

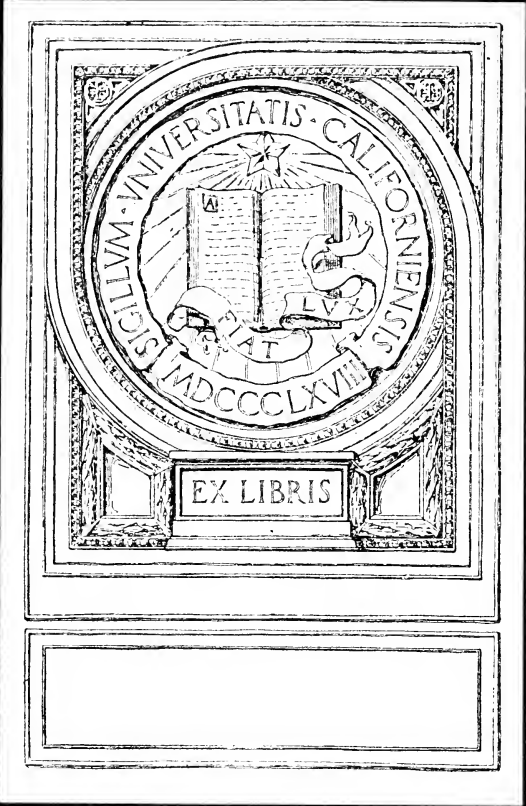
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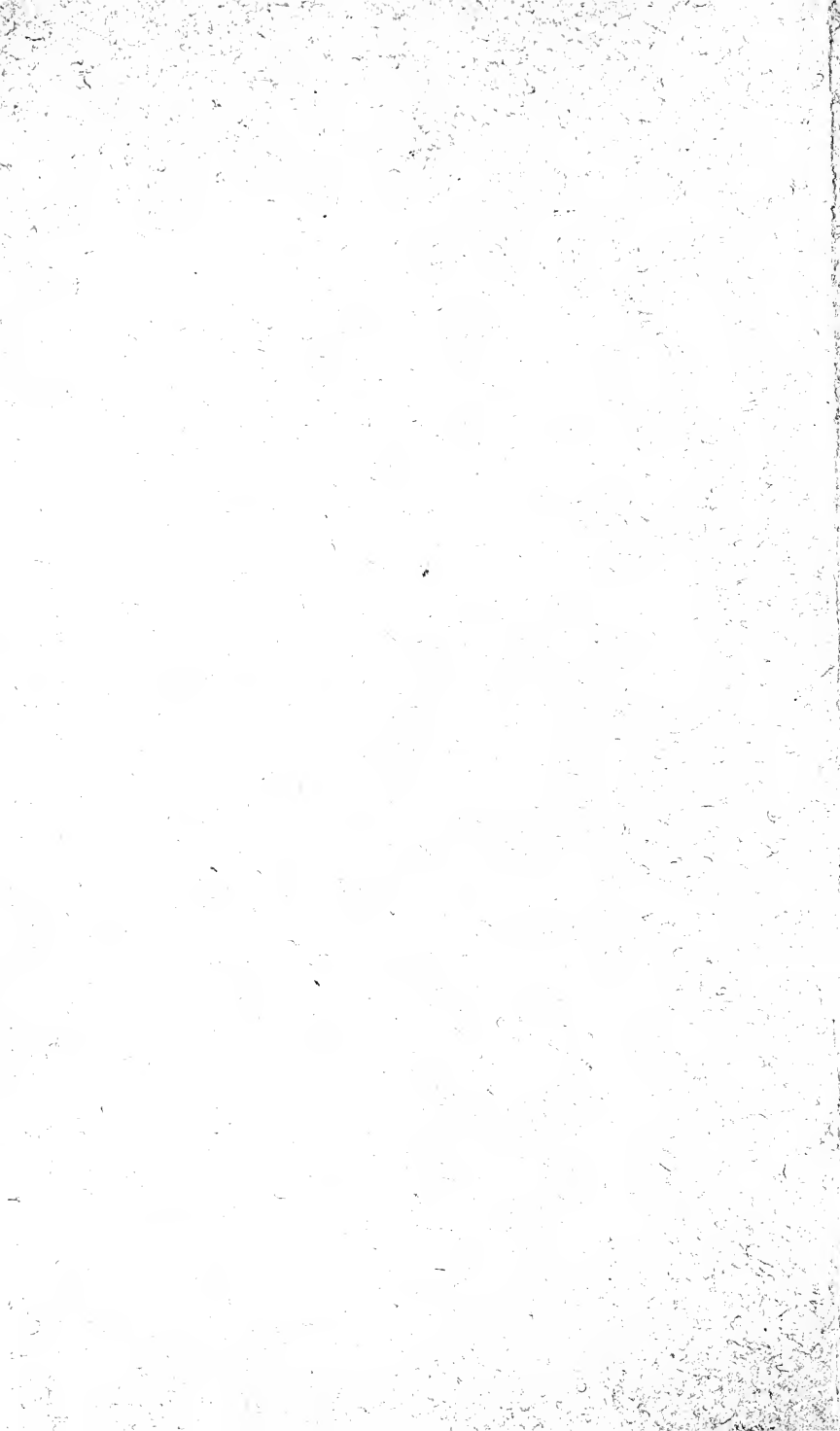
BLACK 'ELL—*a War
Play in One Act by Miles
Malleon.*



FRANK SHAY, *Publisher*

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BLACK 'ELL

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A War Play in One Act

By Miles Malleson

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by Miles Malleson

New York: FRANK SHAY
Seventeen West Eighth Street

BLACK 'ELL

was first produced at the Neighborhood Playhouse, New York, on the evening of April 2nd, 1917, with the following cast:

MRS. GOULD	<i>Hannah Trynz</i>
MR. GOULD	<i>Bennet S. Tobias</i>
ETHEL	<i>Frances Goodman</i>
COLONEL FANE	<i>J. F. Roach</i>
JEAN	<i>Rose Beatrice Schiff</i>
MARGERY WILLIS	<i>Bella Nodell</i>
HAROLD GOULD	<i>William A. Rothschild</i>

SCENE: The morning room of the Gould's home; breakfast time.

