First Edition . . . 1932

Karlee, Varfelli [Charles E. Cooper]. Love in Ebony: A West African Romance. London: John Murray, 1932. Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1970.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO
MY MOTHER

FOREWORD

IN 1820 a first shipload of eighty-eight emigrants sailed from New York for the West Coast of Africa to found a new home for slaves freed from the cotton plantations of the United States. It is owing to this Negro *Mayflower* that we have to-day the Republic of Liberia. Its passengers fought disease, slave-traders, and tribes of the interior who, not unnaturally, resented the arrival of a whole party of people, who resembled them in colour but not in ideas, from across the Atlantic. But they won through. The author of *Love in Ebony* is the grandson of one of those early pioneers.

Liberia has been given unwelcome prominence in the newspapers since a League of Nations report published last year confirmed the existence of forms of forced labour amounting in many cases to definite slavery. " You see," the cynics said, " you can't wipe out these things. Here are the descendants of American slaves themselves encouraging slavery. Here's another experiment which has failed. Here are

the Americo-Liberians, who live along the coast, 'pawning' the Liberians of the interior to the Spaniards at Fernando Po. And the worst of them all was, until recently, Vice-President of the Republic."

That was one side of it. But the critics did not ask themselves to what extent economic hardship had to do with this unhappy state of affairs. Nor have they since troubled to find out how drastic are the measures the new government is taking, with the assistance of the League of Nations, to live up to that article in the Liberian constitution which prohibits slavery in all its forms.

The gentleman who writes under the name of "Varfelli Karlee" has not written a political novel, although he has all the necessary qualifications for doing so, for he has held very important official posts both in Liberia and abroad. He gives us a charming and simple love story of the "uncivilized" tribes of the interior ("uncivilized," to distinguish them from the "civilized" Americo-Liberians who live along the coast). Few white men have travelled in the districts he describes so poetically, and even those who have spent years up country could never write of tribal customs, as "Varfelli Karlee" does, from the inside. Through him we learn something of the "Porrow," the greatest and most mysterious

secret society closed to all but pure-blooded Africans—something, but not very much, for a breach of the oath of secrecy is punished by death. We learn more of the native sorcery which still so influences the native's Mohammedanism or Christianity. And we learn still more of the engaging simplicity of a race whose music, art and folk-lore has so unexpected but so considerable an influence on the civilization of the Whites. One hopes that *Love in Ebony* will find many readers, and that "Varfelli Karlee" will be encouraged to tell us more of such charming young ladies as Farmata Manjo.

VERNON BARTLETT.

March 1932.

GLOSSARY OF NATIVE IDIOMS

Zo	Grand Matron of the Ancient Order of the Porrow.
Kinjar . .	A native measure made of the branches of the palm plaited together, fastened to the heads of the labourers, and hanging down their backs. When filled with grain or palm kernels, it weighs 56 lb. net.
Bonnie . .	A maiden.
Ah-Ya-Da ! .	Oh, dear Lord !
Mahjah . .	A nobleman or person of honour.
Zor . . .	A pagan goddess who lived in trees and plants—said to possess preventive power against disease.

The word "Kinjar" is also used metaphorically in such sentences as :

"Don't bring your troubles to me," "Carry your own kinjar," or "Bear your own troubles."

CHAPTER I

FROM long before midnight, when the coming of cool darkness makes travelling less irksome than it is by day, a ceaseless stream of people had been flowing into the great market-places of Zinta.

Each year the ending of the forty days' Mohammedan fast with the feast of Ramadan and the opening of the native "Bush" sees this gathering of strangers from different parts of Liberia, even from as far away as Musurdu. Some are attracted to the beautiful north-western corner of the Republic solely by the religious celebrations—the singing and dancing that are so dear to the heart of the West-African native. Others, wishing to combine material with spiritual advantages, set forth from their homes more than a month before the feast itself, and travel through the moon-drenched nights and blazing days, with cargoes of raw rice and fruits, dried fish and meat, or a multiplicity of less perishable goods—gaudy, native-woven cloths and mattings, articles for household or personal adornment—barbaric

enough to alien eyes, but with a naïve, fantastic beauty all their own.

By sunrise the market-places with their booths of poles covered with palm-leaf thatch or cloth, loaded with glowing fruits and brilliant stuffs, with here and there the light striking a dazzling glint from brass or copper, closely resemble the bazaars found on the banks of the Nile.

Against this gay background women and girls in festal native costume move with the supple, graceful indolence of pose and gesture characteristic of a coloured race. As the sun rises higher the crowd increases with every moment. The talk and laughter of a child-like people, excited at the prospect of long-expected enjoyment, rise and fall. Voices mingle in the rhythmic cadence of a language that carries with it, even in the simplest speech, the primitive suggestion of a song.

The air at this early hour of the morning is fresh and sweet with scents from the forests that clothe the boundary mountains of the Zinta, or Zigida[1] district of the Liberian Republic.

Across the plain from which these guardian mountains rise, a river winds between green

[1] "At the mouth of a bug-a-bug hill," referring to the passage burrowed by the termite or white ants into the hill thrown up for their dwelling.

banks, from lake to lake, that lie within the clear ring of the horizon like patches of changing jewels beneath the sun-flooded arch of sky.

In the villages of this peaceful, agricultural country the people live simply and modestly in their thatch-covered mud huts, occupied chiefly with hunting, fishing, and the cultivation of rice which is, to a great extent, the staple food of the whole Republic.

Tribal rule still survives, but common Mohammedanism and some relationship of language have done much to promote more friendly intercourse between the native clans, while education, religious and secular, has, in many cases, made the outlook of the people more essentially simple than savage. Fatalists still, they live always in the present, unmindful of the morrow, and find their chief emotional expression in the traditional singing and dancing that characterize such native revelries as those of the New Moon, and the universal, yearly feast of Ramadan.

It was on a morning of such coming festival, while some coolness still breathed from the wide spaces of the rice-fields beside the river, that Farmata Manjo, of the tribe of Vai, wandered from stall to stall of the Zigida market-place, some three miles from her village home. The colour and movement about her, the

tonic freshness of the early air, the magical display of goods upon the booths, were a heady wine of enchantment at the lips of her youth. Her great, dark eyes shone in her oval dusky face, eager expectancy was in every line of her straight, lissom body, as she lingered at stall after stall, her slim, black fingers gently curious, touching now this, now that. Only when the owner spread deprecating hands in explanation of the price did her delighted absorption break into regretful smiles.

About one stall a little crowd had gathered. Farmata, hovering on its outskirts, tried vainly to see what the attraction was. Then, as the people parted and began to drift away, she edged herself in closer until at last her eyes fell upon a pair of armlets of elephant hide, curiously and beautifully wrought with metals.

"What lovely things!" she said involuntarily. "How much?"

At the sound of her voice the merchant, a tall Mandingo youth who had travelled from Foya, in Kanrelahun, to be present at the great feast, and was now busy at the back of his stall, apparently indifferent to the gaze or questions of idle sightseers, turned quickly.

For long weeks past he had been collecting, buying and valuing his curious, quaint wares. But business up to now had been slack. Perhaps because he had not been sufficiently

interested in any prospective purchaser to exercise the arts of salesmanship upon them.

Now, however, as his own more sombre glance caught Farmata's shining, wide-set eyes, it was as if a sudden electric thrill shot through him. For a moment surging excitement held him motionless. Then the desire to keep her at all costs until he had at least learned her name overcame commercial instincts.

"To you, *nya ngaza pago*,[1] the price is only twenty shillings. And if you buy them, they will bring you good fortune," he said softly.

The girl's curiosity was stirred. She longed to know what the future held in store for her, and there was something thrilling and disturbing in the intent gaze of the handsome young merchant's eyes.

She smiled a little uncertainly, lingering by the stall and playing for time by fingering the armlets caressingly. A sudden stillness fell about them, while Momolu silently counted his Tysabiya beads in prayer that she would stay.

At last Farmata put down the armlets with a sigh and turned to go without another word. The curious attraction she felt for the young merchant and the mystery surrounding the armlets filled her with half-superstitious fright. She was afraid to stay alone at the stall any

[1] My pretty maiden.

longer. She could scarcely control the uneven drawing of her breath.

Despair flooded Momolu at her movement.

"Stop one moment," he pleaded, snatching up the armlets and holding them out to her. "Take these as a gift. Only tell me your name."

The girl shook her head, struggling against the spell that seemed to bind her. Then as his eyes caught hers again and held them so that she could not look away:

"My name is Farmata," she faltered. "But I cannot take such a gift from a stranger. Besides, there is some mystery about these armlets. . . ."

"Would you like to know what it is?" interrupted Momolu, his mind catching eagerly at a possible means of seeing her again. "Will you meet me in the palm-grove, after the hour of prayer? Away from all these people I can tell you the secret."

"I don't know—I will think about it," said Farmata uncertainly.

She slipped away before Momolu could answer and was soon lost to his sight amongst the thronging crowds. She was queerly disturbed. She longed to know more about the mysterious armlets, and more still of the strange merchant who owned them. Something swift and sweet seemed to have passed between him and her.

Beneath the bright silk of her festal dress she could feel the quickened beating of her heart.

She hurried along, trying to put the whole episode out of her thoughts, when a sound of sobbing attracted her attention. Turning quickly, she saw a small boy standing alone, beating his tiny hands together and crying in an agony of fear.

Farmata went over and drew the unresisting child close to her, trying to check his hysterical sobbing. "What has frightened you?" she asked gently. "Where is your mother?"

"Mother's gone away," wailed the child, clinging frantically to his new friend.

"Poor little man! And are you hungry?"

The child nodded, raising his dark eyes trustfully to her face. Big tears were still rolling down his cheeks, but the violence of his grief was already passing, his crying subsiding to occasional convulsive sobs that seemed to rack his small body from head to foot. Then a little, elusive smile flickered suddenly at one corner of his mouth. He gave a funny, jigging skip and thrust a damp, very hot hand confidingly into Farmata's as a final sob tore its way through his plump person.

Farmata looked about her. But no one among the passers-by seemed to be concerned with the lost child. So, fearing a fresh outburst of tears, she lifted him in her arms and

walked quickly to the farther end of the great market, where numerous stalls containing ready-cooked foods were served by scantily clothed women. Having secured a bowl of rice and fish, she sat down on a little bamboo stool, in the shadow of a booth, took the child on her lap and began to feed him.

When his hunger was satisfied Farmata, by judicious questioning, discovered that his name was Quellie and that he had come with his mother from the neighbouring village of Gizima with dried fish, meat, and rice for sale in the market.

Since there is always a good sale for eatables during the approaching feast, coming as it does at the end of the forty days on which no true believer is allowed to eat or drink except before sunrise and at sunset, Farmata felt his story was probably true. How his mother had been parted from him she was, however, unable to find out. The mention of her brought ominous tears to the child's eyes, and as he was also showing signs of succumbing to that sudden need for sleep which overwhelms a healthy infant who has been suitably fed, she decided impulsively to take him home with her.

Holding him by the hand, she threaded her way along the crowded paths as quickly as she could. The heat of the day was now well established. The sun, blazing down from a

cloudless sky, brought quick, penetrating whiffs of scent from the stalls along the way—crushed fruit, a sudden breath of cedar-wood, the pungent aroma of hot animal and human bodies. The sun-baked mud of the rough-trodden roadway was hard as iron.

Farmata plodded along, the now contented child trotting placidly beside her, his little bare, black feet making no sound.

Not even to herself would she admit that her eyes sought furtively, yet eagerly, among the people now thronging homeward to their midday rest, for Momolu's tall figure—that her ears were alert to catch the alluring, half-frightening urgency of his voice. Away beyond the market-place she could see the tufted tops of the palm-grove, motionless in the windless air.

What should she do when the hour of prayer was over? Meet him beneath their cool silence and learn the secret of those beautiful armlets that already, in her mind, had about them a suggestion of fateful magic? She did not know. If she went at all it would be to hear their story only. She would not, must not, listen to anything else that the strange merchant might wish to say. She had no right . . .

The child tripped suddenly against a stone, dragging at Farmata's hand to save himself from falling. She caught him to her quickly

to stop the impending tears of hurt and weariness, with gentle comforting, and so momentarily forgot her problems, the meaning of which she was as yet unwilling to understand.

When she reached her home, on a hillside from which it was possible to see the tops of the booths in the great market, Farmata found the house empty, save for an old "Zo," her mother's elder sister. The old lady not unnaturally regarded the strange child suspiciously, and her curious questioning, to which she was unable to give satisfactory answers, made Farmata feel guiltily that she was being spied upon, not merely on account of the child. Nor was she able to account even to herself for the sudden impulse that had led her to carry off Quellie so summarily.

Her thoughts fled to her encounter with Momolu. Could they have been seen or overheard? Well, there was nothing to hide. Nevertheless, her mother would certainly disapprove of her speaking to a stranger.

Farmata's education at a village Mission Institute and, later, at a school in Monrovia, though it had given her some ideas that were above the heads of many of those amongst whom she now found herself at home, had done little or nothing to loosen the traditional bonds of subservience to parental rule that is the heritage of all primitive peoples.

She had not yet finally decided to meet Momolu in the palm-grove without her mother's knowledge. But even the thought of such rebellion was a spur that pricked her conscience to uneasy activity, and made of her present innocence a thing to be publicly, even gratuitously, displayed.

Apart, however, from the instinctive and trained respect she usually accorded to her blood-relations and their sometimes incomprehensible decrees, her dreams of romance had a purpose, a goal, an ideal. True love, she already knew, was not for bartering with gold or cattle.

While a pupil at the Institute, she had watched in wonder, and not a little awe, the meetings of the matron of the school with her young lover; had followed them secretly, beneath the stars, to a small cove, hidden by a great cotton-tree, on the bank of the St. Paul river. She had seen them kiss, had heard their quarrels and reconciliations, had seen their two ecstatic faces on their marriage-day. Such joy as theirs, she had determined then with all the fervour of romantic youth, should be hers also.

Later, in Monrovia, the busy seaport and capital of the Republic, her first acquaintance with another aspect of the subject, had shocked both her sentimental and tribal instincts. This

thing that was bought and sold between men and women could not be love, forbearing, kind, and beautiful as she believed it to be. And, brought up as she had been, as a member of the " Porrow " or " Bush," a secret African cult of great antiquity that glorifies maternity and decrees death to the violator of chastity, her thoughts shrank from the memory of those who, through misfortune, or avarice, had fallen to the ranks of outcasts or slaves.

Tasureba, the " Zo," watching Farmata now, and finding that her open curiosity evoked nothing more than sulky, non-committal replies from the girl, decided to air her annoyance with the neighbours, and went away indignantly to weave anew the age-old grievance of age against youth.

Left alone with the little boy, Farmata was suddenly conscious of overwhelming fatigue. It had been an exciting morning emotionally, and she had walked a considerable distance in the blazing sun. The child, too, was obviously sleepy. But, tired or not, both he and his one small garment were so dirty with heat and uncensored wanderings among the booths that Farmata decided he must be bathed before her mother or anyone else saw him.

Fetching a wooden tub, she put the little creature into it and watched his delighted splashing in the cool water with smiling eyes.

When his absurdly slippery body had been dried as adequately as his wriggling movements allowed, and he had been dressed in a fresh white shirt, much too long for him, she spread a mat on the floor, put two grass pillows at one end, gathered the child in her arms, and lay down to rest.

As sleep descended on them both Farmata's last conscious thought was of a tall youth who stood beneath a tufted palm-tree, and slipped, with caressing fingers, a pair of gold-spangled armlets on her own rounded arms.

The child moved a little at first, crooning incoherently. Then he lay motionless, snuggled against her heart.

CHAPTER II

IT was nearly two hours later that Farmata awoke to instant and complete consciousness.

No sound had disturbed the dreamless quiet of her sleep. But she knew, even before her eyes opened to recognition of the intruder, that someone was watching her.

Framed in the open doorway against the shimmering gold of the tropic afternoon, was a tall man, whose dusky face, beneath the tightly wound turban of a "Mahjah," was in startling contrast to the embroidered white robe that clothed him from head to foot.

Farmata's hasty movement to get up from her sleeping-mat roused the child, who, wakening in an unknown place and in strange company, began to scream loudly, calling for his mother and beating his little fists tempestuously together.

With a bow of grave courtesy the visitor advanced into the room.

"What has happened?" he asked in a gentle voice.

Farmata, alarmed by the child's crying and confused by the dishevelled state of her own appearance in the presence of so great a personage as the Prince Piu, told him briefly how she had found Quellie wandering in the market, and then ran into the kitchen, built out at the back and separately from the house, to fetch the little boy a drink of water.

When she returned, after smoothing her tumbled dress, the child's terror had subsided to a tearless sobbing that grew gradually less violent as Farmata knelt beside him and soothed him with voice and hands, Prince Piu watching her the while with admiring, albeit slightly mocking, eyes. Even his experienced judgment of women was unable to decide whether she was loveliest asleep with the child in her arms, as he had first found her, or now, as she moved and murmured caressingly at her gracious task.

As soon as Quellie was quite quiet, Farmata put him back upon the mat, where he lay round-eyed and solemnly observant until the plaited grass of the pillow beneath his head attracted his attention and he found complete absorption in rubbing his cheek up and down against it.

Farmata gave a sigh of relief and turned to Prince Piu. As she did so, the look of frankly cynical passion with which he had been regard-

ing the girl's dark beauty, changed to one of quiet benevolence that gave his finely modelled face with its low brow, slightly prominent cheek-bones, and large, penetrating eyes, the appearance of that of an austere Karmo, or teacher.

Hurriedly, and a little shyly, Farmata enlarged upon her story of the finding of Quellie. Already she was repentant of her hasty act. Her mother would be home at any moment now. How was she to explain the child's presence in the house? How restore him to his rightful owners?

The Prince listened gravely and unsmilingly, as if such tales of the kidnapping of wandering infants were of the utmost concern to him and of everyday occurrence.

Finally he suggested that, as Quellie had been lost in the Zigida market-place, it would be best to return and make inquiries about his relations there, and offered himself to accompany Farmata on her quest.

The girl was delighted at the suggestion. Prince Piu's help was not to be despised. With him as an ally she would be better able to face her mother's annoyance at her foolish act. For the Prince was a respected friend of the family. Moreover, despite his youth, he was also one of the richest cattle-traders and most powerful men in the country.

So, having made the child understand that she was going to look for his lost mother and that he must stay where he was until her return, she left the house with Prince Piu before the little one had time to realize that he was being left alone.

She had not forgotten either Momolu or the coveted armlets. But there was still plenty of time to the hour of prayer. If her search were quickly successful she could then decide whether to go to the palm-grove or not. In the meantime, the missing woman must be found for the child's sake. The day was fair, the spirit of coming festival abroad. And, though she had long ago formed her own opinion of the Prince, she was not altogether indifferent to the calculated deference of manner, the charm of the slow smile of her distinguished companion.

Farmata and Prince Piu were hardly out of sight of the house when the girl's mother returned to it. She was greatly surprised to find no sign of her daughter, and the house empty except for one small stranger fast asleep on the floor of the living-room.

She stood for a moment looking down at the little boy, who had evidently cried himself to sleep, for tears were still wet on his round cheeks. Then she began to call loudly for Farmata and the servants. But there was no

answer until the sound of her voice awoke Quellie, who began once more to cry and call for his mother.

Yadana tried to make him tell her who he was and how he came there. But the child, now thoroughly frightened again, only continued to sob.

Puzzled and annoyed, Yadana found the situation too much for her own unaided powers. Leaving Quellie still crying on his mat, she ran to the house of a neighbour to tell what she had found.

News travels quickly in Africa, and it was not long before a considerable number of people, all curious and vociferous, were gathered round the unfortunate Quellie, who, more terrified than ever at the crowd of strange faces, only wailed more loudly for his mother. Many were the conjectures as to who she could be and why she had apparently deserted her child.

In the meantime the inquiries of Farmata and Prince Piu were proving fruitless.

Events had moved so fast immediately after the girl had left the market-place with Quellie that, even before she and the little boy had fallen asleep together on the floor of the hut, a strange scene of primitive anger and fear had been enacted before the phlegmatic, but not uninterested, gaze of many onlookers.

Having left Quellie in charge of a friendly

stall-holder while she went to make some purchases at the neighbouring booths, his mother, on her return, could not find him anywhere.

"Where is my child?" she asked, thinking that the little boy was hiding from her on purpose.

"I don't know," stammered her friend. "I had to leave the stall for a moment, to fetch some more cassada. I told him to stay here and wait for me, but when I came back he was gone and no one seems to have seen him."

"You are lying," screamed Nukara, in a fury of grief and rage. "You have sold him as a slave to some stranger! Tell the truth and help me to get him back, or I will kill you."

The unfortunate Dowreah could only repeat what she had already said. But the mother's rage was soon beyond control and she sprang at her and seized her by the throat.

Dowreah struggled to free herself, her eyes rolling horribly, as she sought to tear away the other's clutching fingers.

Suddenly Nukara relaxed her hold and began to beat Dowreah upon the face and breast. Her cries for help brought people running from all parts of the market, even the possibility of profitable bargain-driving forgotten in the interest of a fight.

But before anyone could come to her assist-

ance, Dowreah was lying senseless on the ground, blood flowing freely from the cuts and scratches made by her assailant's fists and nails.

Still screaming hysterically that her child had been sold or killed, Nukara was forcibly held back by two women while Dowreah was carried into a hut near by and tended by sympathetic onlookers.

Word of the disturbance soon reached the local guardians of the peace, who in due course arrested the aggressor and took her before the chief of the town, by whom she was remanded and ordered to be brought to the Palava, or Court House, for sentence on the following morning. For Dowreah, on regaining consciousness, still protested to those around her that she had not sold the child and that the attack made upon her was unjustified.

By the time Farmata and the Prince set about their inquiries the whole episode had been almost forgotten again, except by those whose official duty it was to keep Quellie's mother in custody until the next day. Nor had any attempt been made to trace the missing child. Zigida was full of strangers whose main preoccupation was with the quickest and most lucrative selling of their goods. Such a small matter as the loss of a probably mischievous infant was no concern of theirs.

Doubtless Allah had him in his keeping. And it so happened that such inhabitants and visitors as were questioned by the girl and her companion had not seen the attack upon Dowreah nor heard anything about its cause.

The Prince was not really interested in the result of the search. But he managed, by skilful assumption of sympathy with Farmata's anxiety, to prolong their quest until close upon the hour of prayer. Although he had known the girl since her babyhood, she had about her to-day an added, elusive attraction for which he was at a loss to account. Her eyes, that he had always known were beautiful, held a hint of shyness that made of their soft brightness a thing of disturbing charm. Her manner, with its moments of sudden seriousness, was in alluring contrast with her usual youthful gaiety. Looking down upon her as she walked demurely beside him, he decided, after a little thought, that the change in Farmata was the result of his company, his interest in her welfare. The thought was not unpleasant. So it was with an air of sympathetic dignity that he finally brought her back to her mother's door.

To the girl's amazement, the house was full of people curiously discussing Quellie and his vanished mother.

Pushing her way through the crowd, Farmata ran through the living-room into the kitchen

where Yadana immediately began to rain questions upon her as to her own doings and the identity of the strange child.

"Where have you been? Where did you get this boy? Why did you not wait for me? What trouble have you brought upon my house? And what is this about you and your aunt?"

"I have not seen her," retorted the girl untruthfully.

Pushing Farmata impatiently aside, Yadana went to the door and called: "Tasureba, come here, please."

Tasureba came into the little kitchen and began angrily to tell how Farmata had refused to answer her questions and had treated her as if she were a person of no importance.

The girl listened in sullen silence, occasionally shrugging her shoulders impatiently at Tasureba's exaggerated account of her misdeeds.

But when the old lady at last paused for breath her eyes sought her mother's imploringly. She was on the verge of tears.

Yadana, her quick anger appeased by what she regarded as a justifiable expression of annoyance at Farmata's behaviour, came to her rescue.

"Well, well," she said, "ask forgiveness from your aunt, and in future remember that she is your aunt and your elder mother."

Farmata waited for no more. Tired and over-excited by the strange happenings of the day, she went obediently to Tasureba's side and laid her smooth, young cheek against the wrinkled, old one.

Tasureba, a little stout, her glossy black hair already touched with silver, tossed her head indignantly at first, but it was not long before the ready emotionalism of her race overcame her and she was weeping amiably, rocking her body backwards and forwards, her arms about the equally tearful Farmata.

Outside in the living-room Prince Piu waited, unperturbed by the noise and gesticulations of the neighbours gathered there. But soon, overawed by his tall, quiet presence, they began to drift away to their preparations for the hour of prayer. By the time Farmata emerged from the kitchen to look for the temporarily forgotten Quellie, the room was empty, save for the Prince and the child, uneasily asleep upon his mat.

The Prince saw that Farmata had been crying, and his look, as he came towards her, was full of grave concern.

"What is the matter?" he asked gently.

"Nothing," said Farmata, her face breaking into smiles.

The Prince laid his hand caressingly on her head.

"There is something," he said quickly. "But if you will not tell me what it is, I cannot help you. I should like to, if I could."

Farmata drew away from him a little uneasily. His eyes, looking down at her from his great height, seemed to burn into her mind. But she managed to evade further questioning by pretended fear of disturbing the sleeping child.

Prince Piu accepted the rebuff philosophically. There was no need for hurry. The girl's deprecating shyness was but the natural bloom on the soft charm of her youth. There was plenty of time. Women, even from the "Porrow," were in his belief and experience but chattels, to be had for the taking. Never yet had he failed to get what he wanted. He could afford to wait.

He smiled kindly as he moved to the open door of the hut and, with a courteous, wordless gesture of farewell, made off down the darkening track.

Farmata stood a moment looking after him. The sun was sinking fast behind the hills on the far side of the valley. Already their feet were in deep shadow that made a sombre background to the nearer lake on which long rays of light still lingered so that the water glowed like sheeted gold. Nearer still the motionless tops of the tall palm-trees were

outlined in fire. The world was very still, its only sounds the hurried, intermittent chirping of crickets in the dry grass, the heavier, slow croak of frogs at the lake-side—herald of the full-throated chorus that would last unbroken through the hot night.

Farmata's eyes dwelt on the palm-trees, dark against the last light. The gold and crimson sky behind them made her think of the metalled armlets on Momolu's stall. She knew now that there would be no opportunity of meeting their strange owner that evening. It would be impossible to escape her mother's watchful eyes. There was the child, too, to be fed and cared for until the morning, when the search for his relations must be renewed.

She sighed a little as Yadana called to her from the kitchen to make ready for the hour of prayer. But she shut the door of the hut and went obediently in to dress herself in white from head to foot. Then, each carrying their little prayer-mat, she went out with Yadana and Tasureba to the mosque to invoke the blessing of Allah on the coming night.

CHAPTER III

FARMATA awoke very early on the following morning.

After a quick look to assure herself that Quellie was safe and still asleep, she duly recited the first prayers of the day and then made her way to a creek at a little distance from the hut.

It was one of those mornings that, in Africa especially, break like a benediction on the land, when the freshness of the air is sweet and exciting with the fragrance of countless wild flowers and every living thing seems in triumphant harmony with the splendour of the risen sun.

Farmata, all her youth attune to the vigorous life and scents of the new day, walked buoyantly along, thinking only of Quellie and his mother and wondering whether the search she was about to begin all over again, would this time prove successful.

At the evening meal the night before, she had explained the whole story to her mother and Tasureba, and Yadana had agreed to go

with her and the child to Zigida, and help in the inquiries there. Allah would be with them, she knew, and would direct them.

Reaching her destination, Farmata stood for a while by the side of the creek, watching the swiftness of the flowing water as it sped from sunlight to the shadow of overhanging banks and out again to brightness. About her feet, grasses and leaves were magical with morning dew; above her, birds were musical and rainbow-feathered in the trees. Presently she undressed, kicked off her slippers and plunged into the stream. But, remembering the task held by the hours ahead, not even the delight of the cool water against her bare limbs could hold her long, and soon she had re-dressed and was making her way homeward.

She had hardly left the creek, however, when she saw Momolu coming hurriedly towards her along the path that led back to the village.

Farmata's heart missed a beat and her eyes sought desperately for a way of escape. But already Momolu was close before her.

The girl's failure to meet him on the previous evening, and especially a glimpse he had caught of her in the company of Prince Piu, had fanned natural disappointment to a heat of rage that was little short of madness. For Momolu's acquaintance with the Prince was a

long-standing and painful one, and involved memories of the past that were like branding-irons on the forehead of the present. For the moment the flame had died down to a jealous smouldering that could as easily be re-lighted to cruelty as to love. His eyes were burning and sombre as he greeted Farmata.

"Well, Bonnie, I see you have been to the water."

"Have you been watching me?" Her glance at him was sidelong.

"No, I have just been to your house and found out you had come here. I thought I would walk this way and look for you."

"What do you want?"

"To ask you some questions," retorted Momolu.

For a moment Farmata did not answer. She was not sure either of herself or of him. The strange disturbance that had assailed her at their first meeting was overcoming her again. Instinctively she sought refuge in defiance.

"Well, be quick. I have a great deal to do this morning," she said impatiently.

Momolu moved closer to her.

"Why did you not come last night? I waited in the palm-orchard to tell you about those armlets you saw on my stall. But you did not come. . . ."

With a sudden movement he thrust his hand into a fold of his robe, drew forth the metalled, glittering things and held them out to her.

"See, Bonnie, they are yours, with all their mystery." He made, as in her moment of half-sleep she had seen him do, to slip them on her wrists.

Fascinated, yet half afraid, Farmata tried to draw away from his eager hands. But he was too quick and too strong for her. In a moment the supple leather bands were above her elbows. Like living fire, the tawdry, brilliant things glowed against the darkness of her skin. Farmata's eyes grew wide and soft as, unresisting now, she moved and posed her arms to let brass and copper glintings catch the light. Her child-like pleasure in their brightness struck, straight and swiftly, at Momolu's jealousy. Her eyes were for the armlets, not for him. Inconsistently, too, the very fact that his gift represented considerable value in the bartering of the market-place increased his rage.

Suddenly, he took the girl's face between his hands, forcing her to look up at him.

"Farmata, I love you with all my soul and strength. I will be your slave, work for you and live for you. I swear by Allah, I love you."

For a moment each stared into the other's

eyes. Then Farmata, excited and conscious of power, laughed softly and drew her head away from his grasp. With fluttering, smiling glances from his face to the gleaming bands, she stood, patting their brightness and her own slender arms, like some vivid tropical bird that preens itself in the sun.

The sight tore Momolu's self-control to shreds. Roughly he seized her by the shoulders.

"So," he said, the words stumbling one over the other in the hurry of his anger, "I must buy your smiles with jewels. But Prince Piu, what does he pay you for your love?"

With a cry, Farmata wrenched herself free. Then she struck at him with all the strength of her small, clenched hands.

"You lie," she sobbed between terror and rage. "Go out of my sight. You try to make love to me, and in the same minute tell hideous lies about me. How could I ever love you? How could you ever love me after this?" Her voice rose hysterically as she beat at him with her fists.

Momolu drew back and regarded her passion admiringly. He was not surprised at its exhibition, for he knew instinctively that he had wronged her. But the sight of his smiling unconcern was too much for Farmata. With fingers that trembled as they tore at them, she wrenched the armlets off and flung them,

dramatically, one after the other, on to the ground.

Shrugging his shoulders, Momolu picked them up. Already his rage was turning to repentance, and, despite his jealousy, he felt a little foolish. Without another word he turned away along the path towards the village. The sound of Farmata's angry crying pursued him for some distance; then, at a bend in the track, it ceased. Momolu looked about him. The world was clear, green, and still beneath the trees; only the water and the birds moved. Disappointment and dejection seized him. In his simplicity he did not understand that the cause of Farmata's anger was not so much the unjust accusation, but that he, Momolu, had made it. With suddenness like the flashing of light on a drawn sword, love had struck its disorganizing way into his life. Awakened emotion, thwarted of the instant response it craved, wavered between passion and jealousy that tore at the roots of understanding. Conscience-stricken, bewildered, and almost afraid to hope that he could ever mend the broken fragments of the morning's episode, he wandered disconsolately back to the hut of his friend, Yawfee, where he prostrated himself on the floor, and sobbed bitterly.

Meanwhile, Farmata flung herself on the ground as soon as Momolu was out of sight,

and gave herself over to such an outburst of rage and grief as almost deprived her of consciousness. How long she lay there she did not know. She was roused at last by the footsteps of a woman going to the market who, seeing a young girl apparently fainting on the bank of the stream, brought water in a large leaf and compassionately bathed her face and hands.

Avoiding her benefactor's questions by saying that the heat of the sun had overcome her, Farmata hastened home, where she found Yadana ready and waiting to set forth on the journey in search of Quellie's mother.

Yadana watched the girl curiously as she dressed herself in a length of Fantee cloth and wound a finely figured, green kerchief about her head. Like Prince Piu, she was aware of some indefinable change in Farmata for which the mere finding of Quellie was insufficient to account.

But the girl knew well enough that her mother's eyes were on her and she successfully covered the traces of her recent emotional storm with a bright smile that gave the lustre of diamonds to her dark eyes. Momolu had yet to learn the resolution, depth, and even sternness of Farmata's character; that he must strike the chords of amity, co-operation, understanding, gentleness and love, if he would

evoke her nature to harmonious response. Beneath the superficial, easily aroused emotionalism of her race lay something steadier, more serene, a product of natural qualities enhanced by education.

It was now nine o'clock, beautiful and bright, and Zigida was filled with many strange faces as Farmata and Yadana, with Quellie agog with excitement at the prospect of seeing his mother again soon, strolled patiently and watchfully through the winding, narrow streets, stopping occasionally to chat with some passer-by whom they knew.

At last they found themselves face to face with Fahn Darmie, an old friend of Yadana's, who greeted her with the customary salutation, placing his right hand over his heart and flicking his fingers three times consecutively with Yadana's corresponding hand, to indicate a greeting void of malice or hatred.

"You seem to be troubled about something," he said. "Can I be of any help?"

Yadana indicated Quellie. "This little boy has lost his mother, and we are looking for her. We do not know what she is like, but we want to comfort her by giving her back her child. Have you heard of a strange mother in search of a little lost one?"

"Why, yes," said Fahn Darmie. "That reminds me. As I was passing the Court

House this morning, I heard some of the messengers talking of a Buze woman who had a fight with another woman about her son whom she declared had been stolen and sold as a slave."

After a few more questions, the little party, now more hopeful than they had been before, moved off to the Palava House, where a great concourse of people was gathered. Already the Court House itself was filled to its limit, and scores who could not obtain admission were crowded without in the yard.

Among them Farmata suddenly noticed Momolu who sat, his broad shoulders drooping despondently, in the shade of a plum-tree. Try as he would to forget, the memory of the unfortunate happening of the early morning shot persistently through his mind with all the swiftness of a water-deer. Raging activity and yet a sense of impotence possessed him. Only one thing mattered—to gather up the broken fragments of his love and so re-arrange and mend them as to produce the effect for which his soul longed.

Seeing Farmata approach unexpectedly, he was covered with confusion. For a moment it seemed as if his limbs refused to move. Then, with an effort, he rose to his feet to offer her his seat.

But Farmata took no notice. With apparent

unconcern she bent over Quellie and whispered in his ear so that he laughed and clapped his hands. When she straightened herself and looked across to the group beneath the plum-tree, Momolu's place was empty. But, still angry as she was, Farmata would not turn her head to see in which direction he had disappeared.

Nevertheless she lingered a little uncertainly among the crowd, until Yadana pulled at her arm and pointed out Kwanja, another friend from whom she hoped to obtain further information about the Buze woman.

Kwanja saw them coming, and by the time they reached the place where he was sitting beneath the trees, he was already on his feet, hand on heart, in friendly greeting.

In reply to Yadana's anxious questioning, Kwanja repeated the story of the arrest of the unknown Buze woman, and, proud of his superior knowledge, how he had himself seen the unfortunate victim of the fight, whose damages to eyes and teeth were considerable.

