

# F. HUMÉ



*A Son of  
Perdition*  
An occult romance

# **A Son of Perdition**

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# **A Son of Perdition**

**Fergus Hume**

# CHAPTER I



## LOVE IN IDLENESS

"How can any one hope to transfer that to canvas?" asked the artist, surveying the many-coloured earth and sky and sea with despairing eyes.

"Easily enough," replied the girl at his elbow, "those who see twice as vividly as others, can make others see once as vividly as they do. That is what we call genius."

"A large word for my small capabilities, Miss Enistor. Am I a genius?"

"Ask yourself, Mr. Hardwick, for none other than yourself can answer truly."

Outside his special gift the artist was not over clever, so he lounged on the yielding turf of the slope to turn the speech over in his mind and wait results. This tall solidly built Saxon only arrived at conclusions by slow degrees of laborious reflection. With his straight athletic figure, closely clipped fair hair and a bronzed complexion, against which his moustache looked almost white, he resembled a soldier rather than a painter. Yet a painter he was of some trifling fame, but being only moderately creative, he strove to supply what was wanting by toilsome work. He had not so much the steady fire of genius as the crackling combustion of talent. Thus the grim Cornish country and

the far-stretching Atlantic waters, so magically beautiful under an opalescent sunset, baffled him for the moment. "I have the beginnings of genius," he finally decided, "that is, I can see for myself, but I cannot pass the vision on to others by production."

"Half a loaf is better than none," said Miss Enistor soothingly.

"I am not so sure that your proverb is true, so I reply with another. If indeed appetite comes with eating, as the French say, it is useless to invite it with half a loaf, when, for complete satisfaction, one requires the whole."

"There is something in that," admitted the girl, smiling, "but try and secure your desired whole loaf by sitting mousey-quiet and letting what is before you sink into your innermost being. Then you may create."

Crossing his legs and gripping his ankles, Hardwick, seated in the approved attitude of a fakir, did his best to adopt this advice, although he might well despair of fixing on canvas the fleeting vision of that enchanted hour. From the cromlech, near which the couple were stationed, a purple carpet of heather rolled down to a winding road, white and dusty and broad. On the hither side of the loosely built wall which skirted this, stretched many smooth green fields, divided and subdivided by boundaries of piled stones, feathery with ferns and coarse grasses. Beyond the confines of this ordered world, a chaos of bracken and ling, of small shrubs and stunted trees, together with giant masses of silvery granite, islanded amidst a sea of gold-besprinkled gorse, tumbled pell-mell to the jagged edge of the cliffs. Finally, the bluish plain of ocean glittered spaciously to the far sharp horizon-line. Thence rose billowy clouds of glorious hues threaded with the fires of the sinking sun, heaping themselves in rainbow tints higher and higher towards the radiant azure of the zenith. No ship was on the water, no animals moved on the land, and even the grey huddle of houses, to which the smooth level road

led, appeared to be without inhabitants. For all that could be seen of sentient life, the two on the hilltop were alone in this world of changeful beauty: the Adam and Eve of a new creation.

"Yet," murmured the girl, to whom this stillness suggested thoughts, "around us are nature-spirits, invisible and busy, both watchful and indifferent. Oh, Mr. Hardwick, how I should love to see the trolls, the pixies, the gnomes and the nixies."

"Rhyme, if not reason," laughed the artist lazily, "one must have the eye of faith to see such impossible things."

"Impossible?" Miss Enistor shrugged her shoulders and declined to combat his scepticism beyond the query of the one word. As that did not invite conversation, Hardwick gave himself up to the mere contentment of looking at her. Amidst the warm splendours of the hour, she somehow conveyed to him the sensation of a grey and pensive autumn day, haunting, yet elusive in its misty beauty. He was wholly unable to put this feeling into words, but he conceived it dimly as a subtle blurring of the picture she had bidden him create. His love for her was like a veil before his conception, and until that veil was removed by his surrender of the passion, the execution of the landscape on canvas was impossible. Yet so sweet was this drawback to his working powers that he could not wish it away.

Yet it was strange that the girl should be attractive to a man of his limitations, since her alluring qualities were not aggressively apparent. A delicate oval face, exquisitely moulded, with a transparent colourless skin, and mystical eyes of larkspur blue, were scarcely what his blunt perceptions approved of as absolute beauty. Slim and dainty and fragile in shape and stature, her unusual looks suggested a cloistered nun given to visions or some peaked elfin creature of moonlight and mist. She might have been akin to the fairies she spoke about, and even in the strong daylight she was a creature of dreams ethereal and

evanescent. Hardwick was much too phlegmatic a man to analyse shadows. A Celt would have comprehended the hidden charm which drew him on; the Saxon could only wonder what there was in the girl to impress him.

