Williamson Charles Norris, Williamson Alice Muriel

Where the Path Breaks

Charles Williamson

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Williamson C.

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Содержание

Williamson A. M. Alice Muriel, Williamson C. N. Charles Norris Where the Path Breaks

PART I
THE AWAKENING

CHAPTER I

In dim twilight a spark of life glittered, glinted like a bit of mica catching the sun, on a vast face of gray cliff above a dead gray sea. There was nothing else in the world but the vastness and the grayness of the cliff and the sea, till the spark felt the faint thrill of warmth which gave to it the knowledge of its own life. “I am alive,” the whisper stirred, far down in the depths of consciousness. Next the question came, “What am I?”

At first just that infinitesimal bright glint lived where all the rest was dead, or creation not yet begun. Then slowly the answer followed the question: “I am I. A man. I was a man. I am dead. This is the twilight between worlds. I must dream back. I must know myself as I was. Later I shall wake and know what I am.”

The soul was very still, tired after an all-but-forgotten struggle. It was beginning to remember that it had suffered infinitely. It was patient, with all the patience of eternity before it. There was no hurry. Hurry and turmoil seemed strange and remote, part of some outworn experience. Lying still, it passively waited for the dream to begin. For a moment – or perhaps years – there remained only the gray blankness of the empty world; but the spark of life grew in brightness as a star grows to visibility in the pallor of an evening sky. Then, suddenly, a face flashed into existence – a girl’s face.

“I knew her. I loved her,” the soul remembered with a thrill, like a shooting ray of the star that was itself. “Where? Who was she? What were we to each other?”

The dream began to take on definiteness. The soul groped back to find its body and its lost place in the world. Not this gray limbo, but the sad and happy, the glorious and terrible world whence it had somehow passed.

The girl’s face faded away for an instant, and the face of a man seemed to be reflected in a blurred mirror. The eyes of the soul looked into the man’s eyes and knew them. They were his own. He was that man, or had been. “What a dull dog you are,” he heard himself say, as if he had said it long ago, said it often, and the echo had followed him to this twilit place beyond death. He thought the face was rather like a dog’s, an ugly mongrel dog’s. The girl could not possibly care for him! Yet some one had told him that she did care, and that she would marry him if he asked. “I’m her mother. I ought to know!” As he heard the woman’s voice speaking the words, he saw the face that belonged to the voice: the face of a pretty woman, young looking till the girl came near… The girl had come now! The cream-and-rose tints of her youth made the other face old. This was rather pathetic. He remembered that it had so impressed him more than once. Yet he had never been able to like the mother.

The dream was growing in distinctness. They three – he and the girl and the woman – were in a house. It was a beautiful old house, in the country. Outside it was black and white, with elaborate patterns of oak on plaster. A sheet of water lay so near that the black and white front was reflected in it, like a dream within a dream. The calm water was asleep, and dreaming the house; and some great dark trees and clumps of rhododendrons were dreaming also, which seemed very confusing,

and made him doubt whether there were any such soul as his, or whether after all he were only the spirit of the water or the trees, and had never known this girl who was walking with the ugly man. Yet it seemed to be the ugly man's house, and he knew what the man was thinking. They were one and the same, at all events in the dream. And though he was out of doors with the girl, he could see every room in the house as plainly as he could see the lake and the trees and the pink rhododendrons. He seemed to pass through each room, one after another, because the girl was extolling the charm of the house, and his mind moved here and there following her words, picturing her, white and flower-like against a dark oak paneling, or old brocade, or hanging of faded tapestry.

Yes, it was a beautiful house. He had that to offer her, and money too. There were women who would take him because of what he had to give. And there was something else. What was it? Oh, a title. Not much of a title. He couldn't believe she would be influenced by a trifle like that. She was too perfect, too wonderful. A great many men with nobler titles and more money must have asked her to marry them, or they would ask her in future; for she was still very young. So far she had never fallen in love. She had told him so.

"Not seriously in love," she had said, half laughing, and half in earnest. "There was only my cousin. I adored him when I was child. But I haven't seen him since I was sixteen. And now I'm twenty-one. He was most awfully good looking, and I thought he was a knight and a hero. Perhaps if he came back from India I should be disappointed in him."

Queer that the groping soul should hold an echo of these chance words about India, though there was none for the name of the cousin, nor even of the girl herself. This made the awakening man wonder again if the girl had existed, or whether she lived only in his dreams. It was a vaguely sweet, vaguely sad dream, which seemed to have ended before it was fairly begun, with a very sorrowful ending which he couldn't quite recall yet. He wished to go on dreaming, and to change the end if he could.

The girl and her mother were visiting the ugly man at the old black and white house. He – whoever he was – had to go away. He was begging the girl to stop until he came back. "If I do come back," he added. "Your mother is willing to stay if you are. It would make me happy to think of you in my house, and if anything happens to me…"

"Oh, don't speak of such things!" she broke in. "It's terrible that you must go."

This was very kind of her, because it was not reasonable that she could really care much – such a girl – for such a man, who had never been able to interest her, he felt. But she looked at him, looked up mistily with her dear eyes of smoke-blue. There was some message in them, behind a glaze of tears.

Drowned in those eyes, he heard himself stammering out things he had not thought that he would ever dare to say. "If you could marry me … I don't suppose you could … but if…"

Her answer did not come into the dream. Perhaps she had not answered. But he could see the ugly man holding out his hands, and the girl putting her hands into them. He could see her looking up at him again, and in the beautiful eyes there was that message she wanted him to read. There, at that place, was the end of the dream-picture; it never went further, though he tried over and over to carry it on; the girl looking up, a tall slender shape in white, with the afternoon sun burnishing her hair, and giving to it the color of a copper beech tree under which she stood. He knew that he had thought, "I shall never forget her as she is now, not even when I'm dead." He had kept his word. He was dead; hovering on the borderland of the unknown: and he had not forgotten. But just where the dream ended, before he could read the girl's look and hear what she had to say, her mother had come quickly out of the house, with an open book in her hand. That seemed to be the reason why the picture broke.

It seemed afterwards too, though there was no clear vision, that the girl was willing to marry him, just barely willing. Her mother took it for granted that she had said "yes" when he asked her, and the girl let it go as if it were true; though he could not be sure it was what she had meant when she looked up with the strange light in her eyes, and tried to speak. He would have given years of the future he hoped for then, to have been sure, without any doubts.