"May I see the prisoner?" asked Yadana. "I believe this little boy is her son."

"I do not think you will be allowed to see her or anyone else," Kwanja answered, full of importance, "but if you wait for the afternoon session of the Court, there may be a chance. Anyhow, the case is to be heard this afternoon.

In the meantime come home with me, and let us have something to eat."

It was now past one o'clock, and the heat was intense. Many of the waiting people, some chattering idly, some asleep, were lounging lazily under the trees on spread bamboo mats. For a moment Yadana hesitated. She was hot and tired, wearied of the apparently interminable search for the unknown woman. She was about to refuse Kwanja's hospitality, with the idea of immediately returning home, when Quellie once more set up a piteous wailing for his mother. With an effort Yadana braced herself anew to fulfil her promise to the child. She shook him irritably, but not unkindly, and then, smiling broadly at the expectant Kwanja, made ready to accompany him.

Seated at the old man's table, before a large bowl of palava sauce and rice, with which the elders fed the little boy, but did not touch themselves, owing to their religious faith, Farmata, who had been almost completely silent since they reached the house, suddenly asked Kwanja whether he had seen one, Momolu Bei.

"Who is he?" asked Kwanja, a little surprised.

"A friend of mine whom I met a few days ago," answered Farmata evasively. "A clever trader—I think he must be rich. I saw him just now sitting under the trees in the court-

yard not far from you. But when he saw me coming he suddenly disappeared."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"Shall I inquire for you?"

"No, no," said Farmata hurriedly, and wishing she had not yielded to the temptation to learn more about the stranger whom at the same time she hated, and yet longed to see again.

But Yadana had been watching her daughter and had noticed the expression of eagerness and confusion with which she had spoken Momolu's name.

"Why not?" she said sharply. "And what new animal is this, treading through your field, whom I do not know?"

Farmata shrugged her shoulders. "He is nobody," she said sulkily. "I met him by chance." Her eyes lightened to a teasing twinkle as she glanced across at her mother. "He is very tall and handsome, and likes to have everything his own way," she added softly.

Yadana gave a little indignant snort, and her large, loose body quivered ominously. But Kwanja, sensing trouble, broke in before she could speak.

"Be careful, Bonnie," he said. "This man may be more cunning than you think. But

it is time. Let us go back to the Palava House."

Farmata shot him a grateful look as they went out from the hazy stuffiness of the thatch-covered house to the sweltering, almost visible heat of the afternoon outside.

The old man shook his head at her warningly, but his eyes were kind and wise with understanding.

As for Yadana, her intelligent face was sombre and puzzled as she moved ponderously along with Quellie clinging obediently to her hand.

In the course of the three years that had passed since she and Farmata first came to Zigida from Bendu, she had won something of a reputation among her neighbours for the powers of discernment that she undoubtedly possessed—powers due, on the one hand, to an intuitively quick perception of what lay in the minds of others, on the other, to her early teaching in the "Bush"—the secret, occult ritual and dogma that had fostered and developed a natural cleverness and strength of will, often cunning as well as kind. Though now well into middle age, she had about her still a certain elusive, almost girlish charm that advancing years seemed to enhance rather than diminish. The daughter of a "Mahjah," she never obtruded, but never forgot her

noble birth, and, though her form had long been portly and her chin was no longer single, she had never allowed slovenliness of attire or habit to mar her dower of pride and self-respect.

As she walked now beside the daughter on whose upbringing she had lavished all the scrupulous care decreed by racial tradition, as well as warm personal affection, she dimly knew that forces whose power neither she nor Farmata could withstand were at work about them.

CHAPTER IV

THE Kitchen, or Court House, was almost full, though there were still some seats available which were immediately occupied by Yadana, Kwanja and Farmata, who sat Quellie on her knee.

This Palava House, with its vertical-shaped roof covered with thickly plaited thatch, its six windows set at regular intervals, and its massive door of black gum boards and timbers, had a unique and fascinating appearance from the outside. The structure was supported by oak poles, running perpendicularly and fastened by long pikes through other similar poles placed horizontally, and the whole walled with white mud clay that, hardened by sun and wind, formed a strong kind of cement.

The floor, measuring some three thousand square feet, was also of sun-baked clay, hard and durable, smooth and glossy. At the back was a low rostrum of polished clay, on which sits the Chief in his chair of state, made of bamboo and rattan. Immediately in front of him is ranged the council of elderly

men, apt, astute diplomatists, one and all, well versed in the laws and customs of their land.

Away on the right, some fourteen feet distant from the magisterial council, the defendant is placed on a slightly raised platform. On his or her left sits the Chief's Head Messenger—the Marshal of Court Ceremonies—chosen always for his valour in battle.

The rest of the building is open to the public, who are accommodated on backless, bamboo benches, fastened by rattan, on either side of an aisle.

Time passed slowly enough for the little party, until at length the threshold of the Court was darkened by the arrival of the Chief Varfee, who moved with grave dignity, in his flowing, ceremonial robes, between the lines of waiting people. On his breast, suspended from a silver chain, glittered a silver, heart-shaped disc, insignia of the Paramount Chief of the Zinta district. This symbol of authority is presented by the President of Liberia to the Chief, on the day he is commissioned and sworn into office at Monrovia.

Varfee was followed by the Council, who took the seats allotted to them in order of precedence. When all were seated, the Head Messenger rose to his feet and proclaimed silence, and then, the last whisperings of the

expectant crowd being hushed, announced the business of the afternoon Session.

To an outsider the scene must have been both impressive and interesting, in its blending of modern procedure with the custom of a people who for more than a thousand years had been bathing in the pool of witchcraft, of weird, diabolical superstitions, a people whom neither justice nor the ethics of legislation had touched until, in less than a quarter of a century, they had been gathered within the cordon of a democratic, national government.

The working of the native judicial machinery is, nevertheless, still often incredibly slow. In Africa time does not count. Days, even weeks, are occupied by investigation of the minutest details, especially when a case involves complications between two tribes, or powerful houses. Bloodshed is still, not infrequently, the final resort of justice—as the quarrels of children end in blows despite attempted pacification by their elders. For this reason the patience of a Job and the sympathetic understanding of a Solomon must be the possession of those who would deal successfully with Africa and African affairs.

On the little platform at the left sat the prisoner, Nukara, her bare, black shoulders gleaming like polished ebony in the sunlight that poured in on her. She was too awestruck

by her surroundings to smile, too sorrowful at the supposed loss of her child to raise her eyes and see him where he snuggled, fast asleep now, in Farmata's arms.

The hearing of her case revealed a story of poverty and loneliness, of long-enduring toil peculiar to the peasant classes of torrid lands.

Now, as she sat there, while the voice of the Prosecutor rose and fell in rhythmic cadence, zooming like the buzz of a malignant insect in the stifling air, it seemed to her as if her idol, her dream, her future support had been torn from her for all time.

But the listeners were enthralled by the descriptive, humorous and convincing picture of Nukara's attack upon Dowreah. Not, however, until her victim entered the Court did anything shake the prisoner's complete immobility and lack of understanding of any fact save that her child was gone; then she suddenly hid her face in her hands and wept noisily.

With the rising of the defending counsel to his feet, tension was momentarily slackened. But very soon the easily-played-upon emotional pendulum of a crowd had swayed back at a skilful appeal for sympathy to the women present in the Court-house. Tears were in the eyes even of the old men of the Council, as the vivid story of a mother's grievous loss was

unfolded before them. Would not all of them have acted in the same way had their only child been sold into slavery by the friend to whom they had entrusted him? The orator prayed that Allah, in His wisdom, would immediately restore Quellie to the bosom of his mother.

It was at this moment of dramatic intensity that the little boy awoke, and gave a startled cry.

At the sound Nukara's weeping ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and she sprang from her seat like a leopard on its prey. In an instant she had swooped on the child and gathered him to her heart, anger and fear both forgotten as she proudly displayed him to the laughing, sympathetic onlookers.

When the babel of surprised ejaculations and congratulations had subsided, and Nukara, with the beaming Quellie still in her arms, had been induced to return to the prisoner's seat, Farmata explained to the Chief and his Council how she had found and cared for the child, and the Court was then recessed for thirty minutes.

During the recess Nukara was loud in her invocations of the blessings of Allah upon Farmata and Yadana, as she continued passionately to fondle Quellie, whose dark, brilliant eyes, alight like stars, moved constantly from

his mother's face to the new white shirt Farmata had given him, and whose smiles, that showed teeth like pearls against his ebony skin, revealed his undiscriminating joy in both.

Proceedings being resumed, Nukara was called for judgment. Chief Varfee formally addressed the Court and then gave his ruling —a fine of £5 for infringement of the peace, to be paid immediately.

Farmata, hurrying to Nukara's side, found her with tears in her eyes. Penniless, it was impossible for her to pay. "But if you or your mother will help me by paying the fine for me, I will, in Allah's name, return it to you in three moons' time," she said.

But Yadana, the moral obligation to restore Quellie to his mother already fulfilled, was in no mind to add financial to sentimental charity without some tangible guarantee of the loan's repayment.

Farmata returned to Nukara with the message.

"I have nothing but Quellie," she answered with the fatalistic submission of complete simplicity. "Will you have him?"

"Do you think he would come?" asked Farmata, equally ready to accept as inevitable the process of child "pawning" that was still the custom of the country.

But before Nukara had time to recapture

the unconscious hostage, now earnestly engaged in exhibiting his new shirt to a group of urchins of similar age and interests to himself, there was a disturbance at the doorway of the Court, and a brother of Nukara pushed his way in.

News, miraculously swift in its journey through a country that most Europeans would consider woefully deficient in means of communication, had reached him in Bopora of his sister's disgrace and imprisonment. Without question he had brought his all, £2 in silver, hidden in the folds of his robe, and a little bull, on foot, wherewith to offer bail. Swiftly the money and the animal changed hands, and Nukara, Quellie and his opportunely arrived uncle were able to make their way joyously back to the preparations for the great feast.

CHAPTER V

EVENING was now drawing near, and there lay before Farmata and her mother a trek of three miles to their home in the little village that lay beyond one of the big towns of the Zinta district.

Already the air was cooling as the sun set, and twilight spread rapidly, fold on soothing fold. The skies were as if Allah had dipped his brush in a pot of gold, and had painted them in radiant tints—the leaves of the trees were touched to a transitory glow, as the Master artist of nature sank slowly away.

The ineffable softening of all colour, the gentle loosening of the day's tension of heat, moved Farmata to instinctive religious response. "Allah is great and the works of His hand are wonderful." The words flowed with a sweet solemnity through her mind. She turned to Yadana with ecstatic eyes. "Look what a beautiful evening," she cried.

Yadana regarded her with somewhat alarmed amazement.

"Is this the first time you have seen a sunset?" she inquired.

Farmata laughingly shook her head. "No—but it is so bright," she answered. "It has never been quite like this before."

"I think you are mad," said Yadana calmly. "What is the matter with you?"

But Farmata, intent on the wonder of the vivid sky, lagged deliberately behind and would not answer, and Yadana, after giving her a look that was half puzzled, half vindictive, walked on ahead. She was tired and hungry after her long day away from home. Sunsets never yet appeased an empty stomach, and were, indeed, but Allah's merciful signals that the time for food was at hand.

Farmata followed leisurely until, just as her mother reached a bend in the road that took her out of sight, she heard footsteps behind her, and, looking round, saw Momolu stealing rapidly towards her. Fired with determination to amend the mistake of the morning, he drew towards her steadily in the gloom, a tall, lithe figure moving with easy swiftness. Farmata knew at once that it would be useless to attempt escape from him.

"Can you count the stars?" said Momolu as he reached her side. His voice was soft and ingratiating as he pointed upwards to where the sky was suddenly alive with stars, immediate successors of the vanished sun.

But the girl gave him no response, either of word or movement.

"Farmata, why are you so quiet? Don't you understand? I love you—I, Momolu Bei, whom you met in the market at Zigida? Won't you speak to me? I will explain everything if only you will answer me."

But Farmata, still silent, went steadily on her way towards home. She was so angry with Momolu that she scarcely heard his pleading words as he continued to walk beside her and pour out his inopportune protestations, thinking to sway her by the magic of his tongue. Everything about Farmata intoxicated him—the delicate figure, the dark brown colouring of face and eyes, the shapely mouth upon whose lips his fancy was already pressing kisses of adoring love.

He ventured once more.

"Bonnie, I beg you to forgive me. I was mad—mad with love of you, and when I saw you with Prince Piu, it infuriated me. I have no wealth of gold, cattle nor grains; but I love you with all my power. There is something I must tell you about him. I call on Allah as my witness. . . ."

"Hush!" broke in Farmata, turning on him suddenly. "You have no shame—you who dare call on Allah to hear your lies. I hate you. Do you believe me? Do you hear?"

"No," answered Momolu, who, though somewhat shaken by the ferocity of her attack, was still determined to secure the response for which he craved.

"I never thought you could be so stubborn—this is not you. You are possessed with wicked spirits. . . ."

"You are a fool," broke in Farmata. "There is nothing the matter with me. But you have wounded my heart with your wicked lies. Don't ever try to see me again. . . ."

"Do you really hate me so?" interrupted Momolu. "You do not love me—not at all?"

For a moment he stood motionless, staring down at her. It was too dark for him to see that she was trembling from head to foot, that she was on the verge of tears. The cloud that he had believed would soon disperse was darker than ever about his mind and heart. In his blundering simplicity, he did not realize the need for subtler methods of approach. Love is the singing string of life. To strike it clumsily as he had done, was to be shocked by discord instead of appeased by harmony, or to swoon in mystic revelry of delight.

"Well, then," he said at last. "Good-bye, and may Allah protect you from the storms of the world."

He held out his hand with sudden, gentle grace, but Farmata either did not, or would not see it. Turning abruptly from him, she began to run, stumbling a little in the confusion of her anger and the darkness of the night, in the direction of her home.

Steeped in such desolation and dejection as only essentially primitive and simple souls can know, Momolu made his way back to the house of his friend Yawfee, who had offered him lodging and accommodation during the holding of the great market that was the prelude to the yearly feast.

The short, tropical night passed for him in a slow dreariness of thought and agitation that made its few hours seem endless. In the solemn half-light that precedes the dawn, his mind even played with the idea of suicide. But, ere he could put such drastic measures into effect, the natural resilience of youth came to his aid and he finally dozed off to sleep, determined to seek the advice of one more knowledgeable in the ways of woman than himself.

With this plan in view, he rose very early, made his morning offering to Allah with unusual deference and intensity, and then took his way to the house of Shariff, a Mandingo magician, to whom he unfolded the whole story.

Shariff listened patiently to the recital. Then, with a slow smile, he bade Momolu compose himself to wait while he went out to his secret shrine for mystic consultation with the psychic world.

After an hour's absence he returned with his verdict.

"Farmata does not love you. She might have done so had you not allowed your tongue so wickedly to pierce her heart with lies. It is your own doing, my son, and neither weeping nor despair can wash away the evil words you spoke. It is done."

Momolu's eyes, that had been trusting and excited, like those of a child in his implicit faith in the occult, narrowed as he listened. Then, as Shariff stopped speaking, his face was all at once distorted with rage, and he rushed, half blind with anger, out of the house. His clenched fists raised above his head, he stormed along in the sunlight, muttering to himself, his eyes rolling frenziedly. "I will teach her a lesson she will never forget, and that money-grabbing bloodsucker of a Prince," he raved.

His heart was beating in heavy thuds that seemed as if they would suffocate him; the blood pounded in his ears. "Speak to me, O Allah, that I may see the power of Thy Will." The words were little more than an

incoherent mumble, and he swayed unsteadily. "Allah! Are you asleep, O Allah—asleep or laughing at your child?" His hands clutched at the air—a shimmering haze in which great streaks of blackness wavered to and fro—then closed on emptiness as he fell, face downwards, a sprawling, twitching figure that suddenly lay still.

Within a few moments a considerable crowd of people had gathered. Among them was Farmata, who, determined to forget all about Momolu, had been to visit one of her old school companions, and was then on her way home.

"What has happened?" she asked of a passer-by.

"A man has fallen dead."

"Do you know who it is?"

"No, only that he is dead," was the reply.

Her curiosity aroused, Farmata edged her way in among the murmuring people. Someone had moved Momolu so that he now lay on his back in the dusty roadway, rigid and motionless. For a moment Farmata was too stunned by the unexpected sight to stir or make a sound. Then, as full recognition of what had happened broke in upon her, she gave a wild cry and, rushing forward, flung herself on Momolu's body, weeping bitterly.

Even when friendly hands drew her to her feet again, while two men bore Momolu away,

she would not leave him. Unable to forgive, she yet could not forget this strange intruder who, having figured so largely in her life for a few days, was now gone to the country from whence no traveller is known to return.

But at the door of Yawfee's house, to which they carried Momolu, she was refused admission, and so made her way sorrowfully home to bear the news to her mother.

Yadana was at first completely indifferent. It did not matter to her whether Momolu lived or died. He was a stranger to her. She did not know him, had never seen him, and did not understand why her daughter was so disturbed at the death of this unknown man.

"Why are you crying?" she asked Farmata with some impatience at the girl's listlessness and tear-stained face.

"I am so sorry for him."

"What him?"

"Momolu Bei. I might have loved him. . . ."

Yadana put down the bowl of rice she was preparing for the evening meal with a clatter and regarded her daughter with a look in which severity was strangely mingled with fear.

"Have you been meeting this man without telling me?" she asked.

"No. He followed me, although I told him I did not love him. But he followed me all the same," said Farmata, beginning to cry again as the vision of Momolu, heroic and splendid, now that he was dead and could no longer annoy her with false accusations, rose before her mind.

"Allah be praised, death cures all evils," said Yadana with a simple philosophy that left no room for argument.

CHAPTER VI

IN the house of Yawfee the body of Momolu lay, covered in spotless white linen. The atmosphere in the little room was tense and strangely still, despite the crowd of curious and sympathetic friends who had gathered from all parts of the town to offer condolences to Yawfee. An air of brooding expectancy, made sinister by something other than the presence of the shrouded figure on the bed, hovered over place and people.

Outside the radiant weather of the day before had given place to an ominous, murky gloom; clouds hung black and heavy over the western hills. By the afternoon the gale that presages storm was rising steadily, lightning tore the livid sky, and thunder seemed as if about to shake the world to pieces. Dried leaves and thatch whirled madly in the wind; great trees were felled as if by the invisible axe of a devil.

With the breaking of torrential rain creeks and streams overflowed and poured, raging, through the villages, marooning many of the

huts and sweeping away cattle, poultry, and household goods. Terror of fire and water cowed the villagers, some to whimpering prayer, others to speechless waiting on the will of Allah who had allowed a wicked spirit to break loose and walk abroad in anger.

But from the little room where Yawfee sat, almost as still and rigid as the motionless Momolu, the rumour grew and spread that the storm was caused by the presence of a dead body in the town.

By six o'clock the worst was over and it became possible to creep out of the flooded houses and to begin the digging of trenches down which the water might drain away to the creek. After several laborious hours this was satisfactorily achieved; a cool night air came flowing from the hills, and moonrise found the village sleeping in comparative comfort, but for broken roofs and swamped plantations.

Nevertheless, the people were determined not to run the risk of another such visitation. Mysteriously the stranger Momolu had died among them, stricken, doubtless on account of some hidden sin, by the hand of the great god; fearfully had the harbouring of the body of his wickedness offended Allah, the all-pure.

With the first light of dawn a small crowd gathered at the door of Yawfee's house. When

he stood before them, worn with grief and watching, they paid no heed to his protestations but forced their way into the inner room. Overpowered by numbers, Yawfee and the friends who had shared his vigil could do nothing but look on helplessly while two men wrapped Momolu's body in a mat and carried it away. Not until the bearers were safely out of sight would those who held them prisoners release Yawfee and his friends.

Through the scarcely awakened village the little procession moved fast and stealthily along past the creek where Momolu and Farmata had met and so sorrowfully parted, and out into the forest that lay beyond the village boundary. Here in a small, solitary hut beneath trees whose leaves were still a-drip from last night's storm, they left the body in charge of two servants with injunctions to keep a strict look-out lest anyone should try to steal it back again.

Slowly, languorous with steamy heat, the hours went by. The hut was poorly lighted and so overshadowed by trees that, when the door was shut, it was almost entirely dark. In the stillness of so quiet a place the cracking of a twig might have the loudness of a pistol-shot.

Near sunset, when even the birds had ceased to move or sing, and the eyes of the man who sat beside the body were as heavy with heat

and silence as if he had been drugged, he suddenly gave a loud cry. The sound was so startled that his companion, who had been engaged at a little distance, cooking a meal on a fire ringed with small stones, came running to him. As his figure blocked the entrance, complete darkness enveloped the interior of the hut except for a glimmer of white where the straight, sheeted form of Momolu lay on the ground.

The obliteration of even such dim light as that to which his eyes had by now grown accustomed was too much for the first man. He jumped, terrified, to his feet and pushed the other outside.

"He is alive," he babbled. "I saw his left foot move."

"If he is not dead, then I am not living," retorted the other scornfully and making to go back to the preparation of his food.

"But I swear I saw it move. How should a dead man move his foot?"

"You were bewitched or asleep, and saw it only in a dream. Did not Allah himself slay him on account of his sin?"

"His left foot moved, I tell you. Stay here and watch instead of me. You will see for yourself."

"No, time passes and I am hungry. Let us eat our 'chop' while it is still warm," urged

the second man, pulling his trembling companion forcibly away from the hut.

Their meal ready, they spread a mat on the ground beneath the trees and sat beside it, close together, to eat from the same vessel.

More than an hour later the argument as to whether dead men could or could not move their feet was still at its height; both were still vociferous, and both still unconvinced of the other's regard for truth.

All at once they fell silent and looked at each other simultaneously. Neither knew what it was that had made him cease to talk. Then from within the hut came rather a suggestion of sound than actual noise—a fugitive rustling, a faint sigh, that were more felt than heard.

Their eyes wild with fear and curiosity, the two men rushed back into the hut and peered about them. But all was as they had left it, and Momolu lay rigid as before, the long line of the white linen that covered him, undisturbed by movement of head or hands or feet.

Desperately and superstitiously afraid, the two guards decided to keep an unceasing vigil. But neither would agree to be separated from the other by more than arm's length. So, one on each side of the indifferent Momolu, they sat down on the ground, to wait, with the ineffable patience of their race, for what might befall.

With the coming of full night, such attempts at conversation as they had been able to make while there was still some semblance of green and gold daylight to be seen through the open door, failed them altogether. When it had become so dark that neither could see more than the whites of the other's eyes and the dim blur on the ground between them that was Momolu, they rose with one accord to fetch and light a bundle of bamboo sticks from a stack in a corner of the hut.

Flickering at first, the flame soon steadied to a comforting glow. Only occasionally when little winds, born of the night's vague breathings, drifted in, did it shift or waver. At such moments, as sudden shadows moved on walls and roofing, or slunk, like some faceless animal about the floor, the two men's eyes were almost starting from their heads. More than once the teeth of him who had first declared Momolu living chattered audibly.

Then, just before dawn, when the dark had taken to itself a strange pallor, obscene in its negation of colour and the distortion it imposed on form, when grey ghosts of mist were vaguely visible about the trunks of trees, and shadows were not because light was dead, he again sensed, rather than saw, an unmistakable movement of the linen that covered Momolu's breast.

"Look! Look!" he stammered. "He breathes."

Across the sheeted figure the two stared doubtfully at one another, then bent over it, watching intently, chins bedded in their palms, eyes and ears strained to observe the smallest movement, to catch the slightest sound.

Minutes passed—then once more a vague fluttering movement of the linen.

"I see something," whispered the more credulous of the two.

"What do you see, then?" asked his companion, whispering too, for his unbelief was as false as his terror was real.

"You are a fool. I tell you I saw the cloth move. Your eyes must be asleep; go and wash the sleep out of them, then you will see plainly what I see."

Glad of an excuse to leave the hut where horror had been and still undoubtedly was, the man went out, and, with the help of another bamboo torch, the pieces for which he gathered from the bushes and tied into a little bundle for lighting, found his way to a small stream in which he obediently bathed his face and eyes.

By the time he returned to the hut the sun had risen. Colour and form had come back to the world; once again the trees were beautiful in the new light; gold of sunlight and silver of dew were upon leaves and grass.

"Come here and sit down. Can you see more clearly now?" asked his companion in a low voice, and without looking round as he entered the hut. "See; there it is again."

His hand shook violently as he pointed to where the white linen rose and fell, faintly but unmistakably, above Momolu's heart.

His eyes rolling until they seemed all whites against his ebony skin, the other man strenuously denied the knowledge he was afraid to admit. Such a mystery was beyond his understanding. Momolu was dead, slain by the All-highest in a single moment of time. How, then, should he breathe and live again?

Utterly bewildered, he sat hunched up, chin on hands, elbows resting on his thighs, gazing intently at the sinister sheet. Then all at once he saw it move—slowly it rose and fell again; rose, fell, and was still.

Even in a more civilized community than that in which this negro servant had been brought up, the sudden sight of a corpse, unmistakably breathing, might be more startling than even an unexpected encounter with the fixed immobility of death. To him, at dawn in the African forest, after a night-long vigil made lurid by superstitious fear, the thing was so terrible that it must immediately be made known.

Convinced at last, he darted to the door in

great haste to be the first to proclaim a message from the dead, and, bidding his companion remain with Momolu until he could summon the people of Zigida and return with them to see this wonderful, terrifying sight, hurried off along the narrow footpath that led to the town, some three miles distant.

"The man you gave us to watch over is not dead—he lives," he shouted as he ran, converting the words into a sort of chant. This was Allah's day, and he His chosen messenger. Forgotten were the fears and doubts of the night, the fact that he had poured scorn on his companion's first discovery.

Only as he neared the town a cold chill crept over him suddenly; his teeth chattered, his knees knocked together, his hands were damp with icy sweat. What was this marvel, this bewitchment that made a mockery of death?

But as he entered Zigida the importance of the self-appointed herald swept all fear, all questioning once more aside.

"The man you gave us to watch over is not dead—he lives!" The cry fled triumphantly before him along the street where torn roofs and beaten patches of cultivated ground bore witness to the apparently inconsistent thinking of a power that wantonly destroyed the property of the guiltless, while rescuing the offender from a presumably merited grave.

The messenger stopped first at Yawfee's house, but finding it empty, made his way on towards the market-place, shouting as he went.

By this time, hypnotized by his own rhythmic cries, and seeing that his excited gestures and posturings were beginning to attract attention, he had reached a condition of mind bordering on religious ecstasy.

"What strange news is this?" said one of the villagers to a friend. "Listen! He cries again. Who can it be?"

"He is one of the servants who was set to watch the body of Momolu Bei yesterday morning, after the great storm."

"Does Momolu live, then? Listen! He cries again."

"The man you gave us to watch over is not dead—he lives!" The hoarse voice of the half-demented servant clamoured at their ears.

"Shall we go, then, to the hut in the woods and see what this thing may be?"

"Yes, yes, we will go to the woods."

In a few minutes a crowd of people was pushing and circling about the messenger, who stood in the centre of a ring, ecstatically bidding them follow him.

"To the forest! To the forest!"

The cry was taken up and mingled with the shouts of the frenzied servant. "He is not dead—he lives!"

When the noise and confusion were at their height, came Yawfee, hurrying to learn the truth of the strange rumour concerning his friend. But before he could do more than force his way through the outer circle of the throng, the people broke suddenly away from their self-imposed formation and began to stream in groups, some running in their haste to satisfy their curiosity, others moving more leisurely because of their inclination to regard the whole thing as a joke, along the track to the forest.

At the doorway of the lonely hut Yawfee turned upon them all and raised his hand. Tall and slim, the line of his features almost purely Mandingo, his small head gracefully and strongly poised, his appearance in this emotional moment was strangely arresting.

"He was my friend," he said with dignity. "I will enter first."

The crowd halted, stricken to sudden silence by his look and gesture. But they began to chatter again as soon as he had disappeared into the hut and, in a very few minutes, several of the bolder spirits had forced a way in behind him.

"Tell me the truth. Is he not dead?" said Yawfee sternly to the guard who was still crouching faithfully at Momolu's shrouded feet.

"No, Master, he is not dead."

"By what signs do you judge that he lives?"

"I saw the linen cover move as it would when a man breathes. Many times this happened before we gave the word in Zigida."

Yawfee stooped and laid his fingers on the linen cover above Momolu's heart. But the only movement he felt was the trembling of his own hand.

"This is a strange thing," he said, turning to the expectant people, some of whom had now edged their way into a ring about the body. "Can any of you declare that this man lives?"

"No," answered a young negro. "It is nothing but a joke. These fools are playing with us."

"It is not a joke," broke in the guard indignantly. "It is true—I swear it is true. See! It moves again."

His eyes, that had hitherto been fixed on the motionless cover, sought Yawfee's in desperate appeal.

Sweeping aside the now eager onlookers, Yawfee knelt down on the ground beside Momolu.

"Let in the light," was all he said to them and to those who peered and tiptoed in the doorway in the hope of seeing into the hut.

For seconds that could have been counted by heart-beats the silence was intense. Then Yawfee rose to his feet.

"This man has spoken truth," he said. "With my own eyes I have seen the cover move. We have need of a magician. I go to call Shariff."

He turned to the two guards imperiously.

"Wait here. But do not take your eyes off him, nor let so much as a finger of any stranger touch him until I return to-night. Neither shall you speak anything of that which you have seen and heard. It is the will of Allah."

CHAPTER VII

WITH something of the air of a black-skinned Pied Piper, Yawfee headed the straggling procession of laughing, gesticulating, chattering people back to Zigida.

Opinion among them on the supposed miracle was divided. Many believed, but more doubted. Their incredulity had, however, no effect whatever on the inspired conviction of Yawfee that Momolu lived. Whether he had ever been really dead mattered not a jot, though, with the instinctive perception of the dramatic that characterizes all coloured races, Yawfee, in his heart, secretly hoped he had. But, whether the strange state of his friend had been merely one allied to that of death, imposed for some inscrutable reason by the wisdom of Allah, or the thing itself, he was determined now to restore him to the world of living reality with the least possible delay.

With this object in view he went straight to the house of Shariff—that same Mandingo magician whose pronouncement in regard to Farmata had been, supernatural dispensations

apart, the original cause of Momolu's so sudden withdrawal into the realm of mystery.

Shariff was known and feared throughout the whole of the Zinta district as a devil-man. In better-informed and less generally superstitious regions, he would have found a ready and fitting niche among those pseudo-medical practitioners whose mediumistic and hypnotic powers enable them to impose the will to health upon their by no means always completely ignorant patients.

In West Africa, where " devil-magic," allegories, incantations, and other ju-ju rites formed part and parcel of the common national experience and were indeed the basis of much that, to alien eyes, would seem but an expression of racial hysteria, Shariff was both respected and feared. To those whom the touch of his sensitive, black fingers soothed into the acquiescence of a sombre passivity that was oblivious of pain, he seemed indeed the incarnation of Allah himself, in his power to heal and bless. But fear, as well as reverence, was his prerogative. Stories of incredible wickedness, of diabolical traffic in the black magic of demons, had earned for him the title of " hell's own cat untied." Skilfully indeed he played upon the imaginations of those who sought his counsel and help, touching the strings of their fear, their curiosity, their suffering, as a

musician might sweep the chords of a harp from wildness to peace. Born in another continent, he might have been a brilliant, if ruthless, surgeon. As it was, he succeeded at times in scaling considerable heights of human understanding; at others he descended to depths of barbaric brutality and evil, from which he only emerged sane by reason of the fact that fear was to him a thing unknown.

To this strange mixture of savagery and natural tenderness that was Shariff, came Yawfee, with his tale of Momolu alive from the dead.

Believing implicitly in the power of the man who stood tall and straight before him in his long white robes, his head wrapped in a white turban securely fastened under his black chin, his feet shod in sandals of tan leather, Yawfee wasted no time in laying the case before him.

Shariff watched him in silence with his dark, luminous eyes. Only as the breathless suppliant for his help concluded the story of what, being aware of the circumstances that had preceded Momolu's fall, he had already decided was nothing more nor less than a cataleptic trance, did Shariff allow their steady, penetrating brilliance to soften to a slow smile. Here was a heaven-sent opportunity for a spectacular demonstration of his reputed power over life and death. Allah was undoubtedly

good. But when he spoke it was with the utmost gravity.

"I can do nothing without the aid of Allah. First I must ask his blessing, for without it I am helpless."

"Very well," said Yawfee, somewhat disappointed at the unforeseen delay, but nevertheless impressed by the solemn accents and evident holiness of the great magician. "When shall I return for you?"

Shariff appeared to ponder. Instinctively the charlatan in him must stage-manage the affair.

"At sunset—not a moment before," he said at length.

"And you will do your best for me?"

"Indeed I will. But all power is in the hands of Allah."

Dismissed on so lofty a note, Yawfee went away comforted, to spend the waiting period in supplication for his friend, pacing the floor of his hut back and forth as the hours went slowly by. But as the interminable day dragged on, anxiety got the upper hand of him again, and his prayers were interrupted by frequent and agitated visits to the window to note the position of the sun.

In the meantime, Shariff had made his way to a little hut of white clay that stood beneath a tall tree in the yard behind his house.

Having decided that the present case was

one in which the Deity, rather than the Devil, was likely to be of the most assistance, he duly prostrated himself upon a white sheep-skin mat spread on the baked mud floor, his knees bent beneath the immaculate white robes that flowed about him, his fingers mechanically telling the beads of the Tysabiya, as he prayed in silence, reverently kissing the ground.

In utter quietness, save for the occasional rattle of the potent beads, the hours of preparation sped rapidly to Shariff in his little shrine. For, despite its savage distortions of outlook and belief, his was the soul of the true mystic, capable of abandoning self with equal ease, in the contemplation of ultimate good or ultimate evil. The shrine itself formed a curious illustration of this dual personality. Its windowless, rounded walls and cone-shaped, thatched roof bore a distinct resemblance, in miniature, to many sacred buildings of the Orient. The entrance was characteristically narrow, the casement consisted of soft boards, and a white bamboo mat, suspended from within over the door, served at once as a shutter and a ventilator. Anomalous, indeed, in such a setting were the numerous hideous objects that lay scattered on floor and table, mute witnesses of the cult of demoniac magic and cruelty.

The hour at length came for him to leave

the shrine and await Yawfee, who by this time had ceased consciously to pray, and was standing motionless at the door of his hut, where, gazing anxiously at the sky, he saw that at last the sun was sinking gradually over the tree-tops of the western plains.

The sight roused him to such sudden gladness that his voice trembled as he stammered aloud: "Oh, Allah, be with us this night. All power is Thine; Thy name be praised."

The spoken words unloosed a fount of tears. Falling on his knees, he kissed the earth three times, and then, still weeping, flung himself upon his cot, crying in agony to Allah to revive the body of his friend, that he might walk in safety again among the living, and join them at their feasts and dancing.

But as so often happens at a time of crisis, the pitch of nervous excitement at which he had been living all day betrayed Yawfee suddenly. The sun was hidden by the distant hills, darkness was upon fields and villages. Darkness came flooding in upon his hitherto trusting soul.

"It is not possible that Momolu is not dead." The thought haunted, hurt, baffled him. Valiantly he fought for his faith. "With my own eyes I saw him breathe. But does my friend indeed live? Speak, O Allah, that thy servant may understand."

At this moment, as if in answer to his prayer, and as he stepped out of the door to meet Shariff, a messenger came running in great haste to tell him that the magician was ready, and to enumerate the things that Yawfee must bring with him—a white plate, white Kolo, a white chicken, twelve yards of white cloth, a white ram, and a bushel of new rice, for sacrifice.

Hurriedly Yawfee turned back, ordered his servants to obtain the things and bring them immediately to Shariff's house, and then set out once more to meet the magician.

In a miraculously short space of time, the required articles, animate and inanimate, were duly deposited at Shariff's door, and all was ready for the sacrificial and religious rites that, as symbols of purity of heart, must be employed in formally invoking the blessing of Allah and His divine assistance.