"You are not my ideal of beauty, you know, Miss Enistor," he said in such a puzzled way as to rob the speech of premeditated rudeness; "yet there is something about you which makes me adore you!"

The girl flushed and shrugged her shoulders again. "What a flamboyant word is 'adored'!"

"It is the only word I can use," said Hardwick stoutly. "The Venus of Milo, Brynhild in the Volsung poem, Jael who slew Sisera, Rubens' robust nymphs: these were the types which appealed to me—until I met you."

"How complimentary to my small commonplace looks! What caused you to change your mind, Mr. Hardwick?"

"Something you possess, which is not apparent."

"You talk in riddles. What attracts any one must be apparent."

"Well, that is uncertain. I am not a deep thinker, you know. But there is such a thing as glamour."

"There is. But you are not the man to comprehend the meaning of the word."

"I admit that: all the same I feel its influence—in you!"

"I don't know what you mean," said the girl indifferently.

"Nor do I. Yet the feeling is here," and he touched his heart.

"If I could only shape that feeling into words,"—he hesitated and blushed.

"Well?"

"I might be able to tell you much—Alice."

"Why do you use my Christian name?"

"Why not? We are man and woman on a hillside, and not over-civilised beings in a drawing-room. You are Alice: I am Julian. It is quite simple."

"But too intimate," she objected, "you have known me only six months."

"Do you reckon knowledge by Time?"

"You have no knowledge: you confessed as much lately."

Hardwick looked at her earnestly. "I have this much, that I know how deeply I love you, my dear!" and he took her hand gently between his palms.

Alice let it lie there undisturbed, but did not return his pressure. For a few moments she looked straightly at the sunset. "I am sorry to hear you say that," was her calm remark when she did decide to speak.

"Why?"

"Because I can never love you!"

"Love can create love," urged Julian, again pressing her hand and again receiving no answering caress.

"Not between you and me. You may be fire, but I am not tow to catch alight." The flush had disappeared from her face, leaving it pure and white and calm to such a degree that the man dropped her hand. It was like holding a piece of ice, and he felt chilled by the aloofness of touch and look.

"But you are a woman," he said roughly in his vexation, "you must know what love means."

"I don't: really I don't." Alice hugged her knees and stared with the sublime quietness of an Egyptian statue at his perturbed countenance. As he did not answer, she continued to speak in a deliberate way, which showed that his proposal had not touched her heart in the least. "My mother died when I was born, and I had Dame Trevel in the village yonder as my foster-mother until I was ten years of age. Then my father sent me to a Hampstead boarding school for eleven years. I returned only twelve months ago to live at Tremore"—she nodded towards a long low grey house, which basked on a neighbouring hilltop like a sullen reptile in the sunshine.

"But your father——?"

"My father," interrupted the girl in a melancholy tone, "has no love for any one but himself. At times I think he hates me for causing the death of my mother by being born."



"Surely not."

"Well, you have seen my father. I leave you to judge."

Hardwick was puzzled how to reply. "He is not a man who shows his feelings, you know," he said delicately.

"I don't think he has any feelings to show," replied Alice indifferently. "I am used to his neglect, and so have schooled myself to be quietly agreeable without expecting any demonstrations of affection."

Hardwick nodded. "I have noticed, when dining at Tremore, that you are more like well-bred acquaintances than father and daughter. Perhaps," he added in a dreamy tone, "that is what first made me fall in love with you."

"I see," said Miss Enistor ironically, "you have come across the line of Shakespeare which says that pity is akin to love."

"I have never read Shakespeare's plays," admitted Mr. Hardwick simply. "I'm not a clever chap, you know. But you looked so forlorn in that dismal house, and seemed so starving for kind words and actions, that I wanted to take you away with me and make you happier. Yes," the artist quite brightened at his own perspicuity, "that is what drew me to you—a desire to give you a really good time."

Alice looked at him gravely, but with a suspicion of a smile on her pale lips. "Do you know, Julian, that I believe you to be a good man." The artist blushed again: he had the trick of blushing on occasions, which showed him to possess still the modesty of boyhood. "Oh, I say," he murmured almost inaudibly; then to cover his confusion added: "You call me Julian."

"Yes," Alice nodded her head in a stately way. "Henceforth let us be the greatest of friends."

"Lovers," he urged, "true honest lovers."

"No, Julian. We would be neither true nor honest as lovers. Our marriage would not be one of those made in heaven."

"Are any marriages made in heaven?" he asked somewhat cynically.

She looked at him in surprise. "Of course. When one soul meets another soul capable of blending with it, that is a heavenly marriage."

"Well then," he cried impetuously, "my soul and your soul?"

Alice shook her head. "We don't strike the same note: we are not in harmony, Julian. As friends we can esteem one another, but as lovers, as man and wife, you would end in boring me as I should finally bore you."

