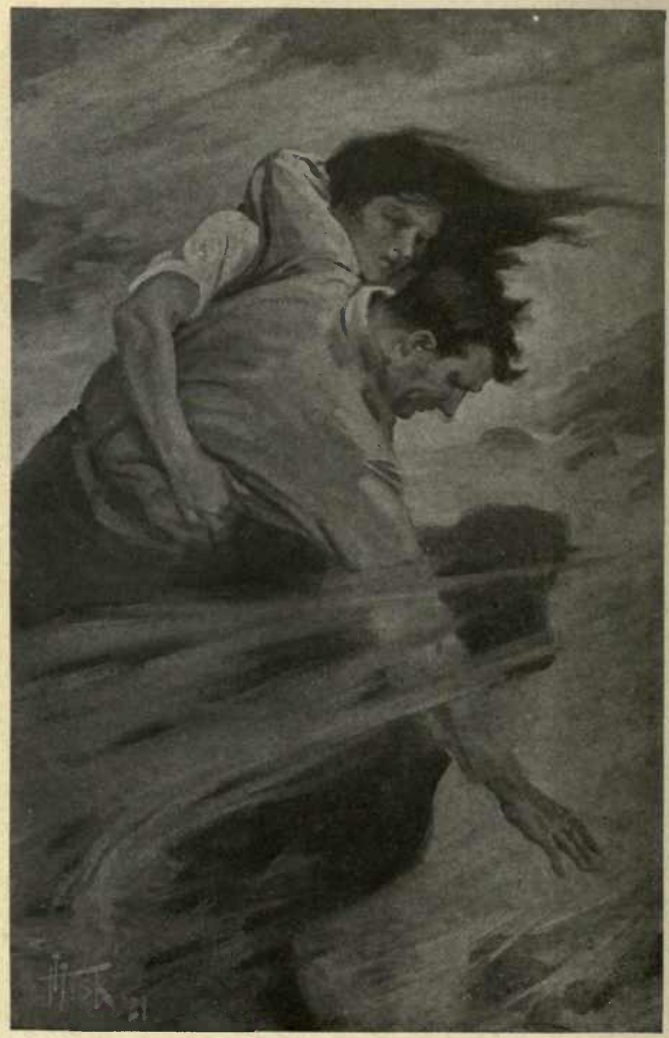

They staggered away into the night

THE BRIDGE

A Story of the Great Lakes

BY

M. L. C. PICKTHALL

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1922

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

TO MY COUSINS

J. M. AND R. F. M.

this book

which I am quite sure they will never read

is affectionately

dedicated

CONTENTS

I

THE SAND

THE BRIDGE

I

MACLEAR was done with it all at last. Not another scrap of evidence to be destroyed, not another fact to be hidden, not another damning half-truth left to be told. Brant and Raynham were the only men who suspected that the central borings might have gone deeper; and they had worked for him like slaves. Now he could rest with a quiet mind till the inquiry began. The firm would come out of it well. He had seen to that.

For ten days he had not been alone. In the soul's craving for solitude he had forgotten the body's craving for rest. His one desire was to reach his office, shut the door, and think things out alone. Perhaps if he could be alone the noise in his head would stop. It had tormented him for a long time. It was like the crash of falling girders or breaking steel.

He quickened his pace. Whatever had broken, it was not his courage. Whatever had failed, it was not his command of himself or of other men. But the end was coming. He knew he could not last much

longer. And for common decency he must be alone when he broke.

He was almost running when he turned in at the entrance of his office building, hounded by a sudden fear of screaming in the street. It was time he relaxed the intolerable strain. He could have beaten the elevator man into insensibility for that one glance that might have been curiosity—or pity. For, after all, the firm was safe. He would not think of the rest, nor even admit it to himself.

He walked steadily enough down the corridor, and stopped at the familiar door. He read the curved black-and-gold letters of his name upon it, two or three times, before he went in. Everything which had belonged to his daily life held now this arresting quality of strangeness.

No one looked up as he crossed the outer office. He was so nearly at the end of his endurance that he was grateful they spared him that. He had his hand on the door of his inner office when he saw that on the threshold lay a single white violet.

Something, some vivid prescience of fear, told him that Moira was here, and that he was to be spared nothing. Nothing.

He opened that door also and went in, shutting it behind him.

She was standing by the windows. She did not move at first, and for a moment he wondered to see

her all in black. Then he remembered that of course she would be in black, for Gordon his brother. He put his hands to his head. The crashing was growing very loud,—hammers beating him down.

The room was very silent. It stood so high that the noise of traffic in the street beneath troubled it no more than the sound of a river troubles the stillness of a forest. But there was no silence for Maclear.

He knew that to meet Moira he must be strong as he had not been before. He must fail in nothing, yield nothing, admit no crack in his armor of justification. For, after all, he had done no more than a hundred other men. Why should he pay when a hundred others, with less excuse, went free? He had been betrayed by circumstance; luck had been bitterly against him. That was all. He must remember it.

In a moment he must speak. He must tell her that the firm would be sure to come out of the investigation with an unblemished reputation, thanks to his own energy. There had been nothing else in the world to work for, these last days. He had worked for it. Now there was nothing else left in the world to say. But he could not say it.

Thoughts and words enough were in his mind, a torrent, without cohesion. He bit them back. They were nothing, after all, but business details, technical arguments with which, hour after hour, day after

day, he had confronted and refuted his own soul They had served with men. They would not serve with this woman.

She came slowly toward him. He saw nothing but the knot of white flowers she wore, the one relief in the unbroken black of her widowhood. He saw that they were faded and dying, each petal rimmed with brown. Seeing his gaze, her hand went up and touched them softly.

In a moment he must speak. And he had nothing to say.

"Gordon was bringing them to me." Her voice was level and quiet. "They found the little box in his hand, and thought I should like to have them. It 's as new as all that," she said, "as new as all that."

She was near him. It was as if the silence of the room stood there with her, questioning the man for whom it seemed there would never be silence any more. He had to raise his eyes at last from the flowers to his sister-in-law's face.

And in an instant the coverings of defense were stripped from him. They withered like leaves in a fire, leaving him with an intolerable consciousness of nakedness. There was no defense.

She knew.

After a long time, and as it seemed from a long distance, he heard her voice again, saying, even with a solemn compassion, "Poor Cain!"

He could not move his eyes from her face; he could not stir. He felt life itself withdrawing from his limbs, centering in one anguished point of receptivity. He had never known that grief came with this stillness, or that it was like this to be judged.

"You have suffered very much. You can't have saved more than a few thousands. Was it worth it?"

He tried to tell her that that was not the point—not the point—that he was clean in intention—that life, fate, chance, had deliberately fouled his hands. The thing was done every day. But he could not speak. He put out his hands as if to shield himself. But there was no shelter anywhere.

"There were three others besides him. But I can't think of any one but Gordon. Not yet. God would n't expect it yet. And then there 's me."

"Moira! You know I 'd die to give him back to you?"

"I am sure of it, Alan. You loved him in your way. You were always very good to us, to Gordon and to me. I suppose that seemed so far apart from your work, from—what do you call it? Dodging a specification? Men, I suppose, do these things—"

Men do these things. Men, it seems, fall full-length on the floor and catch the hem of a black dress and hide their faces there. Well—she looked down on him without any change in the calm white face above the dying white flowers; only, where

his dark hair touched her shoe, she drew her foot away.

"It 's done sometimes, I suppose, and nothing happens. I don't know much about these things. But if you 'd needed money, Alan, I 'd have lent you some. I 've plenty of that. And so gladly."

"Moira—before God—I reckoned everything—left a *wide* margin of safety—"

She listened carefully to the broken voice. She said, "But the bridge fell."

Maclear wondered why he had wanted to be alone, to think things out. Because no thought could ever lighten the darkness of that accomplished fact. There rose in him, with his despair, a hatred of life, that had so betrayed him.

"I 've tried—I 've prayed—to be just to you, Alan. He would have wished it. I have not quite realized things yet. I have felt all along that I must defend you, fight hard for you. And I have. Not a doubt shall ever shadow you through me. But it is going to be very hard. There 's something in myself I can't defend you from. We loved you, Gordon and I. We were so proud of you. He thought the world of you. He said once, 'Alan 's hard, but he 's true as steel.' Sometimes, when I wake in the morning, I can't believe it yet; I can't get things right in my mind. Will you give me the truth now, yourself, without any evasion or excuse?

It is almost the last thing you will ever do for me."

"Yes."

"Behind everything, is n't it the *fact* that you did n't run the foundations of the central spans deep enough? I don't know the technicalities. But you saved on the contract that way, did n't you? And it seemed all right. Only, somehow, the sand got in, and the river followed the sand. And the train went through. Is this true?"

"Quite true."

"You do not ask me how I came to know."

Said the man at her feet: "I have fought, with every bit of me, body and soul, to keep it a secret,—for the sake of the firm. I thought it was safe. But perhaps—one of those four—rose from the dead to tell you?"

She was weeping,—not, he knew, for the dead; but for him, for the living. "It was that poor boy Oldershaw, your clerk, who hinted something, weeks ago. He was boasting of you. He thought you so clever. I stopped him. I never told Gordon."

"Did you come here to tell me this?"

"Yes. We believed in your honesty. I wanted it from you once more. And something else. Alan—Gordon's brother, that he loved so dearly!—I want —some day—to be able to forgive you. I want so terribly to be able to forgive you. But I can't do it yet. Not yet. You are the nearest thing to Gor-

don that is left in the world. And yet there 's that feeling for you, here, like hate. I dread that it should come to that between us. But if I don't see you for a long while, for years, perhaps some day, when we are old and near the end of all this sorrow, I 'll be able to meet you again in the way he would wish me to, in the old way he would like."

"Forgive *me?*"

Again, from that solemn distance, her voice reached him: "Did you know him so little as to think *he* would n't forgive?"

For a little time thought and feeling were broken in Maclear. He did not speak. He knew she was going; that he might never see her again in this life; and of all women in the world she, perhaps, had been the most purely dear to him. But he had nothing to say.

She had not yet gone. He thought she stooped over him, thought she shrank from him; her approach and her repulsion would both, he knew, return in memory and unbearable pain. But now he felt nothing, though the touch of her divine pity was on him, and the whisper of it: "Poor Alan! Poor Cain!" Then the door shut softly. He was alone, as he had desired to be.

He stayed there on the floor a long time.

Once or twice some one knocked softly. He did not hear nor answer. It was late when at last he

dragged himself to his feet. It seemed very dark. The sun was behind the tall buildings on the other side of the street, and their shadow darkened his room. Everything was silent. The staff had gone home. After hesitating a moment, Maclear found his hat and went out too.

He went down the stairs, eight flights, but he seemed to be immediately in the street. Space was opaque to him, the distance lost in mist; he saw men as trees walking. The crashing in his brain never stopped. It confused and benumbed him, seeming one with the mist. Only the passing of late newsboys now and then rent these shadows with intolerable clearnesses as they ran by shouting: "Bersimis Bridge Disaster. Full Details. Who Was to Blame? Inquiry Promised." He walked on.

He had at first no thought of where he was going. He was looking for some place of refuge from the memory and the knowledge that went with him everywhere, that clung inseparably to his soul like a revolting deformity to the body. Moira's dreadful pity had branded him with a sin he yet strove to deny; for in mind and will he had been innocent. Innocent. He felt that if he could not find such a place of forgetfulness, he would go mad. Until he found it he must go on walking till his flesh wore out like a pair of shoes.

He walked on, walked on. The electric street

lamps added their stars to the blue-purple dusk. He left the business quarter of the town, and wandered by older streets, tree-grown; the leaves covered the wooden sidewalks with a diaper of intensest still shadow. All these ways were familiar to him. He had been born in this city, had grown with its great growth. It was like walking back into his own life. In that building he had held his first job; in that house set back from the road, where two maples heaved mounds of motionless darkness against the dim stars, they had lived for two years, that he might be near the technical school. In that larger house with the concrete steps his father had died. Round the corner, in a house with a funny tower, Gordon had had diphtheria. On another street had lived a family at whose home he and Gordon had spent many hours, and there Gordon had met Moira, and Maclear had been half in love with her himself. And here—

Maclear stopped. This was the shuttered house where she and Gordon had lived.

He turned and went away. He wondered why his feet had led him here. Everywhere he went there was some thought of Gordon, some picture of Gordon, his ugly sweet face under its reddish thatch smiling from the night. Maclear began to talk with him, as, in the back of his brain, he had talked for days and days:

"You *know*. I did n't mean it?"

"I know."

"You know I 'd have died to save you, any day, Gordy?"

Maclear waited with trembling insistence for the answer. The imagined face seemed to look upon him pitifully, too; he could not endure it.

"You *know*, wherever you are, I 'd have died to save you?"

"I know. I 've died to save you."

Was it "I've died," or "I'd have died"? Questioning the shadow of his own thought, Maclear did not know. He went on.

The white light and black shadow of the summer night submerged him for hours. He did not know where he went. He walked in a mist, from which occasional sudden things, minute and unimportant, emerged to arrest him: heat-dried grass, wet with dew, sending up a sweet breath; the odd pattern of an iron gate; a shrub covered with pink tubular flowers, rigid as metal in the glare of the street lamp. Sometimes he moved with such effort he felt his legs heavy as stone. Again, he felt himself so thin and light he wondered when people stepped aside to avoid him. All the time he questioned, all the time waited for the answer.

"You know I did n't mean it, Gordon? You know I 'm not to blame?"

The visionary face of his brother returned its compassion.

"You know I 'd have died for you, Gordon?"

"I know." The night itself seemed to reply.

Maclear walked on.

He found himself drinking at a brightly lighted bar. Other men were there, looking at him curiously. He heard one genial soul say to another: "Yes, thas him! Thas Maclear! Cleverest man in the trade, they say, an' the best-lookin' feller, an' the luckiest. And his luck has n't gone back on him yet! You see. There 'll be nothing proved against the firm—Poor devil!"

Maclear paid for his drinks and went on.

That sickness and horrible distaste of life, the tangled, betraying thing that made a man foul himself whether he would or no, shook him from head to foot like a physical nausea. He walked now in streets that are never quite empty, the oldest streets of that city down by the waterfront. He walked in the gutters among the hand-carts and oil-flares, the cries and smells and clamors of a foreign population. He shuddered from the dark bright faces that the night gave him. That girl with the scarf over her head and her teeth flashing; that slim boy pushing home the peanut-stand; that Madonna-faced woman calling her children; even the children themselves, picking up half-burnt moths under a light,—he saw

them all only as so many potential murders, adulteries, betrayals, helpless in the hold of life.

He went on, under the dusty branches of old chestnut-trees which roofed the stir and strife away from the stars. He went on through dark alleys of old warehouses. The smells of Italian cooking yielded to the scent of raw hemlock planks and overripe fruit. He came to the high gleam and shadow of grain-elevators, towering in the night; to houses that were half afloat, boats that were half on land. It was a silent place. The noises of the foreign quarter had fallen away behind. Pausing to listen intenfly, he could hear a slow sigh; it was the wash of lake water among hundreds of piles. The sound was soft as sleep. It was all about him as he went on and on to the end of a long wharf, where a single lantern confronted an infinity of shadows and of stars.

Maclear knew this place, also.

There was a shed on the end of the wharf. Maclear leaned against it. He spread his arms out to steady himself from the recurrent shock and crash of the falling steel which he had never for a moment ceased to hear. He stood very still. The lantern swung softly in a cloud of flower-winged moths. Its light showed him tall and black upon the silvery weathered wall, as if some one had marked the shed with a great dark cross.

He leaned farther out. He could hear the warm air fingering in the funnel stays of a moored tug. He could not fairly see the surface of the water; only the lantern's golden reflection flickering in invisibility.

He knew now why he had come here.

Hollow beyond hollow of forgetfulness, the stars wavered beneath him. They sank perpetually in night, but never vanished there. This was the place where memory ceased.

He thought, as he plunged, that the stars rushed up to meet him. Then his body struck the water, and their images went out in a hundred hastening ripple-rings.

He sank deep. For a moment the cool shock quickened him. He was a good swimmer, and he fought grimly enough, there in the shadow, against the body's instinctive response. He rose, and there reeled upon his vision the black overhang of the wharf, the soaring elevators behind it, the light and shadow of the city upon a heaven as tender as a dark pearl. He shut his eyes to it and sank again.

He had no need to fight any more. His strength went, and it was a half-dead thing the mild water drew down. The noise in his head turned to a blaze of bursting fires, and that to a silence almost complete. When he rose the third time, they were but dying eyes he turned on the night.

Then he cried out. He would have struggled, but the warm thick water lay on him like a weight. His head went back. He was all but gone. He reached out dying hands to life. He felt himself sinking again. He had forgotten how to swim, he could not save himself. A black tide, which he saw almost with his bodily eyes, was rushing down on him, washing out everything.

Everything but the bridge.

He saw the bridge more clearly than he had ever seen it,—the bridge, and all connected with it, compressed in space and time to one instantaneous apprehension. It spanned that on-coming darkness; little brilliant lines and diagrams enclosed it, economical calculations printed indelibly on the universe. It was at the same time gigantic and minute, swift and motionless, dazzling and obscure. He had no longer any assurance of escape. He could not lose it. Even beyond life, perhaps, he would not forget.

The wharf was the last fringe of life, the fence of the unfathomable. He looked, with vain and awful appeal. He saw a black body poised upon the edge of things, rushing down upon him in a clean dive. Then again the star-images were wrecked and broken, and the ripples sped along the hollow under side of the wharf.

He knew nothing else until he knew life returning, with sufficient wrenches and agonies. He was

glad of life. He was lying on the wharf, his head on a man's knees. He put out a hand, touching the sun-splintered wood on which he lay. It came to him that it was wonderful to be capable of such an action. Hands were busy about him, he heard hard breathing and smelt dirty wet cloth. A voice said, "You 're better now?"

"Yes."

"If I let you up, you won't try any of them games again?"

"No."

He was released by the hands that partly supported, partly imprisoned him. But he was too weak to stand alone. In that hour he was stripped of everything, even of the desire for death. He was helpless as one of the half-burnt moths he had watched the Italian children pick up under the lamp. He turned on his face and broke into racking sobs.

He was lower than shame. When he had finished his weeping he sat up and swept the tears from his eyes. The other man's arm was about him, supporting him even with a suggestion of tenderness. Maclear looked into a face grayed with strain, gleaming with wet so that it shone like snake skin; common and pinched, it was yet anxiously human. He asked, "How did you get me out?"

"I 'd a job. You 're a bigger man than me. But times like this a feller 's stronger than ordinary.

And there was a ladder at the side there, by the slip."

"How did you happen to see me?"

"I thought you was drunk," said the man, frankly. "I was follerin' you—to see what was in your pockets when you fell! But I ain't touched a thing. You k'n feel and see. Say, why did you do it?"

"There was something—something I wanted to forget."

"Well—you ain't goin' to try it again that way?"

"No. It's not sure enough. Not sure—here." Maclear held out a roll of sodden bills. "Take them," he said; "they 'll dry."

The man hesitated. Then Maclear saw the blood stain his face. "Not now," he answered awkwardly. "It—don't seem right."

Maclear dragged himself to his feet and stood swaying. Answering his rescuer's look, he said: "You need not worry about me any more. I won't try that way again. It 's not certain, after all. I know something better."

He started to walk back the length of the wharf. The planks under his feet swung in monstrous circles of light and shade, as the moths flew round the lantern. He staggered. The man watching him hesitated, then swore and followed, thrusting an arm roughly within his own. "Here," he said, "you ain't fit to go alone, wherever it is."

They stumbled down the wharf, Maclear and the thief, a black shadow inextricably locked. They crossed railway lines gleaming in the dew, and crept the length of a string of freight-cars on a siding. Another wharf opened before them between dim water lanes. Freight-sheds were on one hand, ships lying along on the other. An arched sign bore the words, "MACLEAR & Co."

The big steel freighters from the upper lakes were in,—*Misstassini, Mirimichi, Meductic,* sea-going ships all. Maclear passed them. He was not thinking of them. He knew at last where he would go, and what he would find.

Then again the way opened. And there before them at the end of things was lying a silver ship.

She lay in the full glare of an arc-light swinging from a high pole. The light painted her silver to her mastheads, beautiful on the face of the night, an old lake schooner loading stone.

"The *Martine Messier,*" said Maclear. "She was to have been broken up soon."

He could not have explained why he had recollected the old ship, nor what affinity had drawn him to her; perhaps it lay in that one word "broken."

They were alongside, looking down on a deck silvered with the dust of stone. Maclear said, "Shout." After a moment the man beside him hailed doubtfully. He hailed again. Some one

came from shadow into the white light, and looked up at them.

"Garroch," said Maclear.

"Sir!—Mr. Maclear!"

Amazement and something of horror sharpened the old voice. Maclear said quickly—he felt he must be quick—"Who 's on board with you?"

"Levett, and my nephew from the Townships."

"Enough to raise sail. Is there any wind outside?"

"Some, I doubt, but—"

"Rouse them up. You could tow out to it in the dinghy. Never mind the cargo. I—can't wait, Garroch. I must go—must go—"

He put his hands to his head. "I must go," he said, "anywhere where I sha'n't hear the bridge, Garroch! Anywhere where I can forget!"

The old man had his foot on the bulwark and cleared the jump to the wharf like a boy. But it was in the other man's arms that Maclear lay, broken at last, like his bridge.

II

Very slowly, through a still evening, the *Martine Messier* was standing in to shore.

They had left behind them the lake highways. They had moved for days in a ring of solitude whose

blue was seldom broken by the stain of smoke or the gleam of a sail. Throughout the day the land they neared had grown almost imperceptibly upon their horizon. Long and low, it had seemed now of the substance of cloud or water, now only of shadow or light.

The wind which so softly drifted the old schooner onward was not strong enough to ruffle the surface of the water. As the sun sank, the great lake turned luminous, lost all bounds, became another roseate heaven. Between these clarities the ship hung, black as grief, moving to a shore drawn in sudden black along the lessening gold.

Then the sun dipped. Again the schooner was gray as a gull in the twilight of the North. The island ahead was again a shadow. As they neared the land that shadow breathed on them a full sweet scent of flowers.

When they came to anchor, the twilight still held. Maclear said, "Put me ashore here."

They hauled in the dinghy towing astern. Maclear lowered himself into it. Garroch followed him and took the oars. They pulled toward the land.

Presently, with no more than a sigh, the boat took the beach. Maclear stepped from it and walked slowly along the sand. He saw nothing else. Under his feet, the dust of silence, deadening their

fall, was nothing but sand; white sand, but stained here and there, where the iron lay, as if with blood. He stooped and touched it. The surface was cold, but beneath it lingered warmth. He sifted it aimlessly in his hands, lifting and letting fall a thousand grains, minute chips of quartz, rounded dust of red and yellow sandstone, powdered ores, sparkles of granite old as the world.

He had no thought at all except that it was pleasant to handle the soft, innumerable monotony. He wandered on.

Inland were low dunes crested with grass, ground willows, and thin poplars. Between him and the dunes stretched a ribbon of marsh, mooned all along with the moth-blurred disks of the evening primroses. It was from here the sweetness had come.

He knew if he walked the island's length he would probably find nothing but more sand, willows, poplars, the flower and fragrance of the little marshes. No more silent place could have been imagined, nor one more remote.

He went slowly back to Garroch, and said: "This is the place. I 'll stay here. You know what to do."

Garroch put back to the schooner, leaving Maclear on the beach.

Far into the night the twilight held. When the dinghy returned, loaded with supplies and camping-

stuff which Maclear had bought at a port on the way up the lakes, the men found him asleep, with his cheek to the sand. They were used to it; he had slept a great deal, in a sick way, aboard the schooner. Even when they raised a small tent, and spread blankets, and lifted and laid him there, he did not wake.

These things done, they returned on board.

They had their orders. Garroch carried a letter to Raynham, giving him full authority in the business, telling him enough. Maclear wanted no letters forwarded. He wished to be consulted in nothing. He wanted to lapse out of life for a little while. Raynham would understand. It would be convenient to tell other acquaintances that he was threatened with a nervous breakdown, and had gone camping. That would do. In two months the *Martine Messier* would return for him.

Toward midnight a breeze sprang up. They worked the schooner out. Her ancient dove-gray topsails, dwindling under the stars, were Maclear's last link with former things. He had broken with all that had been his life.

He slept on. The island was voiceless all night, and his sleep held neither voice nor dream.

Silent was the coming of the dawn.

When Maclear woke, his solitude was as complete as if he had been reborn into an empty world.

III

Morning after morning rose supremely from the hazed sea-line, drowned the world in golden heats, and passed in winged red cirrus, or towering cumulus marching the long horizons. Never had there been such peace, or such fair weather. The lake-bosom breathed, no more. It was the beginning of a world, when the Word was only, Let there be light; and there was light, and a great stillness.

Maclear shared in this stillness.

In all his life he had experienced neither leisure nor physical loneliness. Now these two things laid their hands on him; and he thought he would be healed.

He felt that his only help was in himself, in his own power of forgetfulness, or, rather, in his ability to detach himself from the past. He compared himself to a man maimed in some accident, yet denying his disability, going on in spite of it, the stronger for seeing clearly the bitter possibilities of life. He could not entirely break down that bridge of memory that linked him to previous things; but he could refuse to travel by it. Maclear's mind was strangely calm, lonely, clean-swept. Deliberately he drew into it a thousand tiny details; building them consciously into a shelter; loving more and more to

turn and consider them, as he sifted the sand in his hands.

He built himself a fireplace; and it pleased him to choose each stone for it with curious care, to trace the veins of blackish sparkling ore, the minute fossils, the embedded crystals of the rock. Those he did not like he threw away.

The muskrat trails at the edge of the marsh would hold him for hours, puzzling out their manifold intersections. A little wader with lemon-yellow legs, picking water-snails from the sunken reed roots, gave him food for infinite reflection. A turtle with a wet wine-red shell, creeping from a pond to lay her eggs in a channel of the warm mud, he watched a whole evening. These small lovelinesses were new to him. He took them, shaped them to his need, as sometimes he shaped the wet sand to idle stars or walls or flowers.

As he trained his mind, so he trained his body. He swam, walked, lay in the sun, all with the thought of so increasing his power of resistance to the past. As he was proud of his ability to dwell on the little existences of the marsh and the lake, so he was proud of every slightest physical sensation of rest or enjoyment, and overlooked no one of them. The pleasure of the cold sand under his bare feet as he stepped from his tent in the morning; the thrill when his body passed from the warm surface water

to the depth that never loses its icy cold; his delight in the scent of the wax-white spiral orchises then beginning to blossom along the marshes,—all these he counted and credited to himself, proofs of his own strength.

Yet it was the sand that most charmed his busy idleness.

He never tired of it. It took on an immaterial meaning for him as he dwelt on its material complexity. It was like life. It resembled the countless small deeds and occurrences that go to make up life; some clear as diamond, some dark as blood, yet all alike building one huge indifferent fabric. Of itself the sand had no volition. Outer forces alone moved it, the waves changed it, the wind blew it where it listed. It was so with all that men did; they had no power of themselves to alter their circumstances; they were governed irresistibly, as the sand was governed by the wind. They were blameless. Good and evil in life were no more than the colors of the eternal sand.

As his bodily strength was renewed, Maclear felt a supreme inner mastery of himself. He was without fear, without haste. He counted time only by the slow advances, the slow recessions, of nature. He filled his days in this way. His nights were absolute blanks of quiet and dreamless sleep. After he had been on the island for two weeks, if any

one had asked him, he would have said that he had forgotten about the bridge, in the sense in which he intended to forget.

He thought that his weakness, back there in the city, had been bodily. Now, hardening from head to heel, he dreaded himself no more.

Only once was his security shaken; and by a very little thing.

He was diving from his favorite rock ledge into deep water. The lake was immeasurably calm. He passed down, down without effort, seeing the world change from gold to blue, from blue to green. His fingers touched the sand at the bottom, stirred it into a smoke; closed on something hard. A school of little fish flickered past. He turned and flashed upward, shot with a deep breath and a glitter of brief foam into the sun. Climbing on the rocks again, he looked at the hard thing he had taken from the sand.

It was a pen-knife, massed with rust.

Suddenly, as he looked at it, an extraordinary terror and dismay shook him. It was as if the old knife possessed a destroying atmosphere, or as if it were poisoned. Sheer physical dread darkened the sun for him, his throat closed, he gasped for breath. The terror endured five seconds, perhaps; passed, leaving him shaking on the hot rocks, wet with more than water.

Memory supplied the trivial link, but could not

explain it. Maclear had owned such a knife, nearly thirty years before; and Gordon had wanted it. They had quarreled over it tremendously, as they did about once in a twelvemonth; and in a sudden red-hot rage Maclear had stabbed Gordon in the hand with it. He had forgotten the incident for years, though at the time he had been hard hit by the sight of the red trickle over Gordon's dirty young hand. Now, the sickness and passion of that long-past happening of his childhood was suddenly renewed for him with the force of his manhood. It was as if he had just struck his brother with the rusty knife across his palm. That remembered blood was fresh. Trembling, Maclear flung the knife into deep water. That night, for the first time, he woke, the old cry on his lips, in his heart: "You know I 'd have died for you, Gordon?"

"I know."

"Not my fault, not my fault. My hands are clean. Brother, brother, I 'd die to bring you back, now!"

Silence, and the whisper of the lake along the dark beaches, and the large stars standing low toward the austere dawn. Maclear turned and slept, but there were tears on his face.

The morning came, calm and beautiful. He was strong. The shadow passed, and he returned to his former security.

Later, a small fishing-tug with three men aboard

put in to the island. The men landed, and Maclear went and spoke to them. They were pleasant fellows. They said they only wanted to stretch their legs ashore. They looked at Maclear admiringly,—at his slender, steel-like strength, at his tanned clean-shaven face, at his crisped dark hair and hard blue eyes. They said: "You look as if you were havin' a pretty good time here by yourself."

Maclear smiled and said, "Yes."

"There 's times," said one, genially, "when a feller 's *got* to be by himself."

"What do you mean by that?"

Maclear was startled by the quick low voice that had come from his own lips. The genial man was startled, too. He said vaguely: "Why, nothin',—just that!" and looked rather timidly at Maclear, who, for an incredible instant, had reminded him of a gun ready to go off. Then some one else spoke. The instant was gone.

They walked about the beach, and Maclear showed them the sands, how far they stretched, how level, how hard they were. He liked his visitors, but was a little contemptuous of them. In his mental detachment, he considered them one by one,—the man with the long chin, the genial fat one with the black mustache, and the thin one in waders. He thought: "If what has happened to me had happened to one of them, *he* would n't have got over it so easily."

Going, they asked him, "Anything we can do for you?"

"No, thanks," said Maclear; "I have everything I want."

He was glad when they went, yet he spent a long time going over every incident of their visit. Suppose he had told them who he was; suppose he had said: "I 'm Maclear, who was responsible for the Bersimis bridge,"—how would they have looked at him then? He considered these imaginary looks, in character with the long chin, the black mustache, and the waders. It was the gentle-faced man in waders that troubled him most.

Day after day the motionless bright weather held, and his clear days and blank nights with it.

Then bands of cirrus rose in the sky. The water grew milky under them, iridescent as if oil had been spilled. At long intervals an undulation heaved the surface, and broke on the beaches with a sullen, unexpected thunder. It left a rope of green weed, gray shells, little fish, and drowned butterflies, mile after mile, along those tideless shores. Drying, this drift smelt of desolation.

At night, for the first time, Maclear could see no stars. He slept restlessly. Waking in a dull gray dawn, he knew for the first time that he had dreamed.

He was uneasy. The trouble impending on the lake seemed reflected in his own spirit. An obscu-

rity was drawn between him and nature. He saw the mewing gulls, the dark coween arrowing down the lake, the bronze fish-hawk sailing inshore, as though through mist. He knew this obscurity was in the air; yet felt it on the hard clarity of his own mind.

While he swam, dressed, and cooked his breakfast he was vexed by a persistent wonder as to what he had dreamed.

Later, he wandered down the beach, aimlessly following the rope of drift. He was a little surprised to see a double line of his own footprints on the other side of the rope, since he could not remember walking here before. The weed and dead things breathed on him the barren smell of those great deeps of unsalted sea. This, and the footprints, and the coming storm, and the dream he could not recall were all one in his mind.

Something was leaking and stirring feebly beneath his strength, as the sand had leaked and trickled beneath the spans of the Bersimis.

Then, in a curve of the drifted rubbish, he stopped suddenly.

The drift here framed in its curve a slightly inclined plane of the purest and most stainless sand. To this plane the footprints on the other side of the rope led; here they ceased. And on this sand was drawn, minutely to scale, a large plan of the Bersimis bridge.

The memory of the draftsman had not failed him, nor had his hand for an instant faltered.

Sand, lake, and sky danced a moment in blots and rings of crimson, and went out. Maclear saw nothing but his bridge.

He stood looking at it.

Presently he put his hand into his pocket and drew out a flattened carpenter's pencil which he had happened to have with him; touching the lead unsteadily, he found that it gritted with sand.

This was what he had used, then, when memory drove him out, even in his sleep, to draw his bridge on the hard sand of the island. He wondered how many times he had done it before; what other beaches or dune slopes or hidden places there were which might at any time remorselessly confront him with the handiwork of his sleep.

He moved to stamp the thing out; to blot it away. But there was no need. As he watched, a smoke drove across it; it faded in a moment. It was the sand drifting before a sudden wind.

Maclear turned and walked inland, where the poplar thickets shook a dark-and-silver dazzle of leaves, and the ridges of the dunes trailed into mist. He had lost all thought. He forgot his camp. He had no sense nor aim of direction. He was afraid, for even in himself there was no security.

After the first, the wind did not come in gusts. It

came like a wall, an immense advance out of space. The storm was of wind only. It lifted the sand as if with hands. The air was full of driving sand,—a level, scorching, impalpable fog. It was as though the whole island would be spun and carded away, scattered on the wind, strewn on the lake.

Like the sand, Maclear went on, driven before that wind.

Soon he heard a rising thunder added to the other voices. It was the thunder and incessant crash of the great lake, hurled in breaker upon breaker along the beaches behind him. He thought it was the crash and thunder of a falling bridge.

The earth itself seemed to rise against him, to cast him out in this storm of smallest particles that clogged his feet, choked his breath, scourged, blinded, and perpetually escaped him. The ground was elusive as water. The lashing willow scrub on the flanks of the dunes came away in the hand, the poplars slipped from the hold, the world was a fluid, pouring away into space. There was no firm standing anywhere.

The island was riddled with channels of angry foam. Spume whitened the still lagoons, the inlets frothed among the marsh meadows and the fringed gentian beds. Maclear passed from land to water, from water to land, without knowing. But most terrible of all was the running of the sand.

All day he was a fugitive before it.

With the evening, light broke for a moment through the dry racing clouds; light of colorless brilliance, fierce as steel. The wind held the grass rigid as iron. The blowing dunes showed like clouds, transparent in the wild gleam. Maclear came to another beach; he had crossed the island.

On this beach a woman stood, blown about with foam, gazing toward the coming night. The gleam clothed her in its own heatless fire. She seemed a bright beckoning flame in the flux of existence. To her Maclear went. He struggled for reasonable, commonplace words; but his need spoke for him.

"Hold me," said Maclear, "hold me fast—"

He knew that she turned and looked at him. He saw her face, strange and beautiful between bands of spray-sleeked hair. She did not speak. But divine communication was surely in the gesture with which she stretched her hands and drew him toward her. He rested at last at her side. Her arm was about him. She held him fast against all his storms.

He had no thought at all but that it was good to rest so, near the beating of her heart.

He looked into her face. The light made it golden, wonderful. Simply as a child he asked her, "Who are you?"

"I am Sombra."

The gleam died.

IV

"Where are you?"

"I am here, holding you."

"It 's dead dark. I can't see you. But I can feel your arms. Don't let me go."

"I won't let you go."

"Are these your hands, brushing the sand from my face?"

"Yes. You fainted or something like. I could n't lift you, so I stayed with you. If I 'd gone for help, I 'd never have found you again. The sand would have buried you."

"Don't leave me to the sand."

"Trust me," said the voice from the night. "I won't leave you."