Solemn and impressive in his white robes, Shariff at length came forth and performed the prescribed ceremony of purification of the ram and fowl, which, having been duly slain, were then handed over to the women assembled before the house, to be cooked with the rice and subsequently served in large enamel bowls and basins.

When the food was ready to be eaten it was carried before Shariff for the required blessing

and then distributed to the children of the village, since they alone were innocent of the cares and responsibilities of life. In their tender, unspoiled souls was, therefore, centred the hope of the reward, and they were enjoined to pray with all their childish strength for Allah's blessing upon the work of their elders.

The white plate and Kolo remained, according to custom, with Shariff; the white cloth was divided among the old women of the village.

As soon as the necessary ceremonies and formalities were completed, Shariff and Yawfee set out on their three-mile walk to the lonely hut in the forest. Having been blessed by the old women and the children, both were filled with joyful confidence as to the outcome of their mission—Yawfee because his faith, always of the simplest, was founded on the implicit belief that all things were possible with Allah; Shariff because, having for the occasion deliberately allied himself with the powers of heaven, as opposed to those of hell, he was equally convinced that the result of the coming battle was a foregone conclusion.

The night was beautiful, starless and soft, glowingly silvered by the moon. A small wind touched their dusky faces caressingly as they trod the narrow footpath through the forest.

Reaching the hut, Shariff entered first, closely followed by Yawfee.

"Have you seen any change since this morning?" asked the latter of the attendant guards, who sat, scarcely distinguishable from the darkness inside the hut, one on each side of the still rigid form of Momolu.

"None, Master. But when I laid my hand above his hand just now, I seemed to feel a little warmth."

"That is a good sign," said Yawfee. "Has anybody been here since the people left this morning?"

"No, Master."

"Does he still breathe?"

"Very little. He seems to be growing weaker."

"You may both go home. Shariff and I will watch through the night."

Delighted to be released at last from their gruesome task, the two men quickly made off back towards the town. Then Shariff turned to Yawfee: "Leave me," he said in a low voice. "The mysteries are not for those who do not understand."

As soon as Yawfee had left the hut, to spend the hours of waiting in silent prayer, beneath the trees, Shariff began to make everything ready. When all was done, the vessels of sacred oil that he had brought with him laid out side by side with blood of the recent sacrifice, the prescribed incantations said and

incense set alight, he threw back the cover beneath which Momolu lay, and then proceeded to remove all the garments that clothed the motionless body, accompanying each action with appropriate invocations of the spirit of the dead.

Then, with swift, gentle passes, his hands began to move over the body. Suddenly, a single touch evoked a slight movement of one foot, and Shariff, breathing a little heavily now, concentrated all his strength in the endeavour to impregnate Momolu's body with his own magnetic power.

As time went on, a white mist appeared above the still, black form. After a while it vanished, and whirling sheets of smoke arose from the sacred vessels, filling the hut with utter and opaque darkness. For some quarter of an hour the darkness lasted, dense and acrid; then it was pierced and dispersed by sudden tongues of fire—flames of purification in which no demons could survive. The singing voice of Shariff rose to a note of ecstasy; completely absorbed in mediumistic trance, his face, in the light of the soaring flames, was transformed into something almost superhuman.

With the subsiding of the fires, he bent again over Momolu, and anointed him from head to foot with sacred oil; the subsequent passes of his hands resulted in a sudden, muscular kick.

Encouraged by this undoubted response to his efforts, Shariff began to work upon the rigid lower jaw, which, after a time, he succeeded in unlocking. This success was followed by the administration of a preparation of nux vomica, blown through a small gourd down the throat of the patient and inducing violent vomiting.

But its other effects were equally immediate. Momolu opened his eyes—vacant still though they were; his rigid muscles became supple, and he began to breathe evenly and easily.

At this stage of the proceedings came mimic cries of human voices and a low-toned, urgent chattering. The spirits that the magician had evoked were battling with a malignant demon, bent on restraining the return of Momolu's soul.

Shrill and persistent the cries rose and fell. At last came a scurry of wind and sudden silence, and in the eastern corner of the hut appeared the figure of a man, as if blown in upon the wings of a gale. Suspended in space, the figure hovered, a motionless, dejected image of Momolu, unable as yet to establish contact with the physical body that lay on the ground before it.

For a moment Shariff watched, gathering his power. Then he cried in clear, compelling tones:

"Thou whom I see before me art not dead. Return unto thy self and live."

Like a blown ghost, the image disappeared. In the stillness that followed Shariff's words, Momolu sighed heavily; then turned on his side and his whole body relaxed into an attitude of natural sleep.

Outside the hut a shrieking wind tore through the trees; black clouds blotted out the moon; morning, shivering and sombre, was at hand.

To Yawfee, watching in the chill, brooding forest, it seemed that witches and devils rode abroad in the high heavens. But the hideous howling of their voices on the wind was music in his ears—the angry moaning of evil spirits whom he knew to be defeated and shamed.

In the little hut Shariff, completely exhausted by his long trance, and his expenditure of hypnotic power, knelt beside Momolu who, though he showed signs of extreme weakness, was indubitably alive. With skilful, gentle hands, Shariff rubbed the still ice-cold limbs and administered small quantities of nourishment. Not until Momolu's body was restored to a state of healthy warmth did he allow his own drowsiness to overpower him. Then, one hand still on the pulse of his patient, he stretched himself wearily on the ground beside him, and saviour and saved fell, together, into a deep sleep.

The sun was fully up when Yawfee, accompanied by the two servants who had joined him

on their return from Zigida, ventured to go back to the hut.

Their coming woke Shariff. Smiling at Yawfee with his tired, brilliant eyes, he advised him to have food prepared for Momolu. Then, having collected all the articles used in the occult ceremonial of the night, he bade them a courteous farewell, and went off without waiting to hear Yawfee's thanks and eager protestations of gratitude. For it was characteristic of Shariff that, though never averse to calling even the most revolting wickedness to his aid as need arose, he was always equally ready to do good unrewarded, and for the love of God.

CHAPTER VIII

THUS began for Momolu a not unpleasant period of convalescence, a period during which Yawfee and the two servants nursed and tended him with faithful devotion, and left nothing undone that could speed him back to health.

In the course of a week or so he was strong enough to move feebly about the hut, until, as the days passed, both he and Yawfee became joyfully hopeful that he would be sufficiently well to take part in the feast and dances at the breaking of the fast and the opening of the "Bush."

This latter is a festival that, though it coincides with the Mohammedan Ramadan in time, differs from it in that its rites are veiled in mystery, most scrupulously guarded, and open only to the pure-blooded African. The "Bush" is indeed a secret society, membership of which imposes a sacred oath and obligations. To break the first, or to fail in the second, involves death.

In the Western world, the cult is often

spoken of as "Devil-Bush" or "Devil-worship." The second of these appellations at least is misleading, since the true "Bush" or "Porrow" is rather a mystical system of ethics than a dogmatic creed. In the sense, however, in which the African regards any work of art or invention that is outside his understanding as "devil," the uninitiated are not altogether wrong in applying the same word to some of the mysterious manifestations that occur from time to time in the "Bush"—manifestations that often bear a striking resemblance to the miraculous occurrences on the physical plane that have attended the visions and ecstasies of more than one Christian saint and martyr.

One such phenomenon, known as the "Human Blaze," was observed in the case of a village girl who, having fallen asleep in perfect composure of mind, awoke suddenly to find her body enveloped in fire. Screaming, she strove to beat out the flames with her clenched fists, but to no avail. When at last her cries attracted attention, those who came to her help were unable at first even to approach the bed on which she lay. At length two men, more daring than the rest, succeeded in putting out the fire. By this time the girl was unconscious. But when she had been carried to another room, it was found that

neither her night-clothes nor her bed were even scorched.

In another case, the master of a household had had stolen from a box a considerable sum of money. All his servants stolidly maintained their innocence. Next morning the servants, in the presence of many onlookers, were marshalled before a sorcerer, and their backs and chests exposed. The sorcerer then asked them jocularly how they had spent the money—whether on fine clothes or on some damsel. One and all still protesting innocence, he called each individually to stand before a fire of dried mango wood. He then thrust a cutlass into the flames, instructing the servant who stood before the fire to declare his innocence to the weapon. When the cutlass was red-hot the sorcerer withdrew it from the fire, bathed it in a basin of liquid distilled from certain herbs, and then thrust it into the earth close to a stick that had been dipped at the point into another mystic preparation. When the sorcerer spoke to it the stick moved slightly. Withdrawing the still glowing cutlass from the earth, the magician approached the first servant and laid it, yet hot, on the naked chest and back of the boy. Innocent, he did not even flinch, and the cutlass, when removed, was found to be stone-cold. This same ritual was enacted with each servant in turn, until, the hot cutlass

being laid upon the breast of one who was emphatically declaring his innocence, he screamed loudly and it was seen that his chest was seared and branded right across.

Early one morning, when there was still a fortnight to run before the feast, Yawfee came as usual to the hut in the woods, and was surprised to find Momolu fully dressed in a long, embroidered white robe. His face broke into beaming smiles, his voice into loud ejaculations, as he circled round the invalid, eyeing him admiringly. "Can you really walk?" he cried.

"Why, yes," answered Momolu, and promptly moved forward to meet his friend.

Yawfee grasped him by the hand.

"It is a miracle," he said solemnly. And, dropping to his knees, he began a half-spoken, half-singing chant in praise of Allah's holy name.

All through his illness, Momolu had been deeply touched by Yawfee's devotion and unfailing affection. Now in his weakness, emotion overcame him and he flung his arms about the older man, and folded him to his breast, while unheeded tears rolled down his cheeks.

"My father, brother, and friend; you have been all of these to me. I am poor, I have nothing to give you to show my gratitude, but Allah will reward you and your posterity with an abundance of good things, for my sake."

Yawfee's own eyes were by no means dry as he waved aside Momolu's exuberant thanks.

"Everything is very strange," said Momolu presently. "Let us sit together. I have much to tell and ask you. First, why am I here?" He pointed wonderingly about the little room.

Yawfee smoothed the folds of his robe complacently, and shifted to a more comfortable position on his bamboo stool. He was a born story-teller and the prospect of recounting the recent mysterious happenings was distinctly pleasant.

It took some time for the recital, embellished with verbal decorations as it was, to come to an end. When it had been duly completed, Yawfee, enchanted with his own eloquence, took Momolu's right hand in his, gave it three consecutive flips of the fingers, placed his left hand over his friend's heart and embraced him ecstatically.

Momolu's eyes, that had been sometimes puzzled, sometimes startled during the story, softened now to a look that was akin to shame. Tall, loosely built and naturally slender, the extreme thinness that had resulted from the condition of catalepsy and its subsequent weakness, gave him the appearance of being little more than an overgrown boy. His smile, as he released himself from Yawfee's arms, had in it the unconscious pathos of a penitent child.

"The whole story is to me a dream," he said, sitting down on the side of the cot that Yawfee had caused to be brought from Zigida to the hut for his use. "You have been very good to me. I do not deserve all you have done. But as long as I live I shall be grateful and pray that you may ever be blessed from Allah's store-house."

"It is nothing," said Yawfee generously. "I would do the same to-morrow for any stranger, especially if she whom he loved had treated him so harshly."

"Stop!" cried Momolu, his heart beating so loud and fast that instinctively he put his hand over it to quieten it. "How is she?"

"Radiant as the morning," said Yawfee, suddenly sententious. "Still the picture you saw and dreamed of ever after."

Momolu put out a shaking hand.

"Don't. . . . You are tearing out my heart," he said thickly.

"Come, Momolu, be quiet. I did not mean to disturb you." Yawfee was alarmed at the tense excitement of Momolu's manner, the trembling that shook him from head to foot. "You shall see her when you are strong enough. Think where you have so recently come from. . . ."

"From hell," interrupted Momolu, scowling at his friend.

"No, not from hell—from the valley of death," answered Yawfee quietly, and, rising, he went and fetched a cup of cold water. "Drink this," he said, holding it out. "It will cool your heart."

Sighing deeply, Momolu obediently took the cup and drained it. In a moment or two he announced dramatically that he felt better.

Yawfee nodded sagely. "There is nothing better than water," he said with more regard for convenience than actual truth. "Now I go to pray while you lie and sleep for an hour."

Momolu stared at him for a moment with eyes that saw nothing. Then he smiled wryly. He was still too weak to be able to concentrate for long on one train of thought or to keep his emotional balance steady.

"It is life," he said, stretching himself wearily upon the cot. But in a very few minutes he was fast asleep.

At the end of an hour Yawfee returned to the hut. Momolu still lay motionless, breathing softly and regularly. Yawfee paused irresolutely. He did not want to rouse his sleeping friend. If, on the other hand, he went away without a word, Momolu might be so distressed on waking and finding him gone that there would be some risk of a relapse.

Deciding, however, that sleep was the most potent healer of all, he tiptoed cautiously round

the cot to get a parcel of cloth that he had left on the far side of the room.

But his foot kicked against a bucket of water with such a clatter that Momolu started up in alarm.

"You were not going to slip away without my knowing?" asked Momolu, laughing between yawns at Yawfee's expression of annoyance at his own clumsiness.

"Not exactly," prevaricated Yawfee. "You were still asleep and I did not want to disturb you."

Momolu nodded. Then he sat upright on the cot.

"Come here and sit beside me," he said. "I have something to tell you."

More than willing to postpone his three-mile walk to Zigida until a cooler hour of the day, Yawfee obeyed.

"Are you strong enough yet to tell me the story of your journeys in the other world?" he asked as he settled himself at Momolu's side on the bed.

"Why, yes; that is exactly what I want to do," responded Momolu, "for I think you may be able to explain the mystery to me."

"On that morning when I fell unconscious outside Shariff's house, my body indeed was dead, but my spirit still lived. Forthwith it travelled to a far-off country. There I saw

many people: some were sad, others happy. Desiring to know why this was so, my soul went to an old man with a flowing white beard, robed in white linen and a white turban, who sat upon a mat spread in the shade of a large tree. He wore about him the tolerant air of a philosopher who has forsaken the vanities of material things, but has not lost all sympathy with human frailty.

"To him I said: 'Hymfar, tell me, why are some of these people sad and others happy?'

"'Sir,' he answered courteously, 'do you understand the philosophy of life?'

"'No,' was my prompt reply.

"'The world from which you have so recently come is wrapped in deep mysteries,' he went on. 'To try to solve the problems of the material life is a perplexing task. But as you are eager to know why some are sad, while others are happy, I will tell you a story, and leave it to you to draw your own conclusions.

"'Once in the material world lived a young man who travelled to a place far off from his home, to take part in the great festival of Mohammed. In this strange place he was moved to seek the advice of a magician on some affairs that troubled him. This magician took him to an ancient cave beneath two great mountains. On reaching the cave, the young man was manifestly afraid. But, seeing that

the magician was still with him, and hearing his exhortations to courage, he stiffened the cords of his heart and went boldly in. The cave was dark and wound its way gloomily between the crevices of large rocks that formed themselves into the two walls of a vast precipice, across which it was necessary to leap to gain the other side. Afraid to trust himself to this jump, the young man looked fearfully behind him. There on the ground he saw the writhing forms of poisonous serpents and the snapping jaws of crocodiles. On the far side of the precipice was a field, fair and smooth, where trees of great beauty grew. Through it went winding a crystal stream. But beside it were heaped the skulls and bones of cowards who, though they had found courage to leap the precipice, had fallen victims to a later fear.

"'Beyond the field, about a temple of Mohammed, lay a garden where lived those brave ones who had battled against all difficulties and so come to happiness.

"'This garden was glorious with avenues of palms, and sparkling cascades that glittered like diamonds in the sun. In the green grass, soft as velvet, roses and lilies bloomed beneath the shade of trees in whose branches birds with rainbow feathers perched and sang.

"'Now, the cave in which the young man stood and gazed with longing eyes upon this

loveliness, was divided into several chambers. At the entrance to each stood a guard, armed with a brazen spear that had been bathed in poisonous liquid. The slightest scratch from this brought instant death to an intruder who was not in possession of the pass.

"'The young man, accompanied by the magician, halted at the outer door, and the guard asked him: Why comest thou here?

"'To seek life and happiness, he answered.

"'Enter, said the guard.

"'So the young man passed into an antechamber, where he was given another password and schooled how to ward off the dangers that awaited him.

"'In the chamber beyond were scores of fierce gorillas, that would have torn him to pieces had he not shown a brave front and carefully remembered his instructions.

"'Passing along a narrow footpath, blown out through huge rocks, he came to a second door, where the guard put to him the same question as the first, to which he returned the same answer. Whereupon the guard gave him a new password and instructions.

"'On entering this second chamber, he saw enormous, deadly serpents crawling about the rocks and menacing him with their forked tongues. Remembering his instructions, he began to sing a rhythmic chant that worked

like a spell upon those evil reptiles so that their heads swayed harmlessly back and forth to the brave notes of the singer as he trod safely among them.

"'At the door of the third chamber he received fresh instructions and a new password from the guard on duty. Each set of instructions had to be kept clear and separate in his mind, for to be confused or to falter meant loss of courage that would be followed by despair and a horrible death.

"'As he waded through the muddy waters of this third chamber, where starving crocodiles snapped their jaws at him on all sides, he began once more to be afraid. His knees knocked together, he could recall nothing at all of what had been told him at the door, and his eyes rolled in horror as he found himself unable to move before the approach of one of the huge beasts. At this moment the magician, whom he had not seen for some time, appeared and touched him on the head, and immediately he remembered what the guard had said.

"'In the eastern corner of the chamber, hidden in a crevice of a rock, was a lamp, the light of which was so dazzling that no reptiles could see anything at all when it was played about them. It had, however, certain limitations. Any attempt to take it beyond the border of its ordained territory caused its light

to flicker and die. Neither could it be handled by any save those in possession of the word. Remembering all this, the young man gathered his courage and seized the lamp with both his hands. The instant that its light flared forth across the waters the crocodiles sank down, baffled and harmless.

"'There remained now but one more chamber through which the traveller must pass. Having been instructed by the guard as before, he crossed its threshold feeling weak and exhausted. This chamber consisted of a huge mass of rocks blown into the air by some magic power. It ended in the yawning precipice that the young man had already seen, beyond which lay the fields and garden of peace. A new pass had been given him, and also the words and rhythm of a chant that would enable him to cross space on mystic wings of ease. By this time the magician had again disappeared.

"'Trembling, desolate, his nerves shaken by the horrors through which he had already passed, the young man crawled along the edge of the precipice, sick and faint with fear as he tried not to look into the depths below. Reaching the end at last, he stood up, shivering and afraid, then drew back to take the short run that should precede his leap. But, terrified and faltering as he was, he jumped short, and fell down—down—down, and was dashed to

pieces on the rocks below; his broken bones being afterwards gathered and added to the heap beside the crystal stream.

"'This,' ended the philosopher, 'is a lesson to you. Had he shown courage to the end and remembered what he had been taught, he would to-day have been basking in the garden of Mohammed, in company with the brave and noble.'

"I bowed and thanked him," said Momolu, continuing his strange story, "and went on my way through space. All at once it seemed as if some monstrous power had me in its grip. Black clouds gathered about me, and then there came a tumult of wind that caught and hurled me headlong down a steep precipice. At the bottom of this horrible place I could see my own body lying, mutilated and dead. I stood, high above it, mourning its terrible end. Then there came, from very far off, a strong voice that called aloud to me: 'Thou whom I see before me, art not dead. Return unto thyself and live.' As the voice ceased, I woke and found myself in this lonely hut in the woods."

For a little space after Momolu stopped speaking, Yawfee regarded him in silence with glowing eyes. Then he said gravely:

"This is admirably good. To you, Momolu, it has been given to learn the greatest lesson in the world—courage and perseverance in the

face of difficulties. To me also this story of the philosopher shall henceforth be my chart through life. May the holy vision that has been so graciously vouchsafed you be the means of bringing both you and me in safety to the beautiful garden of Mohammed."

With a gentle touch on Momolu's shoulder, Yawfee rose to go, for he was unwilling to break, by further conversation, the spell of contemplative exaltation that held him.

Momolu understood his friend's feeling well enough. He too was desirous of applying the meaning of the allegory to the problems of his own life. But whereas Yawfee went on his way imbued with the purely spiritual significance of all that he had heard, Momolu lay on his back on the cot, pondering long and earnestly on the relation between courage and possessive love.

It was high noon in the forest, and the watchful servant had more than once crept in to see if his charge slept, so quietly he lay, before he had reached the conclusion that any man who is bold enough can win any woman, provided he is not afraid to use whatever weapon may come to his hand.

CHAPTER IX

THE long-awaited day of the great feast came at last—a day on which pleasure wandered recklessly through towns and villages —on which fashion strutted in gold jewels and beads, silks, satin, velveteen or cotton, dyed to all colours of the rainbow. Heads were bound gaily in rose-pink, blue, or green handkerchiefs, with gold-mounted daggers and combs stuck at the back and sides; fingers and ears were adorned with gold rings; arms encircled by bracelets and necks in chains of gold; feet, twinkling to the dance, were shod in red or black half-moon slippers.

For weeks past villagers and townspeople had been busy preparing their streets with civic pride. Huts had been white-washed and repaired, roads swept, hollows beaten by the recent torrential rains filled in.

Almost before it was light, a concourse of thousands of people, the majority of them women, had assembled in a field about a furlong from the town of Zinta, where hundreds of hampers of new rice, and basin after basin, bowl

after bowl of savoury food prepared with the flesh of cows, sheep, goats and chickens, were set out on mats beneath the trees, in company with proportionate supplies of wine, beer, and gin.

Dawn broke amidst a roar of muskets. Clouds, blown and massed by a fresh wind, floated against a clear, blue sky. The great storm that had devastated the villages a short three weeks before had been, indeed, the last of the wet season. Now the rains were over and dry weather that would last for at least six months had set in.

As soon as the sun was up a great procession formed for a march round the town, music being provided by gourd instruments known as *sambas*, and drums, the former played by women, the latter by men.

It was the rhythmic, barbaric cadence of these instruments, and the always arresting and stirring sound that is the voice of a great crowd, which roused Momolu from sleep, where he lay in the little guest-chamber of Yawfee's house in Zigida.

In the fortnight that had passed since the recital of his mystic adventures to his friend, Momolu had quickly regained his strength, and now, but for an occasional expression in his eyes that showed his mind to be completely withdrawn into itself, there were little or no traces upon him of his recent strange illness.

The quiet days in the forest had had, too, a steadying, clarifying effect upon his emotions and desires. Alone in the green stillness, where the babble of moving water and bird notes of liquid silver were the only sounds save the padding of his own sandalled feet, the kaleidoscopic hours of daylight had seemed to him all bright with the remembered beauty of Farmata, the moon-soaked nights a dreaming hope of tenderness.

Essentially simple in thought and action, with a flair for extravagantly quixotic and naïve friendliness, Momulu was yet capable of persistency as dogged as it was unsophisticated. Now, with renewed physical strength and the, to him, extremely potent inspiration of his cataleptic vision, the determination to win his heart's desire had become his one utmost thought. Even the revengeful hatred of Prince Piu that, prior to his meeting with Farmata, had been his chief emotional preoccupation, seemed now a thing of secondary importance, though the knowledge that the Prince and Farmata were not merely acquaintances but friends of long standing had originally shocked and frightened him so profoundly as to bring about the ruin of his new and dearest hopes.

As a matter of fact, the raging jealousy and fear that had caused him to offend Farmata were based on solid foundations. The same

impetuous, headlong passion that had awakened in Momolu in the Zinta market-place, had been poured out three years before on his first love in Foya. Döng was a Mendi dancing-girl, slim and graceful, warm and sweet with the rose-bloom of youth on all her vivacious loveliness. Growing up from childhood together, the two had come quite naturally to be lovers, meeting each day at sunset beside a stream, or joining in the dances of the New Moon beneath the stars. But it was not until business called Momolu away to distant Bo, on the English side of the hinterland, that he thoroughly understood the real nature of their relationship. With a suddenness that was subsequently equalled by the birth of his infatuation for Farmata, he found himself overwhelmed by passion, tender and importunate—the prospect of immediate separation added fuel to the fire of his new-found love. What had been hitherto a placid, almost inevitable, affection was now for the first time a thing of drama and flame.

Momolu went out to give the final instructions to the carriers who were to accompany him on his journey, with Döng's tears still wet on his face, his heart a turmoil of mingled despair and joy.

Three moons later he had disposed of his hundred hampers of kola nuts at a satisfactory profit, and was back in Foya.

He found Döng awaiting him with terror and shame in her eyes. Smiling, to disguise a sudden stab of fear, Momolu made to take her gently in his arms. But when she resisted him, he gripped her round the waist as if intending to throw her out of the hut, then crushed her to him greedily. The strength and brutality of the embrace seemed to infuse new life into Döng. Her eyes glittering strangely, her burning fingers groped to stroke his face as she lay for a moment, abandoned, in his arms. Then with one of the lithe, graceful movements that Momolu had loved and seen so often, she slipped from him, and, before he could stop her, had begun to dance—slowly at first, but quickly gathering speed, she spun and twisted, advanced and retreated, her arms flung wide, her fluttering hands at once an invitation and a caress. There was no sound in the room save her rapid, uneven breathing, for her bare feet were as light as thistledown and as quiet. Gone now was her first terror of Momolu's raging scorn. With all the art of generations of dancing folk behind her, she set the postures of her quivering, poised body to stir the pulses of remembered love. Soon she was at his shoulder, her hands shuttering his eyes, his long limbs swaying involuntarily to the imperious, seductive cadence that was the movement of her own.

Seizing her wrists in a grip that bruised them, Momolu tore her hands from his face. Her mouth close to his, her head thrown back, Döng stood, suddenly motionless, within the circle of his arms, and smiled. The invitation in her eyes, her immobility, her pose, were unmistakable. For a moment Momolu stared as if hypnotized. Then the truth dawned on him. This had been no ordinary dancing, such as his beloved had often charmed him with before—there was a deliberation about her abandonment that made it more of purpose than surrender. Her movements had the calculated, slight exaggeration of the professional charmer. Gone was the elfin, innocent magic that had stolen his heart. Her eyes, behind their smiling, had suddenly grown old.

Clearly and coldly realization came. Döng was no longer his for the taking. The treasure he had hoped and waited for had been given to another—or taken by force—he neither knew nor cared. And she, knowing the fate that would befall her at the hands of tribal law when her secret was made known, had sought to lure him with the offered gift of herself, that, having taken her, she might claim death at the hands of his love.

Beside himself with rage and a hateful pity, Momolu flung the girl from him so that she half staggered, half fell on to the bed in a corner

of the room. Her eyes, that had been proud and fearless with the knowledge of power, were once again supplicating, young and ashamed, as he stood over her demanding to be told the name of him who had robbed him of his considered rights.

By slow degrees he wrung the faltering story from her. The New Moon dancing, wild and naïve; the subtle courtesy, the grave allurement of Prince Piu; the visit to his house to see and covetously handle a length of cloth of fabulous weaving and design; the sweet, insidious lies that made of earth a heaven and promised, best of all, a magnificent funeral after death, all the enchanting, sordid weaving of the web, whose threads are spangled with the same glittering deceit for black or white.

With the pitiful ending of her tale Momolu was stricken strangely dumb. He could not kill Döng, neither could he love her any more. His heart felt as cold as an empty grave. Presently he left her, lying on the mud floor of the hut, because the sound of her tortured crying was impossible to bear.

Not until he heard that she was dead, and had seen for himself the little mound beneath a walnut tree that marked her resting-place, did the still apathy of despair break up into acute determination to revenge. With complete calmness and seriousness Momolu vowed

that as soon as it should please Allah to give him the opportunity, he would kill Prince Piu. And he would, without a doubt, have fulfilled his purpose had it not happened that the Prince, having returned by the time the moon was full, to his home in Vonjama, did not cross his path.

All this had been reawakened in Momolu's mind when, unknown to both of them, he had seen Farmata in the streets of Zigida with the Prince. The reaction had been swift and inevitable. What the passing of time had already taught him was but a tender vision seen in youthful dream, shattered by fate and dispersed on the wings of the past, had leaped suddenly to pulsing, vivid life, that flaunted its hateful, piteous ribbons of memory against the sunlight of a new and happy love.

As is the way with all primitive creatures, Momolu's hurt and fear led to snarling: like a wounded tiger he had turned and growled.

Now with the finer adjustment between mind and body that had resulted from his long rest, he knew that his love for Farmata was, as it were, but a reincarnation of that he had felt for Döng. She had gone from him, but Farmata had taken her place—the two were different, yet were they strangely one and the same.

Interpreting the philosopher's allegory, Momolu saw how he, who now had the password, had failed to carry the magic lamp of

sympathy and understanding to the Mendi girl as she laboured in the crocodile cave of shame and deceit. Beyond the span of his arms, for he alone had truly loved her, the saving light had flickered and died.

He was determined to make yet a third attempt to win Farmata, and that this should end in her solemn promise to marry him.

Not only Shariff's dispassionate explanation, but his own increased perception of what might be Farmata's ideas in relation to love, made him vow greater carefulness, a new and gentler method of approach that should persuade her of the fine quality of his real feelings and earn forgiveness for the blunder that he now saw to have been one of almost incredible stupidity.

With such reformed and sensible intentions acting as spurs to imagination and hope, Momolu had returned to Yawfee's house in Zigida on the night before the opening of the feast.

The two men who had nursed him in the hut in the forest had obeyed Yawfee's instructions implicitly and had spoken no word of the mystery they had seen. Yawfee too had kept Momolu's restoration to life as a close secret, sending his own servants day by day to tend and sell the goods at his friend's deserted stall in the market-place, a plot hatched between

himself and Momolu who wished to time his reappearance from the dead in as dramatically effective a manner as possible.

Thus it came about that neither Farmata in her village home, nor anyone in the town of Zigida, had had definite word of his "resurrection," and the scoffers who had flocked to the hut in the forest were still enjoying the pleasure of believing themselves to have been proved right.

It was therefore in a state of considerable excitement that Momolu, roused by the voices of a marching multitude and the insistent throbbing of drums, sprang from his bed and saw the people streaming past the house on their way to the festival field.

Very soon he was suitably arrayed in his best clothes—brought with him in a chest from Foya for the occasion that was proving infinitely more fantastic and important than he had ever dreamed it could be. Strutting up and down, he admired the reflection in a mirror, of crimson satin mutton-leg pants, white linen robe embroidered with a design of flowers in white silk cotton, a red fez with golden tassels, brown sandals of an ancient Greek pattern, and on his fingers several gold rings.

When he had fetched an ivory-mounted ebony cane from a corner of the room and had tried the effect of swinging it jauntily to and

fro, the picture was so satisfactory that he laughed aloud.

Then, his eyes a little sheepish and self-conscious despite their dancing gleam, he walked confidently out of the hut, to join the revellers.

CHAPTER X

BY the time Momolu reached the field outside the town, the first dance of two hundred girls from the "Porrow Bush" was in full swing, and excitement among those watching the graceful, cadenced motions of the young bodies swaying and circling in time to the music of the *sambas*, was already running high.

This general dance was followed by competitive "turns" in which two girls at a time took the "stage." The swiftness and grace of their scantily clothed bodies, the regular and forcibly accentuated rhythm of their bare feet, the fluttering of their waving scarves, their fine physique and broad, smiling faces, were all peculiarly characteristic of one aspect of their race and country. Hundreds of people gathered to watch and applaud them, and to fling silver coins into the roughly formed ring in order that their dancing feet might tread and spin upon them, until they were finally collected by the elderly women who had taught the performers.

Momolu, feeling as gay and exotically extravagant as the rest, joined the crowd with Yawfee, and flung coin after coin into the ring. But, though his laughter and applause were for the whirling, impassioned dancers, his eyes sought anxiously for Farmata, who, however, was nowhere to be seen.

A few among the spectators eyed him furtively, with curious, startled glances. One or two of them nudged each other and whispered among themselves. But this was a different Momolu, gorgeous in white and crimson and gold, from the figure some had seen sprawling, in the everyday clothes of a modest tradesman, in the dust, or lying rigid, with folded hands, on the floor of a dark hut in the forest. In any case, the man who had died was a stranger in Zigida and it was impossible to say offhand whether this smiling, splendid personage and he might be one and the same.

At midday the dancing ceased, and the crowd gradually dispersed—some to return to their homes for the noon-hour rest and meal, others to sit or lie on mats spread beneath the trees.

Momolu went back with Yawfee to the latter's house, where a sumptuous feast had been prepared. Some of the guests gathered round tables in a shed of poles roofed with palm-thatch that had been built up for the

occasion in a yard behind the house. But, in order to protect Momolu from curiosity and possible questioning, he and Yawfee sat alone together in an inner room.

Momolu's excitement had now reached the stage at which an affectation of careless joviality best fitted his mood.

One of the decisions he had reached during his days of meditation in the forest had been to guard his secret soul most scrupulously against the intrusion of either people or fears, and to this end he had been trying, for some time, to reduce his outward expressions of emotion to mere sighs, contemptuous shrugging of the shoulders or a loftily condescending smile. Even when, passing one day a luxuriant growth of " touch-me-not "—an African species of sensitive plant—he had put his fate to the test by touching its petals with the question, " Does she love me, or does she not ? " and instantly the petals had closed and withered, he had managed to defy the ill omen with the cry: " It matters not—for Allah loves—What do I care ? "

Yawfee, however, was in a class apart, for he alone shared Momolu's full confidence in all that now concerned his life and hopes.

" Did you see her ? " he asked with pretended indifference, smiting his friend affectionately on the back.

Yawfee regarded him quizzically.

" Yes, I saw her very early this morning, at the march and serenade, while you, lazy one, were still asleep. She was dressed in pale pink, with a head kerchief of the same colour. It was a pity you were not there. But you may perhaps see her this afternoon, as I am told she will take part in the dancing." His voice was teasingly casual.

Momolu's eyebrows rose and his black eyes rolled, round and big. His face was glowing as he seized Yawfee and embraced him.

" There is no ' perhaps ' about it. This day will be my day, Yawfee," he declared, wrapping his arms around himself as if he already held Farmata, warm and safe, within them.

Yawfee laughed. " Are you sure she loves you ? Sometimes I think you forget she has been to school in Monrovia and learned other ways of life than yours and mine. And have you seen her aunt on the matter ? "

" No, I have not."

" Well, take my advice and court the aunt, then afterwards Farmata. As for me, you can count on me to do all I can to help you. But you must set to work in the right way."

Momolu thought for a moment, and when he spoke again his tone was less firm.

" You are quite right, Yawfee. Of course the elder aunt is the person of most influence

in the family, since Farmata has no grandmother—that stands to reason. But aunt or no aunt, I must see Farmata to-day."

"Don't be a fool, Momolu," said Yawfee, a little wearily. "You must take things easily, or you will make a mess of them again."

Momolu pushed away his uneaten food, squared his shoulders and stood up.

"Yawfee, you know the whole story. I cannot waste time on ceremony until Farmata has forgiven me. Whether she loves me or not, I must see her to-day."

Yawfee frowned, then laughed.

"Very well; I see you are determined." Going over to Momolu, he laid his hands on his shoulders. "I am an older man than you, and I have learned a lot," he said. "You are a stranger in Zigida, and you have only seen Farmata twice. I could not bear to see you shamed in the eyes of these people. Already they believe that Allah cursed their town on your account. You must go carefully and follow every letter of the law. Remember, Farmata is of the sacred 'Bush.' If you do anything to break the holy precepts of her caste, neither her family, nor her tribe, will show mercy on you or yours for ever. Nor will Allah himself spare you at your last end."

The gravity of Yawfee's face and voice brought instant response from Momolu.

"There is no need for such heavy words," he said, his eyes meeting his friend's with serious directness. "I love Farmata and will for ever cherish her only in my heart as the sweetest hope of perpetual happiness. Because of this I know that I shall win. But, whether she loves me or not, Prince Piu, however rich he is, must not have her. I swear by Allah she shall learn the truth about him from me. This is what I must do now—to-day—there is a time when a man must show his courage. That time is here."

