

## PART TWO

### CHAPTER ONE

As we know, Heyst had gone to stay in Schomberg's hotel in complete ignorance that his person was odious to that worthy. When he arrived, Zangiaco's Ladies' Orchestra had been established there for some time.

The business which had called him out from his seclusion in his lost corner of the Eastern seas was with the Tesmans, and it had something to do with money. He transacted it quickly, and then found himself with nothing to do while he awaited Davidson, who was to take him back to his solitude; for back to his solitude Heyst meant to go. He whom we used to refer to as the Enchanted Heyst was suffering from thorough disenchantment. Not with the islands, however. The Archipelago has a lasting fascination. It is not easy to shake off the spell of island life. Heyst was disenchanted with life as a whole. His scornful temperament, beguiled into action, suffered from failure in a subtle way unknown to men accustomed to grapple with the realities of common human enterprise. It was like the gnawing pain of useless apostasy, a sort of shame before his own betrayed nature; and in addition, he also suffered from plain, downright remorse. He deemed himself guilty of Morrison's death. A rather absurd feeling, since no one could possibly have foreseen the horrors of the cold, wet summer lying in wait for poor Morrison at home.

It was not in Heyst's character to turn morose; but his mental state was not compatible with a sociable mood. He spent his evenings sitting apart on the veranda of Schomberg's hotel. The lamentations of string instruments issued from the building in the hotel compound, the approaches to which were decorated with Japanese paper lanterns strung up between the trunks of several big trees. Scraps of tunes more or less plaintive reached his ears. They pursued him even into his bedroom, which opened into an upstairs veranda. The fragmentary and rasping character of these sounds made their intrusion inexpressibly tedious in the long run. Like most dreamers, to whom it is given sometimes to hear the music of the spheres, Heyst, the wanderer of the Archipelago, had a taste for silence which he had been able to gratify for years. The islands are very quiet. One sees them lying about, clothed in their dark garments of leaves, in a great hush of silver and azure, where the sea without

murmurs meets the sky in a ring of magic stillness. A sort of smiling somnolence broods over them; the very voices of their people are soft and subdued, as if afraid to break some protecting spell.

Perhaps this was the very spell which had enchanted Heyst in the early days. For him, however, that was broken. He was no longer enchanted, though he was still a captive of the islands. He had no intention to leave them ever. Where could he have gone to, after all these years? Not a single soul belonging to him lived anywhere on earth. Of this fact—not such a remote one, after all—he had only lately become aware; for it is failure that makes a man enter into himself and reckon up his resources. And though he had made up his mind to retire from the world in hermit fashion, yet he was irrationally moved by this sense of loneliness which had come to him in the hour of renunciation. It hurt him. Nothing is more painful than the shock of sharp contradictions that lacerate our intelligence and our feelings.

Meantime Schomberg watched Heyst out of the corner of his eye. Towards the unconscious object of his enmity he preserved a distant lieutenant-of-the-Reserve demeanour. Nudging certain of his customers with his elbow, he begged them to observe what airs “that Swede” was giving himself.

“I really don't know why he has come to stay in my house. This place isn't good enough for him. I wish to goodness he had gone somewhere else to show off his superiority. Here I have got up this series of concerts for you gentlemen, just to make things a little brighter generally; and do you think he'll condescend to step in and listen to a piece or two of an evening? Not he. I know him of old. There he sits at the dark end of the piazza, all the evening long—planning some new swindle, no doubt. For two-pence I would ask him to go and look for quarters somewhere else; only one doesn't like to treat a white man like that out in the tropics. I don't know how long he means to stay, but I'm willing to bet a trifle that he'll never work himself up to the point of spending the fifty cents of entrance money for the sake of a little good music.”