When he stammered out his questions he had not thought of anything better than an engagement, to end in marriage if he came home safely after the war… The war!.. Dim remembrance of hideous suffering suddenly stirred the slow current of his dream. There had been war. That was how it had happened! He had been killed in battle. Or else, none of the dream was true! There had been no such man, no such girl, no such black and white house reflected in a crystal lake. This was a dream of things that had never been. A veil of unreality began to fall between him and the picture he had seen. No, it couldn't have been true of his life, of course, because the dream had begun again, and was carrying him on to a wedding. The church in the village … (he knew that church well, and the way to it from the big gates and the little gates; the long way and the short cut) … The girl, and a man in khaki were standing together … the same ugly man, uglier than ever in his soldier clothes, he thought. He heard the words which a clergyman in a white surplice was reading out of the prayer book. "To have and to hold, till death do you part." And he saw himself putting a ring on the girl's finger. She held her left hand out to him – the long, slim hand he used to think must be like St. Cecilia's, because of the genius of music in its finger tips. He could see no following picture of her alone with him. He saw himself going away, waving good-by: then a train and a boat, and a train again, with a crowd of other men, all soldiers.

He was an officer. (He had left the army before that dream-time, he could not remember why, but it had something to do with money – and with the black and white house: and he had offered himself again for the war.) In the dream he rode a horse along a straight sunlit road, with poplars on either side that gave no shade. There were days of marching in furnace heat. Then came a night of silver moonlight reddened by fire; a village burning. There was a noise as of hell let loose: and since he had been dead he hated noise. It was the one unbearable thing. Hearing noise in his dream, the star which was his soul shattered itself into a thousand sparks, each spark a red-hot nerve of pain. All round him in the crowded dream there was fighting. Smoke stung his eyelids. He breathed it in, and choked. His horse trampled men down. Their cries were in his ears. Some voice he knew called to him for help. He pulled a man up on his horse; a friend, he thought it was, some one he cared for. Now the horse stopped, reared, and fell. By and by the man whose soul dreamed, struggled to his feet, dazed, but remembering his friend dragged him from under the hurt animal. Helmets glittered in the moonlight. Eyes glinted red in the copper glare. He fought with a sword and kept off men that pressed on him and his friend, trying to kill them both. A stab of pain shot through his hand. A bugle sounded. Men were running away. He thought they were men of the enemy; a stream of helmets going. He heard his own voice shout an order, but before it could be obeyed a din as of mountains rent asunder roared his voice down. His whole being was swallowed up as a raindrop is swallowed in a cataract. A huge round shape rushed towards him, black against moonlight and flame. Then the world burst and tore him in a million fragments…

His soul coming back to knowledge of its continuance held the impression that this rending anguish of death had been long, long ago, thousands of years ago in time: and that he was now or soon would be waking into eternity. The breaking of the dream and the pain he had suffered ought not to seem important. It ought not to matter to a disembodied spirit. Yet it did matter terribly. Most of all did it matter that the girl with the smoke-blue eyes and copper-beech hair had been swept away from him forever. She was somewhere in the world he had left behind. He did not even know her name, or whether indeed she had really been in his life. Henceforth he would have to wander through space and eternity without finding her again.

The man groaned.

"He's coming round at last!" a woman's voice said.

The voice sounded muffled, and far off. It sounded harsh, too. It was not a sweet voice, and it was not speaking his language. Through the gray dimness which hung over him like a cloud, trickled this impression. He wondered why, if the language were not his, he should understand what the voice said.

"G-erman," he struggled to say, and succeeded with pain in whispering the word.

Somebody laughed. "He knows he's in German hands!" chuckled the same voice.

An agony of regret fell upon him like an ice avalanche. He was alive, then, whoever he was, and there had never been a girl with smoke-blue eyes and copper-beech hair! She was only a dream. That must be so, because the words she had said to him were all gone from his mind. He could no longer remember anything about her except her face – and those eyes. Those eyes! His interest in past and present abruptly ceased. He let himself slide away into blank oblivion.

CHAPTER II

Hours or years later he waked up with a start, and stared at the light. It was daylight, and he was in an immense room. It seemed big enough for a theater. Perhaps it was a theater. The walls had red panels painted on them, and on each panel one or two cupids danced and threw flowers: repulsive, stout cupids. The ceiling was very far up above his eyes, and there was a dome in the center. From this dome depended a huge crystal chandelier like a bulbous stalactite. There were a great many high windows, with panes here and there opened for ventilation. The windows had no curtains, and the room had no furniture except beds – beds – endless rows of beds, surely hundreds of beds.

He lay in one of these. All were occupied. He could see heads of men whose bodies looked extraordinarily flat. On some of the heads were bandages. Others were shaved, so that they appeared quite bald. They were very pale heads in the bleak, grayish light filtering dimly through the high windows. A number of bunks were hidden by screens. He wished dully that he had this privacy, but his narrow bed had been given no such protection.

A man was slowly walking down an aisle between rows of narrow cots all exactly alike. Beside the man, who had a remarkably large head with a shock of rough, straw-colored hair, was a woman dressed as a nurse. The newly awakened one knew she was a nurse, though she was not dressed in the costume familiar to him in some vague past. There were many in the room wearing the same sort of cap and apron and prim gown that she wore: young women, middle-aged women, old women. They had kind faces, but the watcher saw no beautiful ones. Not that he cared for that, or anything.

He had not been awake long when a big girl came towards him, paused, peered, and went away again. She stopped the nurse who walked with the shock-headed man, and spoke to her. The woman's cap and the man's tousled hair turned from the direction they had been taking, and approached his bed. They bent over it, and he gazed up stupidly at their faces. The shock-headed man had a beard even lighter than his hair. He smoothed it with a white, strong-looking hand, a capable hand, the hand of the born surgeon. The woman had hard features, but soft eyes, wistful, and pathetic.

"You see, he is getting along finely," she said to her companion. "I think we shall have no more trouble with him now."

The man in bed remembered that he had heard her voice before, and that she had spoken German then, as now. He did not wonder this time why he understood what she said, though the language was not his own. He remembered that he had learned German when he was a boy, and had hated learning it because of the verbs.

"How do you feel?" the surgeon enquired, in English.

The man in bed tried to answer. His voice came in a weak whisper. This surprised him, and made him ashamed. "Very – well," he heard himself say, as he had seemed to hear himself speak in the dream which was gone now, far away, out of reach.

"Good!" said the surgeon. "Can you tell me your name?"

The sick man thought for a moment, and the question went echoing through his brain as a voice calling one who is absent echoes through a deserted house. Knowledge of his helplessness brought a sense of physical disintegration, as if the marrow of his bones was melting.