Yawfee listened patiently, while the faint lines that something other than his mere forty-five years had drawn about his eyes deepened perceptibly. Though he was genuinely fond of Momolu, he knew the impetuosity that so often made for weakness in the younger man's character. And, unable now to see exactly how Momolu's original mistake could be set right, the sudden sound of music from the distant dance-field came to him as a welcome interruption of an argument that only time itself could satisfactorily conclude.

"The dancing is beginning again," he said. "Let us go."

As the two friends left the house together hope and fear stalked on either side of them. To Momolu it seemed that the hour was auspicious, the smile of Allah on his clear-cut

plans. In Yawfee's mind doubt of his friend's ability to resist emotional impulses fought with the memory of the philosopher's allegory wherein courage in the face of difficulties was exhibited as the be-all and end-all of man's journey through life. Such courage Momolu was at any rate striving to achieve, and it was not long before this thought dispersed the greater number of Yawfee's fears.

Turning to Momolu, his face and eyes one beaming smile, he said generously:

"You have a stout heart—and without doubt anything worth having is worth fighting for."

"I am glad you have come to my way of thinking," answered Momolu, delighted that his mentor could at last appreciate what he himself felt to be a gallant and rather noble attitude towards a difficult situation.

"I do not say that," retorted Yawfee. "What I mean is that you may certainly need all the courage you can muster if you would come in the end to the garden of Mohammed."

"I know that well enough. Did I not see in vision the bones of cowards beside the crystal stream?"

"Well, well," replied Yawfee, feeling there was really nothing more to be said. "We shall see—only, when the time comes. . . ."

"In the name of Allah—there is Farmata," broke in Momolu, advice and resolutions alike

forgotten in the excitement of the moment as he set off in pursuit.

Yawfee, walking quickly to overtake him, saw the mistake before Momolu, who, indeed, was actually close upon his quarry before he realized that the girl was a complete stranger to him—a dancer of his own Mandingo tribe, some three years older than Farmata. Tied tightly about her waist and falling almost to her ankles, she wore a skirt of pink satin, with an embroidered shirt or "jumper" of the same material, and a pink silk handkerchief about her dark head. Her little feet were encased in red sandals; gold daggers glinted in her hair, and a gold chain about her neck.

She stopped as she heard Momolu approaching so hurriedly, and shot him a swift, appraising glance from eyes that belied her innocence of face and youth of form as she answered his none too polite greeting without evincing either surprise or offence.

Then, as she saw the sombre, almost sulky look of disappointment on his face, her own eyes gleamed with a sudden malice that was as irresponsibly cruel and as unexpected as the scratching of a kitten.

"For whom are you searching?" Poised on one foot, she swung the other in its scarlet sandal carelessly.

"For Farmata," said Momolu sullenly.

"Which Farmata? Is there only one?"

"Farmata Manjo."

"Oh!" The girl changed the position of her feet so as to swing the one on which she had been balancing like a bird about to fly away. Her face was impish beneath its mask of demure solemnity as she said: "I saw her with Prince Piu a little while ago. You will perhaps find her in the crowd with the dancers."

She turned from him with a little laugh and sped away on feet that seemed to skim as lightly and as noiselessly as wings above the hard ground.

As if turned to stone Momolu stood, scowling after her. By the time he had recovered sufficiently to utter the conventional farewell that should be said between those who speak and pass, his wish that the girl might spend a happy day in Allah's keeping was but a blown mockery on the wind that brought her tinkling laughter back to him.

Without waiting for Yawfee, who by this time was close behind, and disregarding his friend's call to him to stay, Momolu strode off towards the field of dancers at such a pace that those revellers he overtook and passed by the way, wondered nervously whether he were mad that he walked so fast in the hot sun. Those among them who saw his blazing eyes were convinced of it.

CHAPTER XI

TO Farmata the past three weeks had been some of the strangest of her short life.

The first sharp shock and horror at seeing Momolu's dead body had passed quickly enough. For she was young and volatile, and Momolu had, as she believed, offended her beyond hope of forgiveness. There was not, and never could have been, any tie between them. Fate had caused the paths of their lives to touch for a brief moment and then to separate, like forest tracks that run together for a few short miles, and then fork off in opposite directions, never to meet again.

Nevertheless, despite these and other philosophical reflections, the days passed in a queer, alternating listlessness and excitement so clearly reflected in the girls' behaviour and speech, that Yadana watched her anxiously, wondering if she were ill—a failure to understand the real cause of the trouble that was very unlike her usually quick intuitions. She was, indeed, much more inclined to regard Prince Piu as

being likely to affect Farmata's moods that varied so unaccountably from dreary sullenness to an exaggerated gaiety that frequently ended in tears.

In any case she had a great deal to do and think about, for the little house on the hill above Zigida had been one of the worst sufferers in the great storm. The major part of its thatched roof was in ribbons, the fencing of the all-important cultivated land about it had been torn to shreds; two trees that had been struck by lightning and had fallen dangerously near the road must be sawn and lifted; several fowls had been drowned or crushed by flying branches, and both her goats were dead.

In this calamitous state of affairs Prince Piu had seen a fresh and welcome opportunity to ingratiate himself with Farmata's family. He understood well enough how important it was that the house and all about it should be set in order in time for the opening of the "Bush," and how difficult Yadana would find it to secure the necessary labour.

At his word, and as if by magic, men appeared with great bundles of new palm-thatch; the fallen trees were sawn into logs and stacked for the kitchen fire, and the fencing set up again. But his crowning largesse was the offering of a young female goat and her kid, immaculately brushed and groomed, and both

resplendent in collars worked in an intricate pattern of dyed grasses, from which depended a gilt bell of appropriate size.

Such generosity, Yadana knew, could have but one meaning. For some time past she had been building splendid hopes as to what the future might hold for Farmata as the Prince's bride. Now this concrete expression of his feelings seemed but the prelude to the request to take her "from the mat"—a ceremony analogous to the purchase of a marriage licence. Among the indigenous natives marriage in Africa is only legal when it is an arranged affair between parents, and the money paid in respect of the bride takes the place of a ring. This money is paid, on behalf of the bridegroom, to the chief of the town, who hands it to the grandmother of the girl, or the eldest female member of the family under whose protection she has grown up.

Yadana was aware that Prince Piu had not, as yet, made the prescribed approach to Tasureba. But he had, on the other hand, been most exemplary in the care with which he had refrained from making deliberate love to Farmata before the long formalities involved in a proposal of marriage to a girl from the "Porrow" had been set on foot.

Nor did she feel that, attractive as was the prospect of having the wealthy Prince for a

son-in-law, Farmata was unworthy of the high estate that would be hers. The girl had a supple, sinuous beauty that was often as vivid as a flame. She had received a very careful religious and secular education, and had, in common with all members of the sacred "Porrow," been taught music, dancing, singing and cookery, as well as the care of children. She was sometimes sulky, sometimes over-impetuous, it was true, but she had the instinctive reverence of her race and upbringing for her elders, and there ran in her veins the pure blood of an ancient and most respectable nobility.

Altogether Yadana saw no reason why a union between her daughter and Prince Piu should not be blessed by Allah with great fertility and equal prosperity. Imbued with the teaching of the "Porrow" in regard to the sanctity of chastity and the inevitable penalty of death to those who violated it, it did not enter her head that the Prince could have any other intention than that of marriage, so that her attitude towards his increasingly frequent visits was one of bland, if extremely discreet, encouragement.

It was therefore with feelings of considerable satisfaction that she surveyed the well-nourished forms of the new goat and her kid, and heard the tinkling of their gilded bells on the first

morning of the feast. The repairs to house and fences, too, had been well and quickly done, and the whole little domain looked spruce and prosperous in the gold and pearl softness of the new day, as she and Farmata set out to join the great procession round the town.

At the end of a pleasantly exciting morning spent in watching the dancing, and gossiping with innumerable acquaintances in Zigida—for Yadana was a popular person despite her sometimes drastically incisive comments on people and things—they returned home for a meal and to rest until it was time for Farmata to join the band of girls taking part in the afternoon's competitions.

For this purpose she changed her simpler dress of the morning to a characteristic dancing costume of mauve silk cloth drawn tightly round the waist, an embroidered "jumper," and half-moon mauve kid slippers, decorated with gold. For despite some advanced ideas acquired at her school in Monrovia and the secret pictures she had often made of herself as a lady in society among the people of Zigida, Farmata had never felt any inclination to adopt European dress, as many of her school companions had done. Nor indeed would Yadana have allowed such a departure from tribal tradition.

By the time the two returned to Zigida the revels, after the midday interval, were once again at their height. It was a lovely afternoon, and the clean, bright streets of the town, spanned by a forget-me-not sky, made a cheerful background for the gaily-dressed crowds that thronged them. The air, too, was alive with lilting, rhythmic music, for the voices of the hammock boys as they strode along—four to each vehicle—with their masters reclining lazily in their different coloured hammocks, each decorated with tassels of brightly dyed grass and shaded with canvas, or native-woven cloth canopies, were raised in a perpetual, cadenced chattering that formed a roughly syncopated accompaniment to the insistent throbbing of the drums and *sambas* from the dancers' field.

Farmata, thrilled with the rapid, colourful movement all about her, and fearful lest she should miss her turn in the competition, was plainly impatient when she and Yadana were overtaken by Prince Piu and were obliged to tarry to give and receive the ceremonious greetings of the occasion. Fortunately the Prince was himself in something of a hurry, for he had arranged to meet a trader from an outlying district to discuss the terms of a cattle "deal," and was on his way to keep the appointment.

But the conversation between the three

lasted long enough for Prince Piu to cast more than one veiled, admiring glance at Farmata in her festal finery—glances that were carefully observed by Yadana, whose usually carelessly seductive voice became almost caressing, as she bade him farewell. And, each absorbed in their own thoughts and calculations, none of them noticed the little Mandingo dancing-girl who stood not far away, swinging one foot in its scarlet sandal, and watching the tall splendid figure of the Prince with alluring, jealous eyes.

Urging the necessity for haste, Farmata hurried her mother along to the field, and at last found her place among the laughing, chattering competitors.

With the opening of the dance the strange oppressions and disturbances of the last weeks seemed to slip from her like a shed garment. Insidious, stimulating, enchanting, the barbaric music of the drums and gourds rose and swelled till all the world was but a beating, cadenced rhythm of sound and motion, and she herself a whirling, disembodied atom that danced on singing air. Faster and faster grew the pace, higher the voices, wilder the clapping of innumerable hands. Green of the field, blue of the sky, crimson and gold and purple where the watching people stood in crowded ranks, ran together, were suddenly distinct, then

merged again—a circling, streaming rainbow that swirled and coiled about her, lapping mind and body in sound that was colour, colour that was sound.

In a clash that seemed to tear the very heavens, the music stopped, and with the almost miraculous control of movement that only the trained or instinctive dancer knows, Farmata's flying feet were instantly still. For a moment she kept her pose, lips parted, arms flung wide. Then the tension of her taut muscles slackened suddenly with the realization that some one was behind her. From the poised grace of a finely modelled statue her attitude changed to that of a creature mortally afraid.

With a little choking cry she turned unsteadily and looked straight into the eyes of Momolu. Seeing her terror, he put his hand gently on her arm. "Farmata, I only want to speak to you."

Her heart beating so fast that she swayed where she stood, Farmata looked wildly about her for her mother or Prince Piu. But Yadana was nowhere to be seen, and the Prince, his back towards her, was walking across the field, deep in conversation with his trader friend, and when she tried to call to him, no sound came. Seeing no help at hand, with a tremendous effort she found strength to speak.

"Who are you?"

"I am Momolu Bei."

"Momolu Bei is dead," said Farmata, unable to move her eyes from those of him who stood before her and spoke with the voice that she had thought never to hear again.

"I am he who was dead," answered Momolu, "but now I am alive."

Farmata, trembling so that the ground seemed to rock beneath her, forced her eyes away from his.

Then she saw that his hand lay upon her arm. She did not know that fear will sometimes deaden other senses than the one through which its first shock comes. That Momolu should have touched her and she not have felt his touch convinced her that the form she saw and heard was ghost or devil—an evil spirit from the world of lost souls.

With a scream of terror she tried to turn and run. But the earth surged in a green haze about her, and the sound of Momolu's voice calling words she could not distinguish, changed in her ears to a roar like thunder as she fell unconscious at his feet.

CHAPTER XII

WITH the mocking laughter of the little dancer flicking at his self-esteem like whips, and vengeful hatred of Prince Piu a red madness in his mind and heart, Momolu had come to the field of festival. Forgotten were his resolutions to be discreet, gentle and understanding in his future dealings with Farmata. Rage and jealousy had swept from his face all its newly acquired serenity and put in its place a scowling mask. Revenged he must be upon this thief who stole unashamedly from the preserves of others, and, when the romantic thrill was ended, left his victims entangled in the web of hypocrisy and disgrace.

He could not understand Farmata's apparent ignorance of Prince Piu's true character—that his wooing was insincere, his love a thing of shame and deceit. It was evident that already she was ensnared by the honey of his words and voice, that her eyes were blinded by the knowledge of his wealth and influence. Not that these last were factors to which Momolu paid much attention. Singularly free from

avarice himself, he was more inclined to discount than to exaggerate the importance of riches and power when weighed in the scale against his own simple conception of the meaning of love. The memory of Döng as she stood before him, her eyes suddenly grown old, the way in which he had last seen her, heartbroken and abandoned, lying face downwards on the floor of the hut, her grave beneath the walnut-tree that no tears had ever watered save his own—these were the things that tormented, terrified, enraged him.

He was convinced, too, that it was to save Farmata from such a fate that Allah had restored him from the dead. He, and he only, could make her understand the truth.

Thus, the afternoon that, to the gay crowd about him, was a time of joyous revelry, was to Momolu sombre and unhappy. Heedless of the music and songs, he shouldered his way through the slow-moving people, intent only on finding Farmata and saving her from the danger that impended; that in this saving she might become his own was an alternative thought that eased his jealousy and fear like a healing ointment applied to a raw wound. But very soon the rhythmic beating of his rage surged back again, strong and high, so that his eyes glared and he smote the earth with his fine ebony cane, and swore aloud.

It was not long after this rather childish, but characteristic, outburst, that he at last caught sight of Farmata as she spun, oblivious of him and all about her, in the whirling excitement and abandon of her competition dance. Stealthily he had edged his way towards the pirouetting, graceful figure. The moment when the music ceased would surely be propitious. For the alarming and desolating outcome of his attempt to touch and speak to her he had been completely unprepared.

As he stood, helpless and disconcerted, on the outskirts of the little group of people who had gathered round the unconscious girl and were preparing to carry her into one of the rest huts that were set up each year for the feast, in the shade of a great cotton-tree, Momolu was joined by Yawfee, to whom he hurriedly related what the dancer had told him by the roadside and the terrible disaster that had now befallen.

" What am I to do ? " he ended miserably. " I mean to save her if she will."

Yawfee's eyelids flickered, but for a moment he made no reply. He was sorry for Momolu, but he knew that nothing he could say would alter his determination to interfere between Farmata and the Prince. The two began to walk together towards the hut into which Farmata had by this time been carried.

" Have you nothing to say, then ? " asked

Momolu, noticing Yawfee's expression of doubt and bewilderment, as they reached it.

Yawfee laughed. " There seems nothing left for me to do but to wait and see," he said.

" Well, you do that, and leave the rest to me," answered Momolu with a sombre smile as he made his way to the door.

The little hut was packed with curious and sympathetic people. But the grim determination of Momolu's face caused them to make way for him as he shouldered in among them.

Farmata was lying on a bamboo bed in a corner of the room. Her eyes were closed and, to Momolu's terrified gaze, it seemed that she had ceased to breathe as she lay there like some dark, exotic flower against the bright foliage of her festal dress and jewels.

But even more terrible than her strange stillness was the presence of Prince Piu at the bedside. Momolu gritted his teeth together as he saw how Yadana, who knelt on the other side of the bed, kept looking anxiously from the face of the unconscious girl to that of the Prince, as he bent solicitously above her. For, apart from the enraging fact that it was the Prince and not himself who was so gently bathing Farmata's forehead, he knew that Yadana must have summoned him to her aid —as if it were a natural, rightful thing for him to be there.

After what seemed to Momolu an interminable time, Farmata began to moan a little, and her hands moved restlessly. Then, slowly, she opened her eyes. At the same moment Prince Piu stood up to his full height and, turning, his glance met Momolu's across the room. For an appreciable space of time the two stared at one another—the Prince with a slightly puzzled expression, Momolu with the pent-up anger and hate of years blazing in his look. Then, with an ironical inclination of his head, the Prince turned again towards the bed.

In two strides Momolu was beside him. But before he could speak, Farmata covered her eyes with her arms and screamed aloud.

Yadana shook her gently. "What is the matter?" she demanded.

"Oh—oh—here he comes again," sobbed Farmata, pointing at Momolu.

"Who is this man?" asked Yadana crossly, annoyed that Farmata should behave so strangely before the Prince.

"Momolu Bei—he who has been dead all these days—he of whom I told you in Kwanja's house." Farmata clung, trembling all over, to her mother's arm.

There was a sudden murmur from the people gathered in the room. Like an incarnate fury Momolu turned on them.

"It is true," he shouted. "I am he who

was dead, but in the power of Allah, I now live." He swung round again to the bed. "Shariff will tell you all," he said more quietly.

The name of the great magician silenced the incredulous questioning that had begun to run from lip to lip and startled even Yadana into a desire to learn more. She rose from her knees and made so imperious a gesture of dismissal, that in a very few moments the last of the onlookers drifted unwillingly from the hut.

Momolu moved nearer to the bed on which Farmata was now sitting up and regarding him with puzzled, but no longer frightened, eyes.

"I have a message for your daughter," he said in a low voice to Yadana. "But I should like to deliver it in private, if I may."

Yadana looked at him for a moment with calm, critical eyes. Of all the many experiences that had been strung upon the chain of her life and that had contributed to the power of discernment she undoubtedly possessed, this was one of the strangest. But, confronted as she was with even so miraculous a manifestation as that of Momolu's resurrection from the dead, her intelligence was too quick to allow her to dismiss it offhand as incredible. She knew intuitively that Momolu had spoken what, to him at any rate, was truth. But she was, too, sufficiently clever to be made uneasy by the whole situation.

"Do you object to Prince Piu remaining?" she asked.

For the first time Momolu showed outwardly that he was aware of his rival's presence. He shrugged his shoulders as he turned and looked the Prince straight in the eyes.

"If he insists," he said, "but were I in his place . . ."

"More of your lies?" interrupted the Prince with a contemptuous smile.

Yadana, sensing battle, drew herself up.

"Do you know this man?"

"Yes . . . I think I do."

"You know me well enough," retorted Momolu, clenching his hands hard. "And you will know me better still when I have finished what I have to say."

"What do you mean?" asked the Prince, his head held high, the whole pose of his tall body in its brilliant robes, arrogant and dignified.

"I mean this." Momolu's voice shook a little as he spoke. "Farmata Manjo is not to be caught, as you caught . . ."

Prince Piu's composure snapped on a sudden oath, and he made a threatening movement towards Momolu.

"You fool! You mad fool! Yadana, this fellow is a scamp, a rascal." His eyes flickered as he tried to avoid Momolu's gaze. "I will

not stay to hear his vicious lies." He pointed a shaking finger of scorn at Momolu, shrugged his shoulders angrily, and went hurriedly out of the room.

When he had gone Momolu turned swiftly to Farmata who had been sitting wide-eyed and quiet, with Yadana beside her, on the bed. He felt that at last he had scored a great victory—that he was a conqueror, a nobleman, a hero, one already fit to dwell in the garden of Mohammed. Instead of being sullen and brooding, his face beamed as he stretched and aired himself with such inflated dignity that the little room seemed all too small to hold so great a hero.

As to Farmata, she no longer felt the old and fearful shrinking from this strange pursuer who had returned so unexpectedly to tread again across the field of her life. But for the moment her curiosity in regard to the truth about Prince Piu was almost as great as her interest in Momolu.

"Why did he run away before you could tell the story?" she asked.

"I will tell you," said Momolu, chuckling excitedly as he strutted up and down the room, feeling as if he walked on air. His enemy had fled, momentarily perhaps, but so as to make it possible for the truth about him to be revealed. Each time he passed the bed in his

self-glorious pacings he looked intently into Farmata's dark, brilliant eyes, lit now with laughter and what he flattered himself was the beginning of love. It was a matter for rejoicing, too, that for the first time he was in the presence of Farmata's mother, whose looks, though she had so far said nothing, were by no means unsympathetic in response to his ingratiating smiles.

"Well, will you not begin?" demanded Farmata, watching him with shy admiration.

"Yes, I will begin."

"Then fetch a stool and come near us."

Needing no second invitation, Momolu fetched a stool and seated himself close beside the bed.

"The story I am going to tell you is true," he said solemnly. "To this I swear—Do you believe me now?"

"Yes," answered Farmata, seeing that the question was addressed to her, and remembering the circumstances in which the Prince's name had last been mentioned between them. "You have changed, Momolu."

His heart beating very fast, Momolu thanked her with his eyes.

"The day we met for the first time in the market-place was the beginning of a happy ending, Farmata. You remember how you fell in love with the armlets of elephant hide that

I had on my stall, and how I told you that if they became yours good luck would follow you all your days. You would not buy them or accept them from me, so you still do not understand their mystery." He smiled a little uncertainly as he saw the frown that puckered Farmata's forehead as she recalled his second offering of the armlets beside the creek. "I promised then to meet you in the palm-grove that night after prayer. I kept my promise and you did not."

Yadana, who had been sitting very straight and still, shifted her position suddenly. Farmata felt the movement and turned to give her a reassuring glance. "Go on," she said quickly.

With a dramatic gesture Momolu plunged his hand into a pocket in his gown, drew forth the metalled armlets, and flung them in her lap. "They are yours," he said, "and their mystery."

Farmata took the armlets in her hands, but she did not look at them. Her eyes were on Momolu's face.

"These armlets will protect you from sickness and danger and will serve you all through life, for the spirit of Zor follows them. If you will wear them at all times and let them become a part of you, you will be safe."

Her eyes full of tears, Farmata held the armlets to her breast. Her gesture and the

look she gave him told Momolu, without words, that at last he was forgiven. Controlling the rush of triumphant joy that swept through him with a great effort, he turned to Yadana.

"Will you listen now to the story of Prince Piu?" he asked.

Yadana nodded silently. Many things were gradually becoming clear to her, but she was still in doubt in regard to the Prince, whose evasive manner and furious face as he left the hut had been a great shock to her.

By the end of Momolu's story Farmata was crying quietly, while Yadana sat with her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes downcast, her face brooding. But she said nothing except to bid the two young people make ready to go home.

Outside, the leaves of the great cotton-tree that shaded the little group of specially erected rest-huts were silver in the light of a full moon; their rustling in the soft night wind was no louder than the fluttering movements of the rice-birds that perched and slept among them. There was still chatter and laughter in the streets and the ceaseless padding of bare or sandalled feet though music and dancing had both ceased and many people had returned to their homes. Against a clear sky the cone-shaped grass tops of the huts were dark silhouettes set about by stars.

In the warm, moon-shot darkness, Farmata and Momolu walked close together, Yadana plodding silently beside them. At last she paused at the entrance to a house and told Farmata to wait for her while she went in to make inquiries for a sick friend.

For the first time since their reconciliation Momolu was alone with his heart's desire. But none of the burning words that had warmed his thoughts so gloriously when he was alone in the forest with nothing more tangible than a dream, would come now. All he could manage to utter was a humble request that Farmata would meet him again on the following day.

With her promise to do so even more wonderful in his ears than the previously given assurance of her indifference to the wooing of Prince Piu, he left her without another word. But when he returned to Yawfee's house the latter had no cause for anxiety in regard to Momolu's powers of speech. For he was obliged to sit and listen to lyrical praises of Farmata until the stars were paling to a new dawn.

CHAPTER XIII

PRINCE PIU'S sleep that night was much broken by thoughts of Farmata and Momolu, and particularly of the way in which he had been so unexpectedly confronted by the latter. Ever since the death of Döng he had been at great pains to avoid meeting his rival, for he was well aware that his treatment of the Mendi dancing-girl had exposed him to the risk of Momolu's vengeance—a vengeance, moreover, that would be justified by tribal law. Only extreme care, he knew, and the payment of considerable sums of money in the right quarters had kept shame from his face and himself still among the living.

To have encountered Momolu now, so far from his home and so long after the event, was an action on the part of Fate made doubly malignant by the fact that the two were once again rivals, though he swore that nothing short of his own death should allow Momolu to take Farmata from him. Not that Momolu really had any chance against his wealth and power. Preening himself at the thought, as he

lay still and straight on his bamboo bed, the Prince smiled in the dark. What had he to fear from the chatter of a stranger merchant from a far-off village, a poor man of no account who possessed neither cattle, nor grain, nor lands, whose tongue could doubtless be easily silenced by judicious bribery? At the same time he wondered a little anxiously what Momolu had actually told Yadana and her daughter after he had left the hut beneath the cotton-tree, in what he realized now to have been ill-advised haste.

For Yadana was an even more important factor in the situation than Momolu himself. There were ways and means of disposing of him if he proved too intractable. But he had known Farmata's mother now for over six years and had had ample opportunity of estimating her shrewd and rigid character. She knew a good thing when she saw it and could as easily recognize a bad customer. More than once in the past few months the Prince had found her steady, dark eyes upon him with a look that made him realize how strong was the power of her will, that, combined with natural intuition and cunning, could make her a dangerous enemy. He had, therefore, set himself most diligently to cultivate her affection and respect, using both personal charm and friendly munificence to achieve his end.

It was monstrous that now this upstart tradesman should have appeared to throw mud at him and upset his carefully laid plans. Was this to be his fate? Must he suffer for ever for his sins?

The night dragged on, as scene after scene of his past life rose before him in accusing array. For, like the magician, Shariff, Prince Piu was capable of good as well as evil. To some his face was that of a man possessed of wicked spirits: others saw in it both gentleness and beauty, despite the slight droop of the lips that hinted at passion touched with cynicism, and the loss of freshness due not so much to the approach of age as to the burning up of youth. Now as he lay watching the dark outside his window turn to ghostly grey, he found himself wishing, with a sudden surge of weariness, that he had never hidden behind his money and the protection afforded by his rank, but had stood forth boldly to pay the penalty of his crime, as the girl he had trapped and left had so pitifully done.

But such thoughts were for the night, not the day. He roused himself at last, dressed, and went out into the street.

The air was as cold as that of the sea at dawn, the roadways of the town as wet with dew as if a fine misty rain had fallen upon them. Above the fields, caught in the tops of

trees, and over all the hills a veil of white mist was lying. But as he made his way towards the outlying fields it began to lift, and, by the time he was clear of the town, the sun had risen and mists and clouds were both a milky whiteness against a blue sky. Looking back, he could see the great cotton-tree towering above the huddled roofs of the town.

Walking swiftly beside the sun-baked fields that stretched before him like the sanded gold of a desert plain whose horizon was the shimmering rainbow of tropic heat, the Prince felt the torments and heart-searchings of the dark to have been but an evil dream. To end Momolu's life and then his own, as more than once during the night he had found himself contemplating as the only way out, would be the shameful action of a coward that could lead him only to unending misery. For he too was imbued with the philosophy of Momolu's vision: cowards and liars will never enter the garden of Mohammed.

Feeling refreshed and invigorated by his walk, he turned at last to go back to the town with renewed determination to put hope and chance to the test. It would take a little time to consider and mature his plans: he would wait for a little while and see which way the wind blew in regard to the effect of Momolu's story. In the meantime there was the business

of the cattle deal with Boikai Kpundek to be completed as well as other transactions that were likely to prove profitable.

As he crossed the last stretch of roadway between fields and town, he saw an army of drivers, or black ants, travelling steadily in close-formed columns six or eight deep. These little creatures act, in Africa, as most effective bands of scavengers, though their utility to human beings is somewhat discounted by the nature of their bites, which are very painful and often inflict serious injuries on those who break their well-organized ranks.

Prince Piu stood for a moment looking down on them as they pursued their undeviating way towards a goal known only to themselves. Then a slow smile lightened the heaviness of his face. In common with all coloured peoples, his imagination was quick to see portents and symbols in the simplest happenings, and the significance of this mass of tiny creatures each deliberately intent upon a definite purpose was not lost upon him. He covered the remaining distance to the town with springy steps and senses keenly alive to the bright air pungent with the aroma of dried fields—the odour of burnt grass after a storm. By the time he had enjoyed a few whiffs of his pipe, filled with tobacco grown and cured in the district, that he had lit immediately on entering his hut,

and had consumed his breakfast of rice and dried venison, he was feeling at peace with all the world, and the memory of Momolu's threatening defiance was scarcely more definite than that of something seen in sleep. His contentment was increased by the coming of Boikai Kpundek, a man of medium height, inclined to stoutness, with black hair, large black eyes, and an ebony skin—a true clansman.

"Good morning, Mahjah," he said courteously with a sprightly, eager glance, and a turn and inclination of his head that had a certain naïve charm and picturesqueness.

"Good morning, Boikai. Take a chair. I am happy to see you. What about the cattle you were to sell me?" answered the Prince, taking his visitor firmly by the hand and giving him three or four distinct flips of the fingers.

Boikai's eyes, bright and alert like those of a watchful bird, travelled round the room. He moved his chair carefully to avoid the draught from the open door.

"I know you are anxious to buy more cattle," he said slowly. "But it can hardly be possible that you are in the habit of buying stock at such ridiculously low figures as you have offered me." He cocked his head a little to one side and looked at the Prince with a quizzical half-smile.

The Prince regarded him steadily from beneath slightly lowered lids. "Your question, Boikai, is ludicrous," was all he said.

"Why?" retorted Boikai, his eyes narrowing.

"Because it is plain that you wish to measure me in your own kinjar."

"Not at all. But if you will treat me fairly, I will sell."

"What are your terms?"

"Five pounds a head without distinction."

The Prince took his pipe from his mouth and stared at it with eyes that apparently saw nothing.

"Would you buy a woman on those terms?" he asked.

"No. Only on her merits, and her use to me."

"Exactly. I do likewise."

Boikai gave a little shrug; then felt for his snuff-box. As he held it out to his host, the latter made a sudden movement as if something had startled him.

"Will you not take a pinch?" said Boikai politely.

The Prince shook his head, his eyes fixed intently on his visitor's smiling face. Then his whole body seemed to relax, as Boikai, having taken a pinch himself, replaced the snuff-box in a fold of his robe.

"You have travelled much?" The question was elaborately casual as Prince Piu drew slowly at his pipe. But his eyes had the veiled watchfulness of a fencer at guard.

Boikai nodded. "For more than eighteen years I had not seen my home in Bendu," he said, scratching his head with a boyish, inconsequent gesture.

"Ah-Ya-Da! A long time indeed." Prince Piu's voice was as steady as his eyes; his fingers taut as steel on the stem of his pipe. "Tell me about it," he said.

Boikai settled himself more comfortably in his chair with a reminiscent sigh.

"From Bendu I journeyed on foot to Little Cape Mount, through Royesville, to Monrovia. There I joined a gang of labourers who were sailing in an Elder Dempster steamer for a plantation in Duala, Cameroon. On that plantation I laboured for six years, because, although my time was up two years after I landed, I renewed my contract for four. All my money I had lost in gambling and did not want to return home with an empty pocket. You know, Mahjah, that would have been shame *palava* on me.

"During the last years I saved a considerable sum. Suddenly our master issued orders to stop work, and we were told that Germany had gone to war with England and France. All my little pile of money I had given to my

master whom I trusted, and for whom I had worked hard and faithfully as head man. He went away and I never received a penny of my savings. I was told that he was taken as a prisoner of war. Who knows? But I had lost everything.

"But that was not all. Many men, I among them, were made soldiers; others were taken as carriers. We suffered much. Many were killed in battle, and many were flogged to death. It was war. We had no business in the affair. It was their *palava*, but we were mixed up in it.

"When the war ended, I found myself in Fernando Po, with just enough money to wipe the shame from my face. I came back to Monrovia, where nearly everyone was a stranger to me. Many of the people I had known in Bendu too were dead, many had moved to other towns; the chain was broken in many places. But I praised Allah that I myself was still alive."

Prince Piu shifted a little in his seat.

"War is always cruel," he said. "You remember the Ding Gola War in your own territory, Boikai. I suffered through that war; I lost nearly all my stock of cattle; but for the help of the Government in Monrovia my town would have been in ruins."

"Ah, well," said Boikai philosophically.

"Let us not talk over our misfortunes that are but fork paths in life."

"As to yourself," persisted the Prince, determined not to let slip the one point in Boikai's narrative that had really interested him. "Your friends and relations in Bendu—were they all dead?"

"That is one of the things that brought me here," answered Boikai. "That, and the long-sought chance of doing business with yourself, Mahjah. For I learned, after much and difficult questioning, that my only sister had left Bendu some years before, and, it was thought, had come to Zigida. Only last month word came to me beyond doubt as to where she might be found."

Prince Piu leaned across the table. "What is your sister's name?" he asked.

Something in his tone arrested Boikai's attention. He paused in the act of taking another pinch of snuff and gave the Prince a grave, searching look that was in curious contrast with his previous light-hearted gaiety of manner.

"Her name is Yadana," he said quietly. "Why do you ask, Mahjah?"

"I thought so." Prince Piu put down his pipe. "And her daughter is called Farmata. I recognized you just now from your likeness to her. I was talking to them both only yesterday, Boikai," he said.

For a fleeting moment the two watched one another, then Boikai grinned suddenly and engagingly as he brought his clenched fist down on the table.

"Tell me all about them," he said eagerly.

"Well," answered the Prince, smiling in his turn, "I happen to be a friend of theirs. I have known them for quite six years, and I—I am very much attached to Farmata."

"I see," interrupted Boikai.

"But I can assure you neither Yadana nor Farmata has ever mentioned your name to me."

"No," said Boikai with a rather wondering sadness. "Everyone believed that I was dead; I have been away so long. When I came back to Bendu, many of my old friends were dead and many of the children grown to be men and women. I could scarcely tell whether I was really in Bendu, or in some strange land. Time changes us all. Farmata was but a baby in her mother's arms when I went away." He laughed frankly and rather loudly. His experience on the coast and his contact with the western world had taught him a great deal, and he knew already that there was more than one side to the character of this man whose suave, statuesque beauty, he suspected, could hide a tigerish cruelty and ruthlessness.

"I saw you the other day in the town with

a young girl. Was that Farmata?" went on Boikai.

The Prince nodded. He knew what the next question was going to be, and his mind was working rapidly, if a little uncertainly, on the most diplomatic way of meeting it.

Boikai regarded him steadily. All the frank joviality had vanished from his face, leaving in its stead a calculated shrewd cunning and acuteness that made him almost startlingly like Yadana. Comparatively poor as he was, bandied about and roughly treated as he had been by fate, long as he had been away from his native surroundings and kinsfolk, his tribal instincts were as strong as ever, and, together with more than one rumour he had heard concerning Prince Piu, bade him be warily on guard.

"Then you are going to take her from the mat." The words were more a statement than a question.

"Perhaps." Prince Piu's face was enigmatic.

"When will the happy event take place?"

The Prince made a restless movement. "Why do you ask me such questions? Surely it would be better to ask the family. Will you be my ambassador?"

Boikai thought for a moment. He was not at all satisfied with the position of affairs, but he had long since learned the value of silence

and a waiting game. "Very well," he said at last. "I will be your spokesman. But as I have not yet seen my sister or Farmata, I cannot speak for them as well."

The Prince smiled gravely. "I understand. But I am not a poor man. . . ." He spread his hands in a significant gesture as Boikai rose to his feet. So far, so good. It had been a lucky happening that had sent this long-lost uncle of Farmata to his company. What the next turn of chance would disclose he could not tell, nor for the moment did he very much care. The only way to cross a dangerous ford was to set one's feet upon such stepping-stones as the movement of the waters opportunely revealed. "What about the cattle? Will you sell?" he asked, with an air of apparent indifference, as he followed Boikai to the door.