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Howell
California

BLACK 'ELL

ABOUT nine o'clock on an August morning in 1916, MR. AND MRS. GOULD are having breakfast. They have been happily married some twenty-five years. Their income is about a thousand a year, and there is nothing to differentiate their dining-room—or their whole house, for that matter—from other dining-rooms and houses of the same class.

MR. GOULD is reading a daily paper propped up against something on the table. Presently he drains his large coffee-cup and pushes it across to his wife. She re-fills it, carries it round to him, and returns to her place. The breakfast continues. He finishes the bacon and eggs on his plate. She has been watching, and asks him if he will have any more. She does that by a little noise—a little upward inflection of inquiry and affection. (The affection is unconscious and unobtrusive—the result of twenty-five years and about nine thousand breakfasts together.)

The little noise catches his attention from his paper. He eyes his own empty plate; he eyes the inviting egg on the dish in front of her, and grunts. A little downward inflection of assent. He gets his second helping and the breakfast continues in silence.

* * * * *

Then, quite suddenly, crashing into the silence, a loud double knock at the front door, followed by a violent ringing. It is as if they had both been hit unexpectedly.

MRS. GOULD. A telegram!

MR. GOULD. Sounds like it.

[Their eyes meet in anxiety. She rises in the grip of fear.]

MRS. GOULD. Oh, Fred, d'you think it's—can it be *that*, at last? Have you looked—the casualty page?

MR. GOULD. Yes, yes, of course I've looked. I always look first thing—you know that as well as I do.

MRS. GOULD. It wouldn't be there—not till to-morrow. They always send from the War Office first—by telegram.

MR. GOULD. [Trying to quiet her in a voice that trembles with anxiety.] Now, mother, mother, we go all through this every time a simple telegram comes to the house.

MRS. GOULD. [Back in her seat, too frightened to do anything but just sit there and wait.] It's about him, I feel—I know it's about him.

MR. GOULD. Don't be silly. [He goes up to the window.] There's

the boy—it's a telegram all right. Why doesn't Ethel answer the door? Oh, there, she's taken it in: [*He comes away from the window. Again their eyes meet.*] Now, mother, there's no need to be anxious—not the slightest reason to get frightened—not the slightest. [*With a poor attempt at a laugh to fill in the wait.*] What a fuss about a telegram! [*The wait lengthens.*] Where is Ethel? I wish the devil people would use the telephone.

[*And even as he eyes it reproachfully, the thing rings. It startles them both.*]

MR. GOULD. [*Ungratefully.*] Damn it! [*Attending to it.*] Yes? Hullo! What's the matter? What is it?

ETHEL, *the maid, enters.*

ETHEL. A telegram, sir.

[*MR. GOULD doesn't want his wife to open it, but he is attached to the telephone.*]

MR. GOULD. [*Holding out his spare hand for it.*] Here, give it to me. [*ETHEL gives it to him and stands waiting. He continues into the telephone.*] Yes? I can't hear. Who are you?

MRS. GOULD. [*Tortured by the delay.*] Oh, Fred. Please—finish talking—and open it.

MR. GOULD. Don't be silly, dear. [*Then hastily to the telephone.*] No, no, nothing. No. I wasn't talking to you. Oh—yes—very well, come round. [*He rings off.*] It's that Willis girl. I never can hear a word she says—she seemed very excited about something—said she wanted to come round.

MRS. GOULD. It may be about him. Some news in the papers we haven't seen. Please—please—tell me what's in it.

MR. GOULD. Nothing to do with the boy at all, you bet your life—somebody wants to meet me at the club.

[*His hands are trembling and he is having some difficulty in opening it. It comes out upside down. At last he gets it right and looks at it; but his eyes aren't so good as he always thinks they are.*]

Where are my spectacles?

MRS. GOULD. Oh, Fred!

MR. GOULD. Mother, don't be silly. Ethel, where are my spectacles? I had 'em—

[*He gropes on the table. It is ETHEL that finds them. Adjusting them, he reads the message and hands the telegram to his wife.*]

MRS. GOULD. Oh, my dear—father—my dear—

[*The tears in her voice overwhelm her words.*]

MR. GOULD. There, there, there—mother—now quiet.

MRS. GOULD. Yes.

[*ETHEL has not left the room; she is standing awkwardly, but unable to go, by the door.*]

MR. GOULD. Ethel, Master Harold is in England again—it's from him—he's home on leave—he'll be back with us this morning. That's all.

ETHEL. Yessir. Thank you.

[*She goes out.* MR. GOULD *looks at his wife. When he is quite sure that she is too occupied with her handkerchief to notice him, he pulls out his own; and walking to the window, does his best to efface any signs of weakness.*]

MRS. GOULD. It's two hundred and forty-three days since he left here, and ever since then, every hour almost, he's been in danger—and now—he'll be standing in this room again. We must telephone to Jean—she'll come round.

MR. GOULD. Don't we—don't you—want the boy to yourself for a bit?

MRS. GOULD. He must find everything he wants when he comes home—and he'll want her. Father, if he's home long enough perhaps they can get married. I had a talk to her the other day. Dear, dear Jean—what this'll mean to her. She must be here when he comes. [*She has risen to go to the telephone and notices the breakfast table.*] Dear, aren't you going to finish your breakfast?

MR. GOULD. No. The young rascal's spoilt my appetite. Does he say what time he's coming?

MRS. GOULD. It says this morning—that's all. [*She is at the telephone.*] Number 2147 Museum, please. Yes, please. Father, will you send Ethel to me? [MR. GOULD *goes out.*] Is that you, Bailey? It's Mrs. Gould. Would you ask Miss Jean to come round here at once? She started? Oh! Something to tell us? Well, I suppose she's heard Master Harold's coming home—she hasn't? Then what *is* she coming to tell us? You don't know—yes—well, she ought to be here now if she's been gone ten minutes—yes. Good-bye, Bailey. [*She rings off.* ETHEL *is in the room.*] I wonder what—Margery Willis was excited, too, father said; and she's coming round. Ethel, what's the telegram say exactly? It's on the table.

ETHEL. [*Reading.*] "With you this morning, Harold." That's all, Mrs. Gould.

MRS. GOULD. Yes. [*She puzzles over it for a moment—then.*] His room must be put ready, Ethel.

ETHEL. Yes'm, of course.

MRS. GOULD. I'd better come and see about it myself.

