, it's beautiful.... But such a lot of money! For one diamond!"

And she drew her husband's hand towards her and suffered him to kiss her on the forehead, because he had been permitted to buy her a three-hundred-guilder diamond. Doddie and Theo stood winking at each other.

Chapter Four

Léonie Van Oudijck always enjoyed her siesta. She only slept for a moment, but she loved after lunch to be alone in her cool bedroom till five or half-past five. She read a little, mostly the magazines from the circulating library, but as a rule she did nothing but dream. Her dreams were vague imaginings, which rose before her as in an azure mist during her afternoons of solitude. Nobody knew of them and she kept them very secret, like a secret vice, a sin. She committed herself much more readily – to the world – where her liaisons were concerned. These never lasted long; they counted for little in her life; she never wrote letters; and the favours which she granted afforded the recipient no privileges in the daily intercourse of society. Hers was a silent, correct depravity, both physical and moral. For her imaginings too, despite their poetical insipidity, were depraved. Her pet author was Catulle Mendès: she loved all those little flowers of azure sentimentality, those rosy, affected little cupids, with one little finger in the air and their legs gracefully hovering around the most vicious themes and motives of perverted passion. In her bedroom hung a few engravings: a young woman lying on a lace-covered bed and being kissed by two sportive angels; another: a lion with an arrow through its breast at the feet of a smiling maiden; lastly, a large coloured advertisement of some scent or other: a sort of floral nymph whose veils were being drawn on either side by playful little cherubs, of the kind which we see on soap-boxes. This “picture” in particular she thought splendid; she could imagine nothing with a greater æsthetic appeal. She knew that the plate was monstrous, but she had never been able to prevail upon herself to take the horrible thing down, though it was looked at askance by everybody: her friends, her step-children, all of whom walked in and out of her room with the Indian casualness which makes no secret of the toilet. She could stare at it for minutes on end, as though bewitched; she thought it perfectly charming; and her own dreams resembled this print. She also treasured a chocolate-box with a keepsake picture on it, as the type of beauty which she admired, even above her own: the pink flush on the cheeks, the brown eyes under unconvincing golden hair, the bosom showing through the lace. But she never committed herself in respect of this absurdity, which she vaguely suspected; she never spoke of these prints and boxes, just because she knew that actually they were hideous. But she thought them lovely; for her they were delightful, were artistic and poetical.

These were her happiest hours.

Here, at Labuwangi, she dared not do what she did in Batavia; and here, at Labuwangi, people hardly believed what people in Batavia said. Nevertheless, Mrs. van Does averred that this resident and that inspector – the one travelling for his pleasure, the other on an official circuit – staying for a few days at the residency, had found their way in the afternoon, during the siesta, to Léonie’s bedroom. But all the

same at Labuwangi any such actual occurrences were the rarest of interludes between Mrs. van Oudijck's rosy afternoon visions.

Still, this afternoon it seemed as though, after dozing a little while and after all the dullness caused by the journey and the heat had cleared away from her milk-white complexion—it seemed, now that she was looking at the romping angels of the scent-advertisement, that her thoughts were no longer dwelling on those rosy, tender, doll-like forms, but as though she were listening to the sounds outside....

She was wearing nothing but a sarong, which she had pulled up under her arms and hitched in a twist across her breast. Her beautiful fair hair hung loose. Her pretty little white feet were bare: she had not even put on her slippers. And she looked through the slats of the shutters.

Between the flower-pots, which, standing on the side steps of the house, masked her windows with great masses of foliage, she could see an annexe consisting of four rooms, the spare-rooms, one of which was Theo's.

She stood peering for a moment and then set the shutter ajar. And she saw that the shutter of Theo's room also opened a little way....

Then she smiled; she knotted her sarong more closely and lay down upon the bed again.

She listened.

In a moment she heard the gravel grating slightly under the pressure of a slipper. Her shutters, without being closed, were drawn to. A hand now opened them cautiously....

She looked round smiling:

"What is it, Theo?" she asked.

He came nearer. He was dressed in pyjamas and he sat on the edge of the bed and played with her soft white hands and suddenly he kissed her fiercely.

At that instant a stone whizzed through the bedroom.

They both started, looked up, and in a moment were both standing in the middle of the room.

"Who threw that?" she asked.

"One of the boys, perhaps," he said: "René or Ricus, playing about outside."

"They aren't up yet."

"Or something may have fallen from above...."

"But it was thrown...."

"A stone so often gets loose...."

"But this is gravel."

She picked up the little stone. He looked outside cautiously:

"It's nothing, Léonie. It must really have fallen out of the gutter ... and then bounced up again. It's nothing."

"I'm frightened," she murmured.

He laughed almost aloud and asked:

"But why?"

They had nothing to fear. The room lay between Léonie's boudoir and two large spare-rooms, which were reserved exclusively for residents, generals and other highly-placed officials. On the other side of the middle gallery were Van Oudijck's rooms—his office and his bedroom—and Doddie's room and the room of the boys, Ricus and René. Léonie was therefore isolated in her wing, between the spare-rooms. It made her cynically insolent. At this hour, the grounds were quite deserted. For that matter, she was not afraid of the servants. Oorip was wholly to be trusted and often received handsome presents: sarongs; a gold clasp; a long diamond kabaai-pin, which she wore as a jewelled silver plaque on her breast. As Léonie never grumbled, was generous in advancing wages and displayed an apparently easy-going temperament—although everything always happened as she wished—she was not disliked; and, whatever the servants might know about her, they had never yet betrayed her. It made her all the more insolent. A curtain hung before a passage between her bedroom and boudoir; and it was arranged, once and for all, between Theo and Léonie, that at the least danger he would slip away quietly behind this hanging, go out through the garden-door of the boudoir and pretend to be looking at the rose-trees in the pots on the steps. This would make it appear as though he had just come from his own room and were merely inspecting the roses. The inner doors of the boudoir and bedroom were usually locked, because Léonie declared frankly that she did not like to be interrupted unawares.

She liked Theo, because of his fresh youthfulness. And here, at Labuwangi, he was her only vice, not counting a passing inspector and the little pink angels. The two were now like naughty children; they laughed silently, in each other's arms. It was past four by this time; and they heard the voices of René and Ricus in the garden. They were taking possession of the grounds for the holidays. They were thirteen and fourteen years old; and they revelled in the garden. They ran about barefoot, in blue striped pyjamas, and went to look at the horses, at the pigeons; they teased Doddie's cockatoo, which tripped about on the roof of the outhouses. They had a tame squirrel. They hunted geckos, those large-headed lizards, which they shot with a blow-pipe, to the great vexation of the servants, because the geckos bring luck. They

bought roasted monkey-nuts at the gate of a passing Chinaman and then mocked him, imitating his accent, his difficulty with his r's:

"Loasted monkey-nuts!... Chinaman kaput!"

They climbed into the flamboyant and swung in the branches like monkeys. They flung stones at the cats; they incited the neighbour's dogs to bark themselves hoarse and bite one another's ears to pieces. They splashed about with the water in the pond, made themselves unpresentable with mud and dirt and dared to pluck the Victoria Regias, which was strictly forbidden. They tested the bearing-power of the flat, green Victoria-leaves, which looked like tea-trays, and tried to stand on them and tumbled in. Then they took empty bottles, set them in a row and bowled at them with rounded flints. Then, with bamboos, they fished up all sorts of unspeakable floating things from the ditch beside the house and threw them at each other. Their inventive fancy was inexhaustible; and the hour of the siesta was their special hour. They had caught a gecko and a cat and were making them fight each other; the gecko opened its jaws, which were like a small crocodile's, and hypnotized the cat, which slunk away, withdrawing from its enemy's beady, black eyes, arching its back and bristling with terror. And after that the boys ate themselves ill with unripe mangoes.

Léonie and Theo had watched the fight between the cat and gecko through the slats of the shutter and now saw the boys quietly eating the unripe mangoes on the grass. But it was now the hour when the prisoners, twelve in number, worked in the grounds, under the supervision of a dignified old native overseer, with a little cane in his hand. They fetched water in tubs and watering-cans made out of paraffin-tins, sometimes in the actual paraffin-tins themselves, and watered the plants, the grass and the gravel. Then they swept the grounds with a loud rustle of coco-nut-fibre brooms.

René and Ricus, behind the overseer's back, for they were afraid of him, threw half-eaten mangoes at the prisoners and called them names and made faces and grimaces at them. Doddie appeared after her nap, carrying her cockatoo on her wrist. It cried, "Kaka! Ka-ka!" and raised its yellow crest with swift movements of its neck.

And Theo now stole behind the curtain into the boudoir, and, at a moment when the boys were running and bombarding each other with mangoes, and when Doddie was strolling towards the pond with the loitering gait and the swing of the hips peculiar to the Creole, he came from behind the plants, smelling at the roses and behaving as though he had been walking in the garden before going to take his bath.

Chapter Five

Van Oudijck felt in a more pleasant mood than he had done for weeks: his house seemed to have recovered after those two months of dull boredom; he thought it jolly to see his two rascals of boys romping round the garden, even though they did all sorts of mischief; and above all he was very glad that his wife was back.

They were now sitting in the garden, in undress, drinking tea, at half-past five. It was very strange, but Léonie at once filled the great house with a certain home-like feeling of comfort, because she liked comfort herself. At other times Van Oudijck would hurriedly swallow a cup of tea which Kario brought him in his bedroom: to-day this afternoon tea made a pleasant break in the day; cane chairs and long deck-chairs were placed outside, in front of the house; the tea-tray stood on a cane table; there were roasted bananas; and Léonie, in a red silk Japanese kimono, with her fair hair hanging loose, lay back in a cane chair playing with Doddie's cockatoo and feeding it with pastry. It was different at once, Van Oudijck thought: his wife, so sociable, charming, pretty, telling scraps of news about their friends in Batavia, the races at Buitenzorg, a ball at the Viceroy's, the Italian opera; the boys merry, healthy and jolly, however dirty they might make themselves in playing. He called them to him and romped with them and asked them about the grammar-school—they were both in the second class—and even Doddie and Theo seemed different to him: Doddie was now plucking roses from the potted trees, looking delightfully pretty and humming a tune; and Theo was communicative with mamma and even with him. A pleased expression played around Van Oudijck's moustache. His face was quite young still; he hardly looked forty-eight. He had a quick, bright glance, a way of looking up suddenly with an acute, penetrating air. He was rather heavy of build, with a tendency to become still heavier, but yet he had retained a soldierly briskness and he was indefatigable on his circuits: he was a first-rate horseman. Tall and powerfully built, content with his house and his family, he wore a pleasant air of robust virility, with a jovial laughing expression around his moustache. And, relaxing himself, stretched out at full length in his cane chair, he drank his cup of tea, and gave utterance to the thoughts which generally welled up in him at such moments of satisfaction. Yes, it was not a bad life in India,¹ when all was said, in the B.B.² At least it had always been good for him; but then he had been pretty lucky. Promotion nowadays was a desperate business: he knew any number of assistant-residents who were his contemporaries and who had no chance of becoming residents for years to come. And that certainly was a desperate position, to continue so long in a subordinate office, to be compelled at that age to hold one's self at the orders of a resident. He could never have stood it, at forty-eight! But to be a resident, to give orders on his own initiative, to rule as large and important a district as Labuwangi, with such extensive coffee-plantations, with such numbers of sugar-factories, with so many leased concessions: that was a delight, that was living, that

was a life grander and more spacious than any other, a life with which no life or position in Holland was to be compared. His great responsibility delighted his authoritative nature. His activities were varied: office work and circuit; the interest of his work varied: a man was not bored to death in his office-chair; after the office there was out-of-door life; and there was always a change, always something different. He hoped in eighteen months to become a resident of the first class, if a first-class residency fell vacant: Batavia, Samarang, Surabaya, or one of the Vorstenlanden.³ And yet it would go to his heart to leave Labuwangi. He was attached to his district, for which he had done so much during the past five years, which in those five years had attained its highest prosperity, in so far as prosperity was possible in these times of general depression, with the colonies poor, the population impoverished, the coffee-crops worse than ever, sugar perhaps threatened with a serious crisis in two years' time. India was in a languishing condition; and even in the industrial eastern portion of the island inertia and lack of vitality were spreading like a blight; but still he had been able to do much for Labuwangi. During his administration the people had thrived and prospered; the irrigation of the corn-fields was excellent, after he had succeeded in tactfully winning over the engineer, who at first was always in conflict with the B.B. Miles and miles of steam tramway had been laid down. The secretary, his assistant-residents and controllers were his willing coadjutors, though he kept them hard at work. But he had a pleasant way with them, even though the work was hard. He knew how to be jolly and friendly with them, resident though he was. He was glad that all of them—controllers and assistant-residents—represented the wholesome, cheerful type of B.B. official, pleased with their life, liking their work, though nowadays given much more than formerly to studying the Government Almanack and the Colonial List with an eye to their promotion. And it was Van Oudijck's hobby to compare his officials with the judicial functionaries, who did not represent the same alert type: there was always a slight jealousy and animosity between the two orders.... Yes, it was a pleasant life, a pleasant sphere of activity: everything was all right. There was nothing to beat the B.B. His only regret was that his relations with the regent⁴ were not easier and more agreeable. But it was not his fault. He had always very conscientiously given the regent his due, had left him in the enjoyment of his full rights, had seen to it that he was duly respected by the Javanese population and even by the European officials. Oh, how intensely he regretted the death of the old pangéran, the regent's father; the old regent, a noble, cultivated Javanese! Van Oudijck had always been in sympathy with him, had at once won him by his tact. Had he not, five years ago, when he arrived at Labuwangi to take over the administration, invited the pangéran—the type of the genuine Javanese noble—to sit beside him in his own carriage, rather than allow him to follow in a second carriage, behind the resident's carriage, as was usual? And had not this civility

toward the old prince at once won all the Javanese heads and officials and flattered them in their respect and love for their regent, the descendant of one of the oldest Javanese families, the Adiningrats, who were Sultans of Madura in the Company's time?... But Sunario, his son, now the young regent, he was unable to understand, unable to fathom. This he confessed only to himself, in silence, seeing him always enigmatic – that marionette, that puppet, as he called him – always stiff, keeping his distance towards him, the resident, as though he, the prince, looked down upon him, the Dutch burgher, and wholly absorbed in all sorts of superstitious observances and fanatical speculations. He never said as much openly, but something in the regent escaped him. He was unable to place that delicate figure, with the fixed, coal-black eyes, in the practical life of human beings, as he had always been able to place the old pangéran. The latter had always been to him, in accordance with his age, a fatherly friend; in accordance with etiquette, his "younger brother"; but always the fellow-ruler of his district. But Sunario seemed to him unreal, not a functionary, not a regent, merely a fanatical Javanese who always shrouded himself in mystery:

"Such nonsense!" thought Van Oudijck.

He laughed at the reputation for sacrosanctity which the populace bestowed upon Sunario. He thought him unpractical, a degenerate Javanese, a crazy Javanese dandy.

But his lack of harmony with the regent – a lack of harmony in character only, which had never developed into actual fact: why, he could twist the mannikin round his finger! – was the only great difficulty which had arisen during all these years. And he would not have exchanged his life as a resident for any other life whatever. Why, he was already fretting about what he would do later, when he was pensioned off! What he would have preferred was to continue as long as possible in the service, as a member of the Indian Council, as vice-president of the Council. The object of his unspoken ambition, in the far-away future, was the throne of Buitenzorg. But nowadays they had that strange mania in Holland for appointing outsiders to the highest posts – men sent straight from Holland, newcomers who knew nothing about India – instead of remaining faithful to the principle of selecting old Indian servants, who had made their way up from subcontroller and who knew the whole official hierarchy by heart.... Yes, what would he do, pensioned off? Live at Nice? With no money? For saving was impracticable: his life was comfortable, but expensive; and instead of saving he was running up debts. Well, that didn't matter now: the debts would be paid off in time, but later, later.... The future, the existence of a pensioned official, was anything but an agreeable prospect for him. To vegetate at the Hague, in a small house, with a gin-and-bitters at the club, among the old fogeys: br-r-r! The very idea of it made him shudder. He wouldn't think about it; he preferred not to think about it at all: perhaps he would be dead by that time. But it

was all delightful now: his work, his house, India. There was absolutely nothing to compare with it.

Léonie had listened to him smilingly: she was accustomed to his quiet enthusiasm, his rhapsodizing over his post; as she put it, his adoration of the B.B. She also valued the luxury of being a resident's wife. The comparative isolation she did not mind; she usually was sufficient unto herself. And she answered smilingly, contented and charming with her creamy complexion, which showed still whiter under the light coat of rice-powder against the red silk of her kimono and looked so delightful amidst the surrounding waves of her fair hair.

That morning she had felt put out for a moment: Labuwangi, after Batavia, had depressed her with the tedium of an up-country capital. But since then she had acquired a large diamond; since then she had got Theo back. His room was close to hers. And it was sure to be a long time before he could obtain a berth.

These were her thoughts, while her husband sat blissfully reflecting after his pleasant confidences.

Her thoughts went no deeper than this: anything like remorse would have surprised her in the highest degree, had she been capable of feeling it. It began to grow dark slowly; the moon was already rising and shining brightly; and behind the velvety banyans, behind the feathery boughs of the coco-palms, which waved gently up and down like stately sheaves of dark ostrich-feathers, the last light of the sun cast a faintly stippled, dull-gold reflection, against which the softness of the banyans and the pomp of the coco-palms stood out as though etched in black. From the distance came the monotonous tinkle of the native orchestra, mournfully, limpid as water, like a xylophone, with a deep dissonance at intervals....

Chapter Six

Van Oudijck, in a pleasant mood because of his wife and children, suggested a drive; and the horses were put to the landau. Van Oudijck had a pleased and jovial look, under the broad, gold-laced peak of his cap. Léonie, seated beside him, was wearing a new mauve muslin frock, from Batavia, and a hat with mauve poppies. A lady's hat in the up-country districts is a luxury, a colossal elegance; and Doddie, facing her, but dressed inland fashion, without a hat, was secretly vexed and thought that mamma might just as well have told her she was going to "take" a hat, to use Doddie's idiom. She now looked such a contrast to mamma; she couldn't stand them now, those softly swaying poppies. Of the boys, René was with them, in a clean white suit. The chief messenger sat on the box beside the coachman, holding against his side the great golden umbrella, the symbol of authority. It was past six, it was already growing dark; and over Labuwangi there hung at this hour the velvety silence, the tragic mystery of the twilight atmosphere that marked the days of the eastern monsoon. Sometimes a dog barked, or a wood-pigeon cooed, breaking the unreality of the silence, as of a deserted town. But now there was also the rattle of the carriage driving right through the silence; and the horses stamped the silence into tiny shreds. No other carriages were met; an absence of all signs of human life cast a spell upon the gardens and verandahs. A couple of young men on foot, in white, took off their hats.

The carriage had left the wealthier part of the town and entered the Chinese quarter, where the lights were burning in the little shops. Business was almost finished: the Chinamen were resting, in all sorts of limp attitudes, with their legs dangling or crossed, their arms round their heads, their pigtails loose or twisted around their skulls. When the carriage approached, they rose and remained standing respectfully. The Javanese for the most part—those who were well brought up and knew their manners—squatted. Along the road stood the little portable kitchens, lit by small paraffin lamps, of the drink-vendors and pastry-sellers. The motley colours showed dingy in the evening darkness, lit by innumerable little lamps. The Chinese shops, crammed with goods, displayed red and gold signboards and red and gold placards with inscriptions; in the background was the domestic altar with the sacred print; the white god seated, with the black god grimacing behind him. But the street widened, became suddenly more considerable: rich Chinese houses loomed white in the dusk; the most striking was the gleaming, palatial villa of an immensely wealthy retired opium-factor, who had made his money in the days before the opium monopoly: a gleaming palace of graceful stucco-work with numberless outbuildings. The porticos of the verandah were in a monumental style of imposing elegance and in many soft shades of gold; in the depth of the open house the immense domestic altar was visible, with the print of the gods conspicuously illuminated; the garden was laid out with conventional winding paths, but beautifully filled with square pots and tall

vases of dark blue-and-green glazed porcelain, containing dwarf trees, handed down as heirlooms from father to son; and all was kept with a radiant cleanliness, a careful neatness of detail, eloquent of the prosperous, spick-and-span luxury of a Chinese opium-millionaire. But not all the Chinese houses were so ostentatiously open: most of them lay hidden with closed doors in high-walled gardens, tucked away in the secrecy of their domestic life.

But suddenly the houses came to an end and Chinese graves stretched along a broad road, rich graves, each grassy mound with a stone entrance—the door of death—raised in the form of the symbol of fecundity—the door of life—and all surrounded with a wide space of turf, to the great vexation of Van Oudijck, who reckoned out how much ground was lost to cultivation by these burial-places of the wealthy Chinese. And the Chinese seemed to triumph in life and death in this mysterious town which was otherwise so silent; the Chinese gave it its real character of busy traffic, of trade, of money-making, of living and dying; for, when the carriage drove into the Arab quarter—a district of ordinary houses, but gloomy, lacking in style, with life and prosperity hidden away behind closed doors; with chairs in the verandah, but the master of the house gloomily sitting cross-legged on the floor, following the carriage with a black look—this quarter seemed even more mysterious than the fashionable part of Labuwangi and seemed to radiate its unutterable mystery like an atmosphere of Islam that spread over the whole town, as though it were Islam that had poured forth the dusky, fatal melancholy of resignation which filled the shuddering, noiseless evening.... They did not feel this in their rattling carriage, accustomed to that atmosphere as they were from childhood and no longer sensitive to the gloomy secret that was like the approach of a dark force which had always breathed upon them, the foreign rulers with their creole blood, so that they should never suspect it. Perhaps, when Van Oudijck now and again read about Pan-Islam in the newspapers, he was dimly conscious in his deepest thoughts of this dark force, this gloomy secret. But at moments like the present—driving with his wife and children, amidst the rattling of his carriage and the trampling of his fine Walers; the messenger with the furled umbrella, which glittered like a furled sun, on the box—he was too intensely aware of his individuality, his authoritative, overbearing nature, to feel anything of the dark secret, to divine anything of the black peril. And he was now in far too pleasant a mood to feel or see anything melancholy. In his optimism he did not see even the decline of his town, which he loved; he was not struck, as they drove past, by the immense porticoed villas, the witnesses to the prosperity of former planters, now deserted, neglected, standing in grounds that had run wild, one of them taken over by a timber-felling company, which allowed the foreman to live in it and stacked the logs in the front-garden. The deserted houses gleamed sadly with their pillared porticos, which, amid the desolate grounds, loomed spectral in the moonlight, like temples of evil. But they did not see it like

that: enjoying the rocking of the smooth carriage-springs, Léonie smiled and dozed; and Doddie, now that they were approaching the Lange Laan again, looked out to see whether she could catch sight of Addie....

Chapter Seven

The secretary, Onno Eldersma, was a busy man. The post brought a daily average of some two hundred letters and documents to the residency-office, which employed two senior clerks, six juniors and a number of native writers and clerks; and the resident grumbled whenever the work fell into arrears. He himself was an energetic worker; and he expected his subordinates to show the same spirit. But sometimes there was a perfect torrent of documents, claims and applications. Eldersma was the typical government official, wholly wrapped up in his minutes and reports; and Eldersma was always busy. He worked morning, noon and night. He allowed himself no siesta. He took a hurried lunch at four o'clock and then rested for a little. Fortunately he had a sound, robust, Frisian constitution; but he needed all his blood, all his muscles, all his nerves for his work. It was not mere scribbling, mere fumbling with papers: it was manual labour with the pen, muscular work, nervous work; and it never ceased. He consumed himself, he spent himself, he was always writing. He had not another idea left in his head; he was nothing but the official, the civil servant. He had a charming house, a most charming and exceptional wife, a delightful child, but he never saw them, though he lived, vaguely, amid his home surroundings. He just slaved away, conscientiously, working off what he could. Sometimes he would tell the resident that it was impossible for him to do any more. But on this point Van Oudijck was inexorable, pitiless. He himself had been a district secretary; he knew what it meant. It meant work, it meant plodding like a cart-horse. It meant living, eating, sleeping with your pen in your hand. Then Van Oudijck would show him this or that piece of work which had to be finished. And Eldersma, who had said that he could do no more than he was doing, somehow got it done, and therefore always did do something more than he believed that he could do.

Then his wife, Eva, would say:

"My husband has ceased to be a human being; my husband has ceased to be a man; my husband is an official."

The young wife, very European, now in India for the first time, had never known, before her two years at Labuwangi, that it was possible to work as hard as her husband did, in a country as hot as Labuwangi was during the eastern moonson. She had resisted it at first; she had at first tried to stand upon her rights; but once she saw that he really had not a minute to spare, she waived them. She had very soon come to realize that her husband could not share her life, nor could she share his: not because he was not a good husband and very fond of his wife, but simply because the post brought two hundred letters and documents daily. She had soon seen that there was nothing for her to do at Labuwangi and that she would have to console herself with her house and, later, with her child. She arranged her house as a temple of art and comfort and racked her brains over the education of her little boy. She was

an artistically cultivated woman and came from an artistic environment. Her father was Van Hove, the great landscape-painter; her mother was Stella Couberg, the famous concert-singer. Eva, brought up in an artistic and musical home whose atmosphere she had breathed since her babyhood, in her picture-books and childish songs, Eva had married an East-Indian civil servant and had accompanied him to Labuwangi. She loved her husband, a good-looking Frisian and a man of sufficient culture to take an interest in many subjects. And she had gone, happy in her love and filled with illusions about India and all the Orientalism of the tropics. And she had tried to preserve her illusions, despite the warnings which she had received. At Singapore she was struck by the colour of the naked Malays, like that of a bronze statue, by the Eastern motley of the Chinese and Arab quarters and the poetry of the Japanese tea-houses, which unfolded like a page of Loti as she drove past. But, soon after, in Batavia, a grey disappointment had fallen like a cold, drizzling rain upon her expectation of seeing everything in India as a beautiful fairy-tale, a story out of the Arabian Nights. The habits of their narrow, everyday existence damped all her unsophisticated longing to admire; and she saw everything that was ridiculous even before she discovered anything else that was beautiful. At her hotel, the men in pyjamas lay at full length in their deck-chairs, with their lazy legs on the extended leg-rests, their feet—although carefully tended—bare and their toes moving quietly in a conscientious exercise of big toe and little toe, even while she was passing. The ladies were in sarong and kabaai, the only practical morning-dress, which is easily changed two or three times a day, but which suits so few, the straight, pillow-case outline at the back being peculiarly angular and ugly, however elegant and expensive the costume.... And then the commonplace aspect of the houses, with all their whitewash and their rows of fragile and meretricious flower-pots; the parched barrenness of the vegetation, the dirt of the natives! And, in the life of the Europeans, all the minor absurdities: the half-caste accent, with the constant little exclamations; the narrow provincial conventionality of the officials: only the Indian Council allowed to wear top-hats. And then the rigorous little maxims of etiquette: at a reception, the highest functionary is the first to leave; the others follow in due order. And the little peculiarities of tropical customs, such as the use of packing-cases and paraffin-tins for this, that and the other purpose: the wood for shop-windows, for dust-bins and home-made articles of furniture; the tins for gutters and watering-cans and all kinds of domestic utensils....

The young and cultured little woman, with her Arabian Nights illusions, was unable, amid these first impressions, to distinguish between what was colonial—the expedients of a European acclimatizing himself in a country which is alien to his blood—and what was really poetic, genuinely Indian, purely eastern, absolutely Javanese; and, because of these and other little absurdities, she had at once felt disappointed, as every one with artistic inclinations feels disappointed in colonial

India, which is not at all artistic or poetic and in which the rose-trees in their white pots are conscientiously manured with horse-droppings as high as they will bear, so that, when a breeze springs up, the scent of the roses mingles with a stench of freshly-sprinkled manure. And she had grown unjust, as does every Hollander, every newcomer to the beautiful country which he would like to see with the eyes of his preconceived literary vision, but which impresses him at first by its absurd colonial side. And she forgot that the country itself, which was originally so absolutely beautiful, was not to blame for all this absurdity.

She had had a couple of years of it and had been astonished, occasionally alarmed, then again shocked, had laughed sometimes and then again been annoyed; and at last, with the reasonableness of her nature and the practical side of her artistic soul, had grown accustomed to it all. She had grown accustomed to the toe-exercises, to the manure around the roses; she had grown accustomed to her husband, who was no longer a human being, no longer a man, but an official. She had suffered a great deal, she had written despairing letters, she had been sick with longing for the home of her parents, she had been on the verge of making a sudden departure, but she had not gone, so as not to leave her husband in his loneliness, and she had accustomed herself to things and made the best of them. She had not only the soul of an artist – she played the piano exceptionally well – but also the heart of a plucky little woman. She had gone on loving her husband and she felt that, after all, she provided him with a pleasant home. She gave serious attention to the education of her child. And, once she had become accustomed to things, she grew less unjust and suddenly saw much of what was beautiful in India; admired the stately grace of a coco-palm, the exquisite, paradisaical flavour of the Indian fruits, the glory of the blossoming trees; and, in the inland districts, she had realized the noble majesty of nature, the harmony of the undulating hills, the faery forests of gigantic ferns, the menacing ravines of the craters, the shimmering terraces of the flooded rice-fields, with the tender green of the young paddy; and the character of the Javanese had been a very revelation to her: his elegance, his grace, his salutation, his dancing; his aristocratic distinction, so often evidently handed down directly from a noble race, from an age-old chivalry, now modernized into a diplomatic suppleness, worshipping authority by nature and inevitably resigned under the yoke of the rulers whose gold-lace arouses his innate respect.

In her father's house, Eva had always felt around her the cult of the artistic and the beautiful, even to the verge of decadence; those with her had always directed her attention, in an environment of perfectly beautiful things, in beautiful words, in music, to the plastic beauty of life, and perhaps too exclusively to that alone. And she was now too well-trained in that school of beauty to persist in her disappointment and to see only the white-wash and flimsiness of the houses, the petty airs of the officials, the packing-cases and the horse-droppings. Her literary

mind now saw the palatial character of the houses, so typical of the official arrogance, which could hardly have been other than it was; and she saw all these details more accurately, obtaining a broader insight into all that world of India, so that revelation followed upon revelation. Only she continued to feel something strange, something that she could not analyse, a certain mystery, a dark secrecy, which she felt creeping softly over the land at night. But she thought that it was no more than a mood produced by the darkness and the very dense foliage, that it was like the very quiet music of stringed instruments of a kind quite strange to her, a distant murmur of harps in a minor key, a vague voice of warning, a whispering in the night – no more – which evoked poetic imaginings.

At Labuwangi, a small inland capital, she often astonished the acclimatized up-country elements because she was somewhat excitable, because she was enthusiastic, spontaneous, glad to be alive – even in India – glad of the beauty of life, because she had a healthy nature, softly tempered and shaded into a charming pose of caring for nothing but the beautiful: beautiful lines, beautiful colours, artistic ideas. Those who knew her either disliked her or were very fond of her: few felt indifferent to her. She had gained a reputation in India for unusualness: her house was unusual, her clothes unusual, the education of her child unusual; her ideas were unusual and the only ordinary thing about her was her Frisian husband, who was almost too ordinary in that environment, which might have been cut out of an art-magazine. She was fond of society and gathered around her as much of the European element as possible: it was, indeed, seldom artistic; but she imparted a pleasant tone to it, something that reminded everybody of Holland. This little clique, this group admired her and instinctively adopted the tone which she set. Because of her greater culture, she ruled over it, though she was not a despot by nature. But they did not all approve of this; and the rest called her eccentric. The clique, however, the group, remained faithful to her, for she awakened them, in the soft languor of Indian life, to the existence of music, ideas, and the *joie de vivre*. So she had drawn into her circle the doctor and his wife, the chief engineer and his wife, the district controller and his wife, and sometimes a couple of outside controllers, or a few young fellows from the sugar-factories. This brought round her a gay little band of adherents. She ruled over them, organized amateur theatricals for them, picnicked with them and charmed them with her house and her frocks and the epicurean and artistic flavour of her life. They forgave her everything that they did not understand – her aesthetic principles, her enthusiasm for Wagner – because she gave them gaiety and a little *joie de vivre* and a sociable feeling in the deadliness of their colonial existence. For this they were fervently grateful to her. And thus it had come about that her house became the actual centre of social life at Labuwangi, whereas the residency, on the other hand, withdrew with dignified reserve into the shadow of its banyan-trees. Léonie van Oudijck was not jealous on this account. She loved her repose and was only too glad

to leave everything to Eva Eldersma. And so Léonie troubled about nothing — neither entertaining nor musical societies nor dramatic societies nor charities — and delegated to Eva all the social duties which as a rule a resident's wife feels bound to take upon herself. Léonie had her monthly receptions, at which she spoke to everybody and smiled upon everybody, and gave her annual ball on New Year's Day. With this the social life of the residency began and ended. Apart from this she lived there in her egoism, in the comfort with which she had selfishly surrounded herself, in her rosy dreams of cherubs and in such love as she was able to evoke. Sometimes, periodically, she felt a need for Batavia and went to spend a month or two there. And so she, as the wife of the resident, led her own life; and Eva did everything and Eva set the tone. It sometimes gave rise to a little jealousy, as for instance between her and the wife of the inspector of finances, who considered that the first place after Mrs. van Oudijck belonged to her and not to the secretary's wife. This would occasion a good deal of bickering over the Indian official etiquette; and stories and tittle-tattle would go the rounds, enhanced, aggravated, until they reached the remotest sugar-factory in the district. But Eva took no notice of all this gossip and preferred to devote herself to providing a little social life in Labuwangi. And, to keep things going properly, she and her little circle ruled the roost. She had been elected president of the Thalia Dramatic Society and she accepted, but on condition that the rules should be abolished. She was willing to be queen, but without a constitution. Everybody said that this would never do: there had always been rules. But Eva replied that, if there were to be rules, she must refuse to be president. And they gave way: the constitution of the Thalia was abolished; Eva held absolute sway, chose the plays and distributed the parts. And it was the golden age of the society: rehearsed by her, the members acted so well that people came from Surabaya to attend the performances at the Concordia. The pieces played were of a quality such as had never been seen at the Concordia before.

And the result of this again was that people either loved her or did not like her at all. But she went her way and provided a little European civilization, so that they might not grow too "stuffy" at Labuwangi. And people descended to all sorts of trickery to get invited to her little dinners, which were famous and notorious. For she stipulated that her men should come in dress-clothes and not in their Singapore jackets, without shirts. She introduced swallow-tails and white ties; and she was inexorable. The women were low-necked, as usual, for the sake of coolness, and thought it delightful. But her poor men struggled against it, puffed and blew at first and felt congested in their tall collars; the doctor declared that it was unhealthy; and the veterans protested that it was madness and opposed to all the good old Indian customs. But when they had puffed and blown a few times in their dress-coats and tall collars, they all found Mrs. Eldersma's dinners charming, precisely because they were so European in style.

Chapter Eight

Eva was at home to her friends once a fortnight: "You see, resident, it's not a reception," she always said, in self-defence, to Van Oudijck. "I know that no one's allowed to 'receive' in the interior, except the resident and his wife. It's really not a reception, resident. I shouldn't dare to call it that. I'm just at home to everybody once a fortnight; and I'm glad if our friends care to come.... It's all right, isn't it, resident, as long as it's not a 'reception'?"

Van Oudijck would laugh merrily, with his jovial laugh shaking his military moustache, and ask if little Mrs. Eldersma was pulling his leg. She could do anything, if she would only continue to provide a little gaiety, a little acting, a little music, a little pleasant intercourse. That was her duty, once and for all: to look after the social element at Labuwangi.

There was nothing Indian about her at-home days. For instance, at the resident's, the receptions were regulated according to the old inland practice: all the ladies sat side by side, on chairs along the walls; Mrs. van Oudijck walked past them and talked to each for a moment in turn, standing, while they remained sitting; the resident chatted to the men in another gallery. The male and female elements kept apart; gin-and-bitters, port and iced water were handed round.

At Eva's, people strolled about, walked through the galleries, sat down wherever they pleased; everybody talked to everybody. There was not the same ceremony as at the resident's, but there was all the chic of a French drawing-room, with an artistic touch to it. And it had become a habit for the ladies to dress more for Eva's days than for the resident's receptions: at Eva's they wore hats, a symbol of extreme elegance in India. Fortunately, Léonie did not care; it left her totally indifferent.

Léonie was now sitting in the middle gallery, on a couch, and remained sitting with the raden-aju, the wife of the regent. She liked that: everybody came up to her, whereas at her own receptions she had to do so much walking, past the row of ladies along the wall. Now she took her ease, remained sitting, smiling on those who came to pay her their respects. But, apart from this, there was a restless movement of guests. Eva was here, there and everywhere.

"Do you think it's pretty here?" Mrs. van der Does asked Léonie, with a glance at the middle gallery.

And her eyes wandered in surprise over the dull arabesques, painted in distemper on the pale-grey walls, like frescoes; over the teak wainscoting, carved by skilful Chinese cabinetmakers after a drawing in the Studio: over the bronze Japanese vases, on their teak pedestals, in which branches of bamboo and bouquets of gigantic flowers cast their shadows right up to the ceiling.

“Odd ... but very pretty! Unusual!” murmured Léonie, to whom Eva’s taste was always a conundrum.

Withdrawn into herself as into a temple of egoism, she did not mind what others did or felt, or how they arranged their houses. But she could not have lived here. She liked her own lithographs—Veronese and Shakespeare and Tasso: she thought them distinguished—liked them better than the handsome carton photographs after Italian masters which Eva had standing here and there on easels. Above all, she loved her chocolate-box and the scent-advertisement with the little angels.

“Do you like that dress?” Mrs. van der Does asked next.

“Yes, I do,” said Léonie, smiling pleasantly. “Eva’s very clever: she painted those blue irises herself, on Chinese silk....”

She never said anything but kind, smiling things. She never spoke evil; it left her indifferent. And she now turned to the raden-aju and thanked her in kindly, drawling sentences for some fruit which the latter had sent her. The regent came to speak to her and she asked after his two little sons. She talked in Dutch and the regent and the raden-aju both answered in Malay. The Regent of Labuwangi, Raden Adipati Surio Sunario, was still young, just turned thirty: a refined Javanese face like the conceited face of a puppet; a little moustache, with the points carefully twisted; and, above all, a staring gaze that struck the beholder, a gaze that stared as though in a continual trance; a gaze that seemed to pierce the visible reality and to see right through it; a gaze that issued from eyes like coals, sometimes dull and weary, sometimes flashing like sparks of ecstasy and fanaticism. Among the population, which was almost slavishly attached to its regent and his family, he enjoyed a reputation for sanctity and mystery, though no one ever knew the truth of the matter. Here, in Eva’s gallery, he merely produced the impression of a puppet-like figure, of a distinguished Indian prince, save that his trance-like eyes occasioned surprise. The sarong, drawn smoothly around his hips, hung low in front in a bundle of flat, regular pleats, which fluttered open; he wore a white starched shirt with diamond studs and a little blue tie; over this was a blue cloth uniform-jacket, with gold uniform buttons, with the royal “W” and the crown; his bare feet were encased in black, patent-leather pumps turning up at the pointed toes; the kerchief carefully wound about his head in narrow folds imparted a feminine air to his refined features, but the black eyes, now and then weary, constantly sparkled as in a trance, an ecstasy. The golden kris was stuck in his blue-and-gold waist-band, right behind, in the small of his back; a large jewel glittered on his tiny, slender hand; and a cigarette-case of braided gold wire peeped from the pocket of his jacket. He did not say much—sometimes he looked as though he were asleep; then his strange eyes would flash up again—and his replies to what Léonie said consisted almost exclusively of a curt, clipped

“Saja, yes....”

He uttered the two syllables with a hard, sibilant accent of politeness, laying equal stress upon each. He accompanied his little word of civility with a brief, automatic nod of the head. The raden-aju too, seated beside Léonie, answered in the same way:

“Saja....”