Nobody cared to bet, or the hotel-keeper would have lost. One evening Heyst was driven to desperation by the rasped, squeaked, scraped snatches of tunes pursuing him even to his hard couch, with a mattress as thin as a pancake and a diaphanous mosquito net. He descended among the trees, where the soft glow of Japanese lanterns picked out parts of their great rugged trunks, here and there, in the great mass of darkness under the lofty foliage. More lanterns, of the shape of cylindrical concertinas, hanging in a row from a slack string, decorated the doorway of what Schomberg called grandiloquently “my concert-hall.” In his desperate mood Heyst ascended three steps, lifted a calico curtain, and went in.

The uproar in that small, barn-like structure, built of imported pine boards, and raised clear of the ground, was simply stunning. An instrumental uproar,

screaming, grunting, whining, sobbing, scraping, squeaking some kind of lively air; while a grand piano, operated upon by a bony, red-faced woman with bad-tempered nostrils, rained hard notes like hail through the tempest of fiddles. The small platform was filled with white muslin dresses and crimson sashes slanting from shoulders provided with bare arms, which sawed away without respite. Zangiaco conducted. He wore a white mess-jacket, a black dress waistcoat, and white trousers. His longish, tousled hair and his great beard were purple-black. He was horrible. The heat was terrific. There were perhaps thirty people having drinks at several little tables. Heyst, quite overcome by the volume of noise, dropped into a chair. In the quick time of that music, in the varied, piercing clamour of the strings, in the movements of the bare arms, in the low dresses, the coarse faces, the stony eyes of the executants, there was a suggestion of brutality—something cruel, sensual and repulsive.

“This is awful!” Heyst murmured to himself.

But there is an unholy fascination in systematic noise. He did not flee from it incontinently, as one might have expected him to do. He remained, astonished at himself for remaining, since nothing could have been more repulsive to his tastes, more painful to his senses, and, so to speak, more contrary to his genius, than this rude exhibition of vigour. The Zangiaco band was not making music; it was simply murdering silence with a vulgar, ferocious energy. One felt as if witnessing a deed of violence; and that impression was so strong that it seemed marvellous to see the people sitting so quietly on their chairs, drinking so calmly out of their glasses, and giving no signs of distress, anger, or fear. Heyst averted his gaze from the unnatural spectacle of their indifference.

When the piece of music came to an end the relief was so great that he felt slightly dizzy, as if a chasm of silence had yawned at his feet. When he raised his eyes, the audience, most perversely, was exhibiting signs of animation and interest in their faces, and the women in white muslin dresses were coming down in pairs from the platform into the body of Schomberg's “concert-hall.” They dispersed themselves all over the place. The male creature with the hooked nose and purple-black beard disappeared somewhere. This was the interval during which, as the astute Schomberg had stipulated, the members of the orchestra were encouraged to favour the members of the audience with their company—that is, such members as seemed inclined to fraternize with the arts in a familiar and generous manner; the symbol of familiarity and generosity consisting in offers of refreshment.

The procedure struck Heyst as highly incorrect. However, the impropriety of Schomberg's ingenious scheme was defeated by the circumstance that most of the women were no longer young, and that none of them had ever been beautiful. Their more or less worn cheeks were slightly rouged, but apart from that fact, which might have been simply a matter of routine, they did not seem to take the

success of the scheme unduly to heart. The impulse to fraternize with the arts being obviously weak in the audience, some of the musicians sat down listlessly at unoccupied tables, while others went on perambulating the central passage: arm in arm, glad enough, no doubt, to stretch their legs while resting their arms. Their crimson sashes gave a factitious touch of gaiety to the smoky atmosphere of the concert-hall; and Heyst felt a sudden pity for these beings, exploited, hopeless, devoid of charm and grace, whose fate of cheerless dependence invested their coarse and joyless features with a touch of pathos.

Heyst was temperamentally sympathetic. To have them passing and repassing close to his little table was painful to him. He was preparing to rise and go out when he noticed that two white muslin dresses and crimson sashes had not yet left the platform. One of these dresses concealed the raw-boned frame of the woman with the bad-tempered curve to her nostrils. She was no less a personage than Mrs. Zangiaco. She had left the piano, and, with her back to the hall, was preparing the parts for the second half of the concert, with a brusque, impatient action of her ugly elbow. This task done, she turned, and, perceiving the other white muslin dress motionless on a chair in the second row, she strode towards it between the music-stands with an aggressive and masterful gait. On the lap of that dress there lay, unclasped and idle, a pair of small hands, not very white, attached to well-formed arms. The next detail Heyst was led to observe was the arrangement of the hair—two thick, brown tresses rolled round an attractively shaped head.