"One would think you were fifty to hear you talk so," said Hardwick crossly.

"Do you reckon knowledge by Time?" she asked, harking back to the phrase he had used earlier in the conversation. He had no reply ready. "Still it is odd to hear a girl of twenty-one talk as you do, Alice."

"You are speaking of my new suit of clothes. I am as old as the world."

"Oh, that is the queer stuff your father talks. He believes in reincarnation, doesn't he?"

"He does, and so do I."

"I wonder that you can. A sensible girl like you——"

"My dear Julian, you speak without knowledge," she interrupted placidly.

"That can't be knowledge which can't be proved."

"I think you must be a reincarnation of Nicodemus," retorted Miss Enistor.

"That is no answer."

"Now how can I give you an answer, when you have not the capability of grasping the answer, Julian? If a peasant wanted a mathematical problem proved to him, he would have to learn mathematics to understand it."

"Yes, I suppose so. But you mean——"

"I mean that you have to live the life to understand the doctrine. Christ said that two thousand years ago, and it is as true to-day as it was then."

With his slow habit of thinking Hardwick had to revolve this speech in his mind before replying. Alice, with an impish

look of mischief on her face, laughed also to prevent his answering. "I am taking you into deep water and you will be drowned," she said lightly, "suppose you begin your picture."

"No," said the man soberly. "I don't feel like painting the picture. I don't believe I ever could," and he looked at the fading glories of sea and land regretfully.

"Next time you are born you will be a genius," said Miss Enistor cheerfully, "as you are building up in this life the brain required by a master-painter. Meantime I wish you to be my friend."

"Well, it is hard to decline from love to friendship, but——"

"No 'buts.' Friendship is love from another point of view."

"Not my point of view."

Alice raised an admonitory finger. "You mustn't be selfish," she said severely.

"Selfish? I? How can I be?"

"By wishing me to give for your gratification what I cannot give for my own. I cannot love you as you desire, because there is not that spiritual link between us which means true love. Therefore to make me happy, if you really love me, you should be prepared to sacrifice yourself to the lower feeling of friendship."

"That is too high for me," murmured Hardwick despondingly, "but I see that you won't have me as your husband."

"Certainly not. I want a man to love me, not to pity me."

"It isn't exactly pity."

"Yes it is," she insisted, "you are sorry for me because I live in a dull house with a neglectful father. It is very nice of you to think so, and it is still nicer to think that you are willing to help me by tying yourself to a woman you do not really love. But I can't accept that sacrifice. You must be my friend, Julian—my true honest friend."

Hardwick glanced into her deep blue eyes, and unintelligent as he was in such subtle matters read his

answer therein. "I shall do my best," he said with a deep sigh; "but you must give me time to cool down from passion to friendship. I want you to be my wife, and like all women you offer to be a sister to me."

"Or I will be your cousin if the relation will suit you better," said the girl, laughing outright at his rueful looks.

Julian took offence. "You don't pity me?"

"Not at all, since your feeling is not one of genuine love," was the cool response. "I would if it were."

"One would think you were a hardened woman of the world to hear you speak in this way."

"Perhaps I was a woman of the world in my last incarnation, Julian. I seem to have brought over a great deal of common sense to this life. You are a dear, sweet, placid thing, but although you have seen more of human nature and worldly existence this time than I have, you don't know half so much."

"Alice, you are conceited."

"Ah, that speech shows you are yet heart-whole, Julian. If you were really in love you would never dare to speak so to your divinity."

"Well, I daresay I shall get over it. But it's hard on a fellow."

"Not at all. Hard on your vanity perhaps, but vanity isn't you. Come," Alice sprang to her feet and took up her smart silver-headed cane, "the sun will soon go down and I must get home. We are friends, are we not?" she held out her hand smiling.

"Of course we are." Hardwick bent to kiss her hand and she snatched it away swiftly.

"That isn't friendship."

"Oh, with you friendship means: 'You may look, but you mustn't touch.'"

"Exactly," said Miss Enistor lightly, "consider me if you please as a valuable Dresden china ornament under a glass shade."

Julian heaved another sigh and began to collect his painting

materials. "I must if I must," he admitted grudgingly; "there isn't another man, I suppose?"

The face of the girl grew grave. "There isn't another man whom I love, if that is what you mean," she said, reluctantly. "I have not yet met with my Prince, who will wake me to love and beauty. But there is a man who wants, as you do, to be the Prince."

"Oh hang him, who is he?"

"Don Pablo Narvaez!"

"That old mummy. Impossible!"

"It is both possible and disagreeable. He hinted the other day that he——"

"Loved you? What impertinence!"

