

## CHAPTER XII

## TIME FLOWS

"THERE is nothing there," Herdjiman had said, speaking of Beljazi.

There is nothing there, but the sunsets that glow over Italy and the dawns that break over the Dalmatian hills, the picture of the coast where Ragusa sits like a fairy city, and the picture of the purple islands, Ginpanna and Mezzo and the islands beyond, and the lone sea breaking on Lagosta; the sails of the fishing boats making for Valle Grande or Lissa, the sea birds, the silence and the perfume of the maquis and the beach.

Herdjiman and his son had, in a single day, made the two huts habitable, and in the days that followed Jean and Karan had completed the business.

Karan, pausing sometimes to rest and gaze at the islands or the luminous coast, seemed like a being divorced from reality, held in the spell of a dream.

The road was gone and the necessities of the road, the world had vanished and turned into Jean. He had taken her soul as well as her body, and she had taken his mind.

Stein with his extraordinary appreciation of men had divined the power of environment on Jean, and here, secure from the troubles of the moment, the environment of beauty and peace had seized him with the additional power lent by Karan. She was part of it all and it was all part of her, this extraordinary and brilliant dream that had nothing to do with the future or the past.

The Future! Why, even Jean's tiny income could support them here; seated amidst the warm maquis and with his arms round Karan, he would sometimes talk of that. One is only poor in cities, the rabbits are not poor and the birds have no money, besides there were pictures to be painted—when one had time.

There was no time for that yet—who works on a honeymoon?—and there was so much to do. Like castaways on a desert island they had their hands full—cooking, drawing water from the well, attending to the little matters of the house—and there was the warm, blue sea that called them into it, whilst Cavani, blind as Homer, sat with his back to the hut wall, the only watcher save the sea birds and the distant fishing boats, and Ragusa, blind as Cavani, in the blue distance.

Karan, slipped from her clothes and covered only by the sunlight, was of all things the most beautiful that Jean had seen.

She was Nature, reckless of and unrecked by Immodesty as the naked hills.

The boat which Jean had bought lay on the beach, he used it sometimes in the first fortnight to run over to Ragusa for extra food or matches, or some of the hundred and one things that turn up wanting by picnickers or castaways; she was carvel built, an old yacht's boat which Herdjiman had picked up a bargain at Spalato the year before. She had no name. Herdjiman had repainted her, but he had not painted on a name, leaving that business to whatever customer might buy her.

Jean, with a pencil and so small that no one could see it without close scrutiny, wrote on the planking close to the gunwale, "Karan." That was her name and Karan laughed when she saw it written

so small, a sort of secret between Jean and herself.

Cavani, to whom Karan had explained the position of things as regards the island and their stay there, showed no objection to going into bivouac and taking to undress uniform ; free of his coat and shako and dressed only in a grey flannel shirt and trousers, he could wander where he pleased without harm. The hard beach just above water's edge was his favourite parade ground, it seemed that he had to keep walking, this remnant of the Grand Army, that is to say when he was not asleep or eating, or half-doing in the sun. Like Fabres' processionary caterpillars round the rim of the vase, so Cavani round the rim of the island took his exercise upon a road that he could have pursued for a thousand million years without being nearer to the road's end.

He had a marvellous power of seeing without eyes and of seeing more than eyes can see. He knew that he and Karan were no longer alone, but he did not resent Jean.

Often on their journeys together he had made Karan avoid places and people that were evil, but he accepted Jean and Beljazi without comment.

He rarely spoke. Sometimes at night Jean would hear the girl talking to him and he to her, but the conversation when overheard was of no interest, and about the most trifling things. Cavani's mind seemed the mind of a small child somewhat shrunk and ossified.

Little petty details such as the button of his uniform coat which threatened to come off some months ago, and which she had sewn on but which threatened to come off again. Little complaints, little grumbles, sometimes a splutter of anger about some nonsense.

Jean found himself sometimes wondering whether the mind of Cavani had been warped and reduced by age and circumstance, or whether this was a true sample of the mind of the common soldier of a hundred years ago. The soldier who marched the roads of Europe and made his bivouac where Victory pointed, the soldier who made and unmade kings, altered empires and shifted frontiers, the soldier of the Grand Army.

