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OTHELLO

The names are music: Othello, Desdemona Other names echo down to us freighted with all the beauty of the greatest poetry and song—but none that carry a story more distilled, more compelling, than these two.

Emil Ludwig tells their story with all the colour of Renaissance times—the passion for beauty, sensual and intense; the inventive daring that could conjure new destructions in war—or a heavenly new magic of voices and viols called "opera"; the tensions, the intrigues, the nobilities of dying Venice—old power unfitted for a new world. It is a fine portrait of Othello, the man of power whose honour matched his strength, whose nature commanded the undying friendship of the truly great in Venice - Titian, Aretino, Monteverdi —even against **the** bitter opposition of patricians who could not bear the eminence of an Arab foundling.

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OTHELLO

[Continued from front flap

The hate of the white nobles against the brown admiral leads to his downfall, and at the same time the calumny spun around' him and his wife's adultery leads him to her murder. The two passions of love and race consciousness, that remain in the background for Shakespeare, govern this powerful novel, indeed a brilliant variation on a great theme.

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OTHELLO

A NOVEL

by

EMIL LUDWIG

1949

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PREFACE

No one but Shakespeare can claim authorship of the Othello legend known throughout the world. He had read a tale in a collection of Ferrarese origin which was printed forty years before his own play. That had been a brief and quite uninteresting story, far below the standard of the great Italian novels out of that epoch. All that Shakespeare found there was a hazy prototype of his Iago and a confused plot nearly bare of human interest.

What then was there in it that galvanized the poet when he read the story?

The Moor of Venice.

The fact that it was a Moor, who as a plain officer of the Venetian fleet took his young wife with him when commanded to sail, was of no more importance to the Ferrara author than the other facts of his invention. The great portrayer of mankind, however, stressed the importance of race in the events of the drama. Still, he does not make of the race problem the decisive factor in the account of the marriage. In fact, Shakespeare has taken over from that arid tale no more than two names and a story about a handkerchief. That a masterpiece should have sprung from that is due to the brilliant way of handling the two principal male characters.

The experts have failed to find an historical basis for this story; neither could they discover records of a Moor holding the rank of general in Venice, for a vague report in an ambassador's letter is no evidence at all. Thus a world figure has grown out of an unimportant invention of no historical foundation.

In the novel which follows here, I have attempted to develop the plot by means of the race problem, and nearly all of it happens in Venice and not in Cyprus. It is not an historical novel, as its two heroes never lived.

Yet the book does have a flavour of this form of writing, as I have stated that a Moor, yea a Moor, was Admiral of the Venetian fleet.

Another motive for writing this story was my wish to portray in it the figures of Titian and his friends, who have dwelt and wandered

CHAPTER I

IN a dark narrow passage a figure crouched motionless, gazing intently through a flat, windowlike opening into a large, dusky hall far below. Her left cheek was pressed close against the wall, her head slightly tilted to catch an occasional word of the conversation. An observer might have taken the grey, muddled form for a sibyl or witch, weaving an evil spell.

But there were no observers in this forgotten passage, and when a chair creaked downstairs or a few words, spoken more loudly, penetrated the silence of this hiding place, the crouched figure shrank back into the shadowy darkness of a corner. On no account must she be discovered. It was not a witch, but a girl of fifteen, the daughter of the house, who had crept up here to watch the scene below.

Hours ago, when the doorkeeper had whispered to her who would be coming to-day at four, she had planned to steal into this disused passage, where she and her friends had often played hide and seek when they were children. It was full of cobwebs now, and the little window, which had been kept open for ventilation in the summer while her mother was still alive and kept the house in order, was now blind with dust.

First she had waited down in the kitchen, listening for the arrival of a gondola at the main entrance of the palace on the Grand Canal. She could tell by the sound of the waves whenever a gondola approached the house. Suddenly she had slipped over to the heavily barred window and peered out. Yes, it was the expected visitor. She recognized the livery of the gondoliers, and the Great Dane, alert and obedient. Quickly she ran up the old winding staircase, her shoes in her hand, and took up her post at the high, small window above the reception hall.

She had been there now for perhaps half an hour, but only once in a while could she catch a sentence, for her father's thin old voice did not carry very far. Only when the visitor raised his full baritone did she understand clearly. But she could see the visitor. Luckily for her, he had taken the heavy green velvet chair she had earlier moved a

few feet toward the centre of the room. She had also ordered the servants to place the little table with the wine and the cake next to the green chair.

"If my arm were to bump against the window," she thought, "or if I had to sneeze! Good Lord, if I have to sneeze, I am surely lost. A soldier's ear takes in anything. And he will get up and look around, for he must be used to spies, and—he might notice that someone is eavesdropping on State secrets."

At that moment the visitor turned right round, as though he had really noticed something. But he did not get up. Raising his voice, he said:

"Your lordship speaks of the things that I owe the republic. I have tried to pay this debt through my services. To-day we are quits, and if I cannot get the fleet under my command now—and I mean all the fleet—then I shall have to find another one."

The girl was frightened. But in the next second she had a sensation as if lightning and sparks and stars appeared before her eyes, turning in circles with ever-increasing speed. It was an apparition of light such as sometimes precedes a sudden inspiration. When it had passed, the figure in the room below appeared doubly clear before her eyes. He had pushed back his purple, gold-threaded cloak from over his left knee, thus exposing his dark purple knee breeches and the silken hose over his sinewy leg. He had put his foot slightly forward; his whole figure was tense, eloquent of the demands he had just made.

Senator Brabantio, the host, was chairman of the war and fleet council, and his voice carried much weight in any decision concerning the supreme command of the fleet. The visitor before him, who since his last victory over the Turks had become the hero of Venice, was loved by the people, and feared by council and senate; and he had come to discuss privately with the old gentleman those things that soon he would demand publicly. Everyone knew that sooner or later the admiral would ask for the supreme command. His boldness, the story of his exploits, was common knowledge in all Venice: from the convents to the taverns, from the Ducal Palace to the Rialto. It was nothing new for a *condottiere* to ask for supreme powers, and both the senate and the Doge would have granted his request without further hesitation had it not been for one obstacle, a seemingly insuperable bar.

Othello was brown—he was coloured. Nobody knew where he came from, even he himself had but the vaguest notion. As he had been brought up by Christians and Venetians, his lowly descent might have been overlooked. There had been an admiral before him who came from the people and not the nobility. But Othello was not white. He was obviously an Arab, probably from the Barbary coast; and although he looked much the same as hundreds of tanned seafaring men of white origin, the people had nicknamed him "Il Moro": the Blackamoor. With his noble Arab features and his orientally flexible figure, he looked no more like a blackamoor than Lodovico Sforza, the famous Duke of Milan, who also was called "Il Moro" because of his dark complexion. From her hiding place the girl gazed intently at the visitor. Neither of the two men spoke, and the senator felt that after so momentous a question he was entitled to an equally momentous pause. From upstairs Othello could be seen in three-quarter profile: his dark cheek, his bold, aquiline nose, and his closely cropped beard, just beginning to show some grey, as did his temples.

Under his cloak he wore a dark doublet, unadorned except for a narrow silver band that, deep under his collar, ran from one side of his chest to the other and seemed to isolate his warlike head and shoulders. His gloves, which he had taken off on his arrival, lay folded next to the untouched glass of wine and attracted the girl as if they had been his hands.

"I wonder whether his lips are really narrow?" she thought. "Perhaps they are only hidden by his beard. What a beautiful curve his bronze forehead has. The blue vein on his left temple has just appeared. The Superior at the convent had two, but they sagged down. If only I could touch his hand, his right hand. He looked rather sad when I saw him for the first time, standing like a statue on the poop of his galleon. Of course, it was two miles out, and I only saw the outline . . . But to-day he is fiery. I wonder how long he will stay."

Her father's shadow slowly shifted. Then she saw him coming toward the visitor, obviously with the intention of shortening the visit, since he was not in a position to answer yes or no. With his snowy, short beard, a cap on his bald head, he slowly approached the admiral, while the latter, remaining seated for the moment, was forced to raise his eyes to the senator.

"Oh, the whites!" the girl thought, "I can see the whites of his

eyes. Perhaps he is going to stab father now? Nonsense. He is only waiting." And then she heard the familiar old voice that had chidded her so many times:

"Your services to the republic are so great that you dread liberty to decide to whom you want to offer your further services. All my life I have tried to judge men only according to their merits and their wisdom, but I did not always prevail with my views."

Here he changed his tone. His visitor rose and stood next to him now, both men leaning over the table as though the wineglasses had been a document they were studying. They had turned their backs to the little window, but the girl ventured to move her head yet closer to the opening, and heard the end of the conversation quite clearly.

"When do your lordships intend to come to a decision?"

"The next meeting of the council is on Wednesday. I shall bring up the subject."

"Can I count on your personal vote?"

"You know that I don't yield to prejudice. That is why I was not elected doge at the time."

At the word prejudice, Othello straightened, drew his cloak more closely about him, fastened his belt, and took up his gloves. Simultaneously the girl withdrew from the window and slipped back through the passageway toward the staircase, which she descended with catlike bounds. Downstairs she lifted one foot after the other to put on her shoes, and had just time enough to remove the combs from her hair and place them anew, so that she should not appear dishevelled as though she had been doing housework. She had the presence of mind to place herself with her back to the main entrance, as if she had just come into the house.

The plan did not work. For it was not her slow-moving father who opened the door, but the excited visitor who flung the door wide open. Othello stood on the steps and the girl in the middle of the hall exactly as if she had been waiting for him. He looked at her, and immediately becoming the courtier, gave a slight bow. He did not smile, nor did he speak. Since the girl was unable to utter a word, both stood silently face to face.

The old gentleman, following slowly to see his guest to the door, **had** now reached the steps and looked somewhat uneasily at his

daughter. He then turned to the visitor and presented her, as one would a child, since she had not yet been introduced to society.

"My daughter has only recently come back from the convent."

Othello did not hear him. For the girl who continued to look him straight in the eye without saying a word, struck him like an apparition. His excitement, aroused by the word prejudice, seemed to grow with this new surprise, as a cork is thrown up by one wave and then borne farther by the next. For the moment he wondered whether this beautiful apparition was a saint or an inquisitive girl, while his experienced eye told him that her figure was not that of a child but of a fully developed maiden. Above her unadorned, soberly coloured house-dress, her exuberant gold blonde hair, the heavy plaits circling her head, appeared to him like a miraculous helmet on the head of a beggar girl. Both of them had, during this mute encounter, the feeing of unreality that one sometimes finds in old legends.

She was so startled that she did not dare to move. But he was man of the world enough to know that a smile would now be indicated; and advancing towards her without holding out his hand, he asked from sheer embarrassment a question obviously addressed to her father.

". . . And what is the young lady's name?"

"Desdemona," she said softly, and made an embarrassed movement halfway between the grave curtsy in a sarabande and the bob of a schoolgirl before the doge. In this manner Othello and Desdemona first became acquainted with each other.

The old gentleman began also to smile now. And drawing his daughter a little towards him, encircling her shoulders with his arm—a gesture which seemed to her unbearable—he pointed to the visitor as if to a strange animal.

"And do you know who honours our house to-day?" he asked her.

"The Admiral," she said.

"So I am not unknown—in Venice?" Othello exclaimed, hearing his own meaningless and stumbling phrase with annoyance. But Desdemona pulled herself together, clutched her father's hand, and said with a firm and almost beseeching look in her eyes:

"You are the victor of Cyprus. We learned it in the convent. You saved the republic." She spoke these words like a schoolgirl reciting her lesson, and Othello, regaining his composure, said, smiling:

"That was only a skirmish with the Turk."

"Oh, no," she cried stubbornly, as if called on to defend the honour of the Republic of Venice, ". . . no, you saved the republic at Cyprus"; and slowly and gravely she added, "my Lord Admiral."

"And what did you hear of Cyprus?" he asked.

"Our largest colony after Corfu," she answered, and with a touch of mockery at her classroom wisdom she continued:

"There are seven strong towers and a gigantic courtyard with forty cannon."

"Really forty?" he laughed. "I should have thought you were more interested in the aloe, the amber, and the myrrh from that island for use on your dressing table——"

"I have not got a dressing table, yet."

"Well, surely you have seen the various perfumes of Cyprus on display at the Merceria . . ." and he was about to add that he would take pleasure in sending her some, when he suddenly remembered the scene of a few minutes ago and the terrible word prejudice. Feeling that he could not make any sort of advance in this house, he suddenly chilled, courteously bowed to both father and daughter, and left the house. His gondoliers made haste to cast off; he stepped into the craft and disappeared from view under the awning over his seat. The Great Dane stood in front of him sniffing his legs as the gondola moved down the canal.

He did not know that the girl was watching him from one of the barred windows of the palace, and that she viewed with jealous envy the huge dog standing at his master's feet.

CHAPTER II

THE din of the hammers at the arsenal paralysed all speech, and many visitors kept their mouths wide open to lessen the strain on their ears. But the hundreds of slaves and workmen, both black and white, who were hammering thin sheets of iron on to the sides of the galleons that were under repair, or who turned a screeching crane or wound up long chains, were immune to the noise. They had learned to shout short questions into their neighbour's ear and to cup a hand over their own to receive the answer.

Most of them were almost naked, for it was hot in April, and the arsenal, which lay at a distance of some six or seven bridges from San Marco along a large, newly constructed basin, did not enjoy the shade of other houses. The ships, both large and small, looked dwarfed, for the arsenal had become merely dock and repair shop, while the real arsenal, the station of the fleet, lay far away from the eyes of the great city, beyond the wreath of islands that formed the lagoon. There the coastal strips, where the republic's greatest treasure lay, were carefully watched and patrolled; but here there were no secrets, and only the inexperienced spy would have come to snatch the drawing for a new rudder, or to sketch an improved piece of gear.

Othello, walking around in his black tunic without armour, in long black hose and low shoes, a cap on his head, would not have been distinguishable as the dominant personality, or recognized by his colour, for here every face and body was deeply tanned. Yet everybody knew him, and since he had given orders not to greet or salute him during work, the silent, serious faces only turned toward him for a moment with the age-old expression that mutely asked the powerful master when he would grant rest and liberty to them.

The man following him was a real blackamoor, a sombre creature of indeterminate age, constantly on the alert though obviously not concerned for himself, who scrutinized suspiciously everyone around. He was like a bloodhound, never playful or hasty, but always in secret readiness to leap to the attack. His gait was slow, almost dragging, but light, and he held his square head slightly bent as if ready to

charge. His master, who liked to surround himself with Arabic sounds and appearances, had called him El Kashef, the scout. No one knew where he had found him, but for many years Othello had not been seen without this shadow. To the popular mind El Kashef was a part of Othello, as was the Great Dane, whom his master, however, did not take along to crowded places like the arsenal.

Stopping beside a galleon in dry dock, he saw two naked men trying to fit a sheet of iron under the fourth of the twenty rowing benches. Their grunting and swearing indicated that they were not making much headway with their work. Othello threw his cane to his slave, hoisted himself over the wooden ship's bulwark, and once inside, asked for the tools. The workmen crowded round, for all of them secretly hoped to see the admiral fail. It took him some time to find a way of moving the iron sheet to the exact position where, lying flat on his back, he could nail it to the bench. Then he slowly pushed himself out, still on his back; got up, jumped over the ship's side, had his clothes brushed, and walked away.

He knew that the sailors would hear about the incident to-night in the taverns. Such a gesture meant more to his men than a victorious battle, especially because on such occasions he never scolded or gave obvious advice. When they said that such behaviour was due to the fact that he himself had once been a galley slave, he did not mind. On the contrary: that he had been in captivity and had escaped only years later belonged to his destiny, and he made no effort to hide it. The noblemen who had been admirals before him and with him considered this attitude in bad taste; but Othello cared more for the confidence of his men than for the praise of his colleagues.

The small white house at the edge of the arsenal in which he transacted part of his business and received callers, was protected against the noise outside by very thick walls, and a conversation could be carried on inside without undue disturbance. As he approached it now, two Germans who had been waiting for him began to outdo each other in exaggerated and obsequious bows. He knew one of them, a man with light blue eyes that looked out with an air of seeming harmlessness from his blonde moonbeam face. But Othello had discovered some time ago what lay behind their innocent gaze. During his various adventures he had learned that nothing was more indicative of a person's character than his face; and he habitually scanned expression,

manner of speaking, and gestures to test an individual's trustworthiness.

Always when he had followed reason instead of instinct, he had been disappointed. As an experienced seaman, he gathered all his information with his eyes: the impending storm, the jealousy of a rival, the treachery or faithlessness of a servant. He talked little and laughed even less; but constantly endeavouring to increase his knowledge, he was now at the height of his career at the age of fifty, less exposed to dangers than other people of his rank and position. From a lonely childhood and a long, hard apprenticeship, he had risen to power because his pride was hungry for it. Had he been born the son of a nobleman, a white man, without the ambition of the coloured man, he would never have risen so high.

He knew that, and he had made an issue of his colour and of his unknown birth, for he was determined to show the world—and himself—how far an Arab foundling could go.

Throughout his life he had felt the effects of race prejudice, and because of that he never allowed himself the slightest indulgence in this respect and always stood up for people who were scorned on account of race or creed, even if their character or beliefs were strange, and, indeed, repulsive to him. Such were his feelings towards the Germans, who were then a growing commercial power in Venice, although nobody really liked or welcomed them. Othello disliked the man before him partly because of his square head and his fat stocky neck, but chiefly because he was a Lutheran. Yet he received him. As for the Venetians, the republic obtained its copper and iron and steel from the Germans and sold them in exchange great quantities of cotton, glasswares, and spices; the Senate had therefore always treated the German merchants and commercial agents stationed in Venice with tolerance, so that the Pope complained that Venice had become a haven for heretics, where all forbidden and heretical books from Germany or Switzerland could be procured.

Othello looked at his visitors. One of them was agent for one of the great iron firms of Augsburg. His name was Hans Binda, and his family came from Berne. Wherever it seemed to be to his advantage, he freely professed himself to be a follower of Zwingli. Where it was not profitable, he avoided the issue and feigned ignorance of such matters. The second man was long and thin, and had a habit of looking at people with a slight slant of his head, as if peering from below. He

was introduced to Othello as the new consular agent, Ernst Schurck. As the three men went into the little house, Othello noticed the sour expression on El Kashef's face. They all sat down, Othello first.

After having looked over a drawing and a sheet of figures which the fat German handed, he gave them back and said:

"Artificial rainfall to destroy the enemy! We had such drawings fifty years ago by Leonardo da Vinci. The device never worked. Anything else, gentlemen . . .?"

"These are the designs for our new cannonballs that we make in Ulm. If your lordship would . . ."

This time Othello did not lift his hand to take the paper.

"Our shells are made in Brescia as you may have found out."

"A mere copy of ours, your lordship," said Binda sharply. "Besides, we now have a new gunpowder that smells so acrid that the eyes and noses of the soldiers are rendered useless. Our mercenaries have seen hundreds of Frenchmen at Pavia rendered unconscious by it."

"You should show it to Contarini," Othello said, and turning to the other man he added aggressively:

"And you, Consul, have obviously come. . . ."

"Only consular agent, your lordship."

Othello leaned back in his chair and continued unsmilingly:

"You have come here, no doubt, because of the three Germans who lost their lives when we captured one of your ships. A most regrettable incident. But should our patrol boats notice another of your galleys in our waters, my men would again obey the orders of the republic and capture it."

Schurck bared his teeth for a moment and then said sharply:

"Your lordship will be pleased to remember that the republic could not undertake a second expedition against the Turk without our metals, or for that matter without our corn from Lubeck and Danzig. Also, the Emperor. . . ."

"Which emperor? Ever since the great Charles died, we hear of a number of princes beyond the Alps, without a leader. The Turks are our friends, Consul. We buy from them what we cannot grow here, and we pay them without delay. What we can produce on the Terra Ferma we don't even buy in Lombardy, and our Terra Ferma extends now as far as Bergamo. We cannot buy our war machines in Nuremberg merely to show our tolerance to heretics."

"We have not noticed much of this tolerance," Binda said, and laughing disdainfully he added:

"Last Saturday works of Melanchthon have again been burnt at the Rialto. Such actions are very harmful to our prestige. In our own *palazzo,* the Fondaco, we are being watched. We cannot row ten strokes before your police know exactly where we are going. The Venetians abroad, on the other hand, have their inns and churches and bathhouses in Beirut, and in Alexandria they have a whole archipelago. . . ."

"But not in Frankfort, as far as I know," Othello interjected.

Schurck now spoke again. "May I be so bold as to remind your lordship that our friends the Fuggers can invest their money just as well with the Turks____"

"Which they have done already, money is their only allegiance. The republic has far more assets than liabilities in foreign countries. If you have an official complaint from the house of Fugger, you will do well to present it formally to my government."

"There is no official complaint—but in Augsburg they are highly indignant about the scurrilous pamphlets Signor Aretino has posted on the bridge here. That swindler, the son of a trollop, is held in high esteem by the Senate, and if. . . ."

Othello had risen and walked towards the door. "In my house you shall not say anything against Signor Aretino. He is the friend of the Doge, the friend of the Pope, and above all he is my friend. If you came to see me, it had better be on some business connected with the fleet."

As the two Germans made their low bows in the doorway, they almost collided with another visitor, who had obviously been waiting outside. Before the door closed they heard the friendly, cordial tone with which Othello greeted his guest.

"Did you see that?" asked Binda, when they sat in their gondola, talking to each other in German.

"What, the man? Who was it?"

"That was the Spanish ambassador. Do you understand now?" Binda leaned back on his cushion and smiled with great satisfaction.

"To call me consul—just to spite me. I should have called him doge! Why did he talk against the Emperor?" Schurck asked his companion.

"To please your duke, of course, to whom he hopes you will report it."

"Certainly not. And this black hound that guards him, who is he?"

"Don't you see?" asked Binda, who was still smirking and now nudged his friend with his shoulder. "Don't you see? He wants to appear as white as possible, therefore he keeps this ugly black shadow. He wants to appear as tolerant as possible, therefore he receives us—heretics."

"But are not converts usually rather fanatical?"

"He is no convert. He was brought up as a Christian by a priest. But he has a bad conscience because of his skin, which proves his Saracen origin. And that is why he wants to show everywhere that he holds Mohammed, the Pope, and Luther at about the same level. He is the only one who does not dare to throw us out. I have managed quite a few things through him, for instance the liberation of Molinari; you know him probably as Mueller, who was indicted for his heretical speeches about salvation through faith."

Schurck yawned. "So what. Salvation through ducats, that's what I believe in. Can't we do anything with the general?"

"Contarini?" exclaimed Binda shrilly; and quickly putting his hand over his mouth and looking around to see whether anyone had heard him, he continued softly: "Worst kind of reactionary. Bursting with conceit. He never received me."

"He will receive me though," said Schurck. "I have letters, letters from the Landgrave of Hesse and Duke Albrecht which he will respect,"

"Nevertheless, he won't buy our gunpowder."

Schurck became annoyed. Shaking his fist in the air, he shouted, "Why the devil did they send me here then?"

The gondola swerved abruptly at this moment to avoid another craft, and the gondoliers swore angrily at each other. Schurck had fallen over on his friend from the sudden movement.

"That is what you get for invoking the devil!" Binda laughed and helped Schurck back on his seat. And with the superior smile of the man who knows, he said;

"Did you hear how they shouted and cursed each other? That is Venice for you. Men move about in beautiful gondolas and the Moors

that row them wear gaudy silks and pointed shoes, but at every corner they bump into each other, and if they don't spit into each other's faces, they hate each other venomously. I tell you, Ernst; listen to me. I have studied them for five years. The whole of this splendid, sea-reaching power is built on decaying piles, just like their palaces. If it were not for the many cats around here, the rats would have gnawed through the foundations a long time ago, and all the splendour would have been submerged. Othello is one of the chief tomcats, and because he is a bastard and half a nigger he is keener than the rest of them, the Contarinis and the Grimanis and the Falieris. He has seen the danger. But he comes too late."

"You talk like our professor in Heidelberg," said Schurck. "I see nothing of decay. Only power and the greatest fleet in the world."

"And nothing but hirelings for officers, against whom the galley slaves will rise some day!" continued Binda with fervour, for this was his favourite topic. "Do you know that none of the young nobles here go to sea any more? They much prefer to quarrel on the mainland, to build villas about one of Titian's models, and quench their lust with some old courtesan. I looked deep into the abyss when I ordered lace from impoverished countesses here."

"Did you order them for Regensburg?" asked Schurck, who was more interested in business.

"I have nothing to do with Regensburg. We are working for Hesse—and we don't choose to be mistaken for anything else, mind you."

"German unity!" Schurck said softly. "Just you wait: we'll bring the Moor to terms yet. ..."

CHAPTER III

"WERE your experiments with the new brigantine satisfactory?" The voice of the Spaniard rose above the hammering outside; the two men stood behind the window panes with their hands behind their backs, as officers do when they are supervising something but are far away in thought, and do not want to betray their impatience by the nervous tapping of their fingers.

Don Alvaradoz was at least ten years younger than Othello, He was dressed in the fashion of Madrid, which was stiffer and more formal than that of Venice; and like all courtiers, he copied the ways of whatever monarch happened to be ensconced on the throne he was serving. Thus, his moustache was drooped sadly exactly like that of the pale, misanthropic Philip II. But Don Alvaradoz was full of life, as if his moustache had been twirled upward; especially to-day, for he had come to see Othello on a momentous issue, and undoubtedly by special order from his sovereign.

Othello, sensing the Spaniard's courting attitude, was very reserved. More than that—he was undecided. His pride would have welcomed an offer from Spain, but the past and a certain natural loyalty bound him to Venice. In this situation he was rather like a happily married woman who finds her charms confirmed by the impetuous advances of an admirer, yet remains unwilling to yield to them. Nothing was certain at the moment. If the Senate should refuse to make him grand admiral, if they should decide not to give him the whole fleet, but should choose, because of those "prejudices," another, say perhaps Gritti, then he would turn his back on Venice.

"I have tried this model once only in battle," he now replied to the Spaniard, as though he had been a rich shipowner, and the other a prospective buyer. "If I am not mistaken, you have a similar model?"

"There I am out of my depth," replied the other, turning away from the window. "All I know of these things is that my friends always assure me that Venice has not only the greatest fleet, but also the greatest admiral!"

Othello offered a seat to the Spaniard and then sat down himself,

indicating by a formal bow that he took this praise as a mere formality. Then, however, he looked straight into the ambassador's eyes to express his willingness to listen to any, even the strangest, proposal. His plain black attire offered a sharp contrast to the gold-braided splendour of his visitor, who had dressed, presumably on purpose, as if he were going to make an official state visit. Both men were conscious of this contrast, both of them proud of their dress, which seemed to symbolize their different origins. Neither of the two, Spaniard nor Arab, whose fathers had been mortal enemies, was going to yield an inch to the other. The Spaniard began an oblique approach.

"We now also export wool," he said with a deliberate pause in the middle of his sentence, ". . . now that England is out of the game."

"But we import wool products from Scotland into Spain," Othello added quietly.

"The finished products, yes," answered the Spaniard; but he saw that he had better leave such matters as ship models and wool trade out of his conversation. His companion was too well versed in these things.

"All these shopkeeper problems bore me," said Othello morosely.

The Spaniard took his cue. Moving slightly forward on his chair, he asked:

"And what would interest your lordship?" He dwelt on the title, which he had avoided for the last quarter hour.

"America," said Othello without a moment's hesitation. "I liked it in Cuba, and since I sweated there as a cabin boy, I would not mind giving the orders there for a change. If the treaty between the most Christian King and our republic should bear fruit, we might arrange a little gondola ride across the Atlantic."

His smile did not deceive the Spaniard, who knew that Othello had used the expression 'to give orders' advisedly. He smiled back, and said vivaciously:

"The treaty in honour—but the 'gondolas' in the West Indies fly the Spanish flag!"

"Have you been there?" asked Othello.

"No. But my grandfather accompanied Columbus."

"On which voyage?"

"On the third . . ." replied the Spaniard hesitatingly, since it was on that trip that the Spaniards had thrust Columbus into chains.

"But he had nothing to do with Bobadilla," he added, smiling apologetically. "Anyway it was your people, the Italians, who gave us our greatest seafarer."

"But not the Venetians, alas," said Othello, who could not forget the old rivalry between Venice and Genoa.

The Spaniard, who, like everyone else in Venice, was aware how proud Othello was of his Arab descent, decided to try that subject, his previous compliment having somewhat misfired.

"There is no doubt that the greatest soldiers were Arabs. Nobody in Spain has forgotten that it was the Caliph of Cordova who conquered Sicily for our king."

His smooth tone annoyed Othello, and he replied rather rudely:

"Shortly afterward the same king, Ferdinand, drove the same Moors out of Spain. It is probable that my forbears too, fled to Algiers at that time."

This was the Spaniard's chance to broach his subject. "All the greater the honour for my country—and also for your lordship—if you would return to Spain in order to give orders: as you suggested before."

Othello drank in these words; Don Alvaradoz had hit the spot in his heart most vulnerable and desirous. He looked silently at his visitor to encourage him to further declarations.

"Did not your famous forbears of Venice also change masters? Where did Colleoni start, he who now rides his bronze steed on the Piazzo San Paolo? Did not Leonardo da Vinci change masters again and again? Did Caboto not become an Englishman, and Vespucci grand pilot of Spain? Titian paints his finest pictures for my master, and Aretino writes his best sonnets for him; both these men are your close friends, if I am not mistaken. All Madrid re-echoes the fame and glory of Venice. The treaty exists; and if it should come to blows with the Turks, who would be more qualified than your lordship to lead our combined fleets? If you would join us, no golden chain of office, saving that of the King and the Grand Inquisitor, would be denied you."

Othello was in a dream, although he did not avert his eyes from the Spaniard. "To return?" he thought. "To return to the place where I was kidnapped, enslaved, and then rescued—return there to command? To show those shopkeepers in the Senate how the greatest king in Christendom can snatch their admiral away from them. Perhaps

to find my mother's footsteps in the sands of Granada or Algiers . . . To open the ancient mosques again for the worshippers of Allah . • . perhaps. . ."

A crash broke into his dream. Somewhere in the arsenal a heavy beam had fallen on iron, interrupting the steady drone of the hammers. Alvaradoz had observed the silent man with mounting excitement, for his own advancement depended on Othello's answer. Whoever succeeded in bringing the admiral to Spain, might also hope for a golden chain. Othello recovered his composure. As he did not wish to dismiss so important a visitor by rising from his chair, he indicated by the tone of his voice that the interview was at an end.

"I am obliged to your lordship for the honour you have been kind enough to offer me. But give me time to think it over. The council has been in session for three years now, and sooner or later they must come to some agreement in Trent. The fate of Europe will depend on their decisions, and even King Philip might want to revise his plans at such a moment."

Don Alvaradoz got up and held out his hand. Othello grasped it with sudden warmth and said cordially: "Come and see me informally and as a friend. I will offer you the best Xerez, and we shall drink to . . ."

Suddenly he paused. He did not want to give preference to either country, and so he continued:

". . .to the memory of the Emperor Charles—if you admire him as much as I do."

When Othello landed later at his palace just at the end of the Grand Canal—the same building which to this day bears the name of Desdemona—the Great Dane stood on the steps to greet him. His front paws were wet from the waves that lapped against the lower steps; his tail waved joyously, but his big square head bore the unchanging serious expression that he had for his master—and in common with him. He pushed his head under Othello's right hand, but the master reached for a small package that his servant held out for him.

Inside, he examined the writing, and opening the carefully folded wrappings, he found a silken handkerchief in which were wrapped two small twigs of laurel tied together with a strand of golden hair. Slowly he called to mind all the fair-haired ladies he had met in Venice.

Finally he recognized the sender and smiled.

CHAPTER IV

HER tresses hung loosely over both her shoulders as she caressed them instead of combing them. Her room at the top of the *palazzo* opened on a small canal and was usually rather dark, but to-day it was lighted by the late afternoon sunlight, which, refracted obliquely from the water's surface, danced and trembled on the ceiling and the upper part of the walls. In this light her room was rather like a summer boat on whose awning the sun and the water had painted a thousand stars and lights.

The small room in which she had stayed when she came home on holidays from the convent, and in which she had now lived for several months, was furnished with the ornaments of a girlish fantasy, all carefully hidden or placed in such a way as to attract the least attention, for she was not really allowed to have anything in her room except her *prie-dieu* and the Madonna above it. Her bed was high, and in accordance with the fashion of the time, one had to climb up two steps to reach it. It had no posts nor curtains and quite against tradition, she had moved it into a corner and had placed in its stead at the centre of the wall, a fine old crystal mirror with a frame of delicate glass flowers. It was fine Murano work, which her grandfather had bought years ago, and which since the death of her mother, had become available—and probably forgotten. Now Desdemona sat in front of this mirror and let her golden hair ripple through her fingers. Her narrow lips and her chin were slightly raised, her lids half closed as she tried to see the outline of her up-tilted head in the lower part of the mirror. She wore a long, lace shift, which was probably also a relic of her mother's. The shimmering play of reflections from the canal, the slight pulsation of the afternoon that rose through the open window, and her dream—above all her dream, which had held her captive ever since *the* encounter—all this increased her sensuous mood.

She gave herself up to daydreams. But suddenly she saw again the same scene that she had seen the other day in a kind of lightning and radiance, when she had heard Othello's voice. It was a wish, but also a promise; she saw herself sitting on the winged lion of St. Mark's and

handing the admiral's baton to Othello. The wish, it seemed, was an old one, the promise, shining new. She had seen a similar scene once, painted on a ceiling: the female figure white and silver, the man black and silver. Only this time it was she, and the man was unmistakably Othello.

Her dream seemed endless, but perhaps it was only a few minutes before she heard a knocking at her door. She asked who it was and immediately recognized the voice of her friend Maria. Hastily slipping on a dress she opened the door.

"Maria!" she said, and embraced her with such force that the other cried:

"Oh, be careful—my hat!"

Maria Contarini, a year older than Desdemona, had chestnut brown hair, her hips were fuller, but otherwise she was slender and of the same delicate complexion as her friend.

"How pale you are. What is the matter," she asked as she put her hat aside.

"Nothing, it's just my heart," Desdemona answered and with a gesture that was typical of her, she pressed her hand on to her heart.

"Who has crossed you? Antonio?"

"He is a devil. You can laugh, you have no brother. Since his return from Istanbul he poisons this house and the Senate as well."

"Why worry about the Senate?"

Desdemona turned away abruptly as though to fix a comb in her hair. Then she sat down beside her friend, took her hand with a fixed smile, and said in a worldly tone:

"And when does my Maria intend to take her Federigo?"

"Oh, my mother takes such a time to prepare my trousseau. One moment it is the coat of arms on the bed linen that is not the way she wants it, because the talon of the eagle is too short; and then again she cannot agree with the Vendramins on the church where we are to be married. It cannot be *in* San Marco because of the old family feud with the proctor there. And now they are discussing the house in Murano, which we are *to get,* the *Loredanzis won't sell* under *eight* thousand in gold, which father does not want to pay. I shall probably be an old maid before they have finished!"

Desdemona opened a drawer and took out a parchment book on

which she showed her friend the word Plato printed on the title page. Then she opened it and read a passage proposing that the supervision of the ideal state be given over to women.

"Well, what am I to do about it?" asked Maria, after a pause, Desdemona embraced her impetuously and kissed her full on the mouth, so that Maria pushed her away.

"Is that all you learn from Plato?" Maria cried. "You really are too crazy, you know."

"And you are too patient, Maria, with your coat of arms and all your Byzantine formalities. Don't you ever feel like running away with your handsome betrothed? Like Bianca Capello, do you remember?"

Maria was now watching her friend attentively. Leaning back in her chair she asked:

"Are you in love?"

Desdemona laughed shrilly. After a pause, she asked:

"Has Federigo any influence with his father?"

"A great deal, I think, why do you ask?"

Desdemona drew the footstool close to her friend's low chair. Then she took a deep breath, as one who prepares to divulge a most sacred secret. Finally she said softly:

"Maria! Old Vendramin is in the War Commission together with my father. There are four or five men. In a few days they will name a new admiral for our fleet. Othello must get the supreme command. Otherwise the republic is lost!"

Maria laughed. "What nonsense you talk! What do you know about commissions—and about Othello?"

"Did I not tell you about last autumn. . .?"

"That you saw his returning galley from the convent window, and on the poop ..."

Desdemona stared down at the floor, and moving her hands as if she were drawing the scene, she continued the unfinished sentence.

"... And on the poop stood the victor of Cyprus, and I saw how sad he looked, and how lonely. • . ."

"That is a lot of romantic nonsense, and typical of you. As though one could distinguish a person from San Lazzaro to the Piazzetta, let alone an expression."

"I felt what I could not see with my eyes."

"**And** you have **never** forgotten him since?"

Desdemona hesitated, a long pause. Then she made up her mind and said: "I have seen him again."

Maria became curious. "No? Really? In his gondola?"

"Downstairs, in the hall."

"Oh! Was he nice?" Maria's tone of fashionable lightness was darkly contrasted by her friend's, who continued:

"He had a thin silver band across his chest, His beard was flecked with grey. His voice was dark and metallic, like that of the bell on the Giant's Belfry. When he pushed back his cloak, I saw his left leg in dark silk hose. And when he turned towards the door, he turned on his hip—like that! . . . But he did not touch my hand."

"How exciting!" Maria exclaimed in her high voice. "What did you talk about?"

"Cyprus."

Rapid steps approaching the door interrupted the confidences of the two girls, and Desdemona's brother entered the room. Antonio, a man in his middle thirties, had a certain elegance about him, but his olive-coloured face showed the ravages of lust and avarice and made him look old beyond his years. He was Desdemona's half brother and twenty years her senior, which made him assume the role of a father, rather than that of a brother. Now that the old gentleman was in his dotage, Antonio felt that he was the master in the house, and he had loudly opposed Desdemona's return from the convent.

"Good day, Maria," he said. "What are you reading there?" And turning sternly to his sister he asked: "Who gave you Plato? You keep to the legends of the saints and don't give yourself airs!"

Desdemona, hurt by the tone of his voice and encouraged by the presence of her friend, jumped up and cried:

"Give me back that book! I shall ask father whether I may read it or not."

"Enough that I forbid it."

His sister turned pale as she cried angrily: "You have no right to forbid anything in this room!"

"I will go through every one of your drawers and turn them upside down to show father what sort of things you read." And he proceeded energetically towards one of the chest's closed doors; but Desdemona jumped up quickly and posted herself with her back against it. Maria took up the same position in front of the other cupboard.

Antonio felt that his masculine pride was being offended. "Do I have to push you away by force?"

Desdemona, seething with anger, held her position and threw out words she had long held in her heart.

"I suppose you are going to use the tactics you used at the Celesti'na. You know, Maria, last Easter, Antonio and his boon companions broke into a convent and danced with the nuns until sunrise! Yes, Lucia told me. I can't repeat it all. Do you think perhaps that I have hidden a man in my closet, as in the shameless novels that lie around in your room?"

Had it not been for Maria, Antonio would have struck his sister.

"You perverted child!" he shouted, shaking his arms in the air, since he could not use them otherwise. "You spied on father and the Moor the other day. Yes, I know everything. And to put an end to such pranks we are going to send your blackamoor to the farthest corners of the earth, and you shall go straight back to the convent."

He turned around and walked quickly through the open door. The girls heard him trip several times on the staircase. Desdemona ran to the head of the stairs, and in her loudest voice, so that the servants could hear it, she cried: "You only want my inheritance! That's why I am to end my days in a convent! But you just wait: there are still other powers in Venice!"

And she slammed the door as it had not been slammed in the women's apartments since the building of the palace two hundred years earlier.

CHAPTER V

THE ceiling of the medium-sized hall in the Ducal Palace where the Senate council usually met, had only recently been adorned with new frescoes, mythical scenes which, however, did not interest the senators very much. On the long wall, opposite the windows, sixteen raised seats had been constructed in the richly carved panelling, in a shallow semi circle whose ends protruded only a little from the wall. In the middle of this semicircle was the seat of the Doge, not higher than the other chairs, but with a dais-like superstructure that gave it the character of a throne. The enormous seats were obviously no more comfortable than the choir stalls of the prelates, and immediately before meeting some of the older senators had cushions slipped onto them to compensate for their lack of natural upholstery. To doze during a lengthy assembly was not easy, since some carved angel or demon awakened the lawmaker promptly and painfully as soon as he leaned back.

The "Council of Ten" really consisted of sixteen senators, who were elected annually amid a thousand intrigues and machinations, for this small group represented the real power in Venice: it ruled, it appointed and dismissed the highest officials, it distributed government contracts and managed the millions of the treasury under a none too strict control. It also decided *de facto* over the life and death of any Venetian through its powerful tool, the Inquisition: those three men, who sat in a room directly adjoining the council chamber, could summon any citizen, never to let him go. From this small room, a stone staircase, dreaded by every Venetian, led up to the detention chambers under the infamous lead roofs, and down to the oldest dungeon of the city. Many had disappeared in these prisons; traitors and spies, as well as personal enemies of powerful senators, and once in a while even a hero of the republic.

To-day the senators, in their dark red velvet gowns, displayed a lively interest in the proceedings, for the discussion touched the very foundation of the republic's existence and the dangers that beset it. Only the old Doge, in the central seat, seemed to present the traditional picture of majestic calm, with his white, short-cropped beard and

his purple gown. Under his high ducal cap, he seemed to remain silent, thereby showing his impartiality and maintaining his physical strength, which was severely taxed by the heat and the heavy accoutrements of his dignity.

Antonio Brabantio, who as one of the younger ambassadors of the republic occupied the difficult post at Istanbul, had just finished his report and stood in front of a small table almost at the end of the semicircle. His dress was even more magnificent than at home, and he had a habit of swinging his wide sleeves through the air, like an actor, especially when he was not too sure of his arguments. As he lacked the inner confidence of his father, and experience had not yet filled the gap, his eyes darted from one senator to another as though he were trying to assure himself of their favourable attitude. For while he was constantly attempting to climb the ladder of social and political advancement—secretly he already considered himself the appropriate candidate for the centre seat of this council—he was also constantly afraid that some rival might undo him by the same intrigues by which he had managed to obtain his present position a few years ago.

Anyone observing Antonio as he answered the questions of the senators, parrying their arguments, trying to defend his policy, might have asked himself whether he was witnessing a trial; all the more, since Antonio stood at a small table two steps lower than his seated interlocutors. In fact he was both prosecutor and defendant, according to whatever ideas the various senators held, but he only advocated one thesis. This singlemindedness was the sole thing he had in common with his sister.

"——And so I can find no better argument, no fitter end for my report to your lordships, than to try to evoke before your mind's eyes the picture that presents itself along the Bosporus and beneath the old castles every week now—since our ships need no longer anchor at Gallipoli: the flag of St. Mark flying on our galleys, hundreds of brown slaves carrying the goods of the north and west ashore, voices shouting back and forth and horses neighing lustily while bales and boxes bearing our signs accumulate on the docks. Often have I stood there and watched such scenes. From the labels on the boxes, from the names of the firms, sometimes even from the smell of the merchandise, I could tell their provenance: woollens from Scotland, sugar from Cyprus, linen from Reims, cloth from Chalons—all carried on our

ships; and then our own products: damask from Vicenza—glassware from Murano—lace from San Paolo! What a glorious feeling for a Venetian, to serve the greatest sea power on earth!"

Antonio made a short pause, as though expecting applause for his aria. But the grave senators seemed unmoved. So he collected his papers and plans, and looking over his shoulder towards the doorman, a gaudily dressed blackamoor, he gave the sign to bring his chair. For it was an ancient privilege of a Venetian ambassador to sit after finishing his report.

A deep, calm voice, contrasting markedly with Antonio's high and excited tone, was heard. It belonged to a man of middle age with the rank of *cornaro,* or count, for the Venetians, despite their love of titles and coats of arms, were never quite sure about these titles. His clear, cool gaze betrayed the business man, while his intelligent face expressed benevolent approval. Although he did not like Antonio's flowery style, he agreed with him on the satisfactory condition of Venetian export, which had enriched his forefathers.

"Your lordship," he said without raising his voice, "has certainly also seen what our ships put on board to bring home. Our figures for Turkish corn are slightly lower than last year. Also the spice trade has dropped rather more than can be explained by the new shipping route around the Cape. In other words, has your lordship gained the impression that the new sultan, like his father, favours the trade with Egypt, and that he has come to an understanding with the French concerning these exports?"

Antonio rose nervously, stepped behind his chair, and leaning on the back answered rapidly:

"The friendship between Selim and King Henry is in no way directed against Venice. And if some day this should be the case, Spain and the Pope would be on our side!"

A smile flickered through the row of listeners, and a deep voice called out: "Are you so sure, my son?"

Now everybody laughed, and even the stern Doge seemed to take the incident in good part. With these words Antonio's father had cut short any hostile comment and Antonio was quick enough to force a smile, which did not suit him at all.

"I merely expressed the hopes of all your lordships here," he said by way of explanation. "But concerning the spice trade, I should like

to say that our galleys bring more pepper, ginger, clove, nutmeg and cinnamon to England now than the Spaniards ever exported to that country. The Venetian ducats are popular currency from China to Calcutta. There can be no doubt: we have the Spanish pepper trade well in hand!"

"Alas! For a million ducats' lease," someone interjected. Another voice asked: "It is then your belief that the entire colonial situation of the republic is a favourable one?"

"It was never better!" Antonio cried with verve. It was just this question he had hoped for. He welcomed every chance to advocate peace with the Turks at any price, for as a diplomat he feared nothing more than the rising power of the army.

"Our fleet," he continued, "is our pride. But its task is not to fight: rather, to protect our commerce. The Turks are horsemen and not sailors. We, on the other hand, are primarily sailors and not horsemen. We should therefore keep a balance with our great rivals. The only way by which the republic can grow to ever greater power and prosperity is that of peace. Selim does not want a war. If he refused us the use of the canal on the Nile, which the defeated sultan of Egypt might have permitted at that time, it does not mean that we are cut off from the trade with India. Selim loves Venice. Only recently he has ordered damask from us for his harem to the amount of three thousand ducats, although he himself fabricates the finest damask. He received me twice as often as the other ambassadors, and he recently sent me three hundred ducats as the customary cabinet money, which is a hundred ducats more than he sent to the English ambassador."

"Dandolo's nephew got three hundred and fifty," 'someone called.

"Yes, indeed—but afterwards the sultan had him arrested and thrown into prison," Antonio retorted heatedly. "Our merchants use our cloths twice," he continued; "first they sell them new, and after they have been used for a time they buy them back and give them to the harem. Our books are being read in Istanbul by the Greeks as well as by the Turks. Everywhere our name is in the ascendancy. A German pamphlet only recently praised our policy of supporting the weaker nations and pointed out how well we fared with this policy. The Duchess of Ferrara has ordered four globes from Paris and a map of the world for her four sons——"

"What sort of order is that?" a voice asked. "Besides, how do you know about that?"

"I have known it since yesterday," Antonio replied haughtily.

"I only wish," a man now said slowly, "I only wish that they would accept our map of the world in Paris for good—or at least for the next hundred years."

The older men laughed approvingly. But a clear, almost shrill voice, cut them short. From the very first word it was obvious that this was going to be an attack on Antonio. All faces turned towards the speaker, Senator Loreto, whose sharp and finely chiselled head with the long nose and narrow mouth gave him the appearance of a humanist scholar among the merchants. He had obviously nothing to do with their spies, their intrigues, or their avarice; presumably he owed his membership in this powerful group to his extraordinary capacity for far-sighted planning, his dispassionate and objective view of opportunities and dangers alike. Had a painter come into this council, he would have picked him out immediately for a philosopher among all the shopkeepers. When he began to speak, his hands gripped the arms of his seat firmly, and remaining seated while he spoke, he gave the impression of someone clinging to the sides of a vehicle tearing down a hill.

"Your lordship has apparently acquitted himself very well of his difficult tasks in Turkey. I should like, however, to contrast this brilliant picture of our situation with a slightly darker one. The Turks became seafaring people long ago, just as the old Romans became a seafaring nation by necessity—or as we ourselves became sailors. It is not by accident that the present sultan calls himself Lord of the Black and the White Seas. The Pope is a sick man. His successor may side with the French, as the former Pope has done. The Palazzo San Marco in Rome, which lately has been called the Palazzo Venezia, is a gift that can be called back—as can his benevolence towards the republic. And we cannot go to war because of that. Since the death of Charles I, there has been no German emperor of power or stature. The son is but a poor counterfeit of the father, and for that reason alone there is no relying on Spain. The commercial treaty between England and Turkey is directed against us. The bank of Priuli collapsed because of this treaty and had to be supported by the government. We stand alone against a power that to-day rules supreme from

Hungary to Alexandria and Baghdad and shows no sign of decline—neither in power nor in potential expansion. It is true that Khair el Dhin, the pirate king of Algiers, is also a threat to the Turks: but at the crucial moment he will throw in his lot with them and not with us Christians."

He coughed lightly, giving himself a moment to look around and see how his words had affected his listeners. Since everyone was looking at him expectantly, he continued:

"During the last thirty years we have lost a number of positions in the Mediterranean. We have not gained a single new one. Without a battle we have given up Rhodes to the Turks, betraying the Templars and the Catalans in their fight against them. The sultan covets the possession of Cyprus; and had it not been for the admiral's brilliant tactics, we would have lost it just as we lost Rhodes. To lose Cyprus means to lose Africa. The people of Cyprus, or at least part of them, await the Turks as their so-called liberators. The ambassador has not repeated this year what he told us last year: namely, that the sultan had asked him during dinner—between *pila* and the sherbeut, as it were—whether Cyprus could not be had by purchase. To me, this remark is an indication of Selim's growing presumption. He is fully aware that we have used the money yielded by the land taxes during the last two years, not for the construction of galleys, but for the embellishment of this palace. I feel that the republic is—as Aretino might put it—beginning to descend from the climax of the third act into the doubtful regions of the fourth. I grant you though, that it is unpleasant to face such facts."

At this moment the Doge leant slightly forward in his seat, lifted his right hand, a gesture that in this council took the place of a bell, and asked in his hoarse unsteady voice:

"Does your lordship wish to make a proposal?"

"No, no; continue," a few excited voices cried together.

The speaker bowed slightly in the direction of the Doge and said, in a changed, almost cheerful, gay tone:

"My proposal is to strengthen the fleet and to unite all its branches under the command of a grand admiral."

"That is a matter for the War Council," someone objected.

"Not in an emergency," replied Loreto, "which has always before led us to speedy action."

"What emergency? We are not at war with the Turks!" cried one of the senators.

"We have to be prepared, and more—we have to reckon on a war, either with the sultan or with the pirate king, or with both of them in conjunction with France, because they know that at the moment we are short of six warships. I further propose that Othello be given the rank of grand admiral and all powers delegated to him. If any of your lordships can nominate another man of equal merits, and of equal popularity with the fleet and the people, I beg of you to do so."

This question put his opponents in a difficult position. Someone cried half-heartedly: "Alviano," and two or three others repeated that name.

"Alviano is an excellent admiral," Loreto continued; "but ask the sailors, ask the men at the Rialto, and you will find that he has been forgotten."

One of the oldest men, Senator Falieri, now decided to say something, and in his excitement was quite unconscious that he had got to his feet, which was not the custom in the council. His immobile, sculptured features did not betray any excitement nor reveal his motive. But it was no secret that he, the head of one of the oldest families, spoke for all the nobility, whose pride could not tolerate such a proposal as Loreto's.

"Your lordships," he began with considerable effort, "your lordships may enlarge the fleet and transfer its command to a grand admiral, if the situation calk for such a decision. Othello—we all know it—has saved the republic. But as far back as the annals of the twenty-four oldest families of Venice go, there has never been an instance of a coloured grand admiral among us. *De facto* he may exercise full powers—he does that already to-day. But if we formally confer this honour, if we place him before the eyes of the republic, nay, the whole world, at the head of the greatest fleet, then we have to subordinate to him all rear-admirals, commodores, commanders, captains, and officers. And if such an action will not lead to a revolt of the people, it will lead to a revolt of the nobility. My ancestors fought at the conquest of Byzantium five hundred years ago, and I am an old man."

Suddenly he seemed utterly exhausted; his right hand trembled

as he slumped back on the seat. A long dark silence followed his speech. The Doge looked around to see whether anyone wished to speak, for it seemed to him inappropriate to adjourn the meeting at this point, since he was one of the nobility himself and since it was his duty to maintain a strict neutrality. Finally, a bald-headed, stocky man, of intelligent features, rose, presumably in deference to old Falieri, who had also risen, and began to speak.

"I cannot boast of an ancestry as old and illustrious as your lordship's. We Alberghetti are not inscribed in the Golden Book, and our family has only been in the service of the republic for about two hundred years. But we were as your lordships may recall, the founders of the Venetian artillery, and some of this knowledge has come down to me in the War Council. Now, I have had much to do with Othello, and I can tell you from my personal experience that none of us, gentlemen, and none of our sons is as expert in the construction of a galley, in the construction of a gun, in the science of trigonometry, as Othello, who did not waste his years of study at the university of Padua drinking and dancing, as we do—or, to be more exact: as I did. The fact that he was victorious at Cyprus was not due to chance, or to the favours of the war god, but rather to the stupendous knowledge and the astounding circumspection of this man, together with the invaluable experience of an adventurous life at sea. We hold the Golden Book in high honour; and the name of this man without a father, this kidnapped and rescued Moor, is not to be found in the pages of the Golden Book—and never will be. Yet Khair el Dhin is the son of a potter, wild, uneducated, and yet one of the greatest seafarers of our time."

Antonio had listened to the discussion, pale and trembling. Now, standing behind his chair, he raised his voice and said:

"If your lordship brings up Khair el Dhin as an example, I may perhaps make so bold as to ask whether the flag of St. Mark should be entrusted to a Mohammedan just because he is good at reading the charts and knows how to handle armaments! In Istanbul it is not permissible for Christians to hold a post in the government. Why should we take someone who, by birth at least, is a Mohammedan?"

The Doge interrupted at this point, for most of the senators had left their seats and had come forward on the floor in little groups.

"May I ask your lordships to resume your seats?" he asked quietly,

and was immediately obeyed. The hush that followed his words did not last long, however, for Alberghetti could not restrain himself.

"How can the ambassador call a devout Christian, who, when he was received by the well-known Padre Domenico, and brought up in the true faith—I cannot see how the ambassador can call this man a Mohammedan."

"A Mohammedan by birth, I said," Antonio retorted. "Besides, every man in Venice knows II Moro's preference for all things Arabic, in his servants, his house, his clothes, his reading. He hates the Turks because they have subjugated the Arabs. But this hatred becomes a danger for Venice if he is given supreme powers in the fleet, and if the outcome of a battle at sea depends on his decision. The republic cannot afford to have a Turk-hater at the head of its fleet. We need a friend of the Turks. Therefore, even if Othello were white, one could not safely entrust him with this position. It would be considered a hostile act by the Sublime Porte if we solemnly conferred the highest powers on the victor of Cyprus."

"That is the very reason, the very means for keeping Turkish arrogance within bounds!" his opponent called out.

As passions mounted, the Doge slowly descended the two steps from his seat and thus gave the sign for the council's adjournment. Everybody stood in their places until the Doge had left the council chamber. Then friends and opponents collected in little groups and continued their arguments, accentuating their points with appropriate gestures. One of the older men came up to Antonio and asked:

"How much pin money did you say you received? Three or four hundred?"

"Three hundred," Antonio answered brusquely and walked away.

"A lot of money," the other said to a friend, "Just consider: it costs the sultan about fifteen hundred golden ducats for pin money alone, and that is only counting the great powers, mind you. This young man is quite right: one should be on good terms with people who have so much money!"

