The Scarecrow, and Other Stories

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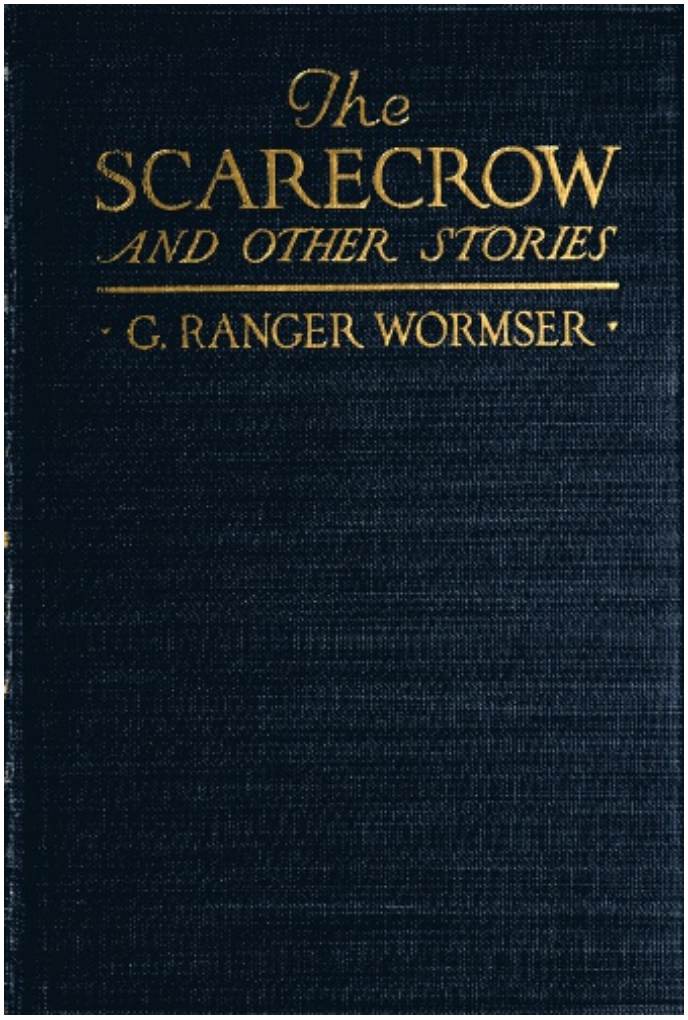

AND OTHER STORIES

BY G. RANGER WORMSER

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THE SCARECROW

"Ben—"

The woman stood in the doorway of the ramshackle, tumble-down shanty. Her hands were cupped at her mouth. The wind blew loose, whitish blond wisps of hair around her face and slashed the faded blue dress into the uncorseted bulk of her body.

"Benny—oh, Benny—"

Her call echoed through the still evening.

Her eyes staring straight before her down the slope in front of the house caught sight of something blue and antiquatedly military standing waist deep and rigid in the corn field.

"That ole scarecrow," she muttered to herself, "that there old scarecrow with that there ole uniform onto him, too!"

The sun was going slowly just beyond the farthest hill. The unreal light of the skies' reflected colors held over the yellow, waving tips of the corn field.

"Benny—," she called again. "Oh—Benny!"

And then she saw him coming toward her trudging up the hill.

She waited until he stood in front of her.

"Supper, Ben," she said. "Was you down in the south meadow where you couldn't hear me call?"

"Naw."

He was young and slight. He had thick hair and a thin face. His features were small. There was nothing unusual about them. His eyes were deep-set and long, with the lids that were heavily fringed.

"You heard me calling you?"

"Yes, maw."

He stood there straight and still. His eyelids were lowered.

"Why ain't you come along then? What ails you, Benny, letting me shout and shout that way?"

"Nothing—maw."

"Where was you?"

He hesitated a second before answering her.

"I was to the bottom of the hill."

"And what was you doing down there to the bottom of the hill? What was you doing down there, Benny?"

Her voice had a hushed tenseness to it.

"I was watching, maw."

"Watching, Benny?"

"That's what I was doing."

His tone held a guarded sullenness.

"'Tain't no such a pretty sunset, Benny."

"Warn't watching no sunset."

"Benny—!"

"Well." He spoke quickly. "What d'you want to put it there for? What d'you want to do that for in the first place?"

"There was birds, Benny. You know there was birds."

"That ain't what I mean. What for d'you put on that there uniform?"

"I ain't had nothing else. There warn't nothing but your grand-dad's ole uniform. It's fair in rags, Benny. It's all I had to put on to it."

"Well, you done it yourself."

"Naw, Benny, naw! 'Tain't nothing but an ole uniform with a stick into it. Just to frighten off them birds. 'Tain't nothing else. Honest, 'tain't, Benny."

He looked up at her out of the corners of his eyes.

"It was waving its arms."

"That's the wind."

"Naw, maw. Waving its arms before the wind it come up."

"Sush, Benny! 'Tain't likely. 'Tain't."

"I was watching, maw. I seen it wave and wave. S'pose it should beckon—; s'pose it should beckon to me. I'd be going, then, maw."

"Sush, Benny."

"I'd fair have to go, maw."

"Leave your mammy? Naw, Ben; naw. You couldn't never go off and leave your mammy. Even if you ain't able to bear this here farm you couldn't go off from your mammy. You couldn't! Not—your—maw—Benny!"

She could see his mouth twitch. She saw him catch his lower lip in under his teeth.

"Aw—"

"Say you couldn't leave, Benny; say it!"

"I—I fair hate this here farm!" He mumbled. "Morning and night;—and morning and night. Nothing but chores and earth. And then some more of them chores. And always that there way. So it is! Always! And the stillness! Nothing alive, nothing! Sometimes I ain't able to stand it nohow. Sometimes—!"

"You'll get to like it—; later, mebbe—"

"Naw! naw, maw!"

"You will, Benny. Sure you will."

"I won't never. I ain't able to help fretting. It's all closed up tight inside of me. Eating and eating. It makes me feel sick."

She put out a hand and laid it heavily on his shoulder.

"Likely it's a touch of fever in the blood, Benny."

"Aw—! I ain't got no fever!"

"You'll be feeling better in the morning, Ben."

"I'll be feeling the same, maw. That's just it. Always the same. Nothing but the stillness. Nothing alive. And down there in the corn field—"

"That ain't alive, Benny!"

"Ain't it, maw?"

"Don't say that, Benny. Don't!"

He shook her hand off of him.

"I was watching," he said doggedly. "I seen it wave and wave."

She turned into the house.

"That ole scarecrow!" She muttered to herself. "That there ole scarecrow!"

She led the way into the kitchen. The boy followed at her heels.

A lamp was lighted on the center table. The one window was uncurtained. Through the naked spot of it the evening glow poured shimmeringly into the room.

Inside the doorway they both paused.

"You set down, Benny."

He pulled a chair up to the table.

She took a steaming pot from the stove and emptying it into a plate, placed the dish before him.

He fell to eating silently.

She came and sat opposite him. She watched him cautiously. She did not want him to know that she was watching him. Whenever he glanced up she hurried her eyes away from his face. In the stillness the only live things were those two pair of eyes darting away from each other.

"Benny—!" She could not stand it any longer. "Benny—just—you—just—you—"

He gulped down a mouthful of food.

"Aw, maw—don't you start nothing. Not no more to-night, maw."

She half rose from her chair. For a second she leaned stiffly against the table. Then she slipped back into her seat, her

whole body limp and relaxed.

"I ain't going to start nothing, Benny. I ain't even going to talk about this here farm. Honest—I ain't."

"Aw—this—here—farm—!"

"I've gave the best years of my life to it."

She spoke the words defiantly.

"You said that all afore, maw."

"It's true," she murmured. "Terrible true. And I done it for you, Benny. I wanted to be giving you something. It's all I'd got to give you, Benny. There's many a man, Ben, that's glad of his farm. And grateful, too. There's many that makes it pay."

"And what'll I do if it does pay, maw? What'll I do then?"

"I—I—don't know, Benny. It's only just beginning, now."

"But if it does pay, maw? What'll I do? Go away from here?"

"Naw, Benny—. Not—away—. What'd you go away for, when it pays? After all them years I gave to it?"

His spoon clattered noisily to his plate. He pushed his chair back from the table. The legs of it rasped loudly along the uncarpeted floor. He got to his feet.

"Let's go on outside," he said. "There ain't no sense to this here talking—and talking."

She glanced up at him. Her eyes were narrow and hard.

"All right, Benny. I'll clear up. I'll be along in a minute. All right, Benny."

He slouched heavily out of the room.

She sat where she was, the set look pressed on her face. Automatically her hands reached out among the dishes, pulling them toward her.

Outside the boy sank down on the step.

It was getting dark. There were shadows along the ground. Blue shadows. In the graying skies one star shone brilliantly. Beyond the mist-slurred summit of a hill the full moon grew yellow.

In front of him was the slope of wind-moved corn field, and in the center of it the dim, military figure standing waist deep in the corn.

His eyes fixed themselves to it.

"Ole—uniform—with—a—stick—into—it."

He whispered the words very low.

Still—standing there—still. The same wooden attitude of it. His same, cunning watching of it.

There was a wind. He knew it was going over his face. He could feel the cool of the wind across his moistened lips.

He took a deep breath.

Down there in the shivering corn field, standing in the dark, blue shadows, the dim figure had quivered.

An arm moved—swaying to and fro. The other arm began—swaying—swaying. A tremor ran through it. Once it pivoted. The head shook slowly from side to side. The arms rose and fell—and rose again. The head came up and down and rocked a bit to either side.

"I'm here—" he muttered involuntarily. "Here."

The arms were tossing and stretching.

He thought the head faced in his direction.

The wind had died out.

The arms went down and came up and reached.

"Benny—"

The woman seated herself on the step at his side.

"Look!" He mumbled. "Look!"

He pointed his hand at the dim figure shifting restlessly in the quiet, shadow-saturated corn field.

Her eyes followed after his.

"Oh—Benny—"

"Well—" His voice was hoarse. "It's moving, ain't it? You can see it moving for yourself, can't you? You ain't able to say you don't see it, are you?"

"The—wind—" She stammered.

"Where's the wind?"

"Down—there."

"D'you feel a wind? Say, d'you feel a wind?"

"Mebbe—down—there."

"There ain't no wind. Not now—there ain't! And it's moving, ain't it? Say, it's moving, ain't it?"

"It looks like it was dancing. So it does. Like as if it was—making—itself—dance—"

His eyes were still riveted on those arms that came up and down—; up and down—; and reached.

"It'll stop soon—now." He stuttered it more to himself than to her. "Then—it'll be still. I've watched it mighty often. Mebbe it knows I watch it. Mebbe that's why—it—moves—"

"Aw—Benny—"

"Well, you see it, don't you? You thought there was something the matter with me when I come and told you how it waves—and waves. But you seen it waving, ain't you?"

"It's nothing, Ben. Look, Benny. It's stopped!"

The two of them stared down the slope at the dim, military figure standing rigid and waist deep in the corn field.

The woman gave a quick sigh of relief.

For several moments they were silent.

From somewhere in the distance came the harsh, discordant sound of bull frogs croaking. Out in the night a dog bayed at the golden, full moon climbing up over the hills. A bird circled between sky and earth hovering above the corn field. They saw its slow descent, and then for a second they caught the startled whir of its wings, as it flew blindly into the night.

"That ole scarecrow!" She muttered.

"S'pose—" He whispered. "S'pose when it starts its moving like that;—s'pose some day it walks out of that there corn field! Just naturally walks out here to me. What then, if it walks out?"

"Benny—!"

"That's what I'm thinking of all the time. If it takes it into its head to just naturally walk out here. What's going to stop it, if it wants to walk out after me; once it starts moving that way? What?"

"Benny—! It couldn't do that! It couldn't!"

"Mebbe it won't. Mebbe it'll just beckon first. Mebbe it won't come after me. Not if I go when it beckons. I kind of figure it'll beckon when it wants me. I couldn't stand the other. I couldn't wait for it to come out here after me. I kind of feel it'll beckon. When it beckons, I'll be going."

"Benny, there's sickness coming on you."

"'Tain't no sickness."

The woman's hands were clinched together in her lap.

"I wish to Gawd—" She said—"I wish I ain't never seen the day when I put that there thing up in that there corn field. But I ain't thought nothing like this could never happen. I wish to Gawd I ain't never seen the day—"

"'Tain't got nothing to do with you."

His voice was very low.

"It's got everything to do with me. So it has! You said that afore yourself; and you was right. Ain't I put it up? Ain't I looked high and low the house through? Ain't that ole uniform of your grand-dad's been the only rag I could lay my hands on? Was there anything else I could use? Was there?"

"Aw—maw—!"

"Ain't we needed a scarecrow down there? With them birds so awful bad? Pecking away at the corn; and pecking."

"'Tain't your fault, maw."

"There warn't nothing else but that there ole uniform. I wouldn't have took it, otherwise. Poor ole Pa so desperate proud of it as he was. Him fighting for his country in it. Always saying that he was. He couldn't be doing enough for his country. And that there ole uniform meaning so much to him. Like a part of him I used to think it,—and—. You wanting to say something, Ben?"

"Naw—naw—!"

"He wouldn't even let us be burying him in it. 'Put my country's flag next my skin'; he told us. 'When I die keep the ole uniform.' Just like a part of him, he thought it. Wouldn't I have kept it, falling to pieces as it is, if there'd have been anything else to put up there in that there corn field?"

She felt the boy stiffen suddenly.

"And with him a soldier—"

He broke off abruptly.

She sensed what he was about to say.

"Aw, Benny—. That was different. Honest, it was. He warn't the only one in his family. There was two brothers."

The boy got to his feet.

"Why won't you let me go?" He asked it passionately. "Why d'you keep me here? You know I ain't happy! You know all the men've gone from these here parts. You know I ain't happy! Ain't you going to see how much I want to go? Ain't

you able to know that I want to fight for my country? The way he did his fighting?"

The boy jerked his head in the direction of the figure standing waist deep in the corn field; standing rigidly and faintly outlined beneath the haunting flood of moonlight.

"Naw, Benny. You can't go. Naw—!"

"Why, maw? Why d'you keep saying that and saying it?"

"I'm all alone, Benny. I've gave all my best years to make the farm pay for you. You got to stay, Benny. You got to stay on here with me. You just plain got—to! You'll be glad some day, Benny. Later—on. You'll be right glad."

She saw him thrust his hands hastily into his trouser pockets.

"Glad?" His voice sounded tired. "I'll be shamed. That's what I'll be. Nothing, d'you hear, nothing—but shamed!"

She started to her feet.

"Benny—" A note of fear shook through the words. "You wouldn't—wouldn't—go?"

He waited a moment before he answered her.

"If you ain't wanting me to go—; I'll stay. Gawd! I guess I plain got to—stay."

"That's a good boy, Benny. You won't never be sorry—nohow—I promise you!—I'll be making it up to you. Honest, I will!—There's lots of ways—I'll—!"

He interrupted her.

"Only, maw—; I won't let it come after me. If it beckons I—got—to—go—!"

She gave a sudden laugh that trailed off uncertainly.

"'Tain't going to beckon, Benny."

"It if beckons, maw—"

"'Tain't going to, Benny. 'Tain't nothing but the wind that moves it. It's just the wind, sure. Mebbe you got a touch of fever. Mebbe you better go on to bed. You'll be all right in the morning. Just you wait and see. You're a good boy, Benny. You'll never go off and leave your maw and the farm. You're a fine lad, Benny."

"If—it—beckons—" He repeated in weary monotone.

"'Tain't, Benny!"

"I'll be going to bed," he said.

"That's it, Benny. Good night."

"Good night, maw."

She stood there listening to his feet thudding up the stairs. She heard him knocking about in the room overhead. A door banged. She stood quite still. There were footsteps moving slowly. A window was thrown open.

She looked up to see him leaning far out over the sill.

Her eyes went down the slope of the moonlight-bathed corn field.

Her right hand curled itself into a fist.

"Ole—scarecrow—!"

She half laughed.

She waited there until she saw the boy draw away from the window. She went into the house and bolted the door behind her. Then she went up the narrow steps.

That night she lay awake for a long time. The heat had grown intense. She found herself tossing from side to side of the small bed.

The window shade had stuck at the top of the window.

The moonlight trickled into the room. She could see the window-framed, star-specked patch of the skies. When she sat up she saw the round, reddish-yellow ball of the moon.

She must have dozed, because she woke with a start. She felt that she had had a fearful, evil dream. The horror of it clung to her.

The room was like an oven.

She thought the walls were coming together and the ceiling pressing down.

Her body was covered with sweat.

She forced herself wide awake. She made herself get out of the bed. She stood for a second uncertain. Then she went to the window.

Not a breath of air stirring.

The moon was high in the sky.

She looked out across the hills.

Down there to the left the acres of potatoes. Potatoes were paying. She counted on a big harvest. To the right the wheat. Only the second year for those five fields. She knew that she had done well with them.

She thought, with a smile running over her lips, back to the time when less than half of the place had been under cultivation. She remembered her dream of getting the whole of her farm in work. She and the boy had made good. She thought of that with savage complacency. It had been a struggle; a bitter, hard fight from the beginning. But she had made good with her farm.

And there down the slope, just in front of the house, the corn field. And in the center of it, standing waist deep in the corn, the antiquated, military figure.

The smile slid from her mouth.

The suffocating heat was terrific.

Not a breath of air.

Suddenly she began to shake from head to foot.

Her eyes wide and staring, were fixed on the moonlight-whitened corn field; her eyes were held to the moonlight-streaked figure standing in the ghostly corn.

Moving—

An arm swayed—swayed to and fro. Backwards and forwards—backwards—The other arm—swaying—A tremor ran through it. Once it pivoted. The head shook slowly from side to side. The arms rose and fell—; and rose again. The head came up and down, and rocked a bit to either side.

"Dancing—" She whispered stupidly. "Dancing—"

She thought she could not breathe.

She had never felt such oppressive heat.

The arms were tossing and stretching.

She could not take her eyes from it.

And then she saw both arms reach out, and slowly, very slowly, she saw the hands of them, beckoning.

In the stillness of the room next to her she thought she heard a crash.

She listened intently, her eyes stuck to those reaching arms, and the hands of them that beckoned and beckoned.

"Benny—" She murmured—"Benny—!"

Silence.

She could not think.

It was his talk that had done this—Benny's talk—He had said something about it—walking out—If it should come—out—! Moving all over like that—If its feet should start—! If they should of a sudden begin to shuffle—; shuffle out of the cornfield—!

But Benny wasn't awake. He—couldn't—see—it. Thank Gawd! If only something—would—hold—it! If—only—it—would—stop—; Gawd!

Nothing stirring out there in the haunting moon-lighted night. Nothing moving. Nothing but the figure standing waist deep in the corn field. And even as she looked, the rigid, military figure grew still. Still, now, but for those slow, beckoning hands.

A tremendous dizziness came over her.

She closed her eyes for a second and then she stumbled back to the bed.

She lay there panting. She pulled the sheets up across her face; her shaking fingers working the tops of them into a hard ball. She stuffed it between her chattering teeth.

Whatever happened, Benny mustn't hear her. She mustn't waken, Benny. Thank Heaven, Benny was asleep. Benny must never know how, out there in the whitened night, the hands of the figure slowly and unceasingly beckoned and beckoned.

The sight of those reaching arms stayed before her. When, hours later, she fell asleep, she still saw the slow-moving, motioning hands.

It was morning when she wakened.

The sun streamed into the room.

She went to the door and opened it.

"Benny—" She called. "Oh, Benny."

There was no answer.

"Benny—" She called again. "Get on up. It's late, Benny!"

The house was quiet.

She half dressed herself and went into his room.

The bed had been slept in. She saw that at a glance. His clothes were not there. Down—in—the—field—because—she'd—forgotten—to—wake—him—.

In a sudden stunning flash she remembered the crash she had heard.

It took her a long while to get to the little closet behind the bed. Before she opened it she knew it would be empty.

The door creaked open.

His one hat and coat were gone.

She had known that.

He had seen those two reaching arms! He had seen those two hands that had slowly, very slowly, beckoned!

She went to the window.

Her eyes staring straight before her, down the slope in front of the house, caught sight of something blue and antiquatedly military standing waist deep and rigid in the corn field.

"You ole scarecrow—!" She whimpered. "Why're you standing there?" She sobbed. "What're you standing still for—*now*?"

MUTTER SCHWEGEL

He was tremendously disappointed. The house was empty. He had thought it looked uninhabited from the outside. It made him a bit dreary to have his people away like this. That uncertain feeling came over him again. The uncertain feeling never quite left him of late. He was conscious of it most of the time. It formed an intangible background to all his other thought.

He decided he would go down to the lodge presently. He was certain to find Bennet at the lodge. And Bennet's wife; and Bennet's three children. He grinned as he thought of Bennet chasing his children out of his gardens. He could imagine the old gardener's gladness at his homecoming.

Going quickly up the last flight of stairs, he could see that the door of his room stood ajar. He wondered at the yellow glow of light trickling in a long narrow stream out into the dark of the hall.

He went rushing along the corridor.

He pushed the door open.

The same old room. The familiar, faded wall paper. The high, mahogany bed. The hunting print he had so cherished on the wall facing him. The table just as he had left it; the books piled in neat stacks on its polished surface. The lamp standing lighted among the books. The two big arm chairs.

He took a deep breath of surprise.

Some one was seated in the chair facing from him.

He saw the top of a man's head. He had a dim recognition of feet sprawling from under the chair. On either arm of the chair rested a man's hand. There was something he knew about those hands; the prominent knuckles; the long, well made fingers. The heavy, silver signet ring on the smallest finger of the left hand was a ring he had often seen.

He crossed the room.

"Otto—!"

Standing there in front of Kurz, he wondered at the change in him. He looked so much older. There was no trace left of the boyishness which he had always associated with Otto Kurz. There were gray streaks in Kurz's heavy hair; gray at the temples of the wide forehead; gray behind the ears. The mustache and beard were threaded with grayed hairs.

He was astonished to find Otto Kurz in his room.

"Otto—! I had no idea that you would be here—!"

He could not understand the rigid attitude of the man's great body; the set mobility of the man's large hewn features.

He moved a bit so as to stand directly in the line of those fixed staring eyes. He wanted to interrupt the wooden

expression of those eyes.

"Otto—It was good of you to come."

Kurz's eyes raised themselves to meet his eyes. He quivered at the look in Kurz's eyes.

"My God!—What is it—?"

The glazed, deadened eyes with the live, dumbed suffering behind them widened.

"Ach—Charlie—!"

"What's happened, Otto?"

"I—do—not—know. I was waiting, Charlie—for—you—to—come."

"Good old Otto!"

He saw Kurz's hand with the heavy, silver signet ring on the smallest finger go up trembling to his beard. It was the old familiar gesture.

"Good?—Did you say good of me, Charlie?"

"Yes, yes!" He insisted eagerly. "Of course it was good of you to come and meet me."

"I—had—to—come."

For he a second he wondered.

"But how did you know?—Who told you?—I only just got here. No one—knew. How could you have known I was coming?"

He heard Kurz sigh; a long sigh that quavered at the end.

"I—? Ach!—how—I—hoped—!"

"That I would come?"

"That you would come, Charlie."

He could not fathom the look in Kurz's eyes. He had never seen a look like that in those eyes. He thought that it was not a human look.

"See here, Otto—What is it?"

Kurz made a little, appealing gesture with his long, trembling hands.

"Later—I—will—try—to—tell—you—"

"Later?"

Kurz nodded his great, shaggy head up and down.

"How did you come in here, Charlie?"

He was surprised at the question.

"How? Why, with my latch key, of course!"

He glanced over at the windows. The blinds were up. He could see the dark pressing against the glass; pressing tightly so that it spread. He started for the window. Kurz's voice stopped him.

"And your family? You have then seen your family, Charlie?"

He smiled.

"No. Not yet. They weren't here when you came in, were they?"

"No—no!—I—have—seen—no—one. I could not bring myself to go before any one. There was an old man. He was going down the hall. I waited till he passed. He must have come to light your lamp."

"Well, old Otto—They're not here. I've hunted all through the house for them. I rather think they must have gone down to Surrey. They've taken the servants with them. After a bit we'll walk over to the lodge and ask Bennet where my people are. That must have been Bennet you saw up here."

"Then you do not know?"

"Know what?"

"About your family?"

"But I just told you, Otto; they must've run down to our place in Surrey. I only came up here to get a look at the old room. I'll go down and ask Bennet presently."

A quick moan escaped through Kurz's set lips.

A sudden thought flashed to him.

"You, Otto—How did you get in here?—With them all away?—With the servants gone?"

He saw the muscles of Kurz's face twitch horribly.

"Ach—! You must not ask, Charlie. A little time, Charlie. There are things I do not myself know. Later—I—will—try—to—tell—you."

"Things you do not know, Otto?"

Kurz's mouth twisted itself into a distorted grin.

"I do not blame you for ridiculing me, Charlie. I always thought I knew everything. Later—; you will see."

"Why not tell me now?"

"No—no—!" Kurz's voice whined frantically. "I do not know if you yourself understand."

"I was only trying to help you, old chap."

"Help—! It is that I want. It is that which brought me here. It is because I must have you help me."

"You've only to say what you want."

"Your help—"

"You know I'll do whatever I can for you."

"Yes—; I hoped that. I counted—on—your—help."

He waited for Kurz to go on. Kurz sat there silent. The long, shaking fingers fumbled at each other.

"Well?"

"Later."

"All right—I don't know what you're driving at."

"Are—you—sure—you—do—not—know—?"

"But—If you don't want to tell me now; why, tell me in your own good time, old fellow."

"Yes. You are not angry? You do not care if I say it later?"

"Of course I don't care."

"Not—care—If—you—knew—; if—it—is—true—; you will care!"

He could not make out what Kurz meant.

"It's mighty nice seeing you," he said after a second's silence. "It's been a long time. Years since I've seen you."

"I came though, Charlie;—I had to come, Charlie."

"I'm jolly well glad you did!"

"You knew I would come."

He drew his brows together in a perplexed frown.

"I knew we would meet sometime."

"Yes. Sometime."

"And the sometime's now. Eh, Otto?"

"Now?" Kurz's big body strained forward. "What—is—it, Charlie—; this—now—?"

The frown stayed over his eyes.

"We were bound to come together again, old Otto. You and I were pretty good pals back there at your university. What a time we two had together! And old Mutter Schwegel! How old Mutter Schwegel fussed over us! How she took care of us! It all seems like yesterday—!"

Kurz got out of his chair.

"Old Mutter Schwegel—;" he muttered.

"Dear old Mutter Schwegel!"

Kurz's eyes stole away from his face.

"Later—I shall tell you of Mutter Schwegel too."

"And the talks we used to have—! The nightlong talks. We settled the affairs of the world nicely in those days. Didn't we, old Otto?"

"The—affairs—of—the—world—"

"And old Mutter Schwegel coming in to put out the light. And then standing there to hear what we had to say of life and of death."

"Of—life—and—of—death."

"And not being able to tear herself away to go to bed. She thought we were wise, Otto. She used to drink in every word we said. And then she'd scold us for staying up all night. Old Mutter Schwegel. I've thought of her often—"

Kurz made a movement toward him.

"And of me, Charlie?—You had thought of me?"

"I say, rather—! Many a time—when they called me back from the university—even after I went out to France—I thought of you."

His mind was muddled a bit. He put it down to the excitement of his coming home. That uncertain feeling came over him again quite strongly. But he had thought of Otto. He remembered he had thought of Otto a lot.