But she always followed it up with a little embarrassed laugh. She was very young still, possibly just eighteen. She was a Solo princess; and Van Oudijck could not tolerate her, because she introduced Solo manners and Solo expressions into Labuwangi, in her conceited arrogance, as though nothing could be so distinguished and so purely aristocratic as what was done and said at the court of Solo. She employed court phrases which the Labuwangi population did not understand; she had forced the regent to engage a Solo coachman, with the Solo state livery, including the wig and the false beard and moustache, at which the people stared wide-eyed. Her yellow complexion was made to appear yet paler by a light layer of rice-powder applied moist; her eyebrows were slightly arched in a fine black streak; jewelled hairpins were stuck in her glossy chignon and a kenanga-flower in her girdle. Over an embroidered garment which, according to the custom of the Solo court, was long and trailing in front, she wore a kabaai of red brocade, relieved with gold braid and fastened with three large gems. Two stones of fabulous value, moreover, in heavy silver settings, dragged her ears down. She wore light-coloured open-work stockings and gold embroidered slippers. Her little thin fingers were stiff with rings, as though set in brilliants; and she held a white marabou fan in her hand.

“Saja ... saja,” she answered, civilly, with her embarrassed little laugh.

Léonie was silent for a moment, tired of carrying on the conversation by herself. When she had spoken to the regent and the raden-aju about their sons she could not find much more to say. Van Oudijck, after Eva had shown him round the galleries — for there was always something new to admire — joined his wife; the regent rose to his feet.

“Well, regent,” asked the resident, in Dutch, “how is the raden-aju pangéran?”

He was enquiring after Sunario’s mother, the old regent’s widow.

“Very well ... thank you,” murmured the regent, in Malay. “But mamma didn’t come with us ... so old ... easily tired.”

“I want to speak to you, regent.”

The regent followed Van Oudijck into the front verandah, which was empty.

"I am sorry to have to tell you that I have just had another bad report of your brother, the Regent of Ngadjiwa.... I am informed that he has lately been gambling again and has lost large sums of money. Do you know anything about it?"

The regent shut himself up, as it were, in his puppet-like stiffness and kept silence. Only his eyes stared, as though gazing through Van Oudijck at distant objects.

"Do you know anything about it, regent?"

"Tida, no...."

"I request you, as head of the family, to look into it and to keep a watch upon your brother. He gambles, he drinks; he does your name no credit, regent. If the old pangéran could have guessed that his second son would go to the dogs like this, it would have pained him greatly. He held his name high. He was one of the wisest and noblest regents that the government ever had in Java; and you know how greatly the government valued the pangéran. Even in the Company's days, Holland owed much to your house, which was always loyal to her. But the times seem to be altering.... It is very regrettable, regent, that an old Javanese family with such lofty traditions as yours should be unable to remain faithful to those traditions...."

Raden Adipati Surio Sunario turned pale with a greenish pallor. His hypnotic eyes pierced the resident through; but he saw that the latter too was boiling with anger. And he veiled the strange glitter of his gaze with a drowsy weariness.

"I thought, resident, that you had always felt an affection for my house," he murmured, almost plaintively.

"And you thought right, regent. I loved the pangéran. I have always admired your house and have always tried to uphold it. I want to uphold it still, together with yourself, regent, hoping that you see not only, as your reputation suggests, the things of the next world, but also the realities about you. But it is your brother, regent, whom I do not love and cannot possibly esteem. I have been told – and I can trust the words of those who told me – that the Regent of Ngadjiwa has not only been gambling ... but also that he has failed this month to pay the heads at Ngadjiwa their salaries...."

They looked at each other fixedly; and Van Oudijck's firm and steady glance met the regent's gaze, the gaze of a man in a trance.

"The persons who act as your informants may be mistaken...."

"I am assuming that they would not bring me such reports without the most incontestable certainty.... Regent, this is a very delicate matter. I repeat, you are the head of your family. Enquire of your younger brother to what extent he has misapplied the money of the government and make it all good as soon as possible. I am purposely leaving the matter to you. I will not speak to your brother about it, in

order to spare a member of your family as long as I can. It is for you to admonish your brother, to call his attention to what in my eyes is a crime, but one which you, by your prestige as the head of the family, are still able to undo. Forbid him to gamble and order him to master his passion. Otherwise I foresee very grievous things and I shall have to propose your brother's dismissal. You yourself know how I should dislike to do that. For the Regent of Ngadjiwa is the second son of the old pangéran, whom I held in high esteem, even as I should always wish to spare your mother, the raden-aju pangéran, any sorrow."

"I thank you," murmured Sunario.

"Reflect seriously upon what I am saying to you, regent. If you cannot make your brother listen to reason, if the salaries of the heads are not paid at the earliest possible date, then ... then I shall have to act. And, if my warning is of no avail, then it means your brother's ruin. You yourself know, the dismissal of a regent is such a very exceptional thing that it would bring disgrace upon your family. Help me to save the house of the Adiningrats from such a fate."

"I promise," murmured the regent.

"Give me your hand, regent."

Van Oudijck pressed the thin fingers of the Javanese:

"Can I trust you?" he asked.

"In life, in death."

"Then let us go indoors. And tell me as soon as possible what you have discovered."

The regent bowed. A greenish pallor betrayed the silent, secret rage which was working inside him like the fire of a volcano. His eyes, behind Van Oudijck's back, stabbed with a mysterious hatred at the Hollander, the low-born Hollander, the base commoner, the infidel Christian, who had no business to feel anything, with that unclean soul of his, concerning him, his house, his father, his mother, or their supremely sacred aristocracy and nobility ... even though they had always bowed beneath the yoke of those who were stronger than they....

Chapter Nine

"I have counted on your staying to dinner," said Eva.

"Of course," replied Van Helderer, the controller, and his wife.

The reception—not a reception, as Eve always said in self-defence—was nearly over: the Van Oudijcks had been the first to go; the regent followed. The Eldersmas were left with their little band of intimates: Dr. Rantzow and Doorn de Bruijn, the senior engineer, with their wives, and the Van Helderens. They sat down in the front verandah with a certain sense of relief and rocked comfortably to and fro. Whiskies-and-soda and glasses of lemonade, with great lumps of ice in them, were handed round.

"Always chock full, reception at Eva's," said Mrs. van Helderer. "Fuller than other day at resident's...."

Ida van Helderer was the type of the white-skinned half-caste. She always tried to behave in a very European fashion, to talk Dutch nicely; she even pretended to speak bad Malay and not to care for native dishes. She was short and plump all over; she was very white, a dead white, with big, black, astonished eyes. She was full of little mysterious fads and hatreds and affections; all her actions were the result of mysterious little impulses. Sometimes she hated Eva, sometimes she doted on her. She was absolutely unreliable; her every action, her every movement, her every word might be a surprise. She was always in love, tragically. She took all her little affairs very tragically, on a very large and serious scale, with not the least sense of proportion, and then unbosomed herself to Eva, who laughed and comforted her.

Her husband, the controller, had never been in Holland: he had been educated entirely in Batavia, at the William III. College and the Indian Department. And he was very strange to see, this creole, apparently quite European, tall, fair and pale, with his fair moustache, his blue eyes, expressing animation and interest, and his manners, which displayed a finer courtesy than could be found in the smartest circles of Europe, but with not a vestige of India in thought, speech or dress. He would speak of Paris and Vienna as though he had spent years in both capitals, whereas he had never been out of Java; he was mad on music, although he found it difficult to appreciate Wagner, at least as Eva played him; and his great illusion was that he must really go to Europe on leave next year, to see the Paris Exhibition. There was a wonderful distinction, an innate style about young Van Helderer, as though he were not the offspring of European parents who had always lived in India, as though he were a foreigner from an unknown country, of a nationality which you could not place at once. His accent barely betrayed a certain softness, resulting from the climate; he spoke Dutch so correctly that it would have sounded almost stiff amid the slovenly slang of the mother-country; and he spoke French, English and

German with greater facility than most Dutchmen. Perhaps he owed to a French mother that exotic and courtly politeness, so innate, pleasant and natural. In his wife, who was also of French extraction, springing from a creole family in Réunion, this exoticism had become a mysterious medley which had never developed beyond a sort of childishness and a jumble of petty emotions and petty passions, while she tried, with those great, sombre eyes of hers, to read tragedy into her life, though she did no more than just dip into it as into an ill-written magazine-story.

She now imagined herself to be in love with the senior engineer, the oldest of the little band, a man already turning grey, with a black beard; and, in her tragic fashion, she pictured scenes with Mrs. Doorn de Bruijn, a stout, placid, melancholy woman. Dr. Rantzow and his wife were Germans: he fat, fair-haired, vulgar, pot-bellied; she, with a serene German face, pleasant and matronly, talking Dutch vivaciously with a German accent.

This was the little clique over which Eva Eldersma reigned. In addition to Frans van Helderer the controller, it consisted of quite ordinary Indian and European elements, people without artistic sense, as Eva said; but she had no other choice at Labuwangi, and therefore she amused herself with Ida's little tragedies and made the best of the others.

Onno, her husband, tired as usual with his work, did not join much in the conversation, sat and listened.

"How long was Mrs. van Oudijck at Batavia?" asked Ida.

"Two months," said the doctor's wife. "A very long visit, this time."

"I hear," said Mrs. Doorn de Bruijn, placid, melancholy and quietly venomous, "that this time one member of council, one head of a department and three young business-men kept Mrs. van Oudijck amused at Batavia."

"And I can assure you people," said the doctor, "that, if Mrs. van Oudijck did not go to Batavia regularly, she would miss a beneficial cure, even though she takes it on her own and not ... by my prescription."

"Let us speak no evil!" Eva interrupted, almost entreatingly. "Mrs. van Oudijck is beautiful—with a tranquil Junoesque beauty and the eyes of a Venus—and I can forgive anything to beautiful people about me. And you, doctor," threatening him with her finger, "mustn't betray professional secrets. You doctors, in India, are often far too outspoken about your patients' secrets. When I'm unwell, it's never anything but a headache. Will you make a careful note of that, doctor?"

"The resident seems preoccupied," said Doorn de Bruijn.

"Could he know ... about his wife?" asked Ida, sombrely, her great eyes filled with black velvet tragedy.

"The resident is often like that," said Frans van Helderer. "He has his moods. Sometimes he's pleasant, cheerful, jovial, as he was lately, on circuit. Then again he has his gloomy days, working, working and working and grumbling that nobody does any work except himself."

"My poor, unappreciated Onno!" sighed Eva.

"I believe he's overworking himself," said Van Helderer. "Labuwangi is a tremendously busy district. And the resident takes things too much to heart, both in his own house and outside, in his relations with his son and his relations with the regent."

"I should sack the regent," said the doctor.

"But, doctor," said Van Helderer, "you know enough about conditions in Java to know that things can't be done just like that. The regent and his family are closely identified with Labuwangi and too highly considered by the population...."

"Yes, I know the Dutch policy. The English in British India deal with their Indian princes in a more arbitrary and high-handed fashion. The Dutch treat them much too gently."

"The question might arise which of the two policies is the better in the long run," said Van Helderer, drily, hating to hear a foreigner disparage anything in a Dutch colony. "Fortunately, we know nothing here of the continual poverty and famine that prevail in British India."

"I saw the resident speaking very seriously to the regent," said Doorn de Bruijn.

"The resident is too susceptible," said Van Helderer. "He allows himself to be greatly dejected by the gradual decline of this old Javanese family, which is doomed to go under, though he'd like to hold it up.... The resident, cool and practical though he may be, is a bit of a romantic in this, though he might refuse to admit it. But he remembers the Adiningrats' glorious past, he remembers that last fine figure, the noble old pangéran, and he compares him with his sons, the one a fanatic, the other a gambler...."

"I think our regent—not the Ngadjiwa one: he's a coolie—delightful!" said Eva. "He's a living figure out of a puppet-show. Except his eyes: they frighten me. What terrible eyes! Sometimes they're asleep and sometimes they're like a maniac's. But he is so refined, so distinguished! And the raden-aju too is an exquisite little doll: 'Saja ... saja!' She says nothing, but she looks very decorative. I'm always glad when they adorn my at-home day and I miss them when they're not there. And the old raden-aju pangéran, grey-haired, dignified, a queen...."

"A gambler of the first water," said Eldersma.

"They gamble away all they possess," said Van Helderer, "she and the regent of Ngadjiwa. They're no longer rich. The old pangéran used to have splendid insignia of rank for state occasions, magnificent lances, a jewelled betel-box, spittoons—useful objects, those!—of priceless value. The old raden-aju has gambled them all away. I doubt if she has anything left but her pension: two hundred and forty guilders a month, I believe. And how our regent manages to keep all his cousins, male and female, in the Kabupaten,² according to the Javanese custom, is beyond me."

"What custom is that?" asked the doctor.

"Every regent collects his whole family around him like parasites, clothes them, feeds them, provides them with pocket-money ... and the natives think it dignified and smart."

"Sad ... that ruined greatness!" said Ida, gloomily.

A boy came to announce dinner and they went to the back verandah and sat down to table.

"And what have you in prospect for us, mevrouwtje?" asked the senior engineer. "What are the plans? Labuwangi has been very quiet lately."

"It's really terrible," said Eva. "If I hadn't all of you, it would be terrible. If I weren't always planning something and having ideas, it would be terrible, this living at Labuwangi. My husband doesn't feel it; he works, as all you men do: what else is there to do in India but work, regardless of the heat? But for us women! What a life, if we didn't find our happiness purely in ourselves, in our home, in our friends ... when we have the good fortune to possess those friends! Nothing from the outside. Not a picture, not a statue to look at; no music to listen to. Don't be cross, Van Helderer. You play the 'cello charmingly, but nobody in India can keep up to date. The Italian Opera plays *Il Trovatore*. The amateur companies—and they're really first-rate at Batavia—play ... *Il Trovatore*. And you, Van Helderer ... don't object. I saw you in an ecstasy when the Italian company from Surabaya were here lately, at the club, playing ... *Il Trovatore*. You were enchanted."

"There were some beautiful voices among them."

"But twenty years ago, they tell me, even then people were enchanted with ... *Il Trovatore*. Oh, it's terrible! Sometimes, suddenly, it crushes me. Sometimes, all of a sudden, I feel that I have not grown used to India and that I never shall; and I began to long for Europe, for life!"

"But Eva," Eldersma began, in alarm, dreading lest she should really go home one day, leaving him alone in what would then be his utterly joyless working-life at

Labuwangi: "sometimes you do appreciate India: your house, the pleasant, spacious life...."

"Materially...."

"And don't you appreciate your own work—I mean the many things which you are able to do here?"

"What? Getting up parties? Arranging theatricals?"

"It's you who are the real rezidente³," said Ida, gushingly.

"Thank goodness, we're coming back to Mrs. van Oudijck," said Mrs. Doom de Bruijn, teasingly.

"And to professional secrecy," said Dr. Rantzow.

"No," sighed Eva, "we want something new. Dances, parties, picnics, trips into the mountains ... we've exhausted all that. I know nothing more. The Indian depression's coming over me. I'm in one of my dejected moods. Those brown faces of my 'boys' around me suddenly strike me as uncanny. India frightens me at times. Do none of you feel the same? A vague dread, amystery in the air, something menacing.... I don't know what it is. The evenings are sometimes so full of mystery and there is something mysterious in the character of the native, who is so remote from us, who differs from us so...."

"Artistic feelings," said Van Helderer, chaffingly. "No, I don't feel like that. India is my country."

"You type!" said Eva, chaffing him in return. "What makes you what you are, so curiously European? I can't call it Dutch."

"My mother was a Frenchwoman."

"But, after all, you're a creole: born here, brought up here.... And you have nothing of a creole about you. I think it's wonderful to have met you: I like you as a change.... Help me, can't you? Suggest something new. Not a dance, not a trip into the mountains. I want something new. Else I shall get a craving for my father's paintings, for my mother's singing, for our beautiful, artistic house at the Hague. If I don't have something new, I shall die. I'm not like your wife, Van Helderer, always in love."

"Eva!" Ida entreated.

"Tragically in love, with her beautiful, sombre eyes. Always, first with her husband and then with somebody else. I am never in love. Not even any longer with my husband. He is ... with me. But I have not an erotic temperament. There's a great deal of love-making in India, isn't there, doctor?... Well, we've ruled out dances,

excursions into the mountains and love-making. What then, in Heaven's name, what then?"

"I know of something," said Mrs. Doorn de Bruijn; and a sudden anxiety came over her placid melancholy.

She gave a side-glance at Mrs. Rantzow; the German woman grasped her meaning.

"What is it?" asked the others, eagerly.

"Table-turning," whispered the two ladies.

There was a general laugh.

"Oh dear!" sighed Eva, disappointed. "A trick, a joke, an evening's amusement. No, I want something that will fill my life for at least a month."

"Table-turning," repeated Mrs. Rantzow.

"Listen to me," said Mrs. Doorn de Bruijn. "The other day, for a joke, we tried making a gipsy-table turn. We all promised not to cheat. The table ... moved, spelt out words, tapping them out by the alphabet."

"But was there no cheating?" asked the doctor, Eldersma and Van Helderer.

"You'll have to trust us," declared the two ladies, in self-defence.

"All right," said Eva. "We've finished dinner. Let's have some table-turning."

"We must all promise not to cheat," said Mrs. Rantzow. "I can see that my husband will be ... antipathetic. But Ida ... a great medium."

They rose.

"Must we have the lights out?" asked Eva.

"No," said Mrs. Doorn de Bruijn.

"An ordinary gipsy-table?"

"A three-legged wooden table."

"The eight of us?"

"No, we must begin by choosing: for instance, yourself, Eva, Ida, Van Helderer, and Mrs. Rantzow. The doctor's antipathetic; so is Eldersma. De Bruijn and I will relieve you."

"Fire away, then!" said Eva. "A new diversion for Labuwangi society. And no cheating...."

"We must give one another our word of honour, as friends, not to cheat."

"Done!" they all said.

The doctor sniggered. Eldersma shrugged his shoulders. A boy brought a gipsy-table. They sat round the little wooden table and placed their fingers on it lightly, looking at one another expectantly and suspiciously. Mrs. Rantzow was solemn, Eva amused, Ida sombre, Van Helderer smilingly indifferent. Suddenly a strained expression came over Ida's beautiful half-caste face.

The table quivered....

They exchanged frightened glances; the doctor sniggered.

Then slowly, the table tilted one of its three legs and carefully put it down again.

"Did anybody move?" asked Eva.

They all shook their heads. Ida had turned pale.

"I feel a trembling in my fingers," she murmured.

The table once more tilted its leg, described an angry, grating semicircle over the marble floor and put its leg down with a violent stamp.

They looked at one another in surprise. Ida sat as though bereft of life, staring, with fingers outspread, ecstatically.

And the table tilted its leg for the third time.

It was certainly very curious. Eva doubted for a moment whether Mrs. Rantzow was lifting the table, but, when she questioned her with a glance, the German doctor's wife shook her head and Eva saw that she was playing fair. They once more promised absolute honesty. And, when they were now certain of one another, in full confidence, it was most curious how the table continued to describe angry, grating semicircles, tilting one leg and tapping on the marble floor.

"Is there a spirit present, revealing itself?" asked Mrs. Rantzow, with a glance at the leg of the table.

The table tapped once:

"Yes."

But, when the spirit was asked to spell its name, to tap out the letters of its name by the letters of the alphabet, all that came was:

"Z X R S A."

The manifestation was incomprehensible.

Suddenly, however, the table began spelling hurriedly, as though it had something at its heels. The taps were counted and spelt:

"Lé ... onie Ou ... dijk...."

"What about Mrs. van Oudijk?"

A coarse word followed.

The ladies started, excepting Ida, who sat as though in a trance.

"The table has spoken.... What did it say?... What is Mrs. van Oudijck?" cried the voices, all speaking at once.

"It's incredible!" murmured Eva. "Are we all playing fair?"

They all protested their honesty.

"Let us really be honest, else there's no fun in it.... I wish I could be certain."

They all wished that: Mrs. Rantzow, Ida, Van Helderer, Eva. The others looked on eagerly, believing; but the doctor did not believe and sat sniggering.

Again the table grated angrily and tapped: and the leg began to spell, "A...," and repeated the coarse word.

"Why?" asked Mrs. Rantzow.

The table began to tap.

"Write it down, Onno!" said Eva to her husband.

Eldersma fetched a pencil and paper and wrote the message down.

Three names followed: one of a member of council, one of a departmental head, and one of a young business-man.

"When people aren't backbiting in India, the tables begin to backbite!" said Eva.

"The spirits," murmured Ida.

"They are generally mocking spirits," said Mrs. Rantzow, didactically.

But the table went on tapping.

"Write it down, Onno!" said Eva.

Eldersma wrote it down.

"A-d-d-i-e!" the leg tapped out.

"No!" the voices all cried together, in vehement denial. "This time the table's mistaken!... At least, young De Luce has never yet been mentioned in connection with Mrs. van Oudijck."

"T-h-e-o!" said the table, correcting itself.

"Her step-son!... It's terrible!... That's different!... Everybody knows that!" cried the voices in assent.

"Yes, we know that!" said Mrs. Rantzow, with a glance at the leg of the table.

"Come, tell us something that we don't know. Come, table! Come, spirit! Please!..."

She addressed the table-leg in coaxing, wheedling accents. Everybody laughed. The table grated.

"Be serious!" Mrs. Doorn de Bruijn said, in warning.

The table bounced down on Ida's lap.

"Oh my!" cried the pretty half-caste, waking out of her trance. "Right against my stomach!"

They laughed and laughed. The table turned round fiercely and they rose from their chairs, with their hands on the table, and accompanied its angry, waltzing movements.

"Next ... year ..." the table rapped out.

Eldersma wrote it down.

"Frightful ... war."

"Between whom?"

"Europe ... and ... China."

"It sounds like a fairy-tale!" grinned the doctor.

"La-bu-wangi," tapped the table.

"What about it?" they asked.

"Is ... a ... beastly ... hole...."

"Say something serious, table, do!" Mrs. Rantzow implored, pleasantly, in her best German-matron manner.

"Dan ... ger," the table tapped out.

"Where?"

"Threat ... ens," the table continued, "La-bu-wangi."

"Danger threatens Labuwangi?"

"Yes!" said the table, with one tap, angrily.

"What danger?"

"Rebellion."

"Rebellion? Who's going to rebel?"

"In ... two months ... Sunario."

They became thoughtful.

But the table, suddenly, unexpectedly, fell over again into Ida's lap.

"Oh my! Oh dear!" cried the little woman.

The table refused to go on.

"Tired," it tapped out.

They continued to hold their hands on it.

"Leave off," said the table.

The doctor, sniggering, laid his short, broad hand on it, as though to compel it.

"Go to blazes!" cried the table, grating and turning. "Bounder!"

And worse words followed, aimed at the doctor, as though by a street-boy: obscene words, senseless and incoherent.

"Who's suggesting those words?" asked Eva, indignantly.

Obviously no one was suggesting them, neither the three ladies nor Van Helderer, who was always very punctilious and who was manifestly indignant at the mocking spirit's coarseness.

"It really is a spirit," said Ida, looking very pale.

"I'm going to leave off," said Eva, nervously, lifting up her fingers. "I don't understand this nonsense. It's quite amusing, but the table's not accustomed to polite society."

"We've got a new resource for Labuwangi!" said Eldersma. "No more picnics, no dances ... but table-turning!"

"We must practise!" said Mrs. Doorn de Bruijn.

Eva shrugged her shoulders.

"It's inexplicable," she said. "I'm bound to believe that none of us was cheating. It's not the sort of thing Van Helderer would do, to suggest such words as those."

"Madam!" said Van Helderer, defending himself.

"We must do it again," said Ida. "Look, there's a hadji leaving the grounds."

She pointed to the garden.

"A hadji?" asked Eva.

She looked towards the garden, expecting to see a Mecca pilgrim. There was nothing.

"Oh no, it's not!" said Ida. "I thought it was a hadji. It's nothing, only the moonlight."

It was late. They said good-night, laughing gaily, wondering, but finding no explanation.

"I do hope this hasn't made you ladies nervous?" said the doctor.

No, considering all things, they were not nervous. They were more amused, even though they did not understand.

It was two o'clock when they went home. The moonlight was streaming down on the town, which lay deathly still, slumbering in the velvet shadows of the gardens.

Chapter Ten

Next day, when Eldersma had gone to the office and Eva was moving about the house, in sarong and kabaai, on her domestic duties, she saw Frans van Helderer coming through the garden.

"May I?" he called out.

"Certainly," she called back. "Come in. But I'm on my way to the godown."

And she held up her bunch of keys.

"I'm due at the resident's in half an hour, but I'm too early ... so I just looked in."

She smiled.

"But I'm busy, you know!" she said. "Come along to the godown with me."

He followed her; he was wearing a black alpaca jacket, because he had to go to the resident presently.

"How's Ida?" asked Eva. "Did she sleep well after her séance of last night?"

"Only fairly well," said Frans van Helderer. "I don't think she ought to do any more. She kept waking with a start, falling on my neck and begging me to forgive her, I don't know what for."

"It didn't upset me at all," said Eva, "though I don't understand it in the least."

She opened the godown, called the cook and gave the woman her orders. The cook was latta;1 and Eva loved teasing the old thing.

"La ... la-illa-lala!" she cried.

And the cook gave a start and echoed the cry and recovered herself the next moment, begging for forgiveness.

"Throw down, cook, throw down!" cried Eva, in Malay.

And the cook, acting on the suggestion, flung down a tray of litchis and mangosteens and, at once recovering, stooped and picked up the scattered fruits from the floor, imploring to be forgiven and shaking her head and clicking her tongue.

"Come, we'd better go!" said Eva to Frans. "Else she'll be breaking my eggs presently. "Out of this, cook, outside!"

"Out of this, outside!" echoed the latta cook. "Oh, mem sahib, beg pardon, mem sahib, oh, enough, enough, mem sahib!"

"Come and sit down for a little," said Eva to Van Helderer.

He went with her:

"You're so cheerful," he said.

"Aren't you?"

"No, I've been feeling sad, lately."

"I too. I told you so yesterday. It's something in the Labuwangi air. There's no telling what this table-turning has in store for us."

They sat down in the back verandah. He sighed.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I can't help it," he said. "I care for you so. I love you."

She was silent for an instant.

"Again?" she then said, reproachfully.

He did not answer.

"I have told you, mine is not a passionate nature. I am cold. I love my husband and my child. Let's be friends, Van Helderer."

"I'm fighting against it; but it's no use."

"I'm fond of Ida; I wouldn't make her unhappy for the world."

"I don't believe I was ever fond of her."

"Van Helderer!..."

"If I was, it was only for her pretty face. But white though Ida may be, she's a half-caste ... with her whimsies and her childish little tragedies. I didn't see it so much at first, but I see it now, of course. I'd met women from Europe before I met you. But you were a revelation to me, a revelation of all the charm and artistic grace that a woman can possess.... And the exotic side in you appeals to my own exotic side."

"I value your friendship highly. Let things remain as they are."

"Sometimes it's just as though I were mad, sometimes I dream ... that we're travelling in Europe together, that we're in Italy or Paris. Sometimes I see us sitting together over a fire, in a room of our own, you talking of art, I of the modern, social developments of our time. But, after that, I see us together ... more intimately...."

"Van Helderer!..."

"It's no longer any use your warning me. I love you, Eva, Eva...."

"I don't believe there's another country where there's so much love going about as in India! I suppose it's the heat...."

"Don't crush me with your sarcasm. No other woman ever made such an appeal to my whole soul and body as you do, Eva...."

She shrugged her shoulders:

"Don't be angry, Van Helderer, but I can't stand these commonplaces. Let us be sensible. I have a charming husband, you have a dear little wife. We're all good, pleasant friends together."

"You're so cold!"

"I don't want to spoil the happiness of our friendship."

"Friendship!"

"Friendship is what I said. There is nothing I value so highly, except my domestic happiness. I couldn't live without friends. I am happy in my husband and my child; next to these I need friends, above all things."

"So that they can admire you, so that you can rule over them!" said he, angrily.

She looked him in the face:

"Perhaps," she said, coolly. "Perhaps I have a need of admiration and of ruling over others. We all have our weaknesses."

"I have mine," he said, bitterly.

"Come," she said, in a kinder tone, "let us remain friends."

"I am terribly unhappy," he said, in a dull voice. "I feel as if I had missed everything in life. I have never been out of Java and I feel there's something lacking in me because I have never seen ice and snow. Snow: I think of it as a sort of mysterious unknown purity, which I long for, but which I never seem to meet. When shall I see Europe? When shall I cease to rave about *Il Trovatore* and manage to visit Bayreuth? When shall I come within range of you, Eva? I'm feeling for everything with my antennæ, like a wingless insect.... What is my life?... With Ida, with three children, whom I foresee growing up like their mother!... I shall remain controller for years and then—possibly—be promoted to assistant-resident ... and so remain. And then at last I shall receive my dismissal—or ask for it—and go to Sukabumi to live, to vegetate on a small pension. I feel everything in me longing for idleness...."

"You like your work, for all that; you're a first-rate official. Eldersma always says that in India a man who doesn't work and who doesn't love his work is lost."

"Your nature is not made for love and mine is not made for work: not for that and nothing else. I can work for an aim that I see before me, a beautiful aim; but I can't work ... just for work's sake and to fill the emptiness in my life."

"Your aim is India...."

"A fine phrase," he said. "It may be so for a man like the resident, who has succeeded in his career and who never has to sit studying the Colonial List and

calculating on the illness of this man or the death of that ... so that he may get promoted. It's all right for a man like Van Oudijck, who, in his genuine, honest idealism, thinks that his aim is India, not because of Holland, but because of India herself, because of the native whom he, the official, protects against the tyranny of the landlords and planters. I am more cynical by nature...."

"But don't be so lukewarm about India. It's not merely a fine phrase: I feel like that myself. India is our whole greatness, the greatness of us Hollanders. Listen to foreigners speaking of India: they are all enchanted with her glory, with our methods of colonization.... Don't have anything to do with the wretched Dutch spirit of our people at home, who know nothing about India, who always have a sneering word for India, who are so petty and stiff and bourgeois and narrow-minded...."

"I didn't know that you were so enthusiastic about India. Only yesterday you were full of wretched anxieties, and I was standing up for my country...."

"Oh, it gives me a sort of shudder, the mystery in the evenings, when something seems to threaten I don't know what! I'm afraid of the future; there's danger ahead of us!... I feel that I, personally, am still very remote from India, though I don't want to be; that I miss the art amid which I was educated; that I miss here, in our everyday life, the plastic beauty which both my parents always pointed out to me.... But I am not unjust. And I think that India, as our colony, is great; I think that we, in our colony, are great...."

"Formerly, perhaps it was so. Nowadays, everything is going wrong; nowadays, we are no longer great. You have an artistic nature; you are always looking for artistic perfection in India, though you seldom find it. And then your mind is confronted with that greatness, that glory. That's the poetry of it. The prose of it is a gigantic but exhausted colony, still governed from Holland with one idea: the pursuit of gain. The reality is not an India under a great ruler, but an India under a petty, mean-souled blood-sucker; the country sucked dry; and the real population—not the Hollander, who spends his Indian money at The Hague, but the population, the native population, attached to the native soil—oppressed by the disdain of its overlord, who once improved it with his own blood, and now threatening to revolt against this oppression and disdain.... You, as an artist, feel the danger approaching, vaguely, like a cloud in the sky, in the Indian night; I see the danger as something very real, something rising—before Holland—if not from America and Japan, then out of the soil of India herself...."

She smiled:

"I like you when you talk like this," she said. "I should end by falling in with your views."

"If I could achieve that by talking!" he laughed, bitterly, getting up. "My half hour is over: the resident is expecting me and he doesn't like waiting a minute. Goodbye ... and forgive me."

"Tell me," she said, "am I a flirt?"

"No," he replied. "You are what you are. And I can't help it: I love you.... I am always stretching out my poor antennæ. That is my fate...."

"I shall help you to forget me," said she, with affectionate conviction.

He gave a little laugh, bowed and went away. She saw him cross the road to the grounds of the resident's house, where a messenger met him.

"Really life, when all is said, is one long self-deception, a wandering amid illusions," she thought, sadly, drearily. "A great aim, an universal aim ... or even a modest aim for one's self, for one's own body and soul: O God, how little it all is! And how we roam about, knowing nothing! And each of us seeks his own little aim, his illusion. The only happy people are merely exceptions, like Léonie van Oudijck, who lives no more than a beautiful flower does, or a beautiful animal."

Her child came toddling up to her, a pretty, fair-haired, plump little boy.

"Sonny," she thought, "how will it be with you? What will be your portion? Oh, perhaps nothing new! Perhaps a repetition of what has so often been before. Life is a story which is always being repeated.... Oh, when we feel like this, how oppressive India can be!..."

She kissed her boy; her tears trickled over his fair curls.

"Van Oudijck has his residency; I my little circle of ... admirers and subjects; Frans his love ... for me: we all have our playthings, just like my little Onno playing with his little horse. How small we are, how small!... All our lives we make believe, pretending, imagining all sorts of things, thinking that we are giving a path or a direction to our poor, aimless little lives. Oh, why am I like this, sonny? Sonny, sonny, how will it be with you?"

Chapter Eleven

The Patjaram sugar-factory was fourteen miles from Labuwangi and twelve from Ngadjiwa and belonged to the half-Eurasian, half-Solo family of De Luce, a family who had once been millionaires, but were no longer so very well off, owing to the recent sugar-crisis, though they still supported a numerous household. This family, which always kept together—the old mother and grandmother, a Solo princess; the eldest son, the manager; three married daughters and their husbands, clerks in the factory, all living in its shadow; three younger sons employed in the factory; the many grandchildren, playing round and about the factory; the great-grandchildren springing up round and about the factory—this family maintained the old Indian traditions which, at one time universal, are now becoming rarer, thanks to the more frequent intercourse with Europeans. The mother and grandmother was the daughter of a Solo prince and had married a young and enterprising bohemian adventurer, Ferdinand de Luce, a member of a French titled family of Mauritius, who, after wandering about for many years in search of his place in the sun, had sailed to India as a ship's steward, and, after all sorts of vicissitudes, had found himself stranded in Solo, where he achieved fame by means of a dish prepared with tomatoes and another consisting of stuffed chilies. Thanks to these recipes, Ferdinand de Luce won the favour of the Solo princess, whose hand he afterwards obtained, and even that of the old Susuhunan. After his marriage he became a landowner, and, according to the national usage, a vassal of the Susuhunan of Solo, whom he supplied daily with rice and fruits for the household of the palace. Then he had launched out into sugar, divining the millions which a lucky fate held in store for him. He had died before the crisis, laden with wealth and honours.

The old grandmother, in whom there was not a trace left of the young princess whom Ferdinand de Luce had wedded to promote his fortunes, was never approached by the servants or the Javanese staff save with a cringing reverence; and everybody gave her the title of Raden-aju pangéran. She did not speak a word of Dutch. Wrinkled like a shrivelled fruit, with her clouded eyes and her withered, betel-stained mouth, she was peacefully living her last years, always dressed in a dark silk kabaai, the neck and the light sleeves of which were fastened with precious stones. Before her sun-bitten gaze there hovered the vision of her former palace grandeur, which she had abandoned for love of that French nobleman-cook who had pandered to her father's taste with his dainty recipes; in her ears buzzed the constant murmur of the centrifugal separators, like the thrashing of screw propellers, throughout the milling-season, which lasted for months on end; around her were her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren: the sons and daughters addressed as raden and raden-adjeng by the servants; all of them still surrounded by the pale halo of their Solo descent. The eldest daughter was married to a full-blooded, fair-haired Dutchman; the son who followed her to an Armenian girl; the two others

were married to Eurasians, both brown; and their brown children—who were also married and also had children—mingled with the fair-haired family of the eldest daughter; and the pride of the whole family was the youngest son and brother, Adrien, or Addie, who made love to Doddie van Oudijck and who was constantly at Labuwangi, the busy milling-season notwithstanding.

In this family, traditions were still maintained, now quite obsolete, such as people remembered in the Indian families of long ago. Here you still saw, in the grounds, in the back verandah, the numberless babus,¹ one grinding rice into a fine face-powder, another preparing incense, another pounding diverse condiments, all with dreamy eyes, all with slender, nimbly-moving fingers. Here the habit still prevailed of an endless array of dishes at lunch, with a long row of servants, one after the other, solemnly handing round one more vegetable, one more sauce, one more dish of chicken, while, squatting behind the ladies, the babus pounded each a different condiment in an earthenware mortar, according to the several tastes and requirements of the sated palates. Here it was still the custom, when the family attended the races at Ngadjiwa, for each of the ladies to appear followed by a babu, moving slowly, lithely, solemnly; one babu carrying a betel-pot, another a bonbonnière filled with peppermints, or a pair of race-glasses, or a fan, or a scent-bottle; the whole resembling a ceremonial procession bearing the insignia of state. Here, too, you still found the old-fashioned hospitality: the row of spare-rooms open to any one who cared to knock; here all could stay as long as they pleased; no one was asked the object of his journey or the date of his departure. A great simplicity of mind, an all-embracing, spontaneous, innate cordiality prevailed, together with an unbounded weariness and tedium, a life of no ideas and but few words, the ready, gentle smile making good the lack of both; a material life, full and sated: a life of cool drinks and native pastry and fruit-salad handed round all day, three babus being specially appointed to make fruit-salad and pastry. Any number of animals were scattered over the estate: there was a cage full of monkeys; a few lories; dogs, cats, some tame squirrels and an exquisite little dwarf deer, which ran about loose. The house, built on to the factory, quaking all through the milling-season with the noise of machinery—like the throbs of screw propellers—was spacious and furnished with the old, old-fashioned furniture: the low wooden bedsteads with four carved bed-posts hung with curtains; the heavy-legged tables; the rocking-chairs with peculiarly round backs: all things which are now no longer obtainable; nothing that betrayed the least touch of modernity, except—and this only during the milling-season—the electric light in the front verandah! The occupants were always in indoor dress: the men in white or blue-and-white striped pyjamas; the ladies in sarong and kabaai, toying with a monkey or a lory or a doe, in simplicity of mind, with ever the same pleasant jest, drawling and drowsy, and the same gentle little laugh. The passions, which were certainly there, slumbered in that gentle smile. Then, when the milling-

season was over; when all the bustle was over; when the files of sugar-carts, drawn by the superb oxen, with glossy brown hides, had brought an ever-increasing store of canes over the fibre-covered road, which was cut to pieces by the broad cart-ruts; when the seed had been bought for next year and the machines were stopped: then came the sudden relaxation after the incessant labour, the long, long holiday, the many months' rest, the craving for festivity and enjoyment; the big dinner given by the lady of the house, followed by a ball and tableaux-vivants; the whole house full of visitors, who stayed on and on, known and unknown; the old, wrinkled grandmamma, the landowner, the raden-aju, Mrs. de Luce, whatever you liked to call her, always amiable, with her dull eyes and her betel-stained mouth, amiable to one and all, with always an anak-mas, a "golden child," a poor little adopted princess at her heels, carrying a gold betel-box behind the great princess from Solo: a slender little woman of eight years old, her front hair cut into a fringe, her forehead whitened with moist rice-powder, her already rounded little breasts confined in the little pink silk kabaai, with the miniature gold sarong round the slender hips; a doll, a toy for the raden-aju, for Mrs. de Luce, for the Dowager de Luce. And for the compounds there were the popular rejoicings, a time-honoured lavishness, in which all Patjaram shared, according to the age-old tradition which was always observed, despite any crisis or unrest.

The milling-season and the rejoicings were now over. There was comparative peace indoors; and a languorous Indian calm had set in. But Mrs. van Oudijck, Theo and Doddie had come over for the festivities and were staying on a few days longer at Patjaram. A great circle of people sat round the marble table covered with glasses of syrup, lemonade and whisky-and-soda; they did not speak much, but rocked luxuriously, exchanging an occasional word. Mrs. de Luce and Mrs. van Oudijck spoke Malay, but were not talkative. A gentle, good-humoured boredom drifted down on all these rocking people. It was strange to see the different types: the pretty, milk-white Léonie beside the yellow, wrinkled raden-aju-dowager; Theo, pale and fair as a Dutchman, with his full, sensual lips, which he inherited from his half-caste mother; Doddie, already looking like a ripe rose, with the sparkling irises and black pupils of her black eyes; the manager's son, Achille de Luce, brown, tall and stout, whose thoughts ran only on his machinery and his seed; the second son, Roger, brown, short and thin, the book-keeper, whose thoughts ran only on the year's profits, with his little Armenian wife; the eldest daughter, old already, brown, stupidly ugly, with her full-blooded Dutch husband, who looked like a peasant; the other sons and daughters, in every shade of brown, not easily to be distinguished one from the other; around them the children, the grandchildren, the little, golden-skinned adopted children, the babus, the lories and the dwarf deer; and over all these people and children and animals, as though shaken down upon them, lay a good-hearted solidarity; and over all these people there also lay a common pride in their

Solo ancestors, crowning all their heads with a pale halo of Javanese aristocracy; and the Armenian daughter-in-law and the bucolic Dutch son-in-law were not least proud of this descent.

