

# The Twins

By Bessie Kyffin-Taylor

The tragedy of my life is summed up in these words—"Basil and I were twins!" It doesn't sound tragical, it doesn't sound even interesting, but hear my story, and pity me.

From the hour of our birth we were remarkably alike: both were dark, both had brown eyes. In fact, so much alike were we that the usual tricks were resorted to by both mother and nurses to distinguish us, and if, as once happened, my blue-ribboned rattle got changed for Basil's pink one, why, then, I swallowed a nauseous dose of medicine, intended for him. That was the start: from then onwards, my brother's misdeeds were laid at my door. *My* indolence, *laziness* my father called it, was put down to my brother. If our parents had been *really* interested in us, they would have studied our various temperaments, discovering that only in appearance had we the remotest resemblance; and, knowing this, if they had guided us, taught us, and led us, all the sorrow that eventually fell to me would have been non-existent.

But parents differ so; some give all their thoughts, time and money to their children, ours gave none. They were wrapt up in each other, and in the gay social life they led. We were more of a bother than a joy, our bringing up depending chiefly on the ministrations of our nurses, and the rough tutoring of an old Scotch gardener, aided by stable men, odd boys about the Park—all and sundry, in fact, who could do us harm instead of good!

The difference between us in appearance was so very slight that even our coachman had been known to bring a pony ready saddled for *me*, who at heart was an arrant coward, whereas Basil would ride pretty nearly anything on four legs. I have seen him try to ride a pig, a sheep, and a cow. He was fearless where horses were concerned, adored animals of every kind, being kindness itself to sick or maimed ones. The kink in his character being love of self, he would stoop to any lie or subterfuge to escape deserved punishment, never having the least scruple about letting me suffer for his misdeeds. He rarely opened a book, except French ones—prohibited—and these were usually found on *my* shelf, or in *my* drawer, never in his.

In our school days, it was Basil who went out of bounds, for sweets, cakes, etc., to the tuck shop, but it was *my* cap, and very likely *my* jacket, that he wore, and *my* room the stuff was stowed away in, until he had time to eat it! In holiday time, it was Basil in *my* pyjamas who acted "Ghost" and terrified the maids; Basil who lamed my father's famous hunter, but *my* whip that was found in the paddock; Basil who was seen drinking beer in the village "pub.", but *I* who was kept a prisoner in my room, and not allowed to go to the skating carnival in a neighbour's park; Basil who enjoyed the society of Esmé Simpson, the doctor's daughter; and so it went on. Occasionally the truth would be found out, and then folks said to me:

"Why don't you assert yourself, give Basil away, and let the right shoulders bear the blame?"

My reply invariably was:

"Too much trouble; besides, it is difficult to swear away the evidence before people's eyes." It was *my* whip, it was *my* cap, they were *my* pyjamas. No one could get away from those facts, my and nature was becoming warped and morbid through long years of injustice, from which there was no redress.

Later, Basil grew more and more unscrupulous, and several times feigned my handwriting, using my notepaper, etc., writing notes, purporting to come from me, to Esmé Simpson; until, at last, her r, the old doctor, called on me to know if I intended asking his girl to be my wife! To

Basil, all this was a huge jest; to me, it still further embittered my life. I was only twenty-four, I did want Esmé; our comradeship, which began in our childhood, was really, in my mind, just a sweet chumship, without a deeper note; but the letters shown to me by the doctor were masterpieces of love-making, and so it came about, as usual, my denials were unheeded, and I was forced into an engagement with Esmé, whom I did not love, and did not want.

She was a dear girl, and an ideal wife for some country doctor or lawyer; was a capable manager, possessed a clear, clever brain; but to me, "Bossiness" aptly described her, and her love of meddling in other folks' business was to me a perpetual worry. A new baby, she was there, lecturing the mother; a wedding, she was there, to dress and buck up the bride; a funeral, she was there, to put things in order and boss generally. It wearied me at first, and made me frantic at last, for my dreamy temperament wanted tranquility, peace, softness. My ideal wife was a very different being from this girl, chosen by fate to be mine. I *had* met my "Dream-girl," met her in the only spot in all the world in which, so far, I was free from my brother: a friend's studio in Chelsea, where I made one of a happy Bohemian crowd on the rare occasions I could escape alone to London. So far, Basil had no trace of me there, for my friends of the studio faithfully kept my secret, all of them remembering a single sentence, which I invariably announced my arrival in town with, proving to them I was Dal and *not* Basil. The words were these, though I fear to put them on paper, lest Basil should one day see them, but so far all is safe, and the words "The lotus flower is in bloom" was sufficient to call together my kindred spirits in the Bohemian corner I loved, the atmosphere of which suited me, and where I was known and was myself only, and not the dual personality I so often seemed to be.

There were one or two artists, a few writers, a few musicians, no terrific overwhelming talent amongst them, but sufficient for each to peg along, paying their way, enjoying a little simple amusement, though the charm lay in the happy-go-lucky spirit of "never crossing our bridges until we reached them," coupled with the ever-ready hand of friendship and help, which one and all never failed to hold out, if needs be.

This was my paradise, my oasis in a world that was using me ill, through my twin brother's evil character.

In my paradise there was an "Angel"; at least, to me she was one, though most people only saw a little elf-like girl, with clouds of dusky hair and green eyes, a small compact little person, with tiny feet and wee, capable hands. She was usually enveloped in an old greeny-grey painting pinafore, when she was not helping someone who was sick or tired, then the pinny was cast aside, and a practical little person, in well-worn, though well-cut blue serge, with a string of jade beads round her throat, would take the place of the dreamy, fanciful little being of her studio up in the roof of an old house. She made enough out of her dainty water-colours for her needs, and to supply those of a few other folks', she occasionally did a small amount of illustrating for papers or magazines, to help out, but this latter work was necessity, and not her wish. Sometimes we did not see her for weeks, but a call to a "Lotus flower" meeting usually unearthed her. She held my heart tightly in the hollow of her little hand, and just to be near her brought out all that was best in me, leaving all that was bitter and wrong far outside. I intended to marry her, as soon as I had an assured position, but this seemed still far distant. So our happiness consisted chiefly of teas in her studio, or walks in unknown bits of old London, with the stars above us and love in our hearts.

My "castle" came crashing to earth with my forced so-called engagement to Esmé Simpson.

I told the whole story to Alys, as I told her most things, sure of her understanding and sympathy; but, on this occasion, the only one in my life, she did not hear me with that

wholehearted faith in me which usually characterized her attitude towards me. She listened, that's true, but listened standing stiffly, coldly, aloof, not curled up on her favourite cushion on the floor in front of her fire; she listened silently, she always did, but oh, what a difference there can be in silence! There is the "silence" of warm understanding love, which seems to envelope you, bringing its own sweet helpfulness and sympathy, but there is the "silence" of cold criticism, which chills you through and through, making you hesitate and falter in your tale, as if indeed you were guilty. It was this unusual "silence" which encompassed me, as I struggled to tell Alys my woeful story, causing me to stumble, to halt, and finally to burst out with—

"Oh, you don't understand, you can't! It seems an impossible yarn to ask you to believe that love letters written by someone else should be the means of *my* getting engaged to someone else."