"And what was it you thought of me, Charlie?"

It came back to him that there had been one time when he had thought of Otto particularly. That one time when something tremendous had happened to him. He could not quite think what. He knew he had been glad when he thought of Otto because he had been spared inflicting the thing on him.

He could not get it clear.

He avoided looking at Kurz.

"Why—; why, I wondered what you were doing. All that sort of thing. You know what I mean."

"Yes. I know. I did go into the army, Charlie. It was that sort of thing you meant, Charlie?"

He felt himself start.

"I was afraid you would do that;" he said involuntarily.

"Yes. I, too, was afraid."

Kurz's voice was low.

"You? Afraid?"

"Ach, Charlie!—You know it. The fear it was not for myself!"

He walked over to the window. He stood there looking down at the huge boxwood hedges looming in thick gray bulks up from the smudging reach of the heavily matted shadows.

He turned.

"You funked meeting me—in—war?"

"Ach!—God forbid!—That—I—should—meet—you—in—war—!"

"I too;" he said it quickly. "I too was afraid that I should come upon you. It haunted me—; that fear I might harm you. It stayed with me—; day and night. I shouldn't want to hurt you, Otto. I—I prayed." It came back to him how often he had prayed it. "I always prayed that it might never be you!"

"Yes—; I know."

He went and stood close beside Kurz. He found himself staring at Kurz intently.

"But you're here;—in England. I say, did they make you a prisoner? Could my people get parole for you?"

"No. I do not think they do that here in your country. I do—not—need—parole, Charlie."

"I thought perhaps—"

"No—!"

"But how did you get here, then?"

"Charlie—; Charlie!—ach!—will—you—not—then—wait?"

"Come, come, old Otto. You've got something to tell me. If you don't want to say how you got here, why, all right. Only, you'd best get it off your mind. Whatever it is you'd better come out and say what you came to say."

Kurz slid back into the chair again.

The room was still. Heavy with silence.

"Yes. I'll tell you—if I can. Charlie, it is hard to say."

He tried to help Kurz.

"It's about this war of ours; that's it, isn't it?"

"About the war? Yes—!"

"Then tell me."

He saw Kurz's massive shoulders jerking.

"How—can—I—tell—you—? I do not think you understand. I do not even know if it is what I think it is. I cannot reason it out to myself. The power of reasoning has left me. I had no other knowledge than my reasoning. I do not know. Now, I do not know where I am—or—what—I—am—"

The maddened urge of Kurz's words struck him.

"You're here, old Otto;" he said it reassuringly. "Here with me. In my room. In England. You're with me, Otto!"

"Yes—with—you." And then beneath his breath he whispered: "Where—are—you—?"

He caught the smothered insistence of that last sentence. He smiled, forcing his lips to smile.

"Standing right in front of you, old man. Waiting for you to say what you came to—"

Kurz interrupted him.

"I—had—to come. I felt that I must come. I—came, Charlie. I got myself here, Charlie."

"Quite right, Otto."

"I want you to know first that I thought of you. That I was, as you say you were, afraid I might in some way injure you. I want to tell you that first."

"Good old sentimental Otto!"

"Sentimental?—Ach!—I am not sentimental. But I do not think you can understand how much you were to me back there at the university. I do not think you yourself knew how much you joyed in things. How happy your kind of thought made you."

He laughed.

"I always managed to have a rather corking time of it," he admitted.

"You loved everything so," Kurz went on. "At night when we talked it was you who believed in what you said. It was you who saw so clearly how well all things of life were meant. It was always I who questioned."

"But, I say, old Otto, your mind was so quick; so brilliant. You could pick flaws where I never knew they existed."

"It was you who had so much of faith, Charlie."

"How we did talk;" he said it to himself. "Talk and talk until old Mutter Schwegel, who was so keen for us, grew tired of listening and came and turned out the lamp."

"And how you spoke ever of your beliefs," Kurz's voice was hoarse. "It was so easy for you to know. You never questioned. You believed. It ended there, with your belief. You were so near to what you thought. It was a part of you. I—I stood away from all things and from myself. I would tell you that the mind should reason. I stayed outside with my criticism, while you—ach, Charlie!—How you did know!"

"And how you laughed at me for that!"

"But now, I do not laugh!" Kurz protested with wearied eagerness. "Now I come to you. I ask you if you know those things—now?"

"What things, Otto?"

"The things of life. The things of death."

"I know what I always knew," he said slowly. "I know that life is meant to live fully and understandingly and that death is meant to live on; fully and understandingly."

"And—you—do—understand—*now*?"

"I understand that always."

"You would not be afraid?"

"Of what?"

"Of—death?"

"No."

He stared out of the window.

The dense, opaque shadows pressing down on the garden. The shadows hanging loose and thick on the high, boxwood hedges. The dark, smooth, night sky.

And suddenly a faint tremor ran through him from head to foot. He pressed his face close to the glass. His hands went up screening a small space for his eyes.

In the still block of shadows, in the black mass of them, he had seen something; something had moved against the quiet clumping shadows.

"I say," he whispered. "There's some one coming up through the garden."

"Yes—yes."

They were silent for a long time.

Once he looked at Kurz huddled in the armchair; his face white and drawn; his eyes staring before him.

He thought he heard footsteps coming softly up the stairs; footsteps that came lightly and hesitated and then came on again.

"Charlie—!" Kurz stammered. "Charlie—!"

He felt that some one was standing in the open doorway.

He turned.

His eyes took in the well known figure. The sweet face with its red cheeks and its framing white hair. The short body. The blue eyes that were fixed on him.

"Mutter Schwegel!" He shouted.

Kurz leaped to his feet.

"What!"

He started for the door.

"Mutter Schwegel, who would have thought of your coming here. It has been a long time. I say!—But I am glad."

"Stop—!" Kurz's voice thundered behind him.

He wheeled to look at Kurz.

Kurz's eyes were riveted on the woman standing in the doorway.

"Aren't you glad to see Mutter Schwegel?" He asked. "When we've been talking of her all night?"

Kurz was muttering to himself.

"Mutter—Schwegel—;" Kurz mumbled. "Mutter Schwegel—! It—is—that—I—wanted—to—tell—you—about—Mutter Schwegel. It—is—as—I—thought. It—is—ach!—it—is—then—that—way—with—us—!"

He felt that the woman was coming into the room.

He turned and looked at her.

"Mutter—Schwegel—is—dead;" Kurz stammered.

He saw that the old woman smiled.

"She—is—dead. Dead—!" Kurz mumbled.

He smiled back at her.

"Dead—;" Kurz's voice droned shaking.

He saw the old woman go to the table.

He and Kurz watched her take the lamp up in her hands. He and Kurz saw her fingers fumbling at the wick. Kurz's quivering face stood out in the lamplight. The old woman was smiling quietly.

They saw her try to put out the light.

The lamp still burned.

"Mutter-Schwegel—is—dead—!" Kurz's voice quavered; and then it screamed. "Dead—," he shrieked; "we—are—all—of—us—dead—!"

That uncertain feeling came over him. And suddenly it went quite from him.

HAUNTED

He lived quite alone in the stone built shanty perched on the highest pinnacle of the great sun bleached chalk cliffs. All about him, as far as the eye could reach, lay the flat, salt marshes with their dank, yellowed grasses. Against the inland horizon three, gaunt, thin-foliaged trees reared themselves from the monotonously even soil. Overhead the cloud splotched blue gray sky, and below him the changing, motion pulled, current swirling depths of the blue green sea. And at all times of the day and the night, the wild whirring of the sea gulls' wings and the uncanny inhuman piercing sound of their shrieking.

He had lived there since that day when the fisherman had pulled him half drowned out of the sea. He could never remember where he had come from, or what had happened. All that he ever knew was that far out by the nets in the early morning they had come upon him and had brought him in to shore. Naturally, the fishermen had questioned him; but his vagueness, his absolute lack of belief that he had ever been anything before they had snatched him from the waters, had frightened them so that since that day they had left him severely alone. Fishing folk have strange, superstitious ideas about certain things. He had borne the full weight of their credulous awe. Perhaps because he, himself, thought as they thought. That he was something come from the sea, and of the sea, and always belonging to the sea.

He had built himself the stone shanty upon the highest pinnacle of those waste grown chalk cliffs; and he had stayed on

and on, year in and year out, close there to the sea.

In winter for a livelihood he made baskets from the reeds he had picked in the swamps about him. In the summer he sold the vegetables he grew in the tiny truck garden behind his house. Somehow he managed to eke out a living.

The fishing folk in the small village at the foot of the cliffs saw him come and go along their narrow streets, morose and taciturn. He never spoke to any of them unless he had to. They in their turn avoided him with their habitual superstitious uneasiness. He went to and fro between his shanty and the village store when the need arose. The rest of the time he sat in front of his iron bolted door staring and staring down at the sea.

Daybreak and noon. Evening and night he sat there.

When the sky above was tinged with the first streaking colors of the dawn he watched the ghostly gray expanse of the ocean. When the sun was high in the heavens he looked steadily at the light-flecked spotted swells of the waves. When the shadows began to creep up from the earth he stared at the greater blackness that swam in glistening undulating darkness to him from across the water. And at night his eyes strained through the fitful gloom at the pitchy, turbulent sea.

It was like that in all kinds of weather. The spring tides, with their quick changes from calm to storm, and the slender silver crescent of the new moon hanging just above the horizon. The long summer laziness of the green ocean with its later gigantic flame-red moons and the wide yellow streak of phosphorescent light that streamed in moving ripples to him; the chill, lashing spray in autumn. The foam-covered seething breadth of it in winter when the blackness of the low night skies and the darkness of the high tides were as one menacing roaring turmoil churning itself into white spumed frenzy. It always held him.

He was a man of one idea: The sea. He was a man who drew his life from one source: The sea. It had taken his body and had tried to drown it; the sea had for that short time caught and gripped his soul. The slimy, wet touch of it was seared into him.

It fascinated him; it kept him near it so that he could not have gotten away from it, had he had the courage to want to get away. It kept him there as though he belonged to it; as though it knew he belonged to it; and knew that he knew it. And always and ever the sea haunted him.

The fishing men coming home late at night across the water had grown used to steering their course by the unreal light that trickled out to them from the shanty on the top of the cliffs. And in the dawn when they pushed their smacks off from the long, hard beach to sail out to the nets, they knew that from the high precipices above them the man was watching.

And outwardly they laughed at him; even when in their hearts they feared the thing they thought he was.

They could not understand him. They, who made their living from the sea, could not understand how he could be content to live the way he was living. They could not have known that he would infinitely rather have died than to have taken one thing from out the sea from which he had already filched his soul.

His enslavement by it had made him understand it a lot better than they understood it.

And so he lived the stupid, hypnotized life of one who is held so enchained and cowed that he could not think for himself, or of himself. Until that day when he first met Sally.

It was a sunny day late in the autumn that he stood in front of the weather beaten wooden hut of the village store, his arms filled with baskets. And as he stood there, Sally Walsh came from the store and out into the street.

She had seen the man a hundred times but she had never seen him so close. She stopped short and stared quite frankly at the bigness of him; at the heavily matted hair clinging so damply to his forehead; and at the white face so strange to her beside the sun-burned faces she had always seen. It was when, quite suddenly, he looked at her and she saw the odd blue green sea colored eyes of him, that she started to hurry on.

She had gotten half way down the street when he overtook her.

"D'you want—anything of—me?" He asked it, his blue green eyes going quickly over her slight form, her small face, and resting for a second curiously upon her masses of coiled golden hair.

"I—? why—no."

"You sure?"

"Sure."

She went on her way again and he stood there watching her go; then he turned abruptly and walked slowly back to the store.

It was not so long after that when he met her for the second time.

She was on her knees in the yard in front of her father's house mending the tar-covered fishing nets with quick deft fingers. He stopped at the gate. Feeling the intensity of his blue green eyes upon her, she looked up and saw him.

She got to her feet.

"It's a nice morning."

She spoke to him first.

"Yes"; he said.

"You live up there?" She pointed a bare browned arm up toward the sun bleached chalk cliffs. "By yourself?"

"Yes."

"You ain't got a boat?"

"No."

"They say you don't ever fish. Why don't you, Mister?"

"I—I ain't the one to fish."

"Want to help me with these here nets?"

"I—I can't do—that."

"It ain't hard, Mister."

"I—can't—do—it."

"Come on in; I'll show you how."

He opened the gate and went into the yard and then he stood there just looking down at her.

"I wouldn't touch—no—net—"

Her brows drew together in a puzzled frown.

"You mean you don't like fishing?"

Somehow he did not want her to know.

"I—ain't—the—one—to—take—no—sea-thing—away—from—the—sea."

"Oh;" she said, not understanding.

They were silent a moment.

"You sell baskets?" She asked him.

"D'you want one?"

"Mebbe. Got a medium-sized one?"

"Got a lot."

"Mebbe—I—could—use—one."

"I'd like mighty well to—to give you one, little girl."

"Why, I ain't a little girl, Mister. I—I thought—I'd mebbe—buy—"

He interrupted her.

"You'll not buy one off of me. I'll bring you one—; if you like."

"A medium-sized one."

"I'll bring it to you—; to-morrow."

"Thanks."

"Good-by, little girl."

"Good-by, Mister."

At the end of the street he turned to look back.

She was on her knees working at her mending of the nets again. She looked very small kneeling there on the hard brown earth with the straggling lines of squat weather darkened shanties trailing behind her out onto the edge of the yellow sanded beach, and the clear unbroken blue of the autumn skies above. She glanced up and then she waved her hand at him.

He went slowly along the narrow pathway that wound through the sharp crevices of the chalk cliffs to the back of his own stone built shanty.

That night he stood staring out at the sea. The moon was on the wane. It hung very low in the sky so that the red-gold streak of it seemed to dip into the water. A cold northeast wind lashed over the waves. Dark swollen purplish clouds raced together in an angry mass. The sea itself was black but for the tossing gigantic waves with their dead white crests of spraying foam. The pounding of them on the beach below him vibrated in his ears. The sea-gulls were flying heavily close to the earth; their inhuman, piercing shrieking filling the air.

The little girl had spoken to him.

He turned from the sea then. He went into his shanty. He bolted the great iron bolts of the door and braced himself against it as if he were shutting something out; something that he feared; something that was certain to come after him. He crouched there shivering and shuddering. The pounding of the sea was in his ears. The wind that came from the ocean whistled and wailed shrilly around and around the house. He leaned there; his back to the door; his hands pressing stiff fingered against it; his lips moving, mumbling dumbly. His eyes, the color of the sea, stared blindly before him. The rumbling roar of the rising tide; the thundering boom of it. And in the sudden lull of the wind the hiss of the seething spray.

The sea was angry.

He thought with a kind of paralyzing terror that it was angry with him. It was calling to him. The lashing of the big waves demanded him. The sonorous drumming of it. He had never before denied its call. The persistent thudding of it there at the base of the chalk cliffs. It was insisting that he belonged to it. The inhuman piercing shrieks of the circling sea-gulls mocked him. They knew that he belonged to the sea. How could he even think of that golden haired little girl who had spoken to him—

The sea was angry.

He tore at the iron bolts and flinging the door wide open he rushed out to the edge of the chalk cliffs. And as he stood there the clouds dwindled in a vaporous haze away from the skies. The thin red-gold line of the waning moon grew

brighter. The sea lay foam flecked and calm beneath the dark heavens. And at the base of the chalk cliffs the water lapped and lapped with a strange insidious sound.

And the next day he sat there in front of his shanty, his reeds in his hands, his fingers busy with his basket weaving; making big baskets and small baskets; and his eyes, blue green and strained, were fixed on the tranquil blue green of the water below him.

For two days he sat there in front of his iron bolted door that now swung wide open on its rusty hinges.

The third day he stood upon the edge of the precipice.

It was a gray fog drenched day. The mist dripped all about him. The opaque veil of it shut out everything in wet obliteration. He stood quite still knowing that beneath its dank dribbling thickness, the sea churned wildly in its rising tide.

And standing there motionless he heard a voice calling through the quiet denseness of the fog. A voice coming from a distance and muffled by the mist. He started. It was her voice calling to him from the narrow pathway that wound up the chalk cliffs to the back of his shanty.

"Mister—oh, Mister."

He reached his hand out in front of him trying to break the saturating cover of the fog. He went stumbling unseeingly toward the rear of the house.

"Mister—oh, Mister."

The rear of the shanty. His feet sank down into the turned soil of the truck garden. He stood still.

"Here."

"Mister;" the voice of her was nearer. "Where are—you—?"

He could not see in front of him. He felt that she was close.

"Here;—little girl."

He saw the faint outline of her shadow then through the obliterating denseness of the mist.

"Some fog; ain't it, Mister?"

"Stay where—you are. There's the precipice."

"I ain't afraid of no precipice."

"Stay—where—you—are!"

He could hear the dripping of the mist over the window ledges. And then he thought he heard, smothered by the weight of the fog, the pounding of the sea.

"You surprised to see me? But you ain't able to see me. Are you?"

"No."

"You ain't surprised?"

Down there at the base of the chalk cliffs the sea was still; waiting.

"You—shouldn't—have—come."

"Why—you don't mean;—you ain't trying to tell me;—you—don't—want—me—here?"

Great beads of moisture trickled down across his eyes.

"Little girl—; I just said you shouldn't have come. Not up here in this kind of weather."

"Oh, the weather!" She laughed. "I ain't the one to mind the weather, Mister."

Again he reached his hand out in front of him in an effort to rend the suffocating thickness of the fog. His fingers touched her arm and closed over it. From below him came the repeated warning roar of the waves.

"Can you find your way home—by yourself—little girl?"

"I ain't going home, Mister;—not yet. I came up here to get that basket you said you had for me; you know, the medium sized one."

"I'll give it to you—now."

Her hand caught at his hand that lay on her arm. Her fingers fastened themselves around his and held tightly. He had never felt anything like that. The touch of them was cool and fresh, like sea weed that had just drifted in from the sea.

And then from far off across the water came the shrill, piercing shriek of a gull.

He felt her start.

"That's only a sea-gull, little girl."

"I know, Mister. But don't it sound strange; almost as if it were the sea itself; calling for something."

For a second he could not speak.

"Why—;" his voice was hoarse, "Why d'you say that?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I get to feeling mighty queer about that water out there."

"You mean—; why—you ain't afraid of it, little girl, are you?"

"Afraid? There ain't nothing that I'm afraid of, Mister. Why, I'd go anywhere and not be afraid—"

He repeated her words very slowly to himself.

"You'd—go—anywhere—and—not—be—afraid—"

He thought then that the fog was lifting. A sickly, yellowish glow filtered through the heavy grayness. He could see her more distinctly.

"There's only one thing about the sea, Mister, that'd scare me, and that's—"

She broke off abruptly.

"What, little girl?"

"Why, Mister; why, I can't hardly say it. But there's Pa and there's my brother, Will. If anything ever happened—; if the sea ever did anything to Pa or Will, why—I guess, Mister, I'd just die."

"Don't!" He said quickly. "Don't you talk like that."

For a second they were silent.

The sun was breaking through the dwindling thickness of the mist. He could see it lifting in a faint gray line, uncovering the reach of the flat salt marshes with their dank yellowed grasses; a thin silver net of it hung for a second between the sky and the earth, and was gone.

From the base of the chalk cliffs came the sound of the sea lapping and lapping with insistent cunning.

She dropped his hand and she stood there looking up to him, scanning his white face with those childlike eyes of hers.

"You live up here because of the sea, Mister?"

"Yes."

"You ever feel the sea's something—alive, like you and me?"

"You—feel—that—too?"

"Yes," she said slowly, "and I knew you felt it, because the first time I saw you—why—you're somehow—something like the sea."

His hands clinched at his sides. His breath came in quick rasping gasps.

"I'll get your basket," he muttered.

He rushed into his one room shanty and caught up the basket nearest to him and went out again to her.

She took the basket from him in silence. She slipped the handle of it on to her arm. Her hands rubbed against each other; the fingers of them twining and intertwining.

"I'll be going now, Mister."

"Yes."

"I've got to be getting home before Pa and Will go out to the nets."

"Good-by, little girl."

"Good-by, Mister; and—thanks."

He stood there and watched her go from the back of his stone built shanty down the narrow winding path that lay along the sun bleached chalk cliffs. She went quickly and lightly down the steep incline, her small slender figure in its blue print dress, with the sun bringing out the burnished glints in her golden hair. His eyes strained after her. In a short while he lost her from sight.

He went back to his basket making then.

And as he sat there, his fingers weaving and bending the supple reeds, mechanically working them into shape, he tried to shut out all thought of her; to feel as though she had never come to him; to rivet his attention upon the insistent pounding of the sea that hurled itself again and again at the base of the chalk cliffs; calling and calling to him.

After a while the early deep blue dusk of the twilight came.

He got stiffly to his feet.

The long moving shadows were quivering in fantastic purpled patterns on the ground about him. Great daubs of them clung in the crevices of the chalk cliffs. A mat of shadows crept over the flat salt marshes and through the dank yellowed grasses. There was a sudden chill in the wind that came to him from off the water. A flock of screeching sea-gulls wildly beating their wings, rose from the cliffs and whirred out toward the open sea, the uncanny piercing sound of their shrieking coming deafeningly back to him.

He stood there staring at the ocean, his head well back; his nostrils dilated; his blue green eyes strangely wide.

Far in the distance against the graying horizon he could see the choppy white capped waves racing over the smooth dark water. Even as he looked the sea began to rise in great swollen billows. The wind too was rising. He could hear the distant cry of it.

His heart began to thump wildly. He knew what was going to happen; just as he always knew. He could feel what the sea was going to do.

He stood there undecided.

A quick picture came to him of the storm.

He had seen it all before. He had stood there on the chalk cliffs and watched it all: Watched the shattered broken logs; the swirling sucking water. The sea had held him under its spell; had compelled him to witness its maddened, infuriated stalking of its prey.

Her people were out there. Her Pa and her Will. Why had she told him that? Why had she said if anything ever happened to them she would die? Why?

He could just make out the stiff sticks of the nets reaching thin and dark from the surface of the gray water against the lighter gray skies; and the boats rowing toward them. The boats with the fishermen. He could see the slender patches of them rising and falling with the waves, going slowly to the nets. He could distinguish the small, dark shadows of the men, rowing. They had pulled him out of the sea in that early morning; he who was something come from the sea, and of the sea; and always belonging to the sea.

To—betray—the—sea—

The waves were racing in to the shore. The thumping, deafening boom of them there at the base of the chalk cliffs below him.

He tried to tear his eyes away from it. It held him as it ever held him. It kept him there as though he belonged to it. As though it knew he belonged to it; and knew that he knew it. A strange uneasiness arose within him. Even before he was conscious of it, he felt that the sea had sensed it. Its insistent angry pounding threatened him.

She had said that she would die.

Below him the swirling, churning sea.

He turned then and went very slowly down the narrow, winding path that led along the sun bleached chalk cliffs. Through the deep blue dusk of the evening he went, and the gray blotched reach of the flat salt marshes with their dank yellowed grasses lay all about him; and overhead the cloud spotted, moving gray of the sky, and beneath him the raging sea that called to him; and called.

He never stopped until he came to the weather darkened shanty where she lived.

He paused then at the gate.

A lighted lamp was in one of the windows on the ground floor. The soft glow of it streamed in a long ladder of light out to him in the darkness.

He opened the gate and went haltingly across the yard, and after a moment's hesitation he knocked at the door.

At the far end of the street the sea thudded over the yellow sanded beach; the pale stretch of it coming out of the grayness in a long white line.

She answered his knock.

The light from the lamp swept through the open doorway.

Something in his face terrified her; something that she had never before seen in those blue green eyes, the color of the sea.

"What is it? What's happened?"

He stood there just looking down at her.

"Oh, Mister, tell me; please—what is it?"

Her two hands went up to her throat and caught tightly at her neck.

"There's—a—storm—"

She looked out into the quiet, darkening evening.

"A storm?"

"There's a bad storm—; coming."

He could hardly say the words.

She stared up at him; her childlike eyes were very wide.

"Will it—be—soon—?"

He never took his blue green eyes from off her face.

"It's coming—quick."

"They're out—Pa—and—Will."

He said it very quietly then.

"That's why I'm here."

"How can we—get them—back?"

"Oh, little girl;" he muttered. "Little girl—"

"How, Mister; how?"

"I'll get a boat."

"There's Sam Wilkins' smack—down there at the wharf. We could take that."

"Then—I'll go—after them."

They went from the door together down the street and out onto the back patch of the wharf. Through the grayness they could see the boat rocking on the water at the farther end. The wail of the rising wind; the pounding of the sea; and close to them the muffled, bumping sound of the smack thrown again and again at the long wooden piles of the wharf.

For a second they stood quite still.

"I'm going," he said.

Her arms went suddenly up around his neck. Her lips brushed across his. He felt her body shivering. He caught and held her to him; and then he let her go and went quickly to the end of the wharf and pulled the boat alongside and stepped into it.

He looked up at her standing there against the gray sky. He could see the white patches of her face and her hands and the pale mass of her hair that the wind had loosened. And down through the draggling grayness he distinctly saw her childlike eyes searching for his.

Before he could stop her she was in the boat.

"Get—back."

"I'm going."

"Quick—get—back."

"I'm going—with—you."

"You can't—; you don't know."

"I'm not afraid. Honest—I'm—not."

"You don't know what it means!"

"I'm—not—afraid."

"Little girl—I ain't going—if you go."

"You've got—to—go."

He repeated her words.

"I've—got—to—go."

"If you don't take me with you;" he had never heard her voice like that—"I'll come out myself. You can't leave me—you can't!"

The rain began then. Great drops of it fell into his face. The whining of the wind was terrific.

"You—don't know what it—means."

"I do know;—oh, God,—I do."

He caught up his oars then.

He rowed with all his strength. The whole thing was so strange to him. Her going. Their being out on the water. The rowing.

The waves rose in tremendous black swells all about them. The rain and the spray drenched them. The wind rocked the small boat. The whistling wail of it; the lowering cloud sprawled pitchy sky.

He pulled in silence until they came to the nets.

She stood up in the boat and called; again and again her voice rose into the wind.

"Sit down!" He told her.

A distant shout answered her.

He bent to his oars then till he came to the cluster of smacks on the other side of the nets.

"Pa—;" she cried.

"Sally—! What you doing here?"

"Pa—; there's a storm."

"I can see that."

"Pa—come on back—to shore."

"You get on back, Sally. It'll blow over."

She turned to him then.

"You tell him;" she said it desperately. "You—tell—him."

He waited until he got just alongside of the fishing smack.

"It's going to be—a—bad—one."

He said it slowly.

He thought then that the angry swirling of the sea became more infuriated; that the swell of the waves was greater. Far in the distance he heard the inhuman, piercing shriek of the sea-gulls.

"Who's that there, Sally?"

"It's—me."

He saw that both of the men in the smack leaned toward him.

"What?"

"It's—it's—me."

"You!"

"Go on back, Pa;—Will, make him—go on back. Get the others to go;—please—Pa;—please."

For answer he heard the man's shout to the other boats about the nets.

"Storm—lads;—make—for—shore."

He saw a moment's hesitation in that cluster of fishing smacks and then one by one he watched them pull away from the nets and row toward the beach.

He reached out his hand and caught hold of the other boat's gunwale.

"Make—the little girl—go—back with—you."

"Come on, Sally. Hop across there. Pa'll help you."

"We'll follow you, Pa."

"All right."

"Tell—the—little girl—to go with you!"

"With—me?"

"Tell—her!"