The liveliest of all these elements, which were melting into one another, as it were, through long communal life under the patriarchal roofs, was the youngest son, Adrien de Luce, Addie, in whom the blood of the Solo princess and that of the French adventurer had blended harmoniously. The admixture, it is true, had given him no brains, but it had given him the physical beauty of a young Eurasian, with something of the Moor about it, something southern and seductive, something Spanish, as though in this last child the two alien racial elements had for the first time mingled harmoniously, for the first time been wedded in absolute mutual sympathy; as though in him, this last child after so many children, adventurer and princess had for the first time met in harmony. Addie seemed to possess not a jot of intellect or imagination; he was unable to unite two ideas into one composite thought; he merely felt, with the vague good-nature which had descended upon the whole family. For the rest, he was like a beautiful animal, degenerating in soul and brain, but degenerating into nothing, to a great nullity, to one great emptiness, while his body was like a renewal of his race, full of strength and beauty, while his marrow and his blood and his flesh and his muscles were all one harmony of physical seductiveness, so purely, stupidly, beautifully sensual that its harmony had for a woman an immediate appeal. The lad had but to appear, like a beautiful, southern god, for all the women to look at him and take him into the depths of their imagination, to recall him to their minds again and again; the lad had but to go to a race-ball at Ngadjiwa for all the girls to fall in love with him. He plucked love where he found it, in plenty, in the Patjaram compounds. And everything feminine was in love with him, from his mother to his little nieces. Doddie van Oudijck was infatuated with him. From a child of seven she had been in love, a hundred times and more, with every one who passed before the glance of her flashing pupils, but never yet as with Addie. Her love shone so strongly from her whole being that it was like a flame, that everybody saw it and smiled. The milling-feast had been to her one long delight ... when she danced with him; one long martyrdom ... when he danced with others. He had not asked her to marry him, but she thought of asking him and was prepared to die if he refused. She knew that the resident, her father, would object: he did not like those De Luces, that Solo-French crew, as he called them; but, if Addie was willing, her father would consent, rather than see her die. To this child of love that lovable lad was the world, the universe, life itself. He made love to her, he kissed her on the lips, but this was no more than he did to others, unthinkingly; he kissed other girls as well. And, if he could, he went further, like a devastating young god, an unthinking god. But he still stood more or less in awe of the resident's daughter. He possessed neither pluck nor effrontery; his passions were not markedly

selective; he looked on a woman as a woman and was so much sated with conquest that obstacles did not stimulate him. His garden was full of flowers which all lifted themselves up to him; he stretched out his hand, almost without looking; he merely plucked.

As they sat rocking about the table they saw him come through the garden; and the eyes of all these women turned to him as to a young tempter, arriving in the sunshine, which touched him as with a halo. The raden-aju dowager smiled and gazed at him, enamoured of her son, her favourite; squatting on the ground behind her, the little golden adopted child stared with wide-open eyes; the sisters looked out, the little nieces looked out, and Doddie turned pale and Léonie van Oudijck's milky whiteness became tinged with a rosy shade which mingled with the glamour of her smile. She glanced at Theo mechanically; their eyes met. And these souls of sheer love, love of the eyes, of the lips, love of the glowing flesh, understood each other; and Theo's jealousy of Léonie blazed so fiercely that the rosy shade died away and she became pale and fearful, with a sudden, unreasoning fear which shuddered through her usual indifference, while the tempter, in his halo of sunshine, came nearer and nearer....

Chapter Twelve

Mrs. van Oudijck had promised to stay at Patjaram a few days longer; and she disliked the prospect, really not feeling quite at home in these old-fashioned Indian surroundings. But when Addie appeared she thought better of it. In the deepest secrecy of her heart this woman worshipped her sensuality, as in the temple of her egoism: here the milk-white creole offered up all the most intimate dreams of her rosy imagination and unquenchable longing; and in this cult she had achieved as it were an art, a knowledge, a science, that of deciding, for herself, at a glance, what it was that attracted her in the man who approached her, in the man who passed her by. In one it was his bearing, his voice; in another it was the set of his neck on his shoulders; in a third it was the way his hand rested on his knee; but, whatever it was, she saw it directly, at a glance; she knew it immediately, in an instant; she had judged the passer-by in an indivisible moment; and she at once knew those whom she rejected—they were the majority—and those whom she approved—they were many. And the few whom she rejected in that indivisible moment of her supreme judgement, with that single glance, in that single instant, need cherish no hope: she, the priestess, did not admit them to the temple. To the others, the temple was open, but only behind the curtain of her conventionality. However shameless, she was always correct, her love was always secret; to the world, she was nothing but the charming, smiling wife of the resident, a little indolent in her ways, but winning everybody with her smile. When people did not see her, they spoke ill of her; when they saw her, she conquered them at once. Among all of those with whom she shared the secret of her love there reigned a certain freemasonry, a mystery of worship; scarcely, when two of them met, would they whisper a word or two, at a similar recollection. And Léonie could sit smiling, milk-white, tranquil, in the great circle, around the marble table, with at least two or three men who knew her secret. It did not disturb her tranquillity nor mar her smile. She smiled to the pitch of boredom. Scarcely would her glance glide from one to the other, while she judged them once again, with her infallible knack of judgement. Scarcely would the memories of past hours rise hazily within her, scarcely would she think of the assignation for the following day. The secret lay wholly in the mystery of the meeting and indeed was never uttered before the profane world. If a foot in the circle sought to touch her foot, she drew hers away. She never flirted; she was even sometimes a little tedious, stiff, correct, smiling. In the freemasonry between herself and the initiated she disclosed the mystery; but, before the world, in the circles about the marble tables, she vouchsafed not a glance, not a pressure of the hand or knee.

She had been bored during these days at Patjaram, for which she had accepted the invitation to the milling-feast because she had refused it in past years; but now that she saw Addie approaching she was bored no longer. Of course she had known him for years; and she had seen him grow from a child into a boy, into a man; and she

had kissed him even as a boy. She had long ago judged him, the tempter. But now, as he came forward with his halo of sunshine, she judged him once more: his comely, slender animalism and the glow of his tempter's eyes in the dusky brown of his young Moorish face; the pouting curves of his lips, formed for kissing, with the young down of his moustache; the tigerish strength and liveness of limbs which Don Juan might have envied: it all dazzled her, made her blink her eyes. As he greeted his mother's visitors and sat down, a volley of wordy gaiety ran round that circle of languid conversation and drowsy thoughts, as though he were casting a handful of his sunshine, of the gold-dust of his temptation over them all, over all those women, mother and sisters and nieces and Doddie and Léonie van Oudijck. Léonie looked at him, as they all looked at him, and her glance fell upon his hands. She could have kissed those hands of his; she suddenly became smitten with the shape of his fingers, with the brown, tigerish strength of the hands themselves: she suddenly became smitten with all the young wild-animal vigour which breathed like a fragrance of manhood from the whole of his boyish frame. She felt her blood throbbing, almost uncontrollably, despite her great art of remaining cool and correct in the circles around the marble tables. But she was no longer bored. She had found an object to fill the next few days. Only ... her blood throbbed so violently that Theo had noticed her blush and the quivering of her eyelids. Enamoured of her as he was, his eyes had penetrated her soul. And, when they rose to go to lunch in the back verandah, where the babus had been squatting, grinding everybody's different admixture of spices with pestles, in little stone mortars, he whispered two words between his teeth:

"Take care!"

She started; she felt that he was threatening her. This had never happened before: all who had shared in the mystery had always respected her. She started so violently, she was so indignant at this wrenching away of the temple-curtain, in a verandah full of people, that her tranquil indifference seethed with anger and she was roused to rebellion in her ever-serene self-mastery. But she looked at him and she saw him broad and tall and fair, a younger edition of her husband, his Indian blood showing only in his sensuous mouth; and she did not want to lose him: she wanted to preserve his type beside the type of the Moorish tempter. She wanted them both; she wanted to taste the different charm of their respective types, that white-skinned Dutch type, so very slightly Indian, and Addie's wild-animal type. Her soul quivered, her blood thrilled, while the long array of dishes was solemnly handed round. She was in a revolt such as she had never experienced before. The awakening from her placid indifference was like a rebirth, like an unknown emotion. She was surprised to remember that she, at thirty, was feeling for the first time. A feverish depravity blossomed up within her, as though bursting into heady crimson flowers. She looked at Doddie, sitting beside Addie: the poor child, glowing with love, was

hardly able to eat.... Oh, the tempter, who had only to appear!... And Léonie, in this fever of depravity, rejoiced at being the rival of a step-daughter so many years younger than herself. She would look after her; she would even warn Van Oudijck. Would it ever come to a match? What did she care: what harm could marriage do to her, Léonie? Oh, the tempter! Never had she dreamt of him thus, the supreme lover, in her rosy hours of siesta! This was no charm of little cherubs; this was the stark radiance of tigerish enchantment: the golden glitter of his eyes, the sinewy litheness of his stealthy paw.... And she smiled at Theo, with just one glance of self-surrender, a very exceptional thing at the luncheon-table. As a rule she gave nothing of herself in public. Now she surrendered herself, for a moment, pleased by his jealousy. She was madly fond of him too. She thought it delightful, that he should look pale and angry with jealousy. And round about her the afternoon was one blaze of sunlight and the hot spices stung her dry palate. Faint beads of perspiration stood on her forehead and trickled down her bosom under the lace of her kabaai. And she would fain have clasped them both, Theo and Addie, in one embrace, in one blending of different lusts, pressing them both to her amorous woman's body....

Chapter Thirteen

The night was like a veil of softest velvet dropping slowly from the heavens. The moon, in its first quarter, displayed a very narrow, horizontal sickle, like a Turkish crescent, between whose points the unlit portion of the disk was faintly washed in against the sky. A long avenue of tjemara-trees stretched in front of the house, their trunks straight, their leafage like drawn plush or ravelled velvet, showing like blots of cotton-wool against the clouds, which, drifting low, announced the approaching rainy monsoon fully a month beforehand. Wood-pigeons cooed at intervals and a gecko was calling, first with two rattling, preliminary notes, as though tuning up, then with his call of "Tokkè! Tokkè!" four or five times repeated: first loudly, then submissively and more faintly.

A night watchman, in his hut in front of the house, on the high-road, where the sleeping market-place now showed its empty stalls, struck eleven blows on his hollow block of wood; and as yet one more belated cart drove past, he cried, in a hoarse voice:

"Who goes there?"

The night was like softest velvet dropping slowly from the heavens, like a whirling mystery, like an oppressive menace of the future. But, in that mystery, under the frayed black blots, the ravelled plush of the tjemaras, there was an inexorable incitement to love, in the windless night, like a whisper that this hour should not be wasted.... True, the gecko was gibing like a mocking imp, with a sort of dry humour; and the watchman, with his "Who goes there?" startled the hearer; but the wood-pigeons cooed softly and the whole night was like a world of softest velvet, like a great alcove curtained by the plush of the tjemaras, while the distant, sultry rain-clouds, hanging all that month on the horizon, ringed the skies with an oppressive spell. Mystery and enchantment hovered through the velvety night, drifting down in the twilit alcove; and at their touch all thought was dissolved; the very soul dissolved, leaving only a warm, sensuous vision....

The gecko fell silent, the watchman dropped asleep; the velvety night reigned like an enchantress crowned with the sickle of the moon. They came walking slowly, two youthful figures, their arms about each other's waists, lips seeking lips under the tyranny of the enchantment. They were as shadows under the drawn velvet of the tjemaras; and softly, in their white garments, they dawned on the beholder like an eternal pair of lovers who are forever and everywhere repeating themselves. And here above all were lovers inevitable, in this enchanted night, were one with the night, conjured up by the all-powerful spell; here they were inevitable, unfolding like a twin flower of predestined love, in the velvet mystery of the compelling heavens.

And the tempter seemed to be the son of that night, the son of that inexorable queen of the night, bearing with him the yielding girl. In her ears the night seemed to sing with his voice; and her small soul melted in tender compliance, under these magic powers. She walked on against his side, feeling the warmth of his body sinking into her yearning maidenhood; and she lifted her brimming gaze to him, with the languid light of her sparkling pupils glittering like diamonds in her eyes. He, drunk with the power of the night, the enchantress, who was as his mother, thought first of leading her still farther, no longer conscious of reality, no longer feeling any awe of her or of any one whatever; thought of leading her still farther, past the slumbering watchman, across the high road, into the compound, which lay hidden yonder between the stately plumes of the coco-palms that would form a canopy to their love; of leading her to a hiding-place, a house which he knew, a bamboo hut the door of which would be opened to him ... when suddenly she stopped ... and started ... and gripped his arm and pressed herself still more tightly against him and implored him to go no farther. She was frightened.

"Why not?" he asked, gently, in his soft voice, which was as deep and velvety as the night. "Why not to-night, to-night at last?... There is no danger."

But she shuddered and shook and entreated:

"Addie, Addie, no ... no.... I daren't go any farther.... I'm frightened that the watchman will see us ... and then ... there's a hadji walking over there ... in a white turban...."

He looked out at the road: on the farther side the kampong lay waiting, under the canopy of the coco-palms, with the bamboo hut whose door would be opened to him.

"A hadji?... Where, Doddie? I don't see any one...."

"He crossed the road; he looked back at us; he saw us: I saw his eyes gleaming; and he went into the compound, behind those trees."

"Darling, I saw nothing, there's no one there."

"Yes, there is! Yes, there is! Addie, I daren't go: oh, do let us go back!"

His handsome Moorish face became overcast; he already saw the door of the little hut opened by the old woman whom he knew, who worshipped him as every woman worshipped him, from his mother to his little nieces.

And he again tried to persuade her, but she refused, stood still, and clung to the ground with her little feet. Then they turned back and the clouds were sultrier, low on the horizon, and the velvety darkness fell more thickly, like warm snow, and the ravelled tjemaras were fuller and blacker than before. The house loomed up before them, sunk in sleep, with not a light showing. And he entreated her, he implored her

not to leave him that night, saying that he would die, that night, without her.... Already she was yielding, promising, with her arms around his neck ... when again she started and again cried:

"Addie! Addie!... There he is again!... That white figure!..."

"But you seem to see hadjis everywhere!" he said, banteringly.

"Look for yourself then ... over there!"

He looked, and now really saw a white figure approaching them in the front-verandah. But it was a woman.

"Mamma!" cried Doddie, in dismay.

It was indeed Léonie, slowly coming towards them:

"Doddie," she said, gently, "I have been hunting for you everywhere. I was so frightened, I didn't know where you were. Why do you go out walking so late? Addie," she continued gently, in kind, motherly tones, as though addressing two children, "how can you behave like this and be out with Doddie so late? You really mustn't do it again: I mean it! I know that there's nothing in it; but suppose any one saw you! You must promise me never to do it again! You'll promise, won't you?"

She begged this prettily, in tones of engaging reproach, as though to show that she quite understood him, quite realized that they were yearning for each other in that velvet night of enchantment, forgiving them at once in the words which she uttered. She looked like an angel, with her round, white face in the loose, waving, fair hair, in the white silk kimono which hung round her in supple folds. And she drew Doddie to her and kissed the girl and wiped away her tears. And then, gently, she pushed Doddie before her, to her room in the annexe, where she slept safely amidst so many other rooms full of the daughters and grandchildren of old Mrs. de Luce. And, while Doddie, softly crying, went to the solitude of her room, Léonie continued to speak words of gentle reproach to Addie, warning him, prettily now, as a sister might do, while he, brown and handsome, with his Moorish look, stood before her, bantering yet embarrassed. They were in the dusk of the dark front verandah; and the night outside exhaled its inexorable breath of luxuriance, love and velvety mystery. And she reproached him and warned him and said that Doddie was a child and that he mustn't take advantage of her. He shrugged his shoulders, defended himself, in his bantering manner. His words fell upon her like gold-dust, while his eyes glittered like a tiger's. As she argued persuasively that he must really spare Doddie in the future, she seized his hand, that hand of which she was enamoured, his fingers, his palm, which she could have kissed that morning in her confusion; and she pressed it and almost cried and implored him to have mercy on Doddie.... He suddenly realized it, he looked at her suddenly with the lightning of his wild-animal glance and he found her beautiful, was aware of her as a woman, white as milk, and he

knew her for a priestess full of secret knowledge. And he too spoke of Doddie, coming closer to Léonie, touching her, pressing her hands between his two hands, giving her to understand that he understood. And, still pretending to weep and entreat and implore, she led him on and opened the door of her room. He saw a faint light and her maid, Oorip, who disappeared through the outer door and lay down to sleep there, like a faithful dog, on a little mat. Then she gave him a laugh of welcome; and he, the tempter, was amazed at the glowing laugh of this white, fair-haired temptress, who flung off her silken kimono and stood before him, like a nude statue, spreading out her arms....

Oorip, outside, listened for a moment. And she was about to lie down to sleep, smiling, dreaming of the lovely sarongs which the mem sahib would give her tomorrow, when she started as she saw walking through the grounds and disappearing in the night a hadji in a white turban....

Chapter Fourteen

That day the Regent of Ngadjiwa, Sunario's younger brother, was to pay a visit at Patjaram, because Mrs. van Oudijck was leaving on the following day. They sat waiting for him in the front verandah, rocking about the marble table, when his carriage came rattling down the long avenue of tjemaras. They all stood up. And now it appeared more plainly than ever how highly respected the old raden-aju, the dowager, was, how closely related to the Susuhunan himself, for the regent alighted and, without taking another step, squatted on the lowest stair of the verandah and salaamed respectfully, while behind his back a retainer, holding up the closed gold-and-white umbrella like a furled sun, made himself still smaller and shrank together in self-annihilation. And the old woman, the Solo princess, who once more saw the palace gleaming before her, went to meet him and welcomed him with all the courtesy of palace Javanese, the language spoken among princely equals, till the regent rose and, following her, approached the family circle. And the manner in which he then, for the first time, bowed to the wife of his resident, however polite, was almost condescending, compared with his obsequiousness of a moment ago.... He now sat down between Mrs. de Luce and Mrs. van Oudijck; and a drawling conversation began. The Regent of Ngadjiwa was a different type from his brother Sunario; taller, coarser, without the other's look of a marionette in a puppet-show; though younger, he looked the older of the two, with his eyes seared with passion: the passion for women, and wine, the passion for opium, the passion, above all, for gambling. And a silent thought seemed to flash up in that listless, drawling conversation, with few words and no ideas, ever and again interrupted by the courtly "Saja, saja," behind which they all concealed their secret longing.... They spoke Malay because Mrs. van Oudijck did not dare to speak Javanese, that refined, difficult language, full of shades of etiquette, on which hardly a single Hollander ventures when speaking to Javanese persons of rank. They spoke little; they rocked gently; a vague, courteous smile showed that all were taking part in the conversation, though only Mrs. de Luce and the Regent exchanged an occasional word.... Until at last the De Luces—the old mother, her son Roger, her brown daughters-in-law—were no longer able to restrain themselves, even in Mrs. van Oudijck's presence, and laughed shyly while drinks and cakes were being handed round; until, notwithstanding their courtesy, they rapidly consulted one another, over Léonie's head, in a few words of Javanese; until the old mother, no longer mistress of herself, at last asked her whether she would mind if they had a little game of cards. And they all looked at her, the wife of the resident, the wife of the high official who, they knew, hated the gambling which was ruining them, which was destroying the grandeur of the Javanese families whom he wished to uphold in spite of themselves. But she was too indifferent to think of preventing them with a single word of tactful jest, for her husband's sake; she, the slave of her own passion,

allowed them to be the slave of theirs, in the luxury of their enslavement. She merely smiled and readily permitted the players to withdraw to the twilight of the spacious, oblong inner gallery, the ladies counting their money into their handkerchiefs, alternating with the men, until they were sitting close together, and, with their eyes on the cards or spying into one another's eyes, gambled and gambled endlessly, winning, losing, paying or receiving, just opening and closing the handkerchiefs containing the money, with never a word nor a sound but the faint rustle of the cards in the twilight of the inner room. What game were they playing? Léonie did not know, did not care, indifferent to their passion and glad that Addie had remained beside her and that Theo was glaring at him jealously. Did he know, did he suspect anything? Would Oorip always hold her tongue? She enjoyed the emotion and she wanted them both; she wanted both white and brown; and the fact that Doddie was sitting on the other side of Addie and almost swooning as she rocked to and fro afforded her an acute and wicked delight. What else was there in life but to yield to one's luxurious cravings? She had no ambition and was indifferent to her exalted station; she, the first woman in the residency, who delegated all her duties to Eva Eldersma, who was quite unmoved when hundreds of people, at the receptions at Labuwangi, Ngadjiwa and elsewhere, greeted her with a ceremony not far short of royal honours, who, in her rosy, perverse day-dreams, with a novel by Catulle Mendès in her hands, silently laughed at the exaggerated ideas that ruled up-country, where the wife of a resident is treated as a queen. She had no other ambition than to be loved by the men whom she selected, no other emotional life than the worship of her body, like an Aphrodite who chose to be her own priestess. What did she care if they played cards in there, if the Regent of Ngadjiwa was ruining himself! On the contrary, she thought it interesting to read that ruin on his seamed face; and she would take care to be even more carefully groomed, to let Oorip massage her face and limbs, to make Oorip prepare even more of the white moist rice-powder, the wonderful cream, the magic salve of which Oorip knew the secret and which kept her flesh firm and unwrinkled and white as a mangosteen. She thought it exciting to see the Regent of Ngadjiwa burning away like a candle, foolishly, brutalized by women, wine, opium and cards; perhaps most of all by cards; by that bewildered glaring at them; by high play, and the calculation of chances which defied calculation, superstitiously reckoning by sacred omens the day and the hour when he should play in order to win, the number of the players, the amount of his stake.... Now and then she took a furtive glance at the faces of the players in the inner gallery, darkened by twilight and the lust of gain, and reflected on what Van Oudijck would say, how angry he would be if she told him about it.... What did it matter to him if the regent's family ruined themselves? What did his policy matter to her, what did the whole Dutch policy matter, which aims at securing the position of the Javanese nobility, through whom it governs the

population? What did it matter to her that Van Oudijck, thinking of the noble old pangéran, was grieved by his children's visible decline? None of it mattered to her; what mattered was only herself and Addie and Theo. She must really tell her stepson, her fair-haired lover, that afternoon, not to be so jealous. It was becoming obvious; she was sure that Doddie noticed it.... Didn't she save the poor child yesterday? But how long would that yearning last? Hadn't she better warn Van Oudijck, like a kind, solicitous mother?... Her thoughts wandered languidly; it was a sultry morning, in those last, scorching days of the eastern monsoon, which cover the limbs with trickling moisture. A shiver ran through her body; and, leaving Doddie with Addie, she carried Theo off and reproached him for looking so savage with impotent jealousy. She pretended to be a little angry and asked him what he wanted.

They had gone to the side of the house, to the long side-verandah; there were monkeys here in a cage, with skins strewn all around from the bananas which the animals had eaten, fed to them by the children.

The luncheon-gong had already sounded twice; the babus were squatting in the back-verandah, pounding everybody's spices. But the people around the card-table seemed to hear nothing. Only the whispering voices became louder and shriller, so that Léonie and Theo, as well as Addie and Doddie, pricked up their ears. A dispute seemed suddenly to break out between Roger and the regent, notwithstanding Mrs. de Luce's attempts to hush it. They spoke Javanese, but they let all courtesy go to the winds. Like two coolies, they abused each other for cheats, constantly interrupted by the soothing efforts of old Mrs. de Luce, supported by her daughters and daughters-in-law. But the chairs were roughly thrust back; a glass was broken. Roger seemed to dash his cards down in anger. All the women in the inner room took part in the soothing process, their voices raised, or muffled, or whispering, with little outcries, little shrieks of apology and indignation. The servants, innumerable, were listening in every corner of the house. Then the dispute abated, but long, explanatory arguments still continued between the regent and Roger; the women tried to hush them down—"Ssh!... Ssh!"—embarrassed because of the resident's wife, looking out to see where she might be. And at last all was quiet and they sat down in silence, hoping that not too much of the dispute had reached her ears. Until at length, very late—it was almost three o'clock—old Mrs. de Luce, with the gambling-passion still blazing in her dim eyes, summoning all her distinction and her princely prestige, went to the verandah and, as though nothing had happened, asked Mrs. van Oudijck if she would not come in to lunch.

Chapter Fifteen

Yes, Theo knew. He had spoken to Oorip after lunch; and although the maid had at first tried to deny everything, afraid of losing the sarongs, she had been unable to continue lying and had contented herself with feeble little protests of "no ... no." ... And, still early that same afternoon, raging with jealousy, he sought out Addie. But Theo was calmed by the indifferent composure of the good-looking youth, with his Moorish face, already so fully sated with his conquests that he himself never felt any jealousy. Theo was calmed by the complete absence of thought in this tempter, who at once forgot everything after an hour of love; forgot so gracefully that he looked up with eyes of ingenuous surprise when Theo, red and boiling with fury, burst into his room and, standing before his bed—where he was lying quite naked, as was his habit during his siesta, with the magnificence of a bronze statue, sublime as an ancient sculpture—declared that he would strike him across the face. And Addie's surprise was so artless, his indifference so harmonious, he seemed to have so utterly forgotten his hour of love of the night before, he laughed so serenely at the idea of fighting about a woman that Theo quieted down and came and sat on the edge of his bed. And then Addie, who was a couple of years younger but possessed incomparable experience, told him that he really mustn't do it again—get so angry about a woman, a mistress who gave herself to another. And Addie patted him on the shoulder with almost fatherly compassion; and now, since they understood each other, they went on confidentially pumping one another as they chatted.

They exchanged further confidences, about women, about girls. Theo asked if Addie was going to marry Doddie. But Addie said that he wasn't thinking of marrying and that the resident wouldn't be willing either, because he didn't care for Addie's family and thought them too Indian. Then, in a single word, he let slip his pride in his Solo descent and his pride in the halo which shone dimly behind the heads of all the De Luces. And Addie asked if Theo knew that he had a young brother running wild in the compound. Theo knew nothing about it. But Addie assured him that it was so: a young son of papa's, mark you, from the time when the governor was still controller at Ngadjiwa; a fellow of their own age, a regular Eurasian: the mother was dead. Perhaps the old man himself didn't know that he still had a son in the compound, but it was true; everybody knew it: the regent knew, the native councillor knew, the head of the district knew, and the meanest coolie knew. There was no actual proof; but a thing like that, which was known the whole world over, was as true as that the world itself existed.... What did the fellow do? Nothing, except curse and swear, declaring that he was a son of the kandjeng tuan residen, who allowed him to rot in the compound.... What did he live on? On nothing, on what he got by shameless begging, on what people gave him and then ... by all sorts of practices: by going round the districts, through all the villages, and asking if there were any complaints and then drawing up little petitions; by encouraging people to

go to Mecca and let him book their passages with very cheap little steamship-companies of which he was the unofficial agent: he would go to the remotest village and display coloured posters representing a steamer full of Mecca pilgrims and the Kaaba and the Sacred Tomb of Mohammed. He would mess around like this, sometimes mixed up in rows, once in a robbery, sometimes dressed in a sarong, sometimes in an old striped calico suit; and he slept anywhere. And, when Theo showed surprise and said that he had never heard of this half-brother of his and expressed curiosity, Addie suggested that they should go and look him up, if he was to be found in the compound. And Addie gaily and quickly took his bath and put on a clean white suit; and they went across the road and along the rice-fields into the compound.

It was already dusk under the heavy trees: the bananas lifted the cool green paddles of their leaves; and under the stately canopy of the coco-palms the little bamboo houses hid, romantically Oriental, idyllic, with their palm-leaf roofs, their doors often already closed, or, if open, framing a little black inward vista, with the vague outline of a bench on which squatted a dark figure. The scabby, hairless dogs barked; the children, naked, with bells dangling from their stomachs, ran indoors and stared out of the houses; the women kept quiet, recognizing the tempter and vaguely laughing, blinking their eyes as he passed in his glory. And Addie pointed to the little house where his old babu lived, Tidjem, the woman who helped him, who always opened her door to him when he wanted the use of her hut, who worshipped him as his mother and his sisters and his little nieces worshipped him. He showed Theo the house and thought of his walk last night with Doddie under the tjemaras. Tidjem the babu saw him and ran up to him delightedly. She squatted down beside him, she pressed his leg against her withered breast, she rubbed her forehead against his knee, she kissed his white shoe, she gazed at him in rapture, her beautiful prince, her raden, whom she had rocked as a little chubby boy in her already infatuated arms. He tapped her on the shoulder and gave her a rix-dollar and asked her if she knew where Si-Oudijck was, because his brother wished to see him.

Tidjem stood up and beckoned to him to follow: it was some way to walk. And they stepped out of the compound into an open road with rails along it, by which the bamboo baskets filled with sugar were removed to the proas that lay moored at a landing-stage yonder, in the Brantas. The sun was going down in a fan-shaped glory of orange sheaves; and the distant rows of trees that outlined the paddy-fields were washed in with dark, soft, velvety touches against their arrogant glow. These fields were not yet planted, but their dark, earth-coloured expanse lay as broken by the plough. From the factory came a few men and women, making their way home. Beside the river, by the landing-stage, a small market of portable kitchens had been set up under a sacred, five-fold banyan-tree, with its five trunks merging into one

another and its wide-spreading roots. Tidjem called the ferry-man and he put them across, across the orange Brantas, amidst the last yellow rays of the sun, outspread fanwise like a peacock's tail. When they were on the other bank, the night fell over everything, like the hasty fall of a gauze curtain; and the clouds, which all through November had threatened the low horizons, hung oppressively on the sultry air. And they entered another compound, lit here and there by a paraffin-lamp, set down on the ground, with a long lamp-glass but no globe. At last they came to a little house, built partly of bamboo, partly of old packing-cases, and roofed partly with tiles, partly with palm-leaves. Tidjem pointed to it and, once more squatting on the ground and embracing and kissing Addie's knee, asked permission to depart. Addie knocked at the door; a grumbling and rumbling within was the only answer; but, when Addie called out, the door was kicked open and the two young men stepped into the one room of which the hut consisted: half bamboo, half deal boards from packing-cases; a couch with a couple of dirty pillows in a corner, and a limp chintz curtain dangling in front of it; a crazy table with a chair or two; on the table, a paraffin-lamp without a globe; and a litter of oddments stacked on a packing-case in a corner. Everything was permeated with an acrid odour of opium.

And Si-Oudijck was sitting at the table with an Arab, while a Javanese woman squatted on the couch, preparing a leaf of betel for herself. A few sheets of paper lay on the table between the Arab and the young half-caste. The last-named, evidently annoyed by the unexpected visit, hurriedly crumpled the papers together. But he recovered his composure and, assuming a jovial air, cried:

"Hullo, Adipati! Susuhunan! Sultan of Patjaram! Sugar-lord! How are you, my god of beauty, the ruin of all good women?"

His jovial torrent of greetings continued without ceasing, while he scrambled the papers together and made a sign to the Arab, who disappeared through the other door, at the back.

"And who's that with you, Raden Mas Adrianus, my bonnie Lucius?"

"It's your little brother," said Addie.

Si-Oudijck looked up suddenly:

"Oh, is it really?" said he, speaking broken Dutch, Javanese and Malay in the same breath. "I can see it is: my legitimate one. And what does the fellow want?"

"He's come to see what you're like."

The two brothers looked at each other: Theo inquisitively, rejoicing at having made this discovery, as a weapon against the old man, if the weapon ever became necessary; the other, Si-Oudijck, secretly restraining, behind his brown, crafty, leering face, all his jealousy, all his bitterness and hatred.

"Is this where you live?" asked Theo, for the sake of saying something.

"No, I'm just staying with her for the time being," replied Si-Oudijck, with a jerk of his head towards the woman.

"Has your mother been dead long?"

"Yes. Yours is still alive, isn't she? She lives in Batavia. I know her. Do you ever see her?"

"No."

"H'm.... Prefer your step-mother?"

"Pretty well," said Theo, drily. And, changing the subject, "I don't believe the old man knows that you exist."

"Yes, he does."

"I doubt it. Have you ever spoken to him?"

"Yes, formerly. Years ago."

"Well?"

"No use. He says I'm not his son."

"It must be difficult to prove."

"Legally, yes. But it's a fact and everybody knows it. It's known all over Ngadjiwa."

"Have you no sort of evidence?"

"Only the oath which my mother took when she was dying, before witnesses."

"Come, tell me things," said Theo. "Walk a bit of the way with us: it's stuffy in here."

They left the hut and sauntered back through the compounds, while Si-Oudijck told his story. They strolled beside the Brantas, which wound vaguely in the evening dusk under a sky powdered with stars.

It did Theo good to hear about all this, about that housekeeper of his father's, in the days of his controllership, dismissed for an infidelity of which she was guiltless; the child born later and never recognized, never maintained; the boy wandering from compound to compound, romantically proud of his inhuman father, whom he watched from a distance, following him with his furtive glance when the father became assistant-resident and resident, married, divorced his wife and married again; by slow degrees learning to read and write from a native scrivener of his acquaintance. It did the legitimate son good to hear about all this, because in his innermost self, fair-haired and fair-skinned though he might be, he was more the son of his mother, the half-caste, than of his father; because in his innermost self he hated

his father, not for this or that reason, but from a secret antipathy in his blood, because, despite the appearance and behaviour of a fair-haired and fair-skinned European, he felt a secret kinship for this illegitimate brother, felt a vague sympathy for him. Were they not both sons of the self-same motherland, for which their father felt nothing except as a result of his acquired development, the artificially cultivated, humane love of the ruler for the territory which he governs. From his childhood Theo had felt like that, far removed from his father; and later that antipathy had grown into a slumbering hatred. It gave him pleasure to hear the legend of his faultless parent demolished; the impeccable, magnanimous man, a functionary of the highest integrity, who loved his domestic circle, loved his residency, loved the Javanese, and was anxious to uphold the regent's family, not only because his official instructions prescribed that the Javanese nobility should be respected, but because his own heart told him as much, when he thought of the noble old pangéran.... Theo knew that his father was all this: blameless, high-minded, upright, magnanimous; and it did him good, here, in the mysterious evening beside the Brantas, to hear that blamelessness, that high-minded, upright magnanimity torn to ribbons; it did him good to meet an outcast who in one moment spattered that high-throned paternal figure with mud and filth, dragging him from his pedestal, making him appear no higher than another, sinful, wicked, heartless, mean. It filled him with a wicked joy, even as he was filled with a wicked joy at possessing his father's wife, whom his father adored. What to do with this dark secret he did not yet know, but he clutched at it as a weapon; he was whetting it there, that very evening, while he listened to the end to what this furtive-eyed half-caste, ranting and working himself up, had to say. And Theo hid his secret, hid his weapon deep in his heart.

Grievances rose in his mind; and he too now, the legitimate son, abused his father; declared that the resident did no more to help him, his own lawful son, to get on than he would do for any of his clerks; told him how his father had once recommended him to the manager of an impossible undertaking, a rice-plantation, where he had been unable to stay longer than a single month; how afterwards he had left him to his fate, thwarting him when he went hunting after concessions, even in other residencies, even in Borneo, until he was now obliged to remain hanging about and sponging at home, unable to find a job, thanks to his father, and merely tolerated in that house where he disliked everything.

"Except your step-mother!" Si-Oudijck interpolated, drily.

But Theo went on, growing confidential in his turn and telling his brother that it would be no great advantage for him even if he were acknowledged and legitimatized. And in this way they both became excited, glad to have met each other, to have grown intimate in this brief hour. And beside them walked Addie, surprised by this quick mutual attraction, but otherwise empty of thought. They had

crossed a bridge and by a circuitous route had come out behind the Patjaram factory-buildings. Here Si-Oudijck said good-night, shaking hands with Theo, who slipped a couple of rix-dollars into his palm. They were accepted greedily, with a flicker of the furtive glance, but not a word of thanks. And Addie and Theo went past the factory, now silent, to the house. The family were strolling, outside, in the garden and in the tjemara-avenue. And, as the two young men approached, the golden, eight-year-old child came running towards them, the old grandmother's little foster-princess, with her fringe of hair and her whitened forehead, in her rich little, doll-like dress. She came running up to them and suddenly stopped in front of Addie and looked up at him. Addie asked her what she wanted, but the child did not answer and only looked up at him and then, putting out her little hand, stroked his hand with it. It was all so clearly the result of an irresistible magnetism in the shy child, this running up, stopping, looking up and stroking, that Addie laughed aloud and stooped and kissed her lightly. The child skipped back contentedly. And Theo, still excited by his evening, first by his conversation with Oorip and then by his explanation with Addie, his meeting with his half-brother, his own confidences about his father – Theo, feeling bitter and interesting, was so greatly irritated by this trivial behaviour of Addie and the child, that he exclaimed, almost angrily:

“Oh, you ... you'll never be anything but a woman's man!...”

Chapter Sixteen

Things had gone well with Van Oudijck upon the whole. Born of a simple Dutch family, with no money, he had found his youth a hard though never cruel school of precocious earnestness, of early strenuous work, of immediate looking forward to the future, to a career, to the honourable position which he hoped—with the least possible delay—to fill among his fellow-men. His years of oriental study at Delft had been just gay enough to enable him later to believe that he had once been young; and, because he had taken part in a masquerade, he even thought that he had spent quite a dissolute life, with much squandering of money and riotous living. His character was based on a good deal of quiet Dutch respectability and an earnest outlook upon life, a rather gloomy, disillusioned outlook, though intelligent and practical: he was accustomed to visualize his honourable position among his fellow-men; and his ambition had developed rhythmically and steadily into a temperate thirst for position, but only on the lines along which his eyes were always wont to gaze: the hierarchical lines of the Indian Civil Service. Things had always gone well with him. Displaying great capacity, he had been greatly valued; he had become an assistant-resident earlier than most and a resident while still young; and his ambition was now really satisfied because his authoritative office was in complete harmony with his nature, whose love of rule had progressed with its ambition. He was now really satisfied; and, though his eyes looked still much farther ahead and saw glimmering before them a seat on the Indian Council, and even the throne at Buitenzorg, he had days when, sober and contented, he declared that to become a resident of the first class—putting aside the higher pension—had little in its favour except at Samarang and Surabaya, but that the Vorstenlanden were absolutely a burden, while Batavia occupied such a peculiar and almost derogatory position, in the thick of so many higher officials, members of council and directors. And, though his eyes thus looked farther ahead, his practical and temperate nature would have been quite satisfied if any one should have prophesied to him that he would die as Resident of Labuwangi. He loved his district and loved India; he never yearned for Holland, nor for the pageant of European civilization, even though he himself had remained very Dutch and above all hated anything that was half-caste. This was the inconsistency in his character, for he had married his first wife, herself a half-caste, purely out of affection; and, as for his children, in whom the Indian blood was eloquent—outwardly in Doddie, inwardly in Theo, while René and Ricus were two thorough little Eurasians—he loved them with an intense feeling of paternity, with all the tenderness and sentiment that slumbered in the depths of his nature: a need to give much and receive much in the circle of his domestic life. Gradually this need had extended to the circle of his district: he took a paternal pride in his assistant-residents and controllers, among whom he was popular and beloved. It had happened only once in the six years during which he had been Resident of

Labuwangi that he had been unable to get on with a controller: then the man was a half-caste, and he had had him transferred: had him sacked, as he put it. And he was proud that, despite his strict discipline, despite his stern insistence on work, he was beloved by his officials. He was all the more grieved by the constant secret enmity of the regent, his “younger brother,” to use the Javanese title, in whom indeed he would gladly have found a younger brother to govern his native population under himself, the elder brother. It grieved him that matters had fallen out thus; and he would then think of other regents, not only of this one’s father, the fine old pangéran, but of others whom he knew: the Regent of D—, a cultivated man, speaking and writing Dutch correctly, contributing lucid Dutch articles to newspapers and magazines; the Regent of S—, a trifle frivolous and vain, but very rich and very benevolent, figuring as a dandy in European society and polite to the ladies. Why should things have fallen out just so in Labuwangi, with this silent, spiteful, secretive, fanatical puppet, with the reputation of a saint and sorcerer, stupidly idolized by the people, in whose welfare he took no interest and who adored him only for the glamour of his ancient name, a man in whom he always felt an antagonism, never uttered in words, but plainly palpable under his icy correctness of demeanour? And then at Ngadjiwa too there was the brother, the card-player, the gambler: why should just he be so unlucky in his regents?

