

# The Black Pool

By Frederick Stuart Greene

The heavy, wrought-iron gates of the Van Norden estate stand now grimly closed. The driveway leading to the deserted house on the hill stretches weed-grown and unused between the double row of blight-killed chestnuts. But it is not the dead trees, towering bark-stripped and bleached, that halt the trespasser; in the glen to the right, hidden from the road, lies the dread spot of the neighbourhood. Here, shut in by crowded locust trees, their scraggy tops thrust high above a thicket of underbrush and tangled cat-briar, gleams the sombre surface of Black Pool.

The Van Norden family had tried for years to have their lake called Mirror Pool. But the native Long Islander frowned; Black Pool it had been in his grandfather's time, and Black Pool it must stay. And yet the word "mirror" fits well this long, narrow pond. The trees on its banks meet with scarcely a break above the still water, the growing leaves on the spread branches throw always a dense shade across the dark surface; the dead leaves, falling season after season, sink to the bottom, and rotting build up an ever-thickening mould of inky blackness which makes the clear water reflect distinctly every object on the shores.

A black pool it is, and a black mirror as well—a mirror into which none now care to gaze. In winter the skater's laughter sounds no more on the pond; the voices of those once eager to use its frozen surface, no longer stir the silence of the fatal place. After nightfall, winter or summer, the passerby turns far aside to avoid its dismal banks.

The once fine bath house stands now at crazy angles, its sagging walls, paint-scaled and blotched, buckle under the burden of its leaking roof. Black Pool, once the pride of the Van Nordens, now lies a deserted tarn amid the neglected grounds of a desolate estate.

In the grey stone house, a half-mile away through the woods, lived, fifty odd years ago, the chief actors in the tragedy that gave Black Pool its blacker history. To the master and mistress of this ill-fated home twins had come, boys, such striking duplicates that only their mother could instantly tell them apart; acquaintances, even old friends, were forced to wait, uncertain, until one or the other had spoken. Speech lessened the difficulty of recognition, for the Van Norden brothers had escaped one drawback of twin life: individual personalities had been granted them. Schuyler Van Norden was quick in speech, action and temper; Allan Van Norden was thoughtful, slow-speaking, slow to wrath. But the one sure sign that distinguished them was the difference in their laughs. Schuyler, amused, would draw his brows to a swift frown, then throw his head far back and break into a big, full laugh. Allan's appreciation of humour was more quiet, his laugh never started with the contradictory frown nor was followed by the thrown back head. Schuyler was the nervous, dashing leader, Allan the steady, strong wheel-horse of the tandem.

During their school years the twins were for the Judge and Mrs. Van Norden an unending subject for friendly debate. Their mother, a contented smile lighting her face, would declare:

"Schuyler will distinguish himself at the bar. Those quick changes in voice would make a famous actor—not, of course, that such a career is fitting." And her handsome head would nod confidently.

The Judge, taking long pulls at his meerschaum, would open for his client.

"Allan is steady; long making up his mind, but once made—still water, my dear, still water."

The old saw that brothers must fight, seemed doomed to fail with the Van Norden twins. As the years sped past, the threads of their lives knitted ever to a closer mesh.

When the last examination at the preparatory school was passed, Judge Van Norden laughed contentedly behind his white beard.

“Haven’t I held for Allan all along? Not first in his class, but where was your Schuyler?”

Mrs. Van Norden fanned placidly, her smile unclouded.

“Who was given the leading part in the school play?”

The Judge, smoking in thoughtful silence, conceded her point. Across the many acres of their land, the contented mother and father watched the setting sun drop into the hills beyond the far shore of the red-tinted Sound.

Then again Mrs. Van Norden’s pleasant voice:

“Just wait, college will be the real test; friends count.”

The line between the Judge’s brows deepened.

“I surprised the scamps to-day, caught them smoking those new-fangled cigarettes. Schuyler burnt his hand.” His frown eased. “Allan, the rascal, only laughed: ‘Caught me fair that time, your Honour.’”

In their senior year at college an incident occurred that would have scored a point for the Judge had any whisper of it reached Black Pool, but the brothers never spoke of the affair, and the few other witnesses were sworn to silence by Nicholas Porter, the most intimate friend Allan had made at the university. During this last year of their college life Schuyler’s evenings were not always spent with his more studious brother. On a night shortly before finals, Allan, tired of waiting, closed his book and paced the floor uneasily. When the college clock struck the single note of the new morning, he frowned and going to the window peered through the rain-splashed glass. The row of lights, bordering the wet walks, flickered dimly above a deserted campus.

Schuyler rushed into the room and threw himself on a chair.

“Say something!” he cried. “Speak to me, Allan!”

“What’s the trouble, Schuyler; lost heavily tonight? I’m ahead of my allowance, you know.”

The wish to aid gave a deeper tone to Allan’s slow voice.

For long no word came. The rain lashing against the windows made the only sound in the room.

