

MAY THE

THE MOTHER-LIGHT



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THE MOTHER-LIGHT



THE MOTHER-LIGHT

A Novel



D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK

1905

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Published February, 1905

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I

UP went the curtain at the Garden Theatre on the third act of the *Morals of the Marchioness*. A boudoir—the Marchioness's; her maid Thérèse moving about alone.

She lit lamps, she drew curtains, she straightened rugs, she arranged cushions—she touched and lingered upon each of the costly articles the management had assembled and advertised for that crucial act. Her close-fitting black costume with white at the neck and wrists gave her long, slim figure its opportunity. But, more than by figure or by grace, she pleased because she radiated that mystery of attraction called personal magnetism—strong and silent and mysterious as gravitation, its corresponding force in the universe of matter. At the rise of the curtain the audience had immediately applauded—that was for scenery and settings. As Thérèse made her exit, there was more, and more vigorous, applause—that was the unconscious tribute to her unconscious magnetism.

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Before she could clear the narrow passage between two canvas "flats" the Marchioness entered it, on the way to make her entrance. She was beautiful, being none other than the famous Victoria Fenton of His Majesty's Theatre; but she was all adangle and aglitter with her notorious jewels, like a pawnbroker's wife at an East Side wedding or a society matron who has abandoned hope of homage to her own charms. The splendors of the boudoir, like the aristocracy of its tenant, ended abruptly at the vision-line of the audience. Victoria's dresser, Wheat, was half-walking, half-crawling beside her along the narrow way, helping her to hold up from contact with the not too clean boards the many and gorgeous folds of the evening wrap and dress which aided her jewels and her beauty in producing public uncertainty as to the degree of her talent.

The applause for Thérèse had not died away. At sight of her, the Marchioness's glorious eyes shot anger and contempt. For a week she had been noting that the enthusiasm at her own magnificent entrance was no greater, was sometimes less, than the appreciation of the humble and obscure and plainly dressed Thérèse. Before that danger-freighted look, seen now at six successive performances, the young woman who was taking the part of maid flushed and shrank. "I'm *so* sorry, Miss Fenton!" she pleaded, pressing herself into the canvas wall. She knew Victoria meant mischief—why

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else had she for the last three nights entered that narrow way before Thérèse could possibly escape from it, each time giving her that appalling look?

As Victoria squeezed by, her breath on the frightened obscurity's cheek, she said coldly: "Here's the creature again, Wheat. Her awkwardness and impudence are beyond endurance."

"Yes, ma'am," said Wheat, her voice muffled by the masses of cloth and silk and linen and lace she was protecting.

The obscurity turned white beneath her rouge. Her alarm was so great that it left no room in her heart for resentment against the deliberate injustice. "I beg your pardon, Miss Fenton. I hope you'll overlook it."

"Just tell the stage manager to rid us of her," continued Victoria, as if there had been no interruption. "She makes me nervous. My fan, now—and the opera bag." And she was the Marchioness returned from the opera to prepare for the great rendezvous in her boudoir.

Thérèse had to reappear from time to time; but the trivial part did not interrupt the current of Agnes Frazer's thoughts. No work all summer, and her baby taken sick just as the season began; a position at ten dollars a week, less two dollars a week to Miss Fenton's thrifty manager; and now, after three weeks, with the baby no better and therefore worse, she was out again.

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Out, when it had been so hard to get in; out, when her expenses were double her wages. Where was she to find work? How keep her lodgings? How provide medicine and food? How pay the nurse she must have for the baby while she was at work or looking for work?

She was leaning against an upright, in the bare, chilly behind-the-scenes, the odor of Victoria's powerful perfumes still sticking to the dampness of the musty air. She had lost consciousness of her dreary physical surroundings; she was wandering in the drearier behind-the-scenes of her own life. Presently she realized that someone was standing before her, was watching her with pitying eyes. She flushed, started, saw the call boy holding out a note. With a sympathy that was professionally critical as well as human, he noted her pallor and trembling hands as she took and opened the note, her look of dumb despair as she read the expected curt dismissal—one of those blows that cannot be discounted by anticipation.

“Fired?” asked the boy.

She nodded.

“Take my advice—get out of the profession,” said he with the condescension the humblest of the “not fired” has for even the highest of the “fired.” “You ain't got the front. You can't throw the bluff. And the other ladies hate you because you've got airs.”

“But I haven't,” she protested, as if it were of the

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utmost impórtance to convince the boy. "I let them walk on me—any of them—all of them. I've humbled myself. I've degraded myself."

"That's just it, Miss Frazer," said the boy triumphantly. "You *look* as if you was lowering yourself. That's what makes 'em red-headed. They don't care how chesty anybody is so long as she *looks* low."

But "Miss Frazer" wasn't listening.

The boy continued his counsels, his face shrewd and old with the premature cynicism of the city "boy of the world." "Get a backer," said he, "and get a hide, or get off the earth. It's no place for people with skins; it's no place for no woman without a man behind her." And he had to hurry away, to thrust his pert face in at sundry dressing-room doors and to deliver his calls in a pert voice.

She went down to the dungeon-like general dressing-room, made her street change, left the theatre. She entered it again by the public door, got her six dollars at the box-office. Out into Madison Avenue, and mechanically southward along the Garden colonnade toward Twenty-sixth Street. In the dimness of the crossing she ran into a young man with eyes down and thoughts as preoccupied as hers. He apologized, but she neither saw nor heard. He knew that she did not, read why in the drama of her thoughts written so ghastlily upon her face. They passed on in opposite directions.

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The young man went only a few steps before he paused, turned, gazed after her. There she was—as yet but a few yards away. He followed.

She crossed Madison Square diagonally, did not stop until she reached Twenty-third Street. A drizzling rain began to fall; she looked eastward for a cross-town car. “No, I must walk,” she muttered, and went rapidly on westward. He quickened his pace, put himself abreast of her, walked beside her in silence. She lowered her head and went the faster.

But he did not take the hint. “I see you have no umbrella,” he said, the only courage in his tone the courage of timidity barely overcome. “May I—Will you—We are going the same way.”

She put her head still lower.

“What harm would there be in walking under my umbrella?” he urged. And he opened it.

They went side by side in silence almost to Sixth Avenue, he carrying the umbrella so that she could easily come under it, but not venturing to hold it over her. At the electric light near the stairway of the Elevated, she stopped and faced him.

“If I annoy you—” he stammered.

“Not at all,” she replied coldly. And her eyes began a calm, critical survey of him—from head to foot and back again. It was not a rebuke but an analysis. He was about as tall as she, agreeable looking, and with a

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good, strong figure. He was well, even fashionably, dressed. Like his dress, his face suggested custom of great comfort at least, probably of luxury. She took a long time for her survey. As soon as he guessed the nature of it, he watched her with a somewhat embarrassed smile.

“What’s the verdict?” he asked, when she had apparently finished and seemed to be reflecting. And he tried distinctly to see her face; but it was in the deep shadow, while such light as there was streamed full upon him. “Will I—do?”

“As well as another,” she answered, her eyes calmly upon him again. “You are not poor?”

“Not *very*,” he said. “Nor yet rich.”

“I think you’ll do,” she went on, still in the judicial tone. “I may need some one—some stranger—some—man like you.” There was a faint sarcastic chill, he thought, in the “man like you.”

“I don’t wonder you misjudge me,” he began.

“Oh, no, I don’t,” she replied. “Besides, what I think of you is of no more importance than—what you think of me. I may need you”—this as if he were an inanimate instrument to some purpose of hers which it was no more necessary to disclose to him than it would be necessary to explain to a table knife that one was about to use it for cutting bread. “If I should—” she went on, reflectively. “This is Wednesday. I’ll prob-

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ably know by Sunday. If you care to, you can come—" she hesitated—" here will do as well as anywhere. Sunday evening—here—at—What time does it get dark?" She gave a short queer laugh that made him wince. "About half-past seven," she went calmly on, answering her own question. "At eight o'clock then—if you care to risk my not being here." She nodded a curt but not unfriendly dismissal and was on her way westward when he, rousing himself, lifted his hat and bowed as if she could see him.

On Sunday evening he swung the corner of Fifth Avenue and came down the south side of Twenty-third Street, ten minutes early. But he found her at the edge of the sidewalk in the same place. Again he could not make out her face perfectly, so strong was the shadow; but he thought it peaked and hollow, and he was sure that her dress—the same she had on before—was now much larger for her. As he lifted his hat, she looked at him. He said: "I beg your pardon, if I'm late. Fact is, I almost didn't come. You were so queer the other night and—Well, I had followed you on impulse——"

"No matter," she cut in. "I'm here." And he felt that her nerves were on such a tension that she wished not to be compelled either to listen or to speak.

"You've dined?" he ventured after an awkward pause.

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“Yes,” she replied.

“We might go in somewhere and have some coffee or a liqueur—or something,” he suggested helplessly.

“As you please. But—I must be home by ten.” She said it evenly enough, if with a certain peculiar slowness and distinctness.

“Listen to me!” he burst out. “I know what you take me for, and I don’t blame you. But no matter about that. It’s altogether a question of you.”

“I am of age,” she said tranquilly. “Twenty-nine, to be exact. I’ve been married—am a widow. I’ve had a pretty thorough experience of what you men call ‘the world’ in these last two years of making my own way. And—I’m here.”

“Yes, and I see in your eyes the same look they had over near the Garden the other night. And I wish you would tell me——”

“I am not here to discuss myself,” she interrupted coldly.

He made a gesture of appeal. “Let me help you,” he said. “Please!”

She drew herself up. “You are mistaken,” came from her in the iciest voice. “I am not a beggar, not an object of charity or of pity. For two years I’ve been selling my soul. I’ve made up my mind never to do so again. I prefer—what I regard as the lesser evil. I prefer to sell——”

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“Don’t finish that sentence!” he commanded sternly. “You think you know what you’re talking about, but you don’t. I’ve been worse off in this town than you could possibly be. You still have clothes. I’ve gone without a shirt for weeks, and with nothing to eat but a roll and coffee every other day or so. There isn’t any humiliation I haven’t struck hands with. I’ve begged. I’ve—yes, I’ve looked about for a chance to steal, and was kept from it only because I couldn’t find anything that would buy bread or lodgings.”

“But why should I beg or steal,” she said—defiant now, “when I need not?”

“Don’t! Don’t!” he implored. “You don’t understand—believe me, you don’t. And I can help you. And you’ve a right to my help—the same right you’d have if you were drowning.”

His tone went straight to her heart. She looked at him—got a vivid impression of strength and gentleness. She looked up and down the street—deserted except by a few forlorn, tawdry figures moving vaguely along, like shadows, like warnings conjured by him to frighten her back. She wavered. “Well—what do you propose?” she asked.

“You must need—” he began. And in spite of himself he showed that nervous hesitation which comes to every sensitive soul when its emotions, whether of generosity or sympathy or passionate love, have to be

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materialized, have to be translated into the always necessarily coarser terms of the tangible. And in his nervousness he blunderingly awakened her with the rude shock of the materializing gesture—his hand moved toward his inside coat-pocket.

“How dare you! How *dare* you!” she blazed out, and wheeled and fled so swiftly that to have overtaken her he must have made both her and himself conspicuous.

He did follow, however, kept her in sight until she turned into Seventh Avenue. When he came to the corner and looked in the direction she had taken, he could not see her. He walked up and down the block; he started away several times, each time returning after he had gone a few yards. He did not give her up for more than an hour. Next morning he searched the newspapers item by item—and many mornings thereafter. He telephoned the most likely hospitals; he even went twice to the Morgue. Wondering at himself, he persisted long after the folly of it was obvious, persisted until a month's absence from the city broke his habit. And still he did not forget. Months afterward her eyes and her voice and that tragic look which had pierced him at first sight of her—or, rather, sense of her—would float into his mind and haunt him. And the spell of the phantom was the more potent for its vagueness.

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She had darted across the avenue and, hiding in the denser crowd there, had rounded into Twenty-second Street. A backward glance as she was turning, and she saw him at Twenty-third Street gazing down the other side of the avenue. At a slower pace she went on to her lodgings. She was putting the key in the door when she heard from the foot of the stoop: "Yes—it *is* you! I can't be mistaken."

She gasped; the key rang on the stone sill; she leaned against the door-frame.

"Don't you know me?" continued the voice—it came from a man making halting ascent toward her.

But she did not hear distinctly and was not looking. In the whirl of her thoughts she was assuming that it was the man who had tempted her to take alms. "This is even more contemptible—" she muttered.

"Maida! Mrs. Hickman!" exclaimed the man, hat in hand and face now clear in the light from the street lamp. "It's I—Will Hinkley—of Ida Grove."

Maida—Mrs. Hickman—those names which she had not heard in her two years on the stage as Agnes Frazer, brought her to herself. "Will Hinkley!" she cried, and stretched out both hands. But before he could take them, she drew back. "How did you find me?" she asked, suspiciously.

"I have come—I have been led here—to see you, to talk with you about—a very important matter."

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He was beside her on the top step and was regarding her with a solemnity that struck terror into her.

“What—what—” she stammered. Had he seen her and the stranger in Twenty-third Street? Had he both understood and misunderstood? Had he followed her? He had known her from childhood, was, therefore, a connecting link with the only public opinion that existed for her—the public opinion of her native town.

At sight of the agitation his words had caused he smiled in solemn triumph. “I see you understand me,” he said. “The Mother-Light—” At this name he paused, bent his head slowly three times, his lips moving as if in some sort of prayer. Then he went on, “has prepared your mind for her message, her invitation.”

She was all at sea; but she felt that at least her suspicion was not well founded. “Won’t you come in?” she asked, picking up the key and unlocking the door. “I’ll have to leave you in the parlor alone a minute or two. But I’ll be down as soon as I’ve had a look at my baby.”

“Your baby!” he exclaimed.

She nodded with a quick smile. “Oh—of course—how could you know? I haven’t seen a soul from Ida Grove since Dick and I left. Eleven years! And I’ve not written to anyone out there—not since we left. Yes, I’ve a baby—two years and five months old. He was born a month after Dick died.”

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“Your baby!” repeated Hinkley, dazed. “Impossible!”

She laughed. “I’ll show you,” she said, opening the door. “He’s not been well, but he’s worth looking at, for all that.”

“You have no baby!” muttered Hinkley, rubbing his hand over his forehead as he followed her into the hall.

A woman was on the stairs. At sight of them she threw her apron over her head and pressed it to her face with both hands. Maida gave a low scream, such a sound as an animal vents when it sees its young in the clutch of the hunter. She sprang past the woman, up the creaking stairway, and was hid by the turn.

“What is it?” Hinkley asked the woman.

“Oh! Oh!” she moaned. “He’s dead—Mrs. Frazer’s baby’s dead!”

Hinkley dropped to his knees and clasped his hands. “A miracle! A miracle!” he cried in a voice that sounded like joy.

The woman was too astounded by this incredible demonstration to show, or even to feel, horror. Hinkley rose and in his ordinary voice, tinged with proper sympathy, said: “Now, please take me to her that I may console her.”

The woman studied his honest, distinctly attractive countenance, was fascinated by his curiously piercing black-brown eyes. She noted his more than decent

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dress, suggestive of the minister. She began to feel that she must have been somehow mistaken about that scandalous, if not lunatic, demonstration of joy. "It's me that's upset," she muttered.

"She and I are life-long friends," Hinkley explained. "I am sure, madam, she will wish to have me with her."

The servant preceded him to the third floor, to the rear end of the hall. She knocked and a nurse opened the door—revealing a small bare hole under the eaves with just room for a folding bed. There sat Maida, her dead baby in her lap, her arms limply under it. She was staring into the wall; and upon her face as upon a mask of gray stone was graven that desolation which suspends the senses and stuns the soul.

Will Hinkley gently lifted the dead child and laid it upon the bed beside her. Then he sat and put his arm round her—he could feel the chill of her body through her clothing.

"Maida, my sister Maida!" he murmured, a sudden sense of her woe upheaving in him the religion of his childhood and youth. "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed——"

With a shudder and a spring she was upon her feet. "The Lord!" she hissed, her hands clinching and unclenching, and her expression shifting as swiftly and terribly as those wrathful countenances that are hinted

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in leaping flames. "The Lord! You—*you*—come to me—here—*here!*—with my dead baby before my eyes—and talk to me of a good God! I tell you, there's no God! There's a devil—yes. There *is* a devil who amuses himself by creating us and slowly torturing us to death, first killing our dear ones, one by one, before our eyes. But—a God!" She laughed long and loudly.

"Maida! Maida!" said Hinkley in a deep, tender voice, fixing his strange eyes on hers.

The look beat upon her fury like rain upon a frenzied sea, slowly quieting it. At last she shivered. "Oh—what am I saying!" she wailed. "Forgive me, God—" She sank to her knees, clasped her hands upon the bosom of her child, interlaced its fingers with hers—"forgive me, God, and let me have my baby—my little one—my all, my all!" Now she was flinging herself upon the bed, her eyes raining tears; and she was kissing the small, cold face, so wasted, so waxen white; was kissing the tiny, thin hands, like withered, crumpled leaves; was kissing the little feet—how often had they brought him tottering and uncertain and all aquiver with joy to the door at sound of her hurrying up the stairs. "Baby! Baby!" she called softly. "Wake, baby! Smile at mamma!" After a long, expectant look, a cry as if her soul were tearing itself loose from her body; and she buried her head in the folds of the baby's night-dress.

II

FOR the next four days she did what they told her to do, did it as she was told to do it. She looked at the coffin as if she either did not see it or did not know what it was. She watched it descend into the earth, heard those few first clods echo upon it like the despairing beat of hands from within. She saw the fresh earth pounded into a coffin-shaped mound under the spades of the diggers. All the savagery of the civilized funeral was enacted before her open eyes without causing either outward sign or inward feeling.

In the darkness of the fourth night the nurse, asleep on a cot at the foot of the bed, started up, awoke, listened. Maida, with pillows or covers or both over her head and pressed against her mouth, was writhing upon the rack of her woe. The numb nerves had come to life, and Grief, most skillful of vivisectionists, was searching them with merciless steel. The nurse gave a nod of satisfaction. "She'll come round now," she said to herself. "The volcano has got an outlet." And as the sounds died away she fell asleep.

Hinkley came at ten the next morning. He found her with heavily circled, dull eyes, with hands like a

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corpse's, with lips only a shade more blueish-white than her face; but she was calm, and while the look she gave him as he spoke was as indifferent and lifeless as living look could well be, still it was recognition again.

"Are you paying for all this?" she began abruptly. Her returned mind had seized at once the thought that had pressed in upon it day and night ever since Richard Hickman died, leaving her a lapsed insurance policy and the debts of his long illness.

"What do you mean?" Hinkley said in evasion.

"The bills—are *you* meeting them?"

"No," he answered.

"Who is?"

"That of which I am the agent, the servant," he replied. And his strange eyes had a fanatical look—she thought she remembered having seen it several days before.

"Please explain," she said curtly.

"Not just now," he answered with firm gentleness. "But soon—and you will be satisfied."

She examined him more closely. He was the same William Hinkley she had known out in Iowa, for the first eighteen years of her life, and until eleven years ago. He had the same stocky, stubborn-looking form and neck and head; the same pleasing, honest features with refinement in them as well as strength, the features

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of a man of the sort of energy that would probably find expression in an art or profession; the same blackness of the hair and of the roots of the close shaven beard which made still darker his swarthy skin; the same unusual eyes.

No, there she saw a distinct change. He used to look the man in search of a mission; he now looked the man who has found his mission, and is filled with the fire of it. Also, he was more carefully and more expensively dressed than he, or any man in Ida Grove, had been. She decided that his mission was of a religious nature, and that it viewed the world to come from a not uncomfortable seat in the world that is.

The touch of clericalism did not surprise her. He had always been intense upon the subject of religion. Many a discussion they had had when she came home on vacation from college where her studies made her disdainful of faith and vain of her fledgling reason's attempts to fly—soarings, she thought them then. Just before she and her husband left Ida Grove to settle in New York, Hinkley became a militant agnostic, resigned the pastorate of the Presbyterian Church in a sermon which caused in that pious, conventional community much such a commotion as the wolf must have caused in the fold when he suddenly dropped his sheepskin and fell to. But the older people predicted that the

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ardent young excursionist into space would follow the path of Ida Grove's few previous "free thinkers" and like them would safely return to some one of the regular orbits of the faith before many years.

"You're preaching again?" Maida asked.

"Yes and no," he replied. "But that, too, we'll talk about later."

"Why not now?" she said with impatience. "Why so mysterious?" Then: "But, never mind. I must gather myself together. I must find a cheaper place this very day, and must take the baby and——"

Hinkley winced and waited breathless. But she hesitated only a second before going on: "I must move my belongings and look for work. I need almost nothing now."

"Don't bother with those things. All your wants are provided for. As soon as you are strong enough, I'll explain."

"Strong!" She said it with an indifferent, self-scorning sneer. "Last night I made a horrible discovery about myself. I found out that I'm a coward—a deep-down coward."

"You?" Hinkley smiled open and tender admiration at her. "I know you through and through. If you aren't brave, then brave doesn't mean what the dictionary says."

"I said I was a *deep-down* coward. Who isn't

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brave on the surface—who that has vanity? But deep-down, under the foundation, there's a quicksand of cowardice."

"Why do you say that?"

"Last night," she replied tranquilly, "I decided to kill myself. That was, and is, the common-sense thing to do. I've nothing to live for—nothing and nobody. I've learned that for me living means a grudging bit of pleasure paid for in pain at compound interest. Yet—I couldn't—I didn't dare pull the slip knot I made out of—" She halted, then went steadily on—"out of one of the bands I used to wind round my baby. Coward that I am, with not even the courage of pride—I wanted to live on."

There were several minutes of silence. She broke it. "Please talk. Take my mind off of—it. Can't you imagine how I'm tearing at myself inside?" This, not excitedly, but with an unruffled surface.

"To live," he said, "the divine instinct that has led all animate nature through the catastrophes and torments of the cycles, and will lead it on until immortality is at last achieved."

"Why do you say divine? To me now, it seems a pitiful clinging to an illusion—like the pauper's child who knows there's no Santa Claus and that there'll not be any presents, yet hangs up his stocking and invites the heart-ache he's sure will come."

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“It would be so if it were not for The Light,” he said.

“You believe, you *feel*, that there’s a hereafter?”

“No—there is no hereafter,” he replied, his eyes suddenly strange and brilliant. “The Mother-Light”—he bowed his head three times and his lips moved as if he were repeating some formula; then he went on—“teaches that there is no such thing as time, any more than there is space or matter—matter in the mortal sense. All three are but evil dreams. The Light shines steadily on, regardless of the motes that may float across it. And these motes touch us, who are all vibrations of the Great Beam, and they cloud our vision and we dream the evil which we ignorantly call life.”

Maida looked at him curiously, quizzically. He showed neither irritation nor embarrassment. But she noticed that the intense look did not leave his eyes. “I’ve put a book on the table there,” he said. “I want you to read it—read it carefully. I shouldn’t ask this if there weren’t a good reason for it, a reason valuable to you.”

“Thank you,” she said—honestly, because he who had been so kind evidently thought he was doing her a further and great kindness. “But I fear I’m not in the humor to read—just now.”

“Pardon me for insisting. I’m not trying to convert you. I’ve a deeper motive. It means your whole

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future—the future the Great All seems to have marked out for you.”

She showed in her eyes the thought that was gathering in her mind.

He looked amused. “I see you think I’ve gone stark mad,” he said cheerfully. “But I haven’t. Or, if, after you’ve heard me, you decide I’m out of my mind, at least you’ll admit it’s a madness that involves highly agreeable consequences to you.”

“Will!” she said sharply.

“Yes, Maida.”

“*Who* is paying for all this?”

“Nobody,” he replied, his eyes twinkling. “It’s a *what* rather than a *who*.”

“*What* is putting me hopelessly in its debt, then?” she persisted.

“Read *The Book*, and to-morrow I’ll tell you.”

“What did you mean when you said you were——”

“Read *The Book*,” he repeated. And he rose and stretched out his hand. She took it and her eyes searched after his thoughts. “What is it?” he asked.

“Will,” she said, slowly, “give me your word that——” She hesitated, then added: “Oh, how shall I say it?”

“I think I understand,” he answered, the color showing faintly. “You are afraid I’m putting you

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under obligations to me. You think I've some idea of—of reviving—the—the past.”

She hung her head. “If you'd been through what I have these last two years, if you'd had to pay with your very soul for just the necessities of life, you wouldn't blame me for being—nervous.”

“How they must have made you suffer!” he said, his face stern. “You, brought up in such a sheltered way, with courtesy and kindness and love—always.” He laid his hand on her shoulder. “I care for you, as I always did. To me you're still the best, in mind and heart and—to look at. But I think I can say honestly that it isn't the kind of care that's for the sake of or with the hope of return in kind. Still, even if it were, even if, unknown to myself, it is, the new life you will enter—for I'm sure you'll enter it—would put an end to my hope forever. No, it isn't I that's doing these things for you. They're done, as you'll find out, because they are your right, your due—they and more. You trust me?”

“Yes,” she replied, adding with a faint smile of mockery, “Yes—since I must.”

III

ALONE, she sat at the window—waiting. Her gaze at first brooded low upon the mean stretches of sooty roof and chimney; but soon it was soaring in the boundless universe of light beyond and above, was soaring aimlessly, taking her listless fancy with it to float and fly and float again.

When the tempest has made a clean sweep, the surface lies barren until a new crop of new life has a chance to spring. The tempest had swept her, had passed; and now she was waiting in desolation, but not in despair. Her mind was prostrate, her body so worn and her face so haggard that those who knew her would with difficulty have recognized her; but, underneath the surface-desert she felt the flow of the strong current of life. She was waiting, expectant, even hopeful.

Hopeful of what?

In her old home, in the outskirts of Ida Grove, away at the far end of the grounds and quite alone, there used to be a huge oak; and its third bough on the left, as she climbed upward, so met the trunk that there was an ideal seat where she could neither be seen nor see

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through the softly luminous walls of foliage. She used to spend hours on hours of successive summer days hidden there, reading and dreaming and not certain, and not wishing to be certain, of what was read and what dreamed. She always approached and left her retreat by stealth. It would have made her unhappy had she known that her mother, worried by her long disappearances, watched until she saw where her little daughter spent the time.