Again, after a time, Maclear asked, "Where are you?"

"Here."

The voice came more faintly. He thought it was receding into the wind. He put up his hand and touched the chill curve of a cheek. He could see nothing at all, but he felt that it was wet, as though with tears.

"Why are you crying?"

"Oh, what am I to do! How am I to save you? The sand and the wind are makin' me weak. I can't even keep your face from the drift no more!"

She was speaking with her face close to his, that he might hear. He said, struggling to be free of the weariness that lay on him like the weight of the sand, "Is there anywhere to go, away from this?"

"Yes, yes! If you could move, if you could walk—"

He fought to his knees, to his feet. In the pitch-dark he sought for her hands, found and held them. They sustained him. He said, "Come."

The voice out of the wind cried faintly: "I can't till you help me. The sand 's over me like a grave."

He mastered his lassitude of flesh and soul, stooped, freed her garments of the iron-heavy drift, drew her erect beside him. Clinging together, they staggered away into the night.

Maclear thought of nothing but that the place where she had held him, where he had rested in her arms, was even now lost and blotted out; that he would never be able to find it nor return to it. By and by he heard her asking, "Can you hear anything?"

"No."

Again she asked him, "Can you hear a sound?"

"What sound?"

"A sound as if the wind was blowing in a great empty shell?"

"I think so."

They went on. Presently she said: "Yes, I hear

it. It 's the wind in Morning House, and that 's my home. We 'll be safe now."

In time they reached a flight of steps, half-buried in sand. Before him, in the night, Maclear was aware of a greater darkness, stretching immeasurably, and made visible only by a single thread of light, a thin finger of whirling sand. He heard, too, a low continuous sound of the utmost desolation; the sound of the wind crying in a wilderness of empty rooms.

Then the pressure of the wind-storm suddenly released him. The girl had led him through a door.

They went down a long dim passage, so still after the night outside that he heard the sand whispering between its double row of closed doors. One door was open, showing light within; and to this room she led him.

To Maclear there was an exquisite homeliness in the room with its wooden walls, black stove, yellow wooden chairs, and table with a worn blue cloth. A lamp with a yellow shade stood on the table, and its circle of light painted vividly upon shadow the dark face of a boy who sat there, and who looked up as they entered, crying, "Sombra!"

At the cry, an old man came from the shade beyond the lamplight. He was so tall his head was in shadow. Shavings clung like flakes of light to his worn blue sleeves as he rested his great hands on

the table, saying softly, "Who 's that breathing there beside ye?"

"A man I brought in from the storm."

The girl's voice came faintly. No one else spoke or moved for a minute. Then the old man began to advance softly round the table, feeling his way. All was so suddenly still Maclear could hear the faint rasp of his knotted fingers passing over the cloth. He knew then that this old man was blind.

The blind face came into the circle of light. Then Maclear would have cried out. For there was death in that face; death in that outstretched groping hand; death and indestructible hate in the soul that drove the great aged body down upon him with the slow inevitable motion of shadow or cloud. And he could not cry nor move.

His senses shrank and dwindled to an aching point, a single apprehension, focused on that advancing hand.

All happened in silence. Since the girl's reply, no one of them had spoken. And now it was in apathetic silence that the tall boy who had been sitting at the table came and set himself in the old man's path. There was something horrible to see in the way the searching hand closed on him. Maclear saw him gripped, shaken, dragged from the room, cast out; and could not stir. If they had shouted or spoken he would have moved; but the

silence bound him as with ropes. And the boy suffered passively as a log, without one gesture of resistance or any change in his dark and secret face.

He thought, when the boy had been cast out, that the old man came back quietly, and fell to work again in his dim corner. But he was not sure.

Later, he thought he heard some one weeping beside him. But he was not sure of that either, because of the ceaseless running of the sand on the roof over his head.

V

Mait Ransome sat at work on the veranda of Morning House.

The veranda was a hundred feet long. Floored with wood, the boards were everywhere thrust aside by willow bushes which had grown up from the hollow beneath; others had rotted away. Every board was scoured to the grain by the action of the sand that heaped the whole length of it in drifts like snow-drifts. The wooden roof had fallen, too, in many places, and at each seam let in the blue of heaven or the rain.

Behind the old man were ten boarded-up windows, flat and featureless; then a plain door; then another ten windows. Above the veranda roof a

row of twenty-one windows took the light on their remaining panes of glass. These upper windows were not protected, and the floors of some of the rooms behind them sagged with the weight of the blown sand.

At the back of the house the details of the front were exactly repeated.

Over both the front and the back doors, a wooden sign from which the paint had long been blistered still bore a shadow of the words, "Morning House. M. Ransome, Proprietor."

Long ago, in the prosperous times of Port Tallis, the place had been built for a summer hotel.

But before any guests had come to Morning House the curse of the sand had fallen on Port Tallis. Some of the slow uncharted lake currents shifted; the harbor silted up in a year or two; ships called there no more, people began to leave the little frame houses among the moving hills of sand. By and by the lighthouse was removed, leaving nothing but its round concrete foundation out in the shallows for the gulls to fish from. Only Mait Ransome was left, living on in his empty hotel, and hearing year by year the advance-guard of the sand whispering in his hollow rooms.

Morning House had known but two guests. The second of the two was Alan Maclear.

He came out of the door into the young light that turned the dewy sand all gold, and said, "Good morning," to Mait Ransome.

"It is a good mornin'. I k'n feel it." The giant turned his face to the broken roof, and a ribbon of sun striped his blunted features like a scar. He resembled one of the trees hidden on the beach; like them, he seemed worn by ceaseless attrition rather than by age. While he talked his huge hands worked with wonderful delicacy, turning a piece of wood against the chisel. Only this deftness betrayed his blindness. Moment by moment a shaving clear as honey fell on the pile at his feet. He went on: "There 's been plenty of fine weather since you come. Your stay with us, sir, has been fort'nate."

His voice was soft and slow, seeming to possess some delicate quality akin to the skill of his hands. Maclear wondered, as he had wondered many a time, if those hands had indeed been outstretched against him. He asked, "Do you know how long I 've been here?"

"I ain't kep' account, sir. I leave it to Sombra."

"It is nearly a month ago that my camp was washed away, and she brought me here. Nearly a month," repeated Maclear, watching the ceaseless curl and fall of the fine shavings.

"It 's not many gent'men would be content in such

a poor place as this. And you 've only been over to town with the boy once since you come."

"I have been very happy here," answered Maclear, gently. As if this thought led naturally to the next, he asked, "Where 's Sombra?"

"Down to the lagoon, sailin' the boats."

Maclear went down to the lagoon.

It was a way he had trodden many times since he came to Port Tallis in the storm.

It was a golden way; the light on the dancing poplar leaves was gold, the dunes were gold with their dews. Here and there boards thrust from them, splayed fences, tilted wooden walks, as well as the blanched roots of trees. This was little Port Tallis, taken by the sand. Through this sun-sweetened desolation, growing daily more dear and more familiar, Maclear went down to the lagoon.

Sombra was standing barefooted in the shallow blue water, sailing a toy boat. Half a score others lay on the sand, waiting their turn. For to this Mait Ransome's strength had come. He made toy boats for the stores in the town, and Sombra tested them.

She stooped earnestly above the little craft she sailed; the ends of her two black plaits whipped the water. The boat was lateen-rigged and painted scarlet. Presently it faltered in its fairy course and

swamped among the bur-reed on the bank. Maclear said, "Sombra."

She did not smile as she turned her head and saw him. But behind her dark beauty a glow dawned like the glow of the sky.

She was tall and of a noble strength, and young, not more than eighteen. Her black braids framed an oval face, tanned almost to the color of gold. Her mouth was rather large, but it had the hue and the texture of certain dark roses. Her brows were very black, and had the languid arch of the sickle, so rarely seen, and the eyes under them were splendid. She lifted the boat, waded ashore, and showed it to Maclear. She said seriously, "It don't sail right."

"What 's the matter with it, Sombra?"

"The mast has n't enough rake forward, I think. It must be fixed before Sal takes it across. The others will be all right. Lugs and schooners—they 're easy; they rake aft."

Smiling, he told her, "What a lot you know, Sombra!"

She looked at him gravely. "Since you come, it don't seem to me I know anything."

"Do you know that I 've been here nearly a month? And that I 've never thanked you for letting me stay?"

"There was no need. There 's rooms enough,—

forty and more, not countin' the downstairs. Why should n't you come to us when your camp was washed away? We 're the only folk left on the island. Why should n't you stay if you 're content with the poor stuff we k'n give you?" Suddenly there were tears in her eyes. "I 'd give you better if I could," she said.

More than her strength or her beauty, this humility in her moved him. Another man might have taken her in his arms, told her his heart. But Maclear was hard. The time was not yet ripe to him; he yet doubted, delayed. He knew that if he could love any woman in the world, this girl was she. He knew that love was advancing on him like the advance of seasons, the coming-on of years: as irresistibly. But he would neither question its kind nor hurry its advent. Enough at present to see her, to know her near. Sometimes not speaking to her much, nor even looking at her; but allowing her presence to absorb every channel of his sense and his life, so that there should be no room for any other guest.

He answered gently: "There could be nothing better for me than what you give, what you have given." He thought of what yet she might give, and the blood flushed his face. "That night when I first came to you, and said, 'Hold me,' and you held me in your arms—"

They looked gravely at each other. Hitherto that

night had not been spoken of between them; now at the appointed time it came to light, to words. Those words seemed to weave them together with invisible strands. Maclear had known it would be so. He was content to leave the unfolding of his passion to those influences of the place to which he had utterly surrendered himself.

"That night, Sombra, I came to you in great trouble."

"I knew."

"You gave me the only rest I have known from it."

"All trouble 's the better for somethin' to hold to. Comfort just comes to that,—a hand held out. When the trouble's bad, don't matter whose it is."

"Mine was bad trouble."

"I knew that, too."

"So bad that I 'd even tried to lose it in death, as well as that death of the whole nature of man that is in perfect solitude."

She watched him, wondering.

"It was no use,—no use at all." Maclear for the moment had forgotten her, he spoke low and passionately. "I realize—now—that I 'll never forget it, never get over it, that way. Such a trouble, such a memory must have full power over a heart and a mind—empty. But if that heart, that life, were so full of better things that there was no room for the trouble and the memory—"

He broke off abruptly. His need again had spoken for him, said more, perhaps, than he had intended to say. But as he looked at her, his eyes burned with a flame that lighted a grave, innocent light in her own. He asked, in a quick, rough voice: "Sombra, if you had known, that night I came to you in the storm, that I 'd done something very bad, very dreadful, would you still have held me in your arms?"

He waited without stirring for her answer, his blue eyes intent. It came slowly: "If you 're to help, if you 're to give comfort, it don't do to think of more than the givin', or maybe the chance 'll go. The want of it 's all. The givin' 's all. The rest don't matter." She looked away. He saw her lips tremble. "I never thought of things like this till you come."

He was trembling a little when he said, still with that fierce earnestness: "Sombra, I'd done nothing bad,—nothing with a bad intent."

She turned her face to him again. She was faintly smiling.

"What I did had a terrible result. Life turned against me. It was like using a tool, and having it slip, and cut your hand. Yes, like that. I did it. But I'm not guilty of that result."

He had been speaking to something that was not Sombra. When she said softly, "I believe you,"

he remembered her. His eyes rested on her. The storm died out of him. He said, a little unsteadily: "You hold me. Sombra, what were you doing on the beach that night?"

"Often I go to that beach in a storm. I think, Suppose another ship was to come ashore there, and no light, and no one by."

"Another ship?"

She was silent a moment, then said slowly: "My father's was wrecked there in a spring blow, comin' up from carryin' fruit in the Gulf, to take on the excursion trade on the lakes at the openin' of navigation. A few years back you could still see some of it, out there on the ledge. But it was an iron ship. There 's nothing left now."

He said nothing. In his presence she had always been reticent; a little shy, a little proud; he had never questioned her, though the household at the ruinous hotel had given him enough cause for curiosity. He had been content to wait for knowledge, too; sure that the impersonal powers to which he had made over his own will would in their time unfold it.

"The boat struck there on the shoal. Nothin' come ashore but my father and some pulped oranges. The beach was yellow with them for miles. The hotel was nearly finished then, and my mother—she was first-cousin to Mait—was helpin' him run it.

They took my father there. He was sick a long time. He could n't work nor talk much English, but he could sing so you could hear him 'way out on the fishin'-ground. At the end of the summer my mother was married to him. At the end of that winter he died.

"Next fall, Sal and me was born. We 're twins. But mother did n't live long after. I 've thought of them two so much—so much! Seems as if I knew why she died." Her voice sank to a breath. "He come like the sun. He went like the sun. It was too *cold* for her to live without him.

"He 's buried in a little graveyard back among the sand-hills. One day I 'll show you. It ain't been used for years. His stone 's the only one standin' now. 'J. M. Luz,' it has on it, 'beloved husband of Martha Ransome, aged twenty-eight years. *His banner over me was love.*' I 've heard she had terr'ble trouble to get that tex' on the stone. They said it was n't in the Bible. But it was. That was the last thing she minded about. Theirs was a short day."

"But a summer one."

She looked at him softly. "Thank you. You always put things right for me."

"Then your name is not Ransome?"

"No. This was my father's name." She stooped and wrote slowly on the sand, "Juan-Maddalena Luz."

She went on; "My name 's Sombra Luz. Sal 's is Salvator Luz. But we 're mostly called Ransome."

"Strange names, Sombra, for Tallis Island."

She said simply, "Father, he wanted Mother to use one or the other, not thinkin' she 'd have a call for both."

He watched her as she stooped again and passed her hand over the writing in the sand. Even so, he thought, had death blotted out the owner of the name, that man of the South who had come up from fruit-loading along the Floridas, been wrecked on Tallis Island, and died after setting up his banner over the heart of Martha Ransome. What currents, he wondered, of snow and sun, shadow and fire, might be mingled in this girl whose name was both shadow and light?

Sombra went on, with a timid kind of pride that escaped him: "Mait 's real well educated. And Sal and me have had schoolin'. There was a school kep' on here for a long while, and we-'ve studied a little since." His thought burned on his lips:

"Sombra, how beautiful you are!"

She glowed to greater beauty as he said it.

And, of a sudden, he was sure of her; her soft surrendered eyes told him that he had only to ask, and she would give, greatly. He guessed that, for all her reticence, the genius for giving was hers, as the genius for art or for work might be another's.

But he had not yet the assurance of due time; of himself he was not yet quite sure. The instinct for possession was strong in him. So also was the instinct of mastery. He would not possess at all until he could possess utterly.

He stretched out his hand gently, lifted and held one of her long black braids still sparkling with water. It lay across his open palm. But it seemed to her that she had not strength enough to free her hair; to him, that he had not strength enough to let it go.

"I have never forgotten that first day at Morning House, Sombra. Do you remember? I came down from the room in which you and Sal had put me, not knowing what I should find. And I found you standing at the kitchen door. The blue lake was behind you, and the foam, and the sun on the sand, and the poplar trees. You held a sand-swallow in your hands. As I watched, it flashed away, a little dark streak into the light; and then you turned, and smiled, and saw me. You told me that the swallow had been blown into the hall over-night, and that you 'd kept it in your work-box near the stove, and now that it was well it had gone. And I said, 'Then there 's more than one hurt thing you 've sheltered from the storm.' Later, I talked to Mait. And when I spoke to you, you said, 'Stay.' Perhaps you meant this hurt thing to stay too till it was well—"

She did not answer except with the pure compassion of her eyes.

"I should like to see real diamonds in your hair, Sombra. Not these water diamonds. I should like to dress you in silk the color of the deep water out there beyond the shoal; or in honey-gold, the color of that little rose you have in your garden; or all in white—"

His voice sank. She was pale, glancing down timidly at her bare brown feet, her shabby skirt, the cheap cotton blouse that strained against the swell of the breast. She seemed very mean in her own sight.

"You are like a golden rose. And you 've been growing here in the sand for years."

He was held by the miracle of her mere physical bloom and perfection in such a place. But she answered his last words:

"Yes. I 've been here all my life. When my mother died Mait took us, for he was her nearest kin, and the Ransomes always hold together, for pride. But—"

For a moment a shadow, a reflection like the reflection of fear from some other face, darkened hers. Maclear's silence yet questioned her. Lifting her eyes, she said in a low voice: "But he hates us. Don't ask me how I know. I know. We remind him. He loved my mother before my father came.

Don't ask me how I know that, either. I *know*. And he hated my father. And he hates us.

"He hates Sal more 'n me—feelin' my father more in him. He 's been terr 'ble hard on Sal. Oftentimes it 's been in my heart to quit, for Sal's sake. But, after all, he 's kep' us, and worked to do it. I could n't quit him, not altogether. And Sal won't quit me.

"When he 'd his sight, 't was n't so bad, though often he 'd fall into such a rage he 'd go crazy, and seem 'most ready to kill Sal. But as he grew old, and his sight failed, and his stren'th, he come to think of nothin' else but what was past. His mind ain't just right, for all he 's so quiet and so clever with the little boats. Whenever there 's a storm, Mait goes back in his mind to the one when my father's boat was wrecked. He looks to see the men carry my father in, and my mother go to him and take his head on her knees. Perhaps Mait does see it, in the dark. That night, when I brought you in, he thought you was my father, come back from the storm."

"Then it was to save me your brother put himself in Mait's way?"

She smiled tremulously, though there were tears in her eyes: "We always have to do that when the storm 's real heavy. It seems then as if Mait 'd have no rest, go quite mad, unless he could get at my

father to turn him out! So Sal goes and gets in his way, and he puts Sal out, and quiets down. Sal, he just goes in at the back door again." Once more her eyes darkened, her brown hands went with passion to her heart. "But sometimes—oh, sometimes, Mr. Maclear, I 'm afraid! I 'm afraid of Sal. It looks, sometimes, as if Mait was standin' in front of a glass he could n't see into when he stands in front of Sal, and as if that glass was givin' him back his own crazy hate from my brother's face. Then—then I 'm afraid. I see nothin' but grief."

Maclear was silent. Then he laughed. He lifted the black hair that lay across his hand, and kissed it, in defiance of the passions and sorrows of past years, of hearts long blown with the sand.

"What 's all that," he said roughly, "to the life that 's in one strand of this? And what 's life but love, Sombra?"

For a moment the world was so still he heard the beating of his own heart, the mewing of the gulls a mile away, the soft, innumerable sound of the dunes, never quite at rest. But the time was not yet. He pressed the plait again to his lips, dropped it, and for that day let her go.

But that evening, when they sat together in the lamp-lit kitchen, and he watched the dark of her hair in the shadow, and her hands like gold as she sewed,

the sense of her presence became something too poignant to be borne. He went then and paced the glimmering island beaches, that night of late summer, towering into stars, no more than a sufficient roof for Sombra and his love.

VI

"There 's a run of herrin' in the shoal water. I 'm goin' to spear some from the ledge. Will you like to come?"

The voice was Salvator's. Maclear paused a minute in astonishment; the boy had hitherto been so unapproachable, so watchfully wild; then he said, "Yes, thanks, I 'll come."

He had been going to bed in the sandy room set apart for him, and furnished by Sombra from her own, and Sal's, and Mait's, with much eager shame and anxiety of heart. He slipped on his coat again and opened the door. Sal was waiting for him in the half-ruined hall, lighted only by a young moon now setting.

If Sal's words had been friendly, his face—so like Sombra's and all but as beautiful—held no more than its usual look of dumb and secret resistance. Maclear was a little chilled. Time after time he had stretched out hands of affection toward that alien,

reserved spirit, which had, time after time, eluded him; so that he had been left holding nothing, as though he had grasped at sand.

Time after time the lad's likeness to Sombra had pulled at his heart and he had tried again.

Sal, seeing him now, said nothing but "Come." He turned down the passage, and Maclear followed him. They kept close to the wall with its row of closed and rotting doors, for the flooring in the center was unsafe; and Maclear felt that wall and doors were alike coated with a scum of sand.

Outside, Sal gave him his fish-spear—which was no more than a large steel fork bound to a stick—and a bundle of frayed willow roots tied together and dipped in oil or tar to form a torch. They went down to the beach together. By the ledge of rock, crested with sand, which here thrust out from shore as straight as a groin, Sal stopped. Maclear took off his shoes while Sal lighted the smoky torches.

In the low moonlight Tallis Island lay like stilled waves of shadow and silver. Not a leaf moved. Peewits cried sadly from the inner marshes. The lake was a rippleless cloth of silver, running for miles, whispering at the rim. Under the lee of the ledge, where the herring had shoaled, it flashed perpetually, a brighter flickering silver of the sides of leaping fish. Maclear and Sal, each carrying a spear and a torch, waded out along the narrow ledge.

Maclear was held there, less by the sport—if such it could be called—than by the beauty of the night and the desire to establish some sort of comradeship with Sal. By and by he gave up spearing on his own account and watched Sal.

The boy stood almost motionless in the shallows, torch lowered to the water and sending along its bright surface a trail of smoke and a gleam of red flame, in which the sides of the turning fish shone red also. His attitude, as he waited with his primitive spear poised, seemed to Maclear singularly and wildly graceful; and he saw that the motion of the spear, when it fell, was too swift to follow with the eye, and that each time it rose, another herring was added to the twitching heap in the basket Sal had brought with him. Maclear was fascinated a little by the spitting redness of the flame, the accurate descent of the spear. He said, when the basket was full and the boy rejoined him on the sand, "You 've speared about three times as many as I have."

The dark eyes—so like, so unlike, Sombra's—rested on him indifferently. Sal only asked, "Will we go back now?"

"The night 's too fine to leave. Shall we have a swim?"

"All right."

"I 'll race you to that rock out there."

Sal did not answer. Where the ledge joined the beach he thrust the two torches into the sand. They sent up a blur of reddened smoke upon the pearly night.

Beyond the torches, out on the ledge, Sal and Maclear slipped off their clothes. Maclear saw on the boy's body old bruises; he knew some of them had been taken on that night when he first went to Morning House, and Sal had set himself in the way of Mait Ransome's groping hands. He was moved. For a moment he reached after an inner meaning, in the apparent fact, that escaped him. Then they dived together. And he forgot everything in the foreseen delight of the cool water racing along his limbs.

He felt without words a brief, exquisite sense of his own union with nature, and again with life. He was in communication with the night and the stars. Love was awaking in him those delicate perceptions which hardly belong to the realm of the flesh. His strength was at full head in him. He laughed; he could have sung aloud with pleasure in his own vigor. He felt himself flashing effortless through that silver calm. He paused an instant and glanced back for Salvator.

He had been sure the boy would be behind him. But the black head and the bruised olive shoulder flashing like glass in the moon were beside him.

A queer sense of danger came to Maclear. He felt he must outstrip Sal in the race to the rock. He swam as he never had swum before. But the black head was always at his side. And at the last the boy dived beneath Maclear, came up on his other side, and touched the rock before him.

The action was almost insolent. Maclear touched the rock too, turned, and swam back. He could not keep up with Sal. When he came to the ledge the boy was standing on it, glittering in the moonlight, and stooping to give Maclear a hand out.

Maclear said, pulling on his trousers: "I thought I could swim. But I wonder how many yards you could give me in a quarter-mile!"

Again the obscure dark eyes rested on him indifferently. Sal answered, "It 's all I k'n do,—swim."

"You do that well."

"It 's not much. There 's other things I 'd like to be able to do. But I 've never had a chance at learnin' 'em." Suddenly he turned on Maclear, with a movement so quick it was almost threatening. He asked, "K'n you wrestle?"

"Yes."

"And box?"

"I used to box a great deal at one time."

There was an odd silence. Then Salvator drew a sharp breath. His lean, tanned chest lifted as

though he sobbed. The blood ran to his dark cheeks, his eyes glowed, softly eager. He seemed in that instant to come alive, as though before he had been dead.

Maclear watched. The likeness to Sombra almost hurt him. He asked, smiling at this young eagerness, "Would you like me to show you how?"

"You—you—would you show me?"

Maclear laughed aloud. "Now, if you like. The moon gives us light enough, and the sand makes soft falling."

The coat he had taken up to put on, he laid back on the rocks. Sal's dark eyes burned on him. There was no sound but the cry of the peewits. He nodded, and the boy advanced, his hands awkwardly raised.

"Mr. Maclear!"

"Well?"

"Let 's have it this way,"—the intent, secret gaze never left Maclear's face—"You see them torches?"

Behind them, at the end of the ledge, the two torches yet flared smokily, like spots of anger on the silver purity of the night.

"Yes."

"Let 's have it like this: You try to pass them torches; I 'll try to stop you."

"All right."

They began. For a time there was no sound but

the light motion of their feet in the sand, Maclear's curt directions, and the wail of the unseen birds.

Then Maclear said, "You must n't let me hit you so much."

Sal had fallen back. He listened with his old guarded look. He said, "I was waitin'."

"What for?"

"My chance of gettin' in a real blow. I 'm used to bein' hit."

"Well, you wait too long. Come."

Sal advanced again. He asked, "Are you any nearer them torches?"

After a moment Maclear said: "No. I am not."

Sal did not speak. They began again.

The boy attempted no defense, save that he clumsily shielded his head. He simply barred Maclear's way with his body, and suffered the blows mutely. Maclear wearied of this opposing inertia, this soft, dumb resistance. It was like fighting the sand. Something—the hour; the silence; the boy's strange apathy, which seemed yet to conceal something formidable—touched his nerves. He dropped his guard a moment, without thought; saw, simultaneously, the dull face flame to sudden white life; then came the blow.

It was so savage, so fierce, that it might have been fatal had it come from a man quite full-grown. It seemed that only the ferocity of a devil could have

driven it across a space of ten inches so hard to the point of Maclear's chin. As it was, his knees gave and he went down. He was up again almost instantly, sick and numbed, his good-will outraged. For neither recklessness nor ignorance could excuse the quality of that blow.

He would not trust himself to speak. He picked up his coat and turned toward the beach where the stumps of the torches smoked. He lifted his hand to send Sal out of the way,—into the water, for all he cared, for a cooling. Though all the time he knew that the heat was his own, that Sal was cold and watchful; and the knowledge added to his bewilderment. He took three steps; and Sal slipped under his raised arm and closed.

They swayed a moment and went down together.

Whatever incomprehensible purpose lay behind all this,—and Maclear was assured of a purpose,—he did not want to hurt this lad, so piercingly like Sombra. But his temper was rising. He was fighting it more than he was fighting Sal.

They strained on the ledge, half in the water, in dead silence. The attack had been so unexpected that Maclear was underneath. He saw Sal's face above him, eager, yet infinitely removed; absorbed in some secret preoccupation. Then he put out his strength, turned, and rose, trying to break free. But Sal rose with him, clinging stubbornly. Again Mac-

lear loosened that hold. But it closed on him elsewhere, ineffectual yet inescapable. He broke away at last, and, as the boy staggered, slipped forward a foot and tripped him. Sal caught at Maclear's arms and pulled him down, too. They twisted again in the sand, close-locked. Maclear felt a faint shock of uneasiness, almost of fear. One would have thought they were fighting for life, the boy was so persistent, so insensible, so relentless. His mind went again to the sand,—to the clinging, choking, yielding, unyielding sand.

He said through his teeth: "I warn you. When my chance comes, I shall hit you without mercy!"

There was no reply. The tense struggle did not relax. Sal's look was still informed with purpose; still, in some way not to be explained, remote. Maclear knew he must end it. With an effort he broke free, sprang back, and, as the boy plunged blindly forward to clinch again, he struck without mercy, as he had promised.

Sal tossed his arms, spun half round, and dropped on the sand.

Maclear stood panting. He had been fighting harder than he would have thought possible; and the torches were still smoldering behind him between the ledge and the beach. He looked at the long sprawl of the young body in the moonlight. The upturned face was all Sombra's. Maclear was

afraid; his heart contracted. He carried Sal past the torches, laid him on the beach, brought water and bathed his face; presently the boy's eyes opened, and he looked quietly at Maclear.

"I 'm sorry I hurt you, lad," said Maclear, his anger all gone out of him, "but you made me."

He need not have justified himself. For Sal's answer was a smile, so suddenly, vividly tender that Maclear was dumb. He dreamed of some day seeing Sombra smile at him with some such fond look—only different, different. Sal said: "It 's all right. I 'm used to bein' hit. And you done that *fine*."

After a moment Maclear helped him to his feet. He winced and whitened, but refused more help. He said it was only his shoulder, where he had hit on it when he fell. His one anxiety seemed to be that Maclear should not be troubled. His own face, with its strange, brooding look of absorption, was yet serene. "I won't be able to row the boat for a week, and Sombra 'll have to take the next lot of toy boats to town. But it was worth it."

"Why did you make me do it, Sal?"

"I—wanted to see—what I could do—against a grown man."

"Well, you know now."

"Yes, I know now."

"You young fool," said Maclear, roughly, "I might have killed you!"

With his faint secret smile, Sal pulled the stumps of the torches from the sand, and cast them into the lake. They drew a thread of sparks through the air, hissed, and were extinguished.

Maclear remembered that he had not passed them.

In the calm darkening night, lit with large stars, they went back together to Morning House. Maclear walked with his arm about Salvator, and he had never felt the boy so distant. The meaning of it all had eluded him; once more he had grasped at sand. He had been passive throughout, as when he crouched on the beach in the storm, blown over by the wind and the sand. Those forces which are the passions of nature had not used and mastered him more completely than had this beaten boy.

He felt that he had been built like a stone into some wall of defense raised by an obscure and tremendous fear.

VII

Back among the sand-hills, by the winding channel of a lagoon, Sombra had a little garden.

By continually freeing it of sand, by much carrying of marsh soil which the dry winds changed to sand again, by much watering, she had coaxed a few ferns to root here; a few stonecrops, fiery nasturtiums, blue lobelias turning wild like their fellows

of the marsh. It was the sand itself that brought her the chief profusion of her garden, after all: huge frail convolvuli, white and pink; small grayish-white asters; silver-leaf strung with golden blooms.

She liked best a small Scotch brier-rose which Sal had brought her from the town; its flowers were golden and honey-sweet. Since Maclear had told her she was like a golden rose growing in the sand she had spent long minutes staring at this bush, wondering why she was like it, and feeling the consciousness of herself slowly flowering in her.

Here, on the day after the herring-run, Sal found her.

She sat with her head bent, her hands clasping her knees, looking into the colorless thin water spreading at her feet, which mirrored her and her garden. Her hair was loose, almost colorless too in the great light, for each strand was iridescent as a spider's web. She was crowned with a wreath of pink convolvulus, already drooping in the heat. Sal could not see her face in the shadow of her hair, but he thought she had been crying. He stood watching her a moment, unheard. Then he asked, "Sombra, why 've you got your best waist on?"

She wore an ugly blouse of pink flannel trimmed with coarse crocheted lace, and a crocheted lace collar fastened with a cheap brooch. She lifted her

head slowly. The glory of her hair flowed and hid the thing. She looked at Sal gravely. At last she asked, "Sal, am I beautiful?"

Her brother considered her; then he glanced at his own reflection in the lagoon,—rough black head, rough clothes, one arm in a sling of blue dusters. He answered simply, "There ain't no doubt, Sombra, that we 're terr'ble good-lookin.' "

"How do you *know?*"

"I 've been to town plenty of times with Mait. The girls there ain't one of them as good-lookin' as you."

She gloomed at him with her great eyes. After a moment, looking away, she asked slowly: "Sal, would you think I was good-lookin' enough to make any one like me—just for that?"

"I—guess so, Sombra." Sal stood very still.

"How d' you *know?*"

He smiled, his faint, obscure smile. "I don't know, of course. But last time I was waitin' for Mait by the wharves, a girl come up to me where I was standin' under the lamp. She was a pretty girl. I guess she was—a good girl. I 'd never seen her before. I 'll never see her again. She come up and said, 'I 've been follerin' you all the evenin' till I 'd courage to ask you for somethin'.' 'What 's that?' I said. 'This,' said she, and pulled my head down

with her two hands; and I kissed her. Then she went away. I guess you could have all of that sort you wanted, Sombra."

"Ain't it all one sort?"

Sal waited, faintly smiling, looking into the clear water. At last he asked, "Why do you want to know if you 're pretty, Sombra?"

"Why? Because it 's all I have!"

She rose suddenly, facing him. Her usual strong serenity was quite broken in her. Her hands clung together, and worked passionately. Then she swept her arms wide, and stood so, facing him. She said, "Look at me!

"Look at me! Look at my clo'es!" She tore at the pink flannel covering her heart. "Look at this! I used to think it was nice. Now I know it 's poor and ugly and common—like us. Look at my hands!" She held them toward him. "They 're all spoiled with work, stained with potato-peelin', scarred where the sand 's got into a cut, or where the frost hurt them, hangin' out washin' in the winter. Listen to me talk. I don't use the right words, I say them wrong; I don't have time to read or study. What I want to know 's this: Am I—beautiful enough so as all the rest—won't matter?"

"Since when have you got to be ashamed of yourself, Sombra, and of me?"

In a moment the passion died out of her. Very

softly and simply she went to her brother, and hid her face on his shoulder. She said, after a little time, "You know."

"I guess I do."

"We 've nothin', Sal, we are nothin', but just ourselves."

"Just ourselves."

"And he—even in the clo'es he got in the town here when most of his things was washed away—even in them, he 's—different."

"Is he?" The boy was still smiling faintly, as he gazed across her bent head at the dunes.

"It 's nothin' he says or does. He 's kind, *kind.* It 's somethin' in me. Sal, a little while ago I 'd have been terrible mad at him for hurtin' you last night."

"I told you it was my fault."

"Yes, but it would n't have made no difference, then. Now"—her voice sank to a breath he could scarcely hear—"it don't seem he could do anything wrong in my eyes."

Sal waited, something kindling behind his dark reserve. At last he moved. It was to thrust the girl away. He said, "Is it like that with you!"

She shrank a little. Sal had never turned his fierce look on her before. He faced her like an adversary. His words came like stones.

"You want to know if you 're beautiful enough?

You got to go with Mait to town to-morrow. Walk down Center Street in the evenin'. Any man's looks 'll tell you what you wanter know."

"Sal—"

"Well? You wanter be told how beautiful you are?" He caught her wrist savagely. "You 're beautiful enough to make *him* sell his soul for you in a little while—if you 'd like it that way—Sombra—?"

There seemed a sort of fire between them as they stood there, so like, so passionate, mutely questioning each other. Then the red flamed in the girl's face. Her eyes darkened. She jerked herself free. Once or twice she tried to speak before the words came:

"I won't have it that way!"

She tore the wreath from her head, the lace collar from her neck, and threw them away together. Her hair she swept into a rope, twisted it, strained it back from her face, and pinned it close. Her hands trembled. She paused. Sal said softly, "You 're beautiful yet, Sombra."

"Then I 'll be beautiful no more!"

There was a broken clam-shell in the sand at their feet, sharp as a knife. She caught the shell in her hand, and gashed her own face with it,—a deep grotesque scratch, broadening into crimson.

After a moment Sal gently took the shell away

from her and threw it into the lagoon. She did not resist him. She was very still.

He asked quietly, "Are you goin' to town like that?"

"I 'm goin' to town like this. I 'm goin' to let every one see me like this. What does that matter? I 'm going to let *him* see me like this, without even the one thing I have!"

Sal, smiling faintly, stood out of her way. She moved past him royally, the blood spreading unstanched on her pale face.

She was beautiful then, with some fire and force of the spirit, as she had not been before.

When she was gone, Sal sat in the sand, motionless, his head on his knees. He stayed a long time.

VIII

Maclear was watching a cloud.

When first it appeared above the heat haze on the horizon, he had thought it a sail.

With a silence that appeared unnatural, this cloud had risen and towered throughout the morning, which had been one of great warmth and stillness. The sand burned. Over the dunes the air quivered. The mirage lifted the base of the cloud above the lake in a perfectly level foundation, upon which va-

pors slowly piled and builded themselves pyramidally, with an inner revolving motion; until the vast cone filled the dull sky to the zenith, and gathered all the light to itself, and was reflected like a mountain peak of pale rose and gold in the lake below. Besides the inner revolution, the whole mass had a motion of advance. Maclear thought he had never seen so lovely a thing.

