

The Shadowy Third

By Ellen Glasgow

When the call came I remember that I turned from the telephone in a romantic flutter. Though I had spoken only once to the great surgeon, Roland Maradick, I felt on that December afternoon that to speak to him only once — to watch him in the operating-room for a single hour — was an adventure which drained the color and the excitement from the rest of life. After all these years of work on typhoid and pneumonia cases, I can still feel the delicious tremor of my young pulses; I can still see the winter sunshine slanting through the hospital windows over the white uniforms of the nurses.

‘He didn’t mention me by name. Can there be a mistake?’ I stood, incredulous yet ecstatic, before the superintendent of the hospital.

‘No, there isn’t a mistake. I was talking to him before you came down. Miss Hemphill’s strong face softened while she looked at me. She was a big, resolute woman, a distant Canadian relative of my mother’s, and the kind of nurse I had discovered in the month since I had come up from Richmond, that Northern hospital boards, if not Northern patients, appear instinctively to select. From the first, in spite of her hardness, she had taken a liking — I hesitate to use the word ‘fancy’ for a preference so impersonal — to her Virginia cousin. After all, it isn’t every Southern nurse, just out of training, who can boast a kinswoman in the superintendent of a New York hospital.

‘And he made you understand positively that he meant me?’ The thing was so wonderful that I simply couldn’t believe it.

‘He asked particularly for the nurse who was with Miss Hudson last week when he operated. I think he didn’t even remember that you had a name. When I asked if he meant Miss Randolph, he repeated that he wanted the nurse who had been with Miss Hudson. She was small, he said, and cheerful-looking. This, of course, might apply to one or two of the others, but none of these was with Miss Hudson.’

‘Then I suppose it is really true?’ My pulses were tingling. ‘And I am to be there at six o’clock?’

‘Not a minute later. The day nurse goes off duty at that hour, and Mrs Maradick is never left by herself for an instant.’

‘It is her mind, isn’t it? And that makes it all the stranger that he should select me, for I have had so few mental cases.’

‘So few cases of any kind,’ Miss Hemphill was smiling, and when she smiled I wondered if the other nurses would know her. ‘By the time you have gone through the treadmill in New York, Margaret, you will have lost a good many things besides your inexperience. I wonder how long you will keep your sympathy and your imagination? After all, wouldn’t you have made a better novelist than a nurse?’

‘I can’t help putting myself into my cases. I suppose one ought not to?’

‘It isn’t a question of what one ought to do, but of what one must. When you are drained of every bit of sympathy and enthusiasm, and have got nothing in return for it, not even thanks, you will understand why I try to keep you from wasting yourself.’

‘But surely in a case like this — for Doctor Maradick?’

‘Oh, well, of course — for Doctor Maradick.’ She must have seen that I implored her

confidence, for, after a minute, she let fall carelessly a gleam of light on the situation: 'It is a very sad case when you think what a charming man and a great surgeon Doctor Maradick is.'

Above the starched collar of my uniform I felt the blood leap in bounds to my cheeks. 'I have spoken to him only once,' I murmured, 'but he is charming, and so kind and handsome, isn't he?'

'His patients adore him.'

'Oh, yes, I've seen that. Everyone hangs on his visits.'

Like the patients and the other nurses, I also had come by delightful, if imperceptible, degrees to hang on the daily visits of Doctor Maradick. He was, I suppose, born to be a hero to women. From my first day in his hospital, from the moment when I watched, through closed shutters, while he stepped out of his car, I have never doubted that he was assigned to the great part in the play. If I had been ignorant of his spell — of the charm he exercised over his hospital — I should have felt it in the waiting hush, like a drawn breath, which followed his ring at the door and preceded his imperious footstep on the stairs. My first impression of him, even after the terrible events of the next year, records a memory that is both careless and splendid. At that moment, when, gazing through the chinks in the shutters, I watched him, in his coat of dark fur, cross the pavement over the pale streaks of sunshine, I knew beyond any doubt — I knew with a sort of infallible prescience — that my fate was irretrievably bound up with his in the future. I knew this, I repeat, though Miss Hemphill would still insist that my foreknowledge was merely a sentimental gleaning from indiscriminate novels. But it wasn't only first love, impressionable as my kinswoman believed me to be. It wasn't only the way he looked. Even more than his appearance — more than the shining dark of his eyes, the silvery brown of his hair, the dusky glow in his face — even more than his charm and his magnificence, I think, the beauty and sympathy in his voice won my heart. It was a voice, I heard someone say afterwards, that ought always to speak poetry.

So you will see why — if you do not understand at the beginning, I can never hope to make you believe impossible things! — so you will see why I accepted the call when it came as an imperative summons. I couldn't have stayed away after he sent for me. However much I may have tried not to go, I know that in the end I must have gone. In those days, while I was still hoping to write novels, I used to talk a great deal about 'destiny' (I have learned since then how silly all such talk is), and I suppose it was my 'destiny' to be caught in the web of Roland Maradick's personality. But I am not the first nurse to grow love-sick about a doctor who never gave her a thought.

'I am glad you got the call, Margaret. It may mean a great deal to you. Only try not to be too emotional.' I remember that Miss Hemphill was holding a bit of rose-geranium in her hand while she spoke — one of the patients had given it to her from a pot she kept in her room — and the scent of the flower is still in my nostrils — or my memory. Since then — oh, long since then — I have wondered if she also had been caught in the web.

