

# The Weavers

A NOVEL

BY GILBERT PARKER

## CHAPTER VII

### THE COMPACT

ONE by one the lights went out in the Palace. The excited guests were now knocking at the doors of Cairene notables, bent upon gossip of the night's events, or were scouring the clubs for ears into which to pour the tale of how David was exalted and Nahoum was brought low; how, before them all, Kaïd had commanded Nahoum to appear at the Palace in the morning at eleven, and the Inglesi, as they had named David, at ten. But they declared to all who crowded upon their words that the Inglesi left the Palace with a face frozen white, as though it was he that had met *débâcle*, while Nahoum had been as urbane and cynical as though he had come to the fulness of his power.

Some, on hearing this, said, "Beware Nahoum!" But those who had been at the Palace said, "Beware the Inglesi." This still Quaker, with the white shining face and pontifical hat, with his address of "thee" and "thou," and his forms of speech almost Oriental in their imagery and simplicity, himself an archaism, had impressed them with a sense of weird power. He had prompted old Dias Pasha to speak of him as a reincarnation, so separate and withdrawn he seemed at the end of the evening, yet with an uncanny mastery in his dark-brown eye. One of the Ulema, or holy men, present had said in reply to Dias, "It is the look of one who hath walked with Death and bought and sold with Sheitan the accursed." To Nahoum Pasha, Dias had said, as the former left the Palace, a cigarette between his fingers: "Sleep not nor slumber, Nahoum! The world is not lost by one earthquake." And Nahoum

had replied with a smooth friendliness, "The world is not reaped in one harvest."

"The day is at hand—the East against the West," murmured old Dias as he passed on.

"The day is far spent," answered Nahoum, in a voice unheard by Dias; and, with a word to his coachman, who drove off quickly, he disappeared in the shrubbery.

A few minutes later he was tapping at the door of Mizraim, the Chief Eunuch. Three times he tapped in the same way. Presently the door opened, and he stepped inside. The lean, dark figure of Mizraim bowed low; the long slow fingers touched the forehead, the breast, and the lips.

"May God preserve your head from harm, saadat el pasha, and the night give thee sleep," said Mizraim. He looked inquiringly at Nahoum.

"May thy head know neither heat nor cold and thy joys increase," said Nahoum, mechanically, and sat down.

To an European it would have seemed a shameless mockery to have wished joy to this lean, hateful dweller in the between-worlds; to Nahoum it was part of a life which was all ritual and intrigue, gabbling superstition and innate fatalism, decorated falsehood and a brave philosophy.

"I have work for thee at last, Mizraim," said Nahoum.

"At last, saadat el pasha?"

"Thou hast but played before. To-night I must see the sweat of thy brow."

Mizraim's cold fingers again threw themselves against his breast, forehead, and lips, and he said:

"As a woman swims in a fountain, so shall I bathe in sweat for thee, who has given with one hand and hath never taken with the other."

"I did thee service once, Mizraim—ch?"

"I was as a bird buffeted by the wind; upon thy masts my feet found rest. Behold, I build my nest in thy sails, saadat."

"There are no birds in last year's nest, Mizraim, thou dove," said Nahoum, with a cynical smile.

"When I build, I build. Where I swear by the stone of the corner, there am I from dark to dark and from dawn to dawn, saadat." Suddenly he swept his hand low to the ground and a ghastly sort of smile crossed over his face. "Speak—I am thy servant. Shall I not hear? I will put my hand in the entrails of Egypt, and wrench them forth for thee."

He made a gesture so cruelly, so darkly, suggestive that Nahoum Pasha turned his head away. There flashed before his mind the scene of death in which his own father had lain, butchered like a beast in the shambles, a victim to the rage of Ibrahim Pasha, the son of Mehemet Ali.

"Then listen, and learn why I have need of thee to-night."

First, Nahoum told the story of David's coming, and Kaïd's treatment of himself, the foreshadowing of his own doom. Then of David and the girl, and the dead body he had seen; of the escape of the girl, of David's return with Kaïd—all exactly as it had happened, save that he did not mention the name of the dead man.

It did not astonish Mizraim that Nahoum had kept all this secret. That crime should be followed by secrecy and further crime, if need be, seems natural to the Oriental mind. He had seen removal follow upon removal, and the dark Nile flow on gloomily, silently, faithful to the helpless ones tossed into its bosom. It would much have astonished him if Nahoum had not shown a gaping darkness somewhere in his tale; and he felt for the key to the mystery.

"And he who lies dead, saadat?"

"My brother."

"Foorgat Bey!"

"Even he, Mizraim. He lured the girl here—a madman ever. The other madman was in the next room. He struck—come, and thou shalt see."

Together they felt their way through the passages and rooms, and presently entered the room where Foorgat Bey was lying. Nahoum struck a light, and, as

he held the candle, Mizraim knelt and examined the body closely. He found the slight wound on the temple, then took the candle from Nahoum and held it close to the corner of the marble pedestal. A faint stain of blood was there. Again he examined the body, and ran his fingers over the face and neck. Suddenly he stopped, and held the light close to the skin beneath the right jaw. He motioned, and Nahoum laid his fingers also on the spot. There was a slight swelling.

"A blow with the fist, saadat el pasha—skilful, and English." He looked inquiringly at Nahoum. "As a weasel hath a rabbit by the throat, so is the Inglesi in thy hands, O saadat!"

