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THE DARK MIRROR

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"She saw . . . the face of the girl she knew as Leonora, and yet . . . it was likewise the face of Priscilla Maine."

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THE DARK MIRROR

BY

LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

Author of "The False Faces," "The Lone Wolf," Etc.

Illustrated by

RUDOLPH TANDLER

DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK LONDON

1920

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TO

WILSON BEALL VANCE

(WHO THOUGHT OF IT FIRST)
THIS TALE IS DEDICATED BY
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The Dark Mirror

CHAPTER ONE

THE STREET OF STRANGE FACES

I. THE DARK CORNER

THE way of the thing was ever the same: it befell without warning; or rather, the girl had never learned to take heed of signs which seemed plain enough in retrospect, when she sat alone and puzzled her pretty head with the dark riddle of this shadow life which set her so widely apart from every girl she knew and, indeed, from all the rest of humankind . . .

She had a day of restlessness, whose every hour brewed its new peculiar mood, whose every mood was purposeless, with times of almost feverish gaiety, causeless, fitful, fugitive, and other times when for no reason in her

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knowledge she caught herself sighing long fluttering sighs that shook her strangely. So might one's spirit sigh in weariness, faint with the burden of incessant strife with some great antagonist of unguessable identity.

Toward nightfall all these were soothed away into a feeling of serene poise and self-possession; and saturate with consciousness of the rich, strong wine of vitality that quickened her, she thought of life in the likeness of a wide and placid river, wherein she drifted like a fearless swimmer—a stream whose waters were warm, sweet, and calm with a penetrating quality of delicious calm she never dreamed could be disturbed, so absolute it seemed, so permanent, so imperturbable.

Only the sighs persisted oddly, as if her spirit knew moments of melancholy of which her mind knew nothing.

And insidiously the tranquil surface of that contentment was flawed by apprehensions of nameless danger, of peril latent, stealthy and implacable; as though the swimmer surmised some monstrous shape of evil skulking unseen in those opaque deeps—or felt herself subtly ensnared by a current whose irresistible set was altogether toward destruction.

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Now at length perceiving what was to come, panic paralysed in her the instinct of self-preservation: though horror brimmed the cup of being, she made no effort to fight free but, as one who knows that struggling must prove vain, resigned herself and let the baneful current work its will with her. Fascination, too, was at work, deep within her a mad desire to go again that wild way she had so often gone, and once more be, and do, and see . . .

So it is, so it must be, with those to whom a drug has made itself a thing of Life and Death.

On ahead, like a bend in the river, waited that turning in her psychic life which she knew as the Dark Corner: while she lay passive in the grasp of that power which so obscurely had its rise in her yet was repugnant to her, being at once her Will and her Necessity. And as the Dark Corner drew momentarily more near, the transfusion which she termed the Change was effected by what may only be described as a convulsion of her very soul, after which came lassitude, a vast enervation in which all lingering traces of reluctance were obliterated.

Now she was no longer herself, but another

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woman than the one she knew, a strange woman clothed in her own flesh but in no other way akin to her Self of everyday, having no thought, impulse or emotion with which that Self could sympathise, save such as may be considered common to all her sex. Yet, incomprehensibly, consciousness of the old self-identity survived; and though (as she conceived it) dispossessed from its tenement, her Self continued by her body's side, observant, critical, intrigued, something amused . . .

In this wise rounding the Dark Corner, she passed into that place which she had named the Street of Strange Faces; and the enigma of this confusion of Self with non-Self was forgotten in the rush of exotic sensation and emotion, excitement and lawless joy, which invariably accompanied definite and final commitment to renewed pursuit of these transcendental adventures.

II. LEONORA

THE strangest thing about the Street of Strange Faces was that neither it nor any of its Faces was really strange. She knew the Street, whose stones her feet

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had never trod, knew every inch of it, all its turns and windings, its doorways and byways and whither they led, its smells and sounds, its babel of tongues, its window-lights that bit the shadows with such diversity of ardour.

Together with the Faces, its windows made the Street, being of many sorts, to each its own significant illumination: hard plate glass masks of saloons beaming false fellowship, mean shop fronts of ingratiating shine, windows of homely golden glow, others through whose latticed shutters filtered sinister gleams bespeaking the unspeakable, others again that gave only dull reflections in begrimed panes of naphtha flames flaring luridly above pushcarts arrayed in unbroken lines along the curbs.

Through this welter of light and shadow, in the sidewalk channels, the Faces passed and repassed, lurking darkly in forbidding doorways, seeking brazenly the brightest glare, coming and going without rest, in uncouth carnival: kind and brutal, cunning and naïve, wicked and innocent, swarthy, fair, unique, commonplace; faces that disgusted, faces that allured, faces that meant nothing, that were mere empty mouthing masks; faces of Oriental cast, yellow and red and brown; negro faces

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in every shade of quartering; faces of Caucasians come together from all corners of the globe; faces twisted and working, or set and stamped with every passion flesh is heir to; grinning, leering, scowling, blazing, bacchic, austere, blank . . .

She knew them all: they all knew her. The sense of strangeness ebbed; with every step, with every look around, with every breath she drew, she was losing touch with that other Self which had so singularly renounced its authority and faded into impotence at the Dark Corner, but which still kept step with her, clung to her more closely than her shadow, and like a wraith of the living, watched, noted and compared while taking part in actions wholly foreign to its nature and experiencing reactions obscure to it and unintelligible.

Now the girl moved swiftly, with ease and boldness, even with a hint of arrogance: giving the Faces look for look, smile for smile, frown for frown; laughing impishly up at a tall policeman who knitted black brows over indulgent blue eyes; flinging racy retorts to the banter of a knot of men emerging from a gin-mill; chilling with glance and word the advances of those who should have known better;

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chaffing hucksters who bawled in her ears the tawdry virtues of their wares; pausing now and again to exchange more kindly persiflage with folk who held title to her liking; cutting an impudent figure, as confident and unabashed as a colt turned loose in home pastures.

Her sharp perceptions took in everything; not one considerable detail escaped their remark. And she liked it, she liked it all, she was curiously permeated to her very marrow with delight in sounds and sights and smells familiar to her senses since time beyond their earliest record.

The Street, never wide, was the narrower for its double rank of pushcarts. Between these an occasional automobile or horse-drawn vehicle went gingerly to spare the multitude of urchins, half dressed and less than half washed, of every age and almost every nationality, that swarmed upon the asphaltum. Tenement houses—their fire escapes converted into balconies lavishly draped with candid bedding and still more candid women—drew confidential heads together on high, leaving visible only a slender ribbon of cobalt sky. In between the air was sluggish, thick with unnatural haze, and rank with many odours; an

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unholy alliance of garlic, fried fish, boiled cabbage and stale beer maintaining debatable ascendency over the native aroma of a stratum of society which holds soap less necessity than luxury. And the night was tumultuous with screams of children at crude play, howls of babies wallowing in neglect, bawling of street vendors, each striving to outyell his nearest competitor, clatter of tinny pianos, blare and whine of jaded phonographs, the drunken giggle of a fiddle, and from some far, high coign of forlorn complaint of a French horn tirelessly reiterating one phrase of stuttering incoherence; all relieved against a wholly normal undertone of incessant gossip and bickering.

The girl hugged to herself the joy of living; this was to her the breath of life; even more, it was enterprise, adventure, the very stuff of Romance.

She went her way smiling, with a conscious smile bred of knowledge that she was dressed in her best, in her very newest best at that, garments of a cut and cost and quality such as the Street seldom saw. But it saw them now and gave tongue to comment in strident accents and pungent phraseology, most of which the girl ignored other than by that toss of her

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head which was a characteristic gesture. To several critics, however, she replied with wit of the gutter, direct and hard hitting but good humoured, or on due provocation with resentment translated into irony that bit like an acid. She was very much at home.

Nevertheless, her show of nonchalance cloaked circumspection; if her looks were free and roving, they were likewise keen and watchful. Though the width of the Street was between them, she was well aware of two plain-clothes men who turned to stare when she had gone by and conferred together concerning her craftily, after the absurd manner of their kind, out of the corners of their mouths.

But that was a minor circumstance, more fun than reason for worry: let 'em rubber as much as they wanted; they hadn't anything on her—never would have. They couldn't jug a girl for wearing good clothes, even if they didn't know where she had got them or how . . .

The stress on her attention was due to considerations far more weighty; and when, of a sudden, at a crossing, she descried its cause, she checked in unfeigned dismay, with startled pulses.

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III. THE MAN MARIO

On the far corner a tall man, simply clothed, composed of habit, stood stirless, hands clasped lightly before him in a gesture with which the girl was well acquainted, head and shoulders lifting above the crowd. Against the tawny flames of naphtha torches his profile was sharp and black, the silhouette of an ascetic, gravely fine; but none better than she knew how its austerity was belied by haunted eyes whose sincerity could wring truth from lips that moved to frame a lie.

And he was looking for her; she knew that, too.

In a flurry so real that it touched her anger, she swung aside into the bye-street, a grim street that led anywhere but the way she wished to go. Yet she welcomed its sullen gloom and went swiftly, heedless of everything but the necessity of escaping, knowing in her heart she could not escape . . .

A street of sullen quiet and gloom: the sound of pursuing footfalls was soon detected, their light, sure, rapid tempo recognised.

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Tempted to run, the girl refrained only because flight must be interpreted as confession of weakness, of shame and cowardice.

Her name was called in a voice of resonant timbre: "Leonora! I beg of you . . . It is I, Mario!"

She stopped and swung round with a specious show of surprise subsiding into indifference. Tone and manner were discouraging; but her heart was faint.

"Oh, hello! It's you . . ."

The man paused, hat in hand, his attitude one of pleading and reproach, yet informed with an ineffaceable dignity.

"You saw me, Leonora. Why did you run—from me?"

She tossed her head. "What makes you think I did?"

"I do not think: I know. You turned up this street to avoid me. Leonora, why?"

"If you thought that—that I wanted to be left alone—why'd you follow me?"

The man lifted his hands palms uppermost, and let them fall.

"You know . . . I love you. I make no secret of that. I have told you—how many times?—a hundred? Yes"—his enunciation

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grew more rapid—"and you are not indifferent to me. You never said so, but . . . I know."

"Oh, I like you all right——"

"No: more than that; too much to wish to hurt me. Is it not so?"

"Why, I don't want to hurt you, of course. But——"

"Then when I see you run from me as if I were a plague, what am I to think? What am I to do? Stand still and let my hurt heart break? Or follow and beg you to tell me why?"

"Well—if you've got to know—I was in a hurry. I've got a date—and I'm late."

"And I am detaining you! Forgive me—but let me go with you a little way."

The girl shot hunted glances right and left; then, since nothing in sight promised diversion, said ungraciously: "Nobody can stop your walking with me."

"Nobody but you, Leonora. One word——"

"One word from me and you'll do exactly as you please." With a nervous laugh—"Oh, come along!"—she turned back, walking hastily, the man Mario falling in at her side. "I'd just as leave you didn't come all the way, though."

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"You do not wish me to know where you go." He nodded sober confirmation of an unuttered guess. "I see . . ."

"You see a terrible lot!" The girl had a spasm of irritation. "You're always seeing things. Well, what do you see now?"

"You go to meet those others"—his tone was sad—"those whom I have so often begged you——"

"Guess it's my business who my friends are."

"Certainly you give me no right to make it mine. That cannot affect the truth that such associations are unwise."

"Maybe I'm best judge of that, too."

"Leonora: why pretend to me? Deceive yourself if you must and can—but not me, not one who loves you as I do. Do not attempt it, even. It is so useless."

With a courtesy the more gratifying because it was so novel, Mario put his hand under her arm, lightly piloting her through the human mazes of the brawling Street, which they crossed squarely and quickly left behind.

After a little while, being in the wrong, she said sulkily: "I don't see why you're always making out I'm trying to put something over on you. I never promised . . ."

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"True. But you know I am right, that I would never ask anything of you not justified by man's natural solicitude for the woman of his love. You know what these friends of yours are, and their ways, whither they lead, their inevitable end. You know, if you persist, your fate must be as theirs."

"I guess what's good enough for my friends is good enough for me——"

"No, Leonora: you are too good for that—or I could not love you."

The man paused, and his hold on her arm drew the girl to an unwilling pause with him, midway down a dark, dead block of industrial buildings, with a windowless wall beside them and not a soul nearby to hear. The rays of a distant street lamp were still strong enough to reveal the intense earnestness which animated the dark, strong face bending over her, and in spite of impatience and of indignation at being cornered, the girl was distressed, more than a little humbled in her own esteem by this revelation of an affection more enduring and generous and frank than any she had ever known.

And all the while that second Self, so weirdly Leonora and yet not Leonora, divined even

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more clearly than she the exquisite mettle of the spirit that shone out of Mario's eyes, and was shaken by the urgency of the message in his favour which it struggled vainly and hopelessly to impart.

"I am not a common man." Mario was stating simple fact, innocent of conceit. "I know the world outside the one you know, and the men and women who live in it. Where I go, I look about me, and reflect on what I see. I am seldom mistaken in those who interest me. And you whom I love . . . I tell you, Leonora, there is something fine in you, something finer than you dream, something that might ennoble you if you would give it one little chance. You are no more of this life than I, and you do a wrong thing, a wicked and cruel thing, when you trample down that which is good in you and might bring you to a splendid destiny."

Impressed in spite of herself, touched, and flattered, too, she looked uneasily away, twisting her hands together, her tongue faltering.

