

CHAPTER X

"A man's whole victory over Fate begins with a question."

PERCIVAL GIBBON

EXCEPT as regards the *menu*, dinner that night, in Lakshman's former sitting-room, could not be reckoned a notable success. To Audrey it recalled an earlier dinner after the storm, when she had counted the moments till she could escape. But to-night she was less concerned for herself than for "the child," whose eyes suggested tincture of belladonna; the more so that two dusky patches of carmine burned in her cheeks.

How much did she know of her father's intent? A few words from him before dinner had apprised Audrey of his wish to secure half an hour with Nevil alone. Lilama would no doubt retire early, and he would regard it as a favour if she left at the same time. The man was clearly too intent upon his purpose to leave anything to chance, and Audrey, as was natural, fell to wondering what he meant to say, and how Nevil would receive it, when she ought to have been coining talk.

Of the four, Nevil only was not obsessed by the sense of something impending. Yet even he gleaned a hint of it from his wife's face, and the fact that she wore her mother's o'-pearl *sari*. He had not seen it for more than a week; and his eyes were not so "deaf for the language of colour" as they had been a year ago. He knew now that she never wore that *sari* in deeply-troubled or despondent mood, and took its reappearance for a sign that the mercury was