"Never mind!" the shock-headed surgeon said, in a quiet, reassuring tone. "It's all right. You'll remember by and by, when you're stronger. Don't worry about yourself. I've performed an operation on you, which is known as trepanning. That was some days ago. It has been a success. But we will let you rest a while longer before we bother you with questions. The only thing is, the sooner we learn your name the sooner we can take steps to let your people hear that you're alive. It's a long time since you were wounded: eight months. We couldn't operate on your head till now. There were too many other things to mend about you! *Somebody* must be anxious. Go to sleep again when you've

had your food, and perhaps the past will all come back to your mind. But if it doesn't, don't make an effort. That will do you harm."

The sick man expressed his thanks with the faint ghost of a smile. When the nurse had fed him with warm liquid, which he drank through a tube without lifting his bandaged head from the pillow, he closed his eyes and tried to find his way into the dream again. But the door of the dream was shut. He could see only the face of the girl. She alone remained to him, as if she had lingered and found herself locked out when the dream-door shut. She had no name, and he had none. But that seemed to be of little importance. It was easy to obey the surgeon and not make an effort. The difficult thing would have been to struggle toward any end. He felt that to do so would shatter his brain. And as he was very sure nobody cared what had become of him, there was no need. Why he was so sure of this, he could not tell. But something inside him, which remembered things *he* had forgotten, was absolutely sure.

How long his lethargy of mind and body lasted, he did not know. Days faded grayly into nights, and nights brightened grayly into days. Neither the surgeon nor the two nurses who had charge of him asked further questions. He took no real interest in anything except the effort to find his way back into the lost dream, which he could never do; and sometimes even the beloved face was blotted out. But at last, the objective began to dominate the subjective in the man. He gave a little thought to his surroundings. He noticed his neighbors who occupied the beds near him, and listened dully when they talked to the nurses. They were all Germans. One day he asked the nurse with the patient eyes, if there were any other Englishmen besides himself in her charge. And as he spoke the word, with confidence which he could not analyze, it sent a faint thrill through his veins, a sense of unity with something. "Englishmen!" He was an Englishman.

He had to speak in German, for the nurse had no other language. Oddly enough, it seemed easy to make her understand.

"We had four Englishmen with you when you came," she replied. "They are – gone now."

He understood that they were dead, and that she did not like to tell him so. He smiled faintly, but asked no more questions then.

Next, he wanted to know where the hospital was, and how long he had been in it.

"You are in Brussels," the nurse told him. "This used to be a restaurant. All the hospitals were full. You have been here only a few weeks, but we had heard of you, for yours was a wonderful case. Many doctors have talked about it. Just before your operation, you came to us. You were brought to Herr Doctor Schwarz for that. He is a great man for the brain. You were lucky to have him to operate. It was thought you might be an officer, because you spoke both German and French, when you didn't know what you were saying. A bit of bone pressed on the brain. Your head had been hurt. And you had many other wounds, which another great surgeon had cured, when every one else said you would surely die. That was why they waited so long before operating on your brain. You had suffered so much already. You had to grow strong after what you had gone through, and get over the nerve-shock, which was worst of all."

"Let me see, how long did Dr. Schwarz tell me it was, before they operated?" he asked.

"Eight months," the nurse answered reluctantly, as if she feared to excite him, yet saw no real reason why, now that he was getting well, he might not hear all the truth about himself. Besides, it might help him to remember the past. She knew that Dr. Schwarz was anxious for him to do so now. He had always been an extremely interesting and rather mysterious "case," sent from a distance by a brother surgeon to Schwarz, and specially recommended to his attention. "Eight months," the woman repeated. "I think you were wounded in some battle early in August. We have the record that came from the first hospital where you were. Now it is the 15th of April."

"Eight months," the man counted dreamily with his fingers. "Why don't they know whether or not I was an officer?"

"It was like this," the nurse explained, with her stolid yet kindly and truthful look; "it was like this: Your cavalry and our cavalry fought. That is the account we have, though it is not very clear. You were getting the better of us, but our artillery came up and our Uhlans were ordered to retreat. When they were safely out of the way, your lancers were shelled. I think they were cut to pieces. Nobody on either side could get at the dead and wounded for days. When they did go to help the living, it was our Germans who went. Most of the English were killed. You and the others who lived (unless a few escaped), were brought to a hospital of ours, in the north of France. Our soldiers would not do such a thing, so it must have been prowling people – thieves – who stripped off your clothes. One reason why our doctors thought you might be an officer, even before you spoke, was because the little finger of your left hand had been partly cut off. It had been done with a knife. That seemed as if you must have worn a valuable ring, so tight it couldn't be got off in a hurry."

"My mother's ring," muttered the man. The words spoke themselves. Again, it was not he who remembered, but something which seemed to be separate and independent, hiding inside him, though not in his brain. It knew all about him, but would not give up the secret. Impishly, it threw out a sop of knowledge now and then, just as it pleased. The nurse tried to encourage this Something to go on, but it would not be coaxed. When she repeated the conversation to Schwarz afterwards, however, he said, "That's encouraging. Don't press him too much. Let body and brain recover tone. Then we'll try more suggestions. It's the most interesting case we've had. What is it to me that he's friend or enemy? Nothing. He's a man. I shall think of a way to set up the right vibrations."

The way he thought of was to commandeer a bundle of English papers which had been passing from hand to hand in Brussels. These papers had been smuggled into the town by a German who had escaped from a concentration camp in England. He was a doctor, and had got into Belgium through Holland. Such newspapers as he had were very old ones, but that did not matter, because the man in whom Schwarz, the surgeon, was interested had lost touch with the world since a day soon after the breaking out of war. He must have been among the first troops sent over from England to France, and rushed straight to the front.

For a few days he had been very silent, asking no questions. He seemed always to be thinking. By Schwarz's orders he was left alone. Then, one morning, he was surprised by the news that he was well enough to sit up. When he had been propped with pillows, the nurse he liked best – the one with the hard features and soft eyes – slipped a roll of dilapidated newspapers under the listless hands that lay on the turned-over sheet.

"English," she said, and saw that his eyes brightened.

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His left hand, with the tell-tale mutilated finger, began painfully to open out the heavy roll. He could not help much with the other hand, for his right arm had been so injured that it had been strapped to his side for weeks, and the muscles had withered. They would recover tone, and the arm its strength, Schwarz prophesied, but he was only just beginning again to use his right hand.

