

hollow sockets, and upon his thin, wan, white lips there was a faint smile of welcome—faint like the smile of the sick, yet sweet as the smile of an angel.

It was with such a smile that he greeted Brandon, and with both of his thin white hands pressed the strong and muscular hand of the other.

"And you are Edith's brother," he said. "Edith's brother," he repeated, resting lovingly upon that name, Edith. "She always said you were alive, and once she told me she should live to see you. Welcome, brother of my Edith! I am a dying man. Edith said her other brother was alive—Frank. Where is Frank? Will he not come to stand by the bedside of his dying friend? He did so once."

"He will come," said Brandon, in a voice choked with emotion, as he pressed the hand of the dying man. "He will come, and at once."

"And you will be all here, then—sweet friends! It is well."

He paused.

"Bice!" said he at last.

Beatrice, who was sitting by his head, bent down toward him.

"Bice," said Langhetti. "My pocket-book is in my coat, and if you open the inside pocket you will find something wrapped in paper. Bring it to me."

Beatrice found the pocket-book and opened it as directed. In the inside pocket there was a thin, small parcel. She opened it and drew forth a very small baby's stocking.

"Look at the mark," said Langhetti.

Beatrice did so, and saw two letters marked on it—B. D.

"This was given me by your nurse at Hong Kong. She said your things were all marked with those letters when you were first brought to her. She did not know what it meant. 'B' meant Beatrice; but what did 'D' mean?"

All around that bedside exchanged glances of wonder. Mrs. Compton was most agitated.

"Take me away," she murmured to Philips. But Philips would not.

"Cheer up, old woman!" said he. "There's nothing to fear now. That devil won't hurt you."

"Now, in my deep interest in you, and in my affection, I tried to find out what this meant. The nurse and I often talked about it. She told me that your father never cared particularly about you, and that it was strange for your clothing to be marked 'D' if your name was Potts. It was a thing which greatly troubled her. I made many inquiries. I found out about the Manila murder case. From that moment I suspected that 'D' meant Despard."

"Oh, Heavens!" sighed Beatrice, in an agony of suspense. Brandon and Despard stood motionless, waiting for something further.

"This is what I tried to solve. I made inquiries every where. At last I gave it up. But when circumstances threw Beatrice again in my way I tried again. I have always been baffled. There is only one who can tell—only one. She is here, in this room; and, in the name of God, I call upon her to speak out and tell the truth."

"Who?" cried Despard, while he and Brandon both looked earnestly at Mrs. Compton.

"Mrs. Compton!" said Langhetti; and his voice seemed to die away from exhaustion.

Mrs. Compton was seized with a panic more overpowering than usual. She gasped for breath.

"Oh, Lord!" she cried. "Oh, Lord! Spare me! spare me! He'll kill me!"

Brandon walked up to her and took her hand.

"Mrs. Compton," said he, in a calm, resolute voice, "your timidity has been your curse. There is no need for fear now. I will protect you. The man whom you have feared so many years is now ruined, helpless, and miserable. I could destroy him at this moment if I chose. You are foolish if you fear him. Your son is with you. His arm supports you, and I stand here ready to protect both you and your son. Speak out, and tell what you know. Your husband is still living. He longs for your return. You and your son are free from your enemies. Trust in me, and you shall both go back to him and live in peace."

Tears fell from Mrs. Compton's eyes. She seized Brandon's hand and pressed it to her thin lips.

"You will protect me?" said she.

"Yes."

"You will save me from him?" she persisted, in a voice of agony.

"Yes, and from all others like him. Do not fear. Speak out."

Mrs. Compton clung to the arm of her son. She drew a long breath. She looked up into his face as though to gain courage, and then began.

It was a long story. She had been attendant and nurse to the wife of Colonel Despard, who had died in giving birth to a child. Potts had brought news of her death, but had said nothing whatever about the child. Colonel Despard knew nothing of it. Being at a distance at the time, on duty, he had heard but the one fact of his wife's death, and all other things were forgotten. He had not even made inquiries as to whether the child which he had expected was alive or dead, but had at once given way to the grief of the bereavement, and had hurried off.

In his designs on Colonel Despard, Potts feared that the knowledge of the existence of a child might keep him in India, and distract his mind from its sorrow. Therefore he was the more anxious not only to keep this secret, but also to prevent it from ever being known to Colonel Despard. With this idea he hurried the preparation of the *Vishnu* to such an extent that it was ready for sea almost immediately, and left with Colonel Despard on that ill-fated voyage.

Mrs. Compton had been left in India with the child. Her son joined her, in company with John, who, though only a boy, had the vices of a grown man. Months passed before Potts came back. He then took her along with the child to China, and left the latter with a respectable woman at Hong Kong, who was the widow of a British naval officer. The child was Beatrice Despard.

Potts always feared that Mrs. Compton might divulge his secret, and therefore always kept her with him. Timid by nature to an unusual degree, the wretched woman was in constant fear for her life, and as years passed on this fear was not lessened. The sufferings which she felt from this terror were atoned for, however, by the constant presence of her son, who remained in connection with Potts, influenced chiefly by the ascendancy which this villain had over a man of his weak and timid nature. Potts had brought them to