Baroness Orczy

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Book One
The Prelude To The Adventure

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Chapter 1

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In the closing years of the last century there arose in the wooded highlands of Brazil a prophet whose name was Antonio Maciel. Of mixed Portuguese and Indian blood, this Maciel had been a store-keeper in his father's business, had totted up accounts of black beans, tobacco and coffee, and had made entries for so many milreis in his ledger. Had it not been for matrimonial troubles Antonio would probably have ended his days peaceably and monotonously in the small provincial town of Quisceramobim, with no excitement to disturb the even tenor of his ways, save an occasional cock-fight on a Sunday, or a mock combat in the market-place.

Unfortunately, in the backwoods of Brazil, as everywhere else, love has its comedies and its tragedies; and even in the Sertao, surely the most desolate, the most isolated, the most abandoned corner of God's earth, the same dramas of love, jealousy and hate are enacted as in the stately homes of England, or the boudoirs of Paris. It is only the *mise-en-scène* that is different. Antonio Maciel had the misfortune to marry a woman of no morality and an ungovernable temper, who indirectly became the cause of the most sanguinary religious conflict of modern times. Her intrigue with a police official of Bahia, a friend of her husband's, became the turning-point in the career of the peaceable store-keeper. It roused the hot Portuguese blood in his veins. He came of a stock that had always held human life very cheap—especially that of an enemy—and coming upon the

treacherous police official at a moment when his embittered soul was thirsting for revenge, he fell upon the betrayer of his honour with holy fury, and though he did not succeed in killing him, he inflicted grave bodily injury upon the traitor.

For this he was imprisoned, and from prison he escaped. Whither? No one knew. For ten years he disappeared and was duly forgotten. But ten years later he reappeared, no longer however as a simple-minded, hard-working storekeeper, but as a visionary and a prophet, preaching the Word of God, the Second Advent of the Lord, the Antichrist and the coming Day of Judgment.

Now the *vaqueiros* of the Sertao, cattle-raisers most of them, primitive, illiterate and wild, have a strong vein of mysticism and superstitious religious fervour in their veins. Catholics nominally, but in reality professing what amounts to the simplest form of theism, they know nothing and care less for the hierarchy of their Church. They are intensely devout, and religion plays a very important part in their lives; but as far as sacerdotalism is concerned, all they trouble about is the one curé of their district, who will absolve them of their sins, baptize them, marry and bury them; of Pope, hierarchy, and articles of faith they have only vaguely heard. Side by side, however, with their outward acceptance of the curé's teachings, they keep up all the old beliefs of their mixed ancestry—the power of the snake-charmers, the Gri-gri men and devil-dancers from Africa, some Moorish practices, and Indian fetishes and totems, any superstition in fact that appeals to their imagination and to their mystic tendencies.

Suddenly then, in the midst of these primitive men, there appeared—coming God knows whence—this tall, emaciated, unkempt creature, clad in a loose robe, with prematurely grey hair and beard fluttering around his parchment-coloured face, loudly proclaiming the imminent destruction of the world by the sword of the Antichrist, and the coming of the Kingdom of God, to which only the elect would presently be called. The appeal was immediate. Men flocked around the prophet like flies around a honeypot. Casting aside their lassoes and their goads, they followed him in their hundreds and their thousands with their wives and their children; they looked upon him as a new John the Baptist, of whom they had only vaguely heard, but who, they believed, must have looked just like this prophet with the flashing eyes and the tall pastoral staff. They followed him; they obeyed him; they echoed his prophecies that the world was now coming to an end, and that therefore, deeds—whatever they were, good or evil—no longer mattered; only prayer mattered, incessant prayer and abstinence which would help to open the portals of the Kingdom of God to His elect.

Led by the erstwhile store-keeper, whom they now called Antonio Conselheiro—Antonio the Counsellor—they trekked as far as the shores of the Vasa Barris River; here they settled, and on a height overlooking the valley they started building an immense church, with their own homes and huts clustering on the surrounding slopes. They did no manner of harm to anyone, beyond consigning in their minds to everlasting damnation all those who did not hold the same

beliefs as themselves. They spent their time in chanting hymns, listening to the prophet and building their church.

