

## The Dead Wall

By H. B. Marriott Watson

THE dawn stared raw and yellow out of the east at Rosewarne. Its bleak and ugly face smouldered through morose vapours. The wind blew sharp against the windows, shaking them in their casements. The prospect from that lonely chamber overawed him with menace ; it glowered upon him. The houses in the square, wrapped in immitigable gloom, were to him ominous memorials of death. They frightened him into a formless panic. Anchored in that soundless sea, they terrified him with their very stillness. In dreary ranks they rose, a great high wall of doom, lifting their lank chimneys to the dreadful sky. They obsessed him with reobodings to which he could put no term, for which he could find no reason. Shrouded under its great terror, his poor mind fell into deeper depression under the influence of those malign and ugly signals. He strove to withdraw his thoughts and direct them upon some different subject. He wrenched them round to the contemplation of his room, his walls, his wife. A dull pain throbbed in the back of his head. He repeated aloud the topics upon which he would have his mind revolve, but the words rang in his ears without meaning. He touched the pictures on the wall, he spoke their names, he covered his face and strained hard to recapture coherent thought. The subjects mocked him : they were too nimble

nimble and elusive for his tired brain ; they danced out of reach, and he followed blindly till a deeper darkness fell. They grew faint and shadowy, like wraiths in a mist, and he pursued the glancing shadows. Finally, his brain grew blank ; it was as if consciousness had lapsed ; and he found himself regarding a fly that crawled upon the pane. Outside lay the oppression of that appalling scene that horrified him—he knew not why.

Rosewarne was growing used to these nervous exhibitions. This unequal struggle had been repeated through many weeks, but he had always so far come out of it with personal security. The dread that some day he would fail continually haunted him, and increased the strain of the conflict. He wondered what lay at the back of this horrible condition, and shuddered as he wondered. And he knew now that he must not let himself adrift, but must dispose the devils by every means. He broke into a whistle, and moved about the room carelessly. It was a lively stave from the streets that his lips framed, but it conveyed to him no sense of sound. He perambulated the chamber with a false air of cheerfulness. He eyed the bed with his head askew, winking as if to share a jest with it. He patted the pillows, arranging and disarranging them in turn. He laughed softly, merrily, emptily. He seized the dumbbells from the mantelpiece and whirled them about his head ; he chafed his hands, he rubbed his flesh. Little by little the blood moved with more content through his body, and the pulse of his heart sank slowly.

Outside, the dawn brightened and the wind came faster. Rosewarne looked forth and nodded ; then he turned and left the room, his face flashing as he passed the mirror, like the distempered face of a corpse. Across the landing he paused before a door, and, bending to the keyhole, listened ; little low sounds of life came to his ears, and suddenly his haggard face crowded with emotions.

He

He rose and softly descended the stairs to his study. The house lay in the quiet of sleep, and within the solitude of that rich room he, too, was as still as the sleepers. The inferior parts of the window formed a blind of stained glass, but the grey light flowed through the upper panes into a magnificent wilderness. The cold ashes of the fire, by which he had sat at his task late into the morning, lay still within the grate. The little ensigns of a human presence, the scattered papers, the dirty hearth, all the instruments of his work, looked mean and squalid within the spacious dignity of that high room. He lit the gas and sat down to his table, moving his restless fingers among the papers. It was as if his members arrogantly claimed their independence, and refused the commands of a weak brain. His mind had abrogated. His hands shifted furtively like the hands of a pickpocket: they wandered among the papers and returned to him. The clock droned out the hour slowly, and at that he started, shook his wits together, and began in haste to turn about the documents. He knew now the sheet of which he had sent his hands in quest. Large and blue and awful, it had been his ghost throughout the night. He could see the figures scrawled upon it in his own tremulous writing, rows upon rows of them, thin and sparse and self-respecting at the top, but to the close, fevered, misshapen, and reckless, fighting and jostling in a crowd for space upon the page. He laid his hand upon the horrible thing; he opened his ledgers; and sat deciphering once more his own ruin.

The tragedy lay bare to his shrinking eyes; it leaped forth at him from the blurred and confused figures. There was no need to rehearse them; he had reiterated them upon a hundred scrolls in a hundred various ways these many weeks. They had become his enemies, to deceive whom he had invoked the wreck of a fine intelligence. He had used all the wiles and dodges of a cunning  
mind

mind to entrap them to his service. He had spent a weary campaign upon them, storming them with fresh troops of figures, deploying and ambuscading with all the subterfuge of a subtle business mind. But there now, as at the outset of his hopeless fight, the issue remained unchanged; the terrible sum of his sin abided, unsubtracted, undivided, unabridged. As he regarded it at this moment it seemed to assume quickly a vaster proportion. His crime cried out upon him, calling for vengeance in his ears. Seizing a pen, eagerly, vacantly, he set forth anew to recompose the items.