"No," said Alice dryly, "he did not commit himself so far. But he hinted that he would like me to be his wife. My father afterwards told me that it would be a good match for me, as Don Pablo is wealthy."

"Wealthy be blessed, Alice," rejoined Hardwick with great heat. "You don't want to take your husband from a museum."

"I don't and I won't," she replied with great determination, "and for that reason I wish you to be my friend."

"Why, what can I do?"

"Stand by me. If my father insists upon my marrying Don Pablo, you must say that I am engaged to you, and this will give you the right to interfere."

Hardwick packed his traps, and swung up the hill on the home-path alongside the girl. "How can you ask me to take up such a position when you know that I love you, Alice?"

"If I thought that you did I should not ask for your help, Julian. But in your own heart you know that you really do not love me. It is only what you call the glamour of my personality that has caught you for the moment. It is not improbable," she went on musingly, "that there may be some slight link between us dating from our meeting in former lives, but it is not a strong enough one to bring us

together this time as man and wife!"

"Oh, this mystical talk makes me tired," cried the painter in quite an American way, "it's silly."

"So it is from your point of view," said Miss Enistor promptly, "let us get down to what you call common sense in your robust Anglo-Saxon style. I want you to stand between me and Don Pablo in the way I suggest. Will you?"

"Yes. That is—give me a day or two to think the matter over. I am flesh and blood, you know, Alice, and not stone."

"Oh, nonsense, you deceive yourself," she retorted impatiently. "Don't I tell you that if I thought your feeling for me was really genuine I should not be so wicked as to risk your unhappiness? But I know you better than you do yourself. If you loved me, would you have chatted about this, that and the other thing so lightly after I had rejected you?"

"There is something in that," admitted Hardwick, as Alice had done previously with regard to his whole-loaf argument. "Well, I daresay I shall appear as your official lover. Don Pablo shan't worry you if I can help it."

"Thanks, you dear good boy," rejoined the girl gratefully and squeezed the artist's arm. "Don't you feel fire running through your veins when I touch you, Julian?"

"No," said Hardwick stolidly.

"Doesn't your heart beat nineteen to the dozen: haven't you the feeling that this is heaven on earth?"

"Not a bit."

Alice dropped his arm with a merry laugh. "And you talk about being in love with me! Can't you see now how wise I was to refuse you?"

"Well," said Hardwick reluctantly, for he felt that she was perfectly right in her diagnosis; "there may be something in what you say."

"There is everything in what I say," she insisted; "however, I shall give you another chance. Catch me before I reach Tremore and I shall be your wife."

Before Hardwick could accept or refuse, she sprang up the narrow winding path as lightly as Atalanta. More out of pique than absolute desire the artist followed. Although he now began to see that he had taken a false Eros for the true one, he resolutely sped after the flying figure, if only to have the pleasure of refusing the prize when he won it. But he might as well have attempted to catch an air-bubble.

Alice was swifter than he was, and ran in a flying way which reminded him of a darting swallow. Down the declivity she dropped, following the twists of the pathway amongst the purple heather, and sprang across the brawling stream at the bottom of the valley before he was half-way down. Then up she mounted, with an arch backward glance, to scale the hill whereon Tremore gloomed amidst its muffling trees. At the gate set in the mouldering brick wall he nearly caught her, for pride winged his feet. But she eluded his grasp with a laugh and disappeared amongst the foliage of the miniature forest. When next she came in sight, he beheld her standing at the sombre porch of the squat mansion binding up her tresses of black hair, which had become loose with her exertions. "You don't love me," panted Alice, who had scarcely got her breath, "if you did I should have been in your arms by this time."

"Pouf!" puffed Hardwick, wiping his wet brow. "Pouf! pouf! pouf!"

"Is that all you have to say?"

"It is all I am able to say. Pouf! Pouf! Well, my dear girl, Saul went to look for his asses and found a kingdom. I went to look for a kingdom of love and find an ass—in myself."

"Oh no! no!" protested Alice, rather distressed.

"Oh yes! yes! The love-mood has come and gone in the space of an afternoon, Miss Enistor."

"Alice to you, Julian," and she held out her hand.

The artist did not attempt to kiss it this time. "Brother and sister," he said, giving the hand a hearty shake, "and official

lover when necessary."

"It's a bargain," replied Miss Enistor beaming, and so it was arranged.



# CHAPTER II



## THE PROPHECY

From the hilltop where Alice and her rejected lover had conversed, the house called Tremore could be plainly seen in its grey nakedness. But on the other side, in front and at the back, it was screened from the salt Atlantic winds by a dismal wood of stone-pines, yews, cypress-trees and giant cedars, planted by various Enistors in the long-distant past, when they had first set up their tent on the waste moorland. The gloomy disposition of the race could be seen, not only in the funereal types of trees chosen for sheltering the mansion, but in the grim look of the mansion itself. Never was there so dreary a place.

