

A Dream of Death

By Unknown (of Danish origin)

Her eyes were smarting from long want of sleep. Her head swam, and she felt a sudden faintness. Involuntarily she groped for support. Faint and deadly sleepy, she let her arms fall down on the table and her face on her clasped hands.

There were strange sounds around her, heavy sighs and a monotonous soughing mingling with the rustling of faded leaves. She wanted to lift her head to see what it was, but could not raise it, however much she tried. At last she succeeded. What is this? she thought. Everything seemed to loom so large round her, and the ceiling seemed so high up, and the light was pale grey, like that of a distant and misty moon, and there, along the wall, stood rows of beds with white sheets and blankets tucked in tightly, and beneath the blankets lay human beings, stiffly stretched out, and groaning. Now and then they raised their heads and prayed with heart-rending voices that their tight coverings might be loosened. But no one answered. By the side of the high narrow door opposite stood a figure with bound hands in a long white shining robe, fastened to the wall by a thick dark rope which was twisted round the waist. The eyes were wide open and had no pupils, but the whites were large and protruding, and out of the mouth hung a long tongue, black as pitch. Else wanted to rise, but she could not move a limb. Stiff with fear, she stared at the door. In a few bounds she would be able to reach it. But supposing it was locked now and the key were gone. Yes, it was locked, and there was no key: she saw that distinctly. She then felt herself become like a paralysed mass, and she began to glide down from the chair. But just at that moment the door opened noiselessly and four men entered quietly, carrying with them a long light coffin, curved into a semi-circle up at the top. The opening of the upper half was covered in front with a pane of glass, and through this Else saw a human head lying sideways with an emaciated, lifeless face, the colour of which seemed black as lead against the white pillow. In a moment she knew it was herself and that she was dead. Struggling to make some sound, she gave a shriek, fell face downwards on the floor, and woke up.