"Yes. But at my price."

The Prince was too clever not to know when he had met his match. Besides, he had need of Boikai.

"Very well, then, I will meet you next month at Vonjama," he said.

Boikai's eyes were bright and bird-like again as he made his salutations of farewell.

"I am honoured, Mahjah," he murmured with an assumed deference that was both comical and charming.

Prince Piu flicked his fingers ceremoniously.

"Until next month, then. And may Allah bless your mission," he added, as Boikai turned away towards the road that led to Yadana's little house on the hillside.

CHAPTER XIV

BOIKAI strolled leisurely along through the bright streets that were thronged already with gaily dressed crowds of people on their way to take part in the second day's dancing and other amusements of the Ramadan. No one paid much attention to him as he passed among them in his long robe of fine, dark material, loose white shirt and baggy white pantaloons, his head encased in the conventional turban, on his feet the half-moon slippers prescribed for festival. Forgetting that he was indeed but a stranger among strangers with whom the town and markets were so closely packed that they outnumbered the regular inhabitants, Boikai was seized with a sudden, desolating sense of loneliness. His homecoming to Bendu after the Great War had been so entirely different from the sentimental dreams he had woven round it during his days and nights of practical slavery on the Cameroon plantation, and the incomprehensible terror and suffering of the war, that it had produced in him a strange reluctance

to make himself known to his relations, for he had almost begun to doubt his own identity. The fear that Yadana might not recognize him, that she would look at him with the same indifferent, unwelcoming eyes as many had done to whom he had proclaimed himself in Bendu, had kept him a whole month in the district of Zigida without visiting his sister. Now, as he made his way towards the outskirts of the town and found no single occasion to greet even such acquaintances as he had made during the past weeks, his heart misgave him utterly. Had it not been for his recent conversation with Prince Piu and the suspicions' he felt concerning his intentions towards Farmata, he would have turned to fly and hide himself on his minute cattle farm near Vonjama until the time appointed for meeting his august customer.

As he hesitated, torn between such fear of disappointment as a child may feel at the prospect of being deprived of some long-promised treat, he became conscious of a sudden tickling prickle in his left arm. For a moment he rubbed the place absently, forgetful of the cause of the sensation. Then he flung up his head and laughed aloud. Here was his real identity disc, one far more reliable than that which he had been forced to wear round his neck during the war. Neither Yadana, nor

any other member of the family, could fail to recognize that scar—a relic of days of childish fishing in the creeks near their home with his sister. In her net-basket Yadana had caught a poisonous cat fish that had stung Boikai severely as he put it, not noticing it, among the others, in the bag slung from his left shoulder, and he could remember still Yadana's scream of terror when she saw what had happened, the hot, throbbing pain of the abscess that had developed in his arm, and his own pride in the deep scar it left in healing. The recollection broke through the gossamer web of vague fears that had been imprisoning his thoughts. Here was proof unquestionable that he was in truth Boikai, Yadana's elder brother.

With this problem so satisfactorily settled Boikai continued on his way. He walked buoyantly now, his head a little cocked to one side, his smiling glance bestowed on all and sundry. He received more than one answering look in return from the chattering girls who passed him. Something in one of them, her dancer's dress, her experimental trippings among a group of laughing companions, caught his attention so that he stood for a moment staring at her. When they all turned and laughed at the rather stout elderly man who was watching them so intently he hurried on. But a glimpse of the gay young

figure in their midst had been enough to restore the missing link in the carefully worded rumours he had heard concerning Prince Piu. A dancing-girl from some distant tribe—a story not to be spoken openly—the Prince was rich and arrogant—the girl was dead.

By the time he reached Yadana's house Boikai had put two and two together pretty accurately, and the confirmation of his instinctive suspicions, coupled with the comforting assurance that he really was himself, had made him feel the equal of Prince Piu on any ground. His face was grim as he remembered the mission he had undertaken on behalf of the Prince and the agreed terms of the cattle deal between them.

But his smile was tender and a little tremulous as he opened Yadana's door like one accustomed to the ways of the house, went in, and called "Is anybody here?"

Receiving no answer, Boikai called again.

"Who is there?" The voice came from the kitchen at the back, and to Boikai's ears was very sweet and soft.

"A stranger."

There was a pause. Then the voice answered prosaically, "Take a seat."

But Boikai was nothing if not good-mannered, and so continued to stand patiently, awaiting who might come.

Farmata, alone in the house, and busily engaged in preparing food in the kitchen, washed her hands, and went quickly into the living-room.

"What do you want?" she asked, looking at Boikai with wide, innocent eyes that were a little afraid.

"You seem frightened, Bonnie," answered Boikai softly.

"No, I am not frightened. But why did you not give the alarm before opening the door?"

Boikai smiled as he saw the reflection of Yadana in her eyes.

"Because your mother is a very dear friend of mine, I took the liberty to come in as I did. Won't you forgive me and tell me who you are?"

His words and look were so gentle, and in some strange way so familiar, that the girl's natural fear of an intruder vanished. The man was plainly no robber, but had, indeed, the air of a Mahjah.

"I am Farmata," she said.

"Are you Farmata, the daughter of Yadana?"

"Yes."

A warm glow surged over Boikai at the word. But he would not betray himself just yet. The sweetness of being once more among his

own people was all the greater for being momentarily unshared. Like a child who hides a treasure in a dark cupboard, only to look at it when he is himself unseen, he shrank from bringing forth his secret possession, even to the sight of love. So he broke the sudden silence that had fallen by the conventional request to be allowed to sit down.

"Of course." Farmata was puzzled. "You are here to see my mother on business, I suppose?"

"Perhaps and perhaps not," was Boikai's enigmatic reply.

At that moment Farmata remembered the pots she had left steaming on the fire.

"Ah-Ya-Da! I must go back to the kitchen," she said.

"Cooking?" Boikai's bright bird-like eyes followed her admiringly as she moved to the door at the other side of the room.

Farmata laughed. There was something very attractive in this strange visitor who was certainly unknown to her and yet seemed to be quite contentedly at home.

"Yes. Will you join us at 'chop'?" The words came as naturally as if they were spoken to an old friend.

"Perhaps, and perhaps not," said Boikai again.

"Why do you answer me so strangely?"

For a moment Boikai sat motionless, staring at the floor. When at last he looked up at her, his eyes no longer teased, but were grave and gentle.

"Because there is something I must tell you while we are still alone."

Farmata gazed at him with surprise in which there was not a little alarm.

"You . . . It is all so strange," she stammered, and fled into the kitchen.

"It will not be so strange when you know who I am," said Boikai loudly and clearly, hoping that she could hear. For he had realized that it would be impossible to find out anything concerning the girl's relations with Prince Piu until he had declared his identity.

Farmata caught only the last words. Consumed with curiosity, her thoughts raced excitedly. "Who can he be? He has the air of a Mahjah. Who is he? Who is he? There is something in him in which I see my mother. I wonder if he might be the Boikai whom she talks of? If he is, then he is my uncle, and has a scar on his left arm."

Turning swiftly, she tiptoed back to the door of the living-room and peered through the crack. Boikai was sitting motionless, where she had left him, his eyes fixed on the door. For nearly a minute Farmata watched him

breathlessly. Then she went back to the kitchen again, as quietly as she had come. She was almost certain now that he was that same Boikai who had gone away to the coast so many years ago, and of whom Yadana had often spoken so lovingly and sorrowfully.

Thrilling with hope and eagerness, she went on systematically with the preparation of the meal, listening anxiously for any sounds of Yadana's return, when she knew the puzzle would be made plain.

After a while Boikai, left alone in the outer room, began to grow impatient and to suspect that Farmata was avoiding him on purpose. Already he had the feeling of having been in the house for a long time, as if, in fact, he had been familiar with it in some previously forgotten past and had but now returned to it, instead of entering for the first time. Almost before he knew what he was doing he had risen from his chair and made his way across the little yard to the door of the kitchen.

Farmata did not hear his coming until he spoke.

"Excuse me," said Boikai with all the politeness of a Vai nobleman who addresses a complete stranger, "but how long will it be before your mother returns?"

The girl looked up, startled, from the stool on which she was sitting to kindle the fire,

for the uninvited intrusion of a stranger into the domestic offices of a Liberian home is as contrary to custom as in other parts of the world. For the first time since her puzzling visitor had appeared she was really frightened.

"Don't be frightened, Bonnie. I only came to talk to you. May I sit down?"

The courteous inevitable question and the gentleness of Boikai's manner reassured Farmata, and, rising suddenly from her seat, she confronted him with a long, steadfast gaze. Once again, as if she looked into a magic mirror, she saw a reflection of Yadana in his dark, bright eyes. She did not know how strangely like her own young face was to his older one at that moment. Her fear vanished suddenly and a smile quivered on her lips. She knew now that there was no need to question him again and pushed forward a stool for him to sit on—a mute gesture of acceptance that satisfied them both.

Without a word Boikai sat down. Then, as was his habit in moments of stress or emotion, he groped in his pocket for his snuff-box. As he did so, the sleeve of his robe fell back from his bare left arm, revealing the tell-tale scar.

Farmata watched with a deepening thrill this unconscious confession of his identity—a confession so utterly convincing that when Boikai rose again to his feet and laid his hands

gently on her shoulders, his touch was as familiar as if she had known it all her life.

"Farmata, my beautiful, I am Boikai, your mother's brother. I am sure she has spoken to you of me, but I fear also that she has spoken of me as dead. How should she know that, though I lived, I was a prisoner of war in the Cameroon, and slept for long enough without food? It was in the mercy of Allah that I returned safely to the land of the free, and I am overjoyed to see what a fine lady you have grown." And he kissed her vigorously on both cheeks.

Farmata drew herself away with assumed dignity, but her eyes were gay and smiling as she gave him the ceremonious salutation due to one who has returned after long absence: "I greet you heartily and welcome you home."

Boikai acknowledged this with appropriate solemnity, inhaled an unusually large pinch of snuff in honour of the occasion, sneezed luxuriously and decided that it was time to broach the subject of Prince Piu.

"I was told that you and your mother left Bendu more than six years ago," he said at last.

Farmata nodded. "Yes. We have lived here in Zigida ever since."

"You were so little and so fat when I saw you last," went on Boikai casually. "It

was foolish of me, but somehow I expected to find you much the same as when I left. Ah-Ya-Da!" He sighed rather wearily. "Eighteen years is a long time."

"Long enough to grow up in, as you see I have. Besides, I have been at school in Monrovia while you were away."

"Is that so?" said Boikai. "And there you learnt . . ."

"All sorts of things," interrupted Farmata, laughing. "Enough to make me very wise," she added with the sublime conceit of youth.

"I wonder." Boikai was feeling his way carefully. "The things we learn from books are not always the most useful," he said sententiously. "I myself cannot read, but I know a lot." The statement was naïve rather than boastful.

"What do you know?" asked Farmata, willing to let the conversation drift whither it would. Like most of her countrywomen she was fond of talking for talk's sake. But she was also a good listener.

"For one thing, that the daughter of my sister has grown beautiful," answered Boikai softly. "But that is not all," he went on hastily, as he saw the bright shy look that the girl turned on him. "There are many others more important. I know how to catch vermin, and to rear cattle, and to fire a rifle, and where

to put the spirit that makes it go into a motor-car. But most useful of all I know when a man is trying to cheat me. Only this morning I defeated one of great wealth who tried to force me to sell my cattle at an unfair price."

The words were said so deliberately that Farmata looked at him inquiringly. "Who was that?" she asked.

"One whom they call Prince Piu." Boikai, watching intently, saw the puzzled, startled look that swept swiftly across her face.

"You know the Prince, then? You have seen him?" Farmata was now as intent as Boikai himself.

"I have just come from his house, and it is part of my errand here to talk to your mother about him."

"Oh, please talk to me instead, as she is not here," said Farmata excitedly.

"I think it will be better if you watch your pots and do not let them boil over," answered Boikai teasingly. He had already learned indirectly what he most wanted to know—that so far at any rate such attachment as there might be was on Prince Piu's side alone.

"They will be all right," said Farmata, adjusting a lid on a pot, and pulling out a few chunks of wood from the fire in order to lessen the heat. "Now, they will cook slowly."

She drew her stool close to Boikai's and looked up at him eagerly.

In a few direct and simple words Boikai recounted the story of Prince Piu and the Mendi dancing-girl that Farmata had already heard from Momolu. In its second telling it seemed to her even more terrible than at first, for she was not capable of such introspection as would have shown her that her original horror had been tempered by a secret, unacknowledged gladness that Momolu's early love was dead. Now she was overwhelmed with pity, not only for Döng, but also for the Prince.

Boikai, watching the tears gather in her eyes and run slowly down her cheeks, was suddenly alarmed. Anger, fear, disgust, he could have understood, had, indeed, expected. Her silent weeping baffled him. He leaned forward and laid his hand on her arm.

"Farmata, Prince Piu is a clever man, but he is greedy, cunning and vindictive. You would never be happy with him. You have been to the Mission and learned many new things. You and he could never see each other in the same glass. Bonnie, you are not going to tell me that you love him?"

Farmata shook her head. "No, I do not love him. But why do you ask?"

"Because you are so sorry for him."

Farmata dried her eyes on a bright cotton handkerchief.

"I like him because he has been friendly and kind to all the family," she said. "And I pity him because no one has a good word for him."

Boikai shrugged his shoulders. He knew that there are some women who seem to have been born to defend lost causes, and he was beginning to suspect that Farmata was one of them. He wished now that he had dwelt on the notorious sharp practice of Prince Piu in regard to those with whom he had business dealings, rather than on the story that had so unexpectedly awakened the girl's sympathy. The fact that he had deliberately set himself to work towards an exactly opposite end to that in which the Prince had sought his assistance troubled him not a jot. He was quite prepared to sacrifice the hoped-for sale of his cattle to the anger that he knew would descend on him when next they met. The kinship, newly restored after years of loneliness, was so sweet that his naturally strong family feeling must express itself in an almost fierce protectiveness in which all considerations of personal profit were entirely swamped. He could not know that Farmata was already aware of all that he had told her, nor what a strange effect this same story had had on her usually uneventful

life. As he heard her next words, therefore, Boikai's face wore an air of amused tolerance that only in part concealed his real anxiety.

"There is no need for you to cry Mad dog. Kill him! Kill him!" said Farmata gravely. "I know he has done wrong and that he is perhaps dangerous. As for me, I can take care of myself. Besides . . ."

She broke off suddenly and held up her hand as a signal to Boikai to listen. But he too had heard the same sound as she from the outer room, and instantly jumped to his feet. By the time he had reached the door of the kitchen, Yadana had crossed the yard and was standing stock-still, in dumbfounded astonishment before him.

"Boikai!" she gasped at last. "Is it really you or your ghost?"

The sound of his name uttered in immediate recognition was as sweet to Boikai as a draught of water to a man dying of thirst—the final balm and benediction on the day that Allah had so magnificently blessed. In two steps he was beside her and had flung his arms about her. Laughing and crying in the same breath, the two clung to one another, rocking themselves backwards and forwards, while Farmata watched them, smiling, from her place by the kindled fire.

At last Yadana began to hurl eager and

coherent questions at her brother. "Where have you been all these years? I thought you were dead. Why did you not come back before?" she demanded as she dropped panting on to a stool and fanned her hot face with a corner of her sleeve.

Slowly at first because of the joy that so strangely seemed to fill his throat with a warm lump, Boikai repeated the story of adventure and tribulation that he had told Prince Piu earlier in the day. Yadana listened in complete silence, and almost without moving. Only when Boikai spoke of the sweated labour of the plantation, the forced marches, the hunger, the floggings, the more merciful, because swifter, killings of the war, she put her hand across her mouth as if to stifle a scream. Much that he said was beyond her comprehension, but enough remained for understanding of the suffering endured by one of her own blood.

But when the tale was done she said nothing except to bid Boikai stay and share at least the coming meal, even if he would not accept the longer hospitality of her roof.

Boikai assented gladly, for, now that his position was so firmly established with Yadana, he was anxious to exercise the privileges of relationship and discuss with her the proposed match between Prince Piu and Farmata.

The latter who, by this time, was busy

preparing the table for the meal, was very much afraid that Boikai might tell Yadana of their little *palava*, so she kept passing in and out of the kitchen in order to listen to what was being said. Her mother observing and disapproving of this invited Boikai to come into her own room in the house itself, telling Farmata shortly to make haste with food for the guest.

Disturbed and perplexed as she was as a result of the story she had heard from Momolu, Yadana's natural satisfaction at her brother's return was increased by the fact that his advice would be of great help to her in so difficult a situation. For, although she had already reluctantly decided to abandon the idea of ever having Prince Piu for a son-in-law, she was still faced with the unpleasant task of having to tell him so. And, even when that was done, there remained the question of Momolu and his intentions towards Farmata.

It was, therefore, with a feeling of considerable relief that, as soon as they had settled themselves on square bamboo stools, she heard Boikai say:

"Yadana, I visited Prince Piu this morning to talk over the sale of some cattle that he wishes to buy from me."

"Did you come to terms?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, his offer was so

ridiculous that I brushed it aside and named my own price. I think he will accept it."

Yadana nodded. "Probably. Did he speak of anything else?"

"Yes, of something much more important," answered Boikai generously. "He said that he had been a friend of the family for the past six years, and that he had Farmata in mind for a wife."

Yadana looked at him for a moment without speaking. Then she said slowly: "That is strange. He has never mentioned the matter to me or to Tasureba, and certainly we do not want him to. You have heard the story about him and the Mendi dancing-girl, Boikai?"

"But of course. We shall have to be very careful, Yadana. He has much power and great riches. It is not always easy for little people like you and me to withstand such as the Prince in safety."

Yadana smiled one of her rare smiles. "I have fought a long time alone and not been beaten. Now that I have you, my brother, I am no longer afraid . . ."

She turned quickly as Farmata appeared in the doorway and announced cheerfully, "'Chop' ready," then with a warning gesture to Boikai to keep silence, followed him and her daughter to the laden table.

Their meal was nearly over when the door

opened suddenly to admit Prince Piu. Advancing into the room, he asked gravely: "Am I late for 'chop'?"

"No, there is more in the pot," answered Yadana. "Will you join us?"

The Prince hesitated as he caught Boikai's steady glance, a look so direct and penetrating that it was almost cruel, and which told him instantly that he could expect no assistance from that quarter.

"Thank you, no. I have just had my food," he said.

"There is a stool you may take." Yadana pointed to one beside her brother, and with a gesture of her head motioned to Farmata to leave the room.

As soon as the girl had gone, the Prince sat down, and a constrained silence fell. Yadana's eyes searched her visitor's face with a gentle, yet probing look, that he found difficult to meet, and he was annoyed to see that his hands, with their long, tapering fingers and dyed nails, were shaking visibly. With a quick, furtive movement, as if he were cold, he hid them beneath a fold of his robe.

Her eyes still fixed on his face, Yadana said suddenly: "You have come to offer an explanation, Mahjah?"

"An explanation of what?" answered the Prince, stammering a little.

"Do you not understand?"

"You mean the lies that Momolu would sell as he sells necklaces?"

"If you understand it that way, yes." Yadana's voice, usually warm and musically toned, had now a rough, husky edge.

"What has it to do with you, Yadana?"

"A great deal. Is it not true that you want my Farmata?"

Prince Piu moved as if settling himself more comfortably on his stool. But he made no answer.

A swift look passed between Yadana and Boikai. Then she said steadily: "You see, Mahjah, I cannot allow your attentions to her to continue unless you remember the oath she is under. She is only to be taken from the mat."

The Prince lifted his eyes suddenly and looked at her. They were strangely wild, rueful, and yet proud. "I had meant to inform the family as soon as possible," he said at last. "For years I have watched your daughter grow, Yadana, and cherished the fondest hope of her love. I dreamed that she belonged to me, soul, heart, and body. Now . . ."

He stopped as Boikai rose to his feet and tapped him on the shoulder. "I will meet you next month at Vonjama, where we

will discuss many things," said Boikai significantly.

Prince Piu flashed a half-sullen, half-angry look at him, but he knew that the alliance clearly established between Yadana and her brother was invincible. He would have to wait to deal with the man who had so patently betrayed him.

"Very well," he said indifferently. "I am leaving here early to-morrow morning, and will meet you at Vonjama as arranged."

Boikai took his sister by the hand, and bade them both a pleasant day. Once outside the house he cocked his head to its usual bird-like angle and smiled to himself as he thought that even a rich man may be a fool.

When he had gone, Yadana turned to the Prince. "Mahjah, you have acknowledged your guilt," she said slowly. "And you will see for yourself that it was natural I should suspect you of seeking to weave around my daughter the same net as that in which Döng was caught to shame and death."

The Prince passed his hand across his face with a gesture of weariness. "It is not true. I love her," he said in a low, passionate voice that shook a little. "But I see clearly that Momolu has so turned her face and yours against me that I must admit defeat. Nevertheless, I swear to Allah and to you that

Momolu shall pay the penalty for what he has done. It is true that as a rule I pay no heed to the throwing of mud until it is flung direct into my eyes. But this time those whom I love have been blinded also so that they can no longer see the fair face of friendship, and their minds are as poisoned as their sight. So am I left as a slave in the hands of my accusers."

Yadana looked at him gravely. Her eyes were strangely kind, though her words stung.

"When you led Döng to violate her oath so that she died, then, in accordance with our customs, you yourself should have paid the penalty of death likewise. You must have paid much money to keep the shame from your face, Mahjah."

"This is your judgment, then, Yadana? You also have joined the ranks of my enemies?"

Yadana got up from her stool with a ponderous movement of her heavy body.

"No. But I am no longer afraid." She stood looking down on the still-seated Prince with a look that was as full of pity as of scorn.

"Then, Yadana, this ends our friendship. I leave myself in your hands, with pleasant memories." He laughed gratingly, then rose to his feet, gathered his robe about him with the sweeping gesture of an actor who grasps

his little moment on the stage, and turned towards the door. "It is time. I must go. Good-bye, Yadana. I will send a messenger with word when I reach Vonjama."

Yadana watched him go in silence. Her strength was spent.

When, a few minutes later, Tasureba put her head round the half-open door, she found her sitting on a stool rocking herself backwards and forwards, and crying noiselessly.

CHAPTER XV

PROUDLY arrayed in a new dress of green velvet, her head covered with a kerchief of the same colour, green half-moon slippers on her bare feet, a gold dagger in her hair, a chain about her neck, and the precious bands of elephant-hide encircling her arms, Farmata left her mother's house to keep her appointment, made the night before, with Momolu.

She had been glad to escape from the tense atmosphere that had enveloped the group around the table as soon as Prince Piu joined it. As far as she was concerned, the story recounted by Momolu on the previous afternoon had frightened and shocked her to such a degree that any fleeting attraction she had ever felt towards the Prince had entirely disappeared and been replaced by an instinctive shrinking. Her championship of him to Boikai had been quite impersonal, and was based merely on natural generosity that had no connection with love.

How far this now definite aversion to the Prince in the rôle of husband would have been

effective had Yadana been determined to carry through the match despite her new knowledge of what he had done, Farmata did not know. Her mother had said no word to her about what had happened in the little hut, nor had she responded to her daughter's tentative references to Momolu and his mysterious reappearance from the dead. Farmata had, indeed, no inkling of what Yadana thought of him, and she was too well imbued with the theory of maternal omnipotence to dare question her openly.

Through the night she had struggled beneath a suffocating burden of anxiety. For she realized that, though in the daylight she could think for herself, in the dark she could think only of Momolu. Haunted by his strangely persuasive power, his glowing eyes, his gentle voice, she yet found herself fighting once more against the sudden and overwhelming apprehension that had seized upon her at their first meeting in the market-place. At times she was inclined to think that his continual tapping at the door of her heart was only spasmodic and temporary, and strove to assure herself that all men were alike and imagined that love could be bought as a chattel by the speculative greed of desire.

But when she remembered Momolu's courage, his dogged determination to win her, the trial

from which he had so recently emerged, she knew that she had misjudged him; that, though he was a weaker character altogether than Prince Piu, he was of a different type; that beneath the stream ran a forceful current she would find it difficult to resist. She did not want to love him, and yet was afraid she might.

It had been a relief to forget the tormented fears and questionings of the dark hours in the sun of excitement and pleasure at Boikai's return. Nevertheless, when Yadana signalled to her to leave her elders to the discussion of their business, she had set about her preparations for meeting Momolu with an unconsidering simplicity and directness that were in sharp contradiction to her night-born resolution to keep him at arm's length.

Now, as she strolled along in her beautiful new green dress, the music of the drums and *sambas* had an intoxicating, wild sweetness that made her long to dance. Not altogether willingly, she turned a deaf ear to their appeal, and elbowed her way along through the crowd until at last she saw Momolu Bei awaiting her beneath the cotton-tree.

Momolu was resplendent in a princely robe of crimson embroidered in gold, with white drill mutton-leg breeches beneath it. In his red fez cap and golden tassel, to Farmata's eyes at any rate, he looked like a nobleman.

Her breath caught in a little, excited gasp at sight of him.

Swinging his ebony stick, Momolu's face, as he came to meet her, was almost as glowing as his clothes. This was the day on which he hoped to laugh at difficulties, to achieve the great ambition of his life and, at the same time, to practise the greatest self-sacrifice. Love, he had told the patient, but weary, Yawfee in the small hours of the preceding night, is the corolla of the flower whose roots reach deep down into the dust of the earth.

" Flowers fade," Yawfee had remarked, " when the sun becomes too hot." But Momolu had withered this cynicism with the declaration that his love was a blossom on the Tree of Life itself.

Stricken to trembling by Farmata's beauty and the joy of her nearness, Momolu indicated one of the little rest-huts beneath the tree. " Shall we go in ? " he asked.

Farmata's eyes darkened momentarily. " Not in there." She pointed to the hut into which she had been carried on the previous afternoon.

Momolu laughed. " Very well, we will choose another. All the same, that little place is to me the house of Allah himself. It was there He gave you back to me."

Farmata looked at him in silence. Already

the old, strange spell was weaving itself about her—sweeter than honey, more potent than fear. Struggling helplessly against it, she moved towards one of the bamboo benches close to which they were standing. " We can sit here," she said.

But Momolu shook his head, and before she could protest again, he had taken her hand, opened the door of the nearest hut and pulled her in after him. The door slammed to.

Inside it was strangely cold, and quite dark. Farmata, trembling between fear and excitement, could see nothing. Groping in what she thought to be the direction of the window, she suddenly found Momolu's hands. Magnetic, gentle, and yet strong, they held her own. She made no sound as they crept up her arms, to her shoulders, her neck. Her face between his palms, their lips met for the first time.

In the dark stillness Momolu released her without a word, found the window and flung back the shutter. Sunlight poured in on them. " See," he cried, " it is the light of Allah."

Her eyes like stars, Farmata came to him. Outside, another pair of lovers stood beneath the cotton-tree. Neither they, nor the two within the little closed-in room, said anything, nor was either couple conscious of the throng of people who passed and repassed between them.

Presently Momolu, looking down at her as she stood quiet, but breathing rather fast, beside him, ventured to lay his hand upon her arm. "You know now that I love you?" he asked.

"Yes. But, Momolu, why have you not made it known to the family?"

"Because I was not sure of you."

She raised glowing, truthful eyes to his. "You who can read the secrets of my heart—you are sure now, Mahjah?"

It was the first time Momolu had heard the word of so sweet deference from her lips. Its music moved him to humility. He put his arms about her again.

But as he held her, Farmata shivered suddenly and clung to him.

"Farmata, what is the matter? Why are you shaking so?"

"I am afraid," she whispered, her face hidden against his arm.

"Afraid?" Momolu laughed tenderly. "I am your slave. I will protect you. Not even Shariff can weave such spells as I shall weave to keep evil from your feet. All the way from Foya I travelled to meet you here. Did I not die and live again that we might journey in company to the garden of Mohammed's everlasting peace?"

With a quick, restless movement Farmata

broke from him. As she stood before him, while he stared at her with dawning terror in his eyes, she wrung her hands together.

"You speak of spells," she said at last in a voice that was little more than a whisper. "What is this spell with which you have bewitched me to yourself?"

"I have woven no spells as yet," said Momolu. "It is you, Farmata, who has spun a web around my heart."

There was a strange look in her face of suspense and fear. Momolu was puzzled. He could not understand this sudden change of front. "You are mine, Farmata," he said slowly, in his gentle abrupt way.

She gave a little nod, looking away from him with deep, submissive eyes, as if she had done something wrong that was being brought home to her.

"Momolu, I have made a mistake." She made a little helpless gesture with her hands, and her eyelids flickered.

"What mistake have you made?" asked Momolu. "When first you did not come to meet me in the palm-orchard, my heart shivered with fear and disappointment. But now that you have come, there can be no mistake. It is fate."

"Why did you not forgive Döng?"

The question was utterly unexpected. Mo-

molu frowned. "That has nothing to do with it," he said harshly. "You are not like Döng."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Then you are good and kind," said Farmata quietly.

Momolu snapped his finger and thumb. As always at any hint of praise, his spirits rose. "The man who persuades a woman to be his wife against her will is seeking *palava*," he said sententiously, "and woman *palava* is the greatest and most delicate *palava* on earth."

Farmata nodded again; but still she did not meet his eyes. "It is expedient that one should be careful not to enter the territory of another without first obtaining leave," she said.

"Am I intruding then on holy ground without permission?"

She turned her eyes to his at last. "One day you may cease to love. If I tell you the truth you will perhaps despise me."

Momolu shook his head. "You are the haven of still waters on which I can safely launch my canoe."

His voice was very tender. Farmata tried to smile. Her heart was beating so heavily and unevenly that it seemed as if it would choke her—her poor new-born heart. All her throbbing, pulsing body had been awakened

by love to pain and mockery. She locked her hands together.

Struggling with perplexity as he saw her obvious distress, Momolu smote his breast. "Love begets love," he cried. "I love, therefore you must love also."

Farmata laughed. "Momolu," she said, "you are funny." She laughed again.

"Funny?" Momolu's voice, shaking with rage, stilled the sound abruptly. He turned away from her, his face dark with anger, not noticing her trembling lips and hands.

Farmata went to him, and put her arms about him. "Don't be a fool, Momolu. You must be sensible."

Momolu pushed her away. "I am in no mind to play. This is a man's business. You would make love into a child's toy."

Scarcely knowing what she did, Farmata laughed again. Then she burst into tears and dropped sobbing on to a stool.

The sight restored Momolu's self-control. Kneeling beside her, he put his arms round her. Her head against his shoulder, she rested, crying quietly, as if unconscious of his nearness. Presently they were looking into each other's eyes, both acutely aware of their contact with the other. Momolu pulled out his handkerchief and gently dried her eyes. "Why do you cry when I am near you?" he whispered.

With sudden determination Farmata sat upright, though she still kept within the comforting circle of his arms. "Momolu, you know I love you," she said, "and I think you will not find it hard to understand what I must say to you. You know what the Porrow teaches about love and faith, and how those who belong to it may never break away from its holy laws. Momolu, my love was pledged when I was ten years old."

As motionless as if he were a kneeling statue, Momolu stared at her. "Is this the truth?" he said at last. His world was crumbling about him, for he knew, without need of words, the unalterable implications of what she had said. To fight against them was as impossible as it would be useless. Such a pledge was as irrevocable as death itself.

After a moment or two of stunned immobility he pulled himself slowly to his feet and stood looking down at her. For the first time in the course of his storm-wracked contact with Farmata, he knew that neither anger nor railing could avail. This was a thing that was beyond the puny power of himself or any other to set aside. Nothing could help him now but a direct intervention of the will of Allah.

Then all at once, across the numbness of shock and misery, there shot a gleam of hope.

"Where is this man?" he demanded suddenly.

Farmata shook her head. "I do not know. We grew and played together as children. When war came upon the town of his fathers he was captured and sold into slavery. I do not know whether he lived or died. But the promise sworn between his parents and mine remains."

Momolu's usually slow-moving mind was working rapidly. Before it passed in swift succession scenes from the vision he had seen in trance. How foolish he had been to think that such comparatively small difficulties as he had already encountered on the pathway of his love were those whose overcoming should bring him final victory. Even now he stood but at the threshold of the second chamber. But he knew the pass—the word was love. His pulses racing, he caught Farmata's hand and pulled her up to him. Expecting an outburst, she put her hands on his shoulders. That secret, treasured dream of the boy who had been her childhood's companion, from whom she had hidden, laughing, from tree to tree in the great green woods, who had fished with her in the creeks and rivers, had danced with her to the music of the *sambas* and drums, was too sweet with sorrow, too holy with unfulfilled hope, to be defiled by anger or

reproach, though, in the light of what had happened, both to herself and Momolu, she knew now that it was only a dream broken on the wheel of fate, whose one unshattered fragment was its irrevocable pledge.

With quiet, remembering eyes Momolu looked down at her. "It comes to this, then: My Fate hangs on chance. If Fate should intervene for me . . ."

"You will be blessed," interrupted Farmata. "But if Fate directs the steps of my lost one back to me, you are rejected. This is what Allah has ordained."

"I understand," said Momolu. "Whatever comes I shall have lived to bless Allah's name."

Farmata put her hand in his. "If Abdullah returns," she said gravely, "then I must keep my promise and the promise of my people. If he does not return . . ."

"You are mine for ever," broke in Momolu. "You have my promise, in the name of Allah."

A sudden burst of music broke the succeeding silence, as a group of dancers, singing and clapping their hands in time to the *sambas*, whirled past the window of the little hut.

Farmata, smiling, pointed to them. "Let us go," she said, and moved to open the door.

Momolu went over to the corner of the room

in which he had left his ebony stick. Turning it slowly in his hand, he sought for words. "You will remember me in your prayers to-night, Farmata?"

She nodded, standing in the open doorway through which a warm, soft air from the forest beyond the town swept into the room. Pungent and sweet with the scent of sun-warmed leaves, its touch was a benediction, its breath a silent song. Farmata watched Momolu close the shutters. They stood together for a moment on the threshold, the little room dark again behind them, their faces towards the light of the brilliant day.

Farmata caught at his hand. "Come, let us dance," she said, smiling up at him.

But Momolu disengaged his hand. "I must think. There is much to be planned and made ready. I will come for you again at sunset," he said sombrely.

Farmata paused. Already the lilting wildness of the *sambas*, the heavier undercurrent of the drums, had stirred her body to instinctive response. In the relief of having her confession over she felt as light as air. But the thoughtful stillness of Momolu's face showed plainly that he did not share the urge to rhythmed movement.

So she made a little half-laughing, half-reproachful grimace at him, waved her hand-

kerchief, and began to dance her way into the crowd.

Left alone, Momolu pulled to the door of the hut behind him with such violence that the overhanging leaves of the great cotton-tree trembled, as if shaken by a sudden wind.

CHAPTER XVI

So deep in thought that he scarcely knew where his footsteps led him, Momolu presently found himself before his own stall in the market-place.

At this hour of the afternoon many of the booths were deserted, or left in charge of some precocious youngster, or elderly member of the owner's family on whose age or infirmity commerce made less strenuous demands than the dancing of the Ramadan.

Seated on a bale of cloth just inside the stall, his hands hidden in the wide sleeves of his robe, on his face the look of withdrawn aloofness that always accompanied his contemplative moments, Momolu found Yawfee.

"You are indeed a wonder of wonders among merchants," said the latter, watching him beneath lazily lowered lids as he rummaged in the back of the stall for another bale of cloth, sat himself down upon it with a heavy sigh, and stared in front of him with the look of one who is walking in his sleep. "Only twice since Allah smote you with His holy hand

have you allowed the light of your countenance to shine on your own business. Had it not been for my servants, and myself, you might have lost everything. As it is, the fruits of our labours are scanty enough." He pointed disdainfully to a copper bowl on the ground behind him in which lay a few coins of insignificant value.