Tremore means "great dwelling" in the Celtic tongue, but the name could only apply to this particular house from the unusual space of ground it covered, since it was only one storey high. Built of untrimmed granite blocks and roofed with dull hued slates, it stretched in a narrow line towards the rear of the hill on which it stood. Here it divided into two other narrow lines, forming on the whole the exact shape of the letter "Y." One of the forks contained the kitchen, the servants' sleeping apartments and the domestic offices: the other held the bedrooms of the gentry, while the main stem of the letter was made up of drawing-room, library, sitting-room and dining-room. It was an odd

place quaintly planned and curiously built: but then the Enistors were odd people.

One markedly strange thing amongst others was the absence of vegetation about the house, since nothing would grow near it. Flowers were conspicuous by their absence, turf was wanting, and not even weeds would flourish. The very trees stood aloof in sulky darkness, leaving the building isolated in an arid space of beaten earth. There it stood on the bare ground with its heavy porch, its thick walls and many small windows, bleak in its nakedness for want of draping ivy. True enough there was a kitchen-garden and a small orchard at the back, beyond the screen of trees, which flourished tolerably, but round the house greenery was wanting, as if the place was cursed. Perhaps it was, as the Enistors had borne a sinister reputation for generations. But whatever the reason might be, Tremore might have been built in the desert from the way in which it lay like a sullen snake on the barren earth. And a two-headed snake at that, like some demon of a fairy tale.

The interior of this undesirable mansion was desperately gloomy, as all the rooms were small with low ceilings, and for the most part panelled with black oak dull and unpolished. The kitchen and servants' rooms were more agreeable, as here Mr. Enistor had conformed to modern ideas of cheerfulness so far as to paper and tile the walls brightly. But his own particular portion of the house he would not allow to be touched, and although it was comfortable enough, it was decidedly depressing, with its sombre tints and stuffy atmosphere. Often did Alice leave its dark chambers and its dismal surroundings to breathe freely on the vast spaces of the moors. East and West and North and South stretched the treeless lands, covered with heather and dangerous with the shafts of worked-out mines. The village of Polwellin below belonged to the Enistors, and over it and its inhabitants the present head of the old family exercised a feudal sway. But beyond this

particular collection of dwellings, containing one hundred people, more or less, there was no house or hamlet for some leagues. Perchton, a watering-place haunted by artists, was the nearest town, and that was ten miles distant. Tremore would have suited a misanthrope, but it was not a place wherein Alice cared to live. She was young and inclined to mix with her fellow creatures, but never did any chance come by which she could enter society. It was no wonder that the girl was peaked and pining, and could see things invisible to the ordinary person. Isolation was unhealthy for one of her temperament.

Seated at the heavy mahogany table, whence, in old-fashioned style, the cloth had been removed for dessert, Alice almost regretted that she had not accepted Hardwick's proposal to remove her from such sad surroundings. The dull carved panelling of the walls, the sombre family portraits, the cumbersome furniture, together with the lowness of the ceiling and the limited space of the room, stifled her and depressed her spirits to such a degree that she could scarcely eat. Mr. Enistor and Don Pablo—the latter dined at Tremore on this particular night—were in accurate evening dress, and the whole apartment bore an aspect of good-breeding and stately ceremonial. The host was attached to the customs of his ancestors, and his meals were always served with quite royal etiquette. And by the light of the many wax candles in silver holders which illuminated the room—Mr. Enistor would have nothing to do with lamps—Alice looked curiously at the two men, whose want of vitality, as she vaguely thought, drew the life-power from herself.

She was wrong as regarded her father, for Korah Enistor was a handsome, healthy man in the prime of life, and had plenty of vitality in his robust frame. He looked somewhat austere with his dark hair, scarcely touched with white, his dark eyes and powerful face, which lacked colour as much as her own did. Like Hardwick, the man resembled a

soldier, as he was tall and lean, well-built and active. Also, he possessed the imperious manner of one accustomed to command men, and spoke in a slow deliberate manner with compelling glances of his dark eyes. The most casual observer would have noted that here was a strong personality given to dominate rather than to obey. All the same, Alice noticed that her strong-willed father pointedly deferred to Don Pablo Narvaez, in a way which argued that he rendered *him* obedience. It was strange that she should entertain this idea seeing that the Spaniard was as frail as Enistor was strong, and did not at all look like one who could, or would, rule so aggressive a personality. This odd deference had puzzled her on previous occasions, but tonight the feeling that her father was thrall to Don Pablo was particularly strong.