Allan took his brother’s head between both hands and forced Schuyler to meet his eyes. Their two faces, one drawn by despair, the other furrowed by anxiety, were as like as a face before a mirror and the reflection in the glass.

“Now tell me, Schuy.”

“It was—” Schuyler’s eyes dropped before Allan’s steady look. “I’ve been accused of cheating!”

“Hell!” Allan sprang back, his face white for the instant before the blood surged up to his temples. “Who accused you?”

“Foley.”

“And you’ve killed him.” Allan’s words were spoken slowly.

“No! No! Not that!”

“Then what did you do?”

“I—why, I—I didn’t do anything.”

“Are you telling me that you let John Foley accuse you of cheating and get off scot free?” The question came in slower dismay.

"I was so—so——Oh, Allan, I didn't know what to do!" Schuyler crouched lower in the chair and covered his eyes.

Wonder held Allan silent. Was this shrinking man before him his brother? The muscles at his throat tightened; slowly the colour left his face. Could it be possible that—? No! The thought shamed him. It was sheer amazement—that was it—amazement! A Van Norden accused of cheating at cards! It was the absurdity of it that had stunned Schuyler beyond action.

"I understand, Schuyler," Allan's arm was about his brother's shoulder, "it's all right. This is my affair now."

The look in Schuyler's eyes made Allan turn hastily away. He crossed the room and taking up a heavy cane hurried down the hall to halt before a room from which came the sound of loud voices.

Allan threw the door open. Instantly silence fell, the men about the card-table stood, each holding the pose Allan's coming had caught.

"I'm *Allan* Van Norden!"

The announcement eased the tension. Allan looked deliberately from one excited face to the other, to end, at last, at a heavy-eyed, heavily built man across the table from him.

"My brother, Schuyler, tells me that Foley, here, has accused him of cheating. Does any other man in the room back this accusation?" Again he searched each face. "I see that none of you do; and for the good reason that Foley lied!" He wheeled upon the heavy-eyed man. "Now, Mr. Foley, you'll tell these gentlemen that my brother did not cheat, and that you lied when you said that he did!"

Foley stepped back, dragging a chair clear from the table.

"Like hell, I will! I said he cheated and I say so again!"

Allan sprang for him. The chair fell hard against his shoulder, he wrenched it from Foley's grasp and sent it flying across the room. At the same instant he brought the heavy cane crashing to the man's head. Before any one could close in, Allan, holding Foley to his feet, struck again. The second blow split the man's scalp, opening a long gash.

Nicholas Porter was the first to reach the struggling pair. He threw his arms about Allan and dragged him back. Some one seized Foley and the fighting men were finally torn apart. "Stop! You crazy man!" Allan heard Porter yell over his shoulder. "You'll kill him!"

"That's what I'm going to do," Allan panted. "He said my brother cheated! Let me go, damn you!"

Foley had sunk to the floor.

"Allan, what in Heaven's name has come over you? The man's down! You can't hit him. He's out, I tell you!"

Porter's words steadied Allan; after a moment he turned from the fallen man and let his friend take him back to his rooms. But during the few hours still left of that night no sleep came to Allan; he passed them in after thoughts of his act. His friends, he knew, had been surprised at the outburst; but he felt more than surprise, he was amazed to know for the first time the whirlwind force of his passion.

The Van Norden twins began the real work of life in the law office of their father. Here, as at college, Allan was the sure plodder. It was nearly a year after Schuyler's maiden speech at the bar, that Allan felt himself competent to address a jury. When, however, he had done so, speaking in his slow, distinct manner, the Court complimented the young attorney on his handling of the case.

It was but a short time after this success of Allan's that the first blow was struck at the happiness of the family at Black Pool; Judge Van Norden's long life came to an honoured end. Both the boys felt keenly their loss, but realising their mother's greater sorrow, did all they could to comfort her. It was Allan, however, who remembered that a cushion adds to the comfort of elderly ladies; that open windows behind his mother's chair were not safe. When, after a time, the stately old lady took again her place in her world, esquired by her tall sons, Schuyler was the first of her knights to talk or dance with some pretty girl.

There came a day, about a year after the Judge's death, when Schuyler failed to meet his brother for the one afternoon train that ran in those times. That night was the first the twins had ever spent under separate roofs.

When Allan reached home he told his mother all the news the papers had furnished for the day, hoping his talk would cause her to think lightly of Schuyler's absence. When the stock of press items ran short, he turned to local affairs. He had heard they were to have a neighbour; the place next to Black Pool had been rented by a Mr. Reid, a widower with an only daughter.

The first Sunday after these new neighbours were established in their home, Mrs. Van Norden ordered the carriage, and in spite of her sons' pleadings to be let off, insisted that they go with her for this duty call.

Mr. Reid welcomed his visitors. His daughter, he explained, had gone to the stables to look over a newly arrived saddle horse, but would be with them presently.