The basis of all this mystery of the oak was a fancy that dominated Maida as far back as she could remember. She was—so she imagined, after the manner of many imaginative children—a being of peculiar destiny. Perhaps the daughter of her father and mother, again perhaps not—perhaps the—but there, the possibilities were infinite, and she exploited a new one almost every oak-tree day. As she grew older and could no longer imagine herself into a state of mind in which she fancied she could see her parents trying to hide a secret of her birth from her, she turned to the future for mystery. She had to admit to herself that she was probably—yes, certainly—born Maida Claffin, daughter of Horace and Janet Claffin; but she told herself that her commonplaceness ended there, and that with the nearing end of childhood's apprenticeship her destiny would be disclosed. Destiny! Hours on hours she would sit in her retreat, with eyes closed or unseeing,

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with her fancy flown out through those leafy screens that seemed to bring the infinite to their very other-side, flown out to explore all the horizons of the possible, and of the impossible, too, in human destinies. For what wonderful destiny fate had set her apart she never attempted to decide; but she believed in it as she believed in her own existence.

Usually these fancies are killed in children when the routine of petty fact crushes the imagination to death and reduces them to matter-of-fact mortals. But in those who like Maida have imaginations too powerful even for the grindstones of fact, some part of childhood's dream-life persists—if nothing more, at least a strong sense of being different from all other human beings whatsoever, past, present and to come, a strong longing for, and hope of, a destiny lifted high above the born-married-died destiny which most tombstones mark. It was this survival—idle fancy or presentiment or instinctive sense of uncommon gifts—that caused Maida to hesitate even at the very altar of marriage, fearful lest she might be marring her destiny. It was this that made her so much more eager than young Hickman for the remote and uncertain adventure of New York when it so curiously offered. It was this that made her a mystery to him long after he lost for her the mystery with which her fancy had invested him and became a plain, pleasant open-book to her. It was

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this that held her head high when her flesh was torturing under the lash of sordid adversity. And it was this that now lifted her, against her will, to the surface of her fathomless flood of grief and buoyed her there.

She looked round her poor little attic chamber; she forced her lips to curl into a scornful smile at her fatuous imaginings, her mocking intuitions. But scorn was in her face only; within, conviction sat undaunted. Destiny! Hope rode high upon her powerful current of life which had poured over obstacle after obstacle unchecked and undiminished. "I am alone again," she thought, "alone and free, if destiny should come."

Her wandering glance paused upon Hinkley's "The Book." She brought it to her seat by the window. It was a small volume, bound in black; upon the cover, in gold block letters, was stamped:

THE WAY OF THE LIGHT,

BY

ANN BANKS

Underneath the name of the author was a sunburst, also in gold. The same lettering and design were repeated on the title-page, with this addition: "Two hundred and seventh thousand. Published by The Light Company, Trenton, N. J. U. S. A. Price \$5."

"Five times two hundred and seven thousand," calculated Maida, "is ten hundred and thirty-five thou-

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sand dollars. No wonder Will is so prosperous—and believes so firmly. Wouldn't he fight against unbelief!" But immediately she was ashamed of herself. "How New York has poisoned me!" she said. "Cheap cynicism that smirches everything it touches. No doubt he's honest about this new religion, and would love it and cling to it, no matter to what poverty and misery it led him." But the spirit she called cynicism and branded "New York" would not down. It had a different origin, a deeper foundation—it was the spirit of this day of science, when everything is taken to the laboratory, there to be weighed, analyzed, tested, dissolved into its component atoms of matter or motive. "Yes, he would die for his religion," she thought. "Yet he probably deceives himself as to why he believes, just as we all deceive ourselves as to almost everything. We so rarely see things as they are—would that I never did!"

She turned the page, came to the Preface, read:

What I have set forth in these pages is *not* a new religion.

Humanity has never been in utter darkness. This faith of ours is the latest development of The Religion which has been the essence of all faiths and creeds. As The Light has passed through the warping prisms of sinful minds, it has been broken into many colors. Here, at last, is The Light with its beam unbroken, clear, pure white as it streams from the Great All.

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The essence of religion is *Happiness*. Past interpreters of The Light have called this Happiness Heaven or Paradise or Nirvana—always a state to be attained *hereafter*. They have professed to point out the way that leads to Happiness.

I proclaim The Way that *is* Happiness!

We are not rushing toward eternity. We are in Eternity.

Time, Space, Matter, Death, Disease, Sin—all these are the delusions of The Darkness. That which takes away their power over the immortal Mind puts in their place a *present* eternity of Life and Health. The Light gives Health of Body no less than Health of Soul. It banishes *all* forms of sin. It purifies the soul—the Mind—and thus enables the Mind to electrify the body forever as in childhood.

I come to assail no religion, but only those who deliberately or deludedly use The Truth for their private ends, holding themselves and their followers in the bonds of sin by making vain promises of a happiness in a remote hereafter. I come to make war upon doctors of divinity who enslave souls under the pretext of healing them, and upon doctors of medicine who enslave bodies under the pretext of healing them. As if body and soul were not one, the perfect expression of The Light, united in an everlasting marriage which only sin can loosen in so-called sickness, only sin can dissolve in so-called death.

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” And the body also.

What wonder that the churches are emptying! What wonder that the seats of the scornful are thronged! What wonder that shameless quackeries in theology and in medicine are preying upon the despairing! What wonder that this is an age of materialism—that hate and selfishness are enthroned! What wonder that the strong cry: “Let us eat,

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drink and be merry. To-morrow we die. Why should we not drink the blood of our brother if it will quench our thirst? Why should we not snatch his bread and add it to our own store? Might is god—and to-morrow we die.”

Men, grown more intelligent, see The Darkness in the alleged light they hear preached—see The Darkness only.

Reader, would you have Health, Happiness, Eternal Life *now*? Then read these scriptures, not with the eye of the flesh, the eye of sin, but with the eye of The Spirit.

May The Light shine in you!

ANN BANKS.

“As confident as other quack advertisements,” said Maida—but not with her heart. She did not believe, she did not think that she might believe; but her heart said, “If it were only true!” Life—immortal life—now! Pain and sorrow cured—Happiness! She had often lingered upon the mystery of mind—Mind, the Sphinx, whose riddle religion after religion had sought to answer, only to fail and fall. And she had seen how the will could be trained to achieve many of the desires—why not indefinite training, indefinite development, as Ann Banks asserted? It had begun, a feeble thing unable to resist the feeblest of the forces of nature. It had grown until now man was able to use them all up to a certain point. Why assume that that point was eternally fixed? Why should not the will move on from partial control to complete conquest?

She began to read again. Ann Banks had extracted

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the essences of the mysterious from all speculations and dogmatizings, savage and civilized, Oriental and Occidental, ancient and modern, priestly and philosophic; she had poured these extracts into a mould of mysticism devised by herself—this crucible she called The Light. And, after much smelting and fusing and assaying and re-casting, out had come this modern religion. “Science,” cried Ann Banks, “has broken some of man’s bonds, but it is making him only the more wretched—for, it is trying to convince him that the worst bonds of all, the bonds of Disease and Death, can not be broken. And his latest, fondest dream of freedom is vanishing.”

As Maida was reading she would find herself groping in a fog after a wonderful idea which always just escaped her; and again, she would see light ahead, would hear voices of tenderness; again, fog, and the treacherous marsh of credulity under her feet, and the old satanic voices taunting: “Nothing! Pain, Death, then—nothing!” But she read on and on. For, under this melting-pot of the new religion burned the hot fire of a personality dominated by a conviction. A personality—*that* was it! She read on because she was drawn by one of those mighty human magnets that take hold through the dominant instincts of human nature—instincts which were ancient inhabitants of the mind before it was human, instincts beside which reason, new-

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comer of humanity's yesterday, is indeed a helpless infant.

It was late in the afternoon when she finished "The Book." And she laid it down with an unconscious manner of respect. She continued to think of it, to the exclusion of everything else—those dogmatic assertions of the unity of soul and body, of the unity of here and hereafter; that fascinating theory that disease and death are but two forms of the same shadow, sin; above all, the dynamic personality of this latest, this "up-to-date" prophet, essaying to provide a religion for those who had felt compelled to surrender their Christianity to the imperious demand of Science but who still cast longing glances into space beyond the exploded mystery of the last weighed and measured star. "How we do long to believe!" thought Maida. "This religion is delusion, perhaps fraud. Yet, I listen."

And when her light was out, when she lay alone, with a chill upon her bosom and her arms, the chill of the void where her baby's head had lain, so warm, so alive—"The Light!" she sobbed. "Any light!" She would have said a week before that nothing could ever stir religious faith within her again—but, *then* she had not lost her child. Now she almost cried out: "I must believe *something!* And why should not Ann Banks have found the light—for, there *must* be light!"

She turned away from these thoughts—mere off-

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spring of sorrow, she regarded them. But still she saw bright upon the black of the night, luminous eyes, shedding hope upon her, hope and healing; and she had a soothing sense of strong hands holding out happiness. "The Mother-Light," she murmured. The peculiar name thrilled her like a strain of seraph music as she lay in that bare attic, with the misery of mortality enveloping her, with heart aching and bleeding in loneliness and grief. "It was to such as me," she thought, "to the slaves and pariahs and beggars of old Rome that the Gospel came. No wonder they heard Him gladly." Mother and Light—what other two words came so near to summing up all that is good in life? "Mother," she murmured, between drowsing and dreaming, "Mother and Light—Mother-Light."

And she slept.

The night's impressions seemed fantastic and unreal in the daylight, but it left enough of them for hope to wind its tendrils. To Hinkley's questions she replied: "It may be your book, but I think it is only my own state of mind."

"It is The Light!" he affirmed.

"It certainly is longing for light," was her answer. "I cannot live on in the dark."

He was well content. He offered her the position of secretary and companion to Ann Banks. She accepted.

IV

WHEN she drove up to the West Twenty-third Street station the following night, all she was or had in the world was there—the bag on the seat opposite her, the trunk on the roof, herself—herself an utter isolation, lost sight of and forgotten by those who used to know her, in the way to be forgotten by those who, coming into contact with her in her calamities, feared to know or even to note her lest her burdens should somehow be added to their own. She dwelt upon her isolation with pleasure, for she felt that, thanks to it, she could re-begin life as freshly as if she were born again. And she had a sense of being born again, of being loosened even from her former name. “I used to belong there,” she thought, as she stood on the deck of the ferry-boat, looking toward the myriad lights of New York. It represented the whole world to her for the moment, as much as if she had been voyaging toward the moon. “And soon I shall belong—somewhere else. Now—just now—I am swinging free in space.” Space! She looked straight up into the sky, into the ocean of infinity. Whether it was swept by the fierce, splendid storms of the sunlight or lay a placid lake of silver and gold

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and blue in the moonlight or sheltered its mystery behind the shimmering veil of the starlight, it had always for her the same delight. And her soul seemed to leap from her body, to fly streaming like a comet from star to star.

Hinkley met her at the landing on the other side, and noted with an approving glance that she was wearing a heavy crepe veil, enough to cover her face, her great coil of auburn hair. That was a silent journey, he reading most of the way after he found she did not wish to talk. She was absorbed not in thought, but in a mood, such a mood as she had often given herself up to in her dream-bower in the old oak tree, a mood that had not tempted her once in these last years of agonized struggle. She was still afloat in space—an intoxicating sense of freedom, vague imaginings the more alluring for their vagueness. At the street entrance to the Trenton station a brougham was in waiting, its coachman and footman in livery. She noted that the cockades in their hats were crimson and gold, that on the small crimson panel in the door of the brougham there was a gold sunburst—as on the cover of “The Way of The Light.”

“Your trunk will be brought out to-morrow,” said Hinkley as he helped her in. The footman closed the door behind them and, without Hinkley’s giving an order, they were off at a swift trot—the city sleeping

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beside its night-lights; then, straggling suburbs with air full of the promise of the open country blowing deliciously upon her face; and then, the fields and hills, the low-hanging moon, the brightest stars, the breath of nature. Her heart was beating wildly now, and the blood was thrilling through her.

Well within the half-hour they were passing a high stone wall, trees many and thick looming above it. The pace slackened for a short turn, and they were dashing in at a wide gate-way and along a curving drive. The carriage lamps showed that its broad level wound through what seemed to be a dense forest. Perhaps a quarter of a mile, and they halted before a square house, lightless, lifting vast and abrupt above the gloom of the forest.

“Are we—there?” she asked in an undertone—it would not have been easy to speak in the natural voice in those surroundings.

“No,” Hinkley told her in the same tone. “This is the House of Pilgrims.”

The footman opened the carriage door and they descended, Hinkley carrying her bag. “That is all for to-night, thank you,” he said to the two servants. “May The Light shine in you ever.”

“And in you,” responded the servants in chorus. The footman sprang to the box; the carriage sped away. As it vanished round the bend in the drive, the

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figure of a man was slowly disengaged from the darkness of the doorway. He descended the steps and the walk toward them.

“Mr. Casewell?” asked Hinkley, almost under his breath. The moon had now set.

“May The Light shine in you ever,” was the answer, in the same cautious tone.

“And in you,” responded Hinkley.

“I’ll lead,” said the man—she had not been able to see his face or to make out anything of him beyond that he was short and was extraordinarily broad in the shoulders.

Hinkley was still carrying her bag. “Keep close behind him,” he said to her, just above a whisper. “I’ll be behind you.” And they set out, along the strip of grass in the shadow of the house until they came to a walk under arching trees. They followed this, and were soon in the woods. It had been dim; now it was black. Often even the blur “Mr. Casewell” made in the darkness just ahead of her was swallowed up and she kept the bearings by sound alone. She was astonished that she had not the least qualm of fear. Her mood of swinging through space from an old planet to a new, of swinging through eternity from an old life to a new, was still upon her. And the mystery of their midnight journey and the mystery of the goal at the end of it was like wine to her brain and nerves.

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It seemed to her long, yet not long—like an opium smoker's moment in Nirvana that stretches to an eternity all too short—and they were directly before a lofty wall—she knew it was a wall because the blackness ahead of her was flat and hard instead of a seemingly endless concave of nothingness. “Mr. Casewell” unlocked a gate—how her heart leaped and thrilled at the click of the key in creaking lock!—and they were in a garden, at least so she guessed it was while they were waiting for “Mr. Casewell” to lock the gate again. And not far ahead she saw a house—low, apparently with a higher part beyond. A hundred yards and they were between two pillars of a colonnade.

“Mr. Casewell” fumbled at what seemed to be a door; presently, after a heavy click as of the turning of a reluctant bolt, it swung back and he vanished. “Close behind me,” Hinkley said to her in his natural voice, as if no longer afraid of being overheard. “There are no steps.”

It was a carpeted hall, without a ray of light. She had counted fifteen of her steps, when “Mr. Casewell” flung wide a door and she was standing dazzled in the entrance to a room. To her, in dimness or black darkness since she left the railway station, the light was for a moment overwhelming. But, when her pupils had contracted, she saw that it was almost a twilight, diffused from a shaded electric chandelier in the mid-

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dle of the low ceiling. And it was revealing the most attractive room she had ever been in. An Oriental carpet, with a shine on it like satin but less glossy, covered the middle of the hard-wood floor; there were teak wood chairs and sofas upholstered with silk tapestry; one large and two small tables, curiously carved, the smallest arranged for writing; filled bookcases; the walls wide panels of some dark wood alternating with narrow panels of mirrors. The room seemed almost huge to her, so long used to cramped quarters in New York flats and lodging-houses.

All this at a glance. For, as soon as the dazzled expression from the sudden light left her face, "Mr. Casewell" had stretched out his hand and had said: "Welcome. May you bring, and find, happiness here."

She instantly liked him—the simple heartiness of his voice, the firm gentleness of his grasp—a hand that held to help. She studied him openly—for, instinct told her that here was a person in whose power her future lay. And he submitted to her scrutiny with amusement, not at all embarrassed. First, she noted his eyes—bright blue, laughing, keen. But not an open keenness. Rather, they seemed to be looking through a mask—through holes in a mask which their glance was keen enough to have pierced for itself. Yet they were not sly eyes. Next, she saw his longish, snow-white beard balanced by a startlingly high dome-

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like forehead. The whole top of his head was bald, about it a snowy fringe that curled under at the back. His skin was blond and rosy, like a baby's, as young as his eyes and voice and grasp. His figure verged on the squat and was tremendous through the shoulders; at the ends of arms that reached too far toward his knees were thick white muscular hands. His nose—now that she saw it, she wondered how she had failed to note it first of all. It was a long, strong, outward curve—a nose to penetrate through the thickest armor of pose into the depths of the real man, the nose of the leader, the nose of courage equal in defeat or victory.

Mr. Casewell, whose glance had not been idle was nodding approvingly. "I like you," he said, his eyes as merry as hickory flames. "I like the way you look and, better still, I like the way you look *at*." He took both her hands. "May The Light shine in you!" His deep voice trembled; tears rolled down his cheeks to hide in his white beard. Then, all in a flash, his eyes were twinkling again—they almost seemed to be laughing at her amazement before his sudden overflow of apparently causeless emotion. "What do you think of your quarters?" he asked.

"Is this the room—I—we—we're to work in?" she inquired with an admiring glance round.

"No, my dear child," he replied. "This is your sitting-room. And through that door there is your bed-

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room with dressing and bath rooms adjoining—all yours.”

She seated herself, and then she noted that before her there was an open fire with logs piled upon great brass andirons. She sighed and smiled with a choke in her throat—after so much storm, what a haven! “Please don’t wake me,” she said to Hinkley with her quick dazzling smile which, rippling and dancing over her usually almost sombre face, rarely failed to surprise those who beheld into reflecting it.

Hinkley laughed, happy as a boy in her delight. “Mr. Casewell’s apartment is just across the hall,” he explained. “His granddaughter’s—Miss Ransome’s—is next behind yours. I’m down at the other end. So, you see, you’re not isolated.”

He went out, reappearing in less than a minute with a big silver tray on which was a cold supper. Mr. Casewell cleared the large table and drew it near the fire. The two men sat at the ends, she between them facing the fire. She had eaten almost nothing at dinner, and she now felt lighter of heart than she had ever thought she would feel again. She ate with the appetite of a growing girl while Mr. Casewell told amusing stories of his experiences as a preacher on circuit in Ohio sixty years before—when the Indians still hoped to drive the whites back east of the Alleghanys.

The quaint brass hands of the tall clock at the cor-

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ner of the mantelpiece pointed half-past one when he said: "But we must go. How sleepy the child must be."

"Ring if you want anything in the morning," said Hinkley, taking up the tray. "The gardens are enclosed—you can walk there if you wish the air. I shan't disturb you before noon."

Mr. Casewell bent over her hand and kissed it. "May The Light shine in you," he said, and the tenderness in his solemn tone made the tears come to her eyes.

She was alone. She leaned back in the great chair and looked slowly round. "It's a dream," she murmured. Then she repeated it aloud. Her glance fell upon the door which Mr. Casewell had said led to her bedroom. She rose, opened it, lifted the inside curtain and entered. The electric light on the night stand was turned on and she saw that she was in another luxurious room—the bed was canopied; its curtains and the walls were hung with dark red brocaded silk; the furniture was dark, and the woodwork also. She stood by the bed—it was, rather, a very wide and very long couch, and the covers were of silk and eider-down and the finest linen. She saw the open bathroom door and entered—a pool sunk in a tiled floor; tiling half way to the ceiling; everything in readiness. There was even a huge bottle of violet toilet water.

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Then to the dressing-room—simple but fine furniture; many things of which she could only guess the uses; on the dressing-table all kinds of articles which a woman of fashion might need. As she stood there, admiring, wondering, the profound silence and the atmosphere of mystery and her own over-tense nerves made her wheel sharply, her hands clasped against her bosom, her breath failing, the blood stinging her skin. But she could see no one. She darted out, closing the door and locking it and leaning against it.

Her glance roamed nervously round the bedroom—nothing and no place where anyone could hide. But she was not calm until she had seated herself again at the sitting-room fire. It vividly and reassuringly reminded her of the existence and the nearness and the thoughtfulness of her old friend and her new one. Thinking of the dressing-room, she remembered that everything in it, indeed everything in the whole apartment, was new with the newness of that which has not been used at all. But her mind was too heavy. “I must go to bed,” she said drowsily, “or I shall fall asleep here in the firelight——”

She rose from her chair with a bound, her heart beating wildly. “Who put out the light?” she gasped—she had just noticed that the only light was from the fire; yet, when she had left the room not ten minutes before the lamps of the chandelier certainly were

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on. "And who moved the table back into place?" Hinkley and Mr. Casewell had left it in front of the fire. "That screen was put round the fire while I was inside." There could be no doubt about it—someone had been in the room. And she had locked the hall door when the two men left! To make sure she tried it, found it locked.

"Who's here?" she called. After a wait, she called again more loudly. A third time, at the top of her voice, imperiously, "Who's here, I say! Answer, or I'll ring!"

But there was no answer. She hesitated at the bell-button. "I'm in no condition to be positive about anything," she reflected. "There's certainly no one here. And what excuse could I make to whoever came?" Yes, the strangeness of it all, the mystery, the sense of greater mystery impending, must have made her forget. Her natural indifference to danger came slowly back.

She contented herself with making a tour of the rooms. She locked the door leading into the sitting-room. She took a hot bath and went to bed. "I shan't sleep," she said, for she still felt wide-awake. But it was a wonderfully soft, reassuring kind of bed; the night-dress, one she had found on the pillows ready for her, was of a thin white material that soothed her skin like the stroke of delicate fingers. She fell almost immediately into a sound sleep.

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When she awoke, she was certain she had been asleep a few minutes at most. She heard someone moving about in the sitting-room. "And I locked the outside door!" she thought, bolt upright in an instant. She called: "Who's there?"

Someone tried the bedroom door. A voice—a sweet, youthful, feminine voice—said: "The door is locked."

She crossed the floor in her bare feet, threw back the curtain and turned the key. As she did it, she noted that the room was not lighted by the electric lamp she had left burning on the night-stand, but by light from the windows—sunlight. She hurried back to bed—the room was chilly. "Come in!" she called.

The door opened and she couldn't restrain a smile; her anxiety seemed so ludicrous now that she saw who had been causing it. On the threshold stood a young woman, dressed much like a maid yet looking out of her eyes like one who had never served. And they were pretty, bright, blue-gray eyes, suggesting Mr. Casewell's but finer and softer. The rest of her face was attractive, especially her golden hair and fresh rosy mouth. Her figure was small but perfect.

"Did I wake you?" she asked, her eyes friendly, her sweet voice regretful.

"How did you get in?" said Maida.

"Why," explained the young woman, "you had

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locked all the doors. So I had to come by the private way."

"Were you in there last night?"

She smiled charmingly. "I couldn't wait—I wanted to see you. So I came as soon as I heard grandfather and Mr. Hinkley go away. But you'd gone to bed, and I only stayed a minute or two and was very quiet. Did you mind?"

"No, indeed," Maida couldn't help saying. "If you'll only tell me *how* you got in."

"I'll show you," said the girl.

Maida threw off the covers, thrust her feet into the slippers at the bedside and followed the girl to the sitting-room. The large panel in the wainscoting to the right of the fireplace was open. The girl pushed it shut and at once there was no hint of a doorway.

"Are there other doors like that?" asked Maida.

"Not in this apartment," the girl replied. "At least, I think not."

"I'd like to know," said Maida.

The girl laughed. "Yes, I should think you would—being a stranger."

"You are Mr. Casewell's granddaughter?"

The girl nodded. "Molly—Margaret Ransome," she said. "And I'm to be your maid, for the present."

"You'll be nothing of the sort," protested Maida. "I'll wait on myself—I always have."

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Molly shook her head. "No—grandfather has ordered it. Besides, it'll give me occupation. It doesn't take any time at all to do what little I have to do for the Mother-Light." Here Molly closed her eyes, raised and lowered her head slowly three times, moved her lips in murmuring some phrase which Maida couldn't catch. "And," she went on, "I love housework. I'd so much rather do it than fuss with 'lady-like' things."

Maida happened to glance at the clock. "Half-past eleven!" she exclaimed. "I must dress. Mr. Hinkley will be here before I can get ready."

"I'll bring you your breakfast," said Molly. And she disappeared by the "private way."

Maida stared after her, stared at the panel now tightly in place. "What a strange house!" she said aloud. "And why was it built so strangely?" But as she dressed, her light-heartedness of the supper-time the night before returned. And when she looked from a window into the garden, as attractive as a garden could be made in September, she felt an inward glow of content.

Her glance, lifting from the green of garden and mounting in her favorite excursion the sparkling steps of the universe of pure light, took her heart with it. And in fancy she paused, now upon cloud-peak of ruby, now upon cloud-peak of gold or silver or emerald or ethereal marble, to indulge this affinity of hers for

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light, to drink in light with all her senses. And the mystery of her new earthly surroundings faded into triviality before these dazzling mysteries of her own being and of the shoreless stretches of infinity where ebbed and flowed from eternity to eternity the seas of living light.

V

WHEN she went again into the sitting-room, her breakfast was on the large table but Molly had gone. Just as she seated herself there was a knock at the door into the hall. She opened it—Hinkley was standing there, dressed in the long, black house-robe of a priest, in one hand a crimson biretta, in the other a bunch of hot-house roses.

“Oh—it’s you!” she said, in a tone that mingled welcome and disappointment. “I’m so glad.”

He took his gaze from her face reluctantly. “But you rather hoped it’d be someone else, didn’t you?” he said, smiling.

“It’s so unusual here. I’m always expecting another mystery,” she confessed.

He gave her the roses. She buried her face in them. When she raised it to thank him she had some color, as if she had borrowed of the roses. While she was arranging them in the vase on a pedestal in the corner, she glanced at him now and then by way of one of the mirror panels. And she noted, not without a certain satisfaction, that he was taking advantage of his fancied

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freedom from observation openly to show admiration—and more.

“I slept nine hours,” she said.

“It’s made an amazing change in you,” he replied. “You don’t look like the same person you were yesterday—literally.”

“I’m not,” she said, turning. “That was a magic bed I slept in.”

His eyes lit up with that intense expression which she had learned to associate with his religion. “You spoke more truly than you know,” was his comment in a significant tone.