CHAPTER VI

LUCIA had spent her life at the Palazzo Brabantio. There she had served as a young girl, there she had grown old. She had seen the death of her first mistress and had been present at the subsequent marriage of the elderly master with a young and ambitious woman. She remembered the hushed days shortly before her second mistress's death, and she had felt—together with the whole household—the hopes and disappointments of the senator. She had witnessed Antonio's wild pranks and had watched the only daughter of the house grow from childhood to maturity. She had no love for Desdemona, nor had she cared for the girl's mother. Lucia had never loved anybody except her long dead mistress. Her sense of duty, however, had grown through the years into a sort of dogma that had taken possession of her. When the young girl returned from the convent, it was expected and understood that Lucia would serve her.

In the feud between brother and sister she was entirely on Desdemona's side and had, therefore, some enemies among the younger servants, who disliked Desdemona for her imperious manner. Also, Antonio had seen to it, with occasional presents, that .the servants were on his side, for he disposed of his father's money as if he had already inherited it, while his sister was penniless and had to enlist Lucia's help to get a piece of lace or a shawl out of the old chest. Although the senator had lived with his two wives without passion, but equally without scandal, the noble old house had been shaken too much and too often by political intrigues, and it had seen too few happy days, to emanate an atmosphere of well-being.

"We shall go to San Lazzaro, this time, for the Ave," Desdemona said to Lucia, who was standing in the hall downstairs ready to carry her mistress's coat. Though Desdemona did not throw her coat at the old servant—she was too well brought up for that—she avoided looking at Lucia as she handed it to her, scrutinizing her shoes instead, the only part of her apparel in which she dared display some elegance when she went to church on a weekday.

Silently the old woman followed Desdemona into the gondola, and

gruffly told the first gondolier their destination. She disliked any change from the set routine—and usually they went to San Sepolcro for the evening service.

The gondoliers, too, disliked to go "so far across the sea," as they put it, and they hurried their pace so as to be back in time for their various pleasures.

When they had come to the island and had alighted at the gate of the spacious monastery garden, Desdemona and Lucia made their way through the eastern courts towards the main entrance. There they were received by an old Armenian who had spent most of his life as doorkeeper in this place. But women were not allowed within the enclosure of the monastery itself. When Desdemona had told the doorkeeper they had come to see Padre Domenico, she was ushered into a waiting room. This priest enjoyed a number of privileges, for he did not belong to the order, and only stayed here as a guest. After a successful spiritual career, he had retired to this monastery some years earlier to end his days in peace. It was therefore quite natural that he should receive Desdemona in his own room, as it was also quite normal that Desdemona left Lucia alone in the waiting room and ascended the steps behind a young friar who led her upstairs.

In the meantime, Padre Domenico combed his thin white hair, straightened out his long white habit, and hung the short black coat over his shoulders. There was no necessity to put his desk in order, for it was always the very picture of meticulous care, without which he could neither work nor think.

Desdemona had been a little afraid of the dark narrow cell to which the bare staircase and halls of the monastery must be leading her, and she was surprised when the door opened on a large, almost festive room. Its occupant had seen her face once or twice in her father's *palazzo* when she was a child, but now, at fifteen, she seemed a mature young lady.

"What a wonderful room!" Desdemona exclaimed softly as she looked round. "Why, it is almost like—like the sacristy at San Marco."

"The statue of the Saviour over there is by the same Sansovino," said Padre Domenico, pointing to a small marble statue in a niche—a work of the famous master, showing all the sophistication he could impart, even to his religious works. This statue, in a way, was the key to the old priest's life and character.

. The girl looked carefully about her, only half listening to what her host was saying; the things she saw and heard were only important to her as far as she connected them with him, who must have come here often to visit the priest who had cared for him as a father. Both her natural curiosity and her education, however, led her to notice the beautifully adorned room.

"What a lovely fireplace—and how the books are arranged on top of it!" she cried now, in a rather childlike voice.

"It is an old assembly room that the brothers have been kind enough to give me. This incense here comes from the south of Arabia via Baghdad and Tabriz. The sultan pays ten pounds in gold for the hundredweight and sells it again for sixty pounds. Othello brought it to me."

"His name," she thought; "—now the ice is broken—in a way." But, out loud, she continued to talk about the fine things in the room. "And you have put the reading desk just before the fireplace—so that when you read in front you get warm at the back."

The old priest laughed so at her naive expression that she blushed and quickly apologized. A small white and yellow dog, very old and almost blind, now came up to her and sniffed her clothes. She bent down and whispered to him; and he sniffed her black silk shoes, which smelt quite different from his master's leather slippers. Padre Domenico, for his part, looked at Desdemona with the eyes of an expert; he noticed her elegance, not only from her shoes, but from little things that she had added to her plain black church dress: he looked approvingly at the black lace mantilla that she had cleverly draped to reveal her gold-blonde hair. He was well aware that these careful touches were not meant for him; but he could not know that they were meant for Othello—although the girl could not in any case expect to meet Othello here in his foster father's room. The old man knew that she had not come merely to pay him a call, and he could see that she had something on her mind. But he could not know that his young visitor had come to hear about Othello: she had not even admitted to herself that she had come to learn something of his youth, be it only a boyish prank he had played when he was as old as she was now—in the hope that this would make him appear less remote. The girl really believed that she had come here to save the republic.

She was still wondering how she could find an appropriate opening

for the subject she wanted to talk about, when the bells of the monastery church began to toll. Both the old priest and the excited girl immediately bowed their heads and murmured in unison the ancient prayers, which a millennium had worn down to an almost unconscious habit. Neither of them thought of anything while they prayed, and a minute later they had forgotten all about it. Desdemona walked over to the arched window, from which the lagoon and distant Venice could be seen. The priest looked, as a painter would, at her slender figure beside the window, and after a little pause said casually: "I hear that Othello has visited your father."

"Thank God," she thought. "He brought it up." But she showed nothing of her excitement and answered gravely, as if she were speaking on orders of the Inquisition:

"Yes, I believe the admiral has recently been to see my father."

The padre laughed. "You say that so solemnly, as though it were a State secret."

She felt herself chill and go pale. There was a tone of derision in the priest's voice which made her think for a moment that she had been betrayed. "What else, father?" she answered. "The admiral would not come to see us on private business."

During these words she had to fight hard to keep her tears back, but try as she would to conceal it, her agitation was obvious to the old man. It was all the easier for him, since his foster son had informed him in a few casual words of the short encounter in the hall of the Palazzo Brabantio. He knew now that her coming had something to do with Othello, and he wondered how he could get her to give him further information. But Desdemona suddenly threw her head slightly back and began to speak passionately in a firm voice.

"Father, you hardly know me at all. You only know my father, and my brother. I came here as a stranger and I have to hurry, for Antonio—my brother—spies on everything I do, and the gondoliers downstairs will think it strange if I stay more than a quarter of an hour at my prayers. Now: certain things that you have undoubtedly known for some time through your foster son have come to my knowledge. He is considering leaving the republic if the admiral's baton, which rightly belongs to him and to no one else, is not given to him. You, father, are the only one who has any real influence with him. Nobody must know that I have accidentally—almost illicitly—

come upon this knowledge. Least of all the admiral. Surely you won't betray the secret of a girl who cannot sleep any more because she—because it—I mean. . . ."

She turned her face away because with those last words she had touched on the very core of her anxiety. It was suddenly clear to her that her concern about the republic was a secondary consideration, and she dreaded the thought of betraying this secret—of perhaps having said too much already.

Turning away, she did not see how the serene face of the old prelate suddenly grew serious, how his smooth forehead set itself in wrinkles, and his fine mouth narrowed as he pressed his lips together. But he saw how she approached the window and how she clung to the sill for support. In this moment they both were united in thinking of the same person; but their thoughts were very different. The padre, leaning back in his chair, thought calmly and methodically: "If this girl came here because she worried about the welfare of the republic, Venice cannot be far from its downfall. She probably does not believe herself that the republic is her concern, although she does not want to admit that it is the man who attracts her. She is too young to see such truths. Othello, on the other hand, who has had many an experience with courtesans and even countesses, is too old to embark on an adventure with a girl who could easily be his granddaughter, and a patrician's daughter at that. For a long time I have been wishing he would marry; and here for the first time such a plan can possibly be envisaged—but under a difficult and dangerous constellation. To break the ring that society would draw round such a pair would take iron nerves. Othello has them, of course; his Arab blood would be to his advantage there. But could the girl stand the strain? Is she in love with his fame or his colour? This can turn into a terrible affair; God have mercy on my son."

At the same time, Desdemona stood at the window and thought: "Here he must have stood many times. Nobody has told me how old he really is. I wonder. But if he were young I would not like him anyway. Those youths all look so weak and effeminate, as if they were girls. His face is hard and strong! That's why he can be calm and self-possessed. If someone could disturb this calm—if someone could melt him—even though one would get burned in the process—Just as he threw back his cloak in our house, or the way he threw open the door

in the hall—Just so will he seize a woman some day, so that she loses her breath."

During the minutes when these two were silently thinking of Othello and his future, El Kashef came into his master's study, stopped near the door, and said softly: "A woman with the padre now."

Othello without looking up from his papers asked: "Who?"

"The Countess Brabantio."

Othello, who could rely on any information his servant gave him, got up—quickly but not hastily—asked for his coat, and nodded at his Great Dane. Ten minutes later his gondola, which had been ordered to go at top speed, landed at a side door of the Cloister of San Lazzaro. He usually used this entrance, for it had direct access to his foster father's room.

Desdemona had turned away from the window long before Othello's arrival, and smoothing her hair with her hands, had asked: "Does the admiral come to see you often?"

"Not so often now; sometimes in the evening, but hardly ever in the daytime."

"You mean after the Ave?" She was desperately hoping for a surprise, and in order to hide her disappointment she returned to her former topic.

"Will you be able to keep the admiral in Venice, father?"

"This, my dear young lady, is the most comfortable chair," he said, instead of answering her question. And pushing the chair up to her, he added: "Othello's favourite chair." She sat down and blushed. The padre noticed it and was taken aback as he saw how she leaned back in the chair, and then, collecting herself, sat bolt upright. He had heard from Othello about the encounter at her father's house, but he had noticed at the time that Othello had turned his back to him while he told him about Brabantio's daughter, as though he did not wish the priest to scrutinize his face. The padre knew nothing of the laurel branch she had sent to Othello.

Desdemona felt Othello's presence everywhere in this room, and giving herself up to her thoughts, she asked almost unconsciously, "How does his Great Dane get along with your little dog?"

"She can think of nothing else," thought the priest and smiled, but aloud he said: "The Dane, like his master, spares the weak,"

Suddenly voices were heard underneath the window. Desdemona sensed immediately what had happened; trying to appear casual, she approached the window and said: "It is late. Lucia will be waiting for me in the sacristy." But no sooner did she find her premonition proved fact than she cried out in a high childish tone: "Oh look, father, the admiral is coming!"

One minute later Othello stood facing the two people who awaited him tensely; he did not pretend to be surprised to find the girl here and walked straight up to her, taking her hand, and gripping it, in his sudden confusion, as though it had been a man's hand. Desdemona, who had so often dreamed of this handshake, withdrew her hand with some embarrassment. Abdul, the Great Dane, who had entered the room behind his master, seemed to sense the tension, and carefully watching Desdemona's movements, stood poised and alert. The padre, whom Othello had forgotten to salute, smiled with amusement, especially when the Great Dane turned to him as for an explanation of the scene. All this had happened within a few seconds, even before the door had been closed again.

"Abdul!" Othello called loudly to the dog, who now retreated behind his master.

"I shall faint in a minute," thought Desdemona, and clutched at the mantelpiece.

"The boat will heel over in a moment, we will all fall into the water," thought Othello.

"My blind dog will come to seek me in a moment," thought the padre.

"That's what comes from pressing a woman's hand so hard," thought the Great Dane.

Othello, too agitated to be diplomatic, walked up to the priest and inclined his forehead, on which his foster father imprinted five kisses. Desdemona realized this must be an old-established ceremonial between the two. Then Othello turned round and said in a vibrant voice:

"El Kashef has informed me. He is quicker than the Inquisition. Since you came to see my father, I thought I could do the same." He stood close to her now, his hands behind his back, and tried to guess what scent she used. Narcissus—from Cyprus, he thought. Suddenly he moved away and brought the large easy chair towards

the fireplace for Desdemona. Then he seated himself on the marble step of the hearth. He looked much younger than his years, all the dignity that he displayed in the world outside forgotten.

In the church below the friars began to sing vespers. Softly their song penetrated the padre's room, where no one had said a further word. All three listened for a while to the chanting, but as the pause became too long and slightly embarrassing, the priest broke the silence.

"You know, the Contessa came here because she was afraid that you might leave us. And she wants to save the republic, and. . . ."

"No, no," Desdemona exclaimed violently, and blushing she got up from her chair in utter confusion. But she could not control her emotions long and suddenly burst into tears. Othello followed her every movement, and a serious expression came over his face as he looked at the priest. It was the look of a son who, in a dangerous and difficult moment, turns to his father. It was both a question and a plea for help. The old priest rose quickly, and putting his hand on the girl's shoulder he gently forced her to face Othello. Helplessly, almost as a victim, and yet surrendering gladly, she looked, her eyes still full of tears, at the man who leaned towards her, motionless, from the hearth. Othello returned her gaze, listening to the low slow beating of his heart, which was beating as it did during a storm when he stood at the helm. The worldly tone in which Padre Domenico had spoken had made their real feelings suddenly clear to them. Silently, almost reverently, they stood now before the revelation of their secret.

The chanting of the friars continued and calmed their emotional tension. The first to regain her self-control was Desdemona, who, forcing a smile, gave her hand to the padre. Mumbling something about the late hour, she bent to kiss the priest's hand. Othello rose immediately and indicated by a casual good-bye to his foster father that he was going to accompany her, not merely down the stairs, but all the way home. Desdemona, who had not even thought of this possibility, and did not really desire it, was afraid he might get into her gondola. Her heart beat furiously as they went down the stairs. It seemed an endless descent, as from a high mountain top, and when they had finally arrived downstairs and Desdemona had nodded to the waiting Lucia, there seemed to be no question as to how the **return journey would take place.**

Othello, deciding suddenly, as was his habit, pointed to the western cloister, which was still bathed in sunlight, and said:

"Come over here for a moment; at the end of this cloister there is a fine view of the Palazzo Ducale."

Desdemona thought it was all a dream. How could it be real, that she was walking alone with Othello through this lonely island monastery where no sound broke the silence except the soft lapping of the waves, and the chanting of the friars from the church.

"There you can see it—no, a bit more to the north-west—just behind the merchantman that is putting in, shortly before the third bridge. . . ." He pointed his left arm towards the city, which seemed aflame in the sunset, but he was careful to keep his distance from her. She noticed how far he kept to her right; a mile she thought, why, a million miles between us, he is really on another planet——

Suddenly she recovered her equanimity, which she had not attempted to regain on their walk through the cloister. For now she followed his arm with her eyes, and between laughter and tears in a voice Othello was to remember years later, she said:

"Out there, you know—when you came back from Cyprus on that big yellow galley—we were over there in the convent garden, on the Giudecca, and we looked over the wall with the nuns. And far back on the deck there stood the admiral, his hand on his sword—and he looked straight ahead of him as if the thousand voices that were acclaiming him were none of his concern——" Suddenly she stopped.

Othello had dropped his arm while she was speaking and now his gaze was full upon her, while she looked out towards the point on the horizon where she had seen him returning as a victor two years ago. From where he stood he saw her in silhouette, and for the first time he saw this girl as a woman. With experienced eyes he followed the lines of her figure from her golden head down to her hips. While she dreamed of his fame, he saw nothing but her youthful beauty.

Desdemona turned round and walked rapidly down the cloister towards the garden gate. Lucia, awaiting her, nodded to the gondoliers. Othello ordered one of Desdemona's gondoliers to run across the monastery garden and have his own gondola brought to the larger gate. After a few minutes it arrived; the way in which Othello had ordered the gondolier and the latter had obeyed him without even

looking at his mistress for further permission had established the admiral's authority over the two waiting women as well.

Both he and Desdemona were too tense to fill those few minutes with idle chatter, so that Lucia wondered for a moment whether the two hated or loved each other. When his gondola had arrived, he motioned Lucia to get into it. He escorted Desdemona to her own, held out his arm, so that she had to lean on it for a moment, and then without asking permission, he stepped in beside her.

As they were putting out, the chanting of the friars rose louder for a moment, for the doors of the church had opened and the wind carried their song to the boats. As the girl heard the deep voices intone the *Ave Maria,* she leaned back exhaustedly in her cushions in an attitude of complete surrender. Both of them gazed at the pink and silver ripples that reflected the sunset and seemed to unite their overflowing hearts. Desdemona, her eyes half closed, saw in these colours a union of their two characters, and with a sort of sensuous pleasure she dipped her hand into the water. A second later she shuddered, for the icy shock of the cold water had seemed like a portent, cutting through her overflowing emotions.

Othello, on her left, sat upright and did not move one inch closer to her, nor did he lean back into his cushions until they approached the house. He did not look at her either, but before his inner eye he saw a flock of convent girls looking over the wall of the garden upon his triumphal return. And among them was one who had understood his mood that day. Her poetic, completely feminine imagination impressed him, for it was a new experience to him; and it seemed to him that this was what he had been looking for in all the women he had known. That she should have told him about it was tantamount to a long acquaintance, for it was both a tribute to his fame, and a declaration of love.

As the rose-coloured facade of the Palazzo Ducale grew larger and its details clearer, partly because they were coming closer to it and partly because it was lit up by the reddish glow of the sunset, it appeared to him as a prize of battle—a battle he had not yet fought—and he sensed that there at his side was another symbol of this same prize. He was most careful not to touch her, and quite contrary to his habit he put his right hand into his dark tunic lest it should betray him. Desdemona did not notice. "Silver and pink," she thought. And

she saw again the silver band on his chest which he was not wearing to-day, but which for her was forever connected with his brown head, like a frame around a picture.

All this time Othello had watched automatically the course of the gondola preceding them. As it turned now, at the Piazzetta, just to the right of the new cupola of Santa Maria della Salute, he calculated that it would be better if he were to stop at his own house, only a hundred strokes up the Canal Grande, rather than accompany Desdemona to the Palazzo Brabantio. His gondoliers had obviously had a similar thought, for one of them turned round and looked at his master, who indicated his wish by raising his hand. A few minutes later the gondolas stopped before Othello's narrow white palace.

In the meanwhile, Desdemona had also awakened from her daydream and was just thinking that when Othello got out of the gondola he would have to shake hands with her. But the silent ride and the strength of his emotions towards the girl had forced him into such reticence that he omitted the usual forms of leave-taking. He jumped on to the steps of his house, waited until Lucia had changed gondolas, and giving a military salute, remained standing until the dark gondola had borne away the white girl whose foot had not touched his threshold.

CHAPTER VII

THREE men were sitting at the massive square table whose fourth side was occupied by a great blue majolica vase containing a bold arrangement of glowing flowers. Past this vase the man in the centre could look into his garden, which sloped gently from the house towards the water and the island beyond. The house stood on the Birla, the north side of Venice, looking out on the. towers of the Giudecca.

If a stranger had entered the room where the three men were sitting, he would immediately have recognized the man in the middle as the host, as a king among men. This man, whose years now numbered three score and ten, was none other than Titian himself.

He was not wearing the golden chain shown in the portrait of that period, nor had he changed from his dark cloak, since there were no female guests. He had been at work in his studio just before the two others had arrived, and had merely laid a white linen collar round his neck and shoulders when he went up to supper. He sat there and conveyed enormous chunks of hot ham into his mouth, displaying a giant's appetite. This ham, considered the best in Italy, had come to him by special messenger from Friuli. Also all the other courses, vegetables, fish and game, had come from different places famous for the production of each speciality.

The Master—for that was the name by which he was known in Venice, notwithstanding the fact that there were a half dozen first-rate masters in Venice at the time—ate with the zest and energy of a soldier. But the way he took care to keep his white, fairly long beard clean, the way he avoided staining his bushy moustache with the sauce, the manner in which he turned his mighty head every now and then to his neighbour on the right, whom he seemed to know less and whom he studied therefore the more; and also the way he placed his tanned hand on the lace cloth in front of him—all this showed that in his development from peasant to king, he had never passed through the stage of the man of the world. Everything on Titian's head was great—eyes, ears, and above all the nose, and since age had diminished

the fullness of his flesh, his bony structure stood out all the more prominently. At that period of his life the man whom God had destined to be the master of painters looked more like an architect.

His guest on the right, whom he studied intensely, as though he intended to paint his portrait, was Othello. Since the admiral was twenty years younger than his host and of sharp and narrow features, since his expression was sombre and abstracted, as if he seemed to be listening for an inner voice, he looked strange and alien next to the lusty old man, like someone who had come from the desert—or from beyond the sea. Everything about him looked foreign: his full black hair and his short cropped beard, in contrast to the white hair—obviously fair in youth—of his host, the narrow silver crescent on his chest, and the silver belt, which he had taken from his military tunic so as to indicate his profession; and even the large amethyst ring he wore on his left hand. And it was just this foreign, this strange appearance that attracted the Master.

With eager looks and curious ears the third man, on the Master's left, observed the others and thought: "Here are the three great men of Venice together in one room. Strange that none of us should have been born here."

Retro Aretino, in outward appearance, resembled the Master rather than Othello, but as his portrait by Titian shows, the resemblance was only a superficial one. For the poet and critic, then in his fifties, was driven by the spirit of challenge and strife, while Titian's serenity showed the born ruler.

"This is the famous sauce a *la Mantua"* Aretino said loudly, "which, if I am not mistaken, Alfonso of Ferrara brought back from Hungary."

"The scoundrel still owes me two thousand *scudi* for my 'Sebastian'," Titian said between two gulps of wine. But then he turned to Othello, and setting down his wineglass he said angrily:

"I think it is an outrage, the way the Senate pokes its nose into my private affairs. Just because of a few ducats in taxes they insist on knowing exactly how much money I get for my pictures. But I wrote back to them that my chief income was from a few loads of hay I get from my property at Cadore."

"And you give your pictures away," interjected Aretino smilingly, as he attacked a new piece of venison.

Titian struck the table with his hand. "Why the devil do they

concern themselves with the pictures I sell to foreign princes? Am I to pay taxes on the money I make abroad? Why—then, the admiral here would have to pay taxes on a sword he wins from an enemy and brings back as booty. I too am a soldier, and my pictures are my booty. If I were to live on what I earn here from these shopkeepers, I could not give my daughter a single pearl. Well, enough of that! Admiral, how do you like this wine? It is old Twenty-three!"

Othello was glad that the Master had abandoned the topic of taxes, which was almost an obsession with him. He lifted his strangely shaped wineglass and said: "This glass from Murano seems to be even older than the wine it contains."

The very tall stem of the pale green glass consisted of three balls over which a pinkish dragon climbed towards the flat, broad cup, so that it was quite an art to empty the glass.

Titian had asked Othello to dinner because he had heard through Senator Brabantio that the Arab was considering leaving Venice for another command. He promptly told his friend Aretino, and the purpose of this dinner was to dissuade Othello from his plans. Really it was Brabantio's idea; he calculated that Othello might listen to two prominent and independent Venetians rather than to politicians and patricians, for spiritually the admiral belonged to the same class as the artists, and the three were united in their dislike of the government and their love for Venice.

Titian was no revolutionary. He was always on the side of authority. But frequent friction with the Senate, chiefly over his unpaid taxes, and the general amorality of his philosophy, which allowed him to accept advances on pictures he was in no hurry to paint, caused him to take the side of the admiral. Aretino was one of those people who constantly change their party allegiance, but never their ideals, and his intransient character made him only too eager to take up the admiral's cause, especially since Othello, scorned on account of his colour, had saved Venice. Titian now took his glass, and without raising his voice or making significant pauses—for he was unversed in the art of proposing a toast—he said:

"May our admiral continue to be our victorious commander, and may he not take exception at the pettiness of those shopkeepers who sit over there in the pink palace ruminating how they could reduce my salary for painting their ceiling."

"And let me add," said Aretino, even stopping to eat so as to stress the seriousness of his words, "let me add that those sycophants are green with envy because the Duke of Mantua has sent me a present of two thousand *scudi* instead of giving it to them: those horse thieves who, at the recent marriage of young Dandolo, put a bowl with four thousand gold ducats on the table among the wedding gifts so that the police should book it as a dowry, though the poor girl never got more than twelve of them; those cowards who let themselves be talked into appeasing the Turks by that ambitious whipper-snapper Antonio Brabantio, whereas only a hundred years ago the Doge himself took up the sword and led the republic against the Turks. Great and victorious admiral! Believe me, the usurious patricians and shopkeepers who rule here are not Venice. What they say is spoken to the wind, to the south-west wind at that, the most evil one we have. But if you should ever hear a word against you or your fleet on the Rialto, then the time has come when you might consider with us, your friends, whether it would not be better to look for other service. You will always find us ready, we can discuss it here, or better still, in your palace, on that great wide bed of yours—in which, as I am told, you always sleep alone. Look who is sitting with you at this table. Your great-grandchildren will say that you have devoured a whole deer together with the Master and Aretino, while Aretino sat with you and ate for two, trying to figure out in his mind what would be served after the duck and the quail and the fresh asparagus and the giant eels, since he can still smell something in preparation. And then my great-grandchildren will say: 'Why that is nothing. Our ancestor sat at the same table with Othello, who was kidnapped in his youth and educated successfully, in the true faith, by that epicurean Father Domenico—successfully as far as the true faith was concerned, but with very sad results as regards the other pleasures of life.' And then my little great-grandson will ask: 'Who is that—Othello?' And I will say: 'You idiot! Have you forgotten again? Go now and write the name Othello two thousand times, and so that the name will not be forgotten again, I shall put it in my will that your son must be called Othello!' "

Aretino stopped to laugh heartily, and the three men mixed their glasses and clinked them softly. Meanwhile, the beautiful Lavinia, Titian's daughter, had come into the room carrying a basket of fruit. "Don't move," growled Titian, and without further order a little

Moorish servant ran into the studio to bring a sheet of paper and some charcoal, knowing that his master wished to jot down a few lines.

Lavinia wore a dress of pale blue damask with a pattern of large leaves, and with sleeves of pink silk that fell down to her wrists. She had watched her father and his models too often not to know what sort of picture she was posing for. As she looked silently at the guests she thought: "I might really ask the admiral for a job in the arsenal for my Giulio."

When she had put down her basket they asked her to stay, but she told them that she would join them only after the quails had been served.

Titian, who was served last, put his nose quite close to the dish and exclaimed furiously, throwing his knife on the table: "There's no pepper on the quail!"

The servant, fearing the fury of his master, explained in a trembling voice that Marco, the cook, had said that there was no pepper to be had.

Titian turned to the admiral. "You see what the Spaniards are doing to us? Since we have bought the pepper trade from them, everybody gets the pepper except we Venetians. For my 'Danae,' King Philip sent me a load of rotten rice on which I lost thirty per cent in the sale-room, and now they take away our pepper!"

Both men noticed that Othello had not really listened to what Titian was saying. He was slow in changing from one subject to another. In a low voice, as always when he was moved, he said:

"If ever I should get a statue on the Giudecca I want an inscription on it, saying I was the friend of the two great masters of Venice. My superiors"—and now his voice became more animated—"are their lordships. We born Arabs love honour more than gold; and that, our shopkeepers here seem unable to understand."

Aretino felt that Othello desired an opportunity of talking to the Master alone. Taking a pear he walked out of the room, obviously with the intention of sharing it with Lavinia.

Othello was grateful, for he knew that it was not possible to have a serious conversation with Aretino unless one were alone with him. Besides, Titian had looked at Othello so inquisitively that the latter felt safe in embarking on matters that touched him personally. Carefully he said:

"Your opinion of the senators is not wholly favourable?**

Titian finished his pear and then said: "No, it is not. They are all the same idiots; about on the level of young Antonio Brabantio. You have heard of his love for the Turks."

"Only a few words. Do you know his father?''Yes, he is an honest man.'*

"And you also know his sister?*' Othello's heart beat wildly under the narrow silver band on his coat.

"Desdemona with the white skin? Yes, she was here once and she was so excited that everything about her seemed to fly in the air. She probably hoped I would paint her." Then he made a short pause and added: "Beautiful creature. In two years she will be just ready."

"For painting?"

"Yes for painting, and for love."

Othello was as confused as a young man, and only age and long discipline enabled him to retain his composure. He changed the subject quickly.

"Are there any indications how the Senate will decide in my case?"

"Well, you know what old Falieri said," replied Titian.

"Not exactly. What was reported to you?"

The Master hesitated for a moment, wondering how much he could tell his guest. "Well, you know it anyway," he said after a while. But Othello, who had collected reports from all sources on the subject of this memorable session of the council, felt a peculiar pleasure in hearing the exact words of his enemies again and again.

"There are various versions. I should like to know the right one."

The Master hesitated again: "Why don't you ask Aretino? He knows more than the Inquisition and your famous servant put together."

"But people are more likely to give them a biased account. They would not lie to you." Othello persisted. Seeing Titian take a couple of deep breaths preparatory to answering his question, he grasped the fragile wineglass like a drowning man clutching at a straw, and strained towards the words of the Master that seemed to come from a far distance.

"Falieri is reported to have said: 'We don't want to be ruled by foreign-born slaves—like the Turks.' "

At this, Othello's hand closed hard on the wineglass, which he was holding at the most fragile spot, just under the three green balls. The glass splintered and fell to the ground and broke, the wine poured over the white lace, and his finger bled. He stammered some excuse, and instinctively, as in battle, he snatched the nearest piece of cloth, his napkin, and wrapped it round the wound. One of the Moors ran to the table; Othello rose and walked towards the hall. Abdul, who had seen the blood, took up a threatening posture and had to be called to order by his master.

Titian remained seated at the table and studied attentively the mingling of the red blood and the purple wine, wondering how he could use this colour scheme in a portrait of a cardinal. When Othello entered the room after a few minutes, he found a new lace cloth on the table. Lavinia and Aretino had joined the Master, and Othello extended his apologies to Lavinia as mistress of the house.

"You must forgive my clumsiness, and though I cannot make up for the loss of the glass, I can show you some of the things that come from our colonies, of which I have brought a few samples with me."

He clapped his hands and El Kashef, who had prepared everything and had already excited Lavinia's curiosity with the bags and boxes he had placed in the hail, now brought in his treasures. He spread a small rug on the floor, placed the things on it, and handed them one by one to his master, who explained their origin and use.

"In this little box here," said Othello, in the tone of an older man instructing the young, "we have a so-called Turkish red. It really comes from Arabia. The coral here is from the Antilles—perhaps the Master can make use of it for a decorative detail. This is Indian gum lacquer—"

"For internal consumption?" asked Aretino and laughed.

"Nonsense! For polishing, of course," said Titian.

"This is a powder for gilding—"

"Just what I need," said Titian softly, and opening the box delightedly, he dipped his fingers into it.

Othello continued with his explanations. "With this lapis lazuli which I once found on the Abyssinian coast, one can make genuine ultramarine. This damask, here, is for the young lady—if she will be kind enough to accept it. The other things are for the kitchen. Some cochineal from the foot of Mount Ararat, which I must confess I obtained by sheer piracy; I had to give a slave in exchange. This is

saffron from Cilicia, which you already know, and this little barrel contains pepper, from Algeria. I did not have it here in time for the quail, but El Kashef quickly got it from my home—so you have it for the next time."

"You are overwhelming us with gifts as if you were the Caliph himself!" cried Lavinia as she draped the damask round her. Titian sniffed at the pepper and then held up the lapis to a corner of one of his pictures to compare the old blue with the new.

Aretino also sniffed the pepper and said: "I really might have a little of this pepper so as not to go home empty-handed."

"For you, Pietro, I have the finest present," Othello replied and handed him a small ivory cabinet.

"A *kursi* for the Koran!" exclaimed Aretino and held out his hands like a child.

"But no Koran in it this time," said Othello with a smile. "It contains two tenth century Arabic manuscripts. This is the Flowers and Birds of Persia—you know—and this the Magamahs of Hariri, all love poems!"

Aretino raised the rare treasures high, and dancing around the room in the dignified Arabic manner, he sang in the monotonous voice of a *muezzin:*

"Hariri is a great poet! Alallah! Titian is a great painter! Alallah! Aretino is a great scoffer! Alallah! But Othello is the great admiral who brings presents from the East! Allalah! Alallah! Alallah!"

Titian's two Moors hid behind a large canvas on an easel in order to conceal their laughter.

CHAPTER VIII

AT first sight it would have been difficult to tell by the faces of the two men sitting in the small living room of the Palazzo Brabantio which of them was the senator and which the priest. Both were in their seventies: the senator sat stiffly on the cushioned window seat, while Padre Domenico relaxed comfortably in the old leather chair on which visitors to the house had sat for the last two hundred years. The room was adorned with two portraits representing Brabantio's deceased wives. The pictures, rather too large for the room, showed two women who resembled each other in posture, dress, and their general expression of boredom, so that it was not only easy to see to which each of the Brabantio children belonged; yet they showed a difference that was accentuated in their respective children: Antonio had his hard look from his mother, Desdemona her dreamy mouth from hers.

"If you cannot dissuade him," concluded the senator, who, for the last half hour had been trying to get some encouragement from the priest, "if your influence cannot prevail on him, you, the only one he will listen to, then the republic will simply lose an admiral. But he should at least know that if he changes service, he may be taking a step for the worse."

The padre smiled, leaning back comfortably in his cushions in contrast to the senator who bent forward eagerly, thus underlining their respective attitudes. "Of course, it might be a change for the worse. And if he thought the whole thing over, he might see that himself. But in situations like this one does not think things out. He feels offended—and he has been offended."

"I voted for him and therefore also for his colour. I am quite satisfied that a man like you has brought him up in the true faith. By the way, is it true that you know nothing about his origin?"

"The only clue I have is a small Arab silver coin the boy had around his neck. While the pirates were boarding our ship, I managed to get a small dinghy overboard, and was just about to escape in it when a young Arab woman handed me the small child with an

expression so pitiful and beseeching that I could not refuse to take him along. I remember still that I made the sign of the cross to show her that I would bring her son up as a Christian. Then I took the child and let myself down by a rope. I was not much over twenty then, and I am sure I escaped the massacre that followed only because I had made the sign of the cross. I was the only Christian on board, and the pirates, of course, were Moors."

"That happened before the fall of Granada?"

"Oh, no, much later. Othello is fifty now, and though they had been driven out of Spain then, they were still in power on the Algerian shores."

The senator listened carefully and said: "If one could read some noble origin into that silver coin . . . shall we say, some indication that he was the son of a sultan? You smile? I have no need of such proof, but my colleagues in the Senate would undoubtedly be impressed if we could tell them something like that. In their snobbery they would prefer the bastard of a sultan to the son of an honest potter from the Rialto."

"There is nothing on the coin," the padre answered, "except his name. And although the sound is Italian, it is inscribed on the coin in Arabic letters. He wears it night and day round his neck and often ponders on it. Sometimes he questions Arab prisoners, but in the last thirty years he has made no headway whatsoever."

The senator looked weary, like someone who has sought with all his reasoning powers, long and in vain, a solution.

The two men were interrupted, however, by Antonio, who opened the door, closed it and asked, when he was already well into the room, "May I come in?"

His father looked angrily at him, but Antonio turned immediately to the padre, and after a short salutation asked without any further introduction:

"Reverend father, you are the only person who could give us information about that strange visit my sister paid to your monastery the other day. She met the Moor there. It looks as if the tryst had been arranged in advance."

Instead of standing up, the old priest looked on the younger man kindly. "Oh, no, it was much more romantic than that. I was surprised by the damsel, and also by Othello; it seems strange that your

Inquisition had a finger in the pie. But they departed very soon and left me alone."

"And you permitted that?"

Now the padre laughed out loud. "The admirai is of age, you know, and I could detain the young lady in the monastery without compromising her."

"You see, Father," Antonio said now to the senator, "last Friday the Moor rode in our gondola with your daughter from San Lazzaro to his house. It is a miracle that all Venice is not gossiping about it."

The old man looked at his son furiously, not wanting to admit that he was in the right.

"And why should this have happened?"

Antonio laughed shrilly. "She is probably in love with him!"

Now the senator was startled. He looked questioningly at the padre, who returned the look with equal seriousness and was silent for quite a while before he said: "So it would appear."

Crossing his arms, Antonio cast a triumphant glance at his father. The senator rose; and, looking through the window, he mechanically counted the gondolas that lay in the form of a star at their moorings. "Eight," he thought; "usually there are seven———. Why, this is terrible. With Othello. If I say no, Alberghetti will say in the Senate that my prejudice drove the admiral into the arms of the Spaniard; and if I say yes—well, I can't say yes. I should send her back to the convent."

"You must excuse me," he said aloud. "I have to collect my thoughts and consider this problem."

Half an hour later Padre Domenico was sitting in his fosterson's palace, while a black servant poured a rich golden Xerez into his glass. The cool hall was ideal for their purpose. They spoke too low to be overheard; and, besides, El Kashef kept the servants at a safe distance. Through the closed door they could hear the calls of the gondoliers on the canal, whose glittering waves reflected the afternoon sunlight every now and then through the crack beneath.

"It seems to me," said the old man in his cheery way, "that you are doubling your stake, my son."

Othello stood with his back to the padre and looked out of the window. At the last words he lifted his head and chin in the manner

of a dog sniffing the air and waited for an explanation. "What do you mean by 'double'?" he asked.

"Well, if what I hear is true, you seem to be trying to get the Admiralty through the girl—perhaps the girl through the Admiralty."

"Is that contrary to your wishes?" Othello asked coldly.

The padre emptied his glass, perhaps to give himself courage, and replied: "The Admiralty is your due. The other matter you will have to decide for yourself."

Like a cat, Othello bounded to the table, and leaning on the arms of the priest's chair, he glared at the old man, showing the whites of his eyes in a threatening manner.

"I did not pursue her," he said, speaking rapidly and softly, "I did not even know her. She could almost be my granddaughter. Her descent does not frighten me. She obviously rebels against it herself. So far I have known only mature women. I do not like courtesans, nor do I like women who belong to other men. I have no children, and I cannot bequeath my history to anyone. Here—perhaps—there is a chance for me to find a wife and a child. I am not worried about the difference in our colours. Just as I am attracted by her white skin, she seems attracted by my brown one. But an elopement, as in the case of Bianco Capello, is out of the question with her. I could not do it. I want to be married to her in San Marco, and then I will take her to the court of Madrid. Let her brother go to the devil. If he should poison me, I can still stab him before I die." With a light tap he let go of the arm of the chair and poured himself a glass of wine, which he emptied in one gulp.

Padre Domenico sat motionless in his chair. "I wish I had begotten a son like that," he thought to himself, for he liked Othello particularly at such times. He liked his honesty and the way he mingled his various motives, as a man shuffles a pack of cards; he liked the suddenness of his emotions, the mixture of man of the world and lover; and above all, he was glad that he had talked of white and brown. Yet he believed it his duty to warn him.

"How would it be if you sat down beside me for a while? Like this—yes. As you know, I am no Thomist; but I should like to remind you of Plato."

"You taught me Plato. Sanudo in Padua taught me about the

maps, the seas, and the winds, and the Turks. All my life I have acted soberly, according to Plato's teachings. Now I am sick of it."

The old man, trying to keep the discussion on political topics as long as possible, said, "Do you realize the faithlessness of the Spaniards?"

Othello nodded.

"Really? It has no bounds; remember Cambrai?"

"I remember it."

"What is your standing in the army now?"

"They love the Moor."

"And the generals?"

"They hate the Moor."

"What is their strength?"

"Fifteen thousand horse. Altogether the strength of the army is about one third that of the navy."

"And in Spain?"

"Even more favourable."

"Do you know enough Spanish to run a ship?"

"No need. All sailors understand the Moorish dialect."

"Well—do you want to go there or don't you?"

"No, I want the supreme command in Venice."

None of this was news to the padre, but he wanted it to be repeated to him, as he had so often had Othello repeat to him a passage from the Gospel. Now he saw that he had to tackle him differently.

"It is not the first time you have wanted to do something unreasonable. Do you recall a certain evening when I advised you to leave a certain princess in a palazzo here? You were furious, you stamped your foot for the first time in forty-five years. The last time I had seen you so furious was when you were a little boy of five, and I stopped you from eating another pear because you had stolen three already that morning from the fruit basket. Now you are smiling, and you think that you have grown wise in the meantime. I suggest that we make a compromise, as we used to do in such cases. If we can manage to get you the supreme command, are you willing to give up the girl?"

"The other way round," Othello said spiritedly.

"Oh dear," thought the padre and was silent.

"Father—what are you afraid of?" asked Othello in his dark voice.

"Complications."

"If I were afraid of storm and fog, I could never set out to conquer an island."

"Have you not conquered enough?"

"Not this island."

"And if this were to sink suddenly into the sea?"

"It won't. It is shown clearly on my map."

"Until now you did not know of such an island."

"No, but since yesterday I do know of it."

"Well, then—it must be, I suppose?"

"It must be."

"It is late. Will you call the gondola?"

Politely, but coldly, Othello accompanied his guest to the door and gave him his arm over the three steps outside. But when the priest was about to get into the gondola, Othello, with one of his sudden movements, stepped one lower and proffered his forehead. Padre Domenico kissed it five times, this being the sign of the cross, according to their old custom, and departed.

CHAPTER IX

"THERE will be a scandal," said Binda, who was sitting with his friend outside a small *trattoria* drinking a glass of wine. Here, the street widened at the western end of the Rialto into a sort of square, and the *trattoria* was only a few steps from the Fondaco, the German house, which, somewhat soberly, represented Nordic order in Venice. A dense crowd of men and women of all classes, in all sorts of attire, shuffled up and down the steps leading to the bridge, constantly talking, laughing, and calling to each other, bargaining at the open stalls, which displayed a colourful variety of wares: fish, glass beads, fruit, ribbons, and the like. They were a happy, good-humoured throng who looked and felt busy, but were not in any way pressed for time.

The two Germans looked at the people with an air of boredom and sipped from their glasses. Binda, who enjoyed himself in the role of prophet, spoke to Schurck with the superior air of a well-informed man.

"A scandal of the first magnitude. You'll see what the Moor will do if he does not get his way. Aretino is his friend, and his pen is omnipotent."

"They will merely give in," said Schurck, always negative and always resentful. "They hate him; but they will give him the command anyway, because the people want it so."

"Do you see the knife grinder over there?" Binda pushed his fat neck forward to indicate the direction. "And over there—no, there under the columns—that shouting money-changer? And do you hear the man over there, at the Gobbo, advertising his pamphlets against the heretics? Well—do you think these people rule the Senate? Not for a moment. It is, however, our job to strengthen the Senate wherever we can in this particular situation. I have some connection with the Tiepolos. As long as we can keep the Moor away from Cyprus, everything is all right. But if he gets there and starts interfering with the sugar trade, the Fuggers in Augsburg will make it too hot for us. We have to think of something good."

"I thought you said that we could use the Moor for our purposes?" grunted Schurck.

"Certainly we can—as long as he is not on top." Binda was thoroughly enjoying his superiority. "As long as people are trying to get to the top, they will shower favours right and left. But once at the top—if he gets to Cyprus as grand admiral, he will rule there like a sultan; and if the sugar gets into Venetian hands, I will lose my position here as commercial agent—and you will lose yours as consular spy."

Suddenly he looked attentively at one particular spot, and nudging his friend he whispered: "Look who is coming!"

"Where?"

"There, the young girl, who is looking all around, with the old woman. Do you see her? That is the daughter of Senator Brabantio of the War Council. Pay for the wine quickly and let us follow her. One never knows. Perhaps she will meet somebody and can introduce us. In any case, it is strange that she should be walking on the Rialto at ten in the morning. She has not come here to buy fish."

Desdemona had persuaded Lucia to go with her for a stroll, as the weather was lovely and she wanted to see the new bridge at San Rocco. For days she had been trying to bring about a meeting with Aretino, whose powerful support she wanted to enlist on Othello's side in the Senate. She did not admit to herself that, quite apart from political motives, she was longing to meet a friend of Othello's with whom she might discuss him. Since she could not call on him, and since Aretino never came to see her father, her only chance was to find him near his house; for it was known that he loved to stroll on the Rialto, which was just round the corner. She had met him once at Murano, and she was sure that he would recognize her. The only danger was the presence of people who knew Aretino and who had a very fine nose for any sort of gossip.

As she was climbing the flat steps towards the bridge, she suddenly saw him, leaning over the railing and looking at a fishing boat from Chioggia. She saw how his nostrils twitched, taking in the smell of salt and fish which rose from the boat.

"No lobster for you to-day, Aretino!" said a half-naked urchin laughingly.

"There are always lobsters," said Aretino, and shaping his fingers like a lobster claw, he pinched the boy through his ragged trousers. The lad screamed and ran away; but from a safe distance he cried

loudly, so that the whole bridge could hear it: "Aretino has pinched me! He owes me a *soldo;* and when he writes a sonnet about it, he gets a ducat and I get nothing!"

A few passers-by bad stopped round Aretino; and this gave Desdemona an opportunity to approach him unobtrusively. He recognized her immediately, since he had thought of her often during these last days. But when he saw her questioning look at the crowd around them, he motioned to her with his head to go on and then turn to the right. After a few moments he stood behind her, looked at her again, and then preceded her towards the Church of San Silvestro, where he stood waiting for her behind the church wall. Lucia followed her mistress with misgivings; but neither of the three knew that the Germans were on their trail.

It was a fine spot for a quiet talk. A few steps led from the church down to the water. On one side of the steps there was a retaining wall, on the other the gardens, rare in Venice, whose trees threw a pleasant shade over the canal. Lucia sat down on the steps, close enough to watch her mistress, as custom prescribed, but too far away to overhear the conversation. The two Germans could not come up to the steps without risking a direct question as to their business. They therefore remained a good distance away.

"Is it not better here than in the crowd on the bridge?" Aretino said, and moved aside on the step where he sat as if they met here every day.

"But you will miss your lobsters," Desdemona said. His words had put her completely at ease, and it did not strike her for a moment that she was sitting here with the most famous lady-killer of Italy. Aretino savoured the entire situation like a connoisseur who smells at a wine without tasting it. He looked at Desdemona, her golden hair, her lovely face, and her beautiful bosom, and methodically and almost coldly took an inventory of her charms. For in the midst of his moral anarchy he had one principle: his friends' women or mistresses were sexless as far as he was concerned, and Othello was his friend. Already on the bridge he had seen from Desdemona's questioning look that the rumour he had heard was true. Othello's case at the Senate had already been magnified to a first-rate crisis by the gossips of the town, **and** Aretino thought that it was more than unlikely that real life should prove less romantic than a romance.

"The Master spoke of you the other day," he began.

"To you?"

"To Othello," he replied, waiting to see whether she would blush. She paled, however, and Aretino thought: Oh, dear, if she grows pale, he is lost.

I wonder whether he knows, Desdemona thought, but she said with complete self-possession: "Does he want to paint him?"

"There is no time for that. Don't you think that he will sail soon?"

"How should I know?" the girl cried with real bitterness, for that was just what she wanted to know. "Do you think that he will get the supreme command?" she added.

"That depends on your father and his colleagues."

Suddenly Desdemona summoned all her courage, and looking Aretino full in the face she said earnestly: "It depends on you, Signor Aretino! If you were to warn the senators with one little epigram such as you publish at the Gobbo, so that all Venice can read it, and repeat your sarcasms, then the old men will get frightened and will give in."

He looked at her with unconcealed delight and asked, "And what do I get for the epigram?"

"Anything you want," she answered, with the confidence of complete innocence.

"If I am successful and Othello gets the command, I shall come and kiss the tip of your ring finger—of course, in Othello's presence."

Now Desdemona blushed, and she asked confusedly, "Why in the presence of—the admiral?"

"Because he will take possession of the rest of the ship."

As she saw that she could not keep up pretences with a man like Aretino, she let her emotions take their course and burst into tears. Aretino was silent. "What a morning!" he thought. "Here I sit with a beautiful girl in a forgotten corner of Venice, and she weeps for another. And that other is my friend. And a hero. And he is coloured. He wants the supreme command and the girl as well. And I am to arrange everything with an epigram!"

She dried her eyes, smiled, and was about to apologize for her behaviour when she noticed his serious look. Without any further preamble she asked, "Has he a mistress?"

"I don't think he has one at the moment."

"But before?"

"I suppose so, I hope he did."

"Don't you think that I am—maybe—too young for him?"

"You mean to ask whether he is too old?"

"No, no. But if he were to appear with a very young wife?"

"Appear where?" asked Aretino maliciously.

"Oh, in Cyprus, or in Madrid——"

"One is never cleverer than at fifteen. I must remember that," thought Aretino. But he smiled at her and said: "It is not a question of age."

"You mean it is one of background. I don't care a fig about that." She said it with such passion that he believed her. But since he was of low birth himself, it gave him pleasure to tease the young countess; and he said complacently: "Othello has no prejudices. He does not really worry about the fact that your forbears were weavers only a hundred years ago."

For a moment Desdemona was frightened. She quickly looked in the direction of Lucia, who had fallen asleep on her step. Aretino observed her and thought that the deep prejudices of her class could never be quite overcome. He expected her next question.

"Is he not a foundling?"

"Yes; but might he not be the son of a Moorish king?"

"That's what I've always felt! How do you know?" She clutched the stone steps and looked at him full of expectation, as if he were to tell her the story of a fairy prince.

"I looked into his face—that is all," Aretino said.

Desdemona jumped up, transported with joy, and cried:

"You understand Othello! You love Othello! Help me. Help us. I only want honour for him because he deserves it. He saved the republic. Those despicable people who take exception to the colour of his skin, hands. But you understand him. The Master understands him. The sailors and the people understand him. I want to serve him! If he wants me to give my hand, I will raise both hands to heaven and pray for him!"

Lucia suddenly awoke and slowly moved over towards her mistress as a silent reminder that the young lady must lower her voice. Both Desdemona and Aretino began to laugh. As the two women prepared to go, Aretino told Desdemona that she would hear from him.

After they had left, Aretino remained sitting on the steps for a few moments. He was thinking out the epigram he was to write in order to frighten the Senate into granting the supreme command to Othello. When he got up, one of the Germans who had been waiting all this time behind the church, approached him; and after a few exaggeratedly polite bows the fat-necked Binda began: "Your lordship lost this silver button over there at the bridge."

Aretino looked at him in amusement and said condescendingly: "You are a German, to judge from your accent."

"To judge from yours you are not from Venice, either," Binda replied impudently.

"But the difference is that I speak a civilized language, while you croak in the tones of the northern heretics."

"How are you going to prove that I am one of the reformists?" asked Binda pointedly.

"Would you like to be burned at the stake, Signor Binda?"

"How do you know me?"

"By your fat neck, by your snooping, and by the silver button."

"I will complain about you to the admiral. He thinks very highly of me. We are not without protection in Venice. We don't come from a small, hostile town like Arezzo, as you do, but from the powerful duchy of Hesse. Will you take your button now?"

"You may seal your letters with it. Thus I shall have the pleasure of having something from my backside on your desk at all times."

CHAPTER X

WRAPPED in a long silver coat such as the Arabs wore, Othello lay on his great bed in the centre of the large room. He was propped up by three pillows and supported his head with his arm.

After the conversation with his foster-father he had ordered his men to row him out to the Lido, but instead of having himself taken to his flagship, he had told them to steer due east and to land on a solitary strip of the coast. When the sun set, he swam out into the sea, and for half an hour refreshed his mind while he tired his muscles. He felt that he must overcome the turmoil of his senses before taking a decision, unaware that he had taken it long ago.

When he returned, he had told the slaves to light all the candles in his lofty room. In the radiance of the great chandelier on which alone forty lights were flickering, the silver candelabra and the candles right and left of the Virgin, he lay at rest, a tall, slender form, brown against silver. He had spread out a map of the heavens at the foot of his bed and thought as he lay there:

"The nor'-west had died down, the waves were quite small—but nevertheless, it was lovely. There is nothing to compare with the Adriatic. If I could no longer swim, I would not care to live. I wonder if she can swim—or ride? If not, I will teach her. The Master says she will be mature in two years time. I will have to be very careful so as not to frighten her. I wonder whether she is pure, or like other convent-bred girls? The Master, who understands these things, said she was so white and candid .. . Why did Father remind me of Cecilia? She too was very white. I believe he does not approve of it, but he does not want to interfere. I ought to ask him to marry us.

"Marry us? But this is crazy! I have never spoken to her, and now I am wondering who will officiate at our wedding. Maybe it's all an hallucination, a dream—if not mine—hers. Romantic child! How she said, with tears in her eyes, 'You saved the republic. I saw you standing on the poop of the returning galleon. . . .'

"Let's look at the map of the heavens which my friend from Fez gave me. Venus rising, Mars pursuing her. What if he reaches the

cusp first and I am killed four weeks after my wedding? But better that than to live on for twenty years and grow old and senile, while she at thirty-five, will be in the full flower of her womanhood. Then I would have no alternative but to kill her and then myself. . . .

"If we live here, I must be able to lock myself into the east room so that none can reach me—neither sailors nor senators, friends nor fair ladies. El Kashef will submit to the new order, but what about Abdul? He is certain to hate her, but will he obey her? Will he be allowed to go on sleeping at the foot of the bed? That's impossible—before the door, then? In any case, he will be hurt, and if he suffers, it will be better to put him down . . . What if she asks questions about my ring or my brand? I hated every woman who tried to learn my secrets. I wonder whether she is jealous? I have never been able to understand jealousy. . . ."

At the same hour, Desdemona, in her sparsely furnished room, was sitting sadly on a small stool in the corner. Her head bowed in her hands, she considered her situation unhappily. "If only I were back in the convent," she thought. "While I was there everything was a dream and a hope, but now all has become confused, and my heart won't stop pounding even for a minute. Aretino was kind, just like an old friend. Though I don't know why women make so much of him. Those horrible silky beards. The Master also has one. Perhaps love is quite different from what it seems in paintings. Perhaps I shall hate it. First I shall scream, and then weep. But he has such beautiful hands, and I am sure he is kind and tender to a woman. But perhaps he is hard and merciless. I don't know what I want. If only I were back in the convent."

She was startled by a sound on the staircase, and recognized her father's slow step. He had not come to her room for many years. When he had come in, somewhat tired and self-conscious, she quickly got up and barred the door of the next room lest somebody should listen there.

"No, Antonio has gone out," her father said, when he saw her locking the door. Still somewhat out of breath, he sank into the armchair that she had carefully pushed towards him.

"Are you still my little girl who liked to sit on my knee and play with my beard?"

"Oh, father," said Desdemona and sat down at his feet.

"You know, my dear," said the old man after a pause, "that I am all for Othello. I shall vote for him. I am not bound to those old-fashioned notions. But you see—for a woman!—it is a terrible risk. A marriage is not just a matter of a name, or rank, or state. A marriage is blood, my child. We are all alone. Perhaps your mother's spirit hears us. You are a virgin, and I have never discussed such matters with you. But now I have to. Now you want to give yourself to a coloured man—for life! You must obey him when he desires you, and then it will be too late to cry out: 'Go away, you are too black.' "

The effect of these daring words, which the old man might perhaps have uttered to his wife but never to his daughter, was surprising. Instead of the groans he had somehow expected, instead of hiding her face or running away, Desdemona burst out laughing—not loudly or scornfully, but kindly, confidentially.

"Oh, father, if he were too black for me I could have chosen a whiter one, couldn't I? There are many of them around. Those pretty young boys are all as white as my arms. But I just happen to have a preference for the brown ones. Didn't you always drink that sweet heavy wine from Chios, while mother and everyone else drank the ordinary Toscano? Even with the spiced eel you drank Chios! And when they teased you about it, you used to say ; 'Why don't you leave me alone?' And you know—they did."