Why the Brazilian Government should have looked upon them as rebels and revolutionaries, why it should have decreed the death of the prophet and the destruction of his followers, it is impossible to say. Antonio Conselheiro was a religious fanatic, as misguided as you like, probably with mind unhinged, but he was not out to make political trouble. He firmly believed that the world was shortly coming to an end, and that therefore it mattered not what men did, so long as they ‘kept in communion with God.’ This meant fasting and praying and chanting hymns. There was no occasion to give alms to the poor, to love your neighbour as yourself, to be faithful to your wife and provide for your children, because there was really no time to bother about such things. The world was coming to an end, and naturally the Almighty was only going to trouble about people who were in constant communication with Him—who never, as it were, allowed Him to forget them.

Well! there might have been a good deal of harm in such a theory if preached in London, say, or New York, or Monte Carlo, but out there, where never foot of stranger treads, where never a word from the outside penetrates, where men live on horseback and have no thought of other occupations save cattle-rearing, what in the world did it matter what further superstitions made happier the lives of a few thousand ignorant vaqueiros? It must have been obvious to any sane official that these men knew nothing about politics, that the words ‘Republic’ and ‘Empire’ had no meaning whatever for them, and that ‘Dom Pedro’ or

‘President X.Y.Z.’ were all the same in their sight. But, of course, when the Government sent a military expedition against them, with Krupp guns and other engines of war, they fought stubbornly, violently, cruelly. Some of their deeds rivalled the worst atrocities committed during the religious wars in mediæval times, but had they been left alone they would not have interfered with anyone; they would have remained content to chant their hymns and to build their church, a law unto themselves perhaps, but as they were so far away from anywhere and had little, if any, intercourse with the rest of the world, the State could not possibly have suffered at their hands.

No fewer than four military expeditions—each one of vastly-increased strength—were sent out against these so-called rebels before they were finally subdued ... annihilated would be the more correct word ... and even then they were not subdued by force of arms, but by hunger and disease. They fought relentlessly to the last, giving no quarter, asking for none. Their women, wrapped in their blankets, starved to death with Indian stoicism. Their leaders were killed to a man. At last the prophet himself succumbed. He was found one morning, at early dawn, within the crumbling walls of the half-finished church, lying on the floor face downwards, a crucifix gripped tightly in his hand.

To the last they chanted their hymns; and when the last of the walls of the church fell crashing over the prostrate body of their prophet, when their homes were nothing but a handful of smouldering ashes, the soldiers of the Government encamped upon the heights could still hear through the stillness of the night a murmur rising from the

valley below—long, mournful cadences that rose and fell like the soughing of the wind through the scrub. It was the song of the dying warriors, still trusting in their God, still waiting to enter into His Kingdom, and content in the belief that those who had brought them down were speeding to eternal damnation.

The author is indebted to R. Cunninghame Graham's *A Brazilian Mystic* for all the facts relating to the life and death of Antonio Conselheiro.

Chapter 2

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All this occurred little more than fifty years ago. Nothing for years was heard of the little band of fanatics who had given the Republican Government so much trouble at the time; only a very few of them could have survived the final suppression of that so-called rebellion, and they presumably went back to their hard life and their peaceful avocation of cattle-rearing.

But, strangely enough, some twenty-five years later, a new turbulent element had sprung up in the Sertao. It seemed all of a sudden as if the strange events of the late ‘nineties were being repeated, though in a different form. Again there arose a mystic leader with power to gather round him a band of enthusiastic and devoted followers recruited from among the half-civilized dwellers of these rocky fastnesses. Unlike Antonio Conselheiro, however, this new prophet—or whatever one chooses to call him—was not a religious enthusiast. He preached neither the coming of the Kingdom of God nor the end of the World and the Advent of Christ. In fact, he did not preach anything at all. He left this part of the business to his enthusiastic lieutenants. Nor was his life as ascetic or his aims as disinterested as those of the great Antonio. Who he was, or whence he came, no one knew. Everything was mere conjecture. But those of his followers whom the exigencies of business or labour brought into contact with the outside world spoke with bated breath of the man whom they called the Great Unknown.