"We must reopen the gate between our places," Mrs. Van Norden said graciously; "it has been nailed up for two years now. It's about half a mile through the woods to our house, you know."

They were in the midst of one of those general locality descriptions usual to first calls; Schuyler was fluently sketching the neighbourhood, when he stopped abruptly.

Marion Reid had come through the door.

Schuyler sprang forward; and Allan thought he held the offered hand longer than necessary.

As the girl greeted his mother her profile was turned to Allan. Could her full face be lovelier? Certainly the line of her strong chin, the delicate curve of her throat, were unmatched by any he had seen. When his turn came and he had his first look straight into her brown eyes, he was conscious of his quick indrawn breath, as his hand closed about hers.

Later, while Marion was giving them tea, Allan saw how often her look turned from Schuyler to him, then back again.

"I know," he said in his slow way, "you're thinking you'll never be able to tell us apart. Now confess?"

"No, you're wrong," though she smiled, Marion took his question gravely, "but you are near the truth. I was thinking that I would never fail to know that you are Mr. Allan, and you," she turned to his brother, "are Mr. Schuyler Van Norden."

"If you can do that, you will be the only person, except Mother, who can."

They were all listening to Allan; his tone was unusually earnest.

Schuyler laughed.

"Of course Miss Reid can see that I'm lots handsomer than old Allan."

"It's not a question of looks at all," Marion did not return Schuyler's laugh, "but you are different. I can't tell just how—but you are different," she repeated confidently.

When time for leave-taking came, Marion walked with Mrs. Van Norden to the carriage and stood waving from the terrace, as it drove away. The sunlight fell on her uncovered head, giving a brighter glow to her copper hair. Allan, silent, begrudged each turn of the wheels that widened the distance between them.

"They are both delightful," Mrs. Van Norden said contentedly. "Undoubtedly cultured; quite an acquisition, I should say."

"Old Reid will do nicely; and that girl," Schuyler waved an appreciative hand toward heaven, "did any one ever see such a complexion?"

When they reached home Allan turned to his brother. "Come into the billiard room, Schuyler, I've something I want to say."

He put his arm through Schuyler's, and led him from the hall.

"We've never had a secret from each other," he began.

"I plead not guilty, Allan. I haven't any secret."

"And I don't intend to have one from you. We've shared in everything, but I have known that sooner or later a time must come when we could not share." He paused. Schuyler's smile did not make it easy. "You'll think me a fool, but the girl we have just seen is the girl I'm going to marry, if I can persuade her to have me."

Looking straight into Schuyler's eyes, he watched him frown in his characteristic way, then throw his head far back and laugh.

"Well, if Brother hasn't woke up all of a sudden! But why so solemn with wedding bells ringing in your ears?"

"Because, Schuyler," Allan was not smiling, "I saw your face when Miss Reid joined us; you never looked that way before at any woman."

Again the quick frown and the laugh.

"Why, man, if you're jealous already, you must be hard hit."

"No, I'm not jealous; but I want you to know, Schuyler, that I was never more serious in my life. If you care as I do,—as I think you care, or will care,—it must be a fair field, an open game. Otherwise all that has been so much in our lives will turn bitter. If you win, I don't say it will not hurt, but I do say I'll stand the gaff and be glad it's not some other man."

Schuyler rose.

"Old boy, you're a wonder! Miss Reid's a fine girl, the prettiest I've seen in a dog's age; but I'm not so quick on the trigger. When I fall in love with her I'll tell you all about it."

A smile drove the serious look from Allan's face.

"That's all I ask." He held out his hand, but Schuyler, reaching for a billiard cue, did not see it.

"Come on, Allan, we have still time for one game before dinner."

The neighbourhood opened its arms to the Reids, the welcome a trifle heartier, perhaps, that it had begun with Mrs. Van Norden. As for Marion, she was liked on sight by every man, and better, by every girl she met. Wherever she went Allan watched her success in a happy glow; a success of which the girl was as unconscious as is a child of its good health. Of the many admirers drawn within the range of her charm, the Van Norden twins caught the light of her smile the oftenest. The hinges of the reopened gate between the estates were free now from rust. The path through the woods of the Reid place was used daily by one brother or the other, often by both together.

On an evening some months after the coming of the Reids, when Allan was alone with his mother, she smiled up at him from her needlework.

"I hope, Allan, we shall have to do over the old farmhouse on the other side of the Pool before very long. But I do wish I knew which of my boys will need it."

"I'd give anything in the world, Mother, to be the one who will. Schuyler promised he would tell me if he cared for Marion; he hasn't said so yet."

Mrs. Van Norden was silent for some moments before she spoke.

“It would be hard for Schuyler to do that now. He’s not as frank as you, Allan.”

It was only a few days after this talk that Allan came into the room where his mother and Schuyler were playing a last game of cribbage for the evening. His face was like sunrise above the edge of a June sea.