"I suppose you know what you mean . . ."

"And you also. I mean, you could love me if you would, and in my love, in the life I offer you, become the self that today you hide away

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so jealously, your real self, a woman fine and strong and true, not this adventure-loving companion of rogues and vagabonds—and worse!" He gave an imploring gesture. "Ah, Leonora, if only you would give them up!"

She looked up with wistful eyes, all effrontery abandoned, only the woman remaining, the woman whom this man alone had the secret of perceiving in her. In this, indeed, resided the true reason for her fear of meeting Mario: he was disastrous to her peace of mind, her self-complacence; when she listened to him, satisfaction departed and in its stead came inquietude, with the wish to be what he would have her be, what intuition told her she could be if she would but set herself to overcome her own resistance.

She searched his face in wonder. When he disturbed her so profoundly, why did she like him so much? What was it that gave him power to charm her wits away, discontent her with all that had otherwise seemed excellent and complete, make nothing of the steel of her set purpose? Was it his love alone?

He loved her, she was satisfied of that, but with such forbearance, such consideration, tenderness and understanding as left her in-

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credulous. In the Street love was another thing entirely, a fiercer, cruder business, brusque and selfish without disguise—something open, direct and casual, but as essential as meat and drink. But this was different, this love Mario had for her.

Yes: and it was true, what he asserted, he too was different; there was no one like him, so gentle and strong and brave, fastidious, reserved, and thoughtful. In her world he made a figure striking and incongruous. Yet he lingered on obstinately, in part (he told her) because it was his passion to study every side of life, but mostly because he loved her and never would willingly give up hope of winning her. He would never leave, he protested, till she went with him.

Her heart misgave her; she was afraid . . .

"Leonora!" he pleaded. "Come with me . . ."

In a moment of determination she tried to put sentiment aside with a hard little laugh of scorn. "I guess you don't understand: Red would kill me if I chucked him!"

"He would never find you where I would take you, to my home in Spain; or if he ever did, he would not dare lift eyes to you, or know

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in you, a lady, moving in the world for which she was born, the girl he knew as Leonora and loved—after his fashion—with whatever feeling it is he calls love!"

In a dull voice she insisted: "You don't know Red . . ."

But she was more than tempted. She liked Mario too much, better even than Red—at long last she admitted it—Red whose conquest had till now been her greatest pride. Sheer force of mind and character compelled admiration and affection for Mario: in his restricted sphere Red prevailed solely through brute cunning, hardihood, and ruthlessness. Life with Red would never lack interest; but with Mario she could be happy all her days, content and unafraid.

"Come with me, Leonora, and be your true self. Life can be beautiful . . ."

He played shrewdly on her most secret weakness: she was fond of believing herself somewhat better than her milieu, through some romantic accident superior in point of birth as well as, what was undeniable, in spirit and intelligence. Vistas of powerful seduction opened to her contemplation. She knew momentary intimations of a fate as strange as

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that which he promised her; and at heart an arrant egoist, she saw herself primitively as she had seen other women, in her excursions into the haunts of the well-to-do, radiantly begowned and furred and jewelled, lolling insolently in a limousine car, Mario at her side "dressed like a gentleman" . . .

But this vision was swiftly dissipated by recrudescence of that fear which Red inspired, in honest conviction that no earthly power could save her from his vengeance.

"You don't know Red." She shook her head solemnly in a spirit of fatal prophecy. "He'd croak you, too; he'd croak us both."

Mario smiled faintly. "I am not afraid——"

"He isn't the only one, he's got his gang."

"Still I am unafraid. What are such creatures? Vermin—less than vermin, nothing!"

"You're not afraid of dying?"

"What is life without your love?" He had a thoughtful moment. "Who knows but death may prove infinitely more wonderful than this life of ours? There is but one way of finding out . . ."

She heard him in a stare. The woman in her could hardly be unaffected by the handsome gravity of that extraordinary counte-

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nance, whose salient features gained so much through that Rembrandtesque play of deep shadows and dull light. And he was "talking like a book," yet unpretendingly, as always speaking his mind without affectation. Under the spell of his mentality she acknowledged now for the first time that he was essential: all else was nothing; Red, adventure, success, the domination of personality which she had already imposed upon her environment—none of these mattered if to have them she must forego the love of Mario. And of a sudden care fastened cruel claws upon her heart and wrung from it a cry of self-betrayal.

"Maybe you're not afraid, Mario. I don't believe you are. But I am—afraid for you. I wish you'd go away."

"You care that much!"

"No—not the way you mean——"

"You love me!" Her hands lifted in protest: he caught and enclosed them both in his own. His shadowed face and eyes grew luminous, his sonorous accents vibrated with emotion. "You love me, Leonora—at last."

He was drawing her steadily toward him, all her strength seemed to have ebbed from her limbs. There was madness in the beating of

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her heart, madness mounting like mist into her brain. Now she was in his arms, and glad. His lips closed on hers. For a long breath she was a mere thing of reeling senses.

"You love me!"

"I don't know," she murmured—"maybe . . ."

"Tomorrow you will marry me, and we will go away——"

Stung by realisation of what had happened, she struggled to be free.

"Let me go, Mario—please!"

"You will marry me?"

"I don't know—perhaps—yes, I will. But not tomorrow—not right away."

"Why——?"

"Let me go—I'll tell you." He released her. She stepped back, shaken with love and fright, looking fearfully up and down the street. It remained dark and lonely, singularly deserted.

"Tell me what reason——"

"I can't marry you just yet. I've got to break with Red so's he won't know it wasn't him that broke with me. And I've got other things to do—things I can't tell you about, Mario—things I've *got* to 'tend to before I

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can marry you. But you can trust me: I've promised, and I will, as soon as ever I can . . ." Her voice quavered, and she thrust out her hands, fending off his arms. "Please don't kiss me again, please let me go now. If anybody saw us and told Red . . ."

He made a sign of submission. "As you will, so be it, my Leonora. I will see you again —when?"

"Tomorrow. I'll give you a ring about noon and fix to meet you—uptown somewheres, I guess. Now—I've got to run. Good night . . . dear."

He uttered in resignation: "Good night." With a flickering smile of fondness she turned and left him, her slight young figure flitting swiftly through the shadows. Beneath the lamp at the far street corner, she turned, looked back, saw him motionless where she had left him, surmised his look of longing and, waving a hand, ran on, wild joy in her heart contending with cold fear.

For now she had done it, and there'd be the devil to pay. But it couldn't be helped. Though hell and heaven were leagued against them, she would go through. She always did, once she got started. And with Mario, she

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knew, it was as with her: he too would go through, now he knew she loved him, though Red and all the world besides should try to stop him . . .

Breathless, she presently modified her pace to a rapid walk, but went on blindly, through a labyrinth of streets of which she received no impression other than of a blur of dubious shadows and uncertain lights . . .

At length, well out of her course, she stopped, imposed coherence upon her thoughts, got her bearings, and started on anew, in a cooling mood constraining herself to forget Mario and concentrate upon the business that waited for her at her destination.

But the Self outside herself, of whose constant company she was wholly ignorant, never ceased to yearn back toward that gallant, lonely figure they two had left behind in the quiet bye-street.

IV. RISTORI'S

Her walk took on the semblance of an aimless saunter. She met the policeman she had seen from a distance, looked him impudently up and down,

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got a blank stare in response, and passed on. Rounding a corner, she glanced idly over-shoulder; he was not even looking back. Feeling more secure, she turned sharply, half way down a block in the shadow of the Elevated, and with the calm assurance of her apparent kind entered what had once been a dwelling of some pretentiousness but now was dedicated to the decadent uses of—according to its painted signboard—"Ristori's Table d'Hôte—Dinner with Wine 75c.—Luncheon 50c."

She was later than she had thought: a glimpse of the general dining room proved that; few patrons of the establishment remained, a scattered handful lingering over liqueurs and cigarettes, elbows planted on coarse and winestained tablecloths, by pairs deeply interested in each other. Scanning their faces, she recognised nobody; and nobody paid her the least heed except a waiter who knew her by sight and scraped her a grinning bow as she started up the stairs.

In the corridor at the head of the first flight, she turned to the back of the house and laid a confident hand upon the knob of the furthest door. It turned, but the door was stubborn. With a movement of impatience she knuckled

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the panels with a triple knock of peculiar timing. A hum of voices in the closed room died away, a heavy tread became audible, a key grated, the door swung open. She went in, nodding lightly to the man who had admitted her and, finding herself under the concentrated regard of eleven pair of eyes, paused in the middle of the floor and struck a spirited pose.

"Good evening, folks! Pipe my new rags!"

The silence that answered her was broken after a little by Red Carnehan, who said heavily: "Hello, kid. Sit down."

Ignoring his invitation to an empty chair on his right, she dropped her pose but remained where she had stopped, lifting her brows a little and reviewing the company with quizzical gaze.

Though both windows were open, closed shutters prevented any draught from vitiating the stuffiness of the "private dining room"—a bed-chamber in the intention of the architect. In an atmosphere stifling with smells of food, alcohol, and a truculent perfume, the smoke of imitation Turkish tobacco hung in lazy, lilac reefs. Discoloured paper of a morbid pattern was parting in reluctant spirals from the walls. Dust of decades weighed down an elderly car-

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pet and obscured its florid design. Scorbutic paint disfigured the fine old woodwork.

The man who had let Leonora in having resumed his chair, twelve were seated at a table littered with debris of a meal, unclean earthenware plates, and those high-shouldered bottles of dark glass, guiltless of labels, which seem to be the sole habitat of the vin du pays so generally known as "red ink" that to name it by this alias no longer excites a smile.

Because of the heat all the men but one—Mr. Harry the Nut—had put off their coats and collars, while the women had loosened their blouses at the throat. Sweat beaded faces of various complexions, ranging from the sanguine countenance of Red to the pastiness of Charlie the Coke. Leonora, looking from one to another, found each, with the exception of Red's, sullen of cast if not openly hostile. She sketched a lofty smile.

"What's the funeral?"

Red Carnehan—red of head and hand—an Italo-Celtic product, as slender, supple and sinewy as a snake, and as deadly—replied sufficiently, "Nobody's—yet," and again waved a hand toward the vacant chair. "Whyn't you sit down?" He added: "You're pretty late."

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"What about it?" The girl flounced to the table and threw herself sideways into the chair. "I don't see as that's any reason why everybody's got to wear mourning."

English Addie, blonde, blousy and full-bodied, sprawled half across the table and, without removing the cigarette from her mouth, spoke in accents of cloying affection flatly denied by her semi-sober stare of jealousy.

"Maybe you won't mind tellin' us w'at mide you lite, dearie . . ."

Leonora experienced a qualm of misgivings. Had somebody spied on her and Mario and hurried ahead to tattle? . . . Even so, that was a matter between Red and herself, nothing to excite ill-feeling in the others. But Red was apparently unruffled although unusually subdued for him, and perhaps a shade suspiciously impartial in his attitude.

She lied readily, without a quiver, naming the two plain-clothes men she had noticed in the Street of Strange Faces.

"Ennis and Corbin lamped me on the way here—if it's anything in your young life, Addie dear—and I had to chase all over to lose 'em."

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"You did shake 'em, kid—sure?" Red demanded with keen interest.

"Sure. If I hadn't I wouldn't be here now."

"Maybe so," Charlie the Coke drawled in a voice as colourless as the flesh of his face—"maybe not."

"Where do you get that stuff?"

In flashing resentment Leonora swung round to face him. For a thought Charlie endeavoured to withstand her gaze, assuming a look of vacuity; but the task was beyond the compass of drug-drenched powers; his eyes shifted, their lids drooped, and his essay in insolence died miserably in a sickly grimace.

"Ah, I didn't mean nothin', Nora."

"You're a liar," the girl stated with crisp conviction. "What's all this, anyway? I want to know."

Her eyes ranged again the array of faces, challenging each in turn, and getting no satisfaction; for each in turn averted his gaze with an expression more or less sheepish and disconcerted, all but Red, Harry the Nut, and Inez, the third and only other woman present.

Red's countenance was morose and anxious; Harry, slenderly elegant in flashy but admirably tailored clothing, wore a look of satiric

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amusement; Inez, like Leonora, dark and young but lacking her clear pallor of complexion and regularity of feature, confronted her with a steady stare and an unquestionable sneer.

"Well? What's it all about? Start something, somebody—why don't you? If anything's gone wrong, let me in the know. I guess I've got as much right as anybody——"

The Nut shrugged and with supercilious nonchalance selected another cigarette from the flat gold case he was fond of displaying; a circumstance which, according to one's bias, might or might not be taken as indicating that the case had been honestly come by. Inez seemed eager to speak, but Red forestalled her.

"It's like this, kid: Eddie's been pinched."

The fact that the person in question, being under indictment for burglary, had for some time succeeded in remaining at large solely by grace of his loyal associates, might have been thought enough to rob this announcement of some of its staggering quality. But to Leonora it came as a genuine shock, and she showed it unmistakably.

"No!" she exclaimed, and added a most unladylike phrase of mixed incredulity and re-

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gret. "When'd they get him—and where?"

"Tonight—in the place next door to Addie's—went straight there as if they knew where he'd be and when."

"Somebody's squealed," Leonora declared with conviction.

"That's just it," Inez affirmed significantly. "I *wonder* who!"

Leonora needed a little time before she was able to couple the thinly veiled animosity of the gathering, to which she had been sensible ever since entering, with the tone employed by Inez, something which this last would ordinarily have lacked audacity to attempt. Then immediately her temper grew incandescent.