"That was at my table," he replied. "Over in the Palazzo Ducale I drank what everybody else drank. Othello stands in the glaring light of fame, and whoever follows him will have to stand in the same light. They love him and call him the Moor. Will you be able to bear it when you are driving under the Rial to and people shout jests at you?"

"If Othello is with me, nobody will dare to shout anything at me."

"And when he is away? In battle?"

"Then I shall not go near the Rialto."

"And what if Maria Barberini and Galatea Cornaro or Bianca Mocenigo turn their backs on you when you come into a room?"

"Then Othello will stab their husbands!"

"And—my dear—if you should have children by him, their names will not be inscribed in the Golden Book of the patricians in which your name is written, and the names of your forbears since 1155. And perhaps—it may be—that your children would not be white—like you!"

Desdemona's good humour disappeared. She got up, and laying

her hand on her heart with her characteristic gesture, she walked over to the window, and stared out for a long while. Then she pulled herself together and with a firm step came back to her father.

"I don't want any children. I am much too young. I want life, love; the pleasures of life: leisure, songs, roses, ships and the stars! I have dreamed for such a long time. Now I want to wake up and see it all, have it all—all the things I have dreamed of!"

"My child, I don't want to force you in any way. I won't send you back to the convent, because I know that you would find means of escaping the very next day; and God knows in what position you would then live with Othello! Your brother constantly talks to me of the disgrace to the family. That is all old-fashioned talk. I have not spoken to you about the family honour. I am an old man, and if things turn out badly, I won't be there to witness it."

"And why should they turn out badly, father?"

The old man sat up in his chair, and collecting all his strength, he said gravely: "Because a passion like this cannot last! What you are starting here is a love affair—not a marriage. If you are attracted by his colour, his maturity, his fame and position, if he desires you because of your youth and your admiration for him, why should pride and affection not combine to forge a really great happiness? Only I don't see how it can last. I have married twice—in cold blood, if you want to call it that. I was never deliriously happy; but we lived pleasantly together, and Antonio's mother and yours had satisfactory lives. But you are about to jump into a volcano——"

"To burn alive!" Desdemona interrupted him passionately. "Yes, that is exactly what I want. No songs, no roses, no leisure! I want to burn. That is why I have chosen a son of the desert who ploughs the sea!"

"I hear the voice of your grandfather," he said softly.

"The one who fell in the battle of Chioggia?"

"That is a legend. He was stabbed for the sake of a woman."

Silently a servant had come up the stairs. Now he stood in the doorway like a silent reminder of the eternal reproach levelled against the individual by human society, and said: "Your lordship is served."

CHAPTER XI

THE great hall in the Palazzo Ducale was filled to bursting point. More than half of the two hundred men had to stand. Except when a new Doge was elected this hall was only used by a few senators on special occasions. To-day all of them had come in their black robes and had, no doubt, introduced some friends. The sixteen red robes of the ruling council could be seen here and there. Even they had not their usual seats. Only the Doge sat in the centre of the side wall on his hard, throne-like chair, just as in the smaller council chamber.

It was very hot, and the doors had been opened to allow the air to circulate. The candles flickered and threw an irregular light on the ceiling, which had recently been adorned with paintings by Sansovino and Veronese. But there was more at stake to-day than beauty, which to the rulers of Venice always appeared transitory, and which they only furthered in order that the republic should appear in as much splendour as possible. To-day it was power that was at stake, for whoever had command of the fleet would be more powerful than the Doge himself, and would be in reality, despite all democratic safeguards, dictator of Venice. Only one man had a serious claim to this position—and this one man was a Moor. Every one of the senators had considered this question for weeks; and even if he himself did not happen to be particularly interested, his wife, his son, or his friends had importuned him relentlessly to vote for or against Othello.

Yet Othello had never asked for the position. Officially he had not demanded any post; nor did he now, as he addressed the senators, mention the Admiralty. He merely argued his policy; large scale armament, development of the fleet, preparedness for war. He spoke to them feeling he was the last man to make an effort to keep Venice in the ranks of the great powers, since the admirals and generals around him, especially their sons, seemed to be more concerned with the enjoyment of the fruits of this position than with its preservation.

In the centre of the long wall Othello had caused a large map to be placed, and the bench under it had remained free. He stood in front of it; and with a lance he had borrowed from one of the doorkeepers

he pointed out certain islands and ports on the map. Every time he pointed, the iron lance flashed through the hall like a symbol of conquest.

Since it was not against the custom to wear part of one's armour at solemn assemblies, he had put his silver brassards on his arms and greaves on his shins, both to honour and to intimidate the Senate. At every turn of his supple body the silver glittered and, setting off his dark appearance, made him appear to the senators—even his enemies—as a hero from the great period of their conquests.

So far he had talked in considerable detail about ports and island bases and of neighbours and rivals. Now he turned away from the map, full face to the audience, the borrowed lance still in his hand. He looked thus like the Moor of the three Magi as the Venetians had seen him on many altar pictures. He raised his voice, for it was not easy to make himself heard in the buzzing hall, and doing so, his voice became hard and metallic as it was only when he gave orders at sea.

"All this, from Dalmatia to the Negroponte, from Candia to Corfu, and all the Aegean islands, your lordships propose to defend with six galleons, forty-five galleys, two hundred and fifty-seven medium and two thousand seven hundred and thirty-six small vessels. The Bocca di Cattaro is not yet fortified. We have seventeen thousand seamen of all classes on these ships and sixteen thousand ships' carpenters at home. The Turks, on the other hand, have a coast line of eight thousand miles and have a navy six or seven times the strengtn of ours. Your lordships have given Euboea to appease Mohammed. Parts of Albania and parts of the Peloponnesus were also sacrificed in order to avoid a war. Such a policy will make us weaker and weaker; and if we go on like this, our sons will have to kiss the silken slipper of the Caliph in Istanbul."

"But we have the league!" someone called loudly, almost threateningly.

"Where is the league?" Othello cried back, just as loudly. "The united armadas of Florence, Genoa, and the Pope have been decisively defeated by the Turks at Jerba, according to my information and have thereby shown an incompetence for which, during two years, they have been utterly incapable of making up. The Hapsburgs have developed Trieste with obvious designs of threatening our commerce. There is not a prince, not a city or republic in Italy that does not hate us

because we have colonies and they have none. They would rather let foreign troops penetrate into their own country than help us. That is what happened at Cambrai, and it can happen again."

"How many galleons do we need, then?" a moderate voice asked.

"For the moment we need seven of the largest type."

"And how are we to pay for them?"

"By taxing the dyers alone we can get two million gold ducats. Since our commerce keeps about ten million ducats in circulation, which bring in four million, and since our State debts are only six million ducats, it is obvious that a large quantity of gold can come out of that. Furthermore, there are the houses of Venice, which altogether represent a value of about seven million ducats. The rent is only half a million: there is another opportunity for a tax. Besides we need new weapons."

"What weapons does the admiral mean?"

"The Germans have invented a hand tube that can be fired from a distance and can shake an entire battalion with one shot."

"That is not a question for the navy!" somebody interjected.

A dozen voices called: "Let him finish," and Othello looked questioningly at the Doge. When the old man nodded, the admiral continued: "In the near future I shall get a shell from Ficardo that spreads a fatal smoke upon explosion. And in Brescia the great mathematician, Tartaglia, has invented a counter-mine against the one used by the Turks."

"Is it true," a voice called now from the opposite corner of the hall, "is it true that our land forces are no longer able to give efficient assistance to our navy?"

Another voice called loudly: "This question cannot be asked of an admiral, according to an ordinance of the War Council of 1519."

Othello looked at the Doge; and when the ruler nodded again, he said: "If his lordship permits me to talk of a matter that is not within my province, I believe that there are at the moment about fifteen thousand horse at our disposal, while our nearest neighbours have about twenty-four thousand. We also have very good Swiss and Italian mercenaries, about eleven thousand; but again our neighbours have far more—about seventeen thousand. The German heretics are constantly spinning all sorts of intrigues, and it is not impossible that friends there will also turn from us one day, change their minds, and

march on Venice from the west. Only an overwhelmingly strong navy can keep them in check."

A strong voice rose out over the excited assembly, shouting: "All this sounds as if war were going to break out to-morrow. Have we not Padua, Vicenza, Verona, Brescia, Rovigo, and Bergamo? Have we not sacred alliances with Spain and the Emperor and with half Italy? The last war cost us seventy million ducats! We have not saved our money merely to give our generals a chance to win new laurels!"

Three or four dozen voices applauded this speech, but the majority looked with even greater excitement from the heckler to the admiral. The latter stood unshaken and made a noticeable effect to keep his voice calm and level.

"I know that Admiral Alviani retired after his last victory. I am ready to do the same if the Serenissimo will accept my resignation at once."

Deep silence lay over the assembly. The Doge, however, rose from his chair and said in a shrill tone: "I would ask the admiral to continue his very important report in all its details."

Othello resumed his vivacious tone.

"Well, then, I will swear by the five great domes of San Marco: if ever I should endanger the republic for the sake of personal laurels, I am willing to descend the sixteen stone steps to the dungeons below us and to come up again in a white shirt and black cap to lay my head on the block between the two columns of the Piazzetta: so help me God! I am standing here to-day, not because of the victory at Cyprus, but in spite of it.

"The republic stands alone, almost alone, at any rate. Spain is still on friendly terms with us. But the Netherlands, of whose latest shipbuilding activity we have very precise details, are arming. Andrea Doria has put the Genoese fleet at the disposal of the Emperor. The Emperor is weak and dependent on the progress of Lutheranism. At Montpellier, the French are building stronger galleys than we do here. And do your lordships know what they sing in the streets of Nizza and Marseilles about our Bucentoro? I will not defile your ears with this unworthy ditty."

"Let's hear it! Speak! Speak!"

"I need the express permission of the Serenissimo." And after the Doge had nodded repeatedly, Othello called sharply into the hall:

"Ces vieux cocus veulent epouser la rner,
Dont ils sont le mari et les Turcs padultere"

Othello had no intention of calming the excitement which followed these stinging verses: rather, he poured oil on the flames by the oratorical skill that he had acquired in Padua but rarely had occasion to practice. He was now completely free from all those reservations with which the military usually arm themselves when they meet political authority. ''If they think that I despise them, they are only finding out the truth,'' he thought.

"And do your lordships really believe that these lampoons are not known in Istanbul? When Mohammed conquered Byzantium, he quoted Firdousi, the Arab poet, saying: 'The spider has become doorkeeper of the palace, and the owl hoots its death call in it.' Four centuries ago Venice conquered Byzantium, but one century ago the Turks made an Istanbul of Byzantium. They are strong, for their sultan is also their pope, and they don't have to bother with others. They are strong because they have forced their Christian prisoners to become Moslems, and because they are fighting now with Janizaries who were born Christians. Of the pirate king, Khair el Dhin, they have made a satellite who led the sultan's fleet to Reggio. We can no longer count on the use of the canal between the Nile and the desert, since the sultan has bought the title of Caliph from the last of the Abbasids. Why should he make it easier for his Christian enemies to sail to India? They have nerves of iron! I have seen Selim myself: a conqueror in the prime of his strength. When his trusted admiral returned from Malta without having conquered it, the sultan had the Golden Horn closed to his ships. To-day, Malta is still in the hands of our friends—if we can call the Knights of St. John our friends!"

A tall man interrupted: "You speak so eloquently of the strength of our enemies that there seems nothing for us to do but be friends with them. We cannot afford to risk our entire trade every five years. We are no longer the conquerers our forefathers were. In sixteen battles the Turks have been victorious."

"But in the seventeenth, at Cyprus, we defeated them," Othello replied in his metallic voice, leaning defiantly on the lance he still held in his hand. "Cyprus, for which we have been fighting now for twenty years, is the key to the Mediterranean. When the pirates of Algiers find out that the greatest fleet of the world is concentrating

round Cyprus; and when they report that to Istanbul, the sultan will leave his seraglio, and he will heave a great sigh and will spend the rest of the evening alone. And all his harem will say that the sultan is sick. He will see that our trade is protected by a mighty fleet, although we don't go out for conquests. He will stop the singing of the French lampoon in the streets of his realm, and will give our ambassador a gold chain worth five hundred ducats. The great doges and bold admirals of Venice did not build up our power by being afraid for their commerce or by relying blindly on their allies. With threatening galleys and intrepid crews our fathers made Venice into a world power!"

Roaring applause, such as the hall had seldom heard, greeted this last speech. Antonio Brabantio, the only one besides his father who knew Othello's secret, now lost his self-control. For a whole hour he had listened to the despicable Moor, betraying his hatred and fury only by his white countenance. Before he had really made up his mind, he heard his own high voice sound through the hall.

"What justification has my Lord Admiral to speak of 'our fathers'?"

A dreadful pause followed these words. Many faces turned towards Antonio and back again to Othello. All those who had been fortunate enough to find seats rose now. Othello had grown pale; returning the lance to the doorkeeper, he slowly walked over towards Antonio. His hand had instinctively sought his dagger. As the middle of the hall was empty, his slim, tall figure, clad in silver, shone terribly in the candle light. Everyone expected the irreparable to happen, and even the old Doge had risen from his throne.

When Othello stood before Antonio, who also had placed his hand on his sword, he felt a letter in his pocket. Suddenly he remembered that his enemy was Desdemona's brother; and taming his wild nature, he called loudly to Antonio's face: "Because I am a citizen of Venice—like you."

Then he turned towards the middle of the hall, bowed to the Doge, and said softly: "Will the Serenissimo permit me to retire now?"

Without waiting for an answer he left, and the salute of the guards sounded loudly over the hushed assembly.

CHAPTER XII

THE letter in Othello's pocket was from Maria, for Desdemona had invited her friend to call with her fiance at the Palazzo Brabantio, and had asked her to summon Othello. Thus she gave the impression of holding a reception at her father's house, where she could receive a half-stranger like Othello if he came with some old-established friends. She had learnt from her father and her brother that a nocturnal session was to be held in the Senate to decide the question of the command of the fleet; all senators with the exception of Othello himself would be there.

Desdemona, who had set out to conquer Othello, instead of being conquered by him, understood that under these extraordinary circumstances she must take the initiative in social affairs and reduce the restrictions of convention and custom to a minimum. Had she followed her instinct, she would have spoiled the triumph, both for him and for herself, that lay in their solemn union. In her heart she wanted to become Othello's mistress; her reason told her to become his wife.

Father and brother had very different reasons for keeping their secret to themselves: the father had not said anything about it because he thought that he might use the announcement during the session to increase the weight of his voice in the meeting. The brother did not dare say anything about it because he feared that he would, on the one hand, make Othello even more romantic and interesting, and would on the other hand bring his political opposition to the Moor down to the level of personal enmity.

"Now he is standing before the senators," thought Desdemona as she adorned herself before her mirror. "I know he wears armour to-night, the little armour, as he calls it. I wonder whether he stands close to the Doge or is in the middle of the hall? Perhaps he is sitting down? Perhaps Antonio stands close behind him to stab him in the back? Oh—but father would stop him!"

"I told you, Lucia," she said, suddenly changing the trend of her thoughts, "only mother's silver shawl goes with this. Go and fetch it.

It is in the left-hand corner of the chest. If it is crumpled we must drape it in folds."

Since she was not yet officially in society, and was still in that ambiguous state between the convent and the ballroom, she had to improvise her attire with bits and pieces. She wanted to be in silver to-night—like Othello. Lucia, who had certain misgivings about this evening's reception, had been combing and setting her mistress's hair for almost an hour, during which time Desdemona had begun to read her Plato. Lucia noticed, not without satisfaction, that Desdemona had to read one page about five or six times; obviously her thoughts were not with the Greek philosophers.

Night came. Desdemona sat in the large drawing room next to Maria's fiance, Fernando, a pale young man with exquisite manners, and heard herself say:

"There are some old etchings of weddings that I have put on the table in the green room. If you would like to look at them later, you will find among them the best examples for the ceremony."

"Don't worry," said Maria laughingly, "—we shall get out of the way as soon as he comes."

Othello, who immediately after the scene in the assembly had left the Palazzo Ducale through the so-called Giant's Staircase, walked the few steps over to the Piazzetta, where his gondola lay. Everybody recognized him and many pressed close on him, for at nine o'clock on a September evening the Venetians had a habit of gathering on the Piazzetta, especially when the lights at the Palazzo Ducale shone and an important meeting was in progress. All Venice knew that to-night the fate of the Admiralty was being decided.

The crowd was for II Moro—if only because the ceremony of installing a new admiral was an occasion for general rejoicing.

Othello, who usually took interest in the crowd, to-night pushed rather rapidly towards his gondola, impatient to see the sister of the man he had almost stabbed a few minutes ago. Abdul and El Kashef were waiting for him; it took the little craft barely *ten* minutes to arrive at the Palazzo Brabantio. Dog and servant followed their master into the house, while the gondoliers sat down comfortably and began a low conversation with the crew of Maria's gondola, which lay moored next to theirs. As soon as Maria had heard the calls of the gondoliers, for which they had all been listening, she drew her fiance

into the green room, so that when Othello entered he found Desdemona alone. She stood in the middle of the room under the large glass chandelier. Since their silent ride from San Lazzaro they had not met again, and this was the first time they saw each other alone. Neither of them spoke.

Desdemona saw before her a handsome Arab in silver armour, just as in a picture. Othello saw the golden-haired girl, dressed in silver, blushing and growing pale alternately. Neither dared stretch out a hand, and so they stood silently for almost a minute. Desdemona misinterpreted the silence at first. "All is lost," she thought. "They refused him and now he will go to Spain and marry a Spanish girl. He has come to say good-bye."

"If they refuse me," thought Othello, "I shall kidnap her and turn pirate."

Then, still under this resolution, he stepped forward and took her head, which he brought so close to his face that he could see nothing but her eyes: "Blue, with a swimming light in them. Lashes long and darker than the hair."

Since he persisted in his silence, she stood still and looked up to him, for he was much taller. She saw his narrow lips open slightly; and seeing a word form between them, she trembled.

"How white you are!" he said finally in a whisper.

She took courage and replied, close to his mouth: "How brown you are!"

Slowly his mouth came closer to hers until their lips met. He kissed her softly, holding her close to him. She did not return his kiss but lay motionless in his arms, her gaze still on him. But he did not let her go, and so she closed her eyes and pretended to dream of this kiss—as she had often done in the convent.

When he freed her lips she was almost startled. She opened her eyes, put her hands to her hair and stepped back. Looking at him from the side, she said remotely:

"Are you Othello?"

"How beautiful my name is when she speaks it," he thought; and out loud he said: "Say it once more."

She smiled, because it seemed now as if she had started a sort of game, and she said again: "Are you Othello?"

He remained quite serious and drew her to a large green chair,

where he sat down. Pressing her gently against his left knee he said: "And you—are you perhaps Desdemona?"

Partly from curiosity, partly in order to continue the game, she replied: "Say it once more."

They were not aware that they were whispering to each other all the while as if they had secret3. "Now I can touch the silver band on his chest," she thought, and hesitatingly moved her hand towards his breast. He followed her example, and she trembled with expectation at the thought that he would touch her breast. But he checked himself halfway and brought his hand up to her golden tresses.

"What is the meaning of the silver band?" she asked, touching it.

Othello gave in to his desire and placed his hand over her left breast. Both of them trembled, for they held each other for the first time, closer than in that kiss which she had not returned. It was like a mystic union and she was frightened. She let him go and again, quite unnecessarily, arranged her shawl and her hair. Both of them in their gestures were like intoxicated lovers who have just met in a wild embrace; and yet they had hardly touched each other. The result was an uncertainty, a heavy breathing as if in a fight which had been avoided at the last moment. Othello felt that they had to come out of this state, and taking the lead, he leaned back against the large table and said: "This silver rim is supposed to be the tropic of Cancer: you know, the line that goes through Arabia, through the Sahara, and then through the Antilles. North of it there is the head: reason, experience, logic. That is our narrow Mediterranean Sea, with our colonies. I have fought many a battle there. But south of it there are wild deserts and seas, undiscovered coasts and countries, wild tribes and unknown peoples."

"Now the bell will begin to toll," she thought, but longing to hear his voice speak her name, she whispered, "Othello!"

He smiled. "Desdemona!"

"I must not lose my head again," he thought, and holding on to the table, he asked: "Would you like to have a silver rim yourself?"

"Oh, no," she replied, blushing.

"I thought that you might have the tropic of Capricorn."

"And where would I wear it."

"Far down on your skirt, just above the ankles."

She laughed and threw herself into his arms so that he caught her

like a little girl. The heaviness had gone from them. At the sound of her laughter, Maria, in the adjoining room, looked sadly at her Fernando, who could not think of anything to do except to hold her hand.

"Are you strong?" asked Othello now, holding her by the hands. "Could you climb a mast?"

"If I were dressed for it," she replied, and she looked up at the. curtain as if she were about to climb it. "Would I get the tropic then?"

"No, you shall have beautiful clothes, of brocade and damask, with Arab designs on it. Would you like to learn Arabic?"

"Is it difficult to read?"

"As difficult as men's hearts," he answered lightly; and for the first time she understood that he liked to hide his serious thoughts. She came close to him and, pointing to his heart, asked: "Is it north or south of the tropic?"

"It is on it."

"May I hear it beat?" She put her head on his chest and listened. He raised his head, into what seemed to him an unknown height, and rested his hand on her hair. He thought of his heart: how often had it stormed, how often lain quietly swelling like the surge of the sea. What a varying career it had had, of dangers and leisure, how close it had been to coming to a stop, how it had ached on the bench of the galley slave, how loudly it had pounded in battle. And now the head of an innocent girl lay against it and counted the beats. And she looked up to him, her blue eyes full of trust and confidence.

CHAPTER XIII

ALL Venice was buzzing with the incredible rumour that Il Moro was going to fetch his bride from the Palazzo Brabantio. On the Rialto, at the fish market, on the narrow, smelly canals of the north, at the dyers, the clothmakers, the blacksmiths' stalls, the glass courts of Murano, and especially at the arsenal and on board the galleys—everywhere it was the topic, and already it sounded like an old-established legend. Everyone laughed and was happy that the hero of Cyprus had won a white countess, and that he had thus fashioned a link which united all classes, races, and ages.

Only in the palaces of the patricians a sullen silence reigned. Something terrible had happened: one of their own class, a member of the oldest aristocracy, was giving his daughter to a Moor instead of locking her up in a convent. The oldest privileges of the patricians seemed to be undermined. It was not like the case of Bianca Capello, who had run away; nor was it like the case of Catarina Cornaro, who had been given to a strange king by general consent of the Senate. Desdemona had not been kidnapped nor sacrificed. She had merely bewitched the old man into giving his approval. A tradition of five hundred years was shaken to its foundations.

Antonio's sally at the assembly had decided the question in favour of Othello. The insult was outrageous, so crude and ungentlemanly that even Othello's enemies wanted to show that they had nothing in common with Antonio. Senator Brabantio was one of the first to do so. He was old and no longer a fighter; besides he loved his daughter far more than his money-grabbing son; and thus he chose this moment, like the experienced tactician he was to announce his secret to the Senate. He depicted Othello's suit for Desdemona as if it had been a formal one. The result was as he had expected: for if he had overcome the prejudices of his class, he wanted, as a member of the War Council, the supreme power for his future son-in-law, who had all the qualifications.

The strange change of attitude towards Othello had come about because, as Padre Domenico had put it, he had doubled his stakes. Openly he had neither asked for the Admiralty nor for the girl. He

had merely asked for seven new galleons. But his warnings and admonitions had kindled the last spark of inherited pride in these men who had degenerated from conquerers into shopkeepers. Just because Othello had not made any conditions, the assembly was disposed to grant everything to him. Besides, everyone knew that he might go to the Spaniards, who, although allies at the moment, might turn into enemies in the future. And he knew the carefully kept secrets of the Venetian army, and could make good use of them should he ever be at the head of the Spanish fleet. Such were the arguments during the two hours of heated discussion that followed Othello's report. His rivals and enemies thought it best to be cautious in their counter-arguments lest they be considered enemies of the republic or at least cowardly weaklings. Antonio did not say another word, and by this example gave no encouragement to his faction. That his father had publicly disavowed him, and that he had announced the impending marriage between the Moor and his daughter, had reduced Antonio's opposition to the admiral to the level of a personal feud.

When the president of the Inquisition displayed the secret files on Othello, nothing was found to incriminate him. Defamations and calumnious letters, which the two Germans had placed into the mouth of the lion outside the palace where complaints against public men could be deposited, were put aside. They contained accusations that Othello had maintained intelligence with various enemies of Venice, notably the Turks, and that he had been in contact with the Spanish ambassador. The former information was too ridiculous to be taken seriously; the latter common knowledge and made him all the more redoubtable. Concerning his private life there was but one letter, telling of his and Desdemona's encounter at San Lazzaro, and that was so harmless that it only produced laughter in the hall.

The Inquisition also informed the Senate of some verses which Aretino had written, which had not yet been published, but which had—as Aretino intended—fallen into the hands of the secret police. One of the senators who had just returned from a visit to the Vatican affirmed the devastating effect that such verses had on the prestige of the republic. In these verses of Aretino's (the Inquisitor said) the Senate was turned to ridicule because of its prejudices, and it was pointed out that the welfare of the republic depended solely on whether they kept one man or sent him away. Added to all this, there was the absence of

any serious competitor for the position. Of the older men no one wanted the rank, and the younger men had no qualified candidate.

At midnight the two Brabantios returned home without speaking a word to each other. They found the house dark and quiet. When they were told next morning of the visitors, the Senator also received a message from Othello, who asked for an interview. This visit was very short. Othello proposed formally, and the Senator accepted his suit. At the same time he informed Othello of what he already knew; that he had been appointed Grand Admiral and Supreme Commander of the Venetian fleet at a balloting of one hundred and seventy red against eighteen yellow balls, an overwhelming majority. Simultaneously it had been decided to send him to Cyprus, the centre of the Turkish danger, immediately.

For all this, Othello felt responsible only to his foster father, whom he visited that same morning. He was in a serious mood as he sat in the padre's room, which looked more like a duke's household chapel than the cell of a simple priest. The padre assumed his merriest manner, which clashed sadly with Othello's sombre mood. Neither of them said much in the beginning, and if they spoke, it was about secondary things. Finally, Othello raised his head and asked: "What is it, father that you dread?"

Padre Domenico reflected—a pause so long that he would have reprimanded it in Othello thirty years ago. At last he turned from the table and, facing Othello at the fireplace, said:

"This white child has taken it into her head to marry the brown hero. The happiest year of your life lies ahead of you. If you could cruise the seven seas for seven years, your joy would not diminish. But one day you will be called back from Cyprus to Venice, which is full of malice, viciousness and envy. The people are for the Moor as long as he is victorious. But the patricians and the Senate will never forgive you your increasing power and your position. How will the girl stand up under this? Would you care to tell me what you feel on this subject?"

"She is adaptable," Othello replied quietly, "and I shall bring her up according to the principles you have taught me."

"I think that I have learned many things from my son."

"Oh, you think that she will want to tie me down? All the better. Then I can become young again, in spite of my grey hair!" He got up and walked over to the old man rapidly.

"To grow young again, father! Everything around me has become so serious, heavy and grave. I have so rarely plucked the fruits of life. You smile: you think I have had enough women in my day! Yes, but I never could marry them, at least not a white virgin. Do you really feel that I should turn away from this chance of happiness because dangers lie close around? Why did you have me brought up as a sailor? I constantly have to take risks and face dangers! Her spontaneous love is one thing that attracts me to her; the uncertainty is another. I am sure the people on the Rialto are saying to-day that the Countess Brabantio is embarking on a dangerous enterprise. But if this enterprise turns out to be my fate, and if I learn to love her as I have never loved anyone before, you will not be sorry."

"And—and if it should distract you from your calling?"

"Father, I have thought of more innovations and changes I want to introduce. Since I have centred half of my being on the child, the other half has become doubly active. Without the thought of her I would not have spoken half as well in the Senate last night; I would not have won the majority, and perhaps I would have stabbed Antonio, and my career would be at an end to-day. So think kindly of her, all the more since there is no one in her house who thinks kindly of me!"

"Except her father. He voted for you last night. . . ."

Othello began to pace up and down. "Her father, yes—but it was a sacrifice for him. A sacrifice he made because he has a noble heart, not merely a noble crest. Also because he hates his son, who only waits for the old man to die so that he may take the palace, the money, and the honours. Deep down in his heart the old senator is unhappy that his daughter stoops to marry——"

"The Grand Admiral of the Venetian Fleet?"

"No—an Arab without father or mother! That she marries a bastard of unknown seed, an adventurer whom nobody loves except the low populace, whom all patricians hate! If she makes a marriage below her rank as Venice understands it, I too marry beneath my rank. I am tolerated here because I am a good strategist at sea. But I have to stand the condescension of these miserable shopkeepers because they need me to boost their exports. I have to put up with them, and cannot spit into the face of my wife's brother. It is I who marries beneath his rank! I have a mind to take her with me to-night, never to return!" He had become so agitated that he struck his forehead twice

against the wall. The padre rose to calm him; and pressing his arm, he pointed to the words engraved over the mantelpiece: *Indulgentia plenaria cotidiana pro vivis et defunctis.*

Neither read it aloud, for they both knew it by heart, but Othello said coldly: "It is not my motto."

The padre nodded and added ironically, "Nor is it Desdemona's to judge by her looks." The tension was broken and the two discussed the coming events.

"You won two victories yesterday," said the old priest, "victories such as I have never had the luck to win. Now be patient and give in to all the conventions and don't ask for more. Let them have the triumph of the retreat!"

The spiritual man-of-the-world had divined correctly. When Othello returned home he found El Kashef full of news both from the *palazzi* and from the Rialto.

Almost all the senators' wives had expressed their refusal to attend the hasty marriage between the Countess Brabantio, to whom they were all more or less related, and the Moor. Suddenly even the finest ladies, who had formerly only spoken of "the admiral," now called him the Moor. The protest of society against Othello had received official sanction.

In the overnight Council of Ten confusion reigned. Since the ladies were not willing to sanction a solemn marriage, the senators themselves were reluctant to grant Othello a solemn ceremony for his investiture, as was the custom. Rumours sprang up, suddenly, of the appearance of the Turkish fleet in the Aegean Sea, and all senators agreed that the sooner Othello left, the better. The Patriarch of San Marco was also in favour of reducing the ceremonies to a minimum and expressed the view that it would be appropriate, for sentimental reasons, if Padre Domenico were to perform the marriage of his foster son. For two days messengers scurried from one *palazzo* to another, from the council chambers to the consistory of the prelates with only one aim: to humiliate the two people whose victory over convention nobody could forgive.

Distorted and exaggerated reports of all these doings came to the Rialto, where the people discussed them excitedly. Everyone was for the Moof and Desdemona. Literally overnight the hero had become a legend; and when they spoke of the Moor at the fish market, they

used the term with as much warmth and friendliness as the aristocracy used it with hatred and disdain.

Hundreds of sailors came into town from the Lido to drink and to dance, for it was the great day of the navy. Every one of them felt personally honoured by Othello's promotion, and there was no shortage of good-natured, if coarse, jokes about the white lady who would now rule the navy.

Antonio had left his father's house after a scene and had gone to stay with friends on the Terra Ferma without seeing his sister. Many of the younger nobles followed him, and arrangements were made in all haste for a large party to which everyone was to be invited to furnish an excuse for their absence from Venice during these days. The senator took all these things in his stride, but Othello noted every detail, every shade. The blows to his honour increased by the hour in the very days when he attained the highest honours. The desire for revenge awoke in his proud heart. But the time for it had not yet come.

When he met the Doge to receive his instructions, the Grand Admiral shortened the interview as much as possible. It had been decided that the Doge would give the admiral's baton to Othello two minutes after his wedding at San Marco. Othello learned that all the officers of the army had reported sick for that day in order to show their solidarity with the aristocracy, to which most of them belonged; and besides, this was a convenient opportunity for giving vent to the age-old jealousy between army and navy. However, the navy itself was hindered from celebrating the occasion to the fullest. The golden victory ship, the *Bucentoro,* on which victorious leaders and important visitors usually made their entry into Venice, but which already on previous occasions had been too golden for the Moor, was, at the moment, unfortunately, undergoing repairs. The customary great procession of the Doge and city officials round the Piazza San Marco was cancelled for lack of time to effect the necessary preparations.

Both the Doge and the Admiral knew, of course, that the rumours about the Turkish fleet concentrations were gross exaggerations whose purpose was to shorten the ceremonies and speed Othello's departure for the East. He carved every one of these official lies into his memory. His race was being heaped with indignities just when, through him, it was being honoured with one of the highest positions in Christendom.

By threats and pressure he had gained the second position in the

republic, and as far as power was concerned, even the first; but it stung him to the quick to realize that this had been possible only by means of threat and pressure. It was the dream of every cabin-boy—and it had been his—to command the fleet one day. The dream had come true, but at the expense of many slurs against his honour, which he felt more keenly now than ever before.

His thoughts fled to Desdemona. He saw little of her during these days when he was busier than ever. He had to decide on plans and positions for the entire fleet before he left for Cyprus. Desdemona had to decide on her clothes and her jewels, even on the manner in which her train was to be disposed. Her dowry had not been mentioned yet, that was to be sent afterwards. She was perturbed by the contrast of all the bustling activity and her father's loneliness, the distraught air of her old nurse, and the ill-concealed merriment of the servants. She had no time for dreams, the forthcoming departure seemed more important than the wedding itself. Only when she was alone with Othello, their hearts beat in unison.

On the afternoon before the wedding Desdemona freed herself from her dressmakers, and leaving even Lucia at home, she draped herself in a long black shawl and went alone to San Marco.

Between the purple columns on the southern wall she found a little pew where she had prayed many times as a child before a golden mosaic Madonna. There she repeated those age-old formulas without really knowing their meaning, merely to tell the Mother of God that her faith was as strong as ever.

Suddenly she realized the great solitude in the cathedral. She thought of her mother, whom she could barely remember, of her brother, with whom in all her life she had not spent one pleasant hour; and she thought of her father, who was old and lonely, who had lost two wives and was losing his daughter now: a touching old man, but cold of heart, whose real ambition in life had been the Doge's cap, which he was never to wear.

"Perhaps Othello had thoughts like these to-day," she mused, "Perhaps he is even lonelier than I am. Perhaps we were made to help and cheer each other; perhaps God willed it that way when he let me see him returning on the poop of the galley."

She rose now and looked curiously around her. At the altar several men were busy replacing the candles and hanging up new festive

draperies. "It's for my wedding to-morrow!" she thought, and her heart began to beat faster. She was sure that no one would recognize her in her large black shawl, so she walked through the church and up to the altar to observe the preparations closely.

Suddenly she saw a man kneeling in deep prayer before the little black Madonna on the north wall. It was Othello who had come back to the Madonna of his youth, imploring her secretly to help him to take a straight course on the waves of life and the sea.

Desdemona, with her typical gesture, put her hand on her heart and gazed with deep feeling upon the praying man to whom she would be wed to-morrow. As he rose and walked out of the church, she pressed herself against the wall so that he did not notice her. The moment he went past her, his head bowed, his thoughts dwelling on the next day, when here in this church he would take Desdemona as his wife before all the world—in that moment she understood every fibre of his nature, and realized that after all the overwhelming impressions of their first few meetings, this was the first moment of real love.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Othello arrived that same evening before the Brabantio Palace, he let his two shadows enter the house with him. But Desdemona, having raced down the stairs, as soon as she heard the boat, was now startled by the appearance of the black El Kashef and the large dog. The Great Dane, misunderstanding her sudden movement, was about to attack her when Othello called him sharply to order. The scene had frightened the girl, and she stood uncertainly on the steps.

"I have come," Othello said smilingly, "to present my household to you. This is El Kashef, whom you know already. He has been in my service for nineteen years—"

"Twenty," said the servant in a hollow voice.

"Twenty, yes. He is faithful and will never leave me while I wish him to remain."

The slave greeted Desdemona in the Arab fashion. With his open right hand he first touched the floor, then his heart, and finally his forehead, thus dedicating to her the earth, his heart and his thoughts.

She looked at him and said: "Serve your master as before. Thus you will also earn my satisfaction."

The slave listened; so did the master as well. He had never heard her speak to a servant before, and he was surprised at the sureness with which she spoke. El Kashef bowed his head and thought: "Anything the master wants is good."

The presentation of the Great Dane was more difficult. Abdul, who was used to being stroked on his massive forehead by his master, had seen his new mistress first under a strange tension, and now in fear. Instinctively he mistrusted her; but on his master's command he made friends with her. Yet it struck him as strange, for he was only four years old and had not seen many women with his master, never one in his house. He understood from his master's tone that this woman was something special—special also in his master's affection, and he immediately became jealous.

Othello, who knew his slave and his dog, saw this mistrust in the animal and considered it a virtue.

"Is he always with you?" Desdemona now asked, not without apprehension. And when Othello nodded, she added: "Also at night?"

"So far he has slept at the foot of my bed. But if you want to sleep with me he will have to lie in front of the door."

These words fell like great drops from the stones of a grotto: forming slowly, being loosed, falling without frightening anyone. There was nothing very intimate about them. They were the words of a seafarer who takes a wife. She understood them in this way and classified them with her thoughts about the bridal veil and the trousseau. The dog could not understand them, but he pressed gently against his master's thigh, which he could just reach, and looked at the woman with undisguised doubt. Finally she took heart and called softly: "Abdul!"

The dog looked questioningly at his master, who said, "Go." Once more the Great Dane looked up to get confirmation of this order. Then he slowly walked over to the girl. Desdemona stroked his square head several times, while the animal carefully sniffed at her hand, the perfume of her dress. When he found this to his liking, he relaxed and pushed his head against her hand, returning the caress. The hound's head reached up to her hips, and Othello's eyes followed the curves of her bending form. Her gaze met his, she blushed and arranged the folds of her dress modestly. Then he stepped close to her and kissed her. The slave and the dog watched and drew their own conclusions.

When Desdemona left her father's house on the following day shortly before noon, to marry the most powerful man in the republic, the whole wedding train consisted of three gondolas: the bride and her father sat in the first craft; Othello, splendidly attired, in the second; while Aretino and Titian brought up the rear in the third. Othello had had the awning of his gondola removed, for he must show himself to the people.

Father and daughter did not speak to each other, and until the last turn in the Grand Canal they sat stiffly, grave and self-conscious. All the *palazzi* they passed seemed abandoned. Only Othello's own *palazzo* was carefully decked out with flowers and carpets. Desdemona smiled when she saw it, but a few seconds later she gave a little cry of surprise and pleasure: before them in the Bacino lay a thousand, literally a thousand, ships; and everywhere the winged lion flew proudly from the masts. It was the Venetian fleet, which Othello had

ordered from the Lido to the city, and which now at a signal from the commander in the first vessel greeted their admiral with the sounding of horns, the ringing of ship's bells, and the confused sound of hundreds of bands.

This had been his surprise, and the ambitious girl had not anticipated anything of the sort. Now she rose and waved to the ships; and since she did it so naturally, with the grace of a schoolgirl, he rose also and remained standing, his hand raised in salute, until they had reached the Piazzetta. There two thousand sailors stood in immaculate rows forming a passage to the cathedral. The five people walked slowly along the Palazzo Ducale towards San Marco: four grey-haired men between fifty and seventy, and a girl of fifteen.

The golden interior of San Marco shone with countless lights. Through the stained windows the sunlight poured on the altar where two columns of incense rose towards the domed ceiling, producing a light of changing colours that Titian's eye sought to capture. On the left of the altar the Doge sat in full regalia, and around him the sixteen senators of the Council of Ten. On the right were the highest officers of the navy and almost all the diplomats with their wives. At the altar Padre Domenico, taking the place of the Archbishop, smiled at the couple as they approached him. It was the first friendly smile they had received that day, and they were both grateful for it. The organ began to play, and the choir boys behind the golden grating of St. Mark's tomb intoned a hymn. Padre Domenico held a brief marriage service and spoke a blessing. When they exchanged rings, Othello refused the one the padre held out to him, and, taking one from his left hand, he put it on the finger of his bride, saying softly but almost threateningly: "Keep it well!"

She was so frightened by his voice that she put her hand on her heart. After the ceremony he left her with her father, Titian, and Aretino, and walked over alone to the Doge's throne. He knelt before the Doge, who rose from his seat together with all the rest of the audience and handed Othello the admiral's black baton adorned with **gold. Othello rose, and walked** with Desdemona towards the main **doors.**

They had bafely emerged from the church **when the** crowd **on the** square **broke out** into **loud cheers**—*"Evviva* **Othello!" It looked as if** all Venice **had** come **together on** this **square; and the crowd, which**

for years had called him the Moor, had the tact to call him by his real name now that the aristocracy had adopted the other.

The shouting of the crowd was suddenly drowned in a majestic volley from the cannons on the galleys. When the others appeared at the door, the people began to shout, "Aretino! Titiano!" Othello felt how Desdemona trembled on his arm.

Suddenly someone shouted: "To the horses! To the horses!" and the cry was immediately taken up by the whole *piazza.* The crowd could barely see their heroes on the flat steps of the church and wanted them to appear on the terrace where the four great bronze horses stood that had come from Byzantium as war booty, and which were very popular because they were the only horses to be seen in Venice. Othello immediately complied with the request; turning back, he offered his arm to Desdemona, and they climbed the stair to the terrace. Titian did not want to go up, but Aretino urged him on and said: "Come, Master, this story will be told in all the courts of Europe and your Madonnas will fetch better prices."

When they emerged on the terrace, the crowd seemed delirious with delight. Not only on the *piazza* itself but from all the windows of Proccuratia, the new gallery that Sansovino had recently completed, and even from the top of the Campanile, the people waved and shouted, "Othello! Desdemona! Titiano! Aretino!"

Only then did Desdemona wake up to reality. Her dream had come true, and her only worry was whether her veil was still properly pinned to her head—already during the ceremony at the altar it had slipped slightly towards the left.

She took out her handkerchief and waved. Othello also abandoned the military salute and waved his left hand to the people.

Aretino, cynical as ever, pulled Titian to the front, between the horses, and said: "If this does not have any value to-day—at least it might inspire a poet some day to write the legend of the Moor!"

But Titian did not look down at the crowd. He had his gaze fixed on the two figures at his left; the tall Arab shining in silver armour, and his bride, in pink and white; and he thought: "Perseus. That's it. Against a yellow wall. She, naked, with the black iron chain around her middle. And he comes with the boat and lifts her off the rock. Now I know how I shall do it. Perseus and Andromeda!"

PART II
THE IDYLL

CHAPTER I

IN the two tall palm trees that flanked the stone steps leading to the meadow, two young Moors sat in the morning sun and laughed. These boys, climbing with great agility around the top of the tree like two young monkeys, were real Negroes, as one could see immediately by the light soles of their feet and the palms of their hands. There were no nuts in the trees, but the autumn had ripened their panicles, from which one could make beads, chains, and other toys. There were also dark red blooms, since this variety of palms bears both fruit and blossoms simultaneously. When the boys jumped to and fro, the red cascades shook between the gently swaying palm leaves.

On this spot, from which long before the Venetian conquest governors of Cyprus had ruled the island, the forbears of these boys had played in the garden of the Castle of Famagusta and had climbed these palm trees; but they had also taken care of them. The weeds had been removed, and the old yellow fronds, which hung broken and decaying from the trunk, like the flags of defeated countries, had been carefully cut off. Yes, this population had outlasted all of them: the Templars, Richard the Lion-hearted, and the kings of Jerusalem, who had all ruled their domains from the beautiful island of Cyprus. The dark green ilexes, the thorny taxus trees, and the crooked olive trees, mysteriously rejuvenated year after year, had witnessed the adventures and passions that masters and slaves, kings and traitors, merchants and thieves had undertaken and suffered for centuries on this ancient island, once sacred to Aphrodite.

At this moment the news of the island was Othello's return. The people of Cyprus had known him for years; and there would not have been much ado about his return had he not brought with him a wife, a young, white lady whom they called "Contessa," since his name was "Il Moro," and no appropriate derivation for his wife could be found from that.

The two boys were still playing in the palm trees when their attention was suddenly caught by a white form flitting down the old steps, where the marble was barely visible under the ivy that greedily

spread over it. The boys stopped their game abruptly for fear of being discovered, and looked timidly and yet delightedly down across the large meadow which stretched to the castle walls, whither the Contessa was going. She wore a light blue summer dress that did not really fit her, but which made her look all the more charming. Her fair hair under the broad-brimmed straw hat swayed up and down, so that one could not quite tell where the hair ended and the hat began. A noise in the treetops caught her attention, and looking up, she noticed the boys.

"Hi, you Moors! What are you doing up there? Come down and show me your bead chains!"

The boys giggled, and one of them threw a piece of wood to the ground. All three laughed. Othello appeared now at the farthest end of the field. He stood in the shade of an old wind-cleft sycamore, his Arab coat round his shoulders, his right hand holding his dog on the leash. For a few moments he stood under the tree and looked at the scene before him.

"A dream," he thought. "Why must it pass so soon? Or perhaps it is not a dream. This white child, playing over there, looked at me last night with her blue eyes. It was a look so long and deep that it seemed as though she wanted to grasp my whole being with her eyes. . . ."

The boys had discovered their master from their perch, and pointing excitedly in his direction, they shouted to the Contessa: "The Governor! The Governor!"

Desdemona turned round; she saw him and could not restrain herself any longer. With bounding leaps she ran down the field towards him. He, too, let go of his dog and strode rapidly through the long grass. But her young legs were faster than his and she ran to him with such force that he caught her in his arms, and lifted her high up in the air. She cried and begged to be released until he put her down tenderly. As she was on higher ground, she was almost as tall as he, and she could put her arms round his neck. For a moment they stood silently face to face.

But then she remembered the Moors up in the tree, and looking quickly over her shoulder, she let him go with a smile and whispered to him, as if she were telling him a secret: "Good morning, Othello."

He felt intoxicated and did not know what to reply. He just pressed his right hand up to feel her hip. She surrendered completely to his

touch, and for a moment their sides were pressed closely together. But he did not dare to pull her close, and she, feeling his hesitancy, gently moved away. She must not give him too much—nor too little. Smilingly they took each other's hands and slowly walked towards the castle.

There, under the shady dome of a loggia, separated from the stairs by a row of columns and a thicket of roses and wistaria, stood their breakfast table laden with fruit and more solid food. Two slaves disappeared silently when their masters arrived, to fetch some hot dishes that were waiting ready.

Like all sailors Othello loved a big breakfast; and since Desdemona was eager to learn his tastes and preferences, she had quickly adapted herself to the large meal at the beginning of the day. In the course of his lifetime he had acquired a number of habits, and it was all the easier for her to accept them as she had not yet acquired many of her own. He noticed it and was grateful to her. He did not want to force anything upon her, and she was only too ready to learn from him. Thus a competition was started wherein each tried to outdo the other in a discerning amiability.

Now sitting opposite him she saw his outline against the sky under the arch supported by two columns. Beyond, at the bottom of the garden, lay the sea, which she could not regard without a certain jealousy. The presence of the silent servants who brought fish, eggs, coffee, and fruit to the table, set certain limits to their conversation, for Othello had warned her never to believe a Cypriot, even if he swore that he did not understand Italian. Whether they were Greeks or Turks, these Cypriots understood everything they wanted or needed to understand; and an intimate word between the Governor and his wife would have been much better fuel for their gossip than a secret of State.

"Where did you learn to use the fork?" he asked over the table. "It is not yet three years since the first forks came to Venice."

"I learned it at my—" she stopped, for the name of her brother was not to be mentioned. "I—now let me see—I forget. I think my father brought a dozen of them back from Paris sometime, and we played with them as children."

"When one watches you at table, one might think that you had been brought up at court."

"And you," she laughed, *"Principus mauretanius cordobensis secretissimusl"*

He laughed too and answered in Latin: "It seems that your ladyship has studied at Padua." Suddenly he turned around and called in a harsh voice: "Cold grapes!"

When the servants had run off, he continued softly in Italian: "Don't believe for a moment that Alecis does not understand Italian. And if he gets just one word and makes up the rest for himself, it will only be worse. Shall I tell you a fairy tale, Desdemona?"

On the rare occasions when he pronounced her name, always softly, always like some mysterious formula, her strength left her completely, and helplessly, without a will of her own, she abandoned herself to his protection. She loved this sort of weakness; and because he felt the power that her name had over her, he pronounced it only rarely. Now she had sunk back into her chair and was looking at him with passion as if she expected an outburst of love.

"And how does your tale go?" she asked finally. Othello ordered the slaves, who had returned with the grapes, to leave and said:

"It is a short story. Only three sentences long: Since I studied Latin at Padua, thirty years have passed. Then I was as young as you are to-day, and it seems to me that since then the world or at least my life has had three sunsets and three sunrises . . . My father spoke often to me in Latin. Did you learn it in the convent?"

"Only Teresa and I learned it, from an old priest who taught us when he saw that we were trying to read Virgil, I wish I could learn it now, properly, because it is beautiful."

"And what else would you like to learn?"

"Everything that you know!" she cried loudly and threw a fig at him, half in defence, half in jealousy.

"What about Arabic?" he asked, holding in his hand the fruit, which he had caught.

"Is it not too difficult?"

"It is the most beautiful language," he said softly.

"Because it is your native tongue?"

"Oh, no—it really is the finest."

"And what language did you talk with your father in the beginning?"

"None at all, probably. A two-year-old makes himself understood by signs and grunts. Especially when he is hungry."

She laughed, but stopped suddenly and asked: "Were you often hungry?"

"Yes. Later, when I was a slave."

"Will you tell me about it—sometime?"

"Yes—anything you want to hear."

"Will it take long?"

"In any case, longer than the actual happening. Things that happen to you are always short, only the telling takes a long time."

"Are you going to cut another fig in four parts? Can I learn how to do that?"

"Come, it is much easier than learning Arabic."

Now idly, now full of meaning, they tossed these sentences across the table like tennis balls, both of them leaning back in their chairs, each scrutinizing the other, for they lived in a sort of loving alertness. Now she leaned over the table until her hands almost touched his. He took the large purple fruit and cut it twice so that the quarters fell to each side, held together only at the base by the thick fleshy skin. He pushed the choicest quarters towards her and watched her eat them. Then he ate the other half of the fig.

All this time she did not take her eyes off him. She carefully studied how correctly he ate, how he managed to take the fig in his mouth without letting any of the juice run over his lips, which he barely moistened while eating, and how he touched them with his napkin as an extra precaution. Uppermost in the minds of these lovers were their respective colours, in which they took delight. It was surprising, for there were hundreds of Venetian noblemen just as tanned and bronze-looking as Othello, and he had seen enough white women in his day. When she had first dreamed herself into the arms of this brown Arab, it was perhaps only because of the antique bronzes that were being discovered at that time. The rustling had so gripped Italy in that century that her youth had been brought up in these ideals as young generations of other periods had been taught to love freedom. The pagan gods were resurrected again in Venice by the Christian masters, as they had once been in Rome. The passionate interest of a whole, people and an entire era in the beauty of the human body had also caught this wilful and imaginative girl in its spell.

He, on the other hand, as he sat now at his breakfast table, admiring her white arms as though they had been created by Titian's palette, had to defend his brown colour all his life. Because of that, he had a tendency to overrate his Arab descent, and it took Padre Domenico's full authority to keep faithful to the Christian religion.

"When I look at you like this—" he began, continuing his thoughts out loud, "when I look at you—" Again he stopped, glanced at the slaves, and shouted loudly, "Leave us." The servants almost fell over each other scampering away, for they knew and feared their master. "When I look at you like this," he began for the third time, "I always wish that the Master would paint you."

"He would have to come to Cyprus for that," she returned, laughing, her voice a little overloud, "For I won't go back to him."

Both of them were shocked at this exclamation. She thought: "Oh heavens, it is not my place to decide such things."

He thought: "What if she only followed me to spite her father and brother, and to avoid the convent?"

She let the golden grape fall back on to the table and stretched out her hand and laid it into his. And with a Madonna-like expression in her eyes she said to him: "I shall go back any time you want me to."

"Perhaps—in two years or so," he replied, but he did not say just why he had suggested just two years.

Quickly and silently she got up from her chair, and after having looked around once more to make sure that they were alone, she put her arms around the seated man.

"Why do you speak of years? This is the year one. God has just finished creating the world for us!"

He looked at her seriously. "And which part does Desdemona want for herself?"

"The dry part. Please!" she laughed, "any land, Signor Admiral, as long as it is the land in which I can meet your lordship! Cyprus, perhaps! Yes, I think I like Cyprus best!"

CHAPTER II

THE carriage seemed to be enveloped in smoke. The horses hoofs and the wheels whirled forth such clouds of dust that the outrider disappeared every now and then behind the dust screen. Only the panting of Abdul, the Great Dane, who ran tirelessly beside the carriage, and the calls of driver and outriders gave the passengers some assurance that the cavalcade was steadily moving forward. The big travelling coach, with its wheels and its metal studs and ornaments, was now covered with a uniform coat of grey. The heat and the dust were no better inside, and when the young woman tried for the hundredth time to suppress her coughing, Othello laughed, grabbed her arm, and shouted, as if the noise around them were as penetrating as the dust: "And my child really prefers all this dry land, all this horrible world of dust, to the clean, fresh seas?"

At first she only heard the words "my child," which he had never before used, and he asked himself whatever had made him use this dangerous phrase. To weaken its impression he shouted out of the window: "El Kashef!" Immediately the carriage tilted slightly over to the left as the heavy man jumped on the running board, holding a bottle through the open window. Othello took it, and wetting his handkerchief, he carefully touched Desdemona's cheeks with the liquid. She shuddered slightly under his fingers, and leaning against him, she said:

"The admiral, who stabs his enemies, has really the touch of a woman. Don't stop. Over here and there. And the forehead and neck." And when she felt that his hand, rubbing the essence against her bare neck, trembled a little, she took it passionately into hers and whispered: "My beloved."

It was the first tenderness she had received from him on their journey: and suddenly land and sea, dust and riders, slaves and animals, all were forgotten. Othello was leaning back, holding his hand on her heart. He felt her without looking at her, without coming closer to her. Both of them had their heads propped against their cushions, their chins held high; and without a word, without a look they sat like this for a long time.

"There it is," she thought, "his brown hand. Once I dreamed of it, and now he holds my heart in it. He could crush it—I can feel the ring on his finger—"

"A young rose," he thought, "a very young rose. I must not press too hard. Is impossible that I have never yet held such a flower in my hand? Will she be ready in a few years to bear my seed? Will the spirit of my mother forgive me this white colour?"

The carriage came to a sudden stop. Othello's hand closed on the seat to keep Desdemona from sliding forward. Abdul's bark sounded menacing. The voices of the drivers and slaves shouted confusedly. Othello put his hand on the dagger that he wore on his left side, but he did not draw it. After a moment El Kashef's square head looked through the window. "It is nothing, lord. One of the horses shied at a viper. We have killed the serpent with a stone."

The young woman listened. She was frightened. A serpent. "While we were in Paradise the serpent came ..." She glanced at the man at her side, who was looking out of the window to see where they were. Now he turned, and for the first time since that mystic communion the two looked deep into each other's eyes.

"Desdemona has been frightened. We are always surrounded and menaced by a thousand dark powers. Fortune is a strumpet. Fate is uncertain. And now she has even taken a seafarer for a husband! Come. We will get out and refresh ourselves, and I will show you a piece of our island."

She smiled at him gratefully, and after a few minutes they stood on a hillock overlooking the landscape, which descended rapidly towards the south. El Kashef had brought a cask wrapped in straw, from which he poured cool water into two silver cups. He placed them with some grapes on a mossy rock; and the young woman, exhausted by the fatigue of the trip, her fright and her passion, snatched the fruit greedily, so that Othello could not suppress a smile.

"At least I am not seasick," she laughed at him. "Where are we? Tell me! Explain!"