It had not been visible when, a few hours earlier, he had helped Sombra launch the heavy old boat in which she was going with Mait to the town on the mainland. He had carried down a dozen little toy vessels for her, and helped her stow them away, with such other odds and ends as they were taking. She had scarcely spoken to him. For him her eyes were veiled; he saw them heavy as though with weeping, and wondered at that, and at the scar. Her face was pale, weary and spiritless; in the gray glare it seemed to have little beauty, that any one should desire it.

In this she had her will.

In nothing else. Maclear watched the old boat passing down the lagoon to the open lake; saw Sombra ship her oars and Mait rise and set the patched sail as if he could see. A faint hot wind filled the canvas; the boat drifted toward the haze, was presently lost there, that pale face, crossed with the red scar, the last thing that glimmered back upon Mac-

lear. And Sombra had never seemed to him so unendurably dear.

He had added an errand of his own to those that normally occupied her when she went to town.

He had the fancy to take her sailing in the evenings, when the shore-larks twittered along the lagoons, and there would be dew on the canvas, and great stars waiting for them out on the open lake. He wanted to see her face under the stars. And on the single occasion when he had gone to the town himself, he had ordered a skiff at the boat-building yard beside the flour-mills. This skiff would now be finished. And he had asked Sombra to bring it back with her; it would tow easily behind the larger boat.

He had spent most of the morning building a rough penthouse shelter for the skiff, among the fringed gentians which colored the marsh meadows for acres with their dark, pellucid sapphire along the lagoon. The marshes exhaled a strong sour-sweet smell. On the beach of the lagoon a migrating column of great red butterflies had paused to rest; they remained there without motion, their wings erect and shut; it was as though the sand were covered with the numberless tiny tents of an army.

In the afternoon Maclear watched the cloud.

Later he saw Sal standing on a high dune, also watching it.

The island remained singularly voiceless, empty,

without stir of any life, throughout the day. Maclear thought it was because Sombra was away. He began to wonder when she would return.

Toward evening, and the cloud usurping the whole heaven, he saw Salvator come from the dunes, carrying a load of driftwood on his unhurt arm. He laid this on the lake beach, and went back heavily, it seemed for more wood. Maclear went toward him.

As the cloud had drawn all light to itself, so now it seemed to have absorbed the air. When Maclear reached the pile of driftwood, he drew his breath quickly, and his clothing clung to his damp body.

Sal had just laid the fourth load on the heap, and now stood beside it. His face was raised to the cloud, and the reflected light made it luminous, still, unearthly. Then he lifted his right hand, and struck, passionately and in silence, at his bruised shoulder.

"What is it?" asked Maclear, quickly.

"I should n't have let her go alone with Mait. But I thought the weather would keep fair."

"Is there a storm coming?"

Sal did not answer. He still struck, softly, ceaselessly, at his own injury, which had kept him on the island and sent Sombra to the town in his place. After a minute the action became intolerable to Maclear. He laid his own hand on the boy's, and stilled it; he asked, "Is it the storm you are afraid of?"

"You know how Mait is in a storm."

Yes. Maclear knew. A vision flashed before him, —a vision of Sombra crouching in the stern of the boat, while the old man moved down upon her, with outstretched groping hand and murder in his face, as he had moved down upon Maclear that night in the quiet kitchen. The heat and silence muffled speech like wool laid on the lips. In a minute he said, "They will see the storm coming, and wait."

"Mait will not see it—"

As though words were futile, Sal's voice trailed to silence. In the sand beside him, Maclear stood like a man half-stunned. Fear had come so suddenly.

The great glowing cloud curled slowly, a crest running for miles, the ethereal foam of a wave.

Maclear asked, "Why are you gathering wood?"

"It 'll be dark when they get back. There 's no light. Maybe they will need help to make a landing."

"The storm may not break."

Maclear knew the deadly suddenness of the lakes, but he could not believe that any danger could come from the cloud, now threading here and there into thin wisps which seemed the only real clouds, blowing from the height of a bright, uplifted hill.

Sal did not reply. He went slowly away to fetch more wood.

After a while Maclear stirred and sighed. He

told himself there was nothing to fear—yet. He, too, dragged himself away to look for wood. There was nothing else to do. There was not another boat on the island.

He dragged at a bleached log, long buried in drift sand. He dug it free with his hands. The sand cut his fingers like glass; they were bleeding when he cleared the log and found it too sodden to burn. Looking at his bleeding fingers, he told himself again that he was afraid of a shadow.

Salvator passed him, walking heavily in the sand, carrying a load of blanched willow roots. Maclear called to him: "This stuff is all too wet."

"There 's none better."

"There 's all Morning House."

They turned together and ran to the house, which fronted them like the skull of a past life, with multiple blank eyeholes. It looked withered and dried in the glare, as though at any moment it might of itself break into flame.

As men move in dreams, so they seemed to move, with enormous effort. As they would have done in a dream, they laid hold of the posts of the veranda and wrenched them away in their hands. Showers of slats and shingles tilted almost silently into the sand, leaving the gaunt corner of some room naked to the light. They toiled on in the heat and oppression, tearing away and carrying to the beach boards,

laths, the sun-rotted sashes of glassless windows, the railings of untrodden stairs. There was something monstrous, out of nature, in the manner in which Morning House yielded itself to destruction; it appeared to destroy itself.

The pile on the beach rose high as the day darkened, and the cloud turned leaden, and the lake took on a milky hue. The work and the dream-like disgust of it—in that they seemed to be feeding their pyre with something that had once lived and was now dead—tired their minds as well as their bodies.

Maclear told himself that there was nothing to fear. He knew that if necessary they could fire Morning House itself, and he thought how the flame would spread and feed on it, and run to the willow thickets and the poplars, till all the island was a consuming torch to light Sombra home.

They rested a little. The storm had not broken. Once or twice they were aware of distant thunder, more as a tremor of the atmosphere than as a sound. Sal said, "I am goin' to light the fire soon."

That was the first time either had spoken for an hour.

They waited a little longer. Then Sal lighted the pile.

The kindling flame fed eagerly on the shavings, the dried grass, the lesser twigs; leapt immediately, and seized on those sun-rotted boards. As if the

outer fire released some terrible energy within itself, the stuff of Morning House sprang into flame, roared, and was consumed in a breath. And as if fire answered to fire, from the depth of the cloud a cloth of flame seemed suddenly lowered and caught back. In the darkness after the lightning their fire lighted the dunes, the lake, the cloud itself. They saw they must bring more fuel.

They went to and fro under the cloud, working in a narrowing world that seemed all on fire.

They rested again, without the intolerable circle of heat. There was another flash of lightning. Maclear asked, "Do you see anything of the boat yet?"

Sal was standing out on the ledge, to his knees in the glassy water. He answered: "No. But here 's the first wind."

A white line, like a line of mist, was running shoreward under the cloud. Maclear saw this first gust, compact in itself as a thrown stone, strike the boy before he himself felt it. Then he was blinded a moment with wind and spray. The gust passed, moaning, inland. In the following silence he heard it break on Morning House like a wave.

Their fire, which had been beaten down and blown into flying rags of flame, sprang erect.

Another blaze of pallid lightning showed them the convolutions of the cloud rigid as iron above, trail-

ing milky skirts of vapor. From this vapor another white line broke glimmering and rushed toward them. Maclear was out on the ledge now with Sal. The second gust struck them together; foam broke suddenly to their waists. Sal clung to Maclear. His voice came like the crying of a gull:

"I think I saw the boat."

Both waited for the next flash. In it they saw something small and dark far out on the lake, flying on the face of the rushing vapor like a bird. A wave, cold as ice, crashed on the island, broke on Sal to the breast; Maclear caught him, and drew him back to the beach. The boy said, "That was the boat."

"What will it be best to do?"

"There 's nothing much we can do. They 're racin' the storm. Me, I think the storm and the boat will about strike on the island together. They 'll beach the boat. No time for anything else. When she strikes, run in and haul her up."

Maclear nodded, his eyes straining to find and hold that faint flying speck where Sombra was coming to him.

In that moment his doubts and his hesitations passed. This was his appointed time, his day of salvation.

He knew that this untaught girl, blown toward him on the face of the storm, was alike his only weapon

and his only refuge; that only in the shelter of her unquestioning love would he be able to live; that only if armed at all points with her trust would he be strong to meet the betraying thing. She was his rock; lacking her, his life would go down in sand.

If the knowledge, come to him thus clearly and immediately, was in itself defeat, he did not see it so. It was at least the measure of his passion, of its power, of its necessity,—that passion rooted in need; to him it seemed an exquisite fulfilment.

He was lifted in a kind of exaltation. He could see the boat plainly now, flying down upon the island. Thunder, the noise of the waves, in his mood seemed only the great music, as of gates lifted up and the fountains of the deep, that companied his love, coming home.

The boat came nearer. Behind it everything was lost in a terrible misty smother, a dissolution of air and water, one with the other. They stood ready to seize the boat when she struck the beach. Maclear had never felt so calm; never so strong.

Nearer she staggered under a terrible press of sail; nearer. Mait was at the tiller. Maclear saw Sombra crouched forward. He smiled. As though he could see, Mait was holding the boat straight on the line of their fire; she fled toward them on a crimson path; steep waves began to overtake her; those two waiting on the beach were blown now, stung with

spray, blinded with level rain. Maclear was no longer afraid. She was there.

"Now!" cried Salvator in his ear.

They leapt into the foam together.

The boat came down upon them. For a moment she was flung upward, tossed to heaven; then she rushed toward them on a sliding hillock of foam, hung, hesitated, took the sand, reeled on again. She struck, heeling far over. They thought she would go to pieces under their eyes. The blind man had not shortened sail, and mast and sail seemed to melt away into the wind; for at that moment the weight of the storm struck also. There was no other sound to be heard. Maclear and Salvator ran in and seized the thwarts, heaving and straining against the grip of the sand.

They had her up in the thinner surf after a sharp fight. Thinking only of Sombra, Maclear leapt into the boat and stooped over that crouching shape in the bows.

Coats, canvas, tarpaulins,—these things were in his hands, and he cast them away. They fell to a horrible vacancy. There was no one there.

There was no one in the boat but Mait.

Maclear searched like a madman. Sal was with him. Sal lifted a broken rope from the stern and showed him the end, trailing in the water. Maclear could not hear what those white lips said to him for

the drive of the rain and the spray. But he was instantly still, seeing the whole thing.

Sombra must have been in the skiff towing astern, that her weight might prevent the light boat overriding the heavy one. Mait could sail a boat by the feel of wind and tiller and the sound of the waves. But why had he not taken her aboard? When had he lost her? When had the rope parted? Mait was slowly climbing the beach, and Maclear, numb and motionless himself, saw the boy run to the old man, and heard those wild questions with his soul, not his bodily sense. He saw Sal clinging to Mait, crying to him with a dreadful beseeching. But Mait struck him out of the way and strode on, silent. Sal lay where he had fallen in the surf and the running shingle, beating at the stones with his hands.

So much Maclear saw. A horror was on him. He did not go to Salvator. He leapt from the waterlogged boat and ran from that place, stumbling. Again, his foothold in life was swept from him, he was blown like a grain of sand in the senseless ruin of events. Once more he was shelterless. He had lost her.

Behind him, the fire he and Salvator had built—the fire to guide her home—sank and was quenched by the spray.

IX

The storm had long been past.

For hours the island had lain under a sky cleared of all but a few clouds of a dove-like whiteness, silent save for the solemn thunder of the waves along all its beaches; the wet sands shimmered in the moonlight like pearl.

For hours Maclear had paced these beaches, looking for what any wave might leave there.

He remembered nothing of those hours.

He was drenched and very cold, his clothing torn, his body bruised. He did not know how he had come to be so. He was conscious neither of his exhaustion nor of his despair. He had simply ceased to feel. He was aware of nothing, except the resolve that he would not survive Sombra.

With this last Judas-kiss of life, when she had been taken from him at the moment he realized his supreme need of her, no compromise was possible.

He thought of nothing but this. When Salvator found him in the night, and spoke to him, brokenly and with tears, and walked beside him in his endless pacing of the sands, he hardly knew it.

Now the night was drawing toward dawn. Sal had left him. He was alone.

He stood on a low promontory, a spur of sand thrust out into the melancholy thunder of the surf.

He was waiting; waiting only to find her, and then to follow her where she had gone.

Even before the stars paled the lake told him of the approach of dawn; it grew a little luminous, as though light were born in it, far down beneath the surface. By imperceptible gradations the deep water was colored with blue, the shallows with green. The moon had set long ago.

Maclear waited for the last dawn he would ever see.

Light came suddenly at last, and long before the sun. As though veils had been torn away, he stood on the low sandy promontory and gazed eastward across the tumbling ridges of blue and white to where, beyond the shallows, something dark rolled in the trough of the wave.

In a minute he saw that it was a small boat, nearly awash.

Maclear began to tremble. He went down the slope of sand to the beach. From here he could not see the boat for a little while. Then it lifted on a higher wave. Water-logged, it drifted very slowly shoreward,—lost repeatedly in the shadowy hollows, visible again against the running foam,—toward the spot where they had built the fire.

Maclear waded toward it through the surf, which was still strong. So slowly the waves shouldered the skiff to land that presently he was swimming heavily.

He had no doubt at all that this was the skiff he had asked Sombra to bring back for him, nor that he should find her in it. Nor had he any hope at all that he should find her living.

He swam out in the colorless twilight. An unearthly purity rested on everything. The last stars were withdrawn.

When he reached the boat he was too weak even to raise himself and look into it, low as it lay in the water. He could only float with it to shore, shouldered in by the waves. Even when it had taken the sand, he could do no more for a while than rest beside it, holding to it with his hands.

Then he drew himself erect, and looked.

She lay as he had known she would lie, with her head on a seat, and her black hair floating in the water which more than half filled the pretty little varnished boat. Her face, pale as pearl, seemed purely asleep; across it the cut showed darkly. Her hands stirred in the water as the skiff shifted on its keel under Maclear's hands.

He stooped, took her in his arms. Her head fell slackly on his shoulder, the water rained from her hair, her clinging clothes. He carried her away from the boat and laid her gently on the beach. Spent as he was, somehow he did not feel that weight. He knelt beside her, with no thought, looking at her face.

Greatly as she would have given to him in everything, she could give nothing now, not even a look. He would have taken all she had to give. Now, as she could not give, he would not take even so much as a touch of her beloved cold lips.

He took his wet coat and rolled it clumsily into a pillow to keep her head from the sand. He straightened her limbs, her dress; gathered her cold wet hair neatly on each side of her face. He remembered how warm it had been that day he kissed it in the sun. He might have spoken then, when she was looking at him with her soft, surrendered eyes; when she was alive, and near. Now she was gone so far she would never hear, though he cried to her all day, —like this,—"I love you, Sombra! I love you!"

He caught her in his arms, crushed her sweet unresponsive face to his heart, told her again and again. Too late.

He rose at last, still holding her, staring out to the deep water, where light was coming to birth. He took a step toward the lake, carrying her. A dark pressure and obscurity was on his mind. He saw the world like a dream on the edge of reality, receding. With the foam about his feet, he went slowly toward the deep water, carrying her.

Then he stopped, aware for the first time of hands that clung to him, of a haggard face turned to his own, of beseeching words.

He asked gently, "What is it, Sal?"

"I been tryin' to make you listen these five minutes. Oh, put her down! give her to me! She ain't drowned. It 's the cold and the wet. She ain't dead!"

Maclear listened, shook his head; the words seemed to have no meaning. He went a little deeper into the surf with his burden.

"Mr. Maclear! Alan, for God's sake, listen! You love her. So do I. Give her to me. I won't hurt her. I tell you she 's alive!"

"What do you say?"

"Alan, I tell you she's alive!"

Maclear began to tremble again. Something was here greater than he could endure,—hope. He allowed Sal to take Sombra from him and lay her again on the beach. He stammered: "Take her. But give her back to me."

"By God, I will!"

"What are you going to do with her, Sal?"

The boy turned on him a face of white life: "The stove 's out long ago at home. There 's just one thing on the island with warmth in it,—the sand where we had our fire. I 'm goin' to warm her in the sand." He laid hold of the sleeves of Sombra's clinging blouse, and rent them from shoulder to wrist. He said to Maclear: "Go and clear the embers away. You can't help me in this."

Maclear went unsteadily to the circle of blackened wood coals on the beach. He cleared them aside with his hands. Here and there a smoldering core of heat was left to scorch him, but he did not feel it. The sand beneath was still hot.

He called to Sal, "What else shall I do?"

"Dig a hole in the sand. Not too deep. As though you was diggin' a grave."

Maclear stooped and dug desperately, making a long, shallow depression in the sand, like the beginning of a grave.

"You got that done, Alan?"

"Yes," said Maclear, and stood away, looking out toward the growing day.

He did not look when the boy passed him, carrying, sheltered in his coat, that shape no whiter than his own face. He did not turn when Sal laid Sombra in the trench and heaped the sand above her, till she was buried from throat to feet in the warm dust. He waited, seeing only the dawn.

He did not know if the dawn brought death or life.

A supreme stillness held all life in suspension. It hovered between two worlds, as the light hovered there on the horizon, half minded to take wing. Along all the marshes of the island not a leaf was moved; yet glittering with rain and cold spray, the small flowers were lifeless and still as jewels; in Sombra's garden, her yellow rose held only a few

chill petals, close-sleeked like the wings of the moths that clung to it.

All being was like a great clean-swept shell, in which nothing had life but the hollow and solemn sound of the waves.

The sun had not yet risen. But far overhead Maclear saw a single fleck of highest cloud glow suddenly like a star. And from the heart of that brightness, drawn along the east behind the hard sapphired ridges of the waves, one white bird was flying to the shore.

As he waited, the sky, the waste of water, the solitary bird returning between them, became a thing mingled and woven forever with his existence.

Sal came quietly to his side. The boy's face was wet with tears. He put his arm about Maclear's neck. He said gently, "Alan, come to her."

Maclear could not stir for a moment; he had traveled too far in that stillness. He saw the white bird wheel above the surf and descend to it surely, and rest.

"Come and speak to her, Alan."

"Is she—?"

"She 's safe. She 's alive."

After a moment Maclear turned, drew Sal toward him, lightly brushed the black head with his lips. His own face was wet. He did not remember that he had wept. He said: "Sal, what I have to say to

Sombra I can't say even before you, who have brought her back to me. Will you leave her alone with me a very little while?"

"Yes. I must go to the house and kindle the stove and bring a blanket or somethin'. I won't be long. I 'll come back for you." But he lingered a minute, looking at Maclear wistfully.

"She 's yours, Sal. Trust me to keep her for you,—a little while."

"I guess she 's not mine any more," said Sal, softly.

He went away. Maclear turned and sank on his knees beside Sombra. He did not speak at first. He wanted nothing but to look at her face and be assured of the life there.

She looked at him also in that silence, with the searching, questioning expression of one who has been far from life for a little while, and finds some new quality in the things of life on her return. At last, seeing how he had suffered for her, she stirred a little under her sandy covering, and stretched to him her hand, glittering with the stuff that had saved her.

He took it in his, raised it to his lips. He could only say, "My dear love."

She drew him weakly toward her, saying, "Kiss me, Alan."

There was no joy in her voice, but a solemn and meek acceptance. She seemed to say, Be it unto

me according to thy word. As his lips touched hers, she whispered: "I 'm glad—glad—that I 'm to see you again. There, in the boat, I thought of you."

Maclear remembered how nearly that rich voice with its homely speech had been lost forever in silence. He said, "I love you, Sombra."

"I love you, Alan. I 've loved you all the time. It seems there never was a time before I loved you. But it ain't right I should. I 'm not fit for you."

"Sombra—your eyes are full of tears. Let me wipe them for you."

She smiled at him. He wiped her eyes, and she laughed a small, faint laugh at her own helplessness. She said: "Will you lift my head a little? The sand 's heavy, though it 's lovely and warm. It was so cold in the boat."

Not trusting himself to speak, he raised her head on his hand, let it lie there. The trembling of that hand communicated some shadowy trouble to her returning life. She whispered to him: "It 's good —to have you near. But if I done right, I would send you away from me—never see you no more."

He looked at her sternly. The passion of his need rose in him,—hard, clear as a flame. The receding waves had left on the beach a clam-shell, brimmed with water, and large enough to hold all night the images of a few stars. Now the stars were gone. As he looked he saw the water rosed and transfused

into wine, the miracle of the full dawn made manifest in that narrow cup.

He lifted the blue oval to her lips and said, "Drink."

She sipped from it, her large grave eyes on his,—wondering. When she had drunk, he too drank of that cold, pure water. Words were in his mind: "Water of life, clear as crystal." They two should drink of the water of life in one sacrament.

He said to her, faintly smiling: "It 's a charm. Nothing can part us now."

The sky, the sand, the foam, the shell in his hand, burned ineffably into thin gold. The sun had risen.

Sombra was silent. Behind them, in the poplar thickets, a shore-lark began his silvery roving song.

II

THE MIST

I

MACLEAR stood on the long wharf beyond the flour-mills which were the small town's reason for being. A steamer was coming in from one of the lake ports lower down; as he was idle, he waited to see her arrive. A small crowd of people were waiting, too, perhaps with better reason. Many of these people forgot the nearing ship a moment in watching Maclear.

It would have been difficult to say why he interested them. Perhaps it was the look in his face, the singular hard radiance that filled it, as though the mechanism of defiance or resolution were here used to express happiness. He was unconscious of their interest.

Night came earlier now. Soon after the steamer appeared on the horizon, bearing straight down on the wharf, the lake had taken that peculiar and steel-like blue which seems the color of solitude itself, and reveals the Northern cold lying in wait perpetually behind the fierce brief summer. One or two lights shone whitely in the town. Round the tall brick

chimney of the mills thousands of swallows circled in ceaseless motion, as they used to circle the forest trees that stood here. Their indifferent, joyous flight seemed to say: "Wait, and in a little while we shall again fly about trees, though many of us shall never outlive the year."

As the steamer approached the wharf an old Indian woman came in the still blue dusk, carrying a basket of red cloth pincushions worked with red and blue beads, beaded moccasins, and little birch-bark canoes for sale. She spread her wares on the edge of the wharf where the passengers must go by, and squatted behind them silently. Maclear went and rummaged in the basket, conscious that at the moment the steamer had floated the last few yards of her journey, reached the wharf, and been moored. In the great lake silence he heard the creak of the hawsers, the voices, the thuds of freight thrown out on the planking, clear but small, as if a distance intervened. Then people began to pass him, going on board, going up to the town.

He did not turn to glance at them, for at the bottom of the old woman's basket he had come upon a pair of moccasins worked with dyed porcupine quills and lined with rabbit fur. He bought them. Seeing his pleasure, the old creature doubled their price. He paid it without question. He would have paid

much more for the delight of putting the pretty things on Sombra's small browned feet.

He had not heard that some one, among the many who passed him, had paused, hesitated, and stopped, and now stood behind him, waiting till he should turn.

He turned, smiling at the moccasins in his hand, and looked from them into Moira's face.

Still as she, he waited for the shock of enforced recollection, of associated pain; for to him she must always come with a shadow of pain. But nothing troubled him.

Then Maclear knew that he was free of the past. He asked quietly, "Why are you here?"

"I came here to find you, Alan. I have found you sooner than I hoped I should."

"Why did you want to find me?"

She looked at him curiously, aware, even in that first minute which to her was fuller of emotion than she could well suffer, of a resistance in him that was almost hostility. The eyes that met her own were quite cold, quite unmoved. Maclear was looking down at her as though she were a stranger. She thought of that last time, when she had looked down at him, when he had lain at her feet. They had been nearer in soul then. She said with some difficulty, "I did not come to—hurt you, Alan."

"You could n't do that, Moira."

The words, gentle in themselves, held a ring of strange hardness. He had spoken as much to himself as to her. Both knew it for the truth; both felt between them a separation deep as the sea. And this separation was neither of sin, nor remorse, nor sorrow. It was of happiness.

She had hardly held herself to the courage for this journey. She had questioned, doubted, agonized. Now that she saw this man, whom once for a little while she had all but loved, who once in his way had all but loved her, her heart failed. She asked unsteadily, "Is there anywhere we can talk a little while?"

He still looked at her, master of himself, master of her. He asked again, "Why have you come?"

"I fancied you in great loneliness and trouble, as I was. I came to comfort you."

"You could n't do that, Moira."

Again the gentle words with their half-cruel meaning. She said in a low voice: "No. I see that I could not. But, having come, and having found you so quickly, I will say what I meant to say. Where can we go?"

He did not answer for a moment, nor stir. And she said quickly, in a kind of amazement, knowing his thought, "You 'll at least listen?"

"If you wish it. But I 'm not staying in the town. I 'm afraid I have nowhere to take you."

"It does n't matter in the least. I knew you were not staying here. I have your address from Mr. Raynham. He would hardly give it to me; but he was anxious about you too,—afraid, as I was, that you were ill and alone—"

She broke off, again watching him with a kind of wonder; his health, his strength, his good looks, had never been so apparent; they seemed to her an insult to remembrance; but then she told herself that she was a woman.

"I am going to the hotel, anyway. From there I was going to try to reach you—with what I had to say. But I can say it here, and now."

Maclear said slowly and, as she well knew, unwillingly:

"Come a little way along the beach, then. No one is there to overhear."

He led her from the wharf and along the beach on the side away from the town. It was solitary except for a man who drove along the shingle in a farm wagon, and by the wharf turned his team into the waves to water them. The beasts drank deep, then lifted their heads and snuffed the air toward the horizon, shoulder-deep in quiet foam. Maclear led Moira to a stranded log beneath some acacia bushes

that grew from the low cliff behind the beach. He said, "We can talk here."

She was tired. She sat down on the log, looking up at him. He stood before her. It was as though he were almost out of sight, of hearing, of her who spoke to him from grief. He waited for her to begin.

The impulse to leave him, with all she had come to tell him untold, was strong on her. What she had considered the spiritual command was stronger still. She said, "You don't know what I came to say to you?"

"Of course not." Again with amazement she heard the forbearance in his voice.

"You don't—wish to hear?"

"I wish you to do anything that seems good to you. I thought there was n't much left in the world to say between us. I never even expected to see you again. But if you have found anything that must be said, say it, Moira, and let me go."

His words left her adrift, helplessly catching at a response that was not there. Pride of sorrow alone helped her to go on. "I 'll say it, then. I came to forgive you."

He remained looking down at her in silence, noting that her delicate fair face was worn, her eyes unnaturally large, her whole expression one of an almost solemn sweetness. Now the sense of distance was with him. She seemed to have passed on a long

way beyond him. And her physical fragility touched him as nothing she could say had power to do.

He said, more gently, "That is—very fine of you, Moira. But—"

The inadequate words filled her with a sudden bitter amusement. That struggle of the soul, that awful strife with grief and hate, to be so rewarded! She repeated, "But—?"

"Do you want the truth?"

"Always, from you."

Even that did not move him. He looked at her compassionately, yet with a suggestion of righteous impatience behind the compassion.

He said: "Then I will tell you the truth. It 's surely the least thing I can do for you, when you have come so far for me. And remember that you 've asked me for it, that I should n't have given it to you of myself."

"Well, Alan?"

In the deepening dusk her face, upturned to him, gleamed with the unearthly whiteness, the unearthly delicacy, of a flower. He hesitated again, and seeing it, she flung out her hands to him in a gesture of scorn. "Oh!" she said, "don't try to find pleasant words! Don't try to spare me! Tell me the truth. You don't want to be reminded, even by forgiveness? You want to forget it all?"

"I want to forget. And I am forgetting."

He turned from her, took a few short paces on the stones, and came back. She waited, motionless, her sad eyes staring at him through the twilight.

"There 's more. Back there, in the city, when I saw you—"

Her eyes caught and held his. Incredibly, it was hers that failed.

"Back there, I was sick. I was not myself. Without minimizing my sorrow for what 's happened, Moira, I must say this: I don't hold myself as guilty as you hold me; and I don't see myself as greatly in need of forgiveness for what I could help no more than you could."

"The bridge—"

"Did I design it to fall?"

"And he—"

As though from a spiritual security greater than any to which she could attain, he answered calmly: "*He* knows, if he knows anything, and *you* know, that I 'd have given my life for his, any day."

She saw him, for a moment, faint and indistinct. He went on, with a rising bitterness: "A terrible misfortune came to me. You, with your weight of forgiveness, would turn it into a crime. Good God! one would think I 'd killed Gordon with my own hands! I did no more than a hundred others do with no bad results. And you 'd make me pay for all! Moira, it was no crime. I refuse to take that degree of re-

sponsibility, to accept it from you. I did wrong, but I won't submit to punishment for something of which I 'm as innocent in intention as you. It was one of the terrible tricks life sometimes plays on any one of us,—on you, or me, or any one. Life—it would grind us to dust, if we 'd let it. Don't forgive me too much, Moira; don't forgive me for what, after all, I did n't do!"

She was silent, blankly bewildered, blankly wondering. Almost he had put her in the wrong, made her less than just, less than kind, her who had broken what was left of her heart in order that she might pity and forgive. She could find no words in which to refute him. Words were nothing. This difference lay in the very language of the soul; this distortion lay in the very sight of the spiritual eyes. The tragic facts were common to them both; he could not deny these, but he saw them out of relation, strangely veiled, the large small, the small great, as things are seen through mist. And he was quite blind to what had lain the corner-stone of that tragedy.

He was still looking at her steadily. The pity which she had come to give him, though it killed her, he gave her. She smiled faintly, feeling very tired, too tired to resist, too tired to argue, too tired to explain. She said, very slowly: "Then it comes to this: You—don't—want to be—forgiven?"

He corrected her: "I don't *need* to be."

She just breathed the words, "You can get on without it!"

He assented gravely: "I can get on without it, in the sense in which you offer it. I must go on. I must live my life. I must forget. I 'm a man. Not as you. I can't keep myself turning like a wheel around a perpetual shaft of remorse, of grief. And I would n't if I could, for a dreadful disaster for which, in the higher moral light of motive, I 'm not responsible."

He was so assured that for an instant Moira had a reeling vision of altered values, of facts shifting and changing ground, of the real becoming shadow, and the shadow becoming truth, like things seen in a flowing mist. She controlled herself, and the glass through which she had seen darkly cleared. After a moment she asked, "When are you going home?"

"I don't know. Not yet. Not until I must. Raynham will send the schooner for me soon, or if anything happens to make it necessary. He 's quite competent to carry on in small things, and there are no big ones on hand just now." He frowned a minute, thinking of the bridge, hoping that the inquiry would be soon now, and the air cleared, and business good again,—in time. It would take time, of course. "I shall stay away as long as I can. Will you be in the city when I go back?"

"No. I am going south for the winter. I only came to—to speak to you before I went."

He said quickly, "Don't think I 'm ungrateful,—for what you intended."

"For what you refuse—"

He had been looking away from her, looking down the beach toward the wharf. Now he turned on her with a fierce passionateness she had never known in him before. He said in a low voice: "By God, you good woman! Do you *want* to make me out a murderer in the face of the truth?"

She shut her eyes, almost terrified at the abyss which lay between them; shaken by the mere masculine force of his anger; and all the time with a sense of blurred vision, of choked breath, of warning voices thin and displaced, as by an invisible fog. She did not reply. By and by he continued quietly:

"There is no need to try to talk of this any more. It is better left alone. Neither you nor I shall overlook our grief. Neither you nor I can judge the other. Neither you nor I, it seems, can adjust himself to the other's point of view. If I have hurt you in this, I 'm sorry. I 'd do pretty nearly anything in the world for you—but this. I won't, by accepting your tremendous forgiveness, brand myself a Cain before you."

She rose, unable to bear anything further, longing to be alone, that in one of the mystic communions

in which of late her failing flesh had been sustained she might confess to Gordon that she had failed; ask, with intense hearing strained beyond the hush of the night, his advice; find, perhaps, somewhere under the stars, an echo of his comfort. Maclear asked, "Will you let me take you to your hotel?"

"No. No, thank you, Alan. I would rather go alone."

He saw she meant it. He said: "As you wish. I am waiting here for some one. Then I am going out to the island."

"To Port Tallis?"

"Yes."

Moira looked beyond him. She asked, "Is this the one you were waiting for?"

Maclear turned. Moira, watching him rather than the one who came to him along the beach, saw his fine hard face suddenly soften to a great tenderness. The marks of life cleared; he looked as though he had never suffered in anything, never sinned in anything. And there was something besides this, infinitely moving and appealing. It was an uncommon expression for any man's face to wear. Seen on his, it was incredible. For it was the look of weakness dependent on strength.

Sombra approached them slowly. Her beauty took on some of the grandeur of the coming night. Her eyes rested on Moira a moment, then went to

Maclear. And even in the twilight Moira could perceive the color leap to the browned cheeks, the breath to the noble bosom.

She asked, uncertainly, "Is this—"

"Yes," answered Maclear, directly. "I was married to her last week. This is Sombra, my wife."

After a long minute Moira went to the girl and took her hands. She said, brokenly: "You 're my sister, then. I hope you will be as happy as I was."

"Thank you, ma'am," answered Sombra. "You 're very kind. I—did n't know Alan had a sister."

"I was his brother's wife."

Sombra's great kind eyes rested on the fair worn face, on the black dress. Suddenly she leaned forward, and touched Moira's cheek with her warm lips.

"I 'm sure that was a good wish," she said softly, "and I could n't help but be happy with Alan; could I?"

But Moira could not reply. At the touch of those innocent, trustful lips the tears had come. She pressed Sombra's hand and turned from them along the shadowy beach, weeping. Sombra asked Maclear, "Ain't you goin' along with her, Alan?"

He said gravely, "She would rather go alone."

"She 'd—come to see you, Alan?"

"Yes. She 'd come to see if I was well and happy."

"That was sweet of her, poor lady. It—don't seem right to let her go that way. What did you tell her? Did you say you was—happy?"

Under the delicate acacia leaves, between the low cliff and the foam, Maclear caught her to him. His lips were crushed to hers. There was something hard and defiant in his love. He said presently, in an unsteady voice: "I told her I was happy as heaven. Happy, happy, *happy*. Come, Sombra, let us go home."

II

Under the gray curve of the sail the low stars led them. There was dew on the sail, dew on the sheets. Tallis Island lay ahead like a shadow growing nearer each moment. They were infinitely alone. On the lake no sail showed but theirs.

Sombra sat in the stern with Maclear. Her head rested against his shoulder. She was silent. Her eyes held the mystery of the night as she watched one faintest pin-prick of light in the great violet distance, which was the kitchen window at Morning House.

In time this light grew brighter and seemed another star, low above the sand-hills and the unseen lagoons. The little skiff altered her course, flying homeward like a bird on the light following breeze. The water chattered beneath her keel with a low, intimate sound.

That was the only one until they entered the narrow channel of the first lagoon, and the reeds brushed the sides of the boat as she turned. A single bird sprang from some hidden nest with a faint chirp, and settled again. Maclear asked in a hushed voice, "Tired, honey?"

"No." She turned her head so that her eyes rested on him. He saw in them the very poetry of passion. Beyond and behind this tenderness, the innocent abandonment of surrender, was a doubt,—not of him, but of herself. He did not see it. He persisted, his lips close to hers, "Then what 's my girl thinking about?"

"I was thinkin' about the many times I 've come home to the island, sometimes with Sal, sometimes with Mait, in the rain and in the sun, in the snow and in the cold." There was a fire, a grace in her voice and slight gestures which seemed of the South, as did the sudden fullness and completeness of her love.

"I was thinkin' that all our lives we 're just on the way home, seekin' through the world, over the land, over the water, till we find—this."

She turned closer to him and hid her face on his breast. "Oh, hold me, love," she said, "hold me, an' never let me go! I 'm poor an' common; I ain't fit for you. But I 'm yours. Oh, hold me! It 's like as if I 'd no home now in all the world but here with you."

"Rest in it, my dear," whispered Maclear, huskily. "I 'll hold you and never let you go."

The little boat swept down another narrow water channel, a winding course paved with increasing stars. In the west they faced still burned a hand's-breadth of the great afterglow.

After a little, Sombra whispered again: "And I was bein' sorry, Alan, sorry for them that has no home like this of mine. And for them that 's had such a home, dear, and lost it. I was thinkin' of that poor lady."

