

The Twin Brothers

By Dora Sigerson Shorter

I

In a lone house in a northern county of Ireland the two brothers dwelt together. Smoothly and quietly their two lives had run side by side for nearly forty years. Bound together by natures modelled without contradictions, with nothing to disturb the deep, and to them yet unknown, emotions that slept in the heart of each, they were content to let year after year pass by them and their solitary life, so that those years left them peace. Their various visits to the big cities for education, and later on for business purposes, had given them no desire to leave the loneliness they loved. Twin brothers! their characters, like their faces, seemed almost alike at first meeting them; after a time the difference struck the observer more forcibly, the ruggedness in the one brother being softened in the other. Where the blue eyes would speak of possibilities, of fierceness and passion, the brown would seem only waiting an opportunity to melt into tenderness and affection. Yet neither character having that love of interference, which makes for much of the unhappiness of the world, each was content to live and let live without inflicting his conscience upon the other or combating his ideals of life. Behind the house a clear mill-stream ran, which, further on, turned two great wheels before it fell back into the river from whence it came. Behind the river a wood stretched into the purple distance; around the house fields of wheat and barley flourished. The brothers from their great farm lands drew a small competence, which they had no desire to spend, loving better to wander apart into the solitude when the day's work was done, than to go among their fellows: one to make with clever hands little models of the inventions his brain was always suggesting, models he dreamt of patenting in the future, that future which is always the dreamer's, and which is too far off for life; the other to scribble verses and songs that no one ever saw, and which even his brother only suspected he wrote.

Thus, though, because of their reserved natures, they were never companions, yet their lives drifted pleasantly on side by side, up to the time of their fortieth year. It was upon that day that their fate overtook them and flung a stone into their life's river that destroyed the flow for ever, and made turbulence and raging billows where once the calm had been.

On the morning of the tenth in a spring month, the brothers rose with a feeling of exhilaration. The glory of the day, the singing of the mated birds, the gold of the new-born blossoms, all made them realize the sweetness of life. They felt that spring was theirs too, as it was glory as fair as brief with promise as a beginning and storm and desolation as an ending; like two trees that put forth green leaves in the sunshine, only later to have them torn and destroyed, and they themselves fall stricken by the storm to earth.

With quiet feeling the brothers clasped hands on the morning of the tenth. "A happy birthday to you, brother." "And to you." They went their ways with no passing sorrow for the years gone; forty to-day, and dreaming still of what fame would bring them in the future. When the brothers had gone through their morning's business, they withdrew with a sigh of relief to their favourite pursuits: the one to the riverside, where he experimented with a beautiful little model of a mill; the other seated higher up the banks beside a steep waterfall. Here he drew a book from his pocket, and commenced to write.

Ernest had been working his little mill for nearly an hour, when he fancied he heard a cry. He looked towards where his brother was sitting, but saw him deep in his book, evidently oblivious of everything else. Another glance, and he saw a few yards beyond the student, in the centre of the river, a young girl balancing dangerously upon some stones above the waterfall. He gave a loud shout and commenced running towards her. But at his call the poet, glancing from his book, awoke to his surroundings and sprang to his feet. In a moment he had seen the girl's danger and gone knee-deep into the river to her side. Without a word he caught her in his arms and carried her to the bank. Loosed from his hold, she stood confused. Ernest drew near, panting with his run.

"I was too late," he said. And then the three looked at each other embarrassed and strange.

"I was painting the falls," the girl explained, "and I thought I would see what they were like from this side. I did not mean to disturb you." She smiled at the inconsequence of her remark.

"You can still see, if you are not too wet," Ernest said.

"I am not wet," she answered, "thanks to this gentleman."

"My brother," Ernest explained. Then, turning to where his brother stood silent, remarked, "You had better go home and change, Hugh, or you will get cold."

The girl looked at his wet things. Her eyes filled with consternation. "Oh, do," she said, "I am so very, very sorry you got wet because of me."

Hugh hesitated a moment. He smiled. "You would not like me to put you back first?"

The girl refused with a merry laugh.

"I will try the bridge this time," she said, then looked after him as he went along the path to the house.