Rosewarne worked on for a couple of hours, holding his quivering fingers to the paper by the sheer remnants of his will. His brain refused its offices, and he stumbled among the numerical problems with false and blundering steps. To add one sum to another he must ransack the litter of his mind; the knowledge that runs glibly to the tongue of a child he must rediscover by persistent and arduous concentration. But still he kept his seat, and jotted down his cyphers. About him the house stirred slowly; noises passed his door and faded; the grim and yellow sun rose higher and struck upon the table, contending with the gaslight. But Rosewarne paid no heed; he wrestled with his numb brain and his shivering fingers, wrestled to the close of the page; where once more the hateful figures gleamed in bold ink, menacing and blinking, his old ghost renewed and invested with fresh life.

The pen dropped from his hand, his head fell upon his arms, and as he lay in that helpless attitude of despair that protests not, of misery that can make no appeal, the door fell softly open and his wife entered.

"Freddy, whatever are you doing here like this?" she said, with surprise in her voice. "Have you gone to sleep?"

Rosewarne

Rosewarne lifted his head sharply and turned to her. Athwart the pallor of his face gleamed for an instant a soft flush of pleasure, and his dull eyes lit up with affection.

"I was doing some work, Dorothy," said he, "and I was tired."

Mrs. Rosewarne took a step nearer. Her fine grey eyes regarded him with wonder and with inquiry, and in her voice a little impatience mingled with a certain kindness.

"It's very absurd your working like this," she said, "and in this cold room without a fire? Aren't you coming to breakfast?"

Rosewarne got up from his chair. "Why, yes," he laughed. "Of course. I didn't realise it was ready. Oh, Dolly dear," he paused and put his hand to his head with a look of perplexity; then his face lightened. "Dolly, I've got something for you."

"For me!" she asked, and the curve of her lips drooped in a pretty smile of curiosity.

He fumbled in a drawer and withdrew a packet.

"Yes, darling. You know what day it is. It's your birthday, and you're twenty——"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Freddy, don't," she interrupted with a touch of impatience; and then opening the packet examined the contents with care. The light dawned in her eyes. "How very pretty! I was in need of a bracelet. Freddy, you are a good boy. But come, you mustn't catch cold. Come into the dining-room, and get warm, you simpleton."

She patted him softly on the head, and fell again to the scrutiny of her present. Rosewarne did not move, but watched her, smiling. "Aren't you coming?" she asked, looking up at last.

His eyes met hers and pleaded with them dumbly, but she made no sign, returning once more to her jewels.

"Isn't it worth a kiss, Dolly?" he asked softly.

Mrs. Rosewarne looked at him vaguely. "What! Oh, well, yes, if you like, I suppose." She bent towards him, and he touched her cheek gently. "But it was very nice of you to think of me," she said, withdrawing. "Come to breakfast now."

Rosewarne followed her into the breakfast-room, with a fresh access of impotence. He fumbled with his chair; the napkin fluttered out of his fingers; he pulled a plate to him, and the silver rattled under his clumsy action; a fork clattered to the floor. Mrs. Rosewarne winced.

"How very stupid you are to-day, Freddy!" she said pettishly.

He laughed a short meaningless laugh, and begged her pardon. Her movements were full of gentle grace; her breath came easily and with the best breeding. Her teacup tinkled sweetly, and only that and the soft sussurra of her sleeves marked her stately presence at the table. She looked at the bracelet comfortably, and lifted her cup to her lips. Rosewarne glanced at her timidly. The sickly light shone clear upon the fine contours of her placid face; the evil magic of that dreary day was transmuted upon her hair. She set down her cup and met his eyes.

"What a dreadful colour you are!" she said critically. The ghastly yellow of his face repelled her. "I wish you would get better, and not rise at such ridiculous hours."

"I slept ill, Dolly," he answered with a faint smile. He resumed his breakfast feverishly. The knuckles of his hands seemed to stand out awkwardly; his elbows waggled; he mouthed at his food in a frightened fashion.

"Good heavens, Freddy," cried his wife, wrinkling her nose in distaste, "why do you eat like that? It's more like an animal than a human being. Your manners are becoming perfectly awful."

He

He started and dropped his knife. "What the devil does it matter how I eat?" he exclaimed angrily. "You—you——" His ideas faded from him, and he sat staring at her in vacant indignation. Then he put his hand to his head. "Oh, forgive me, Dolly; forgive me, please. I'm tired and——"

"My dear man," broke in Mrs. Rosewarne coldly, "if you will make yourself ill, what can you expect?" She unfolded a morning paper and ran her eyes down the columns; Rosewarne sat looking across the room into the fire. Suddenly she called to him in a new voice. "Mr. Maclagan came to town yesterday, Freddy, and paid a visit to Downing Street."

"Yes?" he said, starting again.

She drew down the paper and looked at him over the edge, her eyes filled with some excitement.

"Do you hear, Freddy dear? Now is your chance to make the arrangement final."

He gazed at her, his face contorted in a desperate attempt to concentrate his thoughts upon her words. What was she saying? And what did it mean?