Van Oudijck was in a gloomy mood. He was accustomed to receiving, at regular intervals, anonymous letters, venomous libels spewed forth from quiet corners, bespattering at one time an assistant-resident, at another a controller, besmirching now the native head-men and now his own family; sometimes taking the form of a friendly warning, sometimes displaying a malicious delight in wounding; very, very anxious to open his eyes to the shortcomings of his officials and to his wife’s misconduct. He was so completely used to this that he did not count the letters, reading them hastily or hardly at all and carelessly destroying them. Accustomed as he was to judging for himself, these spiteful warnings made no impression on him, though they reared their heads like hissing snakes among all the letters which the post brought him daily; and as regards his wife he was so blind, he had always been so much in the habit of picturing Léonie in the tranquillity of her smiling indifference and in the home-like sociability which she most certainly attracted round her—in the hollow void of the residency, whose chairs and ottomans seemed always arranged for a reception—that he could never have credited the most trivial of all these slanders.

He never mentioned them to her. He loved his wife; he was in love with her; and, as he always saw her almost silent in society, as she never flirted or coquetted, he never glanced into the slough of corruption that was her soul. At home, indeed, he was absolutely blind. At home he displayed that utter blindness which is often seen in men who are very capable and efficient in their business or profession; who are

accustomed to scan with sharp eyes the wide perspective of their official duties, but who are near-sighted at home; who are wont to analyse things in the lump, but not their psychological details; whose knowledge of mankind is based on principles, and who divide mankind into types, as in the caste of an old-fashioned play; who can at once plumb the capacity of their subordinates, but are utterly unable to realize the intricate complex, like a tangled arabesque, like rankly-growing tendrils, of the psychic involution of those who form their own household: always gazing over their heads, failing to grasp the inner meaning of their speech, and taking no interest in the kaleidoscopic emotions of hatred and jealousy and life and love that shine with prismatic hues right before their eyes. He loved his wife and he loved his children, because the feeling and the fact of paternity were necessities of his being; but he knew neither his wife nor his children. He knew nothing about Léonie; and he had never realized that Theo and Doddie had secretly remained faithful to their mother, so far away in Batavia, ruined by her unspeakable mode of life, and that they felt no love for him. He thought that they did give him their love; and, as for him ... when he thought of them, a slumbering affection awoke within him.

He received these anonymous letters daily. They had never made an impression on him; yet of late he no longer destroyed them, but read them attentively and put them aside in a secret drawer. He could not have said why. They contained accusations against his wife, they contained imputations against his daughter. They sought to intimidate him by threatening that he might be stabbed in the dark. They warned him that his spies were utterly untrustworthy. They told him that his divorced wife was suffering from poverty and hated him, they told him that he had a son whom he had left unprovided for. They stealthily grubbed up all the secret or obscure passages in his life and his career. The thing depressed his spirits in spite of himself. It was all very vague; and he had nothing with which to reproach himself. In his own eyes and the world's, he was a good official, a good husband and a good father, he was a good man. That he should be blamed for having judged too unjustly and unfairly here, for having acted cruelly there, for having divorced his first wife, for having a son running wild in the compound; that people should throw mud at Léonie and Doddie: it all depressed him nowadays. For it was unaccountable that people should do just this. To this man, with his practical good sense, the vagueness was just the most vexatious part of it. He would not fear an open fight, but this mock battle in the dark was upsetting his nerves and his health. He could not conceive why it was happening. There was nothing to tell him. He could not conjure up the face of an enemy. And the letters came day after day; and enmity lurked daily in the shadows about him. It was too mystical and too much opposed to his nature not to embitter and depress and sadden him. Then paragraphs appeared in the lesser papers, utterances of a mean and hostile press, vague accusations or palpable falsehoods. Hatred was seething all about him. He could not fathom the reason of it,

he became ill from brooding over it. And he discussed it with nobody and hid his suffering deep down within himself.

He did not understand it. He could not imagine why it was, why it should be so. There was no logic in it all. Logically he should be loved, not hated, however strict and authoritative he might be considered. Indeed, did he not often temper his authoritative strictness with the jovial laugh under his thick moustache, with a friendly, genial warning and exhortation? Was he not on circuit a pleasant resident, who regarded the circuit with his officials as a relaxation, as a delightful trip on horseback through the coffee-plantations, touching at the go-downs in each; as a jolly excursion, which relaxed one's muscles after all those weeks of office-work: the big staff of district heads following on their little horses, riding their skittish animals like nimble monkeys, with flags in their hands; with the native orchestra tinkling out its blithe crystal notes of welcome wherever he went; with the carefully prepared dinner in the dak-bungalow in the evening and the rubber till late at night? Had not his officials, in informal moments, told him that he was a regular sport of a resident, an indefatigable rider, jovial at meals and so young that he would actually take the scarf from the nautch-girl and dance with her for a moment, very cleverly performing the lissom ritual movements of the hands and feet and hips, instead of buying himself off with a rix-dollar and leaving her to dance with the district head? Never did he feel so happy as on circuit. And now that he was gloomy and depressed, dissatisfied, not knowing what hidden forces were opposing him in the dusk—straight, honest man that he was, a man of simple principles, a serious worker—he thought that he would go on circuit soon and, by that diversion, rid himself of the gloom that was oppressing him. He would ask Theo to go with him, for the sake of a few days' change.

He was fond of his boy, even though he considered him stupid, thoughtless, reckless, lacking in perseverance, never satisfied with his superiors, tactlessly opposing his manager, until he had once more made himself impossible in the coffee-plantation or sugar-factory at which he happened to be employed. He considered that Theo ought to make his own way, as his father had done before him, instead of relying entirely on the resident's protection. He did not hold with nepotism. He would never favour his son above any one else who had the same rights. He had often told nephews of his, keen on obtaining concessions in Labuwangi, that he would rather have no relations in his district and that they must expect nothing from him except absolute impartiality. That was how he had got on; that was how he expected them to get on ... and Theo too. Nevertheless, he silently watched Theo, with all a father's love, with an almost sentimental tenderness; he regretted, silently but profoundly, that Theo was not more persevering and did not look more closely to his future, to his career, to an honourable situation among his fellow-men, from the standpoint of either money or position. The lad just lived from

day to day, without a thought of the morrow.... Perhaps he was a little cold to Theo, outwardly: well, he would have a confidential talk with him some day, would advise him; and now, in any case, he would ask Theo to go with him on circuit.

And the thought of riding for five or six days in the pure air of the mountains, through the coffee-plantations, inspecting the irrigation-works, doing what most of all attracted him in his official duties, the thought of this relieved his soul, brightened his outlook, till he ceased to think about the letters. He was made for a plain, simple life: he found life natural, not complex and involved; his life had followed a perceptible ascent, open and gradual, looking out towards a glittering summit of ambition; and the things that teemed and swarmed in the shadow and the darkness, the things that bubbled up from the abyss: these he had never been able or anxious to see. He was blind to the life that underlies the visible life. He did not believe in it, any more than a mountaineer who has lived long on a quiescent volcano believes in the inner fire which persists in its mysterious depths and which escapes only in the form of hot steam and a sulphurous stench. He believed neither in the force above things nor in the force of things themselves. He did not believe in dumb fate nor in silent inevitability. He believed only in what he saw with his own eyes: in the harvest, in the roads, districts and villages and in the welfare of his province; he believed only in his career, which he saw before him like an ascending path. And, in the unclouded clarity of his simple, masculine nature, in the universally perceptible obviousness of his upright love of authority, his legitimate ambition and his practical sense of duty, there was only one weak point: his affection, his deep, almost effeminate, sentimental affection for the members of his domestic circle ... into whose soul he could not see, being blind and seeing only in the light of his fixed principle, seeing his wife and children as they ought to be.

Experience had taught him nothing. For he had loved his first wife also as he now loved Léonie.... He loved his wife because she was his wife, because she belonged to him, because she was the principal person in his circle. He loved the circle as such and not as so many individuals who formed its links. Experience had taught him nothing. His thoughts were not in accordance with the changing hues of his life; they accorded with his ideas and principles. They had made a man and a force of him and also a good official. They had also allowed him as a rule to be a good man, according to his lights. But, because he possessed so much affection, unconscious, unanalysed and merely very deeply felt, and because he did not believe in the hidden force, in the life within life, in the force that teemed and swarmed like volcanic fires under the mountains of majesty, like troubles under a throne, because he did not believe in the mysticism of tangible things, life sometimes found him weak and unprepared when, serene as the gods and more powerful than men, it deviated from what he regarded as logical.

Chapter Seventeen

The mysticism of concrete things in that island of mystery which is Java!... Outwardly the docile colony with the subject race, which was no match for the rude trader who, in the golden age of his republic, with the young strength of a youthful people, greedy and eager for gain, stout and phlegmatic, planted his foot and his flag on the crumbling empires, on the thrones which tottered as though the earth had been in seismic labour. But, deep in its soul, it was never subjected, though smiling in proud, contemptuous resignation and bowing submissively beneath its fate; deep in its soul, despite a cringing reverence, it lived in freedom its own mysterious life, hidden from western eyes, however these might seek to fathom the secret—as though with a philosophic intention of maintaining before all a proud and smiling tranquillity, pliantly yielding and to all appearances courteously approaching—but deep within itself divinely certain of its own views and so far removed from all its rulers' ideals of civilization that no fraternization between master and servant will ever take place, because the difference which ferments in soul and blood remains insuperable. And the European, proud in his might, in his strength, in his civilization and his humanity, rules arrogantly, blindly, selfishly, egoistically, amidst all the intricate cog-wheels of his authority, which he slips into gear with the certainty of clockwork, controlling its every movement, till to the foreigner, the outside observer, this overlordship of tangible things, this colonizing of territory alien in race and mind, appears a masterpiece, a very world created.

But beneath all this show the hidden force lurks, slumbering now and unwilling to fight. Beneath all this appearance of tangible things the essence of that silent mysticism threatens, like a smouldering fire underground, like hatred and mystery in the heart. Beneath all this peace of grandeur the danger threatens and the future mutters like the subterranean thunder in the volcanoes, inaudible to human ears. And it is as though the subject race knew it and were leaving matters to the latent force of things and awaiting the divine moment that is to come if there be any truth in the calculations of the mystics. As for the native, he reads his overlord with a single penetrating glance; he sees in him the illusion of civilization and humanity and he knows that they are non-existent. While he gives him the title of lord and the homage due to the master, he is profoundly conscious of his democratic, commercial nature and despises him for it in silence and judges him with a smile which his brother understands; and he too smiles. Never does he offend against the form of slavish servility; and, with his salaam, he acts as though he were the inferior, but he is silently aware that he is the superior. He is conscious of the hidden, unuttered force; he feels the mystery borne upon the surging winds of his mountains, in the silence of the secret, sultry nights; and he foresees events that are as yet remote. What is will not always be; the present is disappearing. Dumbly he hopes that God will lift up those who are oppressed, some time, some time in the distant advent of

the dawning future. But he feels and hopes and knows it in the innermost depths of his soul, which he never unlocks to his ruler, which he would not even be able to unlock, which always remains an indecipherable book, in the unknown, untranslatable tongue in which the words indeed are the same but the shades of meaning expressed by them are different and in which the manifold hues of the two ideals show different spectra: spectra in which the colours differ as though given forth by two separate suns, rays from two separate worlds. And never is there the harmony that understands; never does that love blossom forth which is conscious of unity; and between the two there is always the gap, the chasm, the abyss, the distance, the width whence looms the mystery wherefrom, as from a cloud, the hidden force will one day flash forth....

So it was that Van Oudijck did not feel the mysticism of tangible things.

And the serene life, as of the gods, might well find him weak and unprepared....

Chapter Eighteen

Ngadjiwa was a gayer place than Labuwangi: there was a garrison; managers and employers often came down from the coffee-plantations in the interior for a few days' amusement; there were races twice a year, accompanied by festivities which filled a whole month: the reception of the resident, a horse-raffle, a battle of flowers and an opera, two or three balls, distinguished by the revellers as the fancy-dress ball, the ceremonial ball and the *soirée dansante*; it was a time of early rising and late retiring, of losing hundreds of guilders in a few days at *écarté* and in the totalizator.... The longing for pleasure and the cheery joy of life were freely indulged during those days; coffee-planters and young men from the sugar-factories looked forward to them for months ahead; people saved up for them during half the year. The two hotels were filled with guests from all directions, every household entertained its visitors; people betted furiously, while champagne flowed in torrents, all, including the ladies, knowing the race-horses as thoroughly as though they were their own property, feeling quite at home at the dances, everybody knowing everybody, as at family-parties, while the waltzes and Washington Posts and grazianas were danced with the languorous grace of the Eurasian dancers, to a swooning measure, the trains gently floating, a smile of quiet rapture on the parted lips, with that dreamy voluptuousness which the Indian settlers express so charmingly in their dances, especially those who have Javanese blood in their veins. Dancing with them is not a rough diversion, all bumping against one another with rude leaps and loud laughter, not the wild whirl of the Lancers as at Dutch boy-and-girl balls, but represents, especially to the Eurasians, nothing but courtesy and grace: a serene blossoming of the poetry of motion; a gracefully designed curve of precise steps to a pure measure over the club-room floors; an almost eighteenth-century harmony of youthful nobility, waving and trailing and swaying in the dance, despite the primitive boom-booming of the Indian musicians. This was how Addie de Luce danced, with the eyes of every woman and girl fixed upon him, following him, imploring him with their glances to take them with him also in that waving and undulating motion; which was like a dream upon the water.... This came to him with his mother's blood, this was a survival of the grace of the dancing princesses among whom his mother had spent her childhood; and the mingling of modern European and ancient Javanese gave him an irresistible charm.

And now, at the last ball, the *soirée dansante*, he danced like this with Doddie and, after her, with Léonie. It was late at night, or rather early in the morning: the day was dawning outside. A fatigue hung over the ball-room; and Van Oudijck at last intimated to the assistant-resident, Vermalen, with whom he and his family were staying, that he was ready to go home. At that moment he was in the front verandah of the club, talking to Vermalen, when the native councillor suddenly ran up to him

from the shadow of the garden and, suffering from obvious excitement, squatted, salaamed and said:

"Excellency! Excellency! Please advise me, tell me what to do! The regent is drunk, he is walking along the street and forgetting all his dignity."

The guests were taking their departure. The carriages drove up; the owners stepped in; the carriages drove away. In the road outside the club the resident saw a Javanese: the upper part of the man's body was bare; he had lost his head-dress; and his long, black hair floated loosely, while he talked aloud, with violent gestures. Groups gathered in the dusky shadow, looking on from a distance.

Van Oudijck recognized the Regent of Ngadjiwa. Already at the ball the regent had behaved without self-control, after losing heavily at cards and mixing all sorts of wines.

"Hasn't the regent been home yet?" asked Van Oudijck.

"Surely, excellency!" replied the councillor, plaintively. "I took the regent home as soon as I saw that he was no longer able to control himself. He flung himself on his bed; I thought he was sound asleep. But see, he woke and got up; he left the palace and came back here. See how he's behaving! He is drunk, he is drunk and he forgets who he is and who his fathers were!"

Van Oudijck went outside with Vermalen. He walked up to the regent, who was making violent gestures and delivering an unintelligible speech in a loud voice.

"Regent!" said the resident. "Don't you know where and who you are?"

The regent did not recognize him. He ranted at Van Oudijck, he called down all the curses of heaven upon his head.

"Regent!" said the assistant-resident. "Don't you know who's speaking to you and to whom you're speaking?"

The regent swore at Vermalen. His bloodshot eyes flashed with drunken fury and madness. Assisted by the councillor, Van Oudijck and Vermalen tried to help him into a carriage; but he refused. Splendid and sublime in his fall, he gloried in the madness of his tragedy, he stood, as though some explosive force had made him beside himself, half-naked, with floating hair and great gestures of his crazy arms. He was no longer coarse and bestial but became tragic, heroic, fighting against his fate, on the edge of the abyss.... The excess of his drunkenness seemed with a strange force to raise him out of his gradual bestialization; and, fuddled as he was, he drew himself up, towering high, dramatically, above the Europeans.

Van Oudijck gazed at him in stupefaction. The regent was now coming to blows with the councillor, who addressed him in beseeching tones. On the road, the

population collected, silent, dismayed; the last guests were leaving the club, where the lights were growing dim. Among them were Léonie van Oudijck, Doddie and Addie de Luce. All three still bore in their eyes the weary voluptuousness of the last waltz.

"Addie," said the resident, "you're an intimate friend of the regent's. Just see if he knows you."

The young man spoke to the tipsy madman, in soft Javanese accents. At first the regent kept on with his words of oburgation, with his gigantic, raving gestures; then, however, the softness of the language seemed to hold a well-known memory for him. He gave Addie a long look. His gestures subsided, his drunken glory evaporated. It was as though his blood suddenly understood that young man's blood, as though their souls recognized each other. The regent nodded dolefully and began a long lament, with his arms raised on high. Addie tried to help him into a carriage, but the regent resisted and refused. Then Addie took his arm in his own with gentle force and walked on with him slowly. The regent, still lamenting, with tragic gestures of despair, suffered himself to be led. The councillor followed with one or two underlings, who had run after the regent out of the palace, helplessly. The procession vanished in the darkness.

Léonie, wearily smiling, stepped into the assistant-resident's carriage. She remembered the gambling-quarrel at Patjaram; she took pleasure in observing the gradual deterioration which was occurring so visibly, this visible degradation by a passion controlled by neither tact nor moderation. And where she was concerned she felt stronger than ever, because she enjoyed her passions and controlled them and made them the slaves of her enjoyment.... She despised the regent; and it gave her a romantic satisfaction, an artistic pleasure, to watch the successive phases of that deterioration. In the carriage she glanced at her husband, who sat in gloomy silence. And his gloom delighted her, because she thought him sentimental, with his championing of the Javanese nobility, the result of a sentimental instruction, which Van Oudijck took even more sentimentally. And she delighted in his sorrow. And from her husband she glanced at Doddie, detecting in the dance-weary eyes of her step-daughter a jealousy due to that last, that very last waltz of Léonie's with Addie. And she rejoiced in this jealousy. She felt happy, because sorrow had no hold upon her, any more than passion. She played with the things of life and they glided off her and left her as unperturbed and calmly smiling and unwrinkled and creamy white as before.

Van Oudijck did not go to bed. With his head aflame, with a fury of mortification in his heart, he at once took a bath, dressed himself in pyjamas and had coffee served on the verandah outside his room. It was six o'clock; the air was steeped in a delightful coolness of morning freshness. But he suffered from so fierce an anger that

his temples throbbed as though with congestion, his heart thumped in his chest, his every nerve quivered. The scene of that night and morning was still flickering before his eyes, ticking on like a cinematograph, with whirling changes of posture. What angered him above all was the impossibility of it all, the illogicality, the unthinkableness of it. That a Javanese of high birth, forgetful of all the noble traditions in his blood, should have been able to behave as the Regent of Ngadjiwa had behaved that night would never have seemed to him possible. He would never have believed it, if he had not seen it with his own eyes. To this man of predetermined logic the fact was simply monstrous, like a nightmare. Extremely susceptible to surprise, which he did not consider logical, he was angry with reality. He wondered whether he had not been dreaming, whether he himself had not been drunk. That the scandal should have occurred made him furious. But, as it was so, well, he would recommend the regent for dismissal. There was no alternative.

He dressed, spoke to Vermalen and went to the palace with him. They both forced their way in to the regent, notwithstanding the hesitation of the retainers, notwithstanding the breach of etiquette. They did not see the wife, the raden-aju. But they found the regent in his bedroom. He was lying on his bed, with his eyes open, recovering gloomily, not yet sufficiently restored to life fully to realize the strangeness of this visit, of the presence of the resident and assistant-resident by his bedside. He recognized them nevertheless, but did not speak. While the two of them tried to bring home to him the gross impropriety of his behaviour, he stared shamelessly in their faces and persisted in his silence. It was all so strange that the two officials looked at each other and exchanged glances to ask whether the regent was not mad, whether he was really responsible. He had not spoken a single word, he remained silent. Though Van Oudijck threatened him with dismissal, he remained dumb, staring with shameless eyes into the resident's eyes. He did not open his lips, he maintained the attitude of a deaf-mute. At the most, an ironical smile formed about his lips. The officials, really thinking that the regent was mad, shrugged their shoulders and left the room.

In the gallery they met the raden-aju, a short, downtrodden little woman, like a whipped dog, a beaten slave. She approached, weeping; she begged, she implored for forgiveness. Van Oudijck told her that the regent refused to speak, for all his threats, that he was silent with an inexplicable but obviously deliberate silence. Then the raden-aju whispered that the regent had consulted a native physician, who had given him a talisman and assured him that, if he only persisted in maintaining complete silence, his enemies would obtain no hold upon him. Terrified, she implored for help, for forgiveness, gathering her children round her as she spoke. After sending for the councillor and enjoining him to keep a strict watch on the regent, the two officials went away.

Often though Van Oudijck had encountered the superstition of the Javanese, it always enraged him, as opposed to what he called the laws of nature and life. Yes, nothing but his superstition could induce a Javanese to depart from the correct path of his innate courtliness. Whatever they might now wish to put before him, the regent would remain silent, would persist in the absolute silence prescribed by the physician. In this way he believed himself protected against those whom he considered his enemies. And this preconceived notion of hostility in one whom he would so gladly have regarded as his younger brother and fellow-ruler was what disturbed Van Oudijck most of all.

He returned to Labuwangi with Léonie and Doddie. Once at home, he felt for a moment the pleasantness of being back in his own house, an enjoyment of domesticity that always soothed him greatly: the material pleasure of seeing his own bed again, his own writing-table and chair, of drinking his own coffee, made as he was accustomed to have it. These minor amenities put him in a good humour for a little while, but he at once felt all his bitterness awaken when he perceived, under a pile of letters on his desk, the disguised handwritings of a couple of furtive correspondents. Automatically he opened these first and felt sick when he read Léonie's name coupled with that of Theo. Nothing was sacred to those scoundrels: they concocted the most monstrous calumnies, the most unnatural libels, the most loathsome imputations, down to that of what was almost incest. All the filth flung at his wife and son only set them higher in his love, girt them with a greater purity, placed them on an inviolable summit and made him cherish them with a deeper and more fervent affection. But his bitterness, once stirred up, brought back all his mortification. Its actual cause was that he had to propose the Regent of Ngadjiwa's dismissal and did not enjoy the prospect. But this one necessity embittered his whole being, upset his nerves and made him ill. If he could not follow the path which he had determined upon, if life strayed from the possibilities which he, Van Oudijck, had a priori fixed, this reluctance, this rebellion upset his nerves and made him ill.

He had once and for all resolved, after the death of the old pangéran, to raise up the declining race of the Adiningrats, alike because of his affectionate memory of that excellent Javanese prince, because of his instructions as resident and because of a sense of lofty humanity and hidden poetry in himself. And he had never been able to do so, he had at once been thwarted – unconsciously, by force of circumstances – by the old raden-aju pangéran, who gambled away everything, who was ruining herself and her kin. As a friend he had exhorted her. She had always been accessible to his advice, but her passion had proved too strong for her. Van Oudijck had from the first, even before the father's death, judged her son, Sunario, the Regent of Labuwangi, unfitted for the actual position of regent. The fellow was petty and insignificant, insufferably proud of his descent, never in touch with the actualities of life, devoid of any talent for ruling or any consideration for his inferiors, a great

fanatic, always occupied with native doctors, with sacred calculations, with talismans, always reticent and living in a dream of obscure mysticism and blind to what would spell welfare and justice for his Javanese subjects. And the population adored him nevertheless, both because of his noble birth and because he was reputed to possess sanctity and a far-reaching power, a divine magic. Silently, secretly, the women of the Kabupaten sold bottles of the water that had flowed over his body in the bath, as a healing remedy for various diseases. There you had the elder brother; and the younger had quite forgotten himself last night, frenzied by cards and drink. In these two sons the once so brilliant race was tottering to its fall. Their children were young; a few cousins were native councillors in Labuwangi and the adjoining residencies, but their veins contained not a drop of the noble blood. No, Van Oudijck had always failed, glad though he would have been to succeed. The very men whose interests he defended were opposing his efforts. Their day was over. But why this must be so he could not understand; and it all upset him and embittered him.

And he had pictured to himself a very different path, a beautiful ascending path, even as he saw his own life before him, whereas with them the path of life wound tortuously downwards. And he did not understand what it was that was stronger than he when he put forth his will. Had it not always happened in his life and his career that the things for which he had fervently wished came to pass with the logic which he himself, day after day, had attributed to the things that were about to take place? His ambition had now established the logic of the ascending path, for his ambition had established as its aim the revival of this Javanese family....

Would he fail? To fail in striving for an aim which he had set himself as an official: he would never forgive himself! Hitherto he had always succeeded in achieving what he had willed. But what he now wanted to achieve was, unknown to himself, not merely an official aim, a part of his work. What he now wanted to achieve was an aim the idea of which sprang from his humanity, from the noblest part of himself. What he now wanted to achieve was an ideal, the ideal of the European in the east and of the European who sees the east as he wishes to see it and as he could but see it.

And that there were forces that gathered into one force, which threatened him, mocking at his proposals, laughing at his ideals, and which was all the stronger through lying more deeply hidden: this he would never admit. It was not in him to acknowledge them; and even the clearest revelation of them would be a riddle to his soul and would remain a myth.

Chapter Nineteen

Van Oudijck had been to the government-building that day. Léonie met him the moment he returned.

"The raden-aju pangéran is here," she said. "She has been here quite an hour, Otto. She wishes to speak to you badly. She has been waiting for you."

"Léonie," he said, "I want you to look through these letters. I often get libels of this sort and I've never mentioned them to you. But perhaps it's better that you should not be left in ignorance. Perhaps it's better for you to know. But please don't take them to heart. I needn't assure you that I don't for a moment believe one word of all this filth. So don't get upset about it and give me back the letters presently yourself. Don't leave them lying about.... And send the raden-aju pangéran to my office...."

Léonie, carrying the letters in her hand, went to the back-verandah and returned with the princess, a distinguished-looking, grey-haired woman, with a proud, royal bearing in her still slender figure. Her eyes were a sombre black; her mouth, which was widened in outline by betel-nut-juice and which grinned with filed, black, lacquered teeth, was like a grimacing mask and spoilt the proud nobility of her expression. She wore a black satin kabaai fastened with jewelled buttons. It was above all her grey hair and her sombre eyes that gave her a peculiar admixture of venerable dignity and smouldering passion. Tragedy hung over her old age. She herself felt that fate was pressing tragically upon her and hers; and she placed her only hope in the far-reaching, divinely-appointed power of her first-born, Sunario, the Regent of Labuwangi.

While the old princess preceded Van Oudijck into the office, Léonie examined the letters in the middle gallery. They were lampoons couched in foul language, about her and Addie and Theo. Always wrapped in the selfish dream of her own life, she never troubled greatly about what people thought or said, especially as she knew that she could always and immediately win every one again with her personality, with her smile. She possessed a tranquil charm which was irresistible. She herself never spoke ill of others, out of indifference; she made amiable excuses for everything and everybody; and she was loved ... when people saw her. But she considered these dirty letters, spat out from some dark corner, tiresome and unpleasant, even though Van Oudijck did not believe them. Suppose that one day he began to believe things? She must be prepared for it. She must above all retain for that possible day her most charming tranquillity, all her invulnerability, all her inviolability. Who could have sent the letters? Who hated her so much, who could be interested in writing like this to her husband? How strange that the thing should be known!... Addie? Theo? How did people know? Was it Oorip? No, not Oorip.... But who then? And was everything actually known? She had always thought that what happened in the secret chambers would never be known on the housetops. She had

even believed—it was simple of her—that the men never discussed her with one another, that they might discuss other women, but not herself. Her mind harboured such simple illusions, despite all her experience, in a simplicity which harmonized with the half-perverse, half-childish poetry of her rose-hued imagination. Could she then not always keep hidden the secrets of her mystery, the secrets of reality? It annoyed her for a moment, that reality, which was being revealed despite her superficial correctness.... Thoughts and dreams always remained secret. It was the actions that were so troublesome. For an instant she thought of being more careful in future, of refraining. But she saw before her, in imagination, Theo and Addie, her fair love and her dark love; and she felt that she was too weak for that. She knew that in this she could not conquer her passions, though she controlled them. Would they end by proving her destruction, notwithstanding all her tactfulness? But she laughed at the thought: she had a firm faith in her invulnerability. Life always glided off her shoulders.

Still she wanted to prepare herself for what might happen. She had no higher ideal in life than to be free from pain, free from grief, free from poverty and to make her passions the slaves of her enjoyment, so that she might possess this enjoyment as long as possible, lead this life as long as possible. She reflected what she should say and do if Van Oudijck suddenly questioned her, suspicious because of these anonymous letters. She reflected whether she had better break with Theo. Addie was enough for her. And she lost herself in her calculations, as in the vague combinations of a play about to be enacted. Then, suddenly, she heard the raden-aju pangéran's voice sounding loudly in the office, in between her husband's calmer accents. She listened, inquisitively, foreseeing a tragedy, and was quietly relieved that this tragedy also was gliding away from her. She crept into Van Oudijck's bedroom; the communicating-doors were always left open for coolness and only a screen separated the bedroom from the office. She peeped past the screen. And she saw the old princess more greatly excited than she had ever seen any Javanese woman. The raden-aju was beseeching Van Oudijck in Malay; he was assuring her in Dutch that what she asked was impossible. Léonie listened more closely. And she now heard the old princess imploring the resident to show mercy to her second son, the Regent of Ngadjiwa. She entreated Van Oudijck to remember her husband, the pangéran, whom he had loved as a father, who had loved him as a son, with a mutual affection more intense than that of an "elder and younger brother"; she conjured him to think of their famous past, of the glory of the Adiningrats, ever loyal friends of the Company, its allies in war, its most faithful vassals in peace; she conjured him not to decree the downfall of their race, on which a doom had descended since the pangéran's death, driving it into an abyss of fatal destruction. She stood before the resident like a Niobe, like a tragic mother, flinging up her arms in the vehemence of her protestations, while tears poured from her sombre eyes and only the wide

mouth, painted with brown betel-juice, was like the grimace of a mask. But from this grimace the fluent phrases of protestation and conjuration were pouring forth; and she wrung her hands in entreaty and beat her breast in contrition.

Van Oudijck answered in a firm but gentle voice, telling her that certainly he had loved the old pangéran most sincerely, that he respected the old race highly, that no one would be better pleased than he to uphold their lofty position. But then he grew more severe and asked her whom the Adiningrats had to blame for the fate that was now pursuing her. And, with his eyes looking into hers, he said that it was she! She fell back, flaring up with rage; but he repeated it again and yet again. Her sons were her children: bigoted and proud and incurable gamblers. And it was gambling, that low passion, which was wrecking their greatness. Their race was staggering to its downfall through their insatiable greed of gain. How often did it not happen that a month went by at Ngadjiwa before the regent paid the native heads their salaries? She protested that it was true: it was at her instigation that her son had taken the money of the treasury, to pay gambling debts. But she also swore that it would never happen again. And where, asked Van Oudijck, had a regent, descended from an ancient race, ever behaved as the Regent of Ngadjiwa had at the race-ball? The mother lamented: it was true, it was true; fate dogged their footsteps and had clouded her son's mind; but it would never, never happen again. She swore by the soul of the old pangéran that it would never happen again, that her son would win back his dignity. But Van Oudijck grew more vehement and reproached her with never having exercised a good influence over her sons and nephews, with being the evil genius of her family, because a demon of gambling and greed held her fast in its claws. She began to shriek with anguish, she, the old princess, who looked down upon the resident, the Hollander without birth or breeding, shrieking with anguish because he dared to speak like this and was entitled to do so. She flung out her arms, she begged for mercy; she begged him not to urge her son's dismissal by the government, which would act as the resident suggested, which would follow the advice of such a highly esteemed official; she begged him to have pity and show patience a little longer. She would speak to her son; Sunario would speak to his brother; they would bring him back to his senses, which had been bewildered by drink and play and women. Oh, if the resident would only have pity, if he would only relent! But Van Oudijck remained inexorable. He had shown patience for so long. It was now exhausted. Since her son, at the instigation of the native physician, relying on his talisman, had resisted him with his insolent silence, which, as he firmly believed, made him invulnerable to his enemies, he would prove that he, the spokesman of the government, the representative of the queen, was the stronger, physician and talisman notwithstanding. There was no alternative: his patience was at an end; his love for the pangéran did not allow of further indulgence; his feeling

of respect for their race was not such that he could transfer it to an unworthy son. It was settled: the regent would be dismissed.

The princess had listened to him, unable to credit his words, seeing the abyss yawn before her. And, with a yell like that of a wounded lioness, with a scream of pain, she pulled the jewelled hairpins from her head, till her long grey hair fell streaming about her face; with a rending tug she tore open her satin kabaai; beside herself with anguish, she threw herself before the feet of the European, took firm hold of his foot with her two hands, planted it, with a movement which made Van Oudijck stagger, on her bowed neck and cried aloud and screamed that she, the daughter of the sultans of Madura, would for ever be his slave, that she swore to be nothing but his slave, if only he would have mercy on her son this time and not plunge her house into the abyss of shame which she saw yawning around her. And she clutched the European's foot, as though with the strength of despair, and held that foot, like a yoke of servitude, with the sole and heel of the shoe pressed upon her flowing grey hair, upon her neck bowed to the floor. Van Oudijck trembled with emotion. He realized that this high-spirited woman would never humble herself like that, with evident spontaneity, to the lowest depths of humiliation that she could conceive, would not resort to the most vehement utterance of actual grief that a woman could ever display, with her hair unbound and the ruler's foot planted on her neck, if she had not been shaken to the very depths of her soul, if she did not feel desperate to the pitch of self-destruction. And he hesitated for a moment. But only for a moment. He was a man of considered principles, of fixed, a priorillogic, immovable when he had come to a decision, wholly inaccessible to impulse. With the utmost respect, he at last released his foot from the princess' clinging grasp. Holding out both hands to her, with visible compassion, visible emotion, he raised her from the floor. He made her sit down; and she fell into a chair, broken, sobbing aloud. For a moment, perceiving his gentleness, she thought that she had won. But when he calmly but decidedly shook his head in denial, she understood that it was over. She panted for breath, half-swooning, her kabaai still open, her hair still unbound.

At that moment Léonie entered the room. She had seen the drama enacted before her eyes and felt a thrill of artistic emotion. She experienced something like compassion in her barren soul. She approached the princess, who flung herself into her arms, woman seeking woman in the unreasoning despair of that inevitable doom. And Léonie, turning her beautiful eyes on Van Oudijck, murmured a single word of intercession and whispered:

"Give in! Give in!"

And for the second time Van Oudijck wavered. Never had he refused his wife anything, however costly, for which she asked. But this meant the sacrifice of his principle never to reconsider a decision, always to persist in what he had resolved

should happen. Then had he always controlled the future. Thus things always happened as he willed. Then had he never shown any weakness. And he answered that it was impossible.

In his obstinacy, he did not divine the sacred moments in which a man must not insist upon his own will, but must piously surrender to the pressure of the hidden forces. These moments he did not respect, acknowledge or recognize; no, never. He was a man with a clear, logically deduced, simple, masculine sense of duty, a man of a plain and simple life. He would never know that, lurking under the simple life, are all those forces which together make the omnipotent hidden force. He would have laughed at the idea that there are nations which have a greater control over that force than the western nations have. He would shrug his shoulders—and continue his own road—at the mere supposition that among the nations there are a few individuals in whose hands that force loses its omnipotence and becomes an instrument. No experience would teach him. He would perhaps for an instant be nonplussed. But immediately afterwards he would grasp the chain of his logic in his virile hand and link up the iron actualities together....

He saw Léonie lead the old princess from his office, bowed and sobbing.

A deep emotion, an utterly agitating compassion, brought the tears to his eyes. And before those tearful eyes rose the vision of that Javanese whom he loved like a father.

But he did not give in.

Chapter Twenty

Reports arrived from Ternate and Halmaheira that a terrible submarine earthquake had visited the surrounding group of islands, that whole villages had been washed away, that thousands of inhabitants had been rendered homeless. The telegrams caused greater consternation in Holland than in India, where people seemed more used to the convulsions of the sea, to the volcanic upheavals of the earth. They had been discussing the Dreyfus case for months, they were beginning to discuss the Transvaal, but Ternate was hardly mentioned. Nevertheless a central committee was formed at Batavia; and Van Oudijck called a meeting. It was resolved to hold a charity-bazaar, at the earliest possible date, in the club and the garden attached to it. Mrs. van Oudijck, as usual, delegated everything to Eva Eldersma and did not trouble herself at all.

For a fortnight Labuwangi was filled with excitement. In this silent little town, full of eastern slumber, a whirlwind of tiny passions, jealousies and enmities began to rise. Eva had her club of faithful adherents, the Van Helderens, the Doorn de Bruijns, the Rantzows, with which all sorts of tiny sets strove to compete. One was not on speaking terms with the other; this one would not take part because that one did; another insisted on taking part only because Mrs. Eldersma must not think that she was everybody; and this one and that one and the other considered that Eva was much too pretentious and need not fancy that she was the most important woman in the place because Mrs. van Oudijck left everything to her. Eva however had spoken to the resident and declared that she was willing to organize everything provided she received unlimited authority. She had not the slightest objection to his appointing some one else to set the ball rolling; but, if he appointed her, unlimited authority was an express condition, for to take twenty different tastes and opinions into account would mean that one would never get anywhere. Van Oudijck laughingly consented, but impressed upon her that she must not make people angry and that she must respect every one's feelings and be as conciliatory as possible, so that the charity-bazaar might leave pleasant memories behind it. Eva promised: she was not naturally quarrelsome.

To get a thing done, to set a thing going, to put a thing through, to employ her artistic energies was her great delight: it was life to her, was the only consolation in her dreary life in India. For, though she had grown to love and admire many things in Java, the social life of the country, save for her little clique, lacked all charm for her. But now to prepare an entertainment on a large scale, the fame of which would reach as far as Surabaya, flattered alike her vanity and her love of work.

She sailed through every difficulty; and, because people saw that she knew best and was more practical than they, they gave way to her. But, while she was busy evolving her stalls and her tableaux-vivants, while the bustle of the preparations

occupied the leading families of Labuwangi, something seemed also to occupy the soul of the native population, but something less cheerful than charitable entertainment. The chief of police, who brought Van Oudijck his short report every morning, usually in a few words—that he had gone his rounds and that everything was quiet and orderly—had of late had longer conversations with the resident, seemed to have more important things to communicate; the messengers whispered more mysteriously outside the office, the resident sent for Eldersma and Van Helderer; the secretary wrote to Ngadjiwa, to Vermalen the assistant-resident, to the major-commandant of the garrison; and the district controller went round the town with increased frequency and at unaccustomed hours. Amid all their fussing the ladies perceived little of these mysterious doings; and only Léonie, who took no part in the preparations, noticed in her husband an unusual silent concern. She was a quick and keen observer; and, because Van Oudijck, who was accustomed often to mention business in the domestic circle, had been mute for the last few days, she asked suddenly where the Regent of Ngadjiwa was, now that he had been dismissed by the government at Van Oudijck's instance, and who was going to replace him. He made a vague reply; and she took alarm and became anxious. One morning, passing through her husband's bedroom, she was struck by the whispered conversation between Van Oudijck and the chief of police and she stopped to listen, with her ear against the screen. The conversation was muffled because the garden-doors were open; the messengers were sitting on the garden-steps; a couple of gentlemen who wished to speak to the resident were walking up and down the side-verandah, after writing their names on the slate which the chief messenger brought in to the resident. But they had to wait, because the resident was engaged with the chief of police....