He was animated by her request to learn about his world; and since he had never had a son, and as he had always kept his officers at a certain distance, his wife suddenly became his pupil. Thus it was with a different sort of touch that he placed his left hand on her shoulder now, pointing with the other at the mountains and the sea

beyond, as though she were standing on the bridge of his best galleon.

"There to the south is Mount Olympus. Yes, they have a dozen mountains of that name under the Grecian skies. Over there the range is called the Cyrenia, and a bit to the west of that is Mount Carpas. Now everything is dry, but in three months from now, in winter, you will be amazed to see how green the island becomes and how the rivers run full once more. Now we would catch swamp fever if we stayed here for only one night. It is a damnable climate. But our castle stands high on a rock and close to the sea, and there we are safe."

"And how far are we now in latitude and longitude from Damascus in the east and Achaia in the west?" She had studied the position of Cyprus on his maps, and she felt that her question was at least to the point. He was touched by its naivete, and once more he felt as if he had caught a wild bird that he must tame with the greatest of care.

"The distance to Achaia is about three times as much as the distance from here to Damascus. We are on the thirty-fourth degree of latitude here and the thirty-second of longitude. It is the golden mean, for whoever holds Cyprus holds the Mediterranean. Do you understand now why I persistently talked about Cyprus at home, and why I have always asked for more millions to strengthen this island? If you extend the line of the mountain range over there, either to the north, or the south, or the east—everywhere you will strike Turkish territory across the sea. A hundred years ago it was still ours: from Dalmatia all the way around to Thrace. To-day it is all Turkish, from Zara all the way round the Mediterranean to Morocco. The Turks are the Romans of our day, believe me. Algiers is impregnable, and Khair el Dhin is being pampered and appeased by his Christian enemies because of it.

"The French sell him gunpowder against the Spaniards, and the Pope gets ten ducats from them for every favour he grants. To-night he may come and bombard us here with the guns he bought in Augsburg from Exner. This is our last rampart, do you see? St. Mark was in Cyprus once upon a time. Now I am here. Perhaps I am the last to defend it. Perhaps our miserable shopkeepers will call me back, but to-day I still have the island under my feet and the fleet in my hands. If we lose Cyprus we shall have to abdicate—as did Byzantium before us. Then we can still sell our wares on the Rialto, but the power of the Winged Lion will be a thing of the past."

He had taken a few steps forward as he spoke, and now he suddenly took the silver cup and threw it against a rock some distance away. The cup reached its aim and rang pleasantly as it hit the stone. Othello laughed, and Abdul galloped over the rough field to retrieve it. When he brought it back, Othello handed it to the servant to rinse; and having filled it again, he said to Desdemona in a soft voice, quivering with emotion.

"Come, Desdemona, drink to me! First spill a drop on the ground for the gods of the underworld. Then lift the cup to the sun, then touch it with your ring. That is right! For I tried to hit the rock as I will hit the Turkish fleet." He turned the cup in his hand. "My fleet has a few dents, it is true; but it hit the Turk all the same. As long as your lips may touch this cup, and as long as the mountains of Cyprus belong to Venice, I will defend the republic on this island, since I have abducted its daughter!"

It was one of those rare moments when Othello gave free run to his feelings and thoughts. Desdemona was deeply impressed by his words and his emotional tone, and for the first time she began to realize how desperately serious he was when he talked of the welfare of Venice. She felt that she was part of it, strangely connected with his love and care for the republic. As she saw him in this elated and inspired mood, she did not dare to speak. She followed his gestures with her eyes and heard him exclaim in a changed, rejuvenated voice:

"And do you know that the Mediterranean is the most beautiful of all the seas? I have sailed almost all of them, the light blue ones and the dark ones. But the beauty of the mountains, the jagged shores, the mild harmony of the islands here you can find neither in the Antilles, nor in the Persian Gulf. Only here. Our sea is as varied in expression as yourself, only it is much older, and it has tasted all the joys and the bitterness you may yet have to experience."

Suddenly he came close to her and put his arm round her neck. He pulled her head close to his, and looking into the blue of her eyes, he said: "If there should be storm and fog sometime in your blue bays, I should not be surprised."

Having been silent for so long, she now said: "As long as I can drown myself in the darkness of your eyes, you are my Othello, and fog nor viper can trouble our happiness."

When they reached the little town, they found both man and

beast crowded together to await the new governor. Most of them knew him from former years, and the memory of the Turkish attack was even in the minds of the children invariably connected with Othello's name. But although in Venice the people loved the Moor, at least half the Cypriots, a mixture of all peoples and all races, hated him.

Nobody could have told exactly what race or races these hundreds of people belonged to: donkey drivers, mule boys, riders, barbers, traders, beggars, sailors and pimps. They came from all parts of Europe, from Asia Minor, and from Egypt. An ethnologist might even have discovered the traits of some red Indian who had been shipwrecked or captured among them.

To-day the real reason for their curiosity was not so much the Governor as his white wife, whose description had inspired more distrust than affection. For all those who were brown—and in Cyprus they constituted at least half of the population—distrusted the white woman who had obviously beguiled the Arab. The white population were against her for the same reason—and those among them who hailed from Venice felt degraded by this flagrant mesalliance.

As the young woman walked through the crowd at the side of her husband, she felt in the faces and looks, even in the breath of the crowd behind the two rows of guards who stood presenting halberds in salute, a malicious curiosity that was plainly directed against her. Since she had not yet experienced the various ceremonies, the grades and degrees of submission, and arrogance of society, her knowledge of such things was limited to the one hour of her wedding to the admiral at San Marco, amid the cannon volleys of the navy and the cheers of the crowd. Besides, she was far too much occupied with her love to mind the world around her. She thought of the man beside her, his movements, his caresses, his words and his wisdom. She did not give a thought to the governor of Cyprus.

Othello, on the other hand, was accustomed to honours; and he was somewhat tense because of his enemies, most of whom, here in Cyprus, he knew by sight. The insults he feared were all connected with his race, and he scrutinized the faces and gestures with double watchfulness now that he walked through the crowd with the woman he had chosen—a white woman.

In the dark, vaulted hall, to which a half dozen nations had added

columns, arches, and galleries in as many centuries, some eighty or a hundred men had moved aside to make room in the centre for the chief of the province and his suite. The admiral greeted the assembled notables and bowed politely but coldly to the foremost dignitaries. It would have been obvious to a spectator that all these Mediterranean people were far more connected through gestures, manners, and tradition than they were separated by a few shades of lighter or darker skin.

Hatred and jealousy were, however, the main springs that kept the wheels running in Cyprus. The Turkish merchants, who for eighty years had imported their goods under the supervision of Venice, had appeared at this reception only under compulsion. Othello was for them not only the hated admiral who had defeated their fleet two years earlier and had extended Venetian domination over the coveted island; he was also the Arab, whose people they had subjugated everywhere, but who ruled over them. They loathed him with that explosive hatred which fills the stronger towards the weaker who is losing ground but is still powerful enough to hold on for a while. Othello exchanged a few words with one of the rich Turkish merchants while he listened with one ear to the conversation between his wife and a Venetian, who, knowing very well that Desdemona hated her brother, took pains to ask most solicitously after his health and whereabouts. Othello turned to him and in a few seconds changed the subject.

Desdemona's admiration for her husband knew no bounds, and she felt deeply happy that he had come to her assistance so promptly and efficiently. "How brown and slim he is," she mused; "how much taller than any of the others. How he can put everything in the tone of his voice, how short his handshake with the men, how cold his bow to the women! This is Othello, who has defeated them all, of whom they stand in dread—it is Othello—my Othello."

At the same time he thought: "How white and pink she is, yet there is no powder, no paint on her cheeks. All these women have noticed it, and they are green with envy."

With deep bows and submissive smiles, which showed at the same time a degree of unpleasant familiarity, the two Germans, who had followed Othello to Cyprus in order to safeguard the copper trade of the Fuggers, now approached him. Binda, whose short fat neck perspired even more freely in this warm climate, hastened to introduce

once more his friend, Consul Schurck. He grinned from ear to ear and mumbled something about his hopes that the Governor had not forgotten them.

"Have you any complaints?" Othello asked with icy politeness.

"Why, yes, your lordship. Our ships have no safe conduct. In the last month we have again lost two ships to the corsairs."

"The republic cannot give safe conduct to strange vessels. We ourselves run the constant risk of piracy. And for what reason, by the way, do your ships sail under the Genoese flag?"

"Because we enjoy important privileges in the use of the harbour at Genoa, your lordship." This was Schurck's contribution, whose trembling voice seemed to seek shelter behind the bulk of his friend.

"Well, perhaps the Genoese navy will give you a convoy for your safety," replied Othello, putting all the malice he could muster into his amused voice.

"But we are in one of the Venetian colonies," Binda grinned triumphantly.

Immediately Othello raised his voice, and to the others around him he announced: "Do you hear this, gentlemen? These gentlemen here, who sell our copper to Augsburg so that they can make cannon from it, have just told me the startling news that we are in a Venetian colony! This gentleman here, whose name I cannot easily pronounce, has told me that. His lordship intended to explain thereby why he had a right to ask for a safe conduct against the corsairs. He is probably of the opinion that the republic should convoy all ships carrying the products of this island through the entire Mediterranean—and perhaps as far as Venezuela, where we sold some silk recently!"

From the corner of his eye Othello noticed how the two Germans had retreated to the far wall, where they seemed to disappear among the columns like two evil spirits.

CHAPTER III

IN the narrow, half-open cabin of his flagship, the admiral lay over his chart, in his hand a compass, which every now and then he placed on the chart to draw a circle. Close to him, so that their arms touched each other, lay his wife, following with her eyes and ears his explanations. They came abruptly, as though he were talking to himself, and sometimes they were interrupted by strange Arab sounds. Then again he spoke animatedly about some problem and turned towards his pupil, explaining the science of navigation in the simplest possible terms. He was so immersed in his world that he barely noticed the woman in Desdemona and did not realize that half of his talk went past her without making any impression.

For Desdemona was too happy at such moments to concentrate on the matter under discussion. Her mind was strong enough to take in the rudiments of the art of navigation, and she had no difficulty in imagining the dangers that beset the skipper in the Aegean sea, whether in the shape of Turks or fog. But her whole being was aglow with her passion for this particular seafarer, and not a movement of his body escaped her notice. Her senses remained calm. For him love was thunder and lightning, and she was ready to learn it thus from him.

Now she looked at his hand, in the midst of his explanations, how it enclosed the mariner's compass, whose little magnetic needle was then, as it is to this day, the real commander of each ship. In its glass-encased box it had a magic attraction for the navigator, for there was nothing that could replace it. The way Othello passed his hand over the instrument struck Desdemona as a caress; and raising herself on her elbow, she asked him defiantly: "Is there anything in the world you love as much as your compass?"

He paused. Then he looked from the woman tenderly to the compass and said softly: "We all depend on this little needle inside. It is as sacred to me as the Madonna."

"Is it also from Arabia?"

"No. It comes from China. When God wants to show me the way

through the fog, I have to trust this needle, whose direction cannot be altered nor changed."

She kept her eyes fixed on him; and since she had dared to speak once, she asked yet again: "Then you love the compass more than you love me?"

He became still more serious and looked at her more inquisitively than lovingly. "I could perhaps guide you. But the compass guides me. Without it we are lost in the fog—just as we would be without the Madonna."

She trembled, took the compass from him and placed it on the chart, out of his reach. He watched her and said kindly: "It seems that you want to go north-west!"

Under the soothing effect of his voice she gave him back the instrument and said passionately: "Othello, I will sail with you. You shall guide me; you shall be my compass. I have given myself to you—now you set the course. . . ."

Her voice had almost died away with the last words, and she was close to tears. He was deeply moved, for the daring enterprise to take a young life, to guide and mould it, which he had embarked on, at first with the clear conscience of someone who had been asked to do it, now needed his philosophy, his religion for support. There she stood, the beautiful white child, crying because he loved his compass too much. Slowly he took her wrist and turned her head, which she had averted to hide her tears.

"Look, Desdemona," he said, "the compass has led me to you. If the needle had pointed in another direction, that day when I looked for you in San Lazzaro at my father's, I might have gone to Burano instead, and I would have been late. You would have gone home, and I would not have seen your eyes looking at me. I would not have married you and would now be sitting alone with my chart, alone with my compass; and I would be pondering how I could drive the Turks away to-night west of Rhodes."

She forced herself to a smile and asked inconsequently: "Why west of Rhodes?"

He laughed and jumped up. "Would you like to see the galley slaves?"

"No, no," she said passionately. But as soon as she saw his disappointment, she corrected herself and just as passionately cried: "Yes, indeed, I would love to see them!"

When he had shown her, earlier, over some of the ships, he had always avoided the benches on which the naked men sat, three of them chained to each bench. Later he had thought that, since she was so eager to hear all about his own youth, she should see with her own eyes what it was to be a galley slave. Had he not himself sat on such a bench for more than a year of agony and despair? Should he treat her, who never acted the contessa, as a noble, aristocratic creature who must not be shown the gloomy understructure on which her life, his own, and that of the republic was built?

When they stood a little later at the benches, where he talked to two slaves in Italian, he noticed how, standing slightly behind him, she had pressed her lips together, like someone who is trying to master a physical pain. One of the slaves did not understand—or pretended not to understand. Othello addressed him in Spanish and learned that he was a Dutchman. Desdemona noticed how Othello's face became animated as he questioned the prisoner in Spanish, of which she only understood a word now and then. The prisoner sat motionless on his bench, staring morosely in front of him, giving his answers reluctantly, almost wildy.

"No, in India."

"Name?"

"Jansen."

Othello breathed heavily as if he had suddenly discovered his worst enemy. He controlled himself and asked gruffly:

"Which Jansen?"

"Zachary."

"From Harlem?"

"From a village near Harlem."

"Did you know a Jacob Metiers, there?"

The slave nodded. "Spectacle maker."

There was a pause. Othello tried to recover his self-control.

"What was your father's name?"

"Jansen."

"Was he also a spectacle maker?"

"No, that was my uncle, Zachary."

Othello turned around and clapped his hands. El Kashef came.

"Take her ladyship back to the castle. The larger boat with the cushions. Forgive me, I must talk *to* this prisoner." He stepped back a

little to let her pass and saluted her without a smile. Then he turned in the opposite direction.

A few seconds later the slave stood in Othello's cabin. They continued to speak in Spanish, but very softly. The prisoner was bewildered by his sudden liberation, and his answers came rapidly.

"When did you leave Harlem?"

"Three years ago."

"Did your uncle work on anything else besides spectacles? What did Metiers do then?"

"They both worked constantly on the telescope."

For ten years now, navigators of all nations had been on the tracks of three or four opticians in Holland who had made considerable progress with the telescope. Thirty years before, Othello had followed some experiments with the instrument at Padua. Wherever he went, he always tried to keep track of the latest developments. He had only recently learnt the names of these two Dutch opticians, and he guarded them well. He did not dare to write them down and would repeat them to himself at night a hundred times, so that he would not forget the foreign sounds. Now he did not have to think twice. He went straight to the point, giving his orders to the naked shivering man, who had been nothing but a captive beast a few minutes earlier.

"For the time being you are free, Jansen. But you will stay alone in the cabin. Only El Kashef will bring you food. Soon we shall send some wine to Holland. You will go with that shipment. If the slightest hint of all this gets round, you will be tortured for two weeks and then quartered. Be silent and think. If you have something to say to me, ask El Kashef to let me know."

The Dutchman, unable to speak, tried to seize Othello's hand. But he withdrew it and gave El Kashef instructions where to lodge the man.

Half an hour later Othello looked for his wife and found her in the garden, sitting on a carpet spread along the low stone wall that enclosed the pond. Her face was almost covered by a large straw hat, and her hand hung into the water over the wall. She recognized his step and was about to rise, but he stopped her and sat down himself. He had known from the first day that she could only be won by complete honesty. He felt that it would not have been honest to give her an explanation for his behaviour without telling her the truth. Thus for

the first time in thirty years he broke his sworn duty and talked about what amounted to a professional secret. Since she never asked any questions, it was easy to create the impression of complete honesty and frankness. And it was the impression which counted. But to-day something unusual had happened: he had let himself be carried away by the excitement and had sent her away, suddenly, brusquely. So he said, as if he were talking to the Madonna: "Will you forgive your friend, Desdemona?"

Her blood shot to her heart when she heard the word he had never used before. She felt as if she had waited for just this. Suddenly a new honour was conferred upon her. She had been his child, his wife, his love. Now she was his friend as well. She took her hand out of the water and reached for his coat, only half aware that she would moisten it.

"This prisoner," he continued, putting his hand on her hair, from which the hat had fallen, "this prisoner is from Holland; and he is related to the man who has built the telescope, which we have not been able to perfect in twenty years. Perhaps the whole thing is only a legend; perhaps he has not got it. But if it is true and if I can get my hands on it—then you see, I can count the Turkish ships in battle at a distance of five miles—or perhaps even twenty. Then I know more than they do, and we can save the republic once more with .our miserable ships."

"How wonderful!" she said softly and lifted her head, "I shall pray to the Madonna that she may put it into your brown hands. How can you get hold of that man?"

He looked darkly at the ground, and falling back into his commanding tone, he said in a low voice: "By seduction, by bribery, by force—perhaps even by murder."

"Will you go there yourself?"

"No, I must stay in the Mediterranean. The liberated slave must work for me. As soon as he betrays me he will die. He knows that."

All at once, with a feminine lack of logic, she turned to her earlier question.

"Then the telescope comes before even the compass?"

He smiled. "Nothing comes before the compass. Come, I shall get you a water lily. Take a petal and press it in a book. In twenty years, perhaps, you will open the book, think of me and murmur: 'Othello gave me this once. He loved me all his life.' "

She looked at him childlike, "Why will you die before me?"

"Because I am much older and I still have battles ahead of me."

With a wild movement she threw herself at him and cried: "But to-day! To-day!"

"To-day we shall drink Cyprus wine and I shall put my ear on your heart and listen to its beat."

CHAPTER IV

OTHELLO lay on the top of the tower surrounded by a crenellated wall, and looked at a white apparition that seemed to stand or float on the far side of the circular terrace. The moonlight had dissolved the outlines into vague shadows, and Othello pulled more cushions behind him until he was almost sitting up; for he wanted to see the figure, not the sky. He did not call her, but remained quietly contemplative. The reddish light of a lamp, which the servant had put near his couch, shone on him. The carpets and cushions that had been prepared for them up here were not so much a bed as a romantic resting place, such as a traveller might put up next to his camels when he was riding through the desert. He thought of a young female slave whom he had once taken into one of those tents.

This memory showed him the adventurous character of his present enterprise even more clearly. For the figure over there in the moonlight had captured his imagination more and more, had made every day more exciting, while in his former love affairs he had barely taken the time to stop and think. These women he had taken, enjoyed the moment, then abandoned and forgotten them. As the man of fifty felt for the first time that his very soul was chained to his love, his tension, his excitement rose with every day instead of abating after the first weeks. He asked himself secretly how this could go on, and he dared not think how it would end. The distant figure, the moonlight, the romantic surroundings of the round carpeted terrace at the top of the watch-tower stressed the element of unreality. Had she changed suddenly into a wraith he would not have been surprised.

The soft, insistent chirping of the cicadas—or perhaps it was only one—made a strangely harmonious contrast with the soft sound of the waves at the foot of the tower. It was as if the terrestrial voice of the insect were trying to measure its strength against the eternal music of the sea. This striving was reflected in Desdemona's soul; for her heart was restless as she found herself on the roofless tower with her husband. She missed the warmth of an enclosed room and was distracted by the distant music of the stars, interrupted only by the

louder harmonies of the moon. But at the same time she felt half queen, half slave, and vibrated to the ever-growing tension between her husband and herself, which was heightened by the twenty paces' distance between them.

Do dreams ever become reality? she asked herself. Am I really on an island in the south, on top of a castle tower, all alone with the only man who always wandered through my dreams, ever since my breasts first began to form? Over there lies the slender brown man, waiting for me until I come to drown his strength. Yes, over there is Othello, who dreamed only of the compass and the telescope and who did not touch a woman for years. I, a little girl, thought I could conquer the hero of my nation; and now he has conquered me so completely, I want nothing but to submit to him. What shall I do to keep myself strong and beautiful so that I may keep him for myself, he who has all the power, all the knowledge, he whose command thousands obey. Oh, Madonna do not forsake me in this daring, bold enterprise!

She felt how the man approached her on soundless feet, and she began to tremble. In a moment he would be there and would put his hard, strong arm on her shoulder. But when he had reached her, he put his arm with unusual gentleness on her hips, thus indicating the direction of his wishes. Then he lifted her from the floor and carried her back to the corner where the cushions lay.

"Would you like some grapes? They are the blue ones with the thin skins, which you like." And he began to feed her carefully, putting one berry and then another between her lips. She felt weak and would have accepted poison from him with the same calmness. "Won't you have any?" she asked.

"Yes, I will," he replied, raised the grapes over his mouth and bit wildly into them. He laughed and held a large one between his teeth, "Take it from me," he said. And when she had kissed the fruit from his mouth, he said: "And now give it back to me."

Softly she whispered into his ear: "Will you play with me? No one has ever played with me. I was always alone. Tell me about yourself! Did you have someone to play with?"

"I was two when Padre Domenico took me into his care. Who should have played with me?"

"Then you really don't know anything of the time before then?"

"Just one impression. I have seen it with my eyes. I did not dream

it, I am sure." His voice became a whisper and he came close to her ear, so that the spirits around them should not hear it.

"It was a large, flat basin with blue tiles. At the edge two feet, the feet of a woman hung down into it. They moved gently, making a slight splashing sound. They must have been my mother's feet. We had such Arab fountains in Andalusia."

She listened as if to a secret and asked: "Were you there with her? Did you play there?"

"I have never seen myself in this picture. And all I saw of her were her feet, just up to her ankles."

"Now I know what I shall give him for his feast day," she thought.

"It is from her that you got your slender ankles," she said then, stroking his right foot.

"Yours are more beautiful," his voice replied.

"But how did you manage to keep your feet so beautiful?"

"To us Arabs the foot is as sacred as the hand. When I was a galley slave, I wept sometimes to see my ruined feet."

"And how old were you then?"

He pushed back his cloak, and pulling up his sleeve he showed her a scar under the armpit. "Have you seen my number?"

"Yes, I have, but it is hidden. Your slaves all have their number on the forearm."

"The capricious—or perhaps cruel—whim of a sailor saved me from having my number there. He probably thought the iron would hurt more in the tender underside. That was thirty-five years ago. Can you read it still?" He lifted his arm.

"Yes, but it is fading. It was 212."

"Yes," he nodded, "212. If you add these numbers, you get five. My number, my fate. If he had branded me with another, I would never have been able to escape. It was near the Canaries; a German merchantman had seized us. Ever since, I have borne a burning hate for all Germans. All my people know my number. I purposely lift my arm when I am swimming so that they can see it."

"And the women? Did they see it too?"

"If it was not too dark," he said and laughed.

She took her cue from his laugh and asked, "Many of them?"

"Not many."

"Were they white?"

"An Indian girl of twelve was the most beautiful. That was on Cuba."

"And what did you do with her?"

He looked at her frank surprise. "I taught her how to make love."

"And she?"

"She laughed!" After a pause, during which they both let their thoughts roam, he added. "If she had a son by me, he would now be thirty years old!"

A violent pain suddenly stabbed the young woman's heart and she quickly brought her hand to it. He felt and understood it, and began to stroke her soothingly with his brown hands. Then he pointed to the sky.

"Do you see the star up there? No—there, farther west. That is Aldebaran. It is my star. It shines on you and takes away the pain from your heart because you are mine too."

She threw her arms around him. "Othello! Othello! Do you believe that your star could also be mine? Will you relinquish half of its magic to me? Will you swear to me to-night, here under your star, that you will give me all your happiness, all your fate, all your heart? To me and to me alone!"

Her gaze, full of fear and passion, had taken possession of him. The blue of her eyes seemed changed into steel. The fear of a passionate creature, the will of a strong woman to possess the man entirely had become apparent.

The navigator recognized his familiar element and wondered how he might allay the storm. His wordless answer was virile. Her eyes closed as the tension of the last half hour found release in their mutual embrace.

Later she pointed again at the sky and asked:

"Was it this star?"

"No, this one, the only one that has a reddish light. Take it as your own to-night."

"And why is it yours?"

"It was in a battle at sea east of the Cape, when we brought pepper to Spain. Everything seemed lost. The corsairs from Morocco were too many. My compass was broken. I could navigate according to the stars, but heavy clouds covered the sky. My galley had been separated from the other ships and I did not know where we were.

Only once in a while Aldebaran looked through the moving clouds. I steered by this only star, and swere to the Madonna that I would keep it as a sign if she would let it shine long enough to get my bearings. And then it shone every three or four minutes until the danger was over. When the wind changed and the clouds disappeared, I recognized the star, the eye of Taurus. Ever since it has been my star—and to-night it has become yours."

The deep sound of his voice and the force of his embrace filled her soul with a profound certitude. To-day he had told her part of his secret and raised her to the status of his companion. She felt that she alone knew the secret pattern of his destiny. For a long time she lay motionless, her head on his shoulder. At last she no longer felt jealous of his secret thoughts which he had revealed to her. Silently she listened to the beating of his heart and to the music of the night.

She looked at the star and after a pause she asked:

"Do you know them all?"

"Only a few of them."

"Is Aldebaran a Greek god?"

"No. He is Arab. And now sleep, Desdemona! Aldebaran looks down on us, and he will be kind to our love."

CHAPTER V

LUCIA held a wide skirt of blue taffeta to her mistress's hips asking whether she wished to wear it. Desdemona, sitting in the deep bay window of her irregularly built room, seemed absent-minded, showing little interest in the various suggestions concerning her clothes that Lucia offered.

"Why do you choose blue?" she said rather abruptly.

"Because his lordship picked it out the other day and held it over his arm for quite a while. He loves wide flowing gowns of heavy, rustling material."

Desdemona listened carefully, considered the words for a while, and then nodded. Lucia slipped the heavy silken skirt over her head. In front of the mirror she asked:

"Will he come soon?"

"I don't know," Lucia replied; "but El Kashef is outside."

"Oh, call him in!"

El Kashef entered. But he came with a certain reluctance in his mien, for the mistress had never yet required the services of the master's slave. With a movement of her arm that she had obviously learned from Othello, she motioned Lucia out of the room—a thoroughly unorthodox action. There she sat, young and beautiful, before the black slave—it was like a scene from the brush of Veronese. Her heart beat fast: What would happen if Othello were to discover them? For she had a secret, and softly she began to talk to El Kashef.

"Listen, I want to surprise his lordship for his birthday. You must help. It is an exception, but you must keep a secret from your master for once. Down there in the garden, behind the little bamboo grove near the basin with the water lilies, a canal must be dug and a new basin made about twenty or thirty paces from the old one. Get me samples of blue tiles as quickly as possible from the town. The basin itself must be long and broad, but quite flat. Don't forget that it must have some means of letting the water out. In eight days from now everything is to be ready, for his birthday is on the 5th of October. You know that.

Discuss it with the engineer of the arsenal. I don't want to have him come here, because everybody would notice it. Take fifty or eighty men, let them work as silently as possible—and only when the governor is not here. Only you can do this. When it is ready, then I shall take him there and I will tell him that it was you, El Kashef, who did it. And now tell me honestly: are you willing to do it and keep it a secret?"

This was an event for El Kashef. Not for twenty years had anything of the sort happened to him. He was always taken into his master's confidence, but in his capacity as a bloodhound, a spy. Never had he been a party to anything like this. He was to play the role of a son who prepares a surprise for his father! His purple lip drooped and he looked pensively at the white woman: the first creature, other than his master, who had given him an order in twenty years.

He hesitated. The whole thing seemed too strange. But suddenly he remembered how his master had lain delirious on the Chinese coast and had repeated something about a blue basin and the feet of his mother. This sudden memory decided him.

"I will do it and keep it a secret."

Desdemona smiled at him and nodded her thanks.

"But Abdul must be kept away," the slave continued. "Otherwise the dog will smell of lime and strange men, and his lordship will notice it. More than thirty men cannot work together at a time. We need men from the east for the tiling. The gardener must give the water lilies one week's rest."

She nodded again and turned away. At the door El Kashef spoke once more and asked: "Will all these workers keep the secret. . . .?"

"I want it so!" she said harshly and rose. As she stood alone at the window looking at the bay with its many ships at anchor, she realized that this was the first time in life she had given an order. She had never asked for anything more than a gondola in the afternoon or a piece of lace from a dealer. She also realized that her joy at the forthcoming surprise, the secrecy of it had suddenly slipped away from her. Now she understood also why Othello was often so sombre and gruff after he had given an order. On this morning Desdemona became acquainted with the chill of power; she had the feeling that she had lost something.

She looked at herself, undecided whether she should keep the new dress on until Othello came, when she saw his head appear in the

darkness of the mirror, and at the same instant felt his hand on her shoulder.

He pushed his shoulder against her neck; and they walked close to the mirror until they almost touched it. He stretched out his finger and began to draw her mouth on the cool glass, as if he wanted to memorize the outline, never to forget it. She turned her face towards his and kissed him. .

The kiss had no end; neither had it a climax, and their bodies did not move closer to each other. Through her half open lids she could see his eyes close. She thought: "Oh, God, don't let it end—never, never end." He thought at the same time: "To die—why go on—why fight—justdie—die...."

Later that morning they were sitting in a boat about a stone's throw from the rocky shore.

"Just for twenty paces—no farther," she called to him as she was ready to jump overboard. It was the first time that they had decided to go swimming together. He was in a happy mood, a mixture of pride, amusement, and curiosity. He was cool and fresh, for they were both wet under their woollen bathing suits.

It had surprised him to hear that she could swim. Where had she learnt it? At a friend's on the Terra Firma, for in Venice no one ever learned to swim. No Venetian lady could move away from her house without trusting herself to the wet element and none but would have instantly drowned had her gondola capsized. It was only since the new spirit of the times had found something like a codification in the Corteggiano that riding, hunting, and swimming had been allowed for women. It was no good telling the nuns about it, because for them a woman was born in long clothes and died in them. Anything else was sinful. Old conventions and new liberties thus existed closely side by side, and Desdemona had a share in both.

The bathing suit, at that time still a daring innovation, was long and of closely woven heavy material that in no way accentuated the beauty of the female body. Othello, who normally jumped naked into the water, felt strange in his moist artificial skin. Desdemona, who had swum on ahead, now turned to see whether he had already joined her. But at that moment she screamed, for Abdul had come up with her, half under water, and now grabbed her shoulder playfully. Othello jumped in and reached them with a few strokes. After he had chased

the dog away, he pointed to a rock that jutted out not a hundred paces away.

"Let's swim to that rock," he said laughingly and started ahead of her. The dog was the first to reach it, and amid laughter and shouting they finally climbed onto the rock, where Abdul received them with a spray from his wet coat.

Desdemona had lost her cap and her golden hair shone in the sunlight. It was one of those autumn days when the gods seem to smile on the Mediterranean, which looked peaceful and lovely as if a storm could never happen in such a climate. The water was so warm that one had to dive deep down to get into the cooler currents. A slight wind, which seemed to blow only in order to join in their games, caused small light blue waves on the water to gurgle pleasantly against the rock.

When their laughter had subsided they sat—somewhat taken aback—side by side on the wet, smooth rock. "How much more beautiful she is in her clothes," he thought; "Venice may want to marry the sea, but the Venetian woman will never consent if this is to be their bridal attire!" Aloud he said:

"Your muscles are strong. If you trained them, you could beat Catarina Sforza."

"Yes, if Abdul would not come up from the depths unexpectedly I could swim from here to Corfu—or is Corfu not in this direction?"

"Next time I will bring you a yellow bath wrap for drying. The green one over there is too sombre."

He lay on his back with his arms spread out and looked at the sky. She sat upright and looked at him as one looks at a statue. Suddenly the bronze statue of Mercury with which she had once fallen in love appeared before her mind. Seeing Othello for the first time like this in the full sunshine, she began to compare him with Mercury. It is strange, because for the first time in her life she felt older. Not old, but older, more mature than she had been so far. For a moment a cloud lay over her soul and she longed for the days of her girlhood. She became very sad and put her hand on her heart. Othello, seeing this now familiar gesture, sat up quickly and asked:

"Are you cold? Are you tired?" Then he added slowly and mournfully: "Desdemona is sad—"

She looked at him helplessly, almost desperately, and said:

"Just now we laughed so much, when Abdul shook his wet coat, and when I wanted to swim to Corfu. You lay on your back and looked beautiful, my lovely brown Othello. And suddenly everything disappeared in the shadow of a cloud." She began to cry, and throwing herself into his arms she sobbed, talking more to herself than to him: "Now I know why Lucrezia in the picture, with her lover and all her jewellery, looks so sad."

He was silent. For he was familiar with this feeling that she now discovered for the first time. Then he said in a dull voice:

"Melancholy lives as close to mirth as Boreas to the Zephyr. And it is the same with fame and love. Suddenly when we have everything that we have always dreamed of, we no longer want it and we wish that we were back in our dreams. All these weeks I have tried to find out what your blue eyes wanted to tell me when they looked at me so seriously, sometimes, at night, as if they wanted to fathom my very soul. No one can enjoy happiness without asking how long it will last. It is like sailing the seas."

She felt his strong hand on her arm, as though he wanted to wake her from her thoughts. "Come! Let us swim over to the coast. From there we can climb the cliffs and reach our terrace, where a meal awaits us. There are lobsters to-day. I saw them earlier in the basket."

She laughed and shook herself. A shudder ran down her spine but she overcame it and, diving into the water, swam so rapidly toward the coast that both man and dog had difficulty in keeping up with her.

CHAPTER VI

ON their daily walks in the early morning, Desdemona had succeeded in keeping Othello away from the part of the garden where the blue basin was being built. Only once was her secret in danger. Abdul had been with the men at the basin, and Othello, smelling his coat, thought: "Strange! Lime? I wonder where he has been straying?" But Abdul did not reveal the secret.

The fleet at Cyprus had decked its ships with flags and bunting for the Commander's birthday. Othello and Desdemona made the rounds of the ships in a small craft, and everywhere they were saluted and cheered by the men on board. Only the slaves sat sullenly, chained to their benches, and showed no emotion whatsoever. Desdemona thought that the ceremony was rather cold and formal, and the apathy of the slaves spoiled her festive mood. But then she saw that it must be so, because it had always been so.

The basin, which she had visited secretly the day before and which she had found ready, was beautifully finished with blue tiles just as she had ordered it. It lay in the middle of a bamboo grove, and the yellow stems of the large trees contrasted finely with the blue of the basin. After the inspection of the fleet the young woman led him in the direction of the pool, and since he could expect a surprise for his birthday he followed her, as if they came here every day. Abdul, who knew everything, ran to and fro to indicate his knowledge of this new pool, which he found most convenient for his own purposes.

As he stepped through the thicket Othello suddenly saw the blue pool. He stopped for a moment, then he walked closer and stood still at the edge of the basin. Here was his dream, the same tiles, the same edge. He stared at the place where he had seen his mother's feet dangling in the pool. Without taking his eyes off the water he reached for Desdemona's hand, then let it go again and continued to stare, to think, to dream. He had not said a word.

She was much happier. She felt that with this gift she had built a bridge that led him back into his childhood, even if it was only a woman's bridge—or, she thought, perhaps just because of that. **They**

sat down at the broad, tiled edge of the pool and he put his hand into the water, so that the current divided itself through his fingers and made a soft and pleasant noise.

She let him dream, looking lovingly at him and saying nothing. Finally he broke the silence.

"Did your mother have small feet?"

"I never knew her," Desdemona replied.

"Some people," he said, "have their mothers until they grow old. You have given me this basin of my mother's. I shall never forget it." Suddenly he jumped up and with the movements of a young man stepped close to her, and looking out of his black eyes with intensity, he said softly and solemnly, almost as a vow:

"Desdemona! If ever I should do you an injustice, if ever I should reproach you, if ever I should be the victim of a suspicion concerning you—then remind me of the blue tiles and everything will be right again; for I will defend you until I fall!"

He had taken her by the hand; he seemed breathless for a few seconds. She was terrified. She had never thought of such things. For the first time she realized that he even feared that one day he might be prevailed upon to distrust her. Now this impression was soon engulfed by the waves of her loving heart. But it lay there, for the rest of her life.

When El Kashef appeared at the bamboo thicket she called him over and said to Othello: "El Kashef made it all and kept the secret." The slave took courage and addressed a question to his master in Italian, which he had not done for many years. But he felt it necessary that Desdemona should understand.

"Is it the right shade of blue, lord?"

Othello, dreaming beside the pool, nodded. "How many men did you need?" he asked.

"Fifty-two. Is it flat enough?"

"Everything is just right," said Othello, but then he added something in Arabic that Desdemona could not understand.

"What did you say?" she asked interestedly. "Perhaps something is not the way you wanted it."

He rose, and taking her lightly by the shoulder said: "No, it is just like my dream. Only—you know—then it looked a bit larger to me."

She began to laugh. "Well, that is the way with dreams. You taught me that yourself."

The slave crept softly through the bamboo. He had understood the words of his young mistress well enough. He even felt something like respect for the woman. Suddenly he heard himself called and returned to his master. Othello gave him an order, and a few minutes later El Kashef and two other slaves, carrying a large chest, returned and set their burden down at the edge of the pool. This was Othello's surprise for his wife. The chest was not as large as the wedding chest, but it had a glass top and one could see the contents glimmering just as in a fairy story. Before the slaves had gone she was on her knees before the chest, with the naive pleasure of a schoolgirl.

"But it is your birthday—not mine!" she exclaimed twice.

"It is mine and therefore also yours," he said, and explained to her how Antonio di Pesaro had built this chest for the Duke of Mantua, and how Othello had bought it when the Duke had failed to pay for it. She passed her hands along the top of the box, which was studded with silver, rubies, and emeralds as large as the copper nails that usually are seen on such chests.

"Are these buried dreams?" she asked trying to make out the contents through the glass top.

"Unborn dreams, perhaps," he replied, but regretted immediately that he had said it, for she blushed violently.

"How old are we to-day—the two of us together?" she asked, trying to shake off her former thoughts.

"Sixty-six. But you bear only a quarter of these years, while I carry all the rest. Tell me the truth: do I strike you as very old?"

"Your years cover your jewels, as this top protects those in the chest," she replied. Then she added impatiently: "And now give me the key and show me everything, and tell me that it is for me." She was once more the happy child, and laughingly she searched his pockets for the key. But he turned the complicated lock on the chest, lifted the heavy top, took out a necklace, and laid it round her throat.

"These are emeralds from Nubia. They were stolen by a pirate from the Emperor; and later, another pirate, who sold them to me. That was not far from the Coral Islands in the Red Sea."

She did not hear him, or perhaps she did not want to hear him. She only saw the fiery green of her gems. She leaned over the pool

to look at her reflection. "The next time we go to a feast, I won't need a mirror. I'll just come down here and dress before the pool. Perhaps we can pretend that we are Doge and Dogaressa! How would you like that? In a few years they might elect you, and then I can put on these emeralds and you will wear the Doge's cap and look like someone going to the carnival!"

"This candelabra," Othello continued, lifting up a silver candlestick that consisted almost entirely of sculptured figures, "was made by Antonio Vittoria; it took him two years to finish it. If you look at all the details—it will take you two hours easily."

"We shall put that next to your bed. Oh, no, it will attract the insects. No, we can put it on the oval table in the French hall. Oh, look at the bronze dish! Look at the many figures. It is by Sansovino!"

"No, it is a piece by Savelli. The figures are ail from Dante, only without the Inferno."

She was beside herself with excitement. Her eyes wandered from one piece to the other, and reaching into the chest, she lifted out a helmet i n the shape of a lion's head. She put it on and looked into the pool. The heavy helmet fell into the water with a loud splash. The dog immediately jumped into the basin and retrieved it.

"In the next sea battle you must be careful not to lean overboard," Othello said, taking the helmet and drying it. "See how beautifully these ivy leaves are wrought." He put the helmet back on her head and coaxed a few golden tresses forward from underneath it.

"This is exactly what I saw in my mind when I ordered the helmet. It really was Veronese's fault, because his Minerva gave me the idea!"

"Words, words," she exclaimed. "I know that you won't take me with you in battle whether I have the helmet or not. And you know how well I can swim!"

"See what an Indian diver got for you by swimming!" he said, now holding up a double row of cut rubies. "I bought these on the Ruby Island, now called Ceylon. To break them from the rock, one has to dive under water, swim into grottoes and crevasses. This ruby here—wait, it was the seventeenth in the top row—here it is: this had some flaws, so they put it in the fire and burned it clear."

She sat among her treasures and laughed in delight at them without having the slightest notion of the immense value of the things

spread out before her. Suddenly she turned to Othello and asked:

"Do you love me more in pearls and lace, and covered with jewels—than without them—without anything? Tell me the truth! You shower me with gifts, and what do I have to give you?"

He pulled her towards him, and taking the lace carefully from her bosom, he kissed her breast, tenderly, as if it were a bridal kiss.

"I only put lace and pearls on you as one would put a fine frame round a Venus by the Master. Do you not ask me sometimes to put on my long Arab coat?"

"Oh, yes, but that is different! You are never as beautiful as in your Arab coats. And when I see your hips outlined in them, I get weak and want to kiss them and—what am I saying?"

"You speak as my love—and for the first time!" Othello pressed her close to him. "How often have I wished for words like these when your blue eyes looked at me penetratingly in utter silence! See, my love, here is still a ring for you. It is there in the little silver box. Do you know what the blue stone there means? It is the rare blue beryl, the only stone that can rival your eyes. Tomasco cut it for me. Don't you know him? He has his shop behind the Frari, and he hates every customer because he wants to keep the jewels for himself. If I had not threatened to press his son into service, he would never have sold me this ring. I shall kiss it now and speak a prayer over it. And then you shall wear it on your ring finger on your right hand." He stopped for a moment and slipped the ring on her hand. "Now I can kiss your eyes every time I kiss your hand. Do you see what a horrible egoist I am? I am giving you presents, but all of them are presents to myself!"

"Oh, my beloved! How happy you are to-day! It must be the spirit of your mother that takes you back to your carefree childhood. You play and laugh as if you had never been in battle. This is your birthday—the 5th of October—and I shall kiss you five times—just like the Padre—only not on your forehead but on your lips, for then you must return my kisses and they will last much longer."

CHAPTER VII

HIGH up on the side of the castle that faced the sea, a large stone table stood under three gnarled old olive trees. From this spot there was a superb view on harbour and bay, from the rocks below, surrounded by the white foam of the surf, to the range of blue hills far in the distance.

Othello was seated at the table, and when he saw Desdemona, in a sea-green morning gown, coming over the flagstones of the terrace, he waved a letter in the air.

"The courier brought a letter!" he cried. "Can you guess who is writing to us?"

"My father?" she asked. But Othello shook his head.

"Maria, perhaps?"

"No. Look at the handwriting and you will recognize it."

"Aretino! Only Aretino writes like that," she said after having looked at the letter. "What does he write?"

"I have not read it. I saved it until you came. Are you comfortable? Have you enough cushions?"

Desdemona settled close to him. "Shall I read it, or will you?" Othello asked her but before she could answer he added, "I had better read it, for we don't know yet what impossible things he might write." Desdemona blushed a little, and he began:

Dear friends, it is nine o' clock in the morning now and the buzzing from the Rialto is clearly audible. I can't hear words—just a buzzing. Paolo has cooked a trout in white wine, which I have just eaten with some bread and a very light, dry wine from the Castelli Romani. The glass from which I am drinking to you is from the estate of the late Duke Ercole; and every time that I empty it, I send a little curse to its former owner—I think he is mentioned in the thirteenth canto of the Inferno!—for his grandson ordered a sonnet from me and has never bothered to pay for it. Here in Venice such things would not happen. Here I don't pay my rent—or so I am told by Gandolfo, my landlord.

The buzzing from the Rialto continues. When I go down there a little later, and climb the first five steps five times and then the remaining six, I shall be able

to take in all the smells of Venice in one minute, and I shall describe them to you so accurately that you will take the next ship home. For it is time that you came back. When I listen around in the inns and markets, I hear too little about Il Moro and too much about the Contessa.

Othello looked up at Desdemona. But she did not move and merely nodded to him to continue.

And yet, Admiral, do not come. Stay down there. But for the love of the Madonna, stage a small sea battle and let it be known that another Salamis, only more terrible and more bloody, has taken place. Be sure to make it more than a thousand dead. Then I shall make a poem, 'Il Moro's Second Victory' or 'Cyprus Saved Again!' I can have it set to music, so that it will be sung all over Italy and so that the Turks will make a parody on it. But a thousand dead—no less. For were it five hundred, your enemies would already sense a decline in your activities. The other day, when my gondola stopped behind San Paolo to let two others pass, I heard, in one' of them, old Tiepolo say to his wife: 'He lets everything take its course down there. Lorenzo tells me that the administration of Cyprus has come to a standstill, because Il Moro is too busy making love to his wife.'

My beautiful Desdemona—if I may call you that in the presence of your husband—do you remember that line of Petrarca's where he compares the laurel to the myrtle ? Do not listen to these pompous poets, who know little of the world and nothing of love! Don't give him more than an hour a day for his business. Hold him, talk to him, walk with him, be silent with him at all hours of the day. For Cyprus will not happen twice to you. Believe an old friend and a philosopher of love. Even with a thousand dead Turks they will call him home, sooner or later; your brother Antonio has already rallied about fifty votes in the Senate and will not stop there. And then the ladies! All parties and receptions have but one topic. You see they feel the spring, and they are wondering how they could possibly spoil it all for you. The Germans are, of course, in the lead! Too bad that most heretics are Germans. I would be glad to do an honest heretic a favour. But these two send reports from Cyprus to your brother and his friends, who distribute them here and ensure the greatest possible circulation of these slanders. One of these sheets was even posted at the Gobbo the other day. I write all this to you to warn you as a friend. I beseech you by the thirty-seven columns of the Palazzo Ducale———

"Thirty-eight!" cried Desdemona.

Othello nodded and continued;

——for I don't count the fat one in the middle——

Both of them laughed now.

Thus, by the thirty-seven columns I beseech you make the most of every hour you have together! They begrudge you your happiness. The shopkeepers rule in the Palazzo, and the few brave men who trust the brave admiral are being pulled down like the branches of a chestnut tree from which the boys swing until they break it.

The population is, as ever, faithful to II Moro. The artists are on your side, the craftsmen are for you. Even Veronese, who cannot be depended upon, sticks to you. Sansovino beams all over when he hears your name. You know, of course, that he put our three heads in bronze on the new door of the sacristy at San Marco. But do you know what the knave did? He put the Master on the top and me, of course, at the bottom. His own head is in the middle, so one has to touch it every time one opens the door.

The Master is well, and his painting beggars all description. He has just finished a Flora, so beautiful that when I looked at the picture I would have given much to be able to undress her. And I know that he did not even touch the model. How he can paint such vibrating, living flesh on his canvas without a tremor is beyond me. When I am supposed to write a sonnet to Zaffetta I always have to sleep with her first. The negotiations with that horrible bishop of Rome, called Pope, continue, and if the Master really made up his mind to paint the old sinner, in spite of the fact that he is the enemy of the Emperor, his prestige at the Palazzo here would mount to such an extent that the number of Antonio's confederates might be reduced. And if our whole group goes to battle for you, and if I should declare myself publicly against the Emperor—in that case the shopkeepers might be afraid for their golden ducats and might give in.

Above all, dear Admiral, the sea battle! Kiss the Contessa's hand for me and tell her that I am jealous of the lace she wears, even if it only touches her hand.

I am going now to the German House to hear the latest gossip. It always stinks there. They blame the fishmarket opposite. But I know it is their lies, and although I have nothing against lies as such, I get annoyed at these particular ones because they are directed against you. All the lies which professors at Padua print against me only amuse me. But the insidiousness of these patricians who cannot suffer the best man of the republic at the head of the fleet—that makes me angry. My heart tells me that your happiness lies far from Venice and it is my deepest wish never to see you again—because I love you.

Tour unhappily happy,

PIETRO ARETINO.

CHAPTER VIII

THEY sat silent, deeply impressed by what their friend had told them, and by what he had left to their imagination. But they were soon interrupted by the sudden and noiseless appearance of El Kashef, who muttered a few words in Arabic to his master. Othello jumped from his seat, hurried to the edge of the terrace, and scrutinized the horizon, his hands shading his eyes. Suddenly he turned and ran towards the stairs, stopped halfway, returned to the bewildered Desdemona, and shouted: "Kiss it! The ring! No, five times, remember?" When she had done so, he bounded away.

Desdemona soon discovered that some danger was at hand, for the sirens and bells in the town and on the ships began to give the alarm signals. Perhaps Aretino's wish is coming true now! she thought excitedly.

From her platform she could have witnessed a full-fledged sea battle as clearly as if the ships were gondolas and she at the kitchen window. Together with her servants, who had run out on the terrace, she stood watching the harbour. Her heart beat furiously with fear and expectation, and she did not know which of her emotions was stronger: fear for Othello's life, or pride and excitement to see her hero in battle. Hundreds of feet below her the harbour seemed in confusion bordering on chaos. Ships were moving back and forth, sails were being hoisted, flags and sirens signalled from one vessel to another, and Desdemona did not know what the manoeuvres meant nor where Othello was at this moment. All she saw was a maze of white sails under a pale silky sky.

A quarter of an hour later a middle-aged officer, who had been presented to her on a previous occasion, approached, and saluting, informed her that the admiral had detailed him to her personal, protection. A ship was ready in the harbour for her security. But Desdemona was not so much concerned about her safety as curious to get information about what was happening. The officer became commentator rather than protector.

It appeared that a battle was unlikely, since the approaching fleet,

whose ships and galleys resembled those of Venice, was that of Khair el Dhin, the emir of Algiers, who also called himself sultan. That he was not a Turk was obvious from the blue and yellow stripes he flew from the masts of his fleet; that his intentions were amicable was indicated by a large white flag on his flagship, which was leading the way towards the harbour.

Already in Venice Desdemona had known that this dangerous pirate, the dread of the Mediterranean, was as little a friend of the Turks as he was of the Venetians. But it was never certain how far he was allied with the Turk at the moment, or what particular situation might have caused his unpredictable policy to lean towards the enemy. Othello had told her only recently that his spies had found out that Khair el Dhin not only was emir of Algiers but had been to Istanbul to kiss the Sultan's silken slipper, and that he now held the position of grand admiral of the Turkish fleet. This, of course, meant nothing, since Khair el Dhin was proverbially unreliable and it was known that in his heart of hearts he hated the Sultan. Like Othello, he had to keep on good terms with the Sultan; but neither his Turkish rank and title, nor his luxurious palace on the Bosporus—nor the symbolical prostration—would prevent him from siding at the crucial moment with the enemies of the Turks and allying himself with the Spaniards, the Pope, even the Venetians.

Othello had ruminated many a night over these possible combinations when he was making plans for the distribution of his fleet. It was always uncertain where, or from whom, the attack would come, so it remained a gamble. Now, as Othello stood on the deck of his flagship, receiving vague reports of a large fleet sailing towards Cyprus, the chances of possible hostile intentions could not be completely dismissed. His brain worked rapidly as he considered all the things a vast experience in these matters had taught him. Such strategic and political considerations often far surpassed the duties of an admiral; but the people of Venice had given him this command because they felt instinctively that he and he alone could solve such problems,

Desdemona could not follow her husband's thoughts and actions from her lookout, but she felt the vibrations of his brain and her heart vibrated with it. The captain at her side, a shrewd seaman from Rhodes, blindly devoted to Othello, did not seem inclined to play the role of the soothing doctor.

"So the white flag is no guarantee?" Desdemona asked him, for perhaps the third time.

"Guarantee?" he replied. "There is no such thing in the vocabulary of a pirate."

"Do you see?" she cried suddenly, pulling the bewildered Lucia to the edge of the parapet. "Do you see over there? No, you could not. But Graziella, you with your eyes—can you see what they are doing now? I think I can see a plank being thrown over to the stranger's flagship!"

The captain shaded his eyes. "Yes—that may be—yes, indeed it is a plank from our flagship."

"Who is going across?"

"A few sailors."

"Whose? Ours?" Desdemona almost screamed at the captain. Then with a low and anxious voice: "The Admiral?"

The captain laughed: "The Admiral will not go over. Of that you need have no fear, Contessa."

Something snapped in Desdemona, and laughing hysterically she shrieked three times, like an echo: "The Admiral will not go over."

The maids and Lucia also began to laugh, but there was no merriment in any of their voices.

Desdemona was the first to regain control of herself, and peering out into the harbour, she saw a figure move out on to the plank. "Do you know Khair el Dhin? Is that he walking across now?"

The captain strained his eyes: "I don't know him, but the man going across wears three horses' tails on his helmet, a sign that he must be at least a pasha."

"Then it is Khair el Dhin!" Desdemona cried. "His white flag is not a decoy. He comes as our guest. And look, look, there is Othello coming down to meet him. Oh, Madonna! He is safe now. Everything is all right!" And suddenly she fell on her knees at the little retaining wall of the platform, and her servants followed the example of their mistress. The captain, somewhat taken aback by this demonstration, stood sheepishly beside the praying women, and feeling that he ought to do something, he brought his hand to his cap in salute.

Ten minutes later, the whole castle was upside down. Othello had sent a messenger to his wife announcing the arrival of Khair el Dhin and a suite of fifty men. In five hours the biggest banquet the island

had ever seen must be ready. The emir or sultan or pirate—whichever title one wanted to give him—had also brought his wife, his favourite wife, with him, for he was on his way to Istanbul in his new capacity of grand admiral of the Turkish fleet.

Every servant and slave became feverishly busy. While the preparations for the feast were under way, everybody talked excitedly about the visitor who came as a friend but—as everyone knew—also as a spy. There were thousands of stories and anecdotes in circulation of how the pirate king had showered presents on those who were willing to give him information; every man looked with suspicion on his neighbour, wondering whether he would be suborned by the newcomer. In short, no one trusted anyone on that morning in the old castle of Famagusta.

Desdemona displayed the composure of a talented amateur. In her orders to the chief cook she limited herself to those things that were readily available, but in her eagerness she tripled the ordinary amounts. The majordomo had to arrange for tables, flowers, candelabras, and the like. The most difficult task was reserved for the commander of the castle, who had received orders to invite fifty Venetian officers in honour of the fifty strangers of the pirate's suite. Some eighty or ninety officers were officially in line for an invitation, and the commander saw that by choosing only fifty he would make the remainder his mortal enemies.

Desdemona had all her clothes spread out in order to choose the most appropriate garment for the occasion. After considering a few dresses for a minute, she suddenly realized that she was only guided by her desire to please Othello, and she smiled. Her mood changed from one quarter hour to the next. What made her happier than the visit itself was that she could see and feel that her orders were rapidly and willingly executed—from the commander down to the last slave—not because she issued them but because she was Othello's wife. It was their deference to the absent admiral that made them obey, so that Desdemona said to the old Lucia: "Do you see now how they all love him!"

CHAPTER IX

AT five o'clock that afternoon, as the rays of the sun fell obliquely into the old domed hall of the castle, the hundred seamen were in excellent mood. They had been at table for about an hour, and were animated—but not yet inebriated. They all felt the strong bonds that united Venetian and Algerian or Turk, not only because of their common profession but also because of their similar past and traditions as inhabitants of the Mediterranean coasts. When they looked to the rafters on the ceiling, which were adorned with the white and yellow triangle of Algiers and the red winged lion of Venice, most of these men did not really care under which flag they served—or even under which of them they were born.

The officers asked each other about the various countries and states they came from: some were from Genoa, the hated rival of Venice, some from landlocked Florence; others, again, from Sicily, where every little town clung proudly to a thousand-year-old seafaring tradition. Some of them came from Rhodes or other islands in the Aegean Sea; still others were Spaniards, Portuguese, Catalans, or hailed from the Canary Islands, had been around the Cape, and told of their adventures on the Chinese coast. Fundamentally they were all or had been pirates at some stage of their career, even if they now served under the most respectable flags.