Nahoum shook his head. "And if I went to Kaïd, and said, 'This is the work of the Inglesi,' would he believe? Kaïd would hang me for the lie—would it be truth to him? What proof have I save the testimony of mine own eyes? And Egypt would laugh at that! Is it the time, while yet the singers are beneath the windows, to assail the bride? All bridegrooms are mad. It is all sunshine and morning with the favorite, the Inglesi. Only when the shadows lengthen may he be stricken. Not now."

"Why dost thou hide this from Kaïd, O thou brother of the eagle?"

"For my gain—and thine, keeper of the gate. To-night I am weak, because I am poor. To-morrow I shall be rich—and—it may be, strong. If Kaïd knew of this to-night, I should be a prisoner before cockerow. What claims has a prisoner? Kaïd would be in my brother's house at dawn seizing all that is there and elsewhere, and I on my way to Fazougli, to be strangled before sunset."

"O wise and far-seeing! Thine eye pierces the earth. What is there to do? What is my gain—with thine?"

"Thy gain?—The payment of thy debt to me."

Mizraim's face lengthened. His was a loathsome sort of gratitude. He was willing to pay in kind; but what Oriental ever paid a debt without a gift in return, even as a bartering Irishman demands his lucky penny.

"So be it, saadat, and my life is thine to spill upon the ground, a scarlet cloth for thy feet. And backsheesh?"

Nahoum smiled grimly. "For back-sheesh, thy turban full of gold."

Mizraim's eyes glittered—the dull black shine of a mongrel terrier's. He caught the sleeve of Nahoum's coat and kissed it, then kissed his hand.

Thus was their bargain made over the dead body; and Mizraim had an almost superstitious reverence for the fulfilment of a bond, the one virtue rarely found in the Oriental. Nothing else had he, but of all men in Egypt he was the best instrument Nahoum could have chosen; and of all men in Egypt he was the one man who could surely help him.

"What is there now to do, saadat?"

"My coachman is with the carriage at the gate by which the English girl left. It is open still. The key is in Foorgat's pocket, no doubt; stolen by him, no doubt also. . . . This is my design. You will drive him"—he pointed to the body—"to his palace, seated in the carriage as though he were alive. There is a secret entrance. The bowob of the gate will show the way; I know it not. But who will deny thee? Thou comest from high places—from Kaïd. Who will speak of this? Will the bowob? In the morning Foorgat will be found dead in his bed! The slight bruise thou canst heal—thou canst?"

Mizraim nodded. "I can smooth it from the sharpest eye."

"At dawn he will be found dead. But at dawn I shall be knocking at his gates. And before the world knows I shall be in possession. All that is his shall be mine, for at once the men of law shall be summoned, and my inheritance secured before Kaïd shall even know of his death. And I shall take my chances for my life."

"And the coachman, and the bowob, and others it may be?"

"Shall not these be with thee—thou, Kaïd's keeper of the harem—the lion at the door of his garden of women. Is it strange that Foorgat, who ever flew at fruit above his head, perilous to get or keep, should be found on forbidden ground, or in design upon it? Would it be strange to the bowob or the slave that he should return with thee stark and still? Would they not but count it mercy of Kaïd that he was not given to

the serpents of the Nile? A word from thee—would one open his mouth? Would not the shadow of thy hand, of the swift doom, be over them? Would not a handful of gold bind them to me? Is not the man dead? Are they not mine—mine to bind or break as I will?"

"So be it—wisdom is of thee as the breath of man is his life. I will drive Foorgat Bey to his home."

A few moments later all that was left of Foorgat Bey was sitting in his carriage beside Mizraim the Chief Eunuch—sitting upright, stony, and still, and in such wise was driven swiftly to his palace.

## CHAPTER VIII

FOR HIS SOUL'S SAKE AND THE LAND'S SAKE

DAVID came to know a startling piece of news the next morning—that Foorgat Bey had died of heart-disease in his bed, and was so found by his servants. He at once surmised that Foorgat's body had been carried out of the Palace, no doubt, in order that it might not be thought he had come to his death by order of Kaïd. His mind became easier. Death, murder, crime, in Egypt was not a nine days' wonder; it scarce outlived one day. When a man was gone, none troubled. The dead man was in the bosom of Allah—why should the living be beset or troubled? If there was foul play, why make things worse by sending another life after the life gone, even in the way of justice?

The girl David saved had told him her own name, and had given him the name of the hotel at which she was staying. He had an early breakfast, and prepared to go to her hotel, wishing to see her once more. There were things to be said for the first and last time, and then be buried forever. She must leave the country at once. In this sick, mad land, in this whirlpool of crime and secret murder and constant conspiracy, no one could tell what plot was hatching, what deeds were forward; and he could not yet be sure that no one save himself and herself knew who had committed the crime. Her perfect safety lay in instant flight. It was his duty to see that she went, and at once—this very day. He would go and see her.

He went to the hotel. There he learned

that she had left that morning with her aunt for Alexandria *en route* to England.