Alys only looked at me steadily for an instant, and then said:

"It is almost impossible to think that *you* did nothing yourself to put into Miss Simpson's mind the idea that you cared for her."

The words were slowly, carefully uttered, but they raised the devil in me, and I spoke words which a lifetime has been all too short in which to regret. We parted silently, without so much as a hand-clasp—we who had been all in all to each other for four years; we who had so repeatedly said, could not live without each other—parted, bitterly, and month of trials, and troubles were my lot ere the sunshine of my little girl's smile burst upon my sorrowful life, bringing in my latter years the love, the peace, and happiness, that I had thought was within my grasp. On the day we parted, we never meant to meet again, but our lives became interwoven in a manner which left no room for doubt as to our love for each other.

My existence after this was a round of subtle cruelties, practised by my seemingly fascinating brother, and it made of me a morose and gloomy being. My engagement to Esmé was proclaimed far and wide by her worthy, though mercenary, old father. I fulfilled to the best of my ability my duty of an engaged man, but refrained from marrying, hoping always that something would happen to prevent it. Nothing did, and I could see Dr. Simpson was of opinion that the time was surely come for his daughter's wedding to take place. Especially as Basil and I were now well off, owing to the death of our parents at sea—an occurrence, I am sorry to say, which left us unmoved, being, as we were, almost strangers to them.

It was a lovely morning early in May, on which I received a visit from my future father-in-law, a visit which blinded the sunshine, leaving me feeling as if now, in very truth, my last hope had fled. I listened to all he said, and was obliged to agree, that short of playing the villain, there was nothing for me to do but marry the girl, whose name, he said, was suffering through my neglect, and whose health was becoming undermined, owing to her great love for me, and my coldness in responding. So it was settled, the wedding day fixed for six weeks ahead, and it was arranged that, as stated in my father's will, the first of us to marry was to live in the old home. This arrangement flung Basil into a rage; he did not see why I should live in the home that belonged equally to both of us, so, in a fit of generosity I said:

"Live here as well!" and, rather to my surprise, he joyfully agreed. I repented of my rashness—only once, and that was for ever!

Towards the end of the six weeks' freedom left to me, I went up to town, and spent a quiet afternoon in the Art Gallery. I was strolling idly through the rooms when I came upon a little group of people. I only noticed them casually; but, as I passed them, something compelled me to raise my eyes and I looked straight into the green eyes of my one and only love.

“Alys,” I murmured, but a cold stare and a quick movement showed me I was not even to be considered a friend of the girl I loved. I moved away, hearing as I did so, the gay voice of her attendant swain say:

“Come, it is 4.30—tea-time, and I’m starving!” Something made me pull out my own watch, as one so often does, and compare the stated time with one’s own. True, it was exactly 4.30. I also would go and find tea, but alone!

I landed back home after the short railway journey, but alighted at the station before our own, intending to have a tramp home after the stuffiness of a London May-day. The walk would take me almost an hour, and the woods and fields appealed to me, so, lighting my pipe, I set out. It was almost dusk when I reached “The Park,” and lights were beginning to twinkle here and there amongst the local cottages, though “The Park,” as our house was called, struck me as looking particularly bleak and dark.

I entered quietly, and was slipping upstairs to my own rooms, when I was suddenly confronted at the top of the stairs by Smithson, our butler and factotum, accompanied by the village policeman.

I thought they were cronies, and perhaps had been having a quiet smoke, and was passing them with a curt “Good evening” when

“Please stop, sir,” burst from Constable Gill.

I stopped.

“Anything wrong?” I enquired.

“Yes, sir. Miss Simpson has been found murdered in. the old Spinny, and it is my duty to test you for murder.”

“Don’t speak, sir,” he added, in kinder tones, “everything’s against you.”

I was powerless, speechless, and suffered myself to be led away to the village gaol, where I sat, dazed, able to think. Only the merest details had been told to me, simply that about four o’clock, Esmé Simpson had been found shot through the heart lying among the ferns in what was known as “The Little Spinny.” A book was lying close to, a walking-stick—which she generally used—lay a yard or so from her, and the revolver, with one chamber emptied, was at her side. It was, I need hardly say, *my* revolver. More than this I did not know, any more than I knew how I was going to extricate myself from such a predicament. I was known to have been absent the whole of that day, but no one knew where I had been, even my ticket to London was no guarantee that I ever went there.

I was *not* seen leaving the train at my own station, and I question very much whether anyone noticed my departure from the station before. I *was* seen crossing the fields beyond the Spinny, however, yet, surely, no one in their senses could think I would murder a woman between three and four, and hide in the woods until six, the time I reached home. A sudden thought came to me—

Alys! She had seen me, she knew me, at 4.30, in London. Could I send word? Would she come? Would she say she had seen me? Surely, surely, I could trust her, but would she believe or would she doubt? The more I thought, the deeper and darker seemed the abyss before me. I could not see one solitary gleam of light anywhere.

At the inquest, it was proved to the satisfaction of the neighbours that I, Dallas York, had wilfully murdered the girl I was about to marry, using a revolver, proved to be mine, because it had my name on it. I was committed for trial at the County Assizes, and, so far as I could see, my life was ended.

I do not propose to dwell on the awful weeks which followed. I had able lawyers from town to aid me, and to them I told my story. I could see, while doing their best for me, they had little hope, especially, as they found the studio in Chelsea, where I had directed them to seek for Alys, empty! and none knew where the lady had gone. Then I implored them to send my brother to me, for surely he would speak; he could not really mean me to be hanged. If he would only come, I would plead and beg for my very life.

Alas! for my last frail hope, my brother was missing, had not, in fact, been seen since the day of the murder, and village rumour had it that he had said he would not live in the same county as a murderer!

After this the days went by in agony. Time sped, and my trial was upon me. I was tried, by twelve good men and true, and I was found guilty and condemned to death.

The last day of my life had dawned. I was past all feeling, as I sat in my cell, waiting the sound of the keys which would herald my doom.

I heard the heavy footfall of my jailor coming, coming, nearer, louder. I heard the jangle of the keys. I heard the key turn in the lock, and the grating sound as the door swung open, and then— I fainted—

When I came to myself, I opened my eyes on familiar surroundings. I was in my own bedroom at “The Park,” so much I was sure of, and then followed another blank. Slowly, very slowly, I came to complete understanding, and learned that it was to bring me a pardon that my cell door had been opened, and *not* to take me to my death, for my brother had, at the last moment, given himself up as the murderer of Esmé Simpson, and was hanged instead of me. He told all before he died, how all his life he had hated me for my superiority, he called it, and had planned and schemed to injure me always, even to ransacking my desk, and learning of Alys, to whom he had gone, purporting to be me, using our “Lotus flower” code; and finally taking her away to lock her up, and so prevent her giving, as she intended, evidence in my favour. It was a sordid, horrible tale, ending with the murder of Esmé, whom he confessed he had always cared for, and whom he killed in a fit of temper, vowing I should not have her, since she would not have him. Poor fellow! he did the only brave deed in his evil life when he confessed, and took the place so wrongfully allocated to me. His last message was given to the chaplain to give me—

“Tell my brother Dallas I have done right by him, but that time will show him his life will not be a calm one in spite of my death to spare an innocent man.”