Only the Turks were reluctant to tell of their origin and their home towns, hastily stressing some recent service or exploit to keep dark their former careers. For the Turks were the invisible ghosts at this strange banquet. They were the most powerful—or, at any rate, the most dreaded—lords of the Mediterranean, although they had become seafarers by necessity and not by choice, as had the others. Nobody knew but that the sultan would attack the next day—perhaps with these same men—and force the final decision about naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. But now his grand admiral sat at table as the guest of honour and drank smilingly to the sultan's worst enemy, the grand admiral of the Republic of Venice.

Khair el Dhin looked as if he had been through pestilence and fire.

His pock-marked face was much darker than Othello's and showed that he had experienced all the vicissitudes of a rough life. He was short and very muscular, and draped in his colourful silk garments he sat calmly, even happily, next to his host, whom he resembled as little as a hyena resembles a gazelle. Even greater was the contrast between Desdemona and Khair el Dhin's favourite, Fatima. Othello had arranged the seating of his guests so that Fatima was on his left, the pirate king on his right, and Desdemona next to Khair el Dhin. Whether this arrangement was dictated by Othello's distrust of his guest, or whether he wanted to stress the symbolism of this occasion in the eyes of his officers, the official reason was a linguistic one: Othello talked Arabic to Fatima, while Khair el Dhin spoke fluent Italian with Desdemona. Fatima, a dusky Eastern beauty of about thirty, had decked herself out magnificently in order to put the white woman in the shade. El Kashef, standing behind Desdemona's chair secretly armed with two daggers, valued the stranger's jewels at two thousand ducats and was aggrieved that his own mistress's gems on that day were worth far less. The latter was in a mood she had not yet known in her young life: for the first time she felt like a "white woman" in the defensive sense of the word. While she was normally attracted to brown men, because of her irresistible liking for the brown colour, she had never met brown women—at least not of equal rank. But the brown woman over there was somehow her enemy. Desdemona felt it and attributed it correctly to the fact that Fatima could easily have been her mother and was therefore quite naturally jealous of her own white, blooming youth. It was also a question of race, and for the first time a feeling of racial superiority entered Desdemona's heart. She did not know what it was. Certainly not her title or aristocratic descent. Othello and Khair el Dhin were equally famous in the world, two rivals whose wives enjoyed the same position.

These new and disquieting sensations prompted Desdemona to stress her independence from all prejudices, and when the wine and the highly seasoned meal had animated the conversation at the table, she rose—much to Othello's surprise—and raising her fine Venetian glass, she drank to the health of the Sultana, the Sultan, and all seafaring men. The men jumped up and expressed their joy; the only woman had to rise up slowly to acknowledge the honour. But Desdemona had won the hearts of all the men with this first official toast of her life.

In return, the Sultan's toast to his hosts was quite unimpressive, and Othello contented himself with motioning to his officers to pay their homage to the illustrious guests.

To show that he was a great lord, the sultan now ordered his presents to be brought in and spread out before his hostess, while his slaves kindled some pieces of precious wood that gave off incense-like smoke. As the slaves showed the various presents to the audience, the sultan commented on them.

"Here is alum from Mallorca; and this aloe I brought from the Arab island of Sugava. You surely know the bitter juice of these plants? And these, here, the tusks of elephants we hunted in Ethiopia, They are rather different from others because they are female tusks—and in Ethiopia even the females have large tusks,"

This was meant for a joke, and everyone laughed loudly.

Desdemona felt that it was time to leave the men alone, and with a queenly bow to Fatima she invited the latter to follow her into a room off the main hall. There among mirrors and richly designed carpets, female slaves served the sweet beverages of the East, while a woman, hidden behind a screen, sang softly to a guitar. After a fairly long silence Fatima asked: "Your ladyship has no children yet?"

"No," answered Desdemona. "Not yet. Your ladyship has children?"

"Two sons and a daughter," Fatima replied coldly and added: "I wish your ladyship many children. His lordship is a handsome man, and your ladyship is beautiful too. Your children will be beautiful."

Desdemona trembled at these words, for she well understood what the brown woman was alluding to. But she controlled herself and asked: "Do your children resemble you or his lordship?"

"Some look like me, others like the Sultan," Fatima said. "You perhaps know that I am descended from Christians. I was kidnapped and brought up by Arabs—just the opposite case from that of his lordship, your husband."

Desdemona's thoughts about the different races became somewhat confused, and she could not think of anything to say. Finally she murmured: "Surely your children are as beautiful as their mother."

Fatima, distrustful and jealous, heard in these words a criticism of her husband, whose ugly appearance was as evident as Othello's fine presence, and since she had only started this topic to embarrass

the young white woman, she now shook her head and said oracularly: "White women are insuperable."

When the great hall was empty after the banquet and the intoxicated had made their way to their ships, not without rousing the town with their shouts and cries, Othello and Desdemona found themselves in a wildly passionate embrace. It was not only that they were under the influence of the sweet wine they had drunk at the banquet, it was something else which gave their desire such intensity: the contact with the other race. Othello, who had always treated Desdemona with tenderness and care, tore her precious lace gown from her shoulders and locked her white body in an embrace from which she could not free herself. His passion rose to new heights and his only rational thought was that he had never known her as ardent as to-night. The dark look with which she put her white arms against his brown skin, the way she clutched his shoulders when he caressed her with his hard hands, all the things they found new and exciting in each other, expressed the excitement they had caught from the presence of the many dusky strangers, from their thoughts and their unexpressed desires.

Thus the two colours fought against each other and were at the same time united because an irresistible discrepancy attracted them that could only be resolved in love. It was the age-old love dual of the races that now for the first time came to a volcanic eruption in this highly strung, thoroughbred pair. Neither of them won, neither was defeated; neither the woman nor the man, neither white nor brown. They battled in competitive desire of conquest and of submission until they finally collapsed, exhausted, like noble wild animals.

But the affection they felt for one another at this time had become so deep, so powerful, that no surfeit or enmity developed from this nightly contest, as so often happens. Othello's first movement, when the early rays of the sun woke him from his sleep, was to open the door of a closet and take out a new nightgown for the sleeping Desdemona, as if he wanted to repair the damage done during the night. So as not to awaken her, he laid the gown across her. Tenderly he pulled the sheets and covers up, and when he saw that she did not notice anything, he also arranged her pillow. Then he put on one of his Arab coats and lay down beside her, awake and waiting.

When she awoke, she seemed to have forgotten everything. Only

when she saw her nightgown spread over her did she remember. She raised herself a little, and looked at her beloved; and from a little green bottle he poured some musk and amber in his palm and gently rubbed her neck and forehead. He did not venture to kiss her yet, but the fragrance brought her back to consciousness and she offered him her lips. Their kiss was as chaste as though they had lost their way in the night and had bought safety in sharing their bed. How am I to put on my shift? she thought. But Othello lifted her gently from the bed and carefully helped her to put on the fresh white lace gown in the stead of the one he had torn from her body at midnight. . . .

CHAPTER X

HANS BINDA, who looked fatter than ever in his light tropical attire, paced up and down in the little garden of his house. It was difficult to say whether he was thinking out loud or whether he was consulting his friend Schurck, who sat morosely in the shade of a palm tree, listening sceptically, curiously. Othello's downfall was the central point on which the two men were concentrating their efforts; but to Schurck's somewhat acid yet timorous nature, Binda's methods were none too palatable. By means of his spies in Cyprus and his agents in Venice the latter kept an efficient and important apparatus at his command. The Fuggers and two other firms in Germany who imported copper and sugar from Cyprus could not fail to impress the Venetian authorities with their reiterated remonstrances about the moody governor in Cyprus, who did not look after the administration, who quite openly followed an anti-German policy, who grossly neglected the foreign trade of the republic's most powerful colony, who could not command the respect of his subjects—just because of his colour. To keep these accusations within the limits of probability, and to furnish so-called proof for them—that was the job of Binda and his friend Schurck. If the Council of Ten had been able to exercise all the power conferred upon them by the paragraphs of the constitution, they would long since have recalled Othello. But the most powerful men in Venice, at whose command anyone might disappear into the cellars of the Inquisition, had to take one obstacle to their absolute power into consideration: the Rialto. The people, who were hardly ever called upon to express their will in an election or a plebiscite, possessed an almost invincible power. It was the opinion of the people on the fish markets and in the miserable houses along the smelly canals, of the haggling women and the noisy sailors, that constituted the check on the power of the supreme council. And there could be no question about the people's feelings for Othello. He was the Moor of Venice, the hero of Cyprus, the man who had saved the republic. The fact that he was brown had raised popularity to a legend that became part of the folklore. And now that he had married the white contessa,

and Titian, the Master had appeared at his side between the bronze horses, had definitely shown the people that these aliens were every whit as good as the arrogant patricians who cruised around in flower-decked gondolas. The more the aristocracy solidified its opposition to Othello, the more the people increased their hero worship.

As Binda walked in his garden trying to find a new slant or a new slander, he was in excellent spirits. The visit of the pirate king offered many possibilities. The island was full of rumours and anecdotes of what had happened during the visit, and the Germans had only to sort the unfavourable from the favourable and make out a report. To say that Othello had slept with the Sultana and Desdemona with Khair el Dhin sounded too incredible to have much value. Better already was the story of the fight between the two women, so violent that they had had to be separated by Abdul, the Great Dane; for although this story might well strain the credulity of any reasonable person, the Germans knew that the Venetian ladies would see to it that it was believed, either in its present form or with some appropriate addition. Already these ladies had spread the wondrous tale that under II Moro's influence, La Mora—as they called Desdemona now—had become so dark of skin that one could hardly tell her from an Arab woman. Nobody believed it but everybody repeated it, for anything unpleasant or degrading about the woman who had dishonoured all Venice by marrying a blackamoor, was welcome news. If there were some upright characters among the men ready to defend Othello as the man best fitted for this position, no such voice could be found among the ladies. These considered it shameful that the young contessa—fresh from the convent—ruled in Cyprus like an Oriental queen, having built, according to the latest reports, large and sumptuous baths in which she bathed naked to inflame her ageing husband's desire. Her perverse preference for anything black had gone so far that she suffered none but blackamoors to kiss her hand.

Yes, thought Binda; so far I have done pretty well. Only the common people did not believe his stories. They did not even repeat them, but invented stories of their own concerning II Moro.

He thought of the sailor who had maintained that Othello was an Arab and therefore circumcised. Another refused to believe it, until a third called: "Why don't you ask the Contessa," This story was repeated all over Venice and had only increased the Moor's popularity.

"And where do you think you will end up with all your schemes and machinations?" Schurck now asked. "I am perfectly willing to have our ships betrayed to the pirates; but there must be results."

Binda stopped and looked at Schurck with the outraged expression of a guilty man who does not even want to own his guilt to his accomplice.

"What do you mean—betrayed?" he asked righteously.

"You know very well what I mean," replied the tired voice from under the tree.

"Now listen, Schurck, no legends or invented stories, if you please!" Binda had lowered his voice; for, although it seemed unlikely, it was still possible that someone understanding German might be listening to them. "Your secretary, who made out the letters and consignments of the ships, knew the dates very well. I am not the consul, and if one of your people was faithless and gave the sailing dates to a spy of the pirate of Algiers—and, mind you, received a nice sum of money for it, don't forget—well, such things are your affair and not mine. Any child could have calculated at what time these ships would be at the north-west corner of the island. Such things will happen—but don't connect me with them. If our wine does not arrive, it suits me just as well under the present circumstances, but it is merely an accident of fate—with which I have nothing to do whatsoever—do you hear?"

Schurck smiled wickedly at his friend. "You know, of all the disgusting things about you, the most disgusting is your stupid hypocrisy. Why don't you save this speech for the judge in Venice? You have sacrificed our own ships—and only in order to weaken Othello's position. You are doing this because you like your job, and you are afraid that they might recall and make you sit copying invoices in an office in Nuremburg. Very well, that is fair enough. But if you try to convince me that you are an innocent bystander, why, then—" And Schurck spat noisily on the ground to emphasize his feelings.

Binda, who knew how dangerous it could be for anyone, even a so-called friend, to know his secrets, flew into a passion of rage and fear; and shaking his fist at his accomplice, he shouted:

"You dare tell any of these things. I know enough about you to have you hanged in Augsburg or put under the lead roofs in Venice

before you' even know what has happened. If this bandit, whom our glorious grand admiral received like a prince, steals our ships three days later, then it is an accident that concerns us as little as whether Othello begets speckled children or striped ones—like zebras!"

CHAPTER XI

LATE in the evening, some forty members of the Grand Council met in the council chambers of the Palazzo Ducale to discuss the situation in Cyprus. Why these gentlemen, who never worked more than two or three hours at their respective occupations, always chose to meet at night, no one knew. Perhaps they only did it to impress on the population, who could see the lighted windows from the Piazzetta, how seriously they took their public duties.

In these informal meetings, without a chairman and without any formal motions, the most important state business was prepared for the regular sessions. The patricians sat without fixed order; some of them stood, and none of them wore their official gowns. The splendid attire of one showed that he had just come from a reception; the abstracted answers of another betrayed that his thoughts were already with his mistress, whom he had planned to visit afterwards, while a third was talking excitedly to a fourth in a bay window, obviously trying to transact some private business which seemed much more important to him than the whole island of Cyprus.

Antonio, after the dramatic session of the Grand Council in which he had publicly offended Othello, had automatically become the leader of the opposition against the Moor. He stood now under a chandelier, surrounded by friends who were listening to the news he read out from some letters.

"Where did the episode with the liberated galley slave take place?" somebody of the circle asked.

"On galley twenty-three," Antonio said with feigned indifference.

"The Admiral liberated an Arab and sent him on a transport to Holland, where he will go into service with an Arab pepper merchant to whom the Admiral is personally obliged."

"There you are!" a loud voice called. "That is how the republic loses its sorely needed oarsmen, just because these foreigners with their international machinations choose to dispose of them as though they were their personal property. The country which harbours such coloured people can go to the devil!"

"Then why was there no Venetian to save the republic from the Turks?"

"Who says there was not? Some twenty times or more. Only the last time it happened to be a Moor."

"Have you seen the latest letter from the Fuggers in Augsburg?" a younger man called now, and holding out a letter he approached the centre of the group.

"Read it, Enrico."

"To whom is the letter addressed?"

"I would rather not say—at the moment."

"Ah ha!—you are already afraid. How do you know it is from the Fuggers?"

"Because the Germans fold their letters like that."

Everybody pressed around the young man, not so much to hear the contents of the letter as to see to whom it had been sent. For that might be a clue to important business deals. The young man began to look it over silently and only read out loud when he came to the significant passages.

". . . *Especially two of the last transports with consignments of Cyprus wine, mostly old vintages, which are now presumably already in the cellars of the Sultan in Istanbul. The consignments were valued at* 2,320 *and* 2,630 *gold ducats respectively. During the early morning hours of October 21st they were seized at the north west corner of the island of Cyprus by six brigantines flying no flag. Two sailors, the only survivors of the crews, stated with certainty that the ships belonged to the fleet of Khair el Dhin, who had been received by your governor on Cyprus on October 18th. Knowing the dangers of these waters, the Governor should have convoyed the ships at least until they were out of the area infested by Khair el Dhin's fleet after his visit to Cyprus. As the wine was destined for the Duke of Milan, international complications might possibly arise for the republic which we, by the way, hold responsible for the aforementioned sums."*

"The impudence of these Germans!" somebody called.

Senator Alberghetti, who had always defended Othello, now called loudly through the chamber:

"Gentlemen! If any of you agree with the demands we just heard, then I propose that we change our entire financial system and go into the insurance business. The young men here ignore, perhaps, the fact

that in earlier times the Genoese, the Portuguese, the Pope's fleet, and, of course, our Venetian fleet seized ships of all flags! That was the custom of the day. Where would our power, our republic, be to-day if our forefathers had held each governor responsible for the ships lost by their business friends?"

Someone cleared his throat loudly and called: "Still, it is strange that the alertness of the Moor has declined noticeably since he went to Cyprus on his honeymoon."

"And who demanded in this very hall for three consecutive years that the fleet should be enlarged?" Alberghetti returned heatedly. "Did you give him the ships he asked for? No. About a quarter of what he needed urgently was granted. If the Turks attack Cyprus tomorrow —or Crete, or Corfu—and if we should lose those places, it will be your fault, because you prefer to keep the money in the sacks instead of following the example of our fathers, to whom we owe the three glorious centuries gone by. . . ."

"There—now you hear it. That is plain speaking!" someone interjected.

"Very strange." These two words, spoken softly during a moment's pause attracted general notice.

"What is strange?" several senators asked.

The centre of interest now shifted towards the seats where the older senators were sitting, from whence Senator Mocenigo had made his well-calculated interjection. "It is strange," Mocenigo continued, "that the Admiral has avoided the battle of Cyprus at this time. It appears from the reports that it was not Khair el Dhin who flew the white flag but Othello who hoisted it, and persuaded the pirate to be his guest rather than that they should destroy each other."

Here and there in the hall people laughed and sniggered. A young man called, "Perhaps he did not want to risk his reputation before the eyes of his young wife, who admires the hero so much!"

As the men grinned at each other over this; a strong voice addressed Mocenigo.

"Has your lordship any proof concerning the hoisting of the white flag?"

It was old Brabantio, who felt personally offended by the jest at his daughter's expense.

"My dear Count," Mocenigo replied, " you know very well that all

reports about sea battles are inevitably based at least partly on hearsay."

"And why do you voice such hearsay?"

Mocenigo, a shrewd speaker, had saved his best argument for the end.

"Something strange happened during the banquet given in honour of the pirate. The Grand Admiral did not greet his guest formally. Had he felt quite secure, he would have undoubtedly made a welcoming speech. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps it was tact that prevented him from doing so," an old, grey-haired man suggested.

"Yes—such was my first thought also. But that was not all: the Contessa rose, and she gave the official toast, I can give you the source for this information."

The hall instantly buzzed with excited voices. Exclamations—"Incredible," "Shameful!"—were heard from all sides. Suddenly the Doge lifted his arm and imposed silence on the assembly.

"If it is true," he said in his thin, quavering voice, "if it is true that the Contessa greeted the pirates with an official toast, then she has violated the ancient customs of the republic. I know the times are changing. But"—he now moved his chair slightly forward—"she is a white lady just like our mothers, sisters and wives. We have placed a coloured man at the head of our fleet and he has found a white lady who loved and married him. The republic had no business to interfere with these private actions, and I personally approved of this union, since it consolidated the position of one of our highest officials. But I cannot approve of her alleged actions now, by which she is said to have fraternized with an inferior race, in this instance, moreover, represented by doubtful elements."

Roaring applause interrupted the old man, for in the word "fraternize" he had expressed the very thing that had enraged the indignant senators. And it was the Doge himself who had spoken this damning word. Everybody felt that, quite apart from the technical accusations against Othello, the honour of Venice and of the white race as such was now at stake. Othello's friends tried to lead the discussion into less controversial channels, but the excitement could not be restrained and the best they could do was to get an adjournment of the assembly.

The scandal Othello's enemies had hoped for was at hand. Aft

that was needed now was a formal motion to have the admiral recalled from his post.

Early the next morning Aretino came unannounced to Titian's house. He found the Master between a half-finished Venus and a nude model, who did not move when the poet entered the room.

"May I disturb this idyllic scene?" Aretino asked.

"What the devil do you want?" Titian said gruffly and pushed his palette so impatiently off his thumb that a servant just managed to catch it in mid-air.

"Master," Aretino began sweetly, "have I disturbed you once during the last ten years?"

"I would not have advised you to do so." The model now threw a wrap over her nakedness and left the room without asking permission. Aretino, seeing the Master's face red with anger, quickly took a hand mirror and holding it before Titian's face asked: "Would you like to see a model for an enraged Moses?"

Impatiently Titian pushed the mirror away. "Why don't you ask Buonarotti? He likes such prophets."

Aretino replaced the mirror on the table and abruptly launched into a detailed account of last night's discussion at the senate and of the dangers threatening Othello. Titian's face became serious and after a while he rose from his chair and began to pace up and down, stopping every once in a while and looking out over his garden towards the sea. Finally, still staring at the horizon, he said:

"I don't believe the story of the avoided battle. It is not like Othello, He loves to fight. That he did not toast the company shows his extraordinary discretion. You see, he really understands what dignity means! And that she did it instead is even more wonderful. She must really have a goodly portion of Arab blood in her veins by now to act like that. I would like to paint those two lovers—biting each other like tigers! But the painting would only be suited for King Philip to hang behind a curtain in his alcove. Well—but what can we do?"

"The overwhelming majority is in favour. of recalling him. The only one who could give them an ultimatum is you, Master."

"What sort of ultimatum?"

"If you declared that you would not go to Rome to paint the Pope if the honour of Venice were offended in this manner."

"Nonsense!" Titian cried. "In the first place I don't want to paint

the old Farnesian swindler anyway. In the second place these old foxes will be very careful not to involve the honour of the republic; they'll give Othello some decoration for his valour when he is back, or an old bone of a saint in a silver casket."

"What if he then decides to go to Spain?" Aretino asked. Titian did not answer for a while.

"We must avoid that at any cost," he said finally. "We must avoid that, Pietro. Without him our little fleet is lost; and the republic does not stand too firm anyway. We have to do everything possible to keep Othello in Venice."

And so saying, he turned his back on Aretino, took up his brush, called for the model, and continued his work at the very same spot where he had left off half an hour before.

CHAPTER XII

Venice, November **5th.**

My dear son,

Do you recall the lines of Catullus where he speaks of the sweetness of renunciation ? My memory fails me at seventy, and I cannot find the verse at the moment. It might also be in Ovid—but it is on that subject.

I am so selfish as to rejoice at your recall to Venice, though simply because you will be near me again. But it certainly has many advantages for you, and if you have retained any of the lessons in worldly wisdom I tried to instil in you, use the best of them and discard the rest. It was a miracle, or rather it was fear, that made the shopkeepers here forgive you your colour. They have not taken back this forgiveness and nobody touches your rank or position. But certain ladies with high titles and even higher opinions of themselves cannot bear the thought that your beautiful young wife rules in Cyprus. As far as I can see, the Germans have arranged this so-called scandal. The few people who are still able to discriminate on a human level are without exception on your side. Since you can pick your friends, there is no reason why you should not have a pleasant and gay household here. Perhaps you will have to meet the others once a month. But that should not be too bad.

I can see how my daughter will sit here on the step of my hearth and tell me how the mountain ranges stretched around the bay, opposite your castle, and how a white sail ploughed through the waves—a symbol of hope and cheer. And you, my dear son, will stand here at the window and listening whether she describes everything accurately. And when she says, " There was a little bay over to the left,' you will interrupt her and say, "You mean north-north-west." And we shall all laugh.

How happy you must be, my children! What a wonderful trust you have found in the heart of your young wife, for the more I think of your adventure, the more I admire her courage, not yours. Let me tell you, Othello, now that I have known you for more than fifty years: as you have spent your youth in studious earnestness, providence rewards you with a joyful manhood. Perhaps it will be given to me to watch you for a little while. But in any case I would like to tell you to-day that you were the best, the greatest gift that was ever bestowed on me—and much better than a physical son.

Your friend and father.

Cyprus, December 10th.

Dear Father,

Tour quotation is from Horace, but I cannot find the exact place either, since there are no Latin classics on this island of Adonis. With the last sentence in your letter you have given me, dear father, the greatest gift I have ever received. When you saved the alien child fifty years ago, it was surely the Madonna who led your hand and your soul, and because of that everything has gone so well and with the grace of God. In my evening prayers I have always mentioned your name last, that is, at the most significant place; but since Desdemona came into my life I have found myself in a predicament. I have solved it by imploring God's blessing and protection alternatively on her and on you.

I have not dared to say it to anyone—not even to her—but I will say it now to you; I am happy. Surely there has never been so deep an affection, so youthful a fire, so understanding a friendship as between us. Even before she knew what love really meant, she had given me her heart, I have found a friend, after years of loneliness—for, as you know, the other women were merely playthings for me—and since this friend is a woman, she is able to give me all the tenderness I crave. And because she is so young and was so lonely herself, her soul and her mind developed along with mine without any interference. With every new day her childlike, dreamy thoughts seem to reach greater clarity and profundity.

As she literally lives for nothing other than her love, rank and position are a matter of complete indifference to her, whether she calls her morning greeting to me in the castle of Cyprus or at the Grand Canal in Venice, whether she dresses here or there, does not make any difference to her as long as she has me with her. Her heart grows daily, and while it is turned towards me her pride is dormant. The tact with which she clings to the thoughts and customs of her father's is so strong, so developed, that she never makes the slightest attempt to convert me. As fearlessly and proudly as she has accepted my race, just so proudly does she preserve her own, and I know that she is as unwilling to sacrifice her white skin as I am to sacrifice my brown one. you know, father, in reality we are rivals, and only our love changes our strife into harmony. I cannot explain this any better—nor could she, for we have never mentioned it. The only thought that worries me sometimes is the thought of our children. She accepted me, colour, race, and all—but with her heart and mind, and I don't know what the reaction will be if she should bear a child of mixed blood. I am wicked enough to beg God not to give us any children. Forgive me this terrible confession, father.

One day, when you are sitting at our hearth with Desdemona at your feet, you may tell us the story of your own loves.

Tour obedient son,
Othello.

Venice, Palazzo Brabantio.

My dear daughter,

The prospect of seeing you soon cheers my dreary life, I hope that we shall live as I lived with your mother. Nobody will bother us, Antonio who has done everything to have you recalled from Cyprus, could not live in Venice anyway if you were here, I shall get him a post with our embassy in Florence, where he can learn much. Tour servants are at your disposal here, and our people are looking forward to seeing Lucia again, whom they have missed as one misses an old house cat. If you need an extra gondola,you may have Enrico, If you come to eat here, you shall order your favourite dishes in advance. Our cuisine is still on the same level as in your mother's time.

you will find your father much older, I am afraid, but I find solace and satisfaction in my work for the republic. On the War Council I shall have constant contact with Othello, Tell him that as long as I live, his power and position cannot be touched by anyone. If he wishes someone to supervise the work being done on his palazzo,I am very willing to do so for him. It is always better to have somebody on the spot to look after things.

Farewell, dear daughter, and think of your old and loving
Father.

Cyprus, December 11th.

Dearest Father,

There is but one thing that draws me to Venice:to see your face again. I would have liked to live alone with Othello on this island for at least ten years, for here dreams come true and no one disturbs our happiness. It is a great happiness, dear Father, and I only wish that my mother could have seen me now and that I could see her. Is it not strange that neither of us should have known a mother? He only remembers his mother's feet as she sat and bathed in a blue-tiled pool. But he has no portrait, no ancestors—not even a name. The portrait of my mother is stiff and silent, and you have never told me yourself that the painter did not catch her charm and grace.

For years I have not thought of her, but now when my fate seems to draw me away from my own traditions I think of her very often. Once I heard a voice

in a dream. I don't know even what the voice said. I only heard the sound of it, and I knew that it was my mother's voice. Ever since, I have been wondering what it could have meant.

She died at twenty-four, and I am now sixteen, I forget how old you are, father, but I think it is seventy. you cannot imagine how quickly I have forgotten things here on this island. It is bad and ungrateful of me, but when we come back I shall try to serve you. For instance, I could give you my arm when you go to a meeting of the Grand Council and have to climb those steps that Sansovino made a little too high. Or I could sit with you in the evening and you could tell me stories. Or I would accompany you to Carlino,your old tailor, to get you a new and splendid coat!

For I will do any thing for you if you will grant me one wish: love Othello! He has so many enemies, and yet he is so lovable. If you loved my mother the way he loves me, she is sure to bless you every day from paradise. His life was lonely, as lonely as mine, he who knew all the great cities and had seen all the great princes, who had navigated all the seas. Surely God made him remain so lonely that he must one day give himself entirely to me, who ran up to him one day like a kitten to a great hound who could kill it with a single bite.

Father, do you think he will kill me one day? Do you think that the wild beast in him could break out one day to destroy me and himself? For I know there is no middle way, he either loves or he hates. With all his wisdom and knowledge, with all his self-control, the demon can get hold of him. At our breakfast table a blue butterfly got caught on the honey jar, I tried to free it, but Othello took it between his brown fingers and killed it. When he saw that I was struggling with my tears, he looked at me with deep contrition, got up and did not come back all day. My heart was with the dead butterfly—but ever so much more with him, who had killed it and who was sorry now.

Dear father, will you come and visit us often? It really is so close, and I can see how Othello will be standing on the second step to help you out of the gondola. you shall have the best chair and the best Cyprus wine, which you like so much. And when you and Othello talk about the fortifications in Dalmatia, I shall listen to the sound of your voices and I shall think: 'God has placed me between these two men.'

Desdemona.

P.S. Since I have just mentioned Sansovino: do you know what happened to the bronze statue of Mercury by him that used to stand on the column in the hall downstairs, and which you had moved somewhere?

CHAPTER XIII

SUDDENLY all was changed. Happiness and peace, the playfulness of youth, the expectancy of home, all had been engulfed by the night of black hopelessness. In one of the swampy areas which—as every native knew—one should not even approach during certain seasons, Desdemona had caught a fever that within a few hours brought her to the point of death. The quinine rind, discovered not long before to be a potent febrifuge, could not be had on the island. Desdemona's body, glowing with heat, could only be cooled with snow.

Two hundred slaves and as many mules were constantly on the way to fetch snow from the northern slopes of the highest mountain peaks. Packed in straw, half of the snow melted before it reached the castle, for it was a long trek to the mountains lying far to the east from the capital. Every now and then the drivers slaked their thirst with the drops that ran down the backs of the mules.

Desdemona, burning, lay in an old wooden bedstead filled with snow. Othello, who suffered no one to approach her, came and went with the large copper cauldrons in which he carried the snow from another room and distributed it carefully round her body. He did this mechanically and thought of the time when he was a galley slave. He was glad that he could do at least that, for it kept his mind busy. Lucia, the only other person who was allowed to come into the room, sat by the bed giving the patient cooling drinks. When he had brought enough, Othello sat down and gazed despondently at the young woman in her snow coffin.

Where is the Madonna now? he thought bitterly. What good is all philosophy in a moment like this? Why does God suddenly spill such a miraculous vessel of love? If she is dead to-morrow, my despair will be more bitter than my loneliness ever was. What good are the fleet and the republic to me then? Never was she as beautiful as now. She is not white, she is rosy in her bed of white snow. As long as she remains rosy there is hope.

He came closer, and bending down towards her mouth he tried to understand the soft words she murmured in her delirium.

"Can you understand anything, Lucia? Perhaps she wants something. Do you think she is cooler than this morning? When will that doctor come back? Why did he leave? I shall have him put in irons! Lucia! Don't you think that with her youth and strength she will be able to overcome the fever? Don't cry, wipe your face. She could see it if she opens her eyes as she did this morning. Perhaps she is asleep. Her breath is so short . . . Lucia, listen. If we should lose her and I should go soon afterwards, you must have us put in the same coffin so that we can rise together one day. Do you hear me? Who's there?"

The young doctor, a Venetian, had been sent away already three times by Othello, who could not suffer another man to look at Desdemona. Silently he came in again, a handsome young man of about twenty-five. Othello bit his lip to keep his jealousy under control. The doctor put his ear on her bosom and listened to her heartbeat. At that moment Desdemona awoke, looked round in a bewildered way and murmured something. Four words only, but they moved Othello doubly, the first intelligent sounds she had uttered: "Oh—a white cheek!"

The doctor raised his head, threw a confused glance at the sick girl and the servant, but did not venture to look at the admiral. But Othello had turned towards the wall, his hands pressed against his heart, a gesture he had never made in his life.

At that moment Desdemona regained full consciousness. She recognized Lucia and looked with surprise at the snow around her. Then she let her head fall back on the pillow and murmured, "Othello." It was barely audible, but to Othello it sounded like an agonized cry for help. He hastened to her bed and took her in his arms. His emotion was so overwhelming and the lovers seemed so closely united, although they barely touched each other, that Lucia and the doctor retreated into the darkest corner of the room.

From that moment on, recovery began. Desdemona's strong nature had won the battle, and the fever sank rapidly. After three days she was well again. Now she spoke more than Othello, who, standing by her bedside, could do nothing but look at the beloved face again and again. Words seemed inadequate to him.

"Did I say something when I was delirious? Perhaps I talked nonsense. Oh, my beloved, tell me, of what did I dream?"

He looked at her intently.

"You did not speak, Desdemona. Your first word was my name." His lips formed the words but in his ears he heard again those four first words, 'Oh!—a white cheek....'

CHAPTER XIV

IT was summer again when they prepared for their return to Venice. The transfer of Othello's official functions had gone smoothly, for the Senate in Venice, being split into two parties, had compromised by leaving the administration of the colony temporarily in the hands of the officer next in rank. Thus Othello had been spared the humiliation of seeing another governor appointed in his stead. Nothing had been changed during the last year as far as his rank or position was concerned. As before, he was the grand admiral of the fleet, and as before, he gave his attention to the disposition of the fleet, the safety of Cyprus, and other Venetian colonies. The local administration had never been his first concern, and it was with little regret that he saw his successor take over these duties. His imagination belonged entirely to his beloved, and no new friendship between the island and the governor had developed. Othello and Desdemona loved the landscape of the island but had little contact with the people on it, for their passion left them neither strength nor time for other people.

Desdemona had limited her duties to the very minimum, and her "powerful sway" over affairs, the envy of all the Venetian ladies, was something that had never even entered her consciousness. Her illness and her recovery had deepened Othello's feelings for her. The impotence of man against the course of nature, the tragedy of a sudden misfortune in the middle of happiness had been demonstrated all too clearly before Othello's eyes. For himself he had always reckoned with such a change. He had faced death many times and had grown to take it as a matter of course. But for her he had never envisaged anything like that. He had believed her immortal in her youthful strength. Desdemona, for her part, realized from the accounts of Lucia what suffering her illness had caused him while she in her unconsciousness did not know any pain. But Lucia had not mentioned the words she spoke on awaking.

Othello could not easily banish these words from his mind. There were times when he could explain them away rationally: it was quite

natural for her to register surprise at finding a stranger so near her. And being still half-delirious, she expressed her surprise by naming the first thing she saw, namely a white cheek.

But then there were other times when jealousy and fear beset him and when the four innocent words were interpreted as the expression of a primeval desire of her race, which one day might become irresistibly strong. With keen attention, his lips closely pressed together, he had scrutinized Desdemona's reaction the next day when the young doctor came to see her. But he could detect nothing, and when he mentioned the doctor to her on the third day of her convalescence she asked him to dispense with his services altogether. Othello, who could not help hating the young man because of the fateful words, in typically oriental manner sent him an excessively high fee for his trouble.

When everything was packed and ready for the departure, Othello and Desdemona went for a last drive through the island in an open carriage. The weather was pleasant and cool, and the silky blue sky characteristic of Cyprus smiled on the island. Although both of them knew the sky-line of the mountain range around the bay by heart, they looked at it with renewed delight and yearning nostalgia. The beauty of this landscape, which fell in four distinct steps down to the sea, had become intimately associated with delights and beauties they had found in each other in their love. Suddenly Desdemona broke the silence, and said, as if to overcome her melancholy thoughts: "But if we ride far out in the gondola, past Burano, we shall also be alone and undisturbed."

"I shall have a special boat made for you," Othello replied with a smile. "Not longer than a gondola, but wider. We shall put a little table in it and I can serve you the sweetmeats of the Piazetta on it."

"It seems that the gods are in a kindly mood to-day. Look at the pink haze on the mountains. Is that the mountain peak from which you had the snow brought down for me?"

"Yes. But forget your illness. We have had three hundred and sixty happy days here."

"But on one of those days you injured your foot."

"And on another you ate too many grapes!"

"And once we drank too much—both of us!" she said slowly and wistfully.

"Does it seem a hundred years ago?" he asked. "Do you still

remember the story of Othello and Desdemona that we learned in school? They lived in Cyprus and spread their love all over the island, so much so that he almost forgot his duties as governor only because he wanted to be with her night and day."

Desdemona smiled at him, and entering into the game she replied:

"Yes, I remember. They were very happy. But how did the story end? Can you remember that?"

"That page was missing from the old manuscript, and we were told by our teacher that we had to make up the end ourselves."

"And what did you write?"

"It was a sad story. Both of them seemed to have been too happy, so I made him fall in battle."

"And what did you do to her?"

"Oh, that was simple. She died the instant she heard of his death."

Desdemona took his hand and pressed it against her heart. "Do you think that we shall die together, Othello?"

"Perhaps, but I shall pray to the Madonna that we may live together—for as many years as we may!" Desdemona looked at him passionately and, still holding his hand, she solemnly and fervently kissed his ring five times.

Towards the evening they automatically mounted the steep path to the water lilies in the blue pond. She looked at him questioningly. He smiled and began to divest her of her shoes and stockings.

"You must have dipped your feet once into the pool," he said. She rose, lifted her skirts slightly and began to wade through the shallow water. Abdul watched her and looked at his master as though to make sure that all was well and there was no need for him to interfere.

Othello reclined beside the pool, immersed in a dream, and thought: "Mother—daughter—wife." Suddenly a phrase came into his mind and he murmured half unconsciously: "Oh, a white foot—"

Desdemona turned as though to catch his words. She looked like a listening nymph as she stepped out of the pool.

PART 111 CONFUSION

CHAPTER I

THEY had come back to Othello's palace in Venice, which posterity knows under the name of Palazzo Desdemona. The hall on the second floor takes up the entire width of the house, perhaps the narrowest among the famous edifices of Venice. From the hall one can see the blue water through the four Gothic rosettes in the balustrade of the balcony, which also stretched the full length of the house. The traffic on the Canale Grande could not be seen from inside the hall, but those who were used to the shouts and cries of this waterway, to the varying sounds of the waves that lapped now louder, now softer, against the marble steps of the house fronts, could easily picture the scene of which they could only see small fragments through the skilfully carved pattern of the rosettes.

Othello and Desdemona spent most of their time here, for the hall downstairs offered little privacy against callers and the third floor was occupied by the bedrooms. Desdemona loved the quiet hour after the midday meal when the servants were eating in the kitchen, when even El Kashef was out of earshot and Abdul lay lazily digesting the morsels he had received from the table of his master. They sat quietly looking at each other; Desdemona had learned to interpret Othello's serious, almost stern look as one of deep and unalterable devotion to herself.

She thought that this state of affairs would last forever—or rather she did not even think about it, let alone about a change or an end, and circumstances seemed to justify her attitude. Her husband fell more in love with her every month, and she herself was surprised at her constantly deepening love for Othello. Their second year of marriage was in this particular case their great test, for it was the first time they were together in a world that offered many outside distractions, unlike the romantic island where they had lived for, with, and by each other. The man of fifty was far more surprised at his unexpected happiness, and appreciative of this love without disturbances, without rivals, than the young woman, who had dreamed only one dream in her whole life, and who saw this dream come true without giving a single thought to the possibilities of other dreams, which could also be

realized. As in her first year of marriage she had become acquainted with the storms and the calms of love, they seemed to her merely the buds of a rich and fragrant flower that in time would gradually open its petals to full bloom. The only fear she sometimes had was of the fruits. To prevent them was a thought that neither of the two had ever had. And yet she feared to see her love come alive one day. When Maria, her only female friend in Venice, had shown her her four-month-old daughter, Desdemona did not know what to do with this little doll. When she returned in the dusk from this visit, she felt so cold that she asked the gondolier for a blanket, which he did not have with him since it was only September. At home she had ordered a large fire to be built in the fireplace so that she could get warm again without going to bed, which would have frightened Othello. This outward chill was, however, only due to her inward fear of a child, a brown child, perhaps. Not that she wanted a white one! No, she had not felt the slightest desire for any child when she stood before the cradle in Maria's house and listened to the cooing noises the mother, the wet nurse, and the child were making simultaneously. More than that! it had almost disgusted her, because she had never felt the connection between love and the fruit of love. When Maria's pale and effeminate-looking husband came into the room, Desdemona could not help remembering that this was the man from whom her friend had conceived her child, and she shuddered momentarily at the thought.

Had Othello been white, she would certainly not have been so apprehensive at the thought of a child. But she was powerless against her instincts, which through generations had been taught that the blood of her fathers was something venerable, something sacred. She had not dreamed of a child—she had only dreamed of Othello, of complete union with her beloved—and this union had filled her life completely.

As they sat in the warm afternoon breeze that came through the open balcony doors, they heard a gondola approaching the house. A few seconds later El Kashef appeared at the door and announced the visitor: Senator Brabantio. Desdemona ran out to the staircase and greeted her father with the customary embrace but she also kissed him to-day, which surprised the old gentleman. Soon all three of them sat in the hall sipping the old count's favourite Cyprus wine. While

Othello answered some technical question about the fleet, he looked at the man whom Desdemona called father and wondered how far he had become this old man's son. The more he thought about it, the more he felt left out, excluded from the family community. He had grown to love the old man, who always defended him and who had become lonelier than ever since he had sent his son away. But the feeling of real solidarity, the ties of blood were lacking.

Heavy steps sounded after a few minutes on the staircase and Othello turned irritably towards the door, for he had given strict orders not to be disturbed. But before he could say anything, the two Brabantio gondoliers appeared in the door breathlessly carrying a heavy parcel wrapped in straw. Desdemona saw it, and jumping up she threw her arms round her father's neck, exclaiming: "I know, its my Sansovino, my Mercury."

The old man smiled benevolently, but Othello was somewhat puzzled, for Desdemona had never mentioned anything about a statue of Sansovino's—he wondered whether it would be a male or female figure. The gondoliers had been told to lift the sculpture on to a chest, and Desdemona eagerly helped them to take the straw off it. After a few moments they all stood gazing at a naked bronze Mercury. His intuition sharpened by an uncertain feeling of surprise and jealousy, Othello immediately understood that there was a strange connection between Mercury and himself. For one thing, he thought to himself, the brown figure bears a distinct resemblance to me.

He stood looking at the bronze and felt that both his wife and his father-in-law were comparing him with the sculptured god. Desdemona was deeply moved to see the figure with which she had fallen in love as a very young girl, and which, in her brown slender husband, had come to life. She felt an almost irresistible impulse to throw herself into Othello's arms, but since such behaviour would have been indelicate in the old man's presence, she put her hand to her heart and quickly left the room.

When she returned after a while, she found yet another visitor in the hall. It was Padre Domenico. During the past year the two old men had seen each other a number of times; one could almost say that they had watched each other. In the two main questions, Othello's marriage and his political position, they saw eye to eye. They also felt a certain bond between them, for they, two noble and respected

Venetians, found themselves in the position of revolutionaries because of the approval and support they had given their children.

The beautiful Desdemona, dressed in a gown of pale blue damask, stood between four men, of whom one was naked and bore a striking resemblance to her exquisitely dressed husband. Othello looked not only not older, but decidedly younger, than before, and since the two men in their seventies clearly belonged to another generation, two groups formed automatically, Desdemona belonging to the younger one. The padre was the first to break the awkward silence.

"Where did you get this antique? It was not here the last time I came."

"Sansovino!" cried Desdemona. "Oh! I must tell that he has deceived an old connossieur. And so that Othello will not think I am keeping a secret from him, I must tell you that I fell in love with this statue when I was a very young girl—so much so that my father had it removed one day from our hall. But to-day he brought it as a present, after I hinted in a letter from Cyprus that I would like to see it again." She went once more to her father and embraced him impetuously.

The padre immediately understood the connection, and raising his glass he drank to Desdemona and said: "If this were not a god and Othello not your husband, one could really think that they were related." Desdemona blushed, and Othello, trying to divert the company's attention from his embarrassed wife, stepped on to the balcony and called to the others.

"Look at the Doge's gondola. It moves as slowly as if it were a symbol of our august republic, which seems on the point of going to sleep."

"You will fill its sails with wind, I trust," said the padre, who had followed.

"And if they don't give you enough ships, I shall make a scene at the commission," the Senator added good-humouredly.

When they had come in again, the padre asked: "Did you hear what Sansovino replied to the Doge?"

"No. What happened?" asked Brabantio.

"Oh, nothing much. The Doge advised Sansovino in a private letter to be more careful in his public relations with certain ladies, since he was now the architect of the republic and had to maintain some decorum in this position. Whereupon our friend wrote to the Doge that

he thanked him respectfully for his good advice but would suggest that the Doge be as careful in his relations with the Vatican as he with the ladies."

As the two old men laughed, Desdemona looked questioningly at her husband.

"FOr once I am on the Doge's side," said Othello. "His advice to a young artist has definitely the character of a fatherly admonition, because the people in Venice are talking. Had he chosen to do so, Sansovino could have read the letter to his friends and then thrown it in the fire. But he is not in a position where he may give the head of the republic advice, no matter how badly it may be needed."

Desdemona jumped up in protest and said: "Old Cornaro is an imbecile old man, and you have just shown us how he runs the State. He is an old, wicked man who had you recalled from Cyprus!"

It was the first time that Othello heard his wife contradict him. Since it was a contradiction in his favour and in favour of an artist whom both of them admired, it revealed to him the spiritual anarchy of her young soul. He saw the two old men looking at her, and he felt that this scene was more than just a casual difference of opinion. His heart went out to Desdemona, who defended him against all his enemies. Her outburst was, in a way, rather in keeping with his own inclinations. His Arab nature was revengeful, and Christian forgiveness was as strange to his natural profession as it was to his times. He prized honour, and he would take revenge on anyone impairing it. Yet there was another component in his way of thinking: the State. He thought it ridiculous that the old Doge, who had never done anything in his life except inherit the old name and look dignified at the head of the senators, should interfere with the private affairs of a great artist. But the Doge represented the republic for which Othello risked his life in every battle. When Aretino wrote a biting distich against the Doge, Othello sided with him in a general, healthy opposition towards the powers that be. When Titian complained about the shopkeepers who wanted to reduce his income by way of taxes, he sided with the Master. But here, he felt that the honour and dignity of the republic had been violated. He made a long pause, during which Desdemona stood trembling at his side, and then said slowly:

"No, Desdemona. Although the Doge is our enemy, and although I don't think much of his abilities as head of the republic, I do think

that our relations with the Vatican, which have been a delicate problem for the last three years, are far too complex for anyone to make casual and slighting remarks about them, even a great artist like Sansovino. It is a little as if the Doge were to tell Sansovino he thought that the right foot of the Neptune on the Giant's Staircase was anatomically incorrect. He just does not know enough about it. If the Doge behaved ridiculously in interfering with the private affairs of the architect of the republic, nevertheless, that does not give Sansovino a right to play the part of the amateur statesman and give the Doge rather obvious advice. Or do you think, gentlemen, that I am too severe, and take my wife's part?"

Desdemona was pale. She had listened to Othello without moving a muscle in her face. She fully understood the importance of this, the first discord between them. She did not wait for the answers of the two men, whose opinions could not possibly change anything in her disagreement with the man she loved; and walking up and down, as though to bring order into her thoughts, she said:

"What is it then, that takes precedence: statesmanship or the arts? The republic or genius? Power or beauty?" She stopped close to Othello and looked defiantly into his face.

"Power," he said.

Desdemona stood still: her emotions were confused. On the one hand she loved him for this answer, for it was his power that she had admired when she saw him for the first time on the poop of his galley. On the other hand, power was not all. Something told her that his reasoning was not correct. Was it, perhaps, his beauty she loved in Othello? She walked over to the statue, and looking at it she said softly, but loud enough for Othello to hear: "What will be left of old Cornaro in the minds of mankind when Sansovino and his statue still delight them?"

Othello felt that he had wounded her heart. He could not stay in his seat, for this statue—his double who now seemed to oppose him—excited him. So he got up and walked over to Desdemona. Both of them looked silently at the Mercury.

He was jealous: he wanted to find a counterpart to this beautiful bronze youth. 'If Titian would sell me a Venus?' he said to himself—'I wonder how I could pay for it.'

Desdemona's thoughts were only of Othello: 'Only once have I

seen him like that; when we swam in the sea together in Cyprus.'

They did not know how long they had stood side by side, oblivious of their guests. But Padre Domenico rose from his chair and called loudly: "Othello," just as he had done many times in years gone by. Othello turned immediately like the obedient boy he had been and smiled at the padre.

"Since I cannot kiss power—" the old man began.

"Oh, but you can," interrupted Desdemona. "Five times on the forehead."

But the padre paid no attention, and taking her by the shoulder he said, " — I must perforce take beauty." And like a young lover he kissed her full on the mouth.

CHAPTER II

LAVINIA sat in Titian's garden in a wide colourful summer dress. Next to her, clad in yellow silk, sat Desdemona and listened avidly and carefully to every word spoken by an older woman reclining on a low seat between them. It was Zafetta, one of the famous courtesans of Venice. Her name could be found in the directory of courtesans, which was then printed in Venice for the greater convenience of the citizens, and laid down the maximum prices which these ladies were allowed to charge for their services. The prices varied according to the rank and reputation of the courtesans, and although Zafetta's name was among the highest paid ladies, the price quoted for her was almost an offence, since her reputation as a great artist in love had grown by leaps and bounds when it became known that she had been hostess to Duke Ippolito Medici and even King Henry III of France, whose visit to Venice had started a whole flood of myths, legends, and anecdotes. Finally, it was known that Aretino was now one of her most frequent visitors, and that her door was by no means open to anyone who was willing to pay the price. All this gave Zafetta a certain dignity of position, but what opened the door of Titian's house to her was her famous red hair and her extraordinary beauty, which she had preserved to an age that no one knew and which she did not advertise.

She lay on her low seat, her head resting on her right hand, her light red dress draped artistically around her limbs, helping herself with her free hand to some candied fruit that stood between the three women on a silver platter. When one of the other two reached for a piece of candy, Zafetta watched with a worried expression as though she feared none might be left for her.

"Don't you believe a word about old Countess Vendramin!" Zafetta said now. "All her charitable doings with that lace-making school for the children of the poor are a typical racket of the patricians. It does not cost her a penny, but she sleeps better because she imagines herself a public benefactress! Besides, who knows whether the money she gets from the sale of the lace really goes to the patriarch for distribution among the poor?"

"Who knows, indeed?" Lavinia replied. "We have seen them do worse tricks than that. When father painted the ceiling at the Foscari place, they almost did acrobatics to cheat him of his due price. I think that painters get cheated even worse than you," she added, nodding to Zafetta.

"Oh, it is all a question of talent," replied the courtesan with an air of great wisdom.

"Which—I mean, you spoke of talent—what talent do you mean?" Desdemona asked in an embarrassed voice, like that of a novice in a convent who ventures to put her first question to the superior. Zafetta was delighted with the innocent candour of the young woman, who had charmed her the moment she saw her in the garden. Now she jumped up, and taking the dish of fruit with a proprietary air, she offered it to Desdemona with a kind glance.

"I mean the talent for love!" she explained in a friendly tone. "You look at me with surprise? If only you were not so terribly young! You just stay sixteen or seventeen all your life. Look at us: Lavinia with her twenty-five years and I with my hundreds, we both know far too much. You, Madonna, have jumped the walls of the convent in one great leap, conquered the best-looking man in Venice, choosing the finest colour, and you were the first to discover the beauty of this grey-haired hero! At least you were the first lady of rank to do so. And do you know that Othello—I mean his lordship—does not owe his career to the protection of a single woman? Take any of the others: for instance, Colleoni. Had he not had beautiful legs, which a duchess discovered and fell in love with when he was a poor soldier, he would have never risen to power and glory. Now people think that he was a great general because Verocchio has made his eyes look so mad in the statue. But Othello—none of the high-born fools recognized his beauty or his genius. And why? Because they were afraid of his greatest beauty: his colour! Oh, Lavinia, why don't you stop me? I am saying all sorts of things that must be shocking to the contessa, and at the same time eating up all your candied fruits."

"I could listen to you forever," Desdemona said softly. "And to-morrow I shall send you a basket full of candied fruit if you will be kind enough to accept it."

'She'll send it—but she won't ask me to come to her *palazzo,'* Zafetta thought. But she smiled graciously at Desdemona and then asked Lavinia;

"Do you think the Master would let us have a peep into his studio?"

"No. I don't think so for a minute. But I can ask him." And swiftly she ran into the house from where, after a minute or two, she beckoned to her guests, indicating that the Master did not object to the intrusion.

Titian took no notice of the visitors when they entered the studio but continued to paint his "Danae." He had finished the white body of the woman who lay in longing surrender waiting for Jupiter in the form of a shower of gold. Desdemona had stopped at the top of the stairs and was looking at the picture, wide-eyed and breathless. The Master, fully aware of the admiring audience, now began to paint the golden rain falling on the white goddess. Zafetta had to use all her self-control not to giggle while Desdemona flushed and paled alternately. In ten minutes the shower of gold was finished, and Titian rose exhaustedly as if he had been Jupiter himself, stretched his old legs and walked over to the women. He did not hold out his hand but immediately addressed himself to Desdemona:

"And what does my friend Othello say to the Turks now?"

Desdemona was in complete confusion and could only stammer: "The Turks—what do you mean, Master?"

"I mean the Turks in Dalmatia. Are they going to attack? Will Othello meet them?"

"I don't know—I—forgive me, but I can only think of the picture."

The Master laughed and bade the colour grinder cover the "Danae" with a curtain which was held in readiness.

"And you, Zafetta? Did you like the rain of gold?"

"If only it were real," Zafetta replied laughingly.

Lavinia came up, and taking her father by the shoulders she said: "Leave it to us now, father."

She knew that he was always tired after painting, and signed to her guests to bid good-bye. The old man left the studio but turned round in the doorway and called: "My regards to Othello. Soon I shall come to your house and you can show me the excellence of your kitchen and cellar!"

When he had gone, Desdemona felt sightless, speechless and faint. But she recovered soon and asked for her gondola. A few minutes later she fell back into the leather cushions and sat silently with her eyes closed, until the gondolier's outstretched hand showed her that she had reached her destination,

CHAPTER III

THE great house of the Germans near the Rialto, with its five arches, its eighteen rounded windows and two heavy balconies, looked just as it does to-day. But it was the centre of a feverish, industrious activity. The Venetians, who had learned to enjoy life, did not work more than was necessary—and that necessary amount had already been reduced to a minimum since the position of the republic as a great power was on the decline. But Venice was still the centre of European commerce and trade, and neither Lisbon nor London, Bruges nor Paris, not even Madrid or Rome could vie with the city on the lagoon. Among all peoples occupied with trade the Germans were by far the most active, although they were almost the only ones without colonies.

But they were not liked here, because they were too efficient for the easy-going Venetians. A number of expressions had originated from their activities. One said of a notorious felon that he counterfeited like a German; and "to quarrel like a German" had almost become a proverb. When the roof on the German house started to leak, the Germans immediately began to quarrel with the city's administration about the extent of the repair, the materials to be used for it, and so forth. When a Moroccan emir ordered some marble from the little town of Carrara, the German agent was immediately sent there from Venice, to manage the transaction and to have the marble paid for by an equal weight of sugar. The Venetians admired such feats on the part of the German agents, but this admiration did not beget friendship. For the last fifty years the Germans had been reputed heretics, although most of them had not accepted the new faith. But the Venetians were only too ready to add religious prejudice to their general dislike of the men from the north.