Léonie listened from behind the screen. And she turned pale at the sound of a word or two which she overheard. She returned silently to her room, feeling anxious. At lunch she asked if it would be really necessary for her to attend the fancy-fair, for she had had such a toothache lately and wanted to go to Surabaya, to the dentist. It would probably mean a few days: she had not been to the dentist for ever so long. But Van Oudijck, sterner than usual, in his sombre mood of secret concern and silence, told her that it was impossible, that on an evening like that of the fancy-fair she was bound to be present as the resident's wife. She pouted and sulked and held her handkerchief to her mouth, so that Van Oudijck became distressed. That afternoon she did not sleep, did not read, did not dream, as a result of this unusual agitation. She was frightened, she wanted to get away. And at tea, in the garden, she began to cry, said that the toothache was making her head ache, that it was making her quite ill, that it was more than she could bear. Van Oudijck, distressed and careworn, was touched; he could never endure to see her tears. And he gave in, as he

always did to her, where her personal affairs were in question. Next day she went off to Surabaya, staying at the resident's and really having her teeth attended to.

It was always a good thing to do, once a year or so. This time she spent about five hundred guilders on the dentist. After this, incidentally, the other ladies also seemed to guess something of what was happening at Labuwangi behind a haze of mystery. For Ida van Helderer, the tragic white half-caste, her eyes starting out of her head with fright, told Eva Eldersma that her husband and Eldersma and the resident too were fearing a rebellion of the population, incited by the regent and his family, who would never forgive the dismissal of the Regent of Ngadjiwa. The men, however, were non-committal and reassured their wives. But a dark swirling tide continued to stir under the apparent calmness of their little up-country life. And gradually the gossip leaked out and alarmed the European inhabitants. Vague paragraphs in the newspapers, commenting on the dismissal of the regent, contributed to their alarm.

Meanwhile the bustle of preparation for the fancy-fair went on, but people no longer put their hearts into the work. They led a fussy, restless life and were becoming ill and nervous. At night they bolted and barred their houses, placed arms by their bed-sides, woke suddenly in terror, listening to the noises of the night, which sounded faintly in space outside. And they condemned the hastiness shown by Van Oudijck, who, after the scene at the race-ball, had been unable to restrain his patience any longer and had not hesitated to recommend the dismissal of the regent, whose house was firmly rooted in the soil of Labuwangi, was one with Labuwangi.

The resident had ordered, as a festival for the population, an evening market on the square outside the regent's palace, to last for a few days, coinciding with the bazaar. There would be a people's fair, numbers of little stalls and booths and a Malay theatre, with plays drawn from the Arabian Nights. He had done this in order to give the Javanese inhabitants a treat which they would value greatly, while the Europeans were enjoying themselves on their side. It was now a few days before the fancy-fair, on the previous day to which, as it chanced, the monthly council was to be held in the palace.

The anxiety, the fuss and a general nervousness filled the otherwise quiet little town with an emotion which made people almost ill. Mothers sent their children away and themselves were undecided what to do. But the fancy-fair made people stay. How could they avoid going to the fancy-fair? There was so seldom any amusement. But ... if there really were a rising! And they did not know what to do, whether to take the lowering menace, which they half-divined, seriously or make a light-hearted jest of it.

The day before the council, Van Oudijck asked for an interview with the raden-aju pangéran, who lived with her son. His carriage drove past the huts and booths in the square and through the triumphal arches of the market, formed of bamboo-stems

bending towards each other, with a narrow strip of bunting rippling in the wind, so much so that, in Javanese, the decorations are known as “rippings.” This evening was to be the first evening of the fair. Every one was busy with the final preparations; and, in the bustle of hammering and arranging, the natives sometimes neglected to cower at the passing of the resident’s carriage and paid no attention to the golden umbrella which the messenger on the box held in his hands like a furled sun. But, when the carriage turned by the flagstaff and up the drive leading to the palace and they saw that the resident was going to the regent’s, groups huddled together and spoke in eager whispers. They crowded at the entrance to the drive and stared. But the natives saw nothing save the empty market-place looming beyond the shadow of the banyans, with the rows of chairs in readiness. The chief of police, suddenly passing on his bicycle, caused the groups to break up as though by instinct.

The old princess was awaiting the resident in the front-verandah. Her dignified features wore a serene expression and betrayed no trace of what was raging within her. She motioned the resident to a chair; and the conversation opened with a few ordinary phrases. Then four servants approached in a crouching posture: one with a bottle-stand; the second with a tray full of glasses; the third with a silver ice-pail full of broken ice; the fourth salaamed, without carrying anything. The princess asked the resident what he would drink; and he replied that he would like a whisky-and-soda. The fourth servant came crouching through the other three to prepare the drink, poured in the measure of whisky, opened the bottle of soda-water with a report as of a gun and dropped into the tumbler a lump of ice the size of a small glacier. Not another word was said. The resident waited for the drink to grow cold; and the four servants crouched away. Then at last Van Oudijck spoke and asked if he might speak to her in entire confidence, if he could say what he had in his mind. She begged him, civilly, to do so. And in his firm but hushed voice he told her, in Malay, in very courteous sentences, full of friendliness and flowery politeness, how great and exalted his love had been for the pangéran and still was for that prince’s glorious house, although he, Van Oudijck, to his intense regret, had been obliged to act counter to that love, because his duty commanded him so to act. And he asked her—presuming that it was possible for her, as a mother—to bear him no grudge for this exercise of his duty; he asked her, on the contrary, to show a motherly feeling for him, the European official, who had loved the pangéran as a father, and to cooperate with him, the official—she, the mother of the regent—by employing her great influence for the happiness and welfare of the population. Sunario had a tendency, in his piety and his remote gaze at things invisible, to forget the actual realities that lay before his eyes. Well, he, the resident, was asking her, the powerful, influential mother, to cooperate with him in ways which Sunario overlooked, to cooperate with him in love and unity. And, in his elegant Malay, he opened his heart to her entirely,

describing the turmoil which for days and days had been seething among the inhabitants, like an evil poison which could not do other than make them wicked and drunk and would probably lead to things, to acts, which were bound to have lamentable results. He made her feel his unspoken view that the government would be the stronger, that a terrible punishment would overtake all who should prove guilty, high and low alike. But his language remained exceedingly cautious and his speech respectful, as of a son addressing a mother. She, though she understood him, valued the tactful grace of his manner; and the flowery depth and earnestness of his language made him rise in her esteem and almost surprised her ... in a low Hollander, without birth or breeding. But he continued. He did not tell her what he knew, that she was the instigatress of this obscure unrest; but he excused that unrest, said that he understood it, that the population shared her grief in respect of her unworthy son, himself a scion of the noble race, and that it was only natural that the people should sympathize deeply with their old sovereign, even though the sympathy was ignorant and illogical. For the son was unworthy, the Regent of Ngadjiwa had proved himself unworthy and what had happened could not have happened otherwise.

His voice, for a moment, became severe; and she bowed her grey head, remained silent, seemed to agree. But his words now became gentler again; and once more he asked for her cooperation, asked her to use her influence for the best. He trusted her entirely. He knew that she held high the traditions of her family, loyalty to the Company, unimpeachable loyalty to the government. Well, he asked her to direct her power and influence, to use the love and reverence which the people bore her in such a way that she, in concert with him, would allay what was seething in the darkness; that she would move the thoughtless to reflection; that she would assuage and pacify what was secretly threatening, thoughtlessly and frivolously, against the firm and dignified authority of the government. And, while he flattered and threatened her in one breath, he felt that she – although she hardly spoke a single word and merely punctuated his words with her repeated *saja* – he felt that she was falling under his stronger influence, the influence of the man of tact and authority, and that he was giving her food for reflection. He felt that, as she reflected, her hatred was subsiding, her vindictiveness losing its force and that he was breaking the energy and pride of the ancient blood of the Maduran sultans. Under all the flowers of his speech, he allowed her to catch a glimpse of utter ruin, of terrible penalties, of the undeniably greater power of the government. And he bent her to the old pliant attitude of yielding before the might of the ruler. He reminded her, in her impulse to rebel and throw off the hated yoke, that it was better to be calm and reasonable and to adapt herself placidly to things as they were. She nodded her head softly in assent; and he felt that he had conquered her. And this aroused a certain pride within him.

And now she also spoke and gave the required promise, saying, in her broken, inwardly weeping voice, that she loved him as a son, that she would do what he wished and would assuredly use her influence, outside the palace, in the town, to still these threatening troubles. She denied her own complicity and said that the unrest arose from the unreflecting love of the people, who suffered with her, because of her son. She now echoed his own words, save that she did not speak of unworthiness. For she was a mother. And she repeated once again that he could trust her, that she would act according to his wish. Then he informed her that he would come to the council next day, with his subordinates and with the native headmen; and he said that he trusted her so completely that all of them, the Europeans, would be unarmed. He looked her in the eyes. He threatened her more by saying this than if he had spoken of arms. For he was threatening her—without a threatening word, merely by the intonation of his Malay speech—with the punishment, with the vengeance of the government, if a hair was injured of the least of its officials.

He had risen from his seat. She also rose, wrung her hands, entreated him not to speak like that, entreated him to have the fullest confidence in her and in her son. She sent for Sunario. The Regent of Labuwangi entered; and Van Oudijck again repeated that he hoped for peace and reason. And he felt, by the tone of the old princess in speaking to her son, that she wished for peace and reason. He felt that she, the mother, was omnipotent in the palace.

The regent bowed his head, agreed, promised, even said that he had already taken pacifying measures, that he had always regretted this excitement of the populace, that it grieved him greatly, now that the resident had noticed it, in spite of his, Sunario's, attempts at pacification. The resident did not go further into this insincerity. He knew that the discontent was fanned from the Kabupaten, but he knew also that he had won. Once more, however, he impressed upon the regent his responsibility, if anything happened in the market-place, next day, during the council. The regent entreated him not to think of such a thing. And now, to part on friendly terms, he begged Van Oudijck to sit down again. Van Oudijck resumed his seat. In so doing, he knocked as though by accident against the tumbler, all frosted with the chill of the ice, which he had not yet put to his lips. It fell clattering to the ground. He apologized for his clumsiness. The raden-aju pangéran had remarked his movement and her old face turned pale. She said nothing, but beckoned to an attendant. And the four servants appeared again, crouching along the floor, and mixed a second whisky-and-soda. Van Oudijck at once lifted the glass to his lips.

There was a painful silence. To what degree the resident's movement in upsetting the glass was justified would always remain a problem. He would never know. But he wished to show the princess that, when coming here, he was prepared for

anything, before their conversation, and that, after this conversation, he meant to trust her utterly and completely, not only in respect of the drink which she offered him, but next day, at the council, where he and his officials would appear unarmed, and in respect of her influence for good, which would bring peace and tranquillity to the people. And, as though to show him that she understood him and that his confidence would be wholly justified, she rose and whispered a few words to an attendant whom she had beckoned to her. The Javanese disappeared and soon returned, crouching all the way through the front-verandah and carrying a long object in a yellow case. The princess took it from him and handed it to Sunario, who took a walking-stick from the yellow silk case and offered it to the resident as a token of their fraternal friendship. Van Oudijck accepted it, understanding the symbol. For the yellow silk case was of the colour and the material of authority, yellow or gold and silk; the stick was of a wood that serves as a protection against snake-bites and ill-luck; and the heavy knob was wrought of the metal of authority, gold, in the form of the ancient sultan's crown. This stick, offered at such a moment, signified that the Adiningrats submitted anew and that Van Oudijck could trust them.

And, when he took his leave, he felt very proud and esteemed himself highly. For by exercising tact, diplomacy and knowledge of the Javanese he had won; he would have allayed the rebellion merely by words. That would be a fact.

That was so, that would be so: a fact. On that first evening of the public fair, lighted gaily with a hundred paraffin-lamps, scented alluringly with the trailing odours of cooking food, full of the motley whirl of the holiday-making populace, that first evening was wholly given up to rejoicing; and the people discussed with one another the long and friendly visit which the resident had paid to the regent and his mother; for they had seen the carriage with the umbrella waiting a long time in the drive and the regent's attendants had told of the present of the walking-stick.

That was so: the fact existed and had happened as Van Oudijck had planned it in advance and compelled it to happen. And that he should be proud of this was human. But what he had not compelled or planned in advance was the hidden forces, which he never divined, whose existence he would deny, always, in his simple, natural life. What he did not see and hear and feel was the very hidden force, which had indeed subsided, but was yet smouldering, like a volcanic fire, under the apparently peaceful meadows of flowers and amity and peace; the hatred which would possess a power of impenetrable mystery, against which he, the European, was unarmed.

Chapter Twenty-One

Van Oudijck was fond of certain effects. He did not say much about his visit to the palace that day, nor in the evening, when Eldersma and Van Helderer came to speak to him about the council which would be held next morning. They felt more or less uneasy and asked if they should go armed. But Van Oudijck very firmly and decidedly forbade them to take arms with them and said that no one was allowed to do so. The officials gave way, but nobody felt comfortable. The council, however, took place in complete peace and harmony; only, there were more people moving about among the booths in the market-place, there were more police at the ornamental arches, with the rippling strips of bunting. But nothing happened. The wives indoors were anxious and felt relieved when their husbands were safely back home again. And Van Oudijck had obtained his effect. He now paid a few visits, feeling sure of his grip on things, relying on the raden-aju pangéran. He reassured the ladies and told them to think of nothing now except the fancy-fair. But they were none too confident. Some families, in the evening, bolted all their doors and remained in the middle gallery with their visitors and children and babus, armed, listening, on their guard.

Theo, to whom his father had spoken in an outburst of confidence, planned and played a practical joke with Addie. The two lads, one evening, went round the houses of those whom he knew to be most fidgety and made their way into the front-verandah and shouted to have the doors opened; and they could hear the cocking of fire-arms in the middle galleries. They had a merry evening of it.

Then at last the fancy-fair took place. Eva had organized a series of three tableaux from the Arthurian legend on the stage of the club: Vivien and Guinevere and Lancelot; in the middle of the garden was a Madura proa, fitted up like a Viking's ship, in which iced punch was served; a neighbouring sugar-factory, always full of fun, famed for its jovial tone, had provided a complete Dutch fritters-stall, as a nostalgic memory of Holland, with the ladies dressed as Frisian peasant-girls and the young fellows from the factory as cooks; and the excitement over the Transvaal was represented by a Majuba Hill with ladies and gentlemen in fantastic Boer costumes. There was not a word about the tremendous seaquake at Ternate, although one half of the receipts was destined for the devastated districts. Under the glowing festoons of Chinese lanterns slung across the gardens, a great sense of fun prevailed, coupled with a readiness to spend pots of money, especially on behalf of the Transvaal. But amid the merriment there yet quivered a fear. Groups assembled, peering glances were cast at the road outside, where Eurasians, Javanese, Chinese and Arabs stood round the steaming portable kitchens. And the visitors, while tossing off a glass of champagne or toying with a plate of fritters, turned their ears in the direction of the square, where the public fair was in full swing. When Van

Oudijck appeared with Doddie, received with the national anthem, generously scattering rixdollars and banknotes, he was constantly asked whispered questions. And, when it was seen that Mrs. van Oudijck was not coming, people began to ask one another where she was. She had been suffering so with her teeth, said one; she had gone to Surabaya to see the dentist. They did not think it nice of her; they did not like her when they did not see her. She was much discussed that evening; the most horrible scandals were told about her. Doddie took up her stand in the Madura proa as a saleswoman; and Van Oudijck, with Eldersma, Van Helderer and a couple of controllers from other districts, went round and treated the members of his council. When people asked their mysterious questions, with anxious glances at the road, with ears pricked towards the popular market, he reassured them with a majestic smile; nothing was going to happen, he pledged his word on it. They considered him extremely trusting, mightily sure of himself; but the jovial smile around his thick moustache was comforting. He urged all who belonged to his good town of Labuwangi to think of nothing but enjoyment and benevolence. And, when suddenly the Regent, Raden Adipati Sunario, and his wife, the young raden-aju, appeared at the entrance and paid for bouquets, programmes and fans with a hundred-guilder-note, the tension was relaxed throughout the garden. Everybody soon knew about the hundred-guilder-note. And they all breathed again, realizing that there was now no occasion for anxiety, that there would be no insurrection that night. They made much of the regent and his smiling young wife, who glittered with her beautiful jewels.

Out of sheer relief and relaxation of their tense anxiety, out of sheer craziness, they spent more and more money, trying to vie with the few wealthy Chinese—those dating from before the opium-monopoly, the owners of the white marble and stucco palaces—as these with their wives, in embroidered grey and green Chinese costumes, their shiny hair stuck full of flowers and precious stones, smelling strongly of sandalwood, distributed rixdollars broadcast. Money flowed like water, dripped as though in silver drops into the collecting-boxes of the delighted saleswomen. And the fancy-fair was a success. And, when Van Oudijck at last, little by little, here and there, said a word to Doorn de Bruijn, to Rantzow, to the officials from other residencies about his visit, about his interview with the raden-aju pangéran—assuming an air of humility and simplicity, but nevertheless, despite himself, beaming with happy pride, with delight in his triumph—then he attained his greatest effect.

The story ran round the garden, of the tact, the cleverness of the resident, who had laid the spectre of insurrection merely with a word. He received a sort of ovation. And he filled every glass with champagne, he bought up every fan, he purchased all the tickets in the tombola that remained unsold. It was his apotheosis, his greatest

moment of success and popularity. And he joked with the ladies and flirted with them.

The entertainment was prolonged until daylight, until six o'clock in the morning. The merry cooks were drunk and danced around their fritters-stove. And, when Van Oudijck went home at last, he felt an inner mood of self-satisfaction, of strength, he was delighted, enraptured with himself. He felt a king in his little world and a diplomatist into the bargain and beloved by all whose quiet and peace he had assured. That evening made him rise in his own esteem and he valued himself more highly than he had ever done before. Never had he felt as happy as he felt now.

He had sent the carriage away and he walked home with Doddie. A few early salesmen were going to market. Doddie, dog-tired and half-asleep, dragged herself along on her father's arm ... until some one passed close beside her and, feeling rather than seeing, she suddenly shuddered. She looked up. The figure had passed. She looked round and recognized the back of the hadji, hurrying away....

She turned cold and felt as though she would faint. But then, wearily, walking in her sleep, she reflected that she was half dreaming, dreaming of Addie, of Patjaram, of the moonlit night under the tjemaras, where the white hadji had startled her at the end of the avenue....

Chapter Twenty-Two

Eva Eldersma was in a more listless and dejected mood than she had yet experienced in Java. After her efforts, after the fuss and the success of the fancy-fair, after the shuddering fear of a rising, the little town conscientiously went to sleep again, as though well content to be able to slumber as usual. It was December and the heavy rains had begun, as usual, on the fifth of the month: the rainy monsoon invariably opened on St. Nicholas' Day. The clouds which, for the past month, continually swelling, had piled themselves upon the lower horizons now rose curtain-wise, like water-laden sails higher against the skies, rent open as by a sudden fury of far-flashing lightning, pouring and lashing down as though this wealth of water could no longer be upheld, now that the swollen sails were torn apart, as though all their wanton abundance came streaming down from a single rent. Of an evening, Eva's front-verandah was invaded by a crazy swarm of insects, which, drunk with light, rushed upon their destruction in the lamps, as in an apotheosis of fiery death, filling the lamp-chimneys and strewing the marble tables with their fluttering, dying bodies. Eva inhaled a cooler air, but a miasma of damp, arising from earth and leaves, soaked the walls, seemed to ooze from the furniture, dimming the mirrors, staining the silk hangings and covering boots and shoes with mildew, as though nature's frenzied downpour were bent on the ruin of all that was fine and delicate, sparkling and graceful in human achievement. But the trees and foliage and grass shot up and expanded and rioted luxuriantly upwards, in a thousand shades of fresh green; and, in the reviving glory of verdant nature, the crouching human community of open-fronted villas, wet and humid with fungi, all the whiteness of the lime-washed pillars and flower-pots turned to a mouldy green.

Eva watched the slow and gradual ruin of her house, her furniture, her clothes. Day by day, inexorably, something was spoilt, something rotted away, something was covered with mildew or rust. And none of the æsthetic philosophy with which she had at first taught herself to love India, to appreciate the good in India, to seek in India for external plastic beauty and inward beauty of soul, was able to withstand the streaming water, the cracking of her furniture, the staining of her frocks and gloves, the damp, mildew and rust that wrecked the exquisite environment which she had designed and created all around her, as a comfort, to console her for living in India. All her logic, all her feeling of making the best of things, of finding something attractive and beautiful after all in the land of all-prevailing nature and of people eager for money and position, all this failed her and came to naught, now that she was every moment irritated and incensed as a housewife, as an elegant woman, an artistic woman. No, it was impossible in India to surround one's self with taste and exquisiteness. She had been here for only two years and she was still able to make a certain fight for her western culture; but nevertheless she was now already better able than in the first days after her arrival to understand the *laisser-*

aller of the men, after their hard work, and of the women, in their housekeeping. True, the servants with their soundless movements, working with gentle hands, willing, never impertinent, were to her thinking far superior to the noisy, pounding maids in Holland; but nevertheless she felt in all her household an eastern antagonism to her western ideas. It was always a struggle not to surrender to that *laisser-aller*, to the running to waste of the over-large grounds, invariably hung at the back with the dirty washing of the servants and strewn with nibbled mangoes; to the gradual spoiling and fading of the paint of the house, which was also too large, too open, too much exposed to wind and weather to be cared for with Dutch cleanliness; to the habit of sitting and rocking, undressed, in sarong and kabaai, with one's bare feet in slippers, because it was really too hot, too sultry to dress one's self in a frock or tea-gown, which only became soaked in perspiration. It was for her sake that her husband always dressed for dinner, in a black jacket and stand-up collar; but, when she saw his tired face, with that more and more fixed, overtired office expression above that stand-up collar, she herself begged him not to trouble to dress next time after his second bath and allowed him to dine in a white jacket, or even in pyjamas. She thought it terrible, thought it unspeakably dreadful; it shocked all her ideas of correctness; but really he was too tired and it was too sultry and oppressive for her to expect anything more from him. And she, after only two years in India, understood more and more easily that *laisser-aller*—in dress, in body and in soul—now that every day she lost something more of her fresh, Dutch blood and her western energy, now that she admitted, certainly, that in India men worked perhaps as in no other country, but that they worked with one sole object before their eyes: position, money, retirement, pension ... and home, back home to Europe. True, there were others, born in India, who had been out of India only once, for barely a year, who would not hear of Holland, who adored their land of sunshine. She knew that the De Luces were like this; and there were others as well, she knew. But in her own circle of civil servants and planters every one had the same object in life: position, money ... and then off, off to Europe. Every one calculated the years of work still before him. Every one saw before him in the future the illusion of that European retirement. An occasional friend, like Van Oudijck, an occasional civil servant, who perhaps loved his work for his work's sake and because it suited his nature, feared the coming pensioned retirement, which would mean a stupid, vegetating existence. But Van Oudijck was an exception. The majority worked in the service and on the plantations for the sake of the rest to come. Her husband also, for instance, was toiling like a slave to become assistant-resident and, after some years, to draw his pension; he slaved and toiled for his illusion of rest. At present she felt her own energy leaving her with every drop of blood that she felt flowing more sluggishly through her weary veins. And, in these early days of the wet monsoon, while the eaves of the house incessantly discharged the thick, splashing shafts which irritated

her with their clatter, while she watched the gradual ruin of all the material surroundings which she had selected with so much taste as her artistic consolation in India, she reached a more discordant mood of listlessness and dejection than she had ever gone through before. Her child was still too small to mean much to her, to be a kindred spirit. Her husband did nothing but work. He was a kind and thoughtful husband to her, a dear fellow in every way, a man of great simplicity, whom she had accepted—perhaps only because of this simplicity, because of the quiet serenity of his smiling, fair-skinned, Frisian face and the burliness of his broad shoulders—after one or two excited, juvenile romances of enthusiasm and misunderstanding and soulful discussions, romances dating from her girlhood. She, who was herself neither simple nor serene, had sought the simplicity of her life in a simple romance. But his qualities failed to satisfy her. Now especially, when she had been longer in India and was suffering defeat in her contest with the country that did not harmonize with her nature, his serene conjugal love failed to satisfy her.

She was beginning to feel unhappy. She was too versatile a woman to find all her happiness in her little boy. He certainly filled a part of her life, with the minor cares of the present and the thought of his future. She had even worked out a whole educational system for him. But he did not fill her life entirely. And a longing for Holland encompassed her, a longing for her parents, a longing for the beautiful, artistic home where you were always meeting painters, writers, musicians, the artistic salon—an exception in Holland—that gathered together for a brief moment the artistic elements which in Holland usually remained isolated.

The vision passed before her eyes like a vague and distant dream, while she listened to the approaching thunders that filled the air, sultry to bursting-point, while she gazed at the downpour that followed. Here she had nothing. Here she felt out of place. Here she had her little clique of adherents, who collected around her because she was cheerful; but she found no sort of deeper sympathy, no serious conversation ... except in Van Helderer. And with him she meant to be careful, so as to give him no illusions.

There was only Van Helderer. And she thought of all the other people around her at Labuwangi. She thought of people, people everywhere. And, very pessimistic in these days, she found in all of them the same egoism, the same self-complacency, the same unattractiveness, the same self-absorption: she could hardly express it to herself, distracted as she was by the terrific force of the pelting rain. But she found in everybody conscious and unconscious traits of unloveliness ... even in her faithful adherents ... and in her husband ... and in the men, young wives, girls, young men around her. There was nothing in any of them but his own ego. Not one of them had sufficient harmony of mind for himself and another. She disapproved of this in one, hated that in another; a third and a fourth she condemned entirely. This critical

attitude made her despondent and melancholy, for it was against her nature: she preferred to like others. She liked to live, in spontaneous harmony, with a number of associates: originally she had a profound love of people, a love of humanity. Great questions moved her. But nothing that she felt met with any echo. She found herself empty and alone, in a country, a town, an environment in which all and everything, large and small, offended her soul, her body, her character, her nature. Her husband worked. Her child was already becoming thoroughly Indian. Her piano was out of tune.

She stood up and tried the piano, with long scales that ended in the Feuerzauber of Valkyrie. But the roar of the rain was louder than her playing. When she got up again, feeling desperately dejected, she saw Van Helderer standing before her.

"You startled me," she said.

"May I stay to lunch?" he asked. "I am all by myself at home. Ida has gone to Tosari for her malaria and has taken the children with her. She went yesterday. It's an expensive business. How I'm to keep going this month I do not know."

"Send the children to us, after they've had a few days in the hills."

"Won't they bother you?"

"Of course not. I'll write to Ida."

"It's really awfully good of you. It would certainly make things easier for me."

She laughed softly.

"Aren't you well?" he asked.

"I feel deadly," she said.

"How do you mean?"

"I feel as if I were dying by inches."

"Why?"

"It's terrible here. We've been longing for the rains; and, now that they've come, they are driving me mad. And ... I don't know what: I can't stand it here any longer."

"Where?"

"In India. I have taught myself to see the good, the beautiful in this country. It's all no use. I can't go on with it."

"Go to Holland," he said gently.

"My people would be glad to see me, no doubt. It would be good for my boy, because he's forgetting his Dutch daily, though I had begun to teach it to him so conscientiously, and he speaks Malay ... or gibberish. But I can't leave my husband

here all alone. He would have nothing here without me. At least, I think so: that is one more sort of illusion. Perhaps it's not so at all."

"But, if you fall ill...?"

"Oh, I don't know!"

Her whole being was filled with an unusual fatigue.

"Perhaps you're exaggerating!" he began, cheerfully. "Come, perhaps you're exaggerating! What's upsetting you, what's making you so unhappy? Let's draw up an inventory together."

"An inventory of my misfortunes? Very well. My garden is a marsh. Three chairs in my front-verandah are splitting to pieces. The white ants have devoured my beautiful Japanese mats. A new silk frock has come out all over stains, for no reason that I can make out. Another is all unravelled, simply with the heat, I believe. To say nothing of various minor miseries of the same order. To console myself I took refuge in the Feuerzauber. My piano was out of tune; I believe there are cockroaches walking among the strings."

He gave a little laugh.

"We're idiots here," she continued, "we Europeans in this country! Why do we bring all the paraphernalia of our costly civilization with us, considering that it's bound not to last? Why don't we live in a cool bamboo hut, sleep on a mat, dress in a cotton sarong and a chintz kabaai, with a scarf over our shoulders and a flower in our hair. All your civilization by which you propose to grow rich ... is a western idea, which fails in the long run. Our whole administration ... is so tiring in the heat. Why – if we must be here – don't we live simply and plant paddy and live on nothing?"

"You're talking like a woman," he said, with another little laugh.

"Possibly," she said. "Perhaps I don't mean quite all I say. But that I feel here, opposing me, opposing all my western notions, a force which is antagonistic to me ... that is certain. I am sometimes frightened. I always feel ... that I am on the point of being conquered, I don't know what by: by something out of the ground, by a force of nature, by a secret in the soul of these black people, whom I don't know.... I feel particularly afraid at night."

"You're overwrought," he said, tenderly.

"Possibly," she replied, wearily, seeing that he did not understand and too tired to go on explaining. "Let's talk about something else. That table-turning's very curious."

"Very," he said.

"The other day, the three of us: Ida, you and I...."

"It was certainly very curious."

"Do you remember the first time? Addie de Luce: it seems to be true about him and Mrs. van Oudijck.... And the insurrection ... the table foretold it."

"May we not have suggested it unconsciously?"

"I don't know. But to think that we should all be playing fair and that that table should go tapping and talking to us by means of an alphabet!"

"I shouldn't do it often, Eva, if I were you."

"No, I think it inexplicable, and yet it's already beginning to bore me. One grows so accustomed to the incomprehensible."

"Everything's incomprehensible."

"Yes ... and everything's a bore."

"Eva!" he said, with a soft, reproachful laugh.

"I give up the fight. I shall just sit in my rocking-chair ... and look at the rain."

"There was a time when you used to see the beautiful side of my country."

"Your country? Which you would be glad to leave to-morrow to go to the Paris Exhibition!"

"I've never seen anything."

"How humble you are to-day!"

"I am sad, because of you."

"Oh, please don't be that!"

"Play something more."

"Well, then, have your gin-and-bitters. Help yourself. I shall play on my out-of-tune piano; it will sound as melodious as my soul, which is also all of a tangle...."

She went back to the middle gallery and played something from Parsifal. He remained sitting outside and listened. The rain was pouring furiously. The garden stood clean and empty. A violent thunder-clap seemed to split the world asunder. Nature was supreme; and in her gigantic manifestation the two people in that damp house were diminished, his love was nothing, her melancholy was nothing and the mystic music of the Grail was as a child's ditty to the echoing mystery of that thunder-clap, whereat fate itself seemed to sail with heavenly cymbals over these doomed creatures in the Deluge.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Van Helderer's two children, a boy and girl of six and seven, were staying at Eva's; and Van Helderer came in regularly once a day for a meal. He no longer spoke of his intense feeling, as though unwilling to disturb the pleasant intimacy of their daily intercourse. And she accepted his daily visits, was powerless to keep him at a distance. He was the only man in her immediate circle with whom she could speak and think aloud; and he was a comfort to her in these days of dejection. She did not understand how she had come to this, but she gradually lapsed into an absolute apathy, a sort of annihilating condition of thinking nothing necessary. She had never been like this before. Her nature was lively and cheerful, seeking and admiring the beautiful in poetry and music and painting, things which, from her early childhood, from her childish books, she had seen about her and felt and discussed. In India she had gradually come to lack everything of which she felt a need. In her despair she succumbed to a sort of nihilism that made her ask:

"What is the reason of anything?... Why the world and the people in it and the mountains?... Why all this tiny whirl of life?"

And then, when she read of the social movements, of the great social problems in Europe, of the Eurasian question in Java, which was becoming more and more urgent, she thought to herself:

"Why should there be a world, if man eternally remains the same, small and suffering and oppressed by all the misery of his humanity?"

She did not see the purpose of it all. Half of mankind was suffering poverty and struggling upwards out of that darkness ... to what? The other half was stagnating stupidly and dully amid its riches. Between the two was a scale of gradations, from black poverty to dismal wealth. Over them stood the rainbow of the eternal illusions, love, art, the great notes of interrogation of justice and peace and an ideal future.... She felt that it was much ado about nothing, she failed to see the purpose and she thought of herself:

"Why is it all so?... And why the world and poor humanity?"

She had never felt like this before, but there was no struggling against it. Gradually, from day to day, India was making her so, making her sick at her very soul. Frans van Helderer was her only consolation. The young controller, who had never been to Europe, who had received all his education at Batavia, who had passed his examinations at Batavia, with his distinguished manners, his supple courtesy, his strange, enigmatic nationality, had grown dear to her in friendship because of his almost exotic development. She told him how she delighted in this friendship; and he no longer replied by offering his love. There was too much charm about their present relation. There was something ideal in it, which they both needed. In their

everyday surroundings, that friendship shone before them like an exquisite halo of which they were both proud. He often called to see her, especially now that his wife was at Tosari; and they would walk in the evening twilight to the beacon which stood by the sea like a small Eiffel tower. These walks were much talked about, but they did not mind that. They sat down on the foundation of the beacon, looked out to sea and listened to the distance. Ghostly proas, with sails like night-birds' wings, glided into the canal, to the droning sing-song of the fishermen. A melancholy of resignation, of a small world and small people hovered beneath the skies filled with twinkling stars, where gleamed the mystic diamonds of the Southern Cross or the Turkish crescent of the horned moon. And above that melancholy of the droning fishermen, of crazy proas, of small people at the foot of the little light-house, drifted a fathomless immensity of the skies and the eternal stars. And from out the immensity drifted the unutterable, as it were the superhumanly divine, wherein all that was small and human sank and melted away.

"Why attach any value to life when I may die to-morrow?" thought Eva. "Why all this confusion and turmoil of mankind, when to-morrow perhaps everything may have ceased to exist?"

And she put the question to him. He replied that each of us was not living for himself and the present age, but for all mankind and for the future. But she gave a bitter laugh, shrugged her shoulders, thought him commonplace. And she thought herself commonplace, to think such things that had so often been thought before. But still, notwithstanding her self-criticism, she continued under the obsession of the uselessness of life, when everything might be dead to-morrow. And an humiliating littleness, as of atoms, overcame them, both of them, as they sat gazing into the spaciousness of the skies and the eternal stars.

Yet they loved those moments, which were everything in their lives; for, when they did not feel their pettiness too keenly, they spoke of books, music, painting and the big, important things of life. And they felt that, in spite of the circulating library and the Italian opera at Surabaya, they were no longer in touch with the world. They felt the great, important things to be very far from them. And both of them now became seized with a nostalgia for Europe, a longing to feel so very small no longer. They would both have liked to get away, to go to Europe. But neither of them was able. Their petty, daily life held them captive. Then, as though spontaneously, in mutual harmony, they spoke of what was soul and being and all the mystery thereof.

All the mystery. They felt it in the sea, in the sky; but they also quietly sought it in the rapping leg of a table. They did not understand how a soul or spirit could reveal itself through a table on which they earnestly laid their hands and which through their magnetic fluid was transformed from dead to living matter. But, when they laid their hands upon it, the table lived and they were forced to believe. The letters

which they counted out were often confused, according to some strange alphabet; and the table, as though directed by a mocking spirit, constantly showed a tendency to tease and confuse, to stop suddenly or to be coarse and indecent. Sometimes they read books on spiritualism and did not know whether to believe or not.

These were quiet days of quiet monotony in the little town swept by the rustling rain. Their life in common seemed unreal, like a dream that rose through the rain like a mist. And it was like a sudden awakening for Eva when, one afternoon, walking outside in the damp avenue waiting for Van Helderer, she saw Van Oudijck coming in her direction.

"I was just on my way to you!" he cried, excitedly. "I was just coming to ask a favour. Will you help me once more?"

"In what, resident?"

"But first tell me: aren't you well? You've not been looking very fit lately."

"It's nothing serious," she said, with a dreary laugh. "It'll pass. What can I help you in, resident?"

"There's something to be done, mevrouwte, and we can't manage without you. My wife herself was saying this morning, 'Better ask Mrs. Eldersma.'"

"But tell me what it is."

"You know Mrs. Staats, the station-master's widow. The poor woman has been left without a thing, except her five children and some debts."

"He committed suicide, didn't he?"

"Yes, it's very sad. And we really must help her. There's a lot of money needed. Sending round a subscription-list won't bring in much. People are very generous, but they've already made such sacrifices lately. They went mad at the fancy-fair. They can't do much for the moment, so near the end of the month. But, early next month, in the first week of January, mevrouwte, some theatricals by your Thalia society: you know, nothing elaborate, a couple of drawing-room sketches and no expenses. Seats at a guilder and a half, two guilders and a half, perhaps, and, if you set it going, the hall will be full; people will come over from Surabaya. You must help me, you will, won't you?"

"But, resident," said Eva, wearily, "we've just had those tableaux-vivants. Don't be angry with me, but I don't care to be always acting."

"Yes, yes, you must this time," Van Oudijck insisted, a little imperiously, greatly excited about his plan.

She became peevish. She liked her independence; and in these days of dejection particularly she was too disconsolate, in these days of dreaming she felt too much confused to accede at once with a good grace to his authoritative request:

"Really, resident, I can think of nothing this time," she answered, curtly. "Why doesn't Mrs. van Oudijck do it herself?"

She was startled when she had made this peevish remark. Walking beside her, the resident lost his composure; and his face clouded over. The animated, cheerful expression and the jovial smile around his thick moustache suddenly disappeared. She saw that she had been cruel; and she felt remorse for it. And for the first time, suddenly, she saw that, in love with his wife though he was, he did not approve of her withdrawing herself from everything. She saw that it gave him pain. It was as though this side of his character were being made clear to her: she was seeing it plainly for the first time.

He did not know what to reply: seeking for his words, he remained silent.

Then she said, coaxingly:

"Don't be angry, resident. It wasn't nice of me. I know that all that sort of bustle only bores Mrs. van Oudijck. I am glad to relieve her of it. I will do anything you wish."

Her eyes were filled with nervous tears.

He was smiling now and gave her a penetrating sidelong glance:

"You're a bit overstrung. But I knew that you had a good heart ... and would not leave me in the lurch ... and would consent to help poor old Mother Staats. But don't throw away any money, mevrouwte: no expense, no new scenery. Just your wit, your talent, your beautiful elocution: French or Dutch, as you please. We're proud of all that at Labuwangi, you know; and all the beautiful acting—which you give us free of charge—is quite enough to make the performance a success. But how overstrung you are, mevrouwte! Why are you crying? Aren't you well? Tell me: is there anything I can do for you?"

"Don't work my husband so hard, resident. I never see anything of him."

He made a gesture to show that he could not help himself:

"It's true," he admitted. "There's an awful lot to do. Is that the trouble?"

"And make me see the good side of India."

"Is that it?"

"And a lot besides."

"Are you becoming homesick? Don't you care for India any longer, don't you care for Labuwangi, where we all make so much of you?... You misjudge India. Try to see the good side of it."

"I have tried."

"Is it no use?"

"No."

"You are too sensible not to perceive the good in this country."

"You are too fond of it to be impartial. And I don't know how to be impartial. But tell me the good things."

"Which shall I begin with? The satisfaction of being able, as an official, to do good to the country and the people. The fine, delightful sense of working for this country and this people; the ample hard work that fills a man's life out here.... I'm not speaking of all the office-work of your husband, who is district secretary. But I'm speaking of later on, when he becomes an assistant-resident!"

"It will be so long before that happens!"

"Well, then, the spacious material life?"

"The white ants gnaw everything."

"That's a poor joke, mevrouw."

"Very possibly, resident. Everything is out of tune with me, inside and out: my wit, my piano and my poor soul."

"Nature, then?"

"I don't feel it all. Nature is conquering me and devouring me."

"Your own activities?"

"My activities? One of the good things in India?"

"Yes. To inspire us material, practical people with your wit, now and again."

"Resident! You're paying me compliments!... Is this all on account of the theatricals?"

"And to do good to Mother Staats with that wit of yours!"

"Couldn't I do good in Europe?"

"Certainly, certainly," he said, bluffly. "Go to Europe, mevrouw, by all means. Go and live at the Hague; join the Charity Organization Society ... with a collecting-box at your door and a rix-dollar ... how often?"

She laughed:

"Now you're becoming unjust. They do a lot of good in Holland too."

"But do they ever do in Holland for one distressed person ... what we, what you are now going to do for Mother Staats? And don't tell me that there's less poverty here."