As Momolu made no answer, but continued to stare before him into space as if he had not heard, Yawfee took up the bowl and rattled its meagre contents. "A fine harvest from the great Ramadan," he said scornfully. "But he who does not sow cannot expect to reap. What ails you now, Momolu?" The tone of his voice was gentler than his words as he looked at Momolu with a little derisive smile that belied the innocent kindliness of his eyes.

Momolu, emerging slowly from a haze of troubled thought, saw and recognized the look, which meant that his friend would help him if he could, but was quite capable of administering some salutary rebukes in the process. But he was not yet ready completely to unburden his heart even to Yawfee. So he shrugged his shoulders and said: "I am ailing nothing, and this is no place in which to argue about love. Let us talk of something more interesting."

Yawfee raised his eyebrows. "I see. You

have been taught a lesson," he hazarded. "I thought Farmata would do that sooner or later."

Momolu's laugh was harsh. "Well, you are right, in one way, but not in the way you think," he said patiently. "Wait until I come home this evening; then I will tell you everything."

Yawfee hid his hands again in the sleeves of his robe. With his feet tucked under him, he was as motionless as a dark, carved image, his eyes half-closed against the dazzling shimmer of the afternoon heat that danced above the roadway.

A little silence fell. In the grateful shadows of the recesses of the stall, Momolu moved his feet restlessly, then sank his chin on to his breast, and sat as motionless as his companion. Close by a goat bleated shrilly, and the voices of two men discussing the market price of kola nuts, in a neighbouring booth, rose and fell lazily. From the distant field of festival a sudden roll of drums, the thrilling note of *sambas*, announced the beginning of a new dance.

Presently Yawfee said: "You have heard that Prince Piu has been badly beaten at his own game by Yadana?"

Momolu shook his head, and turned his eyes, of which the whites were slightly blood-shot, inquiringly upon his friend.

Relieved that he had at last lighted on something that would stir Momolu's strange apathy that was so unlike his usually talkative, exuberant self, Yawfee went on quickly: "I heard that Boikai Kpundek, who is Yadana's elder brother, came here unexpectedly to sell some cattle to the Prince, and that the two of them laid their heads together and agreed he was no fit person to take Farmata from the mat. However that may be, he is leaving Zigida to-morrow at sunrise, with his carriers, for Vonjama. I saw him going towards his house two hours ago looking like a beaten dog."

"It was not only the laying of their heads together which brought that about," said Momolu hotly. "You know well enough, Yawfee, that it was I myself who first tore the veil from the face of his wickedness."

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten that part of the story," said Yawfee casually. "Nevertheless, it would not surprise me if he has it up his sleeve for you, Momolu."

"You think that, Yawfee?" Momolu's voice was sharp with scorn. "Well, if he wants me, he shall find me. I am no coward. I will meet him anywhere and at any time."

"That is all very well," said Yawfee, getting slowly to his feet, "but a man such as Prince Piu does not always strike in the daylight, and he has a long reach."

"It will be as Allah wills," answered Momolu indifferently, "and Prince Piu may come or go as he pleases for all I care. For myself, I have more important things to think about."

He stood up as he spoke, turned his back on Yawfee, and began, quite unnecessarily, to rearrange some of the various objects displayed on the stall.

Yawfee watched him with a puzzled expression for a moment or two, then spread his hands, palms upwards, in a gesture of mock bewilderment, and took his way into the brilliant sunshine of the street. His parting admonition to the effect that gold in the bowl is of more practical value than love in the heart was completely wasted on Momolu's unresponsive back.

As soon as Yawfee was safely out of sight Momolu came to the front of the stall and looked furtively up and down the road. On either side of him stretched the long line of booths that was repeated on the opposite side of the track. Between them a few of the inhabitants of the town strolled leisurely, eyeing the crude colours and cruder jewels of meretricious importations with more attention than they seemed to wish to bestow on the often beautiful workmanship and textiles of their native industries.

Momolu watched them with calculating eyes. It was not as purchasers, but as potential

guardians of his goods, that they interested him, for among them might be one who, in consideration of a fair percentage on the profits, would be willing to take his place. He did not want to close up the stall because he knew that word of such reckless inattention to the claims of commercial wisdom would immediately reach Yawfee, and he was in no mood to offer explanations. For the same reason he had refrained from asking Yawfee to stay and act as salesman.

Not even the nerve-wracking experience of his trance, nor the imaginative exaltation of the vision by which it was accompanied, had had so definite an effect on Momolu as Farmata's revelation in the little hut. Swift and utterly unexpected as a flash of lightning from a blue November sky, the realization of her childish betrothal to another had scorched its way into the inmost recesses of his heart, burning up all littleness of anger, all pettiness of dispute. With generations of tribal teaching behind him, he knew that such a promise was not for human challenging. To attempt to evade or destroy it would be as futile as to lift impotent hands to heaven in an endeavour to stop the falling of rain. All he could do at the moment was to wait upon the will of Allah and whatever He might send. In the meantime, not even his instinctive fatalism

was altogether proof against the suspicion that heaven would be most likely to look with favour on those who followed the rules laid down by the sacred traditions of their tribe. If he could not force the hand of the All Highest, he could at least take steps to assure omnipotence that he, on his part, had done as much as was allowable in the shaping of his fate towards the desired end.

Such thoughts, together with the determination to clear up the position immediately with Farmata's family, brought him some measure of comfort as he stood making courteous replies to the greetings of those passers-by who spoke to him. But such interruptions were infrequent. Most of them still looked at him a little askance; some deliberately averted their eyes from this strange man who seemed to pass from life to death, from death to life, with equal and uncanny ease. Though Yawfee had ascribed the almost emptiness of the copper bowl to Momolu's continued absence from the stall, it was in reality more largely due to the fact that he owned it and the articles displayed upon it. During the two hours in which he stood there now, he did not sell a single thing. Prospective purchasers withdrew their tentative fingers hurriedly at a nudge or wink from their companions, or as soon as they themselves realized the identity of the would-be salesman.

Weary and disheartened, Momolu at length decided to risk Yawfee's recriminations, leave the stall to itself for the rest of the day, and dismantle it altogether early on the following morning. Already the brief, tropical twilight was at hand; the rice-birds had gone to roost in the cotton-tree beside the huts. The impassionate music from the field of dancers had reached an almost frenzied pitch of wildness and speed. Farmata, he knew, would be looking out for him. In star-shot darkness and coolness they would walk together towards her home. What did a few bales of cloth, or anything in the world matter against the peace of her presence, the magic brightness of her eyes?

With a sudden laugh that startled a woman who had paused by the stall so that she looked up, saw him, and was afraid, Momolu pushed past her and walked rapidly away down the street between the booths. Many saw him go, and many more stood, wondering and awe-struck, beside the empty stall in the succeeding hours. But when one of the two men who had tended Momolu in the forest came at day-break, in response to Yawfee's orders, everything was as the owner had left it. Neither goods nor the money in the copper bowl had been touched.

With the rapidity that is characteristic of

tropical lands, the sun had already set when Momolu found Farmata waiting for him close to the dancing-field. And, by the time they reached the house on the hillside above the town, it was quite dark.

The front door was closed. But Momolu, anxious to seize all possible chances to show that it was now his part to take the lead in everything, hurried past Farmata, opened it quickly, followed her into the house and shut the door with a bang behind him. Farmata said nothing, but she smiled at him. Such high-handedness pleased her, though she did not know why.

"Is my mother at home?" she called to a servant who was lazily resting before the kitchen fire.

"No, but she will be back before long."

Farmata turned to Momolu. "Will you wait?"

"Why, yes. Am I not honoured?" He shot her a look that was both proud and appealing.

"Then take a seat near the window. You can watch the people passing by without being seen. Or if you like you can sit at the table and look at the pictures in that book." She pointed to a square, cedar table standing against the wall, on which lay an old magazine that she had brought back with her from her school in Monrovia.

With great politeness Momolu accepted the invitation to be seated, and was soon absorbed in turning over the pages that, although he could not read English, enthralled him with their graphic illustrations of a life and people he had never known.

Presently he held the magazine out to Farmata, his eyes glowing excitedly, his finger pointing to a flamboyant picture of a white girl abandoned in the arms of her lover. The artist had brought the two figures into sharp relief by grouping them beneath a heavily shaded light that struck full down on to them. The room about them was in deep shadow, but light glinted on the girl's long, unbound hair. Her eyes were closed to the expected kiss.

"What is this?" demanded Momolu.

Farmata surveyed the picture with sudden misgiving. "That," she said slowly, "is how Western people make love."

"Is that love?"

Farmata hesitated. "I am not sure. Perhaps in that other world across the water love is not the same as here."

Momolu shook his head. "Love is the same all the world over. I understand well enough what this means." His hand shook as he closed the magazine and put it back on the table. He turned his eyes away from hers.

"Momolu——" Farmata's voice was soft

and pleading. "If two people were set to guard a trust, would not one of them be doing a wicked injury to the other if she allowed that trust to be in any way interfered with by a third person?"

Momolu stared straight before him; he was afraid to look at her. "Without doubt that one would be guilty of great wickedness," he said gravely.

"Yet," went on Farmata, groping in a mist of words, "if that pledge was truly kept, they would be the happiest two on earth. Even if one of them lived in a distant land and the other in Zigida, they would still be happy, wouldn't they, Momolu?"

As he turned at last with an odd little laugh and looked at her, he saw that there were tears in her eyes. Taking her hand gently, he stood up, close to her. "Farmata, I understand. This Abdullah whom you loved, though he was captured and sold into slavery, must yet be happy because he knows that you have kept your trust."

Farmata, looking up into his big, dark eyes, began to sob. "Let me go," she cried wildly.

Instantly Momolu released her hand and she went over to the door leading to the yard. "I must get supper ready before my mother comes back," she stammered, and ran out of the room.

When she returned some twenty minutes later, Momolu was sitting in an attitude of extreme dejection, elbows on knees, his face hidden in his hands. Farmata tiptoed over to him and touched his shoulder.

" Are you dreaming ? " she asked softly.

Momolu looked up at her with sudden defiance in his eyes as if daring her to doubt him. " Dreams do not come my way. They only seem to follow distant lovers," he said bitterly.

Farmata made a gesture of helplessness. " Do not let us go over it all again, Momolu. I have told you the truth, and we have agreed to a condition. That condition must be approved by my family. Is it not so ? "

He nodded.

" Then let us leave it until my mother comes."

Momolu shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. But presently he ceased to watch Farmata as she moved about the room, setting it in readiness for the evening meal. His chin sunk on his chest, he was busily preparing a suitable speech against Yadana's arrival. Even when Farmata reminded him that it was many hours since he had eaten anything and asked whether he were not hungry, he refused to be drawn out of his absorption, and it was some time before, intoxicated with his own imagined

eloquence, he would even consent to answer smile with smile.

Having waited with true feminine patience for the long-coming lightening of his face, Farmata was quick to seize her opportunity. Swiftly she fetched a stool, set it close to Momolu, and sat down beside him.

" Did you enjoy the dances ? " she asked.

Momolu's look at her was almost vindictive. " I did not see them," he said shortly.

Farmata regarded him in astonishment. " But I thought——" she began.

" I had other more important things to attend to this afternoon," broke in Momolu pompously. Already the lightly swung pendulum of his mind had travelled back from despair to confidence born of the grandiloquent phrases he intended to level at the unsuspecting Yadana. " Dances indeed," he said, stretching his long limbs luxuriously, as if to ease them of the burden of an intolerable weight.

Farmata made a little face at him. " You were watching them yesterday," she said demurely.

Momolu's ill-humour vanished at the laughing, gentle challenge of her eyes. " That is true. And I saw one among the dancers who outshone them all."

He caught her shy, expectant look, and rose to his feet. " It was you, Farmata. Thus

and thus your feet beat the earth to the music of the *sambas*."

With not ungraceful clumsiness Momolu sought to imitate the movements of Farmata's twinkling feet. In a circle round the stool on which she sat he danced and postured, waving his hands, bowing his head towards her to the rhythm of a Mendi love-song that he sang below his breath.

At last Farmata could sit still no longer. In a single movement she had reached his side and was dancing with him, the green of her dress like leaves against the crimson flower of his robe. From the doorway leading to the kitchen peered the astonished face of the servant, awakened from a doze before the fire by Momolu's singing that was now loud and clear.

Circle about diminishing circle, the whirling figures sped, green and crimson, crimson and green. When they had come so close that one was hardly to be distinguished from the other, there came a sudden knocking at the door.

Almost before the sound reached her ears, Farmata was standing stock-still. She caught at Momolu's hand as he spun past her, checking him also to silence and immobility. Finger on lip, her eyes wide with curiosity as to who should be there at that hour, she ran to the door.

To her great surprise, when it was opened, she saw Tasureba standing in a patch of moonlight and panting a little after climbing the hill. Not quite knowing what to do and acutely conscious of Momolu's tall figure in the background, Farmata fumbled with her words, though she managed to smile.

" Oh, Mama Kor, I did not think it could be you at this time of night. I thought it must be a friend of mine from the village who knocked."

Tasureba looked dubious, but she only said: " Where is your mother ? "

" She is not in yet, but I don't think she will be long now," said Farmata, realizing with relief that Momolu had crept across the room and was now concealed, for the moment at any rate, by the still open door.

" Well, I will come in and wait for her. I shall be glad of a rest."

Tasureba made to enter the room but, apparently forgetting that she had to step over the high sill of the door, struck her foot against it, stumbled, and would have fallen had not Momolu rushed forward and caught her.

" That would have been a bad fall," she said, looking up at him slyly as he helped her to a chair. " It was a good thing for me that you came out from behind the door in time."

Momolu watched her gravely as she relaxed,

as if tired, on to the chair. "Yes, the floor is very hard," he said, staring down at the sun-baked mud ground as if he had never seen it before.

Smiling half guiltily, half mischievously at Momolu, Farmata fussed about her aunt, fetching a stool for her feet, and closing the door so that the night air, often treacherously chill, should not blow in on her.

"Thank you, my child," said Tasureba, closing her eyes gratefully. Neither Farmata nor Momolu noticed the little smile that played about the corners of her mouth.

It was now nearly nine o'clock. The roofs of the town could be seen from the window, sharp in the bright moonlight. The air was so clear that it was possible to watch the people passing and re-passing along the zigzag paths between the booths of the market-place. Singing and dancing had begun again, and the night throbbed with sound as with light.

For a little while Momolu and Farmata stood, hand in hand, beside the window. Behind them the old lady was apparently asleep. But presently she broke the silence suddenly.

"Who is this young man, Farmata?"

"Who?" Farmata turned and faced her squarely. "This is Momolu Bei."

"Is he the young man about whom we have heard so much in these last few weeks?"

"Yes."

Tasureba muttered something which the two by the window could not hear. She regarded Momolu with the same quizzical, bird-like cocking of the head that was characteristic of Boikai. "Come here and let me look at you," she said.

Momolu went and stood beside her chair. He knew perfectly well that Tasureba must have heard his triumphant singing and that she had also seen his clumsy attempt to hide behind the door. But her frank, black eyes as they looked up at him were so friendly and so humorous that he burst, all at once, into a loud laugh.

His laughter ceased as suddenly as it had begun. He stared, looked puzzled, and then smiled vaguely in response to a questioning glance from Farmata, who was now standing on the other side of Tasureba's chair. Searching wildly in the storehouse of his mind, he tried to remember where he had seen the old lady before.

"Excuse me, Mama Kor, but did I see you in Yawfee's house a few days ago?"

Tasureba shook her head. "You have mistaken my face for that of someone else," she said.

Momolu smiled, then smote his forehead dramatically. "It is very strange. Have you perhaps been to Foya recently?"

"I used to live there."

Momolu smote his brow again. "I knew I was right," he cried excitedly. "Did you know one Kaifa Mambu?"

"Why, certainly."

"He was my father," said Momolu with pride.

"Ah-ha! Then you were the little boy I saw running about the house and kitchen there some years ago?"

Momolu nodded, grinning sheepishly. "It was a long time ago, Mama Kor, and many of the years between have been years of hardship and pain. Sometimes I have even wished that death might come and set my soul free."

"Nonsense," said Tasureba sharply. "You talk foolishness." Unwrapping the kerchief that covered her head, she pointed to it. "Look at my hair—how white it is with silver threads. That is not age, my friend; it is trouble and hardships. I am fifty-five. For many years adversity hung heavy in my sky. Then one day there came a ray of sunlight, and the clouds were gone. Allah's time is not our time. We must bear our troubles bravely and with patience."

Momolu turned his eyes away. The old woman's words brought balm and courage to his soul, and made him feel ashamed as well. For a moment he fought with a rush of emotion

that brought him near to tears. Then he looked back at her with a grave calmness that made his young face strangely dignified and serene. "I bless the name of Allah for your words of hope," he said quietly.

Keenly aware of what underlay his solemn words, Farmata, without meeting his eyes, laid her hand on Tasureba's arm. "Mama Kor," she said, "will you excuse me so that I may go and see what has become of our food?"

Tasureba nodded absently. Something in the manner and bearing of the tall youth whom she had last seen as a romping child, and now saw grown to manhood and obviously bearing the weight of a man's burden, stirred her sympathy. As Farmata left them alone together, she gave the now nervous Momolu a twinkling smile that had a wealth of kindness and understanding beneath it. "You may be seated," she said graciously.

Momolu sat down on a square bamboo stool. He knew very well why Farmata had deserted him like this—in order that he might take advantage of a heaven-sent opportunity, an opportunity made doubly precious by the discovery that Tasureba had known his father in far-off Foya.

He sat silently for a few moments, gathering his wandering thoughts; then, all the fine phrases he had so carefully prepared forgotten

as if they had never been, he said hesitatingly: "I have been hoping for a chance to meet you, Mama Kor."

Tasureba turned a look of assumed bewilderment upon him. She had already seen more than enough to tell her what was afoot between Farmata and Momolu, and was also aware that the latter was dutifully following the dictates of local custom in laying the matter before her as the eldest feminine member of Farmata's family. But she was determined that the process of asking for the girl in marriage should be properly carried through before she gave any hint of her willingness to approve Momolu's suit.

"I came here to Zigida," went on Momolu hurriedly, "to be present at the Feast, and also to sell my goods in the market. There I met Farmata and loved her from the first moment when she stopped beside my stall. Now I have found out that she was betrothed in childhood to one Abdullah, who was torn from her side by war and sold into slavery. Whether he will ever return is what none of us can foretell. But, if he does not, will you help me to bind the band of love around our two hearts?"

For the space of several seconds Tasureba did not speak. Her eyes held Momolu's, probing and searching, as it seemed to him,

into the deepest depths of his mind. But his look as it met hers was so naïve in its humility, so steadfast in its proud appeal, that presently she was completely satisfied.

"I will hold word on it and talk to Yadana," she said at last. "Anything that I can do, you may rest assured that it will be done."

"You have my gratitude." Momolu bent low, touching her bare feet with his right hand in reverence and respect. With a little tap on his shoulder Tasureba bade him rise.

As he stood up again, Momolu saw that her careworn face was sweet and vivid with beauty laid upon it by understanding and sympathy. He did not know that his own was transfigured by the consciousness of hope re-born.

CHAPTER XVII

SOME two hours later Momolu burst without ceremony into the room where Yawfee, hardly more awake than he was asleep, sat smoking a last pipe before going to bed. He raised his eyebrows in mild surprise as Momolu flung his red fez cap with its golden tassel into a corner, and then, with less respect than he usually accorded to that venerated object, followed it with his ebony stick.

"Is it necessary to make so much noise so late?" demanded Yawfee, startled out of his semi-doze by the clatter with which the stick fell to the ground.

Momolu laughed. "I am sorry," he said, "but I could throw even myself higher than the moon to-night."

Yawfee shut one eye and regarded him out of the other with sleepy disapproval. "What in the name of Allah has happened now?" he asked. "When I saw you last you were as lively as a stream that has dried up in its course. Now you come in here and fling things about as if you sought to wake the dead. Are

you never going to learn to be the same person for two minutes together, Momolu?"

Momolu sat down beside him. "Listen, Yawfee. You gave me your promise that whenever I needed your help, I had only to ask for it. I want your help now."

Yawfee nodded sagely. "I thought as much," he muttered.

"Yes, I know I give you a great deal of trouble, Yawfee. But only wait now in patience until you hear what I have to tell you."

"Be quick, then. I cannot afford to lose my sleep every night on your account." Yawfee's voice was irritable, though his eyes were alert with friendly interest.

With a good deal of dramatic effect Momolu explained all that Farmata had told him in the rest-hut that afternoon, and how he had afterwards met Tasureba and received the promise of her help.

"Just as she had said she would do what she could on my behalf," concluded Momolu, "Yadana came in and invited me to share the family's evening meal. When it was over I asked her formally for Farmata's hand. She said she would have to think it over, that nothing could be decided in a hurry. But—and I think this is strange, Yawfee—she made no mention of the promise to Abdullah's parents." His face clouded suddenly as he

looked anxiously at his companion. "What do you think that means?"

Yawfee, his eyes on the glowing bowl of his pipe, made a little non-committal gesture. "I do not know. It is nearly always impossible to tell what women mean either by silence or by speech. Though in this case Yadana probably meant nothing more than that she has not yet made up her mind about you."

"Tasureba has," said Momolu.

"Very well, then. What have you to trouble about? It is Tasureba's say that really counts in the matter. And anyhow, I do not understand why you are so bent on making this proposal now when you know very well nothing can come of it until it is discovered whether Abdullah is alive or dead."

"I am afraid," said Momolu. "So much has happened in the short time since I met Farmata, and none of it has seemed to bring me any certain hope. There is something more to come, Yawfee. It may be terrible, it may be blessed. Whatever it is, I must be prepared."

Yawfee watched him in silence for a moment or two. Then he said quietly, "What is it you want me to do?"

"To take my offerings and be spokesman for me to Yadana. You know the rules, Yawfee. I must abide by them."

"To act as mediator is often a more perplexing game than love itself." Yawfee spoke as if he were thinking aloud. The little lines round his eyes that were only apparent when he was worried or suspicious made his face look older than his forty-five years. He gave a heavy sigh as he rose to his feet, stretching his arms above his head in a gesture of weariness. "Ah-Ya-Da! One has no peace with such as you, Momolu. First you must fall into love, then into a trance. Now Allah alone knows what sort of trouble you are heading for. However, I will see what can be done in the morning. Now I am going to sleep."

He gathered his robe about him and went over towards a door that led into an inner room.

Momolu sat alone for a few minutes, a deep frown puckering his forehead. So many and so strange things had indeed happened to him since his first coming to Zigida that he felt almost like a piece of wood carried helplessly along by the current of some tumbling stream. More than once the waters had threatened to submerge his life and hope. They were tempestuous still. But he was certain that beyond the noise and peril of their tossing lay a pool of peace. The vision lulled and enchanted him. Presently his head nodded forward with a jerk which startled him so that he sprang to

his feet, uncertain where he was. Then from behind the half-open door he heard Yawfee's regular, gentle breathing. He smiled at the sound, blew out the light, and tiptoed away to the little guest-chamber. In less than five minutes he was fast asleep.

With the first light of day Yawfee awoke and, as was his custom, immediately arose to make his morning devotions to Allah. His prayers done, he flung back the shutter of his window and stood to watch the sunrise behind the branches of the trees. The air was sweet with the faint, elusive scent of wild flowers.

For a long time Yawfee stood there motionless, his thoughts busy with Momolu and his chequered love-affair and the delicate mission he had undertaken. Rousing himself at last, he began to walk up and down the room, pacing backwards and forwards with long, nervous strides, as he had done while awaiting Shariff's visit to the hut in the forest where Momolu lay dead. Locking his fingers together, he strove anxiously to plan the words most likely to win Yadana's consent to the request he had to make.

"What must I say?" he murmured to himself as he paced restlessly back and forth.

Presently he decided that nothing was to be gained by waiting and that he had better get his alarming task over and done with as

soon as possible. A glance at his face as he passed an old mirror in a wooden frame made him smile. "You are getting old," he said to the reflection that stared back at him. "What right have you to meddle in the affairs of these young ones? Sometimes I think you are a fool." He snapped his fingers derisively at himself, and the image answered scorn with scorn, silently.

At that moment a servant came into the room. Yawfee turned to him quickly.

"Go, you, and guard the stall of Momolu Bei in the market," he said, "and see that nothing is stolen, even if you cannot sell." The man bowed his understanding of the order and went away as quietly as he had come.

By the time he had dressed, Yawfee was more than ever convinced of his foolishness in going to so much trouble on behalf of Momolu. "It is all very well," he thought, "to spend oneself for others. What is my reward? If I win his cause for him, Momolu will have eyes for no one but Farmata. If I lose he will hate and despise me. So I get nothing out of it, whichever way it goes." A feeling of desolation and loneliness came over him as he made his way into the outer room.

But when he saw Momolu's smiling face as they sat together at table for the first meal of the day, and heard his eager protestations of

confidence in his friend, Yawfee began to think that perhaps after all there was something to be said for the rôle of mediator, and that it was at any rate impossible for him to go back on his given word.

As soon as the meal was finished, Momolu went to his wooden chest and produced the required offerings.

"This," he said, handing Yawfee twelve yards of white longcloth, "is my heart. These"—two large bottles of gin—"are my words, spiced and sincere. And these four bars of tobacco leaf are my thoughts, my dreams of hope and happiness."

"Very well," said Yawfee, clapping his hands for a servant to come and gather up the offerings, "I will tell Yadana what you say, and I hope my words may be sown in good ground."

"There is one other thing." Momolu followed his friend to the door. "If you see Farmata, will you ask her to meet me beneath the cotton-tree this afternoon?"

Yawfee shot him a scornful glance. "So you are going to waste more time and leave your place in the market open to any who choose to take without paying. It is to be hoped Yadana will not ask me questions as to your business methods, my friend."

Whereupon he departed, preceded by the

servant carrying the presents, and left Momolu laughing.

The door of Yadana's house was opened at Yawfee's knock by Farmata. Her cheerful smile as she greeted him disconcerted Yawfee. He was strangely jealous of this slender, graceful girl who had caused such havoc in Momolu's life, and though he was prepared to admit that she was both beautiful and desirable, he was, at the moment, in no mood to waste words on her. So he only said shortly: "May I see your mother?"

"Why, yes. Please take a seat while I go and tell her you are here."

As Farmata turned away, smiling and excited, for she knew the reason for Yawfee's visit, he remembered Momolu's message. "By the way, Momolu asked me to say he would like you to meet him near the cotton-tree this afternoon," he said, deliberately casual.

Farmata hesitated and her eyes met Yawfee's. Wide, bright, and innocent, they roused his sudden sympathy. "You had better go," he said, more gently than he had yet spoken.

Farmata nodded quickly. "Please tell him I will be there an hour before sunset," she said, and ran hurriedly out of the room to call her mother.

Yadana, not wishing it to appear that she was unduly anxious to arrange a marriage for

her daughter, kept Yawfee waiting long enough for him to become so nervous that his sandalled foot was tapping the ground impatiently when she at last came into the room. But her greeting was so unconcerned and friendly that, by the time the customary formalities in regard to the taking of seats had been accomplished, he had regained his usual outward calm and poise. The two had met already on various occasions connected with the local life of the town, and each, being shrewd judges of character, had summed up the other fairly accurately. Yadana knew Yawfee for a man of deep thought and far-reaching vision, whose gentle deliberation of manner concealed considerable strength. He, on his part, recognized her as a woman whose rigid standards were unusually high and unassailable, who would stand no trifling and might easily be incapable of mercy.

For a moment or two they regarded each other in silence, as if measuring their distance, like two swordsmen with their weapons ready and unsheathed. Yawfee struck first.

"I have come on a mission of love," he said quietly.

Yadana, her plump person held stiffly upright in its brown cotton dress, raised her eyebrows. "Of whom do you speak, may I ask?"

"Of your daughter, Farmata."

A momentary smile flitted across her face. Then she looked at him sternly as if to read his hidden thoughts.

"It is a great pleasure to me to find you in such good health and looking no older than a girl of sixteen," said Yawfee, courteous, but irrelevant.

Yadana frowned. "Did you come here only to speak words of no moment?" she asked coldly.

Yawfee smiled. Leaning back in his chair, he watched her carefully.

"At the Ramadan two days ago," he said, "I saw your daughter in conversation with my friend and guest, Momolu Bei."

"Do you mean Momolu Bei of Foya?" interrupted Yadana.

"Yes."

"Then you need not waste your words. He has been here already and told my sister and me of his wish to take my daughter from the mat." Her eyes glinted. But her shaft fell short.

Yawfee, instead of looking surprised, as she had expected, said amiably: "That was clever of him. He is a fine fellow."

"You think so?" Yadana's deep, warm voice was soft as velvet.

Yawfee decided that the time had come for him to show his hand. He rose from his seat

and went over to the table on which he had put Momolu's offerings. With persuasive voice and eloquent gestures, he explained and displayed them one by one.

Yadana watched him with strangely troubled eyes. Like Tasureba she had had no doubt of Momolu's sincerity on the previous evening, but these tangible expressions of it placed her in a difficulty in regard to her own conscience. She knew well enough that she had been prepared to ignore the fact of Farmata's childish betrothal to Abdullah in favour of the rich and powerful Prince Piu. Now her innate honesty forced the admission to herself that she was going to use that same betrothal as a weapon against one who was comparatively defenceless. She did not understand the workings of her own mind sufficiently to realize that this intention was but a sop to her conscience —a tardy reparation for an offence that had only been prevented by the mercy of Allah. It was therefore with a hesitation very unlike her usual forthrightness of speech and action that she at last followed Yawfee to the table and gathered Momolu's presents into her arms.

"Please take back to Momolu Bei my best wishes for himself and his future," she said slowly. "As for the matter about which you spoke, it is one for deep consideration and much thought. But there is one thing both

you and Momolu must know—unless you know it already," she said, noticing the look of comprehension in Yawfee's eyes.

"About Abdullah?" Yawfee's voice was grave.

"Ah—then Farmata has not forgotten either. It is only from her lips that Momolu or you could have heard the story. No one else in Zigida knows of it—not even my sister, Tasureba. She was living in Foya at the time." Her eyes, dark and perplexed, sought Yawfee's as if for help.

"Come back to your chair," he said gently, "and let us think together what is best to be done."

Looking more like an overgrown child than a middle-aged mother of a marriageable daughter, Yadana crossed the room and sat down again. Sorry as he was for her obvious distress, Yawfee could not help smiling to himself as he noticed how carefully she put the longcloth, bottles of gin and bars of tobacco on the ground beside her chair. The sight encouraged him to further questioning.

"Where is Abdullah now?" he asked thoughtfully.

"No one knows. It is fifteen years since blood and water flooded the town of his fathers, captured and destroyed by an invading tribe under cover of a great storm, and Abdullah

himself was taken and sold into slavery. Nevertheless, the pledge of my house to the house of his parents stands. It is a link in the chain of life that cannot be broken unless snapped by death."

"And you have never received any smallest word as to where Abdullah might or might not be?" persisted Yawfee.

"No—except that about three years ago a traveller who had passed through the Bonde country came to Zigida and told how he had seen a band of slaves working on a plantation there. He called to one of them to bring him a drink of water, and when he came with it the man asked him whether he were by chance journeying to Bendu. When he told him no, but to Zigida for the Ramadan, the slave looked in his face and laughed and cried at the same time, beating his hands together. The traveller thought it was so funny to hear a man weep and laugh with the same breath that he boasted of it among those with whom he talked in Zigida."

"Bendu was where you lived before you came to Zigida, was it not?" queried Yawfee, eyeing her steadily.

Yadana nodded. Her look at him was both furtive and sulky.

"The Bonde country, you said?"

"Yes. But it is three years ago and one slave is very like another."

Yadana was struggling desperately to salve her conscience at no matter what cost to Momolu or anyone else. If Abdullah were to be proved alive, the shameful memory of her intended treachery to tribal law would haunt her for the rest of her days. If, on the other hand, his death were demonstrated beyond a doubt, she would exonerate herself from blame on the ground that she had believed him to be dead at the time—a tortuous method of reasoning that was as naïvely strong as it was ethically weak.

"Whether he would recognize your daughter again after all these years is a different question." The voice of Yawfee broke suddenly across her troubled thoughts.

But here Yadana was on firmer ground. Though she had surrendered, in intention at least, to cupidity for herself and ambition for Farmata in regard to Prince Piu, the record of her emotional beliefs was entirely free from stain.

"Of course he would recognize her," she answered emphatically. "Love does not die. It is like a pebble thrown into a pool and forms circle after circle through all the ages of time."

"Abdullah's death, then, is the only key to the solution, the only hope that Momolu will ever achieve the dream of his life?"

"Yes. You do not blame me or my family for our decision?"

"How could I, Yadana? On the contrary, I honour you for it. The breaking of such a pledge could bring no happiness either to Farmata or Momolu. As for you——"

"I will make one condition," broke in Yadana unexpectedly. "If Momolu can bring me certain proof as to how Abdullah came to his death, who tended him during the hour of transformation and what were the words that fell from his lips as his spirit sped towards Mohammed's sacred shrine, I will listen again to your pleading. If not—my promise stands. That is my final word."

Yawfee, though he felt that the task she had set required almost superhuman energy and skill, was not discouraged. At the back of his mind was the memory of Momolu's words: "There is something more to come. It may be terrible, it may be blessed." That something had now been declared. Whatever the outcome, it was less fearful in the knowing than the imagining.

Yadana saw the first shock of startled surprise in his face give way to resolution as he rose to his feet and bade her a courteous farewell.

"Our time is in Allah's hands and He alone knows what the future has in store," she said.

Yawfee looked her straight in the eyes. "I will tell Momolu Bei what you have said. If Allah wills that you should have the proof you seek, then Momolu will bring it to you. In this you may rest assured that my words are his words, my voice his voice." He gave her the customary flick of the fingers, and went away before Yadana had time to speak again.

Yawfee found Momolu lying on a bamboo bed in his room, anxiously awaiting his friend's return. He sat down beside the bed, and, in answer to Momolu's questioning look, said quickly:

"There is hope. Yadana has accepted your offerings. But she has made conditions. She asks for proof that Abdullah is dead, and, if so, how he came by his death and what were the last words that parted his lips before he died."

"And if he is not dead?" Momolu's voice shook a little.

"Then your hope is lost."

For nearly a minute Momolu lay motionless, his eyes fixed on Yawfee's face, though the latter knew that they saw, not him, but something that was outside and beyond them both.

At last he rose from the bed, smote his breast, and said: "Allah be praised! Tomorrow at sunrise I will go in search of

Abdullah. I do not believe that he is dead—— However that may be, I will not return until I have found him, or can bring some news of his whereabouts."

"That is courage, my friend," said Yawfee, laying his hands on Momolu's shoulders and looking into his eyes. "I wish you luck, and if there is anything that I can do for you, I am always your obedient friend."

Momolu put his hand on Yawfee's arm, but he did not speak. His face had the same exalted look that it had worn as he touched Tasureba's feet on the evening before. The something he had dimly foreseen had come upon him, swiftly and with power. Neither he nor Yawfee found anything strange in the idea that Momolu should himself undertake a quest whose end might be the undoing of his hope. Neither doubted that what Allah had decreed would be accomplished, and the measure of Momolu's confidence in himself as the instrument of that accomplishment was the measure of his love.

Yawfee, suddenly remembering Farmata's message, smiled a little to himself as he realized that Momolu had apparently forgotten his own pleading for a tryst beneath the cotton-tree.

"Farmata will meet you an hour before sunset," he announced with assumed carelessness.

Momolu turned from the wooden chest over which he had been stooping to pack his various clothes and belongings that were strewn untidily about the room. Already the crimson robe of festival, the red fez cap with its golden tassel, were hidden away beneath a heterogeneous collection of things that he was flinging in anyhow, one upon the other. His eyes glowed as he looked at Yawfee. Then he made a hurried dive into the half-filled chest.

"I must find my blue robe," he muttered, searching with as much energy as if his life depended on it.