"You go on, Pa. We'll come right after you."

He felt the boat at his side give a quick lurch. His hand slipped into the water. He could feel the sea pulling at it. His own smack rocked perilously for a second. And then he saw the girl's father and brother rowing toward the beach.

"What—what'd—you—do—that—for?"

She did not answer him.

A wave broke over the bow of his boat.

In the darkness he could see her crawling on her hands and knees along the bottom of the smack to him. He reached down and caught her up in his arms.

"Will they get back—safe?" She whispered it.

"Yes."

"Sure?"

"They're there—now."

And then the storm broke. The lightning flashed in zigzagging, blindly flares across the dark of the sky. The thunder rumbled in clattering crescendo. The sea tore and swirled and sucked. Wave after wave broke over the small boat. She rocked and pitched and swivelled. The oars were washed away. The rain and the wind stung them with their fury. The spray cut into their faces. From far off came the uncanny, inhuman, piercing sound of the sea-gulls' shrieking.

He knew then that the time had come.

He held her very close to him.

He had filched his soul from the sea. He who was something come from the sea, and of the sea; and always belonging to the sea.

He had betrayed the sea.

"Little girl."

"I'm not—afraid."

"Little girl."

"I couldn't stay on—without you. I always knew—always—that some time you'd—go—back."

"You're not—scared?"

"Just—hold—me—tight."

The foam covered seething breadth of the water churning itself into white spumed frenzy. The dark, lowering skies. The black deep pull of the sea.

"Tighter—"

FLOWERS

The night wind brought him the smell of flowers.

For a moment he fought against the smothering oppression of the thing he hated; for a second the same struggle against its stifling weight.

His eyes closed with the brows above them drawn and tight. His teeth caught savagely at his lower lip, gnawing at it until the blood came. His hands, the fingers wide spread, the veins purple and standing out, moved slowly and tensely to his throat.

How he dreaded it! How he abominated the thing! How he loathed the subtle, insidious fragrance! How he abhorred flowers—flowers!

With a tremendous, forcing effort he opened his eyes.

The same garden. The same sweeping reach of flowers. Flowers as far as he could see. Gigantic blossoming clumps of rhododendron. Slender, fragile lilies of the valley showing white and faint on the deep green leaves. Violets somewhere. He got the sickeningly sweet scent of them. Early roses growing riotously. He detested the perfume of roses.

Overhead the darkening sky that held in the west the thin gray crescent of the coming moon.

And all through the garden the first dull blue shadows of evening. Shadows that blurred around the shapes of flowers; shadows that spread over the flowers, smearing out the spotting color of them until they were a gloom-splotched, ghostly mass. Shadows that brought out in all its pungent power the assailing, suffocating smell of the flowers.

He stood there waiting.

He could feel his heartbeats throbbing in his temples. His breath came in long racking gasps. His one thought was to breathe regularly. One—two—He tried to think of something other than his breathing. The intangible odor of the flowers choked him with their stealthy cunning.

It was always like this at first. He had always to contend silently and with all his strength against this illusive, abominated thing poured out to him by the flowers.

His strangling intaking of breath. One—two—

Never in all his life had he been without his horror of flowers; never until now had he known why he hated them. Lately he had begun to wonder if they hated him.

It would be better when she came.

They were her flowers. Her flowers that took all her time; all her thoughts; all her caring and affection. Her flowers that grew all about her. Her flowers that held her away from him. He hated her flowers.

One. Two.

It would be quite all right when she was there.

Her flowers would not harm her.

And then he heard the soft, uneven rustling of her skirts.

He looked up to see her walking toward him down the long lane of her flowers. Through the drenching grayness he could see that she wore the same light dress that made her tall and clung to her in folds so that her figure seemed to bend. He could distinguish the heavy shadowy mass of her uncovered hair. Her eyes, set far apart and dark, fixed themselves on him. A quick light flooded into them. In the dusk he saw that her hands were clasped together and that they were filled with lilies.

"Throw them away," he said when she stood beside him.

"They're so pretty," she told him, staring down at the lilies. "You'll let me keep these; just this once?"

"Throw them away," he repeated. "I can't stand the sight of them. You know that. Why must you go on picking the things and picking them?"

She shrugged her shoulders. Her eyes left his face.

"I love them," she said simply.

"Love?" He laughed. "How can you love flowers?"

"Oh, but I can."

"Well, I can't!" He had been wanting her to know that for a long while.

"Why not?" She asked him.

He could not bring himself to tell her why not.

"Throw them away!"

She let the lilies sift through her fingers one by one. And then the last fell to the ground.

"Are you satisfied?"

"No," he said. "What good does it do, anyway? The next time it'll be the same again. It always is."

She reached out a hand and touched his arm.

"But I never know when you're coming. If I knew I wouldn't be picking flowers. I can't help having them in my hands when you come, if I don't know, can I?"

"It isn't that."

He covered her hand lying on his arm with his hand.

"What is it, then?"

She pulled her fingers from under his and drew away a bit.

He made up his mind to try and tell her.

"It's the flowers. I should have told you long ago. Even at the beginning when we first—When I first came here, I—"

She interrupted him.

"When was that? How long ago?"

"How can I tell? Ages ago."

"It does seem;" she said it slowly. "It does seem as if you had always come here. I can't remember the time when you didn't come. It's strange, isn't it? Because, you know, there was a time when you weren't here. That was when I began with the flowers."

"I wish you'd never begun," he muttered. "That's what I've got to say to you. I hate flowers. I've always hated them! I never quite knew why till I came here and found you loving them so much. You never think of anything, or talk of anything but your flowers. If you must know, that's why I hate them!"

"How silly of you!"

He thought she smiled.

"It's not," he said. "There's nothing silly about it. I'd like to have you think of other things. There're plenty of other things. I want you to think of them. I—want—"

He broke off abruptly.

"What do you want?"

"I—I—want—you—I can't say it!"

For a little while they were silent. It grew darker. The shadows that lay along the ground moved upward through the bushes of rhododendron. He watched the fantastic mesh of them shifting there. The gray of the crescent moon grew faintly yellow. His eyes roved over the shadow splashed reach of flowers. The heavy odor of them sickened him.

"If only you'd try to like them!" She said it wistfully.

"It's no use. I couldn't."

"If you worked among them the way I work, perhaps you could."

"I tell you I couldn't!"

"But they're so lovely." Her hand went out and touched a rose. "It's taken me years to perfect this one. You can't see in this light. But during the day—; why don't you ever come here during the day?"

"I don't know," he told her quite truthfully.

"During the day," she went on, "you ought to see it. It's yellow; almost gold. And its center—That's quite, quite pink with the very middle bit almost scarlet. I love this rose."

He thought then that he could smell the particular fragrance of the one rose permeating subtly through the odor of all those other flowers. She loved that yellow and gold and scarlet rose.

"Good heavens," he said, "do stop telling me how much you love your flowers!"

"If you were with them all the time—"

He did not let her finish.

"That's all you do, isn't it? Just care for your flowers all day long?"

"Why, yes." She was surprised. "Of course it's all I do. It's all I care about doing. It takes every minute of my time. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, I know it." His tone was gruff.

"Then why do you always talk about it like this?" She asked him. "I've done it for years. Ever since I can remember. It's hard work, but I like doing it. I don't think you know how alone I've always been. I'm afraid you don't realize that. Not really, anyway. I've just never had anything to care about until I started in with the flowers. I don't know if I ought to tell you—"

She stopped speaking quite suddenly.

"What?"

"I don't think you'd like to know what I was going to say."

"Tell me," he insisted.

"Well." She spoke slowly. "Sometimes I feel as though—It's so hard to say. But sometimes I feel as if the flowers know how much I care and—and as if they care too."

"Why d'you say that?"

"I don't quite know. Only they're living things; they are, aren't they?"

"I suppose they are; but that's no reason for you to encourage yourself in all those queer ideas about them."

"Queer ideas?"

"You know the sort of thing I mean."

"I don't. What sort?"

He thought then that her voice had a hurt sound drifting through it.

"Loving them. For one thing."

"But what can I do? What else have I to love? I've just told you how much alone I am. All the time, really. The flowers are the only things I have. I've just told you that."

He waited a second.

"You have me," he said.

"You? But you hardly ever come. I'm so lonesome. You can't know what that means. I am lonely. And you—Why, sometimes I think you're not real. Not—even—real—"

"Don't! For God's sake don't say that!"

"I can't help it! I tell you, I can't. It's all right now. It's always all right when you're here. But after you go—Nothing is real to me; nothing but the flowers. And you don't want me to care for them. You keep saying you hate them. They're all I've got. Won't you—can't you see that?"

"But—if—I—come—here—to—stay?"

"To—stay?"

"Would you want me here?"

He saw her hands move upward until they lay in two white spots on her breast.

"Want you?—If—only—you—knew—"

He waited a moment before he said it.

"And you—could—love—me?"

"I've always loved you."

She spoke in a whisper.

"I'll find a way." He told her. "There must be a way."

"But how? How?"

"I don't know. I never thought about it before. I never knew you cared. I thought it was just the flowers. Nothing but the flowers. I hate the flowers. The feel of them—the sight of them—the smell of them. I couldn't ever come here without being suffocated. I was jealous of them; fearfully jealous."

"And—I—thought." Her voice was low. "I—thought—that—because—I—feel—they—love—me;—because—I love—them;—somehow—they—brought—you—here."

"And when I come—"

"When?"

Her voice itself trailed to a whisper.

"I will come to you! I—will!"

"How—can—you—find—me?"

"Somehow—I will!"

"If—only—you—could. I am lonely. Terribly—lonely. If—it—would—be—soon."

"It—must—be—soon."

"I'll—wait—for you—always. But—if you are—real—you'll—come—soon. It's lonely—waiting. And—I—don't—even—know—if—you—are. I—don't—even—know."

The Reverend William Cruthers started from his chair.

Some one had banged the window closed. Some one had lit the lamp on the center table. Its yellow light trickled through the room and over the scant old fashioned furniture and crept upwards across the booklined walls.

The room was stuffy and close. The smell of flowers had gone.

"Billy!"

He turned to see his sister rushing across the room to him. He stooped a bit and caught her in his arms.

"Why, Gina. I didn't know. Why didn't you write and tell me? Who brought you up from the station?"

The girl kissed him hastily and enthusiastically on either cheek.

"A nice welcome home!" She laughed breathlessly. "I was just about to make a graceful and silent exit."

"But, Gina, I didn't know."

"Of course you didn't know. You couldn't. I wouldn't write. I wanted to surprise you. Aren't you surprised, Billy?"

"Awfully," he conceded.

"Awfully?"

Her brows puckered.

"Very much so, I mean."

"You never do know just what you do mean. Do you, William?"

"Naturally, I do."

"It wouldn't be natural for you if you did."

The girl slid away from him and went and perched herself comfortably on the arm of the chair in which he had been sitting. Her hands were busy with her hatpins and her eyes that peered up at him were filled with laughter.

"How did you get up from the station, Gina?"

"Oh, such a lovely way, Billy! And so very energetic for me. I walked. Now, what do you know about that?"

He frowned a bit.

"Very good for you, I don't doubt." He said it stiffly. "After all the motoring you must have done with those friends of yours!"

She had gotten her hat off. She sat dangling it by the brim. The lamplight streaked over her hair.

"Now, don't be nasty, William. And whatever you do, don't speak to me as if I were a congregation. The Trents are perfectly lovely people, even if they are terribly rich and not very Christian. And—and Georgie Trent is a sweet boy; and," she added it hastily. "Wood Mills is a duck of a place!"

He thrust his hands into his coat pockets.

"I never said it wasn't, Gina."

She paid no attention to him. Her legs were crossed. Her one foot was swinging to and fro. Her eyes were fixed speculatively on the foot.

"And you ought to be very glad to have me here again. Suppose I'd listened to Georgie and married him right off, instead of coming back here. A nice fix you'd have been in. You know perfectly well no one in all the world does for you as nicely as I do. You know that, don't you?"

He smiled down at her.

"To be sure I do."

"As a matter of fact," she went on. "When I came in here you were half, if not altogether, asleep in this chair."

"I wasn't asleep, Gina."

"Oh, that's what you always say. But I banged in and you didn't hear me. I lighted the lamp and you didn't seem particularly conscious of it. And the window. The window was wide open. I closed that for you. The wind was bringing in just yards of those flower smells you hate so."

"Was it, Gina?"

"Huh—huh."

"You smelled them, then?"

His tone was strangely quiet.

"Of course I did. Come and sit here, Billy." She wiggled herself into a more comfortable position on the arm of the chair. "And tell your onliest sister how much you love her."

He went and sat beside her in the chair. He put his arm about her waist.

"You're a dear child, Gina."

"I know it!" She snuggled close to him. "And I've had the most divine time, Billy. Wood Mills is a glorious place. There wasn't an awful lot to do; but whatever we did was great fun."

"You'd have a good time anywhere, little sister."

"Would I?"

Her eyes wavered about the room a bit hungrily.

Something in her voice pulled his eyes up to her face.

"Gina, what is it?"

"Nothing, Billy."

She felt his fingers tighten at her side.

"Aren't you happy here, Gina?"

"Of course I am, Billy!" Her head was thrown back so that the long line of her throat showed in its firm molded whiteness. "Only, Billy, I want—I don't think I even know what I want. Only just sometimes I feel it. A want—that—perhaps—isn't—even—mine. It's for something;—well, for something that doesn't feel here."

He stroked her hand.

"It's lonesome for you, Gina."

"No, it isn't that. It's just; oh, I guess it's just that I worry about you."

"Me, Gina?"

"Yes, Billy. Sometimes you look so—so starved. That's what makes me think it's your want I feel—; yours that you want very much—and—and—Billy, that you can't get hold of."

"No, Gina! No!"

She pressed her cheek against his.

"Oh, Billy." She spoke quickly. "There was one place out there at Wood Mills. You wouldn't have liked it. But it was too wonderful!"

He drew a deep breath of relief at the sudden change in her voice.

"What was it, Gina? Why wouldn't I have liked it?"

She fidgeted a bit.

"Why? Oh—because."

"Because what, Gina?"

"It was just one big estate, Billy. A girl owns it. She's an orphan. She's very beautiful. She lives there all by herself except for a couple of old servants. Claire Trent and I saw her once or twice when we rode through the place. Claire says she's sort of queer. She doesn't bother about people. She doesn't like them, Claire says. She spends all her time around the place."

"That sounds very strenuous, Gina."

"Oh, it isn't, Billy. It's lovely. The estate is."

"I've heard the places there are pretty."

"Pretty! But this one, Billy;" in her enthusiasm she leaned eagerly forward. "You couldn't imagine it! There are miles and miles. And the whole thing; Claire says the whole year round; it's just one big mass of flowers."

In spite of himself he pulled his arm away from the girl's waist.

"Oh, is it?"

"Billy, I know you don't like flowers. But this! You've never seen anything like this!"

"There're probably lots and lots of places like it, little sister."

"Oh, no!" Her tone was vehement. "There couldn't be. Not such a garden! All rhododendrons and lilies of the valley—; is anything wrong, Billy?"

"Nothing. Those flowers grow in all gardens at this time of the year."

She stared into his blanched face and her brows drew together in a puzzled frown.

"Not like this, Billy. Really. I've never seen such rhododendrons or such lilies. And the violets and roses!"

He got to his feet suddenly.

"What?" He asked hoarsely. "What flowers did you say?"

"Why, rhododendrons—and lilies,—and—lilies. What is it, Billy?"

"Go on, Gina. Go on!"

"Billy!"

"Lilies of the valley and violets, Gina—"

"And roses;" she finished mechanically.

"What kind of roses, Gina?"

The puzzled frown left her face.

"Glorious roses, Billy." She was enthusiastic again. "There've never been roses like these. Why, there's one kind of a rose. It's known all over now. It took her years and years to grow it."

"What sort of a rose, Gina? What sort did you say?"

"I didn't say, Billy. I don't even know the name of it. But it's a yellow rose; almost gold. And its center is pink and—and scarlet."

For a moment they were silent.

"Did you see this—this woman, Gina—often?"

"Oh, once or twice, Billy."

"When, Gina?"

"In the evenings; each time."

"Where was she, Gina?"

"Why, how strange you are, Billy."

"Where, Gina? Tell me, d'you hear—tell me—where?"

"In her garden, Billy. What's there to get so excited about?"

He fought for his control then.

"I'd like to know, Gina—where you saw her and—and—"

The girl interrupted him.

"I saw her in the evenings—in her garden. She used to walk down—well—it looked like a long lane of flowers. To be exact, Billy, it was always in the evening and kind of gray. So I couldn't see very much except that she wore a light clingy sort of dress."

She stopped for a second.

"Yes, Gina?"

His voice was more quiet now.

"I told you she was a bit queer, didn't I?"

"Queer? God! she—was—lonesome—Gina!"

"Yes," the girl caught at his last words. "I'll bet she was lonesome. Any one would be, living like that. That's what makes her queer I guess. I saw her both times with my own eyes come down the garden with her hands full of flowers. Both times I saw her stand quite still. And then Claire and I would see her drop her flowers to the ground. That was the funny part. She didn't throw them away. It wasn't that, you know."

"No, Gina."

"She'd, well, she'd drop them. One by one. As if—"

"As if what, Gina?"

"Oh, as if she were being made to do it."

He went to his knees then. He buried his head in the girl's lap.

She leaned anxiously forward, her hand smoothing his hair.

"Billy—Billy, dear—aren't you well? Billy, tell me."

He could not bring himself to speak.

"Billy, is this what you do when I come home to you? Shame on you, Billy! Why—why, Billy, aren't you glad to have me here? Say, aren't you?"

"Thank God!" He whispered. "Thank God!"

He got to his feet then.

The girl rose from her chair and clung to him.

"I've never seen you like this, Billy."

"Listen, Gina;" his voice was low. "When you go upstairs to take off your things, pack my grip, little sister. I'm going away."

"Away, Billy?"

"Yes, Gina."

"But where, Billy?"

"To a place where I've wanted to go for a very long—long time, little sister."

"But, Billy—"

"Will you do that for me? Now, Gina? I—I—want to—leave."

"When, Billy?"

"As—soon—as—I can, Gina. It—must—be—soon."

The girl went out of the room very quietly.

He crossed over to the window and threw it open.

Darkness as far as he could see. Darkness in which were smudged lighter things without shape. Somewhere in the distance the feathery ends of branches brushed their leaves to and fro against the sky.

He knew that the wind was stirring.

He looked up at the heavens. Gray and dark save where the thin crescent moon held its haunting yellow light that was slurred over by drifting clouds and then held again.

He could see the wind driving the clouds.

The swish of the wind out there going through those smudged lighter things without shape.

He leaned far over the sill.

And suddenly the night wind brought him the smell of flowers.

Gradually the odor of the flowers blending subtly and faint at first, grew more distinct; heavier.

He stood there smiling.

Flowers—

Her—flowers—

"I'm coming;" he whispered. "I'm—coming—to—you—now—dear—"

THE SHADOW

He was colossally vain.

He lived with his wife Ellen, in the small house on Peach Tree Road.

There was nothing pretentious about the house; there were any number of similar houses along the line of Peach Tree Road. For that matter the house was the kind planted innumerable times in the numerous suburbs of the large city. Still, it was his house. His own. That meant a lot to him whenever he thought of it; and he thought of it often enough. He liked to feel the thing actually belonged to him. It emphasized his being to himself.

The house was a two-storied affair built of wood and white washed. A green mansard roof came down over the small green shuttered upper windows. On the lower floor the windows were somewhat larger with the same solid wooden green shutters. A gravel path led up to the front door. Two drooping willow trees stood on either side of the wicker gate.

Before the time when his aunt had died and had left him the house he had not been particularly successful. At the age of forty-one he had found himself a hard-working journalist and nothing more. He had had no ambition to ever be anything else. He was at all times so utterly confident that the work he was doing was quite right; chiefly because it was the work that he was doing. No man had a more unbounded faith in himself. At that time he had not been conscious of his lack of success. Now, of course, he looked back on it all as a period of development; something which had prepared him for this that was even then destined to come.

He told himself that in this small house, away from the surrounding clatter and nuisances of the city, he had found time

to write; to be himself; to really express what he knew himself to be.

He had become tremendously well known in that space of six years. No one ever doubted the genius of Jasper Wald. He wrote as a man writes who is actually inspired. His books were read with interest and surprisingly favorable comment. There was something different; something singularly appealing in all of Jasper Wald's works.

At that time his conceit was inordinate. It extended to a sort of personal, physical vanity. In itself that was grotesque. There was absolutely nothing attractive in the loosely jointed, stoop-shouldered body of him; or for that matter in the narrow head covered with sparse blond gray hair. The eyes of him were of rather a washed blue and bulged a bit from out their sockets; the nose was a singularly squat affair, at the same time too long. The mouth was unpleasantly small with lips so colorless and thin that the line of it was like some weird mark. Yet he was vain of his appearance. But then his egoism was the keynote of his entire being.

Some people could not forgive it in him; even when they acknowledged him as a writer and praised his work. The man in literature was spoken of as a mystic, a poet, a possessor of subtlety that was close to genius. In actual life, Jasper Wald was an out and out materialist.

As for his wife, Ellen:

She was rather a tall woman; thin but not ungraceful. Her features were good, very regular, still somewhat nondescript. All but her eyes. Her eyes were strange; green in color, and so heavily lidded that one could rarely see the expression of them. Then, too, she had an odd manner of moving. There never seemed to be any effort or any abruptness in whatever she did. Even her walk was sinuous.

He had married her when they both were young. Through his persistent habit of ignoring her she had been dwarfed into a nonentity. To have looked at the woman one would have said that hers was a distinctive personality unbelievably suppressed. It would not have been possible for any one living with Jasper Wald to have asserted himself. Perhaps she had learned that years before. Certainly his was the character which predominated; domineered through the encouragement of his own egoism.

Her attitude toward him was perpetually one of self-effacement. She stood for his conceit in a peculiarly passive way. If it ever irritated her she gave no sign. And he kept right on with his semi-indulgent manner of patronizing her stupidity. That is, when he noticed her at all.

She was essential to him in so far as she supplied all of his physical wants. Those in themselves were of great importance to Jasper Wald. There was no companionship between them. Jasper Wald could never have indulged in companionship of any kind. He had put himself far beyond that. To his way of thinking he was a super being who had no need whatever for the rest of man. He was all self-sufficient.

If there had ever been love between them in those days when they had first come together they had both of them completely lost sight of it. He in his complacent conceit; she in her monotonous negation.

And as time went on, and as his work became greater Jasper Wald grew even further away from the sort of thing he wrote; so that it was more than ever difficult for those who knew him to disassociate him from his writings. There was always the temptation to try to find some of his literary idealism in himself; to find some of his prosaic realism in his works.

On one occasion Delafield, his publisher, came to him; to the house on Peach Tree Road. It was a peculiarity of Jasper Wald's to persistently refuse any request to leave his home. It was the one thing about which he was superstitious. He had never by word or thought attributed his success to anyone or anything outside of himself. He had made his name in this house and he would not leave it.

Delafield's visit came at a time just after Jasper Wald's last book had been published.

Sitting in the square, simply furnished living room, Delafield for all his enthusiasm for the author had felt a certain inexplicable disgust.

"It's great, Wald; there's genius to it. We'll have it run through its second edition a week after we put it on the market."

"I don't doubt that;" Jasper Wald's tone was matter-of-fact in his confidence. "Not for a moment."

Delafield bit off the end of his cigar.

"When will your next one be ready?"

He asked it abruptly.

"Oh, I don't know," Jasper Wald had pulled leisurely at his pipe. "Whenever I make up my mind to it, I suppose. It's going to be the biggest thing I've tackled yet, Delafield."

"Well—" Delafield got up to go. "It can't be too soon. You'll have a barrel of money before you get done. Genius doesn't usually pay that way, either. But—;" he could not help himself. "You've got the knack of the thing. Heaven knows where you get it; but it's the knowledge we all need that comes from—"

He broke off quite suddenly as Ellen Wald came into the room.

"I didn't know;" she said uncertainly. "I thought you were alone."

"My wife, Delafield." Jasper Wald made the introduction impatiently. "Ellen, this is Mr. Delafield, who publishes my books."

She came toward them and held out her hand to Delafield. He could not help but noticing her odd manner of moving.

"Good evening," she said.

Delafield had not known that Jasper Wald was married. It was almost impossible for him to imagine anyone living with this man. He looked at the woman curiously. He had the feeling that her individuality had been stultified. It did not surprise him. Jasper Wald could have accomplished that. It would have been difficult to have matched him with as flagrantly material a person as he himself was. Only that sort of person would have stood a chance with him. Any other would have had to fall flat. She had fallen flat. Delafield knew that the moment he looked at her.

"Why, I didn't know;" Delafield took her hand in his. "You never told me, Wald, that you were married."

"Didn't I? No, of course not.—But, about the new book, Delafield."

Delafield dropped her hand. He had never felt anything quite as inert as that hand. It impressed the nondescript quality of her upon him even more strongly than had her appearance.

"Your husband has promised me another book, Mrs. Wald." He spoke slowly. He felt he had to speak that way or she would not understand him. "Your husband is a great author, Mrs. Wald."

"Yes."

"Why don't you say, genius, Delafield, and be done with it? Why don't you make a clean breast of it with—genius?"

"I've got to be going."

Delafield felt a strange irritation. The man was a fool. For what reason under the sun could this woman with those half closed eyes let herself be dominated by him? The two of them got on his nerves.

"Won't you stay to dinner?"

Jasper Wald was obviously anxious for a chance to speak of himself.

"Sorry, Wald. I've got to be getting on."

Delafield still watched the woman. She stood there quite silent.

"I thought you might have something to say about that book of mine."

"No—There's nothing more." Delafield started for the door. "I've just told you that it's full of the sort of knowledge all of us are in need of. I can't say more, you know. I suppose that knowledge is what constitutes genius; but—" He was staring now full into those bulging blue eyes—"Lord, man, where, where d'you get it from?"

Glancing at the woman, Delafield saw that she was looking straight at him. Her eyes met his in a way which he was completely at a loss to explain. There was something eerie about it.

"Where does he get it?"

She repeated his question stupidly and once again the heavy lids came down over those strange green eyes, hiding all expression.

Jasper Wald drew in his breath.

"I write it," he said.

After that Delafield left them both severely alone. The woman puzzled him. He could not tolerate the man, Jasper Wald, and he could not for worlds have the genius of Jasper Wald hurt or slighted in any way. He knew how big it was. It often left him breathless. But the man; he would have liked to have hit him that day in the living room in the house on Peach Tree Road; to have kicked him into some sort of a realization as to what an utter little rat he was.

And so, because of his physical make-up, people stayed away from Jasper Wald. Not that he avoided people; not that he wanted to live the life of a recluse. He never made any attempt to conceal his living from the general public. He was too much of the egoist to attempt concealment of any kind. So his life was known to any man, woman or child who cared for the knowledge. His life of narrow selfishness, of tranquil complacency; of colossal conceit. And of genius.

He always wrote in the evenings, did Jasper Wald. And often he would keep at his writing well on into the morning.

He liked to sit there in the square, old-fashioned living room with its wide window that gave out upon Peach Tree Road.

When he had first moved into the house as an obscure, hard-working journalist he had placed the desk against the window ledge so that he could look directly out of the window without moving. And he had kept the desk there. He was just a bit insistent about it. Then, too, he liked the blind up so that he could stare out into the evening and at the house opposite.