Othello's power was an obstacle to the Germans, whether they were heretics or not. The Fuggers in Germany had provided the patricians, through their agents, with material that enabled them to recall Othello from Cyprus. Now they concentrated their efforts on furnishing these same patricians with accusations and calumnies concerning the private life of the Moor and his wife, to bring about the final downfall

of this dreaded man. The offended patricians had talked themselves and each other into believing that Othello was a serious danger to the State, and although this opinion was begotten by their envy and their prejudice, it was true that Othello's position was more powerful than ever, now that Titian and Aretino had publicly taken his side. The names of the artists had an enormous prestige in that epoch where the cult of beauty had attained its climax. Whether Titian was going to paint the portrait of the Pope or not was a weighty question that the foreign offices in all countries considered with great earnestness, for it implied that the republic of Venice was re-establishing close relations with the Vatican at the expense of its friendship with the Emperor. The position of the latter—after the death of the great Charles the Fifth—had considerably weakened, and the defection of an ally like Venice had its direct bearings on the attitude of the rebellious German princes or the expansionist policy of the Turks. Thus Titian's decisions or Aretino's verses carried important political weight. It had become a question of State whether the Duke of Ferrara would ask Titian or Michelangelo to portray him, and the ministers of the courts of Portugal or Poland made much of the fact that Emperor Charles the Fifth had, on his last trip to Lombardy, asked Pietro Aretino to ride on his right.

Since the balance of the European situation depended on such diplomatic manoeuvres, it was of decided importance whether the declared friend of the Moor of Venice should penetrate into the citadel of Michelangelo, his greatest rival, or whether Pietro Aretino wrote biting verses against the German Emperor or against the Pope. For if the senators of Venice decided to dismiss their admiral in order to destroy his prominence over their own sons and brothers, the sultan in Istanbul could well give the long-awaited order for an attack by his fleet off the Dalmatian coast against the Venetian fleet without Othello at its head. Thus the paintings of the great artists, the exports of the Germans, and even such matters as the production of the French silk manufacturers stood in close and important interdependence; and the rumours, true and false, that took the role of the modern press, exerted a powerful influence over the politics of all countries.

Equally powerful was the position of the spies kept by every nation at the important, courts and cities. The German spies were particularly numerous because the political and religious disparity

of their country, split into countless duchies and kingdoms, represented equally countless and diverging interests, with the result that no one trusted anyone in the German House in Venice. Schurck and Binda who had followed their prey from Cyprus to Venice, were heartily disliked by their colleagues in the Fondaco because of the success they had so far reaped, which the fat Binda constantly exaggerated.

Aretino, for whose wit these ponderous German intriguers were an easy target, had allied himself soon after Othello's return with El Kashef, who felt flattered by the trust the famous man put in him. The slave was also of the opinion that Aretino was an unbeliever, and liked him for that reason, as he secretly hated all whites and especially all Christians. Of the latter he exempted only one person: his master. One event had won El Kashef for Aretino. On their return from Cyprus the poet had shaken him by the hand, him alone of all the slaves, and although he had never done so again, it was an honour that remained deeply engraved in the Arab's mind. He had not had an opportunity to tell his master about it, since he rarely spoke to him unless to answer a question or make a report. He fervently hoped, however, that his master would hear somehow about this handshake.

The admiral naturally preferred to transact official business with the Germans through his slave, who always managed to see something in the German House worth reporting, rather than by a uniformed messenger from the navy. As they now stood face to face, the small, slim Arab and the fat, tall German, a certain feeling of professional understanding united them; but this bond had its roots, not in mutual respect or liking, but on the contrary, in a mutual distrust. While they were still eyeing each other like two rivals who each knew very well where the other kept his hidden weapon, Aretino stepped between them with his flowing beard and his derisive smile. He had made a practice of visiting the headquarters of his and Othello's enemies. He, too, was a spy, but of a better class than the others and much more respected and feared.

"Well, did you have a pleasant breakfast, Binda?" he asked in fluent German. The fat German bowed obsequiously. "You look as happy as if you had had word of the occupation of Trieste by the Turks."

Binda raised his voice and answered in Italian, so that everybody should understand.

"Your lordship has taken Cyprus wine very early to-day. Your lordship should sometimes try our German wines from the Palatinate. They are light and dry like one of your lordship's sonnets!"

"And less poisonous, I hope," Aretino answered good-humouredly. Then he turned to El Kashef and said in his broken Arabic: "Binda pretends not to know where the Adriatic fleet of the Turks is stationed!"

"You were saying?" the German asked pointedly.

About a dozen people were now standing round the group and Aretino said in Italian: "I just suggested that Herr Binda should be appointed ambassador to Pisa, because there the diplomats are almost as stupid as the professors. Herr Binda would feel at home there."

Everybody laughed loudly, and Binda, who had flushed purple with anger, turned to Aretino:

"Your lordship seems to forget that this is German territory!"

"Oho—German? This belongs to the city," some voice in the group called out. "You are only tenants."

"We pay our rent punctually, and if we choose we can throw all of you out!" Binda shouted furiously.

A number of daggers flashed up, one in the Arab's dusky hand and several in the hands of Germans who had hurried up to stand by their compatriot. Aretino stood in the centre of the group and laughed, nudged the man next to him and pointed to Binda's ludicrous face and beckoned to some gondoliers who were ready to join in the fray. By his clowning he transformed the threatening brawl into a farce, thus making a fool of the German heretic of all Venice. A few minutes later peace seemed restored. Aretino saluted the company and strolled back to his house, turning over in his mind the satire on the scene he would write.

CHAPTER IV

THEY now shared the large bed in which Othello had formerly slept alone. He had given her the larger of the two bedrooms on the third floor of the *palazzo,* and each morning he retired into the smaller adjoining room, which he had equipped as his dressing room. In those days this was an unusual procedure; but since he had said that he always wanted to feel he was her guest, she never entered his room. Since her visit to Titian's garden her love for Othello had grown into a powerful passion. The freedom of that classic atmosphere where gods and artists met, Lavinia's pagan beauty, and the almost shameless self-assurance of the famous courtesan had opened new horizons to the young woman whose life had hitherto been spent in the convent and on the dreamy, magic island of love. These revelations had been so powerful that she had not dared speak of them to Othello. Her silence was not entirely due to her instinctive shyness, but rather to her equally instinctive womanly wisdom; for she had noticed that Othello was not altogether pleased that she had met Zafetta at the Master's house.

He did not worry particularly about his one-time relations with the courtesan, which had been of short duration, but there was always the possibility that Zafetta might invent all sorts of stories about him to tease and excite Desdemona. Nor was he jealous; but from the many and varied impressions she had received at the Master's house, a development could spring that might in time endanger the durability of their happiness.

None of these thoughts occupied Desdemona's mind as she sat in her mauve morning gown in front of the Mercury, which Othello had placed in the bedroom. He felt that it was too intimate a statue to have in the large hall downstairs, where anyone might ask embarrassing questions. To put the beautiful bronze in any other part of the house was **out** of the question, for he feared that Desdemona might think **that** he **feared** the rivalry of the young god. On the contrary—in this respect the **statue** was most welcome to him, for it was another proof ofhis **power** over Desdemona, and he needed such proof from time to time.

As he came into Desdemona's room, she threw herself into his arms.

"Othello!"

He held her close, and the two lovers looked in silence at the Mercury. Finally Desdemona spoke.

"Othello, would you take him away again? He disturbs me here, and he can stand just as well downstairs in the left niche of the entrance hall."

"But he has very poor lighting there, and if Sansovino comes to see us. . . ."

"Then he will be seen at once, whereas if he stays in my bedroom, Sansovino would never know that we have him. Besides, I don't want him any more. Please take him down. I want you, only you. No Mercury and no Danae. You are the most beautiful man, the handsomest officer in Venice." Suddenly she began to laugh. "Shall we have breakfast up here together? Shall I tell Emilia to bring the cats up here? Or don't you want to do anything except kiss me?"

She pressed herself so close to her lover that he would have had to be made of stone to have insisted on cats and breakfast now. He sat on a low chair, and pulling her down to him he asked: "Why did you say you did not want the Danae?"

"Because the Master is painting a Danae."

"Is she finished? What is she like?"

"Oh, you know. . . ."

"Did he paint a shower of gold from the clouds, like Correggio?"

She looked dreamily up to the ceiling and said softly: "Shower of gold—yes—I don't know." He saw that she was entranced thinking of the picture and the world she had seen at Titian's house and he did not want to intrude. Carefully he picked her up, laid her on the bed and kissed her. Then he turned, took the heavy Mercury in his arms and left the room. She heard his heavy steps all the way down, and then she heard his gondola leave the house.

Suddenly she felt lonely. She had expected his caresses, and now he was gone. Was her beauty failing? With the fury of a disappointed woman she threw herself back on her pillows.

Later, in the evening, Desdemona stood before her mirror and scrutinized her dress, her jewellery, and her hair. Never before had she taken so much trouble to look her best, for to-night she was to

receive the three greatest Venetians and a stranger in her house. Lavinia was the only woman she had invited.

Titian's daughter looked beautiful in dark red silk which set off the alabaster whiteness of the throat her father had painted, decked with pearls. Desdemona herself, in white lace, evoked the diaphanous beauty of water, spray and mist, except in the vivid note of colour introduced by the blue-green turban which crowned her tresses.

As she sat at table, the heads of the five men and the two young women constituted a picture so remarkable that each of the artists tried to transpose his impressions into his particular art. What Othello, the man of action, thought, nobody could guess.

Their guests were Titian and Lavinia, Aretino, Sansovino, and Monteverdi, the musician, who was a newcomer both to their house and to Venice. The two older men had donned their golden chains in honour of the occasion: Titian had received his from the late Emperor Charles; Aretino had been decorated by the Duke of Mantua. Othello, who at home always dressed in black, merely wore the silver band around his chest. Sansovino was a man in his middle thirties, with a broad, short beard and a clear, healthy skin. Monteverdi, on the other hand, was as pale and swarthy as a Spaniard. When he spoke, he gestured with both hands as if conducting an orchestra.

These two were the new stars of Venice: the architect, who was just then building St. Mark's library, and the musician, who had been put in charge of the famous choir and orchestra of San Marco. Both were officials of the republic, and both equally welcome guests in the *palazzi* of the patricians, but they apparently preferred the company of the Moor.

"When one passes San Marco these days," Desdemona said to Monteverdi, "one always hears your choir rehearsing. Sometimes one can also hear the viola, the cello, and the organ, like divine voices softly indicating the sky. We owe all this to you."

"Thank you, Contessa—yes—but that is not all that we are going to do," Monteverdi replied confusedly; and in the manner of young rebels he fell into a sort of monologue.

"Everything must be changed. We have started to—we are trying a completely new form—you will see—" And suddenly, as he felt the interest of the company centre around him, he stopped in embarrassment.

Aretino came to the rescue and asked: "You have a German with your company, have you not? I believe his name is Hermann Schuetz. Or is it Heinrich? Is he talented? When the Germans make music, they become interesting. Is he also a heretic?"

Monteverdi looked surprised. "A heretic? How do you mean? Oh, I see. No, I don't know. I have never asked him, and it is a matter of indifference to me what he believes when he goes to communion. He is a musician, and that is the main thing. Sansovino will build us an amphitheatre such as the world has only seen at the foot of the Acropolis."

"There is no one who can build like Sansovino," Desdemona said now. "Only—the Piazzetta has become so noisy because of his library. One can hardly hear your music because his men keep banging and hammering."

"You cannot very well build without making a noise," said Aretino. Sansovino laughed but did not say anything. He had for many years been in love with Lavinia, though he managed to console himself for his disappointment with other women, and even with his own wife. But he had kept his distance with Desdemona from the very beginning, as Aretino had done.

"Where did you get those wonderful chandeliers?" he cried. "Either the Morosinis have copied an old model from Curello or some German has copied it in Murano. It is perfect, and comparing it with the one I designed recently, I find myself in the same predicament as when I compare the Master's work with that of Buonarotti."

"Well, it's always pleasant to meet someone who is dissatisfied with himself," Aretino remarked. "I am always looking for sonnets better than my own, but alas—I have not been successful in my search!"

Everyone laughed until Desdemona said: "Here in our house Sansovino may not criticize his own work. For every morning I see his Goddess of the Wind from my window standing soaring on the globe, her golden sail moving in the wind. It is the first and most beautiful impression of my day—and you have made it!"

"Is it the goddess of the winds or of good fortune?" asked Monteverdi.

"Is there a difference?" Othello interjected.

"There speaks the mariner," said Lavinia.

"No—the philosopher," said her father.

"Do we depend on the winds of good fortune, Master?" asked Monteverdi. Everybody looked to Titian for an answer, and he paused to reply: "You, perhaps. Perhaps even Othello. But not I ." And as the others expected him to say more, he turned to Desdemona and asked: "And you, Contessa?"

She looked at Othello and said: "I have seized my good fortune with both hands. And it also had a sail, like the goddess."

"These words of yours make me ask for the honour of calling you by your Christian name, if his lordship is agreeable," Aretino exclaimed with genuine admiration. And he lifted his glass and drank to her as she nodded her consent. Desdemona was happy, but she was only interested in the thoughts of her husband. She was therefore surprised when he resumed the topic of the winds of good fortune.

"We sailors depend on the wind, of course, but we do not bow to its will. We fight against it with the art of the sails, we thwart its designs with our compass. But we must be prepared to meet the fury of the storm, and we must face the dangers of battle. On high, the goddess of the winds holds the sails wide open, but fate can seize us from below and destroy all our plans."

After a pause Sansovino said to Lavinia: "Othello is obviously the greatest artist among us. I never knew or thought these things when I put the statue up there."

"Then we had better change," Aretino called to the speaker. "We shall appoint you grand admiral of the republic, but before we make Othello architect, I would like to ask him something: How often do you have storms, or sea battles? I mean, on an average?"

While Othello smilingly considered an answer, Aretino continued: "Perhaps once every three years? Or more often? Very well—there you are with your dangers. We artists face the powers of the underworld daily, and every day we can make a fatal mistake. Just ask the three arts represented at this table, and let me answer for the fourth, whether we are not in constant danger while our admirals cruise pleasantly on the seas."

"In constant danger," said Sansovino.

"In constant danger," repeated Monteverdi.

But as Titian's turn came, he mumbled gruffly: "You and your dangers! I rule with my brush; and as to the powers of the underworld, I leave them to Signor Tintoretto." Everyone was impressed

by the freedom with which this Olympian disposed of such a disquieting problem. Aretino, who feared that the conversation might turn to the controversial subject of Tintoretto, with whose art Monteverdi felt a particular affinity, quickly changed the subject.

"Tell us your impressions of Rome and of the Pope, whom you saw last month. Is it worth your while to paint the Pope when you wear the golden chain of the Emperor?"

Titian pointed his fork at Aretino and said: "Why don't you ask Lavinia such things instead of spoiling my appetite at this princely table?"

"Oh, do you think I would tell their lordships your private affairs? Never!" Lavinia called mockingly.

"Well, Master," Sansovino now interposed, "are you going to paint His Holiness or not? I would not be surprised if Farnese turns the whole thing into a profitable affair."

"What the devil!" Titian shouted and banged his hand on the table. "This Pope is not even interested in ducats. He is Mephistopheles incarnate. He is cleverer than I, perhaps even foxier than Aretino!"

"Admiral, protect me against such insinuations," Aretino called now, while Titian had his glass filled again. After he had taken a deep draught, the Master addressed the company once more.

"I tell you, never before did such a scoundrel sit on Peter's throne—and that is saying a lot. He knows that he will get more out of my portrait than he can ever pay for in money—enduring fame. For these gentlemen have no crown princes in whom their names will live on. Therefore he wanted to find out how I would paint him and how he would look in the picture. As soon as I realized his purpose, *1* added a few nasty touches to my sketches, nastier even than I had intended. And since he brought his two nephews along, I suggested that they should stand still for a while, and I quickly drew them. When I showed him the sketch, he perceived my irony and immediately postponed the whole thing. Of course, he did not say anything about it to the others, since the joke was on him. But I have outwitted his spies and have brought one of the sketches home with me to Venice. You shall see it: an old usurer, and two legacy hunters behind him who can hardly wait to open his will."

Lavinia looked somewhat worried; her father raised his voice even more and almost shouted at her: "You are silent, Lavinia? Well,

don't worry. In the first place I am here among artists, and in the second place among friends. But if anyone should repeat this story of the abortive portrait of the Pope in the *palazzi* of the aristocracy, or even in the senate, I would be only too pleased. And if this old Roman tomcat should take revenge on me and refuse my son his due benefices as canon, then we shall wait for the next pope, because I intend to outlive that old skeleton by at least three decades."

Othello had listened to Titian with enthusiasm. Now he wanted to pay him homage but did not want to make a ceremonious speech at his own table. So he looked at a little glass lion, the emblem of St. Mark, that stood before Lavinia's plate. He said to her questioningly: "You admired the little lion in front of you? Desdemona put it on the table to-night. It was made by the ancestor of the Ballarive family, who are said to have started our glass industry in Murano some three hundred years ago. One of the descendants gave it to me after the victory of Cyprus. Will you accept it now in memory of the evening when your father, the true hero of San Marco, honoured our house with his presence?"

Nobody spoke and all seemed moved. But Aretino, who could not stand any emotional tension, quickly broke the silence. "You see, Monteverdi, that is true Oriental generosity. Everything of value has always come from abroad to Venice. All five of us have come from abroad. None of us is called by his real name: but we make our names, while the patrician shopkeepers are made by theirs."

"Yes, indeed," replied the musician, "except for one minor error. My name is really Monteverdi."

CHAPTER V

ARETINO stepped out of the gondola and held out his hand to Desdemona. As they stood in the broad square behind the Church of San Pietro e Paolo, they could hear a buzzing in the air such as is heard in a garden on a summer's day. It was the humming from the various shops, where some of Venice's most famous craftsmen followed their trade. Desdemona had never been to these shops where the people daily produced exquisite works of art as a matter of course, and she had expressed her desire to see them some day. Aretino, who was always eager to amuse her, and who had made a point of keeping an eye on the woman on whom Othello's happiness depended, had suggested this visit. He was glad that he could show her these things himself, which otherwise she would see by the side of some young artist and thus furnish the enemies of Othello with fresh cause for their slanderous rumours.

As they stood in front of the open doors of the shops, every craftsman, every child, immediately recognized her. Everywhere people came out and invited the two visitors into their houses, for she, the wife of Il Moro, and Aretino were almost equally popular, and he was well known in this neighbourhood for his understanding of beautiful things. And beautiful things abounded here in the shops of the stone cutters, the gold and silversmiths, the armourers, the jewellers, the draughtsmen, printers, and bronze casters. It was an atmosphere of activity such as could only be found to-day in the sooks and bazaars of Cairo or Damascus. Only the standards of beauty and skill were much higher then, for Venice was one of the richest towns in the world and the sense for beauty had pervaded the people to a point never to be reached again. Separated by little alleys or narrow canals, these shops lay grouped around the sunny square on which children played.

"There is little to see here at the moment," an old printer said to Desdemona as he pulled his cap from his bald head. "Twenty years ago—ah, yes, when your ladyship's mother came into my shop. . . ."

"Oh, but these metal signs—are they not for music? That must

be something new," Desdemona said, not daring to ask any question about her mother.

"It is an invention by Foscambrone. It is about ten years old now, but the Germans have taken it up and improved the system greatly. The Germans are quick to take up new things."

"And we?" Aretino asked provocatively, "Are we so slow?"

"Terribly slow," replied the old man, looking at Aretino as if to say: You know very well whom I mean. "In the north they engrave their music much more clearly and with much greater speed. The new German musician of San Marco was here the other day, Signor Schuetz."

"Come in here, cavaliere," a voice said suddenly behind Aretino, who immediately turned round.

"Vincenzo! How are you, my friend?" Aretino exclaimed and embraced the man. "This is Vincenzo, Contessa, the best metalworker in Venice. He makes wonderful candelabra, but he always keeps the best pieces. But Vincenzo, I warn you: to-day I have the authority of the entire fleet with me, and if you don't do as I tell you I shall have you chained to the benches in the galley! Where is that wonderful piece you copied from the relief on the Titus arch in Rome? You remember—the Jewish candelabrum with the seven arms?"

"If your graces will step into the kitchen—no, through this door—I can show you an old copper kettle that we have had in our family for over two hundred years. In constant use, too."

As they went into the low, sooty kitchen, where a wide hipped woman offered them bread, honey and wine, Desdemona felt truly happy. Here were the people of Venice, the people who loved Othello. Here Othello was really the hero. And never before had she sat in such a low room. A little girl with dirty cheeks came up to her and began to pull at the lace on her cuffs. Desdemona took the child on her lap, while the mother hastened to clean its face with a rag.

"Do you know who that is?" the mother asked. "It is Il Moro's lady."

The child looked at her with undisguised surprise and then said to her mother, "But she is quite white." The people who were crowding the entrance to the kitchen laughed. Desdemona smiled too, and said to the child: "Well, I can't change myself now, can I?"

Suddenly a woman's voice called from the background, "You just stay as you are and leave the Moor as he is!"

Aretino was tempted to make a reply, but he controlled himself, for he wanted to leave Desdemona every liberty to converse with the people.

When they came to the shop of the famous stone and mosaic cutter, Zuccato, Desdemona said: "Did you not work for Titian? Did you not execute his design for the Apocalypse in San Marco?"

"I was supposed to," the man returned with bitterness.

"That is what we were taught at the convent!" Desdemona persisted.

"Well, it is four years now that I have been waiting for his drawings. But he won't do it because he says that the committee gave the wall with the good light to Tintoretto."

"And why does he not refuse the commission?" Aretino asked amusedly.

"Because he is afraid that Tintoretto might get it!"

"What are these strange angels?" the young woman asked.

"Those are the corner pieces for the golden ceiling in the large hall at Palazzo Ducale," replied a young man, who introduced himself as Giovanni Aleotto.

"After a design by Sansovino?"

"Yes, he designed them, and no doubt he will put his name somewhere on the ceiling."

"And why not?" Aretino asked.

"The senators refused me the privilege. I offered to do the whole thing free of charge if they would let me put my name in a corner. But I will show you that I have done it all the same."

He picked up one of the strange cherubs, and pointing to the eight golden wings, he said: "Eight wings—*ale otto*—Aleotto! You see? Now my name will be on the ceiling not once but three hundred times! And the republic will have to pay for it."

"I shall make a sonnet on that," Aretino called laughingly.

"Oh, no, your grace, please don't! Or wait till the work is in place. Otherwise they will stop me at the very last moment. Oh, look, here comes Maestro Tintoretto."

The whole group turned round as a man of medium height and swarthy complexion took off his cap and saluted Aretino.

"I don't think that you know Signor Tintoretto," Aretino said to Desdemona as he presented the painter. He had purposely used the

"Signor," for the title of master was reserved for Titian. Desdemona knew that Othello had met him, and even Titian had seen him a number of times. There was no open enmity between the two painters, but the high tension that often exists between the older and younger generation of artists.

Desdemona remembered, as she gave her hand to the middle-aged painter, what the Master had said—"I leave the underworld to Signor Tintoretto." There is nothing of the underworld about this embarrassed man, she thought.

Aretino now took the conversation once more in hand and said to Tintoretto: "Monteverdi maintains that you are competing with him."

"I am competing? But I don't write music."

"No, but you have made an Ariadne—and so has Monteverdi."

The people around them laughed. They knew well enough that Tintoretto had been commissioned to paint four mythological figures for the Palazzo Ducale, but Monteverdi had not been in Venice long enough to be known by the people. Desdemona, who had been comparing Tintoretto's appearance with that of Monteverdi, now asked him:

"Is the painting finished? Is it beautiful?"

Tintoretto, who did not speak anyway, was somewhat taken aback at the directness of the question. "He is beautiful," he said finally.

"Who? Theseus?"

"No, I have painted Ariadne with Dionysos."

"And Ariadne? Is she beautiful?"

"Why, that is not difficult. Anyone can paint beautiful women."

Desdemona easily detected the undertone of revolt against the older generation of artists in this remark, and remembered that she had felt the same thing in Monteverdi.

"How did you paint the god?" she then asked.

"Bronze-brown," said Tintoretto.

If only I don't faint now, thought Desdemona, and grew pale. Aretino, seeing the predicament of the young woman, quickly pushed a chair under her; and calling loudly for the seven-armed candelabra, he indicated that they were about to leave.

"I should like to give it to Othello," said Desdemona to Aretino as she looked at the candelabra before her. "Do you think it is very expensive?" she added.

"It is free of charge for the Moor," replied the man.

"I cannot accept that."

"Then I suggest that I shall value it and name a price," Aretino proposed, much to the satisfaction of the bystanders. Desdemona now rose, and shaking many hands she gained the kitchen door. There she gave Tintoretto her hand. But she said nothing. Aretino preceded her, carrying the seven-armed candelabrum high in the air, and singing an Arab melody.

CHAPTER VI

"JUST that you can't sing it does not mean that it is unsingable," Monteverdi called to Schuetz, who, standing before him, was trying to prove that a passage in the soprano part was too high. "Wait until Isabella comes to-morrow from Milan, and then we shall see," he concluded.

The musicians in thin colourful jackets and open shirt collars were sitting together at rehearsal in the sacristy of San Marco. Most of the men were between twenty and thirty, and with the exception of the blond and idealistic Heinrich Schuetz from Germany and a friend from Holland, they were Italians.

"But Glaudio," Schuetz began again, "you can't have her crow like a rooster at the climax of ecstasy."

"Look, Heinrich, why don't you leave this sort of thing to me?" Monteverdi said with growing annoyance. "Who wrote this opera, as you insist on calling it? Did I or did you?—Damn you, why can't you play flat when it says flat?" he shouted at a man who was practising a difficult run on his instrument.

"If the padres hear you curse and swear like this, we'll have to rehearse in the street in future," someone else remarked.

"When they gave me this sacristy, they knew very well that I was not going to rehearse a mystery play but a pagan work about naked women and lusty gods!" Monteverdi said.

"Oh, shhh—" said another one, nodding his head towards the far corner of the room, and everyone immediately became silent. For in this corner sat Desdemona, whom Monteverdi had invited to his rehearsals. Behind her, old Lucia was peacefully asleep in her chair. Desdemona was excited. It was her first acquaintance with polyphonic, orchestrated music and she felt transported into another world. She had accepted the musician's invitation on condition that no one take any notice of her and that she could sit quietly in a corner and listen to the music. Monteverdi had laughed and proudly pointed out that his musicians were far too busy with their work to notice anybody—even a beautiful woman. Yet, all eyes had turned on her when she

came in, and she knew that they were constantly conscious of her presence.

"There is Lorenzo. Late as always. We shall fine him for every minute that he keeps us waiting," several people shouted as a youth of about twenty entered the sacristy, a *viola d'lamore* in his left hand. Without a word of excuse he sat down at his place and, looking around him, noticed the women in the corner. He glanced at Monteverdi and nodded questioningly towards them. Monteverdi took him by the hand, and leading him to Desdemona he said: "This is our first viola. He also has a good tenor voice, but unfortunately he is never on time. I beg your ladyship to excuse the delay."

He turned back immediately to his orchestra, while Lorenzo stood staring for a moment at Desdemona's beautiful face. Thus these two people, who did not even know each other's names, met, so to speak, alone and in silence. He realized after a few minutes who she was; and she could tell that he was from Venice, although she had not heard him speak. The melancholy look, the thinness of his lips, the way he moved, had something so decidedly Venetian about him that she did not for a moment doubt his origin.

A strange silence enveloped these two young people, as though conventions had ceased to exist. No one took any notice of them, not even the sleepy old servant.

Desdemona saw a delicate youth of almost girlish beauty, a dreamer without desires, who held the instrument with the seductive name in his long delicately formed hand which seemed as little fitted to play it as his lips seemed made for kissing. Lorenzo saw the fair-haired ideal of his dreams—with innocent eyes and lips that knew more of love than he did. Everything about her confused him, while he had no more reality for her than a dream image. The young man gazed at her with suddenly awakening love. After a silence of about two minutes he felt obliged to say something.

"Shall I play you the *Lament of Ariadne,* signorina?" He used this form of address with which Italians do homage to youth in woman, although his senses had immediately recognized that Desdemona was no longer a maid. As he spoke the word signorina, he suddenly realized that the slim brown man, the Moor of Venice, spent his nights with this lovely creature, and he quickly took refuge in his instrument, putting it to his chin and tuning it.

His pure Venetian delighted her, and in order to hear his voice again she asked: "Which lament, signore?"

"Lorenzo—" he said softly. "Ariadne's: she laments her lover Theseus."

"He forsook her," said Desdemona. "They say that on Tintoretto's new picture one sees his boat disappearing over the horizon. Can you tell me why he left her?"

The musician was all confused now, and letting his viola sink to his chest, he said: "I suppose because the god was coming. . . ."

"What if the god had come first, before Theseus?"

Suddenly Lorenzo laughed. "That, indeed, would be another plot altogether. Would you like to hear the lament?" And without waiting for her answer he began to sing, while playing an accompaniment of his own composition on the viola:

Lasciatemi morire!
E che dura sorte
In cosi dura sorte
In cosi gran mar tire?
Lasciatemi morire!

"Oh, do stop, Lorenzo! I can't hear my own words," Monteverdi called out; and more politely he added, to Desdemona: "Will you excuse this madman? He always thinks that he has to sing the part of Ariadne, and will not understand that his viola must play the main theme and not the accompaniment."

A group of musicians had now gathered round Monteverdi and Desdemona. The latter had awakened from her dream and got up from her chair.

"I warned you, Madonna," Monteverdi began again, "that it would not be much of a rehearsal. But if you come again to-morrow, it will be better. Isabella Andreini arrives to-night from Milan, and she sings beautifully. And to-morrow we begin rehearsals in the great council hall, where Sansovino has built a wonderful amphitheatre." And looking at Lorenzo, Monteverdi continued: "What do you think of your latest troubadour? Does he not look—no, but you must not smooth your hair down like a young patrician"— and pushing his hand through the young man's locks he said, "now, does he not look like the Dionysos on Tintoretto's picture? Except that he wears too many clothes!"

Desdemona's instinct told her that if she stayed another minute, she would be lost. She shook hands with Monteverdi and bowed coldly, but politely, murmuring a phrase of thanks. When she had turned to go, one of the cellists suddenly called: "Will your ladyship come out to see us in Murano one day? Every Saturday we are there and make music. We shall play you Venetian dances or dances from Cyprus! We have a nice garden there—or does the Maestro think that I am asking too much of a lady of your rank?"

Everyone applauded, and Desdemona promised that she would soon come to Murano. Then she turned again to go. But one more obstacle had to be overcome. Lorenzo was standing at the door, and she had to go past him. In her confusion, she lost her natural graciousness, and because she did not want to be conspicuous, she did not offer him her hand—and thereby attracted general notice. Lorenzo, equally confused, made the silliest mistake of his life: he left the door, and holding out his hand he gave it not to Desdemona but to Lucia, who did not know what was happening to her.

They were outside in a few seconds, and as Desdemona walked through the cathedral she could still hear the sounds of the instruments. But she could not tell whether the viola was among them.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Desdemona arrived home in her gondola and met El Kashef in the hall, she asked him confusedly, almost angrily, why he was not with his master. El Kashef replied that he had been sent home by Othello to report that the master regretted he had to stay aboard his flagship at the Lido until the evening. It was not the first time that official business had kept him out longer than expected, but to-day it was doubly painful not to see him, for all the way back from the rehearsal she had thought of him, of his arms around her, of his greeting. What prompted her to these thoughts she could not tell with certainty. Was it perhaps fear? A bad conscience? Did she have anything on her mind that she wanted to smother in his embrace? Was there nothing she wanted to keep from him? No—it was rather that she had felt instinctively that the moment she came into the hall, his embrace would wipe out all the impressions and emotions she had experienced that morning. And he was not there. Now her thoughts would stay with her. Her first impulse was to go out to the Lido herself and to see him there, but she soon realized that such a surprise visit would merely set him wondering. No—she had to think of something else, for she must not stay alone. The very next second her decision was taken. She stepped back into the gondola and ordered the men to row her to San Lazzaro. While the gondoliers were rowing the small craft over the wide bay, Aretino was sitting in Padre Domenico's room in a posture no one would have expected from the witty, cynical writer. His head was bent forward, and his arms hung limply to the floor as he sat on the edge of an easy chair lost in dejected thought. For the padre had not been able to cheer him up. He had not given him the hope and strength in search of which he had come out to the monastery.

Neither of the men was aware that Desdemona's gondola was steadily coming towards them. But their thoughts—and their talk—had been about her. For both of these experienced psychologists had recognized the first sign of a cloud on the hitherto clear sky.

Aretino explained the situation to the padre, who listened carefully,

although the poet had nothing to report that would have been news to the priest. The German agents had intensified their campaign of defamation, and the hostile patricians were only waiting for another chance to weaken and if possible to destroy Othello's position. Aretino described how the diplomatic intriguers spun their threads from the Pope to the Emperor, from the rebellious princes in Germany to the Turks in Istanbul, and how this spider web might at any moment furnish an opportunity for Othello's enemies to strike.

"And the worst is," Aretino concluded, "that Desdemona in her innocence will soon furnish additional material to his enemies."

"I don't understand," said the padre. "What material do you mean?" Aretino took two or three steps towards the old priest and continued.

"For the first time she has come out into the big world. She moves about in Venice, and nobody is able, or willing to lock her into her *Palazzo.* Other *palazzi,* however, are closed to her. Thus, her natural outlet is the world of art and artists. If she were to move in the circles of the navy, she would die of boredom, quite apart from the fact that Othello would never allow it. So what can she do? She is not the right type for a harem woman, nor is she a lady of our Venetian society: I believe they have only attended two official functions since they came back here, and it was an icy affair both times. I, with my Aristophanic reputation, get around more in society than our grand admiral and his wife! Ergo: the only society she can frequent is that of artists, and it won't be long before Venice is full of stories about her love affairs wi

"True stories or false?" the padre asked.

"False, of course. Or at least for the time being. But Othello's pulse quickens dangerously when the slightest jest is made about Desdemona."

Just as he finished, steps were heard on the staircase outside and a second later Desdemona knocked at the door.

"Desdemona!" the padre exclaimed. "Why, this is just like two years ago! Are you going to save the republic once more? Or is it that the Moor of Venice intends to go to Spain for a change? Or perhaps he has decided to run away from you?"

"That is just it," replied Desdemona with her most winning smile. "He has indeed left me and did not come home for lunch. The Turkish

attack on Dalmatia, however, has not yet taken place—for he sent word promising to be home for supper to-night. The truth is that I was lonely, and so I came to see you, father."

"Do you think Othello is happy at this moment?"

"He is never unhappy when he is alone."

"Oh, but that is a terrible state of affairs!"

"I only mean that he needs some hours of solitude. Even now, Othello needs time for his dreams."

"He never had much company, never had many friends, ever since he was a small boy," said the padre.

"I wonder whether my company will become wearisome for him one day," Desdemona mused.

"I don't think so, for he never loved before and he loves now."

"How was it in Cyprus? Did you see anybody there?" Aretino asked now.

"No, not a soul. And here it is the same. Only I wonder whether I can choose my friends," Desdemona replied.

A-ha, thought Aretino. Just as I thought. But she won't tell the more important half of it. But for once Aretino's forecast was wrong.

"Father, I listened to the musicians at San Marco this morning for an hour at rehearsal. When I came home I had a bad conscience. When I did not find Othello there, I came to you to make my confession. Since Aretino is also a confessor of a sort, I will ask you both to give me your advice. The musicians have asked me to come and visit them in their garden in Murano, where they will play all sorts of music for me. I would love to go, but I have a feeling that Othello will not come with me. And perhaps he will resent my going there alone. What shall I do?"

"My daughter," the padre began, "are you not a Venetian? Is not Othello a Venetian admiral? Is music not a Venetian art? I don't think that you will have to go alone to Murano. He will come with you, and at your first smile all his worries will disappear."

"It sounds wonderful as you say it. But still I know that he will not come, or that he will come against his will, or that he will not want me to go. It is really an idle question, because I can live very well without going to Murano. Only—you see, I realized all of a sudden that we are living here in Venice exactly as we lived in Cyprus. And

perhaps Othello always wants to live that way; perhaps he cannot live any other way."

Aretino thought of the letter he had written them to Cyprus, and suppressing an, "I told you so," he contented himself with mumbling: "That's just it."

"There are so many intrigues around us," Desdemona continued. "Do you think it would be possible to persuade Othello to resign the Admiralty and to take a governorship of an island or a colony? Oh, I would be so happy!"

"So would he," remarked the padre and fell silent.

Desdemona looked from one to the other, but their serious expressions offered little consolation. After a pause the old priest spoke again.

"No, he will never do it. He will never allow his enemies to triumph over him. Not voluntarily. There is much at stake for him—his honour, his race. He must defend them."

Desdemona looked at the two men with pleading eyes. "You are the only people who have any influence with him—the Master does not bother with such things, otherwise there could be a third. I don't want to ask him to change anything, or to add anything to our life here; I know that he gives me his all. But perhaps you two could talk to him. Perhaps you could ask him not to look so darkly when I mention Murano or when I ask him to walk with me to the Merceria, or to go to Torcello to eat roast chicken there, or to come to the Arlechino with me and laugh with me there. Would you ask him? Would you?"

Aretino and the padre looked at each other, wondering who should answer first. Finally Aretino said :

"Serious people always stay serious."

"Also when they love?" Desdemona asked, hoping to hear some joke from the satirist.

"When they love, they become even more serious," said Aretino slowly, and the padre nodded.

CHAPTER VIII

"JUST like old times," said Othello to himself as he sat in the large hall of his *palazzo* and waited for the return of Desdemona from the party in honour of the first birthday of Maria's little daughter. Maria's house was the only place where Desdemona met other patricians, and it was for this very reason that she was not very eager to go there. But the birthday party of the little girl was an event so important to her friend that Desdemona had accepted the invitation.

As Othello heard her gondola come to the mooring posts outside the house, he jumped up, and waving El Kashef back, he bounded downstairs to welcome his wife personally. She had not expected to see him home before her, and she was overwhelmed with happiness at his sudden appearance that she kissed him while she still stood on the lowest step nearest the water, in full view of the gondoliers. After their embrace they both laughed with embarrassment and slowly walked up the stairs, hand in hand like two children. When they had reached the second floor the pressure of his hand indicated that he wanted to climb higher, to their bedroom. Desdemona was seized by a strange excitement, as though Othello had not spent every night and many mornings with her in this room.

"Let it be, Lucia," she said to the old woman, who had come to help her with her shoes, "I shall take them off myself." Lucia nodded and left them alone. It was like old times again. Othello kneeling before the large green easy chair in which she sat, his hands on her hips, his eyes deep in hers. He looked like a thirty-year-old lover, as he laughed softly at her, and not at all like the fifty-year-old commander, Grand Admiral of the Republic, not even like the familiar husband. Desdemona thought: Why can't this last for ever? Why do we ever leave this room? Why can't I have his arms round me twenty-four hours a day? But out loud she said—as in old times:

"How brown you are."

And he replied: "How white you are!"

She let his hands go and leaned back in the chair.

"How often have we said that to each other? Here and in Cyprus!"

"We shall always repeat it, always repeat Cyprus," he said, showing his white teeth.

"There you are, showing your teeth just to prove that you too have something white!"

"But you have nothing brown on you."

"Then I shall dye my hair!"

"The moment you do that, I shall take a brown mistress."

"And what will you do with her? She won't even be able to appreciate your slim Arab hips, let alone your beautiful bronze colour."

"All right, then we won't do anything about our colours and we shall go to Titian, take off our clothes, and have ourselves immortalized on his canvas!"

"But we can't do that. Not all naked. And if he paints us in clothes, we shall look like patricians!"

"Then—I know. He shall paint us as the lion and the lioness of St. Mark."

"Oh, you are crazy!" Desdemona laughed. "Besides, you would have a wonderful mane while I would get nothing!"

"But I tell you one of the lionesses on Veronese's 'Triumph of Venice,' the one on the left, looks exactly like you!" Both of them laughed happily. "Tell me," he continued, "what princes, dukes, and counts did you meet to-day at your friend's party? Were they distinguished, inquisitive, or only stupid?"

"What princes? You should really ask what cakes, because I ate so much there that I won't be able to eat any supper. Well: Onedo, Marvello, Priuli, were there, very elegantly trying to compensate for their obvious lack of intelligence by their fine silk hose, their emeralds and general demeanour."

"Did they try to impress you?"

"Apparently. Everybody crowded round me and said the most flattering things, while Maria kept whispering into my ear, "You see now, what did I tell you?"

"That is a bad sign," Othello said quietly. "Who else?"

"Albert Falieri came in person to kiss my hand-"

"Is that the one whose left eye twitches?"

"No, his younger brother. And I tell you—he kissed my hand like a knight leaving for Jerusalem on a crusade. And do you know what he

said?—'Your ladyship wears earrings like the Queen of Portugal'."

"Did he say that loudly?"

"Yes, so that everyone could hear it."

"That was to illustrate the admiral's prodigality and his wife's regal ambitions! They did not ask after me, did they?"

"Oh, yes, every single one. 'His lordship is in good health, I trust?' Oh, they were smooth—as smooth as your skin, almost—if such a comparison were not too much honour for them. Of course, everyone talked about the coming opera. Monteverdi was there too. He invited us to come to the rehearsals, and also to Murano, where the musicians will play folk music to us in a garden. Please don't say no; let's go to Murano."

"Of course we shall go to Murano. But the rehearsals are probably early in the morning at the Palazzo where everyone would see me. And I can already hear Mocenigo saying that the Grand Admiral goes to study arias and duets while the Turks are moving up the coast of Dalmatia."

"Well, then I shall go there alone and tell you about it afterwards."

"You—alone?"

"Yes—with Lucia, as we did the other day."

"Why, of course; when is it, to-morrow?"

"They have already started rehearsing." She stopped, and looking him full in the face, she asked:

"You don't mind—do you?"

"Of course not! But perhaps you should not talk too much with the Musicians at the Palazzo. You know as well as I do that the place is full of spies, and we are under constant observation. I happen to know, for instance, that one of the German spies dressed up as a butler to-day at Maria's party, to report every word that you said. Your brother has mobilized his friends here, and they have their people everywhere."

Desdemona got up and walked to the window. She hoped that her mounting tears would stop, but the cool night air only aggravated them. She went back, and standing before Othello she said: "But this is terrible! Where do we live? In a prison? Have we done anything wrong? Did you perhaps lose a battle or neglect your duties? Why don't you throw your position in their faces? Appeal to the people. You can have everything from them."

"And yet you told me that the child in the kitchen at the Campo San Pietro showed amazement that II Moro's wife was white! Do you know that the Duke of Mantua has written to the King of France that the allies could no longer depend on the fleet.of Venice because it was all in the hands of Arabs, Turks, and other coloured people? Do you know that Monteverdi was asked by the Vatican to have his *Ariadne* performed there rather than here, where Sansovino is a close friend of the Moor and where the patricians would have to meet the Moor and his wife at the first night?"

Desdemona listened to him, trembling with indignation. "Why don't you go to Spain?" she cried.

Othello looked at her seriously. "And leave the republic to its fate? Do you seriously wish that, Desdemona?"

She threw herself into his arms. "Oh, no, no! I am so furious I don't know what I am saying. No, never, we shall never leave the republic. It was I who stopped you before from leaving it. Forgive me. Forget what I have said. We shall stay here. This time you are no longer alone against them. Together we shall fight it out: the Moor of Venice and his white wife!"

CHAPTER IX

THE cypresses on the island of the dead were slender and high, and the two silent men who approached them in their gondola thought that already their ancestors, hundreds of years earlier, must have gazed on these grave trees when they came to visit the tombs of their dead. The old trees died, of course, but from their seed new ones sprang that resembled their fathers.

The two men who now opened the heavy wrought-iron gate, father and son, also resembled each other, in their black cloaks and caps, pacing slowly up the island with the same measured steps. Yet their hostility, their hatred for each other, was alive, only covered over to-day by pious convention and old usage. It was the anniversary of the death of the first Countess Brabantio, and father and son were going to San Michele, as they had always done to say a prayer at the tomb.

The old count would not call his son home from his post in Florence, but he could not forbid him his house on short visits. To-day, automatically, Antonio had stepped into his father's gondola as he set out for the isle of the dead. Now they stood, bareheaded, in front of the wide vault that bore the name Brabantio in many different inscriptions and styles. Some were in Latin, others in Italian, sometimes the coat of arms of a wife stood next to that of the Brabantios, all of them united under the cross on top of the vault. Antonio remembered how twenty-three years ago they had laid his mother to rest. He remembered the choir boys who sang their hymns, and the lugubrious and depressing faces of the many mourners.

His mood to-day was even gloomier, for he hated this old man, but not because he had taken another wife. On the contrary, Antonio had loved his foster-mother, or to be more exact he had fallen in love with her shortly before she died. Both women lay here under the marble slabs, and Antonio waited impatiently for the day when the old man, their husband, should join them. For years he had felt that his father stood in his way, that he was an obstacle to be removed. In the meanwhile the shame that had come upon their family by the **old**

man's consent to Desdemona's marriage filled Antonio with a self-righteous hatred of his father, and he felt that all his earlier feelings of dislike, for which every now and then he had felt a moments remorse, had been nothing but the just and accurate warning signals of his instincts, and that he had been quite right, from his very boyhood on, to distrust and dislike his father.

It was a warm April morning, and after the two had stood in silence for a while, the old man sat down on a marble seat and began to speak. His voice was unusually and intentionally hard.

"It will not be long before I shall come out here to stay. That you expect my death, that you have made your plans accordingly, is only natural. I don't ask for your sympathy, not even your friendship. But since we are enemies now, I think it only right that we should clarify our mutual situation before you return to Florence. Your sister has married the greatest man in the republic, who is defending us against the Turks. You, your friends, and about half the Senate are bent on ruining this man because he is coloured. He is a Catholic like you or me; he has a spotless reputation, which is more than many a white man can boast of; he loves his wife and she loves him. Their marriage is a success from every point of view. Everything combines to make you his natural friend and ally—yet you fight against him. You have become the centre of opposition against him, and when he closes the door in the *palazzo* of our fathers, you open it to revile him behind his back. I will not stand for this any longer. Here on the graves of our ancestors I warn you for the last time."

His son was taken aback. It was just here in this cemetery that *he* had expected a compromise, some sort of reconciliation, if only a superficial one. But now his father threatened him. He bit his lips, and avoiding his eyes he said:

"And what do you want me to do?"

"To have done with your intrigues against Othello, with all correspondence with the party leaders here, with the invention of anecdotes and calumnies. To stop your payments to those who, on your command, fabricate lies against him, and throw them into the lion's mouth. Avoid mention of the admiral when you go to see the Doge. That is all, I don't ask you to strike up a friendship with him or his wife, your sister, nor to vote for him. Neutrality, strict and complete neutrality, is what I demand."

"**Hmmm** . . ." said Antonio, and rose from the bench to take a few steps among the graves. Then he came back and asked his father defiantly ;

"Then you **are** not of the opinion that the Moor dishonours **our** family?"

"Who has taught you that the colour of a man has anything to do with his honour?"

"You. You have taught me that the descent from noble and decent people means honour. This man has neither noble nor decent parents. He has no parents at all. He is not the son of an emir or a sultan. He was begotten in the dust of Arabia. And if you consented to—nay, you wished—his marriage with your daughter, then you wished that our family be continued by the children of this coloured bastard. Yes, you say it here on the graves of our ancestors, on the grave of her mother. After four centuries of a glorious past, the Brabantios shall be coupled with a brown, nameless foundling, only because a perverted, lust-crazed girl has fallen in love with him. And you ask me to remain neutral?"

"If you are so worried about the continuity of our family, why, may I ask, did you not take a wife and found a family of your own, instead of frequenting a new courtesan every three weeks? It is the son who continues the name of a family, not the daughter, mind you."

"I don't have to account to you for anything of that sort," Antonio replied stubbornly.

"The laws of the republic give me the right to dispose of my belongings as I see fit. I shall make use of this right to the full extent of the law. At my death you will find out what it means to have crossed the will of your father when the family honour is at stake."

"Family honour! You have violated it, not I," Antonio shouted now, losing all self-control, "I will prove to the Senate that you have disinherited me wrongly. By that time the Moor will have lost his power and perhaps more. And I will get my rights!"

He walked off in the direction of the gate, and the old man, after another look at the graves, followed him. They returned as they had come, in complete silence. At the last bend of the Canal Grande, Antonio said: "We are almost home now. But I shall not stay-in this house, for a while, anyway; I shall stay with friends."

The gondola stopped and the servants helped the old count out.

Antonio pulled his cap from his head, bowed stiffly, and got back into the gondola, which he ordered to a *palazzo* in the neighbourhood.

At about the same time Othello was walking on his father's left under the arcade of the Frari church, where nobody would disturb them. El Kashef and the dog Abdul waited outside the gate.

"If the Turks attack to-morrow, or even next month," the padre said quietly, "no one will dare to say anything. But if they come to terms, and if we are entering an era of mutual understanding—what will happen then, my son?"

"Then Antonio will be appointed ambassador in Istanbul, his father will resign from the War Council, and Corridoni will become grand admiral. I—well, I shall perhaps get the governorship of Rhodes!"

"To forestall this, I shall go to Rome next week, if my health permits, and talk to the Pope about it, and above all, I shall see his physician, my old friend Filippo. This whole thing hangs on the lives of so many old men: the Pope, the Doge, Titian, Brabantio, and myself—all of us between seventy and eighty. We must find out whether a Florentine will succeed the present Pope, and whether the Sultan will live or whether he is likely to be assassinated. But tell me frankly: What does she think of all this, our beautiful Desdemona?"

Othello, who had listened coldly and cynically while the political combinations were being discussed, now stopped; and looking full in his father's face he exclaimed:

"Is it not a beautiful name?" And after a moment he added, "What would you say, father, if I bought a piece of land on Terra Ferma? You could move out and live with us, and I would get those old dusty papers out again that I compiled at Padua when I had taken it into my head to found a new system of geography. Perhaps I could also go to Holland then and steal the telescope, which they should have perfected by now."

"That would be wonderful. But what would you do when the news came that Khair el Dhin had defeated Corridoni and we had lost Dalmatia, Rhodes, and Cyprus?"

Othello did not answer. The two men continued their walk and came, at the end of the arcade, to a platform from which one could see the sea. Othello stopped now, and pointing to the horizon he said:

"There, out on the sea, you picked me up. Out there my fore-

fathers, perhaps, spent their lives and bequeathed me my love for the sea. Out there I have spent the better part of my life. But if someone has a mistress who one day leaves him for another man, while he himself is beginning to go grey—don't you think that he should then bid her good-bye, and say to himself reasonably: I will be able to get on without her."

"You are very Socratic," the padre smiled; "but are you so sure that you could take this attitude in the case of a wife?"

"I don't know. My passion for the sea is old and on the wane; that for my wife has barely begun."

"And is it strong enough to replace the sea?"

"Yes—I don't need the sea. But—but the battle with the Turks, that she cannot replace!"

The padre feigned a comfortable laugh, such as had so often helped him over a crisis in life.

"For the sake of the Madonna! Stick to Desdemona. Don't forget that young women are like old seas: they have sudden storms, but the experienced mariner knows how to control them."

"Storms? What do you mean?" Othello asked curtly.

"Oh, nothing—only she is now eighteen, and you are over fifty and closer to me than to her in age."

"Did she complain, when she called on you? Did Aretino put ideas into her head? She told me that he was so serious when she met him at your house."

"We talked about your position, of course he looked serious."

Othello stopped again, and placing his hand on his father's shoulder he said: "In all of Venice—in the whole world—we have two fathers and two friends. Besides, I still have a slave and a dog. Oh, father, stay with me lest I fall!"

The tall mariner stood beside the small priest like a black, imploring shadow.

"Come," said the padre softly, and taking him by the arm he led him into the church, where both of them sank on their knees before an image of the Madonna.

CHAPTER X

THE island of Murano was buzzing with the sounds of laughter, voices, and instruments. This large and densely populated island had more squares, streets, and gardens than Venice, and presented a bucolic picture in comparison with the city on piles a few miles across the water. In other respects, too, Murano stood in sharp contrast to its great neighbour. Here the people ruled, not the patricians. They enjoyed a large degree of autonomy, with their own council and doge, and the patricians possessed nothing on the island except a few summer villas. Of course, the Muranese knew very well that for all practical purposes they depended entirely on the city, but this dependence made them cherish their autonomy all the more.

It was from this island that Venice's fragile renown was carried out into the world; for here almost all the glassware that adorned the tables of kings and emperors, poets and courtesans, was manufactured by glass blowers who had followed the profession of their forefathers for generations. Thousands of lungs blew daily into the long pipes to produce wine glasses, chandeliers, candlesticks, figurines, and bowls such as could not be made anywhere else. It was a large industry, but it was a folk art. There were songs about the old glass blower who could barely muster enough breath on his deathbed to tell his son the secret formula he had inherited from his father. The Vivarini family, in particular, had for more than two hundred years kept the secrets for the ruby and gold glass mixtures, from father to son, and no self-respecting glass blower had ever left the island to practise the art elsewhere. It was true that in the time of King Henry III some Muranese had left their homes and gone to Lyons to work for fabulous salaries. But on the island their behaviour had been looked upon as tantamount to treason, and none of them ever returned. The greatest jealousy, however, existed towards Venice, for the Muranese believed that Venice was dependent on their glasswares and gave expression to this feeling in hundreds of songs and comedies.

Only the Moor belonged to all islands of the lagoon, and a crowd of many thousand people was standing at the quays when Othello and

his wife arrived in their gondola. The musicians had kept Desdemona's promised visit a strict secret, of which they only told a few trusted friends, who in turn confided it only to a few reliable companions: for they were all proud of the visitors. Othello saw the crowd and with a knowing smile turned to Desdemona, who had sworn to him that the musicians would receive them in the strictest privacy. Thus it happened that she walked, for the first time in her life, together with Othello, through a jubilant mass of people who shouted again and again; *Eviva il Moro di Murano!* But it was not only the crowd; there was the reception committee with the doge, the mayor, and the councillors, and Desdemona was relieved to see a genuinely friendly smile on her husband's face, although he usually hated such ceremonies.

As the crowd parted to make room for the visitors, the latter saw the surprise that the island had prepared for them: carriages with horses, all beautifully groomed. Any place in Europe, even the smallest village in Italy, could have matched these horses, but here, close to Venice, a horse was a rarity, if not a miracle. The real pride of the Muranese was not so much their priceless glass but their streets and squares, which really made the town look like thousands of other towns.

Monteverdi and the doge, Othello and Desdemona, drove in the first of the open carriages through the shouting crowds to the garden, which belonged to some musicians and which now had become the refuge of the entire orchestra when the weather was oppressively hot in Venice. As their carriage turned through a gate into a beautiful, if somewhat neglected, garden, the musicians struck up a soft and idyllic suite to welcome their guests. Their stands were placed in a bower, and the audience was to sit on the old stone benches a few paces away. Monteverdi had taken precautions to keep the crowds outside the garden, and only a few of the highest dignitaries were admitted. But soon hundreds of heads appeared on the high garden wall, and no one thought of chasing them away.

Their suite finished, the musicians came forward to greet the guests. They shook hands with. Desdemona, and Monteverdi presented them to the admiral. Desdemona was happy. She had the feeling that she had given her beloved something like a present, the first since the blue-tiled pool on the distant island of Cyprus. For without her he would never have found his way into this enchanting garden of trees,

flowers, and music, and she knew that he was happy too. She saw how freely he spoke to Monteverdi and how he asked the musicians to explain the various instruments to him. He talked lengthily with the German, Schuetz, with whom he discoursed in Latin, which the German spoke far more fluently than Italian. A number of girls, probably friends and sweethearts of the musicians, stood admiringly around, offering Othello refreshments while he teased them and paid them outrageous compliments.

She had not thought often of Lorenzo and had tried to group him together with the rest of the musicians. When she saw him as they entered the garden, she had not felt the pang she dreaded but told herself coldly and objectively that he was without question the handsomest man present. Yet when he came to shake hands with her, she was frightened for a moment, and turning quickly to Othello she said: "This is Signor Lorenzo, who plays the viola. He sang me the lament from Monteverdi's new opera the other day."