'I wish I knew more about the case.' I was pressing for light. 'Have you ever seen Mrs Maradick?'

'Oh, dear, yes. They have been married only a little over a year, and in the beginning she used to come sometimes to the hospital and wait outside while the doctor made his visits. She was a very sweet-looking woman then — not exactly pretty, but fair and slight, with the loveliest smile, I think, I have ever seen. In those first months she was so much in love that we used to laugh about it among ourselves. To see her face light up when the doctor came out of the hospital and

crossed the pavement to his car was as good as a play. We never tired of watching her — I wasn't superintendent then, so I had more time to look out of the window while I was on day duty. Once or twice she brought her little girl in to see one of the patients. The child was so much like her that you would have known them anywhere for mother and daughter.'

I had heard that Mrs Maradick was a widow, with one child, when she first met the doctor, and I asked now, still seeking an illumination I had not found, 'There was a great deal of money, wasn't there?'

'A great fortune. If she hadn't been so attractive, people would have said, I suppose, that Doctor Maradick married her for her money. Only,' she appeared to make an effort of memory, 'I believe I've heard somehow that it was all left in trust away from Mrs Maradick if she married again. I can't, to save my life, remember just how it was; but it was a queer will, I know, and Mrs Maradick wasn't to come into the money unless the child didn't live to grow up. The pity of it -'

A young nurse came into the office to ask for something — the keys, I think, of the operating-room, and Miss Hemphill broke off inconclusively as she hurried out of the door. I was sorry that she left off just when she did. Poor Mrs Maradick! Perhaps I was too emotional, but even before I saw her I had begun to feel her pathos and her strangeness.

My preparations took only a few minutes. In those days I always kept a suitcase packed and ready for sudden calls; and it was not yet six o'clock when I turned from Tenth Street into Fifth Avenue, and stopped for a minute, before ascending the steps, to look at the house in which Doctor Maradick lived. A fine rain was falling, and I remember thinking, as I turned the corner, how depressing the weather must be for Mrs Maradick. It was an old house, with damp-looking walls (though that may have been because of the rain) and a spindle-shaped iron railing which ran up the stone steps to the black door, where I noticed a dim flicker through the old-fashioned fanlight. Afterwards I discovered that Mrs Maradick had been born in the house — her maiden name was Calloran — and that she had never wanted to live anywhere else. She was a woman — this I found out when I knew her better — of strong attachments to both persons and places; and though Doctor Maradick had tried to persuade her to move uptown after her marriage, she had clung, against his wishes, to the old house in lower Fifth Avenue. I dare say she was obstinate about it in spite of her gentleness and her passion for the doctor. Those sweet, soft women, especially when they have always been rich, are sometimes amazingly obstinate. I have nursed so many of them since — women with strong affections and weak intellects — that I have come to recognize the type as soon as I set eyes upon it.

My ring at the bell was answered after a little delay, and when I entered the house I saw that the hall was quite dark except for the waning glow from an open fire which burned in the library. When I gave my name, and added that I was the night nurse, the servant appeared to think my humble presence unworthy of illumination. He was an old negro butler, inherited perhaps from Mrs Maradick's mother, who, I learned afterwards, was from South Carolina; and while he passed me on his way up the staircase, I heard him vaguely muttering that he 'wa'n't gwinter tu'n on dem lights twel de chile had done playin'.'

To the right of the hall, the soft glow drew me into the library, and crossing the threshold timidly, I stooped to dry my wet coat by the fire. As I bent there, meaning to start up at the first sound of a footstep, I thought how cozy the room was after the damp walls outside to which some bared creepers were clinging; and I was watching the strange shapes and patterns the firelight made on the old Persian rug, when the lamps of a slowly turning motor flashed on me through the white shades at the window. Still dazzled by the glare, I looked round in the dimness

and saw a child's ball of red and blue rubber roll towards me out of the gloom of the adjoining room. A moment later, while I made a vain attempt to capture the toy as it spun past me, a little girl darted airily, with peculiar lightness and grace, through the doorway, and stopped quickly, as if in surprise at the sight of a stranger. She was a small child — so small and slight that her footsteps made no sound on the polished floor of the threshold; and I remember thinking while I looked at her that she had the gravest and sweetest face I had ever seen. She couldn't — I decided this afterwards — have been more than six or seven years old, yet she stood there with a curious prim dignity, like the dignity of an elderly person, and gazed up at me with enigmatical eyes. She was dressed in Scotch plaid, with a bit of red ribbon in her hair, which was cut in a fringe over her forehead and hung very straight to her shoulders. Charming as she was, from her uncurled brown hair to the white socks and black slippers on her little feet, I recall most vividly the singular look in her eyes, which appeared in the shifting light to be of an indeterminate color. For the odd thing about this look was that it was not the look of childhood at all. It was the look of profound experience, of bitter knowledge.

'Have you come for your ball?' I asked; but while the friendly question was still on my lips, I heard the servant returning. In my confusion I made a second ineffectual grasp at the plaything, which had rolled away from me into the dusk of the drawing-room. Then, as I raised my head, I saw that the child also had slipped from the rooms; and without looking after her I followed the old negro into the pleasant study above, where the great surgeon awaited me.