"Well?"

"Well, then, there is a great deal of good for you here. Your special activities. Your material and moral work for others.... Don't let Van Helderer get too much smitten with you, mevrouw. He's a charming fellow, but he puts too much literature into his monthly reports.... I see him coming and I must be off. So I can rely on you?"

"Absolutely."

"When shall we have the first meeting, with the committee and the ladies?"

"To-morrow evening, resident, at your house?"

"Right you are. I shall send round the subscription-lists. We must make a lot of money, mevrouw."

"We'll do our best for Mother Staats," she said, gently.

He shook her hand and went away. She felt limp, she did not know why:

"The resident has been warning me against you, because you're too literary!" she said to Van Helderer, teasingly.

She sat down in the front verandah. The skies burst asunder; a white curtain of rain descended in perpendicular streams. A plague of locusts came hopping along the verandah. A cloud of tiny flies hummed in the corners like an Æolian harp. Eva and Van Helderer placed their hands on the little table and it tilted its leg with a jerk, while the beetles buzzed around them.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The subscription-lists went round. The plays were rehearsed and performed in three weeks' time; and the committee handed the resident a sum of nearly fifteen hundred guilders for Mother Staats. Her debts were paid; a little house was rented for her; and she was set up in a small milliner's shop, which Eva stocked from Paris. All the ladies in Labuwangi gave Mother Staats an order; and in less than a month not only was the woman saved from utter ruin, but her mode of life was established, her children were going to school again and she was enjoying a pleasant livelihood. All this had happened so swiftly and unostentatiously; the subscriptions were so munificent; the ladies so readily ordered a dress or a hat which they did not need that Eva was astounded. And she had to confess to herself that the egoism, the self-absorption, the unlovable qualities which she often observed in their social life—in their intercourse, conversation, intriguing and gossip—had been suddenly thrust into the background by a common gift for doing the right thing, quite simply, because it had to be done, because there was no question about it, because the woman had to be assisted. Roused from her depression by the bustle of the rehearsals, stimulated to brisk action, she appreciated the better and finer side of her environment and wrote of it so enthusiastically to Holland that her parents, to whom India was a closed book, smiled. But, although this episode had awakened a soft and gentle and appreciative feeling in her, it was only an episode; and she remained the same when the emotion of it was over. And, notwithstanding that she felt the disapproval of Labuwangi around her, she continued to find the main interest of her life in Van Helderens's friendship.

For there was so little else. Her little circle of adherents, which she had gathered round her with so many illusions, which she invited to dinner, to which her doors were always open: what did it actually amount to? She now accepted the Doorn de Bruijns and the Rantzows as indifferent acquaintances, but no longer as friends. She suspected Mrs. Doorn de Bruijn of insincerity; Dr. Rantzow was too common, too vulgar; his wife was an insignificant German Hausfrau. True, they joined in the table-turning, but they relished the absurd ineptitudes, the indecent conversation of the mocking spirit. She and Van Helderens took the whole thing seriously, though she thought the table rather comical. And so no one but Van Helderens remained to interest her.

But Van Oudijck had won her admiration. She had suddenly obtained a glimpse of his character; and, though it entirely lacked the artistic charm which had hitherto exclusively attracted her in men, she saw the fine quality also in this man, who was not at all artistic, who had not the least conception of art, but who had so much that was beautiful in his simple, manly idea of duty and in the calmness with which he endured the disappointment of his domestic life. For Eva saw that, though he adored

his wife, he did not approve of Léonie's indifference to all the interests of which his own life was built up. If he saw nothing more, if he was blind to all the rest that went on in his domestic circle, this disappointment was his secret pain, to which he was not blind, deep down in himself.

And she admired him; and her admiration was as it were a revelation that art does not always stand highest in the affairs of this life. She suddenly understood that the exaggerated importance attaching to art in our time was a disease from which she had suffered and was still suffering. For what was she, what did she do? Nothing. Her parents, both of them, were great artists, true artists; and their house was like a temple and their bias was comprehensible and pardonable. But what of her? She played the piano pretty well; and that was all. She had a few ideas, a little taste; and that was all. But in her time she had gushed with other girls; and she now remembered all that foolish gushing, that trick of exchanging letters crammed with cheap philosophy and written in a modern style distantly aping that of the poets Kloos and Gorter. And thus, for all her depression, her meditation carried her a stage further and she underwent a certain development. For it seemed incredible that she, the child of her parents, should not always place art above everything else.

And she had in her that play and counterplay of seeking and thinking in order to find her way, now that she was quite lost in a country alien to her nature, among people on whom she looked down, without letting them perceive it. She strove to find the good in the country, in order to make it her own and cherish it; she was glad to find among the people those few who roused her sympathy and her admiration; but the good remained incidental to her, the few people remained exceptional; and, despite all her seeking and thinking, she did not find her way and retained the moodiness of a woman who was too European, too artistic, notwithstanding her self-knowledge and her consequent denial of her artistic capacity, to live quietly and contentedly in an up-country Javanese town, beside a husband wrapped up in his office-work, in a climate that upset her health, amid natural surroundings that overwhelmed her and among people whom she disliked.

And, in the most lucid moments of this play and counterplay, there was the obvious fear, the fear which she felt most definitely of all, the fear which she felt slowly approaching, she knew not whence, she knew not whither, but hovering over her head as with the thousand veils of a fate gliding through the sultry, rain-laden skies....

In these inharmonious moods, she had refrained from gathering her little clique around her, for she herself did not care to take the trouble and her friends did not understand her well enough to seek her out. They missed the cheerfulness in her which had attracted them at first. Envy and hostility were now given more rein; people began to speak freely of her: she was affected, pedantic, vain, proud; she had

the pretention always to aim at being the leading person in the town; she behaved just as though she were the resident's wife and ordered every one about. She was not really pretty, she had an impossible way of dressing, her house was preposterously arranged. And then her relation with Van Helderer, their evening walks to the lighthouse! Ida heard about it at Tosari, amid the band of gossips at the small, poky hotel, where the visitors are bored when they are not going on excursions and therefore sit about in their poky little verandahs, almost in one another's pockets, peeping into one another's rooms, listening at the thin partitions; Ida heard about it at Tosari and it was enough to rouse the little Indian woman's instincts, the instincts of a white half-caste, and induce her suddenly, without stating any cause, to remove her children from Eva's charge. Van Helderer, when he went up for the week-end, asked his wife for an explanation, asked her why she insulted Eva by taking the children away, without a reason, and having them up in the hills, thus increasing the hotel-bills. Ida made a scene, talking loudly, with hysterics that rang through the little hotel, made all the visitors prick up their ears and, like a gale of wind, whipped the cackling chatter into a storm. And, without further explanation, Ida broke with Eva.

Eva withdrew into herself. Even in Surabaya, where she went to do some shopping, she heard the scandalous chatter; and she became so sick of her world and her friends that she silently shrank back into herself. She wrote to Van Helderer not to call any more. She entreated him to become reconciled with his wife. She gave up seeing him. And she was now all alone. She felt that she was not in the mood to find comfort in any one around her. There was no sympathy and no understanding in India for such moods as hers. And so she shut herself up. Her husband was working hard, as usual. But she devoted herself more zealously to her little boy, she immersed herself in her love for her child. She withdrew herself into her love for her house. Well, this was her life of never going out, of never seeing any one, of never hearing any other music than her own. This was seeking comfort in her house, her child and her books. This was the personality that she had become, after her early illusions and strivings. She now constantly felt the yearning for Europe, for Holland, for her parents, for people of artistic culture. And now it developed into hatred for the country which she had at first seen in the overwhelming grandeur of its beauty, with its majestic mountains and the softly-creeping mystery that lurked in nature and humanity. Now she hated nature and humanity; and their mystery terrified her.

She filled her life with thoughts of her child. Her boy, little Otto, was three years old. She would guide him, make a man of him. From the day of his birth she had had vague illusions of later seeing her son a great artist, by preference a great writer, famous throughout the world. But she had learnt much since then. She felt that art does not always stand supreme. She felt that there are higher things, which sometimes, in her despondency, she denied, but which were there nevertheless,

radiant and great. These things had to do with the shaping of the future; these things had to do above all with peace, justice and brotherhood. Oh, the great brotherhood of the poor and the rich! Now, in her loneliness, she contemplated this as the highest ideal at which one can work, as sculptors work on a monument. Justice and peace would follow. But human brotherhood must be aimed at first; and she wished her son to work at it. Where? In Europe? In India? She did not know; she did not see it before her. She saw it in Europe rather than in India, where the inexplicable, the enigmatical, the fearful remained in the foreground of her thoughts. How strange it was, how strange!...

She was a woman made for ideals. Perhaps this by itself was the simple explanation of what she felt and feared ... in India....

"Your impressions of India are altogether mistaken," her husband would say. "You see India quite wrongly. Quiet? You think it's quiet here? Why should I have to work so hard in India, if things were quiet at Labuwangi?... We have hundreds of interests at heart, of Europeans and Javanese alike. Agriculture is studied as eagerly in this country as anywhere. The population is increasing steadily.... Declining? A colony in which there is always so much going on? That's one of Van Helderens' imbecile ideas: speculative ideas, mere vapourings, which you just echo after him.... I can't understand the way in which you regard India nowadays.... There was a time when you had eyes for all that was beautiful and interesting here. That time seems to be past. You ought to go home for a bit, really...."

But she knew that he would be very lonely without her; and for this reason she refused to go. Later, when her boy was older, she would have to go to Holland. But by then Eldersma would certainly be an assistant-resident. At present he still had seventeen controllers and district secretaries above him. It had been going on like this for years, that looking towards promotion in the distant future. It was like yearning after a mirage. Of ever becoming a resident he did not so much as think. Assistant-resident for a couple of years or so; and then to Holland, on a pension....

She thought it a heart-breaking existence, slaving one's self to death like that ... for Labuwangi!...

She was down with malaria; and her maid, Saina, was giving her massage, kneading her aching limbs with supple fingers.

"It's a nuisance, Saina, when I'm ill, for you to be living in the compound. You'd better move into the house this evening, with your four children."

Saina thought it troublesome, a great fuss.

"Why?"

And the woman explained. Her cottage had been left to her by her husband. She was attached to it, though it was in an utterly dilapidated condition. Now that the rainy monsoon was on, the rain often came in through the roof; and then she was unable to cook and the children had to go without their food. To have it repaired was difficult. She had a rix-dollar a week from the mem-sahib. Sixty cents of that went on rice. Then there were a few cents daily for fish, coconut oil, betel-pepper; a few cents for fuel.... No, repairs were out of the question. She would be much better off with the mem-sahib, much better off on the estate. But it would be such a fuss to find a tenant for the cottage, because it was so dilapidated; and the mem-sahib knew that no house was allowed to remain unoccupied in the compound: there was a heavy fine attached to that.... So she would rather go on living in her damp cottage. She could easily stay and sit up with the mem-sahib at night; her eldest girl would look after the little ones.

And, resigned to her small existence of petty miseries, Saina passed her supple fingers, with a firm, gentle pressure, over her mistress' ailing limbs.

And Eva thought it heart-rending, this living on a rix-dollar a week, with four children, in a house which let in the rain, so that it was impossible to cook there.

"Let me look after your second little daughter, Saina," said Eva, a day or two after.

Saina hesitated, smiled: she would rather not, but dared not say so.

"Yes," Eva insisted, "let her come to me: you will see her all day long; she will sleep in cook's room; I shall provide her clothes; and she will have nothing to do but to see that my room is kept tidy. You can teach her that."

"So young still, mem-sahib; only just ten."

"No, no," Eva insisted. "Let me do this to help you. What's her name?"

"Mina, mem-sahib."

"Mina? That won't do," said Eva. "That's the seamstress' name. We'll find another for her."

Saina brought the child, looking very shy, with a streak of moist rice-powder on her forehead; and Eva dressed her prettily. She was a very attractive little thing, with a soft brown skin covered with a downy bloom, and looked charming in her new clothes. She sedulously piled the sarongs in the press, with fragrant white flowers between the layers: the flowers were changed for fresh ones daily. For a joke, because she arranged the flowers so prettily, Eva called her Melati, after the East-Indian jasmine.

Two days later, Saina crouched down before her njonja.

"What is it, Saina?"

Might the little girl come back to the damp cottage in the compound? Saina asked.

"Why?" asked Eva, in amazement. "Isn't your little girl happy here?"

Yes, she was, said Saina, bashfully, but she preferred the cottage. The mem-sahib was very kind, but little Mina would rather be in the cottage.

Eva was angry and let the child go home, with the new clothes, which Saina took away with her as a matter of course.

"Why wasn't the child allowed to stay?" Eva asked of the latta cook.

Cook at first dared not say.

"Come, cook, why wasn't she?" asked Eva, insisting.

"Because the mem-sahib called the little girl Melati.... Names of flowers and fruits ... are given only ... to dancing-girls," explained the cook, as though expounding a mystery.

"But why didn't Saina tell me?" asked Eva, greatly incensed. "I had not the least idea of that!"

"Too shy," said cook, by way of excusing Saina. "Beg pardon, mem-sahib."

These were trivial incidents in the daily domestic life, little episodes of her housekeeping; but they made her feel sore, because she felt behind them as it were a wall that always existed between her and the people and things of India. She did not know the country, she would never know the people.

And the minor disappointment of the episodes filled her with the same soreness as the greater disappointment of her illusions, because her life, amid the daily trivialities of her housekeeping, was itself becoming more and more trivial.

Chapter Twenty-Five

The early hours of the day were often cool, washed clean by the abundant rains; and in the young sunshine of these morning hours the earth emitted a tender haze, a blue softening of every hard line and colour, so that the Lange Laan, with its villa-residences and fenced gardens, seemed to be surrounded with the vagueness and beauty of a dream-avenue: the dream-columns rose insubstantially, like a vision of pillared tranquillity; the lines of the roofs acquired distinction in their indefiniteness; the hues of the trees and the outlines of their leafy tops were etherealized into tender pastels of misty rose and even mistier blue, with a single brighter gleam of morning yellow and a distant purple streak of dawn. And over all this matutinal world fell a cool dew, like a fountain that rose from that drenched ground and fell back in pearly drops in the child-like gentleness of the first sunbeams. It was as though every morning the earth and her people were newly created, as though mankind were newly born to a youth of innocence and paradisaal unconsciousness. But the illusion of the dawn lasted but a minute, barely a few moments: the sun, rising higher in the sky, shone forth from the virginal mist; boastfully it unfurled its proud halo of piercing rays, pouring down its burning gold, full of godlike pride because it was reigning over its brief moment of the day, for the clouds were already mustering, greyly advancing, like battle-hordes of dark phantoms, pressing eerily onwards: deep bluish-black and heavy lead-grey phantoms, overmastering the sun and crushing the earth under white torrents of rain. And the evening twilight, short and hurried, letting fall veil upon veil of crape, was like an overwhelming melancholy of earth, nature and life, in which one forgot that paradisaal moment of the morning; the white rain rustled down like a flood-tide of melancholy; the road and the gardens were dripping, drinking up the falling torrents until they shone like marshy pools and flooded meadows in the dusky evening; a chill, spectral mist rose on high with a slow movement as of ghostly draperies, which hovered over the puddles; and the chilly houses, scantily lit with their smoking lamps, round which clouds of insects swarmed, falling on every hand and dying with singed wings, became filled with a yet chillier sadness, an over-shadowing fear of the menacing world out of doors, of the all-powerful cloud-hordes, of the boundless immensity that came whispering on the gusty winds from the far-off unknown, high as the heavens, wide as the firmament, against which the open houses appeared unprotected, while the inmates were small and petty for all their civilization and science and soulful feelings, small as wriggling insects, insignificant, abandoned to the play of the giant mysteries blowing up from the distance.

Léonie van Oudijck, in the half-lit back-verandah of the residency, was talking to Theo in a soft voice: and Oorip squatted beside her.

"It's nonsense, Oorip!" she cried, peevishly.

"Really not, mem-sahib," said the maid. "It's not nonsense. I hear them every evening."

"Where?" asked Theo.

"In the banyan-tree behind the house, high up, in the top branches."

"It's wild cats," said Theo.

"It's not wild cats, sahib," the maid insisted. "Come, come! As if Oorip didn't know how wild cats mew! Kriow, kriow: that's how they go. What we hear every night is the ghosts. It's the little children crying in the trees. The souls of the little children, crying in the trees."

"It's the wind, Oorip."

"Come, come, mem-sahib: as if Oorip couldn't hear the wind! Boo-ooh: that's how the wind goes; and then the branches move. But this is the little children, moaning in the top boughs; and the branches don't move then. This is a bad omen, mem-sahib."

"And why should it be a bad omen?"

"Oorip knows but dares not tell. The mem-sahib is sure to be angry."

"Come, Oorip, tell me."

"It's because of the excellency, sahib, because of the residèn."

"Why?"

"The other day, with the evening-market in the square and the fancy-fair for the white people in the gardens."

"Well, what about it?"

"The day wasn't well-chosen, according to the portents. It was an unlucky day.... And with the new well...."

"What about the new well?"

"There was no sacrifice. So no one uses the new well. Every one fetches water from the old well.... The water's not good either. For from the new well the woman rises with the bleeding hole in her breast.... And Miss Doddie...."

"What of her?"

"Miss Doddie has seen the white hadji going by! The white hadji is not a good hadji. He's a ghost.... Miss Doddie saw him twice: at Patjaram and here.... Listen, mem-sahib!"

"What?"

"Don't you hear? The children's little souls are moaning in the top boughs. There's no wind blowing at this moment. Listen, listen: that's not wild cats. The wild cats go kriow, kriow, when they're courting! These are the little souls!"

They all three listened. Léonie mechanically pressed closer to Theo. She looked deathly pale. The roomy back-verandah, with the table always laid, stretched away in the dim light of a single hanging lamp. The half-swamped back-garden gleamed wet out of the darkness of the banyan-trees, full of pattering drops but motionless in the impenetrable masses of their velvety foliage. And an inexplicable, almost imperceptible crooning, like a gentle mystery of little tormented souls, whimpered high above their heads, as though in the sky or in the topmost branches of the trees. Now it was a short cry, then a moan as of a sick child, then a soft sobbing as of little girls in misery.

"What sort of animal can it be?" asked Theo. "Is it birds or insects?"

The moaning and sobbing was very distinct. Léonie looked white as a sheet and was trembling all over.

"Don't be so frightened," said Theo. "Of course it's animals."

But he himself was white as chalk with fear; and, when they looked each other in the eyes, she understood that he too was afraid. She clutched his arm, nestled up against him. The maid squatted low, humbly, as though accepting all fate as an impenetrable mystery. She did not wish to run away. But the eyes of the white man and woman held only one idea, the idea of escaping. Suddenly, both of them, the step-mother and the step-son, who were bringing shame upon the house, were afraid, as with a single fear, afraid as of a threatening punishment. They did not speak, they said nothing to each other; they leant against each other, understanding each other's trembling, two white children of this mysterious Indian soil, who from their childhood had breathed the mystic air of Java and had unconsciously heard the vague, stealthily approaching mystery, as an accustomed music, a music which they had not noticed, as though mystery were an accustomed thing. As they stood thus, trembling and looking at each other, the wind rose, bearing away with it the secret of the tiny souls, bearing away with it the little souls themselves; the interlacing branches swayed angrily and the rain began to fall once more. A shuddering chill came fanning up, filling the house; a sudden draught blew out the lamp. And they remained in the dark, a little longer, she, despite the openness of the verandah, almost in the arm of her step-son and lover; the maid crouching at their feet. But then she flung off his arm, flung off the black oppression of darkness and fear, filled with the rustling of the rain; the wind was cold and shivery and she staggered indoors, on the verge of fainting. Theo and Oorip followed her. The middle gallery was lighted. Van Oudijck's office was open. He was working. Léonie stood irresolute, with Theo, not knowing what to do. The maid disappeared, muttering. It

was then that she heard a whizzing sound and a small round stone flew through the gallery, fell somewhere near at hand. She gave a cry; and, behind the screen which divided the gallery from the office where Van Oudijck sat at his writing-table, she flung herself once more into Theo's arms, abandoning all her caution. They stood shivering in each other's arms. Van Oudijck had heard her: he stood up, came from behind the screen. His eyes blinked, as though tired with working. Léonie and Theo had recovered themselves.

"What is it, Léonie?"

"Nothing," she said, not daring to tell him of the little souls or of the stone, afraid of the threatening punishment.

She and Theo stood there like criminals, both of them white and trembling. Van Oudijck, his mind still on his work, did not notice anything.

"Nothing," she repeated. "The mat is frayed and ... and I nearly stumbled. But there was something I wanted to tell you, Otto."

Her voice shook, but he did not hear it, blind to what she did, deaf to what she said, still absorbed in his papers:

"What's that?"

"Oorip has suggested that the servants would like to have a sacrifice, because a new well has been built in the grounds...."

"That well which is two months old?"

"They don't make use of the water."

"Why not?"

"They are superstitious, you know; they refuse to use the water before the sacrifice has been offered."

"Then it ought to have been done at once. Why didn't they tell Kario at once to ask me? I can't think of all that nonsense myself. But I would have given them the sacrifice then. Now it's like mustard after meat. The well is two months old."

"It would be a good thing all the same, Papa," said Theo. "You know what the Javanese are like: they won't use the well as long as they've not had a sacrifice."

"No," said Van Oudijck, unwillingly, shaking his head. "To give them a sacrifice now would have no sense in it. I would have done so gladly; but now, after two months, it would be absurd. They ought to have asked for it at once."

"Do, Otto," Léonie entreated. "I should give them the sacrifice. You'll please me if you do."

"Mamma half-promised Oorip," Theo insisted gently.

They stood trembling before him, white in the face, like petitioners. But he, weary and thinking of his papers, was seized with a stubborn unwillingness, though he was seldom able to refuse his wife anything.

“No, Léonie,” he said, firmly. “And you must never promise things of which you’re not certain.”

He turned away, went round the screen and sat down to his work.

They looked at each other, the mother and the step-son. Slowly, aimlessly, they moved away, to the front-verandah, where a moist, dripping darkness drifted between the stately pillars. They saw a white form coming through the swamped garden. They started, for they were now afraid of everything, thinking at the sight of every figure of the chastisement that would overtake them like some strange thing, if they remained in the paternal house which they had covered with shame. But, when they looked more closely, they saw that it was Doddie. She had come home; she said, trembling, that she had been at Eva Eldersma’s. Actually she had been walking with Addie de Luce; and they had sheltered from the rain in the compound. She was very pale, she was trembling; but Léonie and Theo did not notice it in the dark verandah, even as she herself did not see that her step-mother and Theo were pale. She was trembling like that because in the garden—Addie had brought her to the gate—stones had been thrown at her. It must have been some impudent Javanese, who hated her father and his house and his household; but, in the dark verandah, where she saw her step-mother and her brother sitting side by side in silence, as though in despair, she suddenly felt, she did not know why, that it was not an impudent Javanese....

She sat down by them, silently. They looked out at the damp, dark garden, over which the spacious night was hovering as on the wings of a gigantic bat. And, in the mute melancholy which drifted like a grey twilight between the tall white pillars, all three of them—Doddie singly, but the step-mother and step-son together—felt frightened to death and crushed by the strange thing that was about to befall them....

Chapter Twenty-Six

And, despite their anxiety, the two sought each other all the oftener, feeling themselves now bound by indissoluble bonds. In the afternoon he would steal to her room; and, despite their anxiety, they lost themselves in wild embraces and then remained close together.

"It must be nonsense, Léonie," he whispered.

"Yes, but then what is it?" she murmured in return. "After all, I heard the moaning and heard the stone whizz through the air."

"And then?"

"What?"

"If it is something ... suppose it is something that we can't explain?"

"But I don't believe in it!"

"Nor I.... Only...."

"What?"

"If it's something ... if it's something that we can't explain, then...."

"Then what?"

"Then ... it's not because of us!" he whispered, almost inaudibly. "Why, Oorip said so herself! It's because of papa!"

"Oh, but it's too silly!"

"I don't believe in that nonsense either."

"The moaning ... of those animals."

"And that stone ... must have been thrown by some wretched fellow ... one of the servants, a beggar who is putting himself forward ... or who has been bribed...."

"Bribed? By whom?"

"By ... by the regent...."

"Why, Theo!"

"Oorip said the moaning came from the palace...."

"What do you mean?"

"And that they wanted to torment papa from there...."

"To torment him?"

"Because the Regent of Ngadjiwa has been dismissed."

"Does Oorip say that?"

"No, I do. Oorip said that the regent had occult powers. That's nonsense, of course. The fellow's a scoundrel. He has bribed people ... to worry papa."

"But papa notices none of it...."

"No.... We mustn't tell him either.... That's the best thing to do.... We must ignore it."

"And the white hadji, Theo, whom Doddie saw twice.... And, when they do table-turning at Van Helderens, Ida sees him too...."

"Oh, another tool of the regent's, of course!"

"Yes, I expect that's true.... But it's wretched all the same, Theo.... Theo darling, I'm so frightened!"

"Of that nonsense? Come, come!"

"If it's anything, Theo ... it has nothing to do with us, you say?"

He laughed:

"What next? What could it have to do with us? I tell you, it's a practical joke of the regent's."

"We oughtn't to be together any more."

"No, no, I love you, I'm mad with love for you!"

He kissed her fiercely. They were both afraid. But he rallied Léonie:

"Come, Léonie, don't be so superstitious!"

"When I was a child, my babu told me...."

She whispered a story in his ear. He turned pale:

"Léonie, what rot!"

"Strange things happen here, in India.... If they bury something belonging to you, a pocket-handkerchief or a lock of hair, they are able – simply by witchcraft – to make you fall ill and pine away and die ... and not a doctor can tell what the illness is...."

"That's rubbish!"

"It's really true!"

"I didn't know you were so superstitious!"

"I used never to think of it. I've begun to think of it just lately.... Theo, can there be anything!"

"There's nothing ... but kissing."

"No, Theo, don't, be quiet, I'm frightened!... It's quite late. It gets dark so quickly. Papa has finished his sleep, Theo. Go away now, Theo ... through the boudoir. I want

to take my bath quickly. I'm frightened nowadays when it gets dark. There's no twilight, with the rains. The evenings come all of a sudden.... The other day, I had not told them to bring a light into the bathroom ... and already it was so dark ... at only half-past five ... and two bats were flying all over the place: I was so afraid that they would catch in my hair.... Hush! Is that papa?"

"No, it's Doddie: she's playing with her cockatoo."

"Go now, Theo."

He went through the boudoir, and wandered into the garden. She got up, flung a kimono over the sarong which she had knotted loosely under her arms and called to Oorip:

"Bring the bath-things."

"Yes, mem-sahib."

"Where are you, Oorip?"

"Here, mem-sahib."

"Where were you?"

"Here, outside the garden-door, mem-sahib.... I was waiting," said the girl, meaningly, implying that she was waiting until Theo had gone.

"Is the excellency sahib up?"

"Yes ... had his bath, mem-sahib."

"Then fetch the things for my bath.... Light the little lamp in the bathroom.... Yesterday evening the glass was broken and the lamp not filled...."

"The mem-sahib never used to have the lamp lit in the bathroom."

"Oorip ... has anything happened ... this afternoon?"

"No, everything has been quiet.... But oh, when the night comes!... All the servants are frightened, mem-sahib.... Cook says she won't stay...."

"Oh, what a fuss!... Oorip, promise her five guilders ... as a present ... if she stays...."

"The butler is frightened too, mem-sahib."

"Oh, what a fuss!... I've never known such a fuss, Oorip...."

"No, mem-sahib."

"I have always been able to arrange matters so well.... But these are things...!"

"What can one do, mem-sahib?... Things are stronger than men...."

"Mightn't it really be wild cats ... and a man throwing stones?"

"Come, come, mem-sahib!"

"Well, bring my bath-things.... Don't forget to light the little lamp...."

The maid left the room. The dusk began to fall softly through the air, soft as velvet after the rain. The great residency stood still as death amid the darkness of its giant banyans. And the lamps were not yet lit. In the front-verandah, Van Oudijck, by himself, lay in his pyjamas on a wicker chair, drinking tea. In the garden, the dense shadows were gathering like strips of immaterial velvet falling heavily from the trees.

"Lamp-boy!"

"Yes, mem-sahib."

"Come, light the lamps! Why do you begin so late? Light the lamp in my bedroom first...."

She went to the bathroom. She went past the long row of store-rooms and servants' rooms which shut off the back-garden. She looked up at the banyan-tree in whose top branches she had heard the little souls moaning. The branches did not move, there was not a breath of wind, the air was sultry and oppressive with a threatening storm, with rain too heavy to fall. In the bathroom, Oorip was lighting the little lamp.

"Have you brought everything, Oorip?"

"Yes, mem-sahib."

"Haven't you forgotten the big bottle with the white toilet-water?"

"Isn't this it, mem-sahib?"

"Yes, that's right.... But do give me a fine towel for my face in future. I'm always telling you to give me a fine towel. I hate these coarse ones...."

"I'll run and fetch one."

"No, no! Stay here, stay and sit by the door."

"Yes, mem-sahib."

"And you must have the keys seen to by a locksmith.... We can't lock the bathroom-door.... It's too silly, when there are visitors."

"I'll remember to-morrow."

"Mind you don't forget."

She shut the door. The maid squatted down outside the closed door, patient and resigned under the big and little things of life, knowing nothing but loyalty to her

mistress, who loaded her with pretty sarongs and paid her wages in advance as often as she wanted them.

In the bathroom the little nickel lamp gleamed faintly over the pale-green marble of the wet floor; over the water brimming in the square sunk bath.

"I'll have my evening bath a little earlier in future," thought Léonie.

She removed her kimono and sarong; and, standing naked, she glanced in the mirror at her soft, milk-white contours, the rounded outlines of an amorous woman. Her fair hair shone like gold; and a pearly lustre spread from her shoulders over her bosom and vanished in the shadow of her small, round breasts. She lifted her hair, admiring herself, examining herself for a chance wrinkle, feeling whether her flesh was hard and firm. One of her hips arched outwards, as she rested her weight on one leg; and a long white high-light curved caressingly past her thigh and knee, disappearing at the instep. But she gave a start as she stood thus absorbed in admiration: she had meant to hurry. She quickly tied her hair into a knot, covered herself with a lather of soap and, taking the scoop, poured the water over her body. It flowed heavily down her in long smooth streams; and her gleaming shoulders, breasts and hips shone like marble in the light of the little lamp.... Yes, she would bathe earlier in future. It was already dark outside.

She dried herself hurriedly, with a rough towel. She just rubbed herself, briskly, with the white ointment which Oorip always prepared, her magic elixir of youth, suppleness and firm whiteness.... At that moment, she saw on her thigh a small red spot. She paid no attention to it, thinking that there must have been something in the water, a tiny leaf, a dead insect. She rubbed it off. But, while rubbing herself, she saw two or three larger spots, deep scarlet, on her chest. She turned suddenly cold, not knowing what it was, not understanding. She rubbed herself down again; and she took the towel, on which the spots had left something slimy, like clotted blood. A shiver ran over her from head to foot. And suddenly she saw. The spots came out of the corners of the bathroom – how and where she did not see – first small, then large, as though spat out by a dribbling, betel-chewing mouth. Cold as ice, she gave a scream. The spots, now closer together, became full, like blobs of purple saliva spat against her. Her body was soiled and filthy with a grimy, dribbling redness. One spot struck her in the eye...."

The slimy blobs of spittle marked the greenish white of the floor and floated in the water that had not yet run off. They also fouled the water in the bath and dissolved in filth. She was all red, stained and unclean, as though defiled by a foul scarlet shame which invisible betel-chewing mouths hawked and spat upon her from the corners of the room, aiming at her hair, her eyes, her breasts, her flanks. She uttered yell upon yell, driven crazy by the strangeness of what was happening. She rushed to the door, tried to open it, but there was something amiss with the handle. For the

key was not turned in the lock, the bolt was not shot. She felt her back spat upon again and again; and the red dripped off her. She screamed for Oorip and heard the girl outside the door, pulling and pushing.

At last the door yielded. And, desperate, mad, distraught, insane, naked, befouled, she threw herself into her maid's arms. The servants came running up. She saw Van Oudijck, Theo and Doddie hastening from the back-verandah. In her utter madness, with her eyes staring widely, she felt ashamed not of her nudity but of her defilement. The maid had snatched the kimono, also befouled, from the handle of the door and threw it round her mistress.

"Keep away!" Léonie yelled, desperately. "Don't come any nearer!" she screamed, madly. "Oorip, Oorip, take me to the swimming-bath! A lamp, a lamp ... in the swimming-bath!"

"What is it, Léonie?"

She refused to say:

"I've ... trodden ... on a ... toad!" she screamed. "I'm afraid ... of itch!... Don't come any nearer! I've got nothing on!... on upper line?] Keep away! Keep away!... A lamp, a lamp ... a lamp, I tell you ... in the swimming-bath!... No, Otto! Keep away! Keep away! I'm undressed! Keep away!... Bring a la-amp!"

The servants scurried past one another. One of them brought a lamp to the swimming-bath.

"Oorip! Oorip!"

She clutched her maid:

"They've spat at me ... with betel-juice!... They've spat ... at me ... with betel-juice!... They've spat ... at me ... with betel-juice!"

"Hush, mem-sahib!... Come along ... to the swimming-bath!"

"Wash me, Oorip!... Oorip, my hair, my eyes!... O God, I can taste it in my mouth!..."

She sobbed despairingly; the maid dragged her along.

"Oorip! First look ... look and see ... if they're spitting ... in the swimming-bath too!"

The maid went in, shivering:

"There's nothing there, mem-sahib."

"Quick then, Oorip, bathe me, wash me."

She flung off the kimono; her beautiful body became visible in the light of the lamp, as though soiled with dirty blood.

“Oorip, wash me.... No, don’t go for soap: water will do!... Don’t leave me alone! Oorip, wash me here, can’t you?... Burn the kimono! Oorip!”

She ducked in the swimming-bath and swam round desperately; the maid, half-undressed, went in after her and washed her.

“Quick, Oorip! Quick: only the worst places!... I’m frightened! Presently ... presently they’ll be spitting here!... In the bedroom next, Oorip!... Call out that there’s to be no one in the garden! I won’t put the kimono on again! Quickly, Oorip, call out! I want to get away!”

The maid called across the garden, in Javanese.

Léonie, all dripping, stepped out of the water and, naked and wet, flew past the servants’ rooms, with the maid behind her. Inside the house, Van Oudijck, frantic with anxiety, came running towards her.

“Go away, Otto! Leave me alone! I’ve ... I’ve got nothing on!” she screamed.

And she rushed into her room and, when Oorip had followed her, locked all the doors.

In the garden, the servants crept together, under the sloping roof of the verandah, close to the house. The thunder was muttering softly and a silent rain was beginning to fall....

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Léonie kept her bed for a couple of days with nervous fever. People at Labuwangi said that the residency was haunted. At the weekly assemblies in the Municipal Garden, when the band played and the children and the young people danced on the open-air stone floor, there were whispered conversations around the refreshment-tables touching the strange happenings in the residency. Dr. Rantzow was asked many questions, but could only tell what the resident had told him, what Mrs. van Oudijck herself had told him, of her being frightened in the bathroom by an enormous toad, on which she had trodden and stumbled. There was more known through the servants, however; though, when one spoke of the throwing of stones and the spitting of betel-juice, another laughed and called it all babu-talk. And so uncertainty prevailed. Nevertheless, the papers throughout the country, from Surabaya to Batavia, contained curious, hinting paragraphs, which were not very lucid but which suggested a good deal.

Van Oudijck himself discussed the matter with nobody, neither with his wife and children nor with the officials or the servants. But on one occasion he came out of the bathroom looking deathly pale, with eyes staring wildly. He went indoors quietly, however, and pulled himself together; and no one noticed anything. Then he spoke to the chief of police. There was an old graveyard next to the residency-grounds. This was now watched day and night; also the outer wall of the bathroom. The bathroom itself was no longer used; they took their baths instead in the visitors' bathroom.

As soon as Mrs. van Oudijck had recovered, she went to stay with friends at Surabaya. She did not return. She had gradually, and unostentatiously, without a word to Van Oudijck, made Oorip pack up her clothes and all sorts of knick-nacks to which she was attached. Trunk upon trunk was sent after her. When Van Oudijck happened to go to her bedroom one day, he found it empty of all but the furniture. Numberless things had disappeared also from her boudoir. He had not observed the dispatch of the trunks, but he now understood that she would not return. He cancelled his next reception. It was December; and René and Ricus were to come from Batavia for the Christmas holidays, for a week or ten days; but he cancelled the boys' visit. Then Doddie was invited to stay at Patjaram, with the De Luce family. Although, with the instinct of a full-blooded Hollander, he did not like the De Luces, he consented. They were fond of Doddie there: she would have a better time than at Labuwangi. He had given up his idea, the hope that Doddie would not become Indianized. Suddenly, Theo also went away: through Léonie's influence with commercial magnates at Surabaya, he obtained a well-paid berth in an export-and-import business.

Van Oudijck was left all alone in his big house. As the cook and the butler had run away, Eldersma and Eva constantly asked him to meals, both to lunch and dinner. He never mentioned his house at their table and it was never discussed. What he discussed confidentially with Eldersma, as secretary, and with Van Helderren, as controller, these two never mentioned, treating it all as an official secret. The chief of police, who had been accustomed daily to make his brief report—that nothing particular had happened, or that there had been a fire, or that a man had been wounded—now made long, secret reports, with the doors of the office locked, to prevent the messengers outside from listening. Gradually all the servants ran away, departing stealthily in the night, with their families and their household belongings, leaving their huts in the compound empty and dirty. They did not even stay in the residency. Van Oudijck let them go. He kept only Kario and the messengers; and the prisoners tended the garden daily. Thus the house remained apparently unaltered, outside. But, inside, where nothing was looked after, the dust lay thick on the furniture, white ants devoured the mats, mildew and patches of moisture came through the walls. The resident never went about the house, occupying only his bedroom and his office. His face began to wear a look of gloom, like a bitter, silent doubt. He worked more conscientiously than ever and stimulated his subordinates more actively, as though he were thinking of nothing but the interests of Labuwangi. In his isolated position, he had no friend and sought none. He bore everything alone, on his own shoulders, on his own back, which grew bent with approaching age: the heavy burden of his house, which was being destroyed, and of his family life, which was breaking up amid the strange happenings that escaped his police, his watchmen, his personal vigilance and his secret spies. He discovered nothing. Nobody told him anything. No one threw any light on anything.

And the strange happenings continued. A mirror was smashed by a great stone. Calmly he had the pieces cleared away. It was not his nature to believe in the supernatural character of possibilities; and he did not believe in it. He was secretly enraged at being unable to discover the culprits and an explanation of the events. But he refused to believe. He did not believe when he found his bed soiled and Kario, squatting at his feet, swore that he did not know how it had happened. He did not believe when the tumbler which he lifted broke into shivers. He did not believe when he heard a constant, irritating hammering overhead. But his bed was soiled, his glass did break, the hammering was a fact. He investigated all these facts, as punctiliously as though he were investigating a criminal case, and nothing came to light. He remained unperturbed in his relations with his European and native officials and with the regent. No one remarked anything in his behaviour; and in the evenings he worked on, defiantly, at his writing-table, while the hammering continued and the night fell softly in the garden, as by enchantment.

On the steps outside, the messengers crept together, listening and whispering, glancing round timorously at their master who sat writing, with a frown of concentration on his brows:

"Doesn't he hear it?"

"Yes, yes, he's not deaf."

"He must hear it."

"He thinks he can find it out through detectives."

"There are soldiers coming from Ngadjiwa."

"From Ngadjiwa!"

"Yes, he does not trust the detectives. He has written to the major sahib."

"To send soldiers?"

"Yes, there are soldiers coming."

"Look at him frowning."

"And he just goes on working!"

"I'm frightened. I should never dare to stay, if I hadn't got to."

"I'm not afraid to stay, as long as he's there."

"Yes ... he's brave."

"He's plucky."

"He's a brave man."

"But he doesn't understand it."

"No, he doesn't know what it is."

"He thinks it's rats."

"Yes, he has had a search made for rats upstairs, under the roof."

"These Hollanders don't know things."

"No, they don't understand."

"He smokes a lot."

"Yes, quite twelve cigars a day."

"He doesn't drink much."