"Freddy, don't you hear?" she cried again in a voice in which impatience blended with a certain eagerness. She leaned forward and put a hand upon his arm. He clutched at it feverishly with his fingers. "Lord Hambleton is favourable, I know, and it only remains to secure Maclagan," she went on quickly. "He, you know, was inclined to agree when you saw him before. I'm sure that the nail is ready for the hammer. There is South Wiltshire, where you are known, and no one yet settled upon by the Party. See, dear; you must call on him to-day, and that, with another cheque for the Party, should place the matter beyond doubt. Freddy! Freddy! Don't you hear what I'm saying. For goodness' sake, don't look like a corpse, if you are ill."

"Yes

"Yes, yes, Dolly," said Rosewarne hurriedly.

"And for the love of decency, don't Dolly me," said Mrs. Rosewarne with a petulant movement of her shoulders. "It's bad enough to have to answer to an elderly Quaker name like Dorothy."

Rosewarne got up from the table. "For God's sake, be civil to me, if you can't be kind," he said sharply. She regarded him coldly. "What is it you want?" he asked.

Mrs. Rosewarne rapped her knuckles angrily upon the table.

"I imagined we had made that pretty clear between us long ago," she said with a sarcastic emphasis; "we agreed that you were to go into Parliament, and we laid our plans to that end. The only thing wanting was the particular seat, and now it's found you ask me what I'm talking about."

She looked at him with placid disdain. Rosewarne shuddered; he remembered now, as in a dream, the ambitions she had formed for him.

"No, no, dear," he said. "Tell me. It's all right. I'll see Lord—Lord Hambleton. The——"

Mrs. Rosewarne's expression turned swiftly to complacency.

"No," she said, "leave him to me, Freddy. I shall see him this afternoon at the Charters's. You must see Maclagan to-day, and we'll meet and talk the matter over at dinner."

She smiled upon him with a tolerant air of patronage. Rosewarne stood by the window, restlessly twitching his fingers.

"You will not be in to lunch?" he asked, dully.

"No; I'm going to the Charters's. We have each a long day before us. It's a sort of crisis in our lives. I'm tired of this undistinguished competence. Any one can be the partner in a bank. It is the House that opens the gate to success."

She rose and swept her skirts behind her with a motion of her arm

arm. She regarded herself in the mirror with a face of satisfaction, directing with nimble fingers an errant lock of her hair.

“And now you’ll be off, I suppose,” she said, and turned on him laughing. “Well, Freddy, pluck up your heart and speak your best; you have a tongue as neat as any one when you like. Don’t wear so lugubrious a countenance, dear—come!”

She kissed him lightly on the forehead, laying her hands on his shoulders, her eyes sparkling with excitement. Rosewarne put out his arms and caught her. His eyes devoured her. “Kiss me again, Dolly,” he sputtered. “Kiss me again. Kiss me on the lips.”

She laughed, a faint colour rose in her cheeks, and she struggled in his clutch. “Dolly, Dolly!” he pleaded. A frown of embarrassment gathered in her forehead.

“Do let me go,” she said sharply.

He obeyed; his arms fell to his sides; wistfully he watched her withdraw. Stately in her flowing, rustling robes, receding from him, she sailed through the doorway, and with the loss of that fine vision the light and the flush fell from him, and all that remained was an ignoble figure with discoloured cheeks and sunken head. In that moment and with the chill of that departing grace fresh upon him, he regarded his tragic position plainly and without illusion. The poor rags of his last unvoiced hopes dropped from his outcast soul. He had deferred the story of his ruin, in part out of shame, but much, too, out of pity, and because of some shreds of confidence in his own fortunes. And yet, implicit in that silence he had kept, but unacknowledged in his own thoughts, had been the fear of her demeanour in the crisis. He knew her for a worldly woman, clad in great aspirations; he had taken the measure of her trivial vanities; he had sounded the shallows of her passionless heart; and still he had trusted, still he had nursed an empty

empty faith in her affection. But now at this slight repulse somehow the props swayed beneath his rickety platform, and his thoughts ran in a darker current of despair. The bankruptcy, the guilt, the horror of his defalcations, were no longer the Evil to come, but merely now the steps by which he mounted to the real tragedy of his life.

Rosewarne quietly took up his hat, and drawing on his coat, passed out of the house and walked slowly towards the City.

It was upon two o'clock when Mrs. Rosewarne descended from the portico of her house and was enclosed within her landau by the footman. She was in a fervour which became her admirably ; her cheeks were touched with points of colour, and her fine eyes brightened as with the flash of steel. She itched to try the temper of her diplomacy, and, as she entered the drawing-room of her hostess, the thought that she was well equipped for the encounter filled her anew with zest. Her eyes, piercing from that handsome face, challenged the luncheon-party. Mrs. Charters gave her a loud effusive welcome, as the beauty of the entertainment, and a general murmur of greeting seemed to salute her ears. Stepping a pace from the company and engaging easily with her hostess, Mrs. Rosewarne denoted the guests with sharp glances. Of her own disposition at the table she could have no certainty ; the occasion was urgent ; and with a nod she summoned Lord Hambleton to her side.