ETHEL. We can do everything quite well.

MRS. GOULD. I'd like to do it myself. It seems the same as when he used to come back from school for the holidays—getting his room ready—it seems only the other day. I can remember the first time he ever came back from a boarding-school—quite distinctly I can remember—he came in at that door and ran across the room with his arms open—to me there—and jumped right into my arms—and now, the things he must have been through—and he'll be standing in this room

again. [*A loud ring at the bell.*] Oh, there, that's Miss Jean—she's got something to tell me. Let her in quick.

[*ETHEL, on her way to the door, glances out of the window and stops short.*]

ETHEL. It isn't Miss Jean'm I thought it wasn't her ring.

MRS. GOULD. Not Miss Jean—who is it?

ETHEL. It's a soldier'm.

MRS. GOULD. Not—not Master Harold?

ETHEL. Oh, no'm. Not him.

MRS. GOULD. Let him in, Ethel—and tell your master.

[*ETHEL goes out and comes in again, showing in COLONEL FANE, a staff officer at about forty, looking very military and awe-inspiring in his smart khaki much adorned with red. He is MRS. GOULD's brother.*]

MRS. GOULD. Eric!

COLONEL FANE. Well, have you heard?

MRS. GOULD. We've just this minute had the wire.

COLONEL. You've had a wire?

MRS. GOULD. Yes.

COLONEL. Who from?

MRS. GOULD. Why from him—from Harold.

COLONEL. Where from?

MRS. GOULD. From where he landed—at least I suppose so.

COLONEL. Let's have a look. [*She gives him the telegram.*] That is all you've heard?

MRS. GOULD. All?

COLONEL. You haven't heard anything more?

MRS. GOULD. More? Eric, there's nothing—he's not hurt?

COLONEL. No—he's not hurt.

MRS. GOULD. Then what more? What is it, Eric, what is it?

COLONEL. Nothing but good news—great news.

MR. GOULD *comes in.*

MR. GOULD. Hullo, Eric! Come round to tell us the news, eh? You're too late, my boy. We're before you—just had a wire.

COLONEL. I was just telling May there isn't everything in that wire.

MR. GOULD. [*Collapsing.*] Good God! There's nothing the matter—he's not—

MRS. GOULD. Now don't be silly, father!

COLONEL. It's good news for you—great news. You ought to be the happiest and the proudest people in England to-day. Harold's coming back to you—and he's coming back a hero—recommended for gallantry—it's a D. S. O.

[MRS. GOULD just sits down. MR. GOULD walks about. Fast. Up and down. He is shaking his head; smiling; sniffing violently; and tears are streaming down his face. Presently he goes and shakes hands with the COLONEL; he pats his wife's arm and presses her hand in his. Eventually he comes to anchor by the fireplace. There has been a ring at the bell.]

MR. GOULD. Well—let's—let's hear about it.

COLONEL. He retook a section of a trench with a few men. They say he was magnificent—according to them he must have accounted for several of the enemy himself. Fine management!—apparently he was missing—

MRS. GOULD. Missing?

COLONEL. Yes—for more than twelve hours—got back at night.

[JEAN enters. She is about twenty-two, and the eldest of a large family. Before she had really mastered the art of walking herself, she was presented with an absurd wiggly little baby brother, whom she promptly began to look after; and among three subsequent arrivals she has always been the mother-child—loving, patient, and efficient. Even now, when her deep eyes are alight for her lover, there is over her always a beauty of soft gentleness.]

JEAN. [A daily illustrated paper in her hand.] Have you seen?—There's a picture of him.

MRS. GOULD. [Rising.] Jean, my dear.

JEAN. [Going straight into MRS. GOULD'S arms.] Oh, Mrs. Gould! [The arms receive her.]

MR. GOULD. Well, well! Let's have a look. [But his wife does not take her arms from about the girl, and he has to gain possession of the paper for himself, from JEAN'S hand; he bears it off, and searches to find the picture.] Where is it? Eh? I can't see it. Where are my spectacles? I had 'em just now—On the table, expect— [It is the COLONEL who finds them.] Now—where are we? Ah! Lieutenant Gould. Yes. I shouldn't have known him from Adam.

JEAN. D'you see what it's headed?

MR. GOULD. Yes. [Which is sandwiched between a gulp and a sniff.]

MRS. GOULD. What is it headed, father?

MR. GOULD. It's headed— [But he doesn't trust himself.] Dammit, you read it out, Jean. [He gives his spectacles an entirely unnecessary polishing.] Don't know what's the matter with these glasses—can't see a dam' thing!

JEAN. [With the words by heart.] It says "For Distinguished Services—Another Young Hero."

MR. GOULD. Young scoundrel! [He hands the paper to his wife.] There it is, mother.

MRS. GOULD. Here's some more underneath. It's very small print.

[*She reads.*] "Ridding the world of the Hun. Lieutenant Gould accounts for six of his country's foes. For such magnificent work this young hero is to be awarded the medal for distinguished service."

[*MR. GOULD is looking over his wife's shoulder, and while their eyes feast upon the paper the COLONEL shakes hands with JEAN.*]

COLONEL. May I offer my best congratulations?

JEAN. Thanks.

COLONEL. I don't know which is to be envied most—you or he.

MRS. GOULD. [*After a great look at the paper.*] Yes. I could tell—and he'll be standing in this room again—Eric, do you know what time he'll be here?

COLONEL. That's one of the things I came round about—I happened to hear what train his lot's coming up by. If we go down to the station now, we ought just about to meet it.

MRS. GOULD. [*Rising.*] Quickly—we mustn't be late.

COLONEL. No violent hurry. Start in five minutes in a taxi.

MRS. GOULD. Will he be wearing—IT—his medal? [*Her voice is hushed as if she were speaking of something holy.*]

COLONEL. No, he won't. He may not even know about it.

MR. GOULD. You mean he may get the news from us?

COLONEL. It's quite possible.