Vaqueiros, farmers, herdsmen, as well as outcasts of every sort, Negroes, Indians, half-breeds, and a few gaol-birds, made up the sum total of the followers of this new prophet. The illiterate, uneducated, primitive, declared that he was Antonio Conselheiro come to life again: whilst those who were more enlightened, those who occasionally consorted with their fellow-men and who came from time to time to Bonfim or Joazeiro to sell their cattle or their hides, averred that the Great Unknown was the grandson of Dom Pedro II, the last Emperor of Brazil, come to claim the throne of his forebears. How they worked that out nobody could quite make out: certain it is that a political atmosphere as well as a religious one hung over this new version of an old story. The Sertao appeared now like a second Vendée where men loyal to the old dynasty rallied round the person of their dispossessed sovereign and were apparently prepared to fight and die in his cause. The fact that the grandsons of the late Emperor over in France cared nothing about these fanatical upholders of their cause, nor for the throne of Brazil for that matter, would not have obtained credence in the Sertao for one moment. Nor did these new Vendéans worry their heads as to the exact genealogy of the man they had decided to champion. They stood for a principle and a dynasty, not for an individual, and they believed in the Great Unknown. Heroes like Lescure and La Rochejaquelin were to find their counterpart in men like Gamalleria and Ouvidor, the fierce and fearsome lieutenants of the Great Unknown.

At first nothing very serious happened to throw disquiet into the minds of the Government up at Rio. The only fact

that could be called disquieting was that the number of recruits to the banner of the mysterious leader was growing with amazing rapidity. The two men, Gamalleria and Ouvidor, well known to the police as lawless marauders, escaped gaol-birds in fact, were daily pushing their way to outlying villages, farms, and even small towns, loudly heralding the Second Advent of the Lord and the last Day of Judgment, whilst proclaiming the Great Unknown as the prophet Antonio Conselheiro resurrected from the dead or, alternatively, as Dom Pedro III of Bragança, rightful Emperor of Brazil.

It was a clever way of rousing superstitious enthusiasm and allying it with supposed loyalty to the dispossessed dynasty. The more ignorant crowd took up with fervour the idea of the mysterious leader being the resurrected prophet, whilst to the more educated amongst them the thought of overthrowing the present Government, which insisted on levying and collecting taxes, made a strong appeal.

And, generally speaking, the personality of the Great Unknown made an appeal stronger still to the mystically inclined minds of the Sertanejos. His band soon rose to a horde. He collected them about him and presently established his headquarters at Canudos, the spot where Antonio Conselheiro had built his mammoth church. Here he built himself a dwelling-house, using for the purpose the very stones which for over twenty years had stood, a crumbling mass, as a mausoleum over the body of the sacred Counsellor; and here he had dwelt for the past four or five years in barbaric splendour, with half a hundred women to serve him and half a thousand men to scour the

country round, robbing, looting, stealing from peaceable farmers and town dwellers the food which he needed for his table and the luxuries which he required for his house.

His face was never seen save by an intimate few—a dozen lieutenants, his body-guard—wild, marauding outlaws and escaped convicts with tempers more fierce than the rest, voices more authoritative and powers to compel obedience through ruthlessness and cruelty. They alone were privileged to see the face of the Great Unknown who, when he walked abroad, kept his head wrapped in a veil. He wore a long flowing robe which reached to his ankles; his feet were encased in sandals; his hand was often stretched out for greeting or benediction. Half a dozen Negroes walked before him to beat down the scrub and thorns in his path.

Within the past year or two bitter complaints had reached Bahia of numberless depredations carried on with savage impudence on outlying farms and cattle ranches, of hold-ups—not only on the roads, but even on the railway north of Queimadas—of petty larceny and highway robbery. The police of the province, not being numerous, were powerless, and Bahia sent the complaints up to Rio. The Government, after saying ‘Damn!’ once or twice through the mouth of its officials, found itself compelled to give the matter more or less serious consideration.

‘We must do something about it, I suppose,’ one important gentleman said between two yawns.

‘Must we?’ said another.

It was very, very hot—even in Rio. Great Lord! what must it be like in that God-forsaken hole, the Sertao? And on the

road between the railhead and Canudos, where there is not a single tree to afford shade to panting mule or man, where every drop of water has to be carried for miles and invariably falls short of the needs of the moment, where ... but what is the good of talking about it all when it is so hot?

‘Must we?’

‘Really! Must we?’

Which is just what English Government officials would say in similar circumstances. Some there were here who had grown hoary in the service of their country and who remembered the many ill-fated expeditions that were sent out in the far-back ’nineties against Antonio Conselheiro.

‘We must not underestimate,’ they said, ‘the strength of these fellows. They are tough. They know every inch of their God-forsaken country, and they have stolen enough arms to equip three regiments. Do not let us repeat,’ they said, ‘the mistakes of the past.’