"And you, Lord Hambleton!" said she with a pretty air of surprise, "why, I heard you were in Scotland."

"Scotland!" he said, shrugging his shoulders and smiling. "What! Scotland in January, and the session like a drawn sword at one's heart."

"Ah!" she replied, "I had forgotten the session. And yet my poor husband talks enough about it."

"Indeed!"

"Indeed!" said the Whip with good-humour, "there is still some one, then, who bothers about us."

She lifted her shoulders slightly, as one who would disclaim a personal participation in the folly.

"Doesn't every one?" she asked.

"Why, we talk of ourselves," said he laughing, "but I did not know any one else took an interest in us. We have outlived our time, you see. We are early Victorians, so to speak. Representative government is a glorious tradition, like the English flag or Balaclava—very brave, very wonderful, but very unimportant. I know we bulk largely in the newspapers. It is our *métier*. But I wonder why. The habit exists when the utility is fled. Is it because the advertisers love us, do you think? It is the only reason I can conceive. We all owe our being to the Births, Deaths and Marriages. The servant-girl, my dear Mrs. Rosewarne, confers upon me the fame of a Tuesday's issue, for the shilling she expends upon a 'Wanted.' Alas!" He pulled his features into an expression of dismay. "When the hoarding and the sky-sign come in we shall go out."

Mrs. Rosewarne laughed gently, a demure intelligence shining from her eyes.

"And you," said he quizzically, "you don't care for us?"

"Oh, I!" she retorted with a sigh. "Yes, I talk of you. I am obliged to talk of you over the hearth-rug. I assure you I have all your names by rote, and rattle them off like a poll-parrot."

"Ah!" said Lord Hambleton, peering into her face curiously; "I can appreciate your tone. You are weary of us."

"Frankly, yes," said she, smiling. They both laughed, and he made a gesture of apology.

"Why?" he asked.

The voice of a butler cried from the doorway ; there was a sudden stir in the room, and then a little hush.

"We are separated, alas !" said Lord Hambleton.

"Not at all," said Mrs. Charters, suddenly, at his elbow. "I believe you are neighbours."

Mrs. Rosewarne's heart bounded in her side, and then beat placidly with its accustomed rhythm. Lord Hambleton looked at her. "That's very nice," he murmured.

At the table he turned to her with an immediate air of interest. "Why?" he repeated.

Her gaze had wandered across the table with a profession of gentle indifference. She was surveying the guests with a remote abstraction ; plucked out of which she glanced at him with a pretty hint of embarrassment, her forehead frowning as though to recover the topic of their conversation.

"Why?" she echoed ; and then : "Oh yes," said she, smiling as out of a memory regained. "Because—well, because, what does it all avail?"

"Nothing, I grant you," he replied easily, "or very little, save to ourselves. You forget us. We have our business. Our fathers gamed and we talk. Don't forget us."

He spoke in railing tones, almost jocosely, and she lifted her eyebrows a line.

"Ah yes!" she assented. "Yes, but me and the rest of us, are we to keep you in your fun?"

He paused before replying, and noted every particular distinction in her handsome face. They were at close quarters ; he leaned a trifle nearer, and lowered his voice to a mocking confidence :

"Mrs. Rosewarne, you would never blow upon us, surely." He feigned to hang in suspense upon her answer ; the proximity touched

touched him with a queer elation ; she shot upon him one of her loveliest glances.

“I can hold my tongue for a friend, Lord Hambleton.”

“Come,” he said, nodding, “that is better. That is a very sportsmanlike spirit.”

Mrs. Rosewarne considered, smiling the while she continued her meal. The approach was long, but to manœuvre heightened her spirits, and she was now to make a bolder movement.

“But why,” she asked, “should you expect mercy from a woman?”

“I don’t, Heaven knows,” he responded promptly ; “I wonder at it, and admire.”

“I think you have had a very long innings,” said she, thoughtfully, “and were it in my power I would show no mercy.”

Lord Hambleton laughed contentedly. “Oh, well !” he said.

“There is no opportunity for women,” continued Mrs. Rosewarne, wistfully ; “there has never been.”

“Who would have suspected that you were ambitious?” commented Lord Hambleton, archly.

She threw up her jewelled fingers. “Ambitious !” she said, impatiently. “I am a woman. Where is the use ? That is your business ; mine is the boudoir, naturally. We are always—in the field, you call it, don’t you ? Men go to the wickets. My poor husband would tear out his heart for a seat. He is sound, he is good, he has wits, he is tolerable ; he would serve excellently well upon a minor committee, and would never give a shadow of trouble. He would never ask questions, or soar at Cabinets. Yet it is, I suppose, ambition of a kind. But me ! What has it to do with me ! A woman knows nothing—of politics, no more than life. I can enjoy no vicarious pomp. No ! give me the authority myself ;  
give

give me a share in it, Lord Hambleton, and then I will tell you if I am ambitious ! ”

She put her head aside, and appeared with this tirade to drop the subject ; she made a feint of listening to a conversation across the table. She smiled at the jest that reached her as if she had forgotten her companion. And yet she was aware that the aspect of her face, at which he was staring, was that which best became her. Lord Hambleton watched the long and delicate lines warm with soft blood, and his own senses were strangely affected.