MRS. GOULD. Father, go and get ready—Jean—

[*But into the room like a wind comes another young lady—MARGERY WILLIS. She wears a coat and skirt of khaki, a leather belt and strap, a Colonial slouch hat—it is some kind of uniform. She has made herself as much like the military as possible, and at once takes command.*]

MARGERY WILLIS. [*She, too, has the illustrated paper.*] I say, you people—congrats—have you seen? Oh, yes, you've got it—d'you see what it says—six of 'em. By Jove, wish I'd seen it—it must have been GREAT. I say, Mrs. Gould, you must be tremendously proud. [*She kisses her; to the COLONEL:*] How d'— [*But she remembers just in time, and, drawing herself up, salutes.*] I say, congrats, Mr. Gould—and Jean—I say, Jean, it must be rather wonderful for you. Fancy being loved by a hero.

JEAN. Yes.

MARGERY. [*Holding out her hand.*] It's awfully difficult to say what you mean, you know, but—well, by Jove, congrats. [*Instead of shaking hands she kisses JEAN.*] When's he going to be here? We all want to come in and cheer.

MRS. GOULD. We're going down to meet him now.

MARGERY. By Jove!—wish we could come—can't spare the time, though—we got a terrific day. Making munitions all the morning—giving a concert—you know, Pierrot show. I'm going to sing "The

Arms of the Army"—hot stuff, I can tell you—with Jack as the chorus; he does look an ass doing it. There'll be a whole heap of Tommies there, and this evening the Rector's making up a party, and we're all going to the Royal Opera House to hear St. John Bullock on "War—the new Religion." He's FINE. Dad used to call him the biggest scoundrel before the war—but it's wonderful how it's brought all classes and people together, isn't it? The old Bish is in the chair—Well, so long—I must go. They're waiting outside. I say, Jean, you should come along and munish—it's terrific sport making shells—wish I could be at the station to cheer—we'll all look in some time to-day, though, you bet! So long—*Six* of 'em. [*She goes out.*]

MRS. GOULD. Come along, father, and get your things on—Eric, will you get a taxi for us?

COLONEL. Certainly.

[*He and MR. GOULD go out; as MRS. GOULD is going JEAN'S voice stops her.*]

JEAN. Mrs. Gould.

MRS. GOULD. Yes, dear?

JEAN. I don't think I shall come down to the station.

MRS. GOULD. Not come?

JEAN. No, I'd rather not. Somehow I—I don't want to meet him with all the other people about.—I don't think I could bear it. Will you tell him I'm waiting here for him—may I? I'd rather.

MRS. GOULD. Of course you shall.

JEAN. [*With a quaint little twinkle.*] Don't kiss me. I should start crying.

MRS. GOULD. I know—I'll bring him straight back to you.

JEAN. Thank you.

[*MRS. GOULD goes out. JEAN has not been alone for a moment when ETHEL comes in to clear away the breakfast things.*]

ETHEL. Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Jean—I thought you was gone.

JEAN. Come in, Ethel.

ETHEL. Shall I be in your way if I clears, Miss?

JEAN. Not a bit. [*ETHEL begins to clear; then presently.*]

ETHEL. It's fine about Mr. Harold, isn't it?

JEAN. Yes.

ETHEL. Must be all right for you—wish it was my Tom.

JEAN. I didn't know you had any one out there, Ethel.

ETHEL. Near twelve months 'e's been out there—my Tom 'as.

JEAN. Is he your—

ETHEL. Yes. My young man—near twelve months I ain't seen 'm. [*Here thoughts find words in spasmodic sentences as she busies herself with the breakfast things.*] Twelve months come next Friday

week. I could do without the 'ro part to get him back for a bit—just for an evening out with 'im—a sweetheart, two brothers an' a father at it. I've given my bit to 'em—seems crool, don't it?—all for you-don't-know-what like.

JEAN. They're fighting for you, Ethel, and for me, and for their country.

ETHEL. [*A little unresponsive to this—her thoughts are traveling along their own lines.*] Yes—any'ow, now they 'ave gorn, them wot stays be'ind don't 'arf make me wild—the shirkers don't—'oldin' meetin's, some of 'em. I'd give 'em shirkers—you should 'ear my brother Bert—'e's a corporal.

JEAN. [*With a big enthusiasm and sincerity, though her voice never loses its gentleness.*] Yes—it's a great war for freedom and liberty.

ETHEL. [*Again her thoughts have pursued their own way.*] Broke up one of their meetin's, 'e did—'e and the boys.

JEAN. Oh! What was it about?

ETHEL. They didn't know rightly what it was *about*—something they didn't like—any'ow, there wasn't much more of it after they got in. Australians, they are—the boys—Bert's friends—fine big fellars—there was a young chap on the platform makin' a speech on somethink—they pulled 'im orf—and 'is glasses fell orf an' 'e trod on 'em 'isself—LARF!! I thought I should er died.

[*She disappears with the loaded tray. Back again, she folds up the table-cloth and puts it away in a drawer. From where she is she can see out of the window.*]

ETHEL. There they go.

JEAN. [*Hurrying to the window and waving from it.*] How long d'you think they'll be, Ethel?

ETHEL. Ought to be back in the 'arf-hour—and then Mr. Harold'll be here—Coo! If it were my Tom.

[*JEAN watches her as she stands in front of her, picturing to herself his home-coming. There is a queer little smile on her lips, a tightening in her throat, and tears are filling her eyes that do not see what they are looking at. Her voice is uncertain of itself.*]

It'll be funny—'im coming back again—you can't seem to fancy some'ow—it don't seem as if it 'ud ever really 'appen—'im coming back again—near twelve months it's been just thinkin' of 'im all the time—all the time it 'as—and—Oh! you know, wantin' 'im.

[*The little smile twists itself all wrong; the tears well up, and her longing finds expression as best it may.*]

Oh, I do wish it were 'im coming.

JEAN. [*Touched and sympathetic and feeling a little helpless.*] Ethel, so do I—I wish it were him coming, too.

[JEAN'S voice recalls the girl back to the room again. She shuts her eyes very tight to squeeze them dry, she bites her lip very hard to get the smile back into shape—and she wins.]

ETHEL. But 'e ain't—and that's all there is about it.

[She goes to the door. Two large tears have overflowed and tremble, like two large raindrops, on the brinks of her cheeks—the only tokens of the recent storm.]

Is there anything you want, Miss Jean?

JEAN. No, thank you, Ethel. [ETHEL turns to go, but JEAN feels that she does wait to try and say something.] Oh, Ethel. [ETHEL faces round again—and JEAN hesitates for words.] I—

ETHEL. Don't say anything about 'im, please, Miss.