They swore that they would not—but they did.

They sent a couple of hundred men who, after indescribable sufferings, parched with thirst, half-dead with fatigue, their skin ravaged by insects, their clothing torn to shreds in the scrub, finally reached one of the outlying townships some forty kilometres from Canudos, in a condition that left them quite unfit to meet even the most despicable enemy, let alone a lot of wild men from the bush, well equipped with stolen rifles and other weapons, inured to every kind of hardship, burning with enthusiasm, and to whom a kind of guerrilla warfare was as easy as drawing breath.

Disaster, complete and hopeless, overtook the first expedition. Disaster, even more complete and even more hopeless, overtook the second—one composed this time of five hundred men under the command of a colonel of Teuton descent, who was believed to be a genius in military tactics.

The Great Unknown and his followers were unconquered still, and the two victories had enhanced their prestige and fanned their impudence.

‘They are invincible,’ said the ignorant and the superstitious; and while the Government busied itself in a desultory way with organizing yet another expedition against the brigands, recruits to the banner of the mysterious leader came in in shoals. The Sertao had become a La Vendée in very truth, and an unconquered one at that. And as, previously, Antonio Conselheiro had preached the Second Advent of Christ, the Kingdom of God, and the destruction of the World, so now the followers of the Great Unknown prophesied the return of Dom Pedro III to the throne of his forebears, the fall of the Republic, and the re-establishment of the Empire of Brazil.

It was time the Government up at Rio got a serious move on, or some of these prophecies might be coming true.

There was a talk of sending out Colonel Perraz with two thousand men. Two thousand well-armed, well-trained, disciplined Government troops against a handful of uneducated, semi-savage cattle-raisers! It had to be done, of course, but in secrecy—or the rest of the world would laugh.

No laughing matter, this Great Unknown and his fanatical hordes!

Book Two
The Odyssey

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Chapter 3

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Timothy O'Clerigh, known to all his pals and his messmates as Tim O'Clee, stood by the open window polishing his boots, and he sang—sang in a full-throated baritone, gloriously out of tune—a song of the old country:

I know not, I ask not
If guilt's in thy heart...
Tum, tum, tiddlee tum tum...

Then a long pause while the note, a full half-tone flat, rose in an ascending *vibrato*:

Whatever thou art...

And this last phrase he gave forth so lustily that the full-throated baritone seemed like a detonation out of a gun which went echoing and reverberating across the port and the bay from horn to horn, and away over the purple sea.

'Listen to him!' the little barefooted urchins said down below; and they looked up, gaping and wide-eyed, at the open window where a massive torso appeared above the sill, white and glistening from recent ablutions, with two powerful arms, one hand wielding a brush, the other buried inside a boot that had obviously seen many a better day.

Come rest in this boo-zum my own stricken deer....

'The Englishman,' was the dry comment made by a dark-skinned shock-headed youth who until this moment had been the centre of admiration of the crowd of street urchins. 'They are so white—pah! ... always washing themselves ... and they are mad.'

Leaning against the railings, he was busy with a pocket-knife scooping out the inside of a luscious pomegranate, which he then transferred to his mouth. His star performance consisted in spitting out the many pips, some to an incredible distance, by an indrawing and outpouring of the breath: a skill which could obviously only be attained by the elect, and then only after considerable practice.

‘Measure that one,’ he commanded. ‘No, not that one ... the last.’

And obediently one of the young scamps grovelled on the road and with a long stick carefully measured out the distance that lay between the toe of the star performer and the last expectorated pip.

‘Three and a half!’ he gasped, awestruck with the magnitude of the feat.

‘I have done five,’ the star said negligently, and prepared for a repetition of the unheard-of feat.

But somehow the attention of the public had wandered. That mad, shiny, white fellow up there, whose voice rose above the rattle and the squeaking of the tramcar up the street, and who took the trouble on this hot afternoon to do something to his boots with a brush, was a greater, because a more novel attraction.

And now he put down boot and brush, and disappeared within the room, whence repeated sounds of splashing water and indeterminate snatches of song further roused the contempt of the local idol.

‘They must be dirty,’ he said, ‘or they would not wash so often. I don’t like those English.’

One of the urchins, a knowing-looking little chap with small round eyes like a ferret and a sharp uptilted nose, ventured on contradiction.