Maclear's arm tightened about her. He said, suddenly and harshly, "Don't be sorry."

"I could n't help but be sorry, now that I know what she 's doin' without. Alan, tell me about your brother."

Maclear was silent. He was facing the fact that he could not. Presently she stirred and looked up at him with wonder. He bent instantly and kissed her.

"Sombra," he said hurriedly, "not now. Don't let us cloud these days of ours with even the thought of unhappy things." He looked away from her, and again the little boat altered her whispering course under his steady hand. "I want to be happy," he went on, in a breathless voice. "I must be happy. My God, I *will* be happy!" He looked at her again. And she saw in the starlight that there were tears in his eyes. "Sombra," he finished a little brokenly,

"if you must be sorry for some one, be sorry for me. For I need it very much."

Moved beyond expression, she clung to him. She said nothing, nor asked another question. She was one of those natures to whom love brings in a day, a week, all ripeness, all wisdom, all fulfilment. She had learned silence; and she was silent now. Only she searched within her young heart to see if there remained a thought or a comfort which was not yet Maclear's, and which she might give him.

That night Moira knelt a long time at the window of her hotel bedroom. She found a sort of peace in the silence, and in the great height of stars over the lake, whither the sail of Maclear's boat had faded and dwindled with the day. She could not follow him and his in thought to their island of happiness; her bruised heart shrank from that journey. But she was more at rest than she had been for a long time. She had done what she had come to do. If, as at that time often occurred to her, she was not to live very long, she had at least fulfilled the last possible obligation that life could lay on her.

III

Maclear's marriage to Sombra made very little change in the life at Morning House. She still cooked and worked for them all. If he made any reference to the time when she would not have to

work, she was shy and troubled. Love, having opened to her the gates of wisdom, now taught her fear. She feared the future, though it was his.

They had to discuss this future, though each of them was strangely eager to live only in the present. And it was agreed between them, from the first, that when they left Tallis Island, Morning House should be closed.

Sal would go with them, sooner or later, to the city, and there Maclear would start him in life. He had a great tenderness for the boy, and would have done more than this; but Salvator would take no more from him than the opportunity of work.

There remained Mait Ransome.

In those days his personality seemed fading from him; he resembled more and more the house in which he lived,—an empty shell resounding only with storms. His hatred had sapped and survived all the rest of his nature. And now Maclear feared that his madness was increasing, though outwardly the old man gave him no real cause for this uneasiness.

They told him of their marriage. Neither at the time, nor later, did he appear to understand. But he sat for hours when he was alone, repeating over and over to himself those words that held the whole sum of happiness for Maclear: "Married. He 's

married to her." In a little time, had there been any one to listen, he might have been heard whispering: "Married. He 's married to Martha." And as he whispered his great hands closed on the toy yacht he was rigging, so that when he opened them the mimic rigging and the fairy spars fell crushed and tangled on the ground. He was beyond the reach of living voices. To him the woman he loved had just been married to Juan Luz.

Then Sombra remembered some old friends of her mother's who had a farm on the mainland about thirty miles from the town. In the old days, before Mait had become so crazy, she and Sal had stopped there in the summer. "Kind, nat'ral folk," she said they were, "and their cooking-stove had three ovens." They were not too fortunate. She thought, for a consideration, they would give Mait a kind home if he would agree to go. "And he 'll be better there," she said; "he won't hear the lake in the storms, and maybe he 'll forget about Father at last."

So to these people Maclear wrote, in his own name and hers. He liked their reply. He arranged a meeting with the farmer in town, and settled the matter then and there. There seemed some quality in Mackerrow, like the quality inherent in a cooking-stove with three ovens, that reassuringly balanced Mait's craziness.

When they told the old man of this arrangement, he acquiesced in all they said.

They did not hear him, hours afterward, murmuring in his darkness: "Martha 's leavin' me. She 's goin' away with Juan Luz."

This was the last, or all but the last, of Maclear's new cares. When this had been arranged, he gave himself up wholly to happiness.

With the lovely renewal of his confidence in life that Sombra had brought him, and which was like a renewal of youth, he began to play with life and work as he had never played before.

All life now came to him in this guise of renewal, this restoration of things perishing. He began to plan the rescue of little Port Tallis from the sand.

He told Sombra: "The drift of sand is all from the west. I've been watching the currents in the harbor. If we turned the ledge into a breakwater, and had the harbor on the other side, a dredge for a week in the spring would keep it clear. Then we 'd clear some of the channels, run a line of pipe out into the lake, hide a pumping-station back there among the sand-hills, build some pretty new houses, and we 'd have a town all of our own to play with."

There spoke the spirit of his land. He went on, "And we 'd have a house of our own here, for the summer." Later, he showed her the place for their

house,—an island in an island, a little world of white sand entirely encircled by the broad blue lagoons, and grown with tall poplars; straight columns of leaves now yellowing faintly to the year's change. In the sand he marked out the design of the house,—the large rooms, the wide veranda, the separate kitchen quarters. Sombra, who had been watching her god thus shaping a world for her, here asked him solemnly, "Will I have to have help?"

He laughed at her. "Of course, Mrs. Maclear!"

She flushed. He called her by that name daily for the delight of seeing the lovely following glow. But she said, "I 'd be dead scared of help."

"Not you! You 'll be bossing them in no time, as you do me." He went back to his plans in the sand, saying, as he stooped, "And here, at this corner that takes both south and west, shall be your room."

She said softly, "Ours."

His eyes worshiped her, but he persisted: "No. Yours only. One room, both in this house and in the house we 'll have in the city, shall be yours only. And it shall be a golden room, Sombra. Walls, hangings, fancy stuff,—everything shall be gold. It won't be just a room, you see. It 'll be a type of your golden heart, a shrine for you, My Lady of Comfort. I shall always ask your leave, very humbly, before I 'm allowed in. But you 'll open to me when I knock?"

"Husband, is there any place of mine I would n't let you into? Can you think of any door, and me behind it, and not openin' to you?"

He kissed her hands passionately. But there was some shadow of that dumb trouble in her face which even he was not always able to kiss away. And he kept the hands in his, asking gently, "What is it, child?"

"Alan, have you a terr'ble lot of money?"

"No, dear heart. Not a terr'ble lot."

She flushed again at his mimicry of her way of speaking, tender as it had been. He did not notice it. He repeated his question. Then as she did not answer, said with a little laugh: "Don't you want a house here, Mrs. Maclear? Then you sha'n't have one."

"It ain't—it is n't that. But since you come, I don't want this place changed. Not even changed in a nice way. I would like to keep it the same forever."

"So should I—in one way. But change will come in spite of us, honey."

"Oh, I know. That 's life. Sometimes, since you come, it hurts me. I would like to hold just these days that go so fast, to catch them in my hands as if they was pretty birds, never to let them go. But I can't."

"I would like that too, Sombra."

She looked at him a little wistfully. "Would you? It 's different for you, dear. You 're a man. You got your work to do. I know, soon, you 'll have to go and do it. Me—sometimes I wish you could go away and do your work, and then come back to me, and find me waitin' for you here, in the old house among the lagoons, by the old silted harbor, just the same as I am now; and we 'd be just the same together, you an' me."

He was silent, startled. She had put her finger, as it were, on the one thing which yet shadowed his thought of their future. For he, too, dreaded change, and especially any change which directly affected Sombra. He could not do without her. He could not picture, now, any day or night of his life without her. He longed to possess her every hour. But he longed also to leave her as she was, his golden rose growing in her lovely desolation. He wanted her with him always. Yet he wanted, too, to hold her in some sort apart from life,—his secret garden, his fountain sealed,—that by his returns to her his life might be perpetually and exquisitely renewed.

There seemed a disloyalty even in the thought. He put it by, asking with a smile, "Could you do without me like that, honey?"

A gravity had come on them both. She was pale, and even at a thought of separation tears misted her eyes. But she answered:

"Yes. Yes, Alan, I could, if that way it would be better and happier for you."

"Well—I could n't get on without you!"

His voice was rough with emotion. He slid forward till he rested on the sand at her feet. She sat erect against the bole of a poplar. He thought she looked like some strong angel at the foot of a pillar; and he and she, and the shaft of light innumerable leaves above them, were shadowed forth in the water below, like a picture caught in a blue jewel. Now, after one of her silences, she leaned over him, gently slid her hand under his chin, and turned his face so that she looked into it. Her eyes met his with that calm look in which, the more utterly she gave herself, the more utterly she seemed to possess herself.

She asked gently, "Why?"

Staring at her, his face whitened. He said, "Can you ask me that?"

"Yes. Yes, I do ask it. It has been in my mind to ask it, Alan, many a time. Why is it you *need* me so much?"

"I love you, Sombra."

"But I love you more 'n you do me. Yes, yes, I do. I love you so that it seems to me sometimes that I 've turned into you, that I see things with your eyes, touch them with your hands. And yet, if it was best for you, I could get on without you for a while;

thinkin' of you all the time, waitin' for you, prayin' for you. But you could n't get on without me a day."

"I—don't believe I could, Sombra."

"I know as you could n't, Alan. Why?"

"I love you."

"It ain't that."

With a faint smile he asked, "Well, what is it, then?"

"I don't know. I would like to know. Dear, I know you love me true. But—it don't seem in man's nature to hold to me as you do,—like you held to me when you come to me in the blowin' sand, and I set my arm round you, and you did not know even who I was, nor love me at all. I would like to know what trouble it was so heavy on you when you come to me that night. I would like to know what troubles you now."

"Nothing troubles me now I have you."

There was reproach in her eyes. Maclear looked down at the sand again; he still felt the unspeakable tenderness of her gaze, the protectiveness of her attitude against the screen of shaking, glittering leaves.

"Yes," she said at last, "there is something that troubles you. You can't hide it from me. Why won't you let me share it with you?—this thing that makes you—"

"Well, child?" he asked curiously, hearing her hesitate for a word. "Something that makes me—?"

"Weak."

So he had his word.

He stared at her, amazed. After a minute his face hardened. He said rapidly, "Sombra, you want to help me?"

"Dear, ain't I—are n't I—your wife?"

"You believe what I told you before?—that my mistake—my fault, if you like—was small out of all proportion to the way I 've been made to suffer for it, and may still be made to suffer?"

"Of course."

"Then, if you want to help me, if you want to make me happy again, help me to forget. There 's nothing else."

"Is that the best way, Alan?"

"It 's the only way for strength, Sombra."

"Then I 'll help you that way, dear love."

He knew she would never ask for his confidence again.

Later he wondered why he had not given it to her, as she would have to know before long. Had it indeed been weakness, or a natural reluctance to cloud these her unforgetable days with his own shadow? He did not know. And they did not speak of it again.

The year, advancing, folded them in day after day of golden haze. The nights were colder. Dawn sometimes found no more than the summits of the highest dunes and the sagging roof of Morning House emerging from a level ocean of fog. The first wind loosened this fog from its anchorages, and it would go silently drifting past all day, riming everything with its own whiteness. Or it would recede to a wall on the horizon, a wall that looked sharp-cut and solid as stone, whence it would descend again in the night, and shut Tallis Island away from the world. The lake was rarely free of mist, in which day and night they heard the bellowing voices of the great grain-tanks, going up empty to the head of the lakes to meet, at the end of the harvest, the outpoured torrent of the wheat.

These days were almost unbearably precious to Maclear; for he never knew when they would end, when Raynham would send for him to return to the city.

His impatience outran that return, near as he felt it to be. The fancy of that golden room in the city house possessed him, as such fancies do sometimes possess men of a hard-working youth, to whom love comes fully for the first time at thirty. As he used to play with the colored sands of the island in the days of his desolation, so he played with a hundred pretty inventions for that room, which with its closed

door was to symbolize, as no room open to him could do, his absolute possession of Sombra.

He could not wait. He sent to the city for samples and specimens of wood, silks, carpets, coverings; lacquer, amber glass, and yellow pottery. The room was to be all mellow gold for his golden rose of the sands. While he was ordering these things it came to him, with amazement, how few were the gifts he had ever given Sombra: her wedding-ring, a cheap brooch she had fancied, a few other trifles. He was ashamed. Now he ordered beautiful things for her adornment as he ordered them for the unbuilt room. A slender chain of topaz set in gold, a scarf that should be a tissue of gold deepening into russet shadow, one of those sweeping silken gowns women always seemed to find an odd time for wearing,—Maclear guessed himself an artist, imagining her beauty. He was happy as a boy, lavishing on her all the tender fancies of his life.

The goods arrived in the town at last, and he brought them back to the island in the boat. He and Sal unpacked the boxes in the kitchen that evening, and he spread the samples of parquetry, and heavy silken hangings, and deep-brown lacquer powdered with gold, on the kitchen table with its shabby blue cloth. In the circle of lamplight Sombra and Sal fingered these things reverently, and with the same simple wonder. She lifted her eyes to Maclear at

last, and they glowed upon him with the same innocence of look. She whispered tremulously, "You 're doin' all this for *me?*"

"For whom but you should I do it, Mrs. Maclear?"

"You 're good to me, Alan. You 're real good to me. But this is too much for what I am." She laid softly back upon the table the length of amber-yellow silk she had been holding. The stuff clung to her work-roughened fingers. The slightest cloud, as though of shame, dimmed her brightness. She sighed, "Too much for me."

In answer he brought the yellow silk gown and laid it in her arms.

The light was held in its narrow gold embroideries. It was bordered with lace, and beyond this again with fur. She breathed, "For me, too?"

"Yes. Go and put it on, and show me how lovely you can be."

She trembled a little and blushed under his eyes. She took it, meekly as Esther might have taken the gifts of her king. She went from the room with it. Maclear showed Sal the earrings which he himself would hang in her sun-browned ears, the chain of topazes which he would wind about that noble throat. Sal fingered the pretty toys in silence. At last he said gently: "She ain't used to things like this. Be patient with her, Alan." But Maclear hardly heard

him. For Sombra had come back, and stood hesitating in the doorway.

He had known she was beautiful. But now, the power and royalty of her beauty held him motionless, and her brother too. The folds of the gracious silk expressed her height, the delicate color caught and increased the golden light that seemed always to rest on her skin, as if it were an essence of the sun that they shared between them. Golden rose she was, and rose of his world. But her head that was carried so high above her poor garments was bent before him. She stood meekly waiting for his approval.

He roused himself at last from his dream of her beauty, and went to her, the topaz chain in his hand. But in a moment he stopped, with a vexed exclamation, a little laugh. "Oh, my dear," he said, "I 'm sorry! I forgot the shoes!"

Sombra looked down.

Through a mist she saw them,—her ugly shoes, her working shoes, patched and misshapen, scraped bare of blacking by the sand; under the furred and golden hem of the gown they looked ridiculous. And on the sensitiveness of her love, the perceptiveness of her pride—delicate beyond any imagining of his—that laugh struck like a blow.

He was laughing at her shabby shoes.

She turned with a sob, unexpected to her as to him. He saw a flash of golden draperies, the re-

proach of a face as pure as a wounded child's. Then she was gone, and the outer door had closed softly behind her.

The wild child, thought Maclear, for all her wifehood. That door had scarcely closed before he had it open, fond words on his lips, his hand outstretched to draw her in.

But he opened the door on a blind world. His hand closed on nothing but mist.

While they talked, the mist had enfolded the house, flooding in from the lake, the lagoons, the hidden innumerable channels of the marsh. It was a sea four fathoms deep. Moon and stars stood free of it, and the taller poplars glittered above its surface. All else was lost and drowned. Into this mist Sombra had fled.

Maclear, too, went out, closing the door behind him.

He advanced into that still and silver sea. He felt that he must find Sombra, that he would lose something of her if he let the mist keep her from him even for an hour. She had been but a few minutes gone. But such was the effect of the mist that time and distance were distorted. She seemed to him to be divided from him already by miles, by hours.

He could just make out her footprints in the damp sand. Each mark was already beaded with moisture. He touched the first one he saw, and was vaguely

shocked to find it so cold. It seemed that any sign she had left for him should be warm. It made him think that she was cold; and he was troubled for her, out in the mist in her thin silken gown.

He began to call her softly, but the mist returned to him his own voice only; and the sound was strange. Everything was unreal, disguised. He saw trees move in their places, and vapors lift like rocks. Every poplar bush was Sombra, the foolish child, crouching in her golden gown, weeping because he had laughed at her rough shoes. He called again, and heard no answer but the piping of a peewit in the clear moonlit air above the fog.

He came to the edge of the lake. In their silence the lakes are more dumb than the sea. Not a feather of foam curled by the water's rim. But every now and then this rim advanced and receded a few inches, as though the lake breathed in its sleep.

Maclear turned from the beach. He had lost her footprints in the stones. He climbed a high dune until his head and shoulders emerged from the strange level mist. He saw it all about, in some places even as ice, in others heaped in enormous and visionary undulations. The sky was clear and cold, the moon brilliant; he saw a night-hawk flutter across the gold disk. He saw nothing else.

He climbed down the dune and went on, walking in a pearly circle, an impalpable prison not four

feet across. It shut him in, and it shut Sombra outside. He could not escape it. He began to call her more loudly. He stopped and listened, but could hear nothing but the thud of his own heart. He could not find her, nor she him.

Perhaps, lost in the mist somewhere, she was afraid; perhaps she was calling him, as he was calling her. He looked eagerly for more footprints. His circle of dimness gave him only the sand, the gleam of water, ground willows showing a few fiery leaves, and pods of milkweed spilling a stuff like mist. It hurt Maclear intolerably that she should be calling to him for help, perhaps, for the first time, and that he should not hear.

Again and again he ran and stretched out his hand to a golden gleam; again and again that hand closed on mist and glittering wet poplar leaves, pointed with rime. Again and again some rustle or faint stir led him knee-deep among the rank sedges and the dripping reeds, only to see an owl rise, to hear a muskrat plunge, or to face his own shadow on the moonlit mist.

Fears, vague and enormous as the shadows of the fog, possessed him. He saw her fallen into a lagoon in her golden gown among the late golden water-lilies. He saw her running from him, turning to him a face of reproach and fear. He saw her hiding from him, unwilling to be found. He knew these

fears for folly. But the fog, his own lostness, and the face he could not see, typified for him, as in a brief strange dream, his life without her.

"Sombra, Sombra, where are you? Answer me!"

At last it seemed to him that the silver obscurity faintly replied.

"Sombra! Love, where are you?"

He waited, very still. He heard, drawn slowly through the intervening mists, his name.

"Oh, Alan, dearest, I 'm sorry, sorry, sorry!"

She had had no other words since she ran to him in the mist, and clung as she had never clung before.

"Sombra, I felt as if I 'd lost you for good. I—could n't find you—"

"Oh, my poor boy! but I 'm sorry."

"Never run away again, beloved, so that I can't find you."

"Never, dear, never. Unless—"

"Well, my own girl?"

"It would do you good for me to run away!"

"As though it ever could!"

They laughed softly, there in the white dumb mist, —never so dear, each to each.

"Forgive me, Alan."

"Me, too, Sombra. I did n't mean to be unkind when I laughed."

"You was n't unkind. It was me bein' so silly. It only hurt because—because—"

"What, heart of gold?"

"Because I 'm far beneath you, Alan."

He went on his knees, there in the mist, and kissed the clumsy, sandy shoes he had laughed at.

He said no more to her, nor she to him, as they found their way home together. But that night she woke where she lay beside him, hearing him again call her name. As she listened, there in the dark, she knew that once more in his sleep he lost her, sought her, longed for her with an infinite longing. His soul was bared to her. Awed, she crept to his arms, and those arms closed on her, though he did not wake. She heard the wild beating of his heart, and knew beyond doubt that, from whatever cause, it beat indeed only for her.

She was only a girl, given to love too young. She had doubted, wondering if she had given too much, or if she could give enough. She doubted no more. The doors of her great heart of compassion opened wide for him. She could give, though she could not understand. And she knew now that he needed all she could give, and more than anything else in the world.

She began to be perfectly happy. She knew that his need of her would never fail. The knowledge was like a star, above any possible shadowing of the mists, either of death or life.

IV

Sometimes, in the misty dawns of autumn, Maclear borrowed an old bird-gun of Mait's, and went shooting along the interminable reed beds, where sheltered ringneck, bluebill, and whistlewing. In his new-found security was room for a fresh delight each hour. The chill silence of those mornings charmed him, lying hidden by the lagoons under an old tarpaulin, watching the mists heave and ripple away, and the wet dunes glitter in the sudden heatless sun; the moment when the first string of wild duck arrowed lakeward through the haze, and he sprang erect, careless of how many he scared, and the crack of his shot and the whirling tumble from the sky seemed simultaneous; and he waded thigh-deep, perhaps, to retrieve the pretty limp-necked thing, through bronzing lily-pads, and seed-vessels of the lesser iris, and leaves of arrowhead. Then he would turn homeward in the gradual widening of the world the fog had made so narrow, while day descended on him and his like a dove, whose wings were of silver and her feathers like gold.

Day after day followed in a timeless course of content. Still no word had come to him from the city. The mist and the lonely miles of blue water seemed like a wall, holding Tallis Island with all upon it as Maclear would fain have held it, apart from the world.

But there came a morning when the mist, rolling off the lake, showed Maclear a small launch sheering through the woolly cloud toward the island. And he knew that some word from his other life was come for him at last.

Whatever that word should be, he was strong to meet it. Carrying a brace of whistlewings, the dew of their last feeding-ground still on their feathers, he went down to the landing-stage on the lagoon below Morning House, whither the launch was steering.

On the lagoon the mist yet hung. As Maclear waited on the stage, gun on arm and cloaked in the old tarpaulin, it turned suddenly from white to rose. There was no division between the rosy water and the rosy fog. The little launch, her engines shut off, floated silently the last few yards of her journey, as though borne up in the heart of a cloud. There was a complete silence, like a spell. The two men in her were silent, looking up at Maclear; he was silent, looking down at them. Then one of them stood up and caught the dripping edge of the stage, and drew the launch in. He nodded to Maclear. The other man rose and jumped out on the boards beside him, and said, "Alan."

It was Raynham.

They shook hands. They had not seen each other since those last nightmare days in the city. They examined each other in a curious silence. Maclear's

eyes were steady and hard. Raynham's were strangely timid. At last he drew a long breath and looked uncertainly away. He said in a low voice, "You 're lookin' well, Alan."

"I was never better in my life, Jack."

Raynham looked at him again. His own face was tired, and showed the effect of strain. There was an odd, startled expression in his eyes that made them for an instant like Moira's eyes. He glanced away again, saying hurriedly: "Yes—yes, you 've had a good rest. And more. Mrs.—" he stumbled a moment—"Mrs. Gordon told me she 'd seen her."

"Yes, she saw my wife," agreed Maclear.

"Why did n't you tell us about it, Alan?" asked Raynham, suddenly.

"I don't know, Jack, unless"—Maclear's voice changed—"it was on the greedy impulse of keeping the best things all to oneself a while!"

"Anyway, I congratulate you. Mrs. Gordon said she was very sweet and beautiful. I wish you happiness, old fellow. And if I 'm late in wishing it, it 's not my fault."

Maclear's hand touched his shoulder an instant. "Thanks, Jack," he said; "you wish me no more than I have."

"No." Again Raynham's look rested on him strangely. "No. I see that I don't."

"Come up to the house with me. Breakfast will

be about ready,—lake-trout, Jack, and you 'll see her," finished Maclear, simply.

Raynham's eyes warmed. He seized Maclear's hand again and wrung it hard. "Bless you, anyway," he stammered. "I 'll come up to the house with pleasure, but I guess I 'd better not stop for breakfast. I came down by the night train, and I ought to catch an early one back."

"Did you come to fetch me back with you?" asked Maclear, directly.

"No. I came to bring you news." He looked round with that odd air of uneasiness, of hesitation. "Where can we talk alone?"

"Anywhere on the island," said Maclear.

The mist had cleared. Tallis Island lay bare under the open heavens, a lovely desolation of gleaming sand and yellowing poplars, interlaced with a hundred winding waterways. Raynham looked about him curiously, then at Maclear. He said, "You chose a lonely place, Alan."

"Yes. I could n't have chosen a better one, though. I owe you a great deal," he went on, facing Raynham, "for carrying on the job, and leaving me here. I owe you—everything."

"Oh, that 's all right," said Raynham, with constraint, turning away again.

Maclear said to the man in the launch: "This gentleman won't be ready to go back to town yet. Tie

your boat and go up to the house and have your breakfast. Tell the lady I sent you."

"Right, Mister," said the man, cheerily, looking at Maclear with a frank inquisitiveness. "I know 'em, up to the hotel. I seen *her* go back and forwards with the ole feller since she was so high."

He climbed out, tied the launch, and went up to Morning House. Maclear linked his arm in his friend's and drew him along the sandy path beside the lagoon.

They walked on for a time in silence. Much lay between them that it was difficult to bridge. But the restraint was all on Raynham's side.

He asked at last, "How 's the business?"

"Oh!—so-so. We 've been havin' trouble with Sayers and Company over the blue-prints. I think it would pay us to fix up a room and do our own. We 've plenty of power."

"Well—when do you want me back, Jack?"

"Not till you 're ready to come." Raynham did not look at him.

"I think I must come soon. I 'll bring my wife with me. We can stay at a boarding-house till we find a home of our own. You 'll send the schooner for us, won't you? It 's—just a fancy of mine. She brought me here—broken. Let her take me back—healed. You 've been a good friend to me, Jack."

"I wonder," said Raynham, just above his breath, and after a long pause, "if I have—"

Maclear scarcely heard. In a little while he asked quietly, "What news of my sister-in-law?"

"Oh, all right," answered Raynham, in an absent voice. "She 's gone south for her health, as you know."

"Alone?"

"No. With my mother and sister."

"That 's good," said Maclear, heartily. Again that strange, incredulous look of Raynham's rested on him, but so briefly he was not aware of it. Raynham did not answer. He had his own thoughts, his own hopes. Especially he hoped that after time had a little soothed her Moira might one day give him, if not her love, the right to love her. He asked for no more. And if it ever came, it would not come for years. He kept his lonely hope to himself.

Suddenly Maclear turned on him and looked at him full. "Jack," he said, "when is the inquiry to be held?"

With an abrupt movement Raynham swung away from him and went to the edge of the lagoon. He stood there a minute, staring down into the soft shallow water, where the brown snail-shells crept in the brown sand, among the roots of bur-reed and cat-tail and touch-me-not. His face was white and heavy as he turned back to Maclear.

"Alan," he said, "there 's not goin' to be any inquiry."

They stood facing each other; for a minute they scarcely seemed to breathe. Then Maclear, with an inarticulate exclamation, said unsteadily, "Say that again."

His hardness and strength seemed transferred to Raynham. Raynham answered at once: "The inquiry, to the best of my belief, is—shelved."

After a time Maclear whispered, "How?"

Raynham looked away. He asked harshly, "Do you remember what papers they were that pressed for the inquiry?"

"No."

"They were the 'Morning Leader,' and the 'Echo,' and the 'City News.' "

"All owned by Ducroix?"

"Exactly. All owned, and their policy dictated, by one man."

"Well?" But Maclear knew.

"I tried to buy Ducroix off—Do you want all the dirty details?" asked Raynham, almost savagely.

"No. No, Jack, no!" And Maclear's voice was almost a cry of appeal.

"I could n't offer him a big enough price. But you can't knock around with the same men in the same city all your life without hearing things about every one of 'em. I knew things about Ducroix and the

election five years ago at Rochard Bay. I found a man who knew more than I did. I could n't buy Ducroix or his rags, but I bought *him*. I told Ducroix that if he did n't drop the question of the inquiry, and, what was more, withdraw all he 'd said, I 'd take my man to Bassett of the 'Clarion' and let him tell his little tale and show his proofs, too. And then, I said, 'How about it?' Ducroix climbed right down. Had to. I 've the papers in my pocket, if you want to see how thorough it is."

"No." To himself Maclear was repeating words that had a familiar sound: "It 's done every day, after all."

Raynham was silent, gazing grimly at the golden poplar spires mirrored in the lagoon. Maclear gazed too. Neither saw the beauty of the world. Between it and them a mist had risen.

Maclear said at last, "Then, there 's nothing—"

"There 's nothing," agreed Raynham in a low voice, "for you to fear."

"Thanks to you."

There was no answer. And that silence showed Maclear what his friend had done for him, and at what cost. He was suddenly and incredibly hurt by the knowledge. Moira's grief had not moved him in any degree like this. He said roughly: "Fear? Fear? By God, Jack, I wish you 'd left it alone,—let them bring an inquiry if they 'd wanted to!" He

hesitated a moment; for how much did Jack *know?* Then he finished through his teeth, "I could have faced it."

And at the word a white face he hardly knew for Raynham's was looking into his own. He felt Raynham's hand shake on his wrist.

"Yes," said Raynham, very low, "you could face it. God knows how. But I could n't."

"What do you mean, Jack?" asked Maclear quickly.

"An inquiry on oath? Think. I might have had to be a witness against you."

After a while Maclear said, "Then you 've known all along?"

"All along. I 'd nothing to go on, of course. I just—knew."

"And all along you 've stood by me like this?"

"I was so dammed sorry for you," explained Raynham, wearily. "Do you understand?"

"I understand what you 've done for me—a thing you hate. After all, it 's done every day."

Maclear had not meant to say this. The words came unawares, as if something stronger than himself had spoken with his lips. And Raynham turned with a gesture of revolt.

"This kind of thing—it 's been done too often by one of us, anyway. And it was always a case

of follow-my-leader with me, even when we were at school."

"Have you come to quarrel with me now?"

"No," said Raynham after a pause, "for I 'm still damned sorry for you."

Maclear looked at Raynham's averted face curiously. There was something inexplicable in this compassion, something that had not been there in those black days in the city. Raynham seemed, in some extraordinary way, sorrier for him now than he had been then. A spark of resentment burned at the back of Maclear's mind. They meant well. They all meant well; but if only they 'd let him forget! if only they would not perpetually remind him, with their forgiveness, by their conscious loyalty, that there was anything to forgive or to endure!

He could have faced the inquiry. He smiled as the realization of his own strength and his own security swept over him. He said quietly: "Well—what 's done is done. Send the old *Martine* for me when you get back. And then you 'd better go for a holiday yourself. You 're looking used up. You need a rest. Nothing like a rest to show a man the —the rights of things. When you get back we 'll start over again, Jack, as though all this had never been."

His voice sank. For a minute the sense of what

had been rose like a wave, and the deep waters of remembrance went over him. He set his teeth and endured it; such moments must come. There was no sound but the long inextinguishable sigh of the reeds.

"There was something else I came to tell you."

"Well, Jack?"

"Gorings and Willett have offered me a post. I would like to accept it as early next year as you can fill my place."

After a long silence Maclear asked, rather breathlessly, "Do you mean you 're going to—quit me?"

Raynham nodded slowly, staring over the blue water with unseeing eyes. There was a tired finality about him that held Maclear dumb. He knew Jack had made up his mind.

He asked curtly, "Do you feel like giving me your reasons?"

"You would n't appreciate them."

"Very well." Maclear's hard pride was on fire. "I won't ask you for them. But—after all these years!"

"I know." Raynham's voice was gentle, infinitely sad. "It seems queer. You know it ain't the money. As a matter of fact, I 'll get less with them." He looked at Maclear wistfully. "It 's not as if you needed me, Alan," he said. "I would never quit you while you needed me. But you don't. You can get along without me."

"I guess I can."

Raynham looked at him again, wonderingly. And again he nodded to himself. "Yes," he said, to himself, "it 's that way with you." Then, aloud: "Well, I guess I 'll be getting back. I 'll send the schooner for you pretty soon, but there 's no hurry."

He turned, and silently they walked back to the launch. Maclear did not again ask Raynham to go to the house; and Raynham, his errand done, seemed eager to get away. Maclear felt that their comradeship was drawing to a close; that never again would things be as they had been between himself and Raynham. Raynham was swayed by motives to which he had lost the clue, emotions he did not share; his security and happiness served in some strange way to separate him from Raynham as they had from Moira.

But he was so safe he did not greatly care. Only, as they waited on the wharf till the launch should start, he touched Raynham's shoulder.

"Jack," he whispered, "*why—?*"

"Is it possible," said Raynham, sadly, "that you don't understand?"

"If you 've known—all along—I don't see why you should want to quit me *now.*"

"Don't you? I knew you both, Alan. I loved you both. And—*it just breaks my heart to see you.*"

The man came down from Morning House at a run, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. He cast off the rope and started the engine. Raynham sprang in. He did not say anything more, nor did Maclear.

A shadow was on Maclear for a moment, like a mist across his sun. He was still groping for that clue, that lost key-note, when the launch was no more than a speck out on the lake. He walked slowly back to Morning House, hurt, angry, and supremely puzzled. Why should any man stick to another in trouble and desert him in security?

At the head of the veranda steps Sombra was waiting for him. Seeing her, he quickened his pace. The doubt and the shadow passed. Let them all go. He was safe. He was secure. He saw her like the very future itself, sunlit, strong, fruitful; behind her, like the past wreckage of his own life, was the ruin of Morning House. But he need think of it never again.

Their faces were to the sun. He could never lose her. O God! how safe he was!

V

Day after day, the great companies of birds passed over Tallis Island, flying south.

There was no other sign of the waiting winter. The weather was warm and still. The brazen shafts

of the poplars, the burning torches of the ground willows, were reflected unshaken in the blue lagoons; they seemed, in their splendor, to be waiting for another consummation like that of their spring, not for decay.

But to the mysterious communal senses of the birds a summons had come. Something had stirred in the North. Something had called in the South. They listened and followed in hundreds and thousands,—kinglets, tanagers, bobolinks, whitethroats, sheathed in dull feathers for this flight. One day the island was full of their voices, also grown strange and songless; the next, they were gone, and another company had taken their place.

The big blue-shouldered swallows that Sombra loved had gone early and silently from the sand-hills. But the little black-and-white ones gathered along the marshes, filled the air for four days with their bubbling chatter; on the fifth, as at a signal, lifted and wheeled above the island, leveled, and were gone also. Sombra, watching them go, felt that they took with them the blossom of the year.

In a little while there seemed no birds left living on Tallis Island but the herring-gulls, a few crows, and the great horned owl which they saw sometimes hawking silently along the lagoons, the spirit of insatiable hunger in noiseless feathers. And at night the tremendous starlit spaces above the mists were

threaded through with the tiny traveling-calls of the thistle-birds.

Sombra, listening at the door of the house to these faint heroic pipings in the void, felt tears suddenly in her eyes. She was moved to the deepest springs of her awakening nature; in her soul, also, she seemed to hear the echo of little voices, lost, wandering in the night. She felt as though the arms of her spirit were great enough, tender enough, to fold all the small homeless things of creation, to draw them down to her, to make them hers.

She turned to Maclear, saying softly, "Oh, the poor little birds!"

"They 'll reach the South, all right."

"Not all." For the first time she thought of those, the little ones, the weak ones, who would fall by the way.

He had been standing on the step behind her, in the lighted doorway. Now he came down to her, and put his arm about her. They stood together, their faces upturned, listening to those faint cryings in the night, the voices of life, feeble, mysterious, irresistible.

When her voice again reached him it was a whisper, a breath of the night:

"They 're goin', like the minutes, the hours of this summer. Once—do you remember, Alan?—I said I would like to keep them, to hold them in my

hands, so the time would never go. I can't do that. But—"

"Well, dear heart?"

He felt her strong life thrill within his arm. But her voice was like the lost, whispering voices of the traveling birds as she said, "Those hours, those minutes, they was lovely to me."

"And to me."

"They 're goin', goin'. But maybe they 're leavin' somethin' behind for us—somethin' lovelier than them."

It was her pride that at last made him understand. But when he would have spoken she turned and laid her warm young hand across his lips. "Oh, my dear love," she said, "don't speak. There 's nothing left to be said between us two. For you 're to be the father o' my little child."

Lost in darkness, the golden birds passed over them, crying to one another. And Mait Ransome, who had been standing behind them in the open doorway, turned back into the room and went to his place.

Salvator asked, "Is Sombra out there yet?"