“ But you would influence him,” he said presently. She came back with a display of reluctance, and seemed to pause, searching for his meaning.

“ Oh ! ” she said, “ Heavens ! I have higher aims than that. Make him Under-Secretary, and he would be worth influencing ; but poor Freddy—— ” She shrugged her shoulders and looked away again, as though impatient of the subject. Perhaps she was really tired of the conversation, he reflected.

“ Well, here we are,” he said, with deprecation in his voice, “ talking all the time on a subject which you professed at the outset bored you. How unpardonable of me ! ”

“ Bored me ! ” she said, opening her eyes at him and very innocently. “ Oh, not talking with any one worth while.”

Lord Hambleton’s eyes dropped, and he was silent. The wine had fired his blood no less than her beauty. He looked up again, and met her glance by misadventure. A show of colour flooded her face ; the pulses beat in her white throat. He did not know why, but his hands trembled a little, and a bar seemed broken down between them.

“ Upon my soul ! ” he said, with an excited laugh, “ I believe you would regenerate us all, if you were in the House ! ”

“ I’m sure I should,” she said gaily. Her heart fluttered in  
her

her side. "But there is no chance of that; I could only keep a *salon*. Why isn't it done? There is no Recamier nowadays; there is no Blessington. There is even no Whip's wife."

She was conscious of a faint shudder as she made this impudent stroke, and withdrew in a tremble into herself. She lay back in her chair, frightened. The words fell opportunely into Lord Hambleton's heart; he had no suspicion that they were deliberate, and the blood danced lightly along his arteries.

"You would hold a *salon* bravely," he said.

"Try me," she said with the affectation of playful laughter.

He laughed with her, and "Oh, we shall have everything out of you by-and-bye," said he. "We will bide our time. What we want just now more than anything is sound men. Now Mr. Rosewarne——"

"Poor Freddy is as sound as Big Ben, I suppose," said Mrs. Rosewarne, indifferently.

She felt the blood burning in her cheeks. Their eyes encountered. It seemed to him that they had a private secret together. He scarce knew what it was, so far had his sensations crowded upon his intelligence; but some connection, woven through the clatter of that public meal, held him and her in common. With her quick wit she was aware of his thought. She felt flushed with her own beauty. It was not of her husband he was thinking, and she was aware that he believed she too was not considering him. The understanding lay between themselves. She rose triumphant; her heart spoke in loud acclamations.

"Ah, well," she said, with a tiny sigh, "I must wait, then, for old age to found my *salon*."

"No," he replied, smiling at her; "and why? We must have your husband in the House. Then you may begin at once."

"My

"My husband!" she echoed, as though recalled to some vague and distasteful consideration.

"Yes. You must have this *saison*. It may save us."

She looked at him, as if in doubt. He rose beside her. He overtopped her by a head, and a certain strength about his forehead attracted her. Ah! If this had been her husband! The regret flashed and was gone.

"Come and tell him," she said suddenly.

He misinterpreted the fervour in her eyes. "When?" he asked.

"To-night," she murmured.

There was a momentary pause, and then, "To-night," he assented, taking her hand.

Mrs. Rosewarne moved easily within the retinue of her admirers in the drawing-room. She regarded the company with cool eyes of triumph. She held their gazes; the looks they passed upon her fed her complacency; she was sensible of her new distinction among them. And when, later, she returned to her house, she was still under the escort of success. The excitement ran like rich wine in her body, and under its stimulus her pale face was flushed with a tide of colour. She dressed for dinner, radiant, and crowned, as she conceived, with incomparable splendour. The presiding enthusiasm of her mind prevailed upon her beauty. In the glass she considered her looks, and smilingly softened the glory of her cheeks. Her thoughts reverted with amiable contempt to her husband, and in a measure he too was exalted in her own triumph. She descended the stairs, and swept into the dining-room in the full current of her happiness; and she had a sudden sense of repulse upon finding the room vacant.

"Where is your master?" she asked of the servant, who stood in observant silence at the further end of the room.

Williams

Williams had seen him come in an hour ago ; he had retired to his room. Should he go and inquire ?

“ No : we will give him a few minutes,” said she, seating herself.

She held communion with her own surprises. She anticipated his sensations ; if he had failed with Maclagan, she, at least, had had better fortune, and for a moment Freddy and she were wrapt in common fellowship, set upon a common course. But as the time wore on, and he made no appearance, she grew restless and fidgeted ; a little annoyance mingled with her good-humour ; the warmth of her success ebbed away. She despatched Williams to bring the laggard down, and when he had returned with the report that he could get no answer, she picked up her skirts, and with lowering brows herself undertook the mission.