Jean, at Brest, had once gone over a battleship of the old days and had been astonished at the cramped quarters below deck, at the officers' quarters that were like cattle pens, at the dog-holes where the men slept, at the fact that of the great crew of eight hundred men who manned her there was deck space for less than a hundred at ordinary duty, and that the majority were condemned when not reefing and furling sail, or fighting in actual battle, to a life that few slum dwellers have ever endured.

He had wondered then whether the interior of this ship was a true measure of the glories of the past, and not the exterior with its flags, sails, display of cannon and triumphant masts.

He was wondering now whether Cavani was not that which, as a model, would be of priceless worth in the Musée Carnavelet or the British Museum of London.

A model of the glories of the past (inside and out).

But there was one thing about Cavani certain and at the same time beautiful—the loving tenderness of Karan that surrounded him like a light.

Jean and Karan would sometimes take the boat and put out, raising the sail and making, if the wind were favourable, for the islands to the north or down the coast beyond Ragusa to the south. But the northern stretch pleased them most, raising as

they did Lagosta and Curzola all luminous in the brilliancy of midday or tenderness of evening, fairy islands on a fairy sea that held more miraculous islands still from the Spalmadores to Veglia, whose hand almost touches Fiume.

He had got fishing lines from Herdjiman and they often fished, pushing out a couple of miles to where the Mezzo bank runs north and south, and where, as a rule, the fishing is good.

Then there were the excursions to Ragusa for food and so forth. He generally went on these alone, and when he had bought what he wanted he would leave the parcel at some shop till he came back for it, and then stroll about the town, looking at the shops and streets, sometimes wandering into a church, feeding the pigeons, looking at the tourists.

Ragusa attracts a stranger crowd than perhaps any other show place, people from middle Europe and the Middle East, from the Balkans, from Russia, from America and England. As Jean watched them, these prosperous and well-to-do people to whom life was, for the moment at all events, a holiday, he sometimes thought to himself, "What would they say about Karan?"

He meant what could they say about his relationship with Karan, and he knew well that they would say that for a momentary relationship it was all very well, but for a continuous one impossible.

You can't marry the classes. Daudet pointed that out years ago, when he said that there is no such gulf as class distinction.

It wasn't the question of marrying Karan so much as being with her, travelling with her and Cavani. He was tied to the island, at all events for the present, and though he did not feel the chafing of

the tie he hated the idea that Karan was impossible in Ragusa as his companion.

And this hatred spread to the tourists, the self-satisfied snobs who could have laid themselves down for a noble to trample on, yet who would have sneered at Karan and Cavani.

He used to come back from these expeditions to Ragusa in a bad temper, which, however, soon passed, and the days went by like a flock of gorgeous birds flying across the Dalmatian hills to Italy and beyond.

Then something began to make itself felt in his mind ; something that was, in fact, a craving which Karan could not satisfy nor Beljazi.

He wanted to paint. His fingers began to itch for the mahl stick ; he carried a ghostly palette on his thumb.

And now the commission of Stein's arose before him, and Stein's words that he would have all the artist materials sent from Agram to be waiting for him at the villa.

He had lost Stein's card—he was always losing things—he had forgotten the name of the woman to be painted, though he remembered Stein's naming her. All that did not matter, any one could show him where the villa was ; what held him back for a moment was the thought of the hours that this commission would take from him, of the hours that he would have to be away from Beljazi.

Yet the artist would not rest.

Now why could he not have flung Stein's commission to the winds and painted Karan ? She was worthy of the greatest painter.

Why ?

Well, Stein was a power and his money would be useful, and his influence. Jean was ready enough to

run down the social state, but in practice he saw that it had its laws, and that one of those laws was that the powerful and fashionable can help the poor and unknown to rise.

He had no desire for money as money, but he had the desire of the artist to be known.

Stein's evident appreciation of his work had, without his knowing it, been behind him ever since he left Serajevo.

He had never fed on praise at Julians', that shop of stale ideas masquerading as fresh. The artistic atmosphere of Paris was, in fact, at that moment experiencing a succession of Seine fogs, the vorticists having succeeded the passceists; at all events, it was not an atmosphere for Honesty to stand forth in and to say, "look at me, I am Art! . . ."

But Stein was not smothered in that atmosphere, he could see the distance where Corot stands indifferent to and unscreened by the antics of artistic apes.

Stein's approval was the approval of the world written small.

It is no wonder then that Jean should be anxious to put his hand to this commission, an anxiety, however, that did not affect him till they had spent nearly a month at Beljazi.