Ten years ago, before hard nursing had taken so much out of me, I blushed very easily, and I was aware at the moment when I crossed Doctor Maradick's study that my cheeks were the color of peonies. Of course, I was a fool — no one knows this better than I do — but I had never been alone, even for an instant, with him before, and the man was more than a hero to me, he was — there isn't any reason now why I should blush over the confession — almost a god. At that age I was mad about the wonders of surgery, and Roland Maradick in the operating-room was magician enough to have turned an older and more sensible head than mine. Added to his great reputation and his marvelous skill, he was, I am sure of this, the most splendid-looking man, even at forty-five, that one could imagine. Had he been ungracious — had he been positively rude to me, I should still have adored him; but when he held out his hand, and greeted me in the charming way he had with women, I felt that I would have died for him. It is no wonder that a saying went about the hospital that every woman he operated on fell in love with him. As for the nurses — well, there wasn't a single one of them who had escaped his spell — not even Miss Hemphill, who could have been scarcely a day under fifty.

'I am glad you could come, Miss Randolph. You were with Miss Hudson last week when I operated?'

I bowed. To save my life I couldn't have spoken without blushing the redder.

'I noticed your bright face at the time. Brightness I think, is what Mrs Maradick needs. She finds her day nurse depressing.' His eyes rested so kindly upon me that I have suspected since that he was not entirely unaware of my worship. It was a small thing, heaven knows, to flatter his vanity — a nurse just out of a training school — but to some men no tribute is too insignificant to give pleasure.

'You will do your best, I am sure.' He hesitated an instant — just long enough for me to perceive the anxiety beneath the genial smile on his face — and then added gravely, 'We wish to avoid, if possible, having to send her away.'

I could only murmur in response, and after a few carefully chosen words about his wife's illness,

he rang the bell and directed the maid to take me upstairs to my room. Not until I was ascending the stairs to the third story did it occur to me that he had really told me nothing. I was as perplexed about the nature of Mrs Maradick's malady as I had been when I entered the house.

I found my room pleasant enough. It had been arranged — at Doctor Maradick's request, I think — that I was to sleep in the house, and after my austere little bed at the hospital, I was agreeably surprised by the cheerful look of the apartment into which the maid led me. The walls were papered in roses, and there were curtains of flowered chintz at the window, which looked down on a small formal garden at the rear of the house. This the maid told me, for it was too dark for me to distinguish more than a marble fountain and a fir-tree, which looked old, though I afterwards learned that it was replanted almost every season.

In ten minutes I had slipped into my uniform and was ready to go to my patient; but for some reason — to this day I have never found out what it was that turned her against me at the start — Mrs Maradick refused to receive me. While I stood outside her door I heard the day nurse trying to persuade her to let me come in. It wasn't any use, however, and in the end I was obliged to go back to my room and wait until the poor lady got over her whim and consented to see me. That was long after dinner — it must have been nearer eleven than ten o'clock — and Miss Peterson was quite worn out by the time she came for me.

'I'm afraid you'll have a bad night,' she said as we went downstairs together. That was her way, I soon saw, to expect the worst of everything and everybody.

'Does she often keep you up like this?'

'Oh, no, she is usually very considerate. I never knew a sweeter character. But she still has this hallucination —'

Here again, as in the scene with Doctor Maradick, I felt that the explanation had only deepened the mystery. Mrs Maradick's hallucination, whatever form it assumed, was evidently a subject for evasion and subterfuge in the household. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask, 'What is her hallucination?' — but before I could get the words past my lips we had reached Mrs Maradick's door, and Miss Peterson motioned me to be silent. As the door opened a little way to admit me, I saw that Mrs Maradick was already in bed, and that the lights were out except for a night-lamp burning on a candle-stand beside a book and a carafe of water.

'I won't go in with you,' said Miss Peterson in a whisper; and I was on the point of stepping over the threshold when I saw the little girl, in the dress of Scotch plaid, slip by me from the dusk of the room into the electric light of the hall. She held a doll in her arms, and as she went by she dropped a doll's work-basket in the doorway. Miss Peterson must have picked up the toy, for when I turned in a minute to look for it I found that it was gone. I remember thinking that it was late for a child to be up — she looked delicate, too — but, after all it was no business of mine, and four years in the hospital had taught me never to meddle in things that do not concern me. There is nothing a nurse learns quicker than not to try to put the world to rights in a day.

When I crossed the floor to the chair by Mrs Maradick's bed, she turned over on her side and looked at me with the sweetest and saddest smile.

'You are the night nurse,' she said in a gentle voice; and from the moment she spoke I knew that there was nothing hysterical or violent about her mania or hallucination, as they called it. 'They told me your name, but I have forgotten it.'

'Randolph — Margaret Randolph.' I liked her from the start, and I think she must have seen it.

'You look very young, Miss Randolph.'

'I am twenty-two, but I suppose I don't look quite my age. People usually think I am younger.

For a minute she was silent, and while I settled myself in the chair by the bed, I thought how

strikingly she resembled the little girl I had seen first in the afternoon, and then leaving her room a few moments before. They had the same small, heart-shaped faces, colored ever so faintly; the same straight, soft hair, between brown and flaxen; and the same large, grave eyes, set very far apart under arched eyebrows. What surprised me most, however, was that they both looked at me with that enigmatical and vaguely wondering expression — only in Mrs Maradick's face the vagueness seemed to change now and then to a definite fear— a flash, I had almost said, of startled horror.