‘He is not English,’ he said.

‘Not English. I tell you…’

‘Fra Martino says he is Irish.’

‘Irish? What’s that?’

And this time, to mark contempt still more complete and more withering, the star performer expectorated lustily. The next moment a basinful of soapy water drenched his tousled head and soaked through his dun-coloured shirt.

‘I’ll have you know, my young friend,’ came, with a stentorian laugh, from up above in somewhat halting Portuguese, ‘that an Irishman—a real, fine, none-o’-your-mongrel Irishman—is the most magnificent product of God’s creation; and if you don’t believe me, you just come up here and we’ll have an argument about it, which will leave you with eyes so black that your own mother won’t know you.’

Timothy O’Clerigh, with the empty basin in his hands, his face and body glistening with moisture, his brown hair an unruly shock above his laughing face, waited at the window for a moment or two, not really in order to see whether his challenge would be accepted—for he knew it would not—but because he liked to watch the keen, fox-like faces of those little urchins grinning, yet hardly daring to grin, at the discomfiture of their idol.

‘So much for the loyalty of the public,’ he murmured to himself, put the basin down again and proceeded with his toilet.

Chapter 4

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The very first event in the thirty-two years of Timothy O'Clerigh's life that left a lasting impression on him—in more ways than one—was when at the age of three he chanced to toddle as far as the stable yard, unattended by his nurse, and caught Pat Mulvaney in the act of thrashing Sheilagh, the lovely Samoyed, who was one of Tim's most adored playmates. Pat had fastened a rope to Sheilagh's collar and tied this to a big hook in the wall, and he was lamming into her with a big stick. And, oh, horrors!—there was a dead chicken tied to Sheilagh's collar and another to her tail—at least Tim supposed that these chickens were dead.

Sheilagh was making no sound as blow upon blow rained upon her poor back, but the look in her eyes crouching there, with those dead chickens tied to her, was more than Tim could stand. He was very, very small and he was only three, whilst Pat was old—at least twenty—and very, very big, but Tim's blood boiled at the sight. For the first second or two he had stood as if transfixed with horror, then head down he charged into Pat's legs. Now Pat had neither seen nor heard him; he was not prepared for the assault, being intent upon punishing Sheilagh. Anyway, he lost his balance, tripped and fell on the cobblestones of the yard, and of course Tim fell on the top of him.

What happened after that was in Tim's recollection rather more vague—he was picked up by his nurse and carried, dumb and terrified, into the house. His misdeed was duly

reported to Uncle Justin, who gave him a severe thrashing, and he was put to bed and deprived of his rice pudding. The next day Uncle Justin explained to him that Sheilagh had well deserved her punishment, because she had dug her way into the chicken-run when nobody was about, and had deliberately killed thirty-six young pullets; and this was a misdeed which had to be punished in a stern and exemplary way, lest it should occur again. On the other hand, Pat Mulvaney, the stud-groom, who had only done his duty in this painful matter, was now very, very ill, in consequence of Tim's assault upon him, and as soon as he was a little better Tim would have to go and see him and apologize to him for what he had done. Several days went by, and both Sheilagh and Tim had completely recovered from the effects of the chastisement which they had respectively endured, for they were having a glorious romp with a ball on the lawn, when Uncle Justin came and fetched Tim away and took him to a place in which there was a bed, and in this bed there was Pat Mulvaney, who had something white tied round the top of his head, and whose cheeks and nose were no longer of that nice, bright red colour with which Tim had been familiar —in fact they were almost as white as the pillow and sheet on the bed.

'Here, Mulvaney,' Uncle Justin said in his big, big voice, 'I have brought Master Tim to see you. He wishes to tell you how sorry he is for what he did the other day. He acted like a thoughtless little boy and had no idea that he would hurt you—' or words to that effect. Tim didn't cry, though he was very sorry indeed, for he liked Pat very much, almost as

much as Sheilagh. He shook hands with Pat, and was very glad when Uncle Justin took him home again.

Uncle Justin was never lenient to Tim's misdeeds, certainly not to those which, as he said, were unbecoming to an Irish gentleman; so faults were never condoned, and punishments as Tim grew older were apt to be severe. But Tim nevertheless adored Uncle Justin. A very little time after the painful incident of Sheilagh and Pat, Uncle Justin bought a little tubby white horse and gave it to Tim for his fourth birthday, and it was Pat and Uncle Justin who taught Tim to ride—it was on his fifth birthday that he was first allowed to ride to hounds on his pony without her being on the lead, and on his ninth that he first rode a real Irish hunter.