I did not understand the message then. I *do now*, and daily, hourly, the full horror of all he intended to convey comes home to me!

After the whirl of tragedy which had enveloped me, I lay ill and weak for some weeks; at times bordering on brain fever, and again just lying ill and spent, waited upon by a hard-featured nurse, whose aim appeared to be business and *not* comfort; a woman to whom I represented two guineas a week, and disturbed nights; a woman whose very voice grated in my ears, and whose pursed-up lips, as she took my temperature, made me long to shake her, upsetting the stiff set of her appalling cap, and putting a few creases in her starched apron. She was an automaton, and I question much whether, in her stiffly-held head, there was any other knowledge than the measurements of a medicine glass or the reading of her precious thermometer. I was thankful when, at last, I was able to leave my bed, and try to pick up the shattered threads of my life. The dismissal of my nurse I hailed with thanksgiving, and celebrated the event by going downstairs for my small dinner, after which I intended to pass a few hours in the library with a book and pipe, or my thoughts, for company.

I had successfully managed to dispose of a grilled sole, and was idly playing with my wine glass, when it suddenly snapped in two pieces. How stupid of me, I thought, and what a mess!

“Smithson,” I called, as the butler hovered near, “tidy this up, will you; I can’t think how I was so careless.”

The man eyed me gravely, as he set about removing the debris, but did not speak. As he was moving away, my chair jogged violently.

“Don’t hit my chair, Smithson,” I exclaimed, irritably.

“Sorry, sir,” he answered, “but I didn’t; sir.”

“You must have done,” I snapped, and again there was silence.

Left to myself, I played with the food put before me, feeling weak, tired, unnerved, and unable to eat. I was chilly, too, in spite of a big fire of logs; a curious chilliness, it seemed, but I put it down to all I had gone through, and my subsequent illness; so wended my way to the library, as being a more cosy room than the huge dining-room in which I felt so solitary and alone.

Alone! did. I say, or rather think, yet, even as the word crossed my mind, I was conscious that it was wrong, I did *not* feel *alone!* Would to God I had! Some other presence was there, I knew it, I felt it; I knew it when my wine glass snapped, I knew it when my chair shook. It needed not the feeling of chilliness to impress me that as I sat at my apparently lonely table, some other being was there also!

I resolutely turned, my steps to the library, switching on all the lights as I entered, so that no gloomy corners or shadows could aid my imagination. Taking a book, I drew up an armchair, lit my pipe, and prepared for a quiet read. As I seated myself, the chair similar to mine, on the opposite side of the hearth, wheeled softly towards the fire! and I heard the soft thud, as of a person sitting down, followed by the clatter of the fire-irons. Then I knew! for Basil had invariably sat, feet on fender, usually preceded by the kicking away of the fire-irons. I knew I was ill, but I also knew definitely that *this* was no phantasy of an enfeebled mind. *This* was real, vivid, I was *not* alone, my brother Basil bore me company!

Steadily I tried to read, never for a single moment unmindful of the fact that the opposite chair was occupied. When I could no longer keep any attention on my book, I rose, determined to go to bed. As I rose, so did he, pushing back his chair as I moved mine. Something—call it fear if you will—made me pause, hesitatingly, as I reached the light switches. “I will send Smithson to put them out,” I murmured; but a faint soft chuckle fell on my ear as every light was instantly snapped out, and I felt someone pass me.

I managed to keep some sort of grip on myself as I sauntered through the hall, and leisurely made my way upstairs. Even. as I did so, I heard the soft steps, always furtive as they had been in life, follow me to the top, along the corridor, stopping only as they reached my door. Quickly I entered, slamming the door behind me, foolishly thinking here, at least, I should be free and alone. Alas for my hopes! I speedily learnt that not even here could that be so, no matter where I turned or what I did, those furtive steps followed. I tried to pray, to voice some feeble petition that this haunting presence might leave me. It was useless, or I was too powerless. Half frantic I sought my bedside where stood a small table on which was a framed photo of Alys. I picked it up, to gaze longingly at her sweet face, but the picture was seized from my hand and dashed violently on to the floor. With a smothered sob of grief and anger, I bent to pick it up, but ere I could do so, a hand was pressed heavily on my shoulder, and I raised my head to see a faint illumination—almost, it seemed to me, like a ring of light, in the centre of which stood—my brother! Pale, drawn, silent, he stood, with a faint mocking smile upon his lips, and a mark as of a rope showing plainly round his neck.

I remembered nothing more until I came to myself with Smithson bending over me, holding a glass, containing some spirits, to my lips.

“Smithson!” I gasped. “What is it? Where am I? What has happened?”

“I heard you call out, sir,” replied the imperturbable Smithson, “and I came, fortunately you had forgotten to lock your door, I found you on the floor, sir, with this broken glass picture alongside of you, sir. Did you slip, sir? Or were you ill?”

“Neither, Smithson,” I said, wildly. “I—I—oh—I can’t explain; you’d have me locked up as insane.”

For a moment Smithson eyed me, and then, in a voice more human than his “butler” voice, he said:

“I understand, sir, I understand, it is an awful thing, sir, but you are not alone in it, sire Mr. Basil has been with me too.”

“Been with *you*?” I echoed. “How do you mean, explain please, Smithson.”

“Yes, sir,” answered the man, “he, Mr. Basil, follows me about, has done ever, since he—be—you know, sir—he breaks things, upsets things, turns pictures face to the wall, rings bells, and if I answer them, I’ve heard him give that laugh of his, sort of mocks one, he does, sir, same as he used. He goes along to his own room, sir, and times I’ve gone in, and found the bed all crumpled up like as if someone slept in it, I don’t know if anyone else has heard him, and I’ve kept me mouth shut, sir, you know, beggin’ your pardon, sir, that Mr. Basil was never my favourite, and he seems to be set on paying me back for telling a few things I knew he had done, and blamed *you*, sir. One of the stable hands did tell me, someone had been playing pranks with the horses one night, though, and that all the beasts were uneasy and fidgetty, but I said nothing, and now, sir, here are you, on your first day downstairs, bothered same as I’ve been.”

“Smithson,” I said, “you’re a brick, don’t let us be beaten, be my friend, as well as my butler, and see this thing through together if we can.”

“I’m with you, sir,” answered the man, “there’s hand my on it, if I may make so free, you’ve been kind to me and mine always, sir, and I’ll not desert you. Shall I bring a camp-bed into your room, sir,” he added, in his usual matter-of-fact tones, “until you are well, Sir,—I’d better, I think.”

That night passed quietly, and I was awakened by Smithson at my side with a cup of tea, imperturbable as ever, all trace of his camp-bed removed ere he wakened me. I felt tired, yet in a sense alert, feeling as if I must get up in spite of weakness, for I had work to do which I intended to accomplish.