JEAN. I don't want anything, thank you.

ETHEL. Thank you, Miss.

[And she goes out. JEAN selects a book and sits by the fireplace—her back to the door—half reading, half dreaming. After a little while of silence, the door opens quietly, and HAROLD, in civilian clothes, is standing in the room. The girl has not heard him come in, and realizing that if he spoke he would startle her, he stands there, behind her, hesitating and uncertain. At last he speaks, very softly.]

HAROLD. Jeanie!

[JEAN looks quickly up, but does not turn her head. She thinks her ears are playing her strange tricks, as they have done before in the night silences. For a moment she listens, and then, sinking her head between her hands, covers her ears as if she would shut out the sound. HAROLD waits where he is. Then, when her ears are free again, a little stronger.] It's all right, Jeanie; it's me. [She rises and faces him, too utterly surprised to do anything for the moment, but stare at him.]

Hullo! [His eyes wander vaguely round the room; his voice, as vaguely, seems to echo his thoughts.] They've moved the piano—it used to be over there.

JEAN. But I don't understand—how have you got here—and like that?

HAROLD. There was a fuss down there at the station—and I left them—I oughtn't to have done—and came up up a taxi—where's everybody?—where's mother?

JEAN. They've gone down to the station to meet you.

HAROLD. [Repeating himself.] There was a fuss—I came up in a taxi—and went up to my room—why have they taken the big picture of me down from over my bed?

JEAN. It's in your mother's room.

HAROLD. Oh! I changed my things—I didn't want you to see me in them—

JEAN. Not want me to see you in them! Why, Harold! Harold, you stupid—

[*She advances towards him, ready to move close into his arms and take him back to her—if he had opened them to receive her. But he does not. And as, closer to him now, she looks into his eyes, something in them begins to frighten her.*]

This isn't a bit like I expected—your coming home—not a bit.

HAROLD. Look at me. [*It is a command.*] Look straight at me.

JEAN. Harold!

HAROLD. You *are* like her—

JEAN. Harold!

HAROLD. [*With an indicating movement of his hand across his own forehead.*] All across there you are—and your hair—the wavy bit.

JEAN. Harold—dear—what are you talking about?

HAROLD. And your eyes are terribly like— [*He looks suddenly over his shoulder, and then apprehensively round the room.*] Do you think people haunt you?

[*By this time JEAN, realizing that he is almost unconscious of her, feeling that there is something between them through which she cannot reach him, can only stand watching him, hypnotized, as it were, by his fearful strangeness.*]

No; of course they don't. Of course they don't. I don't believe in ghosts. There isn't anything any more after you've been killed—only, if there is, would they go on haunting you for the rest of your life—there *can't* be anything after you're dead—there are so many of them—and yet [*a great fear comes into his voice*] he spoke to me on the boat—I heard his voice.

JEAN. Whose voice? I don't understand.

HAROLD. He's dead now—and he had a locket-thing—and she was like you; and on the boat at night, when it was all dark, he came and asked for it—and I gave it to him—and he took it away. Of course, it may have just fallen into the sea—I was leaning over—and I stretched out my hand with it—only I heard his voice, just as if you'd spoken to me—suppose I was to hear it again now [*he is as terrified as a child*] and I've given him back his locket—I can't do anything more, can I?

JEAN. [*Quieting him as she might one of her young brothers.*] There—my dear—there isn't anything to be frightened of—if you'd only tell me—what is it that's between us—I don't understand in the least what you're talking about. I want to help. Won't you tell me—quite quietly?

HAROLD. It's all muddled—the beginning—out of our trench into theirs—where *they* were—and men coming at you—their faces quite close—and shooting at them—and the hellish noise and the shouting—and our men with bayonets—and somebody screamed—it went right into him—and then—*him*.

[*He pauses as if trying to recall the details to his mind. JEAN waits. He begins again a low, dull monotone.*]

He was just a gray thing at first coming at me. I hadn't got a shot left and I hit at him, with something in my hand—a sort of knife—into his face—into his mouth—against his teeth—and my hand came out with a lot of blood and things—I remember thinking how I used to hate going to the dentist when I was a kid. I remember thinking that, quite distinctly—and while I was thinking of the time I had a tooth out—this big one at the back—we got clutched up together—then we fell—I was right on top of him, and the thing I had in my hand—it must have been a knife—it went right into his stomach—right in. I fell on him—then I was lying on top of him, and I looked at him—quite still he was. I looked quite a long time—I looked at his face—he was just about my age—and I put my hand over the part that was all smashed, and I thought how good-looking he was—hair with the tiniest little curls, *you* know—then I raised myself up and took the knife out—it had gone right in him, and then all sideways—and I tried to undo his tunic, but it was all—Oh, I didn't do it! You see, I'd fallen on him; it wasn't my fault exactly—and then he began to cry out—and I knew it must be hurting him simply horribly—he kept on crying out—and he wouldn't stop—Oh, it was too awful! and I tried to kill him.

[*A movement, at last, from JEAN.*]

It was the only thing, to put an end to it—but I couldn't—till I put my fingers round his throat and pressed—and I pressed and I pressed—he couldn't struggle much—I watched the life die out of his eyes—

[*His low voice drops into silence; after a little his recollection of it again becomes audible.*]

like something doing a long way away behind a glass—and just before it went out altogether, he put up his hand to his neck—not to try and take my fingers away—but his fingers undid a button—there wasn't any sight left in his eyes—and the locket was there—his fingers clenched round it, and I thought it was all over and let go with my hands—and suddenly, quite beautifully and low, he spoke a girl's name—and the pain all went out of his eyes, and he looked, like you look sometimes, loving and longing and hopeful. I opened it and I thought I was looking at you, and I realized it was *his* you—and he's out there thrown in somewhere with a heap of others, with some earth scrambled over them—and she's there waiting—do you think he came back and took it away, or do you think I just dropped it into the sea?

JEAN. [*Caressing him with her voice.*] My dear, my dear, it isn't your fault; you didn't want the war; nobody in England wanted the war—we're fighting in self-defense.

HAROLD. [*Looking quickly up at her; he is evidently making a great effort at concentration—his voice is more certain of itself, more argumentative.*] Look here, Jean—I've been thinking—I've been thinking quite a lot—

ETHEL *comes in, white and dishevelled.*

ETHEL. Miss Jean. May I speak to you, please Miss. [*She sees that JEAN is not alone.*] Oh, I beg your pardon—I—

JEAN. [*Noticing her face.*] Ethel, what is it?