"Meaning me?"

"Why, hon!" Inez drawled, rounding her eyes—"whatever made you think that?"

But she committed the grievous error of trying to exchange with Red a look of malicious understanding which Leonora intercepted instantly.

"Never you mind what made me think that," she said in cold rage: "I get you: I ain't blind and dumb. But take it from me, Inez: you chuck it and chuck it quick. If I get one more word out of you, trying to make me out a stool-

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pigeon—if I ever see you look that way at Red again—your people'll have no kick coming."

"Oh, is that so?" Inez demanded with mistaken pertness. "What do you think you'll do?"

"Irish you," Leonora informed her savagely —"irish you till all you'll need will be a wood kimono lined with satin and trimmed with tin. And you know I'll do it, too."

Her small emphatic fist struck the table; Red's hand closed on it.

"Easy, kid; don't run away with the wrong idea——"

"I won't. Don't worry." She wrenched her hand free. "I'm no simp. I've got more brains than the rest of this push lumped together—that goes for you, too, Red. And I won't stand for insinuations from nobody—not from that rotten little cat that's trying to make up to you—she's always jealous of me—or anybody else. You . . .!" For a moment words proved inadequate. She sat in a tense posture, white with fury, breathing quickly; and even Red avoided her eyes. "Ah, you all make me sick! Eddie gets pinched—God knows how!—and you all fix on me as the squealer because I happen to be a few minutes

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late tonight! Why, you poor fish——!" She checked abruptly, noting another questionable gap in the company. "Why pick on me? Where's Leo Bielinsky? Why isn't he here? If being late's proof of squealing—he's later than me!"

"That ain't all, Nora," English Addie interposed. "We want to know where you got those clothes."

"What's that to you? Can't I spend my money, dress myself decent, if I want to?"

"Yes: but where'd you get the front you was wearing when Harry seen you up on Fifth Avenue yesterday?"

"He never——"

"Oh, yes, I did, Nora," the Nut interrupted with his exasperating gentility, mincing his words in the fashion he found useful in uptown bars. "Putting on dog, too, and getting away with it great—travelling with a dame that looked like she wouldn't take nothing from the Queen of England. I tell you, I saw you."

"That's another lie!" But the steadiness of Harry's eyes was disconcerting. Unquestionably he believed his assertions. Leonora's tongue tripped over the denial: "I wasn't . . ."

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"Well, then, tell us where you were at four o'clock yesterday afternoon," Addie suggested blandly.

At that hour Leonora had been in a Second Avenue motion picture theatre with Mario: an indiscretion to which she could not possibly confess. Perceptibly she lost assurance.

"None of your damn business."

"Better tell 'em, kid," Red counselled uneasily. "You got to come clean——"

"Like hell I have!" Once more the flames of rage leapt high. "I don't owe this gang anything, much less an account of everything I do. The shoe's on the other foot. You all know me, you all know I'm on the level. Most of you'd be up the river today if it wasn't for me—and you know that, too. How far do you think you'd get if my brains didn't work for you, tell you what to do and how to get away with it without the bulls tumbling? Who planned the raid on Einstein's hock shop? Did any of you get pinched for that? Who figured out how to get those bonds away from the Chemical Trust's messenger? Was anybody lagged for that? . . . And because I take the trouble not to lead a coupla guns right up to you tonight—and because the Nut saw some-

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body that looked like me all dolled up on Fifth Avenue yesterday—or thinks he did——"

"It was you, all right," Harry affirmed coolly.

Their glances met and clashed, the girl's hot with challenge and resentment, the man's cold with malice. For the first time she recognised in this creature an enemy. Then her super-excited intelligence, grappling with the problem of how to confute his implicit accusation, experienced a flash of memory followed by a lightning-like stroke of intuition.

"If you want to know who squealed," she suggested deliberately, "why don't you give Harry the office? Ask him what he does with all his time, where he gets the coin for all his swell clothes, who he talks to when he's bulging up to the bars of the big hotels. Ask him why the cops always look the other way when they see him coming, why he ain't never pinched——"

With an oath Harry thrust back his chair, which overturned with a crash, and jumped up, guilt stamped upon his countenance of sudden pallor, glinting fearfully in his furtive little eyes. But in the same instant the door—left negligently unlocked after the entrance of

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Leonora—was hastily opened and slammed. The first to identify the man who had slipped in and now stood fumbling with the key, English Addie cried out in shrill dismay: *"Leo!"* The company turned simultaneously and with confused cries and questions got to its feet.

Slight and under normal height, panting, sweating, haggard, his face livid, eyes terrified, hatless, and with clothing dishevelled, Leo Beilinsky, alias Leo the Blood, sank back against the door, one hand pressed to his side just below his labouring heart. The other, holding an automatic pistol, described a gesture of supplication. Red snapped over-shoulder a profane demand for silence. Leo's broken phrases became audible.

" . . . Croaked a bull down the street . . . coming out of Bennie's place, Corbin and Ennis tried to jump me . . . Corbin got it." He gesticulated meaningly with the pistol. "Ennis took after me . . . Looks like a frame-up . . . cops everywhere I turned . . ."

Red demanded furiously: "What in hell'd you come here for?"

"No place else to go . . . cornered, I tell you . . . Listen!" The Russian held up a hand and, bending an ear to the door, heard

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sounds below inaudible to the others. "There they come now! For God's sake, get me out of this!"

"Fire-escape," Red indicated with a jerk of his head. Somebody thrust open the shutters of one window. The murderer pulled himself together, reeled across the room, and lurched out upon an iron platform grating. Immediately he disappeared.

Now the rumour was loud in the hall below, the shrill protestations of the waiters rising above yet dominated by the deeper voices of the police. After brief but violent altercation, heavy feet came pounding up the stairs. Then panic fastened upon the wits of all those in the private dining room and stampeded them toward the fire-escape. Primitively in their fright men fought with women for first place at the window. Stifled screams of pain and anger mingled with muttered blasphemies; but the noise of milling feet alone would have been enough to betray them. Not more than two had managed to fight out to the iron platform before the police were clamouring and hammering at the door. Leonora, thrust brutally to one side, saw the futility of trying to escape before the maddened men, and, re-

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"Her ears were deafened with Red's profane instructions t
get herself out through the window without more delay."

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signed, stood clear of the crush, watching the panels of the door tremble under a storm of kicks and blows.

Fear was absent from her temper, but she was shaken by impotent exasperation and sad with regrets. This meant an end to everything, not alone to these associations which barely an hour since she herself had planned to forsake, but to all her hope of happiness with Mario. For she had not the remotest doubt but that she, with at least a majority of the others, would be arrested, jailed and, on the evidence of complicity in past exploits which the police spy, Harry the Nut, would be able to lay before the District Attorney, sentenced to a term of years in one or another of the State penitentiaries. It were idle, indeed, to hope for any better fate, in view of the strong likelihood that others of her associates—Inez and English Addie almost surely—would turn State's evidence.

And long before she had served out her time Mario would forget her; or, even if he did not, would never, never by any chance, make a woman with a criminal record his wife.

And this was what came of indulging her keen delight in excitement and adventure.

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If only she had listened to Mario in time

. . .

Seconds dragged like minutes, and the door still held. She began to catch at straws of hope: only three now remained in the room, Charlie the Coke—already with one foot across the sill, whimpering and mouthing curses because of inability to crowd into the press upon the fire-escape—Red, and herself.

The hammering on the door stopped. She wondered why. Charlie contrived to jam his terror-racked body out through the window. Red caught Leonora by a shoulder, roughly enough if in a rare impulse of chivalry, and tried to thrust her out after Charlie. But the crush on the platform was still too dense. She heard a dull crash and, swinging round, saw the door, its lock shattered by the impact of a brawny shoulder, slam back against the wall. The policeman who had broken it in stumbled and sprawled full length upon the floor. The plain-clothes man, Ennis, leaped in over his prostrate body. Her ears were deafened with Red's profane instructions to get herself out through the window without more delay. She made a vain attempt to obey, and had half succeeded when a rattle of shots sounded and,

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looking back, she saw the man Ennis pitch forward on his knees, then fall prone. The policeman, scrambling up pistol in hand, received the balance of the clip in Red's automatic, and sank slowly down upon his side.

Screaming with horror, the girl fell back from the window. Red shouldered past her, climbed out, turned and caught her by the arm and dragged her after him, still screaming like a madwoman. She tripped, her head struck heavily against the bottom of the window sash, and the lights dimmed weirdly and burned out, leaving only darkness impenetrable, and a strange hush pierced by thin echoes of eldritch shrieks . . .

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CHAPTER TWO

THE ANTAGONISTS

I. PRISCILLA

ROUSING on an elbow, Priscilla Maine found herself awake, with a racing heart, a throat swollen with a strangled cry of horror, and a mind through whose painted murk the reflection of a woman's screams ran like a thread of purple light.

Yet here was only darkness, with silence absolute . . .

Drugged with lees of dream, her wits at first refused to take hold on reality; and sinking back she lay in motionless suspense between dream and waking—save she panted and was shaken by the panic of her bosom—till staring vision cleared sufficiently to recognise, overhead, the rectangle of a skylight framing a violent gloom so deep that it made no impression on the shadows that enwrapped her.

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With a low gasp of relief that was half a sob of fright as well, she sprang up from the divan, stumbled to the wall, and after a moment's groping flooded the studio with milky radiance from an inverted dome.

Still thrall to terror, she stood with a hand on the electric key, dazed eyes identifying one after another objects which lifelong association had made common and kindly in her sight. And in a passion of gratitude she embraced the reassurance inherent in the atmosphere of that richly furnished, spacious and silent studio, her father's workshop till his death and ever since her own.

It was true, then: she was safely restored to her own intimate environment, where nothing resembled even remotely that frowsty room where murders had been done. She had merely dreamed a dream, one more of those amazingly real dreams which she had learned to accept without protest as phenomena of slumber unavoidable, singularly harmless, and on the whole rather amusing.

So at least they seemed till this night when, for the first time, stark tragedy had stalked unbidden and unheralded, rending with ruthless hands the flimsy texture of illusion and

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rendering the dream more fact to her than this awakening, more true, and so much the more terrible.

Pressing palms to temples that throbbed and burned intolerably with their content of thoughts acrawl with fright and horror, she made her way to the bathroom and bathed her face with cold water, then with cologne till, in the sensory reaction of stimulated flesh and nerves, she began to feel measurably more calm and self-possessed, more Priscilla Maine than "Leonora" . . .

A twittering telephone recalled her to the studio. Receiver to ear, she said, "Yes? Who is it?" and heard the agitated cries of the elderly kinswoman whom she called aunt and with whom she had her home.

"Priscilla! Where have you been all evening? I've been half frantic . . . Why didn't you let me know?"

"I haven't been anywhere, dear — only asleep, here in the studio."

"But I called the studio twice, and Central said you didn't answer."

The girl succeeded in mustering an accent of mirth. "I'm sure I didn't, Aunt Esther. So Central must have told the truth."

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"But—one would think the bell——"

"It was one of my famous sound sleeps, dear. You know how impossible it is to wake me up when I'm sincere about sleeping. Well, this was one of those times." She heard a complaining vague murmur—"that dreadful studio"—and laughed lightly. "Please don't be cross, Aunt Esther; I didn't go to do it, honest I didn't! Mrs. Morey left in the middle of the afternoon—she had a tea on, or something—and about half after five I stopped painting and thought I'd lie down and rest a little before coming home. And now it's . . ." She consulted and frowned reprovingly at her wrist watch. "I think my watch must be wrong. What time is it?"

"A quarter to eleven——"

"Really? Then it hasn't stopped. I felt sure it was much later."

"It's late enough for you to be alone there, in that horrid place. Do hurry home. I'll send Arthur with the car at once."

"Please."

She donned hat and cloak before a mirror in whose insusceptible depths she saw, set in her own hat and individual coiffure, the face of the girl whom in her dreams she knew as

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Leonora; and yet it was likewise the face of Priscilla Maine. Vainly with importunate eyes she questioned that counterfeit of two countenances. How could this thing be? Was she one woman waking and another when she slept? Was there in her a dual personality such as reading had taught her to accept as a psychological possibility? Did two natures struggle within her, one prevailing in her hours of slumber, and not always even then?

That train of speculation she was afraid to pursue too far . . .

II. THE PORTRAIT

Beside the mirror, a long pier glass, stood a heavy studio easel holding a full-length canvas, an unfinished portrait of herself in the Zingara dress she had once worn at a costume dance. Begun long ago, on a day when a model failed her, and carried out inconsecutively, "when she felt in the mood," the painting now neared completion; a little more work on draperies and background, and it would be ready for exhibition. Inspecting it critically, with fault-finding eyes, she saw that her work was good, almost as

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good as her father's. She could give herself no higher praise; and she was hard to please when her own work was in question. But here, incontestably, she had done well: the figure on the canvas lived; its striking pose was instinct with almost insolent vitality; the face was aglow with zest in life, the eyes seemed transiently arrested in an instant of gay impudence altogether charming.

Her troubled gaze turned back to the mirror's faithful presentment of a slender, modishly gowned young worldling, the finished product of a fashionable upbringing, a little proud, reserved, thoughtful, exquisite . . . Priscilla Maine.