After a long time Mait replied, "Aye, she 's out there, talkin' to Juan—"

Maclear's first feeling, perhaps, was one of an additional security, a possessiveness nothing could question; more than when he loved her, more than when he married her, she was his.

VI

The soft darkness closed around Morning House, concealing all that day revealed. When the lights within its wall went out one by one, there seemed no division between the house and its surroundings; the mist lay along its passages as it lay along the lagoon channels; the air within its rooms was heavy with the chill, sweet marsh smell; the faint incessant whispers of its decaying fabric were one with the voices of the water, fingering along miles and miles of lonely and tideless sands.

Later, the moon rose; but the mist was compassionate as the dark had been to Morning House. Its rows of empty rooms were featureless and peaceful; filled with strands and webs of fog, they seemed impersonal as the hollows of the dunes. Morning House slept with the substance of the island into which it was resolving year by year.

But an hour or two passed, and something woke within the house. It was something mighty and yet imponderable, enclosed in an old man's body. It filled every passage, every room. The walls of Morning House seemed distended, ready to break, with the pressure of that which was within it.

That spirit reached out to Maclear's, even in his sleep, and woke him.

At first he thought it was Sombra who had called

him. But she was asleep still. He lay and listened and stared at the twilight of the moon. He heard nothing, he saw nothing. Yet in a little while he rose, pulled on a few clothes, opened the door, and slipped silently from the room.

Outside stretched the long decaying passage, bleak and bare with its rows of unused doors. It was full of luminous mist, and as this mist lifted and sank, the doors and the walls seemed to extend and shrink alternately, with a small movement like a pulsation. It was as if Morning House throbbed with fear.

Maclear saw no one. Yet he knew some one had just passed down the empty passage. He walked quickly to the end, where it gave on another. And as he went the mist again worked its impalpable magic. In a moment it had separated him from Sombra. He felt that he would have to grope his way back through immense obstacles of time and place, though their room was but just behind him.

Half-way down the second passage, a shadow moved. The moonlight, strained through softest intervening fleeces, played with the shape of that shadow; now it was vague as a cloud, again, substantial as a man. Maclear knew it for Mait Ransome.

Standing at the corner of the wall, he watched. He heard a soft sound. Mait was knocking gently

at the door of one of those unused ruinous rooms. He heard a soft whisper, clear enough to claim the attention of a drowsing man, light enough not to awaken a man who slept sound:

"Be you sleepin', Juan Luz?"

Noiseless in his bare feet, Maclear followed. That spirit darkly housed in Mait's flesh drew him in its wake as a leaf is drawn by the wind. His breath was cold in his mouth. The man to whom Mait Ransome whispered had slept sound for nearly twenty years.

The old man shuffled on, paused at another door, and softly knocked. Waiting for his answer, he leaned his head to the crack, and listened as though for the breathing of a man asleep. Then he passed on to a third door.

"Be you asleep, Juan?"

Over this door he passed his hand, with a whispering sound like his voice. This door had a rusty latch, and he found and pressed it. The door yielded with a creak. It gave inch by inch unwillingly, like a living thing on guard. Mait entered the room. Such was the conspiracy between his spirit and these rotting substances that Maclear listened for a noise, a voice, a cry. He heard only the sound of the old man's hands traveling over the walls of the empty room, and his tread retreating from the door and again returning to it.

Down the whole length of that passage Mait knocked at the doors and listened, and spoke to the dead. And Maclear had an apprehension of some presence that waited behind all the doors, and, at the right time, would reply. The house was packed from wall to wall with a tremendous intentness which had neither eyes nor ears, and needed none.

When Mait came to the end of the second passage, Maclear was by his side. But the old man was quite unaware of him. And Maclear dared not, by word or touch, divert that haunted spirit. He followed in silence, feeling his own personality strangely recede from him, sucked into that far past which was the living present to Mait Ransome. He felt himself the ghost, Juan Luz the reality, and half waited for the dead to answer.

"Where be you, Juan Luz?"

The passage ended in a blank wall. The old man leaned his head here, and his hands moved blindly on each side of him. The breath of a voice came from his lips, moaning and unmeaning sounds that shaped themselves gradually to speech. "I can't find ye, Juan," Maclear heard. And then, "The deep water, the deep water." And once more: "Martha, Martha, ye 've given me nothing, though I 've served ye seven years like Jacob. But ye 'll give this come-by-night a child."

Then Maclear knew what storm it was that had

driven Mait into his madness on this calm night. Presently the old man turned from the wall, still with that ghostly sobbing-out of wrong, and went past Maclear, and back along the passage once more. Maclear followed him.

He moved now more swiftly, and did not pause at any door. He led Maclear up the broken stairs to the second story. This was more ruinous than the lower one. But Maclear came here sometimes, for here Salvator had his room.

Mait Ransome advanced swiftly along the upper hall. The roof here and there opened on moonlit mist, through which a few stars shone blurred. The flooring gaped here and there on blackness. Mait avoided these places. He moved now quicker and quicker, as though he could see. Maclear followed. The intentness of Morning House had reached a cracking-point. He was aware of a dumb, intolerable strain, a great loneliness.

He was glad when a distant sound from without drawled to him through miles of intervening fog; he knew it for the hand-siren of a sailing-ship far out on the lake; he was less lonely by just so much as that sound, which was presently repeated.

Mait Ransome was going slower now, hesitating before the doors. Black openings gaped in many places, where the doors had been burned for firewood.

Again and again he paused, listened, advanced. He did not knock.

He stood at last outside the door behind which Salvator lay.

Maclear did not know that to this very room Juan Luz had been carried on the night of the wreck. The walls knew it, the rotting floor remembered, the roof proclaimed it, but their voices were silence to him.

Mait Ransome began to knock at the door.

The sound at first was all but inaudible; it seemed a tremor in the substance of the house and of the mist that filled it. Then it grew louder, more insistent.

There was a stir within the room.

Maclear knew it was Salvator who moved. Yet for a moment it seemed to him that Mait had been knocking at the door of a grave, and that the dead had heard.

All was still, except for the muffled and distant sound of the ship's fog-horn far out on the lake. Morning House seemed ready to crack asunder in the stillness.

Then the door opened and Salvator stood before Mait.

He too was sucked like a leaf in the wind of that spirit. Even in his sleep he could not escape it.

All his life, all his dreams, had been commanded by one event, one dread,—the dread and event of an old man's madness.

The mist laid its spell upon them all. It seemed to divide Maclear from those others, as from Sombra, by a great space of time or distance. He felt as though he were looking at a repetition of something that had happened years and years ago; a visible memory; a reincarnated hate. Across that great gulf he watched, motionless, the motion of shadows.

Salvator appeared to walk in a dream. His wide eyes were fixed on Mait with an inhuman intensity of fear. That look was stamped on his face as though the fair young flesh had been formed only to shadow it forth. His left hand was raised as if in defense, his right was hidden.

Suddenly Maclear's attention was riveted on that hidden right hand. He advanced softly toward the two figures.

As he moved Mait also began to move, with his motion exaggerated by the mist, inch by inch toward Salvator. And as he advanced, the boy went inch by inch to meet him, as though this bodily action of Mait's was reflected from his body as the look on Mait's face was reflected from his face. They were like two straws approaching each other in a pool, and were drawn together by an equally irresistible force.

It had all happened years and years before, thought Maclear.

Then, without warning, the boy screamed and struck.

Some sense in Maclear had outrun the event. Before Salvator's right hand fell, Maclear was there, and had caught his wrist. As he leaped forward he shouted,—a great healthy shout that shattered the intolerable attentiveness of Morning House as glass cracks at a blow.

For a minute he had all he could do to hold Sal. The boy's face was inhuman, his strength inhuman. At last Maclear mastered that right arm, drew it down and gripped it, forced open the fingers, waited for the clatter of a knife on the boards.

Nothing fell. The hand was empty.

Maclear pinned Salvator against the wall, staring into his face, which was slowly changing. So strong had been the illusion that Maclear could have sworn to the flash of a long blade in that hand when it flew up. But that also had been a dream.

He waited quietly. At last, without speaking, he released the boy. It was as if Salvator had but now awakened. He leaned back against the wall, shaking from head to foot. Maclear laid a hand on his shoulder. He said in a low voice, "It was only a dream, Sal."

Black horror looked from the young eyes into

his own,—horror and a shadow of fate. "It 's a dream I 'll never escape!" whispered the boy. He hid his face in his hands and began to sob.

It had happened very quickly. Maclear left him and went to Mait Ransome, who was groping vaguely about the doorway. He said, in a matter-of-fact tone: "I think you 've missed your way about the house, Mr. Ransome. This is not the way to your room."

The dream was shattered. For that time the spirit had fled. It was only a crazy old man who answered, mildly and wanderingly: "Well, you don't say so! I don't rightly remember how I happened to come here, but I ain't where I meant to be, that 's straight. Well, now, ain't that queer? And where *is* my room, sir?"

"I 'll take you to it."

He did so. When he returned, he found Sal's room and the passage empty. He went back to his own room.

But he did not go in.

The room was faintly moonlit. Sombra still slept. No echo of fear or hate had called her in her sleep. She had not waked. But she had moved.

Sal was kneeling by the side of the bed, his face hidden. He had not awakened her. But as though mysteriously aware of his need, through some awakening sense within herself, she had stretched out her

arm and encircled him in it, as a mother encloses a child from harm.

Maclear went softly away for a while. He felt that even he had not the right to enter. Not for the first time he felt himself a stranger, outside whatever fate it was that bound so closely together the sister and brother.

When he stole back, Salvator was gone, though Sombra still slept with her hand curved protectively about emptiness. Maclear kissed the arm where that wild head had rested.

The moon set. Once again the darkness withdrew Morning House into its own mercy.

The dawn came like any other dawn in the mist.

They learned that Mait had come down early, cooked his own breakfast, taken a sack, and gone to gather driftwood along the beaches.

The event of the night had left Maclear uneasy, full of a foreboding huge and vague as the fog. He did not voice it when he said, "He 'll get lost or fall into the water."

Sombra said pitifully, for the old man who had hardly ever given her even a word of kindness: "You forget. Dark and light, fog and clear, it 's all one to Mait."

"Yes," he agreed. "I forgot." But he waited for Mait's return, and was troubled when he did not come. Later, they too went out.

VII

Out on the lake the *Martine Messier* lay becalmed.

Under the moon, in the mist, she had moved like a wraith. When the moon set, the mist took her, resolved her into itself. She almost ceased to exist. Only her worn gray topsails stood clear of it, and blotted out the stars.

Leaning over the side, Garroch could hear but the faintest ghostly voice of water. He could see nothing. The schooner's lights were blurred by the mist; distance was so lost that they might have hung among the half-seen stars.

Now and then the noise of her old siren jarred through the voiceless quiet, but no ship replied. It was as though she floated outside the world, outside life, to some nameless harbor of a shadowy sea.

Garroch hummed softly to himself. The rime beaded his gray eyelashes, made him cough. He lifted his hand unconsciously every now and then to brush it away. He wondered what was the sense in keeping a watch when a man could see nothing. And his ears were not so good as they had been.

Later, he went to the hatch and called. A sleepy murmur answered him.

"Come up here, Ian."

In a minute his nephew joined him, a drowsy-eyed,

white-haired boy from the Scotch Townships. Garroch said, "Stand here on the deck an' listen."

"I 'm listenin'."

"D 'ye hear anything?"

"Seems like—almost—engines."

"Stand here. Well?"

"I don't hear nothin'."

Garroch said, "It 's the fog. I thought I heard engines, too, but the sound comes and goes." He melted away into the mist forward, and presently the little fog-horn bleated like a lost sheep, and bleated again. There was no reply. Impossible to say how far the noise would travel on such a night. The boy stayed where he was, awake now, and shivering in the chill, trying to pierce the white darkness with his young vision.

By and by he called sharply, "Uncle!"

"Aye, Ian?"

"I have the sound now. It 's closer."

Garroch ran back and joined him. He said, "I don't hear it."

"It 's gone again. Just as if there was a door openin' and shuttin'."

"It 's the fog. I 've known it before like this."

"There!"

"Aye, I heard it then. Within a half-mile, I reckon. But there 's no tellin'."

He disappeared once more, and the fog-horn wheezed and bleated; but the night returned no answer. The boy followed him, his bare feet pattering along the wet deck. Between blasts of the siren, they both listened; they heard the drip of moisture falling from the standing rigging; the blood hammered in their ears; they thought the hollows of the fog gave back, as it were, an echo of this drumming.

Suddenly Ian shouted again, "There!"

The mysterious doors of the mist had opened. They heard the beat of engines plainly. Garroch said, "If we could but get some way on her! They 're very near. They 're—"

"Right on us!" screamed the boy.

As though some solid intervening substance had been at that instant withdrawn, they heard the engines, saw a red light and a green one, like little balls of colored wool in the fog, bearing straight down on the *Martine's* starboard quarter. They jumped to the side and shouted wildly. They heard a shout in answer; the beat of the engines altered, slowed; a little the lights changed line. They waited. Garroch said aloud, "They can't clear us."

The boy sobbed with suspense and excitement.

Then a shadowy gleaming bow struck the schooner, with a gentle thrusting motion, just abaft the mizzen chains. She heeled over to port. The steamer's bows, coming round, scraped slowly along

her side and the two vessels ground their length together, surged on with a strange effect of leisureliness, and as slowly separated. The tug—it was a fishing-tug—backed away, and immediately vanished into the mist. The *Martine* swung and settled herself once more on a level keel.

A strange voice, extraordinarily near, though the speaker was invisible, drawled through the fog, "That was a close call!"

"Too close. Did n't you hear our siren, sonny?"

"Thought it was miles away. Say, you all right?"

"Guess so."

"So are we, I guess. Better have a look at that old scow of yours. I 'll stand by a while if you like."

"No need," answered Garroch, rather indignantly; "she 's all right."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

"I 'll get on, then. So long!"

"So long!—Say, you aboard the tug!"

"Hello!"

"Don't you go rammin' Tallis Island in the dark, scootin' about like you was an automobile!"

Dim laughter answered from the invisible tug. They heard the ting of a little bell in the mist, the beat of the sturdy engines slowly receding. Presently they were left to silence again, save for their own

voices. At the collision the other men had come up on deck and they now stood yawning and questioning Garroch.

The old man's nerve had been a little shaken. He told the event garrulously. Ian said nothing. He was still listening, aware of an uneasy stir, somewhere in the misty world, between a vibration and a sound.

By and by he stooped and laid his hand flat on the deck. The smallest tremor was running through the wood, as though the *Martine* were sailing on a light wind. He knelt, and laid both hands to the deck. He felt that it was rising ever so little to port.

"What 's wrong with you, boy?" asked Garroch, impatiently, seeing his crouching figure.

Ian did not answer. He jumped up and ran to the side. Standing on the bulwarks, he caught the shrouds and leaned far out.

A glimmer of water under the mist—

The boy's eyes pierced the haze. Suddenly he leaped back on the deck and shouted hoarsely.

"She 's goin' *down!*" he screamed. "She 's goin' down under us! She 's goin' down all standin'!"

A moment's utter silence. Then, "*What? What 's* he say?"

"Sinkin' under us?"

Two or three shadows plunged to the side, and leaned out as Ian had done. One jumped back with

a frightened oath. "Settlin'!" he stammered. "She 's settlin' under our feet! She 's almost awash now! Boys, I could 'a' set my feet in the boat!"

There was another silence, then an inarticulate shouting; one shouted that it was nonsense, another bawled after the tug; in a moment they were all saying one thing: "The boat! Let 's take to the boat!"

They hesitated. The quietness was so great they could not believe their own danger. But as they paused, the deck under their feet seemed to give an uneasy shudder. The *Martine* dipped to starboard, swung slowly back, dipped again. A trickle of dark water slid over the deck from one side to the other.

They yelped and ran, shaken by the silence and the mist.

The boat had been towing astern. The collision had driven it round under the port quarter. They dropped into it one by one, talking in low, scared whispers.

"Been on the lakes forty years. Never knowed the like!"

"The boss 'll be real mad. He was set on the old ship."

"Got the sculls, Levett?"

"Aye, aye. Shove off, there. Quick! She 's droppin' like a stone."

"Where 's that darned tug?"

The last voice ran up and cracked. Another asked, "What is it, anyway?"

"Must have ripped the old planks clean out of her, like they was paper."

"Pull, boys! Get clear. Feel that? There 's a wind behind the fog."

The sculls splashed flurriedly. They pulled away, chattering nervously, as near on the course taken by the tug as they could guess it. They shouted, but there was no reply. In a minute, looking back, no man could see the old *Martine*, nor say where she had been.

In a little while, toward dawn, a wind began to press upon the mist, and the vapor began to flow like water, like a river, interminably. The schooner's soft gray topsails darkened against the paling sky; they filled; her rigging creaked; water-logged, she drifted forward under the last stars.

She kept afloat until day. Then, as if the winds and the lake were consciously gentle with her, the beautiful old forsaken thing, she went ashore softly, all sails standing, on the sands beyond the ledge of Tallis Island, where a fruit-boat from the Floridas had been wrecked twenty years before.

All about her the mist changed to pearl, to a silver and silent tide flowing past without ceasing. It did not lift with the day.

VIII

Sombra was walking homeward with Maclear along the marshes. He carried an armful of driftwood; she, one of flowers and leaves,—silvery yellow aspen leaves, blotched with black, scarlet ground willow, late goldenrod, and purple asters. Leaves, blossoms, and stems were covered by the mist with an infinity of smallest pearls.

Their hair, their eyebrows, even their eyelashes were whitened with the mist. Looking at Maclear, Sombra laughed. "Now we know what we 'll look like when we 're old," she said. Then came the inevitable woman's question: "Will you love me as much when I 'm old, Alan?"

After a moment he said with passion: "Young or old, sick or well, living or dead, Sombra, you hold me. As you held me that first night of all, you 'll hold me to the end."

"And you me."

She sighed with exquisite content, and slipped her arm through his. That clinging touch, her warm nearness, the rough, sweet smell of her autumn flowers,—these things were to remain with Maclear for many and many a day.

He said, with that appeal of which he was unconscious, "You 'll never let me go, Sombra?"

"Never, dear love. And you 'll never stop lovin' me?"

She could but just hear his answer. "Never, even if you were—dust."

They laughed a little, at themselves, at each other.

Never, never, never. Word too great for the knowledge of man's mind, but not for the courage of his heart. The mist flowed past them as though they walked at the bottom of a sea whose substance was cloud, not water. Endless, soundless, it blotted out their world, drifting perpetually. Time, youth, life itself seemed one with that continual silent flood, passing away.

Sombra said: "What 's queer about love like ours is that it don't stay the same. It grows. When I used to think about it—before you come—I thought folk fell in love, an' got married, an' just stayed *so*. It ain't—is n't—that way. It 's growin' all the while, from day to day. Alan, you remember when you laughed at my shoes and I ran away into the mist? Well, I would n't do that now. I 'd know better than that you thought to hurt me."

"And when I was looking for you, I thought you were hiding on purpose, that you did n't want to be found. I 'd know better than that, too."

Her sweet dark face, a little pale, turned to him in the mist. Her deep voice shook. "Dear," she said, "wherever I 'm called on to go, anywhere in

life, anywhere in—death, I 'll want you to find me."

"I 'll follow and find you wherever it is, my wife." He kissed her as though she were a holy thing. They went on together.

Their way led them through a little poplar wood, a grove among the dunes. The straight and slender trunks glimmered about them in the mist. Golden leaves yet clung on the spires above them, here and there, like metal flowers. In the hush of the mist they could hear the beaded moisture dripping on the sand.

Here and there, very gradually, the mist was thinning. It gave them glints of distance, immediately curtained by a fresh and soundless cloud, driving in from the lake. Vanishing windows in the tremendous wall of vapor showed them a bush, a tree, a gleam of sunlight, the gray shadow of a wheeling gull. Some reeling tunnel, brief as a breath, opened on sand or water, the clear sky or a single blade of grass.

Sombra's hand closed suddenly on Maclear's. She said, "Who 's that walkin' in the wood with us?"

"I did n't see any one."

She pointed. "Away there. Just like a shadow, a great shadow driftin' through the trees."

He paused, looked, listened. The mist enclosed them. They walked on again. He said, "I guess that was it,—just a shadow of the mist, Sombra."

"No," she answered quietly, "it was a man."

"Was it?"

"Yes. I think it was Mait."

Maclear was silent. He had not told her of the happening of the night; he did not speak of it now; but he was troubled. He stared among the ghostly gleaming stems of the little poplars. The mist gave him a hundred shapes, a hundred shadows, but not one that might have been a man. He asked, more of himself than of her, "What would Mait be doing out in the mist?"

"Mist or darkness, it 's all one to him, Alan."

Unconsciously Maclear tightened his hold on her arm and began to walk faster. He remembered that great spirit of the night, under which the walls of Morning House had seemed to crack and strain; he wondered if it were abroad now, walking the island, seeking, seeking and never finding. He thought of Mait Ransome no longer as an individual but as an embodied hunger and a dark desire.

Swift as a breeze passing across a pool, the mist quivered and thinned. He looked for an instant down a narrow aisle between wet poplar stems and little aspen bushes. He too saw a shadow moving there with outstretched hand, no sooner apprehended than hidden, lost again in innumerable webs of running mist. He was not sure, but he thought that

huge uncertain shadow had been running, too, in the same direction as the mist flowed, and as though irresistibly driven with it. He saw no more.

They came out of the wood, and walked down the beach. Maclear said, "Where 's Sal?"

"Gone to look at the night-lines he had out by the ledge. Let 's go home that way, Alan, an' look for him." A little later she went on, "There 's something I 'd like to say to you about Sal."

"Say it, dear heart."

She was silent, then suddenly stooped, caught his hand, and kissed it. He saw there were tears in her eyes. "It 's this," she whispered: "if I did n't love you for anything else, Alan, I 'd love you for the way you act to Sal."

"He 's your brother, you silly child!"

"Yes. He 's my own dear brother. We been—dearer to each other than most brothers an' sisters, along of the queer life we 've had. We 've always helped each other. Alan, if there ever comes a day—when I ain't here, dear, to help Sal, do you help him for me."

He knew what she thought of; and, following her thought, his own heart wrenched in him so that he could hardly control his voice. He did so, and promised: he would always be a brother to Sal, for her sake. He looked into her tender, happy eyes;

and the word "brother" laid no least remembered shadow on this fulfilment of his life, with its lovely anxiety and its lovelier hope.

He had indeed forgotten. As he had promised himself, so it was: the past was becoming to him as though it had not been.

Along the beach, in the dizzy flow of the brightening mist, Sal came to them. When he saw them he began running. He joined them, and stood a moment, breathing quickly, and looking from one to the other with eyes bright and wild with excitement.

"What 's happened, Sal?"

It was Maclear who spoke. But the boy replied to Sombra. "It 's a ship," he said briefly, "grounded out on the sands."

Something held them silent an instant. Then Sombra asked, in a low voice, "Grounded in the same place—?"

"In the same place as the fruit-boat went to pieces? I guess so. But I ain't sure. It 's so thick over the water yet that you can't see a thing. But when I was out along the ledge, seeing to my lines, I heard little sounds."

"Voices?"

"No. The wind 's sendin' a ripple in, under the mist. I heard it strike on somethin'. I heard other sounds,—little creaks like riggin', little noises like a ship's sails make, slattin' in the wind. Once I

thought I saw a great tall shadow, as it might 'a' been the sails of a ship."

"She 's run ashore all standing, then?"

"I think so. Last night, I guess, in the fog."

"I heard a siren," said Maclear, quickly.

"Hers, maybe." Again, Salvator was looking gravely at Sombra. He went on: "Don't be worried, Sis. I guess the crew got off all right in the boat."

Then Maclear looked at Sombra, and saw that she was pale and that her eyes were full of tears. He realized, perhaps fully for the first time, how the lonely and desolate lives of the brother and sister had been governed by that event of twenty years before; that without it they would not have existed; that through it their years had been shaped to a reflection of its own sorrow.

Meeting his eyes, she wiped her own on the back of her hand, like a child. "I 'm silly," she said simply, "but I get terr'ble worked up when a ship goes ashore. Seems like as if it reminded me—What you goin' to do, Sal?"

"I 'm goin' to swim out and look. I was just waitin' to tell you and Alan. I guessed you 'd be along sometime soon." He had been carrying a string of fish. These he laid in a tuft of dune grass. "You watch them fish, Sombra," he said gently, "and stay here. We 'll know where to find you if there 's anything you k'n do."

She nodded. Salvator led Maclear back a short distance through the mist, which seemed thrilled now with an invisible excitement, and out along the ledge which was the spine of the shoals. The mist was sunlit now, running faster and faster before a sweetening breeze that already sent small waves slapping gaily along the ledge; but it showed no break. It poured past them as though it would pour forever. Sal pointed into it.

"Listen," he whispered; "she 's out there."

Maclear listened. After a while he thought he heard numberless faint sounds that together made up the complaint as of a living substance. He heard no sound of men.

Suddenly he shivered. The mist and the silence oppressed him. He felt himself passive in the hold of long-dead events, ruled by their ghostly hands, impalpable and destructive as the mist. The whole world, invisible, seemed waiting about him; an enormous peceptiveness filled the air, the water; all existence was focused to one point of blind apprehension. He asked impatiently, "Can you see anything yet?"

"No. But I know she 's there." Sal swept his hand unconsciously across his eyes. "This mist," he went on in the same hushed voice, "I wish it 'd go. I don't like a mist. It makes everything seem all shut up, like; an empty room, shut up, out o' doors." He shook himself out of his shabby old clothes.

"Anyway, I 'm goin' to see. If I was rich I 'd set a lighthouse here again, and a bell to ring."

"I 'll come with you." Maclear stooped to unlace his boots.

"I wish you 'd wait, Alan. I 'll swim out, and if a ship 's there, I 'll yell to you, an' then you k'n go back and tell Sombra. She gets all worked up, times like this. You k'n come out to me then."

"All right," said Maclear, gently. He was touched by the boy's thought for Sombra. He sat down cross-legged on the sand. "Get on with you, Sal," he said; "I want to know if there *is* a ship there!"

Sal glanced down at him with his sudden transforming smile. The next moment he dived from the ledge. Maclear watched the sleeked black head come up, and the water bubbling green along the stones. In another moment Sal had vanished into the milky obscurity. The sound of his strokes came back for a little while to Maclear. Then these also ceased. Nothing was there but the mist running over the ripples. Maclear sat still, staring into the cloud.

That endless flow of obscurity made him feel disembodied from the world.

He thought he waited a long time before he heard, strange and thin-drawn through the fog, Salvator's voice.

He jumped up and shouted in answer, then listened. This time he was in no doubt.

"Alan! There's a schooner aground here on the outer shoal! All standin'! There's no one aboard!"

The ghostly voice broke with excitement.

A thought leapt into Maclear's mind. He shouted back, "What's her name?"

The reply was indistinct, ending in two clear words, "Tell her." Maclear, considerably excited himself, turned back along the ledge to find Sombra. At that moment he heard her voice, wildly calling his name.

There was such terror in her voice that to him it was as though the mist had been rent apart, and showed him darkness, not day. He ran down the ledge, calling to her: "Sombra! Sombra, where are you? What is it?" He could see nothing. She was lost in the fog.

He ran desperately. The very wraiths of the mist seemed to clog his feet, as though he ran in a dream.

Again her voice came to him, sharpest dread in her accents: "Alan! It's Mait! I can't hold him! He's heard the ship out on the shoal! Alan, he's comin'! Don't let him by! He's comin' after Sal!"

Her voice approached, winged with dread. She was running toward him, toward the ledge. But

Mait Ransome was upon him almost before her cry had ceased.

He strode suddenly out of the mist, which seemed to part for him. His broad blind face was raised. His dead eyes stared out lakeward. But at that moment he was not blind. Behind the fog he saw the ship,—the ship of twenty years before: the fruit-boat from the Floridas, long since fallen to dust on that shoal.

That vision was on his face, like a light that was darkness. Maclear caught his breath. No use to speak! He gathered all his strength, sprang forward, and seized the old man round the body.

He was strong. But as though he had been mist Mait Ransome put him aside, swept him by. He said, *"I 'm not goin' to have Juan brought ashore again,"* and passed on toward the vision of his hate.

Maclear staggered, and rolled splashing from the ledge into the shallow water. He was up again almost directly. But in that moment the old man had plunged from the ledge as Salvator had done, and like him was swimming slowly away into the fog, guided by those faint sounds that had led Salvator, the complaint of a dying ship.

Maclear hesitated a moment. But after all, Mait was blind and the boy was quick and could swim like a fish. He gave one great shout of warning, then turned and ran to meet Sombra.

All had happened so quickly that she had not yet reached him. She had been struggling with Mait. He had not hurt her. As he had put Maclear aside, so in the strength of his vision he had put her. She had fallen in the sand. Maclear saw her white face and her streaming black hair dawn suddenly out of the mist.

It was a face he did not know, a face staring beyond him at horror. His heart leaped in his throat. He ran to her, caught her in his arms, spoke to her,—he did not know what. For a moment he had forgotten everything but her. And as she had fought with Mait to hold him, now she fought terribly with Maclear, to get past him. As she had cried then, cried his name, so she cried now. But her cry was, "Sal! Sal! My brother!"

That cry rent his heart. Her desperate struggles to get away from him, to follow and defend Salvator, shook him to the soul. She was wild with terror, that strange terror of dreams which he had seen in the boy's face in the night. He tried to control her, to reassure her, but she was beyond his voice. She struck at him, crying all the time in that terrible dry voice, for "Sal, Sal, Sal!" He imprisoned her hands, and carried her back to the beach by sheer force. Had he not used it she would have thrown herself into the water and followed them to the ship.

He set her down on the sand. Her terror had

passed to him, though he could not have said what he feared. He dared not leave her. She struggled no more. She seemed unconscious that he was holding her. She leaned against him. Her hands were held out, grasping the mist. Now and then she shuddered and moaned.

He never knew how long they waited on the beach behind the shoal, staring into that cloud.

Suddenly, from the unseen ship, there came a great cry. He felt Sombra shudder and grow stiff against him, as though she had died. There had been death in that cry. But life was in her, in the ceaseless endeavor of her hands, in the dreadful gaze that seemed to pierce the mist.

Whose voice?

They waited, awfully intent. There came no other sound.

Then Maclear would have covered her eyes with his hand. But she struck it down.

For the mist cleared.

It was running in great banks, as it does on the lakes, each bank as sharply divided from the clear, and with as clean a line, as though it were a wall of stone. One of these walls passed over the island. In the clear behind it there sprang suddenly to their eyes the glittering ship.

Maclear knew her instantly.

The old *Martine Messier* had grounded so gently

that she lay on an almost level keel. Her deck, just clearing the ripple, was tilted toward them. Her old canvas swelled unavailingly in the sweet fresh breeze. From deck to topsails she was frosted with the rime, and the brief sun sparkled on her as though she were a diamond; she looked a jewel upon the face of another white wall of mist that came sweeping down on her, on the bright shoal water where she lay so quietly, on the island and those who watched.

It came. The ship vanished, and the water, and the strong sun. But not before they had seen.

The deck was empty.

"Sombra! My God! I could n't stop him! He threw me down like a child."

Even then, though her terrible look was still toward the ship, she tried to find comfort for him. "I know," her dead voice said, "I know. It was not your fault, dear. It—was to be."

Suddenly she failed and sank. Maclear laid her down on the sand. Her eyes still stared toward the ship. But he could no longer endure inaction. He left her and ran staggering toward the ledge.

In a moment he stopped.

Some one was swimming heavily to the shore.

Life seemed to stand still for Maclear while he waited.

A sleeked black head appeared from the mist.

Sal's face stared blankly up at him from the fog. Maclear could not move.

Very weakly the boy drew himself up out of the water. Very slowly he walked to where Maclear stood. His eyes stared and stared, beyond Maclear, beyond the world. At last he said faintly: "I been divin'—after him. I could n't find him.—I 'm cold."

Maclear was cold, too. He gripped Sal by his wet shoulders, and strove, by impassioned words, with entreaties, to break that terrible blank stare. He could not.

"He come on me when I was leanin' over the side. He took me to drown me. I threw him—with that fall you learned me. He cried when he went over. I can't find him. It 's done, done, done—"

Still whispering that it was done, done, done, he moved slowly away from Maclear toward the beach.

Shaking himself free of that horror that rested on him as the mist rested on his vision, Maclear stripped and swam out to the schooner.

She dawned upon him like a shadow from the delicate blinding mist. He walked again her glimmering deck. He searched and shouted like a madman. Then, as Sal had done, he dived; came up empty-handed; dived, and dived again. At last he was exhausted. He rested on the deck a while, shaking.

Then he swam back to the ledge, dressed, and followed Sal to the beach.

Salvator had not gone far.

He had fallen on his face at Sombra's feet. And now she sat crouched above him, swaying to and fro. She had drawn the boy's passive head on her knees, encircled his bare wet shoulders with her strong arms, crooning to him, passionately pitying him, with low mother-sounds of immeasurable grief. As Maclear approached she lifted her head suddenly and wailed aloud. And the mist took up her cry, and the lake increased it, and the unseen hollows of the dunes returned it against his heart.

He said, "Sombra, my dear love."

After a long time, and it seemed from a long distance, her eyes were looking at him.

She said: "Don't stay here, Alan. Leave us be. It 's done."

"Sombra, my dearest, listen! It was an accident; it was in self-defense. Oh, my God, *listen!*"

For suddenly an infinite terror struck to Maclear's soul.

She was distant, removed, fading from him, as though he saw her through miles of mist. She lifted Sal's brown hand. As if she had not heard him at all, she repeated, in the same dead voice: "It 's *done.* He 's done it—with this hand—at last."

"Sombra!"

He caught her in his arms. And at that, as if he had struck her, she shrieked. She beat him away.

"Sombra—"

In her eyes was death. That, and a great horror of shame,—not for herself, not for Salvator; for him.

"My love! my wife—"

"Never again, Alan, never again. We 're not fit; not fit for you to as much as touch us any more!"

His hands reached out to her. She shrank from them as though her body would have burned him had he touched it. She said in that dull, strange voice, "We was beneath you before, not fit for you."

"Sombra, Sombra, you 'll break my heart."

"What are we *now?* O Christ of pity, what are we now?"

He tried to find her, to hold her. She and Sal had risen, and somehow they escaped him. The mist flowed between; and that space seemed to widen and increase, till it was a gulf without bound, wider, deeper than the channel of the Bersimis,—an unplumbed hollow that no assurance, no love, no reason could span; unbridgeable as death.

"Sombra!"

But she was gone. He had lost them. Clinging together like stricken children, they were running from him into the mist.

Only her wild voice came back to him, "Never! never no more!"

IX

Maclear was standing outside a closed door.

He must have spent hours standing outside it, waiting for a word that never came; he was familiar with every mark in the unpainted wood of the panel against which his head rested. He knew every curve and whorl and ribboned line in the silvery pinewood. He had traced them over and over with his finger.

He remembered little of the last days but this closed door in the eternal corridors of the mist.

There were other things, all of which he had endured, all of which had passed from him.

Garroch had come out to the island in the launch from the town. The schooner's crew had all been picked up by the fishing-tug and taken safely into port. Strangers also had appeared on Tallis Island, —unknown faces, forgotten as soon as seen, looking at him, talking to him out of this mist.

One of these faces said to him that it was a bad job, and that he 'd always knowed something like this 'd happen, and that the young folk seemed all broke up about the old feller instead of seein' it as a happy release, which it was, look at it how you would. Maclear agreed that it was a bad job. But he referred to life itself.

Mait's body was recovered; it was brought in from the deep water, into the empty rooms of Morning

House as Juan Luz had been carried in long ago. It was taken over to the town and quietly buried—with what unknown irony and unconscious charity!—in the little cemetery where Sombra's mother lay. They rested at last together, with their love and their hate.

There were few questions to be met, no doubts. An old man, known to be half-witted, swimming out to a stranded ship, there to fall from her deck and be drowned,—there was nothing here to question or to doubt. Only Maclear and Sombra and Salvator knew the truth.

It was a truth that could never be told, for her sake. Perhaps Salvator alone realized that he would never be able to lift that burden from his soul by any way of confession. All his life he must bear in silence the fruit of a long-past love and a long-past hate. By the truth he could never make himself free.