Gone, were the fears of last night, gone, the shaken nerves, I intended to win—I was *not* going to be beaten, trampled on mentally—if I may put it so, rendered unfit, by the haunting of my brother. Surely if his tricks were to be confined to the senseless jogging of chairs, breaking of glasses and such like, they were means of a paltry description, and I would speedily show him I was unaffected by them. So determined a clear brain, in a room full of brilliant morning sunshine! I spent a quiet morning, resting and reading, and decided I would after lunch, try what a gentle ride on my favourite horse would do towards restoring my former health and strength. It clouded over towards noon, but I rather liked grey clouds with a warm wind, and started off with a smile and nod to Smithson, who watched me start with rather a solemn look on his face, and a caution “not to overdo it, sir, first time.” Sultan was a little fresh at starting, but gradually settled down and we jogged along peacefully for an hour, when I thought, possibly by the time I got home, I would *not* have overdone it, first time. As we turned towards home, I noticed Sultan stumble.

“Steady, boy,” I murmured, “that is unlike you,” and bent to pat his satin, smooth neck. Before I touched him, he shied violently, nearly unseating me.

“I see nothing to shy at, boy,” I said, but my voice had no effect, and he suddenly stopped dead, beginning to quiver and shake.

Surely the beast’s ill, I thought, preparing to dismount and lead him, but he suddenly seemed to steady down and impatiently shook his head as if to loosen my restraining hand.

“Very well then,” I said, “go ahead,” and he started off obediently—probably a couple of hundred yards were accomplished when again the same sudden stop and quivering. My temper was rising, and I brought my whip down pretty sharply on his haunches. Instantly, he reared, and with a wild snort, set off at a gallop, heading for home; half a mile we galloped, when he paused again, but evidently with the recollection of my whip, did not stop, but giving a wild, terrified squeal as of terror, he took off and jumped probably nearly six feet high, as if over a high fence, and tore on down the road home, nor stopped until he pulled up of his own accord at the front door, where he stood quivering in every limb, with the sweat in gleaming patches staining his satin coat.

My return was greeted by a keen look and a profound silence on the part of Smithson, that is, until the library door closed behind him, as he followed me in. Nor did he then wait for me to speak, but his quick “What is it, sir?” seemed almost wrung from him. I answered somewhat curtly, feeling almost too worried to reply at all, describing the whole scene to him, seeing as I did so, that his opinion was also mine, my terrified horse had seen, feared, and finally jumped over something in the road, which I had only sensed and *not* seen—it was easy to visualize it, however, I had no doubt at all, nor do I think had Smithson, what or who stood in my way.

There seemed little to do, and less to say, so we parted, silently, Smithson to get me some tea, I to sink into a chair, light a pipe, and wonder—what next?

I was not left to wonder long, for Smithson, bringing in my tea tray, was followed diffidently, by Mary Higgs, my housemaid.

“Mary wishes to speak to you, sir,” murmured the man.

I looked up sharply, for this was an unusual proceeding.

“What is it, Mary?”

“Please, sir, I must leave,” gasped the scared-looking damsel.

“Oh?” I queried, “aren’t you comfortable?”

“Oh, yes, sir, very, it’s not that; I’m quite comfortable as far as the house goes but it’s the goings on, sir.

“Goings on!” I said.

“Yes, sir, it’s awful.”

“What is?” I asked.

“Well, sir,” she went on, growing garrulous, as these girls do, given an opportunity.

“It seems like as if someone else was always where I am.”

“Someone else always where *you* are?” I questioned. “Please explain, Mary.”

“Well, sir, if I’m doing your bed, someone pulls the sheet out of my hands, sir, and if I’m cleaning, my brushes and things are knocked down; and—and the worst is, sir, when I’m going upstairs at nights some one walks up behind me, and once, sir, a hand touched my face—a *cold* hand, sir; and, please, I must go, I couldn’t live here, it’s all so like Mr. Basil and his tricks, sir,” saying which, she burst into tears.

There was nothing I could say, so I paid her wages, murmured I was sorry, and sank back into my chair, feeling too exhausted and worried to go up and change.

“Bring me a bite to eat later, Smithson, here; I won’t change, I’m dead tired.”

“Yes, sir,” he answered, moving away with a backward glance at me, almost as if asking if he might stay; but I did not speak.

Daylight faded with a yellow gleam or two as a parting shot from the setting sun, and the room, which in ordinary times I had loved best in the twilight, now seemed to grow sombre, shadowy, eerie, or was it my imagination? I thought not, for I was conscious of a feeling of chilliness as I bent down and threw another log of wood on the fire.

I had every wish to get up, turn on all lights, dispel the gloom, but it seemed foolish, for it was still twilight; moreover, I felt a disinclination to move, or *was it inability?* Slowly the shadows deepened, immovable I sat, wanting to get up, yet fearing to attempt it, without knowing why; there I was, a fairly able-bodied man, to all appearances, comfortably-seated in a big arm-chair, before a glowing fire, in a room of which the appointments left nothing to be desired, surrounded by every comfort, needing but a touch to flood the room with brilliant though tastefully shaded electric light, but that touch—I could not give, I knew it, was conscious of it in every sense and nerve; knew that, free man as I appeared to be, I was bound in my chair as surely and safely as if I had been fastened with iron bands—I could not reach the bell. My tea was a thing of the past. Smithson, knowing my love of firelight and quiet, would probably leave the tea things unmoved for an hour, unless—and there lay my one and only hope—it occurred to his brain to come with some excuse, or without one, to see if “things” were all right. It was ridiculous, I argued with myself, to feel compelled to remain here; I would not, I would assert my boasted will-power and get up. As I determined this, a growing sense of weight oppressed-me, I struggled to rise, but invisible hands kept me down; invisible but plainly felt, their cold clamminess touching my face, my neck, my hair; I sank back, still with all my wits about me yet terror stricken, shivering. I felt something pass before my eyes, I can best describe it as a wet cloud; and, before my horror-stricken eyes, my room seemed to alter, walls seemed to fade, bookcases to recede; I seemed to see only high stone walls, a scaffold! God in heaven! and my brother hanging by the neck. I screamed, as I fought with my hands beating the air, as if to push this awful horror from me. Some maid must have heard me, for Smithson rushed in, to find me, fully conscious, panting, struggling. Instantly he raised me, carrying me to the window, which he flung open.

It was an hour later ere I could tell him the awful thing I had seen.

“Will you give it up, sir?” he asked, “and come away.”

“No!” I said, “not yet, though I may have to unless something else settles it; though what can, I do not know, for as he tortured me in his life, so my wretched brother is determined to torture me still.”

Rather to my surprise the remainder of the night passed quietly. I was correct, I think, in calling it “torture,” as, evidently, the torture was to be intermittent and just enough at a time to keep me perpetually in a state of nervous tension.