But the girl on the canvas was Leonora. And in her self both lived. But which was which? Which false, which true? Was the life she knew, the life of Park avenue and Fifth, of teas, dinners, theatres, dances—relieved only by these days in the studio, her happiest, when she was painting—was this life reality or illusion? And that dream life of which she caught only fugitive glimpses, fascinating, tantalising, terrible, and related to nothing within the scope of her experience—was the dream life perhaps the life of fact?

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She shook a head baffled, bewildered, and faint with wondering.

The door bell interrupted. She answered, finding as she had expected that the chauffeur was waiting to escort her to the town car which he was obliged to leave at the mouth of the Alley. She was glad of his company, when she had put out the lights and locked the studio door, for the Alley was indifferently illuminated and seemed rather grimly desolate at that hour. Their heels struck uncannily loud echoes from its uneven flagging. Its doorways were deep pockets of ambiguous shadow. Anything might happen there after dark, Priscilla told herself, and none be wiser before morning. She knew a moment of sympathy with Aunt Esther's distrustful animosity toward "that dreadful studio life."

If Aunt Esther only guessed how infinitely more dreadful was that other life which Priscilla knew in dreams . . .

But no one guessed. Instinctive reticence, jealousy of her privacy, reluctance to be thought different, and fear of having her sanity questioned as she herself too often questioned it, had guarded the girl's secret and kept it inviolate.

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As the car turned through Eighth street, then north upon the Avenue, studiously dissipated Greenwich Villagers were seeping into the café of the Brevoort, all yearning to be "different." She envied them desperately, whose one desire was to be normal, commonplace, an everyday girl with no secret eccentricity to stand between her and love.

She had long since made up her mind she must never marry while this dream life continued to exert its occult influence upon her. To risk transmitting to her children a mental taint or lesion was unthinkable. So, though she met love or its likeness as often as a woman will who has not only grace, beauty, and charm of breeding, but secure position and comfortable fortune, resolutely she had put love aside, not infrequently at dear cost to herself in nights of sleepless mutiny.

Now of a sudden she remembered the man Mario (or was he merely a shadow?) and in a poignant turn of reminiscence recalled his luminous and compelling eyes, the potent magnetism of his presence, and felt anew the pressure of his lips on hers.

On hers? Or Leonora's?

She cringed low in the corner of the seat, as

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if fearful lest curious eyes detect the waves of colour that burned her cheeks. For in the memory of that kiss she found a sweetness ineffably precious. And in the knowledge that his love was dedicated to that other Self, Priscilla suffered the first bitter pangs of that torment which spares not body, mind or soul, and which is jealousy.

But how should she be jealous of Leonora, if Leonora were herself?

Was it to be her fate to love one shape of dream and hate another?

III. PHILIP FOSDICK

About three in the morning, finding she could not sleep, she slipped into a dressing gown, and went to her desk, where for two hours she wrote steadily, setting forth in minute detail, as memory served, every item, incident and circumstance of her dream. Thus she found temporary distraction and ease of mind. Unaware of weariness till she had written the last word, immediately that was penned she found herself heavy with drowsiness so urgent it would hardly wait for her head to find its pillow.

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Toward noon she awoke and rang for her maid. A pleasant langour tempted to indolence. She adored breakfasting in bed, and did so today with a relish somehow sharpened by a mischievous sense of playing truant, of cheating life's inordinate demands. Not the least inclination toward work influenced her decision not to visit the studio at all that day, or the dozen diverting plans she made for frittering the hours away.

Recollection of the dream recurred tardily and sluggishly, like the images that reluctantly take shape on an under-exposed photographic film, and when sharpest and most definite seemed pale and unimportant in that warm flood of sunlight which bathed her bed chamber, as little worthy of consideration as a wraith of nightmare. But it served to pique her curiosity and, when she had bathed, she took back to bed what she had written in the night and read it with care and, toward the close, something like resuscitation of those emotions which she had known during the dream itself as well as after waking up.

Putting aside the manuscript, she lay a long half hour in pensive idleness, something distrait. In the end she was aware of an im-

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perative need for enlightenment. The thing had grown too serious, was figuring too largely in her life; if its influence was not to prove altogether ill, she must have comprehension of its nature to give her heart courage.

In all the world she knew but one person in whom she could conceive it possible to repose such confidences . . .

She took the telephone from the bedside stand.

Merely to hear that low-pitched, agreeable voice with its ineradicable tinge of humour was comforting. Her clouded countenance was lighted up by a smile of gratitude—and of affection, too.

"Philip, dear! Do you know I haven't seen you for ages?"

"That's brazen blague, Priscilla. You know I know it and nightly bedew my pillow with tears because you haven't called me up during the day."

"Don't be silly. Nothing can excuse the way you've been neglecting me."

"It's your own fault: you will insist on drenching the springtime of your life with turpentine and varnish, overlooking the most important things entirely."

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"What do you consider the most important thing in life? Yourself?"

"No: you. And next to you, letting me make love to you."

"But, Philip, you do it so poorly, you're so professional; you transfix me with the penetrating eye of diagnosis and prescribe: 'Love me!'—for all the world as if love were bread pills or distilled water in a bottle labelled 'Shake well before using'! And I really don't feel run down enough . . ."

"I see. You want love slipped over on you . . . like bribing the cook to put a philtre in your coffee."

She laughed delightedly: "That's it, Philip! Subtly does it."

"Thanks for the tip. I'm making a note of it. So don't be surprised if you wake up one fine morning and find yourself madly in love with me."

"I won't be; and I wouldn't even mind——"

"Priscilla!"

"But I'm not now. So don't lose your head."

"Why not, when my heart——?"

"Please! I called up to ask a very serious question."

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"Shoot."

"What's a psycho-analyst, Philip?"

"Well, I'm one—a cross between a quack and a confidence man."

"I know; but what do you do when you're duly functioning as such?"

"You mean, how do I make a living?"

"No—only what do you do to make people pay you fat fees."

"Why, I pry into their souls, if they happen to have any, and ferret out all their secrets—those they purposely try to keep from me, and those they themselves don't know anything about."

"Do many people have secrets they don't know about?"

"More often than not we suffer from the pressure of secrets buried so deep in the subconscious we don't even suspect their existence."

"How do you do it, Philip—find such things out?"

"By low cunning mostly, Priscilla; I ask apparently innocent questions that ain't, and lay traps and beguile patients into giving themselves away, in various ways no real gentleman would stoop to."

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"And what happens then?"

"Why, naturally, when I've dug up the scandal, found out what it is that makes the soul sick, I talk to the patient like a Dutch uncle, show him how foolish he is to let himself be affected by things past mending, and tell him how to overcome his weakness. Sometimes even that isn't necessary; secrets thrive in the dark, you know; expose them to the sunlight and, as often as not, they shrivel up and vanish right under the patient's very eyes. In which case there's no use arguing: he's already cured."

"I see . . . Philip: will you do me a favour, psycho-analyse me?"

"What's the good? I did that long ago."

"Really, Philip?" Misgivings put a tremor into her voice. "What did you find out?"

"That you're the dearest, sweetest——"

"No—please! I'm in earnest."

"Hello!" He was impressed. "What's up?"

"I think I've got a buried secret, and I want you to exhume it and see what it's made of."

"Are you serious?"

"Desperately."

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"Mm . . . What are you doing this afternoon?"

"Having you to tea, if you can come."

"I'll come whether I can or not. But what about Aunt Esther? We can't have a third present if we're to talk confidences."

"Let's have tea at the studio."

"Same objection: Ada Moyer——"

"I'll get rid of her somehow. She's perfectly human, Philip, and knows quite well she's only there as a lay figure, a sop to Aunt Esther's prejudices about the disgracefully unconventional life of an artist I perversely insist on leading—for a few hours every day."

"Right-o! The studio. What time? Four?"

"Please. I'll be waiting—and so glad to see you, Philip."

"There!" the eminent psycho-analytic physician complained, "there you go, taking all the joy out of life. Just when I'm figuring that the fee I'll exact of you ought to buy me a Rolls-Royce, you spoil it all by overpaying me in the beginning."

"How, Philip?"

"Didn't I hear you promise to be glad to see me?"

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IV. LOVE?

ADA MOYER was a pretty, vivacious, fluffy little woman, thoroughly mondaine and contented with herself, her husband, her world. Entirely lacking in any special aptitude for painting, she dabbled in oils a bit, partly because it afforded her an outlet for much superfluous energy that might otherwise have got her into mischief, partly because she was fond of Priscilla, believed her by way of being a genius, and was glad to lend the girl the show of chaperonage without which she must have had a difficult time of it with Aunt Esther. But Mrs. Moyer was as apt as not to absent herself from the studio for days at a time; and on this afternoon Priscilla found nothing to indicate that the other had been there at all.

Glad to be spared the necessity of explaining that she wanted to be alone with Philip Fosdick, the girl moved alertly round the room, superintending the preparation of tea by the maid she had brought with her, placing the table and the chairs the way she wanted them—setting the stage for a scene which, she

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felt instinctively, might affect most intimately all her days to come. In spite of this tolerably grave consideration, she was in a most cheerful mood, more than once caught herself humming the latest irresistible fox-trot, and when she stopped to think about it appreciated that the pleasure of anticipation was largely responsible for her good temper. She was always pleased when Philip was about. He was, she thought, the dearest man she knew. He never failed to amuse her, to bring out in her all her best and most engaging qualities; and consciousness of the love he had for her was something she would not willingly have forfeited. She was only sorry she didn't love him in return; at least, not in the way Philip wanted and deserved to be loved; but in her own way, with a very quiet, undemonstrative and enduring affection, a vastly different thing from what she might have given had she not set her face so steadfastly against love and all its arts . . . vastly different, too, from such love as had thrown Leonora into the arms of Mario . . .

She paused, a slight frown puckering her delicately lined brows.

Strange how the memory of that caress had

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power to tug at her heart strings! Stranger still that anything as fantastic as that shadowy love of shadows should seem so real, more real than all else in the content of her dream, even its culminating tragedy . . . more real, indeed, than anything in this world of reality wherein she moved and lived and had her being . . .

In a long stare she comprehended the studio as with strange eyes, perceiving afresh the substantial beauty of its time-mellowed furnishings: the well chosen pieces of period mahogany shining with contented lustre; the handsome draperies of rich stuffs matchlessly coloured and toned, brocades, tapestries, embossed velvets, illuminated leathers of antique Spanish artistry; the framed canvases on its walls and those unframed others that turned to them bashful faces, standing on the floor; the fine old rugs whose collection had been her father's hobby; the darkly polished floor darkly mirroring all things that caught the light; the great wide fireplace with its massive dogs of brass; the book-shelves laden with well-bound works on art; the wide, mullioned window in the south wall whose heavy draperies she had thrown back to let in the sun.

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Was all this, with its so intimate associations with humanity, like humanity itself no more than such stuff as dreams are made of?

It was none of it so real to her as Mario's kiss . . .

She gave a gesture of doubt and anxiety. If this were not love, what was it? Not sanity: how could one love a phantom? . . . She began to regret the weakness which had moved her to call up Philip Fosdick. How could she bring herself to confess this secret even to him? How keep it hidden from him? How hope to deceive that keen insight which had lifted him to his present high place in the ranks of psychopathologists? She was anything but proficient in deception and concealment; life thus far had afforded her too little reason for mastering such accomplishments.

She sang no more, but awaited Philip's coming with more misgivings than she liked.

V. CONFESSION

Philip Fosdick had a way of exorcising constraint and implanting confidence even in those who had no special liking for him. And Priscilla was genuinely attached to him,

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more so than she knew. When he took her hands and held them well apart while he looked her over with shrewd, humorous, indulgent eyes, she found it impossible to refrain from answering his smile with one in kind. And when she saw how well he looked, how very much alive and alert—mentally and physically Philip always seemed to concert pitch and never to know a let-down—hesitation and doubts were swept away like leaves before an autumnal wind.

"I suspected it," he announced, nodding sagely: "you're a fraud—and thank God for that! I've been quite upset about you ever since you telephoned, 'Cilla. But nobody ever looked so wholesomely lovely as you who 'let concealment, like a worm i' the bud, feed on her damask cheek.' Now give me tea, please, and tell me All."

She made a little moue of petulance. "I knew you'd laugh at me!"

"I hoped I would."

Philip flopped boyishly into his favourite chair, helped himself to a cigarette, and watched Priscilla narrowly while she sugared his cup with the traditional two lumps, added the slice of lemon, and drowned both in tea.

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Never had she seemed more beautiful or more perfectly poised. Impossible, he told himself, there could be anything amiss with a creature of such radiance! Some girlish notion, nothing more serious . . .

"Well?" he demanded with mock brusqueness when she gave him his cup. She hesitated with her adorably shy smile. "Come now! I'm called in as a physician; so this is business; let's get it over with."

"Give me time to think."

"Against the rules. How can I unmask your shameful duplicity, whatever it is, if I give you time to build up barriers? Besides, you've had all afternoon to make up your mind what you wanted to tell me. Now—out with it!"

So there was nothing for it but compliance.

"How long have you known me, Philip?"

"Let me see . . . To the best of my recollection, since you were about a year old; I remember coming into the nursery unexpectedly and finding you——"

"Never mind! You've known me all my life."

"And loved you all mine, barring the first

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ten years, during which you were as yet non-existent."

"Have you ever observed anything in me that led you to believe I was abnormal in any way?"

He contemplated a frivolous reply, but seeing the gravity in her eyes refrained.

"Never!" said Philip solemnly.

"Well, there *is* something . . . Philip: I have dreams."