ETHEL. I thought you were alone.

JEAN. Whatever is it, Ethel? What's the matter?

ETHEL. I come to you, Miss. I just seen it in the lists—'e won't never come 'ome to me now.

JEAN. Tom?

ETHEL. Killed, it said.

JEAN. [*Going to her.*] Oh, my dear.

ETHEL. I just seen it—just this minute—I can't seem to think—I shan't never see 'im no more—an' I shan't never marry 'im—an' I shan't never love 'im proper—an' I 'ope them wot killed 'im is dead themselves by now.

HAROLD. Don't say things like that, Ethel—they've all got homes of their own—and lovers—

ETHEL. Them! 'Uns!! They're not worth nothink—Oh, I wish I was a man—you done your bit fine, Mr. Harold. You've killed 'em—the devils—six of 'em—

JEAN. [*Trying to keep these last words from his ears.*] Ethel!

ETHEL. I'm sorry, Miss—I come to you—but I thought you was alone.

[*She turns to go.*]

JEAN. Don't go.

ETHEL. Yes, I want to—up to my room, alone—you've got yours back, and I shan't never—I wish black 'Ell to them wot killed 'im, and if there's any justice in 'Eaven, God'll give it to 'em.

[*She breaks down utterly, and finds her way from the room, sobbing terribly.*]

JEAN. How dreadful—poor, poor Ethel.

HAROLD. That's how it goes on—there are people over there cursing me like that. [*He seems to lose grip of the present again, and his thoughts turn inwards.*] If only I knew what his name was, and where he lived—and where she lives—I thought I might—I might go over and see her—d'you think I could—after the war? I could tell her it wasn't my fault—you see, it wasn't; I fell on him. [*Then, quite suddenly:*] How did she know about it? How did that girl know? [*JEAN has no answer.*] Do you know how she knew?

JEAN. [*Very low.*] No—I don't know.

HAROLD. It's between him and me—something I've got to make up for, if I can—nobody else must know ever—only just you—I had to tell some one. I shan't even tell mother and dad—you won't tell them, will you? [*Again JEAN is silent.*] You won't?

JEAN. [*As low as before.*] No.

HAROLD. Only just you and I know and him—but she knew—she said something about six—what did she mean? Jean, what *did* she mean? [*The idea flashes on him.*] It's not in the newspapers—not for everybody to know—My God! I couldn't bear it if it was—I should go mad.

JEAN. You mustn't say things like that—and you mustn't worry.

HAROLD. Is it in the papers?

JEAN. My dear—why should it be?

HAROLD. Is it?

JEAN. No.

[*The Illustrated Daily Paper has been lying open on the table;*

JEAN folds it up and removes it as unobtrusively as she can.]

HAROLD. If it had been—I don't know what I should have done—I don't know what I should have done.

[*The door opens and MR. GOULD stands on the threshold. It is to be noticed that he is carrying the illustrated paper. As JEAN turns to the sound of the opening door, she happens to hide HAROLD.*]

MR. GOULD. [*Speaking at once.*] I say, Jean, my dear, you mustn't be disappointed—there's a mystery—nothing to alarm you. We met the train, but he hasn't c— [*and he sees HAROLD. His mouth is open to complete the word, and it just stays open.*] Why, God bless my soul, here he is. [*He dashes at him.*] *My dear old chap!*

[*He grips his hand, nearly shakes his arm off, and kisses him.*

COLONEL FANE has appeared in the doorway.]

I say, Eric, here he is. God knows how he got here; but here he is. Tell his mother. No, I will.

[*He returns to the open door—calling—evidently far too excited to know what he is doing.*]

Mother!—Mother! Where are you? MOTHER!

MRS. GOULD'S VOICE. [*As she is coming downstairs.*] Yes, dear?

MR. GOULD. I've got a little surprise for you—come along—a little unbirthday present.

MRS. GOULD. [*Appearing.*] What is it, dear?

MR. GOULD. [*His hand outstretched to HAROLD.*] There—look what I've got for you—found it lying about when I came in.

MRS. GOULD. Boy!

HAROLD. Hullo, mother!

[*She takes him to her with an enormous kiss.*]

MR. GOULD. What I want to know is—what's he doing here? Did he fly in through the window, Jean?

JEAN. He came up by himself in a taxi.

MR. GOULD. Oh! [*He eyes him proudly, still in his mother's embrace.*] Got into his own things, too. Well, you've had the first look at him. You've told him the news?

JEAN. No.

MR. GOULD. You haven't?

JEAN. No.

MR. GOULD. [*Waving the paper.*] You haven't shown him this?

JEAN. No.

MR. GOULD. [*Thrusting the paper into her hands.*] Well, then, show it to him now.

JEAN. Oh, no, Mr. Gould—please.

MR. GOULD. Yes, my dear. You're the right person to do it. I don't say I don't envy you.

HAROLD. [*Whose attention has been caught.*] What is it?

MR. GOULD. Jean's got something in the paper to show you.
[*He urges the unwilling girl so that she stands right before*
HAROLD.]

JEAN. [*Helpless.*] Mr. Gould!

HAROLD. [*Quickly.*] Something about me?

MR. GOULD. Yes.

HAROLD. Something in the paper about me?

MR. GOULD. Yes—Come along, Jean.

JEAN. I'd rather not, really; not now.

MR. GOULD. Eh?

HAROLD. Show it to me. [*She puts the paper into his hands. He scans the sheet.*] I don't see anything—what is it? Where?

MR. GOULD. You've given him the wrong side of it now. 'Pon my word, I believe you're frightened it'll turn his head! [HAROLD reverses the paper.] The top picture on the left—and, by Jove! old chap, we're proud of you—we are—we're proud—eh?

[HAROLD has looked up, and the sentence ends with a little noise in his throat.]

HAROLD. [*Almost to himself.*] No—it isn't true—it isn't true. [*He stares at the little group; and, hypnotized as JEAN was, they wait in silence. He is evidently striving again with the past.*] There were six in it when I started, and it was empty when he came—if I could remember— Oh, my Christ! if it is true—and they want to reward me for it. [*He talks horribly in the air.*] I won't take it—I won't touch it—you know I won't, don't you? [*He sinks into a chair, covering his face with his hands.*] Oh, my Christ!