This was the first time he had read anything except the notices posted up on the hospital walls, which forbade loud talking and other offenses. To see the *Illustrated London News* and the *Daily Mail* and the *Chronicle*, dated on days of September, made him feel more than ever that he had died, and come back to earth on sufferance as a ghost. For him there had been no autumn nor winter. The world had ended on a hot night in August. There had been summer, and then blackness. Now it was spring.

September 10th. September 11th. September 13th.

The *Illustrated London News* lay on top. He laid back the cover. There was a battle scene on the first page. It looked vaguely familiar. British lancers and helmeted German Uhlans were fighting furiously together. Apparently it was night. The background was lit by flames from a burning village. It was an impressionist effect, well presented. The man felt very tired and old as he looked at the

picture. Pains throbbed through his head and body and limbs, reminding him of each wound now healed. He turned over the page and several others. Near the middle of the paper he opened to one entirely given up to small photographs of officers. "Dead on the Field of Honor," he read. Under each portrait were a few lines of fine print. He began with the left-hand side, at the top. Faces of strangers. Then two he recognized, with a leap of the heart. One had been an acquaintance, one an old friend. Their names rushed back to him, as if spoken by their own voices, even before he had time to read. Human interests surged round him as he lay, every-day interests of life as he had laid it down. "Dear old Charley Vance. Dead! And Willoughby…"

A photograph in the middle of the page seemed to tear itself from the paper and jump at his eyes. It was larger than the others grouped round it… "Good God!" broke from his lips.

He glanced around, startled. He was afraid that he had screamed the words. But evidently he had not made any sound. No one was noticing him. Most of the men near by, all surgical cases, were resting quietly. Several nurses were talking at a distance, their broad, reliable backs turned his way.

It was his own photograph he was looking at … the face of the ugly man he had seen in the lost dream, as in a dim mirror. Underneath was a name. He would *know*, now – his own name, and – the rest. All his blood seemed to pour away from his heart. A queer mist swam before his eyes. He tried to wink it away, but could not, and had to wait till it faded, leaving a slow shower of silver sparks.

"Killed in action, on the night of August 18th, Sir John Denin, 16th baronet, Captain – th Lancers, aged 32. See paragraph on following page."

The man turned the leaf over. There was the paragraph.

"Captain Sir John Richard Stuart Denin, killed in the fatal night fighting near –, where his regiment was caught by the enemy's artillery fire in a wood, was a well-known figure in the world. It will be remembered that on the death of his uncle, Sir Stuart Denin, from whom the title passed to him, the unentailed estates were left by will to a distant cousin and favorite of the late baronet. Sir John was advised by his friends to contest the will, but refused to do so, saying his uncle had every right to dispose of his property as he chose. This generosity was considered quixotic, but had a romantic reward a few months later when an aunt of the new baronet's mother bequeathed him one of the most beautiful and historic of the ancient black and white houses in Cheshire, Gorston Old Hall, and half a million pounds. On receiving this windfall of fortune which was entirely unexpected, it will be recalled that Sir John resigned from the army, he being at the time a first lieutenant in the – th Lancers. Two years later, on the outbreak of the war, he at once offered his services, which were accepted, and he was given a captaincy in his old regiment, leaving for the front with the first of our Expeditionary Force, and he was, unhappily, also among the first to fall. On the day of his departure Sir John was quietly married at his own village church in Gorston, Cheshire, to Miss Barbara Fay of California, U.S.A., who is thus left a widow without having been a wife. Everything he possessed, including Gorston Old Hall, passes by the will of the deceased officer to his widow. As Miss Fay, Lady Denin was considered one of the most beautiful American girls ever presented to their Majesties, she having made her début at an early court in the spring of 1913, or a little over a year before her wedding and widowhood. The mother of Lady Denin, though married to an American professor of Egyptology who died some years ago, has English blood in her veins; and is a near relative of Captain Trevor d'Arcy of the – th Gurkhas, now on the way to France with his gallant regiment. Captain d'Arcy's photograph taken with his men at the time of the Durbar, appears on the following page, also that of the newly widowed Lady Denin. In the battle where Captain Sir John Denin met his death, he greatly distinguished himself by gallant conduct, and to him would have been due a signal success had not the German artillery rescued the defeated Uhlans and followed up their flight with a withering fire. Sir John succeeded in saving the life of his first lieutenant, the Honble. Eric Mantell, who was one of the few to escape this massacre, and who had the sad privilege of identifying his preserver's mutilated body on the battlefield. Sir Eric had recovered sufficiently from his wounds to be present at the funeral, the remains of the dead hero having after some unavoidable delay been brought to

England and buried in Gorston churchyard. Had Sir John lived, it is said that he would have been recommended for the Victoria Cross."

The man who had died and been buried, whose body had been identified by his friend and taken home, fell back on the thin hospital pillow, and closed his eyes. He felt as if he had come to a blank wall, stumbled against it, and fallen. Then, suddenly, he realized that by turning over a page, he could see *her* face – the face of his wife.

CHAPTER III

He turned the page, but for a moment it was a blank, blurred surface, as if everything on it had been blocked out by order of the censor. He found himself counting his own heart-beats, and it was only as they slowed down that the page cleared, and the eyes he had seen in the lost dream looked up at him from the paper.

They gave him back himself. A thousand details of the past rushed upon him in a galloping army.

"Lady Denin, widow of Captain Sir John Denin," he read. "She is shown in this photograph in her presentation dress, as Miss Barbara Fay."

Barbara had disliked the photograph. He could see it now, in a silver frame on her mother's writing desk, in the drawing-room of the little furnished house taken for the season in London. He had been shown into that room when he made his first call. Mrs. Fay had asked him to come, just when he was wondering how to get the invitation. And Mrs. Fay had given him one of those photographs. It occurred to him that she must also have given one to the newspaper. Barbara would not have wished it to be published. But he had thought it beautiful, and he thought it more than ever beautiful now.

His wife – no, his widow! That was what the paper said: "Lady Denin, widow of Captain Sir John Denin." What would she do, what would she say, if she could see the wreck of John Denin, in a German hospital in Belgium, staring hungrily at her picture?