He approved her wisdom, he applauded her decision. Her presence of mind and swift thought the night before had proven her to be of remarkable character at least. She had done wisely in fleeing at once—yes, she had done wisely. Yet—yet, somehow, as he bent his footsteps towards his lodgings again he had a sense of disappointment, of revelation. She had done exactly what she ought to have done, that which was to have been his counsel to do; and yet the thought intruded itself that she had thought only of herself from first to last. What might happen to him—evidently that had not occurred to her. How could she know but that his life might be in danger; that, after all, they might have been seen leaving the fatal room? Well, she had gone, and with all his heart he was glad that she was safe. A great burden had been lifted off his mind, already burdened beyond endurance. Stranger though she was to him, he would gladly have given his life for her in the circumstances. She was a woman, and she had gone through an experience too terrible for one so young. If it had been Faith, he thought! Faith would have been more discreet; she never would have been involved in the same set of circumstances, yet, by dark accident, she might have been placed in a similar position.

His judgment upon last night's event was not colored or sullied by a single direct criticism upon the girl. But he could not prevent—was not the devil still at work in men's minds, whispering evil and attempting to sow suspicion, distrust, and malice?—he could not prevent the suggestion, suddenly flashing into his mind, that she had thought of herself first and last—a pardonable egoism. Well, she had gone; and he was here to face the future, unencumbered by aught save the weight of his own conscience.

Yet, the weight of his conscience! His feet were still free—free for one short hour before he went to Kaïd; but his soul was in chains. As he turned his course to the Nile, and crossed over the great bridge, there went clanking by in chains a hundred conscripts, torn from their homes in the Fay-

oum, bidding farewell forever to their friends, receiving their last offerings—for they had no hope of return. He looked at their haggard and dusty faces, at their excoriated ankles, and his eyes closed in pain. All they felt he felt. What their homes were to them, these fellaheen, dragged forth to defend their country, to go into the desert and waste their lives under leaders tyrannous, cruel, and incompetent, his old open life, his innocence, his integrity, his truthfulness and character, were to him. They had been to him at once peace and the justification of life. By an impulsive act, by a rash blow, he had asserted his humanity; but he had killed his fellow man in anger! He knew that as that fatal blow had been delivered, there was no thought of punishment—it was blind anger and hatred; it was the ancient virus working which had filled the world with war, and armed it at the expense, the bitter and oppressive expense, of the toilers and the poor. The taxes for wars were wrung out of the sons of labor and sorrow. These poor fellaheen had paid taxes on everything they possessed. Taxes, taxes, nothing but taxes from the cradle! Their lands, houses, and palm-trees would be taxed still, when they would reap no more. And having given all save their lives, these lives they must now give under the whip and the chain and the sword.

As David looked at them in their single blue calico coverings, in which they had lived and slept—shivering in the cold night air upon the bare ground—these thoughts came to him; and he had a sudden longing to follow them, and put the chains upon his own arms and legs, and go forth and suffer with them—and fight and die? To die were easy. To fight? . . . Was it, then, come to that? He was no longer a man of peace, but a man of the sword; no longer a man of the palm and the evangel, but a man of blood—and of crime! He shrank back out of the glare of the sun; for it suddenly seemed to him that there was written upon his forehead, "*This is a brother of Cain.*" For the first time in his life he had a shrinking from the light and the sun, which he had loved like a Persian, had, in a sense, unconsciously worshipped.

He was scarcely aware where he was. He had wandered on until he had come to the end of the bridge, and into the great groups of traffickers who at this place made a market of their wares. Here sat a seller of sugar-cane, there wandered clanking his brasses a merchant of sherbet, there shouted a cheap-jack of the Nile the virtues of a knife from Sheffield. Yonder a camel-driver squatted and counted his earnings; and a sheep-dealer haggled with the owner of a khiassa bound for the sands of the North. The curious came about him and looked at him, but he did not see or hear. He sat upon a stone, his gaze upon the river, following with his eyes, yet without consciously observing, the dark riverine population whose ways are hidden, who know only the law of the river and spend their lives in eluding it—pirates and brigands now, and yet again the peaceful porters of commerce.

Never a criminal in this land but less a criminal than he! For their standard was a standard of might the only right; but he—his whole life had been nurtured in an atmosphere of right and justice, had been a spirited demonstration against force. He was without fear, as he was without an undue love of life. The laying down of his life had never been presented to him; and yet, now that his conscience was his only judge, and it condemned him, he would gladly have given his life to pay the price of blood. Child of the new dispensation as he was, there was in him more of the ancient spirit—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth—than he was at all aware.

But now that was impossible—his life was not his own to give, save by suicide; and that would be an insult to the God whom he had offended, to whom he had sent a life with all its sins unpurged, and without a prayer for forgiveness. He had given his word to the woman, and he would keep it, and, when he thought of her, he had no desire that it should be otherwise. In those brief moments she must have suffered more than most men suffer in a long life, the more so because her own indiscretion, though the indiscretion of innocence, had brought about a humiliation which must overshadow her thoughts as long as she lived. Not her hand, however, but his, had com-

mitted the deed. And yet—a sudden wave of pity for her rushed over him, because the conviction seized him that she would also in her soul take upon herself the burden of his guilt as though it were her own. He had seen it in the look of her face last night. For those she loved, or who loved her, it was her duty to save herself from the horror of discovery. For all her future it was her duty to shield herself from any imputation which might as unjustly as scandalously arise if the facts of that black hour ever became known— Ever became known? The thought that there might be some human eye which had seen, which knew, sent a shiver through him.