“A girl, by Jove!” he exclaimed mentally.

It was evident that she was a girl. It was evident in the outline of the shoulders, in the slender white bust springing up, barred slantwise by the crimson sash, from the bell-shaped spread of muslin skirt hiding the chair on which she sat averted a little from the body of the hall. Her feet, in low white shoes, were crossed prettily.

She had captured Heyst's awakened faculty of observation; he had the sensation of a new experience. That was because his faculty of observation had never before been captured by any feminine creature in that marked and exclusive fashion. He looked at her anxiously, as no man ever looks at another man; and he positively forgot where he was. He had lost touch with his surroundings. The big woman, advancing, concealed the girl from his sight for a moment. She bent over the seated youthful figure, in passing it very close, as if to drop a word into its ear. Her lips did certainly move. But what sort of word could it have been to make the girl jump up so swiftly? Heyst, at his table, was surprised into a sympathetic start. He glanced quickly round. Nobody was looking towards the platform; and when his eyes swept back there again, the girl, with the big woman treading at her heels, was coming down the three steps from the platform to the floor of the hall. There she paused, stumbled one pace

forward, and stood still again, while the other—the escort, the dragoon, the coarse big woman of the piano—passed her roughly, and, marching truculently down the centre aisle between the chairs and tables, went out to rejoin the hook-nosed Zangiaco somewhere outside. During her extraordinary transit, as if everything in the hall were dirt under her feet, her scornful eyes met the upward glance of Heyst, who looked away at once towards the girl. She had not moved. Her arms hung down; her eyelids were lowered.

Heyst laid down his half-smoked cigar and compressed his lips. Then he got up. It was the same sort of impulse which years ago had made him cross the sandy street of the abominable town of Delli in the island of Timor and accost Morrison, practically a stranger to him then, a man in trouble, expressively harassed, dejected, lonely.

It was the same impulse. But he did not recognize it. He was not thinking of Morrison then. It may be said that, for the first time since the final abandonment of the Samburan coal mine, he had completely forgotten the late Morrison. It is true that to a certain extent he had forgotten also where he was. Thus, unchecked by any sort of self consciousness, Heyst walked up the central passage.

Several of the women, by this time, had found anchorage here and there among the occupied tables. They talked to the men, leaning on their elbows, and suggesting funnily—if it hadn't been for the crimson sashes—in their white dresses an assembly of middle-aged brides with free and easy manners and hoarse voices. The murmuring noise of conversations carried on with some spirit filled Schomberg's concert-room. Nobody remarked Heyst's movements; for indeed he was not the only man on his legs there. He had been confronting the girl for some time before she became aware of his presence. She was looking down, very still, without colour, without glances, without voice, without movement. It was only when Heyst addressed her in his courteous tone that she raised her eyes.

“Excuse me,” he said in English, “but that horrible female has done something to you. She has pinched you, hasn't she? I am sure she pinched you just now, when she stood by your chair.”

The girl received this overture with the wide, motionless stare of profound astonishment. Heyst, vexed with himself, suspected that she did not understand what he said. One could not tell what nationality these women were, except that they were of all sorts. But she was astonished almost more by the near presence of the man himself, by his largely bald head, by the white brow, the sunburnt cheeks, the long, horizontal moustaches of crinkly bronze hair, by the kindly expression of the man's blue eyes looking into her own. He saw the stony amazement in hers give way to a momentary alarm, which was succeeded by an expression of resignation.

“I am sure she pinched your arm most cruelly,” he murmured, rather disconcerted now at what he had done.

It was a great comfort to hear her say:

“It wouldn't have been the first time. And suppose she did—what are you going to do about it?”