Othello, who noticed the slightest trembling in Desdemona's voice, immediately sensed a tension. He was aware of the extraordinary beauty of the youth, his eyes, his girlish complexion. Automatically he brought his hand to his own cheeks, and thought that even in his youth he had never had so tender a skin.

"He sang to you?" Othello asked after a short pause. "You did not tell me."

"Oh, did I not?" she replied in confusion, and Othello knew at once that she had not forgotten but had purposely omitted this detail.

"Won't you sing it again?" Desdemona asked Lorenzo.

"No, no," Monteverdi interposed. "No *Ariadne* to-day. You did not come out here to hear modern music but folk dances and songs. The complicated-score of *Ariadne* would be out of place in a garden. Art has nothing in common with nature, even if the schoolbooks tell us it does. Come, Admiral, let us listen to the dances."

Four musicians immediately began to play, and the others joined them one by one on their instruments, until the orchestra was in full strength. The people began to dance, and the colour of the girls' dresses blended gaily with those of the men.

Only Desdemona's heart was heavy. The few words Othello had spoken had revealed his heart to her. Her encounter- with Lorenzo appeared to her a betrayal, her secret, which had been a trifling thing,

now took on the proportions of an important lapse of loyalty. If only she had told Othello about the singing! Now it was too late. She imagined how Othello must interpret the harmless song as a plea to her, a wooing song; and she hated Lorenzo, for it was his fault that Othello's heart was darkened for the first time.

"Won't you dance with us, Contessa?" Monteverdi called.

"I have never learned to dance," she replied timidly.

"A convent?" he laughed, "where the girls don't dance in secret? I have never heard of such a thing."

"Why, of course we danced, but never with men."

"It is quite easy—you will see—if the Admiral permits."

"Dance, Desdemona," Othello called to her, "it is really quite easy."

Desdemona was almost giddy. Not from the dance, whose solemn figures and measured steps did not make the blood rise into the head, but from the pirouettes her thoughts were executing in her mind. One partner after another came to offer his hand to her. The girls watched her closely to see whether she would manage the steps and figures, and would not believe for one moment that this was the contessa's first dance, since her natural grace and litheness gave her the appearance of an experienced dancer. Othello, who did not dance himself but sat with the girls and the musicians, could not take his eyes off Desdemona. Never before had he seen her so beautiful—never before had he watched her with such anxiety, for he expected that Lorenzo would come and dance with her at any moment.

But Lorenzo did not move from his chair. He put all his feeling into his playing, listened to it, and hoped that Desdemona would perhaps hear it too, when she danced past him. To kiss her, he thought; to be alone with her! No dance. No music. No people. But it is a hopeless affair anyway. She has -forgotten me. I shall probably never see her again. She is so far above me—so far away. It was only a dream.

CHAPTER XI

TINTORETTO'S little house lay among the shops of the craftsmen who lived near the Campo San Pietro. Although his fame was rising and had long passed the limits of Venice, he lived in these modest quarters where his family, the Robusti, had for many generations followed their profession of dyers, from which he had taken his name, Tintoretto. In everything he stressed his conviction that it was not necessary to live like a king, or to wear a golden chain in order to be a great painter. Of course, Titian had not lived in splendour, either, when he had been in his middle thirties, but he had always striven for beautiful surroundings, which Tintoretto despised. He denied that harmony was the basis of all art, and breaking thus with the accepted tradition, he strove to show in his private life as well that he did not hold with the famous painters of his time. He did not care for money or honours but lived modestly with his wife and his children and had never touched any of his models, who could easily compete in beauty with those of Titian, except that he preferred them paler.

His feelings towards Titian were similar to Othello's feelings towards white women: he loved and hated him. He admired his art, but he despised the aura of fame and gold that surrounded Titian. Proudly he looked upon his own shadow as the only aura he could boast of. If Othello had not been tied to Titian by a long and deep friendship, he would have tended naturally to form a lasting friendship with Tintoretto, whose demonic figures were much more in conformity with Othello's own nature and taste. The revolutionary character of Tintoretto's paintings had a parallel in Monteverdi's revolutionary music, which had deeply moved and impressed Othello.

Kings and princes, who ordered their pictures from Titian, filled Tintoretto with distrust, and he readily accepted the commission of the republic to paint the ceilings of their churches or chapels.

His deepest emotions were not experienced on tall ladders close under the ceilings of the churches, but in a small dark room that he usually kept locked. There he did not, like Titian, paint naked women, but carefully studied the human body with the,help of antique

sculptures and the works of Michelangelo, Hour after hour he would sit before these plaster copies and draw a thigh, or an arm, putting his candle sometimes closer, sometimes farther away, from the object to see every muscle and tendon. "Titian's colours, Michelangelo's forms": this motto he had painted over the door of this room. Every artist in Italy knew these words; and the younger generation had raised the dictum that "Titian could not draw" to the dignity of a dogma in their new philosophy. But Tintoretto did not belong to any faction or movement. He lived for his art only and shunned the intrigues and idle speculation of the world. He was, therefore, annoyed that his name was being used by the anti-Othello parties to offset Titian's support of the admiral.

He now stood in front of a small model of Michelangelo's figures for the Medici tombs drawing the arm of the "Night". A knock at the door made him look up in annoyance, for he never received visitors in this room. When the door opened and the friendly, blond head of Heinrich Schuetz appeared, he brought so much light into the dark room that Tintoretto's expression changed to a smile, which faded, however, when another figure entered after the German musician.

"I am afraid we are disturbing you, master," said Schuetz, still standing in the door. "This is the German consul, Herr Schurck, who asked for the privilege of making your acquaintance."

"I am sorry that I have no chairs in this room," said Tintoretto. "But the bench over there will perhaps do for the moment."

When they had sat down, Schurck began such a long tirade about the magnificent new frescoes of the master that Tintoretto finally lost his patience and asked rather rudely whether there was anything he could do for the consul. The musician was much embarrassed by the behaviour of his companion, and his face bore witness to his complete innocence of the intrigues for which his compatriot was well known in Venice. Schurck knew that Tintoretto was one of the few artists who had not sided openly with Othello, and that he would be welcomed in society wherever he went: "Tintoretto's fame is rising; he is the fashion in Venice—why not use him for our purposes?" he had told Binda, and the latter had quickly arranged for the present visit.

"Your lordship," Schurck began, but Tintoretto interrupted him.

"I am no lordship—just plain signore, Consul."

"Very well, signore. Undoubtedly you have heard of the grave accusations against the Grand Admiral, and I thought that—"

Again Tintoretto interrupted him, this time even more rudely than before:

"Why do you bother me with these things?"

"I really did not know what the Consul had in mind when we came here," Schuetz said honestly, and the painter believed him,

"Far be it from me to distract you from your high art by political questions, signore," Schurck said in an unctuous tone.

"Why then do you speak of the accusations against the Admiral?" the painter asked.

Schurck moved back and forth on his bench and finally said, very confidentially: "The Admiral is a friend of Master Titian's. He is also a friend of Aretino's. Both of them are the enemies of the German princes whose interests I represent. Since I happen to know that you are an enemy of Titian's—"

The painter rose from his chair and turned the shade of the candle so that the light now fell on Schurck's ashen face.

"You are mistaken. I am an admirer of Titian's, even though I cannot paint as well as he. I am also an admirer of the Moor of Venice. Perhaps you have heard that he saved the republic from the Turks. Anyone who has a complaint against Othello should take it to the proper authorities. I am a Venetian citizen and I will not tolerate any insinuations, least of all from a foreigner. If a German came to my house to accuse our Admiral, I would take him by the neck and throw him out!"

"Please forgive me," Schuetz implored, "I came to see you—I did not expect anything of the sort—"

"When do you play again at San Marco?" Tintoretto asked.

"Sunday—Sunday at ten."

"I shall come and listen to you," said the painter and shook the musician warmly by the hand. He did not even look at Schurck, who had slowly moved towards the door, through which he disappeared with one of his obsequious bows.

The painter turned the candle shade around and once more began to draw the arm of Michelangelo's "Night".

CHAPTER XII

THE full splendour of the Metropolis shone to-night in the great hall of the Palazzo Ducale, for such light and colour, such brocade and jewellery, such dignity and elegance, were not found even at the brilliant receptions of the Vatican or the magnificent feasts of the Louvre. The performance of Monteverdi's new opera, *Ariadne,* was not so much a musical as a social event, for when the old families of Venice turned out in their full glory, their appearance reflected the six hundred years during which this aristocratic republic had accumulated fame, power, and wealth.

For weeks this evening had been discussed in the palazzi of the patricians, for it was the first time that society came face to face officially with the Moor and his wife. Some four hundred people filled the hall long before the curtain rose, for their interest in the music was far exceeded by their interest in their neighbours' jewellery. Of equal interest was the question whom the Doge would honour with his conversation and how he would behave towards the Moor. Most of the audience was standing when Othello and Desdemona came into the hall. They greeted the Doge, who indicated two chairs in the first row, close to his own, with a movement of his hand that was meant to be seen by everyone. Desdemona was too beautiful for her own good to-night, for the hostility of the patrician ladies was fanned to white-hot hatred as they saw her at the side of the tall, dark Arab, whose dusky skin seemed to act as a foil for Desdemona's dazzling whiteness. They looked what they were—a pair of lovers, and this above all incensed the other women.

While everyone stared at the group round the Doge, a voice said rather loudly, "Look over there—Titian and Tintoretto!" Many heads turned and saw how the younger man bowed before the old Master as a marshal bows before his king. Titian accepted this homage with truly regal dignity, and those who stood near enough to overhear their conversation heard Tintoretto say:

"Master—your 'Danae' is really divine. No one will ever equal her."

"I hear that you have painted 'Ariadne': did you inspire Monteverdi?" Titian replied, pointing his hand towards the orchestra where the musicians were tuning their instruments.

"He has no need of me," Tintoretto returned with real humility.

"But they say that his music has something in common with your school."

"I have no school, Master. If anything, I am your pupil."

"Ah! There is the Admiral," said Titian, as he saw Othello and Desdemona proceed down the full length of the hall. Othello was eager to show his admiration and friendship for the Master before the eyes of all Venice, Tintoretto stood a few paces behind Titian; but the Master, still in his royal manner, turned round and asked Othello:

"Do you know Signor Tintoretto?"

Othello shook hands with the painter and introduced him to Desdemona as the patricians observed every minute detail of the scene. Many of them looked curiously at Antonio Brabantio and then again at the old senator, his father, in the hope of reading their thoughts and feelings in their faces, but both men had been too long in the diplomatic service to betray their emotions by any sign. Antonio carefully chose a distant part of the hall so that he would not have any occasion to come near his sister or her husband, and the old Brabantio greeted the couple with casual cordiality as though they had been together all day long.

Desdemona's friend, Maria, the only person in this assembly who belonged equally to both the conflicting parties, had made up her mind to demonstrate her loyalty to her friend. For days she had argued about it with her husband, and no one suspected how fast her heart beat when she went over to the group round the Doge, followed by her husband, and kissed Desdemona on both cheeks. She was in such a state of excitement that she almost kissed Othello as well. But she collected herself just in time to give him a beaming smile instead. The Doge's presence prevented her husband from any counter demonstration, and she glowed with pride that her scheme had worked. All Venice would remark to-morrow that a patrician lady had saluted La Mora in the most unusual fashion. Desdemona was taken aback for a moment at this display of affection, and Othello thought how lonely they were in this splendid gathering.

They were glad when Monteverdi came up and presented his

friend, Schuetz, to the Doge. In his broken Italian the musician tried to say a few words, when Othello offered his services as interpreter and addressed Schuetz in Latin. For a moment everyone round them had the innocent, childlike expression people assume when they unexpectedly hear a foreign language. Othello turned to the Doge and said:

"Maestro Schuetz, also known as Sagittarius, assures us that there is no orchestra in his country comparable to ours."

"I am learning more here than I have ever learned before in my life," said Schuetz again in his faulty Italian, but with such disarming honesty that the Doge smiled at him. "I want to bring the music of Venice to the Rhine and instil it into the hearts of my countrymen. And then I shall tell them that your world-renowned admiral spoke to me in Latin."

Everybody smiled now, and Maria looked triumphantly at Desdemona as if she had arranged everything.

The silver bells rang to summon the audience to their seats just as an imposing man with a wavy, grey beard came into the hall and made his way to the front row. It was Aretino, who had chosen this last minute to come to the spectacle. To get to his seat he had to pass the Doge, and taking the lateness of his arrival for an excuse he merely bowed rapidly to him as one who would avoid disturbing the performance.

Suddenly the conversation stopped, for the small, dark magician who had composed both the music and the plot of the work they were about to hear appeared on the slightly raised platform in the orchestra. He always conducted with the violin, and he had already put his instrument to his chin when he remembered the Doge. He let his instrument sink and turned round to bow to the audience, who received his gesture with applause.

Once more facing the orchestra, Monteverdi raised his bow and the music began. Strange figures appeared on the stage. They were dressed neither in the apparel of antique Greece nor in modern Venetian garb. In a fantastic costume the Athenian seamen moved across the scene, carrying high up, on their raised arms, a veiled woman. Monteverdi's gestures distracted the attention of the audience for a while because he seemed to be beside himself. His bow pointed, threatened, waved to all sides, and it was plain that the chorus on the

stage had missed a cue, but they quickly caught up with the orchestra. Only when Theseus appeared and began to unveil the woman, whom the seamen had laid on a rock, did the people look once more with interest at the stage; the men, because they were wondering how far the hero would unveil the *prima donna;* the women because they wondered how soon they could begin to be righteously indignant and prod their husbands disapprovingly. Altogether it was a daring scene, the like of which had not been shown on a Venetian stage before.

Theseus now went off the stage, and Ariadne, waking slowly from her deep slumber, began a *cavatina* in which she bewailed her outcast lot. The beauty of Isabella Andreini, the magic of her voice, had already become famous all over Italy, but this was her first appearance in Venice. Everyone listened as she began her lament:

"Lasciatemi motive!
E che volete, che mi conforte,
In cosi dura sorte,
In cosi gran martin?
Lasciatemi morire!"

The viola accompanied the singer, or rather it played a contrapuntal melody, as Monteverdi had explained to Desdemcna when Lorenzo sang the aria himself. Even the patricians were moved by the music, and some of the ladies began to weep softly. In some way everyone felt forsaken, misunderstood, unloved.

Desdemona, who alone among all the women felt that she was really loved, could not prevent her mind from associating Lorenzo's expressive playing with the young man's love for her—as he lamented on his instrument the hopelessness of his position, the ardour of his feelings. For she did not for a moment doubt that all this was meant for her. The confusion of her soul was great, because her love belonged to the man who sat next to her. Othello's thoughts also centred on Lorenzo. Had the young man sung his way into Desdemona's heart after all? His jealousy made him feel a bond between them that Desdemona did not yet realize, and which she would never have admitted even to herself had she felt it. Both Othello and Desdemona stood at the zenith of theft passion for each other; nothing had shaken it, except the thoughts of potential complications. They sat motionless next to each other, united and yet separated by the music. In every

note, in every sound of Ariadne's lament, she felt the sadness of her love for Othello, the same indefinite sensation that made her look sometimes with such deadly seriousness into his black eyes. The melancholy portrayed in the moving strains of the young master's music, had been the theme of their love, strains expressing the ever-recurring and fearful question of whether their love would endure. Although Desdemona was convinced that she was not in love with anyone but Othello, the handsome youth who played his viola over there in the orchestra with such feeling and expression was a symbol for both of them of what might happen to their love: something they somehow expected all along. In these strange thoughts, Desdemona suddenly felt an irresistable desire to touch Othello, and secretly she slipped her hand into his. Othello's doubts vanished completely at this gesture, and secretly, so that no one should see it, he slipped his glove off to make the contact closer. Desdemona closed her eyes and felt released from the confusing thoughts and emotions into which the music had thrown her.

Deeply moved, the two lovers sat hand in hand as the opera continued. A new character appeared on the stage: the beautiful young god Dionysos. His ivy-wreathed costume suggested to everyone in the audience the suppleness of his young body and its effect on Ariadne, who after some hesitation accepted the love of the young god. Othello pressed Desdemona's hand so that she almost cried out; he had forgotten his age and greying beard, and felt once again like a young man experiencing for the first time the full impact of an all-powerful passion. Desdemona felt his hand tremble, and her heart joined in the jubilant chorus on the stage with which *amoretti* and cupids celebrated the happy union of the lovers. Suddenly it was all over, the audience applauded and rose from their seats. Desdemona alone remained seated for a moment while she tried to find her way back from a dream to reality. Their friends came over to the couple and discussed the new work. Monteverdi also appeared from the orchestra, and making straight for Desdemona he said in a loud voice: "You know, of course, Madonna, that you are Ariadne! Just in case anyone should have had any doubts, I declare it here once more for the sake of history and posterity."

Titian, who had seen the whole opera in terms of colour, felt that he understood now much better what Tintoretto and the younger

painters were driving at with their revolutionary technique. He moved over to Othello's group and said warningly to Monteverdi:

"Don't flatter her too much, she is already fully aware of her beauty."

'The musicians asked for the honour of being presented to you, Master," Monteverdi said now, as one by one the young men came out of the orchestra and shook hands with Titian.

"You have all covered yourselves with glory," the Master said earnestly to the young men, and turning to Monteverdi he added: "Tell me, who was it that played the counterpoint to Ariadne's lament? I saw the young man in the orchestra and would like to speak to him. Oh, there he is. What did you say his name was? Oh, yes, Lorenzo. Lorenzo, would you come to my studio? I want to paint you." He turned to Othello and Aretino. "Does he not look as if he had come out of one of the canvasses of my master Giorgione?" Othello nodded his head and looked at Lorenzo.

"Now, all of you come with me," called Titian loudly to the group. "I am thirsty and I am sure that you must be too. Where are the singers? Lavinia, invite everybody to our house." And having made it clear that this was more an order than an invitation, he walked rapidly towards the exit.

CHAPTER XIII

ARETINO's garden party—or feast of Venus, as the people called it—was well under way. Monteverdi's musicians enjoyed themselves thoroughly with the ladies Aretino had invited for the occasion. For at such feasts, of which Aretino gave two or three a year, not so much for the guests as for himself, everything was allowed. The preparations usually took up several days, which Aretino spent in constant disputes with his cook and housekeeper, who pleaded with their master to check his prodigality. The guests were asked for mid-afternoon, and the first dinner took place at five o'clock. At nine, another meal followed, and finally at midnight supper was served.

"If your lordship wishes to give three banquets, it would perhaps be better to save the fruit for the last," the cook had said timidly.

"You always want to save! No, fruit three times, after every meal. I shall vary them, don't worry!" Aretino shouted at the man. "Now let us see once more: for the first meal, fried oysters, then pheasants, and then fillets of beef in Burgundy, and—what did we say for dessert?"

"Yes, quite right—and fruit, large baskets of fruit, do you hear me?"

"Yes, your lordship!"

"Now: the second meal, eels, peacocks, and perhaps a pie with a live pigeon inside?"

"Yes, your lordship, but we had that already last year."

"Are you mad? That is a new idea of mine. It has never been done before."

"But craving your lordship's pardon, in the description of the last feast your lordship spoke of the dove, although we did not really have the pie."

Aretino began to laugh heartily. "True. Well, come back later. I shall think out the menu for the two other meals."

The food was but one problem in the preparations. Although Aretino lived less than five minutes from the Rialto, right in the centre of the most populous quarter of Venice, he had a large garden.

He needed the quiet and the colour of the garden, when he wanted to be alone, just as he needed the noise, the talk, and the smells of the Rialto when he wanted to study the people. Neither Titian's palatial house with its view of the sea, nor Tintoretto's narrow and bourgeois surroundings would have suited him. On the day of the party, Aretino was in and out of his house inspecting his garden, putting up tables and benches, placing vases and flowers on the tables, and distributing cushions and pillows everywhere. The flowers had to be placed so that the afternoon light would show up their colours best, but at the same time so that the candlelight during the later hours would bring out their full beauty. Sofas and couches were hidden away in bowers, and he calculated that fourteen couples could enjoy the privacy afforded by the high clipped taxus and laurel hedges.

Now he was walking through the garden and seeing with satisfaction that his guests were making ample use of the facilities provided for them. The second meal was just over, and with a glass of wine in one hand and the poems of Ovid in the other, Aretino went into the larger bower where five or six of the musicians were busily engaged in courting some charming girls, an undertaking in which they had apparently made good progress. Aretino pushed one of the 'cellists away and put his arm round the beautiful young creature whom the former had been fondling. The young people laughed, but listened attentively when he read some verses from Ovid in which the poet advises all lovers to pour their wine on the table and write the name of the beloved in it.

"You should indeed write your love down, not only in wine!" Aretino exclaimed. "Whoever of you, my children, sends me a letter to-morrow morning that can arouse my enthusiasm in spite of the fact that I shall presumably suffer from the most dismal headache in history, to him or her will I bring one hour later a-an-"

"Oho, the great philosopher is unable to finish his sentence," one of the girls cried. "I shall write a sonnet on that and post it on the Gobbo."

Aretino put his hand around her waist in spite of the fact that she was already engaged with another suitor and said: "You probably think that just because I have a grey beard I am no longer in possession of—hm—all my faculties. Just ask—oh, well," and again he stopped in mid-sentence.

"Zafetta!" several voices called at once.

"No, no, Xenocrates," he corrected. "Of course, you don't know who that is."

"Socrates?"

"Xe-no-cra-tes! A great Greek philosopher who is said to have lain chastely for a whole night with a naked woman bent on seducing him."

"Where did you find that? Did the woman tell about it?"

"No, he, of course," Aretino said. "And it all goes to show what lies grey-bearded philosophers tell." He pushed his free hand through his beard and added: "There is one question to which I have not found an answer in forty years: which is more given to pleasure—man or woman?"

"Why don't you ask the gods, with whom you are on such good terms?" one of the musicians asked.

"I did that years ago," Aretino replied. "But they cannot answer me because, as Orpheus tells us, the gods have both sexes in them, they are man and woman at the same time."

"Oh, how wonderful!" one of the girls exclaimed softly, and everybody laughed.

One of the men took his glass of wine and poured it down the back of his girl. She shrieked, and Aretino in the middle of caressing the girl next to him, pulled out a piece of paper and rapidly wrote a few lines, using the girl's back as a desk. When he had finished he kissed her and said, "Forgive me. But I have to catch them when they come, and the music over there just made me think of something. And your back is the best table I have ever written on."

"Oh, how rude you are!" another girl cried, "You should study the *Corteggianol* It is full of pretty speeches."

One of the men stepped into the middle of the bower. "Let's put the *Corteggiano* into practice. Let us try all the things we read in it!"

His suggestion was met with general applause, but Aretino shouted, "Only if we do everything! Otherwise I won't play."

He grabbed two girls and began to study their figures, to see if they agreed with the specifications set out in the *Corteggiano.*

"Enrico," screamed one of the girls, "Save me from this satyr!"

Zafetta, looking lovelier than ever in her somewhat scanty attire, had come into the bower and was now sitting on a stone step some

distance away from Aretino. He noticed her but went on examining the beautiful girl on his lap.

"Well, if you don't let me draw my conclusions by hand I have to use my imagination."

"Stopl Enough now!" The girl held both her hands over his mouth.

"Help, help!" Aretino cried. "I shall have the police here if I can't enjoy the right of free speech!"

"The police are already here. I just saw one of those spy faces in the garden!" one of the men said.

"Where, where?" Aretino jumped up. "I must catch him!" And with these words he made his exit, following Zafetta, who had disappeared a minute earlier. The truth was that Aretino was jealous of Zafetta and he wanted to find her. On the one hand, his classic conception of hospitality was such that he would have offered his mistress to any of his guests if she had been willing. On the other hand, he wished to know what she was doing, and if he had to give her up for one night, he wanted at least to be able to make a generous gesture.

So he walked through the dark garden, peering behind a hedge here, and looking over a wall there, in quest of Zafetta. Everywhere he saw couples in various stages of amorous delight, just as he had planned it, and he was pleased with himself. Finally he came to the place where the musicians were playing and found Zafetta and Lorenzo dancing opposite Othello and Desdemona. The musicians played more softly, and with greater refinement, than in Murano, and Aretino saw with delight how the dancing figures made an idyllic island in his otherwise bacchantic garden.

Othello and his wife had arrived somewhat late and found most of the guests already assembled. At the two meals they had sat at the centre table with Titian, Sansovino, and Monteverdi. Between the first and the second meal Desdemona had gone with Lavinia to join the ball players at the far end of the garden, while Othello had stood with Zafetta, talking to her confidentially in a low voice, which showed the passers-by that they knew each other well.

But ever since the night at the opera Othello had felt a fog in his heart, a fog against which he was as powerless as against the fog at sea, which he feared more than the Turks. The only words that had passed between Desdemona and himself concerning the reason of his anxiety

had been her mention of the fact that Lorenzo had sung to her. That was harmless enough, and Othello had not questioned her further. In fact, he knew that nothing had happened and that Desdemona was his—perhaps more than ever before. But try as he might, his suspicions—or perhaps the fear of future developments—returned and tortured him. When Desdemona was in his arms, he felt happy and secure and all doubts disappeared. But when the musicians were mentioned, when Monteverdi or Titian talked about Lorenzo, the fog thickened and lay heavy round his heart.

Lorenzo put down his instrument and asked Zafetta for the next pavan, in which Othello joined, with Desdemona. The sweet and melancholy melody of the dance made the hearts of three of the dancers strangely heavy. Zafetta, however, who had immediately fallen in love with the beauty and innocence of Lorenzo, merely felt the tension between the three people, which rather stimulated her decision to conquer the young man as quickly as possible. Desdemona's chief endeavour was to appear cool and objective in the eyes of her husband, but she could not help feeling deeply disturbed whenever she saw Lorenzo's eyes rest on her. When, during the dance, she noticed Zafetta's efforts to win Lorenzo's heart, another, as yet unknown feeling took possession of her: rivalry.

When the dancers had made their last bows and the music had come to an end, Aretino asked them to follow him and led them to a table where they found Titian and the other artists enjoying a glass of wine. .

"The contessa in Roman attire!" he called to Desdemona as they approached the table. "I would paint Sabina in dark blue velvet like this. But the Admiral looks as if he were thinking of his galleys all the time. Cheer up, Othello, drink a glass of this excellent wine with me!"

"It is all Monteverdi's fault," Othello replied with a smile. "His dances were written for Elysium rather than for an earthly festival."

"Here, drink this cup and it will bring you down to earth again," Aretino said, offering a silver cup to Othello. "We are no longer young enough to allow ourselves the luxury of melancholy. Let's leave that to these children."

Aretino had spoken these dangerous words without malice, but the only really young people, the only "children" at the table, felt

that they were meant for them. Titian confused their feelings when he said:

"It is strange, but Lorenzo here becomes more and more like a painting of my master's. Did he tell you? Last week he began to pose for me. The more I look at him, the more he looks like a Giorgione instead of a Titian!"

Desdemona and Zafetta trembled inwardly. The admiration of the artist for Lorenzo had undermined all resistance in Desdemona's heart and had made the courtesan burn with desire.

"Play something for us!" Monteverdi called, and Lorenzo, after a moment's hesitation, began to tune his instrument which he had brought along, started a melody that was obviously by Monteverdi, for the latter nodded at him with satisfaction. But soon he abandoned the straight path of the melody and began to play his love to Desdemona in ever new variations. Aretino had sent one of his servants to stop the music in the other part of the garden, and the group sat deeply moved, listening to the longing, melting strain of the *viola d'amore.* It was strange that the two most worldly listeners, Titian and Zafetta, seemed to be the ones least able to control their emotions. The tears ran unchecked over Zafetta's beautiful face, while Titian had his hand over his eyes like a man feigning to be deep in thought while he attempts to hide his feelings. Othello looked at the Master with amazement. Sometimes he had his doubts about Titian's nature, when the Master appeared too worldly, too cynical. Now he was perhaps more deeply moved by the hand before the painter's eyes than by the music itself. And to see Zafetta, the beautiful but hard Zafetta, weep openly—?

Desdemona listened too, but she heard nothing. Her eyes were riveted on the eyes and mouth of the musician, and she had not the strength to avert her gaze even for a second.

Lorenzo did not look at Desdemona, as if he did not want to wake up to reality, and when he finally came to an end he had played for more than a quarter of an hour. As he turned to go, Titian rose from the table, and going over to Lorenzo he embraced him and kissed him on both cheeks. Aretino, who could not endure any prolonged emotional tension, turned to his guests.

"Let us drink to this damnably elusive art. No one can hold it. Here it is, more powerful than any other art—and then suddenly it is gone with the night air. Friends, let us drink to music."

Lorenzo had disappeared into the dark of the garden. **Othello** found it quite natural that Desdemona should also have gone away with Zafetta, to be, for a moment, alone with her feelings.

Had Lorenzo watched her? Did he know where she was? In any case, he found her alone beneath three old cypress trees. Without a word he approached her. He had made his declaration with his instrument, he had said all and more than he could have said with words. He took her gently by the shoulders and first kissed her eyelids, then her mouth. Her lips did not respond, but she accepted his kiss and his love. Their bodies did not touch, and after a few seconds he released her and disappeared once more into the night. A few minutes later Desdemona returned to the table—but Lorenzo was nowhere to be seen.

As Othello and Desdemona found themselves in their bedroom after a silent ride in the gondola through the dawning morning, Othello looked at his wife, of whose actions he knew nothing, but whose mind he knew so well. He stood before her for a few seconds and bowed his forehead, which she kissed fervently five times.

Then he went into the adjoining bedroom and for the first time in three years he spent the night alone.

PART IV

THE CATASTROPHE

CHAPTER I

FOR the first time since 1234, some of the canals were frozen over, and not even the old people in Venice could recall such a cold November. A learned priest published a treatise on the weather and described the five cold winters of the last millennium, since 568, in connection with the historical facts accompanying or following these hard winters. On the Rialto it was repeated that an old fisherwoman from Chioggia had seen the terrible ship of the demons race over the water in a perfect calm. But in Murano, the three saints had appeared in their bark, bringing solace to the apprehensive population. The legend of the three saints was the oldest in Venice and had been immortalized in songs and paintings.

Aretino listened carefully to all these stories and noted their effect. Not that he was more superstitious than the men of his time, but he believed in the premonitions of the people. Since he followed the course of politics without any party affiliation and knew how to wield his influence when necessary with one of his dreaded epigrams, he listened with greater interest to the predictions and opinions of an old potter on the Rialto, or to a gondolier from the Giudecca, than to those of an ambitious cardinal or patrician, whose personal motives he suspected. Thus nobody in Venice foresaw Othello's downfall earlier or more clearly than Aretino. Since Othello was the only man he had ever loved in his life, he now threw himself into the fight for him with all the fire and enthusiasm of his heart, notwithstanding the cynical pose he liked to show to the world. Titian was too Olympian to bother with the individual vicissitudes of life, and Padre Domenico was failing fast. Only Aretino remained to advise the sombre Moor, whose prudence in worldly affairs did not equal his strategic talents at sea.

After observing month by month the gradual deterioration of Othello's position, and knowing the perfidy of the patricians only too well, Aretino thought it quite possible—if not likely—that they were now preparing for a final attack against the Moor. The political situation decidedly favoured such plans. The princes in Germany and

the new situation in Rome were definitely hostile towards Venice, and an alliance between the latter and their arch enemies, the Turks, had now become a serious consideration if not a necessity. It was equally clear that the first step towards such an alliance would be the removal of the violently anti-Turkish Grand Admiral, The influence of the German House in Venice was rising, and the petty spies and agents were now backed by important financial interests beyond the Alps. Aretino knew Othello's character too well to waste his time advising a conciliatory policy towards the Turks, which would merely have raised doubts in Othello's mind as to whether his only ally had gone over to the enemies. .

Still more perilous than the political intrigues were those of Venetian society, which centred around Desdemona. Her life with Othello was too harmonious, too happy to last, and in all the *palazzi* the patricians waited for the collapse of the romance. The slightest rumour, the most insignificant incident, was immediately blown up to the proportions of a major scandal. The innocent love scene between Desdemona and Lorenzo at Aretino's garden party had not escaped the watchful eyes of Binda's agents, who had managed to slip in among the invited guests. The German had taken care that all Venice should hear the startling news of cuckold Moor and his flighty wife, who had come to her senses after all and had taken a white lover. To make his story more credible, Binda had substituted the famous Monteverdi for the unknown viola player, Lorenzo. Even if the older senators and their more experienced wives doubted the truth of the rumour, they did not voice such doubts and readily accepted anything that could strengthen their case against the Moor. The fact that Monteverdi was a frequent guest at Othello's table was interpreted as a clever ruse of Desdemona's, who, by showing no embarrassment, deceived her husband all the more easily. And that husbands were proverbially blind was a truth that had been demonstrated too often not to be believed.

The people on the Rialto, however, took a totally different view of the case. The young countess had proved to them by her marriage to the Moor that she did not belong to the prejudiced aristocracy, and it seemed very unlikely that she should so soon be faithless to the man with whom she lived in obvious harmony. Had the rumour given her a count as lover, the people might have accepted it more readily. But the

story of the musician was obviously one of the slanders that the patricians had invented to disturb the Moor's matrimonial happiness. Besides, the women—and the women made public opinion at the Rialto—had far too high an opinion of Othello's attractions to believe it possible that any woman would look for another lover while she could have him. The whole thing, they said, was nothing but a wicked lie.

Aretino discredited the rumours sometimes by a burst of laughter, sometimes by a show of indignation, but with one person, who knew and loved Othello as much as he did, the matter was more difficult. This was El Kashef, who knew the rumours and who perhaps also knew the kernel of truth from which they had sprung'. Aretino did not doubt that El Kashef had had his spies at the garden party, and it was probable that he had, entirely on his own initiative, kept watch on Desdemona's movements. Aretino decided to sound the dark soul of the Arab slave, for it seemed all-important to him that Othello should not hear the story, least of all from his trusted servant.

When El Kashef came with a letter from Othello, Aretino quickly seized the opportunity to bring up the topic of the slanderous rumours.

"There are again a number of rumours current about his lordship," he said casually to El Kashef. "I hope that you laughed at them."

The slave made no answer. Aretino took this as an indication that he knew the truth, and turning to see his face, he added: "All slanders from the *palazzi,* you know." Again his words were met by the silence of the Arab, who stood before him looking at the floor. Aretino felt that there was nothing to do but to appeal to El Kashef directly, and he said: "The Admiral has his head full of the problems of Dalmatia. The welfare of the republic depends on his decisions. In a situation like this a servant must not disturb his master with unnecessary information."

El Kashef bowed and went out. In the gondola the Arab looked glumly at the water and thought: I am Othello's slave and not Aretino's. I have seen how the musician kissed the Contessa. I owe my master a report. But I am not to disturb my master now. If he finds out, he will kill me.

One man, however, was spared the humiliation of hearing about Desdemona's "love affair": old Senator Brabantio had died at the age of seventy-seven. At the funeral, Antonio and Desdemona had met, but not once did they greet or even look at each other. When the

"Very well, signore. Undoubtedly you have heard of the grave accusations against the Grand Admiral, and I thought that—"

Again Tintoretto interrupted him, this time even more rudely than before:

"Why do you bother me with these things?"

"I really did not know what the Consul had in mind when we came here," Schuetz said honestly, and the painter believed him,

"Far be it from me to distract you from your high art by political questions, signore," Schurck said in an unctuous tone.

"Why then do you speak of the accusations against the Admiral?" the painter asked.

Schurck moved back and forth on his bench and finally said, very confidentially: "The Admiral is a friend of Master Titian's. He is also a friend of Aretino's. Both of them are the enemies of the German princes whose interests I represent. Since I happen to know that you are an enemy of Titian's—"

The painter rose from his chair and turned the shade of the candle so that the light now fell on Schurck's ashen face.

"You are mistaken. I am an admirer of Titian's, even though I cannot paint as well as he. I am also an admirer of the Moor of Venice. Perhaps you have heard that he saved the republic from the Turks. Anyone who has a complaint against Othello should take it to the proper authorities. I am a Venetian citizen and I will not tolerate any insinuations, least of all from a foreigner. If a German came to my house to accuse our Admiral, I would take him by the neck and throw him out!"

"Please forgive me," Schuetz implored, "I came to see you—I did not expect anything of the sort—"

"When do you play again at San Marco?" Tintoretto asked.

"Sunday—Sunday at ten."

"I shall come and listen to you," said the painter and shook the musician warmly by the hand. He did not even look at Schurck, who had slowly moved towards the door, through which he disappeared with one of his obsequious bows.

The painter turned the candle shade around and once more began to draw the arm of Michelangelo's "Night".

At last he asked the question that tormented him.

"So it is all rumour and guesswork," the priest said ,"and perhaps only the product of your own imagination." He pulled the blanket closer around his knees, for he was sitting at a distance from the fire and had been suffering much from rheumatism during the unusually hard winter weather. His son jumped from his stool to help, but the old man waved him back, not without a feeling of gratitude and pride that his training was still bearing fruit. Othello sat down again and without looking at his father's face asked:

"Then you did not hear any stories?"

"Of course I did," the old man replied, "but one hears stories about any young woman. Do you remember the stories they told about you in Cyprus when you had supposedly been the dupe of the Algerian pirates?"

"Then they have told you that Desdemona is in love with the viola player?" Othello persisted.

"Listen, my son. Will you have confidence in an old man who knows women well? Will you listen to your old father?"

Othello turned on his stool and looked so trustingly into his father's face that the old man realized suddenly how lonely the Grand Admiral of Venice was. He instinctively laid his hand on Othello's shoulder, but remembering that he did not like to be touched, he withdrew it again and began:

"Othello! Your wife is a wild and fiery creature who from sheer romantic imagination chose a man whom she did not know and has given her all to him. Do you still remember how she stood here in this room and told me that she wanted to save the republic? You wrote to me from Cyprus one day that you had never known happiness until you were fifty—or something to that effect. Now, don't forget that under your care and influence is a girl who knew nothing but the convent before she married you, who knew nobody except a wicked brother, an old father, a tired old serving woman, and a silly little girl friend. She had never danced, she had never sung—except, perhaps, Gregorian chant—she never knew the pleasure of having beautiful clothes and seeing the admiring glances of other people before she became your wife. Now this young girl has developed into a woman, like a flower that unfolds its petals to its greatest beauty, and she wants to catch up, to enjoy all the things other young noblewomen have had between

sixteen and eighteen. Is it then anything out of the ordinary if a young and good-looking musician at a rather licentious garden party catches her fancy? Nay, let us assume that she even fell in love with him for half an hour—is that unnatural? Is it shameful? Othello! Think of the pretty women you liked when you were twenty or twenty-five!"

Othello had resumed his thoughtful posture and had drunk up every word. Constantly he repeated to himself that the padre was right and that he must make allowances for his wife's youth. But there was one point he could not argue away. The silent, lonely man wondered for a while whether he could bring himself to open his heart altogether to his father; whether he should expose this sore and thus admit his own weakness. Yet, if ever he should express his secret in words, this was the place and the time: the lonely island, the winter night, the crackling fire, and the kindly face of the ageing man.

"Father, you are right but—father, he is white like you and not brown like me, do you understand?"

The priest looked at him with an understanding smile. "And did she not choose a brown man, the white countess? Did she not challenge all Venice with her choice? Did she not fall in love with your colour—with the brown Mercury—even before she met you? Did she ever show any repulsion to your brown skin?"

"But, father, this Lorenzo is white."

"Does she shrink from your touch to-day?"

"No—at least I don't think so, I don't really know. You see—I—we—we don't share the same bed any more."

The old man laughed and for a moment looked almost young again. "You fool! Oh, you simple fool! The senses of this young woman are excited. She has not the slightest intention of being unfaithful to you, and more than ever ought you to sleep with her!"

Othello jumped up. The fog had disappeared from his soul for the first time since the night at the opera.

"You are right, father, I am a fool. But I shall correct my fault. To-night!"

CHAPTER II

THE sombre hall in which Senator Brabantio had received Othello for the first time three years ago had undergone a thorough change at the hands of the new Count Brabantio. The picture of his mother still hung on the wall, but that of the old senator's second wife, Desdemona's mother, had been taken into the attic. Two young girls, whom he had recently hired as servants and whose services to Antonio—as some said—were not confined to cleaning the house and serving at table, wore gaudy colours and rather short skirts as they placed before Antonio's guests another set of glasses in which to try a new bottle of wine. Light and air came through the old passage and through the small window by which Desdemona had once spied on Othello and her father, and a row of potted plants on the window sill gave the room a gay and festive look.

Only the pallor of the young master, if Antonio with his morose expression and his thirty-eight years could be called young, had not changed. Antonio, who had arranged his life to be as nearly as possible an uninterrupted sequence of pleasures, did not enjoy any one of them and paid for them dearly, to judge by his sickly, pale skin. Covetousness was his outstanding and dominant feature. He coveted everything that he saw in the possession of others: money, power, glory, women, and not only the beauty in women but their very flesh. This covetousness left him forever unsatisfied and made him, in the midst of all his worldly goods, an unhappy creature who had no sincere and genuine friends.

Thus the three younger senators who sat with him in the hall, drinking the heavy wines that formerly had been reserved for the evening, had only come to discuss the strategy for the decisive meeting of the Council of Ten, in which they wanted to bring about the final and long expected downfall of the Admiral. The fact that these men were in the house and in the very room where Desdemona had grown up, did not prevent them from reviving once more the famous "love affair," with all its juicy details, and considering how they could make the most of this argument in the forthcoming meeting.

One of the guests had just returned from Germany and was just reporting to the others on his experiences and impressions. The Germans had not been sparing with advice and even threats, but on the other hand they had dangled important offers of future trade arrangements before the avid eyes of the Venetian. These orders were conditional on the republic's behaviour towards the Turks, whose strength and power had assumed gigantic proportions in the minds of the Germans, and whose appeasement seemed to them of paramount importance. Antonio, who had been designated the next ambassador to Istanbul, shared the appeasement theory but talked of the Turks, whom he really despised, with such derision that his whole policy resembled that of a man who makes a rich but disreputable marriage in order to save his fortune. But in any case, the general political constellation was more favourable to Antonio's personal revenge against the Moor than ever before. Of course, his ideal revenge did not stop with Othello's resignation and loss of political power and position; but he did not trust his friends enough to reveal his secret.plans to them, and therefore pretended to aim merely at the voluntary or involuntary removal of Othello from power.

The question that occupied them was the method by which the admiral's downfall should be brought about. It was easy enough, under the circumstances, to relieve him of his duties by decree; but in order to avoid any complications with the people who supported him as staunchly as ever they sought a way of forcing him to resign of his own accord.

While these four men plotted Othello's ruin, four other men sat in Titian's house round the fireplace: the Master, close by the fire with a glass of hot punch, Sansovino, Aretino, and Othello. Politics were not discussed, yet the spies of the patricians took it to be a council of war and reported accordingly. The old master was ailing, and Aretino, alarmed by the rumours of a plague that was said to have broken out in the city, had summoned his friends to meet this afternoon. When a radiant person like Aretino abandoned his natural gaiety and wit, he became uncommonly serious and saw everything in the darkest possible shades. This afternoon he hoped to find out how much the Master—and above all, how much Othello—knew of the rumours about the "love affair"; for he constantly lived in the midst of imaginary conversations with the heroes of the past as well as with his cook,

with his mistress as with his enemies, and carried on these elaborate dialogues as a chess player will play a game in his head, he wanted to see how far in reality his friends would digress from the answers they had given in their fictitious speeches. From this divergence he would then draw his own conclusions and obtain sometimes astoundingly correct results. Titian, who had lately been much annoyed by Tintoretto's increasing fame, had, contrary to his usual custom, hung two of his latest pictures in the hall, and the guests who formerly had to beg for admission to his studio now saw themselves confronted with the "Danae" and the unfinished portrait of Lorenzo: on the right, a naked goddess about to receive Zeus in the shape of a golden shower, on the left, a Venetian youth dressed in light purple silk, as spiritual as the goddess was sensual. Titian had not considered that both pictures must arouse Othello's emotions, but Aretino realized this at once and cleverly managed to change seats in the course of the conversation so that the admiral turned his back to Lorenzo's portrait.

"The new novel from Ferrara is no good," Sansovino said, putting a small elegantly-bound book on the table. "I don't see how one can compare it with the *Decamarone.* It is rather uninteresting and warms up the old story of a jealous passion that finally leads to adultery and murder. The characters in the story do not come to life at all." He did not mention that the leading character was a Moor.

"Jealousy?" asked the Master in a tired voice. "Don't know what it is. Either she wanted me, then I took her, or she wanted another and then I let her go." Everybody laughed, and as Titian took a deep draught of punch he added, —"And what says the Admiral?"

Othello had got up from his chair, obviously to examine Lorenzo's portrait more closely, and standing with his back to the group, he said quietly: "I have been single for many years of my life without any opportunity to study either love or jealousy."

"But now you are married, if I am not mistaken," called Sansovino tactlessly.

"Yes, Sansovino, you are right, and I feel that love and jealousy are tied up with the wedding ring."

"I don't," Aretino said pensively, "but—one talks so much about breaking the marriage vows, yet takes a light view of breaking other vows of love outside of marriage."

"That is because in one case one has sworn a solemn oath before

the priest," said Othello, "and in the other, it is merely a mutual promise."

Aretino laughed. "Well, I for one think that the vows in bed are holier and more binding than those taken before the altar!"

"Oh, what is all this nonsense about vows?" said Titian impatiently. "As though a woman did not commit adultery in the arms of her own husband or even her chosen lover. Which of us has never thought of another woman. If Dante had prepared a special compartment in hell for this sort of adulterer, then that is where they would take me twenty times over!"

The virile tone of his voice, the frankness with which the old man said these things, impressed his audience.

"Those are the sins of thought," said Sansovino.

"That is another term I cannot stand. Sins of thought, indeed!" Titian exclaimed now with pagan fury. "He who begins to have scruples about his thoughts, or reproaches his wife or mistress of having had thoughts he does not like, he had better leave the apples in paradise and nature alone. Adultery! Such a stupid idea could only emanate from priests. Everything is permitted, all thoughts are free, but the act itself constitutes a mortal sin. What a despicable morality, which allows the dreams but punishes the natural union as adultery!"

Titian took his glass and poured the wine into the fire. Everybody understood the meaning of this gesture, and Aretino began to look at a sonnet on this subject. But always curious to know the opinions of the silent Arab, Titian turned round and said: "And what does my friend Othello think of all this?"

Listening carefully as he stood with his back to the fire and the people before it, Othello felt that in an atmosphere of complete frankness, not even a diplomatic evasion or political silence was permitted, and turning round he filled his glass, drank, and sat down on the next chair he could find. To Aretino's alert mind these preparations indicated that he was preparing to quarrel, and he found that he was right as Othello began to speak slowly.

"I have been brought up as a Christian. All the beauty of the world that you, Master, have painted for us has not shaken me in my belief in right or wrong—in sin. Had I been brought up with Mohammed and Allah it would have been the same. For me, the breaking of marriage vows and the breaking of lover's vows is not the same thing.

My hair was already grey when I vowed before the Madonna of St. Mark, before my foster-father, and before a young and innocent girl to keep the faith she expected of me. That was the faithfulness of the body. What thoughts may get hold of us, what wishes and desires may trouble our minds, that we cannot promise in advance. An oath is a promise to do or not to do something. It necessarily refers to an action. Since I have sworn a solemn oath on the flag of the republic I have had many bitter thoughts against it, but not once did I consider a hostile action. Perhaps they will depose me in the near future, then I will hate them even more than now. But to go over to the Turks, to draw my sword against the republic, that I could never do. Why should a young woman not dream of surrender to a man with whom she has danced and with whom she has become infatuated for the moment? The sin, the breach of faith, comes only with the act that she promised solemnly not to do. Every woman knows instinctively where the borderline lies between thought and action, just as every officer knows it in respect to his sworn duty. If honour were bound by thoughts, then love and friendship, the family, the State, would collapse sooner or later. An oath is a heavy burden and its breach a heavy sin, and this I shall believe until my dying day."

None of the three pagans had an answer to this straightforward and disarming confession. Titian had not taken his eyes off Othello while he was speaking. Summing up all the various impressions he had ever received from this strange man whom he loved, he transposed them into forms and colours. Without even an attempt to answer, he said thoughtfully:

"Now I know how I shall paint you, Admiral. As St. Paul on the Areopagus—if you can spare me the time!"

CHAPTER III

FOR many minutes they looked deep into each other's eyes. It was the same questioning look with which they had begun and ended each of their intimate moments, whether they were gay or serious, tender or wildly passionate. They found each other unchanged after this strange separation of two weeks, and Othello, alert to find an indication, though ever so slight, that might corroborate his suspicions, found none.

She knew very well that she was in love with Lorenzo. But his beauty, his charm, had utterly vanished from her thoughts the moment she found herself once more in the arms of the husband she loved to-day as much as ever before. To compare him critically with Lorenzo never entered her mind, and she abandoned herself with such genuine passion to his embrace that he rebuked himself bitterly for ever having entertained a doubt of her love and fidelity. Yet he was clever enough not to tell her that he would soon have to go away on an inspection tour of the Adriatic, where the Turkish situation made his personal supervision necessary.

"Never again must you stay away from me for so long!" she exclaimed as she caressed him. And very softly she whispered into his ear: "I was alone and Othello lay in the other room. I crept to the door and listened to his even breathing. I was glad that he slept so well—yet I wished he had not."

He held her tight and only pushed her head a little backward to look into her eyes. "When you stood at my door, did you not think of another man?"

"I only thought of you, and hated the other man since you punished me because of him!"

"Oh—Desdemona—then you still love me?"

She jumped, and putting both her hands to her heart she looked at him aghast.

"Why do you ask that? Because I let a young viola player sing a song to me? Would you compare a small sailing boat with a mighty galleon? Or would you compare me with a little courtesan, with whom

you have perhaps spent an hour or two? What was so terrible about my dancing with the handsome musician? Should I have pushed him away and played the role of the Admiral's irreproachable wife? And as everybody kissed everybody else on that moonlight night, I let him kiss me, but I did not return the kiss. Do you believe me if I swear it to you to-night: I have given him nothing, I have taken nothing away from you. Oh, hold me fast, I am falling."

She trembled violently and had to hold on to a chair for support until he jumped up and caught hold of her. Tenderly and carefully, as he had done during her fever, he carried her back to the bed and covered her. She was exhausted, and in two minutes she was sound asleep in his arms, like a tired child. By the light of the candle he looked at her. The sudden outburst, her honest and direct confession, her consternation, and her sudden exhaustion, gave him all the proof his tortured mind could not give him. When he remembered his father's words and the hearty laugh with which he had called him a fool, all his anxiety vanished like a cloud from the sky, and he had the same feeling that he had at sea when the danger was over and the ship settled once more to a normal and even course. He took a deep breath and was soon asleep.

When he woke an hour later to free his numb arm from under her neck, he saw her blue eyes watching him with deep earnestness. He had not felt her gaze, nor did he know how long she had been looking at him. His exhaustion had been like hers, only it had lasted longer, and now they looked at each other in perfect silence. Finally, she asked him:

"Is it true that you will go to sea to-morrow?"

"Perhaps. Who told you?"

"Lucia. She has it from El Kashef, she says."

"He cannot know what I don't know myself. But one of these days I shall have to go."

"That means that you will go to battle to-morrow?"

"No, not to-morrow and not the day after. Why do you ask me that, Desdemona?"

"Because I am afraid that you will go away, your heart heavy with doubts and distrust."

"I don't distrust you, Desdemona."

"Will you prove it to me?"

"What proof do you ask?"

'Take me into battle with you!"

"You know I cannot do that. The council would object, and the people would not understand it."

"If I disguise myself as a cabin boy and nobody knows about it, then we can go. We will sail against the Turks and you will defeat them and then we will return: everybody would understand that. And if we were to perish together, they would understand it, too."

Othello raised himself on his elbows. Suspicion once more crept into his heart, and he asked slowly: "Are you afraid of staying alone?"

The meaning of these words was so clear to her that she became deadly pale, for it was true: she did not feel strong enough without him to see the musician as before, and yet she was determined to remain faithful to the man she loved more than anything in the world. She knew that there would be no point in dispelling his suspicions, and so she merely turned away from him and said sadly: "I wanted to share the dangers with you, and even death, but you only think that I am in love and not strong enough to withstand temptation without your presence!"

He rose from the bed and walked slowly towards the door of his own room. He did it not so much to punish her as to be alone for a moment and to collect and weigh his thoughts and feelings. He was not sure whether he really did her an injustice in assuming that she needed his presence to remain faithful to him. In a world and in a city where the people he respected most, such as Titian and his father, took such a light view of love, he could not be sure that his wife would not be seduced and converted to their views.

But Desdemona, who thought of nothing but her love for him, and who tossed and turned on her bed during the endless nights when he left her alone, put all pride behind her and flew to his arms. She reached him as he was about to open the door, and with gentle pressure she brought him back.

And as they lay side by side on the large bed, everything was as in old times—just as Padre Domenico had advised.

CHAPTER IV

ANTONIO was in constant touch with Binda. Schurck knew about every step they took, and advised them now and then; but because of his official position as German Consul, and also because of his sour temperament, he remained in the background and let Binda do the work. Antonio found an ideal ally in Binda, for—unlike his other friends, the senators and patricians—the German was also bent on a revenge which went beyond the resignation or removal of the Moor from his powerful position. They wanted more: his utter ruin, if possible, his death. The only way this could be done was by exciting Othello's jealousy, which was well known to all, and by which he was likely to ruin himself. Desdemona's "lover" was the best weapon, and Binda was busy finding a method by which some proof of Desdemona's faithlessness could be put into the hands of the Moor.

To fake a love letter in Desdemona's hand, he needed above all paper, either some like the kind she used, or better still a sheet or two of her own stationery. It was not difficult to approach Emilia, the pretty maid who came daily to market, to perpetrate this little theft—a mere irregularity—for an appropriate reward. Waiting patiently until she had finished her purchases, Binda accosted the girl and after a few flattering words broached the subject.

"I shall give you half a ducat if you will get me a sheet of your mistress's writing paper. It lies on her table and is pale green, and on each sheet there is the Brabantio crest. Will you do that for me?"

"That is going to be very difficult," the shrewd girl replied with a laugh. "The paper is locked up, and under a ducat I could not possibly do anything about it."

"All right, but I shall need two sheets."

"That costs two ducats—and in gold, mind you."

"Two ducats be it. But you must swear an oath not to say anything about it to anyone,"

"For another ducat—oertainly."

"Very well. I shall meet you to-morrow at nine."

At nine o'clock next morning Emilia brought the desired paper,

and Binda, after inspecting it carefully, gave her the reward. That was the first step. Now he needed a crafty penman. Binda knew where to find him, and he sent a messenger to summon the man to his offices. Half an hour later a dwarf appeared before the fat German. He was a Spanish monk by the name of Zareo who had quite a reputation as copyist, and therefore also as counterfeiter. He looked like an evil gnome in a fairy story and might have been a magician or poisoner. He was probably both, for the strange way in which he received the German's proposition and the interest which he showed in the commercial side of it proved his experience in such matters and his character as a hardened criminal.

"I will go as high as eight ducats," Binda said, "but I need more than a copy of her handwriting. I also want it to be apparent from the writing that she is excited, in love, and in a hurry. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Am I Zareo, who produced the Lisbon manuscript of Pliny, or am I an amateur? If I should choose to tell Aretino about this little plot——"

"You would suddenly feel a dagger in your back and your corpse would disappear before sunset."

"What shall I write? Where is the model? The paper? Damn it, I did not come here to bother about all the tools of my trade. Have you got decent pens?"

Binda saw that he must not treat the dwarf in a high-handed manner but rather as an accomplice. He took out the two sheets of pale green paper, and a letter on the same kind, which he showed to the counterfeiter.

"Carissima Maris," the dwarf read, and turning to Binda he asked: "Are you quite sure that this letter is genuine?"

"Absolutely!"