"I would give my life a thousand times rather than that," he said, aloud, to the swift-flowing river. "It is enough that one should suffer this secret misery—for mine was the sin and hers the misfortune—than that both should suffer, and one be shamed." His head sank on his breast. His lips murmured in prayer:

"But be merciful to me, Thou just judge of Israel, for Thou hast made me, and Thou knowest whereof I am made. For my sin, '*O my God, my soul is cast down within me; Therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites from the Hill of Mazer.*' Here in this land will I dedicate my life to Thee for the land's sake. Not for my soul's sake, O my God. If it be Thy will, let my soul be cast away; but for the soul of him whose body I slew, and for his land, let my life be the long sacrifice."

Dreams he had had the night before—terrible dreams, which he could never forget; dreams of a fugitive being hunted through the world, escaping and eluding, only to be hemmed in once more; on and on till he grew gray and gaunt, and the hunt suddenly ended in a great morass into which he plunged with the howling world behind him. The gray dank mists came down on him, his footsteps sank deeper and deeper, and ever the cries, as of damned spirits, grew in his ears. Mocking shapes flitted past him, the wings of obscene birds buffeted him, the morass grew up about him; and now it was all a red moving mass like a dead sea heaving about him. With a cry of agony he felt the dolorous flood above his



shoulders, and then a cry pierced the gloom and the loathsome misery, and a voice he knew called to him, "David, David, I am coming!" and he had awaked with the old hallucination of his uncle's voice calling to him in the dawn.

It came to him now as he sat by the waterside, and he raised his face to the sun and to the world. The idlers had left him alone; none were staring at him now. They were all intent on their own business, each man laboring after his kind. He heard the voice of a river-man as he toiled at a rope, standing on the corn that filled his khiassa from end to end, from keel to gunwale. The man was singing a wild chant of cheerful labor, the soul of the hard-smitten of the earth rising above the rack and burden of the body:

"O, the garden where to-day we sow and  
to-morrow we reap!  
O, the sakkia turning by the garden  
walls;  
O, the onion-field and the date-tree  
growing,  
And my hand on the plough—by the  
blessing of God;  
Strength of my soul, O my brother, all's  
well."

He did not understand the words, but the meaning of the song got into his heart. He pressed his hand to his breast with a sudden gesture. It touched something hard. It was his flute. Mechanically he had put it in his pocket when he dressed in the morning. He took it out and looked at it lovingly. Into it he had poured his soul in the old days—days, centuries away, it seemed now. It should still be the link with the old life.

As he walked towards his home again, lines from a singer of England came to him, and he repeated them to himself over and over again until he came to his own door:

"Now the midday heat and passion  
burneth,  
May my arm be strong;  
To plough in life's broad field beside my  
neighbor,  
Singing with cheerful heart that lightens  
labor  
The old untiring song."

Rapine, murder, tyranny, oppression,  
were round him on every side, and the

ruler of the land called him to his counsels. Here a great duty lay—his life for this land, his life, and his love, and his faith. He would expiate his crime and his sin—the crime of homicide for which he alone was responsible, the sin of secrecy for which he and another were responsible. And that other? If there had been but one word of understanding between them before she left!

At the door of his house stood the American whom he had met at the citadel yesterday—it seemed a hundred years ago.

"I've got a letter for you," Tom Lacey said. "The lady's aunt and herself are cousins of mine more or less removed, and originally at home in the U. S. A. a generation or so ago. Her mother was an American. She didn't know your name—Miss Hylda Maryon, I mean. I told her, but there wasn't time to put it on." He handed over the unaddressed envelope.

David opened the letter, and read:

"I have seen the papers. I do not understand what has happened, but I know that all is well. If it were not so, I would not go. That is the truth. Grateful I am, oh, believe me! So grateful that I do not yet know what is the return which I must make. But the return will be made. I hear of all that has come to you—how easily I might have destroyed all! . . . My thoughts blind me. You are great and good; you will know at least that I go because it is the only thing to do. I fly from the storm with a broken wing. Take now my promise to pay what I owe in the hour Fate wills—or in the hour of your need. . . . You can trust him who brings this to you; he is a distant cousin of my own. Do not judge him by his odd and foolish words. They hide a good character, and he has a strong nature. He wants work to do. Can you give it? . . . Farewell."

David put the letter in his pocket, a strange quietness about his heart.

He scarcely realized what Lacey was saying. "Great girl that—troubled about something in England, I guess. Going straight back."

David thanked him for the letter.



*Drawn by Andre Castaigne*

FOR THIS LAND—HIS LIFE, AND HIS LOVE, AND HIS FAITH





Lacey became red in the face. He tried to say something, but failed.

"You wish to speak with me, friend?" asked David.

"I'm full up; I can't speak. But say—"

"I am going to the Palace now. Come back at noon if you will—if you wish to talk with me."

He wrung David's hand in gratitude. "You're going to do it. You're going to do it. I see it. It's a great game—like Abe Lincoln's. Say, let me black your boots while you're doing it, will you?"

David pressed his hand.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE LETTER, THE NIGHT, AND THE WOMAN

"TO-DAY has come the fulfilment of my dream, Faith. I am given to my appointed task; I am set on a road of life in which there is no looking back.

"My dreams of the past are here begun in very truth and fact. When in the night I heard Uncle Benn calling, when in the Meeting-house voices said, 'Come away, come away, and labor; thou art idle,' I could hear my heart beat in the ardor to be off. Yet I knew not where. Now I know.