“I don't know,” he said with a faint, remote playfulness in his tone which had not been heard in it lately, and which seemed to catch her ear pleasantly. “I am grieved to say that I don't know. But can I do anything? What would you wish me to do? Pray command me.”

Again, the greatest astonishment became visible in her face; for she now perceived how different he was from the other men in the room. He was as different from them as she was different from the other members of the ladies' orchestra.

“Command you?” she breathed, after a time, in a bewildered tone. “Who are you?” she asked a little louder.

“I am staying in this hotel for a few days. I just dropped in casually here. This outrage—”

“Don't you try to interfere,” she said so earnestly that Heyst asked, in his faintly playful tone:

“Is it your wish that I should leave you?”

“I haven't said that,” the girl answered. “She pinched me because I didn't get down here quick enough—”

“I can't tell you how indignant I am—” said Heyst. “But since you are down here now,” he went on, with the ease of a man of the world speaking to a young lady in a drawing-room, “hadn't we better sit down?”

She obeyed his inviting gesture, and they sat down on the nearest chairs. They looked at each other across a little round table with a surprised, open gaze, self-consciousness growing on them so slowly that it was a long time before they averted their eyes; and very soon they met again, temporarily, only to rebound, as it were. At last they steadied in contact, but by that time, say some fifteen minutes from the moment when they sat down, the “interval” came to an end.

So much for their eyes. As to the conversation, it had been perfectly insignificant because naturally they had nothing to say to each other. Heyst had been interested by the girl's physiognomy. Its expression was neither simple nor yet very clear. It was not distinguished—that could not be expected—but the features had more fineness than those of any other feminine countenance he had ever had the opportunity to observe so closely. There was in it something indefinably audacious and infinitely miserable—because the temperament and the existence of that girl were reflected in it. But her voice! It seduced Heyst by

its amazing quality. It was a voice fit to utter the most exquisite things, a voice which would have made silly chatter supportable and the roughest talk fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune.

“Do you sing as well as play?” he asked her abruptly.

“Never sang a note in my life,” she said, obviously surprised by the irrelevant question; for they had not been discoursing of sweet sounds. She was clearly unaware of her voice. “I don't remember that I ever had much reason to sing since I was little,” she added.

That inelegant phrase, by the mere vibrating, warm nobility of the sound, found its way into Heyst's heart. His mind, cool, alert, watched it sink there with a sort of vague concern at the absurdity of the occupation, till it rested at the bottom, deep down, where our unexpressed longings lie.

“You are English, of course?” he said.

“What do you think?” she answered in the most charming accents. Then, as if thinking that it was her turn to place a question: “Why do you always smile when you speak?”

It was enough to make anyone look grave, but her good faith was so evident that Heyst recovered himself at once.

“It's my unfortunate manner—” he said with his delicate, polished playfulness. “Is it very objectionable to you?”

She was very serious.

“No. I only noticed it. I haven't come across so many pleasant people as all that, in my life.”

“It's certain that this woman who plays the piano is infinitely more disagreeable than any cannibal I have ever had to do with.”

“I believe you!” She shuddered. “How did you come to have anything to do with cannibals?”

“It would be too long a tale,” said Heyst with a faint smile. Heyst's smiles were rather melancholy, and accorded badly with his great moustaches, under which his mere playfulness lurked as comfortable as a shy bird in its native thicket. “Much too long. How did you get amongst this lot here?”

“Bad luck,” she answered briefly.

“No doubt, no doubt,” Heyst assented with slight nods. Then, still indignant at the pinch which he had divined rather than actually seen inflicted: “I say, couldn't you defend yourself somehow?”

She had risen already. The ladies of the orchestra were slowly regaining their places. Some were already seated, idle stony-eyed, before the music-stands. Heyst was standing up, too.

“They are too many for me,” she said.

These few words came out of the common experience of mankind; yet by virtue of her voice, they thrilled Heyst like a revelation. His feelings were in a state of confusion, but his mind was clear.

“That's bad. But it isn't actual ill-usage that this girl is complaining of,” he thought lucidly after she left him.