

The Corrector of Destinies

It had the distinction of a ruin in this modern city, she said; it seemed to mark something old, important, forgotten, but enduring in an age of changes, and to be found thus exactly as it now stood, infinitely further on, when the city should have gone back again to ashes. It gave one, too, she said, the sensation of things inevitable and sinister, like a cell uncovered in a garden. It was a fit dwelling, she thought, for some influence that persisted, that threatened constantly, or constantly promised aid. It might be the ambassadorial residence of a vanished empire, maintaining in the world a mysterious envoy. To such highly colored fancies did this ill-kept colonial house, with its broken flag walk, its tile roof, its plaster columns, lead this imaginative woman.

She expected to find inside, she said, an Egyptian sitting in a chair of black basalt, his hands on his knees, his feet rising on the sacred lotus; or a Chinese Mandarin infinitely old, his long finger nails reaching down under sleeves of exquisite silk; or a Hindoo, squatted on a carpet, emaciated like a corpse, gazing forever into a mystic crystal. The girl's fancy was in an oriental riot. I wondered how she would meet that plain gray man, who was said to resemble the most advanced surgeon in Europe, and whose mania was the practical.

I began then, somewhat late in the hour, to prepare her for this meeting. I advised her of Mason's curious habits, of his unusual abstraction. I warned her against his abrupt, indifferent manner, his rigid,