"You are Miss FitzGerald," Ernest said, his eyes admiring the girl before him.

"And you?"

"I am Ernest Kavanagh. My brother Hugh saved you at least, from buying a new dress."

"That would be no misfortune for a woman," she answered. "How do you know I am Maud FitzGerald?"

"Your father told me you were coming home from school, that you loved painting, and would probably be charmed with my old mill-wheels, and insist upon making a picture of them."

"Will you show them to me? May I look at them now?" the girl asked eagerly.

He turned at once and led the way down the path his brother had gone; they crossed the bridge over the mill-stream and passed behind the house.

"I will show you the place if you care to see it. He brought her past a long row of cottages, through the windows of which she saw men at work. And again they came upon the mill-stream, where she saw the great wheels turning under their weight of water.

Her excitement over its picturesqueness was pretty to the man. He felt a keen pleasure in her presence, in her youth and freshness. It struck him he had never before seen a lady lingering about the old mill. The daughters of his workers had never given the strange beauty to the picture that this girl did standing beside the stream, her pretty curls moving in the wind, and her face upturned to his for sympathy with her mood. He was showing her around the old buildings, pointing out bits he thought would make sketches, when his brother joined them. For the first time in his life he felt that he resented his presence, and relapsed into sullen silence, while Hugh carried on a bright chatter with the girl. On her wish to return home, Hugh immediately offered to show her the way to the bridge. Ernest turned to walk with them, when the girl put out her hand to bid him good-bye. She had no idea that he proposed to go with her too. But he fancied it a snub in preference for his brother, and turned away with a flush of anger.

When the brothers met in the evening to sit together in their study, they were both ashamed of themselves, and the momentary sensations the girl's sudden entry into their day had made. They became, in consequence, more talkative than usual. Ernest over his model had forgotten the glamour of the girl's presence, and only remembered that he had felt a moment's bitterness to his brother. Hugh over his book thought of the passing triumph he had felt in the girl's choosing him to see her home. Both felt wonder that a woman could have had the power to disturb them even for so short a time. They talked long into the night, but neither mentioned the girl's name nor referred to her adventure.

The next day FitzGerald arrived with his daughter.

"I came to thank you both," he said. "My little girl tells me you saved her from a wetting if not worse, she also says she has designs upon your mill-wheels. You will let her paint them, if I vouch for her good behaviour. She will be very quiet, and not disturb you."

The brothers laughed with a vague sensation that it was not impossible she might disturb them very much indeed some day.

They both watched her as they talked with her father in the dingy sitting-room. For the first time it struck them how old and faded everything was in it. The contrast between the dull wall-paper, the worn carpet, the stiff-backed, common-place chairs, and the bright graceful moving bit of sunshine of a girl was so great.

Hugh went to her side impulsively.

"Do you know what you are like?" he said. "A lovely bunch of red and white roses, fresh from the morning, and set in our old dark, dusty room."

The girl blushed. "And the thorns," she said. "They are there, too."

"The right protection of every rose from the rough hand that would snatch her. A rose must be gently wooed and tenderly removed from the parent stem." He laughed, and looked at her father.

"I forgot you write poetry—at least, I have heard you do," the girl said, looking up at him. "Of course you see fairies, and banshees, and things."

He smiled, but did not answer.

"You *do* see them," she insisted.

"There may be such," he answered dreamily. "I believe I almost believe I have seen them."

"Oh, how lovely!" the girl cried, clapping her hands. "Do tell me. What do they wear"

The young man was chilled. The subject was serious to him. He regarded her coldly, and she, seeing it, added in a coaxing voice,—

"You will take me with you next time you go to see them?"

His gaze fell upon her again. She was so gay, so young, so pretty.

"Dreams! They are but dreams," he answered; but whether in answer to her question or to the new whispering of his heart he himself did not know.

The same evening, as the brothers sat together, as was their wont, Hugh noticed again how faded the room was.

"We might have the house done up a bit," he remarked. "It wants it."

His brother stopped his work, and looked keenly at him. The same thought was in his mind, and the same reason had stirred it.

"It has served us long enough," he said. "I see no reason to change it now."