She felt vaguely embarrassed. “I don’t believe my nerves have slept for years until last night,” she went on, returning to the table and beginning her breakfast, he seating himself opposite her. “I’ve been feeling so old—*so* old—as if I’d been let grow old as—as the grandmother of the human race, and then condemned to live at that age forever. But—” she flooded him with the sunshine of her smile—“a few days and I’ll feel as young as Molly. What a beautiful, blooming eighteen she is! I shouldn’t have believed a girl could look so healthy, yet so fine and delicate. Usually *very* healthy looking women suggest kitchen-garden flowers, don’t you think?”

“So you guess Molly’s age as eighteen?” said Hinkley.

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“Is she only seventeen?”

“She’s thirty.”

“Impossible! Not a day over twenty.”

“You forget,” he said, “that she was born in The Light. The Darkness has never touched either her soul or her body.”

“Oh!” was Maida’s only answer, with a vague look and feeling.

After a strained silence, he asked her if she found her apartment comfortable. “Any changes you wish shall be made,” he said. “But you’ll have to keep this apartment—for the present. It’s the only one available. The other wing is more or less public.”

“You know what I’ve been used to—in New York,” she answered. “So you can imagine how perfect this seems here. Already I’m completely unfitted to go back to one room and the bath on the floor below at the other end of the hall. I ought not to have come.”

“Why not?” he inquired.

She did not answer for several minutes. Then she said, absently: “It’s all very strange, Will, but the strangest thing to me, is my own feeling about it. Three days ago I had never heard of this place, and I never saw it until less than twelve hours ago. Yet—I feel as much at home here, feel as much that it is part of my life, of myself, as if it were the old home out West and I had never left it.”

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She did not see his eyes close and his lips move. Presently he said aloud: "It is yours, Maida—yours—forever."

She shook her head. "That can't be. Even if—I like the position, and—she—likes me—still— You told me she was more than eighty, didn't you?"

"Yes," he answered, adding, after deliberation and with an effort that made him color—"and not in very good health."

"Then, you yourself must see—" she began, but halted abruptly to give him a quick glance of amazement. His admission was obviously a denial of his religion, branded it a fraud and himself a hypocrite.

"Do not judge until you know," he said earnestly, looking straight at her. "I see what you are thinking. Her old age, her feebleness—they are only another of those mysteries that baffle us, that test our faith, at every turn. I—we—she—thought she had been freed from the bondage of sin. She hasn't been—wholly—that's all."

Maida was lying back in her chair, so sick at heart that she felt weak and tired. So *this* was the mystery of Ann Banks. And she had come to be companion to a dying old woman—that was her "destiny." "Why didn't you tell me before we left New York?" she asked, rousing herself but not venturing to look at him.

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“Partly because I feared you wouldn’t come,” he answered frankly. “Partly—chiefly—because I then had no authority to trust you with *the* secret of our faith. Mr. Casewell told me to tell you.”

“Why?” she asked.

“He said, ‘She can be trusted. She will stay with us—will work with us.’” Hinkley hesitated, then, watching her narrowly in a breathless way, went on: “He said, ‘She does not realize it yet, but *The Light* shines in her.’”

“Oh!” exclaimed Maida, sinking back in her chair. The color slowly faded from her face, from her lips; her wide eyes, fixed upon vacancy, seemed to be seeing there some vision that held her enthralled. What was she thinking? She did not herself know; she was only listening—listening to that evasive, soundless voice which had been calling to her ever since she was a child, which seemed to have been roused by the repeated words of Mr. Casewell, seemed to be calling to her now.

“But the deception—the deception,” she said. “Why conceal the truth from the world? Why should *The Truth* be afraid of the truth?”

“*The Truth* is not afraid of the truth,” he answered. “*The Light* is not protecting itself against light but against *The Darkness*. She—that is, *The Light* of which she is to her disciples the embodiment—has more than a hundred thousand followers—in all parts of the

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world—in all stages of spiritual strength and feebleness. To them, belief in her—because they see The Light only through her—means happiness, peace, health, life—yes, life! Destroy their belief in her, and you put out The Light for them, you plunge them back into the darkness. Maida, I would fling myself into a slow fire and burn to death before I would do such a thing!” He was standing, his voice high, his eyes ablaze—the fanatic in all his splendor and all his terror and all his power to sway.

“But the end,” she said. “For, there must be an end.”

“We can only wait and watch for guidance,” he answered. “It may be *The Light* in her will yet triumph over The Darkness. There have been several miracles of recovery wrought in her. But, we cannot know. We simply use what means our feeble resources put in our power to preserve The Light’s conquests in the dominions of The Darkness. If we are wrong, then, the sin is ours and the consequences be upon us. But, at any cost, The Light must shine on!”

“And you trust this secret to me?” she said, in wonder.

“Why shouldn’t we?” he answered. “Have we not had leading from The Light itself?”

There was a knock at the hall door. Maida started and gazed toward it. Hinkley, with his hand on the

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knob, looked at her for permission to open. She nodded. As the door swung back Mr. Casewell, in a robe like Hinkley's, but without a biretta, entered and swept the room with one of his drag-net glances—he seemed to take in not only every article within the four walls, not only every detail of her appearance, but also the very thoughts of her brain.

“You have told her,” he said to Hinkley—an approving affirmation. Then he turned to her with a smile that sparkled on his face and great white beard like sunshine on new-fallen snow. And she brightened and felt as if clouds were rolling back from her sky, as if there were nothing on earth she so much wished as to stand with this wonderful, magnetic, old-young or young-old leader, and help him and be helped by him.

He addressed Hinkley: “She is better this morning—much better. She will make the apparition.”

Hinkley became radiant. “That will give the lie to those reports. Doubts will be silenced, and faith confirmed.”

“At half-past two,” continued Mr. Casewell. “Just after my reading.” And he nodded and beamed at her and was gone, leaving brightness behind him to keep her convinced that somehow the whole complexion of the situation was changed, that what had looked black had looked so only because light was not shining upon

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it, that he would presently turn light upon it, and show that it was indeed white.

“An assembly of delegates from the Eastern States,” explained Hinkley, “begins to-day—in the Hall of The Light. She is to appear—it’s the first time in nearly two years. The papers and all the scoffers have been saying that the Mother-Light”—the usual pause and the ceremonial—“was ill, was dying.”

“But won’t the sight of her—won’t they all see—” stammered Maida.

The look of pride, of defiant pride—“a sort of battle look” she thought—which he had worn since Mr. Casewell told him the news, did not change. “You can judge for yourself,” he replied. “I’ll send Molly to take you.”

He had to leave at once, to prepare for “the apparition.” She put on a coat before going into the garden—for, although it was not yet October, the day was sharp. Hats she never wore when she could avoid it; her hair was so thick and so long that by itself it gave her head more covering than was ever needed. The garden, she found, was perhaps five hundred yards long by one hundred and fifty wide; the stone wall around three sides of it was about three times the height of her head and spiked along the top. The fourth side was filled by the end of the wing where her rooms were. Thus, with entrances only from the wing and through

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the solid gate, that miniature park was completely shut off from observation except through the windows of her suite and the suite on the other side of the hall—Mr. Casewell's.

The wing was one tall story high. Over the roof she saw the blank wall of the middle part of the house which rose another story and a half. To the left, apparently separated from the house, rose the great domed roof of a building which she thought must be the Hall of The Light. Above the dome floated an enormous crimson silk banner, in its center a sunburst embroidered in gold thread. And the breeze, lifting the banner and slowly rippling it, made the sunshine flash from the sunburst and transform it into a golden fire. It roused all her passionate adoration of light. As she looked, there poured over the wall the tremendous cataract of sound from a cathedral organ. And she thrilled as if that dazzling banner of blood and fire were the battle-flag of some glorious cause, as if it were the symbol to her of high thoughts and aspirations. She did not walk. She stood where she had paused, gazing upon the banner with shining eyes, listening with soul swaying in those lifting billows of melody. Her reason watched her, amazed and powerless. "If I stay on here," she was thinking, "I wonder if I shan't come to believe, just as these others do—or seem to. I'm like everybody else—susceptible through my nerves and

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senses. And who is strong enough to disbelieve what everyone around him accepts as true? Besides, how happy they are!"

As if to confirm this last, she now saw Molly, in a fashionable fall costume, coming toward her. "There must be *something*," she reflected, "in a faith that can make a woman of thirty look like that." Molly seemed a girl hesitating upon the very threshold of womanhood. There wasn't a crease in the smooth skin; not the smallest break in that soft outline of chin and cheek which is perfect only in the youth of Youth. And in her eyes the just awakened interest in life, the wonder at it, the joy in anticipation of the fulfilment of its promises of joy. *That* certainly couldn't normally survive the disillusionments of a dozen grown-up years.

"We've got to sit in the private box," Molly began. "And no one can see us there—and—don't you like my new dress?"

Maida easily supplied the unspoken regret between the remark about the private box where "no one can see us" and the remark about the new dress. "Let's sit with the others," said she. "Or, you can take me to the box and go away."

"I've been here too long to think of changing my orders," replied Molly.

"You can't have been here so very long," said

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Maida. "I don't believe it. You came on earth only yesterday—anyone could see that at a glance."

"I was thirty last July," Molly answered. "Don't let my looks deceive you—or my way of talking, either. My looks—you know, we of The Light can't grow old." She gazed reverently toward the crimson banner. "Then my way of talking—that's the result of grandfather's theory. He thought a child should be brought up to know everything, to understand everything, and not to get a false point of view and false information from ignorant or coarse people."

If there is fraud, thought Maida, Mr. Casewell must be the arch-cheat. If hypocrisy, he must be the arch-hypocrite. Yet here is Molly, the product of this religion. Certainly, an education and a faith that have made such a human being, such mental and physical and moral beauty as hers, can't be roguery, couldn't be the life-work of a rogue. And she said to herself: "It is easier to accept the doubtful things without question, isn't it, than to believe evil of Mr. Casewell and Molly and Will?"

The two young women returned to the wing, went through the hall to a cross hall, down a flight of steps, along a tunnel—Maida assumed that it was a tunnel because of the descent and because light came through the heavy clouded-glass roof only. Perhaps fifty yards, and they ascended steps that narrowed after the first

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landing. They emerged into a dark, closely curtained box. Themselves unseen, they were looking out upon a great amphitheater. It was lighted by electricity—there were no windows.

As Maida gazed she marveled and admired. The ceiling was a huge concave decorated with a single golden sunburst whose crimson background just showed where the ceiling curved into the walls. In place of windows were deep niches with colossal statues in them—female figures, majestic, graceful, carved out of grayish marble. Under each figure was a name—Truth, Justice, Mercy, Wisdom, Love, Beauty. On either side of the stage was a colossal seated figure—to the left Health, to the right Life. The wings of the stage—it was, rather, a platform shaded by an enormous sounding-board—were filled with the pipes of the organ. In front was a small reading-stand with a crimson banner draped over it. Immediately beneath sat the choir—perhaps a hundred men and boys in white robes. In the seats of the amphitheater was an audience—a congregation—of perhaps four thousand. Maida's first thought was: "Why, there are almost as many men as women." Then she marveled at the high average of intelligence in the faces she could see. And she also noted that there was not a poorly dressed person to be seen, while hundreds were as fashionable as Molly.

Mr. Casewell, in white surplice, was reading—from

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“The Way of The Light.” Maida listened with growing amazement. “Was I mistaken or am I deceived now?” she asked herself. For, read in his sonorous, reverent voice, “The Book” was wholly different. Sentences that had seemed to her commonplace took on dignity and wisdom; sentences that had seemed obscure sounded eloquent and profound; sentences that had seemed mere jumbles of polysyllables, now were like the inspired utterances of some lofty mystic whose meaning might easily elude the dull, gross brain.

Maida glanced at Molly—her expression was rapt, thrilled even, like that of all whose faces she was able clearly to see. “I suppose,” she decided, “if I had got into the habit of hearing that book read as something supernatural, if I had been brought up on it, I’d think it as wonderful as Mr. Casewell’s voice makes it seem. How much depends on one’s point of view!”

Mr. Casewell ended. “May The Light shine in you ever!” he boomed in the mellowest tones of his golden voice, as he opened his arms in a gesture of benediction. Immediately upon his last word the mighty organ lifted up its voice in a ponderous, gently rolling billow of sound that swept through and over that audience, making every soul there sway and tremble in the rhythmic surge. And from the choir swelled an “Amen!” like a sigh of ecstasy. The thrills were racing up and down Maida’s back and her cheeks were burning.

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The lights—they were all round the edge of the domed ceiling—slowly paled. Only the dimmer foot-lights of the stage remained bright, and these sent out a rose-colored glow. Mr. Casewell had withdrawn; the small reading-stand sank into the floor. Maida now noted that the background of the stage was a pair of heavy crimson silk curtains, a sunburst embroidered upon each. These slowly parted. Amid a silence so profound that all possibility of sound seemed engulfed in its abyss forever, a throne came into view—a throne of gold, a woman seated upon it. She stood—what was she like? Maida could not tell. She saw that the tall, slender figure was draped in a robe of soft white silk sprinkled with embroidered sunbursts. She saw that the face was majestic and in a glow of health, that there were large, brilliant eyes, that the hair, the abundant hair, as bronze as her own, was arranged in puffs—puffs piled high in front, puffs at the sides—a curious, luminous casque of golden bronze. But what was the woman like? Was she old or young, handsome or plain? Maida could not tell—her mind would not or could not shake off its awe and look calmly and critically.

Molly fell upon her knees, hands lifted and clasped before her. “The Mother-Light!” she sobbed, and Maida, hearing a rustling and a deep murmur, glanced down—the audience was kneeling; men and women, all, were bending forward, their hands clasped, their faces

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inclined toward the apparition, like thirsty flowers drinking in long-denied rain or sun. And they were murmuring: "The Mother-Light! The Mother-Light! Hear us, heal us, Mother-Light!"

With her blood surging, Maida, resisting the impulse to fall upon her knees beside Molly, turned to the apparition again. The figure stretched out its arms with proud dignity. And a clear voice came from it: "May The Light shine in you—ever, my children!"

Sobs burst from her "children." Tears flooded Maida's eyes. When she could see clearly again, the curtains were falling together, were just hiding the Mother-Light. And the organ lifted its sea-like voice in the first notes of an anthem.

The lights flashed on; the audience rose. Men and women, tears streaming down their faces, cried aloud for joy, embraced one another, gave way to hysterics. One man, several women, had to be taken from the Hall by their friends. And Maida felt their joy, their triumph in this vindication of their faith, swelling within herself; when Molly embraced her, she returned the embrace almost as hysterically.

"We must go," said Molly softly. And they were in the dimness of the passage, were making their way downward, through the tunnel, up again, back to Maida's apartment. "Wasn't it *wonderful!*" exclaimed Molly, sinking upon a sofa exhausted.

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“Wonderful!” echoed Maida—she too was in the reaction from the strain. After several minutes she said: “Was that Ann Banks?”

“Yes,” replied Molly. “But we don’t usually speak of her by that name—here.”

“Did she occupy this apartment?”

“Never. No one ever lived in it until you came. The house was finished ten years ago, and I’ve been here from the first.”

“I thought that—that *she* was—was old.”

“She’s older than grandfather. And he’s eighty-six.”

“Eighty-six!” It was several minutes before she could put aside this amazing puzzle. “You wait on—on her?” she resumed.

“Yes—but until to-day I haven’t seen her for a year and a half. Then I only saw her make an apparition. Since about five years ago, when that insane preacher tried to assassinate her, she sees only grandfather and, once in a while, Mr. Hinkley.”

“Then you’ve never seen her close?”

“Oh, yes!—often. When I was nineteen I heard her deliver a speech. But as the faith became established, she shut herself in more and more.”

“And she lives, shut in—alone?” Maida asked slowly, abstractedly.

“Yes—and will forever and ever. Her mind goes

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where it wills—to the remotest part of the earth. She visits every one of her followers and comforts and strengthens them. Sometimes—once when I was away off at St. Petersburg—I did not feel very well—some sinful thought must have been poisoning me. And all of a sudden I had such peace and joy, and the health began to bound through me so that I felt—oh, like a baby that jumps about in its crib and crows and laughs just because it's bursting with life and health. And I knew I was having a visit from The Mother-Light." And Molly closed her eyes, lowered and raised her head and murmured—Maida heard the words of the formula for the first time—" May The Light shine in me ever—Amen!"

" You—all of you—worship her?" Maida went on, when she thought there had been a sufficient pause after the ceremony.

" No—no indeed!" Molly protested, so vehemently that Maida knew she had touched the sensitive spot in the follower of The Light. " We worship The Great All. The Light streams from Him and is the soul of the universe. We adore it as one of His attributes."

" And the Mother-Light?"

" She," replied Molly, " is the visible expression of The Light. And we *reverence* her. But not *worship*."

VI

EARLY in the morning Molly took Maida, by the passage to the right of the fireplace, to her grandfather's office, in the second story of the main part of the Temple of Temples, and left her at the door.

The workroom of the First Apostle of the Church of The Light was small, rather low, and was paneled and ceiled with black walnut, the decorations, draperies and upholsteries crimson and gold. But Maida saw all this indistinctly, as a trivial incident to Mr. Casewell himself. When he was within view, she—and she soon found that he had the same effect upon everyone—could give attention only to him. He had that unusual, but not rare, power of making his every word and action interesting, of unconsciously rousing in others the feeling that he was a personage of the greatest consequence. Just now he was beaming benevolently at her from his seat behind a huge black walnut table, heaped high with books and papers that had toppled here and there and lay in arrested avalanches of disorder. His chair rose out of masses of books, pamphlets, newspapers, crumpled letters, torn envelopes.

Obviously he had been at work many hours, yet he

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looked fresh and vigorous—like an unchangeable immortality, who had never been any younger and would never be any older. As he came from behind his desk, she saw that his almost misshapenly powerful figure was in baggy blue-black velvet blouse and trousers, gathered at the wrists and ankles and at the waist with cords of dark blue silk. The somber sheen of his garments made his rosy cheeks look rosier than ever, his white beard whiter and bushier—a magnetic and even startling presence that had its climax in those bright, laughing, keen-blue eyes and that nose of mighty curve and thrust.

“And you are—better?” he inquired, looking her full in the face with gentle solicitude. “The night you came—I could only think of some beautiful bird that had been tossed and harried by the tempest until it was quite downcast. And, as I saw you then, gradually relaxing toward a slumber I knew would be profound and refreshing—” he touched her, and she had had no such feeling since last her mother’s arms were about her—“I thanked God the bird had found a safe haven and a home, had found its nest at last. A long, a weary, a devious search, but at last its nest!”

There were tears in his eyes, tears in Maida’s eyes also, for his tone and his strange words moved her profoundly. He led her to a chair beside his table, then himself took the plain, hard, wooden chair in which he always sat when at work. “Molly calls it my peniten-

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tial seat," he explained humorously, to help himself and her to recover self-control. "But that is not quite accurate. As child, boy, and man, I had the hard side of life, and so I got well grounded in the habit of preferring the hard to the easy and soft. It's all a matter of habit—what is not? But, we must discuss and settle our little business." He leaned toward her and smiled. "Now—don't look so serious—don't put your nerves on a tension, my child."

She smiled back at him. "I'm very foolish," she said, apologetically. "The least thing out of the ordinary sets my nerves off. But usually I'm able to conceal it—people have often congratulated me on having no nerves."

"Most people are so busy with themselves that they lose the power of observation," he replied. "My profession—and my temperament, too—have trained me to see at least what goes on before my eyes. And I saw at a glance that you suffer a great deal from nerves."

"It's been a source of pain to me all my life," she answered, "though I don't think I ever confessed it before."

"But a source of great pleasure, too," he suggested.

"Oh, yes! I've never met anyone who seemed to feel music and sunlight, and all the things that reach one through the senses, as I do—especially light. And some colors make me want to laugh, while others go through

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me like a spasm of pain. I've been made ill by harsh noises and harsh contrasts in color." She blushed and checked herself. "That sounds like affectation, doesn't it?" she said, shyly.

"Not to me," he assured her. "I understand. The intoxication some people have to get artificially is yours—ours, I may say—naturally. We are exhilarated—or depressed—all the time. I'm afraid it has been of late depression with you." His eyes twinkled suddenly—for, like all whose methods are simple and whose feelings are sincere, he had no pose which would be damaged by showing the swift shifts of the mind from grave to gay or from gay to grave. "We know your history pretty thoroughly—you don't mind our having made a study of your life? I'm sure you don't, as we can only have found out things to your credit. Let me see—correct me, if I go wrong." And, without referring to any notes, with only an instant's pause as if to open the proper compartment in his memory, he began: "You were born in Iowa at Ida Grove, twenty-eight years and ten months ago. You are the only child of parents who are both gone. You were educated at the public schools and at the Academy in Ida Grove, and went for a time to the Iowa State University. You—and your husband—came to New York eleven years and two months ago. You have been a widow two years and five months."

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Maida bowed in assent as he glanced at her for confirmation of his recital.

“You have no near relations?”

“Father and mother were both only children. My grandparents are also gone.”

“That agrees with my information,” said Mr. Caswell, and his manner suggested a lively satisfaction. “And your husband—he was as peculiarly alone as you, was he not?”

“All his family were drowned in a Mississippi flood.”

“He, I believe,” continued the First Apostle, “floated down the flood in his crib and was rescued by the Williston family of Davenport. They brought him up, taking him, as a boy, to live at Ida Grove.”

“Yes,” said Maida. “And now—I am alone.”

They sat silent, thinking, for a moment. Then he went on in a voice which was tuned to the key of her nerves: “I think—if you will look back upon your life—upon all its sorrows, bereavements, trials—will look at it aright, you will see the plan of a higher power in it, working steadily to one purpose—to fit you in every way for some mission which it purposes to fulfil through you. Have you never felt this?”

The expression of her face, a shining forth of the exaltation which had been inexplicably rising within her as he spoke, made him watch her with awe. She was too absorbed to note him; nor was there any intention

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on his part that she should see. In fact, as soon as her dreamy eyes turned toward him, he swiftly hid his feelings, and she saw only earnest kindness. "Yes," she said. "I have felt—I do feel—I can't describe it, it is too vague. And—" she hesitated, and colored—"I must, to be honest, tell you that I distrust it."

"Your reason warns you against it?" he inquired.

"That is it. Reason tells me that such intuitions—reason warns me to be on my guard against superstition."

"But you *wish* to believe?"

"It would mean peace, perhaps even happiness," she replied earnestly. "But—I fear—I cannot. Whenever I think about it calmly, this faith of yours—all these new faiths—seem like—like the mushrooms that spring up in the dead tree. For, the old tree is dead."

"Its trunk is dead," he said. "One of the strangest facts of our time is the indifference, the apparent unconsciousness, of the leading classes throughout the world, that the great trunk and the far-spreading, all-protecting branches, which have sheltered civilization for so many centuries, are dead. One would think that the whole intelligent world would be mourning. But because the trunk still stands and the gardeners are, from habit and for the wages, still working at the branches, because there is no terrific, crashing fall, men

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fancy that the tree still lives and will put forth new leaves next year or at least soon. But it is as dead as the Olympic gods from whose tomb it sprang.”

Maida had often thought something like this. But when he, with his manner of the sage and the seer, put it into words, she shivered.

“Trunk and branches are dead,” he went on. “And the color in such leaves as cling is the hectic flush of dissolution. But—” and now his eyes lit up and his voice was like a triumphant chant—“The root still lives! Again and again, all has died except the root—and, therefore, nothing of consequence has died. The root lives, watered and kept immortal by the hidden wells of eternal truth which no drought of superstition or of reason can dry up. And, before the cry of bitter despair shall have gone forth, before morality shall have died out among men through the death of the old faith upon which it lived, before the law of The Darkness, the black and bloody and cruel law of the right of might, shall have been established, the new sap will be flowing, and once more the branches will spread their living, sheltering arms! The day dawns, my child! The Light shines!”

“If I could believe!” she exclaimed.

“You will—you do,” he replied. “Down underneath all the superficialities of shallow education, there is the germ of the immortal truth within you. Think

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no more about it. Let reason quibble and sneer whenever it will. But just open your *heart* to The Light, and wait."

There was an interrupting knock at the large door to the left of Maida; Mr. Casewell answered it, held a brief talk in an undertone with some person she could not see. "I must go now," he said, returning to her. As she rose, he led her toward the door of the passage. "It is just as well. A week or two of rest and quiet, to let you get accustomed to these surroundings, will do no harm. We may regard it as settled that you are willing to try the position?"

"If you think an unbeliever—" she began.

He laughed. "The Light has commanded us to take you. We shall trust to it." Then, solemnly: "May The Light shine in you!" And she was alone in the private passage, going toward her own apartment.

It was several days before she saw him again. Hinkley came only to inquire how she was and to say now and then that Ann Banks would soon be ready to receive her. But she and Molly were together the whole of each day—and the days fled. Molly made not the slightest effort to convert her, never brought up the subject of the faith and, when it came up naturally, said no more than was necessary before talking of something else.

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But Molly was more than a voice or even an intelligence. She was an atmosphere.

She had always been sheltered, knew the storms and sorrows of life only by report, and therefore had an exaggerated notion of their ferocity which made her regard Maida with wonder and gave her sympathy a touch of reverence. A stronger nature than Molly's there could not be; but it was the passive strength of gentleness and sweetness, not the active strength which Maida's experience had developed in her. Thus, they were adapted each to influence the other; they had the necessary traits in common, the necessary traits in contrast.

Upon Maida's vexed soul, Molly had the effect of April upon March—sun to soften the winds, rain to make the barrenness blossom. And soon there was an amazing physical response to Maida's internal change. She herself hardly noticed it—her beauty had been her chief source of humiliation and heartache when she first began to try to make a living for herself and her child; and she had been even relieved when she knew her beauty was gone because the men she asked for work began to treat her sexlessly, and therefore far more harshly than if she had been a man. She had forgotten that beauty ever had been hers.

Molly soon noticed the change—the rounder cheeks, the color of health in the skin, the re-appearance of a

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figure of graceful curves. Hinkley was the only one who could appreciate that this rapid transformation was not a going back to the beauty that had been, but the birth of a wholly new loveliness—Maida the woman, with experience illuminating her eyes, with character strengthening her features; a beauty that was founded upon physical charm but took its tone and high individuality from the thoughts. And Maida's thoughts were now of the kind that stimulate the imagination, and make the nerves tranquil without robbing them of their sensitiveness.