He asked himself this, and answered almost without hesitation. She was so loyal, so fine, that she would not grudge him his life. She would even try, perhaps, to think she was glad that he lived. Yet she could not in her secret heart, be glad. Such gladness would not be natural to human nature. She had been hurried into marrying him, partly because he loved her and was going away to fight, partly because her mother urged it as the best solution of her difficulties. Now, all things Mrs. Fay had wanted for the girl were hers without the one drawback; the plain, dull fellow who had to be taken with them – the fly in the ointment, the pill in the jam. Barbara had dearly loved the old black and white house. She had said so a dozen times. She had never once said that she loved John Denin. She had only smiled and been kind, and looked at him in a baffling way, with that mysterious message in her eyes which he had been too stupid to read. Mrs. Fay had loved the house too, and the whole place; and it was hard to believe in looking back, that she had not loved the money, and the idea of a title for her beautiful girl.

John Denin, who ought to have died and had not died, asked himself what was now the next best thing to do. Also he asked the eyes in the photograph, but they seemed gently to evade his eyes, just as they had often evaded them in life.

Next on the page to Barbara's picture was the portrait of her cousin, Captain d'Arcy, of whom she had spoken more than once, the "hero and knight" of her childhood. He looked a handsome enough fellow in his uniform, though hardly of the "hero and knight" type. He was too full-fleshed for that: a big, low-browed, thick-lipped man of thirty-six or seven, who would think a great deal of himself and his own pleasure. Evidently he had changed since the days when he was the ideal hero of a sixteen-year-old girl. Denin, scarred and wrecked, a bit of human driftwood, was dimly shocked at the mean pleasure had in this thought. Barbara – wife or widow – was unlikely to feel her old love rekindle at sight of her cousin, and Denin was glad – glad. Barbara was not a girl to fall in love easily. But, if she believed herself free, she might some day…

A spurt of fire darting up his spine seemed to burn the base of his brain. It struck him almost with horror that the question he had been asking a few minutes ago had answered itself. No matter how undesirable he might be as a husband, he must for Barbara's own sake force the fact of his continued existence upon her.

"As soon as I can control my hand enough to hold a pencil, I'll write to her – or her mother. Or perhaps I'll try to telegraph, if that's possible from here," he thought. Poor Barbara! Poor Mrs. Fay! It would be a blow to them, and – yes, by Jove, to Frank Denin, his cousin. Poor Frank, too! He had got the Denin estates and the money which ought to have gone with the baronetcy, and then by an extra stroke of luck the title had fallen to him, on top of all the rest. It would be a wrench for him to give it up after more than eight months of enjoyment. Then there was that pretty American girl, Miss VanKortland, to whom poor old Frank had proposed time after time. All his money and the two big places had made no difference to her. She had plenty of money of her own. She had seemed to like Frank Denin, but she was a desperate flirt and had always said that if she ever married out of her own country, it would be a man with a title. It was Kathryn VanKortland who had introduced Sir John Denin to Barbara Fay at a dance, not long after Barbara's presentation. John had felt grateful to Kathryn for that, and indirectly grateful to Frank because if it hadn't been for him he would not have been invited to Miss VanKortland's dance. How strangely, vividly, yet dreamily those days and everything that had happened in them came back to him, while the people whose faces he called up thought of him in his grave! He wondered how it was that Eric Mantell had escaped, and how Eric came to believe that he had identified John Denin's body. He wondered also whether, now that Frank Denin was "Sir Frank," Kathryn VanKortland had changed her mind.

"I wish I could make the title over to Frank," the man in the hospital cot said to himself. "God knows I don't value it for myself, and I don't believe Barbara does. But it can't be. And there's just one thing to be done."

There seemed to the weary brain of the invalid, however, no great hurry about doing the one thing. Barbara was certainly not grieving for him. There was no one else to care very much except some of the old servants, and he had remembered all of them in his will before going to the front. As for Frank, in a way it would be a good thing for him if he could secure Kathryn before the news came bereaving him of the baronetcy. The girl could not leave him if they were married, or even throw him over with decency if they were engaged. Besides, Denin wanted to write the letter himself. He would not trust the task to one of the nurses, and had confided to no one yet the fact that memory of his past had come back. He was only just beginning to use his right hand for a few minutes at a time. It would be a week at the least, before he could write even a short letter without help.

Two days went by, and the surgeon's orders to "let him alone," so that he might "come round of his own accord," were still observed. Nobody questioned the invalid about himself, though the nurses said to each other that he had "begun to think."

On the third day, a wounded British aviator was brought into his ward. The news ran about like wildfire, and Denin soon learned that a fellow countryman of his had arrived. The aviator, it seemed, had been in the act of dropping bombs on some railway bridge which meant the cutting of important communications, when he had been brought down with his monoplane, by German guns. Both his legs were broken, but otherwise he was not seriously hurt.

Denin enquired of a nurse who the man was, and heard that he was Flight Commander Walter Severne.

The sound of that name brought a faint thrill. Denin did not know Walter Severne, but he had met an elder brother of his, who was one of the first and cleverest military airmen of England. It was probable that Walter Severne might have seen John Denin somewhere, or his photograph – if only the photograph in that copy of the *Illustrated London News*, which had labeled him as "dead on the field of honor." If his scars had not changed him past casual recognition, Severne would be likely to know him again, and it occurred to Denin that to be identified in such a way would not be a bad thing. Besides, if the aviator had not been away from England long, he might possibly have news to give of Barbara – and Frank – and Kathryn VanKortland.

They were more or less in the same set, in the normal days of peace which seemed so long ago. He asked permission, when he was got up for his hour out of bed, to talk to the wounded Englishman,

and was told that he might do so, provided that an English-speaking nurse was near enough to hear everything they said to each other.

Denin's progress along the ward was slow. He had not been an invalid eight months for nothing, and the mending of his splintered bones and torn muscles was hardly short of a miracle, as surgeons and nurses reminded him frequently, with glee. He moved with a crutch, and one foot could not yet be allowed to touch ground, though Schwarz gaily assured him that some fine day he might be as much of a man as ever again, thanks to his enemies' skill and care. Severne had been told that an Englishman who had lost his memory through injuries to the head, and forgotten his own name, was coming to talk to him. Lying flat on his back with both legs in plaster-of-Paris, the aviator looked up expectantly; but no light of recognition shone in his eyes when the tall form in hospital pajamas hobbled into his range of vision.

Denin did not know whether to be relieved or disappointed. Certainly he was not surprised, for he had asked for a mirror that morning, and had studied his marred face during a long, grim moment. From temple to jaw on the left side it was scarred with a permanent red scar. A white seam where stitches had been, ran through the right eyebrow. A glancing bit of shrapnel had cleft his square chin precisely in the center, giving a queer effect as of a deep dimple which had not been there before August 18th; and his thick black hair was threaded with gray at both temples.