A few weeks after the meeting a neighbour passing FitzGerald's house saw the old father the garden, and spoke to him across the gate.

"I hear Ernest and Hugh Kavanagh are madly in love with your daughter."

The old man started; then smiled.

“By Jove!” he said. “How these little ones grow up. In love with the child,” he laughed aloud then turned serious. “If it is true, it is no bad news. They are good fellows—lean, straight men, and they are rich. There are no hands I would more willingly place her in.”

“But she will have to choose—have to choose,” the old neighbour muttered. “She can’t have both, and neither will like to be left.”

“Whichever she choose,” FitzGerald said, “they are equally good. If he be a bit older than her, well, all the better. It’s the empty-headed lads who don’t know the worth of a woman’s love. Better an old man’s darling than a young man’s slave. Not that they are old—in their prime, it is, they are.”

The neighbour left them with a smile, but he muttered to himself as he went, “Better your daughter than mine. A queer pair they are, the Kavanaghse—ever and queer. God knows what will happen if they both set their hearts upon the girl. What they see in her, a foolish, empty-headed chit—they that have travelled and seen so many noble women—to be caught at last, and by that—only a silly child, only a beautiful envelope—no brains, no brains. Lord! what a pretty face will do to hide the deficiency! Why, my Susan is twice as clever.”

So he hobbled on, muttering and laughing.

To the brothers was slowly coming the knowledge of their position, their love for the girl, their coming battle to gain possession of her. Mentally they stood eyeing one another like two duellists, each calculating the other’s chances, his strength, his constancy.

At first when the girl painted by the mill, they had been attracted in their idle moments by the novelty of her beauty, glowing against those grey walls of the old buildings, and passing with light feet up and down the path where they frequented. Then they grew to talk to her of themselves and their favourite pastimes.

And to both she would listen with sympathy, interest, and admiration. It was enough to make her the ideal woman. She was not clever enough to help them even with advice; but they were too strong to seek or need a woman’s help. As for her, she thought they were the most glorious men she had ever seen. She felt it would be impossible to choose between them. Indeed, she could not tell which she loved the most.

When Ernest spoke with her of his great inventions and hopes, she would look into his deep eyes, and think it would be good to listen to him for ever; but when he would reach for her hand and hold it, in spite of her, between his own, her heart would struggle for its freedom, and hasten after the absent brother, thinking it loved him best.

If it were Hugh who walked with her by the river, telling her wonderful tales of his dream-world, and reading her poems he had written to her loveliness and his devotion, she would feel it better to love this brother, who was so tender and gentle, not daring to touch her hand or speak out his love for fear of frightening her. She would in pity half turn towards him, opening her lips to say she loved him. But her inconstant heart at the movement would pine for the stronger lover, who she felt would have her, even if both were broken in the struggle.

One day, as the brothers sat having tea with her father and herself upon the lawn of her house, Hugh spoke of their first meeting.

“I said you were like a rose, he pleaded to the girl, in a low tone. “And you spoke of thorns. I have found none.

“There are many. Ask father.”

She turned to include the old man in the conversation. She dreaded sentiment from either brother when the other was there, so fierce and jealous the outsider would become. Even now

their angry glances fenced across her. She felt ashamed and alarmed, thus being the object of their silent combat.

"I said," Hugh continued, not heeding her look at her old father, who was talking with his brother, "a rose must be sweetly wooed and tenderly taken possession of."

Ernest heard him and smiled.

"Ask the rose, Hugh," he said. "And in spite of the angry little thorns, it would prefer to be strongly taken by the hot hand of power and burnt in a heart of passion and fire."

"No," Hugh said coldly; "for fear it might break and die, reverence should gather the rose, and love be its slave."

Ernest fixed his eyes upon the face of the

"Better burn than decay. Ask the rose, Hugh; ask the rose."

The girl felt compelled to meet his gaze; his eyes seemed to pierce into her soul. She opened her lips and spoke without her will.

"The rose would like the strong hand best, I think," she murmured. "Better the leaping fire than to wither and fall to dust."