One morning Molly came to her apartment sooner than usual and, after waiting impatiently half an hour in the sitting-room, softly adventured the closed bedroom door. There lay Maida in the dim light that sifted through the shutters; the room was cold as the outside air, and she was in a profound sleep. As Molly's eyes focused to the dimness, she saw first the great coiled braid round the small head, then the features of her face, but them only in outline. Molly stared, fascinated, awed. Then, in a sort of panic, she fled noiselessly to her own quarters.

When Maida rang and she re-appeared, the change in her manner was so marked that Maida spoke of it. "Has something happened," she said—"something disagreeable?"

"Nothing—nothing," replied Molly, looking fixedly

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at her and seeming to be somehow re-assured. "It was only that I had a queer—a sort of dream." And she would not talk about it. After that, whenever Maida would rouse herself suddenly from those reveries that were again her daily habit she would find Molly at a full stop in reading or sewing, and looking at her with an expression that suggested dread or awe, Maida was not quite sure which. Molly would instantly glance away, confused, and Maida, suspecting that some secret of the faith was somehow involved, would pretend that she had not seen.

She noticed a change in Hinkley's manner also, presently—a veiled deference and a struggle not to be formal. And, when Mr. Casewell at last came to her to resume their talk about "the little business"—she had not seen him in more than ten days—he, in turn, changed his manner. It was no longer the kindly, protecting friendliness of an old person for one much younger; it was a friendliness of deference, a sort of courtier courtesy.

"If you wish," he began, "I will take you to—to Ann Banks to-morrow."

She saw that he was tired. His eyes and voice both told of some heavy task that had tried even his strength. She said: "Whenever you like—and I've been hoping it would not be much longer."

"Her mind gave way again the day after the ap-

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paration," he went on, as if pursuing a subject that had been often and frankly discussed by them, when in fact he had never before spoken to her of the high priestess, or goddess, of the faith. "Not till this morning were there glimmerings of a re-shining of the soul through the mist. As I have said to you"—it made a deep impression on her, this melancholy in his voice, so foreign to his whole nature—"life has not been a rose-strewn path for me—many and sharp thorns, and a few roses. But all else I have borne seems a trifle beside the burden of these last years. Latterly Hinkley has helped me, but the burden itself has also doubled. Still, I have marched, not staggered, because The Light has made it clear to me that the way would open. And it is opening—gloriously!"

His enthusiasm caught her in its bright flame and wrapped her round. "Do you really think I can help you?" she asked—and she felt that she could and would.

"The opening way is *you*," he answered. "That is why I tell you these things. You know what my faith is to me, you know what I feel it means to the whole world. Do you think I would trust you thus, were I not sure of you as only the assurance of the Great All could make me?"

"You almost give me belief in myself," she said.

"Not I—but The Light," he urged. "This is the struggle of the Dawn. And after what a night for us

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of the inner altar of the faith! You will appreciate soon—when you have felt the responsibility. You will have that, and the joy of it, without the burden. A general, with an army of a hundred and fifty thousand men, and a desperate battle impending—he feels the sense of responsibility for those lives, for the safety of their bodies. But we—upon us was the responsibility for the *souls* of one hundred and fifty thousand. If, through us, defeat should come—oh, I knew it could not come. But I was born in sin, and for the inscrutable purposes of The Light, my faltering human heart was left me. So, I suffered though I knew the event was secure.”

“And—she?” Maida ventured.

His eyes did not change, but she felt, rather than saw, that he was stilling a tempest within himself. At length, he answered: “She, too, was born in sin. For a long time after she realized that she had let The Darkness retain insidious hold upon her until it was perhaps too late, she hid it from me, thinking it was the final, supreme test and must be borne alone. Then—she told me, and we prayed over it together. For a long time no leading came. And just as I was despairing—not she, for *her* faith could not even falter—but when I was preparing to fight on without hope, it was revealed to us that through you she would be restored.”

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“But what can *I* do?”

“You will know when *The Light* reveals it to you,” he answered. “And until the way opens further, we have thought it best to keep your presence here a secret. You are not a believer and we could not explain taking an unbeliever to be her most intimate associate. You feel the confinement to this apartment and my little garden? I call it mine because I get my exercise by attending to it; but it is yours.”

“Not the confinement,” said she. “I have never felt so free, so—so—at large. But the mystery. I feel that—at times.”

“We could not avoid it,” he explained. “There are eleven servants in this house, nearly a hundred in all on the place. Then, in the far wing of the house are a dozen assistants to Hinkley and me. In a building just beyond are perhaps fifty more assistants, under Apostle Floycroft who is in direct charge of the propaganda. Down at the House of Pilgrims, a mile from here, but well within the grounds—you may remember, your carriage stopped there the night you came—it has accommodation for about three hundred. And all the rooms are usually taken, by visitors, by sick come to be healed, by missionaries, by the theological students. Beyond the Hall of *The Light* lies our general theological seminary, our training college for missionaries, with the houses of the faculty, and their families.”

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“And I thought this almost a solitude!” she exclaimed.

“A town, rather. No, the engine-room of the faith. We received and answered here nearly half a million letters last year, to give only one detail. And in the same period, from this center The Light sent out its healing rays to the bodies and souls of more than three hundred thousand—some strugglers toward The Light, others seated in The Darkness, but interceded for by relatives and friends.”

She was listening in amazement. At last she was realizing the size and the weight of the burden that rested upon his shoulders. “If The Light were to expire!” she thought.

“As you may have noted, that day in the Hall,” he went on, “while The Light shines for all, it appeals most potently to the educated and the thoughtful—those in direst need of faith now, the leading classes whom science has cut adrift on the dreadful sea of unbelief without sun or even star.”

“I know that sea,” she said. And from her heart welled a thanksgiving that, if she could still see those forlorn and lightless wastes, could still hear the moaning of those dreary waves, it was at least from the shore—the shore of what seemed a land of rest and peace.

That night she did not sleep soundly. Whenever she lost consciousness, her mind would wander away into

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fantastic dreams that now awakened her in a sort of rapture, again in a terror so profound that she would hastily reach out and turn on the night-light. Once, as she started to a sitting posture in alarm, she thought she saw the dressing-room door close. She listened, but the silence was unbroken—an utter silence, not even the ticking of a clock or the faint sounds that almost always rasp upon the quiet of a sleeping house. As soon as she could reason herself into courage, she rose and tried the dressing-room door—she could lock it; it had therefore been unlocked; then, the movement she thought she saw might not have been imagined—was not imagined!

She darted to her bed, gathered its covers and her dressing-gown and fled into the sitting-room, securing the bedroom door behind her. She turned on all the lights, revived the fire; and with its warm companionship to reassure her, she stretched herself in comfort. One dream she had that was repeated four times with little variation:

She was in the midst of a multitude so vast that it filled the whole of her vast dream-horizon, made her feel that she would still be in the midst of it no matter how far she might go in any direction. All were kneeling with eyes upon the barren plain; and in a chant that filled her heart with grief they were sending up wailing repetition of the one word "Death! Death! Death!"

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And she knew that here was the whole human race abandoned to despair because it had become convinced that death was eternal and therefore Life a brief futility, unutterably accursed. And then she saw that there was a center to this innumerable company of mourners—a mighty tree, a wreck, a ruin of a mighty tree, a skeleton hideous to look upon, for the great scrawny branches were bare and black. And as the horror of that tree beat upon her brain through her eyes and the horror of that monotonous moan beat upon her brain through her ears, she, too, was crushed down to kneel and to join in that rhythmic cry of despair. Then there appeared at the horizon's edge a figure in a long black robe and bearing a staff. It strode swiftly toward where she was kneeling. It was Mr. Casewell, but giant-tall. He advanced to the tree; he struck it with his staff—and instantly a cloud of flame descended and enveloped the dead skeleton and hid it and consumed it. And the multitude lifted their faces and stretched their arms toward the flame; and the air which had been infinitely cold and infinitely sad became warm and glad. And the swirling billows of the tower of flame curled into the form of a colossal figure, a woman of pure fire clad in garments of pure fire, now blazing, now gently glowing. And there arose a shout that echoed from every corner of the universe—"The Light! The Mother-Light!" And she, too, cried out for joy, and

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awakened gradually; and the colossal figure faded and dwindled gradually until it was the fire-light streaming placidly upon her face.

When Mr. Casewell came to take her to Ann Banks, he noticed at once that she was a little different, that her mind had hung a veil between them. "What is it?" he asked, instantly and frankly. "What is troubling you?"

"Dreams," she answered, "and foolish fancies. You gave me too much to think about yesterday. I didn't sleep well."

"Perhaps you'd rather not go to-day?" he suggested.

"No—oh, no—" was the quick protest of her gratitude for his minute thoughtfulness—never before had anyone tried to understand her, and she had been so long without sympathy or even kindness. "I'm ready. I'm eager."

"I thank you," he said. Then: "We will go by the passageway here." And he advanced to the wall and opened the panel to the left of the fireplace. She started back; he had disclosed a passage exactly like the one to the right.

"This little hall," he went on, "leads directly to her apartment. There is another branch of it, into your dressing-room."

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She was pale as her white waist. "Show me," she succeeded in articulating.

He led the way to her dressing-room. She unlocked its door and stood aside. He entered, but just beyond the threshold wheeled and faced her. Over his shoulder she saw what he had seen—the panel in the rear wall ajar. "I do not know," she said, in a low voice, in answer to his look. "I awoke from a sound sleep. I felt as if someone were in my room. I thought I saw the dressing-room door close."

He examined the bolt of the blind door. "It was not bolted," he said. And he closed the panel and drew the bolt. "Now—you won't be disturbed again."

"I think," said she, "I'd prefer not to go to—to her until to-morrow."

"No, it is better to-day," he urged. "Then you will understand, and your alarm will vanish."

"Let me think," she replied, and they returned to her sitting-room where she seated herself, her gaze upon the fire-light. After perhaps five minutes she stood. "Yes, let us go, now," she said.

VII

THE passage was like that through which Molly had taken her to the apparition. They ascended a short flight of steps and, Mr. Casewell pushing open a blind door, they were in an almost unfurnished and obviously unused dressing-room. Through this, through a hall, and they were in a large salon suffused with a soft, dim, rose-colored light—just such a glow as had irradiated at the “apparition,” just such a glow as had permeated from the fire figure in her dream. The walls were covered with silk brocaded in crimson and gold, and the solid furniture also; and on the floor was a carpet whose crimson surface was strewn with dull gold sunbursts.

She saw, on a canopied sofa at the far end of the room, the Mother-Light.

Her first impression was of youth—high color, dazzling teeth shown in a gracious, cordial smile, abundant hair up-piled in puffs in front and at the sides of the small head, a robe of soft black material embroidered with small gold sunbursts. It was high in the neck, but the sleeves flowed away from forearms round and white and tapering to narrow, long, youthful hands. The features—strength and dignity, and youth.

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Such was her first impression, got at a glance before the Mother-Light spoke. Maida was surprised by the lack of ceremony. Mr. Casewell had simply bowed and was standing with head respectfully bent, waiting for the Mother-Light to address him. She now extended her hand to Maida. "I'm glad to see you, my dear," she said—and the voice did not sound like that of an old woman. As Maida advanced to take the offered hand, the Mother-Light slowly leaned back. And the shadow of the canopy was so heavy that the features which had been dim were now a mere outline, like a face seen in the shadow of moonlight—seen, yet not seen. "This is my second look at you," the Mother-Light went on, amusement in her voice. "My curiosity was so great that last night I ventured down into your apartment. I hope you will forgive me?"

"Then it was you!" said Maida, completely reassured by this voluntary confession. The Mother-Light's manner, the graciousness of a dignity conscious that nothing can impair it, seemed to be putting her at her ease.

"Did you know?" was the Mother-Light's reply, in a regretful tone. "How you must have been startled. And when I was looking at you, I thought you were having a troubled dream." She was still holding Maida's hand and Maida, responding to the slight pressure, half-knelt, half-sat beside her. "But those dreams

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will soon pass away," she was saying, "and your nights will be as peaceful and happy as your days. The Light is shining in you." A long silence, then a repetition in the voice of one half asleep—"The Light is shining in you."

Maida waited with increasing nervousness. Presently she looked round at Mr. Casewell. He was still standing with head respectfully bent. She gently tried to disengage her hand. The effort seemed to rouse the Mother-Light from sleep or reverie or whatever it was that had made her head fall forward upon her bosom. "Yes," she went on—and now her voice was no longer young, and had a quaver in it, the quaver of great age. "Yes—you are young and beautiful—just as I was in my girlhood. I say girlhood, though really I'm neither old nor young—yet I can remember the big meteor shower—it was in 1833, wasn't it, Albert? I ran out when I saw the fire-drops coming down—so soft—so soft. And I held out my apron to try to catch them. But my mother came and dragged me into the house."

The voice ceased. The head fell forward upon the bosom, the grasp upon Maida's fingers relaxed; and the regular, deeper breathing told that the Mother-Light was asleep. When she could endure the silence and the motionlessness no longer, Maida rose and began a slow retreat. But at the fourth step the Mother-Light started and Maida saw her eyes shining upon her from

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the dimness. Maida tried to look away but could not; there was a command in those eyes which she was unable to oppose. The Mother-Light stretched out her arm. "May The Light shine in you!" she said in a voice that vibrated like musical notes. "Albert will bring you again to-morrow."

Maida felt a pressure on her arm, felt rather than saw the Mother-Light and the mysterious, beautiful salon fading slowly. They had withdrawn by the main door to the right—into Mr. Casewell's workroom which she now saw was the ante-room to the Mother-Light's salon. "You wish to return to your own apartment?" he said.

She could not find words or voice to answer but, silent, left by the door of the passage which he, silent, opened for her. In her reception room, she looked at herself in the glass. Her skin was gray, and there were black circles under her eyes; and a nervous headache was making her brain throb and ache. Yet until now she had been conscious of no strain. "What is the matter with me?" she muttered. "Where is my common sense?" And she reviewed in detail all that had occurred during that brief interview. No incident of it, nor all incidents together, nothing that her eyes and ears and other bodily senses had reported to her brain adequately explained this feeling that some mighty force was slowly subsiding within her after having

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turned and overturned the very foundations of her being into a chaos.

She dropped upon a sofa and almost instantly fell into a sound sleep. She awakened with a start and rose and stood at the mirror opposite the fireplace. She studied her image feature by feature, flushed with a fever that was like flaming fingers alternately laid lightly upon her and lifted and laid lightly upon her again. At last she was looking straight into her own eyes, fascinated, awed. For, from them, over the shoulder of the personality gazing back at her, the personality she recognized as her own, there gazed another personality. "Who are you?" she demanded of it. "And why are you there? And whence did you come?"

There was no answer. The new personality simply held to that steady gaze at her from her own eyes and over the shoulder of her own personality imaged in them.

Mr. Casewell could not take her the next day; he sent Hinkley in with her. The Mother-Light was again on her canopied sofa-throne; her head was fallen forward and she was breathing deeply. "Sit here until she wakes," said Hinkley in an undertone, indicating a chair a few feet from the sofa. And he returned to the ante-room, closing its doors behind him. Maida took up a book on the small table at her elbow. It was "Rays

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from the Beam," by Ann Banks, beautifully bound—evidently the author's copy. She read, forgetting what she had read as fast as her eyes passed on. After perhaps a quarter of an hour, she stirred uncomfortably and glanced up. She was so startled that the book dropped from her hand into her lap. The Mother-Light had awakened, was watching her with keen, amused eyes. Just the eyes; the face was merely suggested in the gloaming-like shadow of the canopy. "Have you been waiting long, child?" she now asked, and Maida liked the voice.

"I—think not," was her confused answer. "I was—reading."

"You are fond of reading?"

"Fonder than of anything else—" Maida smiled—"except dreaming."

The eyes seemed to dance, and Maida thought she could see a smile on the features. "Those were my passions, too," said the Mother-Light. "As a child, I used to have visions, used to hear voices. They tried to cure me, but they only succeeded in postponing the revelation. I was nearly forty years old, and had buried my parents, my husband, my two children, before The Light shone clear to me and I ceased to resist. You do not believe—as yet?"

"I—don't know what I believe," said Maida. "I think——"

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“Think!” exclaimed the Mother-Light, her tone satire without offense. “Don’t try to think, child. That is whence all the sorrow comes. Trust to feeling—to instinct. Open the doors—The Light will pour in. We never argue—we have no creed. We simply submit ourselves, and call others to submit, to those universal instincts that the universe has a soul, *is* a soul, and that each of us is part of it. No creed, no logic, none of the devices of The Darkness, nothing for Science to attack. Just a mode of living, just putting ourselves in harmony with the eternal and the immortal.”

Obeying a gesture, Maida came and knelt beside her; and from the dimness of the canopy the Mother-Light extended her strong, beautiful white hands, young yet somehow not young, and laid them on her head. “I looked closely at you while you slept yesterday morning,” she said. Then, after a pause, very solemnly: “My other self. My unborn other self!”

A thrill of awe surged through Maida. She felt that some living force was passing through those hands into her brain, into her body—was passing from the soul of the Mother-Light into her own.

“You have suffered,” the voice went on. “Your heart has been broken, trampled. But it shall be healed, and your destiny shall be fulfilled.” And she kissed Maida’s bowed head. “Now, let us begin. I feel clear

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and fresh to-day. Do you think you could take a dictation?"

Maida seated herself at the desk, a little behind the sofa, took paper and a pencil. "I can write rather fast," she said, hardly knowing what she was saying. For, in her brain was ringing "Your Destiny!" and before her eyes the woven sunbursts of the carpet, the embroidered sunbursts of the walls were whirling.

She could not see the Mother-Light from where she sat. Presently the voice began—"My children—" then lapsed into silence. A few minutes, then: "But first, child, perhaps I'd better explain that I am going to dictate to you a general letter—an encyclical—to our followers in all countries. There have grown up of late many false versions of the faith. Sinful and mercenary persons, seeing the eagerness with which The Light has been received, have stolen my revelation, *my* ideas, and are trafficking in them." She had begun in calmness; but her voice, mounting through agitation to excitement, was now high and tremulous with anger.

"I am the sole prophet of The Light," she cried. "The revelation was to me alone. If anyone tells you that Albert—Mr. Casewell—originated it or wrote my books or my sermons, it's false, false, a lie!" And now the voice dropped to a senile quaver. "My husband was a physician, and in those days there weren't any drug stores, and we used to make his medicines. 'I put

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in the drugs, Annie, and you put in the faith, and the faith's the thing, Annie,' he used to say—and he was right. Faith—that's the thing! Faith! 'Faith without works is dead'—that's true. But what of works without faith? Look at this godless and hypocritical generation—look at its works without faith. Faith's the thing! Faith!"

Silence, and Maida sat thinking of the impending disaster; of Molly and Hinkley and Mr. Casewell, of the tens of thousands to whom this faith was life. This faith, wholly dependent upon this dying woman, once so strong and potent, now a mere echo of intelligence, and dying—dying!

"Yes—I am a broken woman—and dying," came in the Mother-Light's voice, like an answer to her thoughts. "Come to me, child." Maida went and knelt again with bowed head, felt hot tears on her face. "Not for myself, child," the Mother-Light said, "but for the cause. I *know* The Light will shine on. It is the true faith. But—oh, the agony of this time of trial, of transition! My daughter, my unborn daughter of The Light. Do you not feel in your own soul the stirring of a soul that is about to be born?"

"Yes—yes," said Maida in a low voice. "Oh—mother—I am afraid!"

When she lifted her head, the rosy light of that mysterious presence seemed as unreal as her life in this

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unearthly place, as unreal as the light upon those lands of dreams in which she so often wandered, uncertain what was fancy and what reality. "Go now, my daughter," said the Mother-Light. "And send Mr. Hinkley to me. May The Light shine in you—ever!"

In a dream, Maida passed to the ante-room, said, "She wishes you," to Hinkley, went on through the passage to her own apartments.

VIII

SHE always saw the Mother-Light in that same salon, and nowhere else, and in that same unrevealing dimness. At first, whenever Mr. Casewell interrupted them with the affairs of the Church, she immediately left. But this was soon a form to which she herself held because she wished to avoid even seeming to take advantage of their frank, most affectionate friendliness. One morning, perhaps a fortnight after her first visit to the salon of the rose light, as she was departing before Mr. Casewell, he suggested to the Mother-Light: "Don't you think she had better stay? Can't she help us through these matters?" And the Mother-Light, with a shade of constraint in her cordiality, said to her: "Yes—please do, child—please stay."

When Maida, sensitive to the change in her manner, tried to stammer a hastily invented excuse for going, the Mother-Light insisted—"Please, my child. I wish you to know all of our affairs. There will be times when I shall have you represent me at the Council, and how can you if you do not know everything about the Church?"

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So she stayed. And thereafter she was always at the morning consultation, even when the Mother-Light kept to the inner rooms. Presently Mr. Casewell drifted into the habit of going to her in her free hours and walking the garden with her, talking the ever uppermost subject in the Temple of Temples—the Church of The Light. And a most absorbing subject it became to her as she realized the amazing facts of its extent and growth—seventy churches in as many large communities, each church a power with the leading element in its community; more than a hundred thousand active members, and the membership increasing swiftly in face of the jeers of the press, the scoffings of the agnostics, and the denunciations of the pulpit.

Every morning Hinkley brought up from the offices of the Church a big bundle of press clippings on The Light. These were laid upon Mr. Casewell's desk, and she—at his request—made it a rule to look them through. For a while the attacks—many of them clever, some of them wise—produced strong reactions in her toward her original opinions. But after she had become acclimated to and saturated with the atmosphere of unquestioning, militant faith, and had come to know her new, her only friends through and through, those clippings became powerful missionaries of The Light to her. Their facts were so often false, so often malicious and malignant; their arguments were so often tainted

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with animosity, so rarely free from cruel sneers and insults. For example, she once read a venomous attack upon Mr. Casewell, cut from a great English quarterly. It was a mosaic of lying personalities. Not a statement of importance in it but she could contradict from her own knowledge of the man. And in the heap with this article were cuttings from newspapers and magazines published in all parts of the English-speaking world, each cutting an indorsement of the quarterly's libel. As she read, her cheeks burned. And finally she burst out: "How they lie about us!"

Mr. Casewell patted her on the shoulder. He had noted that significant "us," though she had not. He had been waiting, praying, for it. "Be calm, child," he said with gentle cheerfulness. "We must not let these bearers of false witness ruffle us."

"But this is so wickedly, so shamelessly unjust!" she exclaimed.

"And therefore it is helping the cause," he answered. "Let us welcome anything that helps the cause. The Great All moves in many ways to accomplish his ends. And you may be sure that he is moving most powerfully when the forces of The Darkness snarl and snap as they retreat before The Light."

"But it is impossible to sink one's personal feelings altogether," protested she.

"On the contrary it is easy. You will find it so

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when you have been here a while longer and lose that sense of personality which is the vanity of vanities. Then you will have only pity for exhibitions of the beast in man."

And his prophecy speedily came true. In that serene isolation it was difficult not to be serene. Rapidly the world beyond her sheltered domain faded into unreality; and the harsh echoes from it in newspapers and magazines seemed far and faint—as the turmoil of a great city comes over a high wall and through many and dense screens of leaves, and penetrates to a room where only the blue of sky and the green of foliage are visible.

The Mother-Light's lapses from coherence soon affected her only in the same way that they affected Mr. Casewell and Hinkley—reminding her of the black storm that hung in the horizon of the faith. She was under the spell of the "we," the spell of "the organization." And, once any human being is heartily enlisted for any cause, religious or political or financial or merely social, that spell makes him fling in blindly his whole self, makes him regard any question of his cause's justice, or truth, as a crime and a sacrilege, even though that question rise within himself. She felt that her friends, and herself, were the keepers of a lighthouse aloof on a lonely shore but sending out its beams over the angry, cruel sea of life to cheer and guide a

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myriad of soul-ships. Human or divine, The Light was light. And whenever it flickered, she trembled—and prayed, like her friends.

She was, in her attitude, more like Hinkley—he, too, had the periods of profound depression. They both admired and strove to emulate Mr. Casewell. He felt—and he made them feel most of the time—that the miracle would surely be when miracle was needed to save them, that the severe test to their faith would be brought to a glorious end. And he pointed to the miracles all round them for confirmation. Was not he himself—the unchanging, the man of nearly ninety in the vigor of thirty, in the spirits and high enthusiasm of twenty—a miracle? Was not Ann Banks herself a miracle? Maida had penetrated into the penumbra always surrounding that face far enough to see that its youth was to a great extent an elaborate artificiality; still there was the unartificial youth of her arms and hands and voice, explainable in a woman of that great age only on the theory of some soul-force fighting a super-human battle against decay. And there were days when Ann Banks's mind brilliantly flashed forth in its former strength—on those days the three who watched her so anxiously looked hopefully one at another, their looks saying: “Has the miracle begun?”

Yes, the “unborn daughter of The Light” assured herself, only a soul-force, which the instruments of Sci-

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ence had not been able to resolve, could produce these wonders. Yes, her friends were on the track of the Great Truth, the only bridge for the Black Chasm; but how near? Some days she felt that they were very near; other days, and nights, she doubted and feared.

It was in these moods of depression, following the collapsing of their hopes through Ann Banks's bright up-flashings, that Maida often surprised in Hinkley's eyes the passion he had pledged himself not to speak or to show. And there were times when her impulse to respond was strong—her sense of isolation would be overpowering; or she was longing for those tangible expressions of sympathy, those tender and soothing caresses that smooth away the ache of loneliness; or his unhappiness would be appealing to her instinct to console. Once she began to yield to this impulse:—

“I've never been able to thank you,” she said, “for what you did for me.” She had just glanced up from her work to find his eyes shifting from her, in them that moving look of passionate longing without hope.

“But I told you—didn't I?—that you owed me nothing,” he answered. Then he added sadly: “Besides, I'm afraid it isn't your gratitude that I want. If you were not beyond my reach—if you were not high on a pedestal for me——”

He checked himself, and she said presently, without

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looking at him: "If you ever do *really* fall in love, don't put her on a pedestal, Will. A woman likes to be on a pedestal for every man, except the one she loves. For him—She wants to be very, very human to him, and wants him to be very, very human to her."

"I don't believe you have ever been in love," he replied—and she, conscious of his intense gaze, had a sense of walking the edge of a height from which she was not quite sure whether she wished to plunge.

"Sometimes I think so, too," she answered, dreamily. "I've been very fond, and very grateful for—for—love, but—I've not quite understood it. I've felt there was a lack in me or else—a—door in my heart to which no one had ever brought the key—and behind the door—the real me—waiting to be released—or awakened."