"That's good. You look so angelic I was beginning to be afraid you really weren't human; and I'd much rather love a woman than an angel, 'Cilla."

"But the strangest dreams . . . Let me tell you. And please don't laugh, Philip. It isn't any laughing matter."

He drew the soberest face of sympathy imaginable. "Go on."

"As far back as I can remember, I've every now and then had a special sort of dream that seemed very real to me. Even as a little girl —though then, I think, they weren't so definite . . . But when I began to grow into long dresses, the dreams took on a certain form they've kept ever since."

"Form?"

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"Well, perhaps the best way to describe them is to say that they're not ordinary dreams at all, confused, you know, and meaningless."

"Few dreams are meaningless, if one knows how to analyse them."

"But these are different this way: they're like chapters from another life; as if one picked up a book, opened it at random, and read part of a story that had neither beginning nor end but still intelligible form, much like life, where one incident grows naturally out of another . . . you know."

"That's clear enough."

"And in all these dreams I seem to see myself, precisely my identical self in looks at least, living through events and adventures in surroundings such as I've never seen but only read about."

"Such as——?"

"What I fancy slums must be like. The self I see in dreams belongs there—dresses, acts, talks precisely like a girl who's never had any advantages to speak of, much education or contact with the pleasant side of life. All the same she is myself . . . much as if I put on some disguise so complete it disguised even my speech and habits of thoughts, even my

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sentiments and impulses. This girl does and says things I never could and, awake, have never thought of. But to her they seem quite right, the natural and right things to do and say. The truth is, most of the time she's rather self-satisfied and pleased with everything—the life she leads, the people she knows, the fun she has—everything."

"I understand." Now unfeignedly intrigued, Philip had abandoned all pretence of treating the matter lightly, and was sitting forward, cigarette smouldering between his fingers, his eyes intently searching Priscilla's face. "Tell me something about the content of these dreams. Go back as far as you can . . ."

"My first memories are very vague," Priscilla told him; "I don't recall being impressed that they were strange or in any way real. They were childish and simple impressions of another little girl who was rather unhappy most of the time. I think she lived with an old woman—a wretched old witch of a woman who was cruel to her, seemed to hate her and enjoy beating her—in a mean little flat somewhere. The old woman used to tell fortunes with cards in the front room. But all that's

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very vague now. I don't remember much more, except that the little girl used to play a great deal in the streets."

"But when she—or you—grew up, the dreams became more real?"

"Yes: about that time something happened to the old woman, I presume she died, and the girl was left alone to look out for herself. I don't know what she did for a living because I never saw her except at night. Then I would meet her, or rather find myself with her in the Street of Strange Faces . . ."

A questioning look obliged Priscilla to break off here and explain about the river, the Dark Corner, and the Street.

"And then we," she resumed—"or she—would start off and have curious experiences. She'd meet people she knew, sometimes people I knew, too, through being with her when she'd met them before, but not always; and interesting things would happen. I'm afraid she's a bit of a flirt, Philip, but I never knew her to do or think of doing anything wrong till lately. Then, somehow she fell in with a rather tough set. One of them was a sort of desperado, a gang leader such as one sometimes

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reads about in the newspapers, named Red Carnehan——"

"So you remember names!"

"Oh, perfectly; places, too. If I ever saw them, if there really are such places, I should know them instantly, I'm sure . . . And this Red Carnehan fell in love with her, and they became engaged—I guess. She was brighter, more intelligent than he, and she planned things for him to do, with his gang—robberies and such things, as far as I know—and how to escape the consequences. Another man, named Mario, loved her, too; but he wasn't one of Red's gang; in fact he was bitterly opposed to her having anything to do with it, and always begging her to give it up and marry him. But she was afraid of Red, and always refused. I think she always meant to marry Red Carnehan until last night . . ."

Priscilla paused and was so long silent, staring at the floor, lost in thoughts and emotions conjured up by this near approach to her latest dream, that Philip found it necessary to prompt her.

"What happened last night?"

"The dream that frightened me so I had to tell somebody and thought of you."

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"Then, tell me . . ."

She rose, crossed to a desk, came back with the manuscript.

"I'd rather you'd read it, if you don't mind, Philip. I wrote the story out last night, as clearly as I could remember. And here it is . . . But first, tell me what you think."

"I don't know yet, Priscilla. It's apparently the most extraordinary case that has come under my observation since I've been practising."

"You—you don't think it means—insanity, do you?"

His laugh reassured even more than his words. "Bless your heart, no! The insane don't have coherent dreams, or talk about them intelligibly. Don't worry about that . . . But, frankly, I don't know what to think. There must be an explanation, because nothing in nature is without its cause. But in this case it's something that will want a deal of hunting, I'm afraid; and we'll have to get all our facts together before I can even hazard a guess. Now let me read, please."

He concentrated so completely over the manuscript that he seemed utterly forgetful of her presence, and did not so much as look up

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when, after a time, weary of studying his expression without knowing what thoughts moulded it, Priscilla rose and began to wander restlessly about the studio.

It seemed that he would never finish reading . . .

VI. THE EVENING PAPER

SHE was standing to one side of the south window, abstractedly looking down over Macdougall Alley, when she heard Philip utter a startled exclamation and jump up from his chair.

Turning she saw him approaching, the scribbled pages of her narrative crushed in his hand, his face dark with amazement.

"This is more than extraordinary," he declared — "it's impossible, incomprehensible! . . . Priscilla, tell me; have you by any chance seen the afternoon papers?"

Premonition started a hand fluttering toward her bosom. "Why . . . no."

"You're sure?"

"But of course, Philip!" And then, alarmed by his look of doubt—"What is it? Why do you ask?"

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"Half a minute." Philip crossed to the console table near the door, where he had left his hat and stick and a folded newspaper, and came back with the latter, hastily shaking out its sheets. "I remember noticing a news story on my way here," he said abstractedly, as he scanned the columns—"story curiously like yours in some respects—about some gangster or other on the lower East Side who shot a detective in the street last night, then took refuge in a restaurant, and escaped after shooting two others. I'm not sure the name's the same, but . . . Ah!" The backs of his fingers tapped the paper smartly. "Here it is . . . You see."

A headline smote her understanding like a blow in the face:

"GANG MURDERS ON LOWER EAST SIDE"

But the text swam illegibly under her blurring gaze. Even Philip's voice seemed remote, at times barely audible.

"Yes, the same names: Leo Bielinsky, the gangster, a Russian suspected of being a Bolshevik agent—naturally; all Russians are-

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nowadays—Ennis and Corbin, plain-clothes men—Ristori's restaurant. No mention of Mr. Carnehan, though, or anybody else except the proprietor of Ristori's, who swears he never saw Bielinsky before last night. Apparently your friends made a clean getaway, too——"

Priscilla caught his arm with imploring hands.

"Philip! It isn't true! It can't be! Tell me it isn't——!"

Seeing her face of waxen pallor, her dilate eyes in which horror flickered, he dropped the newspaper, freed his arm gently, and took her hand in the firm, calming and encouraging clasp of the physician.

"Steady, 'Cilla, old girl, steady on! Of course it isn't true—not the way you mean. There's an explanation somewhere short of witchcraft, and I'll find it for you, Priscilla, I'll dig it out if I have to chuck my practice to the dogs and give the rest of my life to the job!"

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CHAPTER THREE

THE HAUNTED WOMAN

I. CATECHISM

THERE was an interlude of which she retained no memory more than a confused impression of a time of stress and conflict, of struggling with all her might to hold fast to reason, sustained throughout, it may be saved, by a sense of Philip's sympathy and strength . . .

A crisis was reached and passed. Growing more calm—or rather more numb than calm—Priscilla found herself in a roomy armchair with a serious-faced Philip Fosdick seated squarely in front of her, holding her two hands in a grasp so compelling that it narrowly escaped being painful, and talking steadily in even, persuasive accents, infinitely soothing and heartening.

"There!" He was alert to the first indication of returning self-control. "You're better

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already. Now rest quietly till you've got yourself well in hand, and remember always I'm standing by."

"Have I been silly, Philip?" She essayed an apologetic smile, disengaging her hands to make instinctive dabs at her hair. "Hysterical?"

"Not a bit. You're not that sort. You had a shock, enough to stagger anybody, but you've reacted famously, and now all you need do is sit tight and consider this thing coolly and sensibly."

"But how can I?" Look and gesture were once more distracted. "Why, I don't even know whether I'm myself or where I am——"

"You do: you know you're right here, in your own studio——"

"How can I be sure? I thought I was, last night, but it seems I wasn't—I was, heaven knows how far away, in that dreadful place, when *that* happened—not here at all!"

"Rubbish: you were here asleep, here where you woke up. You merely dreamed you were elsewhere—with what psychic provocation remains to be seen. There are such riddles a-plenty still to be solved in the phenomena of somnambulism, in spite of the long strides

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we've made of late years in psychical research."

Tight lipped, eyes intent, she nodded, then shook her head. "I hear you—or think I do—and seem to understand. But how is one to know what to think? Are you Philip Fosdick or a figure in a dream? Which am I, Priscilla Maine or Leonora?"

"You'll know before we finish: that's a promise, 'Cilla. Look at me, please, and listen: You've had a singularly coincidental dream which, coming as a climax to a long series of dreams quite as singular, seems past understanding. But it isn't. Nothing in life is. There's an explanation, a perfectly simple and natural one, for everything, and it can be got at if only we go after it in the right way. I daresay this case 'll demand a lot of patience and time and some tolerably stiff thinking; but its cause is waiting to be found and can't elude us if we stick at it, keep our heads, and never say die. Which is precisely what we're going to do, you and I."

Words and manner carried a measure of conviction. She searched his face and found it, as one always found it, a face to inspire confidence and hope, a strong face boldly yet

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finely modelled, thoughtful of cast, and illuminated by the most honest eyes she had ever seen, the face of a strong man, sincere, faithful and dependable.

"Thank you, Philip," she said. "I'm trying to believe, but you don't know how hard it is."

"That's where you're wrong: I do know; I understand perfectly. On the other hand, I know there's nothing unnatural in nature, there can't be; and therefore we can't fail to solve this problem except through your lack of faith in me. If you'll trust me, help me all you can, be absolutely frank——"

"I'll do my best . . . Of course, I've got to; I'll never have a minute's peace till I know the truth. Ask me anything you like, and I'll tell you the truth if I know it."

"I'm sure you will——"

"But, Philip: tell me one thing first." . . . She faltered and looked uneasily aside. "You don't . . . you don't think I'm—wrong any way—mentally, I mean?"

Fosdick laughed with calculation, a laugh that scouted the suggestion and at the same time was indulgent.

"Absolutely not. You've got the rightest mind I know. But you're anything but ob-

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vious, 'Cilla, you're as complex a personality as any I've ever known. You're strongly intuitive—or more or less what we term psychic—sympathetic, impressionable, susceptible to influences that work on you without your knowledge. You'd have to be, or you couldn't paint so well. You may mix your paints with brains, as Whistler advised, but *you* apply them with emotion; I mean you feel, and paint what you feel more than what you see; otherwise your pictures would be mere cut and dried reports of surfaces. Artists are like that, the good ones, who do work worth while, whether it's painting or sculping or writing or acting or fiddling or anything creative. With such people the subconscious is very thinly veiled by the conscious, whereas with most of us, simple-minded and unimaginative creatures, consciousness is an indurated husk, tough and stubborn. That's one reason why I'm promising you we won't have much difficulty locating the seat of your troubles. Whatever it is, the truth is known to your subconscious self, and that is bound to tell us, soon or late."

"But how, Philip?"

For the first time since he had shown her the newspaper Priscilla's tone and manner were

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unaffected by mental strain. Fosdick suppressed a glimmer of satisfaction, seeing he had succeeded in so interesting her that she was less sensible of what rightly or wrongly she considered a menace to her reason, than of the fascinating problem it presented.

"If we fail to get at the trouble by straight analysis—collecting, dissecting and comparing known facts—we'll catch the subconscious betraying itself. It always does, 'Cilla. No matter how jealously it may try to hoard its secret, it can't help flirting with the temptation to discuss it indirectly, and so in the end it always lets the cat out of the bag. That's what makes my job so interesting: one never knows what word or phrase, gesture of nuance of expression, will give the clue one needs. So if we fail to make visible progress in direct examination, be sure that some time, when we're least expecting it, the subconscious will prompt you to drop the hint that will lead us straight to the heart of the mystery."

She nodded eagerly, already well persuaded and only too anxious to believe.

"How shall we begin?"

"Feel strong enough to have a go at it now?

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Good! Then let's get our facts in order, first the things we know beyond dispute."

Philip produced a pocket book, found a fair page, and at its top penned the notation: *"Priscilla Maine—age, 21."*

"Where were you born?"

"Here—in New York. At least I presume I was. Does it matter?"

"Can't say as yet." Philip's words followed his fountain pen: "Your father was Henry Hobart Maine, of this city; a portrait painter; made a great deal of money, inherited more; was forty-eight when he died, five years ago, leaving you, his sole heir, a handful of millions. Your mother died when you were born, if my memory serves."

"Yes."

"Her name?"

"I . . . don't know."

Philip's brows lifted. "Didn't your father tell you?"

"Never." The girl's eyes clouded. "He always seemed so distressed when my mother was mentioned, I learned not to ask questions."

"Then he never told you anything about her?"

"No. Neither did anybody else."

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"Odd. Must have been something uncommon to make him avoid the subject with his own child. Ever strike you that way?"