Ernest laughed; his eyes turned from her face; he resumed his conversation with her father, as though satisfied with her answer. Hugh smiled, as though he had suffered no defeat.

"Shall we ask the roses?" he said, and put out his hand to her to raise her from her seat. They strolled towards the garden of roses, whose breath was in the air around them.

When the brothers were at home that evening, the silence for the first time was broken between them upon the subject which was uppermost in the minds of both.

Hugh was the first to speak. He laid the gun he was cleaning across his knees, and looked across at his brother with glowing eyes.

"Ernest," he said quietly, "we have lived together for many years without quarrelling or dissension. Now it would seem things are changed; for days we have met with anger in our hearts because of a woman. It is not a thing I wish to speak of but I care for her very much. You are using your strong will to draw her from me. But for you she would love me. Will you cease persecuting her?"

Ernest fixed his cold gaze upon his brother's face.

"I do not persecute her," he said slowly; "she cares for me. I read it in her heart."

Hugh drew the gun up in his hands.

"You have read nothing I have not read. She is a child. She cannot decide, but she shall. She is mine. I carried her in my arms away from the danger of the river. I saved her; she is mine.

"I saw her first," Ernest said softly; "I called to you. Only for me she would have fallen without help. She is mine; I shall marry her."

"You shall not."

"I shall."

A shot rang through the room. Hugh flung the smoking gun from him, his face white as death.

"My God, Ernest!" he gasped.

Ernest fixed him with his eyes.

"Be more careful with loaded guns," he smiled, "or there may be an ugly accident some day, awkward for you to explain."

But Hugh had marched from the room. All that night he rode like a madman over the countryside, and when he reached home at dawn his horse staggered beneath him, covered with sweat. Before the sun was up, Hugh was prowling about the house where his love slept. He watched the silent building till it woke from its slumbering. One by one the blinds were drawn up, like eyes

slowly opening to the light. The front door opened, and dogs rushed forth, barking in their scramble of joyful liberty. He sat in the rose garden and waited. He knew Maud loved the roses, and tended them every day when she had breakfasted. After a time he heard her voice singing, all so full of youth and untroubled by care, that his heart overflowed with tenderness towards her. He rose and stretched out his hands, as she raced with the dogs towards him. When she saw him she stopped startled, so worn and woe-begone he was, his clothes tossed and stained with his night's travel, his eyes wild and bloodshot, his hair untidy and white with dust.

Has anything happened?" she cried.

"What is it?"

He caught her hand.

"Maud," he said, "you will marry me? Do not send me away unanswered again; I cannot bear it. I am afraid of losing you. I have waited all night, determined to get your answer. Speak to me."

The girl, red and agitated, drew back.

"I cannot; why do you press me so? I don't want to marry any one. I don't think I like any one well enough to marry him." She looked at his flushed face and untidy clothes: he did not look attractive.

"You like Ernest better," he said angrily; "is that it?"

"I said I did not like any one well enough to marry."

He flung her hand from him.

"You do, you do. You love him, you smile at him when you frown at me. I have seen it. You are always ready to go where he asks you, to talk and laugh with him. I see your face light up when he comes. It never does for me."

The girl turned to go.

"You are rude and horrible," she said petulantly. "Anyway, I don't like you."

The poor fellow flung himself in her path, all the rage gone from him.

"Only stay, Maud. I am mad with jealousy, I am a brute. If you could only care a little for me, even a little, I would be so gentle with you, so tender. No one could love you as well as I do."

The girl burst into tears.

"I do not know who I care for," she sobbed.

"Come to me." The man stretched out his arms pleading. The girl hesitated, looked around. Some one was coming amongst the roses whistling. It was Ernest. He did not look at his brother's face, but at the girl's. She felt her tears dry under his hot gaze.

"We are early callers, my brother and I," he said. "Can I see your father?"

"He is in his study, I think," she said, regaining her composure.

"Will you not find him for me?" Ernest smiled. "I want to see him on important business."

He watched his brother stride away, and smiled again. "I was nearly too late," he thought.

Maud noticed reluctantly the contrast he was to his brother. So fresh, so strong, so neat, so unlike and yet so like the broken weary man who had left her. Yet Hugh's agony still wrung her heart; it swung like a pendulum between the two.