She heard him catch his breath. She looked at him. She knew what passions surged behind that pale, dark face—the fires of them never left his eyes. And she knew that she herself was one of those passions—that, the fiercer for repression, it burned side by side with his religion. But for the moment her prudence had been outgeneraled by her longing, and she had forgotten what a blaze that passion was. She saw it leaping in his eyes, transforming his face. And she fled from the edge of the height.

He stretched out his arms—"Maida!" he ex-

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claimed. He did not know that a woman can be carried by storm only when the storm is within herself; nor, had he known, would he have had the power to control himself to use the knowledge.

"No—no—not that, Will," she cried in a tone that compelled him to draw back. He could not quickly hide the wound she had made. "It was my fault—I am sorry—I shall not do it again," she said remorsefully. "I forgot—and—oh, Will, isn't there something *between*? Can't I feel free to ask your sympathy, to lean on you when I haven't the strength to stand alone? Must I be always on my guard?"

"That is unjust," he said with bitterness. "You admitted it was your fault, and now you turn it against me. Why don't you go on to accuse me of having tried to take advantage of your gratitude?"

"I beg your pardon," was her humble answer. "I had an impulse, and I misunderstood it."

He looked at her drearily. "A little suffering more or less doesn't matter. My love for you is a sin, the suffering is my penance."

"A sin?" she said. "That is not the name. I think your love is noble, like you, Will. And it makes me feel how poor I am that I cannot return it."

"A sin," he repeated. "My love is a sin. But the pain it gives me ought to be full penance."

"I don't understand," she said.

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“Not yet,” was his reply in a significant tone. “But—I think you will—soon.”

She did not question him; she wished to get clear away from that dangerous ground. He did not try to detain her, but he went back to it as he was leaving her after they had worked in silence for an hour. “Do not be disturbed by what happened to-day,” he said. “It is enough—far more than I could ever have hoped, that I have you here. And, if you’re beyond my reach, you’re also beyond the reach of any other man.”

A slight and decreasing nervousness the few next times they were alone together, and his outburst almost passed from her mind. Life flowed serenely on for her, with the quiet sparkle of content. And the feeling of changelessness amid a world of change—the feeling peculiar to that atmosphere—took away from her all sense of time as well as all sense of the reality of the world beyond her walls.

But— On a morning in early spring she set out for the salon of the rose light by the usual route at her accustomed hour—eleven o’clock. As she was coming along the hall from the unused dressing-room, she heard Ann Banks’s voice—not the Mother-Light’s, but the thin, broken voice of an angry old woman, its tones full of the melancholy of withered vocal chords. “It’s not I you worship!” the voice was shrilling. “It’s the

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cause. I tell you, I tell you, *I* am the cause. *I* am the Mother-Light."

Maida was on the threshold now. As the canopied sofa was half-turned from her, she could not see Ann Banks; but there stood Mr. Casewell, his head bowed, his lips moving, as if he were praying. Never before had she seen him suggest the old age of ordinary mortality. As she hesitated, he caught sight of her, hurried to her and said in a low voice: "Please come back in half an hour. You see she is under the spell of *The Darkness*."

"Don't send her away!" came in a scream like chords struck by a savage hand from the tuneless strings of an old harp. "Let her stay! I want to tell her that I hate her!"

Mr. Casewell took Maida by the hand. "You must stay now," he said. And he led her round to where she and Ann Banks were face to face—Ann Banks huddled deep in the shadow of her canopy.

"Is it true?" said Maida, very sad and very earnest, gazing into the dimness where a face was visible in faint outline. "Do you hate me?" She was utterly crushed and her voice and her face and even her form showed it. Again misfortune, and a new beginning of that hideous struggle whose wounds were just ceasing to smart. And this catastrophe, when the moment before she had felt secure and content and sheltered

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and loved! "Oh, why did you hide it from me so long? And why should you hate me?"

"She does not mean it," pleaded Mr. Casewell. "She does not know what she is saying. When her mind is clear, she loves you as we all do."

But Maida still gazed into the shadow—her answer must come from there.

"Do not try to deceive her, Albert," came in the Mother-Light's own voice, sweet and clear, and melancholy. "It is true that I hate you, my child."

"Oh!" Maida exclaimed, hiding her face with both her hands.

"But," the Mother-Light went on, "that is of no importance."

Maida had turned, was feeling her way toward the door. "Come here, child," commanded the Mother-Light.

Maida paused and Mr. Casewell pushed her gently toward the canopied sofa. She felt a hand upon her arm, a hand that drew her slowly to her knees. Then the hand was smoothing her hair. "The part of me that hates you," said the Mother-Light tenderly, "is merely the human part, the part that is enslaved by The Darkness. It is that part which is forcing me toward the valley of the shadow of Death. And there—I shall shake it off! What is important, Maida, is that I, the Mother-Light, love you! I love you as a

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mother loves the child she feels leaping within her!" And her voice was like the last chords drawn by gentle, loving fingers from an old harp that is to be thereafter silent forever.

"A prophecy, a prophecy!" cried Mr. Casewell. "The Light shines!"

The hand of the Mother-Light slowly slipped from Maida's head. She waited, her face covered, until Mr. Casewell touched her, whispered, "She is asleep," and helped her to rise.

In her own rooms again and alone, she said aloud: "I must go. It is the end." Instantly she added, "But I cannot," for at the mere suggestion of departure she shivered in the first chill breath of the desert she would have to wander. There lay despair; here, love and hope—yes, belief. If not direct belief in all the doctrines of The Light, certainly belief in its guardians, her friends, the only friends she had in all the world.

She roamed restlessly about her apartment, at last going to the dressing-room. Its two smaller closets were filled with new clothing of every kind—Molly had gone to New York for it, had taken such trouble and pains about it. And these garments, these visible reminders of the loving care that surrounded her—her eyes were dim with tears. To leave—it would be to go alone to unequal battle, each day a thousand pin pricks

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upon her bared nerves, thrust after thrust into pride and self-respect.

As she turned to leave the little room, she happened to notice that the door of the large closet was ajar, that the closet was full—and two hours before it had been empty. She threw the door wide, saw rows on rows of black robes and white robes of the kind the Mother-Light wore—soft, gauze-like materials embroidered with dull gold sunbursts.

She leaned against the dressing-table; her mind snatched the clue and raced through the labyrinth of the mystery.

IX

DAY after day, and the Mother-Light did not appear, remained in the seclusion of those rooms of her apartment to which she never admitted anyone but Mr. Casewell. It had frequently occurred that she was unable to take part in the morning council; but always theretofore, for at least part of the day, she had come into the salon of the rose light and had listened—or, perhaps, slept—while Maida read to her. Still, Maida would not have been so profoundly agitated by this change, had not the first International Assembly been close at hand. For it they had all worked together upon a most elaborate program; at it the semi-centennial of The Light was to be celebrated; and in the original call, issued just after Maida came to the Temple of Temples, the Mother-Light had announced that she would herself welcome the delegates “and all the children of The Light, and all others who may come”—would welcome them on the afternoon of the first day of the Assembly from the south balcony of the Temple of Temples.

When that appointed apparition in the open air, in full day, was only four days away, Maida read in Mr.

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Casewell's deepened lines and nervous eyes the anxiety against which he was fighting as a sinful suggestion of The Darkness. "Can't I help you?" she asked, overcoming her dread of intruding.

He shook his head, and by an effort of that amazing will of his effaced from his features the look of care.

"Sometimes I have been able to rouse her," she persisted. "Why not let me try?"

"She does not hear, doesn't recognize even me," he answered. "We must leave her to The Light. We can do nothing—and need do nothing."

She felt that somehow her doubts and fears would be put to shame—whether faith in him or faith in the faith gave her this deep-seated conviction, she could not decide. And not until two days before the opening, when the House of Pilgrims was reported half filled by arriving foreign delegates, did her faltering courage faint. Hinkley joined her for a walk in the garden—her garden they all called it now. He always looked somber, but she thought his face was paler than usual and his eyes seemed dull, as if the fires that lighted them were low. At last, unable longer to restrain herself, she said: "But will *she* be able to appear—the day after to-morrow?"

"There has been no leading from The Light to the contrary," he replied. The note of defiance in his voice showed that his faith was in torment.

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“But—what if—she couldn’t?” she ventured. “You know how the newspapers and the religious press have been taunting us for the last three months. They are *so* confident. Oh, Will, why *was* that challenge accepted?”

“The Mother-Light herself commanded it.”

“But—” she began, and stopped there, silenced by an imploring look from him.

“To doubt is to doubt The Light,” he said. “Whatever happens, it will be for the glory of the cause.” And he left her.

She was relieved to be alone with the forebodings that made her heart-sick. The cause—the cause of these people whom she loved and who loved her—was it not her cause, too? Had their faith led them to hurry it and themselves on to ruin? Ruin seemed too feeble a word for the catastrophe that would follow the colossal collapse. She did not sleep that night, and when she saw Mr. Casewell’s face the next morning, she shut herself in and remained alone, not sleeping, eating nothing, sitting with eyes fixed upon the impending disaster. Some time during that night before the apparition she, following an impulse she did not try to fathom, went into the hall, to Mr. Casewell’s door, listened there. She could hear him praying. And she fell upon her knees and, addressing the force or mind or heart or whatever it was she vaguely felt lay behind

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the mystery of the universe, she, too, prayed—not coherent petitions, but an opening of her soul full of love for these friends of hers, these friends in her need.

How long she knelt there she did not know—perhaps, part of the time, through overwrought sleepless nerves and long fasting, she was unconscious or in a delirium. When she was again noting clearly what was passing round her, Mr. Casewell's door was open and the old man was kneeling beside her. As he lifted his face she looked in astonishment. Instead of anxiety or despairing resignation, he was irradiating the serenest, proudest conviction of the truth of his faith she had ever seen even in his countenance.

“It is too cold for you here, child, when you are so lightly clad,” he said, rising and helping her to rise. And then she noticed that she had on only her night-dress. Her hair, which she had unloosed because the weight of its coils seemed to add to her headache, was streaming round her like a soft bronze fabric of curious weave and tint. The old apostle led her to the door of her apartment. He kissed her brow. “Good-night,” he said. “Your prayers will be answered. May The Light shine in you ever—Amen!”

Molly, entering toward noon, found her lying on a sofa in the sitting-room, in dressing-gown and bedroom slippers, her hair loosely braided now. She felt

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neither happy nor miserable, neither well nor ill; she seemed to herself to have no body, to be aloof from the people and events about her, a spectator with hearing and sight but no power to feel. Molly was in high enthusiasm, related in detail the opening services, the pageantry, the wonderful appearance of her grandfather and his superhuman effect upon the assembled thousands. "And now, in less than three hours," said she, "we shall have the apparition. Already thousands are on the lawns before the south balcony. There'll be at least fifteen thousand of the followers of The Light—and five or ten thousand unbelievers. Mr. Floycroft says there are more than a hundred sick people. Someone told him that four died in Trenton last night. Poor souls! If they had only had the faith to keep them alive a few hours longer."

"Then there is to be an apparition?" came from the figure on the sofa, in a dull, far-away voice.

Molly glanced at her in surprise. "Why—what makes you ask that?" she inquired.

She did not answer. She turned away her face.

"Certainly," Molly went on. "Grandfather announced it again from the rostrum of the Hall of The Light—not an hour ago. But I see you're half asleep. I'll leave you."

Maida did not detain her. It was a superb late April day. As she stood at the window, looking out on

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her garden, which seemed like a young baby in its rosy freshness and vigor, there came to her from beyond the walls solemn music of the great organ in the Hall of The Light, swelling out an anthem. And she lifted her eyes and there was the huge banner of the faith, streaming and flashing in crimson and gold; and all around it, on and on into the infinities of the sky, oceans upon oceans of light, the perfect symbol of the eternal—of the deathless and the ageless. “Light!” she murmured, “Light!” as her soul drank it in at every sense.

“Is it time?” she asked, half an hour later, without turning her head, for she had felt Mr. Casewell enter and pause behind her.

“Not quite yet,” he answered. Then, after they had watched in silence for a few minutes the banner breasting proudly that sea of light, he went on: “I have just come from her. The end is not far away. You knew it?”

“Yes,” her lips formed.

“How mysterious are the ways of the Great All,” he pursued. “We know now that we were in error in regarding her as the final expression of the Mother-Light. We see that she was too old in the life of The Darkness before the revelation was shed into her. It is all so simple, so natural—our error, our human mistake. Yet, if it should become public thousands would

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reject the miracles that have been performed daily for fifty years.”

“But wouldn’t the truth have been best?” she exclaimed, suddenly turning toward him. “How could the truth dim—The Light? Wouldn’t the truth save all—yet? Isn’t *that* the leading of The Light?”

“Truth!” He smiled mournfully. “You speak as if truth were something absolute. Instead, it is relative. It never alters in one respect—it is always whatever sustains and strengthens the aspirations of a soul. But it does alter for every soul—as the diamond shows a varying facet and light according to the angle of the eye. Truth that would uplift the strong would crush the weak. Truth that uplifts the weak excites contempt, or at best tolerance, in the strong.”

“I had not thought of that,” she confessed.

“If,” he went on, “we exposed the one error, *our* error, we should extinguish The Light for a thousand thousand souls now struggling toward it.”

“But would not The Light protect its own?”

“That is another of the mysteries,” he replied. “Why does not The Light seek out man? Why must he seek it? Why must he stumble toward it, helped by all sorts of weak, clumsy hands? We do not know. But we do know—” And his voice thrilled with the intensity of his emotion—“that the hand that extinguishes any lamp of faith however feeble is im-

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pious—impious! Oh, child, think of the thousands to whom this faith, this sum of all the stars of faith, this true sun of The Light, is the sole alternative to utter darkness! How happy they are in it! How its beauty pervades all their relations of life, makes them not mere savage battlers in the dark for the things that glut the senses, not mere despairing fighters in this cock-pit of a world, but immortalities striving to bathe in The Light and to draw others into its refulgence! They *were* animals, slaves of the law of tooth and claw. They *are* as the gods, free in The Light. Say The Light is darkness; say its truth is falsehood; say we of the inner service are hypocrites and cheats. And still, if you could, would you put this light from thousands of lives? Would you plunge them again in darkness? Would you start again in their bodies the racking pains it has taken away? Would you drop their souls again into the hell of unbelief? Would you?”

“No,” she cried, all on fire. “No—no! For I have suffered.” Her eyes glistened with tears that scalded. “If I could believe, really believe, I shall see my baby again, I’d think no death too awful for anyone who tried to take that belief from me. What does an aching heart care for truth? It wants any medicine that will ease its pain.”

“And the medicine that does relieve the pain,” he

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asked, "is it not in its essence the truth? You who know us—you whom we have trusted—you do not misjudge us. You know that, even when we have had to build bridges of illusion across the chasms between The Darkness and The Light, we have built them only that mankind might cross from sorrow to serenity. We have harmed no one. We have led thousands to health and happiness. And where else is there hope but through The Light? Until recently the world was a wretched place, made wretched by tyranny, war, plague, famine. But now it is becoming a comfortable place. Life is no longer a bondage but the supreme good. Death is no longer a release but a curse. And the Beyond has retreated into a vague speculation. What then of hope is there against the rising flood of brutal materialism? And how can mankind be relieved of the two great curses, disease and death, and at the same time be spiritualized? The Light! It is the only hope. And its miracles of death baffled will be followed by miracles of death destroyed—destroyed by living the life beautiful—the life of The Light!"

"The life beautiful!" she murmured, her gaze roaming that infinite glorious sea of light whose sparkling waves were caressing the banner of The Cause.

"You believe?" he said. "Your prayers are answered?"

"I do not know," she answered. "I only know that

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The Light must shine on." She drew a long breath, and her expression made him bend his head and clasp his hands. "It *shall* shine on!" she cried. "My heart speaks clearly. I must help those who have helped me. If that is doing wrong—then—it is right for *me* to do wrong for those I love."

She did not ask him what was expected of her. In that debatable region between the obviously right and the obviously wrong—the region where such a large, and such an important, part of the human drama is enacted—mind prefers to interpret itself to mind without the precision and deliberateness of speech. Nor did she need to question him. She had suspected ever since she found the Mother-Light's robes in her closet; for two days and nights—forty-eight hours of sleeplessness—she had known. Until two days ago, she thought that if the situation ever came about—which it probably would not—it would bring with it a clear revelation from The Light. Now—the situation was here; but the revelation? She was not sure.

As she seated herself at the dressing-table, she looked her act, as that act then seemed to her, straight in the face. "*They* are all honest," she said, half-aloud, to her reflected eyes, "but you——"

The eyes shifted, but remained resolute, defiantly resolute.

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Without letting herself look directly at herself again, she went swiftly forward with her toilet. She did not need the portrait in miniature on one of the tables in the sitting-room. She could remember every detail perfectly. She built her hair into the curious mass of puffs, front and side—like a strangely fashioned casque or crown of bronze. “I am ghastly pale,” she murmured, and she rubbed rouge into her cheeks and upon her temples, and upon her lips. Still without a direct look at herself, she took a robe of black, gauzy, flowing, clinging, embroidered with dull gold sunbursts. She put it on, fastened it and arranged its folds before the long mirror. As she examined herself in the back with the aid of a hand-glass, her eyes almost met her reflected eyes.

Her toilet was finished. “Now!” she exclaimed, closing her eyes, compressing her lips and stationing herself squarely in front of the long mirror. She slowly opened her eyes; and the image she saw at full length made her pale under her rouge.

It was the Mother-Light.

She advanced toward the mirror until she and this new personality were close each to the other. She looked into its eyes. And within her there suddenly came a shock of recognition. She knew now who that other personality within her was. “Her unborn daughter,” she murmured. “I never looked like that.

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I could never make *myself* look like that. I am now not *like* her—I am she, herself.”

As soon as she turned away, reason tried to scoff “superstition” out of her mind. “You are a cheat!” reason said to her. She frowned it down as if it had uttered a blasphemy.

X

MR. CASEWELL and Hinkley were in the workroom, waiting for her. Usually Hinkley could soon yield up his doubts under the spell of his chief's utter confidence. And never had that confidence shone more serene. But the Second Apostle, in restless eyes and frequent moistening of the lips, betrayed his inability wholly to submit. As the minute-hand passed the last quarter and began to creep toward the hour, he paced nervously up and down, watching now with admiring envy and now with irritation the placid face of his superior. At last he restrained himself to halt at the window where he stood regarding the closely packed throngs on the lawns, with dry, hot eyes and parched throat. He wheeled and, before his courage oozed, hoarsely began the question that in the past hour had been a dozen times upon his tongue. "If there should be a miscarriage——"

Mr. Casewell's calm, luminous eyes rested upon him. "There can be no miscarriage."

"Then you have provided no line of retreat?" Even when victory is inevitable, he was thinking, the

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wise general never neglects the precaution of a line of retreat.

Mr. Casewell shook his massive head in gentle reproof. "After a leading from The Light, to arrange for a retreat would be to arrange for disaster. Not by doubt, Hinkley, but by faith does The Light prevail!"

Hinkley interlaced his long slim fingers. "The curse of doubt!" he cried. "Why does it not leave me? It must be the penalty—part of the penalty—for my sin—for the sinful longings which I will not cast from me!"

Mr. Casewell's expression of sympathy was so moving that it tempted Hinkley to confess. "Confession would ease me," he reflected, "might help me to cast out this guilty love for Her."

He was still choosing words in which to phrase a beginning when the blind door of the passage down into the west wing slowly moved. If that widening space had not compelled all his ability to see, he might have got a consoling glimpse into the depths of his chief. For, Mr. Casewell's strength deserted him. He could not rise; he dared not lift his eyes, knowing that what they would see would determine the destiny of his religion. A pain shot through him that made him feel old and mortally sick, with the cold lips of Death sucking life from his veins.

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A stifled cry from Hinkley roused him and with dull eyes he looked at her as she stood in the narrow doorway—a full-length, living portrait of the Mother-Light! Yes, the Mother-Light, she and none other; but how idealized, how etherealized! From the glory of her hair to the hem of her sunburst-strewn robe, the high priestess and embodiment of his religion of The Light! He burst into sobs.

She understood, and her blood surged and her heart beat high. She glanced at Hinkley for his tribute. But he had turned away; his hands were clinched and his shoulders tense, as if he were trying to tear his arms from their sockets. He, too, had seen that she was the Mother-Light. But instead of rejoicing, he was torn by the torment of hope's death-agony—the hope whose existence he had not suspected, so slyly had it kept itself hid behind his self-deceptions. He turned sharply away to hide from her, and to conquer, the sin that leaped and strained in his eyes at sight of that which had seemed to him desirable above all things from the first time he saw her, that which now made despair rouse the energy of his longings to its fiercest.

“I am ready,” she said.

Hinkley went to the heavy draperies over the entrance to the salon of the rose light. He threw them back and opened wide the double doors. The room was empty; and unfamiliar it seemed to her, flooded with

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daylight from the French windows giving on the balcony.

“Come!” exclaimed Mr. Casewell, like a bugle-note of triumph. He was in a white cassock with a huge gold sunburst embroidered upon its bosom; a richly embroidered crimson stole hung from his mighty shoulders almost to the edge of the skirts of his cassock.

He opened the window-doors and stepped out alone upon the balcony. She, well back, saw him lift his right hand as if in signal. And there rose an anthem from a distant choir—so sweet and noble was the sound that it might have been the voice of that perfect afternoon of warm and flooding sunshine. He came back into the room; they stood waiting until the anthem was ended. Then, after a pause of perhaps half a minute, he said to her: “Go out alone.” And he and Hinkley knelt and bent their heads.

The tears welled into her eyes. She was not thinking now of what she had to face or of who or what she was, but only of these friends of hers who had put themselves and their all into her keeping. She advanced very slowly toward the windows; just as she began to wonder if she would not falter, from somewhere, whether from within or from without she did not know, there came a rush of calm courage. At the casement she paused again—she could see the front of the Hall of The Light opposite, the choir massed on its steps and

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among the pillars of its lofty porch. High above shone the crimson and gold banner, its fluttering folds beckoning her on, waving ecstatic welcome to her from those crystal oceans of light. She walked stately out upon the balcony, advanced to its railing. The world—the world from which she had been separated so long—swam giddily before her eyes.

Now, she could make out through the haze of her dizziness the whole of the massive front of the Hall of The Light. Now, she was seeing the intervening space—the broad, treeless lawns, the walks and drives, all completely covered by thousands on thousands of human beings. A vast garden blooming like a daisy field with the strange white flowers of upturned faces. She trembled—for, from that throng came no sound.

There was a fierce tightening at her heart, a cruel dryness of the throat; she leaned against the rail that she might not fall should her legs fulfil their threat to fail her. “They suspect!” an awful voice shrieked through her mind. “I have ruined my friends!”

A murmur came from the crowd—she nerved herself for defiance. The murmur rose into a terrible, passionate cry that made her heart quake—“Oh, my God!” she moaned. “They will kill me.” But she held herself the straighter and lifted her head the higher.

The cry swelled to a shout, and in the flash-like revulsion her dizzied brain almost made her stagger—

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there was no mistaking that shout. "They are saying something—what is it?" she wondered. "They are moving—what does it mean?"

Her vision cleared, the ringing in her ears and the frenzied pounding of the blood in her temples ceased. She heard the cry—"The Mother-Light! The Mother-Light!" from fifteen thousand throats. And—all those multitudes were falling on their knees. They knelt, they clasped their hands, and stretched them toward—toward *her!* They cried: "The Mother-Light! Hear us, heal us, Mother!" Believers were beside themselves; unbelievers, swept from their balance by the tidal-wave of adulation, were thrilled and convinced.

And she— It had convinced her also, for it swept up to that balcony, drowned her reason fathoms deep, enthroned her nature of dream and fantasy. "I *am* the Mother-Light!" her proud heart exulted. She was drunk with adoration—the wine which, once but tasted, puts in the heart a thirst that can never be slaked, puts in the brain a madness that can never be cured. And she was not merely tasting; she was drinking, drinking deep. "I *am* the Mother-Light!" Did not the divine voice of the multitude proclaim it?

"Hear us, Mother! Heal us!"

Thousands on thousands of eyes blazing at her a belief that made it impossible for her to doubt herself.

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Thousands on thousands of hearts enthroning, exalting, worshipping her. She extended her long arms, her long white hands with their strong palms and fingers. All heads bowed. There fell a silence so profound that the sound of the faint wind in the fringes of trees along the distant edges of the lawns came distinctly, like a sigh of adoring ecstasy from nature itself. And that bright banner—how its jubilant tossing thrilled her! And those oceans of light pouring around and through her!

Then, out at the huge wide-flung doors of the Hall of The Light rolled an enormous billow of solemn music—the cathedral-organ echoing and confirming the divine decree of the multitude. She slowly lowered her arms, and with a last radiant look at the kneeling throngs, stepped backward, was gone from their view. As she re-entered the salon, Mr. Casewell and Hinkley swung the windows shut. Through them came the booming of the organ, drowned presently in a delirious shout—the hallelujahs of those intoxicated believers. At those sounds, her bosom swelled. “*I am the Mother-Light!*” she said to herself, as convinced as the most fanatical of the children of The Light.

She heard a cry—between a groan and a shriek. It snatched her mask from her even before she was conscious that she knew whence it came. She half-turned—in the door leading to Ann Banks’s bedroom stood

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an old woman, so bent, so wrinkled that she seemed some devil's travesty upon old age. The face was writhing and the eyes were streaming hate toward her.

"Ann Banks!" she gasped.

"Impious wretch!" screamed the old woman, tottering toward her, with fingers working and head wagging in a palsy-like motion. "Take off that robe! Albert! Hinkley! Tear it from her!"

Mr. Casewell rushed toward Ann Banks, put himself in front of her, hid her from Maida. "Ann! Ann!" he exclaimed in a voice of entreaty.

She flung herself toward him. "How *dare* you call *me* that!" she screamed. "I am the Mother-Light! Bow! Bow! On your knees, blasphemer!"

He sank to his knees, and Maida saw her again—and shrank and cowered. Not for all those years had Ann Banks been accustomed to adoration without acquiring majesty. Even in her dishevelment, with the least exalted of passions rending her, she still had the power to show through her wrecked body the haughtiness of her soul.