Mrs. Rosewarne paused outside her husband's room, and knocked. There was no response, and turning the handle of the door impatiently, she entered. The lamp burned low, and Freddy lay upon the bed, sprawling in an attitude of graceless comfort. The noise of his hard breathing sounded in the chamber, and the odour of strong spirit filled the air. In an access of angry disgust she shook him by the shoulders, and he lifted a stupid face to her, his eyes shot with blood.

“ Is it you, Dolly ? ” he asked thickly.

Her voice rose on a high note of anger.

“ Do you know that the gong has gone this half-hour ? Bah ! You have been drinking, you beast ! ”

He sat up, staring at her vacantly, and slowly his eyes grew quick with life and fury.

“ And what the devil is it to you if I have ? ” he said savagely. “ Why, in hell's name, don't you leave me alone ? What are you  
you

you doing here? What are you doing in my room? It was you relegated me to this. What are you doing here?"

"I came," said she coldly, "to call you to dinner; but since you have chosen to be the beast you are, I will leave you."

At the word, she swept upon her heel and was gone. Rosewarne sat for some minutes dully upon his bed. The flame of his anger had leapt and died, and he was now hunched up physically and morally, like a craven: his wits dispersed, his mind groping in a dreadful space for some palpable occasion of pain. Presently his reason flowed once more, and piece by piece he resumed the horrible round of life. Thereafter came a deep, warm gush of reason and affection. He had been brutal; he had been the beast she termed him. He had used her evilly when she meant but kindly by him. His heart wept for her and for himself—she was his love and his darling. He would go and pour forth his tears of regret upon her. She had naturally been struck to the heart to see him thus unmanned and sapped in the very foundations of his mind. She did not know. How could she? . . . But he must tell her! The thought fetched him to a sudden term in the maudlin consideration of his streaming emotions. Drawn at this instant before the presence of that Terror, he trembled and rocked upon his couch. He threw the gathering thoughts aside. He must not suffer them to cloud his mind again. He must go forth and enter the room with the pleading face of a penitent. It was her due; it was his necessity—nay, this control was demanded by the very terms of his being.

He set his dress in order; he combed himself before the glass, and regarded his own grimacing image. "I will think of nothing," he murmured. "I am a man. There is nothing wrong. I can assume that for an hour. I shall go straight to Dolly. I must ward it all off. It will suffice later. Now! I

am

am going to begin—Now! I will think of nothing. Do you hear, you fool! Oh, you damned, silly fool! You know it is fatal if you don't. Stop. No figures; no worries. Just thrust them aside. It can't matter that two and two make four when they ought to make five. Now then! From this moment I stop. I am a man," he explained to his grimacing image. "No more figures. I will begin. No worries! Now!" He pulled out his watch. "In five seconds I will start." He saw the hand jump round. "Now!" and then in the ear of his brain a thin voice cried, softly insistent: "Five thousand and that odd two hundred. Is that all right? Go back on it. Give them just a glance." He paused, but the blood in his head stood still. At the cross ways he trembled, dazed with the conflict of the two desires. "Well, one glance."

At that the whole body of his madness rolled back upon him through the rift. He threw up his hands, and, hiding his face in the bed-clothes, groaned. "Now!" he said again, flinging himself peremptorily to his feet. He straightened his figure. "Now!" As if with a wild, reckless motion, he pulled to the door of his mind, and shutting his eyes, marched out of the room, laughing mechanically. "Dorothy, Dorothy, Dorothy!" he muttered under his breath.

Rosewarne entered the dining-room with a quick tread and a moving galvanic smile.

"Dolly, forgive me," he said; "I am late. Where are you? Oh, Williams, some fish. That will do."

He started to talk in a very hurried manner, but with humble cheerfulness. His wife stared at him coldly, answering in short, colourless sentences. But he made amends for her reticence with a continuous stream of talk. He chattered freely, and he ate ravenously. He rambled on through numberless topics with no  
apparent

apparent connection. All the reserves of his nature were enrolled in that gallant essay to fence him from the Horror of his life, and hedge him safely about with casual trifles. Of a sudden he saw things clear about him. A certain bright wit shone in his soliloquies; he spoke with that incoherence and irresponsibility which begets sometimes effective phrasing. His wife considered him; the novelty of his conversation struck her, its frivolity took her with admiration. Slowly the barriers of her own reserve broke down, the sense of satisfaction in herself grew upon her, and by degrees her good-humour returned. She joined in his talk, laughed a little, was inspired by his mood into newer, fresher, wilder hopes. No word was said about the scene in the bedroom; it had dropped into past history, and their feet were set to the future. And when Williams was gone, she turned swiftly upon him, her zeal showing in her eyes.

"And now, Freddy," she said, "tell me all about Maclagan."

His face started into haggard lines; he lowered his eyes, and, with a short laugh, shook his head.

"Later; not now," he said. "You begin."