Ernest looked at her.

"Give me your hand."

She gave it blushing.

"Stay with me a moment," he said softly, "I have something to say to you." He led her to a little summer-house, and drew her to a seat. Her heart beat wildly, she did not know what to do. She knew at last she must make up her mind definitely beneath the power of this man's will.

“You know I love you,” he continued; “I know you cannot make up your mind to love me, but I am weary of waiting, and so you must speak now. There is trouble in our house, things are going badly between my brother and me on account of you. When we are married that will end. What have you to say?”

But the girl had nothing to answer, and only sat silent. Ernest felt her hand quiver in his like a bird longing to fly.

“I shall decide for you,” he said. “You will marry me. I was going to speak to your father about it. We shall be married in a week.”

The girl half rose, but he pulled her down again.

“If I thought you really did not care, I should go away at once and leave you,” Ernest continued; “but you do care.”

The girl dropped her head.

“I do not know.”

He suddenly folded his arms about her, and kissed her passionately.

“But you do care,” he whispered. “Say you do not love me now!”

The girl struggled a moment, then lay still upon his breast smiling. She loved him: she knew it in the joy of that embrace.

When Ernest returned home that day he found his brother gone. A telegram had come summoning one of the brothers away on business, and Hugh had gone, half in the despair and depression that followed the scene in the rose garden. He had left the field to his brother.

Well, what matter? If she cared for him, his absence would not make her care less; if she loved his brother, he were better out of the way till she knew her mind. When Hugh returned, he took a three-mile walk from the station sooner than drive, because he feared to learn what had happened in his absence. Yet his feet hurried him quicker than he knew. At the bend of the lonely road near his home he saw two figures in the dusk. The man’s arm was about the woman: she leant towards him.

Hugh’s heart stood still a moment, then nearly suffocated him with its pulsations. He strode up to the woman, and laid a rough hand upon her shoulder. She screamed, then recognised him.

“It’s Hugh!” she cried, then grew white, and tried to slip from her companion’s clasp; but he held her close.

“If Maud has not become engaged to you,” Hugh said hoarsely to his brother, “I bid you take your arm from her shoulder.”

Ernest returned the fierce gaze with interest.

“You are speaking of my wife,” he said.

Hugh staggered, then drew himself up with an effort. His face changed; it was as though his soul had been killed by the blow.

“You did not fight fair,” he said—~~not~~ on open ground; but I shall follow you—~~follow~~ you: and she shall become mine at last.” He turned with a strange laugh, and disappeared into the growing darkness.

Maud burst into tears.

“What does he mean to do?” she cried. “Oh, poor fellow!”

Ernest smiled.

“Do! why like many another—~~in~~ and bear it. Don’t mind his melodramatic rant. He writes poetry, remember. He cannot annoy you long. We leave for Paris to-morrow. By the time we return we can make some arrangements to divide our farm, and he will, of course, live elsewhere. The house is mine.

For some weeks after they arrived in Paris Maud saw nothing of Hugh. Often her mind would dwell upon him, in spite of her efforts to put him away. His love, his despair, his gentleness to her! What were they to her now? Yet thoughts forbidden would not let her cease remembering him. Sometimes she fancied he was near her, and would suddenly turn to meet a stranger's eyes. Often she thought she felt his gaze, only on looking would find herself mistaken. Once she remarked to her husband the feeling she had, and he laughed at her, and bid her speak and think no more of his brother. Yet in spite of it she felt herself seeking Hugh in every new place she went. At times the feeling that he was near was so strong that it was with difficulty she could prevent herself from crying out in terror. She began to think that he was dead, and that his spirit was following her. At last one evening she saw his living eyes resting upon her through the leaves of a little shrub. She was dining in the open air with her husband when it happened. A great wave of relief passed over her. It was only this then: he had really been there, not his spirit—not that her brain was growing weak, as she had lately sometimes thought. She was annoyed with him; why did he dare follow them about like this! He was at a table not three feet from her. He smiled when their glances met. She turned away at once. She was very angry. Why did he not come up and speak? He must have been following them all the time; hence her strange feelings. She would not pretend to see him again.