"Here in Egypt lies the labor that shall purge my soul. And I pray God that it shall be for Egypt's good that I am come. But the path is steep, for I am now of the household and of the presence of the Viceroy of Egypt—agent, adviser, as one who has the voice of his master, who is the ear of his captain. And for such there is no primrose path.

"Last night the Prince Pasha called me to his Council—after he had come to terms with me upon that which Uncle Benn left of land and gold. Think not he tempted me. No glory of a palace, no lure of place drew me on. Alas! no; but in the dark, the dreadful dark, I reached out my hand for guide, and it touched one who had sinned a great sin, who had fallen by the way, and in his misery and anguish he told me the way to go. So, when the Pasha spoke I answered; for the whole land is sick, and my work is at my hand.

"Last night I saw favorites look upon

me with hate because of Kaïd's favor, though the great hall was filled with show of cheerful splendor, and men smiled and feasted. To-day I know that in the Palace where I was summoned to my first duty with the Prince, every step I took was shadowed, every motion recorded, every look or word set down and noted, haply that I might betray myself into some cause of offence. I have no fear of them. They are not subtle enough for the unexpected acts in the life of an honest man, which accomplish their purposes before design and craft can wreck them. Yet I do not wonder men fail to keep honest in the midst of this splendor, where all is strife as to who shall be uppermost, who shall have the Prince's favor; who shall enjoy the fruits of bribery, backsheesh, and monopoly; who shall wring from the slave and the toil-ridden fellah the coin his poor body mints at the *corvée*, in his own taxed fields of *dourha* and cucumbers.

"But these things you do not note upon the surface. When I saw Kaïd to-day he was full of crisp humor, so that you should have thought that Egypt was a land of smiling happiness, and the courtiers and the hangers-on were the only bane of life—good-natured banes! With a light hand he drew me into a field of plans for the good of his people, which might have filled my heart with joy, did I not know that he is a spendthrift of friendly words and generous purposes, which are swallowed up in a wide, dark flood of tyranny and extravagance. Once, it may be, Kaïd dreamed a dream of a well-governed, rich, and happy people, a frugal state, laws for welfare of the many, and privileges for none; but the good that he intended was twisted from its course by evil agents, who distorted his plans, to give riches to the rich and power to the oppressive. Even to-day with the old phrases on his lips, deluding none save himself, and maybe not himself, he must needs plan to check evil by evil, sink fortunes in the mad hope of redeeming fortunes, ruling by tyranny and—through those who deceive him—by fraud and force and cruelty.

"Is this like anything we ever dreamed at Hamley, Faith? Yet here am I set, and here shall I stay till the

skein be unravelled out; and here it may be you will come one day to see me striving to find far beneath the sands foundation for a new life. I feel that as the days wear on there will be many here who will gather to me. These must be the first grains for the coral wall; and when the wall is builded, though the grain be lost in the accomplished work, yet will its labor be well done, itself fulfilled. To fulfil one's self, is not that the law?

"Soon I shall go into the desert upon a mission to the cities of the South, to Dongola, Khartoum and Darfur and beyond; for there is trouble yonder, and war is near unless, by the grace of God, it is given me to bring peace. So I must bend to my study of Arabic, which I am thankful I learned long ago to write to Uncle Benn. And I must not forget to say that I shall take with me on my journey that faithful Moslem Ebn Ezra, in whom I have great faith, if he returns here in time. Others I shall take also, but of these I shall write hereafter. But before that day comes there is much to do here in Cairo, and in the Prince's Palace, to which I go in residence to-morrow.

"I shall henceforth be moving in the midst of things which I was taught to hate. I pray that I may not hate them less as time goes on. The glowing splendor of the East is the background of it all, and the lean and cruel face of barbarism lurks everywhere. Everywhere also I feel the stir of war; not the open rush of armies, but the night attack and the ambuscade, the furtive fret of mutiny, the evil whisper of revolution and conspiracy. To-morrow I shall breathe the air of intrigue, shall hear footsteps of spies behind me wherever I go; shall know that even the roses in the garden have ears; that the ground under my feet will telegraph my thoughts. Shall I be true? Or shall I in the end breathe out the same air that I breathe in, the lungs of truth poisoned at last by the Palace exhalations, by the atmosphere of centuries of corruption? Shall I at last whisper, and follow and evade, believe in no one, much less in myself, steal in and out of men's confidences to use them for my own purposes? Shall I put the past to sleep, and live from hour

to hour only as men live here engaged in one vast speculation, and are in the way to become quickly rich by dark processes—in the way also to sudden oblivion in the Nile or in the fearful desert of Fazougli? Does any human being know what he can bear of temptation or of the daily pressure of the life around him? what powers of resistance are in his soul? how long the vital energy will continue to throw off the never-ending seduction, the freshening force of evil. Therein lies the power of evil, that it is ever new, ever fortified by continuous conquest and achievements. It has the rare fire of aggression; is ever more upon the offence than upon the defence; has, withal, the false lure of freedom from restraint, the throbbing force of sympathy.