“I have wonderful news!” He crossed to his mother and kissed her. “Mother, I’m the happiest—” He stopped abruptly. “Yes, I know they all say that, but it’s such a big thing in a man’s life we don’t know what else to say.”

He held out a hand to his brother. Looking only at his mother he did not see that Schuyler’s mouth had closed to a bitter line. The pulse of his own happiness beating high, hid the tremor in the hand he caught.

His mother returned Allan’s kiss.

“I’m so happy, so glad for you, my son. And Allan knew, in spite of the break in her voice, that she meant it.

“Splendid, old man!” If Schuyler’s hearty tone was forced, he pounded Allan’s shoulder vigorously enough.

“Mother, I can’t believe it yet—it seems impossible that a girl like her should—” Allan turned to his brother: “Schuyler, there is only one thing now; you said you would tell me; but I can’t believe any man could know Marion and—”

“All lovers think that, don’t they, Allan?” Schuyler paused. Then with a quick change of voice: “I suppose you’ll have your friend, Nicholas Porter, for best man?”

Allan looked at him in surprise.

“Why, of course not! I haven’t thought of a best man, but you are the only one I would ever choose for that service.”

There followed, for Allan and Marion, those days that no cloud can dim, no storm drench the joy of them. Every hour was crowded by great planning. There was the Dutch farmhouse to be remodelled, and together they discussed every line of the new plans; watched each day the building of this lodging for their happiness.

To Allan the big mystery, why Marion had chosen him, was yet unsolved; why him, instead of Schuyler.

“Tell me, Marion,” he asked when as usual they had met at her gate and were walking under the trees, “why did you care for me with Schuyler about; and how do you always tell us apart?”

Marion looked up at him through the gathering darkness, and smiled at his serious tone.

“Lower your head and I’ll whisper.”

After a moment she fulfilled her promise.

“It’s your slow, nice voice, your less sure manner, the gentle dear way of you, that always tells me; that makes me love my Allan. But most of all it’s your voice.

The alterations to the farmhouse were to be completed during the last weeks of April and Marion selected the first of May for the wedding. Three nights before that day a sudden storm swept in from the sea, on a wind so violent that telegraph wires were torn down throughout the length of the Island.

The evening following the storm, a messenger from the railroad station rode up to the Van Norden house. The brothers had just reached home.

“We’ve got one wire working,” he explained as he swung out of the saddle. “So I brought this telegram up for Mr. Allan.”

Allan read the message, then frowned as he crumpled it in his hand.

“What’s wrong, Allan?”

“It’s from Nick Porter. Hanged if he hasn’t been arrested. Wants me to come to town at once.”

“Well, if you hurry, you can catch the evening town train.”

“And not see Marion? Why, man, you forget that day after to-morrow is May the first! Schuy, you’ll have to go—” Allan stopped short; Schuyler was frowning. There had been no friendship between Porter and Allan’s brother since that night of the card party.

“Of course I can’t let Nick spend the night in jail,” Allan hurried to say. “But Marion will come to meet me.” He stood for a moment silent. “Will you go to our gate at the edge of the woods, Schuy, at eight sharp, and tell her why I can’t come?”

“Certainly, I will. You run to the stable before the horses are unhitched; take the back road; you’ve just nine minutes, but you’ll make it.”

Schuyler watched from the porch as Allan raced away. When his brother had turned a corner of the drive, Schuyler’s brows drew to their quick frown; then he threw his head far back, and laughed.

On the way to his room he stopped before a bronze cupid, whose outstretched hands held torches to light the great hallway.

“Will you go to *our* gate at the edge of the woods,” Schuyler’s smile took on a bitter twist, “and tell her why I can’t come?” The words were spoken aloud, in Allan’s slow voice. He laughed softly and hurried up the wide stairs.

Later, before leaving his room to join his mother, he paused, and behind the closed door once again rehearsed his brother’s parting words to him.

Allan found that his friend, Porter, while driving a spirited horse through a crowded side street, had struck a child. Though the accident was due solely to the heedlessness of the injured boy, it required work and time to find a magistrate and persuade him to accept bail. Porter was finally released, but at an hour too late for Allan to return to Black Pool; and the whole of the next day was wasted in tiresome court proceedings connected with the case. Allan tried to telegraph Marion, but the company, due to the still crippled service, would accept only messages of grave importance.

It was long after the usual hour when Allan reached home. He hurried at once to the trysting place. Marion was not at the gate to meet him. Impatient, urged by a great longing on this last night before she was to be with him always, he began running beneath the trees. After a time, he made out her figure far ahead. He called to her and ran on faster to cut the seconds of their separation. For the first time her pace had not quickened at his voice. He slowed to a walk. Through the growing darkness he saw, with eyes that could miss no change in her, that to-night her step lagged. Allan stopped dead and watched the girl’s slow approach in vague alarm. There was in the poise of her head, about her shoulders, an indefinable something, a droop, he had never seen before.