Days passed. Then she saw him once more. This time she was alone, coming out of a church. He looked into her face and smiled, but passed without stopping or speaking. She felt that he had followed her to the church door, and waited to meet her coming out. What did he mean? She went home, but all day could think of little else. She felt it was wrong to let her thoughts dwell so much upon him; yet she knew she did not love him. Her husband seemed unconscious that anything worried her, and she did not speak of his brother's presence for fear of angering him. A few evenings after she saw Hugh facing her as she lunched. She noticed that he drank deeply, that his face had changed terribly: that he had grown thin and haggard, only the eyes remained as strong and brilliant as ever.

"He is drinking himself to death before my eyes; this is his revenge," she thought, and wept for him in the night.

Another day, and for the first time since she married, she spoke to Hugh. He was sitting alone, as usual, in the restaurant. When her husband went to the door, she went back with an excuse of a dropped handkerchief.

She stopped by Hugh a moment.

"Go home to Ireland," she said; "for God's sake, Hugh, and drink no more.

He only laughed.

"Look at the magician," he said, holding his glass against the light. "If you want to be king, this will put you on a throne. If you want to love, this will bring you the woman of your desire. If you want to forget, here is oblivion."

"Go home," she answered. "Hugh, you must not stay here following us about. Why do you do it?"

Hugh looked into her soul till it shrank back afraid.

"I shall follow you no longer," he said slowly; "but you shall follow me. You shall come to me of your own free will. I shall follow you no more."

Maud flushed with anger.

"How dare you!" she said. "How dare you! I shall not speak to you again."

She hurried after her husband, her face red with shame. She would tell Ernest if his brother followed her any more. She did not know what was right. Should she tell him now? Better not now; it would mean an ugly scene; and their holiday was just at an end.

She saw no more of Hugh in the few days that followed. Had he taken her advice and gone home, or was he only keeping out of the way for some reason? She could not help looking for him wherever they went, but never saw him. She thought he was gone at last, till one day, passing *Notre Dame*, she stopped suddenly like one afraid.

“What is the matter?” Ernest said, as she paused and turned from him.

“Some one called,” she said, “or something.” She put her hand wearily to her head.

“There is no one here.” Her husband took her arm. “Do you care to look into the church?”

She did not answer, staring before her like one turned to stone.

“Maud!” Her husband took her hand in his. “What is it? Are you ill? What do you see?”

She drew her hand from his, and walked quickly away. He followed, angry and puzzled.

“Where are you going?”

“Hush!” she said. “Listen to him calling.” She went before him hastily round the church towards the Morgue. She went up the steps before he had time to stop her. He had his hand upon her arm before she reached the inner room.

“Do not go there,” he said; “it is horrible!” He heard some one, in the crowd of people looking at the photographs of the dead, laughing.

“Look at this one,” said a girl. “What a face!”

“And this fellow. God! what a grin he has!”

Ernest tried to draw his wife away, but she drew herself roughly from him, and went inside as though forced. When he followed she was standing gazing through the partition at two corpses lying inside: one that of a young woman with a cruel gash on her forehead, the other the body of his brother Hugh, lying smiling at him through the glass.

II

From the first day after Ernest reached home he noticed a change in his wife. She grew absent-minded, and would spend long hours in the woods and beside the river alone. When she met her husband at such times, she would flush and seem confused. At first he was troubled, thinking her ill. Then he became a prey to jealousy, and spied upon her, but never saw her with any one. His brother was dead; he had no other rival. What had he to fear? Yet he was disturbed. The continued guilty look upon his wife’s face, when he met her upon one of her lonely walks, her confused answering to his questions as to what she was doing everything told him something was wrong, but what he could not guess. Often after his day’s work of weary business monotony, he would long for his wife’s company in the evening, and though she would sit with him for a time, she would be sure to rise and leave him before long, going out to wander by herself for hours in the dusk. If on her return he reproached her, she would burst into tears, and endeavour by her tenderness to make him forgive her absence.

