

CHAPTER XIII

THE GOD OF WAR

THEN one day when ashore the thing that had begun to urge him took him by the arm, and said, "Go and find Stein's place, and see about the business, anyhow. It may be that you have delayed too long and lost it."

"Baron Stein—yes, monsieur. His villa is the great house on the right as you go up hill, La Majiola, you cannot mistake it."

You could not, that is to say if you were looking for the residence of a millionaire.

Great gates by Fiametti, whose ironwork recalls the delicate designs of the lace worker, a drive smooth-sanded and broad leading between ilex trees that showed a glimpse of the cream-white walls of the villa; everything, including the perfume of flowers from some unseen garden, proclaimed the fact that here was wealth.

At the door of the house, in answer to the bell, appeared a manservant.

A pale-faced man, secretive, subservient, yet assured looking.

Baron Stein was not at home, the Baron had been called away for a few days—the man looked at Jean as though able to read his business—but he had given orders. Was Jean, by any chance, M. Matisse? Oh, well, would he come in, Madame the Baroness was at home? M. le Baron had been expecting M. Matisse.

He made way for Jean to enter, and closing the

door led him across a circular hall in the centre of which a marble fountain was playing in the cool light from the high windows above a circular gallery, whose supports were pillars of coloured marble.

The servant showed Jean into a morning-room opening upon a garden, and there left him.

It was a woman's room, oriental and rich with old Chinese porcelains.

Here was the God of Light as he appeared to the artists of the Ming period, the face and wand in soft white enamel, the robe in green decorated with hawthorn blobs. Here Benton in her robe of yellow with a background of deep *rouge de fer*. Jean was not a connoisseur, but he was he'd by the charm and worth of these things, by their colour, mystery and form, by the flying Ho-Ho birds of the Famille Verte vases that faced the window, by the God of War with his hands of aubergine and robe of clouds who held a corner to himself, making it a den from which he looked out through a mask of appalling ferocity.

The perfume of the garden came through the open window, and the songs and twitterings of birds evidently caged but beyond sight, and the sunlight of the day outside.

Hauptmarch !

The name suddenly sprang from the subconscious to the conscious mind of Jean ; he was back again in the Hotel d'Europe at Serajevo and Stein was sitting with him at the table offering him the commission to paint this woman, his cousin, the Baroness Hauptmarch. His cousin—his mistress.

Jean's light and careless mind had dropped the name, but here it was back again, and here was the place where the woman lived—and what was she like ?

Good looking, of course, beautiful perhaps; but would she be sympathetic to his brush. The name suggested a heavy woman, no longer in her first youth.

It came to him as a sort of grim joke that Stein's idea of beauty might be different from his, he had a deep distrust of other people's ideas of beauty where women were concerned. In Paris he had seen men fascinated by atrocities, and when he had heard a woman belauded by other women he generally, in the event, found her to be a frump.

Now, what a mess it would be if this rolling-in-money Stein were in the hands of some sexually attractive Boule de-Suif or some skeleton in armour like the Countess Jagow.

Baroness Hauptmarch! He came to the window and looked out at the garden.

The delay irritated him. It seemed to him that he was kept waiting like a man who had come to lay the floor carpets, or a plumber to mend the drains. Of course he was unknown and of no account to these plutocrats—well, of course that was natural enough, and there was no use in chafing. After all, money was money, and when a man has to work for money there is no use in his trying to place himself on a level with his employers.

Still, as a matter of fact, the turning of a hair would have made him walk into the garden and, finding the main entrance, leave the place in one of those sudden huffs not alien to the artistic temperament when thwarted, or held back or subjected to some fancied slight. But the hair did not turn.

He came back into the room and seated himself on a fauteuil, with legs outspread and eyes fixed in contemplation on the God of War.

How well the Chinese understood ferocity—

ferocity and the beauty that lies in a spray of hawthorn, or the flight of a Ho-Ho bird—and colour.

The door opened and a young girl came into the room. She did not look more than fifteen, yet she seemed to have stepped out of a past age. The age of Greuze.

It was the Baroness Hauptmarch.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BARONESS HAUPTMARCH

WELL, well, there are shocks that one recovers from almost at once, owing to the tonic of their wonder, and when the girl had stated who she was it did not take Jean a moment to adapt himself to the idea that this girl was not only the redoubtable Baroness, but the mistress of Stein.

It came to him at once that she was a bit older than she looked, that she was no innocent, that the charm of her manner was a continuation of the charm of her face and body, but everything was nothing compared with the fact that she was his for ever and ever, and that he only had to make her his own!

He had never seen any one of like appeal to his genius.

And he felt that he could make her his own. Love! Nonsense, no more than the thought of love for Herdjiman's wife (whom he had met, for he sometimes visited the good Herdjiman in his little home). Power—that was it. He had the power to make this woman, this girl, his, so that men in future ages would speak of the Baroness Hauptmarch by