Allan called again to her, hoping she had not heard his first cry. Sudden dread gripped him; the quick response he longed to see, had not come; Marion was walking as before, slowly toward him, her head still bowed.

“Marion, dear one, it’s your Allan!” he pleaded.

There was no sign that she had heard.

“Marion!” He called louder and held out his arms.

Only a few paces separated them now. She raised her head for an instant; then with a cry that cut to his deepest nerve, she sprang forward and buried her face on his breast. She clung to him quivering.

“Why, Marion, precious one, what—?”

“Don’t speak! Don’t speak to me yet, Allan!”

At the distress in her voice Allan’s heart tightened. He held her in strong, tender arms, silently stroking her trembling shoulder while long minutes dragged by.

“Precious, may I speak now? What has hurt you?” His struggle to steady his voice did not show in the gentle tone so dear to her.

They stood there together, long silent, in the gloom; Allan holding the quivering girl hard against him. When at last her sobbing eased, he dared speak again;

“Dear one,” he pleaded, “let me look into your eyes.”

She pressed her face harder against his breast.

Not yet, Allan! I can’t! I can’t!”

He lifted her face. But she fought against him, hiding her eyes again.

He bent down until his lips pressed her forehead.

“Now, Marion, tell me. I cannot wait longer.”

Faintly her broken, frightened words reached him:

“Oh, Allan, how could you? You—we must have been mad last night!”

Within his breast something shattered to bits as freezing water shivers glass. Her words turned his heart to ice, deadening every nerve; only his brain withstood the numbing chill. Then rage reared its blinded head and beat sledge strokes against his temples. Slowly, above his turmoil of torture one sane thought rose, crying to him through his misery: *She must never know!* He must hide his wrath; no trace of his horror must show. For a moment he stood, his teeth clenched to hold silent the outraged cry straining his throat. He could not trust himself to speak, but crushed her close within his protecting arms. Not daring now to meet her eyes, he bent low over the drooped head and pressed his lips against her hair, longing, yet fearing to kiss her trembling lips, lest his frozen ones betray the secret horror they must not speak.

*She must never know!*

Allan and his bride returned to Black Pool during the early days of June; their homecoming hastened by a message from Schuyler that business called him from town and office affairs made it necessary for Allan to be on hand.

Mr. Reid had started, immediately after his daughter’s wedding, on an indefinite trip to the far East. So it fell that Mrs. Van Norden was the only one to welcome back the husband and wife. As she led them into the big living-room of the new house she smiled happily and turned to Marion:

“I shall do all I can for my two children to offset your disappointment that Schuyler is not here. I know, Allan, not having him with us makes your homecoming incomplete.”

Allan crossed to a window and lowered a shade.

Schuyler’s absence was lengthened by one excuse or another into weeks. When, at last, he returned, Allan and Marion were quite settled in the new home, and their lives, Mrs. Van Norden declared, lay all before them, a broad path, smoothed ready for work and happiness. Happiness! The very word was a mockery to Allan, but he had managed to hide even from his mother’s discerning eyes the smouldering rage that poisoned his life.

Schuyler reached home one Saturday night, too late to see the people at the farmhouse. He made amends by writing them a note which was delivered early Sunday morning. Allan had just finished his answer when Marion joined him in the breakfast-room.

"Schuyler has come back." Allan looked toward her.

Marion was standing where the morning light fell full, the sun glistening her copper hair. To Allan's eyes, God had made her finer than any other thing. There was in his wife's face a beauty so exquisite, that looking at her suddenly, brought always to him a sensation near kin to pain. This sense of her beauty strengthened, to-day, his determination to carry through the plan his disturbed brain had worked out.

Marion crossed to him, and looking over his shoulder, read the note.

"Dear Schuyler," it began, "to have you home again is my only wish left unfulfilled. You are coming over for lunch, of course, but let's have a swim first. I'll meet you at the pool at eleven. We haven't held the test this year—to-day will be just right for a try. I'm anxious to see if that sign-post is still far away.

"Ever your affectionate brother,  
"Allan."

As Marion finished reading, she leaned down and kissed Allan.

"I don't believe that two brothers ever lived whose love was as perfect as yours and Schuyler's."

The pen Allan still held snapped in two parts.

"But come now, Allan," Marion had not seen his closed hands,—“come to breakfast, and then you can tell me about that test you wrote of.”

"It's only a boy's game; each year Schuyler and I have made the swim from the diving float around the grey stone, at the end of the pool, and back again.

"Is that all! You do that nearly every time you go in."

"But not for a record. The year we started to college Schuyler suggested that we time our swims; each year after that we have held the test, and each year we have bettered our record."

"My Allan won, of course, and now he expects me to award the prize.

"I'll take the reward before telling you." Then after a moment: "I really deserve it; it's pretty even, but I lead Schuyler by two victories. He says the year our time fails to improve, will show we're at the signpost that points out the middle-age road."