"Sometimes." Priscilla hesitated, looking down at a forefinger which traced a pattern on the arm of the chair. . . . "Does it seem heartless of me, I wonder? I was always so happy, life was so kind, father so thoughtful never to let me know an unsatisfied wish—I'm afraid I never bothered about my mother much."

"That's human enough. Still, somebody must know . . . Your Aunt Esther?"

"I'm afraid not. She married before father did, and went to England to live and never came back till her husband died, a few years ago. She isn't really my aunt, you know."

"Distant cousin, I believe?"

"A third cousin—but the only living relative I have."

"Did she ever mention your mother?"

"Only once, and then only to say she understood father's married life wasn't a happy one."

"Didn't she say why?"

"She didn't know."

"Somebody must," Fosdick repeated testily. "Now if only my father were living . . ."

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"Yes: he would know, if anybody. He was father's dearest friend."

"Well, there's our first big question mark. Now——"

"Philip—you don't think—possibly—the reason the marriage was unhappy was because of—anything—like mental trouble on my mother's side?"

"No!" Fosdick declared with just the right degree of pained forbearance. "Do try to cure yourself of that notion, 'Cilla. It's ridiculous; there's nothing wrong with your mind any more than with mine. Neither dreams nor psychic susceptibility are symptoms of insanity. You're as right as rain, every way. . . . I was just coming back to you. Let's see"—his pen hung poised—"you had the happiest of childhoods—that I know—and the usual education; and thus far you've lived an average life, the sort of life our sort of girls do live nowadays. Setting aside your painting, you're conventional enough, and all your tastes are soundly feminine: you like fun and friends and pretty frocks, books, music, the theatre, admiration; you've never once known hunger or hard work or, barring what you may have

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read, anything about the harsh and seamy sides of life."

"Does all that matter?"

"Everything matters, young woman. Remember: you're now a Case. To continue . . ." Philip hesitated, eyeing her with a frown of whimsical apprehension. "I know you've never been engaged, but whether you've ever been in love . . ." Priscilla coloured, but shook her head. His eyes narrowed. "Honour bright?"

"Oh, I've had crushes, of course; every girl has; and I've always been awfully fond of you——"

"Fond!" he groaned.

"I've been afraid of love, Philip, because of these dreams. It didn't seem right to think of marrying with such a cloud hanging over me."

He grunted impatiently, scowled at his notebook, shrugged, pursued: "The dreams began in childhood, you say, and were infrequent and formless until about your fifteenth year. Then they began to seem real, and therefore to play an important rôle in your life, to occupy your thoughts more or less and exercise a secret influence on all your motives and actions. You made up your mind you were 'not like other

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girls,' and that made you timid about contracting close friendships or giving anybody your confidence. . . . I presume you never kept a diary, or any record of the dreams? You couldn't give me any idea how often they occurred . . . at what intervals?"

"No . . . I never thought . . ."

"Pity. It might be helpful if we could prove periodicity, even eccentric. However, if they go on . . . That's one thing you must promise me: always tell me as soon as you've had a dream; let me talk to you about it before the impression has a chance to fade; and always write it down, too, the way you did this one."

"I will—of course."

"You've never consulted anybody else——?"

"Never a living soul."

"Not even your father?"

"Not even him."

"Too bad: there's no outlet so helpful as talking about one's troubles. Everybody ought to have at least one confidant."

"I couldn't talk to anybody, I simply couldn't risk their thinking me—queer."

"I understand . . . Now let's see if we can get a line on this from another angle. How

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were you feeling yesterday? Any way unusual?"

"Restless and unsettled—couldn't seem to keep my interest fixed on anything for ten minutes at a time—otherwise very well, rather jolly, you know, inclined toward a lark of some sort."

"What did you do with yourself all day?"

"Nothing much. I had a model in the morning, but didn't like what I was doing and let her go before noon. In the afternoon I worked on my portrait of myself till the light began to change and——"

"Didn't know you were painting your own portrait, 'Cilla. May I see it?"

"Why, of course!"

II. AUTO-HYPNOSIS

DELIGHTED, as always when someone she liked showed interest in the work she loved so well, the girl forgot her preoccupation in a twinkling and, jumping up, gaily linked Philip's arm and led him across to the tall canvas beside the pier glass.

"There!" she laughed—"did you know Priscilla Maine could be like that?"

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Impressed by his first glance, Philip merely uttered a thoughtful *"Hmm!"* and in silence studied the portrait with an intelligent appreciation not unmixed with wonder.

Priscilla released his arm and stepped back, pleased by this mute tribute, pleased as well to have her own overnight impression confirmed, experiencing that rare, warm glow of gratification which only an artist knows when he looks upon his handiwork and finds it good.

Well drawn and modelled, daringly yet sensitively painted with an unerring sense of colour and values, the girl in gipsy dress was amazingly spirited and convincing. There was arresting challenge in that impudently tossed head with its laughing mouth of scarlet and dark eyes agleam with charming insolence under lowered lashes.

"Well done," said Philip simply.

"I'm so glad you like it, Philip. Harkness" —she named a dealer known to both—"wants to show it in his galleries."

"I like it immensely, only . . . I can't get over an odd notion that it isn't you. The likeness is extraordinary—I remember well the night you wore that costume—and yet, somehow . . ."

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"You see it, too?" Philip turned to her with a sharp glance. She laughed consciously. "I didn't myself till last night, after I'd waked up. Then with the dream fresh and real in my thoughts, I saw I'd painted not myself but that other Self. The girl you see there isn't Priscilla Maine, not the Priscilla you and I know; she's Leonora."

"Good Lord!" Philip looked grave. "Were you thinking of her while painting?"

"No—not consciously, not that I remember."

"And yet, without your knowledge, you must have been . . ."

He moved nearer the picture to examine it more closely.

"It brings everything back so clearly," the girl mused; "it gives me the strangest feeling of unreality, makes me wonder which is which; which the living woman, which the shadow . . ."

The voice behind him trailed off into a pensive murmur. And for longer than Philip appreciated there was unbroken silence while he stood frowning at the portrait in the abstraction of conjecture, one after another weighing theory and surmise and rejecting all, vainly

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ransacking memory for precedent with which to compare this case.

He made a movement of exasperation and, simultaneously becoming conscious of the stillness, looked round to see the girl posed in a stare, gaze steadfast at the portrait, her look dull and remote: head thrown back a trifle, hands hanging with palms exposed in a gesture curiously appealing, her respiration abnormally slow and deep.

Fosdick took a quick step to her, crying: "'Cilla!" She seemed not to hear. He said in sharp insistence: "Do you hear, 'Cilla? Come out of it!" That broke the spell. She roused like a sleeper wakening: intelligence slowly reinformed her countenance. Sighing softly, she drew a hand across her eyes, then with an uncertain smile extended it to him. Philip clasped it between his own.

"Now what?" he demanded with brusque good humour.

"I've had the funniest sensation . . . I was thinking about the painting, wondering if, perhaps, I'd done something extraordinary and weird, painted my own soul into the figure on the canvas—you know—so that it really lived and was me while I was merely a shell of flesh

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and blood . . . and suddenly it seemed to me my fancy had come true, that I was really there on the canvas looking into the room here, seeing myself, I mean seeing Priscilla Maine, and wondering about her and about you, as if I'd never known either of us, as if I were a stranger in my own studio . . . Do you understand, Philip? It must sound so wild and silly . . ."

"It doesn't," he said quietly. "But I think we'd better stop looking at the picture for a while. Besides I want another cup of tea, and you need one."

Retaining her hand, he led the girl back to the tea table, made her sit down, then resumed his own chair.

With obvious effort Priscilla busied herself with the tea things; her bewildered look persisted.

"What was it, Philip? What made me feel that way?"

"Auto-hypnosis — a mild phase — superinduced by excitement and fretting. Nothing to worry about. And still . . . Frankly, I don't like it. I wouldn't care to have it happen too frequently. It's no good encouraging that sort of thing; each time it happens it breaks

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down resistance, makes you only the more susceptible to the next suggestion. If I were you, I'd drop that portrait, put it out of sight and mind till we've settled this question—opened it up and let light into its darkness, and so relieved your doubts and fears."

"Perhaps you're right," Priscilla demurred, "but—I don't know. It makes me unhappy to have unfinished work on hand. I'm afraid I won't forget, even if I do turn its face to the wall. Don't you think I might better finish it up, and get it out of the studio altogether?" But Philip's disapproval was manifest. "Please!" she begged her prettiest. "It only means another day or two; then I can let Harkness have it and forget all about it."

"I can't say yes, 'Cilla. I shouldn't be at all surprised if it turned out that the portrait was wholly to blame for last night's experience, I mean for the peculiar content and trend of your dream."

She was frankly puzzled and said so.

"The power of suggestion it has exerted on your thoughts," he explained. "Till yesterday you never expressed it even to yourself; but subconsciously, I haven't any doubt, the thought has always been at work, that it wasn't

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yourself you were painting but the heroine of your dream story, another woman of a different life with an independent spirit and mentality. And then—of course, all this is sheer guesswork—there are associations inherent in the concept of gipsy girl and a gipsyish existence, romantic, adventurous, full of dangers, twists and turns and thrills: such thoughts may well have dictated the character and course of the dream, though you were never actively aware of thinking them."

"I wonder . . ." Priscilla sipped her tea. "Maybe you're right . . . But still I don't see why I shouldn't go on with the painting. Just one more day, Philip——"

"Confound you!" Philip exploded with an irritated laugh—"you know how hard it is for me to refuse you anything. But it's no good this time, 'Cilla. I won't have you agitating yourself with that painting till you've entirely recovered poise. For that matter, it would be better for you to keep away from the studio altogether for a few days. You've been living entirely too much within yourself. You want distraction, amusements, to break up this habit of morbid introspection. Get out and about,

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see people, go to restaurants and plays and dances more——"

"How can I enjoy such things with this trouble——?"

"That's just it. Until we find the explanation, which may take time, you're bound to keep worrying unless you go out more into the world. I'm in earnest about this, Priscilla: promise to keep away from the studio for at least three days."

"If you insist," she conceded with a suspicion of a pout—"I presume I've got to do as the doctor orders."

"Then that's settled," Philip asserted with reckless complacence.

III. THE PRESCRIPTION

PRISCILLA had a pensive moment. "Hypnotism?" she echoed her thought: "I wonder if that's one way . . . Do you think you could get at the truth, Philip, if you were to hypnotise and then cross-examine me?"

"I'd rather not except as a last resort. Hypnotism demands such complete surrender to the will of the hypnotist, it tends to undermine

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the independence of the ego which is essential to the right development of the individual."

"But what else can we do?"

"Many things . . . To begin with, I want to take this story home with me and go over it word by word. As it stands, in its intrinsic significance, it's an absolutely unique human document, utterly artless and honest. The clue we need may be in it, in some unconscious betrayal of repressed emotion or desire; it may lie hidden in some turn of phrasing, even in some unusual word, the word you wouldn't ordinarily use to express your thought. Such things can only be got at through close study."

"What else?"

"Oh, plain sleuthing, for one thing—like digging into the mystery of your parents' marriage, finding out why they were unhappy, and especially who your mother was and what sort of family she had behind her—whether, in short, it's possible that you've inherited some psychic tradition. There are families, for instance, that hand down from generation to generation the clairvoyant tendency we know by the name of second sight."

"You don't believe in such things—you, a modern scientist!"

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"The more modern the scientist, 'Cilla, the more open his mind. I may not be wholly credulous, but I won't deny anything I can't disprove. People have been burned as witches who only made use of natural laws of which their day was ignorant but which science today recognises and openly utilises for the common good. . . . Finally," Philip added, "we may find the police useful."

Priscilla started sharply. "The police!" she repeated in a tone of protest.

"Why not?" Philip tapped the manuscript of the dream story. "Don't forget we have here an amazingly circumstantial and convincing narrative, with names and places plainly stated. Now if you actually did, through some freak of psychic activity—'travelling clairvoyance,' or whatever it is—have first-hand knowledge of this Bielinsky business . . . Well, his isn't the only name mentioned. And if you remembered his accurately, and the plain-clothes men, Ennis and Corbin, and Ristori's—why shouldn't the others be real names of real persons as well? English Addie and Inez, Harry the Nut and Charlie the Coke, Red Carnehan . . ."

Struck by a circumstance whose significance

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had till now escaped him, he paused for thought, unheeding the signs of disconcertion betrayed by Priscilla.

"I say! If you dreamed true, neither of the policemen who entered that upstairs room lived to tell what they found there. Then Bielinsky is credited with two murders of which he's innocent. I fancy Police Headquarters will be deeply interested if I can persuade them Red Carnehan was the author of the killings in Ristori's!"

Priscilla's cup and saucer clattered.

"You mustn't!" she cried, her eyes wide, her features drawn with dismay. "You mustn't do that, Philip! Don't you understand—don't you know what will happen if you do? Red wouldn't hesitate an instant if he thought I'd—if he thought Leonora had told. He'd croak—I mean, he'd kill her, Philip!"

"Oh, come!" Philip put down his cup and tried to speak reassuringly. "You're taking this too seriously——"

"I'm not. It is serious: it's life or death!" She was suddenly on her feet, gesticulating in a manner utterly out of character. Philip got up to face her, and tried to interrupt, but she wouldn't listen. "It's the way they do with

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squealers—informers, that is—people who tell. I know what I'm talking about. They kill them, or get them killed!"

"Easy, 'Cilla. Don't lose your head."