'Elbows closer, Tim, look at your feet—damn it, boy, you look like a blasted dago on that horse.'

And Tim would grip the saddle with his little thighs, and square his young shoulders, trying to look as magnificent on a horse as Uncle Justin himself; and if at the end of a hard day's hunting Uncle Justin would say to him: 'You took that fence well, Tim, my boy!' or 'I liked the way you picked yourself up after that fall,' Tim's little heart would swell with pride and determination to do better still.

For twenty-six years Tim had adored Uncle Justin. Born a posthumous child, his mother, too, had died before he ever knew he had one. But Uncle Justin had been for him father, mother, brother, friend—in childhood, in school days, during those terrible years of the war. When Tim lay wounded, almost dying in hospital in France, it was Uncle Justin who watched at his bedside more devotedly than any mother could have done, who cared for him when he was

convalescent, who lavished all that money and thought could provide to hasten his complete recovery to health.

Uncle Justin was for Tim the embodiment of everything that a gentleman should be—generous to a fault, and if quick-tempered, always just and kind; a magnificent horseman, a hard rider; a splendid all-round sportsman; a great admirer of the fair sex; fond of his glass and of good cheer. And of all the places in the wide, wide world, there was none in Tim's eyes to equal Castle Traskmoore, the stately Irish home on the hills above the lake, with the age-old elms and oaks mounting guard over the majestic grey pile, the crenellated towers and ivy-covered battlements that had seen the whole history of the country unfolded beneath their walls.

'It will all be yours some day, my lad,' Uncle Justin would say, with that cheery laugh of his which masked a deep emotion, whenever Tim 'enthused' more than ordinarily over the beauties of Traskmoore.

'I love it because you are here, Uncle,' Tim replied. After which nothing more was said, because these two understood one another as no other friends in the world had ever done.

Tim had sent in his papers after the Armistice, and since then had become his Uncle's right-hand man on the estate, in the stables, the stud-farm, the kennels. A busy life and a cloudless one. And then there were the equally happy, if somewhat more hectic days in London. Lord Traskmoore had a fine house in Grosvenor Square and he always went up to town for the season; this meant Epsom and Newmarket, Ascot and Goodwood; it meant Lord's and Henley. Tim joined

him when he could, spent a few joyous days in London with Uncle Justin, and returned to Traskmoore to carry on the work on the estate.

But Tim had one great weakness, one grave disappointment in life; he was under the impression that he had a fine voice, and that, given good tuition, he would become a great singer—not a professional singer of course, but one who could give his friends an infinity of pleasure. The trouble was that he had no ear, and not one true note came out of his lusty throat. A great teacher of singing in London, consulted on the subject, declared that nothing could be done for Major O'Clerigh. An ear for tune was a gift of God which had been denied him.

Tim was offended with the great musician, called him 'a blighter,' took a few lessons from a more accommodating personage and continued to delight Uncle Justin—who had no more ear than he had—by singing Irish ballads to him gloriously out of tune, to the accompaniment of the gramophone.

Chapter 5

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It had indeed been a happy life for Tim O'Clee until that spring of 1924, when the crash came. It was a catastrophe such as Tim, even in the wildest possible nightmare, could never have conceived.

He ran up to town at the end of May, hoping to spend a month with Uncle Justin in Grosvenor Square for the Derby, Ascot, and so on. The very first day had not yet gone by before he realized that an extraordinary change had come over the old man. Something of his cheeriness had gone; he seemed at times strangely absent-minded and, when called to himself, equally strangely embarrassed. With Tim he appeared constrained, with occasional outbursts of devil-may-care joviality which were obviously forced. Tim, vaguely disturbed by what he felt was a presage of evil, groped in vain at first for the key to the mystery; but friends soon put him in possession of it. A man always has enough friends to do that job for him. Hadn't he heard? Didn't he know? Why, it was the talk of the town!

'Great God! What?' Tim exclaimed.

'Hold-Hands Juliana! A positive infatuation, my dear fellow! Didn't you know?'