"Such things I dreamt not of in Soolsby's hut upon the hill, Faith, though, indeed, that seemed a time of trial and sore-heartedness. How large do small issues seem till we have faced the momentous things! It is true that the larger life has pleasures and expanding capacities; but it is truer still that it has perils, events which try the soul as it is never tried in the smaller life—unless, indeed, the soul be that of the Epicurean. The Epicurean I well understand, and in his way I might have walked with a wicked grace. I have in me some hidden depths of luxury, a secret heart of pleasure, an understanding for the forbidden thing. I could have walked the broad way with a laughing heart, though, in truth, habit of mind and desire have kept me in the better path. But offences must come, and woe to him from whom the offence cometh! I have begun now, and only now, to feel the storms that shake us to our farthest cells of life. I begin to see how near good is to evil; how near faith is to unfaith; and how difficult it is to judge from outer actions only; how little we can know to-day what we shall feel to-morrow. Yet one must learn to see deeper, to find motive, not in acts that shake the faith, but in character which needs no explanation, which—" He paused, disturbed.

Then he raised his head, as though not conscious of what was breaking the course of his thoughts. Presently he realized a low, hurried knocking at his door. He

drew a hand over his eyes and sprang up. An instant later the figure of a woman deeply veiled stood within the room beside the table where he had been writing. There was silence as they faced each other, his back against the door.

"Oh, do you not know me?" she said at last, and sank into the chair where he had been sitting.

The question was unnecessary; and she knew it was so, but she could not bear the strain of the silence. She seemed to have risen out of the letter he had been writing, for had he not been writing of her, of what concerned them both? How mean and small-hearted he had been to have thought for an instant that she had not the highest courage, though in going she had done the discreeter, safer thing! But she had come—she had come.

All this was in his eyes, though his face was pale and still. He was almost rigid with emotion, for the ancient habit of repose and self-command of the Quaker people was upon him.

"Can you not see—do you not know?" she repeated, her back upon him now, her face still veiled, her hands making a swift motion of distress.

"I know," he answered, quietly. "Do I not hear your voice? Do I not see you? Has thee found in the past that thee is so soon forgotten?"

"Oh, do not blame me!" She raised her veil suddenly and showed a face as pale as his own, and in the eyes a fiery brightness. "I did not know. It was so hard to come—do not blame me. I went to Alexandria—I felt that I must fly, the air around me seemed full of voices crying out—did you not understand why I went?"

"I understand," he said, coming forward slowly. "Thee should not have come back. In the way I go now the watchers go also."

"If I had not come, you would never have understood," she answered, quickly. "I am not sorry I went. I was so frightened, so shaken. My only thought was to get away from the terrible Thing. But I should have been sorry all my life long, had I not come back to tell you what I feel and that I shall never forget. All my life I shall be grateful. You have saved me from a thousand deaths. Ah, if I could give you but one life! Yet—

yet—oh, do not think but that I would tell you the whole truth, though I am not wholly truthful. See, I love my place in the world more than I love my life: and but for you I should have lost all."

He made a protesting motion. "The debt is mine, in truth. But for you I should never have known what, perhaps—" He paused.

His eyes were on hers, gravely speaking what his tongue faltered to say. She looked and looked, but did not understand. She only saw troubled depths lighted by a soul of kindling purpose. "Tell me," she said, awed.

"Through you I have come to know—" he paused again. What he was going to say, truthful though it was, must hurt her, and she had been sorely hurt already. He put his thoughts more gently, more vaguely.

"By what happened I have come to see what matters in life. I was behind the hedge. I have broken through upon the road. I know my goal now. The highway is before me, leading through a dark country."

She felt the tragedy in his words, and her voice shook as she spoke. "I wish I knew life better—I could make a better answer. You are on the road, you say. But I feel that it is a hard and cruel road—oh, I understand that at least. Tell me, please, tell me the whole truth. You are hiding from me what you feel. I have upset your life, have I not? You are a Quaker, and Quakers are better than all other Christian people, are they not? Their faith is peace, and for me, you—" She covered her face with her hands for an instant, but turned quickly and looked him in the eyes—"for me you put your hand upon the clock of a man's life, and stopped it."

She got to her feet with a passionate gesture, but he put a hand gently upon her arm, and she sank back again. "Oh, it was not you; it was I who did it," she said. "You did what any man of honor would have done—what a brother would have done. You helped me in my worst need."

"What I did is a matter between me and my own soul," he responded quickly. "Had I never seen your face again it would have been the same. You were

the occasion; the thing I did had only one source, my own heart and mind. There might have been another way. For that way, or for the way I did take, you could not be responsible."

"How generous you are!" Her eyes swam with tears; she leaned over the table where he had been writing, and the tears dropped upon his letter. Presently she realized this, and drew back, then made as though to dry the tears from the paper with her handkerchief. As she did so the words that he had written met her eye: "*But offences must come, and woe to him from whom the offence cometh!* I have begun now, and only now, to feel the storms that shake us to the farthest cells of life."

She became very still. He touched her arm and said heavily, "Come away, come away."

She pointed to the words she had read. "I could not help but see, and now I know what this must mean to you."

"Thee must go at once," he urged. "Thee should not have come. Why should that matter? Thee was safe—none knew. A few hours and it would all have been far behind. We might never have met again. I would have remembered only that through a woman I came to know myself, and through myself my fellow men."

Suddenly she gave a low hysterical laugh. "You think you hide the real thing from me. I know I'm ignorant and selfish and feeble-minded, but I can see farther than you think. You want to tell the truth about—about *it*, because you are honest and hate hiding things, because you want to be punished, and so pay the price. Oh, I can understand! If it were not for me you would not. . . ." With a sudden wild impulse she got to her feet. "And you shall not," she cried. "I will not have it." Color came rushing to her cheeks. "I will not have it. I will not put myself so much in your debt. I will not demand so much of you. I will face it all—I will stand alone."