She didn't even hear. "Red's suspicious already," she declared. "He's rowed a lot with Leonora about Mario. He told me . . . I mean, I remember his telling Leonora he thought Mario was a dick—a detective—and if he caught her talking to him again, or anything happened to make him think she'd talked too much, he'd kill her first and Mario next."

She threw out hands that shook with passionate anxiety. "Promise me you won't go to the police, Philip—for my sake, for Leonora's, for Mario's!"

"For Mario's sake?" Philip's eyes darkened. "To be sure: I'd forgotten about Mario. And he seems to be rather a more important personage than I——"

"I—*she* loves him, Philip—and he loves Leonora. And his influence is good for her. I know, if you won't tell—I don't know how I know, but I do—Mario will find a way to save her, he'll get her away from those others and marry her and make her good, and make her happy, too. Give him—give both of them

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a chance, Philip! Please! If anything should happen to either of them, I——"

"Priscilla!"

The imperative tone shocked her into momentary silence. But her attitude remained that of supplication, she still trembled in frantic anxiety and besought his generosity with pleading hands.

"It shall be as you wish," Philip told her. "Do you understand?"

"You won't—you promise not to go to Headquarters?"

"I promise. For the time being, at least, I'll keep away from the police—but on one condition . . . Are you listening?"

"Yes—yes, Philip——"

"You must stop this fretting—take things quietly. And you must come away from the studio with me at once. I'll see you home, and this evening—if Aunt Esther will have me—I'll drop round for dinner. After that, if you've nothing else arranged, we might do a play. If you like, I'll scare up some others and make it a box party, and afterwards we can drop in at the Club de Vingt for a dance. What do you say?"

The panic in her eyes gave way to daze, then

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to dawning comprehension. She smiled feebly, her hands sketched a sign of apology and chagrin.

"I've been silly again! What have I been saying, Philip?"

"It doesn't matter. Will you give me this evening and do your best to help me enjoy it?"

"It sounds awfully jolly, and I'm sure it'll do me heaps of good. Philip"—her eyes were dangerously kind—"don't think me ungrateful. You're so good to me. You're such a dear . . ."

"I know," said Philip with a rueful smile. "But I hope that won't be my only epitaph."

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE HAUNTING PORTRAIT

I. IN THE AIR

THAT was the year of the impetuous Spring: March brewed weather whose golden graciousness she stole from May, April brought times of summer heat, such as that afternoon when Priscilla fell asleep in the studio and dreamed her dream of terror. Days followed as rare, unseasonable enough but sweet with the warm delight of youth anticipating the richness of maturity, with nights of wonder whose winds walked suavely beneath skies of velvet, purple, dense and soft. Topcoats and heavy wraps went early and unmourned to limbo, summer furs appeared to stress the delicacy of summery frocks. Shop windows bloomed with displays of sheer and dainty fabrics exquisitely tinted, like beds of exotic flowers under glass. In between them the Avenue saw confused and dis-

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tracting shows of living flowers, drifting up and down, eddying in groups, pausing lightly. And by day and night as well the Town abandoned itself to such frivolity as had no precedent in the maddest chapters of its history. Between twelve and twelve it was difficult to secure a table at any of the more favoured restaurants unless one had been thoughtful enough to make reservation long in advance. Plays offering the sorriest of entertainment prospered beyond relief. At one in the morning rushing tides of motor cars rendered the passage of Fifth avenue as perilous as at five in the evening. The more retiring social life was proportionately more gay and restless, its brief post-Lenten season incandescent with a brilliance unparalleled in the memory of the most elderly idler. Everywhere there was endless feasting, dancing, coquetry, laughter, love in idleness. Announcements of engagements popped in well-nigh continuous fusillade; and after dark all the kindly shadows in the parks were murmurous with the voices of humbler sweethearts. Love was in the air, as omnipresent as the dust of gold sprayed into the night by flaming sky-signs. It found few immune, none quite insensible to the preoccupa-

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tion it imposed so generally. Even Priscilla, though she made no sign . . .

II. ANALYSIS

Love worried Philip Fosdick with relentless importunity, whether he were behind the desk in his consultation room, doing his best to give his best to those unfortunates who sought him out to lay open distressed hearts and bespeak his sympathy and healing counsel, or whether he sat in solitude cudgelling his wits for insight into the mystery that shadowed the happiness of the woman he loved.

The problem mocked his shrewdest efforts. Practice and study, personal contact and observation together with close examination of cases recorded by others, had long since made him, as he believed, familiar with every phase of psychosis, hysteria, and neurosis, as well as with these psychic phenomena which will at times develop in persons of seemingly normal idiosyncrasy, from simple dreaming to somnambulism in all its guises, with hallucination, trance, ecstasy, telepathy, and telæsthesia, and the various forms of hypnosis.

However nearly akin they might be to more

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than one of these, what Fosdick for want of a better name continued with Priscilla to term her "dreams" persisted in defying classification by virtue of a perverse sort of intrinsic uniquity. For they were in no sense true dreams, having none of the features peculiar to those fantastic inventions of the mind uncensored by waking consciousness. They were utterly without traceable relation to anything in the memory of the subject or her personal circumstances and environment. Nor were they, as is every ordinary dream, a jumble of condensed and disfigured impressions unintelligible but to the trained perceptions of the analyst. On the contrary they were, as communicated to Fosdick, coherent, dramatic, picturesque, convincing reports of happenings which, if they fell short of the rounded completeness of the invented story, were strikingly like reels inconsecutively viewed in some cinema of entrancing interest.

Further: Priscilla was not hysterical, neurotic, or anæmic. Neither was she of unsound mind. Hallucinations, trance and ecstasy take shape only in the miasmata of insanitary mental and physical states. The man who since her earliest days had adored and watched over

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her, knew few minds more clear of vision, unprepossessed by illusions, or capable of straight, honest reasoning. But it was not more sane than her well nourished, groomed and guarded body.

To a certainty, however, the "dreams" were telepathic. And Fosdick had already seen they could be stimulated by auto-suggestion —as when Priscilla had suffered a sense of translated identity while puzzling over her portrait of "Leonora." So, too, without question, they fell within the definition of *telæsthesia* as "*any direct sensation or perception of objects or conditions independent of the recognised channels of the senses, and also under such circumstances that no known mind external to the percipient's can be suggested as the source of the knowledge thus gained.*" But in either case the link was missing; there was no "known mind" with which Priscilla's could conceivably communicate with such intimate sympathy whilst she slept, but only "Leonora's."

But was "Leonora" anything more than a fancy born of subliminal recognition by Priscilla of the fact that she was the vessel of a dual personality? Or, if there were a real

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Leonora, what was the nature of the affinity that linked her mind with Priscilla's?

Indisputably Leonora was to Priscilla a living fact, a dissociate personality leading an independent and factual existence. On the other hand, constantly by word of mouth and in writing Priscilla referred to Leonora as her "other Self"—a plain and direct lead to the solution expressed by the term dual personality. And (as Philip had told the girl) in the unconsidered, spontaneous phraseology of a naïve subject the key to the riddle may frequently be found.

And yet, Fosdick had repeatedly to remind himself, the projection of a secondary personality through any considerable distance in space, or the creation of a new and strange environment for its activities, was a phenomenon as yet even to be suggested by the most pretentious charlatan or the most credulous pseudo-scientific student of the psychic.

Nevertheless, he felt constrained provisionally to adopt the hypothesis of dual personality and upon it base the beginnings of his survey.

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III. THE AMATEUR SLEUTH

DREDGING the past for the truth about Priscilla's mother brought to light nothing that seemed helpful. In twenty-odd years New York itself had changed almost beyond recognition and the constitution of its society had been made over again and again till few of the original elements remained. Then, too, the memory of man is peculiarly brief concerning the troubles of others. Henry Hobart Maine, one of the most successful of American portrait painters and in his day a conspicuous figure in the social life of the city, nevertheless had made few close friends, and of these only one had survived him by a year or two—Philip's father. Priscilla's "aunt," Mrs. Trowbridge, being duly pumped, proved to be as ignorant as the girl had said she was concerning the marriage of her kinsman. She knew indefinitely that "there had been trouble": its nature, its cause, its outcome, were alike outside her knowledge and alien to her interest. Apparently she had never been anything more than she was to-day, an amiably self-centred soul, comforted and sustained by

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those delusions of personal importance which are so essential to the insignificant.

From other sources, by dint of guarded and seemingly casual but persistent gossiping in the lounges of clubs frequented by the elder generations, Fosdick learned that Maine had been regrettably guilty of a romantic indiscretion in marrying a woman of a world outside his own. But her very name had been forgotten. He found, indeed, nobody who remembered Mrs. Maine, and but few who recalled the tradition of a hot-blooded, high-spirited creature whose hopeless impatience of restraints and conventions defied all Maine's half-hearted attempts to reconcile his wife with his friends and mode of life, till, discouraged, he disappeared with her and for some years absented himself utterly from New York. Concerning this period of his life nothing definite was known; there was a suggestion that he had devoted it to travel in South America. But it was certain that he had returned with a girl child and without a wife. This last was presumed to have died, though there were whispers to the contrary, that "incompatibility" had dictated a separation. Maine never made any explanation but, it appeared, quiet-

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ly resumed his place and thenceforth devoted himself steadfastly to his profession and the care of his daughter. A gentleman of grave presence relieved by a whimsical turn of speech, with eyes tolerant and humorous, yet with a hint of pain lurking ever in their smile: Philip remembered him well. He lived to see Priscilla give promise of carrying on the torch of his genius, even as her dark loveliness foreshadowed something of the furore it was destined to create. . . .

Disappointed but not discouraged, Fosdick turned to other avenues of investigation.

Bound by his pledge to Priscilla not to consult the police, discreet employment of channels of information provided by a wide acquaintance among newspaper men nevertheless brought him all Police Headquarters knew about the Bielinsky affair. The man, it seemed, had been sought in the first instance on a warrant charging him with violation of the Espionage Act in spreading Bolshevik propaganda. Nothing was known concerning the party in the room at Ristori's by way of which the Russian escaped after adding two murders to his score. The proprietor of the restaurant, held as a material witness, stoutly

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denied knowing Bielinsky or any of the tenants of the private dining room, all of whom had, he insisted, left some time before the tragedy. The name of Red Carnehan had not been mentioned in connection with the crime. There was, however, such a person, a notorious gang-leader of the lower East Side.

Considering it essential that he should learn more of Mr. Carnehan and his friends, and perceiving but one way to gain that information without breaking his promise to Priscilla, Philip adopted it without more hesitation.

On the following morning, Priscilla, calling up his office, was informed that Dr. Fosdick had been suddenly called out of town on a case of vital importance.

IV. MERE PAINT AND CANVAS?

After one week of gadding about, of shopping and theatres and dances and motoring, Priscilla felt quite fed up with distractions. She was as fond of amusement and personal success as any girl that ever breathed, but not so constituted as to be able to fritter time away forever without a qualm of conscience—that scourge and consolation in one of the creative temperament. In short, she wanted to get

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back to her work, and wouldn't be happy till she did.

And why not? she demanded when she failed to get Philip on the telephone and secure his professional permission to return to the studio. "A few days" of trifling was all he had stipulated; and those few had served. She dreamed no more of Leonora or Red Carnehan or Mario. Today, all that, indeed, seemed remote and unimportant. What though she had dreamed a nightmare which coincided so mysteriously with actual events as to scare her nearly out of her wits? After all, it was at worst a dream; and in this delightfully substantial and matter-of-fact world, coincidences don't count with anybody except novelists hard up for a plot. . . .

She found Ada Moyer pottering with a hopeless daub of a still life, spent most of the morning giggling and gossiping, carried her off to the Ritz for luncheon, and left her there with some friends who needed a fourth at bridge: an arrangement perfectly agreeable to Priscilla; it was hard enough at any time to settle down to work after a spell of idling, it was the next thing to an impossibility with Ada on the premises.

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The quiet of the empty studio was soothing and grateful. Through windows wide to the slow moving airs of that sultry afternoon drifted the drone of the quarter, a sound restful in its implication of a community tranquilly seeking to justify itself with works. Priscilla sighed contentedly, wheeled the heavy easel over to its stand beside the pier glass, shrugged into a paint-smeared smock, and in the next fifteen minutes did nothing whatever but sit in a chair before the self-portrait, in stirless, intent study of her work.

Again it seemed good in her sight, decidedly the best thing she had ever done; and yet she was dissatisfied; something was wrong, something was missing without which it could not prove convincing.

The head she must not touch, lest one misjudged stroke mar the excellence of its spirited gesture. Neither could she see any way to improve her painting of the figure. The folds of the skirt needed some little attention, not much, possibly half an hour's work. . . . No: the fault was in a background treated in a fashion too academic and tame to suit that brilliant counterfeit of life.

At length, rising, Priscilla took up her pal-

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ette and from fat shining tubes squirted upon its satiny surface sleek coils of colour, cadmium, burnt sienna, orange vermilion, black, ultramarine, a tiny blob of crimson lake. Then with swift, sure brushwork she overlaid the insipidity of the original background with an impressionistic scheme of soft, deep tones of night relieved by hints of tawny lights.

For hours she worked steadily, absorbed, till a premature change in the light broke the spell. With a slight frown of annoyance she looked up to find the frosted glass of the northlight overcast with pale blue shadow. A second glance through windows whose draperies were motionless in the heavy air discovered the western sky dark with beetling cliff on cliff of slaty cloud.