One evening when she started up to go, he bid her remain, and she sat down again reluctantly. He determined to speak to her about it.

“I see you have grown tired of me, Maud,” he said half playfully; “you cannot bear my company.”

She flushed hotly, tears coming into her eyes, yet she did not deny his half question.

Offended by her silence, he spoke no more, and turned to his paper. The moment he did so she rose and softly left the room. In a few seconds he followed her. He was angry, and determined to find some meaning for her strangeness. He heard her light feet go across the wooden bridge behind the house, and knew she had gone towards the falls where he had first seen her. It was almost dark, and only now and then her slight figure could be seen passing amongst the trees. She stopped and seated herself as he came behind her. He saw the grey outline of her girlish figure bend forward, and she laid her head upon her hands with a heavy sigh. He stretched his arms out to reach and comfort her, his anger forgotten at her grief. As he did so, she became aware she was no longer alone.

“You must come to me no more, oh, my love,” she wept. “You must not compel me to meet you again.”

Ernest caught her by the wrists in a mad grasp. She screamed, and rose facing him. He dragged her home by her hands without a word, she crying and moaning. He thrust her into the room she had left with more force than he had ever used before to a woman, and entering locked the door behind him.

He was livid with anger. She crouched on the floor afraid of him.

“So this is it.” He paced the floor like a tiger. “A lover! This is the meaning of the lonely evening walk—the repulse of your husband and his caresses, the distaste for his company.” He suddenly stopped before her, dragging her to her feet.

“Who is the man? Answer me. Who is the man?”

She put out her hands as though to avoid a blow.

“There is no man, no lover, I swear to you.”

“Who, then, were you bidding not come to you, who did you call your love?”

She only cried without answering.

“Who was it?” he thundered at her.

“I swear to you nobody; you must believe me.”

“You are lying to me.”

She faced him proudly.

“Prove it,” she said. “Have you heard a rumour of my being seen with any one? Have you yourself cause to suspect me? It is I who ask you. Who is it?”

A flush of shame passed over him. He thought of how he had followed and spied upon her. No, there was no one to suspect.

“You have grown cold to me, you do not love me,” he said sullenly. “Why is this?”

“I do care,” she said in a low, disturbed voice.

“You lie to me,” he said, maddened at her confusion.

She did not reply, but he read the truth upon her face. She did not love him. Without a word he unlocked the door and let her go. She passed him weeping, and he heard her go upstairs to her room. After that night he had no peace. Sometimes he vowed to leave her to go as she willed, after whatever strange motive she liked. At others, a great rage seized him to solve the mystery of her behaviour, and end it. Now she seldom went outside, but would sit alone in her room, and if he went into her presence suddenly, he saw a holy light upon her face like one who knew a great love.

At last the truth burst upon him, leaving him for the moment stricken. One day he passed her door and heard her voice. Thinking she called him, he stopped and listened, but it was not his name that came to his ears.

“Hugh,” her voice said, low and tender, “Hugh, are you not coming?” And then with infinite love and pity, “Give me your cold, cold hands, my love, till I warm them with my tears.”

Ernest opened the door and stood for the moment dumb upon the threshold. Only his wife was before him, but in a flash he realized she was not alone. Hugh was there. The spirit of his dead brother had taken his wife from his living arms. He closed the door, and staggered forward.

“Where is he?” He looked around the room. His wife, white as snow, started to her feet.

“Who? There is no one here except ourselves.”

“Where is the robber? Where is Hugh?” her husband gasped. He felt as if he were choking. He thought his brother was somewhere laughing at his helplessness. He flung his hands around, grasping the air on all sides. “Where is he? My God! where is he?” He was mad with rage.

The woman crouched in her chair, afraid to speak. She watched him with terrified eyes as he staggered about beating the air, till at last his helplessness came home to him, and he fell into a chair with his face upon his clenched hands.

His wife knelt beside him, and tried to force his hands away.

“Tell me what this is?” he said, and thrust her from him.

“Hugh is dead,” she said; “be pitiful.”

“I thought you loved me best,” he answered; you swore it.”

The woman stammered through her confession.