She laughed also. "I have seen Lord Hambleton," she said with a burst of excitement. "He is coming to-night." And watched upon his face for the effect.

"Oh, you clever girl!" he cried, his eyes smiling, his lips quivering slightly. "You clever girl."

Again she laughed. It almost seemed to her at that moment that she loved him.

"Ah, you would think so, if you knew how I managed it."

"But I know it, I know it," he cried, seizing her hand across the table. "You are as clever as you are beautiful."

He hardly recalled the point to which their conversation related; he was aware only of her proximity and her kindly eyes. She returned



critically. Even in the red light the colour of his face, which had fallen into ugly lines, repelled her. "Come, what is it? Is anything the matter with you? Have you seen your doctor? What are you keeping from me?"

The questions ran off her tongue sharply, even acrimoniously. She had anew the sense of irritation that he had chosen this hour to be ill.

"No," he replied in a blank voice, "I suppose I'm all right. I don't know. I've been—yes—I'm ill with the horrible trouble. I'm——" He fell quickly upon his knees, burying his face in her gown. "Oh, Dolly, Dolly," he sobbed, "I have ruined you, and you don't know it. It is all over—all over."

Her eyes opened in alarm, but she did not move. "What nonsense are you talking, Freddy?" she asked in an uncertain voice which rang harshly. "You're ill. You've been overworking. You mustn't. What foolishness!"

She laughed faintly, with embarrassment, and almost mechanically put out a hand and touched his hair as though vaguely to reassure him of his mistake; while all the time her heart thumped on and her mind was wondering in a daze.

At her touch he raised his head, and clutched her, crying, "Ah, you do love me, Dolly. You do love me. I knew you loved me. I knew you would be sorry for me."

She sat motionless, fear reaching out arms for her heart. Slowly she was beginning to understand.

"What is it that you have done?" she asked in a dry voice.

He pressed her hand tightly, crushing her fingers. "I have taken money," he whispered, "trust money. I am ruined. I must go to prison, unless I——"

She moistened her lips, impassive as ever.

"But you do love me," he repeated, clinging to her. "Yes,  
you

you do love me, Dolly. Even if I have to do—that thing, you love me still.”

Through all her being ran a repulsion for this creature at her knees, but she was clogged with her emotions and sat silent.

“Dolly, Dolly,” he cried pathetically. “I shall have to do it. I know I shall have to do it—I——” He looked up, gulping down his sobs, as though seeking in her face for a contradiction. He knew the warm tears would fall upon him. Through his blurred vision he saw her mutely, indistinctly, raise her arms, extracting her hand from his grasp. He felt—he knew—he hoped—— Ah, she would throw them about his neck and draw him close in a passionate, pitiful embrace.

“Dolly, Dolly,” he whispered, “I shall have to die.”

With a rough movement she thrust him from her and got upon her feet.

“Die!” she exclaimed in a voice full of ineffable bitterness. “Die! Oh, my God, yes. That is the least you can do.”

He lay where he had fallen to her push, huddled in a shapeless heap, stirring faintly. It was to her eyes as if some vermin upon which she had set her foot still moved with life. There was left in him no power of thought, no capacity of emotion. He was dimly conscious of misery, and he knew that she was standing by. Far away a tune sounded, and reverberated in his ears; it was the singing of the empty air. She was staring upon him with disgust and terror.

“Poor worm!” she said in tense low tones; and then her eyes alighted on her heaving bosom and the glories of her gown. The revulsion struck her like a blow, and she reeled under it. “You devil!” she cried. “You have ruined my life.”

The sound of those sharp words smote upon his brain, and  
whipped

whipped his ragged soul. He rose suddenly to his feet, his face blazing with fury.

"Damn you," he cried passionately. "I have loved you. I have sold my soul for you. I have ruined my mind for you. Damn you, Dorothy. And you have no words for me. Damn you."

His voice trailed away into a tremulous sob, and he stood contemplating her with fixed eyes. She laughed hardly, withdrawing her skirts from his vicinity. His gaze wandered from her, and went furtively towards the mantelpiece. She followed it, and saw a revolver lying upon the marble.

"Bah!" she said. "You have not the courage."

At that moment a knock fell upon the door; after a pause she moved and opened it.

"Lord Hambleton, ma'am," said Williams. "He is in the drawing-room."

Breathing hard, she looked round at her husband. Rosewarne's dull eyes were fixed upon her. They interceded with her; they fawned upon her.

"I will be there in a moment," she said clearly. Rosewarne moved slowly to the table and sat down, resting his head in his hands. He made no protest; if he realised anything now, he realised that he had expected this. The door shut to behind her; a dull pain started in the base of his brain; into the redoubts of his soul streamed swiftly the forces of sheer panic.

Mrs. Rosewarne entered the drawing-room, the tail of her dress rustling over the carpet. Lord Hambleton turned with this sound in his ears, stirring him pleasantly.

"Well," said he, smiling, "you see I've come."

She gave him her hand and paused, confronting him. Her heart thumped like a hammer upon her side; her face was flushed with colour, and her lips quivered.