There was a touch of indignation in her voice. Somehow she seemed moved to anger against him. Her hands were clasped at her side rigidly, her pulses throbbing. He stood looking at her fixed-

ly, as though trying to realize her. His silence agitated her still further, and she spoke excitedly.

"I could have, would have killed him myself without a moment's regret. He had planned, planned—to ruin me. He would have treated me—ah, God, can you not see it all! I would have taken his life without a thought. I was mad and foolish to go upon such an adventure, but I meant no ill. I had not one thought that I could not have cried out from the housetops, and he had in his heart—he had what you saw. But you—you repent that you killed him—by accident—it was by accident. Do you realize how many times others were trapped by him as was I? Do you not see what he was—as I see now? Did he not say as much to me before you came, when I was dumb with terror? Did he not make me understand what his whole life had been? Did I not see in a flash others, how many! whose lives he had spoiled and killed? Would I have had pity? Would I have had remorse? No, no, no! I was frightened when it was done, I was horrified, but I was not sorry; and I am not sorry. It was to be. It was the true end to his untruth and vileness. Ah!"

She shuddered, and buried her face in her hands for a moment, then went on: "I can never forgive myself for knowing him, for going to the Palace with him. I was mad for adventure, for mystery; I wanted more than the ordinary share of knowledge. I wanted to probe things. Ah, I guessed little what I should find if I probed! Yet I meant no wrong. I thought then nothing of which I shall ever be ashamed. But I shall always be ashamed because I knew him, because he thought that I—oh, if I were a man, I should be glad that I had killed him, for the sake of all honest women."

He remained silent. His look was not upon her, he seemed lost in a dream; but his face was fixed in trouble.

She misunderstood his silence. "You had the courage, the impulse to—to do it," she said sharply; "you have not the courage to justify it. I will not have it so. I will tell the truth to all the world. I will not shrink. I shrank yesterday because I was afraid of the world; to-day I will face it, I will—"

She stopped suddenly, and another look flashed into her face. Presently she spoke in a different tone; a new light had come upon her mind. "But I see," she added. "To tell all is to make you the victim, too, of what *he* did. It is in your hands; it is all in your hands; and I cannot speak unless—unless you are ready also."

There was an unintended touch of scorn in her voice. She had been troubled and tried beyond bearing, and her impulsive nature revolted at his silence. She misunderstood him, or, if she did not wholly misunderstand him, she was angry at what she thought was a needless remorse or sensitiveness. Did not the man deserve his end?

"There is only one course to pursue," he rejoined quietly, "and that is the course we entered upon last night. I neither doubted yourself nor your courage. You must not turn back now. Already I have planned my future by what happened. You must not alter the course which was your own making, and the only course which you could or I should take—the only course which I would take, though all the world were against me. I have planned my life according to the word I gave you. I could not turn back now, though your own happiness depended on it; and your happiness depends on the course of silence to which we agreed. We are strangers, and we must remain so. You will go from here now, and we must not meet again. I am—"

"I know who you are," she broke in. "I know what your religion is; that fighting and war and bloodshed is a sin to you."

"I am of no family or place in England," he went on calmly. "I come of yeoman and trading stock; I have nothing in common with people of rank and riches. I have nothing in common with you. Our lines of life will not cross. It is well that it should be so. As to what happened—what I may feel has nothing to do with whether I was justified or no. It has nothing to do with the man's character or his vile and evil plans—nothing to do with the wrong to you, nor all the wrongs that ever he did to your sex, or to any good woman. What I feel belongs to my own soul, and

in the end the thing must be solved by a Power which will not take our little views into account. But if you have thought that I have repented doing what I did, let that pass forever from your mind. I know that I should do the same, yes, even a hundred times, and not by accident, if I were placed again where I was placed. I know what was in my heart at the moment, and I did according to my nature. You say you will not have me remain silent unless I am unprepared to face the penalty! But your first thoughts were right. You had done no wrong, intended no wrong. Your fault, if fault there was, came from defiance of those conventions which are for the protection of the strong as well as the weak; for the strongest may be the innocent victims of their own independence. Having defied convention—having placed yourself in a position where injury was possible and evil placed you at a disadvantage, you must not now be punished cruelly for a thing you did not do. Silence is the only way of safety or of justice. We must not speak of this again. We must each go our own way. We must not change our course."

Her eyes were moist. She reached out a hand to him timidly. "Oh, forgive me," she added brokenly. "I am so vain, so selfish, and that makes one blind to the truth. It is all clearer now. You have shown me that I was right in my first impulse, and that is all I can say for myself. Silence, at least, will save me; and I shall pray all my life that it will do you no harm in the end."

She remained silent, for a moment adjusting her veil, preparing to go. Presently she spoke again: "I shall always want to know about you—what is happening to you—how could it be otherwise?"

She was half realizing one of the deepest things in existence, that the closest bond between two human beings is a bond of secrecy upon a thing that vitally, fatally concerns both or either. That two people shall hold in common a fact which they only know is like laying a wire between two points upon which the electricity plays, producing a common current of understanding. It is a power at once malevolent and beautiful. A



secret like that of David and Hylda, so far-reaching in its consequences, will do in a day what a score of years could not accomplish, will insinuate confidences which might never be given to the nearest or dearest. In neither was any feeling of the heart begotten by their experiences; and yet they had gone deeper in each other's lives than any one they had known in a lifetime. They had struck a deeper note than love or friendship. They had touched the chord of a secret and mutual experience which had gone so far that their lives would be influenced by it forever after. Each understood this in a different way.