The little monk examined the paper once more, holding it against the light, smelling its perfume and scrutinizing the writing. "Obviously written in a hurry. Not a society hand. She must be a wild creature, by Jove! And young too! Would not mind having something like that for a night myself."

"Don't daydream. Get to work!" the German shouted, "Can you do it?"

The dwarf picked up the second sheet of paper, and looking at it

contemptuously he said: "This is your attempt, I can see. You-must have shaken like a tattered battle flag when you tried to copy this."

"So do women when they are excited, don't you know that, you miserable dwarf?"

"One more outburst like that and I shall go."

"Don't give yourself airs. Read what I want you to write and tell me whether there is perhaps a mistake in it. If you want something changed, say it now and I shall think it over." Binda had pushed the little man into a chair, where he began to read out loud:

"When will you come to me Lorenzo? I tremble and burn and then feel cold again. In my daydreams my hands and fingers move along your white skin, whiter and sweeter than the wing of a dove. Nothing, nothing of all you gave me was sweeter to me than the touch of your white skin, of your white body. Even if you were to lose all your male strength I would still long for you, only to kiss you, and to feel the whiteness of your skin. Come, son of the gods, come, my Theseus. I pine for you. Ariadne."

The burlesque way in which the dwarf accompanied his reading with little round movements of his hand, as if he were writing it into the air, together with the coarse and vicious sounds that Binda emitted now and then to correct the intonation, produced a weird scene that Aretino would have given several gold ducats to observe.

Zareo turned to Binda and asked: "Is that the same kind of ink? No? Well, you are an amateur." And from his voluminous cloak he produced a box with a number of inks, which he put on the table. Then he tried and compared the inks, sharpened a few quills, and began to write. Binda looked eagerly over his shoulder, but the little man gave him such an unexpected push that the fat German almost fell to the ground.

"Go and read my breviary," the monk growled, "it can do you a lot of good."

Binda laughed tonelessly and went over to the window, where he began to read a novel. But he listened to the rustle of the paper and the scratching of the pens and waited secretly for some sign of admiration or applause for the text he had composed. However, his literary vanity remained unsatisfied, for the monk was far too busy with his work to consider the German's stylistic or psychological efforts.

Zareo copied the letter many times on various sheets of paper.

When finally he took the original paper and began to write, Binda could no longer control his curiosity and came over just when the dwarf had finished the signature "Ariadne," which was not unlike Desdemona's real signature.

The dwarf sank back in his chair, completely exhausted, and closed his eyes. He did not move until he heard Binda take up the letter. Then he jumped up like a cat and snatched the paper from the German's hand.

"Do you remember?—my ducats!"

In the meantime Aretino's spies had not been idle. He was informed that an uncommonly small man had come to see the Germans and that he had stayed in the house for some time. Aretino was in a state of alarm, for he knew very well that Othello was on the point of sailing for the Dalmatian coast and that the Germans were only waiting for his absence from Venice to put some artifice into operation. He cursed the absence of his best informer, El Kashef, who had had to accompany his master on the trip. For Othello had received alarming news from Istanbul and from Algiers, and he had decided to leave immediately. So he parted from Desdemona the morning after their reunion, knowing full well how strong the temptation was for the young woman he left alone. He believed—more, he knew—that she did not think of another when she lay in his arms. But he had also seen her fear of this temptation, of her loneliness. For a moment he thought of leaving El Kashef behind to look after the contessa, but he immediately repelled this thought, which seemed an offence not only to his wife but to himself. So he took his slave and his dog with him as he bade farewell to Desdemona as she stood on the lowest step of his *palazzo*. Both knew that their separation would last but a few days; yet both were filled with fears.

When his gondola had taken him to the Lido, where his galleys lay, he decided to leave his adjutant, a young lieutenant by the name of Giovanni, behind. "You will stay here," he said to the officer. "I won't really need you, and it may be that her ladyship would like to keep in touch with the navy. You will report to her daily and ask for her wishes." The officer saluted, and Othello went on board.

CHAPTER V

As Desdemona sat at home an hour later, thinking what she could do with her time, she suddenly remembered that Titian was not well and that it would be very fitting to pay a visit to the ailing Master. What she did not admit to herself was that she hoped to see Lorenzo there. She knew that in the pale November light the Master only painted around the noon hours, and she quickly summoned Lucia to dress her in blue—Lorenzo's favourite colour—and asked for her gondola. She was surprised and even frightened for a moment when, instead of her own gondola, a larger naval one appeared in front of the *palazzo* and the young lieutenant who commanded it came up the stairs.

"Did the Admiral leave a message for me?" she asked.

"No, your ladyship, I am to report to you every day to ask after your wishes," Giovanni reported.

For a second Desdemona wondered what course she should take, but she asked quickly, "Do you know the Master?"

"I have only seen him from a distance."

"Come with me. We will call on him, for he is sick."

She took his hand as he helped her into the gondola, and invited him to sit beside her. Their ride to Titian's house was silent, for the young officer did not dare to start a conversation that might easily lead to naval questions that he was not at liberty to answer, and Desdemona was still wondering whether the young officer had been sent to watch over her safety or her actions.

As they landed at Titian's house, Lavinia, more beautiful than ever, came running through the garden to greet her visitors. The officer was quite confused for the moment as he found himself between these two and he felt fully enchanted when he saw the silhouette of the Master through the large glass windows of the studio.

"Yes, he is much better to-day and is painting again," Lavinia said to her friend, with that radiant smile for which her father kept her virtually a prisoner because he could not and would not miss it.

"What is he painting? Do you think we might—" Desdemona asked timidly, although she knew the answer only too well.

"Why, Lorenzo, of course," replied Lavinia. "During his illness he had interrupted everything. From here you can look into the studio." Desdemona looked and saw her admirer exactly as she had expected to see him, only that he wore a purple doublet and a thin golden chain around his neck. His dark locks fell over his white neck, and Desdemona thought for a moment that she could smell his hair—as she had done when he had kissed her.

Lavinia, who had announced the visitors to her father, returned from the studio. "We cannot go in now for he is just painting the moutn, and even the thought of an onlooker disturbs him then. But if it is not too cold for you, we can sit here at the step, where he cannot see us but where we can just see the model." They all sat down on the steps and looked into the studio silently. The officer craned his neck to see the famous profile of the Master; Lavinia had taken up a strategic position from where she could look into the studio while watching Desdemona's face. The latter had her eyes steadily fixed on Lorenzo. She had not seen him since that night at Aretino's garden party, nor had she had any letter from him. Lorenzo, without moving his head from the pose he held for the Master, let his eyes rest on Desdemona, and it seemed to him that in this silent exchange, separated by the glass of the large window, they were able to tell each other all the things that must forever remain untold. The glass partition is symbolic, he thought, though we can clearly see how we feel, we must forever be separated.

Titian, who knew very well that Desdemona was sitting somewhere whence she could see the model, was inwardly pleased, for the youth's thoughts animated his mouth ever so slightly and gave him a yearning expression, which the Master tried to capture on the canvas. In the world of art, over which he had ruled for two generations, every enhancement of beauty appeared justified and natural. After a while he grew tired and put his brush aside. He waved to Lorenzo, and the guests, led by Lavinia, came into the studio. Titian looked at the officer and without further ado asked him: "Is the the Admiral still at the Lido?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you," the young man said with embarrassment.

"But I can tell you, Master," Desdemona said, "For I am not sworn to secrecy. He left this morning."

Quite unconsciously Desdemona had taken Titian's hand and kissed it. He did not seem surprised but pulling her face towards him, kissed her on both cheeks. Lavinia was surprised at this unexpected ceremony, but she approved so heartily of it that she too kissed Desdemona. The Master seemed much pleased at the whole scene.

Only the two young men were amazed and embarrassed. They felt left out, and Lorenzo looked with jealousy at Lavinia, while the Master, noticing the look, engraved it on his unfailing memory. Desdemona, on the other hand, felt embarrassed only by the presence of the three people and wanted to be alone with Lorenzo. She felt miraculously protected by the young officer in his grey uniform, that she boldly asked Lorenzo whether he would like to ride back to San Marco with her. "Or aren't you rehearsing to-day?" she added.

"Oh, yes, we are rehearsing," stammered Lorenzo, and all three made their adieus on the steps of the studio. Titian looked after them pensively, and after what seemed a long silence he said:

"The Admiral is gone, but the musician is here."

Lavinia laughed, but her father turned round and frowned. "Don't laugh. Aretino tells me that this may end in disaster."

When the gondola approached San Marco, Desdemona suggested in the lightest and most conventional tones that they might have a look at the new Tintoretto. "From to-morrow it will be on public display in the Palazzo, but I am sure they will let us in to-day." And turning to the officer, she added: "You know, it is his Ariadne."

"Oh, Ariadne—the Admiral said that—yes, indeed," Giovanni stammered.

"What did the Admiral say about Ariadne?" Desdemona asked with undisguised curiosity.

"He said, I believe, that she resembled in style the new opera by Monteverdi——"

"All the more interesting for our viola-player here," Desdemona replied lightly.

'The watchman at the Palazzo immediately opened the door for her ladyship and expressed his regret that the picture was still covered by glass, which according to the instructions of the painter was to remain on it until to-morrow, when the general public would be

admitted to view it. Master Tintoretto would come this evening to remove the glass himself, he explained. When they stood before the picture, the watchman stepped a few paces behind Desdemona and the young officer did likewise.

So it came about that Desdemona and Lorenzo stood alone in front of the picture. They stood there wrapped in their cloaks, but they recognized in each other the beauty of the gods they became in their dreams. The glass reflected their forms, clad in the costume of their time, and they mingled with the nude godlike bodies on the painting. After a few seconds, Desdemona saw the yearning countenance of the young musician on the divine form of Dionysos, and it seemed to her that the garlands of ivy he wore around his loins and his brow revealed his true nature to her.

The young man saw the ideal of his dreams in naked loveliness. He would have liked to lift the blue draperies that veiled Ariadne's body, and Desdemona's eyes which looked out at him from the painting seemed to consent.

The hallucination they were both experiencing was so overwhelming that they both might have lost consciousness if the watchman had not interrupted them by moving the picture and saying: "Perhaps your lordship and your ladyship are dazzled by the glass. . . . "

When Desdemona returned home, she was strangely restless. She tried to concentrate on a book, but after a few minutes she put it aside and looked out of the window. She tried to master her excitement by counting gondolas on the Grand Canal, but she lost count of them. Finally, she went down to the kitchen to busy herself somehow. She inspected the copperware, the china, and the silver, much to the astonishment of the maids, who did not see her in the kitchen for weeks on end. Candida, the cook, was slightly put out by this sudden intrusion into her realm, and Desdemona felt that she would have to talk to her. After a few questions, she suddenly noticed a basket full of kittens. "Has our cat had kittens?" she asked.

"Yes, your ladyship," Candida replied, lifting the little creatures out of the basket and holding them up. They were only a few days old and still blind.

"Oh, how ugly they are," Desdemona exclaimed, starting back as if Candida had shown her a basket full of snakes.

"Yes, they are indeed ugly," Candida said maliciously.

"But last year they were so pretty!"

"Yes, your ladyship, but last year the father was the nice black tomcat, and this year she has been going around with the yellow and white tom—and look how ugly they are."

"Perhaps they will get prettier when they grow up," Desdemona said tentatively.

"Oh, no, your ladyship, it is a bad breed, that is all. One really should throw them into the canal right now."

"No, you can't do that to the mother! She has only two of them, and she is full of milk. She would die, and——" Suddenly she got up from her crouching position and walked rapidly out of the kitchen. In the hall she sat down before a table and putting her head into her hands she groaned: "Terrible! It is terrible!"

From the kitchen she heard the laughter of the maids and thought: This is meant for me. If I had a child by Othello it would perhaps be as ugly as those striped kittens down in the kitchen. The maids think so. And I—God forgive me—I think so too!

She was still sitting at the table when she heard soft footsteps on the stairs. A moment later Maria stood in the door. With the strength of despair, Desdemona jumped up and threw herself violently into her friend's arms. Here was an anchor, here was a friend who had been faithful to her all these years, and pulling Maria over to a couch she buried her head in her lap and began to weep convulsively. Maria tried to soothe her, but Desdemona kept repeating a few words which her friend finally deciphered as, "The goddess of good fortune has turned away from us."

Maria looked out of the window at Sansovino's statue on top of the dome and saw indeed it had turned its back towards Othello's *palazzo*.

"She always turns away when the wind is from the south," she said with a laugh. "Ask your husband—he will tell you. Come, cheer up. Everything will be all right."

"What will be all right?" Desdemona asked now defiantly. "Won't I get striped children?"

"Why? Do you feel—are you pregnant?"

"No, I feel nothing, but the cat downstairs has a litter of horrible kittens, and who knows what will happen to me?"

"Oh, is that all?" Maria exclaimed with relief.

"No, it is not all." Desdemona was again on the verge of tears.

"Then it is perhaps Lorenzo?'*

"You know? What do you know about Lorenzo?"

"Well, nothing, all Venice talks about it. They all know it."

"Then all Venice knows something that never took place. Gossip! Nothing but gossip! You know me, and I have never told you a lie. Nothing has happened between Lorenzo and myself. I have given him nothing."

"Why, of course; but just think how often a young attractive artist looks at us, and we look back at him and wonder about the things we may do and may not do—and then we go away and everything is forgotten. It certainly is not worth while getting excited about these things."

For a while Desdemona looked straight into Maria's eyes, and bracing herself she said: "You are my only friend. Listen to what I have to tell you—something I would never tell any other person on earth. Maria! I want him, I must have him. Once, only once I must have him!"

Maria knew Desdemona well, and she knew that anything was possible for this young woman—even resignation and sacrifice, if only she could have her will. In the last three years, Maria had often thought about the marriage with Othello and all its possible complications. So she was not at all surprised when Desdemona made her confession to her.

"Then take him!" she said quietly.

Desdemona was frightened and asked, "When?"

"To-morrow."

"But I have vowed to be faithful to Othello."

"I know. I too have a husband."

"And were you always faithful to him?"

"Yes. Always."

"And were you never in love with another?"

"Yes, I was."

"Then why should I do what you yourself refused to do?"

"It is not that you should do it—but I am afraid that if you don't, you will think until your dying day that a white man is different."

Desdemona let her head sink once more **and** again she groaned: **"Oh,** it is **terrible—terrible—"**

One hour later Desdemona sought the advice of another woman, the beautiful courtesan, Zafetta.

As she sat opposite the courtesan, surrounded by four low tables on which Zafetta had piled all the sweetmeats she could find for her unexpected guest, Desdemona felt almost stifled by little boxes, flasks, and knick-knacks, for Zafetta had brought all her perfumes and essences to cheer her visitor.

When the gondolier announced the Admiral's wife, Zafetta immediately sensed that something important was in the air. Ladies of society did not call on courtesans, not even the wife of the very modern and liberal Othello. Through Lavinia, she knew more about Othello's household than most people in Venice, and with genuine affection she eagerly embraced the opportunity to be of service to the contessa.

"This is a pastry from Alexandria," she said smiling at Desdemona, "or at least in the manner of Alexandria. Be careful—there is a little pepper mixed into the sugar. A new trick of the Egyptian baker."

"Just as in love—sugar and pepper."

"Oh, but you have learned fast! You cannot be more than nineteen, at that!"

Zafetta sat down at her dressing table and brushed her hair.

"And you?" Desdemona asked timidly. " — I mean when did you begin——?" *

"To learn about love? Oh, I believe that I was twelve, but I never knew a man before I was fourteen. Every art has to be practised from childhood on. Or did you ever hear of a great painter or poet who only began at the age of twenty?"

Desdemona shook her head and rubbed some perfume on her forehead, which was still very hot.

"No, no, not on your forehead," cried Zafetta. "That is for the wrists, I have another one for the brow."

"Love really is an art, then?" Desdemona laughed. "What is this scent for?" she asked shyly.

"To put on the breast with a piece of silk. Sometimes it drives a man crazy. Perhaps you wore something like that when you met that young musician at Aretino's love feast?"

"What do you know about that?"

"No more than every one else in Venice," Zafetta said pleasantly.

"But I really think that the Admiral is too severe with you. Or is it perhaps that the Contessa has been too meek?"

"Perhaps I have been too meek. You see, I have married an Arab, but a devout Christian."

"How clever you are, signora—I should say, your ladyship—that is just it. His whole idea of marital fidelity is based on his religion."

Desdemona looked at her in surprise. "And how do you know that?" she asked.

"Aretino told me, of course. A few days ago Othello was at the Master's with Aretino, who brought up the subject of adultery. Titian and Sansovino thought, of course, as we do—I mean, as I do—and they laughed at all the fuss that is being made about it, since people sin in thought all the time, although they may lie virtuously in their spouse's arms. But then the Master wanted to know what Othello had to say, and in his typical manner—you know, 'And what says my friend, Othello?'—he challenged him, and got the surprise of his life when your husband came out with the most orthodox views. He said that no man can rule or regulate his thoughts, and that every woman probably thinks at times of someone else while she was embracing her husband. But that this was a very different thing from breaking the marriage vows by an act of adultery, and that the sin began with the act, not with the thought. Where the flesh sins, he said, there adultery begins. Are you surprised, Contessa?"

Desdemona had a sensation of vast relief though she did not quite know why. She did not answer Zafetta's question but asked her instead, "Does he apply the same standards to men?"

"Yes. He said so, most specifically. For him it is not too difficult, since he did not take his marriage vows until he was already grey-haired. Of course, most people make love without art as a necessity, like eating. But have you noticed that Master Titian eats with the same concentration he puts into his painting?"

Desdemona now ventured to approach the subject she had come to discuss. "Would you mind if I asked you a few questions about love?"

"Nothing could be more charming! No man can discuss love like a beautiful woman."

Desdemona listened to the courtesan as a pupil listens to her teacher.

"If he did not take his marriage vows until late in life, he must have

promised everlasting love many times in his earlier days. Don't yd think so? What did they say about him before I met him?"

"Just as much gossip as they are spreading now about you—or me, for that matter. But as I know him, he kept away from any sort of promise and usually departed as quickly as he had come."

Desdemona's heart beat wildly, and she had to use all her self-control to keep her voice from rising.

"Is that the way of an Arab?" she asked.

"Why of an Arab?"

"Have you known men of different colour?"

Zafetta laughed loudly, and coming over to Desdemona's couch she took her hand.

"Do you want to know whether the coloured men differ from white men in love? Such nonsense occurs sometimes in fiction but never in reality. Every man is different from another, but there are no racial distinctions in love. And I should know because I have known many: Negroes, Chinamen, Indians———!"

"Also—Arabs?"

Zafetta laughed again, and playing with her hair-brush she said in an exaggeratedly confidential tone: "Once upon a time, or—to be more accurate—about ten years ago I knew an Arab. He was a great lover, with a wonderful figure, and of a beautiful brown colour." She paused jokingly. "And his name was Othello!"

Desdemona rose. "Then he found a great artist to love!" she said.

"And I a great master," Zafetta replied.

Desdemona looked straight at her, kissed her on both cheeks, and said: "Thank you, I must go now. My gondola is waiting!"

CHAPTER VI

THE weather had improved next day, and a feeble sun had warmed the atmosphere. At the landing place of the Piazzetta two carriers waited with a sedan chair. Slowly and with obvious difficulty, the Master got out of his gondola with the help of his men and seated himself in the sedan. The people around doffed their caps respectfully, but Titian did not return the salute. Aretino, who had arranged this visit to the Palazzo, had refrained from coming with him, so as not to give additional publicity to the whole affair. It was a great sacrifice for the old Master, for he was rather indolent and now, moreover, not too well; and in his regal attitude he had scorned to visit the seat of the Venetian government for years.

As he was carried up the steep stairs Sansovino had built, the two giants on top of the clock tower began to strike twelve with their great iron hammers. In the antechamber, Titian ordered his men to put down the sedan; he alighted, again with difficulty, and walked over to the wall where Tintoretto's "Ariadne" stood. With a magnifying glass that he always carried with him he examined the brush strokes, then stepped back and looked at the whole, only to go up close again for a new examination of the technique. He seemed much interested, but he made no gesture from which the watchman could draw a conclusion, nor did he say a word.

A few minutes later he stood before the Doge's room, took off his cap, arranged his clothes, and dismissed his servants. The door opened, and the Doge, realizing the importance of his visitor, did what the protocol of the republic did not permit: he rose and walked over to greet his guest. Titian, who was familiar with all court ceremonies, noted this gesture with great satisfaction. When they were seated, the Doge asked: "A glass of wine?"

Titian nodded and the servants immediately brought two glasses. The Doge did not drink, but the Master took a glass and emptied it with a swift motion that betrayed both his habits and his present exhaustion. Breathing heavily and with obvious satisfaction, he addressed the Doge, without waiting for his cue, exactly in the manner in which a king would speak to his ambassador:

"I am a painter and not a senator. But since I am by now perhaps the oldest Venetian alive, and at the same time well known in the world, a friend of the Emperor and the Pope, I have taken the liberty of having my old bones brought up here in order to tell your lordship that the republic is in danger."

The Doge, who had resolved to receive his famous caller with all the marks of distinction and respect, was surprised; for people came to him to ask whether the republic was in danger—not to tell him so. He was the republic, and so therefore the best judge of such danger. But he ignored the irregularity and replied: "The news that we received concerning the movements of the Turkish fleet was indeed alarming, but the Grand Admiral has gone in person to watch over the welfare of the republic. Perhaps he will be back by to-morrow to report to me and the council. That is all that disturbs us at the moment—or is your lordship in possession of secret news that has not reached us?"

Titian felt the gentle rebuke and the cold politeness, and he thought: One should paint this head without the fool's cap of his dignity. Therefore I must talk to him as if he were an old citizen with common sense.

While he was still pondering, he saw that the Doge had sent his servants out of the room. The scene was laid for an intimate heart to heart talk.

"My news is not unknown to your lordship," he began again, "The Grand Admiral is to be deposed!"

"I know nothing of such a resolution; in fact I must deny it categorically."

"There is no official resolution about it, but it is a plan that is slowly ripening. The Council of Ten will manoeuvre the Grand Admiral into such a position that he will be forced to offer his resignation. At that moment the Turks will prepare an attack, and since Othello is indispensable to the republic, it may well be that we are faced with grave danger, perhaps in a month, perhaps already next week."

The Doge sat up straight and spoke in an official tone: "It is not my duty to anticipate the decisions of the council. We live here in a democracy, and every vote counts. I have only my vote."

"When a high official has saved the republic," Titian continued

raising his voice slightly, "when there is no man of equal talent and experience, one can dismiss him only when he makes a mistake."

"That would be the only reason—if the council is planning any change."

"The only mistake he ever made was to be brown!" Titian said abruptly, without even adding the customary "your lordship" to his sentence. The Doge remained unperturbed and replied: "He has been brown for a long time—in fact he was never anything but brown. If colour were an obstacle, the council would not have appointed him, or at least would have recalled him long ago."

"I am sure they would have done so, had they not feared the reaction on the Rialto."

"We are the chosen representatives of the people. It is the Rialto that has elected me to my office. We stand under the protection of our laws. We are the people and need not fear them."

"That was the case until lately," Titian said loudly. His voice had regained its customary strength, and he used the deafness of the Doge as an excuse for shouting at the appropriate moments. "In the meantime a few foreigners and heretics have succeeded in undermining the reputation of the Moor by dastardly lies and calumnies; and since they could not shake his professional reputation, they attacked his private life. Count Brabantio is in alliance with these crooks and is trying to carry a personal feud with the Moor on to the floor of the Senate."

The Doge became visibly excited and shifted back and forth on his seat.

"I am afraid that your lordship himself has become the victim of false reports, which probably proceed from Signor Aretino's circle. If the wife of the Grand Admiral of the republic attends a scandalous garden party, and there gives—shall we say—cause for criticism, the republic cannot overlook such serious things."

"Nothing happened at that party, nothing that Venetian society would not condone or even take part in. If there were no other proof for it, my presence would be proof enough."

"Your lordship is not an official of the republic!"

"No, the kindness of the gods has preserved me from such a fate! But Sansovino and Monteverdi are officials, and if these great artists, who honour the republic with their services, dance with pretty women

on a summer night, and even if they kiss them, no admiral or admiral's wife is being compromised thereby, let alone the reputation of the republic!"

The Doge, advancing his second argument, spoke in a moderate tone.

"It is said, however, that the white wife of the Admiral, who, to the astonishment of all Italy and of the whole world, married an Arab, is wearying of his colour and grants her favours to men of our race, into which she was born."

Titian burst into Olympian laughter just as if he were sitting at his own table over a glass of wine, and exclaimed:

"There were no other brown men at the party in question. If the young woman wanted to enjoy herself, she had to dance with white partners whether she liked it or not!"

The Doge adopted an acid tone and said quietly: "Your lordship is pleased to pursue this conversation on the level of a comedy by Machiavelli. But there are serious men in Venice who draw very different conclusions from the behaviour of the young contessa. If this young woman who married an Arab against the will of her father does not even stay by her husband's side, we must conclude that the Arab race is perhaps not capable of managing important affairs in our republic of white citizens."

Titian laughed again, but it was a short and angry laugh. "I have never had such a thought, in spite of the fact that I am comparatively white. I only saw that neither the Vendramins nor the Falieris—nor the Cornaros—nor other white Venetian, with a glorious tradition and the very best opportunities, went out to save the republic before Cyprus, but the foreign Moor without name or ancestors, the brown bastard, did save us! And this shame is too much for the white noblemen to bear. And that is why they desire his downfall!" After the last words, Titian rose from his chair because he was not willing to be dismissed by a Doge or even a king. The Doge also rose, and when he saw the Master sway slightly, he offered his arm. But Titian had reached the corner of the fireplace, and there he supported himself.

"The fidelity with which your lordship stands by his friends is a typically Venetian trait," the Doge said, trying to establish a certain equilibrium by this diplomatic reply.

"My fidelity is not so much concerned with my friend as with the

republic. And if your lordship pleases to call this a Venetian trait, I must state that in my long life I have seen very little of this trait here. I get my commissions from foreign princes, my pictures hang in foreign countries, and what I have seen of the doings of the republic did not have much in common with the term fidelity!"

"Your lordship will please to corroborate this accusation with an example?" the Doge exclaimed.

"An example?" Titian replied. "The entire history of Venice is full of examples! This *palazzo* here, and the one that stood here before, reverberate with such examples. Your lordship will surely remember a certain Marco Foscari—to quote only the latest example—who was sent to Paris as ambassador of the republic and who was recalled because of his so-called intrigues and high treason. Down there he was executed, and his body was exhibited to the population between the two columns of the Piazzetta! And a few weeks later his accuser was found out and confessed that his accusations were lies from beginning to end. He also was executed, and hung by the same rope that had ended the life of the noble Foscari! Beware of such mistakes! If something like that should happen with the Moor, the name of the ruling doge would be shamefully connected with it for posterity!"

He turned to go, but since he had just offended the Doge, he felt that he must make a bow before he left. He nodded his head and looked at the Doge with such regal deference that the latter felt it unnecessary to accompany his caller to the door. Slowly Titian walked across the polished floor, and when he stood before the door, it was opened by the servants who had heard his steps.

CHAPTER VII

WHILE Titian rode home in his gondola thinking over the interview he had just had with the Doge, another gondola was being rowed in a different direction over the smooth green surface of the water. The change in the weather had suddenly prompted Desdemona to visit Lorenzo at the garden in Murano. For a chaperone she had enlisted the services of her friend Maria, and to make the outing thoroughly harmless she had asked Giovanni, the young lieutenant, when he presented himself in the morning, to join them. A few conventional words informed Lorenzo of the proposed visit, and he managed to get away from the other musicians, on receiving her note after a rehearsal at San Marco. As the letter informed him that Maria would accompany Desdemona, for she had not mentioned the officer, he thought it wise to have a companion and asked his friend, the flutist, to come with him to Murano.

The party in the gondola was surprised to find two musicians to welcome them on the island. Maria had found the officer a very agreeable companion indeed, and was somewhat disappointed to see the other man, whom she obviously had to amuse as well, in order to give Desdemona and Lorenzo an opportunity to be alone.

On entering the garden, Desdemona's heart seemed to stop every time Lorenzo's hand casually touched hers as they walked side by side toward a slight rise in the ground around which a group of trees was planted. They sat down on the grass in two groups that seemed to form quite naturally: Lorenzo and Desdemona, and Maria with her two admirers. Maria, disappointed at not being able to enjoy the landscape alone with her officer, gave him an unmistakable look and asked the flutist whether they could not go beyond the little hill to have a look at the sea. The flutist was eager to oblige, but he had no intention of leaving them alone.

"Here, through the little door in the wall and down the other side, there is a wonderful view of the sea and the city. But you would never find it alone, so I had better come with you."

Maria gave another meaningful look to Giovanni and followed the men through the **little door.**

No sooner was the door closed again than Lorenzo and Desdemona flew into each other's arms. For a while they remained standing, holding each other in a fast embrace. But slowly they sank to the ground and lay once more on the grass. Desdemona did not refuse her kiss to him as she had done at the garden party, but when Lorenzo pressed for further favours, she suddenly pushed him away with her knees and interrupted the natural development of their embrace. She knew that she was in love with him, she felt with every fibre that she desired him; but since her talk with Zafetta, Othello's dogma of fidelity was ever present in her mind. I have sworn to be faithful to him. I must not break my promise, she said to herself as she freed herself from Lorenzo's arms. She had not known how difficult it would be to resist the temptation, for she had expected to find a chaste youth. But Lorenzo's full passion had been roused, and he was not to be deterred so easily. He opened Desdemona's lace, and put his head on her bosom.

"A white ear," she whispered, "where have I seen a white ear on my heart before. . . ?"

At the sound of her voice Lorenzo sat up, for they had not said a single word to each other, never called each other by their names. As he looked at her on the grass he suddenly realized the folly of his desire, and the artist gained control over the man.

"Desdemona——" he said.

"Lorenzo."

He put his head close to hers and looked deep into her blue eyes. After a while she said: "Lorenzo, bring your viola and play everything to me that you want to give me. I shall listen and shall imagine that I return all your gifts."

Half kneeling before her, he began to play while she lay with eyes closed on the grass. But after a few minutes she sat up, for she did not want to miss one single expression of his face, his eyes and his mouth, which had enthralled even Titian.

When the garden gate opened and the three young people returned from their walk, they looked at the picture before them with surprise.

He will never learn, thought the flutist.

Artists must be different from other *men,* thought the young officer.

Thank God that Lorenzo had enough sense, thought Maria.

CHAPTER VIII

THE man who directed all preparations against the imminent crisis threatening Othello was Aretino. Everywhere he had his spies, and heard all that was going on. He was accurately informed of all of Antonio's plans and knew the various intrigues which were spun in the halls of the Senate. Titian's interview with the Doge had not reassured him; on the contrary he now believed it possible that the Grand Admiral might find himself suddenly a prisoner of the republic. He therefore prepared Othello's flight, and that of his friends, and had all their enemies shadowed—Antonio, the two Germans, and their helpers—so that in case of necessity they could lay their hands on them. In this activity, during these three decisive days, he missed nobody as much as El Kashef. He had asked Othello to leave him behind; but knowing Othello's motives for taking him on the inspection tour, he had to accept a sullen no for an answer.

When Othello returned towards noon on the following day, he found a short note from Aretino in which the poet described Desdemona's activities during the last days, in order to forestall a less favourable account that might reach the jealous Arab. But Othello was too agitated to weigh this information soberly. He had found out that Khair el Dhin had assembled a large fleet between Euboea and Rhodes, and he was sure that this time he was not going to pay a social visit. As far as possible, he had pieced together information about the disposition of the Turkish fleet from agents he had caught and tortured. He had decided that he must attack before the two fleets joined forces. To-morrow he would ask the council's authorization for this step.

When he saw Giovanni, he asked him casually how her ladyship had passed the time while he was away. The hesitant way in which the young officer made his report revealed to him immediately that he wished to conceal something. He asked him to be more specific and heard that Maria, Giovanni, and the flutist had gone for a walk at Murano while Desdemona and Lorenzo were left alone. El Kashef,

who had left one of his spies behind on his own initiative, now reported that Desdemona had been to see Zafetta. Everything seemed to speak against her innocence, and for a moment Othello wondered whether his father, Aretino, and Titian, who had always stood up for Desdemona, were really his friends. He finished his most urgent business at the Lido and then commanded his gondola to take him to San Lazzaro. Little did he know whom he was to find there.

Desdemona had spent the better part of the night after her visit to Murano tossing and turning in her bed, torn by remorse and at the same time regretting the opportunity she had allowed to slip by; falling asleep at dawn, she slept until late in the afternoon, although Lucia tried to awaken her several times. When she finally roused herself, she immediately washed to go to Padre Domenico to ask his advice and to make her confession. She dressed in black and ordered her gondoliers to row as fast as possible to San Lazzaro. Shedding bitter tears, she told the old man all her secrets and the exact way in which her now famous "love affair" had developed. She knelt before him, her head on his knees; the padre thought: Thus the Master should paint her—as Magdalen.

"Don't you see, father," she cried, "I love nobody but Othello, I have never loved anyone else. I was only infatuated with the lips of the young musician, with his playing and his tender look. I will forget him, I shall never see him again! I have not taken anything away from Othello, I have not given anything away that belongs to him. And if it is true that he is in danger now and that they want to depose him, oh, father, I will go with him to death. Can you tell him that? Can you explain it? You are the only person to whom he will listen. I implore you."

Suddenly she heard steps on the staircase, the light steps of Othello. When he entered the room she was still on her knees before the priest, but looking towards her husband with her tearful eyes. Othello immediately concluded that she had just confessed her adultery to the priest, whose help she was trying to enlist against his righteous wrath. But suddenly all three of them remembered an afternoon, three years before, when Desdemona had come to the padre's room and had said, "The republic is in danger!", setting out to conquer the Moor. **The scene** stood so vividly **before them that** the present seemed **forgotten.**

Only Othello pushed the past away, and without saluting his foster-father, he said roughly to Desdemona:

"You seem to have amused yourself very well while I was away!"

"Were you in a storm?" she asked in return.

"No more than you!"

Desdemona got up and smoothed her hair. A golden thread had fallen on the padre's black habit, and she brushed it off. Then she turned to Othello and asked: "What crime have I committed?"

"It is not seemly for you to visit a courtesan!"

"I hear that you used to visit them too!" she snapped back and was immediately terrified at her forwardness. She saw the whites of Othello's eyes and retreated behind the chair, in which the padre sat restlessly, shifting about, quite contrary to his habits.

"That was ten years ago, before I met you. In the last three years no one has seen me with another woman!"

"You had your youth. I had none when I met you here in this room for the first time."

"You seem to be catching up with it now," he called sharply.

"I have not given anything away that was yours."

"Yet you went to see your fiddler yesterday!"

"Maria was with me, and your officer."

"Who obligingly went for a walk."

"Your spies work as thoroughly as though they were watching the movements of an enemy fleet!"

All at once he strode through the room and, standing directly before her, shouted:

"Did you sleep with your lover?"

She looked at him without a tremor, and forcing herself to be calm she said quietly: "I have no lover and I have not slept with anybody."

The padre now lifted his hand as if to draw Desdemona towards him. She came closer and put her hand on his shoulder. Then he looked at Othello and said:

"Desdemona is innocent."

The effect of these three words was immediate and sweeping. All his life Othello had trusted his foster-father implicitly, and his trust was strong enough now to tell him that the priest saw clearly while he himself was blinded by his emotions. He bent his knee and kissed his

father five times, then went over to Desdemona and kissed her too. None of them said a word, and for many minutes absolute silence reigned in the room.

When Othello had collected himself, he turned away from the window and said in a matter-of-fact tone:

"There will be war. To-morrow I shall ask the council to authorize my plans. We must attack the Turkish fleet at once. If they refuse the authorization, I shall resign."

"Then we shall go into Spanish service and sail to America!" exclaimed Desdemona, and both men felt that she wanted to escape the problems and temptations that were tormenting her. As Othello heard the word "we" from her lips, he felt a warmth surge up in his heart and he looked at her lovingly. The old man stretched out his hands and with difficulty reached both Othello and Desdemona. Then he laid their hands together and prayed silently.

CHAPTER IX

THE narrow silver band that he was wont to wear across his chest was the only adornment Othello had added to his grey uniform when he stood before the Council of Ten on the following morning. The senators wore their golden chains, but the hall seemed grey like Othello's uniform in the bleak November weather that promised snow and cold. Othello had placed himself as far away as possible from Antonio, whom he had not seen since that scene in this very hall three years ago, except once from a distance at the opera. On a table before him lay his maps and papers; in clear and precise terms he made his report to the sixteen men and the Doge. He told them that the Turkish and Algerian fleets would presumably join forces within the next ten days and that an immediate attack on one or the other fleet before their union was imperative in the interests of the republic. He spoke about twenty minutes in all.

As he had done three years ago, Senator Alberghetti immediately backed up the admiral. He added what Othello could not say himself, namely, that the republic had an advantage in having at its disposal the victor of Cyprus, whose name alone would intimidate the enemy. The next speaker was an old patrician who argued that even at the cost of one or the other colony it was necessary to appease the Turks and win their friendship because of the general political situation, which had taken a turn for the worse. The German princes were known to be backing the Turks, the King of France had made ostentatious presents to the sultan; Spain and the new Pope could not be considered friends of Venice. The republic could not afford to make enemies of all powerful states in Europe by attacking the Turks. The entire meeting was a mere formality, for it had been decided long ago by the senators what its outcome would be. They counted on a vote of twelve to four, and the Doge, unwilling to prolong the farce, asked for a vote on the question whether the Grand Admiral was to prepare for attack or defence. As had been prearranged, twelve senators voted for defence and only four for attack.

Othello had expected as much. In a toneless voice, he said: "If the

council does not authorize an attack, the odds favouring the defeat of our fleet are just about the same as the proportion of votes cast a moment ago. The republic risks losing its most valuable colonies without ensuring the friendship of the Turks. This responsibility I cannot shoulder, I therefore ask your lordships to accept my immediate resignation both as grand admiral and as a member of the fleet."

"The republic regrets this desire of your lordship's," the Doge said, and the lack of a pause indicated how well everything had been prepared beforehand. "In full appreciation of meritorious service, the republic hereby grants your request for resignation."

Othello raised his hand in a military salute and walked towards the door. But at this moment Antonio rose.

"I regret I must ask your lordship to remain a while with us, and I ask for the floor to inform the council of an accusation supported by twelve of its members." His manner was triumphant. The moment for his revenge had come. But in the short pause that intervened, something happened that Antonio had not forseeen, but which Aretino had carefully prepared. He had ordered El Kashef, who was waiting for his master outside the council chamber and who had been informed of everything, to give a signal from the window of the antechamber if and as soon as Count Brabantio asked for the floor.

Aretino had expected the accusation; and he knew the swiftness with which the Inquisition acted, regardless of the position or rank of its victims. Three of its members sat in a small room adjoining the council chamber, and if called upon they could convey their victim into the subterranean prisons with surprising rapidity. Once in these prisons there was no escape—no hope. Every child in Venice knew that, and in their classes they learned the names of the supposed traitors to the republic who had been punished by the Inquisition.-But that this fate threatened Othello to-day, nobody knew except Aretino and the small secret group of plotters. Aretino had therefore ordered El Kashef and his companions to apprehend the chief intriguers, Schurck and Binda, the night before; he now had them safely Jocked up in his own cellar.

He had also made Desdemona virtually a prisoner. Othello had passed a very quiet and peaceful night with her but had not allowed her to accompany him to the Palazzo Ducale. He was afraid that she might possibly meet her brother there, and a clash between the two

would have destroyed the last hope still remaining to him before the council's decision. Aretino, who had informed Othello of as much of his intelligence as he deemed necessary, had asked Maria to stay with Desdemona, enjoining her not to let her out of the palace under any circumstances.

After these preparations, the main action, which Aretino, from his intimate knowledge of the people of Venice, had conceived a long time ago, had to be put into motion. As soon as Antonio brought up his accusation, Othello's fate would be sealed; half an hour later he would be under the lead roofs of the dreaded dungeons. There was but one way out: the people, revolution. Only it had to be timed well. Not too soon, not too late. Aretino, who from an arcade below had been watching the window of the antechamber for almost an hour, could not hear the words Antonio began to speak in the council chamber, but he knew very well what line the attack would take.

"I must explain to your lordships," Antonio began, "that Othello's resignation alone is no longer sufficient. In the name of twelve members of this council, I accuse him of gross neglect of duty when he received the Emir of Algiers in one of our colonies as a guest of the republic, in order to avoid a battle that would have been in the interests of the republic, and when he lowered the prestige of the republic by allowing his wife to drink a toast to the enemies of Venice. I furthermore accuse him of having secret intelligence with the aforesaid Emir, and through him, with the court of France; and, at the same time, with the German heretics, since as a born Mohammedan he desires the destruction of the Christian church."

Well before Antonio had reached this point, El Kashef had given the signal at the window. Aretino ran through the arcades out into the Piazzetta, where a number of loafers were sitting around on the benches, more than usual, to-day, because it was known that the council was in session. With a few dramatic gestures, which came easily to Aretino, who was somewhat of an actor, he shouted to the people: "They are taking the Moor prisoner! Come! Help! Help us save the Moor of Venice!"

His words had the desired effect. Everyone knew Aretino, and nobody doubted his word, which had proved good enough in the past. That the council was going to take their hero a prisoner seemed quite possible to them, for they expected nothing better from the hated

patricians. The loafers suddenly became very agile, running here and there, repeating the call, and in three minutes the news had reached the Rialto. From all the shops people began to run towards the Piazza San Marco; the silversmiths left their work, the washerwomen the laundry in their tubs; even from schools and churches the people streamed towards San Marco. Gondoliers, watchmen, glassmakers, everybody ran, shouting, "Save the Moor! Long live the Moor!"

Antonio was still reading his accusation when a deep rumble was heard outside the windows. A few senators turned their heads but did not interrupt the speaker. As the noise became louder and louder, one of them got up and opened one of the high windows to look out. Suddenly the howls of five thousand people crowding the Piazzetta burst into the council chamber and drowned Antonio's voice. Nobody thought now of the accusation; alarmed and worried, they pressed towards the windows to see what had caused the uproar. As they looked down, they saw the guards at the gate of the courtyard, hopelessly outnumbered, beginning to retreat. The mob poured into the inner courtyard, and to shouts of "We want the Moor" the younger men were already running up the Giant's Stairs and posting themselves at the very door of the council chamber. The council, the Doge—the government of Venice—were now the people's prisoners.

Pale and terrified, the senators looked at each other. It was clear that if they continued proceedings against Othello now, they would never leave the council alive. They stood paralysed with fear as they saw the door of the council chamber open. But it was only El Kashef, who had been waiting outside and who now informed his master of events. Othello turned round and followed his slave. In the doorway he met Aretino, who whispered to him: "Show yourself to the crowds or you are lost," and going to one of the windows himself the poet shouted, "To the horses! The Moor to the horses!" The cry was taken up, and Aretino pushed Othello through a secret staircase that connected the Palazzo Ducale with San Marco. Othello was reluctant, as he cared nothing for the acclamation of the populace, and was brooding on his revenge. Aretino, pushing him forward, shouted: "Quick! You must choose between the horses and the dungeons!"

In the meantime Desdemona had been seized by such anxiety that she declared she must go to the Palazzo to hear what had been decided. Maria's remonstrances were of no avail, and when she put

herself with outspread arms before the door, Desdemona pushed her away with such force that her friend was frightened for a moment. Lucia was also no effective obstacle to. her frantic mistress, who hastily put a black shawl over her head and left the house by way of the kitchen door. She ran through the narrow street all the way to the Piazza. There she stood in the middle of the crowd, in the same black shawl as all the other women wore, and tried to shout with them. But she was not able to utter a sound.

When Othello appeared beside the great bronze horses of San Marco, the shouts increased tenfold. *"Evviva il Moro! Evviva il Moro!"* He did not smile, nor did he wave to the crowd, he merely held his hand to his cap in salute. He could not see Desdemona, but she saw him, and an unspeakable sadness filled her heart as she thought of the moment three years ago when she had stood with him up there waving at the crowd. She did not know that her harmless flirtation had given the patricians an excuse to ruin her husband, and bring catastrophe into her happy life.

At this moment something terrible happened. A few people standing in the first rows of the crowd suddenly fell to the ground. The people, who knew more about the ravages of the plague than they admitted, for they believed that they could check the disease by ignoring it, immediately understood that these victims had not been pressed or trampled to death. It was the black plague. The shouts gradually changed into screams, and as quickly as they had come to the Piazza they now fled from it. The pale senators at the window also understood the significance of this sudden flight, and for a moment their hopes rose high. But the crowd, with a typical lack of logic, interpreted the outbreak of the plague as God's punishment for the wickedness of the Senate that had intended to harm the Moor.

Aretino and El Kashef saw that the outbreak of the plague would facilitate their flight from Venice. When Othello came down from beside the horses, the Piazzetta was almost empty. In the main door stood Aretino, with Sansovino and Monteverdi, and behind them Tintoretto, who wanted to show that their hearts were with Othello although they were all three in the pay of the government. Othello shook hands with each of them and then followed Aretino and El Kashef to his gondola. As he was about to get into the boat, a monk handed him a letter. The monk was exceptionally small. Such letters,

which Othello received frequently from the trembling hands of fathers and mothers, usually contained a request for promotion of their sons or relatives. This man, however, to make sure that Othello would read the message, whispered: "It is a letter to her ladyship." He said "to" so as to protect himself. Othello hesitated for a moment, then jumped into the gondola and waved to the men to take off. They pushed off, craning their necks towards El Kashef, who, led by his strange instinct, had decided to follow the little monk, and had soon caught him. At the portal of his palace Othello shook hands with Aretino.

CHAPTER X

OTHELLO'S *palazzo* looked abandoned. Three of the kitchen maids had already fled, for the Venetians believed that whenever the plague struck the city, the mainland was a safer place. Lucia sat in a corner and wept. Where was her ladyship? Nobody knew. Only Abdul stood at the door and did not leave his master.

"Now she is gone," Othello thought. "Where could she have gone at this very moment when I need her most? To her lover? Perhaps she deceived my father with her tears, as she deceived me."

He was not able to think. The events of the last hour, and the imminent flight, held him in a nervous tension from which he could not free himself. He was exhausted, and all he wanted was rest. He went upstairs and let himself fall on the bed without taking off his uniform or putting aside his arms. He thought of Antonio. Was not this the brother of his own wife? Were they not all related and inter-narried, this faithless, treacherous tribe? Had he not served them to the best of his abilities? A wave of hatred and indignation against these whites welled up in him. As he sat up, he felt the crackling of paper in his pocket. "A letter to her ladyship," the dwarf had said. He rose, and as it was dusk he walked over to the window to read the message. Suddenly he began to tremble from head to foot. Had the plague befallen him? He tugged at his collar, wiped his forehead and eyes, and read the letter for the third time:

"When will you come to me, Lorenzo? . . . in my daydreams my fingers move along your white skin . . . nothing you have given me was sweeter than the touch of your white skin . . . Come, my Theseus . . . Ariadne." Once more he tried to scrutinize the handwriting, but suddenly everything went black before his eyes and he fell to the ground in a swoon.

When he awoke, he saw Desdemona bending over him, with a glass of wine in her hand. The taste of the wine was in his mouth and a moment later he had regained full consciousness. She smiled at him, but her smile froze when she saw the whites of his eyes.

"Othello!"

"Were you with your lover?"

"With whom?"

"Your white Theseus!"

"Which Theseus? Othello!"

He rose from the floor, and seizing her by the throat he dragged her over to the large bed. She offered no resistance and only said softly, "I know you want to kill me—I have always known it."

"Is this your writing? Your paper? Your signature?"

She stared at the green paper and said, "I never wrote this!"

"You arc lying! Here, this proves that you are lying! In your own hand!"

"It looks like my hand! Othello, somebody is trying to deceive you! If you want to kill me, don't—"

. . . She could still see him draw his dagger. It flashed for a second as he struck it through the green letter, and then she felt its point just under her left breast.

Abdul had lifted his front paws on to the bed and was licking the blood. Othello stood at the window and looked out upon the Goddess of Good Fortune. Yes, she had turned her back on him. He was surprised how calm he was, how unhurriedly his thoughts came to him. The white woman had committed adultery. He had revenged his honour. That was as it should be. Now he must get away in Aretino's carriage on to the mainland. There would be no time to take leave of his foster-father. But Lucia! He had to keep Lucia from coming into the room. Quickly he went to the door and barred it. He heard the soft noise his dog made as he lapped up the blood of the adulteress. Was it not Gonzaga who put a ducat on the body of his faithless wife, when he had killed her? To pay for the funeral expenses. No, perhaps it was not a Gonzaga. . . .

But how was it possible that she should have lied to me only last night? White—yes, she wanted the white skin. The senators, too, wanted somebody white. I have studied, I have learned and fought in battle, I have done everything that was expected of me—but I could not become white. Perhaps I shall go to Arabia now and live with the brown Corsairs whom I met in battle. How still it is. The plague, of course, they have all fled. Has Aretino left me? No, Aretino is faithful.

He heard the splash of a gondola below. But more than two feet

were coming up the stairs? The Senate's hangmen? Aretino's voice callecl through the door. Othello opened and saw him, together with a dwarfish monk whose hands were tied behind his back. The letter! In a flash Othello saw the truth. Aretino saw the dog licking his mistress's bipod, and for a moment he was unable to move. As in a dream he walked over to the bed and looked at the motionless form. He felt no indignation, only pity; he seemed to be witnessing a tragedy he had written himself.

A roar made him turn, Othello's voice filled the whole room like the roar of a wild beast. He had the dwarf before him on the floor.

"Did you write this letter?"

The. monk nodded.

"Who made you write it? Who paid you?"

"Binda, the German."

Othello's second dagger flashed through the air. With his foot he pushed the body into a corner. But his vengeance was not appeased.

"Have you caught the Germans?" he asked Aretino.

"We have them."

"Binda must not be stabbed. El Kashef is to strangle him. Where is Antonio?"

"The Palazzo Brabantio is on fire. El Kashef knew that Antonio had stored sugar from Cyprus. When he had gone into the house, El Kashef laid the fire. No one helped, for all have fled from the plague. I saw the blaze as I came here."

Othello sighed with relief, "My father? Can we take him along?"

"He is too sick. Nobody will harm him."

"And the Master?"

"Dying."

"Will you see that the musicians—you know, Lorenzo—will they be safe? And Zafetta. Have you a dagger with you? I don't want to go downstairs to—"

Aretino handed him a dagger. Othello again looked at him; "Will you need this on your flight?"

"No, I have two others."

Othello pulled the weapon from its sheath. "Cordoba! Arab steel." Then he turned to Aretino again. "Hurry, you won't have much more than an hour. Take Abdul with you, and £1 Kashef. £1 Kashef is to go into Arab service."

As the dog heard his name, he came to his master. Othello put his hand on his head for a second, then held it out to his friend.

"Farewell, Pietro. Perhaps you will write my story some day."

For once Aretino, the talkative and witty poet, could not think of anything to say. Silently he shook Othello's hand and left the room, followed by the dog. The door closed behind him.

"If I ever should mistrust you, remind me of the blue pool . . ." Had he not promised to spare her because of this? It was the fifth, my birthday, and she had built a blue pool for me because I had seen my mother's feet in it. As I lay on the ground she came and gave me wine. And when I asked her whether it was her letter, she said that someone was trying to deceive me. Oh, her blue eyes. When she stood next to the Doge's wife at the opera and nodded to her, she looked like a queen. And when we swam together and the dog almost pushed her under, she screamed and then she laughed. And at night when I had gone to sleep resting on her arm, she did not move for fear that she might wake me. At first she always said right and left, but then she learned to say north-north-west and south-south-east. *Evviva la Contessa,* the people cried when she stood with me between the horses of San Marco. When I came to her at night, she always covered herself. Strange, with all her passion, she remained chaste. Sometimes she played with my foot. The left. Always the left. And once she rubbed me with oil, from top to toe, and called me Mercury. How pagan the whites are, much more than the Arabs! Titian asked her what she thought of good fortune, and she said: My fate also has a sail. Oh, she must have felt it. A hundred times she must have foreseen this end. A hundred times she looked at me with a strange, unfathomable look in her blue eyes—the look of a nomad."

He walked over to her, opened her dress, and said in Arabic: "Oh, beauteous body."

But then he saw the letter stuck on the dagger, and ripping it off he threw it on the floor. Pen and paper! He wanted to tell the world that she was innocent. He could not leave the room, and looking round he saw a hat trimmed with feathers on her dressing table. He plucked one feather out, dipped the quill into the half-congealed blood under her breast and wrote in scarlet letters on the lower margin of the forged letter:

"The monk lying in yonder corner deceived me with this letter.

Aretino knows everything. She **is** innocent and **I** am **to** blame. **North**-north-west of Cyprus there is a cliff that is not on the maps. Warning! Giovanni knows all about the Dutch optician who is in Haarlem: if the Dutchman can be caught, he must be forced to give up the secret of the telescope—if necessary by torture, so that we may have it before the other fleets. Galley 36 needs repair. The commander always forgets it. God save the republic!"

He took down the small Madonna that hung over the bed, and laid the picture on Desdemona's heart. Then he removed the little medal with his name in Arabic from his neck and put it beside her—where he used to lie. He tried the point of the dagger with his tongue and drove it into his heart with the precision of one who has often stabbed other men. Stifling the groan that rose to his lips for fear of waking her, he crawled, with his last remaining strength, to the feet of the woman he had killed.

CHAPTER XI

AN hour later three carriages rolled from Mestre towards Vicenza, each one with a different goal, each accompanied by the fear of detection.

Aretino sat silently beside Zafetta, the dog Abdul at their feet. El Kashef sat with the coachman. To-morrow they could reach Mantua and the protection of the Duke. Schuetz and Lorenzo drove in the second carriage. At Lake Garda they planned to turn north to reach Germany, where they intended to practise their art. Alone in the third carriage sat Schurck, the German consul, whom Aretino had released because of his official position. But this man had no intention of facing his employers, for he knew what he could expect from them. He was bound for Switzerland. Binda had been strangled by El Kashef in Aretino's cellar—just an hour ago, when Othello had died by his own hand. Binda's body was to lie there for many days, for Venice was paralysed with fear of the plague.

Later, one hundred and twenty senators assembled to bury the charred remains of Antonio in the family tomb of the Brabantio's, where the old count had cursed his son. Nobody followed the coffins that carried the remains of Othello and Desdemona, and only the remotest corner of the island cemetery was granted them. Padre Domenico had died one day after his son without hearing of the tragedy. No priest had the courage to give the Grand Admiral a Christian burial. The victorious leader of the great fleet was buried without the presence of a single one of his officers, without the flag of the republic. The three painters received letters threatening them with servitude in the galleys if they dared to attend Othello's funeral. Thus all his friends were either dead, in flight, or under threat.

Only one gondola followed the two black coffins. Old Lucia sat in it weeping, representing the people at the obsequies of the Moor they loved.

Soon Italy and the whole world, heard the story of Othello. Only one person never heard of it. Lavinia had kept it a secret from her dying father and told him that his friends had fled to Mantua.

"The Duke will help them," the Master said in his breaking voice. "Write to Othello that he should take service with the Spaniards, and take his wife to Cuba, where the finest trees and fruits grow. Aretino is to ask the Duke of Mantua for two thousand *scudi* he owes me for the 'Madonna with the Lily.' But see that you get them from Aretino! My nephews, those scoundrels from Cadore, will not get a penny froom me. It is all yours. And sell my last pictures to King Philip in Madrid."

He seemed exhausted. Lavinia knelt at his bed and prayed. But he turned once more towards his daughter and said:

"The left cheek, call Palma—and tell him to make the left cheek a little whiter on Lorenzo's portrait—the left cheek whiter—"

THE END

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