No matter: her task was ended, and sooner than she had thought it would be. A few days more and she could varnish. . . .

She put aside brushes and palette, shut the windows (through which now a cold, strong draught was blowing) drew the draperies close, and returned to the chair before the portrait.

The concentration of the working mood was still strong in her. For some time she re-

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mained in quiet contemplation of the tremendous improvement she had wrought in the canvas, without appreciating the true significance of what unconsciously she had accomplished; for those sombre, atmospheric depths with their remote play of lights now framed the figure of Leonora truly in its native background.

The slow, thoughtful smile provoked by this discovery merged slowly into a look of abstraction ever more profound as reverie led her insensibly back to memories of the Street of Strange Faces whose dim reaches stretched away indefinitely behind that painted shape of dream. The effect of return to old associations grew strong, she could veritably see, she could almost smell and hear the Street . . .

She knew a period of mental uncertainty, of daze and wonder, out of which grew the sensation she had once before experienced of confusion of identity with the woman in the portrait. Inexplicably something impalpable yet essential seemed to go out from her to the other, with whose spiritual essence it blended intimately, so that for the moment she had no true existence save upon that painted surface, where she paused, hesitant, doubtful, confused,

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as on some dark strange threshold, before passing on and away into a vague half world, a place of vast and shapeless spaces where there was neither light nor darkness, wherein consciousness grew faint and the sense of Self was blotted out entirely . . .

V. BEYOND THE THRESHOLD

Out of nothingness, out of a sort of inert chaos, spectral walls like veils of mist took shape, closed in, added unto themselves a floor and ceiling, assumed a semblance of stability, became a box-like room wherein her spirit was pent in a mood of sluggish and melancholy mutiny: a room hatefully familiar to her in its every hideous detail: its poisonous wall-paper, stained ceiling and threadbare linoleum, its iron sink in the corner, its rude chairs and common table cluttered with soiled crockery and a gas-stove linked to an overhead jet by frayed tubing, its shelf from which hung articles of dejected clothing, its shaky iron bedstead with sagging springs and the lumpy mattress upon which her Self lay, half dressed and half conscious, too bored to care whether she waked or slept . . .

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Weariness and disconsolation were eloquent in her posture as she rested on her side, a hand between her head and the emaciated pillow, and written legibly in bluish shadows under listless eyes, in sallow cheeks whose normal hue was clearest pallor barely warmed by glowing health, in the unstudied disarray of her masses of fine black hair, in the sullen cast of her firm lipped mouth.

A mutter of far thunder swelled and died.

The girl moved only her eyes, looking up to a window that revealed the storm-black sky.

What mattered it to her whether or not it rained? She was condemned, apparently, to endless imprisonment in this dismal place whose threshold her foot had not crossed in so many days she had lost count of them.

She shuddered and once more lay still, surrendering to the enervation of thoughts that pursued one deadly round, discovering never one new thing to lend them animation.

The room grew dark, the sky more savage. A sword of lightning slashed the gloom, and again distant thunder boomed and grumbled into silence.

By the pert tin clock whose stridulation was

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the only voice her hiding place had heard in days, the hour was barely five.

She wondered why she had taken the trouble to look. What was the use of it, this keeping count of time? What was time indeed but waste, one long-drawn torment of waiting in idleness and impotence for the sign that never came to set her free?

She could have shrieked for sheer exasperation of ennui without alloy. She told herself that anything were better than such a fate as this. Why not shriek till her cries fetched the police? Or, better still, arise, go forth, and court arrest? A cell in the Tombs were preferable to this place of proved security. Was she less a prisoner here than she would be there?

But she did not shriek, she did not move, she did nothing, but remained as she had been on awaking from the desolating stupidity of unneeded sleep, so still she scarcely seemed a living, breathing being.

More lurid lightning, a deeper diapason of thunder, again that breathless hush . . .

Of a sudden she left the bed and in one soundless bound gained the middle of the floor, where she paused in the crouch of a hunted

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thing at bay, her wide gaze fastened to the door.

Through a wait so long that she concluded her hearing must have been at fault, she heard nothing. She relaxed, drew a deep breath—and grew rigid with alarm when she heard the noise repeated, a stealthy knocking on the panels.

Putting out a bare arm, she caught up a cheap red cotton kimono and wrapped herself in it, then moved to the door in stockinged feet.

Now that fumbling knock was unmistakable, and with an ear to the crack between door and frame she seemed to detect a panting murmur: "Nora! . . . Nora! . . ."

She called guardedly: "Who's there?" A voice of greater confidence replied: "Me—Charlie—le' me in!" She drew a bolt and turned the knob, distrustfully opening the door a few inches with a shoulder to it, prepared to slam it shut with all her might should she find cause to think she was being tricked. In the outer murk, the pale contour of a face she knew was just discernible. She stood aside and let its owner enter. He came in with shuffling feet, sidling, and slouched against the wall, his

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limbs a-quiver with the jerking palsy of the drug addict. She welcomed him curtly, with a scowl.

"Well? What do you want?"

The Coke returned a twisted, placating grimace.

"I don't want nothin'. Red sent me to tell yuh he wants yuh."

"Red!" She caught her breath sharply. "Where——?"

"I dassent tell. He made me take me oat'. But he wants yuh."

"When? How?"

"T'night. He says it's all right. Ristori's kep' his trap shut. Th' bulls ain't wise to Red and Leo's hang-out. He wants yuh shou'd come to him t'night."

"He does?" There was a trace of challenge in her tone that was less disguised when, after brief deliberation, she demanded: "Suppose I don't? What if the bulls pipe me in the street? Suppose I don't come?"

The dope slave shuffled spasmodically.

"Red says yuh're to——"

"So *you* say. But how do I know he does? How do I know Red sent you here to tell me

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that? How do I know this ain't some dodge the Nut put you up to—or Inez?"

"Hones' t' Gawd, Nora, yuh got me wrong!" the Coke protested. "I ain't seen the Nut, nor Inez either, sinst that night. Red sent me."

"Prove it."

"How'm I gonna do that?"

"Go back to Red and bring me something to prove he sent you—that silver ring he wears—anything."

"I would, Nora"—the protestation was convincingly earnest—"but I dassent. Red'll half kill me if I go back without yuh. Besides, it ain't safe, goin' there too offen. The bulls might see and follow me."

"Well, what about me? What if they see and follow me? I suppose it's all right if I get pinched along with Red and Leo." The girl gave a gesture half impatient, half defiant. "Nothing doing. You tell Red I said so."

"Red says, tell yuh if yuh don't come t'night somepin yuh won't like'll happen to that Wop what's stuck on yuh."

Mario! . . . Her lips framed without uttering the name. She retreated a pace, convul-

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sively tightening the fist that clutched the folds over the kimono above her bosom.

"What—what are you talking about?"

"What Red said to tell yuh. Take it from me, Nora, yuh better do like he says. Somebody's been givin' him an ear-full about yuh an' that Spanish guy——"

"Spanish guy?" she echoed shrilly. "I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Maybe so, maybe not." The Coke licked his lips with a furtive tongue. "Anyhow he's sore. If I was yuh, and didn' want no more trouble I'd do like Red says."

After a while the girl said sullenly: "How am I going to find him if you won't tell me where he is?"

"I'll take yuh there. Red said I should. It's all right, Nora—yuh don't hafta be afraid——"

"Don't worry about me. What time——?"

"Ten o'clock tonight."

"Where'll I meet you?"

"In the room upstairs at——"

A lurid flame of lightning dried speech upon his lips. Terrified, he cowered back to the wall. Darkness fell. Thunders shook the tenement on its foundations, crash upon rippling

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crash. Half stunned, the girl felt the leash upon her senses slipping. Her hands caught wildly at nothingness . . .

VI. THE STORM.

Body and soul seemed welded into one taut string vibrating in agonised response to the fury of the tempest: she found herself standing far from the chair in front of the easel, in quivering affright gazing overshoulder at the featureless long rectangle of the portrait in the shadows.

Rain sluiced the skylight in windwhipped waves, with a crisp, tearing noise. Thunder rocked the skies, ripped and raved, rumbled away in lessening reverberations. A lull fell, loud with the monotonous drum of rain upon the roof. Then without warning the gloom was abolished by a ghastly lilac glare—and the face on the canvas started out of its dark background with an uncanny look of life, the gay mockery of its smile distorted into grinning malice. Instantaneously blacked out as thunder once more smote and rattled, it lingered stubbornly before the vision of the girl, like the sun blot that hangs before dazzled eyes. She

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was fain to switch on the lights to lay that ghostly leer.

Even then she dared not look again. With head averted, she swung the easel round so that the painting faced the wall.

Still she was ill at ease in the company of the thing. She could not forget how that cold electric blaze had seemed to wake the painting into goblin life, transient but terrible. The memory of its jeering smile persisted. Like a spectre unseen but importunate at her shoulder, round a corner of her consciousness, denied but insistent, the notion lurked of the work of her own hands turned monster, preternaturally inspired with a spirit of fatal animus . . .

She had a crawling shiver of superstitious dread. Commonsense was powerless to comfort her with its assurance that she had merely had one more hypnotic hallucination induced by auto-suggestion. Instinct insisted commonsense for once was wrong, that there was more in this than the human mind, fettered to the claims of natural laws, could comprehend or cope with. Surely supernatural forces were here at work . . .

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She strove without success to cast out that thought. . . .

Comparing her wrist watch with memory of the hour marked by the clock in Leonora's refuge, she reckoned her lapse from full waking consciousness had not lasted longer than five minutes: in that scant spell her soul had journeyed far, tarried a while in communion with another, and returned with a freight of fears, of doubts, and cares, that threatened the stability of her reason; in those few moments the work of a week had been undone. She stood now where she had been immediately after the last preceding dream, poised perilously near the verge of derangement, haunted by a shape of fear no whit less awful if it were after all only the creature of her imagination.

No: in even worse case; for then she had only her own self to fear for; while now (so she conceived) the lives of others hung in the balance, lives as real to her as her own, though she knew them through the medium of dreams alone.

Within five hours her other self must go to keep an assignation with a murderer. Fancy pictured Leonora stealing through streets of

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sinister shadow to that rendezvous with a fate inscrutable . . .

But not for Leonora was all this torture of solicitude. Through unhappy mischance Mario had been marked for Red's enmity. And where Red hated, tenure of life was treacherous . . .

Now it was revealed to her that, however inexplicable the affinity of their souls, however dissimilar their circumstances and irreconcilable their ways of thought and standards, in this respect Leonora and Priscilla Maine were one: in love of Mario.

Acknowledging this incredible fact without protest, Priscilla told herself she had loved Mario always, ever since that time, long past, when he had first figured in her life of dreams.

And contemplating the prospect of living through the night to come, under whose impenetrable cover Mario and Leonora must work out their dark entangled destinies, while she waited, powerless to help or hinder, in an ignorance irremediable and maddening, Priscilla felt a shadow fall athwart her understanding, as black and cold as Death.

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CHAPTER FIVE

RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY

I. THE CLOCK

IN New York even hope and despair may meet at times on common ground; for if it shower, only the most desperate of optimists will try to get a taxicab by telephone. By the time Priscilla Maine had spent twenty minutes and all her patience garnering snubs from one arrogant cab company after another, the van of the storm had passed, dragging its heaviest guns on rumbling caissons, leaving the completer subjugation of the stunned and cringing city to the endless legions of the rain.

Her own car was being used by Mrs. Trowbridge for a dinner visit out of Town. The outlook from the windows offered no more promise of an early end to the downpour than the steady tempo of its pounding on roof and skylight. In her present state of mind and nerves the prospect of stopping on indefinitely in the studio was insufferable.

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Resigning herself, then, to a drenching, the girl locked up and scampered through swimming streets to Fifth avenue—where she waited three minutes that seemed ten till a trudging bus consented to pick her up. At the uptown end of her journey, likewise, she had two blocks to run, from Fifth avenue to Park, before she got home with hat, suit, furs and temper all demoralised.

While her maid prepared a bath, she begged off by telephone from a dinner engagement to which she had long been looking forward. Tonight she felt it would be impossible to hold her own, with anxiety on account of Mario and Leonora forever at her elbow, a gibbering spectre.

A hot bath and the ease of négligé should have lent her some tranquillity, but did not. She made the merest pretence of dining from a tray in her room. She could not forget . . .

Past seven: in less than three hours Leonora must start upon her journey . . .

And she could do nothing . . . nothing! . . . but wait and wonder and wring useless hands . . .

The evening aged with desolating deliberation, the tension of anxiety became madden-

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ing, the need to *know* a consuming prepossession. By nine Priscilla was beside herself, pacing madly to and fro, the creature of exquisite torments, hagridden by premonitions so awful she dared not name them even to herself.

A little before ten an inexplicable change in the texture of her emotions made her aware that the peak of her transports had been reached and passed. Of a sudden she found herself more calm, not with the calm of misgivings set at rest, rather with that of courage dauntlessly addressing itself to a forlorn hope.

Intuition divined the explanation: In that strange, deep sympathy which made them one, her mental and emotional processes faithfully reflected Leonora's; what agonies of doubts and fears she had suffered tonight were but replicas of those which Leonora had suffered. But now the time of waiting was no more: Leonora had left her hiding place and, committing herself bravely to her dark adventure, had found relief in action.

If only she might be with Leonora tonight as she had so often been, seeing what she saw, doing what she did, knowing what she knew, participating in every reaction of her wits and perceptions . . .

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