“I did,” she sobbed; “I loved you best when I married you. Sometimes when you were so fierce and wilful, I thought of Hugh, who was always gentle to me; but I never loved him till I was in Paris. He followed us everywhere, so I was always thinking of him. So sure was I of seeing him everywhere, that if he stayed away I kept wondering why till I saw him again. I was angry with him and myself, but could not control my thoughts. I dared not tell you, for you hated him, and I dreaded a scene. And I did not think it mattered; I did not care for him. Afterwards, when he died, I grieved for his broken life. and wept many tears. I thought of him lying so stiff and cold—he who had been so strong and full of life. I wept for him. Then he came to me. No one would have believed me if I said I saw him, so I did not speak. And then I knew he had followed me to make me think of him always; and that he died and came to me in spirit to possess my love. I could not struggle against the dead; I am his, I love him. He wanders without rest; I could not shut him from my heart. Every evening he comes to me from that strange, unknown country of the shades.” She hid her face in her hands crying bitterly.

Ernest raised his clenched hand as though to strike her, but something seemed to seize it and hold it back. For a moment he turned as though to face an invisible foe; then rose and left the room, his face set with a strange look.

For days they dwelt together like strangers; there was no word upon his part to show he remembered the ugly scene they had passed through together. The hope that he had half forgotten or pardoned his rival, now that he knew he was no living man, came often to his wife. She wondered at his devotion to his work, and was startled one day by a friend asking if her husband was going away, as he was settling his affairs, and asked her what it meant.

“Perhaps he is going abroad,” she said, but did not know. She felt she would not care much; he was so fierce, so strange; his eyes glared like a wolf’s beneath his dark brows; she went in fear of him always.

She knew he was meditating something; it was like watching a tiger crouched to spring.

And yet she half realized his bestial rage was not for her, that she was thrust aside while he stood to some stronger foe for Hugh, perhaps, but how could he reach him?

When at last the blow fell, it almost killed her. She went up to his room and found him lying upon the bed dead.

He lay there fully dressed, his clothes and the bed red with his blood; he had cut his throat from ear to ear. Her shrieks brought the servants around her, a doctor was sent for, and her father, but nothing could be done.

For three days they "waked" him, and she saw his face, white and cold before her, with a triumphant smile upon its lips; the same strange smile his brother had upon his mouth, lying dead in Paris. She knelt by the bed for three days, praying for forgiveness, and at last the face was hidden away and was seen no more.

* * *

The night it went she crept weary into the room, weeping her heart out on the bed where the corpse had lain; did she not love him best after all! Poor weak creature! the wills of two strong men had governed her heart, and torn it between them! In the midst of her crying, she heard a noise in the passage outside the door, as of people running; she started to her feet, her tortured nerves anticipating some new shock; she heard a scuffle at the door, and the weight of a heavy body thrown against it. Some one was fighting outside. Her heart swelled with anger; what scandal was this, who was quarrelling, in the widowed home, before the dead was cold in his grave? She went forward to open the door, then shrank back as if afraid. There was murder being done outside; she heard the frightful gasping of a deadly struggle. The door shook beneath the shock of heavy bodies pressing against it; she could hear the thud of limbs striking the floor, the hammering of fists, the tearing of clutching hands. She shrieked as the door burst open; no one was there, yet something had entered fighting, snarling, gasping, struggling. She stood in the centre of the room as though rooted to the ground. She saw the tables overturned, the chairs fall and break, the curtains torn from the windows, by invisible hands. And all the time the terrible choking, gasping sound went on.

"Who is it?" she cried. "Ernest! Hugh! O God!"

Then she felt hands fall upon her, her clothes were torn, she was dragged, now this way, now that, by violent, invisible fingers.

Shriek after shriek pierced through the house; the stairs became full of people, they were hurrying to her assistance. Her father was first to enter; he caught her in his arms. "She has gone mad with sorrow," he said, looking round the destroyed and littered room, and at her torn clothes. "Who left her alone at such a time? She has gone mad."

Then feeling her collapsed and heavy weight in his arms, he looked at her more closely, clutching her to him. "O Heaven, she is dead!" he cried, and bent over her in anguish.