A chair was given to him, in which to sit by the newcomer's bedside. Severne was very young and, it seemed to Denin in contrast with that new vision of himself, as beautiful as a girl. Warned that the other man had lost his memory, the wounded aviator was pityingly careful not to ask questions. He talked cheerfully about his own adventures, and said that he had been "at home" on leave only a week ago.

"At home!" Denin echoed. "What was it like – over there?"

"Awfully jolly," said Severne. "Not that they don't care, or aren't thinking about us, every minute, night and day. But you know how our people are. They make the best of things; they have their own kind of humor – and we understand. Fact is, I – went over to get married. I suppose – er – you never knew the Lacy-Wilmots of Devonshire? They're neighbors of ours. I married the second daughter, Evelyn. I – we had two days together."

"You were lucky," said Denin.

"Think so? Well, we didn't look at it like that. I wrote to her this morning. Hope she'll get the letter."

"Some fellows had only an hour or two with their brides, I heard," Denin said, almost apologetically.

"That's true," said Severne. "Jove! There are shoals of war brides, poor girls, and as brave as they make 'em, every one!"

"What about – the war widows?" Denin ventured, stumbling slightly over the words.

"They're brave too, all right. But I expect there are some broken hearts. Not all, though, by any means. Damn it, no! Lady Denin, for instance. Did you ever hear of her? I mean, did you ever hear of John Denin? *They* had about an hour of being married before he went off with the first lot in August, poor chap."

"What about Denin?"

"Oh, you didn't know him, then? Why should you? I didn't myself, but he belonged to one or two clubs with my brother Bob. I may have seen him myself. Awfully fine chap. Everybody liked him, though he was close as a clam – no talker. Came into a ripping place and piles of oof a few years ago. Not much on looks, though he was an A1 sportsman and athlete. Girls thought him a big catch. I've heard plenty say so. Well, he married an American girl, a beauty, the day he left for the front, and about a fortnight later she was a widow with everything he had, made over to her. That wasn't much above eight months ago. But the day Evie and I were tied up, the first of last week, Lady Denin married her cousin, d'Arcy of the – th Gurkhas. Quick work – what? No heartbreak there!"

As there came no answer, Severne supposed that his visitor felt no interest in this bit of gossip apropos of war widows. He glanced up from his hard, flat pillow at the other man, and saw what he took for a far-away look on the scarred face. To change the subject to one more congenial, the aviator began to chat of things at the front; but almost instantly the English-speaking nurse intervened. The two invalids had talked long enough. Both must rest. They could see each other again next day.

Without any protest, and scarcely saying good-by, Denin dragged himself back to his own part of the ward. "'Nobody home!' The poor fellow looks as if he wasn't all there yet." Severne excused the seeming rudeness of the nameless one.

Denin had not had his full hour of freedom from bed, but he declared that he was tired and that his head ached, so he was allowed to lie down. He turned his face to the wall, and appeared to sleep, but never had he been more vividly awake.

His plan had fallen into ruin with one bewildering crash. The corner-stone had been torn out from the foundation. His duty – or what he had seen as his duty – was changed. After all, Barbara had not been disappointed in her cousin. She had found him her "knight and her hero" as of old. She had loved the man so passionately that she had given herself to him after only eight months of widowhood. If he had heard this thing of a woman other than Barbara, Denin would have been revolted. It could only have looked like an almost defiant admission that there was no love in the first marriage – nothing but interest. He could not, would not, however, think that Barbara's act was a proof of hardness. Lying on his bed, with his face to the blank white wall, he began to make desperate excuses for the girl.

She had married him by special license at three days' notice eight months ago, hurried into a decision by his love, and perhaps the glamour of war's red light. Her mother, too, had given her no peace until she made up her mind. For the hundredth time he assured himself of that fact. And as for the well-nigh indecent haste of the second wedding; why, after all, was it so much worse than the first?

Her marriage with him, John Denin, had been a marriage only in name. She was left a girl, with no memories of wifehood. No doubt this new giving of herself had been another "war wedding." Trevor d'Arcy in his picture looked like a man who would do his best to seize whatever he wanted. He had of course been going away, perhaps after being wounded and nursed by Barbara. It would be natural, very natural, for her to feel that she would be happier when d'Arcy was at the front, if they belonged to each other. Denin told himself savagely that it would be brutal to blame the girl. She had a right to love and joy, and she should have both, unspoiled. He would be damned sooner than snatch happiness from Barbara, and drag her through the dust of shame, a woman claimed as wife by two men.

"This decides things for me, then, forever and ever," he thought, a strange quietness settling down upon him, like a cloud in which a man is lost on a mountain-top. "She's free as light. John Denin died last August in France."

CHAPTER IV

But the man in the German hospital did not die. He could not, unless he put an end to his own life, and to do that had always seemed to Denin an act of cowardice and weakness. He remembered reading as a boy, how Plato said that men were "prisoners of the gods" and had no right to run away from fate. For some reason those words had made a deep imprint upon his mind at the time, and the impression remained. His soul dwelt in his body as a prisoner of the gods, a prisoner on parole.

Life – mere physical life – rose again in his veins as the days went on, rose in a strong current, as the sap rises in trees when winter changes to spring. He was discharged from the hospital as cured, and interned in a concentration camp in Germany not far from the Dutch frontier. Though he had given his parole to the gods, he would not give it to the Germans. He meant to escape some day if he could. He limped heavily, and had not got back the full strength of his once shattered right hand, so there was no hope of returning to fight under a new name. Had there been a chance of that, he would have wished to join the French Foreign Legion, where a man can be of use as a soldier, while lost to the world. As it was, he made no definite plans, but set about earning money in order not to be penniless if the day ever came when he could snatch at freedom.

He had always had a marked talent for quick character-sketches and a bold kind of portraiture. He could catch a likeness in a moment. With charcoal he dashed off caricatures of his fellow prisoners, on the whitewashed wall of the room which he shared with several British soldiers. The striking cleverness of the sketcher was noticed by the man in charge who spoke to some one higher in authority; and officers came to gaze gravely at the curious works of art. Denin had rechristened himself by this time "John Sanbourne." Sanbourne seemed to him an appropriate name for one without an aim in life, and as for "John," without that standby he would have felt like a man who has thrown away his clothes. Sanbourne's charcoal sketches, therefore, began to be talked about; and officers brought him paper and colored chalks, bargaining with him for a few German war notes, to take their portraits. By the end of May he had saved up two hundred marks, accumulated in this way, charging from five to twenty marks for a sketch, according to size and detailed magnificence of uniform.