For all his impossible vanity there must have been imbedded deep down in the small, hard soul of the man some excessive, frantic hunger of self-recognition by others. A potential desire to accomplish an assertion of self that could in no way be denied; a fundamental energy which had in some way made possible the work, but which he could never admit for fear that it might evade the importance of himself.

The house opposite interested him tremendously. Sitting there in an abstract fit of musing, he watched it as one subconsciously watches a place that has one's attention.

To all outward appearances the house across the way was heavily boarded up and closed. It had always been closed since the time that Jasper Wald had come to live in Peach Tree Road. Yet every evening in the window directly facing his he had seen the shadow of a man moving to and fro; to and fro, beyond the drawn blind. He would sit there watching the dark, undefined shadow until he felt that he had to work, and then the whole thing would slip from his mind until the following evening when he would again be at his desk.

Strangely enough he had never mentioned the presence of the shadow to anyone. There was about it a certain mysterious unreality. That much he, Jasper Wald, was capable of knowing. It was the one thing outside of himself that gripped at his intelligence.

During all those six years he had waited at his desk each night for the coming of the shadow. And when it came he had started to work. He never explained the thing to himself. He never thought he had to explain anything to his own understanding. Had he tried, he would have been utterly at a loss for an explanation. So Jasper Wald had come to look upon the shadow as a sign of luck; a superstition-fostered thing that epitomized his genius to himself.

Naturally it had not always been that way. The first time that Jasper Wald had felt the shadow he had experienced an uncanny sense of terror. That had been before he had really seen it.

He had been standing there beside the window just after he and Ellen had moved into their home, looking out at the closed house opposite. He had felt a queer oppression which he readily interpreted as the vibration of his new environment. When the thing had persisted he had become a bit uneasy. The sense of oppression so utterly unknown to him had changed to one which grew upon him; as if he were being forced out of himself in some uncanny manner.

There was about it all a curious sensation of remoteness of self and at the same time a weird consciousness of the haunting permeation of something invisible and dynamic.

He never thought back to that evening without a positive horror. The whole thing was so completely alien to him.

It had been with a great sense of relief that he had, finally, been able to see and to rivet his attention upon the shadow there against the blind of the house opposite. He had clinched his thought onto it. And the other thing had left him; had lessened in its maddening oppression.

That evening he had started to write. He had felt that writing was a thing he had to do. It was entirely because of his first fear that he kept the knowledge of the shadow to himself.

Cock sure as he was of himself, thoroughly certain of his genius, and inordinately vain of his success, there was one thing about it all that Jasper Wald could not quite make out. Not for worlds would he have admitted it. Still there was the one thing. And the one thing was that Jasper Wald could not understand the kind of thought behind what he himself wrote.

It was late one summer evening that Jasper Wald sat at his desk in the square living room; his pen was in his hand; a pile of blank paper made a white patch on the dark wood before him. His blue eyes that bulged a bit looked out into the graying half light. The green of the lawn was matted with dark shadows. A mist of shadows were pressed into the faint lined leaves of the two drooping willow trees on either side of the wicker gate. An unreal light held in the sky.

His eyes were fixed on the one window of the house opposite. With his pen in his hand, Jasper Wald waited.

From somewhere in the house came the chimes of a clock striking the half hour.

Starting from his chair, Jasper Wald went to the side of the desk and leaned far out of the window. A wave of heat came up to him from the earth. His eyes stared intently at the window opposite.

The door behind him was thrown open. He turned to see Ellen's tall, not ungraceful, figure standing in the doorway. Her two hands grasped the bowl of a lighted lamp.

"I don't need that."

Jasper Wald told it to her impatiently.

She came a step into the room.

"It's dark in here, Jasper."

"But I don't need any more light, Ellen. I don't need it, I tell you!"

"It's dark in here, Jasper."

"All right, then; put the thing down. I can't take up my time arguing with you. How can a man write in a place like this, anyway? Have you no consideration? Must I always be disturbed? Have you no respect for genius?"

She came a step further toward the center of the room.

"Genius,—Jasper?"

"My genius, Ellen. Mine."

He watched her cross the room with that odd, sinuous moving of hers and place the lamp in the center of his desk. And then he saw her go to a chair within its light and, sitting down, pick up some sewing which she had left there.

He went back and sat at his desk.

He had made up his mind that this new book of his would be something big; something bigger than he had ever done before. He wanted to write a stupendous thing.

He caught up his pen and dipped it in the ink.

She startled him with a quick cough.

"Can't you be still?" He turned toward her. "You know I can't write if I'm bothered. You don't have to sit in here if you're going to cough your head off. There're plenty of other rooms in the house."

She half rose from her chair.

"D'you want me to go?"

"Oh, sit there," he muttered irritably. "Only, for heaven's sake be still!"

"Yes, Jasper."

All of his books had brought him fame; but this one; this one would bring him fame with something else. This book would be the great work that would show to people the staggering power of one man's mind; his mind.

His eyes that stared at the window of the house opposite came back to be pile of blank paper which made a white patch on the dark wood before him.

Without any definite idea he began to write. A word. A sentence. A paragraph.

He tore the thing up without stopping to read it.

Ellen's dull-toned voice came to him through the stillness of the room.

"Anything wrong, Jasper?"

"Wrong? What should be wrong?"

"I don't know."

He began to write again.

He looked out of his window at the window of the house opposite.

He went on with his writing till he had covered the whole page. Again he tore the paper up and threw it from him.

"I'm going, Jasper."

He turned to see her standing in the center of the room, her heavily lidded eyes fixed on the floor.

"I told you you could stay here!"

"I'd best be going, Jasper."

"Sit down, over there; and do be still."

"I seem to bother you. You haven't started to write. Is it because I'm here, Jasper?"

"You!" He snorted contemptuously. "What've you got to do with it?"

"I don't know," she said quietly, and she went back to her chair.

Again his eyes were fixed on that one window. He leaned forward quickly. His hands gripped the chair's arms on either side of him. His brows drew down together above the bulging blue eyes.

Thrown on the clear blank of the window blind, moving to and fro across it, went the shadow.

With a sharp sigh of relief Jasper Wald began to write.

It was not until he had gotten far down the page that he became suddenly conscious of Ellen standing directly behind him.

He looked over at the window. The shadow was still there.

"What is it? What d'you want?"

The lamplight brought out her features, good and very regular and still somewhat nondescript. The lamplight showed her strange green eyes and beneath the heavy lids the lamplight brought out in a glinting streak the expression of the eyes themselves.

"What made you do that, Jasper?"

"I'm trying to write. You keep interrupting me. What are you talking about? Made me do what?"

"Made you write, Jasper."

"Don't I always write?"

"Yes, Jasper. Always. All of a sudden—; like that."

"Well, what of it?"

"What makes you do it, Jasper?"

"Oh, Lord, can't you leave me alone?"

"D'you know what makes you do it, Jasper?"

"Of course I know."

"Well, what?"

"My—it's my inspiration!"

"That comes"; she spoke slowly. "Every night when you look out of the window. That's how it comes, Jasper."

"Look out of the window? Why shouldn't I look out of the window?"

"What is it you see? Over there; in that house; in that one window?"

He looked across the way at the shadow moving to and fro against the window blind.

He started to his feet so suddenly that his chair crashed to the floor behind him. He faced her angrily.

"What under the sun's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"Then why can't you leave me alone?"

"I want to know, Jasper."

"You don't know what you want."

"Yes, Jasper; I—want—to—know—"

"Leave the room," he said furiously. "Leave the room! I've got to write!"

She started for the door.

"You've got to write?" Her words came back to him across the length of the room with a curious insistence. "*You've*—got—to—write, Jasper?"

He waited until the door closed behind her and then he went back to his desk.

What had she meant by that last question of hers? Didn't she know that he had to write? Didn't she realize that he had to write?

And this book of his; this book that was to be the biggest thing that he had yet done.

"Ellen," he called. "Ellen!"

He heard her feet coming toward him along the passageway.

She came back into the room as though nothing had happened.

"Yes, Jasper?"

"What—what did you mean by that, Ellen? By what you just said?"

She faced him in the center of the room.

"I've been wanting to tell you, Jasper."

"Well?"

Her hands hung quite quietly at her sides.

"I've put up with you for a long time, Jasper. I haven't said very much, you know."

"What?" He stuttered.

"Oh, yes," she went on evenly. "If it weren't for your vanity you'd have realized long ago what a contemptible little man you really are."

He interrupted her.

"Ellen!"

His tone was astonished.

"You're so full of yourself that you can't see anything else. You're so full of that genius—; of—yours—"

"You don't have to speak of that—; you can leave that out of it—; you've nothing to do with it—; with my genius."

"Your genius." She laughed then. "It's your genius, Jasper, that has nothing to do with you!"

"Nothing—to—do—with—me?"

"No, Jasper. I haven't been blind."

"Blind?"

"I've seen, Jasper; sitting here night after night in this room with you; I've seen."

"What?"

"Over there—; in the house opposite."

"You mean—"

"And you can't write without it, Jasper! You couldn't write before and you can't write now without it. It isn't you. It isn't you who writes. It's something—something working through you. And you call it your own. Jasper, you're a fool!"

"Ellen, how dare you!"

"Dare!"

She spoke the word disdainfully. He had never in his whole life seen her this way; he had never thought to see her like this; but then, he had never given Ellen much thought of any kind.

"It's you who're the fool." He was furious. "It's I who've always been the brains; if you could you'd have hampered me with your stupidity. But you couldn't. I shut you quite outside. I nurtured my own genius. If I'd have left things to you, I'd have been down and out by now; and that's all there is to it."

"No!" Her voice rang through the room. "I won't let you say that, Jasper. I'll tell you the truth now. And take it or leave it as you will. You won't be able to get away from it. Not if I tell you the truth, Jasper. There'll be no getting away from it!"

"Truth—; about what?"

"You and your genius. I wouldn't have told you but it's no good going on like this. I thought there was some hope for you; I couldn't think any human being would be as self-satisfied, as disgustingly material as you are. Why, if you have a soul, but you haven't, and I thought—God, how I hoped!"

He started to speak. He could not find his voice.

She went on presently in that quiet, monotonous voice which had been hers for so many years.

"You left me alone; I wouldn't have complained; I wouldn't complain now if you had some excuse for it. It all made me different. There's no use in telling you how; you couldn't understand. But I got to feeling things I'd never felt before; and then I saw things. And after a while I found I could bring those things to me. And that night, the first night we moved in here—"

He interrupted her in spite of himself.

"What of that night? What?"

"That night when you were standing there at the window I got down on my knees and prayed. I brought something to you that night. And you called the genius yours." She broke off and was silent for a second. "I brought it to you because I wanted you to be great. I thought with all that energy of yours for writing that if it could work through you, you'd be big. But you were too small for it! You tried to make it a thing of your own. And I've held on to it. For six years I've kept it here with you; and now it's going. I'm letting it go back again. You're too small; you can't ever be anything but just—you!"

He walked over to his desk, and sank down into the arm chair.

"I don't—know—what—you're—talking—about."

"You do! And if you don't, why do you look out of the window there every night? Why d'you wait for it to come, before you start to write?"

His exclamation was involuntary.

"The shadow!"

"Yes. Its shadow—; from this room where I kept it—casting—over—there—its—shadow."

So that was what she meant. The superstition-fostered thing that epitomized his genius to himself. The shadow that he had come to look upon as a sign of luck. But it was nonsense. It wasn't possible; not such rot as that. It was his mind; the big creative mind of him that wrote.

"Have you said all you're going to say?"

For a second her gaze met his and then the heavy lids came down again over those strange green eyes, hiding all expression.

"Yes, Jasper."

He looked out of the window. His eyes stared through the night beyond the two shadowy, drooping willow trees on

either side of the wicker gate and over at the house opposite. He caught his breath. The yellow light from the lamp on his desk played across the clear blank of the window blind across the way. The shadow had gone.

"Ellen—" His voice was hoarse. "Ellen!"

"What is it?"

"It's not there, Ellen—; six years; now—; why, Ellen—"

She went and sat down in the chair beside the desk.

"Yes."

"It isn't there! I tell you—"

"I thought it could make no difference to you!"

"It was—lucky—Ellen."

"Oh, lucky, Jasper?"

He made an effort to pull himself together.

"It won't make any difference to me—not to my writing; not to my genius."

After the silence of a moment her voice came to him in its low even measure.

"Then—; write!"

"Of course." His tone was high pitched, hysterical. "Naturally I'll write."

"Write, Jasper."

He caught up his pen and dipped it in the ink. He drew the white pile of paper nearer to him.

"Jasper—"

"How can I work if you don't stop talking? How can I do anything? How can I write?"

"Are—you—writing—Jasper? Are—you—?"

He did not answer her.

"Because;" she went on very quietly. "It's gone back, Jasper. It's—gone—now—"

His pen went to and fro; to and fro across the page. His figure was bent well over the desk. Every now and again, without moving, his bulging blue eyes would lift themselves to the clear blank blind of the window opposite and then they would come back and fix themselves intently upon the white page of paper which he was so busily covering with stupid, meaningless little drawings.

THE EFFIGY

"Mr. Evans is upstairs in the library, ma'am."

Genevieve Evans hurried through the hall and up the steps. She pulled off her gloves as she went. She rolled them into a hard, small ball and tucked them automatically in her muff.

She had hoped that she would get there before him. She had been thinking of that all during the quick rush home. She would have liked to have had a moment to pull herself together. After what she had been through she wondered if she could keep from going all to pieces. It could not be helped. She did not even know if she cared a lot about it. She was quite numbed. He was there ahead of her; there in the library. Of all the rooms in the house that he should have chosen

the one so rarely used. The room she hated.

At the door of the library she paused breathless.

For a second she thought the long dark room empty.

Then she saw Ernest.

He was standing in one of the deep windows. A short squat figure black against the dim yellow of the velvet curtains. One hand held his cigarette; the fingers of the other hand tapped unevenly on the window glass.

She knew then that he must have seen her come into the house.

"Ernest."

He turned.

"I've been waiting for you," he told her with studied indifference. "Where've you been, Jenny?"

She took a step into the room.

"I'm sorry, Ernest. I didn't know you'd be home so early."

"It's late. Where've you been?"

She wondered why she should bother avoiding answering his question.

"Oh—out."

Her tone was vague.

"No," he scoffed. "I wouldn't have guessed it. Really, I wouldn't!"

She loosened the fur from her neck and tossed it onto the center table.

"Don't, Ernest."

"Don't what, Jenny?"

She sank down into the depths of the nearest chair.

"Oh—nothing." Her hands clinched themselves. "Nothing."

He came and stood quite close to her. He glanced quickly at her, puffing the while at his cigarette. She thought he looked wicked and pagan; hideous and yellow behind the rising smoke. His narrow eyes peered at her.

"Well, Jenny—out with it, my girl. Where've you been?"

She looked away from him. Her face was pale. In the twilight shadowed room he had seen how wide and strange her eyes were.

She made up her mind then that it was not worth bothering about. She would tell him the truth. She did not care how he took it.

"I've been to see—; to—see—father—"

She whispered the words. Her eyes wavered back to his face.

"Good heavens!" He laughed harshly. "After all you said?"

"Yes."

"Rather a joke, that."

"No. There wasn't anything funny about it."

"Well. Was the old man surprised?"

"No. He told me he knew I'd come—some time."

"Wise old beggar, Daniel Drare!"

Her breath came quickly; unevenly.

"He's a devil, Ernest! That's what he is—; he's—"

He interrupted her.

"Not so fast, Jenny. You went there to see him, you know."

"But, Ernest, I couldn't stand it any longer. I—simply—couldn't—"

He walked deliberately over to the screened fireplace and tossed his cigarette into it.

"Why d'you go to him?"

"You know why I went."

"Why!"

She had felt right along that he must be made to understand it. She could not see why he had not known before.

"Oh, don't pretend any more. I'm sick of it. You know I'm sick of it."

His brows drew together in an angry frown.

"Sick of what? Eh, Jenny?"

Her eyes crept away from his and went miserably about the room. They took no note of the rare old furniture; of the dark paneled walls; of the color mellowed tapestries. She sat looking at it all blindly. Then her eyes raised themselves a bit. She found herself staring at the picture hung just above the wood carved mantel. The famous picture. The work of the great artist. The picture before which she had stood and hated; and hated. The picture which was the pride and portrait of her father, Daniel Drare.

She got to her feet.

"I'm sick of you—;" she said it quite calmly. "And—I'm sick—of—him." She nodded her head in the direction of the portrait. "I'd do anything to get away from both of you—anything!"

He smiled.

"You'll not get away from me," he told her.

"You—!" The one word was contemptuous. "You don't really count."

"What d'you mean?"

He still smiled.

"I mean what I say." Her voice was tired. "You're nothing—; nothing but—oh, a kind of a henchman to him. That's all you are. Not that he needs you. He doesn't need any one. He's too unscrupulously powerful for that. He's never needed any one. Not you. Nor—me. He didn't even need my mother. He broke her heart and let her die because he didn't need her. I think you know he's like that. You're no different where he's concerned than the others."

"After all—I'm your husband!"

"That's the ghastly part of it. You—my—husband. You're only my husband because of him. You knew that when I

married you, didn't you? You knew the lies he told me when he wanted me to marry you. You never contradicted them. And I was too silly, too young to know. I wanted to get away from it all; and from him. I couldn't guess that you—d'you think, Ernest, if it hadn't been for those lies I'd have married you? Do you?"

"Oh, I don't know. I usually get what I want, Jenny."

"And why do you get it? Why?"

"Perhaps because I want it."

She laughed harshly.

"Because Daniel Drare gets it for you. Because he's had everything all his life. Because he's behind you for the time being. That's why!"

"And what if it is?"

"My God!" She muttered. "I can't make you understand. I can't even talk to either of you."

"You went to see him!"

"I went to him to tell him I couldn't stand it any longer. I begged him to help me; just—this—once—I told him I couldn't go on this way. I told him I couldn't bear any more. I told him the truth; that I'd—I'd go mad."

"What did he say? Eh, Jenny?"

For a second her eyes closed.

"He laughed. Laughed—"

"Of course!"

"There's no 'of course' about it. I'm serious. Deadly serious."

"Don't be a fool, Jenny. If you ask me I'd say you were mighty well off. Your father gives you everything you want. Your husband gives you everything you want. There isn't a man in the whole city who has more power than Daniel Drare. Or more money for that matter. You ought to be jolly well satisfied."

She waited a full moment before speaking.

"Maybe I'm a fool, Ernest. Maybe I am. A weak, helpless kind of a fool. But I'm not happy, Ernest. I can't go this kind of a life any more. It's gotten unreal and horrible. And the kind of things you do to make money; the kind of things you're proud of. They prey on me, Ernest. There's nothing about all this that's clean. It's making me ill; the rottenness of this sort of living. I'm not happy. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

"Nonsense. You've no reason for not being happy. The trouble with you, Jenny, is that you've too lively an imagination."

"Oh, no, Ernest. I've got to get away. Somewhere—anywhere. Just by myself. I don't love you, Ernest. You don't really love me. It's only because I'm Daniel Drare's daughter that you married me. It was just his wealth and his power and—and is unscrupulous self that fascinated you."

"You don't know what you're saying."

"I do, I do, Ernest! You'd like to be like him. But you can't. You are like him in a lot of ways. The little ways. But you're not big enough to be really like him. Let me go, Ernest. Before it's too late;—let me go!"

He came and put a hand on her shoulder.

"I'll never let you go," he said.

"You must!" She whispered. "You've got to let me. Just to get away from all this. I've never been away in all my life. He'd never let me go—either."

Unconsciously her eyes went up to the picture.

The full, red face with the hard lines in it. The thick, sensual lips. The small, cunning eyes that laughed. The ponderous, heavy set of the figure. The big, powerful hands.

His gaze followed after hers.

And very suddenly he left her side. He walked over to the mantel.

"Funny," he muttered to himself. "Jolly strange—that!"

Her fingers clutched at her breast.

"Ernest—! What're you doing?"

"Can you see anything wrong here, Jenny?"

He was looking up at the portrait.

"Wrong?" She said it beneath her breath. "Wrong—"

He reached up a hand. He drew his fingers across the canvas.

"By Jove!" His voice was excited. "So it is. Thought I wasn't crazy. When could it have happened, eh? Ever notice this, Jenny?"

She could not take her eyes from his hand that was going over and over the canvas along the arm of the painted figure.

"Can't you see it, Jenny?"

"I—I can't see anything."

She whispered it.

"Come over here—; where I am."

She hesitated.

"Ernest, what's the sense? How can you see in this light anyway, how—"

He did not let her finish.

"Come here!"

Slowly she went toward him.

"What is it, Ernest? What?"

"A crack?" His hand still worked across it. "In the paint—here along the arm. Or a cut, or something. How under the sun could it have happened? We've got to have it fixed somehow. Never heard of such a thing before. Old Daniel Drare'll be as sore as a crab if ever he gets wind of this. It'd be like hurting him to touch this portrait. He certainly does think the world of it! How could it have happened;—that's what I'd like to know."

"I—I don't know what you're talking about—I—!"

"Here! Can't you see it? It's as plain as the nose on your face. Along the arm. It's a cut. Right into the canvas. You can run your finger in it. Give me your hand."

She shrank back from him.

"No—no, Ernest."

He stared at her intently.

"You do look seedy. You'd better go up and lie down. I've got to dress for dinner, anyway. We'll have to have this fixed."

He started for the door.

She blocked his way.

"Will—you—let—me—go, Ernest?"

"Don't start that again."

"All right. I won't!"

"That's a sensible girl, Jenny. Even your father had to laugh at you when you told him the way you feel. It isn't natural. It's just nerves, I guess. You could stick it out with Daniel Drare. You can stick it out with me. Look here, Daniel Drare's a great old fellow, but I'm not as crude in some things as he is; am I, Jenny?"

"You would be if you could." Her voice was singsong. "You haven't his strength; that's all."

"I'm not as crude as he is."

"You haven't his strength," she droned.

"I've enough strength to keep you here; if that's what you mean."

"No, it's not what I mean." A puzzled look crept across her face. Her eyes were suddenly furtive. "Maybe I don't know what I mean. But I don't think it's you. I don't think you count. It's him. It's Daniel Drare! He's behind it all. I don't think I quite know what I'll do about it. I must do something! I mustn't be angry!"

He stared at her.

"You'd best come along if you're going to dress."

"I'll be up in a moment," she said.

When he was gone she went over to the window.

She stood there gazing out into the darkened quiet side-street. She was trembling in every limb. Now and again she would half turn. Her eyes would go slowly, warily toward the portrait hanging there over the mantel and then they would hurry away again.

She started nervously when the butler knocked at the door.

"What is it, Williams?"

"Mr. Drare's housekeeper, ma'am. She'd like to see you, ma'am. I said I'd ask."

"Show her in here, Williams."

The man left the room.

She walked over to the farther corner of the room and switched on the lights.

She heard footsteps in the hall.

She stood quite still; waiting.

Footsteps—Nearer—

A middle-aged woman very plainly dressed was in the doorway.

"Miss Genevieve—"

"Nannie!"

"Miss Genevieve. I wouldn't have come; only I've got to tell you."

"What, Nannie? Come and sit down, Nannie."

The woman came into the room. For a second she paused, and then hurriedly she closed the door behind her.

"No, Miss Genevieve. I'll not sit down. Thank you. I can't be staying long. He might want me. I wouldn't like him to know I was here."

The muscles on either side of Genevieve Evans' mouth pulled and twitched.

"So? You're frightened too, Nannie!"

She said the words to herself.

The woman heard her.

"That I am, Miss. And that I've got good reason to be; the same as you, my poor Miss Genevieve."

"Yes, yes, Nannie. What was it you wanted?"

The woman stood quite rigid.

"You was there, Miss—this afternoon?"

"Yes—"

"Did you notice anything, Miss?"

She drew a deep breath.

"What d'you mean, Nannie? Nannie, what?"

"It's him, Miss. It was last night—"

The woman broke off.

"Yes, Nannie;" Genevieve Evans urged.

"I don't rightly know how to tell it to you, Miss. It's hard to find the words to say it in. He'd kill me if he knew I come here and told you. But you got to know. I can't keep it to myself. He's been fierce of late. What with making so much more money. And the drinking, Miss. And the women. The women, they're there all hours, now."

"My mother's house!" Genevieve Evans said it uncertainly.

"Yes, Miss," the woman went on. "And it was almost as bad when she lived."

"I know, Nannie. I've always known!"

"But last night, Miss; after they'd gone. I was asleep, Miss Genevieve. It woke me. It was awful. Plain horrid, Miss."

"What—Nannie?"

"The scream, Miss—A shriek of pain."

"No,—no, Nannie!" Genevieve Evans interrupted wildly. "Don't say it! Don't!"

The woman looked at her wonderingly.

"Why, Miss Genevieve—Poor, little lamb."

"Nannie, Nannie." She made a tremendous effort to control herself. "What was it you were going to say?"

"The scream, Miss. In the night. I rushed down. I knocked at his door. He wouldn't let me in. He was moaning, Miss. And cursing. And moaning. He was swearing about a knife. I listened, Miss—at the keyhole. I was scared. He kept cursing and moaning about a knife; about his arm—"

"Nannie—"

She whispered the word beneath her breath. "Yes, Miss. Cut in the arm. He would have it that way. And he wouldn't let me in. I waited for hours. And this morning I went into his room myself. He was in his shirt-sleeves. I pretended I wanted the linen for the wash. I was looking for blood, Miss. Not a drop did I find. Not a pin prick stain. But I seen him bandaging his arm; right in front of me he did it. And then I seen him rip the bandage off."

"Nannie—"

"It's his reason I fear for, Miss. He turns to me and asks me if I can see the cut."

"Yes? Yes, Nannie?"

"He shows me his arm. And, Miss—"

The woman stopped abruptly.

"Nannie—what? What?"

Genevieve Evans' hands had gone up to her throat.

"There wasn't a scratch;—not—a—scratch!"

"Oh—" She breathed.

"And that's why I came here, Miss. To ask if he'd said anything of it to you. Or if—if you'd noticed anything, Miss."

Genevieve Evans waited a full second before she answered:

"No, Nannie. He wouldn't have told me. I didn't notice anything. I wasn't there very long. You see I only went to ask him to let me get away. Out in the country—by myself. I wanted the money to go. He and—and Mr. Evans never give me money, Nannie. Just things—all the things, I want. Only I'm tired of things. I don't quite know what to do. When—I think about it I get very angry. I was very angry. Last night I was very angry! I've such funny ideas when I'm angry, Nannie. I mustn't get angry again. But I've got—to—get—away."

"I don't blame you, Miss Genevieve, for being angry. You've been an angel all your life; all your life pent up like—like a saint—with—with—devils."

"You—don't—blame—me—Nannie?"

"No, Lamb. Not your Nannie. Your Nannie knows what it's been like for you. I know him, Miss Genevieve. I know he didn't give you the money."

"No, Nannie. He laughed at me. Laughed—"

"He's a beast! That's what he is, Miss. He should have give it to you. And him going away himself. He was telling me only to-day. Into the country."

"What?"

"Oh, Miss. I hate to say such things to you. He's going with that black-haired woman;—the latest one, she is. He thinks she works too hard. He's taking her off for a rest. Is anything the matter? Aren't you well, darling?"

Genevieve Evans swayed dizzily for a second her one hand reaching out blindly before her.

The woman came quickly and took the hand between both of her hands and stroked it.

"Nannie, I'm sick—sick!"

"Nannie's darling—; Nannie's pet."

From somewhere in the house came the silvery, tinkling sound of a clock striking seven times.