Suddenly she clutched at her throat, staggered. From her lips came a wail of despair. "Oh, my God!" she cried. "I *am* mortal! How I suffer—how I suffer!" And shaking with terror of threatening death, she dragged herself to Maida, sank at her feet, caught at the train of the gold-embroidered robe of the Mother-

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Light. She kissed the folds with mumbling lips. "I'm only an old woman," she muttered. "You are the Mother-Light! But some day you may be as I am now. I suffer—I suffer! And they won't send for a doctor, though I beg them to. Mother-Light, I am an old woman—too sick and weak for faith. Send for a doctor. Show mercy, as you hope to have mercy shown you some day."

Maida sank into a chair, covering her face with her hands.

"She's out of her mind," murmured Hinkley in her ear.

Maida shuddered and sprang to her feet. "You will do as she wishes!" she commanded. "She must have a doctor."

"Impossible," pleaded Hinkley in a low voice—Mr. Casewell had lifted Ann Banks and was leading her away. "Think what that would mean. The doctors are bitterest against us, eagerest to destroy us."

"She *shall* have a doctor!" said Maida inflexibly. "I shall go for one myself if *you* do not."

Mr. Casewell had laid Ann Banks upon the sofa—she was in a stupor again. He advanced to Maida and Hinkley. "Very well," he said to her. "You are right. The matter can be arranged."

"She must have a doctor—at once," repeated Maida.

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“As soon as he can be brought from New York,” replied Mr. Casewell. “Hinkley will telegraph for Doctor Thorndyke immediately. I must stay here—with her.” And he gazed sorrowfully toward the piteous figure upon the lounge.

Maida looked at him suspiciously. “How will I know that they are bringing a real physician?” she said to herself. Then she asked: “Who is Doctor Thorndyke?”

“He is my grandnephew,” replied Mr. Casewell, and his bearing made her ashamed of her suspicion. “He is young, but one of the distinguished surgeons in New York—and a good physician. I send for him because there is a possibility that he may not betray us—if—” He did not finish, but after a long look of entreaty, said to her: “I studied medicine in my youth. I assure you that, looking at her case from the worldly standpoint, nothing can be done for her, absolutely nothing. Can you not take my assurance and spare us the—the sin?”

Maida lowered her eyes and flushed. “If I did,” she said in a low voice, “and if—if—anything—should happen, I should feel that I had committed a crime.”

Without another sign of protest Mr. Casewell went to the table and wrote. “Here, Hinkley,” he said. “Take this to the telegraph office in Trenton, yourself.

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And you'd better wait there until he comes—he'll leave New York by the first train."

Hinkley went, and Mr. Casewell returned to Ann Banks. Tenderly as a mother, he took the old woman in his arms and bore her toward her bedroom. Maida, left alone, wearily dragged herself back to her own sitting-room. With her hands clasped behind her head she stared dully into vacancy. She was worn out, heart-sick—and she loathed herself. "I—Maida Hickman—Maida Claflin"—she said slowly, half aloud—"the daughter of *my* mother and *my* father—I sunk to *this!* I must be out of my mind—out of my mind!" In a passion—as when one tries to convince an obstinate person by sheer force—she tore down her hair from the up-piled puffs to a shimmering bronze shower about her shoulders and to her waist, and below; she ripped and wrenched the black robe from her body; she trampled it under foot. Then she threw herself into a great chair, and let the storm rage itself out in sobs and tears.

Presently she heard a rustling. She lifted her head, started up. It was Molly. "What is it, Molly?" she cried, terrified by the expression of the girl's face. "Is she——"

But Molly had fallen at her feet. "Forgive me, Mother-Light!" she begged. "Forgive me. I doubted. I—I——"

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Maida caught her by the arms and rudely raised her. "Don't do that," she said sharply. "Don't kneel to me."

But Molly freed herself and was again upon her knees. "I must! I must!" she cried. "You don't understand. But you *will*—you *will*. Mother-Light!"

Maida dropped into her chair, power and desire to protest vanishing. "What do you mean, Molly?" she asked, dazed.

"This afternoon," Molly went on in a broken, breathless way, "I came in here—and looked. They told me long ago that you— Oh, I thought I believed them, and yet I couldn't! And I was wretched between loving you and believing and doubting and—came here—looked in your dressing room—and I saw you—when you didn't know—when you were——"

Maida flamed scarlet—her face, her bare neck and shoulders, even her arms. And she felt as if her skin from head to foot were afire.

"And," Molly went on, "though I loved you—oh, nothing, *nothing* could make me stop loving you—still, it seemed so—so— You understand what I thought and felt."

Maida had hidden her face in her arms. "You were right, Molly," she said in a choked voice.

"No! No! I was wrong. I was wicked. I set up

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my own wicked mind against The Light. They had told me the Mother-Light was passing from Ann Banks to you—how you had been miraculously found when it was revealed that the Mother-Light would pass from Ann Banks. But you seemed so lovable and human and—and *near*, that it was hard to believe——”

“I’m not so bad as you thought,” said Maida, her face still hidden. “I almost convinced myself.”

“You are, you are!” exclaimed Molly. “This afternoon, I was in the crowd on the lawn, my heart full of sinful thoughts. And you came out on the balcony. And suddenly the sin passed from me, and The Light shone clear again. As you stood there I knew, just as they all knew, that it was the Mother-Light. And I fell on my knees. And I saw—yes, I saw there with my own eyes—afterward—more than fifty who had come, sick and suffering—and they had all been healed by you.”

Maida sat erect, a far-away look in her face, her lips apart, her breath coming quickly.

“One man”—Molly was saying—“he was blind. And he saw you—and then saw everything. Oh, you should have heard his cries of happiness as he looked round and said: ‘The sky! The trees! The people!’ And then his eyes fell on his daughter—she had been a baby when he last saw her, and she was now a beautiful woman. Oh, Mother-Light! You should have heard

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his sob when he saw her face." Molly, sitting on the floor at her feet, wept with joy at the recollection of the joy she had seen.

Maida looked dreamily down at her. "I—healed—them?" she said slowly.

"Yes—you—you." Molly clasped her hands and gazed up at her adoringly. "The Light that lives in you."

Maida sighed. "I'm tired and confused," she murmured. Then she bent and pressed Molly's head against hers. "Dear Molly!" she cried.

Molly helped her undress, sat beside her bed, watching her while she slept the sleep of exhaustion. When she awoke after three hours, she did not stir but lay with her hands clasped behind her head, gazing up into the hollow of the canopy. Presently she said to Molly: "Will you go and ask how she is?"

Molly soon returned. "She has not recovered consciousness—and will not," she reported. "Her soul is slowly——"

As Molly hesitated, Maida without looking at her, said: "She is—dying?"

"No," replied Molly, the light of the faith bright in her eyes. "Her soul is casting aside its worn-out shell. It is passing into you."

"I don't understand," said Maida, a feeling that was both dread and awe stealing over her.

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“Nor do I,” was Molly’s answer. “We don’t understand any of the great vital things—love and life and faith. We just accept them.”

“We just accept them,” repeated Maida. “We just accept them.”

XI

AT eleven she sent Molly to inquire for the fourth time. The doctor is here, was Mr. Casewell's message, and there will be nothing further to-night. Molly went away to bed; but she waited on in the silence and aloneness peopled with the clamors and creatures of the morbid fancy of her overstrained nerves. When, toward one o'clock, through this unreality there came the more awful reality of a knock upon the hall door, she leaped and shut her teeth together hard to suppress a cry. It was a tap rather than a knock, so gentle was it—one of those faint sounds that at certain times echo in the ear and through the chambers of the brain as the loudest din would not. Panting, she stood near the door. The tap came again. "She is dead," it said. "She is dead," Maida whispered. Then she called: "Who's there?" and wondered how her voice could sound so calm and steady.

"Casewell," was the answer.

She unlocked the door and, to give herself more time to regain composure, turned after she had said "Come in," and was on her way to the sofa at the opposite side of the room when he entered. She seated herself,

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made a pretext of arranging the loose coil of her thick, heavy braid, finally looked furtively at him. His eyes were mournfully upon her, in them the expression the thought of death puts in the eyes of the very sick and the very old only. He bent his head slowly in answer to the question in her glance. He seated himself in front of her. He was gazing straight ahead, almost in profile to her; she was studying him. Rising from his black, priestly gown, his magnificent head with its fringe of snowy hair and its great snowy beard seemed a marble bust, as changeless, as emancipated from time, almost as pallid—a marble image of some powerful leader of the ancient days when men reasoned little, believed much.

“You are alone?” he asked, after a moment. “Molly isn’t here?”

“She went at half-past eleven.”

Another interval of silence, then he said: “Doctor Thorndyke is spending the night in Hinkley’s apartment.”

“Did he see—her—before the—the end?”

“No,” was his reply. “I used my best judgment. She was eighty-nine years old. There was nothing the matter with her except in the mind—the soul. It was perfectly plain that she was beyond medicine—miracle even. The stupor you saw did not pass.” He fixed his gaze upon her, waited until they were looking each

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straight at the other; then he said slowly and solemnly: "That was the final drawing of the blinds before the tenant left for the new house."

When she was at the Iowa University, she had seen the professor of chemistry pour a few drops of some harmless fluid into a glass vessel filled with another fluid, equally harmless and tranquil; instantly there had arisen a seething so furious that for the moment she had quailed in terror. So, now, as those few last words of Mr. Casewell's, said so tranquilly, dropped upon the apparent calm of her mind, there was instantly just such a tempest and frenzy—as if the atoms of her being had become possessed each of an independent will and had gone furiously to war with one another. She pressed her fingers upon her eyelids; she was shaking with a violent chill.

"The new house," he repeated, and his gaze rested with admiration and affection upon that splendid auburn crown of hers.

"Will Hinkley," she said, faintly. "I think I should like to see him."

"If you command," he answered. "But this innermost secret of our faith should be known to the fewest possible—to no one but myself and you."

"Me!" she exclaimed, shrinking. "But that was only for the one time—only for yesterday afternoon."

"For all time—for eternity," he answered. "The

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Light shines through you. You are the Mother-Light." And he stood, crossed his hands upon the bosom of his black robe; and his lips moved in the formula.

She half-started up in protest. But a power invisible seized her, drew her back into her seat; and the voice that had been so vague all her years of dreaming, now spoke to her clearly—"You *are* the Mother-Light!" The words of protest would not pass her lips. "It is so—so—strange," she stammered, instead. "I must have time. I am not *sure*."

"No one else—not even Hinkley—*knows* that she is gone," he continued, as if he had not heard her. "No one else ever shall know it. I told Doctor Thorn-dyke that I sent for him on a matter of family business. He has asked to be presented to you. I promised it—if he would stay over until to-morrow afternoon. He saw the Mother-Light once, about seven years ago—at a distance—at an apparition in The Hall. He wishes to see her again in circumstances which his skepticism regards as more favorable." And Mr. Casewell smiled, if a mingling of a gleam of triumph and a curl of scorn can be called a smile.

There was a long silence. She was deciding her "destiny," so she thought. As if what she would do had not been decided long, long before; as if the very temperament she was born with, the dominance of im-

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agination over reason, of heart over intellect, had not all but determined the decision in advance. It was a typical so-called "crisis"—one of those solemn-farce hearings before the court that is always "packed" by those twin arbiters of human destiny, heredity and circumstance.

Too late to go back, she said to herself; at least, I must wait. To go back now would be to betray and desert my friends. Clearly I must wait before going back. "Going back"—to what? As Maida Hickman, I have no place in the world. What little identity I used to have is wiped out. And how mysteriously! How strangely my whole life has developed to just this point. If it is not the work of some overruling power that I sit here, less of an individuality than *her* withered, abandoned shell, then there is no overruling power! If I am not the Mother-Light, if *her* identity has not passed to me, then I do not exist! To refuse to go forward is to ruin them, is to violate my own highest instincts and aspirations, is to throw away my chance to be of use in the world—my destiny!

Mr. Casewell, following the debate with her expression as his guide, now entered the current of her thought. "To go forward!" he exclaimed. "That means you enthroned and filling the world with light. I see millions released from the anguish of disease into the health of The Light. I see sin and pain banished

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—a new world—and you, the eternal and changeless Mother-Light.”

He had thrown all the energy of his leadership and magnetism into these words. And—“I must follow what light I have,” said she. “I must go forward. There is no other road for me—just now.”

“I knew The Light would lead in its own good time,” he said. And his marks of age and harassing anxiety faded; in their place returned the old confident content. “You will change to your own apartment to-night?” he suggested, rather than inquired. “It is ready for you.”

She thought a moment, her brain still working under the spell of his. Then she went into her dressing-room. She took from the large closet the clothing she would need—a night-dress of cream-colored silk with a dull gold sunburst embroidered in the lace collar on either side, and a dressing-gown of crimson silk with cords of dull gold braid. She put these on, and crimson slippers with a gold sunburst worked upon either instep. Without a glance into the mirror that seemed to lean toward her and demand it, she returned to the sitting-room. “Let us go,” she said.

They went by the blind door to the left of the mantel, along the passage, into the unused dressing-room in the Mother-Light’s apartment. There she stopped short. “Who planned this house?” she asked.

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“We did,” he replied “—she and I.” He felt what was in her mind, for he went on: “She ordered in these passages—and she had not then told me her secret—indeed, she was only beginning to dread it. She had me make these and many other preparations against the time when *The Darkness* might claim the part of her that was its own.”

He unlocked and partly opened the door into the bed-room of the *Mother-Light*. She had never seen it; but she was not noting its magnificence; her eyes were searching, searching. “In another part of the apartment,” he said, watchful of, sensitive to, every shift of her thoughts. “I thought it best not to bring her back here yesterday.”

She sank into a chair—her nerves seemed to be in that unstrung state in which nothing makes an impression upon them. He turned off all the lights but the shaded electric lamp on the night-stand. “You will sleep,” he assured her, looking that serene tenderness which, more than any other of the fine elements in his character, appealed to her love and trust. “May *The Light* shine in you ever—Amen!” And he was withdrawing by the door into the rose-lighted salon.

Her courage seemed to be following him out of the room. “But if I should—should need you,” she said, keeping her nervousness under the surface. “I’m not brave—and—it will be—lonely.”

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“I shall be in the next room the rest of the night, or near it,” he answered. “If you should wish anything, a ring, a call even— But, you will sleep.”

Alone, she looked about her, studying her surroundings minutely. The weariness, the languor had disappeared; her eyes, her hearing, all her senses were fairly aching with sensitiveness to impressions. She seated herself near the bed, which was heavily and richly curtained and stood on a raised platform to one side of the center of the almost vast room. Not there, not anywhere in the room, could she see or imagine the slightest sign of a previous occupant. She felt as if she had merely been assigned to different quarters in that palace. How faint the impression human beings make even upon their most intimate surroundings; a few things changed about, a few things tucked away, and the home, the bed-room itself, is ready for another.

Besides the door to the rose-lighted salon and the one by which she had entered, there were two others. She tried them—both were locked. She returned to her chair, sat as wide awake as if she had just risen from a long sleep. Thoughts showered like drops of molten metal upon her brain, making it quiver to the uttermost end of every nerve. “Where is *she*?” she asked half-aloud, glancing first toward one, then toward the other of the two locked doors. “In there? Or, in there?” She turned her chair round so that she could lie back in

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it and still see both doors—Ann Banks might emerge either in the flesh or in the spirit and bring her to frightful judgment, and her instinct had ever been to face danger.

“May The Light shine in me!” she muttered. And somehow fear, which she had felt creeping, creeping across that great room toward her, seemed to be halted—not exorcised but halted, to watch her from afar.

She suffered acutely from the silence—profound, mystery-fraught, just such an utter calm as might well precede some dreadful act. Then there came a sound, faint, far, the more terrible because it was human. She sat erect, her gaze leaping from door to door. Again that sound—even fainter, but unmistakable. It came, or seemed to come, through the farthest door. She stood; she hesitated, for an instant only. Hers was the courage that fears fear vastly more than it fears danger. She advanced toward the door; she noticed for the first time that the key was in the lock. Now she could hear a voice within—Mr. Casewell’s?

She softly turned the key and opened the door. She was looking into a small ante-room; beyond, through the space between curtain and door frame, there was a bright light. She went to the curtain and listened. Now she could hear sobs. She widened the space; she was on the threshold of a handsomely fur-

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nished dressing-room. She looked, and stiffened with horror. Facing her, at the opposite end of the room, standing in just such a space as that in which she was standing, was Ann Banks, all in white, gazing at her. An instant, and she saw that she was seeing not Ann Banks, but herself—in a long mirror against the opposite wall. Next, she saw Mr. Casewell beside a couch, on it a drape of crimson embroidered with dull gold sunbursts; in the drape, in the pall, the outlines of a human form. His clasped hands were pressing his long white beard against his chest. His powerful shoulders were shaking and tears were coursing down his cheeks.

This unfathomable man mourning beside the body of his companion and friend of half a century swept away all her other emotions in a surge of sympathy. This homely human scene—death and grief. Mr. Casewell looked up, looked into the mirror, saw her. With a wild exclamation he was upon his feet, was facing her, shrinking and at the same time stretching out his hands imploringly. “Ann! Ann!” he quavered. “Speak to me—your old comrade in the faith!”

“It is I, Mr. Casewell,” said Maida, advancing a step. “I could not sleep. I heard you. I came.”

He rubbed his trembling hand over his lofty bald brow. He stared uncertainly at her, then down at the crimson pall shaped to the body beneath. “Yes—yes

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—of course,” he muttered. Then with sudden elation, “What a test! The Cause is safe!”

Side by side they stood looking down at the dead woman. He drew the pall from her face—it was an old, old face, but full of power and dignity—and so calm! The tumult that had been raging in Maida for hours with hardly a lull rapidly stilled. And there stole around her and through her that tranquillity which ever emanates from the face of the dead to hush all in its presence, even the maddest passion, into peace.

“Fifty years ago to-day we—she and I—founded the Church of The Light,” said Mr. Casewell to himself rather than to her. “She was a wonderful woman then—and wonderful almost to the last. And so beautiful, so sweet. She won the hearts before she won the souls. She breathed the majesty and beauty of the truth. She was what you will be when The Light fills you as the sunshine fills the diamond.”

She returned to the bedroom of the Mother-Light, again closing and locking the door between. With all the electric lamps full on, she half-reclined among the cushions of the lounge, reading Mr. Casewell’s latest book, one she had helped him with—The Light Is Life! But the dead face, the dead form, of Ann Banks, which had had so soothing an effect upon her a little while before, now floated between her and her book like a tormenting doubt—more, a menace. After many efforts,

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after using all the formulæ of the faith for exorcising the evil suggestions of The Darkness, she flung away the book and sprang up. "I can't endure it here!" she cried. At that proclamation of surrender the infinite silence seemed to concentrate a phantom of The Darkness, and she fled, it pursuing—through the unused dressing-room and into and down and along the passage to her old sitting-room. She pushed open the blind-door, entered and was about to close it behind her when her glance happened to fall upon the floor in front of the fireplace. She stood unable to move or even to utter the fright and amazement that opened her throat and lips.

The rug was rolled back almost to the middle of the room. Where it had been there yawned a large square hole; a trap-door lay back, propped half-way by a chair. She was staring into a dimly lighted cellar where some one was stirring—some one, or some *thing*. A few seconds, and she could see into the depth distinctly. A short flight of skeleton stairs; beyond it, the back, the tremendously broad and powerful back of a man—his head was beyond her view; his body was between her and the small lantern which was the cellar's only light. He was in some sort of long black coat, its skirts gathered up—a cassock. "Mr. Casewell!" she said under her breath.

The cellar was floored with stone; two large slabs

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were turned over behind him; there were several barrels—she could see five. Now he was standing erect, was fumbling in the bosom of his cassock. Now he was bending over for the lantern. Now he had taken a position where she could see his profile—he was holding up the lantern to illuminate the page of a book. It looked like *The Way of The Light*. Now he was reading from the book—without sound, though she knew from the motions of his great white beard that his lips were moving. The tears were rolling down his cheeks, and book and lantern were trembling. At his feet was an oblong opening in the flagging, half filled with earth.

Suddenly a blackness lifted from the cellar, swift and noiseless as a spirit. It struck her full in the face, a soft, vague, horror-fraught blow. She screamed. But that terror instantly vanished before one which froze her into silence and rigidity.

At her scream she saw Mr. Casewell stiffen into a statue. A second, and his head seemed to be recovering the power of motion. It moved, it turned slowly, as if seeking the source of that sound. Now the light of the lantern was strong upon his features. His expression stopped her heart. For, its fanatic ferocity made her know he had doomed to immediate death the eavesdropper upon that innermost secret of the Church of *The Light*; he was looking about that he might

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pounce with all the fury of his fanaticism and all the strength of his mighty frame—might pounce, and kill.

As she stared down, watching him, waiting for him to see her and spring, something grazed her cheek—a touch as light and as awful as a brush from the wing of a fiend. “Help!” she screamed, flinging out her arms and staggering back into the passage. She fell against the wall, slid weakly down to the floor, lost consciousness.

When she came to, Mr. Casewell was bending over her, was bathing her temples with a wet towel—she was lying on a sofa in her sitting-room; round and round the lighted chandelier were circling two bats. Before she recovered the train of events, she had smiled bravely up into his tenderly, anxiously, reassuring countenance. “What a fright you gave me,” he said. “You are not hurt?”

She shook her head and raised herself to a sitting posture.

“Are you afraid of the bats?” he asked.

“Not now that I know what they are,” she answered. She looked nervously at him—it was impossible to believe that the expression of doom she had seen—or did she only fancy it?—could ever have formed upon those benevolent features. But she went on to explain, in a half-apologetic way: “I grew uneasy in—the—the

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bedroom. So, I thought I'd come down here. I didn't know—I didn't intend——”

He patted her gently. “It doesn't matter,” he said. “My fear was that some one—some outsider—My nerves, too, are unstrung.”

“I will go back up there—if you wish,” she went on. “I am all right now—and a good deal ashamed of my cowardice.”

“No—stay here if you prefer,” was his answer. “I had almost finished. You are sure——”

“It's all past,” she interrupted. “Don't—don't bother about me. I feel that my hour of trial is over.”

He descended into the cellar. From where she now was, she could not see him at work, could only see occasionally the hugely exaggerated shadow of his head and beard or head and shoulders loom on the patch of cellar wall that was within her vision. But she could hear—and imagine. She knew he had not had time to dig that grave. “It must have been dug when the house was built,” she said to herself. “And it and the barrels of earth have been waiting there for years, underneath me all these months.” And like a cloud of bats more horrid than those two alternately circling and hanging from the moulding, there swept through her fancy a cloud of phantoms that made her nerves react in alternations of fever and chill. And she muttered to herself, over and over again: “The wages of

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sin is death! What was *her* sin? What was the sin through which The Darkness betrayed her? Is it in me, also?"

When he came up the steps and stood, head and shoulders out of the cellar, the phantoms vanished. For, that face shed serenity and faith upon her heart; it was indeed the face of the First Apostle. And out of the subsiding storm of thought and emotion there rose a rock upon which she felt she could stand secure, a rock of faith in herself and in her mission, a rock founded upon her faith in him, in his goodness and strength and his love for and belief in her.

"It is finished," he said mournfully. And he came on up to the floor and closed the trap and rolled back the rug.

"You have left the lantern," she suggested, unconscious how that suggestion opened a passage into her sub-conscious self where was the real work-shop of motive and action.

"Yes—I put it where I got it," he replied. "I have omitted nothing. There is not a trace except the earth on these boots. And that will soon be gone."

She gave a sigh of relief. "The faith is secure!" she exclaimed.

"May The Light shine ever!" he rejoined.

She rose. "I think I have vanquished The Darkness. I will go back to—my apartment." And her

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nerves were steady, her mind free and clear. She felt that into the grave of Ann Banks had gone all of herself that belonged to the past.

As he held open the blind-door for her, he said: "I am glad that you came here. It has made me, and perhaps you, too, realize how brave and strong are the hands that now hold the standard of The Light."

She smiled sadly. "I am not strong yet," she said. "But I shall be. And it makes me the stronger to feel that I have you to lean upon. Yes—I *shall* be strong. Good night. May The Light shine in us ever!"

"Amen!" he said, bending his head to her reverently.

And the Mother-Light went to her apartment, and slept.

XII

AFTER a cold bath, she stood at the long mirror near the pool arranging her bronze hair in the puffs and waves. She felt like the warm wind that was dancing in from among the trees, through the room and out among the trees and blossoms again. It was one of her days when the joy of the sense of life cleared her sky to the horizon, and beyond. Whenever had she felt so young? Not since childhood; not even then, for childhood had not this superb consciousness of its own well-being, this power to linger upon and intensify and delight in each sensation of happiness. It was more than hope, it was realization itself, that was laughing in her eyes, glowing on her soft white skin, giving her the most exquisite joy in the liveness and freedom of her movements.

“Who would care for disembodied immortality?” she thought. “It originated with some one who had forgotten, or had never known, youth and health. To live—that means to feel.”

Under her spell of exhilaration, the things that had been darkest became lightest. “How is it possible to doubt?” she said to herself. “Don’t I feel the miracle

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at work within me? Don't I see it before my eyes?" And the bright being reflected from that mirror certainly had only a remote resemblance to the harried and haggard creature who—long, long ago, and in another world—fainted and fell, and died. "Yes—died!" she repeated. "The very walls of the house have been made over for the new tenant."

Now she understood that former life of hers. It was clearly her apprenticeship to this her destiny. She recalled proof upon proof—the abnormal sensitiveness of her childhood, the passionate religious emotions, the sometimes glorious, sometimes hideous, always vivid, reality of the unseen world; her skepticism that had yet never been able to shake her belief that The Mystery had a clue, and that she must not rest until she found it; the sense of aloofness and apartness; the strange drifting away of all attachments—of old associations and acquaintances, of friends and relatives, of parents and husband, of her child. All now worked into the making of a consistent pattern. The puzzle of conflicts internal and external, of bereavements and sufferings, was solved. The apparently disconnected lines and figures had gathered together into unity; the completed design read: "The Mother-Light."

"The Light!" she cried, giddy with the joy of it. "The Light! It centers in me. I am the Mother-Light!" And she went to the side window, to im-

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merse herself there in the ocean of sunshine, to let all the nerves of all her senses revel in that rapturous sea—for, light had always had for her perfume and voice, and tangibility, even, as well as power to mount the imagination on the soaring glance. And as she stood there, as her eyes sparkled and dreamed while her fancy dived and darted in those glittering waves that stretched away to the shores of infinity, she did indeed look the child of light. Light, the essence of Life; and she, the essence of Life and Light!