The day following my twilight horror I never saw nor heard anything unusual, but my household, stablemen, etc., were all subjected incessantly to discomforts and annoyances. Another maid gave me notice, and fled; a stable lad, with eyes all but jumping out of his head, shaking knees, and stammering speech, tried to tell me a garbled tale of the horses all taking fright and lashing out; all but Stella, my brother’s mare, who “whinnied, rubbing her soft nose up and down for all the world, sir, as she did when Mr. Basil petted her; and, please, I can’t bear it, sir, I’m off.” That left me with Smithson, my housekeeper, a pert kitchen girl, who boldly acclaimed she cared nought for spooks, and two men for the garden and stable. We all by this

time were fully alive to the trouble, but so far were all determined to see it through. I had my doubts.

The next day came, still quietness; what did it portend? For I could not think it meant *peace*. I knew my unhappy brother too well for that, still I was thankful for small mercies. What should I do with my quiet hours so long as they were left to me? thus I mused over my after-breakfast pipe. Should I ride? I thought not; that was to court trouble. Should I walk? I did not think so; for, though honourably acquitted, the village folks, and others, too, still looked at me askance, nor seemed anxious to rush to me. I would not give them the chance to cold-shoulder me. The other direction from the village? No; I could see the spinny from every side, some day I might walk past it, but not yet; there was therefore nothing left but a prowling in the grounds, read, or write. I was just about to get my cap, when a sudden ring of the front door bell made me hesitate. I would wait a minute, just in case a friend had called to look me up; but alas! for my hopes, it was only a telegram, brought up by Smithson.

“Any reply, sir?” he asked. I opened it, read it and re-read it.

“I don’t understand,” I said. “You know I’ve never left ‘the place, Smithson, but this is from a friend I had once in London—

The wire read—

“Don’t ever come to see me again. I wanted to see you—I would have made friends—but you have spoiled it coming like that. ALYS.”

“Say ‘No reply,’ Smithson,” I managed to say, “and don’t come until I ring,” saying which I closed the door, once again reading my wire. “Alys!” What did it all mean? “I would have made friends”—oh, how my heart beat at the thought of such happiness—“but you have spoiled it coming like that.” Like what? I wondered, for full well I knew what had happened. Alys must be back in her studio. Basil must have shown himself to her as of old pretending to be me. But how? What had he done? Oh, God! show me a way out of my misery. What will quieten the unrestful spirit of my brother; will nothing make him cease his persecution of me—living or dead?

Long I sat, with my head bowed on my hands. I saw no way out, I was helpless. Even my loved little girl could have come back to me, but he had prevented that. It would have been better if my life had paid forfeit, for to live in such misery was beyond my power.

Should I go to Alys, throw myself on her mercy, tell her the whole story; let Smithson do his share. Could we convince her; and if we did, to what end? She had failed me in my hour of dire need, but that it was not entirely her fault had been explained. I would go to her. This decision made, I was restless for daylight so that I could go at once.

Next morning I was up early, catching the first train up to town, carefully avoiding, as far as possible, those of my neighbours who were likewise bent on London.

Usually, I enjoyed walking through the streets, having a look at shops and people; but to-day I was too intent upon my errand to loiter by the way, so hailed the first taxi, bidding the man drive quickly to Chelsea, when I would further direct him. As we neared the block of buildings where the studio was, my courage began to ebb. I almost wished I had not come, as, with trembling knees, I climbed the worn stairs, halted for an instant before the dull brown door with its old knocker, noticing, as I did so, that the copper plate with Alys’ name on it was shiny and bright. Then she *is* here, I thought, and knocked my own familiar knock. The door opened slowly, and Alys stood before me, wearing an old green overall as in days gone by. She stood an instant looking at me before she spoke, then asked in ice-cold tones—

“Why have you come?”

“Let me come in,” I said, “I have much to say; be just if you cannot be kind, for the sake of old times.

Something in my voice must have touched her, for she drew back, motioning to me with her hand to enter.

I did so, and felt the same restful calm steal over me, as I had ever done in her quiet studio, here, shut in from all sounds, save the dull rumble of the busy world outside.

Fear left me, cares seem to lessen; for a brief moment I even forgot what had brought me here, so happy and at rest did I feel. Quite quietly, just in her low, sweet tones I had loved so well Alys spoke to me. Will you please sit down, she said, and then, as if she too remembered, her voice altered, becoming cold, as if she spoke to a stranger, as she added: “And kindly explain why you have come in spite of my wire, telling you *not* to come again.”

“Again!” I said. “I have not been before, not since my trouble.”

She laughed a little mocking laugh.

“You are pleased to add untruthfulness to the rest of your horrible behaviour,” she said.

“I am telling you the truth,” I answered, “absolute truth!”

“Truth!” she replied. “You don’t, apparently, now the meaning of it. You came here, you gave me the Lotus Flower signal, I let you into the studio, where you stood laughing at me; I thought you must be drunk, until you touched me and your hand was as cold as death. You walked round my room, you upset my things. I begged you to go, you did not answer, only looked at me with the expression of a fiend, your eyes sunken, your face ghastly. And then you held my face between your two horrible cold hands, and I felt myself going faint; I screamed, and my charwoman came in. You must have slipped out as she came in, I did not see you go; and now you sit there telling me you have not been here, and you talk about ‘truth.’ *Why are you here again* I ask?”

“Will you hear me patiently?” I said; “hear my story, and then judge me. I will prove to you *I* was *not* here.”

She seated herself some little distance from me, merely inclining her head to tell me to proceed.

Carefully, without exaggeration, I told my tale. She listened unmoved, for a while, but gradually I saw a dawning interest in her eyes, when I told of the receipt of her wire after the morning I had spent of indecision, and for which Smithson could vouch; she seemed to become suddenly alert, and rising from her seat, came swiftly to me.

“Your story,” she began, “sounds an improbable yarn. There are but two small items that make me even half inclined to believe you. The first—I know it was *not* you who sent me the false telegram, which resulted in my being kept a prisoner until your trial was over. I will tell you about that horrible time later on. The second item—whoever it was who came here, purporting to be you, did not give your signal on the knocker, and to-night I heard it; I felt I *must* open the dooz’. I am glad I did; but, oh! your story is too horrible to believe. I must prove it; I must know. May I return with you; your housekeeper will, I know, look after me. There are things I *must* find out; will you let me come?”

Would I let her come? Dear heaven! how my heart beat at the mere thought of it! Alys, *my* one and only love, under my roof! But I must not frighten her, so merely said—

“Yes, come, my housekeeper shall look after you; come by all means if you are not afraid.”

So within an hour we left together, managed to find a quiet place for some food, sent a wire to Smithson to order the car to meet the evening train from town, and to tell Mrs. Goodson, my housekeeper, to prepare rooms for a lady. We caught a train about four, arriving at our station

somewhere about eight, where the run-a-bout met us. The short distance to “The Park” was soon covered, though it, like the rest of our journey, was almost passed in silence. I helped Alys out, handing her bag to Smithson, with the remark—

“All well, Smithson?”

“Fairly so, sir,” was his reply.

“Miss Stainton,” I said, turning to Alys, “if you will come now, I will take you to Mrs. Goodson. Dinner will be ready when you are, unless you prefer to have some sent up to your room.”

“Thanks,” she answered; “I will come down.

I bowed; and seeing Mrs. Goodson coming towards us, I gave Alys into her capable charge, merely saying—

“Miss Stainton is an old friend, look well after her.”