I sat quite still in my chair, and until the time came for Mrs Maradick to take her medicine not a word passed between us. Then, when I bent over her with the glass in my hand, she raised her head from the pillow and said in a whisper of suppressed intensity:

‘You look kind. I wonder if you could have seen my little girl?’

As I slipped my arm under the pillow I tried to smile cheerfully down on her.

‘Yes, I've seen her twice. I'd know her anywhere by her likeness to you.’

A glow shone in her eyes, and I thought how pretty she must have been before illness took the life and animation out of her features. ‘Then I know you're good.’ Her voice was so strained and low that I could barely hear it. ‘If you weren't good you couldn't have seen her.’

I thought this queer enough, but all I answered was, ‘She looked delicate to be sitting up so late.’

A quiver passed over her thin features, and for a minute I thought she was going to burst into tears. As she had taken the medicine, I put the glass back on the candle-stand, and bending over the bed, smoothed the straight brown hair, which was as fine and soft as spun silk, back from her forehead. There was something about her — I don't know what it was — that made you love her as soon as she looked at you.

‘She always had that light and airy way, though she was never sick a day in her life,’ she answered calmly after a pause. Then, groping for my hand, she whispered passionately, ‘You must not tell him — you must not tell any one that you have seen her!’

‘I must not tell any one?’ Again I had the impression that had come to me first in Doctor Maradick's study, and afterwards with Miss Peterson on the staircase, that I was seeking a gleam of light in the midst of obscurity.

‘Are you sure there isn't any one listening — that there isn't any one at the door?’ she asked, pushing aside my arm and raising herself on the pillows.

‘Quite, quite sure. They have put out the lights in the hall.’

‘And you will not tell him? Promise me that you will not tell him.’ The startled horror flashed from the vague wonder of her expression. ‘He doesn't like her to come back, because he killed her.’

‘Because he killed her!’ Then it was that light burst on me in a blaze. So this was Mrs Maradick's hallucination! She believed that her child was dead — the little girl I had seen with my own eyes leaving her room; and she believed that her husband — the great surgeon we worshiped in the hospital — had murdered her. No wonder they veiled the dreadful obsession in mystery! No wonder that even Miss Peterson had not dared to drag the horrid thing out into the light! It was the kind of hallucination one simply couldn't stand having to face.

‘There is no use telling people things that nobody believes,’ she resumed slowly, still holding my hand in a grasp that would have hurt me if her fingers had not been so fragile. ‘Nobody believes that he killed her. Nobody believes that she comes back every day to the house. Nobody believes — and yet you saw her —’

‘Yes, I saw her — but why should your husband have killed her?’ I spoke soothingly, as one would speak to a person who was quite mad. Yet she was not mad, I could have sworn this while I looked at her.

For a moment she moaned inarticulately, as if the horror of her thoughts were too great to pass into speech. Then she flung out her thin, bare arm with a wild gesture.

‘Because he never loved me!’ she said. ‘He never loved me!’

‘But he married you,’ I urged gently while I stroked her hair. ‘If he hadn’t loved you, why should he have married you?’

‘He wanted the money — my little girl’s money. It all goes to him when I die.’

‘But he is rich himself. He must make a fortune from his profession.’

‘It isn’t enough. He wanted millions.’ She had grown stern and tragic. ‘No, he never loved me. He loved someone else from the beginning — before I knew him.’

It was quite useless, I saw, to reason with her. If she wasn’t mad, she was in a state of terror and despondency so black that it had almost crossed the border-line into madness. I thought once that I would go upstairs and bring the child down from her nursery; but, after a moment’s hesitation, I realized that Miss Peterson and Doctor Maradick must have long ago tried all these measures. Clearly, there was nothing to do except soothe and quiet her as much as I could; and this I did until she dropped into a light sleep which lasted well into the morning.

By seven o’clock I was worn out — not from work but from the strain on my sympathy — and I was glad, indeed, when one of the maids came in to bring me an early cup of coffee. Mrs Maradick was still sleeping — it was a mixture of bromide and chloral I had given her — and she did not wake until Miss Peterson came on duty an hour or two later. Then, when I went downstairs, I found the dining-room deserted except for the old housekeeper, who was looking over the silver. Doctor Maradick, she explained to me presently, had his breakfast served in the morning-room on the other side of the house.

‘And the little girl? Does she take her meals in the nursery?’

She threw me a startled glance. Was it, I questioned afterwards, one of distrust or apprehension?

‘There isn’t any little girl. Haven’t you heard?’

‘Heard? No. Why, I saw her only yesterday.’ The look she gave me — I was sure of it now — was full of alarm.

‘The little girl — she was the sweetest child I ever saw — died just two months ago of pneumonia.’

‘But she couldn’t have died.’ I was a fool to let this out, but the shock had completely unnerved me. ‘I tell you I saw her yesterday.’

The alarm in her face deepened. ‘That is Mrs Maradick’s trouble. She believes that she still sees her.’

‘But don’t you see her?’ I drove the question home bluntly.

‘No.’ She set her lips tightly. ‘I never see anything.’

So I had been wrong, after all, and the explanation, when it came, only accentuated the terror. The child was dead — she had died of pneumonia two months ago — and yet I had seen her, with my own eyes, playing ball in the library; I had seen her slipping out of her mother’s room, with her doll in her arms.