A breath, she thought, could have blown the guest away like thistledown, so frail and weak did he appear. What his age was she could not guess, but conceived that he was an octogenarian. His scanty white hair, his shrunken figure, his small wrinkled face, and the false teeth which showed when he smiled, all favoured this belief. Don Pablo was like an expiring flame, which the slightest breath might extinguish, and the only thing, hinting to the girl's mind at enduring life, were his eyes. These were of a brighter blue than her own, extraordinarily large and piercing, so that few could bear their direct gaze. The idea entered Alice's head at the moment that here was a bunch of blooming flowers in a cracked vase of great age, or to be less fanciful, she told herself that Narvaez had a weak body dominated by a powerful will which kept the life intact. She could imagine him stepping out of that fragile shape, and still be alive, more powerful and more vitalised in another. His brain was clear, his speech was incisive, and always he used his dominating eyes to compel all those he gazed at to surrender to the spell of his powerful mind. There was

something sinister about his interior youthfulness and exterior senility.

The girl both hated and dreaded him. Being sensitive she was responsive to influences which a coarser nature—say that of Hardwick—would never feel. Don Pablo impressed her as something terrible in spite of his weak looks. His frail body was only the jungle, as it were, that concealed the tiger, and she could imagine him putting forth powers whose force would shatter the aging tenement. What such powers might be she did not know, as he revealed nothing of his dominating nature to her. But she vaguely felt that what force he possessed was deadly evil, and would be used for purely evil purposes. Therefore, warned instinctively by her pure soul, she kept out of his way as much as possible. The stealthy attempts of her father to bring youth and age together, Alice resisted as best she could. But it was difficult to fight against two such commanding natures, and all the time there was the insistent feeling of being drawn into darkness. Alice often blamed herself for thinking in this hostile way of her father, but could never get rid of her doubts. It was firmly rooted in her mind that Narvaez and Enistor were dwelling in an atmosphere of evil, which they wished to extend so as to include herself. At the moment the pressure was particularly strong, and she sighed with weariness as the invisible forces came up against her. Hardly had the sound left her lips when Don Pablo glanced swiftly at his host.

"You are tired, Alice," said Enistor, rising to open the door.

"The heat is oppressive to-night. Take a turn in the garden and you will feel better. Is your head aching?"

"Yes, father," replied the girl almost inaudibly, and glided out of the room like an unquiet ghost to seek the life-giving moorland air.

Her father returned to the table in his stately fashion, and poured himself out a fresh glass of water. On the shining mahogany there were no decanters of wine: only dishes of

fruit, crystal jugs of water, and the three empty coffee-cups. Neither Narvaez nor his host drank any alcoholic liquor: they did not indulge in smoking and were extremely temperate in eating. An ordinary man would have missed the smiling good-fellowship which is usually to be found at a dinner-table. Had these two even laughed outright they would have appeared more human. But they did not, and throughout their conversation maintained a sinister calmness disconcerting in its aloofness from the chatter and merriment of commonplace mortals. Yet somehow this profound quietness seemed to suit the room with its menacing atmosphere.

"It is difficult," murmured Don Pablo, with a glance at the door.

"But not impossible," returned Enistor, answering the thought rather than the words. These two were versed in mind-reading beyond the ordinary.

"That is as it may be, my friend!"

Enistor frowned. "You mean her innocence?"

"Is it necessary for you to put that into words?" demanded the older man in a mocking way; "of course I mean her innocence. That very purity which makes the girl so valuable to me is the wall which protects her from the influence I wish to exercise over her."

"Constant dropping of water wears away a stone, Master."

"That proverb does not apply in every case," retorted the other darkly. "I tell you that I am helpless before your daughter. I am too old for her to love me, therefore her heart is safe. She is not greedy for money, or admiration, or position, or dress, or for half a dozen things which would tempt an ordinary girl. There is no foothold to be obtained."

The host cast an uneasy glance round, and his eyes grew piercing, as if he would force the invisible to become apparent. "She is guarded, we know!"

Narvaez' wrinkled face grew even darker than before. "Yes, she is guarded. I am aware of the power that guards her."

"So you have said several times, Master. Why not explain more fully?"

"The time has not yet come to explain. If you were advanced enough to read the Akashic Records, then you might see much that would explain things."

Enistor nodded gloomily. "I understand. The present situation is the outcome of the past."

"Everything in life is an outcome of the past," said Narvaez, "even a neophyte such as you are should be certain of that. Cause and effect govern all things."

"But if you would explain the cause, I might see how to deal with the effect, Master."

"I daresay," returned the other dryly, "but in spite of my superior knowledge, I am not yet omnipotent, Enistor. I can read a trifle of the records, but not easily. There are veils before my eyes which prevent me from knowing the exact state of affairs which has brought things to this pass in this set of lives. All I can say is that you and I and your daughter, together with two other people, were in Chaldea over five thousand years ago, and the lives then are linked with the lives now. The Karma of that period has to be worked out while we are all in the flesh to-day."