MR. GOULD. Hullo!

MRS. GOULD. What is it?

JEAN. He's been telling me—it isn't a bit like we expected—he's been telling me about the man he killed.

COLONEL. It's all right, people; they're often like that at first—shock, you know—nerves—he'll be all right in a day or two.

[HAROLD *has not raised his head from his hands, and MR. GOULD, going to him, pats him gently and kindly on the shoulder.*]

MR. GOULD. There, there, there, my dear old chap; we understand—of course we do—one or two good breakfasts at home, a few nights in your own comfortable bed, and a dinner with me at the Club, eh? You'll be as right as rain. [*No answer.*] Come along, old man, pull yourself together. [*No answer.*] It sounds strange, here in my own house, telling the soldier who's been facing death for us for nearly a year to "pull himself together."

HAROLD. [*Suddenly looking up.*] It isn't a soldier's job to get killed—it's his job to kill.

MR. GOULD. [*Momentarily nonplussed.*] Yes—but—

HAROLD. You know, it isn't *them* so much—or even *him*—it's her, waiting there—coming back to Jean makes you realize.

MR. GOULD. Oh, come, come, come! You've killed your men, we know; but it was in fair fight.

HAROLD. Fair fight!

MR. GOULD. Well, if it wasn't fair fight, it wasn't *you* that was fighting foul—we know *that*. I shouldn't let myself be weak.

HAROLD. Fair fight! If you only knew what it means—all of it—all fighting's foul!

MR. GOULD. Oh, come—that's rather a queer view. [*He tries a little joviality.*] We get quite enough of that sort of thing from the cranks at home. We can't do with any sentimentalism, you know, from the men who are doing the work.

HAROLD. Fair fight!

[*He is evidently on the verge of breaking down completely. The COLONEL, who is not a man of words, has taken up his position with his back to the fireplace; MRS. GOULD and JEAN can only watch and listen. When MR. GOULD speaks again, he is entirely serious.*]

MR. GOULD. Come, old man, I want you to listen to me quietly—are you listening? [HAROLD *nods assent.*] Look here—if a criminal was to come into this room and attack me, or your mother, or Jean, you'd be the first to protect us—Eh? Of course you would. Well, that's what you've been doing—and you wouldn't be so much upset if you happened to damage the blackguard in the process—of course you wouldn't—my dear old chap, nobody wanted this war—but if you're attacked you've got to defend yourself. That's all it is—it's perfectly simple—but, by Jove! we *are* proud of you, and we *are* thankful to you for the way you've been protecting your home, and your country, and all that she stands for.

HAROLD. D'you know when I heard all that last?—all of it almost—in their trenches. [*He has risen in a passionate, nervous excitement.*] I was lying there all night, quite close, and I heard them talking, just like our chaps do sometimes—laughing and joking about all the things they're going through, and knowing they've got to climb out in the

morning and don't stand a dog's chance of being alive—not death itself simply, but bits of you smashed up, and you lie and roll about; you can hear them crying out all over the place—and the night before they wait—and make fun—and they know all the time—it's just in the early morning, when it gets a bit colder and the light begins to come in the sky, waiting—my God! they are fine, all of 'em—d'you think they'd do that to each other, month after month, if they didn't both think they were right and the others wrong, and they were protecting something? It's all a bloody muddle!

MR. GOULD. Harold!!

HAROLD. It is!! If you'd heard them. There was a man there—a Socialist or something, I suppose—talking against the war—and the way they all sat on him. They got furious with him. They talked just like you—how they were afraid of Russia and France and England all against them, and how nobody wanted the war; and how, now it had come, they must all protect their wives and their children, and their homes and their country—and they told each other stories to prove what brutes we were—stories of what the Russians had done—filthy things—and the French foreign troops—I don't know if they were true, but they were just the same as we say about them. [*The COLONEL and MR. GOULD begin to get restive. They would interrupt, but in his growing passion he gives them no opportunity.*] Who makes everybody believe it's somebody else's fault? They believe it—you believe it. Jean said it to me. There were two men in our company from the dirty little street out at the back there—what have I ever done for them before the war?

MR. GOULD. [*Getting a word in.*] Really! That's got nothing to do with it—you're only worrying yourself.

HAROLD. [*Turning on him.*] It has got something to do with it. I want Jean to understand, and mother, and you, and all decent people. [*He tries to put into words an idea he has been worrying at.*] I mean, what have you, or any one in this whole street of great big houses, ever really done about the beastly little streets just behind at our back-doors—a whole wilderness, miles and miles of 'em—except pretend they aren't there? And it's the same in other countries. It's their job to join together and get a more decent share of life, instead of being born and living and dying in ugliness—only we put expensive weapons into their hands, and tell them to go and kill one another. And they do. That's the horrible part. They do. We put 'em in uniforms, and yell "Form fours! as you were!" At 'em, till they'll do anything. They're tremendously brave—they're magnificent. I know, I've seen 'em—but the waste! [*The COLONEL makes a short advance from his position on the hearthrug, clears his throat, and is, unfortunately, at once overwhelmed.*] After all, what's it matter who was to blame in the beginning! It's happened. And all the young men in the world, and the workpeople who didn't have anything to do with starting it—and all think they're right—are tearing one another to pieces in screaming agony. (It ought to be stopped—aren't there enough sane people in the world to prevent it ever happening again?) Now they've seen what

it's like. If only they'd find a way of stopping it! D'you know what I thought the other day?—If we could get some of the statesmen, and the newspaper men, and the parsons, and the clever writers in all the countries who keep it going—put them in a room—with knives—sharp knives—and let them hurt one another—hurt one another horribly—stick them in, and scream with pain—or, with a few bombs—and their legs and arms and hands and feet just torn off—great gashing holes in them. My God, they'd want to stop soon enough—they'd "start negotiations" all right—only now they just sit at home, the old men, and set us at each other.)

MR. GOULD. [*Feeling he is being implicated.*] This is monstrous!

HAROLD. [*The anger in his father's tone rousing its answer in his.*] You sent me out there, and I've done the life out of a man my own age. He looked a ripping good sort, and I might have liked him, and you want to reward me for it—and if he'd have killed me—he might just as well, only I fell on him—you and Jean and all of you'd have been miserable—and they'd have rewarded him—it's all so dam' silly.