He moved in that shadow, far off from them and apart.

Maclear was left alone, standing outside a closed door.

Wherever he went in the perpetual mist, it stood before him. He wandered the island to escape it, and it fronted him in every barrier of the fog, every shadow of the flowing cloud. At night he returned to it, and rested with his hands upon the threshold,

sleepless and still. Hour by hour, he knew, that space was widening between them.

He was released now from the small duties, the arrangements which had spared her. All was over. Old wrongs had come to their appointed end. In the lonely rooms of Morning House the little painted hulls gathered the blowing sand, and the mist ran over an empty place.

Once more Tallis Island was solitary, returned to its wandering voices, its waves and shadows. Even the schooner had been towed off the shoal, patched, and taken to the town yards.

Maclear leaned against the closed door, and thought of the golden room in which he would have set his love, and the door he would have shut for the delight of opening it; and laughed.

Silence had laid a hand on Morning House. This was the first sound that the empty rooms had heard. The flickering spaces of the mist seemed to shrink from it.

He began to call her, very softly: "Sombra! Sombra!" There was no answer. He called her aloud. Something was giving way in him. He set his shoulder to the door. It quivered, cracked; the bolt flew out; he thrust again, savagely, as he might have thrust at a living enemy. The door fell.

He had her in his arms. He had been starving for the feeling of her hair against his cheek, her heart

under his hand. These he had now, and his kisses were on her lips, her hair, her pale eyelids. Words came from his lips, broken words, stammering phrases, in which there was nothing distinct but "I love you, Sombra. I can't do without you. Don't let me go."

All at once he was very still. She lay in his arms without look, motion, or resistance. Even her finger was not lifted against him. But it came to him that he had not broken down the door after all.

He released her. She went slowly away from him to the wall, against which she rested, hiding her face in her hands. He said again, "Sombra." She lifted her head then, and looked long at him. Looked and looked, as one looks on a thing soon to be gone, soon to be hidden; then again she hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, Sombra! my dear love! my poor child! why punish both of us this way?" He was suddenly very tender with her.

She looked at him once more. He was her world. What she contemplated was like death; the death of the body would have seemed to her a little thing, and what she contemplated, that she had strength to do.

Like a dream half forgotten, the thought of the ruin and waste and betrayal of life was returning to him, overwhelming him; all that he had built

on was again running with the sand, drifting with the mist. He was lost. He spoke again, using the words of that dream unconsciously.

"Don't leave me. Don't let me go."

Her voice came to him as though from a great distance. "I said—long ago—that I 'd never leave you, unless it was good for you to be left."

He answered now as he had answered then: "My God, as though it ever could be!"

And all the while—as he fought, as he pleaded, as he struggled with her, spirit to spirit,—there flowed in upon him, like the cold tide of the mist, that weary sense of waste, that vast blank foreknowledge of futility.

She uncovered her face; it was colorless; her eyes were sunken in dark rings, but they looked at him with steadiness; her whole being was keyed to this passion of suffering and sacrifice; having seen this agony, she embraced it. There was something in her not of the North. She saw herself and Salvator in the same dark shadow of fate. She—pure child, pure wife, pure mother that was to be—called herself a murderer's sister; she was resolute to keep Maclear free from that stain. Looking forward, she thought it would be well if she died and released him from an inconceivable wrong.

If she could have ceased to be his wife, she would

have; if she could have blotted from his mind every memory of her, she would have; if she could have charmed him so that he would have passed her and thought her a stranger, it had been done. The height of her love alone could now plumb the depths of her abnegation. She had shut a door between them. She would not defile him to admit him.

"Sombra, you saved me once. Will you let me be lost now? I 'm lost without you. I must see you, speak to you, listen to you, or I shall go mad." The mist had taken everything. But as that running cloud, when he walked in it, released him here a stone, there a pool, again a tree, so now wild words were returned to him, an agony of appeal that broke upon the girl like foam.

"Alan, I saved you once by comin' to you. I thought—I thought as you 'd turn from us—after this—not to be disgraced by us. Maybe I prayed you would. Maybe that was a selfish prayer. And what I must do, I must do of my own self."

"Sombra—"

"If I must save you this time by goin' from you, I 'll do it, if I die for it."

He heard her as if from miles away, though he was there at her feet, clasping her knees. She did not even tremble. She stooped, and with her cold hands unlaced his hot fingers. Her words came

to him faintly: "We ain't fit that you should touch us. Will you go, Alan,—forgive me—oh, forgive me—for what I let you do, and go?"

"Never, Sombra."

He caught those cold hands, kissed them, wept over them. No tremor broke her calm. Only after a while she whispered, "Dear, if you touch me any more, I shall die."

He dropped her hands and rose, facing her. Her love, across that abyss love itself had dug, looked back at him with an awful, solemn compassion. He spoke now very quietly. He asked, "Sombra, are you going to leave me?"

"Yes, Alan."

"I could stop you. I could lock you in this room. I could send for the schooner and take you back to the city and keep you there. I 'd almost find it in my heart, Sombra, to tie you up, to beat you, to break you, to smash that beautiful body of yours till I came to *you;* to hold *you* in my hands a minute, like a bird out of a cage—that wild thing. Only—" he flung up his hands—"only you 'd be gone. Gone."

Her eyes never faltered; rather, they lit to a brighter flame. She said clearly, "I love you, dear, better than my life."

And he said: "I know it. I see it. That 's why you are doing this."

As he spoke he drew back from her. He had lost her. He looked all round the familiar shabby room, then again at her. And at this time, when he was defeated as he had never been before, when he was betrayed as never before, when the whole substance of his life had gone down in ruin,—at this time, as never before, he was strong.

Under the sand and the mist, under the wreck and the waste and the cruelty, he had come upon a rock.

He said, "Sombra, if you want to leave me, I won't lift so much as a finger to prevent you."

She waited, her pitiful eyes on his.

"You shall do what you like, go where you like. I leave you free. My poor love, I 'll torture you no more."

Now she began to shake. She made no sound. But the tears brimmed her eyes silently, flooded her cheeks in a bright glitter, dripped on her gown.

"But, Sombra, you can never lose me. You can never leave me. You can never escape me. Because I love you."

He went out then, and she was alone within the broken door.

The night passed over Tallis Island; the mist, and the keen air, and the tide of stars. When the stars were going out, and a great wash of yellow light filled the sky, Sombra leaned over her brother and woke him.

He looked up at her quietly. As though the thought that had been all the time in her mind had been also in his, he asked, "Sombra, you goin' away?"

"Yes."

Her eyes rested on him without reproach. His face twitched. He got up. He had lain down fully dressed, as though in expectation of her summons. She held out her hand. He took it. Clinging one to the other, like stricken children, they went through the empty house. They passed that room of the broken door, and many another; no door had now anything to close upon or to guard.

They went out into the mist. There had been a frost, too, and the whole front of Morning House, the pale brown reeds of the lagoons, the grass, the sand itself, were all immaculately silvered. Their foot-prints were black in this purity; the first sun, the increasing warmth of the day, would make them as though they had never been.

They went to the little boat-house. But Sombra, who had been quiet as a stone, shrank and wailed suddenly: "Not the little boat! Not his!" And so the dumb boy left the skiff where it was, and launched the heavy boat that had been Mait's. They stepped into it. Salvator took the oars. They crept away into the mist.

The oars made a muffled sound in the stillness

and the dim golden cloud. It was like the throbbing of a heart. The sound struck on a heart. And in a moment the snowbirds whirled affrighted from the lake beaches, and a score of wild duck lifted from the reeds. The mist itself seemed to part before that wild cry, "I love you, Alan, I love you!"

The oars beat steadily. The boy bent over them groaned once. The mist had not parted toward Morning House, but toward the town. It was like a lane of rolling yellow vapor, a reeling tunnel, down which the old boat crept and crept, and in which it presently vanished away.

Later, when Maclear woke, he knew himself alone.

X

He went, too, the next day, over to the town. He went in the little skiff, which he left at the yards where the schooner was; then he found himself a room in the town.

He had spoken no more than the truth to Sombra. She could not lose him. But before he followed her he must rest.

He was aware now of a blank like death, an immense lethargy. The mists seemed to have entered his soul; his senses were dulled; his whole being reeled and drifted. But behind this mist his love shone like a star. And love is very patient.

The room he took was a cheap and common one, in a poor part of the town. He had chosen it out of several better ones because its single window gave on a blank wall and not on a view of the lake.

Here he lay in bed all day, his lean knees drawn up, staring at the ceiling, too tired, for a little while, even to grieve.

He stared at the ceiling because there was a stain on it caused by a leak. The leak made a very good map of Tallis Island, and he traced on it over and over again the lagoons, the site of Morning House, the sand-hills, and the shore.

He was out of sight of the lake. But in the quiet of the night he could hear it. And when darkness came in his ugly room, he could see it. He always saw it rippling softly shoreward under a milk-white mist, and rising from it a boy's stricken face.

His landlady, a kindly soul and much puzzled about him, brought him food. Sometimes he ate it and sometimes he forgot it, as he stared at his map on the ceiling.

The house was quiet. Occasionally people came to it and were admitted. He always knew when the front door opened or shut, because an ill-hung picture on the ill-built wall opposite his bed shook on its nail. One evening, when he could no longer see his map, he saw this picture glimmer in the dusk, and knew that some one had entered the house.

Presently he heard steps outside, and his door opened, admitting a bar of gas-light from the hall.

He said, "Who is it?"

"It 's me,—Jack. You never wanted me before. Do you want me now?"

"Yes," said Maclear, after a while. Then he asked, "How did you know I was here?"

"Garroch told me."

"I thought you 'd—quit."

"Well, I 'm here."

Raynham moved forward to the side of the bed, suddenly and quietly dropped on his knees there.

"I told you I 'd never quit you if you wanted me, Alan. It 's good and dark. Tell me all about it, old man."

Maclear turned over, rested his forehead on Raynham's hand, and told.

All the time the mist drifted above them; above the town and the lake; above Tallis Island and the empty house; above hearts that sorrowed and hearts that slept. It was like Time, ceaseless, vast, impalpable, flowing away, taking all things to itself. All things but love, which was, and is, and is to come.

III

THE SNOW

I

IT was late when Maclear rode out to the farm. His horse was tired. He went at a walking-pace along a sandy track where thin ice crackled in every rut. A half-moon, high-risen, barred the track with regular blocks of silver between the black shadows of pines that grew on each side.

Maclear looked at every tree and bush that he passed. For along this track Sombra might sometimes have walked; and he was glad his eyes should rest where hers had rested.

He rode through an opening in the old snake-fence into a wide pasture, limitless silver in the young frost. From the midst an owl lifted noiselessly as he went by. He crossed the pasture and entered another road, at the end of which a cluster of small bare buildings showed sharp and frail as paper in that Northern moon.

Over them a windmill pump reared a lofty disk, whirling now and then with a hollow clank in the silence. A dog barked. Two great maples grew behind the buildings. The stars glittered among

their quiet branches,—so delicate, small, and still, like white fish in a black net. One window of the house showed a light behind a red blind. Maclear knew himself expected and awaited.

He rode softly to a weather-whitened door, about which the dry dead stems of a vine rustled. He shivered at the faint wintry sound. He dismounted. Before he could knock the door opened and a woman stood there.

"It 's I,—Maclear."

"I knew it 'd be you."

He looked with keen scrutiny at Sombra's friend. The woman was worn and thin; she had the look of a human body reduced to its hardiest fiber by hard work; but in her eyes was a young and living spirit; they were the only means of expression she had, for her voice was so weary and nasal it conveyed no meaning. She said again: "I knew it 'd be you. Come right in."

He entered with her. She called softly, and presently a half-clad freckled boy came stumbling down the stairs, stared a moment sleepily at Maclear, and then led his horse round to the stable. The outer door shut. She led him along a warm, stuffy hall and into a dim, warm kitchen. Maclear looked round as though he wanted to mark everything the room contained, and remember it. For here Sombra came every day.

"Set right down, Mr. Maclear. I kep' some supper for you."

He sat down in silence. She came to the table with a steaming coffee-pot and some cold meat. She turned up the lamp. Her worn face was revealed against the shadows; his also. For a moment they measured each other quietly.

Then Maclear said: "It 's good of you to have waited up for me. It 's good of you to have let me come at all."

He was indeed grateful to this woman. But there was another matter that went beyond gratitude. He continued, in a very low voice, "Mrs. Mackerrow, how is she?"

"Her health 's good, Mr. Maclear, her bod'ly health. It 's her mind 's—hurt."

"I know."

"So it 's best she should n't see you yet, sir, nor know you are anywheres around."

Maclear took up the knife and fork she had set for him and began to eat. Presently he asked in the same quiet way, "And the boy?"

"Well—in bod'ly health. He 's off with Bassett to-night. They 'd to take the big sleigh into town to get the runners fixed, and they 'll stop over-night. I 'm glad he 's away. It—he 's eatin' his heart out over you, some way."

Maclear looked up, and met the keen and living

glance of those eyes in the withered face. He said, "It 's the most pitiful thing in the world."

Suddenly Mrs. Mackerrow leaned her twisted hands on the edge of the table and bent toward him. She said in that dragging flat voice, "I envy you both."

He stared at her, scarcely able to believe she had used those strange words. Her hands shook, her faded face worked. In her eyes was a glow like the eagerness of hunger.

"Mr. Maclear, life 's a difficult thing. Marriage is another. I don't know what 's separated you an' her. I don't seek to know. But I know you 're sufferin'. So 's she. And I tell you, you be glad of that sufferin'. For love 's safe while you can suffer. It 'll never die while you can suffer. Just as life 's safe while you can fight. Everything 's safe, so long 's you can feel enough. The pitiful thing is when you 're too tired to feel.

"Some way—I don't wanter know how—trouble 's come between you and Sombra, black trouble. I don't know whose fault it is. I ain't faultin' anybody, and I don't wanter know. Likely it was no one's fault. Just life, likely as not. And now you 're sufferin' for her, and she 's sufferin' for you."

The flat voice failed. Maclear saw that there were tears in her eyes. He leaned forward and laid

his own hand over those work-crippled ones trembling on the table's edge.

"And you say—"

"I say to you, be glad of it. Don't try and get out of it or get it over. Don't try and forget. Take it, hold it, accept of it. Meet it square. It 's hard. And deservin' 's nothin' to do with it. Things come. Sometimes it 's your own fault and sometimes not. But it 's life. If you 're goin' to master life, you must take hold on it. And be glad if you keep the feelin' to suffer and the heart to ache. Be glad that whatever 's come, you 're sufferin' for Sombra an' she for you. For while you 're sufferin' for each other, you 're sufferin' together. And you can be together that way till death do you part."

Presently she drew her hands from his. She turned away, asking, "What you goin' to do?"

"I suppose—wait."

"That 's right. You 've taken plenty else she 's give you. Take this. Don't try an' get out of it. Meet it square. Say, before God 'n man, This is *mine*. You ain't goin' to try to see her?"

"No. I know she 's safe with you."

"That 's right."

He looked toward her with a flash of something like jealousy. "But she 's mine yet! They 're both mine,—my care, my affair. You understand?"

She said immediately, with her strange discord of voice and words, "I could n't take money from such loneliness."

There was a silence, in which he heard the monotonous solitary creak of the pump. It was broken by the woman, saying, "You find it all right at the Ferry House with Lanssen?"

"Yes. Quite all right. I have to thank you for finding me a place where—"

"Where you 'll be near her? You can stop there long as you like, I guess. She won't know. There 's no one to tell her. It 's on the other side of the river, and Lanssen, he don't talk, anyway. And he 'll be glad of your company."

Maclear did not reply. She waited, in her bent, weary attitude of inexhaustible patience, her vital eyes watching him intently. In a minute he asked hoarsely, "Mrs. Mackerrow, where is she now?"

"Up in her room, asleep."

He got up, walked the length of the kitchen and back. He stopped in front of her. He said, "Let me look at her."

She was silent, measuring him intently with her vivid glance.

"Let me look at her." He, who had had so much, who had fared so richly in love's security, was begging now for such crumbs as might have fallen

from that feast. His voice broke. "One look—from the door."

She did not speak. She took the lamp from the table. Motioning him to quietness, she led him out of the room and up the stairs. At the door of a little room at the end of the upper hall she paused. She opened it silently. Holding the lamp high, she stood back to let him look in.

The lamp had a yellow shade. Like a blow over the heart Maclear realized that the room he looked into was a golden one. It was just chance, of course, that the cheap wall-paper, the carpet, the bedspread, the common furniture, should take a mellowed golden color in the light of the lamp.

" . . . And it shall be a golden room, Sombra. . . . It won't be just a room, you see. It 'll be a type of your golden heart. . . . But you 'll open to me when I knock?"

"Husband, . . . can you think of any door, and me behind it, and not openin' to you?"

Oh, very well he could think of it! She was there, within reach of his hand. And he dared not stretch that hand out. Within hearing of his softest word. And that word he could not speak. She loved him. And he might not go to her.

His eyes had blurred. Now they cleared, and he saw his wife.

She was deeply asleep. She did not move, except that the yellow crazy-quilt lifted with her breath.

Her beauty was not changed. Her face was thinner, but it had the look of physical health. He remained motionless in the doorway, impressing anew on his starved memory every curve and color, every shadow and feature, of her who was both his shadow and his light. He thought that she had wept before she fell asleep.

He set his teeth. His fists clenched. She was there, within reach of his hand. And he might not touch her. If he went to her, and lifted her, and called to her as he longed to do,—his poor girl!—if that face were against his heart and her hands and her hair touching him, she would be no nearer him.

He stepped back with a little shiver. Mrs. Mackerrow closed the door and led the way back to the kitchen.

He put on the coat he had slipped off when he came in, and took his hat. He went slowly to the outer door. With his hand on it, he turned. He said briefly, "Be good to her."

"I will be."

"I know it. I can trust you. When I learned they 'd come to you, I was glad. They 'd nowhere else to go. Let me know at any time if—if I 'm wanted, won't you? There might be something I could do, without her having to be told of it."

They shook hands. Maclear rode away wearily on his tired horse into the black-and-silver night. Mrs. Mackerrow watched him till he vanished. Then she went in and shut the door.

Maclear rode on. Everything slept. Everything seemed to have a refuge but himself and the little bitter wind wandering under the vast height of stars.

He recrossed the wide pasture and went back along the track until it entered at right angles the concession road, running straight as a line, mile after mile, between the moon-grayed woods. The bright night showed him more woods and low hills in the far distance; and across hill and plowland, meadow and marsh, the dwindling silvery line of the road.

At the end of four miles the sound of running water came to him from the night. He turned off the concession road. Stones rattled under his horse's feet. Presently horse and rider came to a river, running quick and black, spanned by a very rough and flimsy wooden bridge. Near the other end of the bridge, across the river, some old wooden buildings showed on the bank; and again Maclear saw the light of a lamp in a single window, drawing a long line of reflection right across the river, and knew himself expected and awaited.

Obedient to some sign he did not know he had made, the horse had stopped. Now he touched it

with his heel, and it moved slowly forward. Its hoofs took the loose planking of the wooden bridge with a hollow sound. Through the flimsy timbers raced the black swirl of the water, powdered with stars. All the night seemed adrift, pouring away, and he with it. He was very tired.

He rode up to the house on the bank where the light was, and swung heavily out of the saddle. A man opened the door and came out to him. He was a square man, very silent, with a thick thatch of youthful yellow hair, which had never grown gray, above an oldish weather-beaten face. Lanssen had been a sea sailor in his youth, then a sailor on the lakes. Now he was come to keeping the Ferry House, as he must have something to do with water.

At one time the ferry had been the only means of crossing the river. Then the bridge was built, and rebuilt or repaired every spring, as the ice nearly always swept it away when the break came. So the ferry-boat was still useful, and Lanssen had the old Ferry House rent-free in consideration for working the ferry if it was wanted. He rented rooms to summer visitors in the season and had been glad to rent one to Maclear when Mrs. Mackerrow spoke to him about it.

He led the horse away. Maclear went up to his room overlooking the river. Tired as he was, he could not rest. He stood at the window and watched

the passage of the black current, sweeping away the immortal stars.

Then he was aware of a faint bitter-sweetness in the cold room.

He looked. On the shabby bureau was a vase full of dried immortelles, the little white yellow-hearted flowers that grew all over Tallis Island. He took one from the bunch and raised it to his lips.

It had a small, keen, wild smell. The smell of the autumn on the marshes. Sombra used to gather the immortelles and dye them red and blue. For a minute he felt her beside him, acutely near. Then he knew he was alone.

The rough and pungent scent must have brought him dreams. For when he slept he dreamed of the island. He was looking for Sombra there, along the marshes, by the lagoons and the shifting, desolate hills of sand. He was calling her. At last some one answered him. Even in his dream he was amazed. For it was not Sombra who answered, but Gordon, his brother. And Gordon came to him with the old look, saying in the half-forgotten voice, "Say, before God and man, this is *mine*."

Desperately, in the bonds of sleep, Maclear strove to find the application of those words. And like an echo they remained with him when he woke.

And that same night Mrs. Mackerrow heard Sombra cry out. She went to the little yellow room at

the end of the hall. She found the girl wild-eyed, shaking, hurrying into her clothing.

"What is it, Sombra?"

"He 's been here! Oh, he 's near! I must go! I must run away! He must n't find me! I ain't strong enough, if he should find me, to turn him away!"

Mrs. Mackerrow looked at her keenly. She saw the girl was dreaming, had no knowledge of the truth. And yet it was the truth! With kind hands and petting phrases, as to a child, she coaxed Sombra back to bed. And in the morning Sombra did not remember, did not guess Maclear had been there.

Later, Maclear wrote to Raynham, from the Ferry House:

She 's well, and I 've seen her again,—a glimpse while she was asleep. That glimpse seemed to show me that I must not try to see her yet; and also that she needs me desperately.

I can't do anything but wait, near at hand, until things change. They must change for good or evil, though her mind shows no sign of changing. She is resolute to keep apart from me.

You know all the truth. You know what she and that unhappy lad have been through. Theirs was never a normal life. If they show an abnormal reaction in such trouble as this, don't wonder at it. Perhaps this is purely a matter of nerves, overstrained through years, and will wear itself out. I don't know. I just have to go on waiting.

That's it, Jack. *I have to go on.* I know that I'm throwing an unfair responsibility on you. I know that I should be back at work again if the business is ever to recover. I know all this. And yet—I must stop here. It's as if I was kept here, against my own will, by something stronger than it.

I've a good deal of time to think. And it's been impressed on me that never, since I came to Tallis Island, have I really decided anything for myself. At the last moment things have always been turned from the outside. It's curious. I've had about as much free-will as sand or mist blown in the wind. And now—I know that I just have to *wait.*

It's hard, this waiting, within a few miles of her. And yet, there seems nothing to be done but what I am doing. You know the whole truth. So you will have patience with us a little longer. An end must come to it all. I don't know how. By love, or patience, or death; or the child. At present, the greatest of these is patience. And I won't add to what my poor girl is suffering by any act of mine. Yet I can't leave her alone.

The boy's working at the farm. He's well. I can't think of him yet. It's all of her.

I was so hungry for her that I rode across the river to the farm one night, telling no one. It was about a week after I had seen her. She has a room at the end of the house that you can see from the road. I saw her shadow on the yellow blind.

I stood in the road, watching. It was raining. The track was full of water. All in a minute it seemed to be a bottomless abyss plunging between Sombra and me. The illusion was so strong I backed away from the edge.

Mackerrow has a lantern swung on a post to show the road to the barn when it gets dark early. This was lighted now. And presently a man came along the other side of the road, beyond this imaginary abyss of mine, and waited under the lantern as though for me to join him.

And for that minute, Jack, my heart seemed to be ripped clear out of me. For the man seemed to be Gordon, waiting there for me to cross over to him.

I don't know why I 'm telling you this. It seems easier to tell things than it used to be. I can't even say why I should have thought of him then. That 's over. Heavy as it was, God knows, the old trouble 's lost in the new one. But it took as much grit to cross that wet road as to cross the gorge of the Niagara.

When I came to the man under the lantern, he was lighting a corn-cob pipe. I 'd never seen him before. He was n't like G. in any particular. He wished me good night and went on. But for the moment I 'd even forgotten her. I looked at the marks the fellow's boots had left in the mud. Queer the things we do at times. Something impelled me to go and stand in those marks. When the light behind the yellow blind went out, and her shadow with it, I went back to the Ferry House.

So Sombra, thinking herself alone on her Via Dolorosa, had love watching over her all the while. She did not know. She did not guess that Maclear was there, guarding her as far as possible, ready if she should need him, and able to deny himself, until that hour came, even a word with her.

Once, he had taken all she gave. Now he gave,

and she did not even know she took from him, though the others knew.

While they waited, a great stillness came on the world.

II

There is no stillness like that of the Northern woods immediately before the coming of the great frosts and the snow. The very thoughts of the heart are stilled with them.

Sombra felt that it was good for her to be here.

Sometimes she would walk along the concession road from the farm. In the morning hoar-frost the road lay like a silver cord through the young hardwood forest. There were not many farms. Here and there the log house of some first settler yet remained, shadowed by a huge walnut or maple, a survival of the primeval woods destroyed forever. Here and there were burnings, where the silvery rotted wrecks of trees lay like bones. Here and there some wood-lot rang to the sound of the ax. But for the most part the bush stretched quiet and lonely, elm and maple, oak and hickory, broken by the dark masses of the cedar swamps where the climbing bittersweet blazed with berries on the branches, insistent as a flame or a cry.

Silence, and a sense of waiting. Sometimes a

jay screamed, or a chattering flock of grosbeaks, late from the Arctic, fed among the pine-cones. Streams ran with a distant and muffled sound, as though they knew they would soon be silent.

Sombra's mood was generally one of apathy, a heavy peacefulness like that which follows an anæsthetic. For a while she was not capable of more suffering.

In that dead peacefulness she walked solitary, cut off from the world. She was quite alone. Mrs. Mackerrow did not know the truth. Between her and Sal there was a gulf fixed, as there was between her and Maclear. Her compassion for her brother never failed. But as the days went on he withdrew himself more and more from her pity. He walked with shadows she trembled to comprehend. He was divided from her by what he had done as by hundreds of miles or centuries of time.

But sometimes the numb quietness of her soul was shattered. Then Sombra walked quickly and aimlessly about the woods, her dark eyes—a little wild now, like the eyes of a lost, homeless creature—seeing strange things in the lonely world waiting for the cold.

She saw a little child coming down the road, jumping from rut to rut. He was a sturdy boy, with black hair like her own, and Maclear's blue eyes. He carried a toy gun with which he was pretending to

shoot chipmunks. Maclear walked behind him. She thought the child, laughing, turned the gun on Maclear and pretended to shoot him; and that Maclear, with a white, terrible face, struck the toy out of the child's hands so roughly that he screamed, saying: "I can't bear to see him do that. Some day he might do it in earnest. There 's unknown blood in him, dangerous blood. He must be watched."

The child changed to a little girl, a fairy child of whom Maclear seemed sadly tender. Her dress must have been made of one given her mother long ago, for it was of yellow silk edged with fur. Sombra thought the little girl grew angry over some trifle, stamped her feet, struck at Maclear with an absurd fist; and that Maclear took a stick from the ground and beat her, saying: "There 's an unknown strain in her, a bad strain. She must be taught."

With such dreams Sombra wandered in her loneliness.

Sometimes she walked so far and so aimlessly when these moods of terror held her that Salvator had to follow her and fetch her home. She was always gentle and obedient to him when he found her.

Not far away was a new railway embankment. And close to the concession road some of the workmen who had been employed on it in the summer had built a shack under a silver maple. Many of these workmen were Italians. Whoever built the shack had

also made a wooden cross, cut and carved it with rough grace, and nailed it to the overshadowing tree, whose dead leaves now half filled the hut.

Sombra liked to come here and crouch in the leaves and think, and think.

She wondered if there was any way in which she could right the wrong which she conceived she had done to Maclear when she allowed him to bind his life to hers. She was not altogether of the North. There was a power for tragedy in her humility, in her passionate renunciation. She sought for any means by which she might mark afresh the division between herself and the man she was saving from herself.

Dangerous, too, in her strained visionary mood, was her simplicity. She saw the bare facts, without excuse, without alleviation, as a child sees.

She saw the years men call dead, under whose shadow she had lived all her life, stretching out their hands from vanished Time, touching her happiness, touching Salvator, shattering them. Through her, she resolved, no shadow of that past should darken Maclear.

She spent all her days thinking how she might finally evade him.

And sitting so, thinking, thinking, in the shack under the tree, at last she saw him.

It was impossible that he should remain so near her and that she should never know. She had bent

her head a moment under the growing weight of those thoughts of hers. She raised it, and he was coming down the road toward her, leading a horse.

He was there. She had only to speak, to call, and the gulf would be spanned. She crawled to the back of the hut, cowering among the blown leaves. She dared not move for fear they should rustle. Her spirit seemed ready to break free, her whole being strained toward him like smoke on the wind. And she hardly dared breathe, lest he should hear.

He did not hear. He did not guess she was there. It seemed impossible that they should be so much the slave of the narrow senses that a little wall of split cedar could imprison her agony of longing for his touch, his voice. Yet so it was.

She watched him, her hands across her mouth for fear that longing should break from her in a cry. There was a small stream by the shack. And supple and strong, he came down to it, his calm face intent. Against his arm the horse thrust a gentle nose. Their footfalls were deadened on the soft earth. They seemed to come like shadows from the woods.

Arrived at the shallows, Maclear felt the horse's flanks, loosed the bit, and let him drink. He stood near; presently he stooped and washed his hands in the cold water. The horse lifted its head, snuffing the air. Maclear said, "Done, Joe?" and the beast's soft eyes turned to him as though in kindly

answer. At the sound of his voice Sombra slipped to her face in the shack, blinding her eyes, covering her ears. Maclear, leading his horse past the shack, heard the little rustle of her fall. He thought it was a squirrel stirring. He went on.

When he was gone, Sombra crept from the shack and looked about her. The vacant woods rose upon her eyes, a horror of emptiness like the night; the very air seemed drawn out of the world, leaving earth and sky brittle and dry, and ready to flare into fire and crumble at a breath.

Cries broke from her now that there was no one to hear. She began to run after him, breaking through the bushes, stumbling over thimbleberry vines, sobbing and wringing her hands foolishly. Those few minutes in the shack had left her weak as bodily effort could not weaken her. She ran a little way along Maclear's track, and fell.

Salvator, looking for her along the road perhaps two hours later, found her lying there yet, her hands covering a hoof-print Maclear's horse had left.

She was quite conscious. When her brother raised her to her feet she could walk, leaning on him. Her one prayer, so wildly made that he was terrified, was that he should take her home: "Take me back and hide me; hide me, so I won't see him any more."

He began to lead her back to the farm. They had not walked half a mile when she fell once more.

It was neither a faint nor an illness, simply a failure of strength; sense, motion, life itself, seemed taken from her. Salvator carried her back to the little shack and laid her on the dry leaves.

He called her, held her in his arms, chafed her hands. She turned her head from him with a little weary murmur. She was beyond his reach. That weary, patient murmur of denial was all she had for him.

He took off his own coat and wrapped it round her. Over her feet he heaped the dry leaves. His reserved and secret face never changed. But he had kissed her feet before he covered them.

Then he went out of the shack and left her, her pale face turned to the wall.

He hesitated a moment, then turned in the direction Maclear had taken, and ran.

Maclear, riding back, saw the boy running to meet him. Fear leapt in him, vivid and alive. When Salvator reached him, and stood panting at the horse's shoulder, he could say only, "Sombra?"

"Back there. In a little shack near the road. She saw you."

"She 's—sick?"

"No. Like as if she was dyin', though there 's nothin' the matter with her I can make out. Dyin' for you, Alan."

Maclear waited an instant. Then he said, "Go

back and get whatever you think we 'll need, and bring it there."

"Will I get them to come?"

Again Maclear waited. Then he said in a low voice: "No. Not yet. Leave her with me."

His thought was that he might be an hour with her alone.

After a few more hurried questions he rode to the shack. Salvator went to the farm. When he reached the shack again it was late. He heard Maclear's voice from within, speaking to Sombra.

III

"Sombra!"

Salvator had brought a bottle of hot milk, brandy, a blanket. Maclear was holding a tin cup in one hand, and turning Sombra's face gently toward him with the other. There was no response in that ivory oval, no tremor in the pathetic lips, no stir of the heavy eyelids.

"Sombra."

"She does n't hear you."

Maclear looked across quietly at Sal. "Not yet. But she will." He called again, patiently, persistently: "Sombra, Sombra."

By and by there was the palest change in her face, like the change in the sky, heralding a dawn. She

did not stir nor open her eyes. But he said to Sal, in the same assured way, "Now she hears me."

"I thought she was dead—too."

Maclear looked again at Sal, remembering that this was the first time they had been together since Sal and Sombra left the island. He said: "No. She will not die. See. Watch her. *Sombra.*"

Again that faint stir of the face, like the passage of light rather than movement. They waited. In the silence they heard the horse tossing his head under the maple; the stream, growing gray in the evening mist, seemed to change its note with its color, and they heard it; heard, too, that first breath from her lips that shaped his name.

"Alan—"

Salvator, watching, saw the man's face contract as though under the sharpest pain. Her eyes were open, looking at her husband. She was smiling at him with her old look of exquisite surrender. Both knew that she had forgotten, that she had gone back to the earlier days of her love.

This was perhaps the hardest thing Maclear had had to bear,—that she should have forgotten the division she herself had made between them, and that he should have to remember it.

"Sombra."

"What a long time you 've been gone, dear love!"

"Drink this, Sombra."

She sipped the milk obediently from the tin cup. Then she shut her eyes. "No more. I 'm kind of tired. I don't want any more."

"A little more, Sombra."

She shook her head, as it rested on his arm, with her plaintive murmur of refusal; but she was smiling faintly.

"Sombra."

After a while she whispered again, "Alan." And the lovely secret smile transfigured her.

"You must take a little more. Come, child. Be good."

Like a child she murmured, "Must I?"

"Yes."

Once more she drank from the little tin cup. Maclear asked quickly of Sal: "Did you bring anything to eat?"

Sal gave him some soft bread. Maclear soaked little pieces of it in the milk and fed her with them one by one; let her rest; called her back, and fed her again. So for an hour, while the boy watched; and over the silent woods stole the cold night fringed with stars.

At last Maclear said to Sal, "She 'll be all right now."

"You 've brought her back."

"Yes. Once you brought her back for me. Now

I 've brought her back for you. I suppose Mackerrow will come and fetch her home?"

"He said, soon as Bassett gets in with the horses."

The lad was sitting in the doorway, his face turned from Maclear toward the glimmering dusk. No one could have read the thoughts of his heart. Maclear laid Sombra down in her nest of dry maple leaves, and at the movement she opened her eyes again and smiled upward drowsily. Maclear's face was drawn and sharpened as though with fatigue; he rose stiffly to his feet. Instantly her outstretched hand groped for him. He gave his own into it, and she was still. Bending over her, he said, "Sombra!"

"Alan," she answered at once from the gateway of consciousness.

"Do you feel ill, Sombra? Are you in any pain?"

"No. No. Only tired."

He leaned lower. "Rest, my dear heart, my poor girl."

The boy in the doorway bent his head until his face was hidden on his knees. He sat very still. His somber courage would not have escaped any of these words, any more than he would have run from steel or fire.

"Alan."

"Yes, love?"

"Why are you goin' away?"

"I must go, Sombra."

"Why?"

"There 's—something you asked me to do for you."

"Is there? How queer! I don't remember."

"I remember."

"That 's right. My head 's kind of tired. Everything 's a long ways off. I forget. But it 's all right if you remember."

"It 's all right if I remember."

"You 're so good to me, Alan. You always was. You 're always givin' me things and doin' things for me. There 's one thing—I know there 's somethin' big I asked you to do for me. Never mind now. You 're goin' to do it."

"I 'm going to do it."

"And it 'll take you some while?"

He was silent a moment. His voice was low as hers, as he answered: "It 'll take a long while, Sombra. It 'll take me—a long way."

"And you don't mind?"