"Do you know who the other two people are?" asked Enistor eagerly.

"I know one. He is powerful, and hostile to you and to me!"

"He does not follow the Left-hand Path then?"

"No. He is a White Magician. You will see him some day when the hour strikes. I am teaching you all I can so that you may be able to confront him."

"I am not afraid of any one," snapped Enistor sharply.

"Oh, you have courage enough," admitted Narvaez, "but knowledge must be added to that, if you are to be victorious. As to the other person who has to play a part in the working out of this Karma——"

"Well! Well! Well?"

"I don't know who or what he is," confessed the other.

"He is a man then?"

"Yes, I know that much!" Narvaez drank a glass of water, and rose with an effort as if his bones pained him. "We had better understand the situation." In spite of his mind-reading Enistor could not understand and said as much with a puzzled air. Narvaez laughed softly for a moment and then became his usual calm self. "I refer to the position on the physical plane of you and myself and those surrounding us—the flesh and blood puppets I mean with which we have to deal."

"Are they puppets?" demanded Enistor dubiously.

"One is not. You can guess that I mean our powerful adversary. But the others—bah!" he swept the air with one lean hand. "I think I can deal with them, if you give me your assistance."

"I have promised to give it—at a price," said Enistor tartly. The guest stared at him with a sphinx-like expression. "I know your price and you shall have your price," he dropped into his chair again with an air of fatigue, and his eyes grew brighter than ever. "Listen, my friend. I came here from Spain three years ago in search of you, as I learned by my arts that you would be useful to me. You have the blood of my race in your veins, as you know, since that Spanish sailor, who was wrecked on these coasts in a galleon of the Great Armada, married your ancestress from whom you are descended."

"I know all this, Master."

"Quite so, but I wish to refresh your memory. I found you here a poor man——"

"Which I am still," interrupted Enistor gloomily.

"Of course. The time is not yet ripe for you to gain your wish!"

"My wish! my wish!" the host rose and raised his arms, with a fierce look on his powerful face. "When will it be gratified? I want money—a large amount—thousands of pounds, since money means power."



"And power is the real thing you desire. The money, as we know, is only the means to obtain that power. You wish to influence men at all costs; to rule the masses; to be famous as a leader!"

The sneer with which Narvaez made this speech irritated Enistor, although he was sufficiently educated in mystic lore to be aware how important absolute self-command is to those who deal with occultism. That is, he knew such was the case, more or less, but could never attain to the necessary calm. "It is not a contemptible ambition," he snarled savagely.

"Our adversary of the Right-hand Path would say so," rejoined Narvaez coolly, "since you desire power and rule and money in order to gratify Self."

"I never knew that you worked for other people, Narvaez," sneered Enistor.

The Spaniard smiled coldly. "I don't, I never shall. I strive, as you do, for power, and, thanks to my knowledge, I have more than you, although it is not enough to content me. It is because your aims are the same as mine that we can work together. But Alice does not desire anything and that is what baffles both of us."

"In that case, she is useless to you, Master, and therefore it is no good your marrying her."

"Once she is my wife, I can influence her more easily, Enistor. As you know, I have no feeling of love for either man or woman. That philanthropic sentiment of sacrifice for humanity is disagreeable to me. In black magic, as in white, one must live like what is called a saint to be powerful. To be absolutely free you should never have married."

"Yet you propose to make the same mistake."

"There is no mistake about the matter," said Narvaez calmly, "my marriage with your daughter will be no marriage in the accepted sense of the word. I simply wish to bind her to me, so that I can train the clairvoyance she

possesses which is so valuable to me. I can give her plenty of money——"

"You won't give it to me," interposed the other hastily.

"Of course not. Why should I? Nothing for nothing is the rule of the Left-hand Path. But that I require your services and cannot dispense with them I should not waste my time teaching you my knowledge. However, the situation stands thus. I am to marry your daughter, and when I train her clairvoyantly—waken her sleeping powers, that is—we may learn from her reading of the Akashic Records what danger threatens."

"There is a danger then?"

"Yes, and a very real one, which has to do with this adversary I told you about. A desire to defeat him brought me to you, and as he is your enemy as well as mine, you are wise to obey me in all things."

"Yet I know that when you have no further use for me, you will cast me aside as of no account," said Enistor bitterly.

"Why not?" rejoined the other coolly. "You would act in the same way."

"I am not so sure that I would."

"Ah. You have still some human weakness to get rid of before you can progress on the path along which you ask me to lead you. I have no use for weaklings, Enistor. Remember that."

The host drew himself up haughtily. "I am no weakling!"

"For your own sake, to-morrow, I hope you are not."

"Why to-morrow?"