Not having given his parole, he was carefully watched at first, but as time went on his lameness, his exemplary conduct, and air of stoical resignation deceived his guards. One dark night he slipped away, contrived to pass the frontier, bribed a Dutch fisherman to sell him clothing, and after a week of starvation and hardship limped boldly into Rotterdam. There he parted with the remainder of his earnings (save a few marks) for a third-class ticket to New York, trusting to luck that he might earn money on board as he had earned money in camp, enough at least to be admitted as an emigrant into the United States. Those few marks which he kept, he invested in artist's materials, and on shipboard soon made himself something of a celebrity in a small way. He was nicknamed "the steerage Sargent," and with an hour or two of work every day put together nearly sixty American dollars during the voyage. That sum satisfied him. He refused further commissions, for a great new obsession dominated his whole being, preoccupying every thought. Absorbed in it, he found his portrait-making exasperating work. Something within him that he did not understand but was forced to obey, commanded the writing of a book – the book, not of his life or of his outside experiences, but of his heart.

He had no idea of publishing this book after it was written. Indeed, at the beginning, such an idea would have been abhorrent to him. It would have been much like profaning a sanctuary. But there were thoughts which seemed to be in his soul, rather than in his brain, so intimate a part of himself were they; and these thoughts beat with strong wings against the barrier of silence, like fierce wild birds against the bars of a cage.

So ignorant was John Denin of book-writing that he did not know at all how long it would take to put on paper what he felt he had to give forth. He knew only that he must say what was in him

to say; and every moment when he was not writing he chafed to get back to his book again. Indeed, it was but his body which parted from the manuscript even when he ate, or walked, or slept. His real self was writing on and on, every instant, after he had gone to bed, and most of all, while he dreamed. The idea for the book, when it sprang into his mind, was full-grown as Minerva born from the brain of Jove. Denin felt as if he were a sculptor who sees his statue buried deep in a marble block, and has but to hew away the stone to set the image free. He got up each morning at dawn, bathed, dressed hurriedly, and worked till breakfast time, when a cup of tea and a piece of bread were all he wanted or felt he had time to take. Then, in some out-of-the-way, uncomfortable corner where his fellow travelers of the steerage were not likely to interrupt him, he wrote on often till evening, without stopping to eat at noon. He used ship's stationery begged from the second class, sheets off his own drawing pads, and small blank books that happened to be for sale in the wonderful collection of things ships' barbers always have. Sometimes he scribbled fast with one pencil after another: sometimes he scratched painfully along with a bad pen. But nothing mattered, if he could write. And nothing disturbed him; no noise of yelling laughter, no shouting game, no crying of babies, nor blowing of bugles.

"When that chap's got his nose to his paper, he wouldn't hear Gabriel's trump," one man said of him to another. Everybody asked everybody else what he was doing when he suddenly stopped his traffic of portraits; but nobody dared put such a question to him. Some people guessed that he was a journalist in disguise, who had been in the war-zone, and was working against time to get his experiences onto paper before the ship docked at New York. But, as a matter of fact, it did not occur to Denin to wonder when he should finish until, suddenly and to his own surprise, the strange story he had been writing – if it could be called a story – came to its inevitable climax. His message was finished. There was no more that he wished to say.

This was at twelve o'clock one night, and the next morning at six the ship passed the Statue of Liberty.

Denin felt dazed among his fellow emigrants, all of whom were of a different class in life from his, and all of whom seemed to have something definite to expect, something which filled them with excitement or perhaps hope, making them talk fast, and laugh as the immense buildings of New York loomed picturesquely out of the silver mist.

"Othello's occupation's gone," he found himself muttering as he leaned on the rail, a lonely figure among those who had picked up friendships on the voyage. He realized that he had been almost happy while he was writing his story. Now that it was finished and had to be put aside, he had nothing to look forward to. He was indeed *sans bourne*.

What the other steerage passengers did on landing, he did also. Vaguely it appealed to his sense of humor (which had slept of late) that he, Sir John Denin, should have his tongue looked at and questions put to him concerning his means, character, and purpose in coming from Europe to the United States. He went through the ordeal with good nature, and passed doctors and inspectors without difficulty. When he was free, he joined a couple of elderly Belgians to whom he had talked on shipboard, and with them set forth in search of a cheap lodging-house, where he might stay until he made up his mind what work he was fit to try for, and do. He was a poor man now, and could not afford to live in idleness for more than a few days. He realized this, also that a "job" of any kind was hard to get, and doubly hard for him since he was not trained for clerical work or strong enough at the moment to undertake manual labor. Still, he could not resist the intense desire he had to shut himself up and read the book which, when he thought of it, seemed to have written itself. He had always gone on and on, never stopping to glance back or correct; and he had a queer feeling that the story would be a revelation to him, that help and comfort and strength would come to him from its pages.

The Belgians remained in the lodging-house only long enough to unpack a few things. They then went out together to see New York, and visit an agency which had been recommended to them. But Denin shut himself up as he had longed impatiently to do, in the tiny back room he had engaged,

on the top floor of a dreary house. There he took from the cheap bag bought in Rotterdam – his one piece of luggage – the oddly assorted pages of manuscript which made up a thick packet. With the moment that he began to read, the stained walls and the dirty window with a fire-escape outside vanished as if some genie had rubbed a lamp.

The story was of a soldier and his love for a girl who did not greatly care for him. She married him rather than send him away empty-hearted to the front, cold with disappointment, when it was in her power to arm him with happiness. They parted on the day of the wedding. The soldier went to France and was killed in his first fight. The girl grieved because it had not been possible to love the man with her whole heart, and because he had had no time (so she believed) to taste the joy she had sacrificed herself to give. But the man, going into battle and afterwards dying on the battlefield, was divinely happy and content. He saw clearly that his love for her had been the great thing in his life, its crown and its completion; that the thought of her as his wife was worth being born for; that it made death only a night full of stars with a promise of sunrise. The story did not end with the ending of the soldier's life. The part before his death was no more than a prelude. The real story was of the power of love upon the spirit of a man after his passing, and his wish that the adored woman left behind might know the vital influence of a few hours' happiness in shaping a soul to face eternity. The book was supposed to be written in the first person, by the man, and was in four parts. The first told of the courtship and marrying; the second, of the man's going away from his wife-of-an-hour, to the front, and his fall on the battlefield; the third described the regret of the girl that she had not been able to give more, and her resolve to atone by denying herself love if it came to her in future; the fourth, the dead soldier's attempt to make her feel the truth; that she was free of obligation because those few last hours had been a gift of joy never to be taken from his soul.