‘Is there another child in the house? Could there be a child belonging to one of the servants?’ A gleam had shot through the fog in which I was groping.

‘No, there isn’t any other. The Doctor tried bringing one once, but it threw the poor lady into such a state she almost died of it. Besides, there wouldn’t be any other child as quiet and sweet-looking as Dorothea. To see her skipping along in her dress of Scotch plaid used to make me think of a fairy, though they say that fairies wear nothing but white or green.’

‘Has any one else seen her — the child, I mean — any of the servants?’

‘Only old Gabriel, the colored butler, who came with Mrs Maradick’s mother from South Carolina. I’ve heard that negroes often have a kind of second sight — though I don’t know that that is just what you would call it. But they seem to believe in the supernatural by instinct, and Gabriel is so old and dotty — he does no work except answer the door-bell and clean the silver — that nobody pays much attention to anything that he sees —’

‘Is the child’s nursery kept as it used to be?’

‘Oh no. The doctor had all the toys sent to the children’s hospital. That was a great grief to Mrs Maradick; but Doctor Brandon thought, and all the nurses agreed with him, that it was best for her not to be allowed to keep the room as it was when Dorothea was living.’

‘Dorothea? Was that the child’s name?’

‘Yes, it means the gift of God, doesn’t it? She was named after the mother of Mrs Maradick’s first husband, Mr Ballard. He was the grave, quiet kind — not the least like the doctor.’

I wondered if the other dreadful obsession of Mrs Maradick’s had drifted down through the nurses or the servants to the housekeeper; but she said nothing about it, and since she was, I suspected, a garrulous person, I thought it wiser to assume that the gossip had not reached her.

A little later, when breakfast was over and I had not yet gone upstairs to my room, I had my first interview with Doctor Brandon, the famous alienist who was in charge of the case. I had never seen him before, but from the first moment that I looked at him I took his measure almost by intuition. He was, I suppose, honest enough — I have always granted him that, bitterly as I have felt towards him. It wasn’t his fault that he lacked red blood in his brain, or that he had formed the habit, from long association with abnormal phenomena, of regarding all life as a disease. He was the sort of physician — every nurse will understand what I mean — who deals instinctively with groups instead of with individuals. He was long and solemn and very round in the face; and I hadn’t talked to him ten minutes before I knew he had been educated in Germany, and that he had learned over there to treat every emotion as a pathological manifestation. I used to wonder what he got out of life — what any one got out of life who had analysed away everything except the bare structure.

When I reached my room at last, I was so tired that I could barely remember either the questions Doctor Brandon had asked or the directions he had given me. I fell asleep, I know, almost as soon as my head touched the pillow; and the maid who came to inquire if I wanted luncheon decided to let me finish my nap. In the afternoon, when she returned with a cup of tea, she found me still heavy and drowsy. Though I was used to night nursing, I felt as if I had danced from sunset to daybreak. It was fortunate, I reflected, while I drank my tea, that every case didn’t wear on one’s sympathies as acutely as Mrs Maradick’s hallucination had worn on mine.

Through the day I did not see Doctor Maradick; but at seven o’clock when I came up from early dinner on my way to take the place of Miss Peterson, who had kept on duty an hour later than usual, he met me in the hall and asked me to come into his study. I thought him handsomer than ever in his evening clothes, with a white flower in his buttonhole. He was going to some public dinner, the housekeeper told me, but then, he was always going somewhere. I believe he

didn't dine at home a single evening that winter.

'Did Mrs Maradick have a good night?' He had closed the door after us, and turning now with the question, he smiled kindly, as if he wished to put me at ease in the beginning.

'She slept very well after she took the medicine. I gave her that at eleven o'clock.'

For a minute he regarded me silently, and I was aware that his personality — his charm — was focused upon me. It was almost as if I stood in the center of converging rays of light, so vivid was my impression of him.

'Did she allude in any way to her— to her hallucination?' he asked.

How the warning reached me — what invisible waves of sense-perception transmitted the message — I have never known; but while I stood there, facing the splendor of the doctor's presence, every intuition cautioned me that the time had come when I must take sides in the household. While I stayed there I must stand either with Mrs Maradick or against her.

'She talked quite rationally,' I replied after a moment.

'What did she say?'

'She told me how she was feeling, that she missed her child, and that she walked a little every day about her room.'

His face changed — how I could not at first determine.

'Have you seen Doctor Brandon?'

'He came this morning to give me his directions.'

'He thought her less well today. He has advised me to send her to Rosedale.'

I have never, even in secret, tried to account for Doctor Maradick. He may have been sincere. I tell only what I know — not what I believe or imagine — and the human is sometimes as inscrutable, and inexplicable, as the supernatural.

While he watched me I was conscious of an inner struggle, as if opposing angels warred somewhere in the depths of my being. When at last I made my decision, I was acting less from reason, I knew, than in obedience to the pressure of some secret current of thought. Heaven knows, even then, the man held me captive while I defied him.

'Doctor Maradick,' I lifted my eyes for the first time frankly to his, 'I believe that your wife is as sane as I am — or as you are.'

He started. 'Then she did not talk freely to you?'

'She may be mistaken, unstrung, piteously distressed in mind' — I brought this out with emphasis — 'but she is not — I am willing to stake my future on it — a fit subject for an asylum. It would be foolish — it would be cruel — to send her to Rosedale.'