"I've got to go, Miss Genevieve, dear."

"All right, Nannie."

The woman drew a chair up and pushed her gently into it.

"You'll not be telling him, Miss?"

"No, Nannie—; no—"

The woman started for the door.

"Thank you, Miss Genevieve."

"Nannie—; you said he was taking her—; the black-haired one—; away for a—a rest? Away into the country?"

With her hand on the door-knob the woman turned.

"Yes. Why—lamb!"

"Into the country." Genevieve Evans' voice was lifeless. "Into the country where everything is quiet and big—; and clean. You said that, Nannie?"

"I said the country, Miss Genevieve, dearie."

"Nannie—Nannie—;" her eyes were staring straight before her. "I—want—to—go!"

"Lamb—darling."

The woman stood undecided.

"But he wouldn't let me. He laughed at me. Nannie, he laughed."

The woman made up her mind.

"Will Nannie stop with you a bit, Miss Genevieve, dearie?"

"You said;" Genevieve Evans' lifeless, monotonous voice went on; "you said you wouldn't blame me for being angry. I get very angry, Nannie. Very angry. It brings all kinds of things to me when I get angry. His kind of things. Rotten things. And he's going to take her into the country; where everything's clean; and he won't let me—go. God!"

"Will I stay, Miss Genevieve?"

"No, Nannie—go! Go quickly! Go—now!"

"Yes, Miss Genevieve. He'll be wanting to know where I am."

"Go, Nannie!" She half rose from her chair. The door closed quietly behind the woman. "Go!" Genevieve Evans whispered. "He's going—into the country—; he's taking that woman. He wouldn't let me. He wants to keep me here. Just to feel his power—; his filthy power. He's not the only one." She was muttering now. "He's not the only one who can do things. Rotten—dirty things! His kind of things!"

She swayed to her feet. Her steps were short and uncertain. Her whole body reeled. Her face was blanched; drained of all color. Her fingers trembled wide spread at her sides. She was quivering from head to foot.

Only her eyes were steady; her eyes wide and dilated that were riveted on the portrait hanging there above the wood carved mantel.

She backed toward the door, her eyes glued to the picture.

Her shaking fingers, fumbling behind her, found the key and turned it.

Feeling her way with her hands, her distended eyes still fixed on that one thing, she got to the center table.

It took her a while to pull open the drawer.

Her breath came raspingly; as if she had been running.

The old Venetian dagger with the cracked jeweled handle was between her fingers.

Very slowly now she went toward the fireplace.

The electric light flared over the colored gems that studded the handle of the dagger, giving out small quick rays of blue and red and green.

"I'm angry;" she whispered hoarsely. "I—I'm very angry—with—you. You've no right—; no right—to—ruin—my—life—and laugh! You did—laugh—at—me!"

Her eyes stared up at the full, red face with the hard lines in it. Up at the thick, sensual lips. Up at the cunning eyes. At the ponderous, heavy-set figure. The powerful hands.

"Why—don't—you—laugh—now? You aren't afraid—are—you? You—aren't—afraid of—anything? Not of—me—are—you—Daniel Drare—? You've—done—your—best—to—keep—me—under—your—power—; you—stood—behind—Ernest—to keep—me under—your—power. You're—not—afraid—of—me? Why—don't—you—laugh—Daniel—Drare?"

Her right hand that held the dagger raised itself.

"Laugh, Daniel Drare! Laugh!"

She stood there under the portrait. Her left hand went stiffly out feeling over the long cut in the painted arm.

"Angry—last—night." She whispered. "And—it—hurt—you. Daniel Drare—I—could-hurt—you!"

For a second her eyes went up to the dagger held there above her head; the dagger with the thousand colored gleams pointing from it.

She gave a quick choking laugh.

"I laugh—at—you—Daniel—Drare."

With all her strength she drove the dagger into the heart of the canvas.

She staggered back to the center of the room.

There was a gaping rent in the portrait.

She laughed again; stupidly. Her laughter trailed off and stopped.

She stood there waiting.

Once she thought some one paused outside the door.

Her hands were up across her eyes.

Motionless she waited.

Suddenly she gave a quick start.

Out there in the hall a telephone had rung.

She heard her husband answer it.

Her one distinct thought was that he must have been on his way out for dinner.

His unbelieving cry came to her.

"My God! it can't—"

Her fingers were pressed into her ears. She did not want to hear the rest. She knew it.

THE FAITH

The great lady fingered the pearls that circled her throat.

"Quite true," she murmured, and a smile crept up about the corners of her lips and lingered there. "Really, surprisingly true."

The woman with the white hair and the heavily lidded eyes bent a bit lower over her charts of stars and constellations.

"This year"—she went on in that low, undecided voice of hers—"this year Madame has had a big sorrow. It was the loss to Madame of a young man. He was tall and fair like Madame, but he had not Madame's eyes. He had courage, Madame, and a soft voice; always a soft voice. He went on, this young one, with his courage. The son of Madame died in the early Spring."

The great lady's hands dropped into her lap and clinched there: the knuckles showing white and round as her fingers strained against each other. Her eyes stared hard at the cracked walls; up over the low ceiling, toward the back of the small room that was divided off from the kitchen by a loose-hung plush curtain; out through the one window which gave on to the street. She could just see the heads of people who were passing and the faint, gray shadows of the late evening that were reaching in dark spots up along the rough, white walls of the house opposite. Her eyes came dazedly back to the room and the chairs and the table before which she sat. Two giant tears trickled down her cheeks. The smile was wiped from off her mouth.

The woman with the white hair had waited.

"There is another here. He is perhaps a little older than the one who died. He has not that one's courage. He is very careful of all the small things; like his clothes and his cigarettes and his affections. The big things he has never known. His eyes are like the eyes of Madame. Madame has this son in the war now."

"No—no!" The great lady leaned across the table. "Don't tell me—not that he—I couldn't bear it! Not—both—of—them!"

The woman with the white hair looked up quite suddenly from her charts of stars and constellations. A pitying quiver shook over her face.

"You need have no fear, Madame. He is not ready. It is a wound. It is not a wound that gives death."

The great lady fingered her pearls again.

"You—you quite carried me away. For a moment you startled me."

"I regret it, Madame. Perhaps I should not have said anything."

"Of course you should have. I told you that when I came in, didn't I? I said I wanted to hear everything. Everything you could tell me."

"Ah—yes, Madame."

"Is that all, now? You're certain that you've not forgotten anything?" And she pulled at her gold mesh bag, which was studded with sapphires.

"It is everything, Madame. Unless, perhaps, Madame has some question she would like to ask of me?"

The great lady drew her money out and tossed it on the table.

The woman with the white hair and those heavily lidded eyes did not touch it. The great lady got to her feet and started to the door. Quite suddenly she stopped.

"When—" She made an effort to steady her voice. "When will this thing—; this wound—come—?"

The woman with the white hair bent over the charts again. And then she caught up a pencil and made little signs on the yellow paper and drew a triangle through them and across them at the points.

"The fourth day of the second month from now, Madame."

The great lady came back to the table and stood there looking down.

"How do you do it?"

The woman with the white hair stared up in astonishment.

"Madame?"

The great lady's ringed fingers spread out, pale and taut at her sides. The jewels of the rings showed in dark, glistening stains against the white of her skin.

"What you've just told me—all of it. I don't see how you know—how you can know. It's true. I can't understand how it can be true. But it is. Every word of it."

The woman with the white hair fingered her pencil a bit wearily.

"But—of course, Madame."

"I came here;" the great lady spoke hurriedly. "I don't know why I came. Only I didn't think: I wouldn't have believed it possible. I couldn't tell you now why I came."

"There are many who come—these days."

"These days?"

"People would know more than they know of things they never thought of before, Madame—these days. They would follow a bit further after the lives that have been broken off so suddenly. They are impatient because they cannot see where they have never before looked and so they come to me because I have sat, staring into those places. They will see—all of them—soon. They are going on, further, because they must know. These days they must—know!"

The great lady stood quite still.

"You have a wonderful gift—wonderful."

"It is not mine, Madame."

The great lady's eyes went about the room.

"I'll be going," she said. "It's quite late."

Her eyes took in the cheap poverty of the mended carpet and the paint-scratched walls and the dingy-threaded, plush-covered chairs.

The woman with the white hair got to her feet.

"I know what you are thinking." Her voice was low. "If I can do this for others, you think, why should I not be able to do everything for myself? If I can tell to others, what may I not tell to myself? If I can give help to others, why can I not give help to myself?"

The silk of the great lady's dress gave out a faint rustle as she took a step back.

"No—" She murmured uncertainly.

"It is not 'No.'" The woman's voice trembled. "It is 'Yes.' It is what was going through your head—going around and around and fearing to be asked. But I will answer you. I will say that the power is not mine. It is the power that is given to me. It is not for myself. I do not want it for myself. I shall never touch it for myself, because it is meant for others. To help others and that is all."

"D'you mean you can't see things for yourself?"

The great lady was curious.

"But of course I can see. It is that which, sometimes—" The woman with the white hair broke off abruptly. "Do you know what it is to see and then to be able to do nothing—nothing? Not—one—thing—!"

"How can you?"

"I can, Madame, because that is what I am here for. It is by being nothing myself that this thing comes through me so that I can feel what other people are; what they are going to be. If I thought only of me, I would be so full of myself I could not think of anything else. It is from thinking a little bit beyond that the power first came. And now that I keep on thinking away from the nearest layer of thought, it works through me. And I can help. It is the wish of my life to help. It is what I am here for. Placed in the field. They told it to me—the voices. Put in the field,—by them."

The great lady shrugged her shoulders.

The woman with the white hair pulled herself up very suddenly. There was a quick, convulsive movement of her hands and for a short second her eyes closed. She went to the table and caught the money between her fingers and dragged it across the red cover to her.

"I thank Madame."

The great lady walked slowly to the door.

"Good-by. Perhaps some day I'll be back."

"Perhaps—Madame. Good-by."

The great lady went out of the room and closed the door behind her. The sound of her high-heeled footsteps tapped in sharp staccato down the uncarpeted stairs, and died away into the stillness. The long-drawn creak of rusty hinges and then the muffled thud of the front door swinging to. In the street the soft diminishing whirr of a motor grew fainter and was gone.

Silence.

The woman sank into a chair and buried her face between her two shaking hands.

Shadows crept up against the uncurtained window and pressed, quivering, against the pane. Shadows came into the room and stretched themselves along the floor. Shadows reached up across the wall and over the chairs and the table. Shadows spread in a gray, moving mass over the still figure of the woman.

A young girl came quickly and silently through the curtain that partitioned the room off from the kitchen.

"Maman—"

The woman did not move.

"I had not thought, Maman, that you were alone."

The woman slowly drew her face from out between her hands. She looked up uncertainly, her eyes only half open.

"Leave me, Angele."

"But, Maman, supper is ready."

"Let it wait, Angele."

The girl came over to the table and put her hand on the woman's shoulder.

"Was she then horrid, Maman?"

The woman sighed softly.

"It is not that, Angele. She was like the others. They come because they are curious. Something, perhaps, brings them here, but they do not know that. They are only curious. They do not believe. I tell them the truth. They are shocked for a little moment. They do not believe, Angele."

"Pauvre petite Maman, you are tired."

"Non, non, Angele."

"Will you have Jean see you tired, Maman?"

The woman stared up into the girl's small, white face that was dimmed with shifting shadows. The woman's heavily lidded eyes met the girl's wide, dark eyes.

"Jean—"

"He will be home to eat, Maman. Soon, now, he will be home."

The woman passed her hands again and again over her forehead and then she held them with the tips of her fingers pressed tight to her temples.

"He is such a child, Angele."

"Shall we have supper now?"

"Angele—"

"I will bring a light in here, Maman, and then when Jean is back we will go in to supper."

"He—is—such—a—child,—Angele."

"And never on time, Maman!"

The woman caught the girl's fingers between her own.

"Answer me, Angele. Answer me!"

The girl looked down in surprise.

"But what, Maman?"

The woman's breath came quickly.

"He is a child. Say that he is a baby. He is all that I have. You and he are all—everything! Say, Angele, that he is a child! Only yesterday, you remember—the long curls? The velvet suit? Surely it was yesterday. Say, Angele, that he—is—still—a—little—one."

The girl threw back her head and laughed. The shadows lay like long, dark fingers on the white of her throat.

"Of course. He is young—too young even now when they take the young. You have no need to worry, Maman. Maman—what is it?"

She had seen the sudden, far-away look in the woman's eyes.

She had seen her head stretch forward, the chin pointing, the mouth a little open.

"Maman—"

The woman's hand reached out in a gesture commanding silence.

"The voices," the woman whispered. "They have been after me the whole day. The voices. They—keep—coming—and—coming—to—me—I have not been able to think—for the voices—"

"Maman—"

"You say 'yes.' You are coming—nearer—nearer. No—I cannot see. But hear—Mais, it is good now! You speak distinctly. Of course I thank you for speaking so beautifully. You—say—you—want—want—"

"Petite Maman, you will make yourself ill with those old horoscopes and these voices. Petite Maman, have you not done enough for one day?"

The woman paid no attention to her. She did not seem to hear the girl. Her face was pale; there were faint, bluish smudges about her mouth and nostrils.

"You want—I cannot—cannot understand what you want. I'm trying to understand. I'm trying hard! If you will tell it to me again. And—slowly. With patience. It is better now. So that is it? More slowly,—if you can. Of course. Is it that you wish to know? Of—course—I—shall—give—you—what—you—want. I always give you what—you want. I do my best for that. You—want—"

The woman's eyes were closed. She was breathing deeply. Her whole figure was tense. The girl stood beside her, a puzzled, half incredulous look coming into her face.

"I—should—look. It does no—good—to—look. I can never see—Beyond the wood—I should look beyond.—What wood? Now? Is it perhaps that—you—mean—gate? Swings to and fro? Now—you—want—; this—moment—"

The door was flung wide open.

At the noise the woman slowly opened her eyes, staring blindly before her.

"You—want—" She murmured.

A boy stood in the doorway. He was slight and young. His face was small and rather like the girl's face, and his dark eyes were set far apart like her eyes. Through the gray of the massing shadows gleamed the brass buttons of his uniform.

The girl sprang forward.

"Jean—!"

"Maman." The boy came a step into the room. "See, Maman!"

"Hush, Jean." The girl turned to gaze at the woman sitting there with that stony, frozen stare, staying in her eyes.

"Maman, they have taken me at last!"

"Oh," for a second the girl forgot the woman. "But I am proud of you!"

"Maman, I wear the uniform. They will let me go now. I knew they would take me. Sooner or later; I knew they would have to! Aren't you glad?"

The girl remembered and interrupted him.

"Be still, Jean!"

The boy stood looking from one to the other, his eyes straining through the gloom.

"Maman," he whispered.

The woman's voice came trailing softly to them.

"They—want—"

"Maman;" the girl threw her arm protectingly over the woman's shoulders. "Jean is here. See, petite Maman; it is Jean. Your Jean."

The woman repeated the words in that gentle, plaintive singsong.

"They want—" and then she got to her feet. "Jean!—" Her voice rose shrilly crescendo. "It was that! My—Jean—"

"Maman;" the boy came and stood beside her. "You would not have me stay behind when they need me? You will be glad to have me go. Come, Maman, you must say that you are glad!"

"My little one—"

"Say, Maman, that you are glad."

"So young, Jean."

"But old enough to fight when they need me. Old enough to fight for France!"

"My baby—"

"You will not grieve, Maman."

She reached up and caught his face between her two hands and drew it down and kissed him on the mouth.

"Ah, Jean!"

"And say, how do I look?" He turned around and around in front of them. "But, Angele, fetch the lamp quickly. You cannot see in this dark. You cannot see me."

The girl laughed a bit uncertainly, and then she went quickly, rushing into the next room.

The woman gripped hold of the boy's hand. His fingers grasped hers.

"Petite Maman."

"Mon Jean—just—a—moment—still—so."

They stood there silent and very close to each other, in the room crowded with moving, splotching shadows. The girl came back through the curtain, a lighted lamp between her two hands. The flicker of it spread broadly into her eager, anxious face. The glow of it trickled before her and widened through the room. The shadows stuck to the walls in the corners and rocked up against the ceiling, black among the uneven streaks of yellow light.

"Now, Angele. Now, Maman. Put it there on the table, Angele. No, hold it higher. Like that. Keep your hands steady, Angele, or how can Maman see? Such a miserable lamp! Does not my uniform look magnificent? I am the real poilu, hein? Something to be proud of, Maman?"

"The real poilu?" The girl questioned softly. "The grandchild of the real poilu, maybe."

"She mocks me, Maman."

"Be quiet, Angele."

"I do not mock, Maman; but I will not have his head turned. The poor little cabbage!"

"See, Maman. She will not stop. Tell her that I fight for France."

For a moment the woman hesitated. They could hear the deep breath she took.

"For France. And for something else, my little son."

With great care the girl placed the lamp on the table.

"Something else, Maman?"

"The thing for which France stands—; and conquers."

He seized at her last word.

"Conquers? Of course she conquers. And I will help! I will kill the Boches. Right and left. I shall fight until France will win!"

A strange light had filtered into the woman's heavily lidded eyes.

"Bravo!" The girl clapped her hands together. "And shall we have our supper now, petite Maman, and my little rabbit?"

"Maman—when I have this uniform—"

"Go, children. In a moment I will be with you."

"Come, my cauliflower. Maman would be alone."

"Maman—"

"Jean—I do not mean to tease. Let us go in to supper. If I do not try to be pleasant I shall weep. You would not have me weep, brother Jean? I would wet the pretty shoulder of your uniform with my tears. That would be a tragedy. So come along to supper, my rascal."

Hand in hand the boy and the girl went through the loose-hung, plush curtain into the kitchen.

The woman stood rigid beside the table.

"Help me," she whispered beneath her breath. "You—"

She stumbled to her knees. Her head was pressed against the edge of the table. Her hands fumbled over the top of it, the fingers widespread and catching; clutching at whatever they touched.

From the kitchen came the sound of low voices. A knife rattled clatteringly against a plate. Once the girl laughed and her laughter snapped off in a half-smothered sob.

The woman moaned a little.

"Just to watch over him. That's all I ask.—You—across there, just—to—protect—him—"

Her hands went to her throat, the fingers tightening.

"A sign," she implored. "Dieu—that—you—hear—me!"

Her eyes stared about the room, peering frantically from under their heavy lids.

"Will you not help me?" She pleaded. "Dieu! mon Dieu,—will you not—help—me—?"

Her kneeling figure swayed a bit.

"You will not hear," she whimpered. "You will—not—hear—"

For a moment longer she waited in the tense silence. And then she rose stiffly to her feet. Her eyes riveted themselves upon a little pool of yellow light that lay in the center of the table under the lamp. The palms of her hands struck noiselessly together.

Very slowly, she went through the curtain and into the kitchen.

It was a scrupulously clean room. A stove stood in one corner. Against the wall hung a row of pots and pans that caught the light from the swinging lamp in brilliant, burnished patches.

Angele and Jean sat near to each other at the center table. Their heads were close. Their cautious whispering stopped

abruptly as she came toward them.

The woman sat down with the girl on one side of her and the boy on the other. She was very silent. There was only one thing she could have said. She did not want to say it.

Mechanically she tried to eat. She watched her hands moving upward from her plate with a sort of dazed interest. It was only when she tried to swallow that she realized how each mouthful of food choked her.

The one question came to her lips again and again.

At last she asked it.

"When do you go—mon Jean?"

The boy gave a quick glance at his sister and his eyes fixed themselves upon the table before him and stayed there. She knew then what they had been speaking of when she came into the room.

"What difference does it make, petite Maman, when I go?"

"But when, my son?"

"See, Angele, she is anxious to be rid of me! She cannot wait until I go. She insists upon knowing even before we have finished this supper of ours."

"Maman;"—the girl spoke hurriedly. "Let us talk of that later."

"When?" She insisted.

"But, Maman, you have not touched your food. Was it not good? And I thought you would so like the p'tit marmite."

"It is excellent, Angele."

"Then eat, Maman."

"It is that I am not hungry, Angele."

"So, the p'tit marmite is not good, petite Maman. If it were excellent, even though you have no hunger, you would eat and eat until there was not one little bit left."

The woman took another spoonful.

"When?" She repeated.

The boy's dark eyes lifted and looked into hers.

"To-night,—Maman."

Her figure straightened itself with a quick jerk.

"To-night?"

"And what does it matter, petite Maman, when I go? Surely to-night is as nice a time as any."

"As nice a time as any;" she echoed his words.

The three of them sat there silently.

The girl was the first to move.

"Ah, but it is hot in here." She pushed her chair back from the table. "It is uncomfortable!"

The boy and the woman got to their feet.

"I'll pack, Maman. Not much, you know. Just my shaving things and soap, and some underwear. Angele will help me. I won't be long."

He went out of the kitchen door and down the narrow passage way to his room. The girl hesitated for a moment. Without a word she hurried after him.

The woman crossed slowly into the next room. For a second she stood beside the table, and then she walked over to the window.

Outside the street was dark. No light trickled through the blinds of the house opposite. No light reached its brilliant electric flare into the sky. No light from the tall lamp-post specked through the gloom. In the dim shadow of the silent street she could see the vague forms of people going to and fro. Blurred figures moving in the darkness with the echo of their footsteps trailing sharply behind them.

She stood quite still. Once her hands crept up to her mouth, the backs of them pressing against her teeth.

"Maman."

She wheeled about at the sound of Jean's voice.

He was standing just within the doorway, the girl at his side. The woman stood there staring. The girl crossed the room quickly and put her arm about the woman's waist, drawing her close.

"Petite Maman—"

"You—go—now—Jean?"

She said the words carefully and precisely with a tremendous effort for control.

"But, yes, Maman!"

She leaned a little against the girl.

"Mon Jean, you will have courage—; great—courage—my little one, you will be protected. You—will—be—protected!" She had said that in spite of herself.

He came to her then and flung his arms about her and kissed her on either cheek, and held her tightly to him.

"Good-by, petite Maman."

"Good—" She could not say it.

"Good-by, Angele."

"My little rabbit—I wish you luck. My cabbage—au revoir—;" and her lips brushed across his mouth.

For a second he did not move. Then he went across the room and out through the door.

He was gone.

The woman's eyes went to the window. The silent, darkened street. The people there below her. The somber, black lack of light.

"Maman;" the girl whispered.

"They will watch over him," the woman muttered. "They must watch—out—there. They do come back into the world again to protect. They cannot—cannot leave them in all that horror—alone."

"See, Maman." The girl's quivering face was against the window-pane. "Maman, Jean waves to you!"

Her eyes followed the pointing of the girl's finger.

"They—must—be—here—," she murmured.

"Maman,—wave to Jean!"

Her gaze rested on the dim, undefined figure of the boy standing in the street with his hat in the hand that was reached toward them above his head. Mechanically she waved back.

The woman and the girl stood close.

"Oh—petite maman;" she whispered piteously.

The woman's eyes dilated.

There, following after Jean; going through the shadow-saturated street; moving unheeded among the vague figures of the people going to and fro. Something was there. Some scant movement like a current too quiet to see. A shadow in the shadows that her sight could not hold to. In the dark, gloom-soaked street, staying close to her Jean, she could feel something. Some one was there.

Her eyes strained with desperate intentness. Her hands went up slowly across her heart.

The words that came to her lips were whispered:

"Dieu! Give me faith;—faith—not—to—disbelieve—"

YELLOW

He walked along the pavement with the long, swinging stride he had so successfully aped from the men about him. It had been one of the first things upon which he had dwelt with the greatest patience; one of the first upon which he had centered his stolid concentration. He had carried his persistency to such a degree that he had even been known to follow other men about measuring their step to a nicety with those long, narrow eyes of his, that seemed to see nothing, and yet penetrated into the very soul of everything.

His classmates at the big college had at the beginning laughed at him; scoffing readily because of the dogged manner in which he had persevered at his desire to become thoroughly American. Now after all his laborious painstaking, now that he had carefully studied all their ways of talking, all their distinctive mannerisms; now that he had gone even beyond that with true Oriental perception, reaching out with the cunning tentacles of his brain into the minds of those about him, he knew they had begun to treat him with the comradeship, the unthinking fellow-feeling which they accorded each other.

He thoroughly realized that had they paused to consider, had they in any way been made to feel that he, a Chinaman, had consciously made up his mind to become one of them, consistently mimicking them day after day, that they would have resented him. He knew that they could not have helped but think it all hypocrisy. And yet he actually felt that it was the one big thing of his life; that desire of his to cast aside the benightment of dying China, for what he considered the enlightment and virility of America.

To be sure he recognized there was still a great number of the men who distrusted him because of his yellow face. He had made up his mind with the slow deliberation that always characterized his unswerving determination to win every one of them before the end of his last year. He would show them one and all that he was as good as they were; that the traditions of the Chinaman which they so looked down upon, upon which he himself looked down upon, were not his traditions.

As he walked along he thought of these things; thought of them carefully and concisely in English. His narrow eyes became a trifle more narrow, and a smile that held something of triumph in it came and played about his flat, mobile mouth.

It had been raining hard. The wet streets stretched in dark, reflecting coils under the corner lamps. Overhead a black sky lowered threateningly; pressing down upon the crouching, gray masses of the close-built houses in sullen menace. Now and again a swift moving train flung itself in thundering derision across the elevated tracks; a long brightly lit line streaking through the encircling gloom.

He could feel the mysterious throb of life all about him. The unfathomed lure of the night, of the few people that at so late an hour crept past him, looming for a second in sudden distinctness at his side, then fading phantom-like into the

deep engulfing shadows of the dim street.

He was at a complete loss how to express to himself the feeling of dread; a subtle feeling that somehow refused to be translated into the carefully acquired English of which he was so proud.

For a moment he doubted himself. Doubted that, were he so thoroughly American, he could feel the Oriental's subconscious recognition of the purposeful, sinister intent in the huddled mass of darkened shop windows with their rain-dripping signs; in the shining reptile scales of the asphalt underfoot; in the pulsing intensity of the hot, torpid July atmosphere.

A street lamp flickered its uncertain light sluggishly over the carefully groomed figure and across the placid breath of the yellow face.

He paused a second as he saw a form come lurching unsteadily out of the gloom ahead of him. It came nearer and he could see that what had at first appeared to be a dark, undefinable mass, pushed here and there by unseen hands, was in reality a man swaying drunkenly out of the shadows.

He watched the man curiously, with a little of that contemptuous feeling an Oriental always holds for any expression of excess. As the man stood before him in the darkness, as he stumbled and seemed about to fall, he put out his hand and caught him by the elbow.

"Thank 'e;" the drunken eyes blinked blearily up into his stolid impassive face. "It's fine to be saved on a stormy night like this. It is—"

"Don't mention it."

"It's a powerful dark night;—it is."

"Les. That is so."

"And it's a damn long way home. Ain't it?"

"I do not know."

"By the saints! And no more do I. Ain't you got a dime on you, mister? You could be giving it to me for car fare—; couldn't you now, mister?"

"Velee glad to let you have it."

He fished in his pocket. He drew out the coin and placed it in the man's outstretched hand. He watched the dirty fingers close eagerly over it. Suddenly the bloodshot eyes wavered suspiciously across his face. He saw the red flushed features twitch convulsively.

"Holy Mother!" The drunkard muttered thickly. "It's a heathen."

The dime slipped from between the inert fingers. It tinkled down onto the pavement, rolling with a little splash into a pool of water that lay a deep stain in the crevice of the broken asphalt.