It was about half-an-hour later when we met at the foot of the stairs—both, apparently, intent upon our own thoughts; both trying to keep up a chilly reserve, and more or less succeeding.

Mrs. Goodson, so I learnt subsequently, was inclined to be censorious on the subject of my having a lady guest in the absence of what she considered a proper chaperon, possibly it was unorthodox, but so were the circumstances; moreover, I could not well explain that this visit of Miss Stainton’s was by her own desire to see if I was, to put it baldly, telling her yarns by way of clearing myself in her eyes; I could see she was only half inclined to believe me in my denial of going to her studio and behaving strangely; I was also pretty certain that she did not believe at all my story of the wretched brother’s haunting of me—to this end she had come as my guest, to prove me. I knew it, felt it in her gravely-disapproving green eyes, as she faced me during dinner. It remained to be seen whether or not anything would happen to upset the theory, which I was convinced she held, that I was either bad, or mad.

It was a farce of the first water, that tête-à-tête dinner of ours; conversation was impossible, long silences hung with oppression over us. I, at least, could not help comparing it as it was, with the might have been, if things had not gone so much awry with me.

Smithson waited upon us with much solicitude, and had just put dessert upon the table, lowered the lights round the room, leaving only the softly-shaded little lights in the centre of the table, then withdrew, with his usual manner of—

“I will put coffee in the library, sir,” and closed the door softly behind him, leaving us alone, at least, I suppose so, though I was not by any means sure.

“Will you excuse me, Mr. York?” asked Alys, rising hurriedly, as she spoke; “I— I am rather cold.”

“It is cold,” I said; “but please come for some coffee, the library will be warmer.”

“Not unless you insist,” she replied.

“I cannot, of course, insist,” I said, “but I do ask you to give me all the help you can.”

“Very well,” she murmured, “for half-an-hour I will come, but—I do not believe your tales.”

I bowed in answer, as I held the door open for her to pass through, steps, other steps than hers were plainly audible.

I noticed a startled expression flit across her face, then she paused, looking at me, as if questioning. I smiled, endeavouring to be reassuring, and we crossed the dim hall side by side, her little high-heeled shoes making a click on the polished floor, my heavier tread beside her, and close behind us those other steps—unmistakable. We ignored them by tacit consent, and entered the library. I pulled the arm-chair close to the fire for her, heaping cushions at her back, and asked if she would pour out coffee while I got my cigarettes.

In spite of all I had gone through, I found myself hoping that the horrors might be repeated, if only to convince Alys of my truthfulness. I even felt it would be happiness if, in terror, she looked to me for help, already I knew she had heard the steps, what else might she not see, and hear. My spirits rose as I pictured her face, when she really had to believe me and knowing her generous heart, I felt it was only a matter of time ere we were once more lovers, without a cloud between us. Having possessed myself of my smokes, we sat in silence, one on either side of the fire, with the coffee tray between us. It was a unique situation, for, to all intents and purposes, we were host and guest, and yet we sat there as strangers, so far as any attempt at conversation or interest in each other went.

One hour passed in almost total silence! Uneasily, I watched her as she sat cold, immovable, each moment, as it passed, seeming to add a harder, sterner line to her pale face. Ten o'clock sounded as she rose to her feet, saying, as she looked at me with scornful eyes—

“I might have known. But I felt I must give you what appeared to be your one, chance—the chance to prove you were telling me the truth. I disregarded conventionality, I have braved the gossip that must follow me; I came to your house, and I learn nothing. Not one thing which you have put forward as your plea has happened; I do not believe in your story of haunting. I believe you to be an unscrupulous man, and I consider you have added insult to the rest of your horribleness. I refuse to see or speak to you ever again!”

In silence I held the door open for her, but as I watched her go slowly up the stairs I heard her little laugh as she spoke to Mrs. Goodson, and the laugh hurt me more than all. Perhaps I had not yet learned that women can, and do, laugh and jest with breaking hearts; laugh until none could dream that beneath the gaiety lies sorrow little dreamed of. I learned it later, but then, I believed that Alys truly felt nothing more than distrust and dislike of me, or perhaps even amusement.

I returned to my chair, as sad a man as one could find, frantically cursing my brother, that he could even withhold what I needed, to help me to happiness. I groaned aloud: “If you had shown yourself to-night, I might ever have forgiven you!” burst from my lips almost involuntarily. I was answered from the opposite chair by a low, ironical laugh! It was my last straw. I felt I could not endure anything more, so made my way to my room, determined if sleep as well as all else forsook me, I would drink until oblivion came. *I*, even I, who all my life had been abstemious would now drown my troubles in drink—was my mental state; and to what it would have led me, I dare not think, but for the simple fact that, as I passed the door of the room where Alys was, my steps were arrested by the sound of low sobbing, such sounds as few men could hear unmoved, and yet to me it brought a rush of joy, checking once and for all my idea of weakly drowning my trouble in drink. I dare not knock or whisper a word, as with a full heart I went on towards my room, sure only of one thing, the laugh I had previously heard had not meant either indifference or amusement, it was, I felt sure, only to hide her real feelings, which I had discovered unwittingly, and which I must therefore ignore.

The following day, after a sleepless night, I was not awakened by Smithson until almost ten o'clock, and then he told me Miss Stainton had gone by the early tram, bidding him tell me she would write, and regretting her hasty departure. This I knew to be a polite fiction for the benefit of the household, nor did I ever receive the promised but unexpected letter.

I wrote once to the studio, but my letter was returned through the dead letter office, which seemed the ending of my brief love story. I made many attempts to discover Alys's whereabouts from some of our mutual Bohemian friends. One and all these so-called friends ignored and finally cut me, and my life was one endless weary round of trouble.

All my staff had now left, except Smithson and Mrs. Goodson. We shut up most of the house, and I lived through days, weeks, months of brooding isolation. Once the neighbouring clergyman called, but he was a man of narrow views, and his visits were hours of torture to me; and I think he always left me sure in his own mind that either I was mad, or that my house was possessed by evil spirits, brought there by my own evil thoughts. In my distress I asked him could he not pray and thus help me to rid myself of the persistent haunting of my brother. He listened, with a pious face of horror, as I told him a little of my story, but assured me, with a pitying smile meant to humour me, that; so far, he was not aware of anything abnormal! This was true, horribly true; my wretched brother appeared to take infinite care that nothing abnormal should occur, if ever there was anyone present likely to be of help to me. Even Smithson, with earnest desire to help me, had on several occasions asked his crony, Constable Gill, to smoke a pipe with him; but, invariably, the house was silent on these occasions, except in my own rooms, and Gill would leave, believing me mad, and admiring Smithson for his assiduous care of “the poor gentleman.” And so it went on—by day, I was tormented; by night, it was even more hideous. It sounds so little as I tell it, yet imagine yourself for even *one* day always conscious that you were *never* alone. At my meals I always heard another chair drawn up to the table, as I moved through the house those other steps kept pace with mine, at nights I was disturbed in a dozen ways, and an unusually calm day was invariably followed by a night of horror. The chilliness of my room, causing my teeth to chatter, always heralded the arrival of my wretched brother, and if, as sometimes happened, I felt resigned to my fate, and more or less inert, it was then I would not only hear him, but see him, pale, shadowy, with a mocking smile upon his lips, and always the awful mark as of a rope around his neck. I realized, to the full, now what he meant by his words to the chaplain of the prison: “Tell my brother his life will not be a calm one, in spite of my death to spare an innocent man.” And I knew also what I had done when I asked him to live in the house with me; *that* was the meaning of his mocking smile—he did dwell with me, I was *never* free from him. I had tried, as time went on, absence from home; I had even gone abroad; nothing availed me, so I returned where, at least, I had the material comforts of my home.