COLONEL. The best thing you can do is to lie down for a bit—I must get back to the War Office.

HAROLD. [*Going straight on.*] Dam' silly. I saw as I came up from the station, "No Peace Piffle" on the 'buses—and a whole lot of men learning to prod sacks with bayonets—and they were laughing—God in Heaven, I used to laugh.

MARGERY WILLIS bursts in.

MARGERY. Has he come? [*She sees him.*] There he is! Three cheers for Lieutenant Gould, D. S. O. [*She calls out of the door:*] I say, you people, he's here. Come along up and cheer. I'll bring 'em in. [*She disappears calling:*] Jack, Audrey, Daddy—he's here! Come on in!

COLONEL. [*Feeling that these things should not be heard outside.*] I don't think I should say any more now, if I were you; at least—don't. You mustn't say anything more now. You must be quiet.

HAROLD. It's no use ordering me about, because I've done with it. Oh, I know, I know. You all think I'm mad—looking at me like that. [*He has completely lost control of himself; his words rush out in an ever-growing crescendo.*] But there are millions doing it—millions. The young ones doing it, and the old ones feeling noble about it. Yes, Dad feels noble because I've killed somebody. I saw him feeling noble—and you all look at me, because I tell you it's all filthy—foul language and foul thinking—and stinking bits of bodies all about—millions at it—it's not me that's mad—it's the whole world that's mad. I've done with it! I've done with it! That man in the trenches—he'd had enough. He said he was going to refuse to kill any more, and they called him a traitor and pro-English, and they've probably shot him by now. Well, you can shoot me, because I'm not going back. I'm going to stop at home and say it's all mad. I'm going to keep on saying it—

somebody's got to stop some time—somebody's got to get sane again—and I won't go back—I won't, I won't—I won't!

MARGERY. [*In the doorway, cheering wildly.*] HURRAY! HURRAY!
[*There are sounds and voices in the passage: "Where is he?" "He's in the dining-room"—"Come along in"—"Three cheers for Harold."*]
HIP, HIP, HURRAY! HIP, HIP, HURRAY! HIP, HIP, HURRAY!

[*But as he stands there, white, with clenched fists, and still, the*

CURTAIN *comes quickly down and hides him.*]

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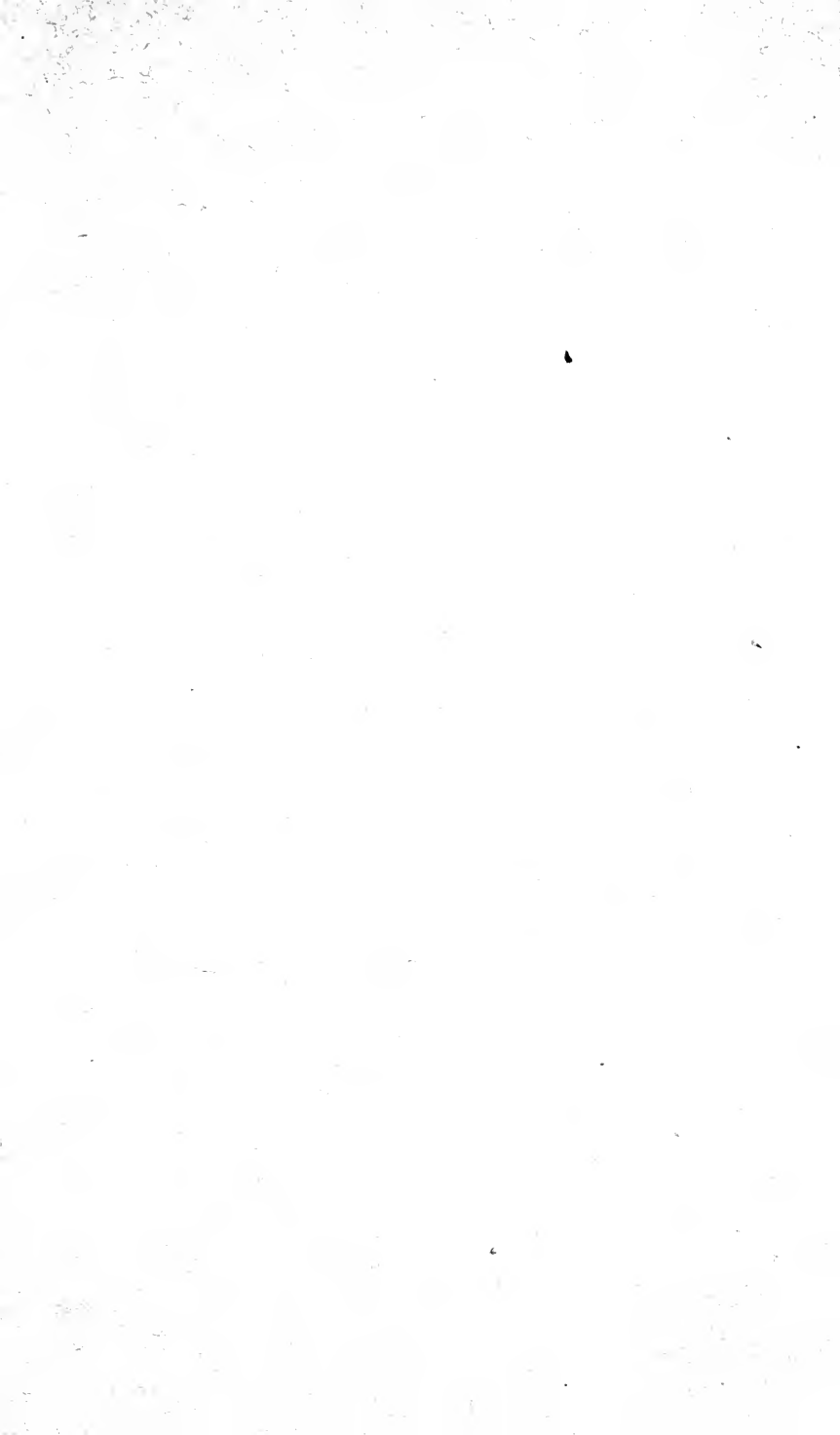
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