For a moment he wondered placidly at the injustice of it; wondered that he should be made to feel the disgust of so revolting a thing as this drunkard.

He saw that the man had crossed himself with sudden fervor; he saw him shuffle uncertainly this way and that, as though the feet refused to carry the huge, bloated body. He stood watching the reeling figure until its dark outline was absorbed into the intenser darkness of a side street. The expression on his face never changing, he walked on.

He knew he had no right to be out at that time of the night; he knew he ought to be sitting at his desk in his comfortable little room, working out the studies which he had set himself. And yet he could not make up his mind to turn back.

Something drew him on into the blackness of the night; pulling him into it like a fated thing.

Now and then he found that the stride he had acquired from such grinding observation tired him. Not for worlds would he have shortened his step to that padding, sinuous motion so distinctly Chinese.

He had grown to hate all things Chinese. In the short time in which he had been in New York he had discarded with the utmost patience the traits which are so persistently associated with the Chinaman. To be thought American; to have the freedom, the quick appreciation of life that belongs to the Occident, that had been the goal toward which he had striven; the goal he prided himself he had almost reached.

Suddenly he became aware of a hand on his arm.

In the dark he felt the pressure of bony fingers against his flesh.

Looking down he saw that a woman had crept up from behind him; that she had put out her hand in an effort to detain him.

It was in the center of a block. The thick blackness that hung loosely, an opaque veil all about him, was almost impenetrable. Yet as he looked at her with his small, piercing eyes, he thought he saw her lips moving in crimsoned stains splashed against the whiteness of her face.

"What is it?" He asked.

He saw her raise her eyelids at his question. He found himself gazing into her eyes; eyes that were twin balls of fire left to burn in a place that had been devastated by flames.

"It's hot;—ain't it?"

He stood silent for a moment trying to realize that the woman had every right to be there; trying to understand with an even greater endeavor that she was in reality a flesh and blood woman, and not some mysteriously incarnate soul crawling to his side out of the sinister night.

"Les,—it's velee hot."

Something in his tone caused her to start; caused her to look around her as though she were afraid.

"I wouldn't have spoke," she stammered. "I wouldn't have spoke only it's such a fierce night." Then as he did not answer her immediately, her voice rose querulously. "It's a fierce night; ain't it, now?"

That was the word for which he had so vainly searched throughout the vocabulary of his carefully acquired English. The word the woman had given him, that expressed the sullen menace of the night about him.

"It is—fie—" He made an effort to accomplish the refractory "r." "It is fierce."

The hand she had withdrawn from his arm was reached out again. He could feel her fingers scrape like the talons of a frightened bird around his wrist.

"You get it too, mister?"

"Get what?"

"The kind of feeling that makes you think something is going to happen?" She drew the back of her free hand across her mouth. "Ain't it making you afraid?"

Somehow the woman's words aroused within him a dread that was a prophecy. He made one attempt at holding to his acquired Americanism. The Americanism which was slowly receding before the stifled waves of Oriental foreboding, like a weak, protesting thing that fears a hidden strength. For he knew the foreboding was fate; and he knew too that when fulfilled, it would be met with all the stoicism of a Chinaman.

"You feel aflaid?"

The fingers about his wrist clattered bonily together; then clinched themselves anew.

"Yes," she whispered. "I guess that's it. I guess I'm afraid."

For a moment he thought of the lateness of the hour.

"I'm velee solee," he said. "I'm solee, but I must be going."

"You can't leave me;" she stuttered behind her shut teeth. "You ain't got the heart to leave me all alone on a night like this."

"You can go to your home;" and he thought of the drunkard who had gone to his home. Surely the night sheltered strange creatures. "Les, you better go on to your home."

She laughed.

He had never thought of one of his little Chinese gods with their crooked faces laughing; but as he heard her he knew that their mirth would sound like that. Sound as though all the gladness had been killed; choked out of it, leaving only the harsh echoes that mocked and mocked.

"Gee, mister—; I ain't got no place to go."

"I'm velee solee."

He said it again, not knowing what else to say.

Something in his evident sincerity aroused her to protest.

"Oh, I know you thinks it queer for me to be talking this way," she said. "I know you thinks it funny for me to say I'm afraid. And I ain't, excepting—" she added hastily, "on a night like this. It kinder makes everything alive; everything that's rotten bad. I ain't ashamed of the things I've done. I ain't scared of the dead things. It's the live ones I'm afraid of—; the dirty live things. They kinder come at you in the dark." For an instant her body trembled against his. "Then they goes past you all creepy-like. Creeping on their bellies—; sliding,—like—like—slime."

"You don't know what you are saying," he interrupted.

"I know," she insisted. "I know! Some night like this I'll be doing something awful;—and they'll be there." She pointed a shaking hand towards the shadows. "They'll be there, wriggling to me—quiet—!"

"Imagination," he said, and he smiled. In the dark she could not have seen the smile, nor could she have known that the lightness of his tone covered a deep, malignant dread. "It is all imagination!"

"It ain't!" She spoke sullenly. "I tell you, it's real. It's horrible real!"

Her voice was frantic.

"Maybe it is," he conceded, and then, as she made no answer, he asked: "You like to walk with me a little?"

"Yes." Her head drooped as though she were utterly discouraged. "It wouldn't be so bad as sticking it out here—alone."

He could not help but notice that she hesitated a bit before the word alone. Undoubtedly she could not get the thought of those things—those live things she so feared, out of her head. The things that waited for her in the shadows.

They walked along the wet pavements together.

An engine shrieked weirdly above them, like something neither bird nor beast; like something inhuman.

Under a street lamp she glanced up at him curiously.

He heard her gasp. He looked down at her. He saw her eyes widen in terror; he saw her pale, bare hands creep uncertain, stumbling to her neck, as if she were choking. He heard her voice rattling in her throat.

"What is it?" He asked. "You are ill?"

He put his hand on her shoulder. He could feel her shudder, as she writhed and twisted under his touch.

"Let go of me." Her voice was hoarse. "Let go of me, I say!"

For some unaccountable reason his fingers closed all the more tightly on her shrinking flesh.

"Let me go;—you—damned—Chink!"

She muttered the words under her breath.

He heard her.

He thought of the drunkard and he thought of her.

Suddenly he felt quite furious; stilly, sinisterly furious.

"I'm 'Melican."

He said it stolidly. His narrow, black eyes were unwavering on her.

She began to cry.

"Let me go," she whimpered. "I ain't done nothing to you. I couldn't have got on to your being—a—Chink."

"What diffelence does that make?" He asked. And then he reiterated with careful precision: "I tell you I'm a 'Melican."

Her words came to him in a gurgle of terror.

"I hate you. I hate all of your yellow faces—and them eyes! I hate them horrid, nasty—eyes!"

He bent his head until his face almost touched hers. His strong, angry fingers held her firmly by either arm.

"It is not pletty, this face?"

She struggled, inane with fear. She fought, trying to free herself, to tear away from the vise-like grip of those awful hands; swaying like a tortured, trapped creature against his strength. She could feel the intensity, the calm scrutiny of his long, narrow eyes upon her.

Suddenly something in his brain snapped.

He pushed her roughly from him.

He saw her fall to the pavement; he saw her head strike the curb.

He stood there watching her as she lay, outlined by the light colored material of her dress against the wet blackness of the asphalt.

"What diffelence does it make if I am a Chinaman?"

He asked it as he bent over her. But she did not answer. The question went out into the heavy stillness, hanging there to be echoed deafeningly by a thousand silent tongues.

Something in the sudden quiet of the way she lay filled him with a tranquil joy. He knelt beside her, He reached his hand over her heart.

He got up slowly, deliberately.

He moved silently away, going with that padded, sinuous motion, so distinctly Chinese.

With cunning stealth he went back the way he had come, treading lightly; cautiously seeking the darkest shadows.

He had gone some little distance when he heard the regular beat of hurrying footsteps following him.

He stood stolidly, still, awaiting whatever might happen.

Overhead he saw a cluster of heavy, black clouds sweeping across the sky, like eager, reaching hands against a somber background.

It had begun to rain again. He could feel the raindrops trickling gently down his upturned face.

He wondered, as the footsteps halted beside him, if he should have run. His mind, working rapidly, decided that any other man would have gotten away; any other man but not a Chinaman.

A heavy hand fell across his shoulder.

"I've got you, my boy!" A voice shouted in his ear. "I seen you kneeling there beside her. You'll be coming along with me!"

He turned to face the voice.

The wind that heralded the coming storm rustled through the street, carrying with it a litter of filthy castaway newspapers. Flurries of stinging sand-sharp dust swirled above the pavement. A low rumble of thunder bellowed overhead. Then the rain came down in sudden lashing fury.

He had to raise his voice to make himself heard.

"I'm velee glad," he said.

The bull's eye was flashed into his placid, narrow eyes.

He could see the policeman's face behind the light; see the surprise quivering on the red features.

In the darkness above the racket of the storm, he heard the man's gasping mutter:

"Yellow—by God!—Yellow!"

CHINA-CHING[1]

The racket was terrific. The yelping, the shrill prolonged whines, the quick incessant barking; and running in growling under-current, the throaty, infuriated snarling.

The woman stood at the window gazing out into the gathering twilight. Before her eyes stretched the drab, flat fields; here and there a shadowy mass of trees reached their feathery tips that were etched in darkly against the graying skies. Directly before her, beyond the unkept waste that might at one time have been a garden, reared the high, wire walls of the kennels. She could just make out the dim, undefined forms of the dogs running to and fro within the narrow, confining space.

The swift, persistent movement of them fascinated her. The ghostly shapes of them pattering sinuously and silently along the ground; the dull scratching thud of the claws and bodies that hurled themselves again and again into the strong wire netting. The impossibility of their escape throttled her. Their futile attempts at freedom caused a powerful nausea to creep over her. And there in the center of the run she could distinguish, chained to the dog-house,—a pale blur in the fading light,—the motionless yellow mass of the chow, China-Ching.

The shrill, prolonged whines, the quick, incessant barking:—

"Oh, my Gawd;" she muttered involuntarily. "Oh, my Gawd!"

The man sitting in the middle of the room pulled his pipe out of his mouth.

"What's that you say?"

She stood at the window, her eyes fixed steadfastly on that one dumb dog among all those yelping, snarling other dogs.

The man got up from his chair and came and stood beside her. Unconsciously she shrank away from his nearness.

"Ain't you used to that by now;—ain't you?"

She turned toward him;—all but her eyes. Her eyes were still riveted out there upon the motionless chow chained in the center of the run.

"It ain't the noise; that,—that don't mean so much, James. It ain't the noise."

"Then what's the matter,—huh?"

She pointed a trembling forefinger at that yellow mass tied to the dog-house.

"Him," she whispered. "He don't make no racket, James."

The man peered over her shoulder.

"The chow?"

"Yes;" her voice was still. "China-Ching. He don't make no racket, James."

"I'd like to hear him," the man blustered. "I'd just like to hear one peep out of him;—that's all."

She saw his coarse, hairy hand go to his hip pocket. She smiled bitterly. She knew the confidence he felt when he touched the mother-of-pearl handle of his pistol.

"You don't need that on him," she said. "He just sits there and don't never move. He don't hardly eat when you feeds him. He don't seem to have no heart left for nothing. He ain't like the terrier what had the distemper;—he ain't like the greyhound what had the hydrophobia,—so awful bad."

"What d'you mean?" The man muttered angrily. "Ain't they had the hydrophobia;—ain't they had the distemper;—ain't they?"

"You says they did, James."

"Ain't I the one to know? If I ain't been born with dog-sense, would folks be giving me their muts to care for?"

"You shot them pups, James."

"And what if I did?" He stormed. "They was dangerous—they was a menace to the community,—so they was. And see, here,—you take it from me, there ain't nothing more dangerous as a dog when he gets took that there way. Why, I've heard tell of dogs what have torn men limb from limb." And then he added in afterthought: "Men that've been kind to 'em, too."

Her laughter rang out shrilly, piercingly.

"Aw, James," she giggled hysterically. "Aw, now, James—

"What's that?" His hand was on her hand. "See here, you, ain't I kind to 'em?"

His touch sobered her quite suddenly.

"Kind to 'em—?"

She repeated his words vaguely as though not fully conscious of their actual meaning.

The grip of his fingers tightened cruelly about her arm.

"Ain't I—kind—to—'em?"

"Oh, my Gawd," she whimpered. "Oh, my Gawd,—yes."

He went back to the center of the room and lighted the lamp on the bare-boarded, pine-wood table. Its light flickered in a sickly, yellow glow over the straight-backed chairs, across the unpapered walls, and dribbled feebly upwards to where the heavy rafters of the ceiling were obliterated in a smothering thickness of shadows.

"What're you standing there for? Pull down that blind! Come here, I say!"

The faint, motionless form there beside the dog-house. The wooden, stiffened attitude of it. The great mass of the chow's rigid body that was gradually becoming absorbed into the gray shadow; that was slowly losing its faint outline in the saturating, blurring darkness.

She did as she was told; hastily, nervously. And then she came and stood beside the table. Try as she would to prevent it her eyes kept on staring through the curtained window.

Again she became conscious of the yelping, the prolonged whines, the quick, incessant barking; and running in growling under-current, the throaty, infuriated snarling.

"I can't stand it no more!" she shrieked. "It's too much,—so it is! I just—can't—stand—it—no—more!"

He looked up at her, startled.

"What under the canopy's eating you?"

She sank into a chair. The palms of her hands pounded against each other. In the lamplight her face showed itself pale and drawn with the eyes pulling out of its deadened setness in live despair.

"You got to do something for me, James." Her voice shook. "You simply got to do it. I ain't never asked nothing from you before this. I've been a good wife to you. I've stood for a lot,—Gawd knows I have. I ain't never made no complaint. You got to do this for me, James."

"Got to,—huh? Them's high words, my lady. There ain't nothing what I got to do. You ain't gone plum crazy, have you?"

"Crazy?" She muttered. "No, I ain't gone crazy;—not yet, I ain't. Only you got to do this for me, James."

"What're you driving at,—huh?"

She rose to her feet then. When she spoke her tone was quite controlled.

"You got to let that chow-dog go."

The man sprang erect.

"What d'you mean?"

"You—got—to—let—China-Ching—go! You got to let him get away. You got to make that China-Ching—free."

He laughed. The laugh had no sound of mirth in it. The laugh was long and loud; but its loudness could not cover the insidious evil of it.

"That's a good one," he shouted. "Let a dog go of his own sweet will when some day I'll be getting my price for him. That's the funniest thing I've heard in many a long day. Land's sakes! You're just full of wit,—ain't you?"

"I ain't," she retorted sullenly.

But he paid no attention to her.

"I never would have thought it—that's a cinch! Say,—it do seem I'm learning all the time."

Her teeth came together with a sharp snap.

"Better be careful you don't learn too much,—about me."

She whispered it beneath her breath.

"Muttering,—huh?" He leaned toward her over the table. "I don't like no muttering. I ain't the one to allow no muttering around me. Speak out—if you got something to say;—and if you ain't,—why, then,—shut up!"

The lamp threw its full light up into his face. Not one muscle, not one wrinkle, but stood out harshly above its crude flame. She drew back a step.

"All right." She had been goaded into it. "I'll speak up—All right. That's what you wants, ain't it? I've stood for enough. I reckon I've stood for too much. You knows that. But you ain't thought that maybe I knows it,—have you? That makes a difference,—don't it? You knows the way you treats me,—only you ain't thought that I ever gives it no thought;—and

I ain't,—no,—I ain't; not till you brought that there China-Ching here. Not—till—you—brought—China-Ching."

"What's that mut got to do between you and me?"

His eyes refused to meet her eyes that were ablaze with a strange, inspired light.

"Everything. From the day I seen you bring him here—; from the day I seen you beating him because he snapped at you—; from the day you chained him up to that dog-house to break his spirit—; from that day it come over me what you done to me."

"You're crazy;—plum crazy!"

"Oh, no, I ain't;" she went on in suppressed fury. "I've slaved for you when you was sober, and when you was drunk. I've stood your kicks and I've stood your dirty talk, and I've stood for the way you treats them there dogs. And d'you know why I've stood for it,—say, do you?"

His hands clenched at his sides. Their knuckles showed white against the soiled dark skin.

"No—and what's more—"

She interrupted him.

"I've stood for it all because I knowed that any time—Any time, mind you,—I could clear out. Whenever I likes I can get up and,—go!"

"You wouldn't dare;—you ain't got the nerve!"

"I have—; I have,—too."

"Where'd you go,—huh?"

"I'd get away from you,—all right."

"What'd you do?"

"That ain't of no account to you!"

He watched her for a second between half-closed lids. A cunning smile spread itself over his thick lips. He walked to the door and threw it wide open.

"You can go—if you likes;—you can go—now!"

Her hand went to her heart. The scant color in her face left it. She took one hesitating step forward and then she stood quite still.

"If you lets the dog go—I stays."

Her words sounded muffled.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"The dog's my dog. I ain't able to see where he comes in on all this."

"You can't see nothing;—you don't want to see! It's knowing too well what that pup's up against that makes me want you to let him go. It's that I don't want to have the heart took out of him;—the way you took the heart out of me,—that makes me want to have him set free."

He gave a noiseless chuckle.

"So I took the heart out of you,—did I?"

She glared at him savagely.

"You knows you did!"

For a moment they were silent.

"Well?" He asked.

She saw him wave a hand toward the door.

"Aw, James, you can't be so cruel bad—You can't. The other dogs don't mind it—; they makes a noise and they tears around. And then they eats and drinks and late at nights they lies down and sleeps;—if there ain't no moon. But that China-Ching he ain't like them. Maybe—he is savage;—maybe you're right to be afraid of him."

His whole figure was suddenly taut. His head shrank into his shoulders.

"There ain't nothing I'm afraid of;—get that into your head—I ain't afraid of nothing—And if you wants to go,—why, all I got to say is, you can—git!"

A stillness came between them, broken only by the sounds from the kennels. The yelping, the shrill prolonged whines, the quick, incessant barking; and running in growling under-current, the throaty, infuriated snarling.

He went to the table and took the lamp up in one hand. He went over to the door and closed it with a loud bang. Then he started toward the stairs.

"If you ain't able to bring yourself to leave me," the words came to her over his shoulder, "you can come on up to bed."

Mechanically she followed him up the steps. Mechanically she went through the process of undressing and washing. Long after he had fallen asleep she lay there wide awake watching the moonlight trickle in quivering, golden spots across the floor; lay wide awake listening to the eerie baying of the dogs.

She had had her chance of freedom and at the last moment her courage had failed her. What she had told him had been the absolute truth. She had never realized what had happened to her, what a stifled, smothered thing she had become, until that day when he had brought the chow-dog home to the kennels.

She had married James when she was very young. Their fathers' farms adjoined. It had been the expected thing and she had gone through with it quite as a matter of course. In those days he had been somewhat ambitious. The country-folk around admitted grudgingly that James Conover was a born farmer. Then the old people, both their fathers and his mother, had grown a bit older, and one by one they had died. There had been nothing violent in their deaths. Silent, narrow-minded, like most country persons they had grown a trifle more silent, a trifle more bigoted, and then they were dead. It had seemed to her that way at any rate. She had become conscious all of a sudden that she was alone with James. Strange that the consciousness should have come to her after she had been alone with him for three years; and then that she should only realize she was alone in the world with him the first time he came home drunk. After that he took to drinking more and more, and finally he gave up farming. It had been quite by accident that he took to boarding dogs; now and then buying one for a quick turn. He liked the job. As far as she could see it gave him more time to spend in the village saloon.

One thing she had never been able to understand. In her heart she was certain that James was terrified of the animals. She had seen him shoot a dog at the slightest provocation. But until she had seen the chow she had never bothered with the beasts. She had cooked their meals but she had not been allowed to feed them. She had watched them from the outside of the kennels but she had never gone in to them. She had tolerated their racket because she had never fully understood what lay in back of it all. And then the chow came.

James had brought China-Ching home in the old runabout; brought him to the kennels tied down in a great basket. She had not paid much attention to either man or dog. The first sight that she had of the chow had been because of James. She had heard his cursing and the crack of his huge whip. She had gone out on the porch then and had seen the man beating the dog with all his strength; the man swearing loudly and furiously and the chow silent. She had never gotten over that spectacle. It was the first time she had ever seen a dog maintain silence.

And then day after day she had watched China-Ching, chained there and so strangely silent. Among all those yapping, yipping dogs he alone had remained quiet. And the other animals had paid scant attention to him after the first short while. Even in their wild racing about the enclosure they had given him a wide berth. There was something magnificent, something almost majestic in the chow's aloofness. If it had not been for the dog's eyes she would have thought him

dumb;—a fool. But the eyes haunted her. Great liquid brown eyes, that met hers with unutterable sadness; eyes that clutched and held on to her with the depths of their sorrow.

She made up her mind after the first month that she must free the dog; that she must get him out of the kennels somehow or other. She had never thought of a direct appeal to James. If it had not been for the way he had goaded her this evening she would never have spoken as she did. Only she had always known that it would not be in her power to let the dog escape from the kennels without his finding who had done it; without bearing the brunt of his inevitable rage.

And after the first month she began almost unconsciously to associate herself with the chow, to put herself in his place. As she commenced to understand what his desires for freedom must be so she first realized that those same desires were hers. Only, as she phrased it to herself, she could stand it a lot better than the chow. Dogs could not reason. She could go on existing this way till the end of her days; but she felt that if China-Ching could not be freed that he would die. She could not bear the thought of that. Whatever happened to the dog would happen to that part of her which had come into being when the dog had come.

The moonlight trickled further and further into the room. The stream of it spilled itself wider and wider along the shadow-specked floor.

She could hear the man's deep breathing, now and then punctuated by a guttural snore. The eerie baying of the dogs; and out there the one silent dog chained to the dog-house.

Not one moment longer could she endure it.

Very stealthily she got up and slipped on her skirt. Shoeless and stockingless she crept out into the hall and down the stairs. Unbolting the front door, she paused an instant to hear if she had been detected. With strained ears she listened for those harsh, long-drawn snores. But the house was very still. She could not hear his breathing from where she was. If only he would snore. She waited. The sound came to her at last. She hurried out on to the porch.

The dampness of the summer night was all about her. Overhead the pale flecks of innumerable stars, and the far, cold light of the waning moon. From somewheres in the distance came the monotonous droning of locusts. Against the dark clump of bushes darted the quick, illusive glimmer of a will-o'-the-wisp.

She shivered as her feet struck the chill, wet grass. And then very slowly she went toward the kennels.

Her eyes took no note of the dogs that lay on the ground; of the little fox-terrier sniffing here and there along the wall for rats; of the big police-dog, and the massive English bull, reared on their haunches, their muzzles lifted to the moon. She only saw, chained to the dog-house,—a pale blur in the haunting, whitened light,—the silent, yellow mass of the chow,—China-Ching. She knew that the great, liquid brown eyes were fixed upon her; she could feel them drawing her on. She went toward him.

Very silently she went. And as she went she mumbled.

"If they start a rumpus,—the same racket,—maybe,—if he wakes he won't think nothing of it;—that is, if he ain't enough awake to know I ain't there besides him. Maybe though, he won't wake;—maybe they won't make no noise;—maybe he won't—please, Gawd—! only to get China-Ching,—so that he can feel free—please, Gawd!—so's China-Ching don't have to stay—so that I—please Gawd!—so's I can set something—free."

She suddenly became afraid to approach too silently. Afraid of the deafening uproar of a dog's warning. Already the police-dog had stopped his regular baying; already the little fox-terrier sniffed the air through the wire netting, sensing some one coming. If only she had thought to get them some bones; if only she had a piece of meat; a dog-biscuit,—anything to throw to them to keep them quiet. But she had not had time to think of that.

She began to whistle softly, and then a bit louder as she realized that she had whistled the call of the whip-poor-will. The police-dog got to his feet. She could hear the sinister rumbling of his throaty snarling. She saw the bull-dog waddling clumsily after him. They stood there, their coats bristling, their ears erect, their muzzles poked into the wire netting. And then a quick bark from quite the other side of the kennels.

She felt that numberless small eyes were peering out at her with betraying cunning. It seemed to her that innumerable dogs were rising from the ground; were rushing to the walls; were tearing out of their separate kennels.

She called then; called very low, in the hope that they might know her voice.

"China-Ching;—oh, China-Ching."

She was face to face with it now. All through the day she managed somehow to bear with it. Hideous as it was, deafening so that she could not hear, hated so that it made her physically ill. And now in the dead of night it was let loose; with the unlimited stillness of the night vibrating in grotesque, yapping echo, with the cold light of the moon spotting uncanny over the kennels, she had it. The yelping, the shrill, prolonged whines, the quick incessant barking; and running in growling under-current, the throaty, infuriated snarling.

She knew then that it was quite beyond hope that James should not hear them. She had to hurry. She began to run; and all the while she called in the same low voice:

"China-Ching;—I'm coming to you. Oh China-Ching—"

She pulled back the stiff, iron bolts. It took all her strength to do that. She opened the gate a bit, and slipped in, pushing it to, behind her.

And then she was among them. Their noise increased in volume,—pitched in a shriller note. The sudden rush of them threw her off her feet. Some of them leaped on her. She felt a sharp, stinging nip in her wrist. In a second she was up again.

"Down!" She commanded. "Down!"

She went toward the chow, pushing the other dogs out of her way with both hands; stumbling, stepping over them as they crowded about her feet.

"Down!" She murmured breathless.

It was not until she got well within a couple of strides of the chow that the other dogs dropped away from her. It was the same thing that she had witnessed a hundred times from her window. The animals had always given China-Ching a wide berth; had always respected his magnificent, majestic aloofness. And as she reached him she fell to her knees.

"China-Ching;" she whispered brokenly. "China-Ching!"

Her arms went around the dog's neck. Her hands stroked the thick ruff at his throat. She felt a cold nose on her cheek. A slow, deep sniffing; a second later two heavy paws were on her shoulder, and a warm, moist tongue curled again and again about her ear.

In the moonlight she looked into his eyes. The great, liquid brown eyes met hers with all their unutterable sadness.

"D'you want to go, China-Ching?" She murmured; "d'you want to go and be free?"

Her fingers were working swiftly at his collar. As it clanked to the ground she felt him stiffen rigidly beneath her touch. She saw his ears go back flat against his head; she saw his upper lip pulled so that the long, sharp teeth showed glisteningly in the huckle-berry, blue gums. She followed the set stare of his eyes, and what she saw sent a shiver down her spine.

Coming across the waste that had once been a garden, running stumblingly in the full path of the moonlight, came James. And the other dogs had seen him. She realized that when she heard the growling, the snarling, the low, infuriated snorts.

She rushed back to the gate.

James saw her then.

"Get away," he shouted. "Get away from there!"

She threw the gate open and stood leaning against it to keep it wide.

"China-Ching," she called; "come on,—China-Ching!"

But it was the other dogs that tore past her. First one, then another, then two together, and then the whole wild, panting pack of them.

"For Gawd's sake;" the man shrieked. "Get—get—" The words were lost in his breathless choking.

The chow-dog was the last to go. For a second he stood beside her. She bent over him. She was afraid to touch him; afraid that at that moment her hands might involuntarily hold him.

"Go on, China-Ching;" she urged frantically; "go on!"

"Hey, you—!" The man stormed at the dogs. "Here—, here—!" He whistled; "here, boy,—here, old fellow,—come on; —"

He suddenly stood still. He tried to make his whistling persuasive. He was out of breath. When he saw that they would not come to him he ran after them. They scattered pellmell before him. She saw them disappearing in every direction. Some of them slinking away with their tails between their legs; some of them crawling into the bushes on their bellies; some of them rushing head-long, racing madly into the night. Only the yellow mass of the chow-dog went in even padded patter out toward the road.