Yawfee pointed to where the missing garment, trimmed with black braid round the neck, sleeves and front, hung from a nail in the wall. "It is there before your eyes," he said, laughing.

Momolu tumbled back his disarranged possessions, rose to his feet, and surveyed his handiwork ruefully. "I will do better another time," he said apologetically, noticing Yawfee's look of pretended disdain. "Now I am in a hurry. First I must wash, and then, while we eat our afternoon meal, we will think out a way to find Abdullah."

By the end of the meal they had sketched out a tentative plan, based on what Yadana had let fall about the strange slave seen by a traveller in the Bonde country.

"My cousin Zeze," said Yawfee, "knows that district as if it were the palm of his own hand. Him I will bargain with to accompany you as guide. And I will send my own carriers on ahead to prepare camping-grounds and food for him and you."

Having arrayed himself for his meeting with Farmata in his blue robe, white pantaloons, a loosely-wound white turban around a green fez cap, and with red Morocco sandals on his bare feet, Momolu went off to the market-place to supervise the dismantling of his stall. He felt a strange little pang go through him as he watched one of Yawfee's servants carry away the last bale of cloth, the last basket of miscellaneous objects that he had collected with so much care and pride in preparation for the feast. Things had turned out very differently from the way in which he had pictured them as happening. And now he was face to face with the strangest of them all.

When the stall was emptied of everything save the copper bowl, to which no more than two small coins had been added since the day before, Momolu took it up, rattled the contents enticingly in the faces of a number of urchins who had been watching the process of removal with scornfully interested eyes, then flung them into the midst of the excited, prancing group.

As he looked back from a bend in the path that would take him to the meeting-place beneath the cotton-tree, he could see the small, ebony figures still scrambling wildly in the dust.

CHAPTER XVIII

VERY early on the following morning, before it was fully light, Momolu came to the door of Yawfee's room.

During his absence in the market-place Yawfee had been busy making preparations for the search for Abdullah. Having seen his cousin, Zeze, and persuaded him to act as guide through the Bonde country to Barkadu, he set about engaging and instructing a band of carriers, and collecting such provisions and baggage as might be necessary for a long, and possibly dangerous, journey.

By the time Momolu returned to the house after meeting Farmata beneath the cotton-tree and then escorting her home, all was in readiness for an early start, Yawfee had shut himself in his room and had given orders to his servants that he was not to be disturbed.

Momolu had spent what was left of the evening in a state of alternating depression and exaltation. He prowled restlessly about the house, watching Yawfee's closed door anxiously for any sign that his friend was about to

emerge from his strange seclusion and would keep him company.

But there was neither sound nor movement. Presently the servants had withdrawn to their own quarters, and Momolu was left entirely alone. Backwards and forwards, like the shuttle of a loom, his mind wove unending pictures of memory and hope.

Of the first the sweetest was his recent parting with Farmata. They had nestled together on a bench beneath the cotton-tree like two doves upon a branch. And each had seen in the eyes of the other the look that is for true love alone. With gentle words, like those of children who have been admonished to be good, they had re-pledged their troth in the event of Abdullah's not returning—a troth made doubly solemn by the eating by each of one of the halves of a white kola nut, broken between them.

More than once it had been on the tip of Momolu's tongue to tell Farmata of his projected journey and search. But something held back the words, so that they had separated at last at the door of Yadana's house with no more definite words of farewell than those that always pass the lips of lovers who part, even for a night.

Returning alone along the moon-bright roadway, Momolu was glad that he had kept silence

about his quest. His own state of mind, to one unpractised in the intricacies of introspection, would have been difficult to explain. His love for Farmata was as sure, as all-powerful as ever. But it had risen to a higher level at which the air was clear above the mists of passion. Desire was still there, sharp and penetrating, but it was no longer more than the red-hot centre of a flame whose far-flung, steady glow was a selfless devotion in which his own happiness might burn to ashes if only Farmata's were assured. He was certain, without knowing why, that he would find Abdullah for her. His one fear was that he might find him dead instead of alive.

Now, as he stood outside the door of Yawfee's room in a semi-darkness that seemed to move as light grew, moment by moment, he felt curiously detached from himself. Almost it was as if he looked from some invisible spy-hole and saw his own figure standing there in its Mandingo black and white-striped breeches and robe, his head covered with a white turban, his neck draped against the heat of the sun, on his feet native sandals of dark brown leather, in his hand a long, spear-headed, wooden staff.

Already the carriers had gone ahead in the breaking darkness and must by now be two hours on their way. Drawing a deep breath,

like one who braces himself for a plunge into an unknown current, Momolu smote the door with his staff.

"Who is there?" Yawfee's voice seemed to come from a long distance.

"It is Momolu."

"You may come in."

Wondering a little, Momolu entered the room. The shutters were closed across the window, but a lamp, set upon a small table, made a pool of brightness about Yawfee. His feet tucked under him, he was sitting bolt upright on a mat on the ground, a wooden slab held in his left hand, on the floor beside him a pot of black ink. The slab was closely covered with Arabic characters.

He looked up at Momolu with eyes that were brilliant with weariness and long thought. Pointing to the slab, he said:

"All night I have been working for you, to find out what the future holds. You go in a holy moment, Momolu. Allah is great and good. Upon his sacred word you will succeed. It is written." He indicated an open book that lay on a box beside him.

Momolu stooped over it, but he could decipher nothing of the strange words upon the page. As Yawfee got stiffly to his feet, Momolu said gravely:

"You are the best friend in the world,

Yawfee. Never will I forget all you have done for me."

"It is nothing." Yawfee spoke hastily. "You are my friend. Now go, and Allah be with you, in your search and in your returning. The sign has been given, and the time has come. Let us not waste words."

He put his hand on Momolu's arm and pushed him gently towards the door. In silence they left the house together and found Zeze awaiting them outside. Over the town the sun had risen; the air was already warm and sweet as the two travellers turned towards the road.

"You will tell Farmata for me where I have gone and for what reason?" whispered Momolu hurriedly in Yawfee's ear. The latter nodded, making a signal with his hand that they should be gone. As Momolu looked back from a corner that would take him out of sight out of the house, he saw Yawfee prostrate himself and kiss the earth three times.

Momolu's first objective was Barkadu, capital of the Bonde section of the country, the chief town of Northern Central Liberia, and one of the busiest market centres of the Republic. Among the thousands of Mandingo merchants who congregated there to offer their wares, upon a barter system, in exchange for kola nuts, he hoped to find one who could give him word of the slaves imported into and

working in the district. For his conviction was as strong as Yawfee's that the slave of whom the traveller had spoken in Zigida was none other than Abdullah.

The town, too, would serve as the starting-point for inquiries farther afield. If local investigation failed to be of help, it might be necessary to pursue his journey to the French Sudan, to which the trade in kola nuts was extended among the Arabs in exchange for French silver currency. Merchants from a wide district around the town came also to Barkadu with horses, mules, and cattle for sale, while still another class of visitors was attracted to it by its considerable resources in iron and alluvial gold.

All day Momolu and Zeze journeyed steadily, preceded by their carriers. Much of their way lay through marshes studded with hard-wood trees of some commercial value, and vivid with gorgeous creepers and the great, scentless flowers only found within the tropical belt. Parts of this marsh-tract had been sown as rice-fields, whose velvety green spaces, changing to gold in the ripening patches, gave off an aroma like that of burnt grass wet with morning dew. A dreamy north-easterly breeze was blowing, and the long blades shimmered in the sun against an azure sky.

In this section of the country timber was

available in large forest formation, but, owing to the fact that the rivers became unnavigable at a short distance from the coast by reason of rocky rapids, and that roads and bridges were practically non-existent, its commercial possibilities were still unexploited. Even had it been practicable to carry logs to the coast, the difficulty of floating them over the bars, for shipment, would have been insuperable. So it was that these valuable trees were felled, if not destroyed by fire, to be used by the sawyers for building purposes.

But the dignity of the native towns is in large measure due to the enforced use of such local material, as well as to the laying out of their buildings according to a traditional plan which has been handed down from generation to generation. All Liberian native houses have sun-hardened adobe walls of such thickness as to render them cool inside, with roofs of stout thatch made of country grass and fibre. The space around the houses is kept scrupulously free from bush or weeds, and is regularly swept each morning by the women and girls.

Momolu and his companion reached a small town (colloquially known as a half-town) just as darkness fell. Without much difficulty, for travellers to Barkadu were familiar visitors in all the towns along their route, they obtained lodging for the night.

Whilst he slept Momolu dreamed he saw Abdullah, pursued by a band of savage men, of whom he himself was one, fall headlong over a precipice on to the rocks below. Being aware in his dream that Abdullah still lived, Momolu hastened to him, and, with imperious authority, bade some of the men help him to carry the injured man to his own hut. As Abdullah lay motionless and bleeding from the mouth on the floor of the hut, there came a sudden gust of wind and Momolu saw the tall figure of Shariff in his white turban, his feet bared, standing beside the broken, helpless form. Stooping, he laid his hand upon Abdullah's mouth, and instantly the flow of blood ceased. One sobbing word broke the silence: "Farmata!"

Seized with such terror as only dreams can bring, Momolu tried to turn and flee. But Shariff laid his hand upon his arm, motioning him to quietness, while he pointed to where the figure of Farmata now knelt in speechless grief over the body of Abdullah.

Trembling and icy cold, Momolu awoke. Through some small holes in the thatch of the room where he lay light was pricking in in little shafts. Feeling half dazed and with tears still wet upon his face, he went to arouse Zeze. The anguish of his dream had been too sharp to let him bear inaction. He did not know

that at the same moment, in far-off Zigida, Farmata too had awakened, sobbing, from a tortured sleep in which she had held Abdullah, dead, in her arms. Such knowledge would have urged him to even greater speed upon his way.

In the still darkness of two hours earlier the carriers had already left the half-town with their load. When Momolu and Zeze made their way from the hut the sun was up, the air a-twitter with the chirping of rice-birds as a great flock of them passed overhead towards the fields where they would sap the immature rice-seeds, not yet ready for the harvest.

Still shaken by his dream, but somewhat calmed by the performance of his morning devotions, Momolu grasped his spear-headed staff with grim determination. Away beyond the village he could see the outline of Mount Wuro, tall and straight against the gold and blue horizon. Nearer at hand a gigantic cotton-tree, such as is invariably found in every native town or half-town, spread its branches like the massive sails of some great green ship that had run aground in a sea of grass and flowers. More than a hundred feet high, it towered above the place where, on spread bamboo mats, chiefs and noblemen would sit in council on the affairs of the town, or lovers

lingered at twilight until the leaves above them were turned to silver by the moon.

As he walked towards the tree, it seemed to Momolu impossible that but one short day and night had passed since he and Farmata had exchanged their kola nuts beneath the tree of state in Zigida. Looking up into the impenetrable green depths, he prayed aloud: "Allah be praised! Hasten my mission and guard my steps." Then, turning to Zeze, he said quickly: "Let us go on before the sun gets hot."

At noon, having travelled many miles along the footpath towards Dabou, they rested on the bank of a creek, where close-growing bamboo-palms, the ends of their thick, glaucous leaves trailing in the slow-moving water, made a grateful shade. These yellowish-green leaves are of great strength and are much used by the natives for thatching and other building purposes, as well as in the preparation of piassava which is exported for sale in the English and German markets.

As Momolu sat watching the stream flow past him, his thoughts, his hopes of success in his mission went with it, dreaming of a happy issue and the blessing of Farmata's thanks. Lulled by the green quietness and peace, his mind was no longer primarily occupied by Abdullah, living or dead. Rather was he intent only on the fulfilment of the

will of Allah, himself the vessel from which the benediction of that fulfilment might be poured forth upon the head of his beloved.

As for the other matter of Prince Piu that still lay before him to be dealt with, he was prepared to let that wait until the way was plainer. But, knowing little of the object of their journey beyond the fact that Momolu wished to reach Barkadu as quickly as possible, and nothing at all of the connection between him and the Prince, Zeze, uninspired by the consciousness of a task imposed by Heaven, had found the passage of the long miles wearisome, especially as Momolu, still absorbed in the memory of his dream, had been inclined to be morose and uncommunicative. Seeking in his mind for topics of conversation that might rouse his companion's interest, he had unfortunately lighted on the subject of the political and economic power of Prince Piu in his native district. The storm of wrath that burst upon him was as astonishing as it was unforeseen. Only with considerable difficulty and by dint of humble apologies had he at last succeeded in calming Momolu's incomprehensible anger against him, but not before the two had come near to a serious quarrel.

The conversation had, however, brought back the whole subject, vividly and painfully, to Momolu, and he had vented his personal hatred

of the Prince in a long tirade against the impositions, delays of justice, and other evils among the people for which he believed his enemy was responsible. His passion had ended in a solemn vow to rid the land of one whose wickedness and treachery rendered him unfit for his authoritative position.

Now, with the sense of well-being in rested limbs and the consumption of food, eaten with appetite in the open air, peace had been securely established between Momolu and Zeze once more. But such reconciliation must be ceremoniously cemented. Taking Zeze by the hand, Momolu placed his other hand above his heart, then raised both, palms upwards, to the heavens, and declared that he bore no malice towards Zeze who should support him and be his firm friend for ever. The same statement having been made by Zeze, each then consumed a white kola nut placed on the head of the other, and a little blood, drawn from a small incision in the wrist of each, was injected into the veins of the other.

With this resolution of friendship thus firmly and amicably fixed, they proceeded on their way, discussing their future activities as they went. The afternoon turned ominously cool, clouds obscured the sun, volleys of thunder rolled behind the hills, the wind rose, and soon rain was streaming down upon them.

Making hurriedly, at Zeze's suggestion, for the nearest town, Pamdeme, they crossed the swollen Loffa River by a swinging "monkey" bridge of sticks tied together with the thick, rope-like vine known as rattan, and suspended from the trunks of trees growing on either bank. The path on the further side was ankle-deep in muddy water. Splashing their way along it, both were too weary and too wet to have eyes or thoughts for anything but the nearest shelter. In less uncomfortable circumstances Zeze would probably have enlarged upon the wonders of that same Loffa River which they had just crossed. Along its course, farther towards the coast, exposed stretches of sand-banks rose above the water, the rest and feeding-places of shrill-voiced, gay-plumaged water-birds. On the banks grassy spaces opened out, studded with great trees and various graceful varieties of palm. Where the sand gave place to mud, fine groups of scentless flowers were clustered, as if planted deliberately by the hand of some master-gardener.

Here too was wild animal life in abundance. In the trees many different species of monkeys chattered and swung from branch to branch; glimpses might occasionally be caught of elephants feeding on the river-banks, goring the cabbage from the heart of the palm-fronds with their tusks, while in the mud basked

the pigmy hippopotamus (peculiar to Liberia), a harmless animal, little bigger than a well-fed Yorkshire pig, which the natives trapped in trenches covered with leaves and thin sticks.

Momolu and his guide reached Pamdeme about nine o'clock that night, worn out with the stress of the storm, and both presenting a woefully bedraggled appearance in their soaked clothes. The rain had ceased some little while before, and the town, as they entered it, was bathed in brilliant moonlight. The air was soft and balmy; great clouds floated lazily past the moon, momentarily dimming its light, then moved slowly towards the coast, leaving behind them a sky whose bluish-violet was alive with stars.

Zeze conducted Momolu to a large hut, where they found the inmates seated on bamboo mats or wooden stools around a big fire.

Entering, Zeze hailed Polopka, the owner of the hut, and, after the customary greetings had been exchanged, was hospitably invited to take a seat beside the fire. Before accepting the seat Zeze introduced Momolu to Polopka, who then introduced him to his head wife and, through her, to the other members of the family.

Acquaintance having been thus duly established, Polopka, pitying their condition, took

Momolu and Zeze within to his own room, and sent one of his servants to tell Momolu's messenger, in whose care were the travellers' personal effects, to bring a change of clothing.

The carriers having arrived several hours ahead of their master, the messenger was soon fetched from a hut near by and came bringing the small tin trunk and canvas bag in which Momolu and Zeze had packed their spare clothes.

By the time they had both changed into dry garments the women of the house had prepared food for the strangers who were so obviously tired and hungry.

Momolu, feasting ravenously from a bowl of fried chicken and rice, paid little attention to the conversation of the group around the fire, though the talk about things that happened in the great Palava House, of disputes between tribes, between man and wife, or of suits pending for discussion by the Chief and his Council, would ordinarily have been of great interest to him. But such chatter concerning the everyday *palava* of life in Africa interfered now with the thoughts about his mission, the precarious position in which he was likely soon to find himself, and the haunting urgency of his desired revenge upon Prince Piu, of which his mind was full.

Zeze was well aware of Momolu's restlessness, though he did not altogether understand its cause. But he made up his mind to seek his confidence when they should be alone together upon the following day. In the meantime, he tactfully strove to conceal his companion's obvious trouble of mind from Polopka, who showed signs of feverish inquisitiveness as to the nature of the business that had led them to undertake so long a journey, by starting a discussion with his host as to a possible deal in cattle. The suggestion worked with the rapidity and success of a miracle. Polopka forgot all about his second guest, and was soon so engrossed in the business of thrust and counter-thrust in regard to prices, the number of heads, and quality of the cattle he wished to sell, that he scarcely noticed when Momolu rose to his feet, yawned, stretched his arms above his head and asked to be excused.

Alone at last in the tiny, thatched room that had been assigned to him, Momolu flung himself on the low, bamboo bed. He longed to sleep and yet was afraid to do so lest his dream of the night before should re-visit him. But he was young and strong and had travelled many miles that day on foot. For a while he lay listening contentedly to the steady drone of voices from the outer room. Presently it ceased, and no sound broke the succeeding stillness except the hooting of owls from the

compound, the shrill humming of a myriad insects.

With a long sigh Momolu turned upon his side. He did not know when he passed from waking thoughts of Farmata to the dream of her that came with his first sleep.

CHAPTER XIX

ON that same early morning which saw the departure of Momolu and Zeze from Zigida, a little group of men stood in the roadway before the house of Prince Piu. Waiting for their master in the swiftly growing light, some were sullenly silent, while those who spoke did so in undertones, with quick, expressive lifting of eyebrows and shoulders and much spreading of palms as they whispered together, glancing anxiously at the brightening sky. Over the whole party seemed the shadow of some indefinable fear, a furtive discontent at the thought of the journey they were about to take, although to many of them the unexpected prospect of returning to their native Vonjama was one that had seemed sorrowfully to grow more and more remote with the lengthening stay of Prince Piu in Zigida.

Only on the face of Musa, the Prince's personal, confidential servant, was there no trace of the common cloud. Long years in the service of a master who was by turns arrogant and tender, and the peculiar, instinc-

tive understanding that exists between men of the same tribe, whatever their difference in rank, had taught Musa to conceal both the perplexities often aroused by the Prince's inconsistent behaviour and the love that was compounded of sympathy as well as affection. Born and bred, like his master, a member of the Mandingo tribe that claims descent from the Arabs, and has for centuries travelled back and forth over the northern plains of the continent, across the Sahara Desert, to the west and eastern coasts in pursuit of the slave trade, Musa had inherited something of the business acumen which has earned for his tribe the name of " wizards of trade "—the wandering Jews of Africa. To his foresight and penetration, to his wise advice Prince Piu owed many successful *coups* in dealing with obstinate or dishonest cattle traders—a tie that he respected and recognized by giving Musa almost autocratic rights over his household. That he was also able, even partially, to credit, though without outward acknowledgment, the other's devotion that so selflessly withstood the wear and tear of his often petulant egotism, was doubtless due to the fact that, on his mother's side, the blood of the royal house of Vai ran also in the Prince's veins—a tribe that is, even amongst the African natives, outstanding in their skill in singing and dancing,

easily cultured and adaptable to the western education provided by the mission schools and American churches of Liberia; a charming mannered people, more conventional than their nomadic neighbours, of whom the women, their dark skins soft-bloomed as velvet, are the belles of the Liberian bush. The Vais are, too, faithful followers of Mohammed, and are the only West African tribe that has developed their own scrip, which has a superficial resemblance to the Arabic handwriting, though its construction is entirely different.

As Musa stood now, dignified and aloof in the white robe of ceremony, awaiting his master whom he had left a short while before that the latter might make his morning offering to Allah in private, his eyes, large and heavy-lidded in his strong, bearded face, betrayed no consciousness of the anxious discontent evinced by the other members of the Prince's bodyguard. He was, nevertheless, well aware of the cause of their uneasiness. Two nights before a runner had come from the district of the Loffa River, across which the cavalcade must pass, with word that a series of heavy local thunder-storms had swollen the river to flood depth and fury. The man's report that the usual ford was impassable on foot, that an evil spirit had stirred the river torrents to avenging anger, that the black granite rocks

over which they swirled and foamed had assumed the form and ferocity of wild animals eager to devour all who approached them, had so alarmed the advance carriers that Musa had had great difficulty in persuading them to set out at all. Only by dint of cajolery and vivid descriptions of the Prince's vengeance if his orders were not obeyed had he at last succeeded in starting off the long string of a hundred men, their backs and heads loaded with kinjars and boxes heavy with the spoils of the Ramadan. Not until he had seen them actually passing in single file, like a flock of dark geese, towards the green arches of the forest that lay between Zigida and the Loffa River, had he believed that he would secure their departure without enlisting the Prince's personal intervention.

Musa knew, too, that the fear of those whom he hoped were by now well on their way to Bamai, had infected those who remained behind to await the setting out of their master. Nor was he himself altogether immune from the brooding sense of foreboding that seemed so strangely out of place at the serene breaking of a new day. But neither his own fears nor the plainly expressed terror of the men of whom he was in charge weighed with Musa against the Prince's order that a start should be made at dawn. To him there was but

one law—that of his master; the fulfilment of that law was his only care. One alteration he had, however, allowed in the itinerary. Since the river ford was undoubtedly impassable, he had given instructions to the carriers to proceed in a north-westerly direction to Bamai and to make arrangements for the Loffa to be crossed in dug-out canoes at a strategic point farther north.

A sudden silence fell upon the waiting group. At its coming Musa drew himself up and made a gesture to the men who, with their singing-drums made of monkey-skin stretched across a light framework, were standing close behind him. With a slow, deep throb that quickly rose in a wild *crescendo*, the music of the drums broke loose as Prince Piu came from his house into the roadway, preceded by his stool-bearer.

As keeper of his confidence, Musa stepped right to his side. His head held high, Prince Piu cast one searching glance at the faces of those who awaited him. Of what he saw he gave no sign. But those on whom his eyes rested stiffened to attention as if at a word of command. The cadence of the drums became more insistent. The muscles of their bare backs rippling as the muscles of a jungle animal ripple as it crouches to the spring, the four hammock-men stooped and lifted the swaying stretcher, on which the Prince had silently

laid himself, to their heads. The voices of the attendant musicians joined the voices of the drums. To a swift, stirring rhythm they proclaimed the praises of their master—his wealth, his munificence, his power. In the babel of triumphant sound about him Prince Piu raised his hand. The procession began to move.

Staring straight ahead along the broad Government roadway, Prince Piu lay motionless. To Musa, watching anxiously, the set face of his lord, with its wide-open, unseeing eyes, looked suddenly like the face of one newly dead. He clutched his Tysabiya beads, fingering them for comfort. Despite the warmth of the now fully-risen sun, a little cold shiver crept down his spine. He turned and cursed a man behind him for treading clumsily against his heel.

Six hours of steady going to the measured movement of the hammock-bearers, movement so rhythmic and in such perfect unison that each of the four seemed but a part of a tautly sprung machine, found the cavalcade turned aside from the roadway to a forest footpath whose shade afforded welcome relief from the intense heat of the sun.

As the green gloom closed about him and for a moment his eyes, strained by the quivering light through which he had passed, saw nothing

but momentarily ominous darkness, Prince Piu moved restlessly. Then, as coolness fell like a touch of benediction on his face, his whole body relaxed. When a moment later Musa, thinking he had heard him call, came quickly to the side of the hammock, he found his master asleep.

Musa made a sign to the bearers to watch their footing with especial care. Such repose as this he knew the Prince badly needed, for he had heard him, during the past night, pacing back and forth hour after hour. More than once, listening intently at the crack of the door, he had heard the Prince groan as if in pain. Had it not been that some instinct assured him that his master's suffering was mental rather than physical, he would have gone to him.

For the rest of the day, with Musa moving now content beside him, Prince Piu slept peacefully. Not until the procession was nearing the edge of the forest did the agitation that had resulted from his *palava* with Yadana and his jealous hatred of Momolu engulf him once again in the form of a dark dream that shattered the serenity of his rest. Out of a blank nothingness in which he had been unconscious of space or time he was drawn suddenly to a vision of himself lying in the hammock on the heads of his men. As he looked down, as if

from a great height, upon his own recumbent figure, the two front carriers stumbled against the projecting roots of a tree. In an instant the hammock was thrown forward and its occupant flung headlong out and across a great rock. With a violent effort the Prince tried to raise himself. His sudden movement startled the carriers who stopped dead. Roused by the cessation of the slow swinging that had lulled him for so many hours, Prince Piu awoke. For a moment he believed that he still dreamed. Then, made curt by fear and shock, he ordered the men to lay the hammock on the ground.

Stepping from it, he saw that night was at hand and that a half-town lay a little way ahead beyond the forest. Already the water-carriers had gone on to refill their cans and gourds with fresh drinking water. A deep draught restored Prince Piu's outward calm and it was not long before, the procession having been re-formed, with himself walking now at its head, they entered the town of Loupomai on the Franco-Liberian boundary, to the sound of drums and singing.

The advance carriers having already passed through the town the night before and given word of their master's coming, Prince Piu was received by the Chief of Loupomai with the ceremony natural to his rank. Yet his reception, though all the usual formalities were duly observed, lacked enthusiasm.

Strolling through the streets of the town after the Prince had retired to the hut assigned him for the night, Musa was conscious of a cold hostility that was only thinly concealed by the conventions of native hospitality. His own loyalty was unshakable. But he was well aware that the people of Loupomai had good cause to hate Prince Piu and that his very life was safe only at their hands because of the veneration and respect in which they held his father, the reigning chief of the Mandingos.

To both master and servant the night passed in anxious wakefulness. To Musa, motionless on his rush mat before the Prince's door, the hours seemed no less endless than to the restless man who tossed and turned incessantly on the grass mattress of the bamboo bed within the close, dark room. But Musa knew better than to intrude upon his master's sleepless solitude. Not until the sky was already lightening in the east and the cessation of the little creaking sounds that had been coming all night from behind the shut door told him that the Prince was asleep at last did he allow himself to fall into slumber as light and as sudden as that of an exhausted animal. But he was awake again before the clapping of the Prince's hands summoned him to the pre-

paration of his bath—a primitive arrangement in the form of a pebble basin laid out in the yard of the hut behind a screen of bamboo mats.

His master's ablutions completed, Musa waited upon him obediently to receive the orders for the day. He showed no surprise when the Prince, overcome by a lassitude that was more the result of mental stress than of physical exertion, stretched himself once more upon the bed and told him irritably that he did not intend to join the tribal council already in session at the Palava House of the town, though the absence of a visiting Mahjah from such a gathering was, he knew, more than likely to give rise to critical comment.

Without a word Musa left the hut and made his way by a circuitous route that avoided the Palava House to a hut at a little distance where the water-flasks of the cavalcade had been stored in coolness against a fresh start. Returning to the Prince's side with an old leather gourd that he had filled with fresh water, he lifted his master's head with a skilful, gentle movement and held the gourd to his lips.

As he did so the eyes of the two men met. Something in his servant's face, whether pity or distrust, he could not tell, roused the Prince from his strange lethargy. A sudden desire for understanding and sympathy overwhelmed

him. With a quick, passionate gesture he smote the grass mattress on which he lay with his clenched fists. Musa smiled gravely.

"Mahjah?" he questioned, spreading his hands.

The Prince turned his head aside.

"Listen, Musa," he said. "Trouble is upon me, by night and by day. When I sleep evil dreams pursue me, and when I wake darkness is before the face of the sun."

"And the cause, Mahjah?"

The Prince moved restlessly. "The cause is unknown to me," he lied.

Musa's steady eyes regarded him unwaveringly. "I have heard rumours among the people, and whispers among the maidens," he said, "that crowd upon my ears like a swarm of angry bees. And though for myself I have no fear—for you, Mahjah, I am afraid, because I love and serve you. One day you will be king over your people. When that day comes there must be no shadow before the face of the sun that lights a king."

Musa's glance dropped to his own folded hands. For a moment there was silence in the little room. Then Prince Piu drew himself up to a sitting position.

"What you say is true," he said slowly, and to himself the sound of his words was as if some other spoke them. "But you forget.

All my life power has been mine at the lifting of a finger; the harvest of my wealth has been rich and secure."

With a strangely peremptory gesture Musa interrupted him. "That is why I fear for you, Mahjah. The king, your father, is both rich and powerful, but he is also wise and just. Men need no command to follow him. I followed you because I loved you, and as my tribe and yours is one I have not deceived you nor misled you. But the people—they neither love nor trust you, for they know that the laws of the holy Porrow are less than nothing in your eyes. And the voice of the people when they name your name is like the angry murmur of the stinging bees."

A wave of passion swept Prince Piu at Musa's words so that the blood pounded at his temples and his pulses raced. For a moment it seemed that he was about to strike the older man who stood so fearlessly before him and voiced the unwelcome thoughts that his own conscience had ceaselessly reiterated throughout the long hours of the night.

But the very simplicity and dignity of Musa's bearing disarmed his anger, and, with a look that betrayed both forgiveness and understanding, he merely gestured to his servant to leave the bedside. Spreading his hands in obeisance, Musa went out without another word.

Left alone, Prince Piu covered his face with his hands. But, try as he would, he could not shut out the series of accusing pictures that passed and re-passed relentlessly before the eyes of his mind. His autocratic, self-seeking dealings with members of his own tribe; his shameless use of his powerful position as the son of a great Chief to wrest commercial profit from those less advantageously placed; his disregard of the all-embracing, arbitrary tenets of the Porrow, as a member of which he had been born and bred; the glowing, lovely face of Döng; the secret hunting for mean and hidden ways of gratifying his personal passions; the cowardice that had invoked the protection of his rank against the outlawry and punishment that should have been meted out to him by tribal law; his base intentions towards Farmata that had only been frustrated by the intervention of Yadana and Momolu—Momolu whom he hated, not only as a rival but as a better man than himself—the memory of all these things made of the endless hours of the day a torment, of the succeeding darkness a horror of remorse and rage.

Not that Prince Piu was genuinely concerned with the just government of his people, nor with the obligations of his birth and the grandeur of his ancestral stool, except in so far as these could be turned to his own profit.

The anger that consumed both pride and peace, like a slow fire that smoulders beneath a heap of withered leaves, was based on the realization that wickedness had, for once, defeated its own end. The glory of Farmata was, as he knew now, her goodness. That that goodness would ever ally itself with such as he knew himself to be he had little hope. And reformation was beyond his power.

Nevertheless, when dawn brought once more the ceremonial beating of the drums that heralded the end of his two nights' sojourn in Loupomai, something of Prince Piu's old cynicism reasserted itself above the welter of despairing introspection that had occupied his thoughts for so many hours. And the sight of Musa's inscrutable, politely smiling face as he stood before his master to receive the orders for the day's march, coupled with the necessity for assuming his usual air of dignified majesty, enabled him, temporarily at least, to throw off the night's oppressions.

"Everything depends on a woman and on Allah," he thought philosophically, as he laid himself once more in the swaying hammock, "for Allah alone knows what a woman will do."

But as the monotonous stages of the journey succeeded each other day after day, and the brief, moon-shot nights—many of them spent beneath the over-arching thickness of the jungle

where the flames of the camp-fires fought a demoniac, dancing battle with surrounding shadows and formed a protection to the sleeping cavalcade against wild beasts—dragged themselves away, Prince Piu ceased to struggle with his conscience or his hopes and surrendered himself to the ever-rising tide of fatalism that is the heritage of his race. As Allah willed, so would the way be made plain. The daily chanted praises of the musicians, the wild, exciting throbbing of the drums that heralded and closed each day's progress; the homage of the chiefs gathered in council at the Palava Houses of the towns through which he passed or honoured as the guest of a night; the watchful, comprehending eyes of Musa, his swift obedience that was both respectful and fond, did much to restore the shaken balance between pride and remorse. But behind the reassurance born of familiar pomp and autocracy the dark tide of fate, recognized and unalterable, rose steadily until it penetrated every nook and cranny of his conscious thought. And with its rising was swept away the last remnant of fear.

By the time the cavalcade came within three days' march of Soundedou, on the Franco-Liberian frontier, the Prince, obsessed with his own importance, yet convinced that the avenging eye of Allah was upon him and the

day of his fate at hand, was in a state in which he sometimes found it difficult to distinguish between hallucination and reality. Even Musa was unable to account for his strange behaviour as the procession entered a great field that marked the boundary of the district of Soundedou.

Ordering the bearers to lay the hammock on the ground, Prince Piu alighted from it, and, commanding both musicians and drummers to follow him, began to make his way along one of the narrow footpaths that, at regular angles, cut the field into large squares. Here between the towering grasses—many as much as six feet high—that stood in patches of gold and green like a platoon of soldiers on parade, Musa and the other astonished servants saw him stop, then bow from left to right as one who receives triumphant welcome from invisible hosts.

Half mesmerized and wholly terrified, the drummers beat an answering salute, while the musicians automatically raised their voices and woke their instruments to pæans of praise. Ahead of them, Prince Piu accepted obeisance from those whom no eyes save his own could see. All at once he peremptorily signalled for silence. For a moment or two he stood listening, a motionless white figure amidst the swaying green and gold, his head flung back so

that his dusky face was turned upwards to the unheeding sky. When the men behind him began to move uneasily, he turned and smiled at them—a strange, dark smile that was both wild and pitiful. Then, as Musa ran to him, the drums broke out again and a long, surging chant arose from the musicians —the Chant of the Dead. None among them could tell what it was that wrung this music from them. But the procession was re-formed to its plaintive, passionate wailing, with Prince Piu marching, Musa close and watchful behind him, at its head.

That night they rested in a small village outside the main town. Morning broke dull and lifeless. For the first time since leaving Zigida the sky was overcast by clouds heavy with rain. Musa surveyed them anxiously. If he had dared, he would have delayed the start to Soundedou. But one look at the face of his master, implacably withdrawn within himself, forbade discussion, and he gave the order for the bearers to take up their burdens in a voice that sounded strange in his own ears.

But all day, though a sense of presage weighed dully on every member of the party, the long march went steadily on. Rain fell at intervals, though not heavily, and once Musa, his senses keyed to an almost painful alertness, was conscious of a slight tremor that

sent a sudden shudder through the ground. But even then Prince Piu gave no sign. Wrapped in impenetrable silence, he seemed to be asleep. On and on interminably went the hammock-men, thumping the earth with their bare feet.

Only when the drums roared out at sunset did the Prince rouse himself to receive the welcome of the Chief of Soundedou, and Musa sighed in relief to know that the sanctuary of the town had been reached without mishap.

For the last time Prince Piu rested that night beneath the roof of hospitality, and his sleep, after the strange tension of the day, was deep and dreamless. Between him and the Loffa River lay now but two days' march. But time had, for him, ceased to exist. If not to-day, then to-morrow, or in a hundred days the fate that he knew awaited him would be fulfilled. Though his heart beat slowly and heavily at the thought, as if already it could no longer sustain the burden of life, his sole concern was to keep his outward aspect of dignity and pride secure against the assaults of the terror that came closer and closer with every breath he drew. Even his consciousness of Musa's unceasing vigilance had become a thing remote and apart. He was alone in a void whose depth and darkness Allah alone knew.

It was high noon of the second morning after leaving Soundedou when the cavalcade came at last in sight of the Loffa River, swollen and wild, as the runner to Zigida had reported, as it thundered to the falls a quarter of a mile away.