"No ... only his whisky-and-soda of an evening."

"He'll ask for it presently."

"No one has stayed with him."

"No. The others understood. They've all left."

"He goes to bed very late."

"Yes, he's working hard."

"He never sleeps at night, only in the afternoon."

"Look at him frowning."

"He never stops working."

"Messenger!"

"He's calling."

"Yes, excellency?"

"Bring whisky-and-soda."

One of the messengers rose, to fetch the drink. He had everything ready to hand, in the visitors' wing, to avoid having to go through the house. The others pressed closer together and went on whispering. The moon pierced the clouds and lit up the garden and the pond as with a humid vapour of silent enchantment. The messenger had mixed the drink; he returned, squatted and offered it to the resident.

"Put it down," said Van Oudijck.

The messenger stood the tumbler on the writing-table and crept away. The other messengers whispered together.

"Messenger!" cried Van Oudijck.

"Excellency."

"What have you put in this glass?"

The man trembled and shrank away at Van Oudijck's feet:

"Excellency, it's not poison; I swear it by my life, by my death; I can't help it, excellency. Kick me, kill me: I can't help it, excellency!"

The glass was a dull yellow.

"Fetch another tumbler and fill it before me."

The messenger went away, trembling.

The others sat close together, feeling the contact of one another's bodies through the sweat-soaked cloth of their liveries, and stared before them in dismay. The moon rose from its clouds, laughing and mocking like a wicked fairy; its moist and silent enchantment shone silver over the wide garden. In the distance, from the garden at the back, a plaintive cry rang out, as though a child were being throttled.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

“And how are you, mevrouwjtje? How’s the depression? Is India suiting you any better to-day?”

His words sounded cheerful to Eva, as she saw him coming through the garden, on the stroke of eight, for dinner. His tone expressed nothing more than the gay greeting of a man who has been working hard at his desk and is delighted to see a pretty woman at whose table he is about to sit. She was filled with surprise and admiration. There was not a suggestion of a man who is plagued all day long, in a deserted house, by strange and incomprehensible happenings. There was hardly a shadow of dejection on his wide forehead, hardly a care seemed to rest upon his broad, slightly bowed back; and the jovial, smiling line about his thick moustache was there as usual. Eldersma came up; and Eva divined in his greeting, in his pressure of the hand, a silent freemasonry of things known, of confidences shared in common. And Van Oudijck drank his gin-and-bitters in a perfectly normal manner, spoke of a letter from his wife, who was probably going on to Batavia, said that René and Ricus were staying in the Preanger¹ with friends who had a plantation there. He did not speak of the reason why they were not with him, why he had been entirely abandoned by his family and servants. In the intimacy of their circle, which he now visited twice a day for his meals, he had never spoken of this. And, though Eva did not ask any questions, it was making her extremely nervous. So close to the house, the haunted house, whose pillars she could see by day in the distance, gleaming through the foliage of the trees, she became more and more nervous daily. All day long, the servants whispered around her and peered timidly at the haunted residency. At night, unable to sleep, she strained her ears to hear whether she could detect anything strange, the moaning of the little children. The Indian night was so full of voices that it could but make her shudder on her bed. Through the imperious bellowing of the frogs for rain and rain and more rain still, the constant croaking on the one bellowing note, she heard thousands of ghostly sounds that kept her from sleeping. Through it all the lizards and geckos emitted their clockwork strokes, like strange mysterious time-pieces.

She thought of it all day long. Eldersma did not speak of it either. But, when she saw Van Oudijck come to lunch or dinner, she had to compress her lips lest she should question him. And the conversation touched upon all sorts of topics, but never upon the strange happenings. After lunch, Van Oudijck went across to the residency again; after dinner, at ten o’clock, she saw him once more vanish into the haunting shadow of the garden. With a calm step, every evening he went back, through the enchanted night, to his wretched, deserted house, where the messengers and Kario sat squatting close together outside his office; and he worked until late in the night.

He never complained. He pursued his enquiries closely, all through the district, but nothing came to light. Everything continued to happen in impenetrable mystery.

“And how does India suit you this evening, mevrouw-tje?”

It was always more or less the same pleasantry; but each time she admired his tone. Courage, robust self-confidence, a certainty in his own knowledge, a belief in what he knew for certain: all these rang in his voice with metallic clearness. Miserable though he must feel—he, the man of profoundly domestic inclinations and of cool, practical sense—in a house deserted by those who belonged to him and full of inexplicable happenings, there was not a trace of doubt or dejection in his unfailing masculine simplicity. He went his way and did his work, more conscientiously than ever; he continued his investigations. And at Eva’s table he always kept up an animated conversation, on politics in India and the new craze for having India ruled from Holland by lay-men who did not know even the A.B.C. of the business. And he talked with an easy, pleasant vivacity, free from all effort, till Eva came to admire him more and more.

But with her, a sensitive woman, it became a nervous obsession. And once, in the evening, as she was walking a little way with him, she asked him if it wasn’t terrible, if he couldn’t leave the house, if he couldn’t go on circuit, for a good long time. She saw his face clouding at her questions. But still he answered kindly, saying that it was not so bad, even though it was all inexplicable, and that he would back himself to get to the bottom of the conjuring. And he added that he really ought to be going on circuit, but that he would not go, lest he should seem to be running away. Then he hurriedly pressed her hand and told her not to upset herself and not to think about it any more or talk about it. The last words sounded like a friendly admonition. She pressed his hand again, with tears in her eyes. And she watched him walk away, with his calm, firm step, and disappear in the darkness of his garden, where the enchantment must be creeping in through the croaking of the frogs. But standing there like that made her shudder; and she hurried indoors. And she felt that her house, that roomy house of hers, was small and unduly open and defenceless against the vast Indian night, which could enter from every side.

But she was not the only person obsessed by the mysterious happenings. Their inexplicable nature lay like an oppression over the whole town, so completely did it clash with the things of everyday life. The mystery was discussed in every house, but only in a whisper, lest the children should be frightened and the servants perceive that people were impressed by the Javanese conjuring, as the resident himself had called it. And the uneasiness and depression were making everybody ill with apprehension and nervous listening when the darkness was teeming with voices in the night, which drifted down on the town in a dense, velvety greyness; and the town seemed to be hiding itself more deeply than ever in the foliage of its

gardens, seemed, in these moist evening twilights, to be shrinking away altogether in dull, silent resignation, bowing before the mystery.

Then Van Oudijck thought it time to take strong measures. He wrote to the major commanding the garrison at Ngadjiwa to come over with a captain, a couple of lieutenants and a company of soldiers. That evening, the officers, with the resident and Van Helderer, dined at the Eldersmas'. They hurried through their meal; and Eva, standing at the garden-gate, saw them all—the resident, the secretary, the controller and the four officers—go into the dark garden of the haunted house. The residency-grounds were shut off, the house surrounded and the churchyard watched. The men went to the bathroom by themselves.

They remained there all through the night. And all through the night the grounds and house remained shut off and surrounded. They came out at about five o'clock and went straight to the swimming-bath and bathed, all of them together. What had happened to them they did not say, but they had had a terrible night. That morning the bathroom was pulled down.

They had all promised Van Oudijck not to speak about that night; and Eldersma would not tell anything to Eva, nor Van Helderer to Ida. The officers too, on their return to Ngadjiwa, were silent. They merely said that their night in the bathroom was too improbable for any one to believe the story. At last one of the young lieutenants allowed a hint of his adventures to escape him. And a tale of betel-juice-spitting and stone-throwing, of a floor that heaved, while they struck at it with sticks and swords, and of something more, something unutterably horrible that had happened in the water of the bath, went the rounds. Every one added to it. When the story reached Van Oudijck's ears, he hardly recognized it as an account of the terrible night, which had been terrible enough without any additions.

Meanwhile Eldersma had written a report of their united vigil; and they all signed the improbable story. Van Oudijck himself took the report to Batavia and delivered it to the governor-general with his own hands. Thenceforth it slumbered in the secret archives of the government.

The governor-general advised Van Oudijck to go to Holland on leave for a short period, assuring him that this leave would have no influence on his promotion to a residency of the first class, which was nearly due. He refused this favour, however, and returned to Labuwangi. The only concession that he made was to move into Eldersma's house until the residency should be thoroughly cleaned. But the flag continued to wave from the flagstaff in the residency-grounds.

On his return from Batavia, Van Oudijck often met Sunario, the regent, on matters of business. And, in his intercourse with the regent, the resident remained stern and formal. Then he had a brief interview, first with the regent and afterwards with his

mother, the raden-aju pangéran. The two conversations did not last longer than twenty minutes. But it appeared that those few words were of great and portentous moment.

For the strange happenings ceased. When everything had been cleaned and repaired, under Eva's supervision, Van Oudijck compelled Léonie to come back, because he wished to give a great ball on New Year's Day. In the morning, the resident received all his European and native officials. In the evening, the guests streamed into the brightly lit galleries from every part of the town, still inclined to shudder and very inquisitive and instinctively looking around and above them. And, while the champagne went round, Van Oudijck himself took a glass and offered it to the regent with a deliberate breach of etiquette; and, in a tone of solemn admonition mingled with good-humoured jest, he uttered these words, which were seized upon and repeated on every hand and which continued to be repeated for months throughout Labuwangi:

"Drink with an easy mind, regent. I give you my word of honour that no more glasses will be broken in my house, except by accident or carelessness."

He was able to say this because he knew that—this time—he had been too strong for the hidden force, merely through his simple courage as an official, a Hollander and a man.

But in the regent's gaze, as he drank, there was still a very slight gleam of irony, intimating that, though the hidden force had not conquered, this time, it would yet remain an enigma, forever inexplicable to the short-sighted eyes of the Europeans....

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Labuwangi came to life again. It was as though people unanimously agreed not to discuss the strange affair any further with outsiders, because it was so excusable that any one should refuse to believe in the thing; and they, at Labuwangi, believed. And the up-country town, after the mystic oppression under which it had lain cowering during those unforgettable weeks, came to life again, as though shaking off all its obsession. Party followed upon party, ball upon ball, theatricals upon concert: all threw open their doors to entertain their friends and make merry, in order to feel natural and normal after the incredible nightmare. People so accustomed to the natural and tangible life, to the spacious and lavish material existence of India—to good cooking, cool drinks, wide beds, roomy houses, to everything that represents physical luxury to the European in the east—such people breathed again and shook off the nightmare, shook off the belief in strange happenings. If and when they discussed the thing nowadays, they commonly called it that incomprehensible conjuring—echoing the resident—the regent's conjuring-tricks. For that the regent had something to do with it was certain. That the resident had held a terrible threat over him and his mother, if the strange happenings did not cease, was certain. That, after this, order had been restored in everyday life was certain. So it was conjuring. All were now ashamed of their credulity and their fears and of having shuddered at what had looked like mysticism and was only clever conjuring. And all breathed again and made up their minds to be cheerful; and entertainment followed upon entertainment.

Léonie, amid all this dissipation, forgot her irritation at having been recalled by Van Oudijck. And she too was determined to forget the scarlet pollution of her body. But something of its terror lingered in her. She now bathed early of an afternoon, as early as half-past four, in the newly-built bathroom. Her second bath always gave her a certain shudder. And, now that Theo had a job at Surabaya, she got rid of him, also, from terror. She could not get rid of the idea that the enchantment had threatened to punish both of them, the mother and son, who were bringing shame on the home. In the romantic side of her perverse imagination, in her rosy fancy full of cherubs and cupids, this idea, inspired by her fears, struck too precious a note of tragedy for her not to cherish it, for all that Theo might say. She would go no further. And it made him furious, because he was mad with love for her, because he could not forget the shameful happiness which he had enjoyed in her arms. But she steadily refused him and told him of her dread and said that she was certain that the witchcraft would begin again if they two loved each other, he and his father's wife. Her words drove him scarlet with fury, on the one Sunday which he spent at Labuwangi: he was furious with her non-compliance, with the motherly attitude which she now adopted and with the fact, of which he was well aware, that she saw Addie often, that she often went to stay at Patjaram. Addie danced with her at parties and hung over her

chair at concerts, in the improvised residential box. True, he was not faithful to her, for it was not his nature to love one woman—he loved women wholesale—but still he was as faithful to her as he was able to be. He inspired her with a more lasting passion than she had ever felt before; and this passion roused her from her usual passive indifference. Often, in company, suffering and inflicting boredom, enthroned in the brilliance of her white beauty, like a smiling idol, with the langour of her years in India gradually filling her blood until her movements had acquired that lazy indifference for anything that did not spell love and caresses, until her voice had assumed a drawling accent in any word that was not a word of passion: often the flame which Addie shed over her would transfigure into a younger woman, livelier in company, gayer, flattered by the persistent homage of this youth, on whom every girl was mad.

And she delighted in monopolizing him as much as she could, to the vexation of all the girls and of Doddie in particular. In the midst of her passion, she also took an evil pleasure in tantalizing, merely for tantalizing's sake: it gave her an exquisite enjoyment; it made her husband jealous—perhaps for the first time, for she had always been very careful—and made Theo and Doddie jealous; she aroused the jealousy of every young married woman and every girl; and, since she stood above all of them, as the resident's wife, she had an ascendancy over all of them. When of an evening she had gone too far, she delighted in winning back, with a smile, with a gracious word, the place in their affection which she had lost through her flirtations. And, strange though it might seem, she succeeded. The moment they saw her, the moment she spoke, smiled and exerted herself to be amiable, she won back all she had lost and was forgiven everything. Even Mrs. Eldersma allowed herself to be conquered by the strange charm of this woman who was neither witty nor intelligent, who merely became just a little livelier, who roused herself a little from her boring lethargy, who triumphed only through the lines of her body, the contour of her face, the glance of her strange eyes, restful and yet full of hidden passion, and who was conscious of all her charm because she had meditated upon it since her childhood. Together with her indifference, this charm constituted her strength. Fate seemed to have no hold upon her. For it had indeed touched her with a strange magic, until she thought that a chastisement was about to descend upon her, but it had gone its way again, drifted away. But she accepted the warning. She had done with Theo and henceforth affected a motherly attitude towards him. It made him furious, especially at these parties, now that she had grown younger, livelier and more seductive.

His passion for her began to burn to hatred. He hated her now, with all the instinct of a fair-haired native, for that was what he really was, despite his white skin. For he was his mother's son rather than his father's. Oh, he hated her now, for he had felt his fear of the punishment only for an instant and he ... he had forgotten everything

by now! And his one idea was to injure her — how he did not yet know — but to injure her so that she might feel pain and suffer. The process of thinking it over imparted a Satanic gloom to his small, murky soul. Although he did not think about it, he felt unconsciously that she was as though invulnerable; he even felt that she boasted inwardly of her invulnerability and that it made her daily more brazen and indifferent. She was constantly staying at Patjaram, on any excuse that offered. The anonymous letters which Van Oudijck still often showed her no longer disturbed her; she was growing accustomed to them. She returned them to him without a word; once she even forgot them, left them lying about in the back-verandah. Once Theo read them. In a sudden flash of light, due to he knew not what, suddenly he seemed to recognize certain characters, certain strokes. He remembered, in the compound, near Patjaram, the hut, half bamboo, half packing-case-boards, where he and Addie de Luce had been to see Si-Oudijck and the papers hastily raked together by an Arab. He had a vague recollection of seeing those same characters, those strokes, on a scrap of paper on the floor. It passed vaguely and quick as lightning through his head. But it was no more than a lightning-flash. His small, murky soul had room for nothing but dull hatred and troubled calculation. But he had not sense enough to follow out that calculation. He hated his father by instinct and innate antipathy; his mother, because she was a half-caste; his step-mother, because she had finished with him; he hated Addie and Doddie into the bargain; he hated the world, because it made him work. He hated every berth he had ever had: he now hated his office at Surabaya. But he was too lazy and too muddle-headed to do harm. Rack his brains as he might, he could not discover how to harm his father, Addie and Léonie. Everything about him was vague, turbid, dissatisfied, indistinct. The object of his desire was money and a fine woman. Beyond this, he had nothing in him but the dull-witted gloom and discontent of the fat, fair-haired Eurasian that he was. And he continued to brood impotently over his murky thoughts.

Until now, Doddie had always been very fond of Léonie, instinctively. But she was no longer able to conceal the fact from herself: what she had first thought an accident — mamma and Addie always seeking each other with the same smile of allurements, one drawing the other the length of the great room, as though irresistibly — was not an accident at all! And she too hated mamma now, mamma with her beautiful calmness, her sovereign indifference. Her own violent passionate nature was coming into collision with that other nature, with its milk-white, creole languor, which now for the first time, late in the day, because of the sheer kindness of fate, was letting itself go as it pleased, without reserve. She hated mamma; and her hatred resulted in scenes, scenes of nervous, loud-voiced temper in Doddie contrasting with the irritating calmness of mamma's indifference, scenes caused by all sorts of little differences of opinion: a visit, a ride on horse-back, a dress, a spice or condiment which the one liked and the other did not. Then Doddie wanted to

have her cry out on papa's breast, but Van Oudijck would not admit that she was in the right and said that she must show more respect to mamma. But once, when Doddie had come to him for consolation and he reproached her for going for walks with Addie, she screamed out that mamma herself was in love with Addie. Van Oudijck angrily ordered her out of the room. But it all agreed too closely—the anonymous letters, his wife's new-born flirtations, Doddie's accusations and what he himself had noticed at the last few parties—not to give him food for reflection and even to worry him. And, once he began to worry and reflect upon it all, memories came suddenly darting into his mind like lightning-flashes: memories of an unexpected visit; of a locked door; of a moving curtain; of a whispered word and a timidly averted glance. He pieced it all together and he quite suddenly recollected those same subtle memories in combination with others, of an earlier date. It all at once aroused his jealousy, a husband's jealousy of the wife whom he loves as his most personal possession. This jealousy burst upon him like a gust of wind, blowing its way through his concentration upon his work, confusing his thoughts as he sat writing, making him suddenly run out of his office, during the police-cases, and search Léonie's room and lift a curtain and even look under the bed.

And now he no longer consented to have Léonie staying at Patjaram, advancing as his pretext that the De Lucés should not be encouraged in the hope of getting Doddie as a wife for Addie. For he dared not speak to Léonie of his jealousy.... That Addie should ever get Doddie for his wife!... True, there was native blood in his daughter too; but he wanted a full-blooded European as his son-in-law. He hated anything half-caste. He hated the De Lucés and all the up-country, Indian, half-Solo traditions of that Patjaram of theirs. He hated their gambling, their hobnobbing with all sorts of Indian headmen, people whom he accepted officially, allowing them their rights, but, apart from this, regarded as unavoidable instruments of the government policy. He hated all their posing as an old Indian family and he hated Addie: an idle youth, who was supposed to be employed in the factory but did nothing at all, except run after every woman, girl and maid-servant in the place. He, the older, industrious man, was unable to understand that kind of existence.

So Léonie had to do without Patjaram; but in the mornings she went quietly to Mrs. van Does and met Addie in this lady's little house while Mrs. van Does herself went out peddling, in a little cart, with two jam-pots filled with diamonds and a bundle of embroidered bedspreads. Then, in the evenings, Addie would stroll out with Doddie and listen to her passionate reproaches. He laughed at her tempersome displays, took her in his arms till she hung panting on his breast, kissed the reproaches from her mouth till she melted away amorously on his lips. They went no further, feeling too much afraid, especially Doddie. They strolled behind the compounds, on the irrigation-dikes of the rice-fields, while swarms of fire-flies whirled about them in the dark like tiny lanterns; they strolled arm-in-arm, they walked hand-in-hand, in

enervating, caressing love, which never dared to push matters any further. When she came home again, she was furious, raging at mamma, in whom she envied the calm, smiling satiety as she lay musing, in her white tea-gown, with a touch of powder on her face, in a cane chair.

And the house, newly painted and whitewashed after the strange happenings, which were now past, the house was filled with a hatred that rose on every hand, as it were the very demoniacal bloom of that strange secret; a hatred centering upon that silent woman, who was too languid to hate and only delighted in silent tantalizing; a jealous hatred of the father for the son, when he saw him too often sitting beside his step-mother, begging, in spite of his own hatred, for something, the father did not know what; a hatred of the daughter for the mother; a hatred in which all this family-life was being wrecked. How it had all gradually come about Van Oudijck did not know. He sadly regretted the time when he was blind, when he had seen his wife and children only in the light in which he wished to see them. That time was past. Like the strange happenings of not so long ago, a hatred was now rising out of life, like a miasma out of the ground. And Van Oudijck, who had never been superstitious, who had worked on coolly and calmly in his lonely house, with the incomprehensible witchcraft all about him; who had read reports while the hammering went on above his head and his whisky-and-soda changed colour in his glass; Van Oudijck for the first time in his life – now that he saw the gloomy glances of Theo and Doddie; now that he suddenly discovered his wife, growing more brazen daily, sitting hand-in-hand with young De Luce, her knees almost touching his – became superstitious, believing in a hidden force which lurked he knew not where, in India, in the soil of India, in a deep-seated mystery, somewhere or other, a force that wished him ill because he was a European, a ruler, a foreigner on the mystic, sacred soil. And, when he saw this superstition within himself, something so new to him, the practical man, something so strange and incredible to him, a man of single-minded, masculine simplicity, he was afraid of himself, as of a rising insanity which he began to perceive deep down within himself.

And, strong though he had proved himself to be at the time of the strange happenings, which he had been able to exorcize with a single word of threatening force, this superstition, which came as an aftermath of those events, found a weakness in him, a vulnerable spot as it were. He was so much surprised at himself that he did not understand and was afraid lest he might be going mad; and still he worried. His health was undermined by an incipient liver-complaint; and he kept on examining his jaundiced complexion. Suddenly he had an idea that he was being poisoned. The kitchen was searched, the cook subjected to a cross-examination; but nothing came to light. He realized that he had been frightened by nothing. But the doctor declared that he had an enlarged liver and prescribed the usual diet. A thing which otherwise he would have thought quite natural, a far from uncommon illness,

now of a sudden struck him as strange, a mysterious event; and he worried over it. And it got on his nerves. He began to suffer from sudden weariness when working, from throbbing headaches. His jealousy upset him; he was overcome by a shuddering restlessness. He suddenly reflected that, if there were now any hammering above his head, if betel-juice were now spat at him, he would not be able to stay in the house. And he began to believe in a hatred rising slowly all around him out of the hostile soil, like a miasma. He believed in a force deep-hidden in the things of India, in the nature of Java, in the climate of Labuwangi, in the conjuring – as he continued to call it – which sometimes makes the Javanese cleverer than the European and gives him the power, a mysterious power, not to release himself from the yoke, but to cause illness, lingering illness, to plague and harass, to play the ghost most incredibly and hideously: a hidden force, a hidden power, hostile to our temperament, our blood, our bodies, our souls, our civilization, to all that seems to us the right thing to do and be and think. It had flashed before him as in a sudden light, it was not the result of thought, it had flashed out before him as in a dreadful revelation, which was utterly in conflict with all the logic of his methodical life, his methodical mode of thought. In a vision of terror, he suddenly saw it before him, as the light of his approaching old age, as men who are growing old do sometimes suddenly perceive the truth. And yet he was young still and hale. And he felt that, if he did not divert his maddening thoughts, they might make him ill, weak and miserable, for ever and ever....

To him, above all, a simple, practical man, this change of mental attitude was almost unbearable. What a morbid mind might have contemplated in quiet meditation now flashed upon him as a sudden terror. Never would he have thought that there might be somewhere, deeply hidden in life, things which were stronger than the power of the human will and intellect. Nowadays, after the nightmare which he had so courageously defeated, it seemed to him that the nightmare had sapped his strength nevertheless and inoculated him with every sort of weakness. It was incredible, but now, as he sat working late in the day, he would listen to the evening voices in the garden, or to the rat that rustled overhead. And then he would suddenly get up, go to Léonie's room and look under the bed. When he at last discovered that many of the anonymous letters by which he was persecuted came from the pen of a half-caste who described himself as his son and was even known in the compound by his own surname, he felt too doubtful to investigate the matter, because of what might come to light that he had himself forgotten, dating from his controllership, from the old days, at Ngadjiwa. He was doubtful now of things of which he had once been certain and positive. Nowadays he was no longer able so positively to order his recollections of that period as to swear that he had not a son, begotten almost unconsciously in those days. He did not clearly remember the housekeeper who had looked after him before his first marriage. And he preferred to let the whole business

of the anonymous letters smoulder in the dusky shadows, rather than stir it up and enquire into it. He even caused money to be sent to the native who called himself his son, so that the fellow might not abuse the name which he arrogated to himself and demand presents all over the compound: chickens and rice and clothes, things which Si-Oudijck exacted from ignorant villagers, whom he threatened with the vague anger of his father the sahib, yonder at Labuwangi. In order that there might be no more threats of this anger, Van Oudijck sent him money. It was weak of him: he would never have done it in the old days. But now he had an inclination to hush things up, to gloss over things, to be less stern and severe and rather to mitigate anything unduly strict by half-measures. Eldersma was sometimes amazed when he saw the resident, who used to be so firm, hesitating, when he saw him yielding in matters of business, in differences with crown tenants, as he had never done before. And slack methods of work would gradually have found their way automatically into the office, if Eldersma had not taken the work out of Van Oudijck's hands and given himself even more to do than he already had. It was generally stated that the resident was ill. And, in fact, his skin was yellow; his liver was painful; the least thing set his nerves quivering. It unsettled the house, in conjunction with Doddie's tempers and outbursts and Theo's jealousy and hatred, for Theo was at home again, had already thrown up Surabaya. Léonie alone continued her triumphant career, ever beautiful, white, calm, smiling, contented, happy in the lasting passion of Addie, whom she knew how to hold, amorous expert, love's sorceress that she was. Fate had warned her and she kept Theo at a distance; but for the rest she was happy and contented.

Then suddenly Batavia fell vacant. The names of two or three residents were mentioned, but Van Oudijck had possessed the best chance. And he worried about it, was afraid of it: he did not care for Batavia as a residency. He would not have been able to work in Batavia as he worked here, at Labuwangi, zealously and devotedly fostering so many different interests connected with agriculture and the people. He would rather have been appointed to Surabaya, where there was plenty going on; or to one of the Vorstenlanden, where his tact in dealing with the native princes would have been turned to good purpose. But Batavia! It was the least interesting of all districts, from the official point of view, and, what with the arrogant atmosphere of the place, the least flattering to one in the position of resident, in close contact with the governor-general, surrounded by the highest officials, so that the resident, who was almost supreme anywhere else, was at Batavia no more than yet another high official among so many members of council and directors. And it was much too near Buitenzorg, with its arbitrary secretariat, whose bureaucratic and red-tape methods were always clashing with the practical administrative methods of the residents themselves.

The prospect of being appointed unsettled him entirely, harassed him more than ever, with the thought of leaving Labuwangi in a month's time, of selling up his furniture. It would break his heart to leave Labuwangi. In spite of all that he had gone through there, he loved the town and especially his district. During all those years, he had left traces of activity throughout his district, traces of his devoted labour, of his ambition, of his affection. And now, within a month, he would probably have to transfer all this to a successor, to tear himself away from everything that he had so lovingly cherished and fostered. It filled him with a sombre melancholy. He cared not a straw for the fact that the promotion also brought him nearer to his pension. That unoccupied future, with the boredom of approaching old age, was a very nightmare to him. And his successor would perhaps make all manner of changes, would disagree at every single point.

In the end, the chance of his promotion became such a morbid obsession with him that the improbable thing happened and he wrote to the director of the B.B. and to the governor-general, begging to be left at Labuwangi. The secret of these letters was pretty well kept: he himself concealed them entirely, both from his family and from his subordinates, so that, when a younger second-class resident was appointed Resident of Batavia, people said that Van Oudijck had been passed over, but not that this had happened at his own request. And, in seeking the cause, they raked up all the old gossip about the dismissal of the Regent of Ngadjiwa and the strange happenings thereafter, but without finding in either any particular reason why the government should have passed over Van Oudijck.

He himself recovered a strange sort of peace, a peace due to weariness, to *laissez-aller*, to becoming rooted in his familiar Labuwangi, to not having to be transferred, old up-country veteran that he was, to Batavia, where things were so very different. When the governor-general, at his last audience, had spoken to him about going to Europe on leave, he had felt afraid of Europe, afraid of no longer feeling at home there; and now he felt afraid even of Batavia. And yet he knew all that there was to know about the would-be western humbug of Batavia; yet he knew that the capital of Java only pretended to be exceedingly European and in reality was only half-European. In himself—and unknown to his wife, who regretted that dispelled illusion of Batavia—he chuckled silently at the thought that he had succeeded in remaining at Labuwangi. But, while he chuckled, he nevertheless felt changed, aged, belittled, felt that he was no longer glancing at that upward path—the prospect of constantly winning a higher place among his fellow-men—which had always been his path of life. What had become of his ambition? What had happened to decrease his love of authority? He put it all down to the influence of the climate. It would certainly be a good thing to refresh his blood and his mind in Europe, to spend a couple of winters there. But the idea immediately evaporated, wiped out by his lack of resolution. No, he did not want to go to Europe; it was India that he loved. And he

indulged in long meditations, lying in a long-chair, enjoying his coffee, his light clothing, the gentle relaxation of his muscles, the aimless drowsiness of his thoughts. The only obvious thing in his drowsy mood was his ever-increasing suspicion; and now and again he would suddenly wake from his languor and listen to the vague sounds, the soft, suppressed laughter which he seemed to hear in Léonie's room, even as at night, when, suspicious of ghosts, he listened to the muffled sounds in the garden and to the rat scurrying overhead.

Chapter Thirty

Addie was sitting with Mrs. van Does, in the little back-verandah, when they heard a carriage rattle up in front of the house. They smiled at each other and rose from their seats:

"I shall leave you to yourselves," said Mrs. van Does.

And she disappeared, to drive round the town in a dog-cart and do business among her friends.

Léonie entered:

"Where is Mrs. van Does?" she asked, for she always behaved as though it were the first time.

It was her great charm. He knew this and answered:

"She has just gone out. She will be sorry to have missed you."

He spoke like this because he knew that she liked it: the ceremonial opening each time, to preserve above all things the freshness of their liaison.

They now sat down in the little, shut-in middle gallery, side by side on a settee.

The settee was covered with a cretonne displaying many-coloured flowers; on the white walls were a few cheap fans and kakemonos; and on either side of a little looking-glass stood a console-table with an imitation bronze statue, two nondescript knights, each with one leg advanced and a spear in his hand. Through the glass door the musty little back-verandah showed, with its damp, yellow-green pillars, its flower-pots, also yellow-green, with a few withered rose-trees; and behind this was the damp, neglected little garden, with a couple of lean coco-palms, hanging their leaves like broken feathers.

He now took her in his arms and drew her to him, but she pushed him away gently:

"Doddie is becoming unbearable," she said. "Something must be done."

"How so?"

"She must leave the house. She is so irritable that there's no living with her."

"You tease her, you know."

She shrugged her shoulders; she had been put out by a recent scene with her step-daughter:

"I never used to tease her. She was fond of me and we got on all right together. Now she flies out at the least thing. It's your fault. Those everlasting evening walks, which lead to nothing, upset her nerves."

"Perhaps it's just as well that they lead to nothing," he murmured, with his little laugh, the laugh of the tempter. "But I can't break with her, you know: it would make her unhappy. And I can't bear to make a woman unhappy."

She laughed scornfully:

"Yes, you're so good-natured. From sheer good-nature you would scatter your favours broadcast. Anyway, she'll have to go."

"Go? Where to?"

"Don't ask such silly questions!" she exclaimed, angrily, roused out of her usual indifference. "She'll have to go, somewhere or other, I don't care where. You know, when I say a thing, it's done. And this is going to be done."

He was now clasping her in his arms:

"You're so angry. You're not a bit pretty like that."

In her temper, she at first refused to let him kiss her: but, as he did not like these tempers and was well aware of the irresistible power of his comely, Moorish virility, he mastered her with rough, smiling violence and held her so tight to him that she was unable to stir:

"You mustn't be angry any longer."

"Yes, I will. I hate Doddie."

"The poor girl has done you no harm."

"Possibly."

"On the contrary, it's you who tease her."

"Yes, because I hate her."

"Why? Surely you're not jealous!"

She laughed aloud:

"No! That's not one of my failings."

"Then why?"

"What does it matter to you? I myself don't know. I hate her. I love tormenting her."

"Are you as wicked as you are beautiful?"

"What does wicked mean? I don't know or care! I should like to torment you too, if I only knew how."

"And I should like to give you a good smacking."

She again gave a shrill laugh:

"Perhaps it would do me good," she admitted. "I seldom lose my temper, but Doddie...!"

She contracted her fingers and, suddenly calming down, nestled against him and locked her arms about his body:

"I used to be very indifferent," she confessed. "Latterly I have been much more easily upset, after I had that fright in the bathroom ... after they spat at me so, with betel-juice. Do you believe it was ghosts? I don't. It was some practical joke of the regent's. Those beastly Javanese know all sorts of things.... But, since then, I have, so to speak, lost my bearings. Do you understand that expression?... It used to be delightful: I would let everything run off me like water off a duck's back. But, after being so ill, I seem to have changed, to be more nervous. Theo one day, when he was angry with me, said that I've been hysterical since then ... and I never used to be. I don't know: perhaps he's right. But I'm certainly changed.... I don't care so much what people think or say; I think I'm growing quite shameless.... They're gossiping too more spitefully than they used to.... Van Oudijck irritates me, prying about as he does. He's beginning to notice something.... And Doddie! Doddie!... I'm not jealous, but I can't stand her evening walks with you.... You must give it up, do you hear, walking with her! I won't have it, I won't have it!... And then everything bores me in this place, at Labuwangi. What a wretched, monotonous life!... Surabaya's a bore too.... So's Batavia.... It's all so dull and stodgy: people never think of anything new.... I should like to go to Paris. I believe I have it in me to enjoy Paris thoroughly...."

"Do I bore you too?"

"You?"

She stroked his face with her two hands and passed them over his chest and down his thighs:

"I'll tell you what I think of you. You're a pretty boy, but you're too good-natured. That irritates me too. You kiss everybody who wants you to kiss them. At Patjaram, you are always pawing everybody, including your old mother and your sisters. I think it's horrid of you!"

He laughed:

"You're growing jealous!" he exclaimed.

"Jealous? Am I really getting jealous? How horrid if I am! I don't know: I don't think I am, all the same. I don't want to be. After all, I believe there's something that will always protect me."

"A devil...."

"Possibly. Un bon diable."

"Are you taking to speaking French?"

"Yes. With a view to Paris.... There's something that protects me. I firmly believe that life can do me no injury, that nothing can touch me."

"You're becoming superstitious."

"Oh, I was always that! Perhaps I've become more so.... Tell me, have I changed, lately?"

"You're touchier."

"Not so indifferent as I was?"

"You're livelier, more amusing."

"Used I to be a bore?"

"You were a little quiet. You were always beautiful, exquisite, divine ... but rather quiet."

"Perhaps it was because I minded people more then."

"Don't you now?"

"No, not now. They gossip just the same.... But tell me; haven't I changed more than that?"

"Yes, you have: you're more jealous, more superstitious, more touchy.... What more do you want?"

"Physically: haven't I changed physically?"

"No."

"Haven't I grown older?... Am I not getting wrinkled?"

"You? Never!"

"Listen. I believe I have still quite a future before me, something very different...."

"In Paris?"

"Perhaps.... Tell me, am I not too old?"

"What for?"

"For Paris.... How old do you think I am?"

"Twenty-five."

"You're fibbing. You know perfectly well that I'm thirty-two. Do I look thirty-two?"

"Rather not!"

"Tell me, don't you think India a horrible country?... Have you never been to Europe?"

"No."

"I was there from ten to fifteen.... Properly speaking, you're a brown native and I a white creole...."

"I love my country."

"Yes, because you think yourself a bit of a Solo prince.... That's your Patjaram nonsense.... As for me, I hate India, I loathe Labuwangi. I want to get away. I want to go to Paris.... Will you come too?"

"No. I should never want to go...."

"Not even when you reflect that there are hundreds of women in Europe whom you have never loved?"

He looked at her: something in her words, in her voice, made him glance up; a crazy hysteria, which had never struck him in the old days, when she had always been the silently passionate mistress, with half-closed eyes, who always wanted to forget everything at once and to become conventional again. Something in her repelled him. He loved the soft, pliant surrender of her caresses, the smiling indolence which she used to display, but not these half-mad eyes and this purple mouth, which seemed ready to bite. She seemed to feel this, for she suddenly pushed him from her and said, brusquely:

"You bore me.... I know all there is to know in you.... Go away...."

But this he would not do. He did not care for futile rendez-vous and he now embraced her and solicited her....

"No," she said, curtly. "You bore me. Every one bores me here. Everything bores me."

He, on his knees, put his hands about her waist and drew her to him. She, smiling a little, became slightly more yielding, rumpling his hair nervously with her hand. A carriage pulled up in front of the house.

"Hark!" she said.

"It's Mrs. van Does."

"How soon she's back!"

"I expect she's sold nothing."

"Then it'll cost you a ten-guilder note."

"I dare say."

"Do you pay her much ... for allowing us to meet here?"

"Oh, what does it matter?"

"Listen," she said again, more attentively.

"That's not Mrs. van Does."

"No."

"It's a man's footstep.... It wasn't a dog-cart either: it was much too noisy."

"I expect it's nothing," said she. "Some one who has mistaken the house. Nobody ever comes here."

"The man's going round," he said, listening.

They both listened for a moment. And then, suddenly, after two or three strides through the cramped little garden and along the little back-verandah, his figure, Van Oudijck's, appeared outside the closed glass door, visible through the curtain. And he had pulled it open before Léonie and Addie could change their position, so that Van Oudijck saw them both, her sitting on the couch and him kneeling before her, while her hand still lay, as though forgotten, on his hair.

"Léonie!" roared her husband.

Her blood under the shock of the surprise broke into stormy waves and seethed through her veins and, in one second, she saw the whole future: his anger, the trial, the divorce, her alimony, all in one whirling vision. But, as though by the compulsion of her nervous will, the tide of blood within her at once subsided and grew calm; and she remained quietly sitting there, her terror showing for but a moment longer in her eyes, until she could turn them hard as steel upon Van Oudijck. And, by pressing her finger softly on Addie's head, she suggested to him also to remain in the same attitude, to remain kneeling at her feet, and she said, as though self-hypnotized, listening in astonishment to her own slightly husky voice:

"Otto ... Adrien de Luce is asking me to put in a word with you for him.... He is asking ... for Doddie's hand...."

They all three remained motionless, all three under the influence of these words, of this thought which had come ... whence Léonie herself did not know. For, sitting rigid and erect as a sibyl and still with that gentle pressure on Addie's head, she repeated:

"He is asking ... for Doddie's hand...."

She was still the only one to speak. And she continued:

"He knows that you have certain objections. He knows that you do not care for his family ... because they have Javanese blood in their arteries."

She was still speaking as though some one else were speaking inside her; and she had to smile at that word arteries, she did not know why: perhaps because it was the first time in her life that she had used the word arteries, for veins, in conversation.

"But," she went on, "there are no financial drawbacks, if Doddie likes to live at Patjaram.... And the children have been fond of each other ... so long."

She alone was speaking still:

"Doddie has so long been overstrung, almost ill.... It would be a crime, Otto, not to consent."

Gradually her voice became more musical and the smile formed about her lips; but the light in her eyes was still hard as steel, as though she were threatening Van Oudijck with her anger if he refused to believe her.

"Come," she said, very gently, very kindly, patting Addie's head softly with her trembling fingers. "Get up ... Addie ... and go ... to ... papa."

He rose, mechanically.

"Léonie, what were you doing here?" asked Van Oudijck, hoarsely.

"Here? I was with Mrs. van Does."

"And he?" pointing to Addie.

"He?... He happened to be calling.... Mrs. van Does had to go out.... Then he asked leave to speak to me.... And then he asked me ... for Doddie's hand...."

They were again all three silent.

"And you, Otto?" she now asked, more harshly. "What brought you here?"

He looked at her sharply.

"Is there anything you want to buy of Mrs. van Does?" she asked.

"Theo told me you were here...."

"Theo was right...."

"Léonie...."