'Cruel, you say?' A troubled look crossed his face, and his voice grew very gentle. 'You do not imagine that I could be cruel to her?'

'No, I do not think that.' My voice also had softened.

'We will let things go on as they are. Perhaps Doctor Brandon may have some other suggestion to make.' He drew out his watch and compared it with the clock — nervously, I observed, as if his action were a screen for his discomfiture or perplexity. 'I must be going now. We will speak of this again in the morning.'

But in the morning we did not speak of it, and during the month that I nursed Mrs Maradick I was not called again into her husband's study. When I met him in the hall or on the staircase, which was seldom, he was as charming as ever; yet, in spite of his courtesy, I had a persistent feeling that he had taken my measure on that evening, and that he had no further use for me.

As the days went by Mrs Maradick seemed to grow stronger. Never, after our first night together, had she mentioned the child to me; never had she alluded by so much as a word to her dreadful charge against her husband. She was like any woman recovering from a great sorrow, except that she was sweeter and gentler. It is no wonder that everyone who came near her loved her; for there was a loveliness about her like the mystery of light, not of darkness. She was, I have always thought, as much of an angel as it is possible for a woman to be on this earth. And yet, angelic as she was, there were times when it seemed to me that she both hated and feared her husband. Though he never entered her room while I was there, and I never heard his name on her lips until an hour before the end, still I could tell by the look of terror in her face whenever his step passed down the hall that her very soul shivered at his approach.

During the whole month I did not see the child again, though one night, when I came suddenly into Mrs Maradick's room, I found a little garden, such as children make out of pebbles and bits of box, on the window-sill. I did not mention it to Mrs Maradick, and a little later, as the maid lowered the shades, I noticed that the garden had vanished. Since then I have often wondered if the child were invisible only to the rest of us, and if her mother still saw her. But there was no way of finding out except by questioning, and Mrs Maradick was so well and patient that I hadn't the heart to question. Things couldn't have been better with her than they were, and I was beginning to tell myself that she might soon go out for an airing, when the end came so suddenly.

It was a mild January day — the kind of day that brings the foretaste of spring in the middle of winter, and when I came downstairs in the afternoon, I stopped a minute by the window at the end of the hall to look down on the box maze in the garden. There was an old fountain, bearing two laughing boys in marble, in the center of the graveled walk, and the water, which had been turned on that morning for Mrs Maradick's pleasure, sparkled now like silver as the sunlight splashed over it. I had never before felt the air quite so soft and spring-like in January; and I thought, as I gazed down on the garden, that it would be a good idea for Mrs Maradick to go out and bask for an hour or so in the sunshine. It seemed strange to me that she was never allowed to get any fresh air except the air that came through her window.

When I went into her room, however, I found that she had no wish to go out. She was sitting, wrapped in shawls, by the open window, which looked down on the fountain; and as I entered she glanced up from a little book she was reading. A pot of daffodils stood on the window-sill — she was very fond of flowers and we tried always to keep some growing in her room.

'Do you know what I am reading, Miss Randolph?' she asked in her soft voice; and she read aloud a verse while I went over to the candle-stand to measure out a dose of medicine.

“‘If thou hast two loaves of bread, sell one and buy daffodils, for bread nourisheth the body, but daffodils delight the soul.’ That is very beautiful, don't you think so?”

I said, 'Yes,' that it was beautiful; and then I asked her if she wouldn't go downstairs and walk about in the garden.

'He wouldn't like it,' she answered; and it was the first time she had mentioned her husband to me since the night I came to her. 'He doesn't want me to go out.'

I tried to laugh her out of the idea; but it was no use, and after a few minutes I gave up and began talking of other things. Even then it did not occur to me that her fear of Doctor Maradick was anything but a fancy. I could see, of course, that she wasn't out of her head; but sane persons, I knew, sometimes have unaccountable prejudices, and I accepted her dislike as a mere whim or aversion. I did not understand then and — I may as well confess this before the end comes — I do not understand any better today. I am writing down the things I actually saw, and I repeat that I have never had the slightest twist in the direction of the miraculous.

The afternoon slipped away while we talked — she talked brightly when any subject came up that interested her — and it was the last hour of day — that grave, still hour when the movement of life seems to droop and falter for a few precious minutes — that brought us the thing I had dreaded silently since my first night in the house. I remember that I had risen to close the window, and was leaning out for a breath of the mild air, when there was the sound of steps, consciously softened, in the hall outside, and Doctor Brandon's usual knock fell on my ears. Then, before I could cross the room, the door opened, and the doctor entered with Miss Peterson. The day nurse, I knew, was a stupid woman; but she had never appeared to me so stupid, so armored and encased in her professional manner, as she did at that moment.

'I am glad to see that you are taking the air.' As Doctor Brandon came over to the window, I wondered maliciously what devil of contradictions had made him a distinguished specialist in nervous diseases.

'Who was the other doctor you brought this morning?' asked Mrs Maradick gravely; and that was all I ever heard about the visit of the second alienist.

'Someone who is anxious to cure you.' He dropped into a chair beside her and patted her hand with his long, pale fingers. 'We are so anxious to cure you that we want to send you away to the country for a fortnight or so. Miss Peterson has come to help you to get ready, and I've kept my car waiting for you. There couldn't be a nicer day for a trip, could there?'