"It takes me away from you, dear heart."

"And you can't get along very well without me, can you, poor boy?"

Something of the old wondering, starry compassion was in her eyes, those shadowed eyes that still saw

only dreams. She said in her murmuring voice: "I know it was somethin' that *had* to be done, dear, or I would n't let you do it. Go quick, so you 'll come back to me quick. It 's somethin' that must be done; ain't it?"

"So you say, Sombra."

"Or I would n't let you go. I don't remember. But it seems like as if you 'd been gone a long time. A long time. Kiss me before you go, Alan."

In silence he knelt and touched the chill pure curve of her cheek with his colder lips. Something higher was here than passion. Something greater than longing. She lifted her hand languidly and just touched his face in the dusk, with a caress like a child's. She said: "Good-by, dear love. I 'll sleep till you get back. Then I 'll be well." She slept before he could rise from his knees.

Presently he freed his hand, went to the door, and stood there without speech or movement. If he had been aware of himself at all he would have known that when he rose from his knees to leave her he stood at a greater height than his own stature.

After a while he said quietly, even cheerfully: "Well, she will be all right now. You need n't be afraid for her. Mackerrow will be along soon, and then you can get her home."

He went out, and patted the patient horse standing

under the maple. Without stirring, Salvator asked, "Alan, you goin' to leave her?"

"Yes."

"Oh, my God, Alan! You goin' to let her leave you?"

"Yes."

"She 's doin' it. But she 'll die of it."

"No. Oh, no, she won't die. It 's—steady, now, Joe!—it 's wonderful what people can bear, and not die."

The boy with the hidden face heard the light stir of hoofs in the leaves as Maclear rode past him. He said softly, "Take care of her, Sal."

In a flash Salvator was running at his stirrup. He said, lifting his dark face to Maclear and speaking breathlessly, "*You* give me that to do for you?"

"Yes."

"To take care of her—for *you?*"

"Yes. Do it as you have all along. For me too now."

"I 'd die for you, Alan," said Sal, clearly.

Maclear stooped from the saddle and touched the boy 's shoulder. "Live for her," he said, and turned his horse to the bank and was gone, in a flurry of leaves like birds.

Long after he was gone, long after Mackerrow had come with the creaking farm wagon banked with hay and blankets and taken Sombra home, long after the

night had flooded in upon the world like a deep sea, Salvator remained at the shack.

After a long, long while light stole over the world; it was as though the cold blue waters of night, drowned in which all life had lain, thinned and changed; the voice of the running water changed. When the dawn came, it showed the shack, the woods, the earth itself furred thick with the dazzling substance of the white frost. Each twig was a crystal against the pale yellow sky.

In all this unearthly world, the running of the brook alone made any sound.

And Salvator was standing against the wall of the shack, his arms spread out on each side of him so that his body formed a cross. It was a white cross, for he was silvered from head to foot with the frost. His dark eyes, hollowed by those hours, stared upward at the wooden cross nailed upon the tree.

He, too, was not all of the North. Dim powers, passionate repentances, unknown strivings of other lives commanded him. He had been standing before the cross all night.

IV

And as though the frost, which was silently blotting out all memory of love and summer from the mind of the earth, worked in the same way on her

own mind, Sombra had no memory of those hours in which she had lain in the shack, in which Maclear's hands had been about her and his face near hers; in which he had called and she had answered.

The time was one of unimaginable stillness, purity, and beauty. A little light snow fell every night. The earth yet had life in it; the streams ran between delicate fringes of ice and the ferns were green under this snow. It was tender and harmless as flowers. It hid the first advance of death under a covering that seemed as mild as the blades and leaves of spring.

The woods were very silent. Only on sunny noons the black squirrels, most noiseless of their kind, looped about the birch trunks in a silent ecstasy of play.

Maclear saw silver ice in the river shallows every morning. But it melted soon. The clear dark water flowed free and strong. It seemed impossible anything should ever prevent it in its course toward the great lake and the ultimate seas.

It was like the current of human life, human love, sweeping onward to an unimaginable fulfilment.

So by day. But at night, crossing the bridge, Maclear would feel on his face a bitter wind, creeping down the river channel from the hills. It slid out of a far distance like a blade, and caught the breath, and sent the blood back upon the heart. And

he would see, behind those hills, the green ice-blink, reflection of the Arctic floes, glimmer like low moonlight all night long.

There came a day when, waking in his gaunt room at the Ferry House, he felt a subtle change, not only that of temperature. It was as though a battle had joined unawares while he slept.

Behind the Ferry House to the north rose a ridge of land grown with thin pines. Toward them, in the glittering golden morning, Maclear climbed. And as he climbed from the hollow to the height, he heard above him the sound of a tide; a sound solemn in the sun, and inhuman,—the going of the great north wind.

On the ridge it met him full. It marched to meet him with leveled spears.

Perhaps, in the great ocean of air, some current a thousand miles away on the shores of a frozen sea had given that wind birth. And it had swept south across the musk-ox pastures, across the desolate tundra, and the caribou-moss, and all the Land of Little Sticks, drawing in its wake the snow, bearing on its wings the frost. Already, as Maclear descended the hill, the ruts of the track were ringing hard as iron in full sun; already the trees looked dead and brittle as wire against a heaven of blue stone.

By the river he stood and saw the cold at work.

Where a shadow touched the water by the shore, a long frost-leaf, unimaginably delicate and beautiful, built itself from the element. The shadow lengthened, and the leaf lengthened, throwing out branches, buds, other fronds; thickening, whitening, until all that little inlet was subject to the frost. And that was going on all along the shores. Every stone and lily-pad was a vantage-point for the ice.

In a thicket of seeded goldenrod behind the Mackerrows' orchard Sombra, wandering in the sun, saw a small golden thing lying among the brown stems. She stooped and took it in her hand.

It was a little goldfinch, a thistle-bird from one of those great flocks which she had heard passing over Tallis Island in the night, their voices piping bravely to one another under the great void of stars. Perhaps this was the very last of those weak, heroic travelers, fallen by the way.

Salvator, coming to look for her with his continual watchfulness, found her holding the little yellow bird to her heart, while her tears fell on it.

So the winter came.

V

In the strange silence and idleness of that winter to which Maclear, the man of action, was condemned, he found his mind occupied, as once it had been oc-

cupied with the blown sands of Tallis Island, with the struggle of the river against the cold.

It was a struggle that seemed almost human, almost conscious. Like the innumerable indestructible sands, like the unremembering mists, it seemed to have a meaning for him.

Night by night, the plates and scales of delicate ice crept out from the banks. Day by day the river broke them down. Yet they increased, advanced toward one another; and between them the current of living water ran narrower and narrower.

Then there were days of iron frost in the hills, and the lakes that fed the river froze deep. After that came a sudden thaw and rain, which presently froze as it fell, a glittering rain as of glass. But the thaw had shaken the ice in the headwaters; and down the river came the floe like the April ice-break out of time, to swing and grind on the shallows, to pack against the groaning piles of the bridge, and to link bank to bank in a rubble of wild crystals in a single zero night.

And prisoned and bound as it was, the river still fought. It sent black runnels to carve the stranded ice into islands. It pressed and fingered against the grounded pack above the bridge. It hollowed the shore ice into great milky bubbles, and cut unseen pits and holes in its barriers. It worked with a silent and inexhaustible patience. It seemed to pre-

figure some force which thus, in patience and silence, worked forever against the waste and ruin of life.

Lanssen said, "That bridge, she won't hold till spring."

Maclear always seemed to see Lanssen through the steam of a kettle. In his old age he suffered much from cold feet, and sat with his striped, stockinged feet curved for hours over a stone hot-water bottle, which he constantly refilled. He continued placidly, "Aye, the bridge, she 'll go, and the boat she won't be no good, and we 'll be cut off. Cut off, we 'll be. I 'm just as glad. There always comes water in the boat and gets my feet cold."

Now and then Maclear saw Sal, hauling loads of wood to the town. The boy did not stop. And there came no message from the farm.

Silence, patience, and the heart's indestructible faith, fighting; fighting all the time, like the river.

At last the bridge went. The pressure of the ice and the water behind the ice crushed it into a litter of planks and posts. Black water rushed over the ice-cakes, spread, and froze. The pack groaned, heaved, and swept forward, to ground again a little below. The thrust subsided. Lanssen, who had been watching from the bank with Maclear, said, "Now we're cut off. I go 'n' fill my bottle."

But later Maclear heard the old man roaring:

"You go back! Quid, I tell you! That ice, she won't bear! She 's shook!"

Maclear went out again into the cold gray day. It was one of those days that lend to everything the clearness and stillness of glass. In this translucent light he saw Mackerrow's big bay team, hauling the wood-sleigh, drawn up on the other side of the river. Bassett was at the horses' heads. As Maclear watched he saw the man move. The horses' heads bowed, their breath steamed in the stillness.

The sleigh went forward, creaking. Bassett led the team out on the ice below the wreck of the bridge.

"You 're crazy! You! Go back! Quid, I tell you!" Old Lanssen added strange Scandinavian oaths. Bassett did not stop. He looked over at them a moment, and they saw his teeth white between the upturned points of his mackinaw collar as he grinned at them. Then he continued, coaxing the horses, who were scared, slipping on the ice.

The sleigh came toward them. Lanssen was muttering angrily: "That feller! He always know too much. I tell him, the ice, she 's shook. She—"

He stopped abruptly. At the same moment, and as it seemed noiselessly in that silvery stillness, the sleigh tilted up. One of the horses rose straight against the pole, pawing the air, a living picture of terror. The other was down. They saw a black

ring spreading, rushing on the white surface around the sleigh. They saw Bassett, to his credit, with a bared knife, slashing at the harness. Then the blackness, which was water, seemed to spread and rise and swallow them like night.

All happened so swiftly that it was like a picture thrown for a moment on a white sheet and flashing away. Maclear took one leap back to the house, caught up an ax, and ran back with it. He heard old Lanssen say wretchedly, "Now I got to get my feet cold." Then they too were out on the ice, running toward the place where it was broken.

It was a clean break. The edge, that is, was solid, —eight inches of gray river ice, veined and grained like marble. On the side nearer the Ferry House, Bassett was clinging, his wet face upturned, blued already about the mouth from the cold. Behind him was a boiling trouble in the water.

Maclear flung himself flat on the edge and caught Bassett by the wrists. Lanssen grabbed Maclear round the body and hauled. They had Bassett out on the ice in a moment. He lay an instant, gasping, then staggered to his feet and ran round to the other side of the hole. He stammered: "Bully 's down and under. But there 's Bud."

Maclear said to Lanssen, "Go and get some boards and rope." He said to Bassett, "Catch hold of my legs, and don't let go." He lay down again on the

ice, leaning far over that black trouble of the water. Bassett's half-numbed hands were gripped round his ankles. Maclear had his knife in his hand. He groped, found a taut strap, and slashed fiercely. He was almost under water, the cold of it stung like fire. The strap broke. He found a thicker one, and sawed through that. A horse 's brown head surged suddenly to the surface, wild, straining, terrible, fighting humanly for breath. Poor Bully was gone, under the ice. But here was Bud. Bassett released Maclear, ran forward, and held the horse under the jaw, keeping his head up. Presently the beast quieted, with long shuddering snorts and rolling eyes. Bassett repeated continually in his trembling voice: "I won't quit you, Buddy, ole feller. It was my fault. I won't quit you."

Lanssen came back with ropes and boards. They got Bud out at last with a running-tackle rigged on the ice, Bassett going again into the bitter water, and standing on the sunken sleigh to hitch the rope round the beast's body. When he came out, he was pretty well exhausted. Lanssen said: "You better come on over to my place, an' we 'll get our feets warmed. You—"

A sound like the boom of a gun came from the water-worn hollows beneath them. The ice on which they stood vibrated like a stretched string. Maclear, Bassett, and the horse plunged for the bank. Lans-

sen turned and ran for the Ferry House. They all gained solid earth at the same time, and looked around. Great cracks were starring the ice in all directions. Black veins opened as they looked. Some mysterious balance had been disturbed when the team went through. Now, it would be a hazardous chance for a man to attempt the crossing.

Lassen, on the Ferry House side, raised an arm to Maclear. "I told you we 'd be cut off," he ıoared placidly, "and we be. You better take that feller along to the farm. I 'm goin' to get my bottle heated up. My feet 're cold."

He vanished. Maclear looked at the shivering man, the shivering horse. He said: "Come on. We 'll have to go to the farm."

Bassett groaned, "I dunno 's I can walk."

"Oh, yes, you can," Maclear assured him grimly. "You 've got to run."

They started off at a sharp trot, leading the horse between them. Maclear himself was wet to the waist. Presently their blood warmed painfully with the motion. At first they had dragged Bud. Now, with a thought of his stable ahead, he dragged them, his big hoofs, that had all but smashed Bassett's life out, going like hammers. That was the only sound in the woods,—*thud, thud, thud, thud.* Like the beating of a heart. A heart straining toward home.

They reached the rise of the track, and stood a mo-

ment, looking down toward the farm. They could not see it. Then Maclear was aware for the first time of a faint continuous sigh and rustle throughout all the woods. There was no wind. He lifted his face. Something small and light touched his cheek.

"This 'll be the first heavy fall of the year," panted Bassett.

Maclear did not answer. There was something in the sound that hushed the voice and seemed a warning to the mind. It was so gentle, ceaseless, and inevitable,—this sound of innumerable grains of dry snow, falling, falling on the woods.

They went down to the farm.

An hour later Sal, coming from the barn where he had been tending Bud, saw Sombra standing in the yard, waiting for him.

In that hour the snow had wonderfully increased. Already it was curding into a crisped ripple by every stake in the fence, around the root of every tree. The air was a haze of delicate grains, dry and fine as dust. They drove along the hard earth with an incessant whisper that was the very note of forgetfulness.

Sombra did not seem to be aware of the snow. She must have been waiting for her brother some time. Her face was pinched and wan. In that hour even her beauty seemed to have perished. With a little gesture of despair, the boy ran to her.

"Sombra! We thought you was down in the chicken house. Why did n't you come into the barn if you wanted me?"

She lifted her head. The dry snow lay like a whitening of years on her hair. She looked at Sal with a passion so intent, an appeal so wild, that his heart gave a great leap. He said: "Sombra! What you want?" and foreknowledge sank his voice to a protest, a whisper. He stood facing her. He made no movement to touch her or to comfort her. It was as though they looked at each other across a great space.

Twice Sombra tried to speak. Then she said faintly, "I 've seen—I 've seen—"

"You 've seen Alan?" said the boy, sadly.

"Yes."

"Bassett let the team through the ice. Old Bully 's drowned. Alan and old Lanssen saved Bassett and Bud. Alan had to bring them home."

"I saw—him."

Again Sal lifted his hands helplessly. "We thought you was down at the chicken house, Sombra. We—did n't want you to know—not yet—"

"I saw—his head—at Bassett's window—as I was comin' up through the orchard. Sal—Sal—"

"Well, Sombra?" asked the boy in the same sad way.

"What 's he doin' round here? Him and old Lanssen—?"

"He 's been livin' at the Ferry House, Sombra, some while. Sombra, he 's let everything go, given up everything, just to stop on there and be near you when—when you turned to him again."

She bent her head. The snow whitened, whitened on her black braids. She stood so still that Sal was afraid. He said timidly: "Sombra! Sister—"

"As if I 'd ever turned from him!—my dear love!"

Her voice was faint, yet had a thrilling quality of music in it. It was the music that used to sound for Alan in the old summer days at Morning House. Sal said, very low: "Oh, Sombra!—poor Alan!"

"And he 's been near me all this while?"

"Yes, Sombra."

"Watchin' over me when I thought he was far away?"

"Yes, Sombra."

"And that time, when they told me I 'd took sick a little in the woods—that time—it was n't a dream?"

"It was no dream, dear."

"He was there? He come to me? He held me in his arms?"

"He held you in his arms, Sombra." The boy's face was white as her own. "He talked to you and

made you better. And when the time come—oh, Sombra, he loves you so true!—he went away and left you. Poor Alan!"

"Not so poor as if he had me with him, and me not fit, not fit. But he don't know it yet, my dear love—"

Salvator shrank and was silent.

"And I 'm afraid—I 'm afraid—he loves me so he 'll never let me go!"

She lifted her head. The boy said shakenly: "Why, sister, why—what 's come to you? You look happy!"

For Sombra's beauty had come back,—strange, still, radiant; a winter of beauty after her summer season. There was something unearthly in her as she looked at her brother with the snow on her head and those spiritual fires in her eyes. She said—and no tenderer whisper had ever passed her lips in the days of happy love at Tallis Island—"Ain't that a fine thing for any woman to know? He spoke true. He 'll never let me go. He 'll never set himself free of me—and mine."

Presently the fire died out of her. She bent her head again, shivering. She whispered: "I must go away from here. I must leave him if he won't leave me."

Some remembered ecstasy held her, she spoke as though she were in a dream. Salvator did not know

what to do. If he took her into the house she might meet Maclear face to face; and he was afraid for her overwrought, exalted mind. He led her into the barn, folded a horse blanket round her shoulders, made her sit down in the soft straw. She murmured to herself; he caught a few words. He remembered afterward that she had said something about the railway and the trains. When she was quiet, smiling secretly to herself, he left her, though with an alarmed heart. He ran back to the house to tell Maclear.

But Maclear was already gone. He would not wait, Mrs. Mackerrow said, for fear that very thing would happen that had happened. He said he thought there was a way to cross the river on the ice above where the bridge had been, and that he would get back to the Ferry House before the snow was heavier.

Salvator listened in silence. When Mrs. Mackerrow had done, he looked round the trim, warm kitchen. A curious sense came to him that he would never see the kindly place again just so, just as it was. He asked curtly, "Where 's the boss?"

"Gone to Westerley's about that buck-saw young Bert borrowed. If the weather keeps on, he 'll likely stop all night."

Again Salvator listened in silence. He felt that in some way the very forces of nature, the common

course of daily existence, were concerned in and aware of this business of theirs. Bassett helpless, Maclear gone,—whatever was coming, whatever hour the great clock of life had struck, he was to be left alone. He had been alone all his life with shadowy and immutable dreads. Mrs. Mackerrow asked, "Where 's Sombra?"

"Down at the barn. I 'll go fetch her in."

He went down to the barn. Half-way across the yard, he was running, an arm over his eyes to shield them from the snow.

"Sombra."

He plunged in at the door, and the great sweet-scented stillness enclosed him. Bud stamped in the loose-box they kept for sick beasts. A mouse rustled in the stored fragrance of the hay. That was all.

Sombra was gone.

Sal looked round, calling her, though he knew it was in vain. She had taken the old oilskin coat Mackerrow kept hanging on a peg. He seemed to hear her voice: "I must go away from here. I must leave him if he won't leave me."

Where had she gone?

Sal ran out of the barn. She could not have been gone many minutes, yet already she was lost to sight in the snow, hidden from him by innumerable falling crystals, fine as ashes, as though by a wall. Her footprints were there, her one link with what she

was leaving. But even as Sal stared at them, they were melting under his eyes, blurring into invisibility.

He hesitated a minute, wondering if he had time to go back to the house and tell Mrs. Mackerrow. He had not.

He ran after Sombra.

VI

Again and again Sombra whispered to herself, "I must leave him, who won't leave me."

She was walking through the woods, following a short cut to the railway that Mackerrow had shown her. Arrived at the railway, she meant to follow the line down until she came to the station, and there wait until there was a train,—in any direction, as her one necessity was to set distance between herself and the man she loved.

She had calculated neither time nor the miles. She had measured nothing justly. When she saw Maclear at the farm, and knew how near he had been to her, and again fled from him, she touched an intensity of renunciation that left her, perhaps, not entirely sane as we count sanity. Perhaps that ceaseless dwelling through weeks on one despairing thought had a little shaken her pure and simple mind.

At first, huddled in the farmer's old tarpaulin

coat, she had not heeded the snow, or had heeded it only as an additional security. The skies seemed to be showering themselves upon her; and in a little while everything lost its shape, became blurred and featureless in the drift of white, as though, under this very dust of forgetfulness, trees and fences lost memory of their own likeness. One would have thought this continuous rain of smallest crystals could have come from nothing less than the falling-away of a universe, thus dissolving through space, grown old and cold.

She whispered, as though to an unseen companion: "We 'll go away from him, lovey. We 'll set him free that way. Even if it 's against his will, it 's best so. Then he 'll never need to be ashamed of us, never need to be afraid for us."

So, for his sake, she went on into a world that without him was indeed a ruin, grown cold and old.

She walked very quickly in spite of the snow, which soon lay deep enough to clog her feet. She passed from the more open hardwood trees to a track that wound between spruce and balsam that even in the snow made a night of their own. They grew so close together that wind hardly swayed their sweeping branches of everlasting green. Each cluster of needles on the boughs was massed with snow; it lodged like dust in the interstices of the cones.

The substance of the trees seemed to be turning into snow.

To her brother, following her with his every sense intensely applied to that one action, she seemed to have melted away and vanished in snow.

Footprint after footprint of her track he gained and passed. They were clear enough at first. But soon he knew that behind them their tracks were being obliterated in a few moments, as though they had been left in some fluid; that not a trace remained in the yard, by the farm, or on the concession road they had crossed. No one would know where to look for them, nor what had happened to them if they did not return. The iron earth and the snow would have no speech to say, Here they went, and here passed Love.

He set his lips, glanced at the weather, and pressed on.

Here and there among the spruce a current of air carved the snow into small hollows that almost looked like footprints. Sometimes these lay beside Sombra's track, as though another and vaguer shape had joined her in the woods and walked with her. Sometimes Sal must pause, looking for the real prints; must stand a moment, watching all marks blur, soften, and fill, before he could go on. At these moents he felt Time drifting past him with the snow.

The snow, blotting out distance, altering the real

features of things, distorting all into its own likeness, had this effect upon the mind: it became necessary to hold strongly to some purpose, to be supported by some deliberate putting forth of will; as the body was supported by the earth under the disguising deepening drifts.

Sombra was supported by her will to free Maclear of that wrong she thought she had done him; Salvator by his resolution to save her, and himself.

For those weeks of intense mental suffering under a memory of which he spared himself nothing, excused himself in nothing, had, by the hidden processes of the spirit beside which the processes of the life in the womb and the grain in the ground are plain and easily to be understood, made of the dark and secret boy a man. He came suddenly into his inheritance of mastery. Not the storm, not any effort of nature could stay him; not Sombra's entreaties could turn him any more. Behind that unholy shadow of inherited hatred which had darkened his youth, which had come to its fulfilment on the deck of the stranded schooner, which since then had darkened his whole present and future, and the lives of those most dear to him, he had seen a light.

"A life for a life." Those words, which the stern creed of his upbringing read in wrath, might they not be read in mercy? To those two he loved, life was death without each other. If he could by any

means restore their life to them, their life in each other, could he not take that as a sign,—a sign of his own reconciliation with life, with destiny?

He pressed on, driven by that thought; would have pressed on if the grains of snow had been of fire, and the sword of the frost a sword of steel. If he had fallen and died, it seemed that his spirit must have gone on, and manifested his will through the very stuff of the world.

Sombra's track still led him through the evergreens. Under their immense drooping fans they had drawn and concealed all the winged things remaining in the woods, as completely as seeds were hidden in the ground. This ground descended, and in time the spruce and balsam were mingled with alder and tamarack; and her footprints led him across a stream, stilled and dumb under silver ice and snow. It was the same stream that ran by the hut where she so often went; where Maclear had held her, talked with her, left her.

It was as though some recollection of this dragged her back. For now, and for the first time, Salvator was sure he was gaining on her.

She was not far ahead. The snow had confused her; she had lost the trail to the railway. She was not aware of it. The insistent soft whisper of the snow had released another whisper in her mind. What if there were another way to set Maclear

free?—a surer, better way than all? What if she just lay down, and covered her face, and felt nothing any more but the sure descent of the snow, the sure descent of sleep? "We 'd be safe then, lovey," murmured Sombra, her large eyes melancholy and lost. "No one to be troubled by us, no one to be ashamed for us. We must come of a wild dark stock for such a thing to have happened. Not fit for him, lovey, and him so clean and high and proud. Will you forgive me? I was always far beneath your daddy, dearie. Maybe it would be best this way. We 'd rest then. And we 're tired,—tired of keepin' on, without him."

She pressed on, now through a growth of delicate young birch, almost invisible in the snow. In some places their stems were close-set as grass, complaining all together with a little ceaseless sound. The weight of the snow was on her feet. The weight of it seemed on her heart. She was tired, tired. She remembered how he had spoken to her, going back to the island. "Rest in it, my dear," he had said. And that which she was to rest in was his love, her true home, only home of all loving hearts in all the world. She had no other. And that she must leave for his sake. There was nothing else to rest in but the snow.

As if the snow fell on her very thoughts and had power to change and hide them, as it hid her foot-

prints, she forgot the purpose with which she had left the farm. She stood still. She shut her eyes, and stretched out her bare hands to the ceaseless noiseless descent that was as the ruin of a universe, the falling-away of years, falling like ashes on the world. It was as though she sought the acceptance of this visible forgetfulness.

She felt her outstretched hands clasped strongly in other hands. Her own were very cold. The grasp hurt her. It was like painful life, dragging her back from that harbor of rest the snow offered.

She opened her beautiful, desolate eyes. She looked at her brother wildly, mournfully. She asked: "Oh, why have you come? Why don't you let me go?"

With a calm look his eyes shone upon her. He seemed exalted in conflict as another might have been in happiness. He said, "I 've come now to save you and me."

"Oh, leave me be! Leave me be, and go! Brother, if I ever done anything for you, if I was ever dear to you, leave me be now to do what 's best for Alan!"

She turned and stumbled blindly form him. He followed and caught her in his arms. It was as though life itself held her, to drag her back, to force her into more wrong. She struggled against his hold. All her quietness went. When he released

her, she could only slip down and kneel at his feet, huddled in the snow, crying to him she knew not what,—nor he,—only that he would let her go, leave her be, and go, for she was not fit, not fit.

He waited, very pale under her words. But his steady look did not change, nor his calm. The frost had touched her cheek. In one place it was wax-white and bloodless. He laid hold of her again; held her, sobbing and crying, while he rubbed her cheeks with snow; when he saw the blood returning, and knew, by the greater concentration of her eyes. she suffered pain from it, he lifted her to her feet.

"Sombra," he said, "look at me."

She looked at him with her lost and tragic gaze. She said, "I 'll never forgive you if you stop me doin' right by Alan."

Plaintive and trivial phrases she must needs use to clothe the passionate renunciations, the denials and despairs of her soul; as each body of this dust clothes the flame of which none can say whence it cometh or whither it goeth.

"Sombra, you 're more to me than any one else in the world. But now your forgiveness or your unforgiveness don't matter to me more than a flake of snow."

She was held and stilled by his solemn voice as his hands could not hold or still her. He lifted those hands before her, held the open palms in front of her

eyes. And the storm of the snow seemed suddenly weak, faint, of little account in the balance with that gesture.

"Sombra, what do you see on them hands o' mine?"

"I see the snow."

"No," answered the son of Juan Luz; "it ain't snow that 's on them. It 's blood."

She shivered, her breath caught in her throat. His hands fell. He stood before her; and the curled and crested drift crept round them like a wave of the sea. He did not again touch her. But she could not escape him.

His voice was a breath. But before it her passion shrank and dwindled as the storm and the wind had done.

He said again, "There 's blood on my hands.

"You 're my dear sister. You 're Sombra.

"We know the truth, you and me. Many might find an excuse, a pardon for what I done. But we don't see it that way. Many would say I done it in self-defense. It ain't true. I did n't *have* to do it. When he come at me on the deck of the wreck, I could have got away, as I 'd got away many and often a time before. But the hate rose up in me, the darkness was on my eyes, and I struck, I *struck*.

"For what I done to you when I done that, maybe you 'd forgive me. But your forgiveness don't ease

me. No one knows but us three. Suppose we died, no one in the world 'd know the truth. Ain't that so? Yes, but there 's Something 'd know. And that Something sets me away from the world. No one knows. But I 'm like Cain, wanderin', separate, till I can get linked up with life again.

"The hate come on me, and I was afraid, and I struck. It 's all in that. The hate was n't rightly my hate; the love that started it was n't my love. It began before we was born. It 's been overhangin' us all our lives, the dread and the fear of it. Yet when it happened, Sombra, it was n't *that* that happened. Not just death! It was that I had an instant, a second, in which I was free to choose. And I chose hate. I was afraid, when there was nothin' to fear but a shadow. I give in to a long-past evil. And by givin' in I brought that evil down to the present, and laid that shadow on ourselves."

His solemn voice sharpened. "Oh, Sombra," he said, "to wake every day to that shadow, not 'way off in old years, but now! To see you runnin' from Alan as though you was a leper, and know why! To see that blind face I could have escaped, in every man's face, and that old grippin' hand in every man's hand, and to know all the while I did n't need to fear them! At first, if I could have run into the middle of a city, or climbed on top of a great high buildin' and shouted out, 'I killed an old man because I was

afraid! Come and punish me!' I 'd have been near happy. But there 's no punishment like a sin you can't pay for. God knew what He was about when He let Cain go about free and did n't let any one touch him. And his punishment, says the Book, was greater 'n he could bear."

He dashed wild drops from his eyes. "Sombra, by my own deed, and only by that, I brought the hate and the trouble between our father an' mother an' Mait down to our own time. I 've set a mark of hate in the world afresh, like as if it was Cain's mark. I can never wipe it out by confession, because of you and Alan. O Christ! would there be any punishment hard as mine if it was n't for the way out?"

He was trembling, but without any effect of weakness. The snow went over them, and behind the snow was the shadowing of the night. But time had ceased for them.

Sombra's cold lips just shaped the words, "What way?"

"By rebuildin' as far as I may what I overturned. By openin' the way for love, instead of hate. If— if it was given me to do that, I 'd know I was n't wanderin', separated, cast off past the findin'."

"Oh, Sal, what do you mean?"

"You got to come back to Alan. I know—I tell you, I *know*—if you go to him, there 'll a way be opened. You got to see him face to face."

"Never, never—"

"Sombra, while I live, you shall never leave him this way."

He took her in his arms again. His eyes were a fanatic's at that moment, his beautiful face pitiless. She struggled against him, but his resolution swept her on with him. She was helpless, she, his sacrifice. He led her back through the little birches. They stood like rods of glass in the coming twilight. All their former tracks were utterly gone; it was as though no one had passed that way.

"Oh, Alan!" she sighed. "Oh, Alan!"

Perhaps the thought was in her mind that Alan would have saved her from this, would have himself released her, would have, out of his love, himself set her feet upon the road that led her away from him. But she could fight no more.

Her brother said, "I 'm takin' you to him."

But she knew he was not.

He might set her down in the same room with Maclear. He might give her from his own arms to her husband's. But no physical nearness could bridge the distance she had set between them. It was still there.

In the early evening the world was narrowing every moment. Solemn shadows clustered on the edge of the bright thicket of birches. The wind was dying away. It was becoming very cold with the night.

"Oh, Alan!" sighed Sombra very softly, "Oh, Alan!"

They traveled a mile, and Salvator was half carrying her. The snow and the cold had suddenly become a weight greater than hers. The life of the body seemed consciously to shrink and withdraw, as though it were an animal going into hiding. His limbs were like stone. He moved them and felt nothing. He looked at her. He thought the cold had touched her also. He looked at the small ripples, the delicate patterns in the snow, and saw again a trail beside the one they left, as though a huge unseen companion traveled with them. He knew now that, before they regained the farm, they would walk shoulder to shoulder with Death.

The passionate will flamed in him more fiercely. It might be given him to save not only her love, but her life, for Alan.

They went on and on. It became an unspeakable effort of endurance just to go on, bearing her with him. She was quite passive in his hands, quite helpless; this, in one of her strength and vigor, seemed of itself unnatural, dreadful. He measured his advance as one measures the endless movement of a dream; he saw the stalk of a dead flower emerging from the white, and passed it; and there was another stalk just ahead. A tree reared a cowled shadow in the whirl of flakes, and he passed it with enormous

effort; and there was the same tree yet to be passed, and again, and again.

There came the time, with night closing round them, that she slipped from him and fell, and lay in the snow. And his stiffened hands had hardly the strength to raise her.

He crouched in the drift beside her, coaxing her as you coax a child: "Come, Sombra, just a little way more, just a little way."

She whispered, thinking of the man to whom he was taking her, "A long, long way!"

"Sombra," besought her brother hoarsely, "I 'm —I can't carry you no more, Sombra. And you 'll die if you stop here."

She raised to him eyes like the night itself. Her voice was a breath. "Perhaps that would be best. Perhaps that is what God means." All her old compassion and sisterhood shone in her. "Go on, dear." she said; "you can't fetch me back to him this way. Go on—and leave me be."

He rose to his knees in the snow. He lifted his hands to that dark and solemn cloud in which the trees of the forest were lost, and even the snow becoming one darkness. He lifted his face. Softly the snow touched it. He said, "What am I to do!"

With infinite softness her voice came to him. "Oh Sal, *this* ain't bringin' us nearer together!"

He beat his hands wildly against his own body, as though he hated the thing that had weakened against his will. She said gently, "Go on, dear."

"You 're crazy, Sombra. You don't know what you say."

"He 'll forget me, this way. He 'll be free, this way. This way—"

"Ain't God's way, Sombra."

He had seen something, a square of more solid dark in the shadows, a line of more stable whiteness in the whirl of the snow. He got up and stumbled toward it.

It was the shack in the woods where Sombra used to sit and wonder how she could free Maclear; where she had lain when Maclear cared for her, and she had not known it; where Sal himself had stood all night before the wooden cross.

He saw it now with a remembrance of that time that was like a pang. The maple was no more than a faint sigh in the night; but on the trunk the cross glimmered where the snow had lodged upon the arms. He turned and went back to Sombra.

"Come, Sombra."

She shrank from him with a small tired sound, as though she found the snow warm and pleasant. With a set face, Salvator dragged her to her feet. With his arms around her, he took her to the hut.

When he heard the rustle of dried leaves about his feet, he laid her down.

Her voice came to him from the utter darkness, a voice of saddest compassion and reproach: "Oh, Sal! what you think you 're goin' to do?"

"Sombra, I must go on and get help. Sombra, I must save you for Alan."

"Not this way,—oh, brother, not this way!"

"Any way, so I keep you for him."

"Against my own will, Sal? Would you be that cruel?"

"Yes," said the boy, "I 'll keep you from death itself, for him."

He was beating his numbed hands together fiercely as he spoke. The sound of those blows was unspeakably threatening to her, crouched among the leaves. Presently she heard him wrenching furiously at the loose flimsy cedar "shakes" of which the shack was built, and then the rustling of leaves. There came the scrape of a match, struck with clumsy fingers; soon a little spurt of flame. And from that, as flowers and branches from a single bud, more flames, and more. The interior of the shack leapt at her suddenly from the dark, and her brother's strange, set face, all golden in the light, and the square of the doorway a square of night, across which ceaselessly drifted a dust of rose and gold.

He had scraped a circle in the snow drifted in at

the door; and within a circular wall of snow he had made a fire of dried leaves and flakes of cedar. He went away into the dark, and returned with dead branches of spruce, beaded with frozen resin like beads of gold, and frost like beads of silver. He fed the fire with this weightier stuff, and it soared upward with a living sound that defeated the deathly whisper of the falling snow.

So intense was the cold now that only the inner surface of the low snow rampart melted; the outer continually froze.

Now he went to his sister. An intent so inexorable showed in his face that she said nothing; only she covered her own face with her hands.

He had a long woolen scarf about his neck. This he took off, and with it he tied her to a post in the back wall of the shack; passing the scarf about her waist and knotting it on the outside of the wall with triple knots too large to pass through the warp-holes which had admitted the ends. Then, standing before her in the wild firelight, he half stripped himself, and wrapped her in his clothing above her own. He said: "You 'll be safe here for two hours. The fire 'll burn for two hours. I dare n't to make a bigger one or it' d catch the shack."

He looked at her, measuring her strength, then about her, measuring the defenses he had raised,—the fire, and the snow wall to keep the wind from

scattering it, and his own coats wrapped round her. In the same way, looking from the door, he measured his own strength with what he would have to face.