Hylda looked towards the letter lying on the table. It had raised in her mind, not a doubt, but an undefined, undefinable anxiety. He saw the glance, and said: "I was writing to one who has been as a sister to me. She was my mother's sister, though she is almost as young as I. Her name is Faith. There is nothing there of what concerns thee and me, though it would make no difference if she knew." Suddenly a thought seemed to strike him. "The secret is of thee and me. There is safety. If it became another's, there might be peril. The thing shall be between us only, forever?"

"Do you think that I—"

"My instinct tells me a woman of sensitive mind might one day, out of an unmerciful honesty, tell her husband—"

"I am not married—"

"But one day—"

She interrupted him. "My life is my own, and it shall not be the absolute possession of any man. My own conscience shall decide. Sentimental egotism will not rule me. Tell me," she added, "tell me one thing before I go. You said that your course was set—what is it?"

"I remain here," he answered, quietly. "I remain in the service of Prince Kaïd."

"You—you—with Kaïd Pasha—here!" she gasped. "It is a dreadful government, an awful service—"

"That is why I stay."

"Ah, I know. You are going to try and change things here—you alone."

"I hope not alone—in time."

"You are an honest man. They will kill you."

"Then an honest man will have come by an honest end."

"You are going to leave England, your friends, your family, your place—in Hamley, was it not? My aunt has read of you—my cousin—" she paused.

"I had no place in Hamley. Here is my place. Distance has little to do with understanding or affection. I had an uncle here in the East for twenty-five years, yet I knew him better than all others in the world. Space is nothing, friend, if souls are in sympathy. My uncle talked to me over seas and lands. I felt him, heard him speak."

"You think that minds can speak to minds, no matter the distances—real and definite things?"

"If I were parted from one dear to me, I would try to say to him or her what was in my mind, not by written word only, but by the flying thought."

She sat down suddenly, as though overwhelmed. "Oh, if that were possible!" she said. "If one could send a thought like that!" Then with an impulse, and the flicker of a sad smile, she reached out a hand. "If ever in the years to come you want to speak to me, will you try to make me understand—as your uncle did with you?"

"I cannot tell," he answered. "That which is deepest within us obeys only the laws of its need. By instinct it turns to where help lies, as a wild deer, escaping from captivity, makes for the veldt and the watercourse."

She got to her feet again. "I want to pay my debt," she said solemnly. "It is a debt that one day must be paid—so awful—so awful!" A swift change passed over her. She shuddered, and grew white. "I said brave words just now," she added in a hoarse whisper, "but now I see him lying there cold and still, and you stooping over him. I see you touch his breast, his pulse. I see you close his eyes. One instant full of the pulse of life, the next struck out into infinite space. Oh, I shall never—how can I ever—forget!" She turned her head away from him, then composed herself again, and said quietly, with anxious eyes: "Why was nothing said or done? Perhaps they are only waiting. Perhaps they know. Why was it announced that he died in his bed at home?"



"I cannot tell. When a man in high places dies in Egypt it may be one death or another. No one inquires too closely. He died in Kaïd Pasha's Palace, where other men have died, and none has inquired too closely! To-day they told me at the Palace that his carriage was seen to leave with himself and Mizraim the Chief Eunuch. However it was done, whatever the object, he was secretly taken to his house from the Palace, and that his brother Nahoum, whose place I now shall hold, seized upon his estate in the early morning. I think that no one knows the truth. But it is all in the hands of God. We can do nothing more. Thee must go. Thee should not have come. In England thee will forget, as thee should forget. In Egypt I shall remember, as I should remember. Thee must leave to-morrow. Thee will permit me to take thee back to the hotel? Thee should not have come alone."

"Thee," she repeated softly. "I love the Quaker *thee*. My grandmother was an American Quaker. She always spoke like that. Will you not use the *thee* and *thou* in speaking to me always?"

"We are not likely to speak together in any language in the future," he answered. "But now thee must go, and I will—"

"My cousin, Mr. Lacey, is waiting for me in the garden," she answered. "I shall be safe with him."

She moved towards the door. He caught the handle to turn it, when there came the noise of loud talking, and the sound of footsteps in the courtyard. David opened the door slightly and looked out, then closed it quickly.

"It is Nahoum Pasha," he said. "Please, the other room," he added, and pointed to a curtain. "There is a window leading on a garden. The garden gate opens on a street leading to the Esbekiah and your hotel."

"But, no, I shall stay here," she said. She drew down her veil, then taking from her pocket another, arranged it also, so that her face was hidden.

"You must go," he said—"go quickly." Again he pointed.

"I will remain," she rejoined, with determination, and seated herself in a chair.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

## The Sign

BY LILY A. LONG

HOW beauty fills the world!  
Men strive and sin,  
And higher heap the burden of Earth's ill,  
And weave a web of wrong for her,—and still  
'Tis beauty fills the world.

No blot in all the world!  
The creeping green,  
The water flashing down in shining ways,  
The light that breaks in drenching color sprays,  
With beauty fill the world.

If beauty fills the world,  
Then all is said.  
The secret joy of one small perfect flower  
Were proof enough of God,—His love, His power,—  
And beauty fills the world!