"It is good of you," she said tremulously; "won't you sit down?"

He did not heed her invitation, but shot a shrewd glance at her. Her voice startled him; the discomposure of her appearance arrested his eyes. He wondered what had happened. It could not be that his visit was the cause of this confusion. And yet he noted it with a thrill of satisfaction, such as he had experienced in the colloquy at Mrs. Charters's.

"You are very good to look at like this," he allowed himself to say. He picked up the thread of their communion where it had been dropped earlier that day. She was marvellously handsome; he had never admired a woman so much since his youth. The faint light spreading from the lamps illumined her brilliant face and threw up her figure in a kind of twilight against the wall.

Her heart palpitated audibly; it seemed to her that she had a sudden unreasonable desire to laugh. The squalid gloom of that chamber beyond lifted; it seemed remote and accidental. She was here with the comfortable eyes of this man upon her, contemplating her with admiration. She was not a parcel of that tragedy outside. She smiled broadly.

"Why, the better for my *salon*," she said.

What had excited her? he asked himself. "Ah! we will arrange all that," he answered with a familiar nod.

"You will?" she asked eagerly—breathlessly.

"Why, certainly," he replied. "I think we can manage it—between us."

She laughed aloud this time. "Yes, both of us together," she said.

He met her eyes. Was it wine? he asked. Or was it——? Lord Hambleton's body tingled with sensation. He had not suspected that matters had progressed so intimately between them.

Almost

Almost involuntarily he put out a hand towards her. She laughed awkwardly, and he drew it back.

"You should have had it long ago," he said. "You have thrown away a chance."

"My life, you mean," she cried, breaking in upon his mellifluous tones with a harsher note.

She shifted her head towards the door as if listening for a sound. Her action struck him for the moment as ungainly.

"Things do not always fall out as we want them," he said slowly.

"Not as you want them?" she asked, coming back to regard him. "Why, what more do you want?"

He watched her from his quiet eyes, which suddenly lost their equable expression. To him she had always appeared a woman of dispassion, but now the seeming surrender in her mind, the revolution in her character, flashed upon him with an extreme sense of emotion. His heart beat faster.

"I think you know," he said softly, and reaching forth, took her hand.

Swiftly she turned; a look of dread rushed into her eyes. All on a sudden the transactions of that neighbouring room leapt into proximity. She saw Freddy handling the revolver; she watched him lean over the table and cock it in the light; she saw him—— She gave a cry, and moved a step towards the door, with a frightened face.

"What is it?" asked Lord Hambleton in alarm. "You are ill. You——" She made no answer, and he seized her hand again. "Let me ring for a glass of wine," he whispered.

Mrs. Rosewarne laughed loudly in his face.

"No, no," she said; "it is nothing. Pray, don't. I shall be better."

She

She looked at him, and then turned her ear to the door again, listening with a white face. He watched her anxiously, but in his own mind the reason of her perturbation was clear. The thought was sweet to him.

"Well," said he ; "and now to business."

"Business !" she echoed, and moved quickly to him, "I— Please, you must excuse me, Lord Hambleton. My husband is ill. Do you mind ? I—"

He rose abruptly. "I am very sorry," he said ; "I will not trouble you, then, just now."

He took his hat. She had turned away and was hearkening with all her senses for that report that did not come. He bit his lips. Perhaps she had been overstrained. He could scarce say what feeling ran uppermost in his mind. She hurried him to the door, accompanying him herself.

"Must you go ?" she asked, stupidly, on the doorstep.

He looked at her ; perhaps she really was ill. But she was very beautiful. She did not hear his answer. The rough wind blew through the open door and scattered her hair and her skirts. Lord Hambleton went down the steps. She watched him go. At that moment, somehow, a great revulsion overwhelmed her. She had listened, and there had been no discharge. What a fool she had been ! Of course, he had no courage. She had the desire to rush after Lord Hambleton and call him back. She had tortured herself idly ; she had played a silly part in a melodrama. She recalled Lord Hambleton's ardent gaze. There was a man ! Ah, if this thing were not fastened about her neck ! She stole back along the hall—furious. Once more she was confronted with the squalor of her position. Her indignation rose higher ; she could see that pitiful creature crying for mercy, crying for affection. Bah ! He was too cowardly to die. Burning with the old anger, she  
crossed

crossed to the study and opened the door. She would have it out with him ; they should understand their position. With Lord Hambleton the dignified prospects of her life had vanished, and she was flung back upon a mean and ignominious lot.

Rosewarne was seated in the armchair ; the revolver rested where it had lain upon the mantelpiece. He made no movement to rise as she returned, and she stood for a second looking down upon him from behind with curling lips. A bottle of whisky and a glass stood upon the table at his elbow. It was probable that he had drunk himself to sleep.

“Are you awake ?” she called sharply. He made no sign. She bent over angrily and shook him.

His head fell to her touch, and from his fingers a little phial tumbled upon the floor.