She waited there for James. She could not think. She only waited.

And at last he came back.

"You—" His voice was low; "you—!"

The words were smothered in his anger.

She smiled then. She thought that she still could hear the even, padded patter of the dog jogging to his freedom.

"So you turned on me;—you—! D'you know what's going to happen to you;—d'you dare to think?"

Her voice was filled with a strange calm.

"I don't care, James;—I don't care—none. I set China-Ching loose."

His face leered at her evilly in the moonlight.

"You ain't got no excuses;—you don't even make no excuses to me;—huh?"

"No, James;—no!"

Her tone was exultant.

The even, padded patter was still in her ears. It seemed so near. She saw the man's raised fist. The coarse, bulging hammer of it. She felt that something was behind her. She turned.

The chow stood there—His ears back; his coat bristling, the hairs standing on end in tremendous bushiness; his fangs laid bare. There he crouched, drawn together, ready to spring.

The man took a step toward her. Out of the corner of her eyes she could see the huge taut fist.

"I wouldn't do that, James;" she said quietly. "I just—wouldn't!"

"You'll live to rue the day." The words came hoarsely, gutturally. "I'm going to beat you, woman. I'm going to beat you, —damn good!"

"You ain't;" she said. "Look, James!"

She pointed to the chow.

"Call him off;" the man shrieked. "D'you want him to kill me?"

She saw him trembling with fear, paralyzed with terror so that his clenched hand still reached above his head,—shaking.

She thought then of the pistol he always carried with him. For the second time she smiled. She saw him try to take a step backwards. His knees almost gave way under him. The chow wormed a bit nearer.

"Call him off;—take him away. Damn you, speak to him—! For Gawd's sake,—do something;—" he whined.

She looked at the man, cowed; abjectly afraid. She had nothing more to fear from him. He was beaten. Her hand went out until it rested on the dog's head.

"It's all right, China-Ching. It's all right,—now." She felt the chow's great eyes fixed on her face; she felt that he was waiting. "You can go on, James;—go on into the house!"

"What—what d'you mean?"

He stuttered.

"I'm going," she said. "Me, and China-Ching. I told you I'd go when I was ready;—but I wasn't going alone. That's what you ain't understood, James. Now we're both going. And you better be meandering up to your house, or maybe China-Ching he'll be getting tired of waiting."

Slowly the man turned; ponderously, his figure huddled together, he started back stumbling along in the full path of the moonlight.

She thought she saw his fingers fumbling to his hip-pocket.

"Stop!" She called. "None of that, James. This here's one time when that there gun don't work."

"I ain't got no gun." The mumbled words came back to her indistinctly. "D'you think if I'd have had—"

"Stand where you are. And don't you make no move from there. We'll be on our way,—now."

He stood still.

"Come on, China-Ching."

She started toward the road, the dog at her heels. Once as she went she turned to look at the emptied, quiet kennels, at the moonlight drenched waste that had once been a garden; at the huddled figure of the man standing there so silently.

"Good-by, James," she called.

Out in the road she paused to look up and down the long, white stretch of it. The chow stopped at her side. His great, liquid brown eyes were raised to hers. She could feel his impatience to be off. Suddenly he started.

Her feet followed those padded, pattering feet.

"Aw, China-Ching," she whispered, "aw, China-Ching—"

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THE WOOD OF LIVING TREES

And I do hereby swear and take unto myself right solemnly and in most sacred oath before the Lord God to prove myself innocent of this most awful and hideous crime, for the which, in the morning, I do swing by the neck. I, Cedric of Hampden, do swear to show with the righteous help of most high God, that it is not I who beareth the blood guilt of the murther of the Lady Beatrix.

There is in this world a certain devilish influence that worketh most evilly against the high Heavens and the good in man, and the which doeth foully with the flesh of man and bringeth the soul of him unto the stinking depths of hell. I, Cedric of Hampden, having scant knowledge of the meanings of witchcraft, or of magic, either black or white, have many times and oft felt the spell which lyeth so infernally o'er the Wood of Living Trees. I, who loveth the Lady Beatrix, who did meet her death the while she wandered within the confines of the Wood of Living Trees, searching therein for

the Crucifix which she did lose from off her neck, do accuse no one of the killing of her whom I loved. Yet unto myself I do confess the knowledge of this evil thing, the which I have assured myself hath the power at all times to become incarnate.

This will I prove. At some unknown time will I show that in this world a certain devilish influence worketh most evilly against the high Heavens and the good in man. I do confess the knowing of this to be true, and many times and oft have I convinced myself that this Satanic thing hath the power to become incarnate.

In the morning I hang. God, the Father, Christ, the Son, come unto me in purgatory that I may fulfill my sacred oath and that the soul of her I love may find peace within the seven golden gates of Heaven.

At first there was not one of them who noticed it. Strange that people who are forever entertaining are so very apt to disregard the congeniality of their guests. Perhaps they become calloused; probably they grow tired of a ceaseless picking and choosing.

After a while they caught on to it. It was one of those things that could not be avoided. Gregory Manners never was the sort of chap to conceal his feelings, and very evidently he had most decided ones in regard to the Russian, Stephanof Andreyvitch.

He was much in vogue, was Andreyvitch. It was considered rather a stunt to get him to come to one of your dinners. He was tremendously in demand. Not that Andreyvitch had ever done anything to make himself famous. It was just the personality of the man. Women would tell you that he was fascinating, different. Of course there were some of them, the stupid, fastidious ones, who took offense at his looks. No one could ever say they were in any way prepossessing. He was fairly well built, extremely sinewy. His arms were noticeably long and he had an odd fashion of always walking on the balls of his feet. Add to that a rather narrow face, a heavy nose, deep-set eyes, a bit too close together, and a shock of reddish-brown hair, which grew over his head and face in great abundance. Most men would not pretend to understand him. He was at all times courteous. Perhaps even too suavely polite for the Anglo-Saxon temperament. He aired his views with a wonderful assurance; views that had to do chiefly with æstheticism and a violent disregard of all conventional thought. When Andreyvitch spoke, one had the feeling that he feared to express himself too well; that after all his wicked disbelief in the things in which most men placed their entire faith was something actually a part of him; something which might even cause the amazing heathenism of his talk to be somewhat subdued. And when Stephanof Andreyvitch spoke, one could not help but notice his teeth. Yellow, horridly decayed things they were, with the two eye-teeth on either side surprisingly pointed, like fangs.

Of course, in his way Gregory Manners was a bit of a lion. It was that which undoubtedly made them attribute his dislike of the Russian to jealousy. At least at first. Afterwards they found plenty of other reasons. Naturally one of them was Kathleen. But that came much later on.

He had traveled all over the world, had Manners, and he wrote charmingly vague bits that one read and then forgot. He took himself very seriously. He was one of those men who believe firmly and basically that they are sent into this world with a mission to perform. One could not actually tell whether Manners really thought his writing to be his life work. His best friends maintained that he had not as yet found himself. But no one bothered to ask him the question. His work was good; he was a distinctly decent sort of chap, utterly British, and he was above all else exceedingly interesting. For the most part, people were really fond of Manners, and he fond of them.

The first time Andreyvitch and Manners were introduced, Manners had the feeling that they had met at some time before. He even asked the Russian if it had not been in Moscow. When Andreyvitch told him that he had never in his whole life seen him, and that he positively regretted not having done so, Manners' attitude underwent a sudden and unexpected change. He became silent, almost morose. He kept away from Andreyvitch all evening, and yet he stayed near enough to him to watch his every move.

After that night Manners decided he hated Andreyvitch; that he knew the man was a liar, an impostor. Not at the time that he was in any way jealous of the Russian; still there was a strange familiar feeling there that he had felt at some other time, and in connection with the same man. He could have sworn he had known him before. It was the only way then in which he could explain the thing to himself with any degree of coherence.

It was never difficult to get Gregory Manners to speak of the first evening he met Andreyvitch. It was almost as if he were tremendously puzzled, as if he thought speaking of it, even to a casual acquaintance, might clear things up to himself. He never varied the thing. At first, at any rate. Later on he became strangely, uncannily secretive about it all. That must have been when he began to suspect there was a great deal more to it than had appeared upon the surface.

"D'you know?" His words always came slowly. "Deuce take it! I thought I was going to like the fellow. I'd heard so much about him, too. Why, old chap, I was anxious; positively keen, to know him. And then—Why, when I stood face to face with him, I couldn't think of anything but that I had known him, or did know him, or something. First glance and I saw he was one of those poseurs. One of those rummy fellows who affect poses because they're always consciously trying to imitate the people about them. That's it, you know. They can't be themselves because of some queer kink they funk expressing. So they fake other people and quite naturally they overdo it."

He would usually get worked up about this time; and then he would go on a lot more quickly:

"I've seen them the world over. There was one chap—but—well—I thought this—this fellow who calls himself Andreyvitch, was just going to be one of them—poseurs, you know. He looked harmless enough to be sure. Of course there were his eyes—and the way he walks—but then—I couldn't help feeling he wasn't quite—quite cricket. That came over me confoundedly strongly at the very first minute. And when he smiled—I say, man, d'you ever see such damnably wicked teeth?"

And the man to whom he spoke always had to admit that he had never seen such teeth.

Later on Manners never worked himself up as much.

"That fellow who calls himself Andreyvitch—I've met him before. Don't know where; and at that I've a pretty fair head for names and places. But I know him. He may have looked differently, and it probably was in some of those out-of-the-way holes; but I know him. I don't say he was the Russian Andreyvitch when I knew him—but—Well, old chap, we'll see."

They stopped asking Andreyvitch and Manners around together after a while. But that never kept Manners from speaking of the Russian.

"Was Andreyvitch there?"

"They don't ask us together, eh?"

"No fear, old chap, of my insulting him; I couldn't, you know!"

"Rather a filthy sort of beggar, that Russian; makes the gooseflesh come over me. Happened before. Deuce take the thing!—If I could only think when!"

And then after Manners had dropped out of sight for a fortnight or more, he suddenly made his appearance at the club.

They were all of them unspeakably shocked by his looks. He never carried much weight, but in those two weeks he had gotten down to little else than skin and bones. His color was ghastly. His cheekbones were appallingly prominent and his eyes looked as if they were sunken back into his skull.

To all their questions he gave the same answer:

"No, he wasn't ill. No, he hadn't been ill. There was nothing the matter with him. He'd felt a bit seedy and he'd run down to his place for a fortnight. It was good of them to bother. He was quite, quite all right."

They saw he wanted to be left alone and they let him go over to the window and sit there, his great, loose frame huddled together in the leather arm chair.

There could not have been more than three or four of them sitting near him. It was only those three or four who saw him stagger to his feet, swaying there dizzily for a second. Only those three or four who could distinguish the words spoken in that low, half strangled whisper.

"That's it—I've got it now—Something rotten; always living—Always waiting the chance to do its filthy harm! The power to incarnate—in any form. The greater its loathsomeness, the greater that incarnating stuff! Probably at most times more beast than human—but it could take on human guise—that's it—that's—"

And those three or four men saw him rush out of the reading-room, his head thrown well back, his eyes ablaze with a great light.

And then Mrs. Broughton-Hollins gave the famous house-party. The house-party of which every member, although not

fully understanding, tried to forget. The house-party which drove Gregory Manners and Kathleen Bennet out of England.

Mrs. Broughton-Hollins was a charming little American widow, with untold wealth and a desire to do everything, everywhere, with every one. Of course she always managed to get a lot of nice people together, and of course she picked the very nicest ones for her house-party. Then because she had set her heart on having the Russian, Stephanof Andreyvitch, she naturally got him to come, and because she had Kathleen Bennet, she had to ask Gregory. Kathleen and Gregory were engaged to be married.

She was a dear, was Kathleen. As pretty as a picture and delightfully simple-minded. Her father belonged to the clergy, and her family consisted of innumerable brothers and sisters. Gregory Manners, who had traveled the world over, fell quite completely in love with her. And she—She worshiped the ground he walked on.

No one ever quite knew whether or not Manners heard that Andreyvitch was to be of the house-party. Perhaps he had; probably he had not. If Kathleen were to be there, that would have been all-sufficient, as far as Manners was concerned.

By that time Manners had worked himself out of his frenzy of hatred against the Russian. They had been able to explain it to themselves by saying that he had talked himself into it. As a matter of fact, the whole thing was totally subconscious. Whenever he had become conscious the man was anywhere near him, he had begun to realize his hatred of him. But now it had gone infinitely further than just that.

Manners had become uncannily quiet and uncannily knowing.

They were all together in the hall when Manners, as usual, came in late. Mrs. Broughton-Hollins and an anæmic looking youth, who always lounged about in her wake; a man named Galvin, an oldish chap, who had seen service in India, and his pretty, young wife. The Dowager of Endon and her middle-aged son, the Duke, and Stephanof Andreyvitch, holding the center of the floor with little Kathleen Bennet sitting close to where he stood, her eyes fixed in awed surprise upon his face; her white fingers toying nervously with a small silver crucifix which hung about her neck.

Whether or not Andreyvitch heard the man announce Gregory Manners, whether or not he saw him standing there in the doorway, whether or not he purposely went on with what he was then saying was a subject for debate the rest of the evening.

"Faith?" Andreyvitch's low, insidious voice carried well. "But there's no such thing. Can't you realize that all this sickly sentimentality is nothing but dogmatic idiocy on your parts? Must you all drivel your catechism at every turn of the road? Must you close your eyes to filth, to vice, to everything you think outside of your smug English minds? Don't you know you're a part of it? That each one of you is part of the lowest, rottenest—"

It was then that, unable to stand it a second longer, Gregory Manners came into the room.

"I—I most sincerely hope I'm not interrupting, Andreyvitch—but—are you speaking of those things—again?"

The quiet, polite tone was full of subtle significance. And although they could not have known what Manners actually meant, they all of them recognized an emphatic significance. And not one of those people present could overlook the peculiar stress which he had laid upon that slow-drawled "again."

Andreyvitch turned sharply; his face for a second drawn into a hideous, ghastly grimace.

"It is no interruption, Mr. Manners." He was trying hard to resume his habitual insouciance. "But what do you mean, eh? What is this?"

He stood where he was, did Manners. His face was almost expressionless.

"I think you know what I mean. But see here. I'll repeat it for you, if you like. Listen this time. Are—you—speaking—of—those—things—*again*?"

The Russian was livid.

And for an infinitesimal fraction of time it seemed to those watching him that he was cowed; terrifyingly cowed.

"Your humor," he shrugged his shoulders, endeavoring to pass the thing off as flippantly as possible; "your humor is bizarre, Mr. Manners. I spoke but of that which we all know exists. Surely there is no harm in speaking of what we all

recognize!"

Manners' voice rang out clearly, in surprising sternness.

"We all know what exists in this world. We know that greater than all else is faith. As long as you speak before those who know what real goodness is, who believe in it, there is no harm done! I hardly think this is the first time you've tried to impress evil on people—The reason for that's easily understood. But, thank God." His tone vibrated with earnestness. "Thank God, you can do nothing here!"

The Russian turned on him. His usual suave manner had left him. His words were little else than an angry snarl.

"You know me well—very well, indeed, my English friend. You who have met me—is it not once—perhaps, eh, twice?"

Manners laughed. A laugh that had no sound of mirth in it.

"I've met you again and again. And you know it! And there's something else we have to settle for—And you know that, too—Mr.—Mr. Andreyvitch!"

And then Gregory Manners turned to Mrs. Broughton-Hollins.

"Good afternoon," he said, quietly.

A bit flustered, the hostess got hastily to her feet.

"So good of you to come—You know every one, don't you, Gregory? You'll have your tea here with us?" And below her breath, she added: "You mustn't be too hard on Andreyvitch, Gregory. These Russians—well, they're all a bit primitive."

He went from one to the other of the men. He kissed Kathleen's hand and told her how pretty she looked. He let Mrs. Broughton-Hollins pour his tea, and he ignored the Russian completely, the while he watched Kathleen with a strange foreboding, as her eyes flickered again and again over Andreyvitch's face.

Things did not go very smoothly during the next two days. Naturally they all did the usual. Golf and riding, bridge and dancing in the evenings, and shooting. Andreyvitch was passionately fond of shooting. Manners had never so much as killed a sparrow in all his life.

There was an undercurrent of uneasiness which permeated the entire household. It was not particularly because of Andreyvitch and Manners. It was something that not one of them could have explained if they had been put to it.

The first day Mrs. Galvin told her husband that she would be glad when it was all over. And although unexpressed that was the general sentiment.

Not that Andreyvitch or Manners made the others uncomfortable. After Gregory's first outburst, and now that they were under the same roof, it rather seemed that the Russian avoided Manners. And Manners—He watched carefully every movement, every little turn or twist of Andreyvitch's. At that time it was as if he were trying to substantiate some memory of his; to substantiate it deliberately and positively.

And then because of Andreyvitch's unceasing attentions to Kathleen Bennet, word went round among the various members of the house-party that Gregory and Kathleen had quarreled.

It was Sunday afternoon when Manners came upon Kathleen walking alone in the rose-garden.

"I'll be jolly well glad," he told her, "when we get back to town again."

"Aren't you having a good time, Greg?"

"How can I?"

"But you really needed the rest—You haven't been looking any too fit, you know. I thought this would be quite nice for you, Greg."

He let loose at that.

"If you must have it, Kathleen. I can't stand you and that bounder in the same house. That's the truth of it, old girl!"

She avoided answering him directly.

"It's such a ripping place here, Gregory. All—that is, all but those forests over there. The gardener told me his grandfather used to call them the Wood of Living Trees. He couldn't tell me why—only—Isn't it a strange name, Greg?"

She wound up lamely. Evidently she had not said what she started out to say.

"Not so awfully," he answered absent-mindedly. "It's probably an old, old name. They stick to places, you know."

"But the woods," she went on slowly, "they're so dark and mysterious and all that sort of thing. I've wanted to explore them ever since I've been here—that is—that's not altogether true, Gregory. They frighten me a good bit—especially at night. I get into quite a funk about it—at night. I say, you wouldn't call me a coward, would you, Gregory?"

"Of course not, Kathleen. What utter nonsense!"

"But if I weren't afraid," she continued half to herself. "If I weren't really terrified, I'd go into the woods and show myself there's nothing to be frightened of, wouldn't I?"

"You most certainly would not!" He said. "If you did, you'd be sure to lose your way, old girl."

For a second they walked in silence.

"D'you ever feel"—she turned to face him—"d'you ever feel you'd been in a place before—and yet you knew you'd never been there at all?"

"No," he told her a bit too abruptly.

"You needn't be so stuffy, Gregory," she murmured.

"Oh, my dear!" He caught her and held her in his arms. "Can't you see that it's all like a horrible nightmare? Can't you see that I'm not able to know positively until it's actually happened—and then—oh, my God!—If it should be too late!"

Her hands clenched rigidly on his shoulders.

"Gregory," she whispered, "tell me, dear—you've been so strange of late—so terribly unlike yourself. Tell me, dear, what is it?"

"Nothing, dearest girl—nothing."

"Oh, but there is something!" She exclaimed passionately. "I've known it right along. I haven't asked because I thought you'd tell me. Why—one must be blind not to see how you've changed! You're—you're just a skeleton of yourself, Gregory." She paused for breath. "Can't you bring yourself to tell me—can't you, dear?"

"If I only knew," he muttered, "if I only knew—for certain."

Her eyes were lifted to his. The brows met in a puckering frown above them.

"Gregory—that time you were away—for a whole fortnight—did anything happen, then—Gregory?"

"Did anything happen?" She had surprised him into it. "Good God, did anything happen? Why, you don't know what it was like—You couldn't know! If they'd told me such a thing were possible—I shouldn't have believed it! I wanted to think—I wanted to work the thing out for myself—so I went down there for a rest. Rest—"

He broke off then, but she stood very silently beside him and presently he went on again.

"Have you ever felt you were going mad, Kathleen? Raving, tearing—mad? That's how I felt for two weeks. I thought it would never end. And all the time—why, I couldn't think! I couldn't do anything but feel that something was driving me to do something—something tremendous, as if the very force of my own life were making me do this thing that I had been sent into life to do. And, Kathleen," his voice sank to a hoarse whisper, "I couldn't understand—what—it—was!"

She put her arm about his neck and drew his head down until her cheek rested on his.

"I couldn't think a thought," he muttered. "I'd laid myself open to the thing. It just swept over me and through me. It saturated me with the impulse to do the thing I had come into the world to do! The one thing that stood out—was—the feeling that it would have to be done—soon." He paused for a moment. "And then one afternoon at the club—when I'd been back a day or two—something came to me-a sudden knowledge of—well, of rottenness—that—that might have to be done away with—as if that had something to do with it. Only I don't know, Kathleen—not—as yet."

He looked at her then and he saw her eyes were filled with tears. He thought he had frightened her. He waited until he had himself well in hand before he spoke again.

"Kathleen, always believe in the good of things, dearest girl. And, Kathleen," the words that came to him were almost as great a surprise to him as they were to her. "Never leave that crucifix off your neck. Promise me, dear?"

"I promise."

A little later they went in to tea.

He got to bed that night with a great feeling of relief that in the morning they would all be back in town. He had thought something would happen. He had not known what, but the feeling had been there. He did not mind admitting it to himself now, and he did not mind acknowledging that he could not understand how the thing, whatever it was, had been avoided. Unformed, undefinable, it had been powerfully imminent. He fell asleep wondering what it was that he had expected.

The full moon was streaming into the room when he awoke.

He was on his feet in the middle of the floor in a flash.

He could have sworn a cry had awakened him. A woman's voice calling for help—A woman's voice that had been strangely like Kathleen's.

He went to the window and looked out. A cloud had drifted across the surface of the full moon. The whole garden lay blotched with shadows. And there beyond the garden was the forest. Black, sinister, mysterious. The dark depth of it sickened him. Kathleen had spoken only that afternoon of the forest. The Wood of Living Trees. She had told him it was called The Wood of Living Trees.

In Heaven's name, where did the horrible, appalling significance of the Wood of Living Trees come from? What was this ghastly knowledge that sought for recognition in his own mind? What did the Wood of Living Trees mean to him?

And then he heard the faint, far cry—

His shoes—his trousers—hatless and coatless he was out in the garden.

The cloud had passed from off the face of the moon. The garden lay in the bright moonlight; even the separate flowers were visible. Beyond was the sinister depth of that black forest.

He felt it then. Sensed the insidious evil of something that emanated from the wood. Something which lurked there beneath the trees—something which clung to the tall trunks of them—something which rose and expanded among the leaves and reached out to him in evil menace. And at some time he had felt it all before.

He ran quickly through the garden; over the rosebeds; crashing through the high boxwood hedge at the farther end; and then into the forest.

His feet sank into the moss-covered slime. The trees were gigantic. He felt as if they were closing in on him. Their branches stretched out like living arms, hindering his progress. Thorns caught at his clothing, at his hands, his face. He had a vague, half-formed thought that the forest was advancing to achieve his destruction. His only clear determination was to protect his eyes.

He knew then, he had always known, that the wood was some live, evil thing—the Wood of Living Trees; and that it hid the presence of something infinitely more foul.

A queer odor assailed his nostrils. An odor that was not only of the damp, dank underbrush; an odor that, in its

putridness, almost suffocated him.

Breathless and half crazed with an unexplainable dread, he fought the forest, beating his way with his naked hands through the dense bushes.

And then he heard a sound. The first sound he had heard since entering the forest. It was quite distinct. Vibrating loudly through the deadly stillness of the wood, came the steady patter of a four-footed thing.

The next instant something leaped out of the darkness—something huge and strong that tried to catch at his neck. He fought for his life then. Fought this horrible thing that had been concealed by the forest. Fought with the darkness shutting down on him and that putrid odor smothering his breathing. Panting and blinded, he and the thing swayed to and fro, crashing against the tree-trunks, springing again and again at each other from the tangled underbrush. He never knew how long he struggled there in the blackness of the wood. It might have been hours; it might have been minutes. And then he had the beast by its great, hairy throat. The infuriated snarling grew weaker—

He felt the body become rigid.

Silence.

He threw the thing from him.

He staggered farther into the wood.

He had not gone far when he came upon Kathleen.

She was walking uncertainly toward him.

The moonlight trickled clear and yellow through the branches now.

He could see her lips moving—moving—He knew that she was praying. Her eyes looked out at him dazed and unseeing; and in her right hand that was reached before her he saw the little, silver crucifix.

He did not dare speak to her. He was afraid. He sank back against the bushes and let her pass. The moonlight flooded the place with its haunting golden light. A strange feeling of relief came over him and with it a vast calm. And very quietly he followed her.

She went a bit further. And she came to that spot where he had killed the thing. He heard her shriek. The wild cry that had awakened him.

"The wolf—Gregory—the wolf!"

He caught her in his arms as she fainted. Then he looked down.

There at his feet lay the body of the Russian, Stephanof Andreyvitch.

This will I prove. At some unknown time will I show that in this world a certain devilish influence worketh most evilly against the high Heavens and the good in man. I do confess the knowing of this to be true, and many times and oft have I convinced myself that this Satanic thing hath the power to become incarnate.

In the morning I hang. God, the Father, Christ, the Son, come unto me in purgatory that I may fulfill my sacred oath and that the soul of her I love may find peace within the seven golden gates of Heaven.

BEFORE THE DAWN

He had gotten as far as the cross-roads. He could not go on. His feet ached; his eyes hurt with the incessant effort of trying to penetrate the obliterating dark. Where the three roads met he stopped.

Above him the black, unlighted skies. Before him mile upon mile of deep, shadow-stained plain. Somewhere beyond the plain, at the foot of the hills, lay Charvel. Jans was waiting for him at Charvel. His orders to meet Jans were urgent; but now he could not go further. Jans would have to wait until morning, when, by the light of day, he could again find

the way which he had so completely lost in the night.

He sank down at the base of the crucifix. It loomed in a ghostly, gray mass against the muddy white of the wind-driven clouds. He pulled his coat collar up about his ears. His eyes were raised to where he thought to see the dimly defined Christ figure; but the pitch black gloom drenched opaquely over everything. There was something mysterious; something remote, about the cross. He imagined peasants kneeling before it in awed reverence, gabbling their prayers. The ignorance of such idolatry! Their prayers had not been proof against the enemies' bullets; and still they prayed. Tired as he was, he laughed aloud.

"Why do you laugh?"

He started to his feet. The voice, quiet and deep, came from directly behind him. He had not conceived the possibility of any human thing lurking so dangerously near. He peered blindly through the obscuring dark.

"Who's there?" He questioned, his fingers involuntarily closing tautly about the butt of the revolver at his belt.

"You, too, ask questions, eh?" The voice went on. "I can almost make out the shape of you. Do you see me?"

It seemed to him then that by carefully tracing the sound of the voice he could dimly define the outline of a man's form lying close within the murked, smudging shadow of the crucifix.

"Yes, I think now I almost see you." His tone was anything but assured. "What are you doing here?"

"What is there to do but sleep?" The muttered words were half defiant. "Name of a dog! it was your laughter that woke me. Why did you laugh?"

"If I weren't so tired, I might explain it to you." He hesitated a second, playing for time. "I was thinking—drawing up a mental picture of the ignorant peasant praying here before your back-rest."

"My back-rest?" The man's voice was sleepily puzzled. "It's this cross you mean, eh? Well, never mind, my fine fellow. It has comfort—And that's something to be grateful for."