The moment had come at last. I knew at once what he meant, and so did Mrs Maradick. A wave of color flowed and ebbed in her thin cheeks, and I felt her body quiver when I moved from the window and put my arms on her shoulders. I was aware again, as I had been aware that evening in Doctor Maradick's study, of a current of thought that beat from the air around into my brain. Though it cost me my career as a nurse and my reputation for sanity, I knew that I must obey that invisible warning.

'You are going to take me to an asylum,' said Mrs Maradick.

He made some foolish denial or evasion; but before he had finished I turned from Mrs Maradick and faced him impulsively. In a nurse this was flagrant rebellion, and I realised that the act wrecked my professional future. Yet I did not care — I did not hesitate. Something stronger than I was driving me on.

'Doctor Brandon,' I said, 'I beg you — I implore you to wait until tomorrow. There are things I must tell you.'

A queer look came into his face, and I understood, even in my excitement, that he was mentally deciding in which group he should place me — to which class of morbid manifestations I must belong.

'Very well, very well, we will hear everything,' he replied soothingly; but I saw him glance at Miss Peterson, and she went over to the wardrobe for Mrs Maradick's fur coat and hat.

Suddenly, without warning, Mrs Maradick threw the shawls away from her, and stood up. 'If you send me away,' she said, 'I shall never come back. I shall never live to come back.'

The gray of twilight was just beginning, and while she stood there, in the dusk of the room, her face shone out as pale and flower-like as the daffodils on the window-sill. 'I cannot go away!' she cried in a sharper voice. 'I cannot go away from my child!'

I saw her face clearly; I heard her voice; and then — the horror of the scene sweeps back over me! — I saw the door open slowly and the little girl run across the room to her mother. I saw the child lift her little arms, and I saw the mother stoop and gather her to her bosom. So closely locked were they in that passionate embrace that their forms seemed to mingle in the gloom that

enveloped them.

‘After this can you doubt?’ I threw out the words almost savagely — and then, when I turned from the mother and child to Doctor Brandon and Miss Peterson, I knew breathlessly — oh, there was a shock in the discovery! — that they were blind to the child. Their blank faces revealed the consternation of ignorance, not of conviction. They had seen nothing except the vacant arms of the mother and the swift, erratic gesture with which she stooped to embrace some invisible presence. Only my vision — and I have asked myself since if the power of sympathy enabled me to penetrate the web of material fact and see the spiritual form of the child — only my vision was not blinded by the clay through which I looked.

‘After this can you doubt?’ Doctor Brandon had flung my words back to me. Was it his fault, poor man, if life had granted him only the eyes of flesh? Was it his fault if he could see only half of the thing there before him?

But they couldn’t see, and since they couldn’t see I realised that it was useless to tell them. Within an hour they took Mrs Maradick to the asylum; and she went quietly, though when the time came for parting from me she showed some faint trace of feeling. I remember that at the last, while we stood on the pavement, she lifted her black veil, which she wore for the child, and said: ‘Stay with her, Miss Randolph, as long as you can. I shall never come back.’

Then she got into the car and was driven off, while I stood looking after her with a sob in my throat. Dreadful as I felt it to be, I didn’t, of course, realize the full horror of it, or I couldn’t have stood there quietly on the pavement. I didn’t realise it, indeed, until several months afterwards when word came that she had died in the asylum. I never knew what her illness was, though I vaguely recall that something was said about ‘heart failure’ — a loose enough term. My own belief is that she died simply of the terror of life.

To my surprise Doctor Maradick asked me to stay on as his office nurse after his wife went to Rosedale; and when the news of her death came there was no suggestion of my leaving. I don’t know to this day why he wanted me in the house. Perhaps he thought I should have less opportunity to gossip if I stayed under his roof, perhaps he still wished to test the power of his charm over me. His vanity was incredible in so great a man. I have seen him flush with pleasure when people turned to look at him in the street, and I know that he was not above playing on the sentimental weakness of his patients. But he was magnificent, heaven knows! Few men, I imagine, have been the objects of so many foolish infatuations.

The next summer Doctor Maradick went abroad for two months, and while he was away I took my vacation in Virginia. When we came back the work was heavier than ever — his reputation by this time was tremendous — and my days were so crowded with appointments, and hurried fittings to emergency cases, that I had scarcely a minute left in which to remember poor Mrs Maradick. Since the afternoon when she went to the asylum the child had not been in the house; and at last I was beginning to persuade myself that the little figure had been an optical illusion — the effect of shifting lights in the gloom of the old rooms — not the apparition I had once believed it to be. It does not take long for a phantom to fade from the memory — especially when one leads the active and methodical life I was forced into that winter. Perhaps — who knows? — (I remember telling myself) the doctors may have been right, after all, and the poor lady may have actually been out of her mind. With this view of the past, my judgement of Doctor Maradick insensibly altered. It ended, I think, in my acquitting him altogether. And then, just as he stood clear and splendid in my verdict of him, the reversal came so precipitately that I grow breathless now whenever I try to live it over again. The violence of the next turn in affairs left

me, I often fancy, with a perpetual dizziness of the imagination.

It was in May that we heard of Mrs Maradick's death, and exactly a year later, on a mild and fragrant afternoon, when the daffodils were blooming in patches around the old fountain in the garden, the housekeeper came into the office, where I lingered over some accounts, to bring me news of the doctor's approaching marriage.