"I'll hold the watch for you to-day."

"No," Allan answered. "The test is strictly private. I'd hate to let any one know, even you, dear, that we had reached that sign-post."

"Very well, then. But even if you win you get no prize this time."

"I shall not fail to-day, Marion."

"Then don't be so serious about it. Your look doesn't go well with victory." She rose and, standing behind him, joined her hands under his chin. "If you'll smile again, perhaps I'll let you discount your winning now."

After breakfast they went together out into the sunshine.

Walking among the flowers of their old-fashioned garden he watched the joy she took in them with eyes that grew more serious as the minutes passed. He had trouble, when she looked suddenly at him, to call up a smile in time to meet her glances.

Allan purposely reached the pool some minutes after the appointed time. Schuyler was in one of the compartments of the large bath house, so their greetings were carried on by calls over the top of the partition between their rooms. When Allan, ready for swimming, came out to the float,

Schuyler was in the water; no handclasp had been exchanged between the brothers at the end of their longest separation.

"I'm feeling uncommonly well to-day," Schuyler called. "I'll bet you any part of a hundred that I lower the record."

"Just for boasting, Schuyler, you'll have to start first. Climb out, I have the watch."

Schuyler gained the float and stood beside his brother. Upon the smooth surface of Black Pool, lay two mirrored portraits, every curve of the muscular bodies alike, every line of the handsome faces identical. In expression only was there a difference; Schuyler's face was lighted by the excitement of the coming test. Allan's face was white, his jaw set.

"Ready, Allan, give the word!" Schuyler balanced himself at the edge of the float, his arms uplifted, his muscles tense for the spring.

Allan's eyes dropped from his brother's smiling face to the watch; his tongue moved across dry lips.

"Go!" he called.

Schuyler split the water by a clean, shallow dive. He began at once to use a fast side stroke, his body surging forward without halts between the sweeps of his powerful arms.

Rounding the grey stone at the pool's end, Schuyler was hidden for a moment; another passed before he splashed into view. He speeded up for the last half of the swim. Behind him stretched a wake of ever-widening ripples, breaking the dark surface of the pool.

Allan dropped to his knees at the edge of the float, the flesh of his body quivering beneath his sweating skin.

Schuyler came plunging on. Only a few strokes now to the finish. Allan caught the sound of his brother's heavy breathing.

"Time!" he called as Schuyler flashed past.

Schuyler eased his stroke and turning, swam slowly back.

"How about it?" he panted. "Did I lower the record?"

Allan reached far out over the water.

"What the devil!" Surprise, quick fear, showed in Schuyler's face. "Let go my shoulders, Allan."

Allan tightened his grip.

"Yes, Schuyler," he spoke with deadly calm, "you've lowered the record of all manhood!" On his face was the same grim look that had settled there the night he had so nearly killed a man in his brother's behalf.

"Let go, damn you! Let go!" Schuyler cried, between the gasps of his heaving lungs.

Allan's lips were a sealed line against further useless words. He dragged his brother through the water, closer to the float.

The coward's brand showed plain in Schuyler's terror-widened eyes, but gathering every ounce of his spent strength, he drew his knees quickly up and gaining a foot-purchase against the floating stage, strained to push free from Allan's hold.

But the long swim had taken its toll. Allan jerked Schuyler half out of the water, and plunging him down, cut short the cry that started from his throat. Then steadying his merciless grip, Allan held his brother's head beneath the surface, glaring without pity down through the water at the appalled face. With unshifting gaze he watched the muscles of Schuyler's jaws tighten as he strained to hold in his breath; watched until the jaws dropped and the trail of bubbles spurted to the surface. Just at the end, hate flashed in his brother's eyes before the death-glaze shut out consciousness. When the last feeble quiver ran through the drowned body, Allan dragged his

eyes away from the ghastly face. After a moment to steady himself, he slid silently from the float into the pool. Clutching a handful of wet hair, he towed the dead man halfway to the grey stone. When directly in the line of Schuyler's swim he let go. He waited, treading water, while the body slowly sank. As it drifted downward it turned. Again the glaring eyes stared full at Allan. Shuddering, he swam swiftly to the float, frantic to leave the water that held the dead thing he had made.

But, on land again, Allan walked without haste through the quarter-mile of woods between the pool and the open lawn about his mother's house. Reaching the end of the wood, he broke into a run, and began calling for help.

When the body of Schuyler Van Norden had been lifted from the bottom of Black Pool, it was unmarked. The doctors agreed that death had been caused by the violent effort of the test swim. Where it was found the pool was some thirty feet deep; no wonder that Allan's diving had been useless. Even had he reached the exhausted man before he sank, it would have been to no purpose. When the heart once stops, as the doctors said, it stops forever.