Denin had dashed down a title on the first page of his manuscript before beginning the book. There had seemed to him only one name for it: "The War Wedding." Now that he came to read it all over, he still had the feeling that something in him more powerful than himself had done the writing; and suddenly he began to wish intensely that Barbara might see the testament of his heart.

He wished this not because he was proud of his work, or thought it superlatively good, but because he hoped that it might comfort her. She had been strangely reserved with him, invariably baffling, almost mysterious, during the latter half of their acquaintance, yet he had felt that he knew the truth of her nature, deep down under the girlish concealments. He had believed her tender-hearted. If she had not been so, why had she married him? And he thought that a girl of her strong character and sensitive spirit might be stabbed with remorse sometimes after gathering the flower of happiness for herself so near a new-made grave. He could not bear to think that Barbara might torture her conscience for his sake. He wanted her to be happy, wanted it more than anything else now. Not that he was naturally a marvel of unselfishness, but that he loved Barbara Fay better than he had ever loved himself. If this story which he had written – like, yet unlike, her own story – should happen to fall into Barbara's hands, she might find consolation through all the coming years, because of certain thoughts from the man's point of view, thoughts that would almost surely be new to her. And what joy for Denin, even lying in the gulf of forgetfulness, if his hand could reach out from the shadows to give her a thornless white rose of peace!

He wondered eagerly if he could find a publisher in New York – a publisher who produced books in England as well as America – to accept his manuscript.

Now that the wish was born, it seemed too good to be true that anything could come of it. Still, he determined to try, and try at once. Full of excitement he went out into a noisy street, and bought several newspapers and magazines. There were a number of publishers' advertisements in them all, some with familiar names, but one he had known ever since he was old enough to read books. It was a name of importance in the publishing world, but there was no harm in aiming high. He had brought the manuscript out with him, because he could not bear to leave it alone in a strange house.

Now he decided to take the parcel to the publisher himself. Nothing would have induced him to trust it to the post.

CHAPTER V

Four-thirty in the afternoon was Eversedge Sibley's hour for leaving his office. If he had cared about escaping earlier he could easily have got away, for since his father's death he stood at the head of the old publishing house; but to him business was the romance, poetry, and adventure of life. He passionately loved the champ and roar of the printing-presses as many people love a Wagner opera. There were never two days alike. Something new was always happening. Yet just because he was young for his "job," and knew that he was a man of moods and temperament, he forced himself to be bound by certain rules. One of these rules was, even if he chose to linger a few minutes after four-thirty, that no caller need hope to be admitted. That was a favorite regulation of Sibley's. It made him feel that, after all, he was very methodical. One afternoon, however, he did a worse thing than break this rule. He went back from the elevator, the whole length of the corridor to the outer office, simply to enquire about a man he had met at the lift door.

They almost collided as the man was stepping out and as Sibley was about to step in. But he did not step in. He let the lift shoot down without him, while he paused to stare after the man.

"Strange-looking customer!" he thought.

Sibley himself was a particularly immaculate person. Being somewhat of the Latin type, black eyed and olive skinned, he was shamefacedly afraid of looking picturesque. He dressed, therefore, as precisely as a fashion-plate. The man who had got out of the lift might have bought his clothes at a junk-shop, and a foreign junk-shop at that. They were not clothes a gentleman could wear – yet Sibley received a swift impression that a gentleman was wearing them at that moment: a remarkably tall fellow, so thin that his bones looked somehow too big for him.

He walked past Sibley with no more than a glance, yet it was partly the glance which impelled Sibley to stop short and gaze at the back of a badly made tweed coat, the worst sort of a "reach-me-down" coat.

The quick mind of the publisher was addicted to similes. (He had once written a book himself, under a *nom de guerre*. It had failed.) The thought sprang to his mind that the glance was like the sudden opening of a dingy box, which let out a flash of secret jewels.

In spite of his shocking clothes, the man had the air and bearing of a soldier. Sibley noticed this, in criticizing the straight back, and it aroused his curiosity more than ever in connection with the scarred face.

Any one who got out at the tenth floor of the Sibley building must want to see Eversedge Sibley or one of his partners, so evidently this person intended to ask for some member of the firm. He looked the last man on earth to be a budding author; yet Eversedge Sibley had caught sight of a paper-wrapped roll of manuscript. One who was not of the publishing or editorial world might have mistaken it for something else; but no manuscript would disguise itself from eyes so trained to fear and avoid it.

"Looks more like a heavy-weight champion invalided after a desperate scrap, than a writer; or like Samson betrayed by Delilah," thought Sibley, rather pleased with the fancy.

He put out his hand to touch the bell for the lift to come up again, but did not touch it. Instead, he turned and walked back along the marble-walled corridor to the door of the reception room. The tall man had just arrived and was talking to a wisp of a creature facetiously known in the office as "the chucker out."

"Mr. Sibley has gone, sir," little McNutt was insisting, with dignity. "He doesn't generally receive strangers. Mr. Elliot is in, though, and might see you if you could wait – "

As he spoke, McNutt caught sight of his "boss" at the door, and by looking up a pair of thick gray eyebrows, he made a distressful signal of warning. It would be awkward for Mr. Sibley to be trapped and buttonholed here, just as he had been officially described as out. McNutt could not

remember the boss ever coming back after he had gone for the day, and appearing in the publicity of the reception room. If he had forgotten something, why didn't he let himself in at the door of his own private office, which was only a little further along the hall? But, there he was, and must be protected.

"Who is Mr. Elliot?" enquired the stranger.

Eversedge Sibley spent a short holiday in England every summer, and knew that the vilely dressed man had the accent of the British upper classes. His curiosity grew with what it fed on.

"Mr. Elliot is the third partner in the firm," explained McNutt, to whom such ignorance appeared disgraceful.

"Thank you, I'd rather wait until to-morrow and try to see Mr. Sibley himself," said Denin.

"I am Mr. Sibley," the publisher confessed, on one of his irresistible impulses. "I've just come back for something forgotten. I can give you a few minutes if you like."

The man's face lit. It could never have been anything but plain, almost ugly, even before the scars came; yet it was singularly arresting. "That's very good of you," he said.

Sibley ushered the odd visitor into his own private office, but before he could even be invited to sit down, Denin got to his errand.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.