Thus, one year passed, solitary, isolated, alone, except—always except—for the company of my brother. I lived the life of a hunted animal, daily seeking sanctuary but finding none, my health undermined by days of torture and sleepless nights, all pleasure long since gone; my stables were empty, I could neither keep horses nor men in any semblance of peace; my gardens were mere wildernesses, for no man would remain to see his work mutilated and spoiled. It had even happened that when I once found a book which held my attention to the exclusion of all else for a few brief hours, that same book was removed from the table whereon I had placed it, and I found it battered, torn, illegible, on the floor.

I had resolutely kept my vow, I had not degraded myself by drink, but at last, after a severe nervous breakdown, had given Smithson the excuse he had long sought to call in a medical man. I permitted it because the local doctor, a man well known to me and my family, was, I learnt, absent from home, his place being filled for the time by a young man from London. Knowing him to be a stranger, trusting also that there had not been sufficient time for him to have heard the local version of my affairs, I permitted him to be called in. He did not stay long on the first visit, nor did he allow me to talk but left me some medicine and the assurance that it would bring me needed sleep. It did, but it brought me more—it brought me a man to whom I could open my over-burdened heart, sure of his understanding. I asked Dr. Willis if he was not afraid of administering sleeping drugs to a man in my condition, but his repeated assurances that I must

have plenty of grit to battle as I had done, heartened me, gave me confidence, and he acceded to my request to spend all his leisure with me with whole-hearted alacrity.

As usual my tortures ceased when the doctor entered, to commence again the instant the door closed behind him, but on one never-to-be-forgotten day he came prepared to spend the whole day. We lunched, and I, as ever, was at once aware that my constant visitor was close at hand, but I was surprised when Dr. Willis suddenly exclaimed—

“How cold it is, York!”

I smiled in answer, and he at once understood that we were *not*, as he supposed, alone! Colder and more icily chill grew the room, until our teeth chattered. At last Dr. Willis rose.

“For God’s sake, York, let’s get out of this,” burst from his lips.

“Very well,” I said, “we will try the library.” As ever, the room looked the acme of comfort.

“Ah! this is better,” said Willis, drawing a chair nearer to the fire, sinking into it with a sigh of relief, only to spring from it with an oath, as he gasped—

“There’s someone else sitting in it.”

“Of course,” I murmured; “there usually is.”

“Man!” he said. “It is a marvel to me you are not a maniac.”

“I should be,” I replied, “save for one fact—my never slackening desire to prove to a woman, whom I love, that I am neither a maniac nor a liar!”

“You shall prove it,” he said, “for I will help you.”

As he spoke, there was a crash, splintering the mirror behind us into a thousand fragments.

“That is a mere nothing,” I assured him; “nothing is safe.”

“But,” he said, “I don’t understand.”

“Nor I,” I answered.

“I mean, I don’t understand the reason, the wherefore,” he said. “I am as hard-hearted as most men, harder than a good many, but I suppose even the hardest of us have a soft line somewhere, some dim recollection, maybe, of stories told at our mother’s knee, of angel guardians, stories of good folks who died, and went to Heaven. One reads, of course, that people claim to have seen the spirits of those departed come back to earth. I have even read of pranks played in old houses, but that any spirit can come again and carry on a systematic degraded existence, be it here or on some sphere, I can’t grasp. Where can such a being dwell, to whom practices of this kind are of the slightest satisfaction?”

“I don’t know,” I answered. “I am almost as much at sea as you are, doctor. I say *almost*, because during these last months I have abandoned my former studies and have read and studied every book on occult matters I could lay my hands upon. There is, I find, a theory amongst certain students of the occult, to the effect that ‘the very lowest planes of the Astral world are filled with souls of a gross type—undeveloped and animal life, Who live as near as possible the lives they lived on earth.’ Also the particular book in which I read this goes on to say—‘About the only thing they gain being the possibility of their living out their gross tastes and becoming sick and tired of it all, thus allowing them to develop a longing for Higher things . . . these undeveloped souls cannot, of course, visit the upper planes, etc. . . . they often flock back as near to earth as possible.’ There is a good deal more, but something of this kind may control, so to speak, the actions of my unhappy brother. His life here was *not* an elevated one, his tastes and ways were of a low order, and I take it that his hurried passing from here to wherever he has gone, left him no time for either repentance or desire to become a better man. It’s a horrible theory, but I can find no other. The only chance for him and for me then, seems to be, that something will so sicken him of his present life, that he may be moved to long for some higher

plane, and therefore attain it; but what must it be that will help him? and where can I turn to find it?"

The doctor shook out his pipe, and refilled it, before he spoke; then, to my amazement, he said, quietly, and in most matter-of-fact voice:

"Love might do it. You spoke of a woman you loved; there was once, long ago, such a woman in my life. She died, but the love she scattered lives on, and many people still bless her dear name. I often chided her for working too hard amongst the poor souls where my earlier work was done. She never spared herself, early and late she nursed and toiled amongst the sick; and when I would have checked her, she would answer brightly—'We only pass this way once, let me help all I can.' She died six months later of diphtheria, caught from a child she nursed devotedly; and if your theory is in any way correct, then there are men and women too, whose lives hereafter will be on a higher plane than they would have been, but for the example of her unswerving unselfishness, and noble aims. Can you not get this girl you love to help you?"

I answered him sadly enough, by giving him a resumé of my happy days with Alys, and my subsequent meetings and disappointments.

"She must be made to understand," he said. "Sooner or later she must realise the truth. I will think it over, and now, 'Good night'; I must leave you, although I hate to do so."