After a time, life fell again into adjustment in the two houses at Black Pool. A new interest arose to dull the edge of Mrs. Van Norden's grief. An interest that caused Allan to show gladness when with Marion or his mother; to lie in wakeful thought, hour after hour during the night when darkness hid the frown of doubt that ploughed his forehead. When, in daylight, he saw in Marion's eyes the look of expected joy, he would smile bravely back at her. Seeing her face alight with life's secret, he would forget for the moment the stare from terror-widened eyes that followed him; and be glad that those eyes no longer lived to see this woman.

Allan did not know the murderer's remorse; he felt as a man might who had crushed the head of a viper that had poisoned the woman he loves. And yet, alone, the memory would come of eyes, staring up through water; and he would see again the twisted blue-lipped grin on his victim's mouth. From Marion, he hid all trace of unrest, of doubt; his manner toward his wife grew more gentle, more tender, as the day drew nearer.

"If you are so good to me, Allan, our child will find a spoiled mother to put up with," she told him.

But in spite of all his caution, she twice caught him off guard. Late one afternoon she came into the library; Allan was staring, vacant-eyed, at the empty fireplace. He lifted the hand she laid on his shoulder and kissed it in silence.

"It's strange, Allan, we never thought of it before, but if, dear, it's a man child, I'll let you call him Schuyler."

He wondered how he managed to smother the blaze of hate in his eyes before it had burned through the wall of his secret.

His second lapse had been harder to cover. Marion was resting while he made ready for dinner. He had left the door to his dressing-room open that they might call to each other, begrudging the short time that shaving took him from her.

"Allan! Allan!" He heard Marion's voice as from a distance. "Why don't you answer? Allan, stop! Don't look that way!" She was beside him, gripping his arm, the fright in her tone brought him to full consciousness. But he had no words to explain why he had stood silent, staring, for how long he did not know, at the reflection in the bowl of clear water before him.

This was the beginning of a dread that grew day by day; from that time, Allan could never again trust himself to look into still water.

The January of that year held dreary throughout its length. The last morning of the dismal month struggled to life beneath a slate-coloured sky. All day steady sleet beat against the soiled surface of a two-weeks-old snow. Allan stayed within the walls of his house, fretting at his helplessness, starting at each sound that came from Marion's room. It was during the saddest hour of the day that he went through those moments which were a Hell to him, a senseless torture to her he loved. When at last his mother came to him, he cried out at the change in her face.

"For God's sake, tell me quickly, Mother!"

She put her old arms about his neck and drew down his head until his cheek touched hers.

"You have a daughter, Allan!" She spoke as bravely as she could.

"But Marion?"

He felt her sudden tears wet his cheek. Catching her shoulders he dragged her to where the last grey light lay stagnant against the western window.

"Marion!" he cried. "She is not dead?"

"No; but go to her, Allan. Go to her quickly!"

He tore from the room and ran blindly down the hall. At Marion's door he stopped, clinging to the knob, while he forced himself to calmness. Then he went swiftly to the bed and fell to his knees beside her; all the longing of life in his look at Marion's closed lids.

"Precious," he whispered, "I am here with you."

Her hand moved feebly toward him. He caught it up and held it against his heart. Her eyes opened; the shadow of a smile crossed her lips.

"My Allan," she whispered back in answer. Then her eyes closed . . .

It was his mother who at last broke the grip of Allan's fingers that held Marion's cold hand; she who led the dazed man from the room.

The effect of his loss was a shock to those who loved Allan. That he had cared for Marion with a devotion only short of worship was plain to all who had seen them during the few months of their married life. But it mystified his friends to see this strong, controlled man sink into despair. From the night his mother had taken him from that room where Marion's life had been torn from his keeping, Allan had been as one numb to all sensation. Now always silent, he wandered aimlessly through his shattered home as if searching, ceaselessly searching. His hopeless steps took him from room to room, from floor to floor, but always he shunned one part of the house.

His mother's tactful efforts to break his lethargy were unavailing. Often, when she spoke to him he would not answer; then, the question being repeated, he would turn to her bewildered. For two months after Marion's death Mrs. Van Norden watched in silence, but with growing fear, Allan's strange manner. Then, unable to bear it longer, she went to him determined to put an end to his brooding at whatever cost. He was, as she now so often found him, sunk back in his chair, looking vacantly at his empty hands.

"Allan, I have something to ask; something you must no longer refuse." She put all her mother love into her voice.

"Yes.—Yes.—What did you say, Mother?"

She shook him gently.

"I said there is something you must do for me. Grief, Allan, has its place, perhaps its use; but to give way to it utterly is a weakness, unworthy of a boy of mine."

He offered no answer, meeting her look as if he but dimly heard.

“There is something else, Allan, that is both unworthy and unjust. How can you feel bitterness against—against your baby, your own daughter?”

He turned away from her.

“I beg you, Mother,—I can’t. I tell you I can’t!”