At noon she had dressed, and was entering the salon of the rose-light. It was no longer rose-lighted; the great windows were clear of those heavy curtains and day was streaming in, softened only by the lace close against the sashes. With no sense of strangeness, she seated herself on the canopied sofa of the Mother-Light. Yesterday, last night, the events of the early morning hours—she remembered them all clearly, but between them and her an eternity seemed to sweep, and across it she saw them as one sees at the far horizon the last black edge of the passed storm.

She pressed the electric button on the table at her elbow, unconscious that she did it with the motion of arm and hand she had seen Ann Banks make a hundred times. Hinkley hurried in from the work-room, and his obvious amazement at this summons from the bell used only by the Mother-Light showed her that Mr.

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Casewell had not forewarned him, even by hint. As his gaze fell upon her, he stared wildly, lowered his head in a reverent bow. She thought he had recognized her; but she saw she was mistaken when at her salutation—"May The Light shine in you, ever!"—he started even more violently, and looked at her astounded.

"Maida!" he exclaimed. "You!"

She returned his gaze without a change of countenance, and slowly he comprehended that the Miracle of the Transfer had been completed. After a strained silence, she repeated with pointed emphasis: "May The Light shine in you, ever!"

He had collected himself. "Amen!" he said, lowering his eyes and bending his head respectfully.

"There is a doctor here—a relative of Mr. Casewell's," she began—her voice still formal.

He bowed.

"Mr. Casewell has asked me to receive him," she continued. "Will you bring him, please?"

Hinkley bowed again. He was about to withdraw when he glanced toward the windows and the inpouring daylight. "Shall I arrange the room—as usual?" he asked.

"I prefer it as it is," was her answer, after reflecting. "The more light in The Light hereafter, the better."

Her tone was less formal, and his face brightened. They looked each at the other, smiled with a reminis-

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cence of the old friendliness. He left, and she took up the book on the table—The Way of The Light. She opened it at random, read:

When the Mind comes each morning from its bed-chamber in the Soul, it should find its ante-room thronged with Good Thoughts, eager to rush forward and greet it; and its every moment of waking should be passed in their company. If they surround it, they form a charmed circle which Evil cannot penetrate.

She read this again. It seemed a message direct to her. Yes, she must apply it. She must keep her thoughts full of her work, of her duties and responsibilities. She must maintain the "charmed circle"; then doubts and vanities and longings and passions from the world, from The Darkness, would never penetrate to her.

The work-room doors opened and closed. She put down the book and slowly turned her head. Two men were approaching—in advance, Hinkley; close behind him, somewhat vague in the shadows of that part of the room, another—taller, fairer, with gaze upon her, where Hinkley's head was bowed. Now she could see a notably strong, erect young man, with head and face and poise that suggested the edged energy and drive of the axe-blade.

The face swam before her eyes and Hinkley's voice—"Doctor Thorndyke, Madam"—seemed to come

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from a vast distance. She sank against the cushions, into such small shadow as the canopy cast. The young man, bowing respectfully, regarding her with keen, frank, curious eyes, was he whom Maida Hickman had met in Twenty-third Street.

But before he could possibly have noted her flash of consternation, it vanished. That reserve force which flies to the rescue when anything vital is imperiled had responded without summons. She accepted fate's challenge; she put her safety to instant test. "May The Light shine in you," she said in her slow, sweet voice.

At the sound he started. She leaned forward into the full light and smiled graciously upon him—the rising moon could not seem more tranquil. "Won't you be seated?" she continued, indicating a chair near her.

Hinkley, behind him, made a gesture of protest—to remind her that it was not the custom for the Mother-Light to let strangers sit in her presence. She looked steadily at Hinkley, then significantly toward the door. He hesitated, his face darkened; he retreated, but only to the farthest window.

"You have been here before?" she said to Doctor Thorndyke.

The sound of her voice brought again to his face that startled, searching look—and she liked it, even while she dreaded it. "No—that is—yes," he stam-

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mered, his strong handsome form uneasy in the chair, the color showing in his clear skin.

From somewhere—perhaps from natural audacity, edged on by her high spirits and a first-glance strong physical attraction toward him—came a temptation to tease him and to provoke fate. “Ought I to remember you?” she asked. “It seems to me I have seen you. Do you remember?”

He reddened, looked at her in astonishment and confusion. Apparently he decided that he had not heard aright, for with an effort he said: “My senses seem to be playing me strange tricks this morning. Pardon me—I am not sure I quite understood your questions.”

“Did you not say you had been here before?”

“Oh!” he exclaimed; and he seemed relieved. “I had forgotten what I said. Indeed, I’ve been in a daze from the moment I saw you—in the shadow—and heard your voice. Something in your look—when I could not see you distinctly—and perhaps in the sound of your voice, awakened an agitating memory.”

While he was explaining thus in detail, partly through embarrassment, partly through an unconscious desire to show her, and himself, that his embarrassment was not “superstitious” awe, she was studying him from the shelter of her shading hand. She had studied him once before. But then, the darkness of the rainy street enveloped them and she regarded him as an envoy

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of her merciless enemy, the world, come to demand final, complete surrender. Now, her thoughts were as different as her point of view. Vividly their last meeting came back to her—misery tracking her like a famished bloodhound; at last, hope gone and all courage except the courage of despair that nerved her to look about for some not too cruel hand to give her the finishing stroke; how she had pressed the knife upon this man, had bade him strike; how he had flung it away, had said: “Sister! Let me help you.”

Her eyes dimmed; her heart went out to him. Yes, there was at least one incident of that dreadful dream-past that she did not wish to forget in this beautiful dream-present. Thus, her mind, far from hindering, spurred on the attraction toward him that stirred as she looked. For, she liked his manner and his voice, his shoulders and the poise of his head, the way the thoughtfulness of brow and eyes and the sweet expression round his mouth redeemed from coarseness, without subduing, his intense masculine vitality.

“It was some years ago,” he was saying. “But I did not have the honor of being presented to you. I only saw you at—an apparition, I believe you call it—in the Hall of The Light.”

“You are a nephew of Mr. Casewell?”

“A grandnephew.”

“But not of his faith?”

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“Not of any faith,” he replied. “I’ve had little time to think of the soul in the Hereafter. I’ve been so busy with the body on the thorns of the Here.”

“That is our occupation, too,” said she. “To remove the thorns—now.”

“It is curious, isn’t it, and inspiring, too,” he suggested, “how, at bottom, all men, whether they know it or not, are of the same religion. Each in his own way believes, and—if he is wise—tries to live, the great gospel—the Gospel of Work.”

“The day’s work!” she assented. “I think Shakespeare should not have lauded sleep, but work, as the balm and restorer. It is work that gives to the day content and to the night the only sleep that satisfies.”

She saw his covert hostility relax as she spoke. And it was in the tone of a man to a woman who attracts him as a woman that he presently said: “The world will be a vastly different place when its toilers are emancipated from the slavery of the task into the freedom of work—when its idlers and potterers and parasites learn that not work but the absence of it is the curse and the disgrace.”

“And the women, too,” she said. “Or, do you include them in potterers and parasites?”

“And the women, too,” he answered, with a smile which suggested that she had guessed aright.

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They were looking each at the other friendlily as they rapidly lowered the barriers of strangeness and reserve. "But," she went on, "work must have an object, and *there* is the province of religion. It gives the two great gospels—the gospel of work and the gospel of hope. Of what value is either without the other?"

"True," he admitted, at once somewhat on his guard again. "As men lose faith in the Hereafter they go to their work with heavier and heavier hearts. One must work hard and not lift his eyes, if he is to escape the paralyzing sense of futility. But—" He hesitated to adventure the hazardous ground.

"But?" she encouraged.

"As to religion, how can we *know*?"

She smiled. "You are a man of science," she said. "All your sciences—your physics and mathematics—rest upon propositions that are impossible, are even self-contradictory, do they not?"

He admitted that it was so—admitted with an appreciative smile for her ingenuity.

"Your expression tells me that you guess what I am about to say," she continued. "You assume those impossible propositions. You base all your scientific structure upon them. Yet for the foundations of the hope that alone makes life explainable as other than an absurdity, you demand what you call certainty. You demand for faith foundations which you cannot give

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science—you scientists who can't prove that two and two are four without assuming first a hundred impossible ultimate propositions."

She was smiling; he was laughing—and thinking, and admiring.

"We," she went on, "prove immortality as you prove that the sum of all the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles—by proving that every other supposition is absurd."

"But," he objected, "there is proof positive that death is the end of life—of life as an identity. Open any grave. Watch at any death-bed."

"Oh—death!" she exclaimed. "But ours is not a religion of death—of a life hereafter. The Light is not a promise but a fulfilment. Its kingdom is of this world—the world everlasting. It is the faith of the true religion and the true science."

He was silent.

"I am glad," she said, "that you are investigating our faith."

He showed surprise with a faint gleam of satire in it. "I confess I—I am not conscious of any desire to—to make a careful study of *any* faith."

"Then why are you here?" she inquired.

He was plainly disconcerted.

"Surely not out of idle curiosity? A busy man, like you!"

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He reddened under this direct attack, the keener for its good humor. "It is so, nevertheless," he said, at bay. "I wished to see—Your religion hinges on the immortality, the physical immortality of—of yourself. I saw you some years ago. I wished to see you again."

"And now that you have seen?" Her eyes were bright with amusement.

"Candidly, I don't know what to think," was his answer after a pause, and a long, steady, searching look at her which she withstood tranquilly.

"But what will you *say* when you go back to your men of science?"

His glance shifted. "I can only tell them that you are as your followers allege, and that my granduncle is as he was thirty years ago—when I first remember him distinctly—and that my cousin, Miss Ransome, looks now as she did when I used to call on her at Miss Wilkinson's School in Fifth Avenue—twelve years ago."

"And there you will stop! And that is as far as your passion for thorn-destroying will carry you! You will go on encouraging your fellow scientists to try to hide the truth from mankind and to try to wrest our truth from us."

"It is unfair to corner me," he pleaded. "I cannot argue here or—" almost inaudibly—"with you."

"Why not?" She opened her eyes wide. "We are not sensitive about our faith."

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“Then, too, your point of view and ours radically differ. To you, our science seems folly. To us, your disdain of science seems—irrational.”

“And so it is,” she astonished him by admitting. “Irrational—wholly irrational.”

“Then you do not try to convince reason?”

“No—no—no,” she said almost passionately. “We appeal to the supreme authority.”

“But is not reason the supreme authority?”

“You *say* that. You fancy you believe it,” she answered. “But what do you really believe? What ‘must’ do you obey?”

“Reason’s, I hope.”

She laughed a little. “I venture to believe that you are better than your creed,” she said. “Reason has produced the world as it is, a world in revolt against the supreme authority—Love! It hasn’t been your Science, coldly seeking to destroy man’s ideals, that keeps alive the little good there is. That good has come through Love, and its instincts. Your Science, your devil-god Science, always putting fresh weapons in the hands of the few to enslave the many. Your Science has given the club, the spear, the sword, the gun, and now the machine—the machine to which the few bind the many for sordid, withering toil. Always some new weapons for tyranny! Whenever Love has been about to free mankind, in has stepped Science to prevent it.

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For centuries your Science's strongest weapon was theology, which it used to pervert a gospel of love into a gospel of hate. And now that that weapon grows blunt and rusty, your Science has taken up philosophy and is laboring to convince the strong that the material is the all, that the life fullest of selfish pleasures is the wisest life. Your Science teaches the few favored with intellect how to make slaves of the many, and tells them that to do so is right!"

"Because men abuse—" he began.

"Oh, I don't say Science hasn't a place," she went on, "but not the place of master. It is an insolent servant seeking to seize the household of humanity and reduce it to kitchen-level. It is Caliban at the throat of Prospero. But—in spite of your Science, Love is triumphing! It is Love that has implanted the instinct for the brotherhood of man, Love that bids the clever forbear from enslaving the dull." She stood, and a radiance that seemed to him divine streamed from all her beauty. "Love is supreme! Love is The Light!"

He had risen also. Hinkley, at the distant window, had turned toward them, was regarding her with the expression of a devotee at the shrine. Thorndyke broke the silence. "Is *that* your religion?" he said, in a low voice and in a tone that made Hinkley scowl and blaze sullenly at him. "If it is, then it is mine also. Only, I never thought it out before."

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But she seemed not to hear. The fire was dying from her face, and she sank among the cushions again. She looked about her like one awakening from a dream. She only vaguely knew what she had been saying. Some power had seized her, had used her lips to utter its thoughts and words, and now it had released her. "What did you say?" she asked.

"I had never before realized it," he said. "True, there is no *reason* why the strong should spare the weak. There's no restraint but this irrational law of Love—an instinct which Reason analyzes away."

"Reason has explained away the religions that appealed to fear—they never held any but the cowardly in check. And now the issue is squarely joined—either Reason will destroy Love, or Love will reduce Reason to a docile and useful servant." She irradiated him with her sudden smile. "On which side do *you* fight?"

"I thank you, I thank you," he said. "I came here—I'm ashamed to confess what I thought. Your religion seemed to me only one more of the innumerable attempts to work upon the superstitious element in man. And——"

"So it is," she interrupted. "Our whole appeal is to the superstition in man—in me, in you, in all of us. To enlighten it, perhaps—but that is not important. To *use* it—that is the vital point. It's there. It can't be destroyed. Call it a weed, a poisonous weed,

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if you will. But it's a weed that contains the only medicine that will heal the soul. Ours is simply another of the countless efforts to distil that elixir—that love-potion.”

“I do not give in my allegiance to your faith,” he began, then interrupted himself with a smile. “That sounds as if I regarded my personal decision or opinion as of importance. But, believe me, I know it is important only to myself. I only speak my thoughts because you've done me the honor to invite it. So, I say I can't believe your religion. There are elements—appeals to what I regard as ignorance, which—do not attract me.”

“We make an instrument with which to convey truth to the ignorant, weak, human race—to men in the mass,” she said with good-humored satire, “and you reject the truth because you do not like the instrument that enables others to receive it. You forget that spiritual sight is as varying and uncertain as physical sight.”

“Then you don't insist that all who believe can live forever?” he asked.

“We insist only upon The Light—The Light, shining with different intensity and power according to the soul that it shines on. But”—she was smiling with raillery—“you profess to believe in development, and you are of a profession that daily uses, as its potent remedy, the power of the mind to ease the body. Yet

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you scoff at the idea that a mind could be so developed that it could banish death and disease and age from its body!"

"I do not scoff," he said—and again his voice made Hinkley wince and glower. "I came to scoff—I have been compelled to—to adore."

She caught her breath and that exuberant vitality of hers thrilled with a new intensity. "I have only shown you what was already, unconsciously, the law of your life." She did not realize until she had spoken the words how they sounded with the link of Maida Hickman's experience with him missing. She flushed, glanced at Hinkley hovering like a bird of ill omen. But she could not recall them. "May The Light shine in you—ever!" she added, with the dignity and solemnity of the Mother-Light. She took the copy of *The Way of The Light* from her table and held it out to him.

"Your book," he said.

Her book!—shame flung its scarlet over her cheeks and brow. "Not *my* book," she answered, casting a furtive glance at Hinkley and noting his sudden change from gloom to terror. "The book of *The Light—our* book," she went on. "I give it to you on one condition."

"I accept," he said.

"That you will read it three times—without the spectacles of cynicism."

"Them I never had," he replied. "And—I believe

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in The Light already, The Light as I see it in you." He had forgotten Hinkley, standing out of his sight. He had forgotten everything but the woman with a soul like her voice, with a voice like her face, with a face like haunting music heard in a dream. "May I venture to make a condition?"

Her eyes asked what it was and promised to grant it.

"That you will write in the book."

She took it and moved toward the desk at the east window. As he walked behind her, she felt his gaze upon her. His eyes, the faint flush in his cheeks, showed how acutely sensitive he was to the graceful motion of her form, adorned, not hidden, by those draperies of gauzy black and dull gold. And well they set off the splendor of that casque of shining, living bronze and the healthful pallor of her magnetic skin a-glow with the sense of him. She seated herself, wrote upon the fly-leaf of the book in the large angular hand in which all the documents and signatures of the Mother-Light were written or engraved: "The Law of The Light is Love."

He was standing beside her as she blotted this. Hinkley, greenish white above the black of his beard, came forward, caught Thorndyke's eye with a glance which plainly meant that it was time to go. "Thank you again," said Thorndyke, taking the book from the desk. His manner was formal to coldness in the effort to hide his struggle against emotions that strove to defy

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common-sense and conventionality. Her elbow was on the table and her long white fingers, rosy at the tips, were against her cheek. Her eyes were swimming and glistening; she was not looking at him but was a-quiver with the sense of his nearness.

“You must let me know what you think of our Book,” she said, and the new music in her voice grated along Hinkley’s nerves.

Again Thorndyke forgot Hinkley. “If I dare,” he answered, and his tone made his double meaning clear.

Both he and she winced as Hinkley’s harsh voice came with an almost sneering, “It would indeed call for all Doctor Thorndyke’s courage to proclaim it, if his eyes should be opened to The Light. Many brave men have fled from ridicule, and his fellow-doctors would not spare him.”

“Perhaps The Light, when it convinced me, would give me the courage to be frank,” replied Thorndyke.

She rose, and he bowed no less reverently than Hinkley as she lifted her hand and said: “May The Light shine in you.”

Long after the closing doors hid him, she could still see him, could still feel his presence. She had not heard Hinkley’s interrupting words; but his voice had cut into her dreaming like a finger thrust into a bubble. Smart-

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ing from the shock, as an awakened sleeper resents the noisy alarm bell, she stood at the window, gazing resentfully at the great crimson and gold banner burning against the sky above the Hall of Light. She had a defiant sense that somehow her more than royal prerogatives as Mother-Light had been infringed; and her resentment turned not against Hinkley personally but against all whom and which he, as an apostle of the faith, represented. "They must leave me free!" she said to herself. "I *must* be free!"

So preoccupied was she that she did not know Hinkley had re-entered until he was almost at her side. She turned to find his strange eyes like embers in a powder magazine. "Had you ever seen Doctor Thorndyke before?" he demanded, between his teeth.

She paled, but not with fear. The gleam of her eyes and the curve of her brows started up fear in him to struggle with his jealous rage. "I did not ring," she said in a voice that was dangerously calm.

He lowered his gaze, then his head.

"It is forbidden, I believe, to enter this salon without a summons—or to speak before I give the salutation. You forget——"

"Did *you* not forget, Mother-Light?" he muttered. And he performed the ceremonial of the name.

In that solemn pause the Power within made itself heard and felt. Her anger vanished in spite of herself.

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She *had* forgotten. Like the Israelites worshipping the golden calf with Sinai thundering above their heads and flashing before their eyes, she had defied the spiritual and had yielded to the cravings of the material. Her impulse was to confess it, but pride and the spectacle of Hinkley's almost trembling humility restrained her. Instead, she took the course of self-protection and said with a gentleness that softened the sting: "Gratitude puts me at your mercy, and you take advantage of it."

"I deserved that," he said, the red flooding his face. "Pardon me—and forgive me."

Self-reproach for having turned his just rebuke into a seeming of cowardly intrusion impelled her to put out her hand. But she did not dare—she must at any cost guard her future against such supervisions. "As the Mother-Light," she said, "I pardon you. But there can be no question of forgiveness between *us*." And she gave him the benediction. He bowed with the deepest humility and left her.

Her eyes went back to the bright banner. Now she wondered that she had let Thorndyke make such an overwhelming impression upon her. "I will not see him again," she thought, for, even in her changed mood, the vividness of her memory of him, of every detail of his face and manner and movements, warned her that she should not trust herself.

XIII

LATE that afternoon the strain of the previous day and night suddenly showed itself. She and Molly were walking in the garden of the west wing—she was swathed in a long crimson wrap that harmonized with and emphasized the strangeness of her head-dress and of her new beauty; and Molly was keeping a little apart from her instead of their having each an arm round the other's waist, as in their last walk together, less than two days before; and Molly's manner and, whenever she looked up at the Mother-Light, her glance, had a certain deference in them, a recognition of the Miracle of the Transfer that was without effort on her part and that constrained the Mother-Light even in thought as the etiquette of the court constrains the King.

Just as they were beginning to talk again with freedom, an enormous weariness abruptly halted her, body and mind—the imperious demand of health for rest. They returned and at the door of her bedroom she sent Molly away with, “No one is to disturb me, not even if I don't ring for days. It seems to me I ought to have a grave and an eternity properly to rest.”

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She dropped her clothing in a careless heap beside the bed. With a sigh of delight she felt the coolness of the fresh white silk night-gown ripple over her skin, rousing her nerves to one last keen sensation. She flung wide her windows, sank into the bed and drew the curtains that shut off the direct light. She was almost instantly asleep, and when she awoke it was only that she might enjoy the luxury of sinking softly to sleep again. "It doesn't matter what hour it is," she thought, comfortably, "or how long I've been sleeping."

When she awoke again, it was daylight. She remembered that it had been dark when she was last awake. Her head felt as if a weight were pressing upon it. She put up her hands, found, with a momentary sensation of surprise, the puffs and waves of the crown of the Mother-Light. In her eagerness for rest she had not paused to take down her hair. She sat up in bed and shook free the thick tresses of bronze. But she was too languid to braid them. Leaving pins and combs on the covers where she dropped them, she fell back and stretched herself out; and, lulled by softness and perfume and health and youth, she wandered away into a sleep that was profound yet deliciously conscious of its own delight. She dreamed she was dreaming with her head on a pillow of moss in a wonderful grove among the wild flowers of spring; and the ticking of the clock was the tinkle of a brook.

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At her third awakening she knew it was late in the afternoon. And interest in the world beyond her bed and its dreams was beginning to revive in her. But she lay nearly an hour longer, motionless, utterly contented, her unnoting gaze upon the hollow of the canopy, her mind ranging the whole of her life as one skims the pages of a read romance—skipping rapidly here, pausing there only to hasten on, omitting this or that dull or disagreeable passage altogether. Her thoughts wandered at last to Thorndyke, to circle, hover, alight, then rise and circle, hover and alight again. But his reality to her was drifting—as all realities beyond the moment that is were apt to drift—into the mystical haze which ever enveloped her mind and made life to her a succession of dreams within dreams.

It was five in the afternoon when she raised herself on her elbow, drew back the curtain and looked out into the room. The first object on which her glance lit was the black and gold gown of the Mother-Light cast upon the floor under the heap of linen and lace. She sprang from the bed and darted into the bathroom. And in three-quarters of an hour—half of it necessarily spent in making the elaborate arrangement of her hair—she was in the salon, was pressing the summons bell.

Hinkley responded, careful to keep his head bent until he had received the salutation. “Mr. Casewell,” he then said, “is busy with the departing delegates.

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He asked me to give you these, if you should ring." And he laid upon her table a mass of newspaper clippings.

"Please send Molly with something to eat, Will," she said.

He gave her a look of gratitude. "May I bring it myself?" he asked, snatching at the first small chance to show that he was appreciating her reward for his penitence.

"Do," she said, with her old friendly smile. "What are these?" And she took up the topmost cutting.

"The newspapers haven't done you justice," he replied. "Many of them are not even courteous. Journalism is the servant of The Darkness. Still, they couldn't hide the truth, the miraculous truth."

She looked at him vaguely. Then she noted the headlines. As he was withdrawing, she had gathered a handful of the clippings, was glancing from one to another with dilating eyes. Great headlines, profuse illustrations, column upon column of description of the astounding acceptance of the challenge to the Church of The Light—how the Mother-Light had shown herself in full day, had faced not only her followers but the impartial eyes of unbelievers, re-enforced by opera and field glasses. The New York and Philadelphia papers had given more than a page to miraculous cures alone—ninety-seven persons restored to health wholly or in part.

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When Hinkley returned, she was deep in the most detailed of the accounts of cures—careful histories and descriptions of, and interviews with, the blind who were now seeing, the deaf who were now hearing, the lame who had thrown crutches away. She looked up at him, and in her eyes was that same bright blaze of fanaticism which had once disquieted her whenever she saw it in him or Mr. Casewell or Molly. “And they dare to put forward the old, feeble explanation!” she exclaimed. “The doctors sneering and saying that in some cases the disease was hysteria and in others the cure.”

“They’ve been saying that for centuries,” he replied. “What else can they say? It’s easy to sneer. It would take some mental effort to go into the mystery of miracle cures. It might abase their vanity of reason if they were to be forced to see how gloriously The Light has manifested itself whenever man, however imperfectly, has sought it. But, now The Light is shining!” And he looked his adoration.

She was on her knees before herself, was worshipping this spirit from the unknown that awed her far more profoundly now, when it was living within her, than it had when she used to see it in others.

“The Light has been a torch. It has become a conflagration!” he exclaimed. “It will fire the whole world!”

“We shall drive out cruelty and pain and death.

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We shall restore the age of faith. Oh, Will! Will! Not even you who had belief in me when I hadn't in myself—not even you can imagine the wonder that is about to come to pass.”

His enthusiasm mounted skyward upon hers, as hers had upon his. “The modern world,” he cried, “has been waiting for a soul whose fire would thaw its heart frozen in the ice of Reason, and would quicken faith and conscience again. You'll drive before you like chaff before the wind these ‘scientists’ who would chain the soul of man to the dirt.”

Just then Mr. Casewell appeared. His very beard, huge and white, seemed to irradiate joy. When she had given him the salutation, he burst forth. “Here”—and he held up his hands full of papers—“are telegrams and cablegrams. And Floycroft tells me he has, from the morning's mail alone, two thousand seven hundred letters, asking for your prayers, for your healing, for books about The Light.”

The Mother-Light clasped her hands and struggled to keep within bounds the dizzying emotions which had been loosed within her. “The Light is shining!” she murmured.

“The revolution in public opinion!” Mr. Casewell went on. “Those wise materialists have been chattering about the religious instinct being dead, killed by their ‘scientific enlightenment.’ These scientists! These

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will-o'-the-wisps that lure man into the rotten ooze of the swamp of despair which breeds them! These stiff-necked, vain alleged reasoners have had possession of the printing-press, and so, they have been able to wield the lash of ridicule and to force mankind at least to pretend assent to their reasonings. But, now, behold the soul of man is once more lifting up! The petty cruel games of seekers after power and pelf are shrinking to their true proportions. Once more it is not man the economic unit to be exploited, or man the political unit to be voted. It is man the Immortal Soul, the Ray of The Light that streams from the Great All!"