'It is no more than we might have expected,' she concluded rationally. 'The house must be lonely for him — he is such a sociable man. But I can't help feeling,' she brought out slowly after a pause in which I felt a shiver pass over me, 'I can't help feeling that it is hard for that other woman to have all the money poor Mrs Maradick's first husband left her.'

There is a great deal of money, then?' I asked curiously.

'A great deal.' She waved her hand, as if words were futile to express the sum. 'Millions and millions!'

'They will give up this house, of course?'

'That's done already, my dear. There won't be a brick left of it by this time next year. It's to be pulled down and an apartment-house built on the ground.'

Again the shiver passed over me. I couldn't bear to think of Mrs Maradick's old home falling to pieces.

'You didn't tell me the name of the bride,' I said. 'Is she someone he met while he was in Europe?'

'Dear me, no! She is the very lady he was engaged to before he married Mrs Maradick, only she threw him over, so people said, because he wasn't rich enough. Then she married some lord or prince from over the water; but there was a divorce, and now she has turned again to her old lover. He is rich enough now, I guess, even for her!'

It was all perfectly true, I suppose; it sounded as plausible as a story out of a newspaper, and yet while she told me I felt, or dreamed that I felt, a sinister, an impalpable hush in the air. I was nervous, no doubt; I was shaken by the suddenness with which the housekeeper had sprung her news on me; but as I sat there I had quite vividly an impression that the old house was listening — that there was a real, if invisible, presence somewhere in the room or the garden. Yet, when an instant afterwards I glanced through the long window which opened down to the brick terrace, I saw only the faint sunshine over the deserted garden, with its maze of box, its marble fountain, and its patches of daffodils.

The housekeeper had gone — one of the servants, I think, came for her — and I was sitting at my desk when the words of Mrs Maradick on that last evening floated into my mind. The daffodils brought her back to me; for I thought, as I watched them growing, so still and golden in the sunshine, how she would have enjoyed them. Almost unconsciously I repeated the verse she had read to me:

'If thou hast two loaves of bread, sell one and buy daffodils' — and it was at this very instant, while the words were still on my lips, that I turned my eyes to the box maze, and saw the child skipping along the graveled path to the fountain. Quite distinctly, as clear as day, I saw her come, with what children call the dancing step, between the low box borders to the place where the daffodils bloomed by the fountain. From her straight brown hair to her frock of Scotch plaid and her little feet, which twinkled in white socks and black slippers over the turning rope, she was as real to me as the ground on which she trod or the laughing marble boys under the splashing water. Starting up from my chair, I made a single step to the terrace. If I could only reach her — only speak to her — I felt that I might at last solve the mystery. But with the first flutter of my dress on the terrace, the airy little form melted into the quiet dusk of the maze. Not a breath

stirred the daffodils, not a shadow passed over the sparkling flow of the water; yet, weak and shaken in every nerve, I sat down on the brick step of the terrace and burst into tears. I must have known that something terrible would happen before they pulled down Mrs Maradick's home.

The doctor dined out that night. He was with the lady he was going to marry, the housekeeper told me; and it must have been almost midnight when I heard him come in and go upstairs to his room. I was downstairs because I had been unable to sleep, and the book I wanted to finish I had left that afternoon in the office. The book — I can't remember what it was — had seemed to me very exciting when I began it in the morning; but after the visit of the child I found the romantic novel as dull as a treatise on nursing. It was impossible for me to follow the lines, and I was on the point of giving up and going to bed, when Doctor Maradick opened the front door with his latch-key and went up the stair.

I was still there when the telephone on my desk rang, with what seemed to my overwrought nerves a startling abruptness, and the voice of the superintendent told me hurriedly that Doctor Maradick was needed at the hospital. I had become so accustomed to these emergency calls in the night that I felt reassured when I had rung up the doctor in his room and had heard the hearty sound of his response. He had not yet undressed, he said, and would come down immediately while I ordered back his car, which must just have reached the garage.

'I'll be with you in five minutes!' he called as cheerfully as if I had summoned him to his wedding.

I heard him cross the floor of his room, and before he could reach the head of the staircase, I opened the door and went out into the hall in order that I might turn on the light and have his hat and coat waiting. The electric button was at the end of the hall, and as I moved towards it, guided by the glimmer that fell from the landing above, I lifted my eyes to the staircase, which climbed dimly, with its slender mahogany balustrade, as far as the third story. Then it was, at the very moment when the doctor, humming gayly, began his quick descent of the steps, that I distinctly saw — I will swear to this on my death-bed — a child's skipping-rope lying loosely coiled, as if it had dropped from a careless little hand, in the bend of the staircase. With a spring I had reached the electric button, flooding the hall with light; just as I did so, while my arm was still outstretched behind me, I heard the humming voice change to a cry of surprise or terror, and the figure on the staircase tripped heavily and stumbled with groping hands into emptiness. The scream of warning died in my throat while I watched him pitch forward down the long flight of stairs to the floor at my feet. Even before I bent over him, before I wiped the blood from his brow and felt for his silent heart, I knew that he was dead.

Something — it may have been, as the world believes, a misstep in the dimness, or it may have been, as I am ready to bear witness, an invisible judgment — something had killed him at the very moment when he most wanted to live.