He thought he would just be able to reach the farm. He gave her one last look as she sat in the pulsating light, her face covered from him. He heard her broken pitiful words: "Oh, Sal, it ain't to be done this way, not if you bring him and set him here beside me." But they drained from his will like water. Then he left her, trod the path of light stretching from the fire in the doorway, and again plunged into the woods.

Before he entered them he took out his knife. He knew he would not be able to guide any one to the shack who did not know the way, and he must blaze the trail. The path was long obliterated in snow.

Holding the knife in both hands, which bled where he had wrenched the wood from the shack, he cut a flake from the first large tree. The next was a birch. He bent a branch so that it trailed in the snow. The next of any size was a hemlock. He blazed the trunk. So with the next, and the next, and the next; until he had forgotten that he had ever done anything else. He thought the trees were of stone, not kindly wood, they were so hard to blaze.

Behind him, like a rose opening in the wood, the light of the fire showed through night and snow. While it burned Sombra would be safe.

He went on. The roll of the ground hid it. When he could no longer see it, the night seemed to grow colder yet.

He lost all count of time or distance. The cold struck to the very centers of his life; and presently he lost count of suffering. He was but a clumsy stone, blundering through the white, whispering night. But he held to his purpose and his direction.

He climbed a low ridge. He thought it was like the slope of a tremendous white wave, suspended and frozen in motion,—such a wave as ran before the wild winds of the lakes. He fancied that by and by such a wave might crash down upon him in a crest of foam, and crush out the world. He could not feel the ground under the snow, and no assurance of stability came to him from it. All things had taken on the same solemn revolving motion as the snow; they mingled all together and together towered above him.

On the summit of this hill was a great tree, a pine. From it trailed long strips of bark like ragged clothing. He forced himself toward it. Only when he raised his hands to blaze the trunk did he know that he had been crawling up the slope, on his hands and knees. He attempted to lift himself. He managed it at last, but could not reach above the snow crusting that mighty trunk, to leave a mark on it.

He tried and tried to draw himself up, standing on a heaved-out root. But his frozen fingers fell

away helpless from the tree. In a little while, however, he was satisfied, and staggered on. He had left a dark sign on that tree even if he had not been able to cut the bark,—a dark sign pointing the way to Sombra.

Here once more was the summit of a hill; and a vast slope beneath, into which seemed to pour silently snow, trees, rocks, the deepening night itself. Into this hollow he went.

At the bottom he came on a fence.

Because men's hands had made it, suddenly it seemed a human thing. He clung to it a minute as though it could warm him. He could feel nothing. Nor could he climb over it. But it was a snake-fence. He went to the nearest angle, set his shoulder under the top rail and heaved it down; so with the next and the next; then he could step across. He did so, and went on into an open field.

That great wave seemed still to heave high above him its swimming crest of foam, higher than any earthly wave could have been. Now he saw, deep in its glittering and translucent heart, a star.

Only his will kept him on his feet, kept him moving. He was all but dead with cold as he walked, and the effort to go on was a torture that crucified the lingering consciousness.

He came to a wire fence. He set his foot in the squares of the wire and pitched over. He fell in

the drift on the far side, struggled clear, and went on. Once more there were trees about him. These had whitewashed trunks gleaming like ghosts,—peach-trees, propped all round against their last burden of fruit. His star sent a reddish beam among the last ones, in which the flakes of snow glowed rosy as the vanished peach blossoms.

Then the star was a window with a red blind. He stood outside it.

The very power of speech was lost to him. He could not call. His lips seemed frozen together against his voice. He staggered to the wall, lifted his heavy hand, and with a last effort sent it crashing through the pane.

All about him the wave was lifting, lifting like the foam of the lake, whiter than it, soaring a poised breaker fit to blot the world: He felt himself raised and carried into the house. Voices were around him in a running dazzle of light like bubbles in foam; even, he thought, tears.

"Where is she, then? He 'd never quit her. This here 's brandy. K'n you get it down him?"

"Wait. Wait till I lift his head. There. There, now. What 's happened? Oh, my God! look at the boy's hands!"

A voice, this last, that even had power to restrain that falling wave. Salvator struggled toward it, as to a vessel in a sea. It broke, then steadied to an

appeal that might have reached Sal if he 'd been dead indeed.

"Sal, Sal, *where is she?*"

Twice and three times, with a terrible effort, he tried to speak where he lay on the rag rug, his head on Bassett's shaking knees. Then the brandy did its work. They, listening with every appalled sense, as though they had listened for hours, heard the ghost of a voice. The words were clear, quick, and distinct, though scarcely audible.

"Is this Alan? Holdin' my hands?"

"Yes, lad, yes."

"How 'd you come to be here?"

"There 's been another shift of ice in the river. I could n't get over. I had to come back here. I found you both gone. Sal—"

Sal raised himself, looking at Maclear. It was inexpressibly sweet to him that Alan should be there, taking care of him, looking at him with more than kindness, as in the old island days. He tried to smile, and some gleam of that transforming look did touch his face, changing it to a deathly likeness of the girl's that pierced Maclear's heart.

"Where, Sal, *where?*"

"In the little shack under the maple. Waitin' for you. She 's safe while the fire burns. You 've maybe an hour. You know the way. But even if you don't find it—"

He lifted his rent hands, gazing at them. Then he smiled again, dimly. "I blazed the trail to her the whole way," he said.

"Sal!"

"And anyway—you could n't lose it. It 's—God's way, too."

The hands fell. The whole visible universe was sucked up and up, like white flame in a draft; faces, voices, lights, rushed up with the rest, soared, flickered, vanished away.

There was a thunder of waters. He tried to push Alan back from them into safety, but he was too weak. He fell into Bassett's arms.

The great wave fell.

VII

"If only Mackerrow was home!"

"This is mine," said Maclear.

There was a ghost of familiarity about the words. He lifted Sal and laid him on the worn horsehair couch. Mrs. Mackerrow and Bassett went to him. Bassett watched Maclear over his shoulder. He said: "Better let me come along. I 'd be some use."

Maclear just shook his head. He could not spare time from what he had to do for any argument. He filled a flask with brandy. He slipped on an old short mackinaw coat of Mackerrow's in preference to

his own. He put the flask in his pocket, together with an electric torch he always carried. There was coffee hot on the back of the stove. He filled a bottle with it. The woman said, "There 's old flannel in the drawer of the dresser." He wrapped the bottle in flannel and stowed that away. Then he was ready.

He asked the two busy about Salvator, "How long should it take me?"

"Over an hour, anyway, to the new embankment. Go easy. Maybe you 'll have to carry her home."

He nodded. Mrs. Mackerrow's face showed no emotion, only the wrinkles had deepened till they looked like scars. Maclear said to her: "Don't worry. I 'll bring her back alive. Be ready for us."

The weary-faced woman looked at him with her strange passion of impersonal jealousy. "I 'll be ready," she said. "And you—you be glad you 're here to find her and carry her home. That 's a good thing for a man to be able to do for his woman."

Maclear went out. When he had shut the outer door behind him, it was as though he had closed a door between life and death.

The wind had almost ceased. It was apparent only as a sound of a distant tide in unseen trees. A great silence was covering the world with the snow.

Snow was falling steadily, but in larger flakes.

Maclear found it possible to follow Salvator's track through the orchard. The snow was to his knees. It was so light and dry, it seemed easy to walk through as drifted leaves fallen from some crystalline tree.

"Find her and carry her home."

He vaulted the wire fence. Crossing the open, he was aware for the first time how cold it was. He would have to race the cold. Sal had spoken of a fire. He did not know how long a fire would burn and warm her where she waited. He wondered if she waited in love. Yet he did not think of this very much. He felt that something more than Sombra waited for him.

As he followed the boy's trail that would lead him to her, he had the sense that he followed another way,—a way that had been laid down for him to tread, week by week, month by month. He felt that every least incident of his life was in some manner linked with what he now did; that this track he now followed was like the last twig of a tree of deeds whose roots reached back to the past and bound his dead years with his living present.

He was aware that a time was accomplished; and that in its fullness some moment would presently be released to him; and that in this implacable moment he might gain or lose the world.

His world was Sombra. He had learned it now,

if ever he had not known. But what is a man profited, once said a Man, if he gain the world and lose his soul?

Maclear went on his way.

He came to the snake-fence. Looking for the place where Sal had crossed, he switched on his torch. It was like an act of creation. In the disk of brilliance the frosty rails sprang to a dazzling clarity, and the snow was like flakes of falling light. He found the place where the rails were thrown down. Beyond it, in the shelter of the trees, he again picked up the trail.

On this ascending slope the snow was not so thick. The trees stood in a solemn order. Rank upon rank they opened to him as the beam of the electric torch solidified them into an instantaneous glittering existence. As the beam passed on, they seemed to close in behind him, he seemed to walk at the head of a vast soundless procession of shadows and of snow.

Now he began to feel that the snow was not light. It was like wading through a dust of diamonds, of stone.

He climbed. At last the thin beam showed him a great pine standing on a ridge. He approached it.

The light gave him every intricacy of frost and gray lichen and bark like carved stone, with a dazzling purity and minuteness. A smear of frozen scarlet was netted under a web of new crystals. He knew

that Salvator had passed here, and left a sign that should lead him to Sombra, if any sign were needed.

He turned the beam on the next tree. It was a black birch. One branch was newly broken. Beyond it a dim scar gleamed on a young oak.

Then Maclear was aware that he saw the trees with a new clearness, as though a veil had passed. It was like an added stillness to what had seemed utterly still, a new solemnity to what had already been hushed and remote. He looked up. The last flakes of snow touched his face and ceased. He saw the passing of the cloud whence they came.

A low bank of vapor, glimmering like foam, spread from east to west. It was the curled outer wave of an ocean of traveling cloud that now passed above him. And beyond it was the black pit of the north, a void in which the great stars were hung with their space about them like lamps. Behind each star the hollow stretched visibly. Beneath it the abyss was unbridged. One after another he saw emerge glittering from the receding cloud. Their light was reflected from the snow until he stood in an elusive radiance, and the drifts glittered as though fallen from the stars and not from the clouds,—ashes of stars.

Maclear plunged down the slope. As he stood on the ridge facing that void of stars its breath had touched him from the hollows of outer space where

there is no life. It stung his cheek like searing iron. Colder than the cloud, more pitiless than the snow, was the clear heaven and the stars.

But yet he did not fear for her or for himself.

He went on. Minute points of frost pierced his clothing. The drifts were heavy on his feet as lead. The cold was so intense the air was all thinned away. He gasped for breath, and the frost stabbed him. His heart beat heavily. The only sound in that silence was the sound of his own life, the echo of his own tread.

So desolate in its perfect beauty and strangeness was the frozen night through which he traveled that when he came within sight of the little hut, it also appeared strange. No man-made thing seemed to have place with silences so august.

He advanced toward it. Out of the glimmer of the ashy star-shine it grew slowly,—the white mass of the roof, the maple lifting over it a cloud of branches delicate as thread, the cross outlined in snow upon the tree.

He saw that a glow of red passed over it from time to time, like a last pulsation of life, from the embers of a fire that had burned in the doorway.

He saw no other sign of life, and heard no sound.

He stood by the entrance, very still. Then from the darkness within the shadow of a voice breathed his name.

He turned the light of the torch into the opening.

Instantly she was there; like a dream she sprang out of the night. The disk of white light was centered by her weary face. That was his first thought, —her weariness. Pain and passion had used her, cast her aside.

She sat as Sal had left her, leaning against the post to which she was bound. Her head rested against the wall. Her bare hands seemed to say that she, who had given all, now resigned all. Her eyes were closed. Her mouth expressed patience, utmost humility; and as Maclear looked, her lips just parted on a breath:

"Alan."

He trod over the dying embers and entered the shack. It was as though he would not enter until she had called him in. He knelt at her side. He cut the scarf which held her prisoner, and, as once before in that place, he took her in his arms.

"I am here, Sombra," he said.

VIII

He was in time. The fire had burned long enough to save her. But through every crack and cleft in the shack the frost entered like a steel blade. And she had slept.

At first it was difficult to rouse her from that deep

dream of the cold, which confuses the mind before it harms the body, as though it would capture the citadel before the rampart yields.

"Speak to me, dear love."

"Dear love," she echoed him out of her passing dream.

"Give me your hands, your poor cold hands, Sombra. Let me warm them for you this way, against my heart."

"My heart," she said.

"I 've found you, my poor girl."

"Poor girl," sighed the little wandering voice.

"I 've come to carry you home."

"Home?"

"Yes, Sombra. Yes, Sombra. Home to rest."

"Rest?"

"Just a minute, dear. Wake up. In a minute we 'll go."

"Go," she said.

The stillness seized on the little echoed word. It seemed immediately to become a part of the night and the icy stars so high above them. In the circle of torch-light her eyes opened and gazed at him, sadly, familiarly. If she had been pathetic in her sleep, Maclear thought he had never seen anything so sad as that waking look.

He felt nothing for her at that moment but a strange and almost impersonal tenderness, an over-

powering pity. All the passion and emotion, the denied love and patient longing of the winter, passed from him. All his life, all his ways and works, seemed to have led him up to this hour, to her. Yet now he knew, with an increasing certainty, that it was not to her only; that his love for her was but as the body for some approaching event that yet awaited the soul.

He asked pitifully: "Are you afraid of me, Sombra? Why did you run away?"

"I was afraid."

"Afraid I 'd force myself on you?—hold you against your will? How little you know me, Sombra!"

She began to tremble against his arm. Tears gathered on her eyelids. She drew herself a little away from him, and turned her head so that she no longer looked at him. He saw her lips move.

"What do you say, Sombra?"

"Go."

"Is that the only word you have for me?"

"If you 'd believe it, Alan—if you 'd but believe it—it 's the best word."

"To go away and leave you forever?"

She bent her head.

"You 're strong enough to tell me to do that?"

Again that faint motion of assent. He said solemnly: "And you have made me strong enough to go.

You? I don't know. Something has. If I could believe—if I could believe—I have lost you."

He looked at her. She was within arm's length of him. Her beauty, which had first claimed him, was there,—the eyes, the lips so faithful in denying him, the generous hands now closed to him, the dark hair with which he had been bound. And now he knew that they were nothing, that in a little while he might hold them and these dear things be no more to him than a shadow, a wraith. For that dearer she, the hidden self, the real Sombra,—she would not be with him. She was still apart from him, gazing at him, with sad eyes of farewell, across the separation she had made between them. And it was that inner Sombra for whom his spirit hungered. Lacking that, or holding that unwilling and estranged, to hold her beloved body would be no more than to possess himself of ashes and of dust.

And he knew that if he could not reach her, could not bridge that gulf her wild humility had made, he would lose her more surely than if she died there in the leaves before him.

In that moment every force of his body and soul was gathered up, bent like a bow, concentrated on the will to reach her. He became a being of one single purpose. He breathed, his blood coursed, his brain perceived, only for this and to this end. And what he wanted, what he must reach, was not the

fair flesh he had held; not even the love for him which had never wavered, the girl's love and the wife's: but that deep inner unity, that acceptance of each by the other, that communion of knowledge and compassion, which is true marriage, and without which life was nothing to him.

In that moment, if her beauty had withered and fallen from her, he would hardly have known. He looked at the black square of the doorway, where the fire had dwindled to a single red spark, and beyond which hung those intolerable stars; he wondered for what purpose he was here beneath them, for what they and the night and the snow had been set as witnesses.

He stood up. He stood away from her. But as he stepped back he seemed also to step forward as a man steps to the last round of a fight, the last test of his strength. A few feet between them; yet the distance between their spirits made that of star from star a very little thing.

He must find a way to span that distance, or he must lose her, the divine part of her in which his real need was rooted, forever.

He saw that space as though with his bodily eyes. And his soul cried out that if there were no way to cross it, then life was indeed a betrayal, and it would have been better for him if he had died among the drifting sands of the island.

Dumb as it was, the tremendous silence seemed to apprehend that cry. He called her aloud, "Sombra!"

She turned. There was a sense of wrong in the look she raised to him, a thrill of despair in her voice. She said, "Oh, why did you come?"

"You 're afraid yet, Sombra. You need not be."

She hardly heeded. "Oh, if you had n't come to save me, it would have been done by now! Done and over! Now it 's all to do over again!"

There was a long silence in the shack. Then Maclear asked, "Was this thought in your mind when you left the farm?"

She was weeping heartbrokenly. "No, no! Then I thought only to get away from you, to leave you free. But then, when I was walkin' to the railway, it seemed as if it would be so easy, just to lay down in the snow and forget everything, and be at peace again. And better for you, better for you! And now you 've come, Sal 's sent you to tear my heart again. Oh me! Oh me! how will I have the strength to do what I must do?"

"You have n't to do it, Sombra," he said. "My wife, if it must be done, I 'll do it for you."

Again, rapt in her pitiful passion, she hardly heeded. But she looked up when he said, "Sombra, I love you."

"Alan, go an' leave me be."

"You know how I love you. I know how you love me. You 'd kill yourself to save yourself from doing me what you thought was a wrong. But here 's something you don't know: Once your love was greater than mine. You told me so once. You were right. But it is n't so any longer. It 's come to be untrue. In all these weeks since you left me I 've come to love you with a bigger kind of love than yours is for me."

He looked at her solemnly, tenderly. "You 'd say, Sombra, 'Is there a greater love than that which would die to save love from a stain?' And I 'd say to you, 'There is,—the love that asks only to share that stain, if such it is'!"

He seemed to command her. He was infinitely the master of her whose faith and beauty had ruled him so long. Yet he felt, outside himself, an approaching mastery; something that used him as the sand and the mist and the frost were used in the perfecting of a year; something made, shaped, appointed, and now summoned in the fullness of time.

His voice was stern now, for there seemed no room for tenderness any more. "I love you so," he said, "that I must leave your will free. Just because of it. For fear, in some unearthly way, I should kill you if I did n't, blot you out—not this, but the real you, the thing that must come to me free as a bird or not at all—"

His voice faltered an instant. He looked down at her, and a great shiver wrenched him. But in a moment he was calm again. She regarded him attentively. But the reproach of her look was unchanged, and unchanged the distance across which she looked at him.

"All the time you 've been hiding from me, my poor hurt, unhappy girl, I 've been near. I could have stopped you any day, any place. I would n't. I could have stopped you from leaving me, right at the beginning. I would n't. I won't bind you. If I can't keep you with my hands open, I won't with them shut. If you still want to run away from me and hide, go on. I won't stop you. I leave you your right to freedom. Only—do you understand, Sombra?—wherever you go, I reserve my right to be near you."

A single breath of air moved in the maple over the shack, in a long sigh. A wave of rosy auroral light ran among the hollows of the stars, flushed the snows a moment, and went out. Maclear stood very still. The resolution that had sustained her was now his. Everything had died from him but the will to reach her. He hardly existed in any other sense.

She murmured, "If you 've any pity for yourself or me, Alan, you 'll leave me an' go."

"Sombra, I 'll not lay a hand on you without your

consent. You need not be afraid that you will not be strong enough to turn me from you. My poor girl, there is nothing for you to fight."

Not in his hands, he thought; not in his hands. A sense was on him that all this had been long appointed; that the words they used, the phrases exchanged between them, had been rehearsed by a thousand great voices, and told where there is neither speech nor language.

Her eyes besought him, her voice drifted to him as though across a great void: "I ain't fit for you. We was n't fit for you before. O Christ of pity! what are we now?"

She must have repeated these words a thousand times to herself.

"Sombra, tell me why you are not fit for me."

Her look of reproach changed to one of purest pain. She muttered, "We 're poor, ugly, common folk."

"That never separated us."

She struck her hands together. She said in a low, terrible voice, her great eyes staring upon him, "Think what he done!"

"Well, Sombra?" he asked solemnly.

There was something fanatic in her now, as there had been in Salvator. "Love," she said, with sudden clear ardor, and as he knew, finally, "I 'm the sister of one that killed an old man and broke my heart

doin' it. He did n't need to do it. Somethin' blind and evil rose up in his heart and he struck. And in all the world now, I ain't sure of anything or safe in anything. It 's as if that evil might rise up anywheres. For it was my own brother that done this, whose mind I thought I knew better 'n my own mind, whose heart I thought was clearer to me than my own heart, though sometimes, in a kind of dream, old things made me afraid. And all the while, what he did was hid in him, and he did n't know it, like a flame in the dark, ready to break out and burn. If that flame was hid in him, so near to me, so dear to me, son of her that bore me too, what may be hid here?"

She clenched her hands on her bosom. Her deep, sweet voice was like a bell, tolling for the end of hope. She said: "I don't know what 's in me. I don't know what inheritance I have to pass on. Evil, and a stain. I don't know my own self now, nor trust myself. I dread even my own self, for what dark things may be hid in me. And I won't pass that darkness and that dread to you,—or any more to your children."

He did not offer to touch her. He asked quietly, "Is that your last word, Sombra?"

"My last word, if you 've any pity for us both."

He stood looking down at her. As though some voice which had been ordained since the beginning

of the world spoke with his mouth, he heard himself ask, "Is there nothing that will change you?"

"Nothing. Because I love you."

At another time what she said would have moved him beyond expression. But not now.

Another fan of rosy light like a dawn spread among the stars and went out. Another solitary breath like the wind of the spirit moved the unseen branches and went out. Another moment, for loss or for salvation, was given to the sons of men, and went out.

He heard himself, very far off, asking, "Will nothing in life bridge that space between us?"

"No."

"Yes," said Maclear, in a strange voice. "One thing will."

All his senses were suddenly merged into one burning comprehension of soul and flesh. He was all at once crushed, deafened, blinded by something which partook of great space, great sound, great light. It was like the instantaneous opening of a door; but it was more than this. It was like the rush of vast wings; but it was more than this. It was like the overwhelming return of vision to one blind; but it was more than this. No words could measure or express the depth and height of that revelation.

It was intolerable pain. Yet with it came a consciousness of freedom, of release that not even love

at its highest had brought him. He possessed himself again. He was released even of his need for Sombra.

The moment had come.

In it the suspended worlds, the night, the snow, rode upon his eyes, sparkled into motes, vanished. Sombra vanished. He was alone with that which had been coming to meet him ever since he started to escape from it,—with that necessity which had been as faithful to him as he to Sombra, and perhaps for the same end.

He knew.

Across the gulf sprang the bridge, a single strand as of fire by which he might come to her.

And now he seemed to run to meet that scorching self-knowledge as for long months he had fled from it. As though for the first time he drew to himself his unacknowledged companion. As though for the first time he stood erect, and said, "Before God and man, this is mine."

From that cup which his own hand had filled, for the first time he drank. He spoke, and the words as he said them seemed worn with use as coins are worn, though they were so new they appalled him.

"Sombra, from that poor boy's moment of fear and madness, a deed instantly repented and terribly suffered for, you build a monstrous shadow of guilt and remorse to blot the light from our lives. And

you say that this shadow makes you unfit to be my wife.

"I could argue against this dreadful delusion of yours, but I know it would be no good. The horror of it has bitten too deep for words to heal, or for reason to reach. But, Sombra—

"Do you remember the first night I came to you?

"I was in great trouble. You held me from it. Later, at my asking, you covered it up from me, as this snow covers the true shapes of things, with your compassion.

"You would have heard of it, in time. But by that time, under your mercy deep as the mercy of the snow, its true shape would have been lost. My part in it you would have taken from me as I chose to give it to you. And you would have believed in me."

Her eyes were watching him now as if he were the only thing in the world. He looked at her sadly. "Oh, my poor love," he said, "do you know what kind of sinful man it is to whom you 've given a greater love than you have for your brother?

"Sombra, if there 's any stain on poor Sal, God knows it 's on me too, and heavily, heavily!

"If there 's a shadow that must rest on him and on you through him—and God knows I see none—for what he did in a moment of inherited fear and dread, it 's on me too, and without his excuse.

"Sombra, what long brooding on old terrors and tragedies drove him to do at last, I did through the wish to save money.

"He struck in a flash. I measured and cheated and calculated. And four lives paid for what I did.

"And one of those men I killed—by one dishonesty common as the dirt it is, and surely as if I 'd blown his brains out with a gun—was Gordon, my brother."

IX

The last spark of the fire died out. Only the stars remained. Maclear waited.

But while he waited, a peace like that of the snow, a surrender like that of the earth under the fulfilling frost, possessed him. At the moment when he had bound himself to his own sin, he knew freedom. At the moment when he accepted his own responsibility he knew release.

And that release and freedom were not dependent upon happiness, nor even upon love; nor on life, nor on death.

With the last words he spoke, time ceased.

At last he heard a voice, almost indistinguishable from the sigh of the occasional wind. "My God! What is it you 're tellin' me!"

"The truth, at last."

"You—?"

"Yes, Sombra."

"You done *that?*"

"I, Sombra. Sal killed Mait Ransome in an instant of irresponsible terror. He did n't really mean to. I killed my brother to save a few thousand dollars. I did n't mean to, either. But I did it."

For the first time he looked from the stars to her eyes. "You, my poor girl—?" he said very gently. "You not fit to be my wife? It's I that have never been fit to be your husband. But, Sombra, not because the lives of four men are on my hands; because I said my hands were clean. Not because that crime's laid on my shoulders, but because I was a coward and refused to bear it. Not because that account's rendered to me, but because I ran from the debt."

He was still again, standing in the doorway, turned from her toward the night. With a faint low sound, she stared at him, and stared.

After a little she breathed; "All the while,—ever since you come to me, that night in the blowin' sand, and said, 'Hold me,' and I held you in my arms because I knew you was in trouble,—all that while, *this* has been in your mind?"

"All that while Sombra."

"When we first loved each other, when it was summer on the island, when we went about knowin'

the thing that was comin' to us, when you told me your love, this was true?"

"True all the time, Sombra. The only truth."

"All the while we was plannin' for life together and buildin' the house in the sand?"

"All the while."

"Then—then—we was just buildin' life and love itself on runnin' sand in a blind mist—"

"Yes."

"Oh, *you!*—you that I 've give all to,—why did n't you give me the truth? Is that the thing men 'll never give a woman? I asked you, sittin' that day under the gold poplars. Why would n't you tell me then?"

"I was afraid."

"Of losin' me?"

"Yes."

After a long silence, she said faintly, "Ain't you afraid of that now?"

"Yes, Sombra."

She spoke again: "You!—that I was willin' to live and die for, that I held so high above me,—you whose hand I felt hardly fit to hold, and wondered how you could look at me, as if you was a king in them old countries—?"

"My poor girl! my poor child!"

"All the while, that other was you?"

"That was I. A weak, sinful man. Too weak to be willing to suffer for what he 'd done."

"And that poor lady that day on the beach,—she knew?"

"She knew. She came to forgive me."

"*Ah!*"

"I did n't want forgiveness then. Some day, perhaps, I 'll dare to ask for it again,—on my knees."

"That man, your friend, that come to see you and that you did n't bring to the house—?"

"Raynham? Yes. He knew. He was going to quit the firm because he could n't bear, he said, to see me like that. I did n't know what he meant then. I do now."

"I thought—you did n't ask him up to the house because you might be ashamed o' me. Did he quit you?"

"For a while. When I lost you he came back. He 's been keeping the business together all the winter."

"Then you ain't been all alone with your trouble? You had one friend who knew?"

"Yes. And that was more than I deserved."

There was another long stillness.

Then he heard a small, low sound.

And its meaning for him was such that for a minute he must hold to the lintel of the door. It was

a sound full of life and promise as the running of the first thread of freed water in the spring. It was the sound of Sombra's tears.

She was weeping wildly. Not as she had wept before, in the desolation of her heart. But passionately, warmly, as a woman weeps for a hurt to one dearer than herself.

It was like a resurrection; like the first break of the green life through the snows. He could not have stirred. A great weakness smote him and kept him motionless. But she was coming to him.

Through the snow and the ashes and the dead leaves she came, crying aloud. She clung to his shaking hands. She sank to her knees and drew him down to her. He heard words at last through her wild crying:

"All that long while, and me not to know! I don't understand. I can't get it anyways straight. I can't bother with rights and wrongs. You say you done that bad thing. Oh, dear Alan, it don't matter! Nothin' you could do would matter to me, so long 's I could do you good. Dear, givin' 's all. Rights and wrongs don't matter. It 's you that 's done it. And above everything you could do, I love you. But oh, my pore boy, my dear love!—to bear it all alone this great while! When I could have borne it along with you!"

She was there, beside him, living and loving; near

as hands and feet; his own again. She forgot everything but his need. And divinely from her great ignorant heart she gave to him. That door was once more opened wide, in that deep fellowship and compassion without which love can leave no more than ashes in the snow. He yielded to her, dropped to his knees beside her and hid his face.

All roads were ended here. They were at home. For a little they remembered nothing of sin or grief, only knowing that they were once more together.

After the sound of the trumpet must come a stillness. The stars, the snows, the trees,—these alone were the angels of their resurrection.

Then, having found her, through the hushed and solemn woods he took her back to the farm.

X

Raynham, standing in the silence of his own small office, partitioned off from the larger one, had been reading a letter.

He had finished it now, and was staring out at his high window. Between two twelve-story buildings on the other side of the street he could see the lake, —gray, speckled with floating cakes of ice above which wheeled the hungry gulls, and empty of any shipping. It was all winter to the eye. But a string of crows swung up from a mud bank and flew

high, with an air of purpose, toward the wooded heights behind the city; they were cawing in a high-pitched, excited note; they, long before the man, were conscious of the year's turn and obedient to it.

Raynham stared at the horizon until it seemed to recede, and he was looking at Tallis Island over miles and miles of desolate water,—not as he had seen it in the autumn, but as it would be now, the long beaches battered with the floe, the lagoons frozen, and Morning House alone at last.

Yet even there, there would be consciousness—in the spears of pale green among the reed roots under the ice, in the packed buds of the woolly willow—of that change.

He read again from the letter in his hand, which was from Maclear:

. . . We shall never go back to the island any more. I 've no wish for it, nor has she. Those empty rooms would be unendurable, and the little hulls laid out to dry. All that was good of our days there, we can keep in memory, so that it 'll be always ours. But now we have changed. And the place has not changed with us. It 's in the past. We 'll leave it there.

Once I was going to build a house for her on the island. Now I know that house will never be built, anywhere. And there was to be a golden room in it, just for her. A fool and his fancies, you know, are hardly parted. I 'm going to have a golden room in the house on Frontenac Avenue. You said you would have a look at the wiring

before they laid the hardwood floors. Anyway, I know you have the key, and go in and out,—God bless you!—as I look for you to do when we 're there. So if you see Smeaton's men inside with a lot of yellow stuff, don't chase them out.

It was queer,—was n't it?—that the little room she had at the farm should have been a yellow one? It was walled with yellow pine and strips of yellow-flowered paper, and there were yellow curtains, and the quilt was all yellow squares. It was gold when the lamp was burning. I saw her first, as she lay asleep, in that gold light like memory.

When I brought her in out of the snow, I carried her there. I stopped with her all night except when I went down to look at Sal, who was taking hardly his return to life after saving hers, poor lad. She has taken no harm. The boy's hands are bad and heal slowly. But he 's very patient.

I don't know what I said or did n't say to you in my first letters. It never occurred to me that you 'd be anxious about any one but her. I 'm all right, Jack. When she 's fit, I 'm hungry to get back to the city and get to work and face the future.

Raynham laid the page down, drumming with his fingers on the window-sill. Over the lake evening was coming, and the gray light changed to one not of earth. Change, change, everywhere, ceaseless and implacable,—the running of the sand, the drifting of the mist, the covering of the snow,—and all building; building the stuff of the world, the life of the heart, the soul of man. Raynham raised the window, and into the warm air of the room slid a

blade of air keen as though he stood on a mountain. He felt himself raised on a height.

"So he 's facing it at last," he said. "At last he 's standing up to it. At last he 's taken it."

He drew down the window and went out through the large office with its rows of covered tables and hooded typewriters, and so to the door of another room. He took out a key, opened the door, and went in.

It was Maclear's office,—where he had gone, that day of summer, to think things out; where Moira had been waiting for him. Perhaps, in the dust that lay on everything, was some dust of the white violet she had let fall.

Raynham went to the closed desk, looked at that and at the empty chair. He said: "He 'll be sitting there again next week, outwardly as if nothing had happened. Queer, how our bodies hide things. Like curtains. Queer, how time goes."

There, at Raynham's side was the place where Moira had stood. There, on the carpet, was where Maclear had lain. The dumb stuff kept no record, and Raynham did not know. These things had only builded in their hour, and with it were gone.

He went to a large locked folder in a rack, opened it with another key. From among the plans it held he selected one, drew it out, and carried it to the window.

It was a plan of the Bersimis bridge.

He looked at it, studied it in every detail, then laid it back once more in its place and put all away.

Something in Maclear's letter had told him that this also had been faced at last.

He pulled out a drawer in the desk. All sorts of odds and ends were there as Maclear had left them. Raynham, burrowing, turned out faded envelops, string, a cigar-box, broken-backed cigarettes,—an infinite accumulation of nothings. Thrust down at one side was what he had had in mind.

It was the framed photograph of a tall, ugly young man. Under it was scrawled, "Al, from Gordy."

The photograph had been thrust down at the side of the drawer with such violence that the glass over it was broken and the metal frame crushed out of shape.

With a very gentle touch, Raynham straightened the frame. He spoke to the pictured face as if to the original.

"He must have been regarded as worth it, Gordon," he said. "Such life, such suffering, poured out to turn him! He was hard to turn. *You* 'd think it worth while. You 'd grudge him nothing, not even your life. You were always a great giver, Gordon. So 's she. It 'll be my job, and hers, to help him to make it and keep it worth while."

He hesitated a minute, then deliberately set the

picture on the top of the desk, where it had stood—before.

This also. He knew that Maclear had done with his forgetting; that he could forget no more than the earth under the frost and snow forgot the seeds in the furrows of her sorrow.

He took up the letter again. The page he lifted began:

Did you know that a farmyard was such a pleasant place to walk in? I did n't. The thaw was strong enough to make you believe in spring. Canada-jays and crows were quarreling somewhere, and the poultry were scratching through the snow to the straw beneath. Every icicle had a gold drop on the end of it, the cows were lowing, and just then Mackerrow swung in with a load of logs from the wood-lot, the runners shrieking at the turn, the whip cracking, the big team jetting steam. I tell you, it was fine. The girl on my arm clapped her hands and laughed out. It 's the first time I 've heard her laugh like that. Mrs. Mackerrow heard her in the kitchen, and Sal.

We 've worn out a path on the sunny side of the barn, she and I, pacing up and down while we talk of the future. A thing we rarely did before. Everything we have and are seems turned toward the future, as to a redemption, and the present is just the bridge by which we are traveling to it. I must tell you one thought of hers.

We read in the paper an account of a sudden flood following an ice-jam up North on a river. A party of miners, crossing by the single dangerous ford, were swept away, and two were drowned. The account gave it that such accidents were common there. She said, "There must be

plenty places like that in this country where life 's held so light. What would have saved those poor men losing their lives?"

I told her, a bridge, of course. Only there would be nobody to build one in such a place until the railway reached it.

"Yes," she said, "there might have been some one to set a bridge there. There might be some one. There might be you, Alan, when you 're rich enough."

Just the germ of a thought, Jack, but surely a divine one. To save lives that way for the lives I lost? Could it be done? I don't know. There 's no reason against it. And a thought like that is a star to steer by. There 's time enough. And I could train Sal to help me in it. The lad would like it. Perhaps, in time, I might train a lad of my own. . . .

Raynham laid the page down gently, as if something of Sombra, something of his friend, lingered there with their thought. His thought was that he must tell Moira that.

He also looked to the future and saw hope.

He gazed round the silent office to see that all was in readiness for Maclear's return. His face softened indescribably. He thought: "It 'll be good to have him back. And in time—in time,—we 'll all be happy again. Gordon would not wish it otherwise. Nor Moira. He 'll have hard things to fight, hard things to face, all the while. But there 'll be me. And there 'll be his wife. We 'll keep it worth while. He shall win out in the end."

He went out and shut the door. He was satisfied in patience for his friend as for himself.

For love was there. And where there is love, there is an exceeding patience.

Companied with these things, it is not difficult to await the times of God.