"Because a blow will fall on you."

Enistor looked uneasy. "A blow! What kind of a blow?"

"Something to do with a loss of expected money. That is all I can tell you, my friend. You keep certain things from me, so if you are not entirely frank, how can you expect me to aid you?"

Enistor dropped into his chair again, and the perspiration beaded his dark face. "A loss of expected money," he

muttered, "and Lucy is ill."

"Who is Lucy?"

"My sister who lives in London. A widow called Lady Staunton. She has five thousand a year which she promised years ago to leave to me, so that I might restore the fortunes of the Enistor family. I had news a week ago that she is very ill, and this week I was going up to see her in order to make sure she had not changed her mind."

"It is useless your going to see Lady Staunton," said Narvaez leisurely, "for she *has* changed her mind and has made a new will."

Enistor scowled and clenched his hands. "How do you know?"

"Well, I don't know details," said the Spaniard agreeably, "those have to be supplied by you. All I am certain of is that to-morrow you will receive a letter stating that you have lost some expected money. As the sole money you hope to receive is to come from Lady Staunton, it is logical to think that this is what will be lost. You should have told me about this and I could have worked on her mind to keep her true to you."

"But it is impossible," cried Enistor, rising to stride up and down in an agitated way. "Lucy is as proud of our family as I am, and always said she would leave her fortune to restore us to our old position in the country."

"Lady Staunton is a woman, and women are fickle," said Narvaez cruelly. "I fear you have lost your chance this time."

"You may be wrong."

"I may be, but I don't think so. I was looking over your horoscope last evening, Enistor, and from what I read therein I made further inquiries, which have to do with invisible powers I can control."

"Elementals?"

"And other things," said the magician carelessly; "however I learned positively that you will get bad news of the nature

I explained to-morrow. It is too late to counteract what has been done."

"The will——?"

"Exactly, the will. From what you say I feel convinced that my knowledge applies to Lady Staunton and her fortune. See what comes of not being frank with me, Enistor. You are a fool."

"I don't believe what you say."

"As you please. It does not matter to me; except," he added with emphasis, "that it makes my hold over you more secure."

"What do you mean by that?"

"My poor friend!" Narvaez glanced back from the door towards which he had walked slowly. "You are losing what little powers you have obtained, since you cannot read my mind. Why, I mean that with five thousand a year you might not be inclined to give me your daughter in marriage. As a poor man you are forced to do so."

"It seems to me," said Enistor angrily, "that in any case I must do so, if I wish to learn the danger which threatens me as well as you."

"Why, that is true. You are clever in saying that."

"But perhaps this possible loss of money is the danger."

"No. The danger is a greater one than the loss of money. It has to do with your life and my life in Chaldea; with our adversary and with the unknown man, who is coming to take part in the drama of repayment. I have a feeling," said Narvaez, passing his hand across his brow, "that the curtain rises on our drama with this loss of money."

"I don't believe Lucy will cheat me," cried Enistor desperately.

"Wait until to-morrow's post," said Narvaez significantly, "you will find that I am a true prophet. Our bargain of my marriage with Alice must continue on its present basis, as the want of money will still prevent your becoming independent. I might suggest," he added, opening the door,

"that you forbid your daughter to see too much of young Hardwick. She might fall in love with him and that would in a great measure destroy her clairvoyant powers. She will be of no use to either of us then. Good night! When you sleep we shall meet as usual on the other plane!"

Narvaez departed chuckling, for disagreeables befalling others always amused him. He was absolutely without a heart and without feelings, since for ages in various bodies he had worked hard to rid himself of his humanity. Enistor was on the same evil path, but as yet was human enough to worry over the inevitable. Until he slept he did his best to convince himself that Narvaez spoke falsely, but failed utterly in the attempt.

# CHAPTER III



## FULFILMENT

Next morning Enistor was gloomy and apprehensive, for he had slept very badly during the hours of darkness. He tried to persuade himself that the Spaniard prophesied falsely, but some inward feeling assured him that this was not the case. Before the sun set he was convinced, against his inclinations, that the sinister prediction would be fulfilled. Therefore he picked up his morning letters nervously, quite expecting to find a legal one stating that Lady Staunton was dead and had left her five thousand a year to some stranger. Fortunately for his peace of mind there was no letter of the kind, and he made a better breakfast than he might have done. All the same he was morose and sullen, so that Alice had anything but a pleasant time. Towards the end of the meal he relieved his feelings by scolding the girl. "I forbid you to see much of that young Hardwick," he declared imperiously, "he is in love with you, and I don't wish you to marry a pauper painter!"

Aware that her father wished her to accept Narvaez, it would have been wise for the girl to have held her tongue, since a later confession of a feigned engagement to the artist was her sole chance of resisting the loveless