As the party halted on the bank and Musa and the other servants busied themselves with preparations for the embarkation, Prince Piu stood a little apart, his eyes incredulous, but no longer afraid, surveying the foaming torrent. Then, as one of the men launched the tiny dug-out canoe in which the crossing was to be made, he stretched his hands above the racing waters in a gesture of mingled authority and appeal. The man in the little, bobbing boat looked up at him expectantly. Prince Piu smiled gravely at him as he stepped into it.

To the men gathered behind him on the bank the end was as swift and unforeseen as the stroke of doom. As the tiny boat paddled slowly to the centre of the stream, the face of the sun was blotted out by a great cloud that broke in torrents of rain, and a sudden wind arose, whipping the surface of the river to spray-flecked frenzy on which the canoe tossed and drifted like a whirling leaf. Paddling desperately, the terrified servant tried in vain to control the helpless craft. A roar of sound that was darkness made audible broke about

Prince Piu as the boat swept, plunging madly, over the rocky falls.

For an instant after it had disappeared, Musa stood, motionless and staring, on the bank. Then he gave a loud cry, threw up his arms and, before the other stupefied servants had even grasped his purpose, flung himself headlong into the river.

CHAPTER XX

THE third day of their journey saw Momolu and Zeze up and away with the first light, after the customary invocation of the blessing of Allah upon the house of their host and his kinsmen.

Their early morning trek towards Wetessu lay through a dense formation of unbroken forest, where the faintly marked path, winding in and out between towering trees, centuries old, was often difficult to follow. Gorgeous flowers, some like large tropical butterflies in shape, others whose dew-drenched petals resembled the wings of small birds, glowed about their feet. Rainbow-hued kingfishers poised and darted wherever water flowed, and the branches of the great trees were musical with bird song. As the sun climbed, the barking of deer, chattering of monkeys, the occasional roar of some distant beast broke across the incessant hum of insects which filled the hot air with a sound like that of innumerable gourd instruments.

Until long after noon the two pushed their way patiently through the green avenues,

sometimes finding their heads or arms entangled in the prodigal clusters of crimson, lemon, pink, and white creepers that clung, with all the tenderness of the proverbial lover, to the branches of the undisturbed forest, and ever warily on the look out for poisonous snakes and the insects whose sting is as deadly as their approach is secret and unseen.

By the late afternoon they had passed through the thickest of the forest and were able to see the sun again before them in the west, its golden glow deepening to the luminous purple of oncoming night.

Along a narrow footpath they crossed a field of high grass where wild deer fed carelessly, their only companions a few porcupines.

In a small village beyond the field Momolu and Zeze stayed to rest a while and quench their thirst. Wetessu was still ten miles ahead, and long before they reached it darkness so impenetrable had fallen that, until the light of the moon at last broke through the mist that rose towards it from the heated earth, it was impossible to see their way.

As they crossed the last stretch into the town, a sound of singing flowed suddenly towards them. The sound cheered and encouraged them, and, as its volume increased as they neared it, so their footsteps gathered speed as if lured by some magic voice.

On entering Wetessu two hours before midnight the reason for the music at once became apparent. A burial feast was in progress in honour of the head wife of the Chief of the town who had died two years before.

Death, in Liberia, is regarded in many different ways. Some tribes believe that the spirit of the deceased remains always among them and is able, during certain phases of the moon, to communicate with the living. At such times thousands of people congregate together to do honour to the ever-present spirit, the numbers assembling and the extravagance of the ceremony bearing a direct relation to the importance of the dead. Relatives from both sides of the family are summoned from all over the country. Food, prepared in large enamel bowls, basins and iron pots, is collected together and placed on the floor of a large kitchen or court-house for inspection by a responsible member of the family before it is set out on mats beneath the trees in selected parts of the town for distribution. The feminine relatives of the dead are not allowed to participate in the feast, but, clothed in little more than an old loin-cloth, their heads shaven, and wearing no ornaments of any kind, they must remain hidden in a hut from public view and prostrate themselves upon the dried-mud floor. The men of the

family attend upon the male head of the house, who sits in another hut apart from the ceremony, whilst about him paid mourners (generally women) weep and wail. The spirit of the dead is believed to hover around this direful chamber proclaiming its approbation of the attentions paid to it, and then passes out like a gust of wind and is subsequently seen to join in the frantic dancing and singing of the younger women and girls, as well as in the exotic orgy of excitement that prevails among their elders. These dances are performed every night for a fortnight, while the moon is at its brightest and largest, and great quantities of palm-oil, native-grown rice, gin and beer, and the flesh of cows, goats, and chickens, are heartily consumed.

Among other tribes it is held that death is the result of a spell cast by witches, and that the spirit leaves the body and enters the form of some ferocious animal in order to be revenged upon the witch. Its desire accomplished, it is then free to pass to the spirit world.

Others, again, hold that when a man dies his life is ended for ever with the closing of his grave. Nevertheless, a belief in re-incarnation in one form or another exists in many districts where the dead are worshipped under the guise of trees, fish, or animals.

When death is thought to be the result of

pulmonary disease or septicæmia, some tribes, with the aid of their medicine-man, conduct a regular *post-mortem* examination. Certain organs of the body are dealt with in order that suspicion may be confirmed or allayed. In other cases the penalty of death is inflicted by the medicine-man upon the suspected sufferer, either by sudden and quick extinction of life or by a slower, more prolonged process.

Having been made welcome, allowed to rest and eat at the feast in Wetessu, Momolu and his guide decided to push on through the cool hours of the night towards Nainga.

As they left the town, its narrow streets a seething mass of whirling black figures in the clear moonlight, the sound of music followed them.

Momolu stood still in the roadway, holding up his hand as a signal to Zeze to listen too. Rising and falling like the waves of the sea that beats upon the golden sands of the coast, the sound of drums and *sambas* surged upon their ears. Both knew and recognized the omen. To a native Liberian, to be followed by music is a sign that joy is on its way towards him who hears. For a moment the wild, arresting, magical sound tore away the present from Momolu's consciousness. His memory, borne on the swinging, beating rhythm, fled to the sea, and he saw himself, a tiny, toiling

figure among the black granite rocks of Cape Montserrado, at whose feet the waves broke in little foaming froths of white. Fearful of falling, for the way was almost sheer, he saw his own hands reach for safety and clasp their ebony strength about the alabaster whiteness of lilies, drenched with sea-spray, that grew in the crevices of the rocks. A scent of salted sweetness drifted against his face.

As Momolu turned and motioned with his head to Zeze that they should proceed, the latter saw that his eyes glowed strangely, as if lit from within. Behind them the voice of the drums and *sambas* rolled, threatened and cajoled. Presently, at a bend in the track, it was cut off suddenly, as if a door had been closed upon it in the night.

In the hushed hours of the moonlit dark the two walked in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. During the three days of their fellowship Zeze had learned much and discovered more. Though he was still unacquainted with the real object of their quest, he knew, from his companionship with Momolu, that this was no ordinary journey. From the outburst against Prince Piu he suspected that revenge might be its goal. But something in Momolu's often rapt, aloof manner led him to think that love was its origin and its end. He was convinced that the young stranger to

Zigida, of whom his cousin Yawfee had told him little save that he was his friend, was a true and tender-hearted lover, one who would not shrink from sacrificing himself, yet one who was equally capable of exacting vengeance for a wrong done to him or his.

Momolu, on his part, was aware that Fate had given him in Zeze a faithful friend. He had long since realized that the references to Prince Piu that had so startled and annoyed him had been made in ignorance, not in malice. Neither had he forgotten his sight of Zeze, when in the dim light of early dawn he had gone to rouse him for the day's march. Momolu had found him already up and dressed in the white robes of prayer, in his hands the Tysabiya beads, his face a serene picture of fervent devotion.

Loyal to his promise to find Abdullah, living or dead, his mind full of a secret sweetness born, partly of love, partly of a new-found humility that made for strength rather than weakness, Momolu decided to entrust Zeze with his confidence and definitely to enlist his help.

"Zeze," he said at last as they walked slowly together, while the light of the moon, sinking in the west, lost its clear silver radiance and became a thing of pallid coldness that no longer glittered or shone, "you and I have

made a vow that is sacred to the end of our lives. Let us not deceive ourselves. My mission is a very difficult, maybe a dangerous, one. In you I know I have a true friend. If I tell you the secret of my heart . . ."

Smiling, Zeze stood still and laid both hands on Momolu's shoulders. Looking steadily into his eyes, he said: "My vow is as sacred as yours. I swear in Allah's name that your thoughts are my thoughts, your wishes mine."

Feeling that Allah had indeed bestowed upon him more than he deserved, Momolu repeated to Zeze the whole story of Prince Piu and Döng; then of his love for Farmata and of the task laid upon him by Yadana.

Zeze listened humbly but without fear. His belief in Momolu, who, though he was not born of noble stock, and had no worldly power or influence, yet possessed such forceful determination and showed so self-sacrificing a love, was increased rather than diminished by the story. A true romantic at heart, his imagination thrilled at the prospect of an adventure that had, in addition to its emotional appeal, the excitement of a possible encounter with Prince Piu himself.

Silence, disturbed only by the chirping of crickets in the grass, fell between them at the end of Momolu's recital. Feeling their way with sticks after the moon had gone, they

plodded along, side by side in the dark. As daylight broke, Momolu turned to Zeze again.

"It may be that my enemy will lie in wait for me at the end of our journey," he said, as if the idea occurred to him for the first time, though the possibility had long since presented itself both to him and to Zeze.

The other nodded. "As Allah wills. Nevertheless, Prince Piu left Zigida but two hours later than we did, on the other road for Vonjama."

"I know. But Fate works often strangely. And if there is for me a double wonder stored up, to slay my enemy and crown my love, I shall rejoice."

"You will be blessed," said Zeze. "Allah is good, and such love as yours is holy in His eyes. As for Prince Piu, the danger is as great as is his power to strike in darkness as other men strike in the light. Nevertheless, since right is on your side, I do not doubt the end." Looking at Momolu affectionately, and holding his hands above his heart, Zeze swore his loyalty again, praying in the same breath that Allah would guide them and give them victory.

Being very weary after their long march that had lasted, almost without a break, from dawn to dawn, they rested for a while beneath a tree some three miles from Nainga.

The nearer he came to what he implicitly believed would be the end of his journey, Momolu's love, his faith in the issue of his quest, grew steadier, warmer, deeper. The gift of so true a guide and companion as Zeze had much to do with his ever-increasing assurance. But his only fear—and this did not seem strange, even to himself—was that he should be compelled to return with news of Abdullah's death to Zigida. Though he still dreamed of the natural consummation of love's hope so that his heart beat like that of a child in possession of a new toy, the brooding luxury of meditation to which he had surrendered during the long hours of silent marching, the peaceful resting in green places with the sound of flowing water in his ears, had shown him, clear and unassailable, the finer vision of love's sacrifice. If Farmata's happiness was indeed dependent on the return of Abdullah safe and well, then he would be content to be the medium through which that happiness should come to her. Steeling himself to bear with fortitude whatever might befall, he had no thought beyond the finding of his rival, and that thought was a constant prayer that he still lived.

As they sat now beneath the tree, Zeze made his first practical contribution to their plan of campaign with the suggestion that

Momolu should discard his Mandingo name and tongue and assume those of blood brother to Zeze himself, together with the disguise of a Buze peasant, in which he would be able to trade in the markets of Barkadu much less conspicuously than as an obvious member of the Mandingo tribe.

Momolu received the proposal, which he recognized as an exceedingly wise one, with smiling approval. For any game of make-believe is always acceptable to the simple-hearted. And Momolu, despite the recent change in his outlook and his conception of life, had lost none of the unostentatious, childish simplicity that was one of his chief natural charms.

The two entered Nainga a couple of hours before noon, tired and very hungry, and rested at the house of a friend of Zeze. After a well-earned meal both slept dreamlessly until five o'clock in the afternoon. Then, glad of the air cooled by the spreading of a cloak-like cloud before the sun, they set out on the last stage of the journey to Barkadu.

Light was fading, but had not entirely gone, as they took the road again. Day and night seemed to have been made one in the twilight mystery of the shadowy sky and the mist that rose to meet it from the marshes at the foot of the Tisyboo mountains.

Standing perfectly still, Momolu looked for a long time at this mountain range. Then he made a sign to Zeze and, spreading their mats, the two knelt down upon them in prayer. The pallor of the twilight began to grow dusky, hazy and grey-white. A cool air stirred among the mists, relic of a storm that passed, far off, towards the coast. Its going drove the haze that was neither day nor night before it. With real darkness came the light of stars and a great moon upon their path.

Talking and laughing as if neither care nor fear obsessed them, the two walked fast and tirelessly, their vow of friendship made visible now in their outward semblance of blood brothers. For Momolu had changed his clothes in Nainga for a set of Zeze's Buze garments.

With the setting of the moon they were within five miles of Barkadu and had reached a forking of the ways.

Zeze stopped suddenly and pointed to the ground. One road led east, across comparatively open country. The other wound towards the north, through thick forest. At the opening of the eastern path fresh leaves torn from the branches of near-growing shrubs, lay with their faces to the earth. At the other a group of the same leaves had been placed face upwards.

Momolu, stooping, examined them carefully,

but without touching them. As he straightened himself again Zeze's eyes met his.

Momolu's face was very serious. "I understand. A lodge of the Porrow is in session on that eastern road. We must travel by the northern one."

"Of course." Zeze stroked his chin meditatively. Then he looked at Momolu with sudden apprehension in his eyes. "It is a good thing there was still light enough for us to see them by," he said. "A friend of my father's once paid no heed to such a signal and took the forbidden road. He was not an initiate and would not listen to the warnings of his companions. He trod the turned-down leaves into the dust and went, singing on his way. He was never seen again."

Momolu nodded gravely. He knew that Zeze spoke truly of a thing that will always remain one of Africa's deepest mysteries—that strange, crude, terrible, and wonderful cult of the Porrow which it is foolhardiness for anyone outside its fold to attempt to explain or understand, a cult that runs the whole gamut of mystic teaching, from the most rigid system of morality to the cruellest depths of fanatical savagery.

With their high spirits of the early night chastened to humble gratitude for escape from a danger great and unforeseen, Momolu and

Zeze plunged into the darkness of the forest road towards the north.

A little wind sighed behind them as they went. Its light passing left the leaves of mystery entirely undisturbed.

CHAPTER XXI

BY the early afternoon the travellers had come in sight of Barkadu.

Most of the hot hours of the morning they had spent resting in the forest after their long night march. But as they emerged from the shelter of the trees into the dazzling day beyond them, they saw, far off, on a hill, a high, shimmering whiteness that Zeze at once recognized as the dome of the great mosque that stands above the town. Behind it, more than twenty miles away, loomed the long range of the Tisyboo mountains, above the greenly wooded plains through which, from the west, flowed the River Loffa, gold in sunlight, purple in shade, with the conical-shaped roofs of a village in the foreground. Beyond this rose the shadowy form of Samedou, faint across its seventy miles of distance, and mist-enshrouded as always except on some clear May morning when the atmosphere, washed by a deluge of the early rains, and the smoky haze of the mist absorbed by the heat of the sun, were so transparent that the great

mountain seemed to have moved closer in the night.

Momolu caught his breath at the first far vision of his hope. With the sun shining on the white dome of its high-set mosque, the pointed white roofs of its mud huts, Barkadu looked like a celestial city seen in dream.

The two men entered the town unnoticed, even by the children playing about the doors of their homes. The coming of two Buze peasants was an event of no moment in a city through which a constant tide of strangers ebbed and flowed, a tide so varied in its component tribes and nationalities that an attitude of tolerant indifference to those who came and went was as marked a feature of the town as if it had been one of the most cosmopolitan cities of the Orient.

There were, however, certain formalities with which strangers must comply if they wished to remain for any length of time in Barkadu. And this, after they had rested for the night in the hut of Zeze's friend, Zakama, Momolu proceeded to do.

Dressed still in his Buze clothes and accompanied by Zeze, he made his way, early on the following morning, to the court or Fabo-Belle where the Chief sat in council. In the case of Zeze no official permit to stay in the town was necessary, for he was already well

known to the Chief, who liked and respected him.

Having received assurance that he himself was welcome, Zeze presented Momolu, under his assumed name, and offered, on his behalf, the customary gifts of white shirting, gin, and a few bars of tobacco leaf. The Chief was gracious and at once accorded Momolu the desired permission to trade in the town under his protection. Such a privilege, though it was of the utmost importance to Momolu to secure it in order that he might be free to go in and out where he would in the course of his inquiries for Abdullah, involved Zeze in a certain amount of risk of destroying the highly-placed confidence he now enjoyed if it should be discovered that Momolu was quite another person from the description of him given to the Chief. Zeze, however, was prepared to take the risk in loyalty to his vow of friendship. If any difficulty arose, he thought a little anxiously, he would doubtless be inspired to frame some plausible explanation that would overcome it.

For several days the two friends pursued their ostensible business of merchants unmolested and without causing any comments among those with whom they came in contact in the ordinary way of trade. Zeze had more than one acquaintance of old standing in the

town, and by judicious questioning among them and the strangers with whom he talked in the market-place, sought to glean any smallest scrap of information that might set them on Abdullah's track.

But nothing came of it, nor of Momolu's efforts in the same direction. Slaves there had been in plenty, both in and outside the town. But no one was interested in them except from the point of view of impressed labour, and such definite questions as Momolu occasionally ventured to ask were received with open laughter or stolid indifference.

Talking over the situation with Zeze when they had been in Barkadu for more than a week, Momolu showed signs of restlessness. But Zeze quieted him with the reminder that even a month spent in searching for one who had been lost for more than fifteen years might easily pass before they happened on a clue. To be disheartened with a failure of seven days was foolishness.

On the morning after this conversation Momolu, walking through the great market on the way to his stall, caught sight of an old Zo tottering feebly along with the aid of a stick. Something about her reminded him suddenly of Tasureba, though she was plainly much older and her thin, fragile body was bent over with age. Moving slowly and with obvious

difficulty along the crowded street, no one seemed to notice her, and she was buffeted so roughly by the passers-by that often she could hardly keep her feet.

Pitiful of her loneliness and fearing that she would fall, Momolu went up to her, took her by the hand, and led her to his own stall. Seating her on a stool at the back out of the glare of the sun, he politely introduced himself under his Buze name, and then knelt before her and touched her bare feet with his right hand.

His chivalry and gentleness stirred the old lady's heart. Her children killed in a tribal war, and utterly alone in the world, she had no one to serve her in the loneliness of her last days. With the intuition of the very old, which is often as direct and penetrating as that of a young child, she loved Momolu from that moment as if he had been her own son. He, on his part, as he put his arms about her trembling frailness, was suddenly convinced that through her he would obtain the key to the house of his dreams.

When he told Zeze about the incident later in the day, the latter was inclined to scoff at his belief that the old woman would be able to help him. But, knowing that one chance was as likely as another to be of use in the difficult task they had undertaken, he offered

no objections when Momolu, persistently and tenderly, cultivated the Zo's friendship by ministering to her daily needs and listening patiently to the interminable babble of the past with which she regaled him on his frequent visits to the tiny, miserable hut in which she lived. But, acting on his friend's advice, he said no word to her of the real reason for his own presence in Barkadu.

As time went on and still there came no ray of light across the darkness that had engulfed Abdullah, Momolu found it more and more difficult to possess himself in patience, and even Zeze was beginning to think it would be necessary to seek some other district for investigation, perhaps even as far afield as that of the Arabs in the French Sudan. For, though he had only promised Yawfee to guide Momolu in safety as far as Barkadu, the bond between them had become so strong that it never occurred to him that he should not accompany him wherever, and however far, his quest might lead.

Then one morning, swift and unexpected as Momolu's first learning of Abdullah's existence, came the beginning of the end.

Just after the sun had crossed the meridian and the intense heat of the forenoon was mitigated by a south-easterly breeze, a sudden pandemonium arose in the market-place be-

tween the members of a foreign tribe who were visiting the town and some of the inhabitants.

Listening idly at first and without particular interest in the dispute, Momolu before long caught some words that brought him quickly to the front of his stall. Fast and furious the discussion raged around the stolen slave of a certain nobleman of Musurdu. The slave, alleged the strangers who were in search of him, had escaped, crossed the frontier, and, as they explained with more volubility than politeness, had doubtless been trapped and held as hostage by some dishonest dweller in Barkadu.

Both men and women were concerned in the question, for, with his heart beating so loudly in his ears that it seemed as if those about him must hear it, Momolu presently noticed a girl whose commanding gestures and impassioned speech left no doubt in the minds of the onlookers that she was on the side of local integrity.

Edging his way unobtrusively towards her, Momolu at last reached her side.

"Who is this man about whom they quarrel?" he whispered in her ear.

Without troubling to turn her angry eyes away from the face of one of the strangers who stood before her awaiting an opportunity for a well-timed retort to her arguments, the

girl answered briefly, " He is Abdullah, a stolen slave."

The loud beating of Momolu's heart fell suddenly to quietness. The pupils of his eyes dilated and contracted. For a moment it seemed as if he were about to suffocate. Then, without waiting to hear more, he turned quickly away, as if obeying a command, and walked off to find Zeze.

For the remainder of the hours during which the stalls in the market were allowed to remain open, Momolu, accompanied by Zeze, whom he had found quickly enough as the latter was also searching excitedly for him, lingered among the crowd, hoping to learn more. But as they were afraid to ask direct questions for fear of arousing wonder as to why two Buze peasants should concern themselves with a purely local matter, and the vociferous confusion among the partisans of either side made any likely thread impossible to follow, they were unable to obtain any coherent information.

At five o'clock when, by order of the District Commissioner, the stalls were closed down for the night and the process of cleaning up the market before sunset had begun, Momolu all at once remembered the old Zo. The thought of her struck suddenly across the agitation of his mind like a shaft of light in a dark room.

Giving Zeze the slip by pretending that he had left something in his stall that he must go back and fetch, he made his way straight to her hut. The old woman knew his knock and bade him enter unhesitatingly.

Both the window and the shutters of the tiny room in which she sat were closed. The air was acrid with the crude burning of the one dim light that shone on her hair, limp and white as cotton now that she had untied the cloth beneath which it was usually concealed.

She showed no surprise at Momolu's hurried entrance nor when, having flung himself on the mud floor beside her stool, he told her swiftly his real name and tribe and the reason for his coming to Barkadu. Only her old, wrinkled hands worked ceaselessly one upon the other, and she moaned a little as she heard his tale. But when he spoke of the quarrel in the market-place, her whole fragile body shook as if palsied and the slow tears of age ran down her face.

Momolu was sorry to have frightened her, but the sight of her distress only confirmed what he had always believed—that she alone could tell him where Abdullah was to be found.

Now, having sworn a solemn oath that he would never betray her, nor what he was about to hear, he listened breathlessly while she told how she had come upon Farmata's long-lost

lover on a day when she had been gathering sticks in the forest for her fire, and how he now lay hidden some miles from the town in a hut that was closely guarded by the servants of those who had stolen him from his original master. Secretly and with great difficulty on account of her own feebleness, and also because of the danger that those who had so nearly tracked him to his sanctuary might discover it, the old woman had been taking him supplies of food from her own slender store. Of the things that Momolu had brought her for her own comfort, she had carried most to the distant hut and put them beside Abdullah where he lay. She had known all along that she was running considerable risk in thus helping a fugitive from justice. But Abdullah's plight, stricken as he was with mortal illness, had moved her profoundly. So it was that this strange old creature, who was in reality more dead than alive, had been the means of preserving in life the object of Momolu's long quest.

The sudden realization that Abdullah might even now be dead roused Momolu to instant action. Assuring the Zo that her secret was as safe with him as his was with her, he rose to his feet, kissed the old lady's head, and hurriedly left the hut.

Without a moment's delay he made for the forest. It was already intensely dark beneath

the trees, but with unerring instinct and sure sense of direction, he moved forward cautiously in the inky blackness, his hands outstretched before him.

Presently they came sharply in contact with rocks. Gingerly Momolu felt about, and scrambling and slipping so that his hands bled, at last managed to climb over them. On the other side he found a small footpath formed by constant treading over the undergrowth. As he crept stealthily along it, still feeling the way he was unable to see, stopping to listen anxiously at the cracking of any twig beneath his feet and often with the feeling that someone was following him, the moon, in its rising, spread a pale glimmer of light where the trunks of the trees parted. In the midst of this shadowy brightness Momolu saw a little bamboo hut.

Creeping stealthily first to a grass-covered tent in which the guards had fallen asleep with that animal ease and utter disregard of consequences that are peculiar to natives and having satisfied himself that he had nothing to fear from them, he went on towards the hut, being careful to make no smallest sound and moving with the lithe swiftness of some forest creature intent upon its prey. The door yielded at a touch, and Momolu stepped within the little chamber.

On a grass mattress in a corner lay the wasted body of a man. As the light in the room flickered fitfully in the draught from the open door long shadows moved about the motionless figure, and Momolu, as he came gently close beside him, saw that Abdullah smiled in his sleep.

For some time he knelt on the ground by the mattress, gazing at the face of Farmata's childhood's lover as if he were hypnotized. He would have had no doubt of the sick man's identity even if, as he presently began to toss restlessly from side to side, he had not muttered Farmata's name. Hearing the word, whispered and barely audible, as if in his dream Abdullah feared to disclose his secret to some wandering ghost that might be listening to the cries of his soul, Momolu's one feeling was a surging pity, entirely devoid of rancour or bitterness. He could not tell whether Abdullah was dying, but he knew that the one thing he had to do was to bear the helpless, broken creature he had become back in safety to Farmata's love.

After a little while he laid his hand on Abdullah's forehead; its touch burned. His movement did not rouse the sick slave to consciousness, but he tossed more restlessly, rolling his head on the hard mattress as if seeking to escape from some invisible bond. Then for a time peace came to him; he lay

still and ceased to murmur. Suddenly he gave a piercing cry. Trembling all over, he tried unavailingly to raise his body, then lay back shuddering in the cold grip of weakness and unutterable fear. His eyes stared straight up into the eyes of Momolu who stooped above him. As he screamed in terror, Momolu laid his hand over his mouth. Cowering and shrinking, Abdullah struggled as if he had been caught in a trap. But very soon his little strength failed and he lay still again except for the shaking of the whimpering, gasping breaths that tore their way through him.

Speaking gently, as if he talked to a frightened child, Momolu told Abdullah of his love for Farmata that had brought him so far and on so perilous a quest at the bidding of her mother, and of how he intended to take him back in safety to Zigida where she, who had kept her trust untarnished, now waited his return.

The soothing voice stilled Abdullah's fears and soon he dimly understood that Fate had guided Momolu to the little hut and that he should submit himself in peace and happiness to its irrevocable decree. Looking up into the face of the man who spoke to him so tenderly, he realized at last that this was no ghost to terrify, but one who had come in warmest friendship, with tidings of peace, of freedom, and of love. When he attempted once more

to raise himself, Momolu put his arms about him. Panting, but no longer afraid, Abdullah rested against his shoulder.

"Who are you, then?" he asked feebly.

"I am Momolu Bei of Foya. I know that you are indeed Abdullah and that my search is at an end."

Abdullah made a gesture of assent, but Momolu saw that he was too exhausted to speak again. So he laid him back gently on the mattress and bade him try to sleep until he could return with a hammock and carriers for the journey to Zigida.

For the first time Abdullah smiled. His body wracked with pain and fever, he hardly heard what Momolu said. Only the word "Zigida" was music in his ears.

"Keep a good heart until to-night," went on Momolu as he moved towards the door. "And have no fear. Without fail I will return. I am your friend, and there is joy in store for you."

Looking back as he left the hut, he saw that already Abdullah had fallen into quiet sleep.

Momolu reached Barkadu again at noon. He was tired, and very hungry. His own emotions as he tramped back through the forest to the city had been incomprehensible. At one moment he felt as if he must dance to the

music in his soul. At the next he was plunged into the depths of desolation by the thought that Farmata could never now be his. But, however his mind veered and swung from the heights of exaltation at the accomplishment of his quest to the bitterness of what now seemed the inevitable renunciation of his love, he clung steadfastly to one intention—to bear Abdullah back to Zigida alive.

Making his way with all speed to the hut of Zakama, Momolu found Zeze taking his midday rest upon his bed. Keyed up to a pitch of emotional intensity that made his eyes bright and wild, he rushed across the room and flung himself down beside his friend.

"What is the matter with you? And where have you been all night?" demanded Zeze, pulling himself quickly into a sitting position.

Momolu smote him on the shoulder. "I have found Abdullah," he said, his voice thick and shaking.

Zeze stared at him for a moment, incredulous. But there was no mistaking the look on Momolu's face. He gave a joyful cry and flung his arms round him. In a state of passionate excitement the two embraced, then, after the customary flicks of the fingers, embraced again.

The first eager questions as to what had happened asked and answered, they began to

make plans for an immediate departure. Zeze, the practical, knew they would need help. So, as soon as Momolu had told him everything and had been induced to eat a hurried meal, he left the hut to secure the services of two men whom he trusted. Taking them to a quiet corner of the town, he sealed a bargain with them by the gift of twelve shillings in money, a bar of tobacco and a piece of cotton cloth and swore them to secrecy.

In the meantime Momolu, knowing that but for her Abdullah might never have been found, went to the hut of the old Zo to present her with a small bag of silver coins. The old lady wept and blessed him, laying her feeble hands upon his head. She was so ancient and so weak that she knew it was unlikely she would ever see Momolu again, though he strove to comfort her by promising to return and visit her when next he came to Barkadu.

But the wonder of this day was not yet over for Momolu. Returning to the hut where he had arranged to rejoin Zeze, he found his friend pacing impatiently up and down the roadway before it. His face wore so strange a look that Momolu stared at him in alarm. With a gesture that forbade questioning Zeze drew him hurriedly into the hut.

"What is it?" demanded Momolu as Zeze closed the door carefully behind him.

"Allah is great," said Zeze solemnly. "Your debt is paid. Prince Piu is dead."

Momolu's breath caught in a sudden gasp.

"As I returned from bargaining with the carriers," went on Zeze slowly, "I fell in with a merchant newly arrived from Vonjama. He it was who told me that the Prince was drowned crossing the Loffa River beyond Soundedou. Even now his body hangs in the burial hut at Vonjama amidst the smoke of the sacred fires. And with it hangs that of Musa, his confidence-man, who followed his master to death."

For a moment a black mist seemed to whirl before Momolu's eyes; he grasped at the table for support. Then, as his vision cleared and the full import of the news broke in upon him, he caught at Zeze's hand.

Without a word the two knelt side by side and prostrated themselves, touching the dried mud of the floor three times with their bowed foreheads.

But even when they stood erect once more words still failed Momolu. Only in his heart something stirred and sang, and the grave smile of Zeze answered the shining of his eyes.

Darkness was falling fast when the little party at length set forth beneath a starless sky. Feeling their way as they went, with Momolu acting as leader over the rocks and

through the dense undergrowth, the journey back to the hut in the forest was made swiftly and quietly. The guards this time were awake and sitting around a fire kindled in their tent, and Momolu and his men were obliged to wait for some time until they saw them stretch themselves for sleep upon the ground.

Momolu and Zeze entered the hut together. Still lying on the mattress where he had left him in the early morning, Abdullah seemed to be asleep. He moaned a little and moved weakly as Momolu touched his shoulder, and his eyes were momentarily startled and afraid as he opened them.

"Come," said Momolu gently. "It is time to go."

Abdullah tried to raise himself, but, in his utter weakness, was unable to do so. Momolu beckoned to Zeze. Slipping their arms beneath him, they wrapped Abdullah carefully in a native cloth. Then, carrying the light, emaciated form between them, stole quietly out of the hut.

At a little distance in the forest the two men were waiting with a hammock suspended from a long pole.

Almost afraid that even their gentle movements might have extinguished the flickering flame of life, Momolu put his hand upon Abdullah's heart as the hammock on which

they had laid him swung slowly from the shoulders of the bearers.

As he raised his eyes to tell Zeze, who stood beside him, that Abdullah's heart still beat, Momolu saw that the moon had risen. Before them the narrow pathway was a silver glory of love's hope.

EPILOGUE

IT was very early in the morning. Light was just tipping the tree-tops and roofs of Zigida with the pearly glow of dawn, the birds chirping their first sleepy notes on the quiet air.

In the doorway of Yadana's house on the little hill above the town Farmata stood motionless, her eyes fixed on the road.

She was quite alone, for no one else was yet awake. She knew that neither bird-call nor any sound had roused her, a few minutes before, from dreamless sleep. One moment, her cheek pillowed on her hand, she had been lying, oblivious of time, and form, and space. The next, as if some invisible presence had stirred beside her bed, her eyes had opened suddenly to the consciousness of coming light.

Dressing hurriedly, impelled by something felt rather than seen or heard, she ran down to the door. A rush of cool air greeted her as she opened it.

Away towards the town she could see, but only dimly as yet, the shadowy outline of the

wide road. Instinctively she stood to watch it, her head bent back resting on the wall behind her, her arms hanging listlessly at her sides, one foot raised a little behind the other, a dusky, slender figure of youth inexplicably and suddenly afraid. But her eyes, misty with strange and unshed tears, never wavered from the road.

Gradually it grew lighter. The moon's short reign was over and it hung in the western sky like a piece of frosted glass, growing fainter and more faint as daylight spread from the east. Presently, as if a trumpet had been blown across the heavens, the sun came up, swift and splendid, above the horizon, and the pall of dead night was rolled away.

Suddenly Farmata's drooping figure stiffened. Something was moving on the sun-emblazoned road. Her heart beat wildly, pounding in her ears. Her eyes stared at a speck far off along the road. Why did it move so slowly, barely appearing any larger after what seemed an interminable time had passed? She might have gone to meet it, but her feet were rooted to the spot. Straining her eyes until they burned, the speck became several figures. She thought she could see four men and that two of them bore something slung from their shoulders.

Nearer and nearer they came, still with that

intolerable slowness. At last Farmata could bear it no longer and hid her eyes. She did not know that she was crying until she felt tears wet against her hands.

The sound of low-pitched voices startled her so that she looked up. Before her stood Momolu's tall figure, while behind him two of his companions, with ineffable gentleness, laid their unknown burden on the ground.

Farmata gave a cry, swaying unsteadily where she stood. She would have fallen had not Momolu put his arms about her and held her close. Her face against his sleeve, she heard his voice, tender and grave:

"Farmata, I have brought Abdullah back to you."

Raising her head, Farmata looked round, wondering. The other men had gone. She and Momolu were alone save for Abdullah, who lay on the hammock on the ground, so stiff and still that only his eyes seemed alive.

For a moment Farmata gazed at him. Then, guided by Momolu's hand, she went to the hammock and knelt beside it.

"Abdullah!" she whispered. "Oh, Abdullah, Abdullah!"

She made to put her arms beneath him, but Abdullah, moving for the first time, lifted his hand.

"Touch me not, Farmata. I am unclean."

Raising himself on one elbow, he fumbled feebly at his throat, pushing aside the opening of the shirt that covered his chest. Beneath it the skin was horrible with the parasitic sores of the West African craw-craw. Farmata's tears streamed down upon his wasted hands.

"Through all the years, Farmata, I have longed and wept for you. But Allah is good. He has let me see your face before I die."

The husky, difficult words caught in his throat. Moving his hands uncertainly, like one who can no longer see, he found Farmata's, then stretched the other towards Momolu.

Kneeling one on each side of the hammock, the hands of Farmata and Momolu met across the body of the dying man. Abdullah laid his own, ice-cold, on their warm ones.

"Momolu," he said, his voice suddenly strong and clear, "I leave Farmata in your care. Be kind to her and make her happy. Love her with the strongest love you have. Or, as Allah has rewarded you, so will He punish."

He turned feebly towards Farmata, looking straight into her eyes.

"I place you under the protection of a good and honourable man. Serve him well, Farmata, and be worthy of his great love for you. And now I break the pledge between your house and mine. May Allah bless——"

The words trailed off. With a quick, pro-

tective movement, Momolu caught Abdullah in his arms. A moment later he laid him back upon the hammock in an attitude of sleep.

The two who knelt together in the sunlit silence knew that he had passed into the garden of Mohammed's everlasting peace.

Made and Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London