"Not the sort of splintery comfort I'd choose."

He wondered what sort of a man this was. He was used to judging men at sight. He cursed inwardly the unlighted night.

"I'm not spending my time out here from choice—I can tell you that! This does for me well enough. I told you, didn't I, that I was asleep until your stupid laughing woke me? Sacré, why did you have to laugh? What's the joke, eh?"

"Perhaps it's my natural humor; even when I'm dead tired." He grinned to himself. He had reached his decision. This sleepy fool sounded safe enough; besides the question itself was non-committal. He asked it: "Say, do you know the way to Charvel?"

"You're miles from Charvel, my friend. You've surely lost all sense of direction."

"Right. I don't know where I'm at. It's this damned blackness. Never saw such an infernal night. Started to walk from Chalet Corneille this afternoon. Didn't count on its getting dark so early. Then I lost my way. Been wandering about for hours. Probably in a circle. And now I'm half dead. God! I'm all in!"

"It's almost morning. If you wait for the light, you'll not miss your road again; but I shouldn't counsel you to try to find it till dawn."

He wondered if he dared to go to sleep with this man beside him. There were the papers carefully concealed in his right boot-leg; the papers Jans was waiting for. The man sounded plain-spoken and courteous enough, considering he had been aroused from supposedly sound slumber. He felt he wasn't a soldier. That is, he couldn't be one of Their men. He knew what Their men were like. Despite Their world reputation he had heard they were anything but courteous. But then one never knew. And anyway hadn't this man spoken to him in irreproachable French? Still, French was the language of the country and his own gift of languages was rather pronounced. Of course it tended to make him a bit suspicious; but logically he couldn't lay much stress on it. If only he had gotten beyond Their lines before night, everything would have been all right. As it was he must have been wandering round and round, covering the self-same ground and getting no nearer to Charvel, where Jans was waiting for him and the papers.

Taking all in all into consideration, he decided it best not to let himself sleep; even if the staying awake was not an easy plan for a man utterly tired. He would have to do it somehow or other.

"You're a native of these parts?" He asked, trying to keep any trace of speculation as to what the man really was out of his voice.

"Sacré, but I thought you were about to sleep." The tone sounded as if it might be angry. "I assure you it will soon be morning."

"Don't feel like sleeping. If you don't want to talk I can easily be quiet."

"No—no! It makes no difference to me. I've had my forty winks. We'll talk, if you want. Not that I was ever one for doing much talking. I'm too little of a fool for that—still—Why don't you lean back here beside me against this beam?"

He wriggled backwards and propped his drooping head stiffly against the wood of the cross.

"I can't see you at all." He closed his eyes; it wasn't worth the throbbing strain of it to try to penetrate the obliterating, dripping darkness. He couldn't do it. "I'd like to see you."

"I'd like to see you, my friend. But what good are wishes, eh? Do you say you live at Chalet Corneille?"

On the instant he was alert.

"Why do you ask?"

"Curiosity, my friend. I know of some good people there by name of Fornier. Perhaps they might be friends of yours."

"Don't think I know them." He paused to collect his wits. He had been startled by the man's suave question. He wondered if he was going to try to trap him. He thought he couldn't have done it more neatly himself. This job of stalling when he was almost too tired to think wasn't an easy thing to do. He called upon his imagination. "I'm an artist," he lied smoothly. "Sent over here to paint war scenes. I couldn't miss the chance of a ransacked village. Its picturesque value is tremendous. I've just finished my painting of Chalet Corneille."

He waited tentatively. Surely if the man were just some simple, sleepy fool he'd say something now to give an inkling of what he was.

"One week ago it was splashed in blood—Soldiers too, in their way, are artists," was all he said.

"Then you're not a soldier?"

"What made you think I was?"

"I don't know what you are," he answered truthfully; and then quite frankly he came back with the man's own question. "Did you say *you* lived in Chalet Corneille?"

"No—I asked if you knew people there by name of Fornier?"

"Mighty few folk left there now." The picture of the razed town came before him. "Some old men waiting for the lost ones to come back to them; some young children and three or four sisters of charity. And then this morning I saw a woman—she wasn't much more than a girl—she had a face you couldn't forget. They told me about her at the inn, where I breakfasted."

"Tell me," the man suggested grudgingly; "we're comfortable enough. Dawn's a long way off, and I suppose you want to talk."

"There isn't much to tell. She left the town; was driven out of it with the others. Unlike them, she came back. God knows what she wanted to do that for! They told me of her goodness; and her beauty and her kindness. They dwelt on it at great length. Don't know as I blame them for harping on all that. And now it seems the spirit of the war has lit upon even her. She's changed—they say she's absolutely no good these days. Steals—lies—has done everything, as near as I can make out, excepting commit murder. But you ought to have seen her face. I'll wager that once seen, it would rise to haunt any one. I don't care who it'd be. It was beautiful—but—"

He felt the man look up at the sky and the ghostly, gray mass of the crucifix stretching across it.

"Strange creatures, these peasant people." The man's words were speculative. "Dumb kind of beasts—these soil-tillers—the best of them. Got nothing in their lives but work and religion. Don't know as I blame you for laughing when you looked up there. Sacré, but there is nothing real about religion to me!"

"You're right." He stifled a yawn. "All that sort of thing went out of the world years ago. Thinking people aren't religious nowadays. It doesn't give them enough food for logical thought. It's all too palpably obvious and absurd for an intelligent person to bother with."

"Rather a strange view for an artist, my friend, is it not?"

"What do you mean?"

"Thought you fellows traded on the beauty of faith, the talk of priests, and all that sort of thing."

"Good Lord, no." His voice was energetic enough now. He was becoming interested. "All this belief in God and man and the innate good, and the rest of it, is tommyrot—That's what it is! And the soul within you—and the teachings of Christ"—he paused to regain his breath. "We'd know those things all right enough, if they were real. We'd see them, wouldn't we, if they were real? They'd happen—They couldn't help but happen—every day. But they don't, and so they're just talked about. I tell you if there were such things, we'd know it!"

"Yes—yes—Surely we would see it—some time."

"I haven't had more than the average University education," he went on. "But I've seen men and women, and I know that some of them are bad, and some of them are good, and that's all there is to it. If a man wants to be a liar—he'll lie. What's going to make him tell the truth, I'd like to know?"

"It doesn't sound like artistic idealism, this talk of yours."

"What do I care for any kind of idealism? There's too much of the poppycock—too many of those long-haired, long-winded donkeys playing the miniature creator for my taste. Lord, but I'd like to see an army of them in the field!"

"You speak like a soldier, my friend."

"I'm proud, sir, of being a soldier!"

In a flash he realized what he had said. Beneath his breath he cursed furiously. Never before had he been guilty of such blatant stupidity. A sudden anger welled within him against this man who had caught him in his lie. Yet the man seemed harmless and indifferent enough. Perhaps he could still get out of it. What in the name of heaven had drawn the truth from him? He glanced up at the crucifix and his cursing abruptly stopped. He fell to wondering if he had better strike out again in the dark. He couldn't tell who the man was, and he had the papers to guard. Dawn wasn't a long way off. He wondered if he ought to chance it.

"See here"—the man's voice caught in on his train of thought. "I know what's going through your head. You didn't want me to know that you were a soldier. I wasn't going to tell you, either. But I'm one, too. Only I'm not one of Them; not one of that blood-thirsty, blood-drunk canaille. You're not either. I knew the minute I heard you speak. And see here, I pretended at first that I didn't want to talk. But it wasn't true. I was starving for a word with one of my own kind. I told you I was comfortable, didn't I? I told you I was asleep? Well—I lied. I've been writhing here for hours. I'm in agony. My leg's shot off—that's what They did to me. I've been lying in this place for a day and a half. A peasant stopped to pray here to-night. He gave me some water; but he was afraid to touch me." A sob vibrated hoarsely in the man's throat. "My brother, I want your hand."

Without hesitation he put out his hand, his fingers fumbling over the hard earth, until at last they found and grasped the man's hand.

"Is there anything I can do?" He asked.

"No, it's too dark. We must wait for the dawn. Then if you'll help me along the road a bit"—His voice trailed off into silence.

So they sat there.

"There's some one coming," he said.

He felt the man try to struggle to a sitting position.

"No use," he moaned. "I couldn't see through the dark, anyway. Sacré, didn't I try it before, when you came along?"

Breathlessly they waited. There was nothing pleasant about this meeting people one couldn't see. It was just luck that the man beside him hadn't been one of Them. He wondered if the approaching person would stop before the crucifix or would go on.

The footsteps came nearer and nearer. Louder and louder they grew until the sound of them echoed clatteringly through the silence of the night. Then sudden deafening stillness.

As yet he could make out no form. He wondered what was happening. Slowly he realized that the gloom-merged mass of the crucifix had been seen and that the feet were coming toward it. A long half minute and then something soft and cold brushed his cheek. A quick, half-smothered cry. A woman had reached him with her outstretched hands. Her fingers had touched his face.

"Mon Dieu!" She whispered. "Then I am not alone? Mon Dieu! Who are you?"

He answered her.

"I've lost my way. I'm waiting for the dawn."

"You will not hurt me?" Her whimpered words betrayed her fear. "You will let me stay to wait the daylight with you?"

"That makes three of us," he said, "waiting for morning."

"Non—non; how is it then three?"

"My brother here—you—and—I."

"Mon Dieu! Such a darkness. Tell me, it is a sign of luck, is it not, to meet with two brothers?"

"Well," his tone was apologetic. "We're not blood-brothers—just—" He hesitated.

"Ah!" She breathed softly. "Is it, as the curé says, 'a Brotherhood of man'?"

He could not explain to himself why he should so resent her comparing him to her priest.

"It is a brotherhood of understanding," he said. "It is because we are friends."

"Friends?" She questioned.

"Of course," he stated emphatically. And at the same time he wondered at his own vehemence. Why should he call this man, whom he could not even see, his friend? "Surely you do not think that I could sit here in the dark, holding my enemy by the hand?"

"But no," she muttered as though to herself. "No hands are given in this time of war. No hands but the hands of hate."

For the first time the man spoke.

"Hate has made men of us. Sacré, but is there anything greater than hate?"

"Mon Dieu! It is all so cruel—this hate that has crippled our men. Look you, you two brothers—I would avenge them as you avenge them, but voilà—there is so little—so pitifully little that I can do!"

"Will you sit beside me?" The man asked gently. "I'd move, if I could, but They've shot off my leg, and moving isn't easy."

"The barbarians have caught you too?" She sank to her knees beside them. "How I loathe Them! Ah, how I detest Them! They burned my home—They drove me out of Chalet Corneille—my father and my mother and I. We fled by the light of our flaming farm-houses. I thought that bad, but it wasn't the worst. That came when They took me away

with them. What I have been through! It is as if I had suffered and suffered; and now there is nothing left me to feel but hatred. And I've been back there, thinking my people might come for me. Mais, they never came, and so I must go on. I've an aunt in Charvel. There's just a chance—But even if I do find a home, I'll still hate those soldiers. I'd kill Them if I could. I pray to Christ that some day I may kill to avenge."

"Is that what you're here for?"

"I'm here to await the dawn."

"Madame is religious?"

"The sisters and the curé were my only teachers."

"And now before the crucifix, Madame prays Christ for the power to kill?"

"Non—non," her voice rose shrilly. "There is no Christ here on this cross. The canaille pulled him down and dragged him away in the dirt when They passed. There were peasants who begged Them to leave the figure, but They left only the cross—and once—three days after They had defiled it—I saw a spy crucified there. I helped cut him down. Now it's empty!"

"Sacré, it is like Them," the man said. "I'd wondered why the cross was bare. I'm not one of your believers, but I can see how it would hurt a good woman like you."

"A good woman?" She questioned vaguely, as if in her innocence all were good. "Mon Dieu, I only know that it hurt."

He looked up at the crucifix. The sky was slowly, very slowly, lightening.

"It will soon be day," he said.

They were silent. And in the stillness they could feel the expectancy of dawn; the terse waiting for the light. The eager, anticipating stare of each was fixed upon the other's face.

The black of the sky merged very gradually into a pale, sickly gray. Far to the east quivered a thin streak of yellow light.

The three drab shadows of them cowered beneath the cross.

Mauve and pink and golden light spread slowly over the firmament.

"No, it can't be!" He muttered, his eyes upon the man's face—this man whom he had sat with those long hours before the dawn, whose hand he still held in his. He thought he caught the man's whispered "sacré!"

The woman was the first to speak.

"Voilà!" She taunted. "But it is—oh, so pretty! A French soldier with a leg shot off and a German officer to nurse him. You two—you who spoke of hate, do you still sit hand in hand?"

"The girl from Chalet Corneille!" He had known he would not forget her face.

"The dark has made cowards of you," she mocked. "Before the morning you clung together. But now it is dawn!" Her voice rang out bitterly, brutally clear. "Did not one of you ask, 'Is there anything greater than hate'?"

"Sacré! What you say is just." The wounded man's eyes were raised to glance at the light-quivering firmament. Slowly the eyes caught the sight of something else. Very gradually they took in that unexpected thing. Mechanically the words were jerked out: "It—was—I—who—asked—" A sudden pause—a quick gasp—"God forgive me—it—was—I!"

The uncanniness of the words shocked him. In spite of himself, his own eyes followed the man's wide stare; followed it from the eastern horizon, over the shimmering sky; followed it until he reached the crucifix. The hand, which, at the girl's words, had half-heartedly sought his pistol, shook now as he crossed himself.

Was it the smudging shadows, the still unlighted mass of them up there on the arms of the crucifix? Would shadows take on so the semblance of the human body?

"If there were such things—we'd know it—" Fragments of their talk in the night came vividly back to him. "If these things were real—sometimes—we'd see it!"

The girl dropped to her knees. Her hands were clinched over her heaving breast; her gaze riveted itself upon that mass of shadows, high up on the cross; that mass of shadows so mysteriously like the dimly defined Christ figure.

With a hoarse, racking sob that shook his whole frame, the wounded soldier fell upon his face. Quickly the officer bent over him, his hand on the shaking shoulder, his breath coming and going in short, rasping gasps. Motionless he stood there, moving only to catch hold of the girl's fingers, that reached up and clung to his.

The faint, cold light of early morning tinged across the gray-white of the sky. Daybreak lighted the three grouped figures huddled so close together beneath the crucifix. Dawn showed clearly the brown wooden cross and the great half-ripped out nails that had once held the Christ.

THE STILLNESS

He cringed in shuddering awe beneath the stillness. He could not stand the heavy, deep silence of it; the muffled, sucking thickness absorbing so completely all sound into its deadening mat. He had gotten so that he had to be perpetually stopping himself from screaming. He had to keep watch on himself always. He was terrified that he might go mad. He feared the oppression of the awful quiet would craftily draw his reason away from him. He did not want to scream. He did not want to attempt to defy the harrowing, rending silence. He was afraid of the blanketing, saturating weight of the stillness.

Sometimes when he could bring himself to think he thought that he might after all like to go about shouting at the top of his lungs. His mind kept on surreptitiously toying with the thought of the relief from the thing. He thought of it a lot. He knew that shouting about his own farm would not do him any good. He was too far away from everything and everyone in the strip of valley hemmed in between the rolling hills. Of course there was old man Efferts. Old man Efferts did not live so very far away. He knew he could not count on Efferts. Efferts had lived there too long in the stillness that rolled down to him from the hills and came together to lie flat and sluggish, thudding down on the valley land. If he could bring himself to walk into the ten-mile-off town shouting so that other people would follow after him shouting; so that there would be some kind of continuous, human noise for a while. It was that he wanted more than anything else; human noise.

At night he would wake suddenly from his heavy, quiet slumber; from the dreamless, ponderous pit of it and listen to the stillness.

When he first went to bed it would take him hours before he could get himself off to sleep. He dreaded the muted, frantic struggle of those dragging, pulling hours in which he would try to shut his ears to the soundless, deafening silence that throbbed noiselessly from a great distance and was noiseless in the room all about him; and pressed noiselessly against his blood filled ear-drums. He had the feeling at night that the stillness became more real sweeping in a greater rush down the hills; that it had an heightened, insidious power to get inside of him.

He would toss about on his narrow wooden bed for hours; moving cautiously and carefully so as not to do anything that would offend the drugged burden of the silence. He would move a leg or an arm slyly and then he would lie quite quiet for a time holding his breath until the cracking pain came plunging again and again into his chest. He could feel the stillness filling in all the spaces and crevices around him, so that he thought it rose and swelled hideously.

He was afraid of those hours before he went to sleep; before he could drop off with that overwhelming sense that in losing consciousness he was consciously letting himself drown in a tremendous, swollen wave of silence.

And then toward morning that sudden, inevitable awakening. His rousing himself to listen. His whole body becoming rigid; tautly holding itself with straining, shaking muscles to the position in which he lay. The sweat breaking out all over him and trickling coldly down from his armpits along his sides. His cunning shifting of his head so that he could clear his ears to hear better. His futile harkening for the sound that never came. His intensive shivering waiting for it. And nothing but the stillness. He could never make himself move. The thing was so actual; suffocatingly potent; malignant. He had grown terrified of attempting to disrupt it in any of those little ways at his command. He had begun to think that the noise he would make would not be a noise. He could not have stood the shock of making a noise that would be quite vacantly without sound.

All day long, working in his fields, he used to wonder at it. In the sunlight it was with him still and bated. It rose up to him from the ground at his feet, from the soil it had wormed itself into. It crushed down on him from the clear, blue sweep of the sky. It spread unseen toward him down the long, uncertain slopes of the hills coming on always from all sides and staying.

It had become so that nothing was real to him; nothing but the stillness that drenched everything; stifling and choking.

The old mare working her way in front of the plow along the narrowed, deepening furrows, was a ghost creature to him. The grayness of her blurred ahead of him in the brightest stream of sunlight. Her foolish, stilly gliding played horridly on his raw nerves. At all times she was a phantom animal, stirring with the intangible motion of the silence. He felt that she did not belong to him; that she was a thing of the stillness.

He would trail after her, his quivering, thin hands on the plow handles, his eyes riveted on her bony withers. He would try to concentrate his thoughts on the way she moved and then overcome quite suddenly with the quiet, insidious stealth of her ambling, he would pull her up and stop to mop his forehead, his eyes going slowly around him as if he almost expected to see the thing that had lain that smothering, strangling hold on to him.

His one and only companion was a yellow mongrel that had come slinking in at the farm gate, its tail drooping between its legs. He had been glad at first of having the dog with him. And then gradually he had come to feel the oddness of the animal. If he could have done so he would have turned the dog out again into the stillness from which it had come to him. He was sure that the mongrel must be old; unnaturally old. He could not understand the dog's awful quiet. In his heart he was scared of the dog. The mongrel followed incessantly at his heels, always with dragging tail. Whenever his eyes turned behind him they met the mongrel's eyes that were fixed on him; the eyes that were filled with that uncanny, beaten look as if it had been horridly cowed. There was an age of agony in the dog's eyes. As the days went on he became more and more afraid of the mongrel's eyes.

He had come out to the farm to start with because of the silence. He had felt that he would have to get away from the noise and the tumultuous uproar of the city. After what he had done he could not stand it. He had gotten away. He thought now that his mind would snap; that it would break from under the lull which had come into it—The lull which devastated him with its hushed brutality.

He had never been fond of people. Even in those days back there in the city before he had done the thing that was wrong he had mistrusted them. And after it he had run from them. Run wildly and unthinkingly to cover with the fear of them coming on behind him. The deathly, lonely farm was to him at that time a haven of rest.

He had made up his mind to live on the farm until the end of his life. He used to think bitterly of his waiting so patiently for his death. When he could think of anything other than the silence he thought of his dying; of life being squeezed out of him by the shrouded quiet. Sometimes he would wonder if it were death that ominously waited for him in that appalling, threatening stillness.

There had been days when he had tried to recall the sound of voices he had known. He had spent long hours in awakening in his memory those voices. He had wanted particularly to think of people laughing. He used to want to get the pitch of their laughing; to surround himself with the vibration of reiterated laughter. And then when he had gotten it so that he almost heard it, so that he felt that with concentrated attention he might hear the laughing, he would find himself listening to the frightful, numbing stillness.

He had not the courage to go on trying that.

Following the plow and the old gray mare through the fields with the dog skulking abjectly at his heels, he would think of that thing which he had done that had ostracized him from the rest of humanity. He never thought of the possibility of making his life over again. He could not have thought of it if he had wanted to. It was all too hopeless; too impossible to think about. The deadening quiet in which he had been steeped had drained him; sapped from him all initiative.

When evening came he would go into his shack and close the door. He would light the oil lamp on the old table that stood in the center of the room and he would go about getting supper for himself and the mongrel. He took great care always to move his pots and pans gently. If he picked up a plate he did it slowly, softly. When he put his bowl of food on the table he slid it consciously onto the surface without noise. And going to and fro not oftener than he had to, his feet in their padded moccasins lifted him to his toes.

He ate quietly and quickly, swallowing his food without chewing, feeding himself and the dog with his fingers. And all the while feeling that the stillness was rushing down from the hills and gathering to greater force about him.

And when he was quite finished with the clearing away of his dishes he would sit beside the table, the mongrel in front of him, and he would think frantically of the relief of talking. His lips would begin to quiver hideously; to move. That hoarse, inhuman muttering that had no sound of voice in it would start. And then he would see the dog's eyes, filled with that horrid, beaten look, fixed on his mouth and he would stop, gasping.

Once every little while old man Efferts would come down to the shack in the valley.

He knew nothing of old man Efferts other than that ever since he had come to live at the farm Efferts had stopped in for an evening now and again.

At first he had resented old man Efferts' coming. Later when he had seen that Efferts would not interfere with him he had not minded so much. He had become quite used to seeing the bent, huddled figure of the man trailing down the hillside and shambling into the room to sit there opposite to him quite silent. Of late he had gone about fetching the old man a glass of cider and a piece of bread. And they had sat facing each other, never talking; just sitting rigidly with the dog on the floor between them and the silence spilling itself in gigantic floods all around them. And then old Efferts would light his pipe and when he had finished it he would get up and go out of the door. And after he had watched old man Efferts go, with the feeling that he might not be real, he would stumble up to his room to lie in the narrow wooden bed trying to shut his ears to the deafening silence about him; cringing between his blankets as the swell of it heightened insidiously.

He knew that the stillness had swamped itself into old man Efferts. He could see the stamp of it in the uncertain, stupefied face; in the bewildered eyes that had behind them something of the look that stayed on in the dog's eyes; in the thin-lipped mouth that drooled at the corners; in the old man's still, quiet way of moving, the unreal, phantom way in which the gray mare moved. He did not know why the old man should come to him to sit so dumbly opposite him for a whole evening. He did not care. He was long past caring.

There were times when he thought he might tell old man Efferts of that thing which he had done years ago and which had isolated him from his fellows. Not that he thought so much of it. He had almost forgotten it. The stillness had made him forget everything but itself; had pushed everything out of his mind before its own spreading weight. But he kept the thought of speaking to Efferts of what he had done in the back of his head. He knew how his telling it to Efferts could not fail to act. He knew that something would infallibly happen; that the surprise of it could not help but penetrate the thickness of Efferts' silence. He always felt, soothing himself with the thought of relief, that when the power of the stillness became unbearable he would shock old Efferts into talk. There were moments when he hungered savagely to force old Efferts out of his walling quiet. Moments when he was starving for the comfort of human sound. His voice and Efferts' voice. Voices that would rise above the stillness; voices that would penetrate cunningly through the quiet; voices that would speak and answer each other.

He was sitting in the center of his lamp lit room. He had had his supper and had cleared away the dishes with his usual crafty carefulness. He had lighted his pipe. He sat in the chair beside the table; his body quite rigid; his arms and legs stiffened to a torturing quiet. The mongrel crouched at his feet. There was something strange in the way the animal lay; in its tightened muscles that pulled and twitched as it breathed. Whenever he looked down his eyes met the dog's eyes.

Outside the heavy shadows of the night crept along the ground, pushed on by the rushing, rising silence behind them. He knew that the stillness was rolling down the slope of those long hills. He knew that its awful quiet was gathering in the valley. He knew that it was trickling horridly still into the low ceilinged room. He had the feeling for the thousandth time that the most minute noise was swallowed up in the stillness before it came into being.

He looked up then to see the door shoved warily ajar. A wrinkled, ugly hand showed against the dark wood in a lighter patch of brown. A coarse booted foot came behind the swing of the door. Standing against the black of the night he saw old man Efferts.

He watched the old man come into the room.

He saw him pull up a chair, lifting it from off the floor and setting it down opposite to him within the pooling space of the yellow lamplight. He stared at Efferts as he sank into the chair.

Old man Efferts took out his pipe and lit it.

He kept his eyes on Efferts as he had so often done; on the uncertain, stupefied face that was turned to him; on the bewildered eyes that had something behind them of the look that stayed on in the dog's eyes; on the thin-lipped mouth that drooled at the corners.

He got up then and went on his toes to the door and closed it softly. He felt that Efferts' eyes were on him; and the mongrel's eyes. He came back and sat down in his chair.

They both smoked quietly.

He remembered the glass of cider and the piece of bread.

He could not bring himself to move to-night.

He felt the suffocating weight of the stillness crowding past him. It was expanding menacingly throughout the small room. It filled in all about him.

Presently old man Efferts would finish his pipe and would get up and shamble out of the door. He would sit there and watch him go as he always watched, wondering if perhaps old man Efferts was not real. And then he would stumble up to bed and lie awake and listen to the stillness that grew greater and greater.

He wanted the relief from that silence; wanted it desperately; passionately.

He remembered that if he told Efferts of that thing that he had come so near forgetting in the smothering quiet that he would have what he so frantically wanted. Some human speech. Human talk that would break the silence even for a little while; the sound of human voices that would rise and answer each other.

He glanced at the old man surreptitiously. He tried to think what expression would come into that stupid face with the bewildered eyes; he tried to see the thin-lipped drooling mouth as it would look with the lips of it startled into moving.

He sat very still.

Words formed themselves; lagging into his mind.

"I—am—going—to—tell—"

He would start to say it to old man Efferts that way.

He could not stand the stillness any longer.

Anything was better than the appalling agony of the quiet.

He made a little tentative movement with his thin, shaking hands.

He felt that Efferts was staring at him.

The mongrel crouching at his feet moved stealthily. He heard no sound from the animal's moving. He knew it had gotten to its feet. He saw it standing there between where he sat and where Efferts sat.

He felt his lips begin to quiver.

"I—am—going—to—"

He got the words into his head again through the menacing, waiting stillness.

He muttered something.

Old man Efferts leaned forward, his hand behind his ear.

In a sudden blinding flash of knowledge he realized that old man Efferts was deaf.

He felt his mouth twisting around his face.

He tried then to shout.

His eyes avoided the mongrel's eyes that he knew were filled with that uncanny, beaten look and were fixed on his jerking, grimacing mouth.

All about him the ominous, malignant silence.

He tried again and again to speak. He could not talk. Sweat stood out in great, glistening beads on his forehead and dribbled blindingly into his wide, distended eyes. His body shook with the stupendous effort he was making. His tongue was swollen. He could feel his throat tightening so that it hurt. He could not get his words into that hoarse, inhuman muttering that had no sound of voice in it.

He kept on trying and trying to speak——

He saw that old man Efferts had finished his pipe. He watched him get out of his chair and go shambling across the room and through the door.

He sat there.

His hands went up to his working mouth. He wanted to hide the hideous jerking of it.

His eyes met the mongrel's eyes.

The stillness grew appalling.