Left to my loneliness once more, I pondered deeply over my friend's words—"Love might do it." Aye, it might, if only it could! Here my reflections were broken in upon by the steady knocking, as of a hammer, on first one, then another, of the chairs or tables in the room, followed, as always, by the icy chilliness of the room. This hammering was a recent form of torture, generally occurring when I was either in deep thought or reading. It effectually put a stop to either as a rule; but to-night, I was determined to continue the thinking-out process, so sat apparently unmoved, though fully conscious that the room grew perceptibly colder, and that the dreaded presence hovered close. I was correct in my surmise, for now, two icy hands passed themselves over my eyes, encircling, as it were, my head also in their cold grasp. The pressure was intense, as if my head was in a vice of marble coldness; the sweat began to break out on me, in awful fear, as I sat there, failing now to think at all, conscious only that in another instant I should faint or scream—tighter, tighter, grew the clasp, gradually moving lower, lower, lower, so gradually, that I did not realise at once that the vice-like grip was now over my nose. Then my mouth and ears were covered and held, lower—and oh, God! the grasp was at my throat; tighter, tighter, that awful icy clasp; on my throat the pressure seemed now to concentrate into a tight line round my throat, as of a rope. I knew it, knew in a brief moment of horror, that it was a hangman's rope that I was held by! Slowly I felt myself lifted, my feet no longer rested on the ground, I was suspended by the neck in mid-air. I was being hanged, though gradually, to spin out as it were a torture that would in ordinary event be swift. I felt myself gasping, choking—and knew no more. I learnt later that Dr Willis had returned, having forgotten his pipe, and had found me rigid, cold in my chair, my collar and tie lying on the floor, and a blood-red mark round my throat. When he left the house again, he took me with him, and for some months nursed me back to life, in his own house in London, where he took me the instant the local doctor returned to his own duties. In Dr. Willis' pretty home I recovered some of my former health; and though, at times, I was still subjected to persecution by my brother, I had help at hand, and was no longer alone to endure it.

At last came one never-to-be-forgotten night. Willis had been out spending the evening with friends, leaving me alone. During those hours, I endured every conceivable torment from my haunting brother, and I was reduced to a quivering bunch of nerves by the time Willis returned.

He saw at once that all was not well with me, nor did he need any spoken word to show him I was in the last stage of exhaustion.

“Doctor,” I began, but he cut me short—

“Don’t say it,” he ordered. “I can see you are at the end of your endurance, but you will not end your torture by taking your own life.”

I stared at him, for though I had never hinted such a thing to him, this end of my trouble had lately been much in my mind.

“Cheer up, old man” he went on. “I have another solution, but first I must give you a dose to pull you together, then I have something to tell you; and when I have told you, don’t put me down as an interfering ass. As you know, I have spent the evening with some friends, but they are an unconventional crowd, mostly artists or writers. I am an outsider, but more or less am one of them, at heart, at least, and they dub me their Medico. To-night the talk turned on ghosts, and hauntings. A young fellow, gave us a strange story of a man he knew, who was, so the man said, ‘haunted’ by the spirit of his brother who had been hanged for murder. Do you follow me, old man. I found myself listening to *your* story, as seen from another point of view. One or two present believed it, and pitied you; several derided it; and a little girl, who had listened silently and attentively throughout, announced that she believed it to be a fabrication right through, that she had reason to know this haunted man, as he called himself, was an untruthful, unscrupulous man, but added she would like to prove his story true, for several reasons. I saw at once that chance, Providence—call it what you will, had led me face to face with the girl you love, and put into my hands, perhaps, a better way of helping you than with my drugs. To cut my story short, I managed to get introduced to Miss Stainton, and in a very few moments I had interested her in a case of haunting which was in my care. She listened, open-eyed, believed me, and then rather falteringly asked me could I not get to know her friend and find out if he also was truly, as he believed, haunted. Little by little I led her on, until she confessed to me that she loved this man, but had no reason to believe him, and every reason to distrust him. Then, and then only, I, too, confessed, told her it was you; and at this moment she awaits a sign or message from you, telling her you forgive all her doubt of you.

Gone were my fears, gone my wish to end my life!

“Doctor,” I said, grasping his hand, “you give me hope, but, alas! I am a broken-down man, I dare not ask a girl to share such a life.”

“Try it,” he answered. “Who knows that love and all the inspiration it brings, may not help, try it.”

That night, my brother stood beside my bed until early dawn, the old mocking smile upon his lips, I closed my eyes, his cold hand was laid on my face; I opened them, to see him always at his post beside me. As my thoughts wandered to Alys, he shook his fist menacingly at me, his expression seeming to say:

“Do not dare to get the better of me.”

With love in my heart, I dared it all. I rose early and sent a messenger to the address Willis had given me, then waited.

She did not keep me long in suspense, for shortly after breakfast was over the maid announced:

“Miss Stainton for the doctor.”

Willis looked at me, motioned me to go, and with faltering steps I entered his study.

“Alys,” I murmured, fearing almost to put out my hand, “you have come.”

For an instant she looked at me, then, with a sob, was in my arms.

“Do you believe me?” I asked.

“Can you ask?” she answered. “I should not be here unless I did. Dr. Willis convinced me that you spoke the truth, and that I had wrongfully judged you. I am here because I love you, here if you love me, to help you.”

“I have never ceased to love you, dear,” I answered. “But I dare not ask you to share my haunted, troubled life.”

“I *am* going to share it, however, and it may be neither troubled nor haunted, we will see.”

About a week after this meeting, a quiet wedding took place at a Registry Office. It was not the wedding I would have chosen for my little girl, but we judged it best, as she insisted upon my not going back home alone. We two, and our friend Willis, had a merry little luncheon later, and then my wife and I travelled home.

Once again my home became a real home. In it love ruled and reigned supreme. Alys’ life, her ideas, her aims, were so pure, so true, so noble, that gradually the evil sounds in my house began to grow less and less, until one winter’s day, she had been out all afternoon, I did not know where, and I had been alone; she came in about five, and found me in the library, deep in thought; and, kneeling down on the hearth rug, began to tell me where she had been.

As she began, I suddenly saw the old familiar, queer light begin to appear in the dim room. She saw it, too, and raising her head, looked before her, with shining eyes.

“Basil,” she called, “have you come to say you are sorry?”

I gazed at her, wonderingly, for, as she spoke, the form of my brother stood before us, one pale hand was laid upon her little head, the other was outstretched to me, as with a sorrowful smile he softly vanished, leaving behind him for an instant, a glowing radiant light, in place of the cold, chilly gleams which formerly came and went with him.

Then silence fell upon us.

“Tell me where you have been,” I asked her, in a few moments.

Shyly she answered:

“I went to put flowers on the grave of Esmé Simpson,” she said, “and I got permission from the governor of the prison to lay a tiny wreath on the earth where your poor sinning brother lay.”

Probably it is an unknown thing, I have never heard of it being done, that someone could so think of a murderer as to pity him and softly lay a flower upon so dishonoured a grave; but maybe the very act of love would inspire the unhappy soul to long for better higher things; and in the eyes of his Maker, repent and struggle to atone in the Great Beyond for the sin he committed on earth. I may, or I may not be right in my theory, but I prefer to think that this act of tender love on the part of my dearly-loved little girl was the means of aiding my unhappy brother, as her tender love and devotion helped and strengthened all with whom she came in contact. Be this as it may, from that day onwards our home and ourselves were free from all trace of haunting. As the years passed, they only served to hold us firmer in our endeavours, as they held us more and more securely in bonds of love, faith and comradeship.

Nothing could shake our trust and love for each other, devotion seemed almost a weak word to express all that we lavished on each other. Dr. Willis, our most valued friend, stayed with us often, and had been heard so say, jokingly, he wouldn’t mind being haunted, if it brought such happiness, though he and I knew it was love for “all things great and small” that brought happiness to us, as it must to all.