If Tim had been told that the heavens had fallen into the middle of Hyde Park, he could not have been more dumb-founded than he was at this moment. Hold-Hands Juliana! Heavens above! And it was the talk of the town that old Traskmoore was infatuated with her! Oh! Tim knew the woman well enough. A Roumanian (or something of the

sort) by birth, she was the widow of that eccentric fellow Dudley Stone, who before the war had been a good deal in the public eye through a series of wild and foolhardy adventures in which he had embarked at different times. He had flown from London to Vladivostok, had spent three months in Tibet disguised as a wandering fakir; at one time he fitted out an Antarctic expedition, at another he commanded a division of Bulgarian *comitadjis* during the Balkan War. It was said that he had seen the inside of eighteen different foreign prisons, including one in Siberia, all on a charge of spying. His great idea was the search for hidden treasure: he fitted out various expeditions for that purpose and went off to find the buried treasures of the Armada, of Captain Kidd, of the cities of Arabia. The ambition of his life was to find one day the land of El Dorado in the wastes of Brazil, where lay hidden the priceless treasures of the Incas of Peru.

Of Dudley Stone himself the public had heard quite a good deal in those pre-war days, but of his wife—nothing. She was not Hold-Hands Juliana then, and but few people had ever seen the pale-faced, wide-eyed young girl whom that ‘lunatic, Stone,’ had married somewhere out in the Balkans. He was in Bulgaria when the war broke out, and after that there were some very ugly stories current about him in connection with the rout of the Serbian army, due, it was said, to the machinations of an English spy. Be that as it may, Stone was never again seen in England. What became of him nobody knew and certainly nobody cared.

And then one fine day Hold-Hands Juliana appeared upon the scene—no longer pale, no longer thin—with pearls round

her neck and diamonds in her ears. She gave it out that her husband had gone out to Brazil after the Armistice to find the treasure of the Incas. He had succeeded apparently, though Juliana didn't actually say so, but she threw money about with a lavish hand in London, Deauville or Monte Carlo. Hardly a day had gone by during the last season or two without some mention of her in the Society columns of the *Continental Herald*. Tim had often heard her referred to by men of a certain set as 'Hold-Hands Juliana.' She was no longer young: she was coarse, and loud and common. She had huge, goggled dark eyes, strongly-marked eyebrows and long, curved black lashes. Her mouth was very full and her teeth very white, like a row of marble tombstones. Her hair was black and glossy; she wore it parted very much on one side with a big, unnatural-looking wave falling over her left eye. Her dresses always looked too short, and her corsets too tight. Her fingers, short and thick, were smothered in rings. When Timothy first met her—somewhere or other in London—she had appeared to him like the true presentment of a cinema vamp.

Oh, yes! Tim knew all about her. But that Uncle Justin should—

The old man had met her, apparently, somewhere this season—it didn't much matter where—and, according to Club gossip, had at once fallen a victim to her wiles in the way that old men do when a clever adventuress sets a trap for them. Unfortunately, there was no doubt about it. Club gossip had not even exaggerated. With a sinking of the heart, which at times made him almost physically sick, Tim stood by and watched the growth of this fateful senile

passion. He could note its every phase, whilst he himself was powerless in face of the coming catastrophe, which he would have given the best years of his life to avert.

It came even sooner than he expected. By the end of June, Hold-Hands Juliana gave it out that her husband had died of malarial fever at Monsataz in Brazil, the small seaport town south of Pernambuco from whence he had been on the point of starting for the land of El Dorado, where lay buried the most marvellous treasures of the earth. She was seen shopping in Bond Street clad in deepest mourning. Later on, the Society columns of the daily Press announced that Mrs. Stone would sail from Cherbourg on the French steamer *Duguay-Trouin* for Pernambuco, and would not be back in London before the autumn. Tim was at Traskmoore when he read of these various social events in the London papers; his hopes rose at a bound. Absence, he argued with himself, might work wonders with Uncle Justin's infatuation for that blatant adventuress. Pity, he thought, that the hunting season was not yet on, but there was the fishing—Uncle Justin might try Norway this year—and the 12th was not so very far off now.

Tim went to bed that evening happier than he had been for weeks. He had already made up his mind to go up to London at once. But the next morning he had a letter from Uncle Justin telling him that his beloved friend Juliana, the widow of Dudley Stone, had made him the happiest of men by promising to become his wife as soon as the period of mourning was over and she could return to England from her pilgrimage to the grave of her late husband.