“And I say, what you can’t do, is to let this morbid, unnatural thing live and grow in you. It is getting worse every day. Yesterday, when you were in the upper hall, and I opened the nursery door, you fled down the stairs. Do you ever think how that hurts me?” She paused, to end in lower voice: “How it would hurt her?”

He hid his face.

“Allan,” his mother pleaded, “I ask you to break the power this aversion has gained over you. I ask it in Marion’s memory, for your child’s sake.”

For a long time silence, before he answered in smothered voice:

“What do you want me to do, Mother?”

“Come with me to your child.”

“Now?” he whispered.

“Yes, now!”

He shrank from her.

“I promise you, Allan, there will be no one else in the room.”

He sat irresolute for a moment; then got slowly to his feet.

She caught his cold hand and went with him from the room.

They were in the nursery, when she spoke again. “Go to her, Allan,” she said gently, “and see what a beautiful child you have.”

He stood without sound or motion, looking at the white bassinet until his mother had reached the door. Then with a cry he sprang to her.

“Don’t leave me! For God’s sake, don’t leave me alone with it!” Sweat stood in heavy drops on his forehead.

His mother took him by both arms.

“I’m ashamed! I’m ashamed of you, Allan! How can you let go of yourself in this way? Come,” she commanded peremptorily, “and I will show you the most wonderful thing in the world—a baby—your baby!” She took him to the lace-covered cradle. “Now look!” The white-haired woman was splendid in her anger. “Look, my son, and be a man again!”

Allan stood above the tender thing that lay looking up at him with wide-opened eyes, eyes so like his own—and Schuyler’s.

Something within his grief-deadened heart answered to that look; the lines about his mouth grew less tense.

“See how perfect she is.” His mother lifted the baby in her arms.

Marion’s child gazed at Allan with the unfocussed eyes of babyhood. He drew nearer. Then from out of that mysterious nothing that makes a baby’s world there came a something to the awakening mind. As Allan leaned forward, the soft brow creased to a minute frown, instantly after, the head was thrown far back, the small mouth opened, and from it came those sounds that pass for baby laughter.

For a second the man stared, his eyes suddenly aflame, his face twitching. Then he cried out a frightful oath and, springing back from his horrified mother, turned and rushed from the room.

Plunging recklessly down the stairs, Allan fled from the house. Not heeding his direction he went wildly on, feeling no chill from the raw wind that swept past his bared head. His distraught mind held but one thought; he must get far from the house that sheltered the child. In his frenzied

haste he stumbled and fell. During the pause after he rose he found that he was on the pathway that ended at a place of terror to him. He could not go to that path's end. As he stood uncertain, thoughts of the helpless thing, that to live had taken Marion's life, crowded his brain with fiercer hate. How quickly—how easily,—he looked at his hands; the fingers were spreading and closing in eagerness. Cursing aloud, he started running, fleeing straight onward along the path. He did not pause nor slacken his pace until he reached the floating stage at the shore of Black Pool.

No sun rays from the overcast, March sky, cut through the branches of the naked trees; the surface of the pool gleamed a sheet of dull, polished steel, under the lowering clouds.

Allan, panting hard, stood, his eyes upturned. He would not—he swore it—he would not look into the black water.

Yet why not look? Why not see once more the very spot where he had rid the world? No!—He strove to master the spell that was drawing him closer, always closer, to the water. Inch by inch he moved against his will, until he felt the edge of the float beneath his feet. He struggled a moment longer; then dropped to his knees. His teeth ground hard together. There! There! just beneath him, below the still surface of Black Pool, floated the face of his brother! Not a blue-lipped, dead face now, but a live face distorted by rage. A wind ruffled the surface of the pool, sending shifting, twisted grins across the mouth.

“He's come back!” Allan screamed. “He's come back to laugh at his victory!”

The eyes below the water grew wider, wilder; the grin played mockingly about the open mouth.

Screaming an oath, Allan thrust down a gripping hand. His fingers closed in an empty grasp—but it had not gone, that face. It was there, gloating hate at him, just beyond his outstretched hand. It must not escape! Only a little farther and he could seize it!— The mocking face sank lower beneath his deeper reach.

“I'll follow! I'll follow!” Allan cried. “You shall not escape!” He plunged into the pool.

Groping blindly to catch and throttle the hated throat, Allan forced himself down through the icy water, sinking deeper and deeper at each mad stroke.

His lungs ached for air.

“Now!—Now!”

His fingers closed about some unseen thing far below the surface. He would never let go; never loose his grip,—until,—until.

Long after its waters were quiet again, Allan's hands were locked about the rotting snag at the bottom of the tarn—locked long after all was still, on the surface, and below the surface, of Black Pool.

The heavy, wrought-iron gates of the Van Norden estate stand now grimly closed. The driveway leading to the deserted house on the hill, stretches weed-grown and unused between the double row of blight-killed chestnuts. Hidden from the road, shut in by a thicket of underbrush and tangled cat-briar, desolate, gloomy, bleak, lies the sinister mirror of Black Pool.