She rose and, with her eyes hard as steel, she intimated to him that he must believe her, that she insisted on his believing her:

"In any case, Otto," she said; and her manner was once more gently kind, "do not leave Addie any longer in his uncertainty. And you, Addie, don't be afraid ... and ask papa for Doddie's hand.... I have nothing to say where Doddie is concerned ... as I have often told you."

They now all three stood facing one another, in the narrow middle gallery; breathing with difficulty, oppressed by their accumulated emotions. Then Addie said:

"Resident, I ask you ... for your daughter's hand."

A dog-cart pulled up at the front of the house.

"That's Mrs. van Does," said Léonie, hurriedly. "Otto, say something before she comes...."

"I consent," said Van Oudijck, gloomily.

He made off at the back before Mrs. van Does had entered and did not see the hand which Addie held out to him. Mrs. van Does came in trembling, following by a babu carrying her bundle, her merchandise. She saw Léonie and Addie standing stiff and hypnotized:

"That was the resident's chariot!" stammered the Indian lady, pale in the face. "Was it the resident?"

"Yes," said Léonie, calmly.

"Oh dear! And what happened?"

"Nothing," said Léonie, laughing.

"Nothing?"

"Or rather, something did happen."

"What?"

"Addie and Doddie are ..."

"What?"

"Engaged!"

And she shrieked the words with a shrill outburst of uncontrollable mirth at the comedy of life and took Mrs. van Does, who stood with the eyes starting out of her head, and spun her round and kicked the bundle out of the babu's hands, so that a parcel of embroidered bedspreads and table-slips fell to the ground and a little jam-pot full of glittering crystals rolled away and broke.

"Oh dear!... My brilliants!"

One more kick of frolicsome wantonness; and the table-slips flew to left and right and the diamonds lay glittering scattered among the legs of the tables and chairs. Addie, his eyes still filled with terror, crawled about on his hands and feet, raking them together.

Mrs. van Does repeated:

Chapter Thirty-One

Doddie was rapt into the seventh heaven of delight when Van Oudijck told her that Addie had asked her hand in marriage; and, when she heard that mamma had been her advocate, she embraced Léonie boisterously, with the emotional spontaneity of her temperament, once more surrendering to the attraction which Léonie had exercised upon her for years. Doddie now at once forgot everything that had annoyed her in the excessive intimacy between mamma and Addie, when he used to hang over her chair and whisper to her. She had never believed what now and again she had heard, because Addie had always assured her that it was not true. And she was ever so happy that she was going to live with Addie, he and she together, at Patjaram. For Patjaram was her ideal of what a home should be. The big house, full of sons and daughters and children and animals, on all of whom the same kindness and cordiality and boredom were lavished, while behind those sons and daughters shone the halo of their Solo descent: the big house built on to the sugar factory was to her the ideal residence; and she felt akin with all its little traditions: the spices, crushed and ground by a babu squatting behind her chair, while she sat at lunch, represented to her the supreme indulgence of the palate; the races at Ngadjiwa, attended by the leisurely dawdling procession of all those women, with the babus behind them, carrying the handkerchief, the scent-bottle, the opera-glasses, were her non plus ultra of elegance; she loved the old dowager raden-aju; and she had given herself to Addie, entirely, without reserve, from the first moment of seeing him, when she was a little girl of thirteen and he a boy of eighteen. It was because of him that she had resisted with all her energy whenever papa proposed to send her to Europe, to boarding-school in Brussels; because of him she had never cared for any place except Labuwangi, Ngadjiwa or Patjaram; because of him she was prepared to live and die at Patjaram.

It was because of him that she had felt all her little jealousies, when her girl-friends told her that he was in love with this one or carrying on with that one; because of him she would always know those jealousies great and small, her whole life long. He would be her life, Patjaram her world, sugar her interest, because it was Addie's interest. Because of him she would long for many children, very many children, who would be really brown: not white, like papa and mamma and Theo, but brown, because her own mother was brown; and she herself was a delicate brown, while Addie was a beautiful bronze colour, a Moorish brown; and, after the example set at Patjaram, her children, her numerous children, would be brought up in the shadow of the factory, in an atmosphere of sugar, with a view to their planting the fields, when they grew up, and milling the sugar-cane and restoring the fortunes of the family to their former brilliancy. And she was as happy as a girl in love could imagine herself to be, seeing her ideal, Addie and Patjaram, so closely attainable and not for a second realizing how her happiness had come about, through the word

which Léonie, almost unconsciously, had uttered, as though by autosuggestion, at the supreme moment. Oh, now she need no longer seek the dark corners, the dark rice-fields with Addie; now she was constantly kissing him in broad daylight, leaning radiantly against him, feeling his warm, virile body, which was hers and would soon be hers entirely; now her eyes yearned up to him, for all to see, for she no longer had the maidenly power of hiding her feelings from others; now he was hers, hers, hers!

And he, with the good-natured surrender of a young sultan, suffered her to caress his shoulders and knees, suffered her to kiss him and stroke his hair, suffered her arm around his neck, accepting it all as a tribute due to him, accustomed as he was to that feminine tribute of love, he who had been fondled and caressed from the time when he was a little, chubby boy, from the time when he was carried by Tidjem, his babu, who was in love with him, from the time when he used to romp, in his little pyjamas, with little sisters and cousins, all of whom were in love with him. All this tribute he accepted good-naturedly, though secretly surprised and shocked by what Léonie had done.... And yet, he argued, it would perhaps anyhow have happened of itself, some day, because Doddie was so fond of him. He would rather have remained unmarried: though unmarried, he nevertheless had all the home life at Patjaram that he wanted and retained his liberty to bestow abundant love upon women, in his good-natured way. And he was already ingenuously reflecting that it would not do, that it would never do to remain faithful to Doddie long, because he was really too good-natured and the women were all so crazy. Doddie must get used to it later on, must learn to accept it; and, he reflected, after all, in Solo, in the palace, it was the same thing, with his uncles and cousins....

Had Van Oudijck believed what Léonie said? He himself did not know whether he did or not. Doddie had accused Léonie of being in love with Addie; Theo, that morning, when Van Oudijck asked him where Léonie was, had answered, curtly:

“At Mrs. van Does’ ... with Addie.”

He had glared at his son, but asked no further questions; he had merely driven straight to Mrs. van Does’ house. And he had actually found his wife with young de Luce, found him on his knees before her; but she had said so quietly:

“Adrian de Luce is asking me for your daughter’s hand.”

No, he himself did not know whether he believed her or not. His wife had answered so quietly; and now, during the first few days of the engagement, she was so calm, smiling just as usual.... He now for the first time saw that strange side of her, that invulnerability, as though nothing could harm her. Did he suspect, behind this wall of invulnerability, the ironical feminine secrecy of her silently smouldering inner life? It was as though, with his recent nervous suspicion, with his restless mood, in

the rankness of superstition that led him to pry and listen to the haunting silence, he had learnt to see around him things to which he had been blind in his burly strength as a ruler and high and mighty chief official. And his longing to make certain of the mysteries at which he was guessing became so violent, in his morbid irritability, that he grew more pleasant and kinder to his son, though this time it arose not from the spontaneous paternal affection which, when all was said, he had always felt for Theo, but from curiosity, to hear all that he had to say, to make Theo speak out. And Theo, who hated Léonie, who hated his father, who hated Addie, who hated Doddie, in his general hatred of all those about him, who hated life with the stubborn ideas of a fair-haired Eurasian, longing for money and beautiful women, angry because the world, life, riches, happiness—as he pictured it to himself in his petty fashion—did not come rushing to him, falling into his arms, falling on his neck: Theo was willing enough to squeeze out his words drop by drop, like gall and wormwood, silently revelling in the sight of his father's suffering. And he allowed Van Oudijck to divine, very gradually, that it was true, after all, about mamma and Addie.

In the intimacy that sprang up between the father and son out of suspicion and hatred, Theo spoke of his brother in the compound, said that he knew papa sent him money and therefore acknowledged that the thing was true. And Van Oudijck, no longer certain, no longer knowing the truth, admitted that it might be so, admitted that it was so. Then, remembering the anonymous letters—which had only lately ceased, since he had been sending money to that half-caste who ventured to assume his name—he also remembered the libels which he had often read in them and which, at the time, he had always cast from him as so much filth; he remembered the two names, those of his wife and of Theo himself, which had so constantly been coupled in them. His distrust and suspicion blazed up like flames, like a now inextinguishable fire, which scorched every other thought or feeling ... until at last he was no longer able to restrain himself and spoke roundly to Theo on the subject. He did not trust Theo's indignation and denial. And he now trusted nothing and nobody, he distrusted his wife and his children and his officials; he distrusted his cook....

Chapter Thirty-Two

Then, like a clap of thunder, the rumour ran through Labuwangi that Van Oudijck and his wife were going to be divorced. Léonie went to Europe, very suddenly, really without any one's knowing why and without taking leave of anybody. And it caused a great scandal in the little town: people talked of nothing else and talked of it even as far away as Surabaya, as far away as Batavia. Van Oudijck alone was silent; and, with his back a little more bowed, went his way, working on, leading his ordinary life. He had abandoned his principles and assisted Theo to obtain a job, in order to be rid of him. He preferred to have Doddie staying at Patjaram, where the De Luce women would help her with her trousseau. He preferred Doddie to get married quickly and to get married at Patjaram. In his great, empty house he now longed for nothing but solitude, a spacious, cheerless solitude. He would no longer have the table laid for him: they brought him a plateful of rice and a cup of coffee in his office. And he felt ill, his zeal lessened; a dull indifference gnawed at his vitals. He delegated all the work, all the district to Eldersma; and, when Eldersma, after not sleeping for weeks, half-crazy with nervous strain, told the resident that the doctor wanted to send him to Europe with a certificate of urgency, Van Oudijck lost all his courage. He said that he too felt ill and done for. And he applied to the governor-general for leave and went to Batavia. He said nothing about it, but he felt certain that he would never return to Labuwangi. And he went away, quietly, with not a glance at what he was leaving behind him, at his great field of activity, which he had so lovingly organized. The administration remained in the hands of the assistant-resident at Ngadjiwa. It was generally believed that Van Oudijck wished to see the governor-general about certain questions of importance, but suddenly the news arrived that he was proposing to retire. It was not credited at first, but the report was confirmed. Van Oudijck did not return.

He had gone, without casting a glance behind him, in a strange indifference, an indifference which had gradually corroded the very marrow of this once so robust and practical man, who had always remained young in his capacity for work. He felt this indifference for Labuwangi, which, when there was a question of his promotion to resident of the first class, he had thought himself incapable of leaving except with the greatest regret; he felt this indifference for his domestic circle, which no longer existed. His soul was filled with a gradual blight; it was withering, dying. It seemed to him that all his powers were melting away in the tepid stagnation of this indifference. At Batavia he vegetated for a while in his hotel; and it was generally assumed that he would go to Europe.

Eldersma had already gone, sick almost unto death; and Eva had been unable to accompany him, with the little boy, because she was down with a bad attack of malarial fever. When she was more or less convalescent, she sold up her house, with

a view to going to Batavia and staying there for three weeks with friends before her boat sailed. She left Labuwangi with mixed feelings. She had suffered much there, but had also reflected much; and she had cherished a deep feeling for Van Helderer, a pure, radiant feeling such as could, she was sure, shine forth only once in a lifetime. She took leave of him as of an ordinary friend, in the presence of others, and gave him no more than a pressure of the hand. But she felt so profoundly sad because of that pressure of the hand, that commonplace farewell, that the sobs rose in her throat. That evening, left to herself, she did not weep, but sat in her room at the hotel, staring for hours silently before her. Her husband was gone, was ill: she did not know how he would be when she saw him, whether indeed she would ever see him again. Europe, it was true, after her years in India, stretched its shores smilingly before her, held forth the vision of its cities, its culture, its art; but she was afraid of Europe. An unspoken fear lest she should have lost ground intellectually made her almost dread the circle in her parents' house, to which she would have returned in a month's time. She trembled at the thought that people would consider her colonial in her manners and ideas, in her speech and dress, in the education of her child; and this made her feel shy in anticipation, despite all her pose as a smart, artistic woman. Certainly she no longer played the piano as well as she did; she would not dare to play at the Hague. And she thought that it might be a good thing to stay in Paris for a fortnight and brush off her cobwebs a little, before showing herself in the Hague....

But Eldersma was too ill.... And how would she find him, her husband, so much changed, her once robust Frisian husband, now tired out, worn out, yellow as parchment, careless of his appearance, muttering gloomily when he spoke?... But a gentle vision of a refreshing German landscape, of Swiss snows, of music at Bayreuth, of art in Italy dawned before her staring gaze; and she was herself reunited to her sick husband. No longer united in life, but united under the yoke of life, the yoke which they had shouldered together, once and for all.... Then there was the education of her child! Oh, to save her child, to get him away from India! And yet he, Van Helderer, had never been out of India. But then he was himself, he was an exception....

She had bidden him good-bye.... She must make up her mind to forget him.... Europe was waiting for her ... with her husband ... and her child....

Two days later she was at Batavia. She hardly knew the city; she had been there once or twice, years ago, when she first came out. At Labuwangi, in that little, outlying district, Batavia had gradually become glorified in her imagination into an essentially Eurasian capital, a centre of Eurasian civilization, a dim vision of stately avenues and squares, surrounded by great, wealthy, porticoed villas, thronged with smart carriages and horses. She had always heard so much about Batavia....

She was now staying with friends. The husband was at the head of a big commercial firm; their house was one of the handsomest villas on the Koningsplein. And she had at once been very strangely impressed by the funereal character, by the deadly melancholy of this great town of villas, where thousands of varied lives are waging a silent, feverish battle for a future of moneyed repose. It was as though all those houses, gloomy despite their white pillars and their grand fronts, were frowning like faces careworn with troubles that sought to hide themselves behind a pretentious display of broad leaves and clustering palms. The houses, however much exposed, amidst their pillars, however seemingly open, remained closed; the occupants were never seen. Only in the mornings, as she went on her errands along the shops in Rijswijk and Molenvliet, which, with a few French names among them, tried to give the impression of a southern shopping-centre, of European luxury, Eva would see the exodus to the Old Town of the white men, white-faced, dressed in white; and even their eyes seemed pale with brooding anxieties, fixed upon a future which they all calculated in so many decades or lustres: so much made, in this year or that; and then away, away home from India to Europe. It was as though it were not malaria that was undermining them, but another fever; and she felt clearly that it was undermining their unacclimatized constitutions, their souls, as though they were trying to skip that day and reach the to-morrow, or the day after, days which brought them a little nearer to their goal, because they secretly feared to die before that goal was attained. The exodus filled the trams with its white burden of mortality. Many, already well off, but not yet rich enough for their purpose, drove in their victorias or buggies to the Harmonie Club and there took the tram, to spare their horses.

And in the Old Town, in the old, aristocratic houses of the first Dutch merchants, still built in the Dutch style, with oak staircases leading to upper floors which now, during the eastern monsoon, were stagnant with a dense, oppressive heat, like a tangible element, which stifled the breath, the white men bent over their work, constantly beholding between their thirsty glance and the white desert of their papers the dawning mirage of the future, the refreshing oasis of their materialistic illusion: within such and such a time, money and then off ... off ... to Europe.... And, in the city of villas, around the Koningsplein, along the green avenues, the women hid themselves, the women remained unseen, the whole livelong day. The hot day passed, the time of beneficent coolness came, the time from half-past five to seven. The men returned home dog-tired and sat down to rest; and the women, tired with their housekeeping, with their children and with nothing at all, with a life of doing nothing, a life without any interest, tired with the deadliness of their existence, rested beside the men. That hour of beneficent coolness meant rest, rest after the bath, in undress, around the tea-table, a short, momentary rest, for the fearsome hour of seven was at hand, when it was already dark, when one had to go to a

reception. A reception implied dressing in stuffy European clothes, implied a brief but dreadful display of European drawing-room manners and social graces, but it also implied meeting this person and that and striving to achieve yet one advance towards the mirage of the future: money and ultimate rest in Europe. And, after the town of villas had lain in the sun all day, gloomy and wan, like a dead city – with the men away in the Old Town and the women hidden in their houses – a few carriages now passed one another in the dark, round the Koningsplein and along the green avenues, a few European-looking people, going to a reception. While, around the Koningsplein and in the green avenues, all the other villas persisted in this funereal desolation and remained filled with gloomy darkness, the house where the party was given shone with lamps among the palm-trees. And for the rest the deadliness lingered on every hand, the sombre brooding lay over the houses wherein the tired people were hiding, the men exhausted with work, the women exhausted with doing nothing....

“Wouldn’t you like a drive, Eva?” asked her hostess, Mrs. De Harteman, a little Dutchwoman, white as wax and always tired out by her children. “But I’d rather not come with you, if you don’t mind: I’d rather wait for Harteman. Else he’d find nobody at home. So you go, with your little boy.”

So Eva, with her little man, went driving in the De Hartemans’ “chariot.” It was the cool hour of the day, before darkness set in. She met two or three carriages: Mrs. This and Mrs. That, who were known to drive in the afternoon. In the Koningsplein she saw a lady and gentleman walking: the So-and-Sos; they always walked, as all Batavia knew. She met no one else. No one. At that beneficent hour, the villa-town remained desolate as a city of the dead, as a vast mausoleum amid green trees. And yet it was a boon, after the overwhelming heat, to see the Koningsplein stretching like a gigantic meadow, where the parched grass was turning green with the first rains, while the houses showed so far away, so very far away, in their hedged-in gardens, that it was like being in the country, amid wood and fields and pastures, with the wide sky overhead, from which the lungs now breathed in air, as though for the first time that day, breathed in oxygen and life: that wide sky, displaying every day as it were a varying wealth of colours, an excess of sunset fires, a glorious death of the scorching day, as though the sun itself were bursting into torrents of gold between the lilac-hued and threatening rain-clouds. And it was so spacious and so delightful, it was such an immense boon that it actually made up for the day.

But there was no one to see it except the two or three people who were known in Batavia to go driving or walking. A violet twilight rose; then the night fell with one deep shadow; and the town, which had been deathlike all day, with its frown of brooding gloom, dropped wearily asleep, like a city of care....

It used to be different, said old Mrs. De Harteman, the mother-in-law of Eva's friend. They were gone nowadays, the pleasant houses with their Indian hospitality, their open tables, their sincere and cordial welcomes, as if the colonist's character had in some sense altered, had in some way been overcast by the vicissitudes of chance, by his disappointment at not speedily achieving his aim, his material aim of wealth. And, he being thus embittered, it seemed that his nerves became irritable, just as his soul became overcast and gloomy and his body lethargic and unable to withstand the destructive climate....

And Eva did not find Batavia the ideal city of Eurasian civilization which she had pictured it at Labuwangi. In this great money-grubbing centre, every trace of spontaneity had vanished and life became degraded to an everlasting seclusion in the office or at home. People never saw each other save at receptions; any other conversation took place over the telephone.

The abuse of the telephone for domestic purposes killed all agreeable intimacy among friends. People no longer saw one another; they no longer had any need to dress and send for the carriage, the "chariot"; for they chatted over the telephone, in sarong and kabaai, in pyjamas, almost without stirring a limb. The telephone was close at hand and the bell was constantly ringing in the back-verandah. People rang one another up for nothing, for the mere fun of ringing up. Young Mrs. De Harteman had an intimate friend, a young woman whom she never saw and to whom she telephoned daily, for half an hour at a time. She sat down to it, so it did not tire her. And she laughed and joked with her friend, without having to dress and without moving. She did the same with other friends: she paid her visits by telephone. She did her shopping by telephone. Eva had not been accustomed at Labuwangi to this everlasting tinkling and ringing up, which killed all conversation and, in the back-verandah, revealed one half of a dialogue—the replies being inaudible to any one sitting away from the instrument—in the form of an incessant, one-sided jabbering. It got on her nerves and drove her to her room. And, amid the boredom of this life, full of care and inward brooding for the husband and penetrated by the chatter of the wife's telephonic conversations, Eva would be surprised suddenly to hear of a special excitement: a fancy-fair and the rehearsals of an amateur operatic performance.

She herself attended one of these rehearsals during her visit and was astonished by the really first-rate execution, as though those musical amateurs had put the strength of despair into it, to dispel the tedium of the Batavian evenings. For the Italian opera had left; and she had to laugh at the heading "Amusements" in the Javabode, which amusements as a rule were limited to a choice of three or four meetings of shareholders. This too used to be different, said old Mrs. De Harteman, who remembered the excellent French opera of twenty-five years ago, which, it was true,

cost thousands, but for which the thousands were always forthcoming. No, people no longer had the money to amuse themselves at night. They sometimes gave a very expensive dinner, or else went to a meeting of shareholders. Eva, in truth, considered Labuwangi a much livelier place. True, she herself had largely contributed to the liveliness, at the instigation of Van Oudijck, who was glad to make the capital of his district a pleasant, cheerful little town. And she came to the conclusion that, after all, she preferred a small, up-country place, with a few cultured, agreeable European inhabitants – provided that they harmonized with one another and did not quarrel overmuch in the intimacy of their common life – to this pretentious, pompous, dreary Batavia. The only life was among the military element. Only the officers' houses were lit up in the evening. Apart from this, the town lay as though moribund, the whole long, hot day, with its frown of care, with its invisible population of people looking towards the future: a future of money, a future perhaps even more of rest, in Europe.

And she longed to get away. Batavia suffocated her, notwithstanding her daily drive round the spacious Koningsplein. She had only one wish left, a melancholy wish: to say good-bye to Van Oudijck. Her peculiar temperament, that of a smart, artistic woman, had, very strangely, appreciated and felt the fascination of his character, that of a simple, practical man. She had perhaps, only for a moment, felt something for him, deep down within herself, a friendship which formed a sort of contrast with her friendship for Van Helderer, an appreciation of his fine human qualities rather than a feeling of Platonic community of souls. She had felt a sympathetic pity for him in those strange, mysterious days, for the man living alone in his enormous house, with the strange happenings creeping in upon him. She had felt intensely sorry for him when his wife, kicking aside her exalted position, had gone away in an insolent mood, arousing a storm of scandal, nobody knew exactly why: his wife, at one time always so correct in her demeanour, notwithstanding all her depravity, but gradually devoured by the canker of the strange happenings until she was no longer able to restrain herself, baring the innermost secrets of her profligate soul with cynical indifference. The red betel-slaver, spat as it were by ghosts on her naked body, had affected her like a sickness, had eaten into the marrow of her bones, like a disintegration of her soul, of which she might perhaps die, slowly wasting away. What people now said of her, of her mode of life in Paris, represented something so unutterably depraved that it was not to be mentioned above a whisper.

Eva heard about it at Batavia, amid the gossip at the evening-parties. And, when she asked after Van Oudijck – where he was staying, whether he would soon be going to Europe, after his unexpected resignation, a thing that had surprised the whole official world – they were unable to tell her, they asked one another if he was no longer at the Hôtel Wisse, where he had been seen only a few weeks ago, lying on his chair in his little verandah, with his legs on the rests, staring fixedly before him

without moving a limb. He had hardly gone out at all, taking his meals in his room and not at the table-d'hôte, as though he—the man who had always been accustomed to dealing with hundreds of people—had become shy of meeting his fellow-creatures. And at last Eva heard that Van Oudijck was living at Bandong. As she had to pay some farewell visits, she went to the Preanger. But he was not to be found at Bandong: all that the hotel-proprietor was able to tell her was that Van Oudijck had stayed a few days at his place, but had since gone, he did not know whither.

Then at last, by accident, she heard from a man whom she met at dinner that Van Oudijck was living near Garut. She went to Garut, feeling pleased to be on his track. The people in the hotel were able to direct her to where he lived. She could not decide whether she should first write to him and announce her visit. Something seemed to warn her that, if she did, he would make some excuse and that she would not see him. And she, now that she was on the point of leaving Java for good, wanted to see him, from motives of mingled affection and curiosity. She wished to see for herself how he looked, to get out of him why he had so suddenly sent in his resignation and thrown up his enviable position in life, a position instantly seized by the next man after him, in the great push for promotion.

So, next morning, very early, without sending him word, she drove away in a carriage belonging to the hotel. The landlord had explained to the coachman where he was to go. And she drove a very long way, along Lake Lellès, the sombre sacred lake with the two islands containing the age-old tombs of saints, while above it hovered, like a dark cloud of desolation, an ever-circling flock of enormous black bats, flapping their demon wings and screeching their cry of despair, wheeling round and round incessantly: a black, funereal swirl against the infinite blue depths of the ether, as though they, the demons who had once dreaded light, had triumphed and no longer feared the day, because they obscured it with the shadow of their sombre flight. And it was all so oppressive: the sacred lake, the sacred tombs and above them a horde as of black devils in the deep blue ether, because it was as though a part of the mystery of India were being suddenly revealed, no longer hiding itself, a vague, impalpable presence, but actually visible in the sunlight, rousing dismay with its menacing victory.... Eva shuddered; and, as she glanced up timidly, she felt as though the black multitude of screening wings might beat down ... upon her.... But the shadow of death between her and the sun only whirled dizzily around, high above her head, and only uttered its despondent cry of triumph.... She drove on; and the plain of Lellès lay green and smiling before her. And that second of revelation had already ticked past: there was nothing now but the green and blue luxuriance of the Javanese landscape; the mystery was already hidden away among the delicate, waving bamboos or merged in the azure ocean of the sky.

The coachman was driving slowly up a steep hill. The liquid rice-fields rose in terraces like stairs of looking-glass, pale-green with carefully-planted blades of paddy; then, suddenly, there came as who should say an avenue of ferns: gigantic ferns, waving their fans on high, with great fabulous butterflies fluttering around them. And between the diaphanous foliage of the bamboos there appeared a small house, built half of stone, half of wattled bamboo, surrounded by a little garden containing a few white pots of roses. A very young woman in sarong and kabaai, with cheeks gleaming like pale gold and coal-black eyes inquisitively peeping, looked out in surprise at the carriage, which was approaching very slowly, and fled indoors. Eva alighted and coughed. And she suddenly caught a glimpse of Van Oudijck's face, peering round a screen in the middle gallery. He disappeared at once.

"Resident!" she cried, in a coaxing tone.

But no one appeared and she grew confused. She dared not sit down and yet she did not want to go away. But round the corner of the house, outside, there peeped a little face, two little brown faces, the faces of very young half-caste girls, and vanished again, giggling. Inside the house, Eva heard a greatly excited, very nervous whispering:

"Sidin! Sidin!" she heard somebody call, in a whisper.

She smiled, took courage and stayed and walked about in the little front-verandah. And at last there came an old woman, not perhaps so very old in years, but old in wrinkled skin and eyes that had grown dim, wearing a coloured chintz sabaai and dragging her slippers; and, beginning with a few words of Dutch and then taking refuge in Malay, smiling politely, she requested Eva to be seated and said that the resident would be there at once. She herself sat down, smiled, did not know what to talk about, did not know what to answer when Eva asked her about the lake, about the road. All that she could do was to fetch syrup and iced-water and wafers; and she did not talk, but only smiled and looked after her visitor. When the young half-caste faces peeped round the corner, the old woman angrily stamped her slippered foot and scolded them with a hasty word; and then they disappeared, giggling and running away with an audible patter of little bare feet. Then the old woman smiled again with her eternally smiling wrinkled face and looked at the lady timidly, as though apologizing. And it was a very long time before Van Oudijck at last entered the room.

He welcomed Eva effusively, excused himself for keeping her waiting. It was obvious that he had shaved in a hurry and put on a clean white suit. And he was evidently glad to see her. The old woman departed, with her eternal smile of apology. In that first cheerful moment, Van Oudijck seemed to Eva exactly the same as usual; but, when he had calmed down and taken a chair and asked her whether she had heard from Eldersma and when she herself was going to Europe, she saw

that he had grown older, an old man. It did not show in his figure, which, in his well-starched white suit, still preserved its broad, soldierly air, a sturdy build, with only the back a little more bowed, as though under a burden. But it showed in his face, in the dull, uninterested glance, in the deep furrows of the careworn forehead, in the colour of his skin, which was dry and yellow, while the thick moustache, about which the jovial smile still flickered at intervals, had turned quite grey. His hands shook nervously. And, when she told him what people had said at Labuwangi, he listened without interrupting, betraying a lingering curiosity about the people yonder, about the district of which he had once been so fond. She discussed it all vaguely, glossing over things, putting the best face on them and, above all, saying nothing of the gossip: that he had taken French leave, that he had run away, nobody quite knew why.

"And you, resident," she asked, "are you going to Europe too?"

He stared in front of him and gave a painful laugh before replying. And at last he said, almost shyly:

"No, mevrouwte. I don't think I'll go home. You see, I've been somebody out here, in India; I'd be nobody over there. I'm nobody now, I know; but still I feel that India has become my country. It has got the upper hand of me; and I belong to it now. I no longer belong to Holland, and I have nothing and nobody in Holland that belongs to me. I'm finished, it's true; but still I'd rather drag out my existence here than there. In Holland I should certainly not be able to stand the climate ... or the people. Here the climate suits me and I have withdrawn from society. I have helped Theo for the last time; and Doddie is married. And the two boys are going to Europe, to school...."

He suddenly bent towards her and, in a changed voice, he almost whispered, as though about to make a confession:

"You see, if everything had gone normally, then ... then I should not have acted as I did. I have always been a practical man and I was proud of it and proud of living the normal life, my own life, which I lived in accordance with principles that I thought were right, until I reached a high place among my fellow-men. I have always been like that and things went well like that. Everything went swimmingly with me. When others were worrying about their promotion, I passed over the heads of five men at a bound. It was all plain sailing for me, at least in my official career. I have not been lucky in my domestic life, but I should never have been weak enough to break down on the road with grief because of that. A man has so much outside his domestic life. And yet I was always very fond of my family-circle. I don't think it was my fault that everything went as it did. I loved my wife, I loved my children, I loved my home, my home surroundings, in which I was the husband, and father. But that feeling in me was never fully satisfied. My first wife was a half-caste whom

I married because I was in love with her. Because she could not get the upper hand of me with her whim-whams, things became impossible after a few years. I was perhaps even more in love with my second wife than with my first: I am simply constituted in these matters. But I was never allowed to have a pleasant home-circle, a pleasant, kindly wife, children climbing on your knees and growing up into men and women who owe their lives to you, their existence, in short, everything that they have and possess. That is what I should have liked to have. But, as I say, though I did not get it, that would never have pulled me under....”

He was silent for a moment and then continued in an even more mysterious whisper:

“But that, you see, the thing that happened.... I never understood; and it’s that which brought me to where I am. That ... all that ... which clashed and interfered with my practical, logical ideas of life ... all that” —he struck the table with his fist— “all that damned nonsense, which ... which happened all the same: that did the trick. I did not shirk the fight, but my strength was no use to me. It was something against which nothing availed.... I know: it was the regent. When I threatened him it stopped.... But, my God, mevrouw-tje, tell me, what was it? Do you know? You don’t, do you? Nobody knew and nobody knows. Those terrible nights, those inexplicable noises over head, that night in the bathroom with the major and the other officers! It wasn’t any hallucination: we saw it, we heard it, we felt it, it spat at us, it covered us from head to foot; the whole bathroom was full of it! It is easy for other people, who didn’t experience it, to deny it. But I ... and all of us ... we saw it, heard it and felt it! And we none of us knew who it was.... And since then I have never ceased to feel it. It was all around me, in the air, under my feet.... You see,” he whispered very softly, “that—and that alone—did it. That made it impossible for me to stay there. That caused me to be struck stupid, to become a sort of idiot in the midst of my normal life, in the midst of my practical good sense and logic, which suddenly appeared to me in the light of an ill-constructed theory of life, of the most abstract speculation, because, right through it, things were happening that belonged to another world, things that escaped me and everybody else. That, that alone, did it! I was no longer myself. I no longer knew what I was thinking, what I was doing, what I had done. Everything in me was tottering. That ruffian in the compound is no child of mine: I’ll stake my life on it. And I ... I believed it. I sent him money. Tell me, do you understand me? I don’t suppose you do. It’s not to be understood, that strange, unnatural business, if you haven’t experienced it, in your flesh and in your blood, till it finds its way into your marrow....”

“I do believe that I also experienced it, once in a way,” she whispered. “When I was walking with Van Helder by the sea ... and the sky was so far and the night so deep ... or the rains came rustling towards us from so very far away and then fell ...

or when the nights, silent as death and yet brimful of sounds, quivered about one, always with a music which one could not catch and could scarcely hear.... Or simply when I looked into the eyes of a Javanese, when I spoke to my babu and it seemed as though nothing of what I said reached her mind and as though what she replied concealed her real, secret answer....”

“That, again, is another thing,” he said. “I can’t understand that: as far as I was concerned, I knew my native through and through. But possibly every European feels it in a different way, according to his nature and his temperament. To one it is perhaps the dislike which he begins by feeling for the country that attacks him in the weak point of his materialism and continues to oppose him ... whereas the country itself is so full of poetry, I might almost say mysticism. To another it is the climate, or the character of the native, or what you will, that is antagonistic and incomprehensible. To me ... it was the facts which I could not understand. And until then I had always been able to understand a fact ... at least, I thought so. Now it appeared to me as though I no longer understood anything.... In this way, I became an incompetent official and then I realized that it was all over. And then I quietly resigned my post. And now I’m here ... and here I mean to stay. And do you know the strange part of it? Perhaps I have – at last – found my family-circle here....”

The little brown faces were peeping round the corner. And he called to them, beckoned to them kindly, with a broad fatherly gesture. But they pattered away again, audibly, on their bare feet. He laughed:

“They’re very timid, the little monkeys,” he said. “It’s Lena’s little sisters; and the woman you saw just now is her mother.”

He was silent for a second, quite simply, as though she was bound to understand who Lena was: the very young woman, with the golden bloom on her cheeks and the coal-black eyes, of whom she had caught a fleeting glimpse.

“And then there are some little brothers, who go to school in Garut. Well, you see, that’s my domestic circle. When I came to know Lena, I adopted the whole family. I admit it costs me a lot of money, for I have my first wife at Batavia, my second in Paris, and René and Ricus in Holland. It all costs me money. And now my new ‘home-circle’ here. But now at least I have my circle.... It’s a very Indian kettle of fish, you’ll say: that Indian quasi-marriage to the daughter of a coffee-overseer, with the old woman and the little brothers and sisters included in the bargain. But I’m doing a little good. The family haven’t a cent and I’m helping them. And Lena is a dear child and is the comfort of my old age. I can’t live without a wife; and so it happened of itself.... And it works very well: I lead a cabbage-life and drink first-rate coffee; and they look after the old man....”

He was silent and then continued:

"And you ... you are going to Europe? Poor Eldersma, I hope he'll be better soon! It's all my fault, isn't it? I worked him too hard. But it's like that in India, mevrouw. We all work too hard here ... until we stop working altogether. And you are going ... in a week? How glad you will be to see your father and mother and to hear some good music? I am still always grateful to you. You did much for us, you stood for poetry in Labuwangi. Poor India! How they rail at her! After all, the country can't help it that we freebooters have invaded their territory, barbarian conquerors that we are, only working to grow rich and get away! And then, when they don't grow rich, they start railing: at the heat, which God gave it from the beginning; at the lack of nourishment for mind and soul: mind and soul of the freebooter! The poor country railed at like this may well say in itself, 'You could have stayed away!' And you ... you didn't like India either."

"I tried to grasp the poetry of it. And now and then I succeeded. For the rest, it's my fault, resident, and not the fault of this beautiful country. Like your freebooter, I should have stayed away. All my depression, all the melancholy from which I suffered in this beautiful land of mystery, is my own fault. I don't rail at India, resident."

He took her hand and, almost with emotion, almost with a gleam of moisture in his eyes, said, softly:

"I thank you for saying so. Those words are like you, the words of a sensible, cultivated woman, who doesn't rave and rant, as a silly Dutchman would at not finding in this country exactly what corresponded with his petty ideals. Your temperament suffered much here, I know. It was bound to. But it was not the fault of the country."

"It was my own fault, resident," she repeated, with her soft, smiling voice.

He thought her adorable. That she did not burst into imprecations, that she did not fly into ecstasies because she was leaving Java in a few days' time gave him a sense of comfort. And, when she rose to go, saying that it was getting late, he felt very sad:

"And so I shall never see you again?"

"I don't think that we shall be coming back."

"It's good-bye for ever, then!"

"Perhaps we shall see you in Europe."

He made a gesture of denial:

"I am more grateful to you than I can say for coming to look the old man up. I shall drive with you to Garut."

He called out something indoors, where the women were keeping out of sight and the little sisters giggling. He stepped into the carriage by her side. They drove down the avenue of ferns; and suddenly they saw the Sacred Lake of Lellès, overshadowed by the circling swirl of the bats ever flapping round and round:

"Resident," she whispered, "I feel it here...."

He smiled:

"They are only bats," he said.

"But at Labuwangi ... it was perhaps only a rat."

He just wrinkled his brows; then he smiled again, with the jovial smile about his thick moustache, and looked up with inquisitive eyes:

"What?" he said, softly. "Really? Do you feel it here?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't. It's different with everybody."

The giant bats shrilled their triumph in shrieks of desolation. The little carriage drove on and passed a little railway-halt. And, in the otherwise lonely region, it was strange to see a whole populace, a swarm of motley Sundanese, streaming towards the little station, eagerly gazing at a slow train which was approaching, belching black clouds of smoke amidst the bamboos. All their eyes were staring crazily, as though anticipating the bliss of the first glance, as though their first impression would be a treasure for their souls.

"That's a train full of new hadjis," said Van Oudijk. "They're all pilgrims newly returned from Mecca."

The train stopped; and from the long third-class carriages, solemnly, slowly, very devoutly and conscious of their dignity, the hadjis alighted, in their rich white-and-yellow turbans, their eyes gleaming with pride, their lips pursed with conceit, in brand-new, shiny coats and gold-and-purple skirts which fell in stately folds to just above their feet. And, humming with rapturous excitement, sometimes with a rising cry of ecstasy, the waiting multitude pressed closer and stormed the narrow doorways of the long railway-coaches.... The hadjis solemnly alighted. And their brothers and friends vied with one another in grasping their hands and the hems of their gold-and-purple skirts and kissed that sacred hand or that sacred garment, because it brought them something of Mecca the Holy. They fought, they hustled one another around the hadjis, to be the first to give the kiss. And the hadjis, conceited and self-conscious, seemed unaware of the struggle, maintained a peaceful dignity and a solemn stateliness amid the struggle, amid the billowing, buzzing

multitude, and surrendered their hands, surrendered the hem of their garments to the fanatical kiss of all who approached.

And, in this land of profound, secret, slumbering mystery, in this people of Java, which, as always, hid itself in the secrecy of its impenetrable soul, suppressed indeed, but visible, it was strange to see an ecstasy rising to the surface, to see an intoxicated fanaticism, to see a part of that impenetrable soul revealed in its deification of those who had beheld the tomb of the prophet, to hear the soft humming of a religious rapture, to hear, suddenly, unexpectedly, a shout of glory, not to be suppressed, quavering on high, a cry which instantly sank again, drowned in the hum, as though itself fearful, because the sacred era had not yet arrived....

And Van Oudijck and Eva, on the road behind the station, slowly driving past the busy multitude which still buzzed about the hadjis, respectfully carrying their luggage, obsequiously offering their little carts: Van Oudijck and Eva suddenly looked at each other and, though neither of them cared to express it in words, they told each other with a glance of understanding, that they felt it, that they felt that, both of them, both together this time, in the midst of this fanatical multitude....

They both felt it, the unutterable thing, the thing that lurks in the ground, that hisses under the volcanoes, that slowly draws near with the far-travelled winds, that rushes onwards with the rain, that rattles by in the heavy, rolling thunder, that is wafted from the far horizon of the boundless sea; the thing that flashes from the black, mysterious gaze of the secretive native, that creeps in his heart and cringes in his humble salutation; the thing that gnaws like a poison and a hostile force at the body, soul and life of the European, that silently attacks the conqueror and saps his energies, causing him to pine and perish, sapping his energies very slowly, so that he wastes away for years; and in the end he dies of it, perhaps by a sudden, tragic death: they both felt it, both felt the unutterable thing....

And, in feeling it, together with the sadness of their leave-taking, which was so near at hand, they failed to see, amid the waving, billowing, buzzing multitude which reverently hustled the yellow-and-purple dignity of the hadjis returned from Mecca, they failed to see that one, tall, white hadji rising above the crowd and peering with a grin at the man who, though he had lived his life in Java, had been weaker than That....

The End.