And he sank to his knees before her. Hinkley, swept away by the First Apostle's frenzy of enthusiasm, was upon his knees also. "The Mother-Light!" they cried. "The Mother-Light!"

She stood with an expression of exaltation that made her beauty superhuman. She stretched out her arms over them. Then, as they rose, she sank back among her cushions and covered her face. "No—no!" she exclaimed. "Not to me! I understand it isn't I you worship. The others—the Church—when they kneel, they see in me the symbol of their faith. But you who know me, you *must* not kneel."

"You *are* the symbol of our faith," urged Mr. Casewell.

"Still, you must not kneel. I am not accustomed

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to this power that has taken up its abode in me and is using my poor body and mind as a mighty electric current uses the slender, feeble wire. And I—I—fear I might forget—might feel it was to me you knelt—might fall through pride and vanity.”

A silence that seemed somehow ominous; she looked from Mr. Casewell to Hinkley, and instantly regretted her impulsive unbending. Mr. Casewell's expression, though it was not even stern, chilled her from the inside out. Hinkley—His profile was between her and the windows; its outline, like a carving from some substance hard as iron, harsh as granite, made her shiver into her shrinking self. These two relentless guardians of the faith, terrible even in their gentlest moods, if looked at aright—like the sea in their boundless capacities for graciousness and for fury. “I must never again chill the enthusiasm of any of my followers for me,” she reflected. Her thoughts ran on resentfully: “These two regard me as their instrument, as their prisoner—me, the Mother-Light! I must make them see that I rule here, or my position will become impossible. They had too much power during her years of feebleness.” And for the first time she clearly surveyed the chasm between her new position and the old. In that, she had been joined with Casewell and Hinkley in friendship, equality, and mutual confidence, their three wills against Ann Banks's feebleness and aberrations. Now, it was she

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that was apart and alone, with their two wills against her—against her inevitably, because wherever there are individualities there must be a strife and the lower combining against the higher.

“You have some telegrams and letters for me,” she said formally to her First Apostle.

“Nothing especial,” he replied. “Merely routine that I or the others can look after.”

“I’ll not detain you from your duties, Mr. Hinkley,” she said to her Second Apostle with the same formality of tone and manner. When he had gone, she began her breakfast. Mr. Casewell was still standing, awaiting leave to sit or to go. She ate in silence, apparently unconscious of his presence but diffusing a chilling constraint.

“Did you wish anything?” he said at last, giving over the attempt to force her to speak first.

“The business that must be awaiting my attention,” she answered colorlessly.

“Everything has been attended to,” he explained, in his ordinary tone but with keen eyes watchful of this puzzling development in the young Mother-Light. “All of us strive to spare the Mother-Light as much as possible.”

“Your kindness is misdirected,” she said, looking tranquilly at him, “when it tempts me to shirk my responsibilities.”

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“All your orders shall be obeyed,” he answered deferentially.

She knew his sincerity, therefore knew he thought his deference sincere. But she felt that he misunderstood himself. “Certainly,” she said, with a slight lifting of the eyebrows. “Obedience is the matter of course. I should not discuss that. There would be little hope for the Church if it were not so.”

“We are all under the discipline,” he reminded her gently, with slight stress upon “all.”

“Not *all*,” she replied, and his eyes had to sink before hers. “I am responsible only to the Power that rules me and rules the Church through me.”

A purple flush overspread his face, his forehead, and the bald dome beyond.

She rose and at her full height seemed to tower above his short, powerful figure. “The first test of faith,” she continued slowly and with winning reproachful sadness, “is loyalty to the Power that resides in the Mother-Light. Is it not so?”

In the pause his flush gradually retreated and died away. She could not see his face, but some emotion was struggling to express itself against the resistance of those mighty shoulders.

“And if there is a Mother-Light,” she continued, “she must be the inspiration of the Church, not a figure-head with an idle, mischief-breeding mind. She must

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be full of the joy of the faith—and how is that possible unless she has work that she believes in and that makes her believe in herself? I believe in myself—now. But how long should I believe, if I had nothing satisfying to do and if *you*—especially you, Mr. Casewell!—were reminding me day by day that you thought I was your creation rather than the chosen of The Light?”

“Enough,” he said—rather, begged. “You have shown me my sin—my sin of pride. You know—you must know—that it was unconscious. And it was the worse for that, because our unconscious sins are not mere open foes but are traitors.” And he would have knelt to her had she not prevented it through a subtle instinct that if he were visibly to humble his proud personality in those circumstances, it would in spite of himself rankle afterward as a humiliation.

“We understand each other now,” she insisted. “Let us never speak or think of this again. I simply saw that you had for the moment lost your spiritual point of view, and were leading Will Hinkley astray. How can we expect others to be spiritual if we are not?”

“Not until this moment,” said he, “has my belief in you struck down to the foundation rock, to rest there unshakable. It shows the subtlety of sin and doubt. When Ann Banks first told me that she felt the spirit of The Light relaxing its hold upon her, we began to cast about, praying to The Light for guidance. We

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had almost fixed upon some one—a young English woman of wonderful power who had made the greatest worldly sacrifices for the faith. But we hesitated—we felt that *The Light* was not in our selection. Then—One day, Hinkley talked to me of you—of your resemblance to Ann Banks, and of a certain veil of mystery over your mind and heart, and person even, which had marked you from childhood as unusual and apart. He had no idea what was in my mind. But, as he talked of you, a feeling came over me—a drawing toward you, like a command to seek you out. I talked to her of you, as casually as Hinkley had talked to me. She listened, said nothing. A few days and she sent me a note by Molly from her inner apartment to which she had withdrawn, as she frequently did and as you doubtless will, to isolate herself to the full power of *The Light*. The note directed me to search you out from the beginning. At every step my conviction grew that you were the chosen of *The Light*. So confident were we that, after you had come to us, we did not attempt to guide you. We left you to *The Light*. And you found it!”

“How hard I have fought against it,” she said. “If I could only be sure that the struggle is won!” And before her rose vaguely the form of Thorndyke—not as a temptation but as a shadowing of one of the remote possibilities of temptation.

“In your darkest moments,” he replied, “always

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remember that in a universe where truth is so elusive, he who once touches what seems to him to be the truth, must grapple it fast. Better even illusion of light than the despair of darkness. But, best of all, *The Light!*”

“May *It* shine in us all—ever!” prayed the Mother-Light.

“Amen and Amen!” exclaimed the First Apostle.

She sent him away and went into the dressing-room that was only partly furnished, and so through the passage to her first apartment. After trying all the doors to assure herself that she was locked in, she drew from the closet in the sitting-room the bag and the trunk she had brought with her from New York. She got the key and unlocked them. Everything she had brought was there. In the top tray of the trunk the cheap little toques and waists and the worn boots and shoes; in the very bottom things that had been Richard Hickman’s—a necktie she had thought particularly becoming to him; a photograph of him, another of herself when she was graduating from the academy in Ida Grove, his pocketbook with several of his cards in it and some love verses he had fancied and had cut from newspapers, a bundle of his letters to her and another bundle of her letters to him—she did not pause to read them—the pawn tickets for his watch and her rings, a locket she knew contained a lock of his hair—and she did not open the locket. Last of all she found a pair of

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tiny shoes, with a little white half-stocking tucked in each, and a photograph of the baby taken at six months. She sat upon the floor for an hour, or longer, with these last things in her lap, her hands resting listlessly upon them. Her face had softened at first sight of them; it set in sternness and bitterness as the phantoms of her life in New York, conjured by those mementoes, filed in grim procession before her. She watched with eyes that were dry and a heart that was cold as the chill of death.

She lit a great fire on the open hearth; as rapidly as they would burn she flung in all that had been in bag and trunk. She hid her baby's things by wrapping them in one of her old skirts before she threw them upon the pyre. When only ashes were left, she tossed the bag into the trunk and thrust it into the closet. She was just leaving the room; she paused to take a farewell glance at the ashes; she came slowly back and threw herself on the rug directly over the entrance to the sepulchre of the "broken candlestick of The Light." She buried her head in her arms, cried and moaned and sobbed. When the storm had passed she rose and stretched her arms toward the gray ashes. Then she returned to the apartment of the Mother-Light.

"I have effaced the grave of the late Maida Hickman," she said, gazing out of the great window of her private sitting-room.

Against the horizon where the light made the air

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seem a vast silent sea of crystal faintly tinged with purple there rose a column of smoke, passively drifting, now smutching and now adorning the sky, as the evil of shadow or the good of sunshine happened to envelop it. "How like life that smoke is," she thought; "passive, the sport of force and chance." And she watched it until it had merged into the purple—"As Maida Hickman is merged in The Light," she said, with an uplifting heart.

XIV

THE evening of his return to New York Thorn-
dyke dined with his friend Brenton, the specialist in
diseases of the brain and nerves. For years they had
dined together at least four times each week; and when
they did not dine together each usually dined alone, as
neither had any other intimate. They had been at-
tracted each to the other at the P. and S., by similarity
in poverty and in ambition; they had lived and studied
together at Paris, then at Vienna; and, after sixteen
years of closest personal association, they were still
intimates, despite the fact that in one important respect
each repelled the other—Thorndyke's touch of imagina-
tion seemed to Brenton a weakness in an otherwise well-
balanced mind; Brenton's lack of imagination seemed to
Thorndyke a narrowness and a disfigurement. Perhaps
they clung together chiefly because, without the other,
each would have been entirely alone. They had settled
in New York, strangers to it; they had become dis-
tinguished, were becoming famous, yet they remained
members of New York's huge colony of citizen-strangers.
And they were beyond the expansive period of youth
when friends are made. While Thorndyke's imagina-

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tion had kept alive his sympathy with the rest of mankind, Brenton had become an icy isolation, a personified scientific curiosity; and through incessant study of insanity he had acquired many of the mannerisms of the insane—stealthy smiles and gestures, a habitual look of steely, glittering craft, convulsive twitchings of the fingers in moments of abstraction.

Such was the analytical chemist to whom Thorndyke was about to submit himself, his senses still steeped in that mysterious irradiation from the Mother-Light's eyes and hair and form and motion, an irradiation which he longed to believe divine. And with the energy possessed only by a delusion which dreads its own destruction he was unconsciously bracing himself against the incantations Brenton would certainly pronounce in the name of Reason.

“Well,” said Brenton, breaking a long silence.

They were at a small table in the almost empty dining-room of their club.

“Well—what?” asked Thorndyke, determined not to give battle until it was forced upon him.

“Did you see the Mother-Light?”

“Yes—I saw her,” said Thorndyke, conscious that his tone was defensive. “But, the newspapers told the whole story.”

“Ah!” Brenton gave one of his peculiar, sly smiles. Thorndyke knew how meaningless those mannerisms were,

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but this smile irritated him. He suspected that a sinister meaning lurked in it. "Yes, I read the papers carefully. She evidently carried the reporters off their feet. An interesting case. The Light is the most interesting of all these contortions into which dying faith is throwing itself. And her theology is very shrewd—a fog bank which it's practically useless for Science to cannonade. She catches the classes that think they're intelligent because they're more or less educated. I'd like to see her."

"Yes—I wish you could," said Thorndyke. "I think you would be surprised."

"Oh, for that matter I should find nothing I don't already know about!" answered Brenton. "The phenomenon is familiar. It's as old as the nervous system and its religious form differs in no essential from its other forms. Every asylum always has its group of enthusiasts who believe themselves or some one else the center of a new religion or of some new development of an old religion."

Thorndyke's amusement was, perhaps, not wholly a pretense. "Then you think—the—Mother-Light and her followers all insane?"

"Not under a conservative definition of insanity," said Brenton, unruffled because still unconscious. "Only in the sense that the entire race of human animals is insane—letting its egotism read into its ignorance

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evidence that it is a sort of aristocrat come down in the universe from 'better days' which will presently return. I shouldn't call that insanity for practical purposes. It becomes practical insanity only when it interferes with the routine of accumulating property and posterity."

Thorndyke had no comment. He would have said the same things himself, or at least would have indorsed them, twenty-four hours before.

"Tell me about *her*," said Brenton, when his train of thought led him back to his starting point.

Thorndyke flushed. "I should only excite your ridicule," he said, "and that in turn would excite my anger."

Brenton was so astounded that he laid down his knife and fork and stared. "You don't mean that she converted *you!*" he exclaimed. He had thought that his knowledge of the devious turnings of the mind made it impossible for any aberration in anybody to astound him. But this particular aberration in this particular man—it was unbelievable!

"In the sense you mean—no," answered Thorndyke. "In another sense—But I don't care to explain."

Another long silence, during which Brenton studied his friend's dreamy, abstracted face, with an expression alternating between amazement and anxiety. Then Brenton: "I had a curious case to-day—the beginning of it. One of the instructors in psychology up at the

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university—perhaps you know him—Carmack? He's the author of a popular book on spiritualistic phenomena."

"I've heard of him," said Thorndyke somewhat curtly.

"A brilliant mind—well-balanced until recently. He finally found a medium whose tricks he couldn't fathom. And now he has gone clean daft—believes in the medium—takes the money his own family needs and squanders it in keeping the fellow going—has contracted a spiritual marriage. A miserable story. Only his family and a few friends know as yet. They came to me because they hope he can be cured before he makes himself notorious or kills himself. And the climax of absurdity is that the medium's an utterly preposterous person—a shifty, uncouth scallywag who went about exposing the medium business a few years ago, then went back into it."

By this time Thorndyke had his good-humor. "And the moral?" he asked cheerfully. "The moral for me, I mean."

"The moral for everyone who respects his sanity," said Brenton. "It is, *never permit the mind to hang over and peer into the swamps and sewers of instinct.* To be busy, incessantly busy, upon the firm ground of the known and the immediate and the useful—that is sanity, and it's the highroad away from misery. I, my-

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self—Not a day passes that I do not feel in the very marrow of my being the ages-old, ages-strong germs of superstition, alive and defying any germicide of my new faith in reason.”

“And why,” queried Thorndyke, “do you call the old faith a superstition and the new faith—for you say reason is only a faith—a true religion?”

“I prefer the new faith for the same reason that I prefer electric light to tallow dip. It enables me to see better.”

Thorndyke smiled somewhat bitterly. “But, in view of what it reveals,” he said, “wasn’t the twilight better?”

“There you go beyond me,” conceded Brenton. “I don’t waste energy in railing at the blindness of the blind motive-power of the universe. Why fall afoul the stone that has accidentally rolled down hill and struck you?”

“But,” suggested Thorndyke, “aren’t you carrying your craze for lighting things up a little too far when you try to ease a poor devil of a harmless lunacy that makes him supremely happy?”

“Harmless!” replied Brenton, with a grunt. “The trouble is that insanity is progressive, progressive toward worse conscious miseries than health ever knows.” Brenton said this so seriously that Thorndyke laughed outright.

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“We specialists!” he jeered. “Always finding our pet disease in every symptom. What would you say, what wouldn’t you think, if I told you I’d read *The Way of The Light* three times from end to end without missing a word!”

Brenton tried to look cheerful; but his face soon clouded and he sat soberly regarding his plate. Thorn-dyke watched him with laughing eyes until he looked up. Then he said: “But you don’t ask me what I thought of it.”

“No doubt you found it a revelation,” said Brenton. “The alphabet would become an acrostic containing the ultimate secret of things if one read it over often enough and protested to himself vigorously enough. The sublime and the ridiculous are such close neighbors that addle-headed humanity often mistakes their doors.”

“Well, it may astonish you to learn that three times wasn’t often enough for me. My mind is still too strong as you would say, or too weak, as the followers of *The Light* would say.”

“You’re laughing,” said Brenton, “but you, anyone in our profession, ought to appreciate why I’m ready to believe almost anyone is ‘touched’—especially a strong mind. It takes a strong mind to go good and crazy—a Peter Hermit to get a crusading insanity that sets Europe stark mad for centuries; a Mark Antony to

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get a love-lunacy that throws an empire into convulsions and unsettles the human imagination for all time."

At Brenton's last words Thorndyke flushed and his eyes lit up, and he lapsed into abstraction. Brenton watched and reflected; there came back to him the description of the Mother-Light which the newspapers had given—her beauty revealed to the public in the clear day for the first time in nine years. "You must have got there too late to see her on the balcony," he said presently.

"My uncle got me an interview," replied Thorndyke.

Brenton's lips and fingers twitched and his eyes gave off a sly, furtive glitter. "Did she receive you in a light room?"

"As light as this," said Thorndyke, "only, with the light of day." He was seeing it all again—the crimson and gold symbolism of the beautiful furnishings and draperies, a fit background for that mysterious, haunting, intoxicating personality. "Was the day the only light?" he said to himself.

"How old did she seem to you to be?" pursued Brenton in his jarring tone of the matter-of-fact.

"She didn't give me an impression of age, one way or the other," said Thorndyke, still abstracted. "The strongest impression was of—life. I have never seen anyone so terrifically *alive*."

Brenton smiled his strange smile in security.

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Thorndyke wasn't even looking in his direction. "Was she beautiful?"

"I think so. But, as I said, there was only the one vivid impression."

"And she gave you," Brenton ventured, "a sense of the supernatural?"

"As I told you, I don't wish to talk of that," said Thorndyke, looking straight at him now. "But I will say one thing, Eugene—In all my searchings into the secret of things—and what intelligent man can keep his mind from that?—I've always ended with a sense that there was no secret, only to return to the search again with a sense that something had eluded me—that there must be something more than a chemical reaction in friendship and love, in justice and mercy. And when I looked at that woman and listened to her, I felt that if there was a mystery, she held the key to it for me. You may call it insanity or superstition or——"

"But I don't," interrupted his friend. "I'm not so absurd as that." His fears were allayed and he was eating busily.

"Then what do you call it?" demanded Thorndyke.

"Love," said Brenton, without interrupting the motion of his jaws.

Thorndyke slowly shook his head. "No," he said, "more than that. A religion."

Brenton shrugged his shoulders. "If you like, call

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it that," said he, chillingly using the microscope upon that for which Thorndyke thought the telescope far too feeble. "All energy is the same. We give it different names in different circumstances for convenience. The form it takes is determined by environment. It becomes light or heat or electricity or patriotism or religion or love or what not."

But Thorndyke would discuss no further. He shut himself in with himself, and with his passion which in some moods seemed to him as supernal as religion, again as sinister as a black mass, and yet again the one chance to make the one brief life a draught of purple wine in a golden cup. He hated his once beloved profession for the time it compelled. Had this passion come in the days when he was waiting, instead of in the days when he was working under the drive of a won reputation, or had he been able, or had he hoped to be able, daily to see Her, Brenton's gloomiest misgivings would soon have been realized. But he was compelled to work, was compelled to be patient, fretting incessantly and at times furiously against the restraints to thought of Her and against the barriers to the sight of Her.

After several weeks of maneuvering he contrived to get himself invited by his granduncle to spend a Saturday-to-Monday at the Temple of Temples. He was quartered in the apartment opposite Mr. Caswell's. "It is intended for the private secretary to the

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Mother-Light," the First Apostle explained to him, "but the position is vacant just now." This nearness worked to intensify his sense of her until it was a high fever. On Sunday Molly showed him all the buildings, took him for a two hours' drive in the park, acres on acres of forest of enormous old trees. As they returned he pointed toward a great enclosure adjoining the east wing of the Temple of Temples. "What is that?" he asked.

"It is Her garden," said Molly. "I wish I could take you there. It is beautiful."

"Isn't it ever open to the public?"

"Not to us even, except when She sends for us."

"What a lonely life she must lead!" he exclaimed.

"Of course, She sees very few people. But—Do you think people are the only source of companionship? Don't most of them make one feel more lonely than solitude? Besides, even if there were nothing else, how could She be lonely when the Church, scattered throughout the world, centers in Her?"

He talked of Her, as a religion, to Mr. Casewell; he talked of Her, as a personality, to Molly. But he heard nothing of her wishing to see him, saw no chance to cross the barrier which seemed the higher, the nearer he stood to it. At last, he asked Mr. Casewell point-blank if she would receive him.

"I do not know," said the First Apostle. "And

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I have no means of finding out. The Mother-Light"—and he paused for the ceremonial which Thorndyke had at first looked on as a pitiful superstition but was now approving as Her due—"sees no one a second time," he went on, "unless she herself sends for them."

"Perhaps—if she knew I am here—" began Thorn-
dyke, but was stopped by his granduncle's look of amusement. "If," he hastened on to explain—"she knew how anxious I am to see her again, she might admit me long enough to let me thank her for the book—for the pleasure I had in reading it."

"There are millions of unbelievers who would like to gawk and gape at Her," said his granduncle. "I am afraid, my boy, that I gave you a false idea by arranging to have you received. I must remind you that She is the holy fountain of a religion dear to many, many thousands. Unless you wish to pain me, you won't again make me think you are regarding Her as a fit subject for an idle curiosity. You have no business with Her; you are not of our faith. She—we—care nothing for your or anyone's shallow 'reasonings' about our religion. If She, or The Book, or the blessed influence of The Light has set you to groping your way from The Darkness, pray and struggle and humbly strive after wisdom. And you will find again that old faith in the Great All which you have vaingloriously abandoned for this jaunty, new-fangled fad of reason-wor-

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ship. Do not resent my speaking plainly. I have lived a long time. And I may add, I am very fond of you."

Thorndyke was so abashed that he was disconcerted. "You are right, but you are wrong, too," he said. "However, I must say no more. Only—don't think for an instant, Uncle Albert, that I—" He broke off abruptly, for in his eagerness to cover his retreat he was about to tell a deliberate falsehood—it *was* in disdain of The Light that he was asking to see her; it was in obedience to a passion which would have made his grand-uncle long to strangle him did he know its sacrilegious imaginings. They almost seemed sacrilegious to him, as he walked those north lawns of the Temple of Temples and looked toward it and thought of the sacred mystery its white creeper-clad walls contained—a mystery as sacred to him as to any other of Her adorers.

"She undoubtedly believes in her divinity," he said to himself. "We all live on the mental atmosphere we live in. And in this atmosphere, faith is as natural as disbelief is in the atmosphere of a medical college." She believes in herself? Why, did not even *he* believe in her—he who had searched out life to the uttermost cells and had pronounced it a matter of mindless chemistry? But how *could* he doubt, he asked himself, when the miracle of arrested age, incredible in Molly and in his granduncle, soared to a transcendental climax in that glorious eternal youth of the Mother-Light?

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“Death is the supreme test,” he thought. “It proves what is man and what is God.”

His granduncle was still waiting for him to finish his uncompleted sentence. “I don’t know *what* to think!” he now exclaimed. “My unbelief—or, is it my belief?—frets at me always.”

“May it give you no rest until you emerge into the peace of The Light!” prayed his granduncle with that convinced fervor of his which never failed, at least for the moment, to sober the cynic and to make the scoffer uneasy.

Thus it came about that Thorndyke was at the Temple of Temples two Sundays in each month. Mr. Casewell hoped he would enter the Church, saw what a tower of strength his intellect and energy would be. And one Sunday, as he looked after the young man and Molly setting out for a walk, another idea came to him, one that made his eyes wonderfully soft and his smile exquisitely tender. Thenceforth he watched Molly with that gaze of his which let escape no detail, however small and obscure, of anything he fixed his mind upon. What he observed led him to say to her presently: “I’ve been very selfish with you, little girl, haven’t I? Trying to keep you all to myself, guarding you like a jealous ogre from the happiness you might give and get out of loving and being loved.”

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She knew that he had seen into her heart. There came a fine glow over her face, but she went and sat on his knee and looked at him with the eyes which show that their owner has nothing to conceal or to be ashamed of. "I thought I was dedicated to The Light," she said.

"And so you were, and are," he replied, pressing her head against his chest so that the golden hair and the white beard were mingled. "But The Light is love—all the kinds of love worthy of the name. It would be impossible for you, born in The Light, to give or to inspire"—his voice failed and, when he finished, it was almost in a whisper—"the love that kills."

"Besides—I have promised Her that I will never leave Her."

"And who talked of your leaving her"—he laughed—"or *me*? You don't say a word about not wanting to leave *me*! Never mind—what can an old grandfather expect?"

She pulled his great white beard until he stopped teasing her. Then she said: "Whoever marries me marries us both. But my promise to Her—that's different."

"You wouldn't leave Her," he explained. "You'd stay, and bring—someone who would be a power in The Light—wouldn't he, Margaret?"

She nodded. "If he would only believe!" she

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sighed, "would only let himself believe! I wish She would see him again."

"Haven't you told Her when he's been here?"

"I thought you had," said Molly. "I—didn't like to—to speak of him. I've got no skill at hiding my feelings. And I shouldn't want Her to know until he said something to me."

The old man laughed. "He looks at you and talks of you as if he had," said he.

And his words made her heart soar and sing like a lark in the sunshine; for she felt now that there must indeed be some justification more solid than mere longing, for what she found in the trifles of look and tone and manner she was treasuring and constantly re-examining.

In June—on its third Sunday—Thorndyke saw Her again.

He read in the morning newspapers that the Mother-Light would probably appear to the graduating class of speaking missionaries, that the apparition had not been announced because a large crowd was not wanted. He took the first train and at one o'clock his cab, got at the station, joined the long procession toward the park of The Light—people of every condition, in every kind of vehicle and on foot. Not until nearly three o'clock did he find himself on the lawns before the south balcony,

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one of five thousand or more, hiding himself in the crowd. There was no conversation around him, no whispering even; the eyes of all, believers and unbelievers, and the thoughts of all, were upon that small balcony with its white marble front half covered by creepers. The long windows behind it were closed, their lace curtains drawn.

Half-past three, and a shiver of awe passed through the crowd. From behind them, through the doors of the Hall of The Light, was coming the murmur of the great organ. The doors under the balcony opened; eleven young men and six young women in black robes with scarlet and gold hoods filed out, placed themselves in two rows at the outer edge of the reserved space directly before the balcony. Thorndyke noticed their types of head and face—long, narrow heads, curiously high foreheads, rarely broad; faces alight with dreamy enthusiasm. The murmur of the organ swelled into a triumphal march; the balcony windows, wide and high, opened; Thorndyke saw the four apostles—Casewell, Tillinghast, both very old; Hinkley and Floycroft, about his own age. They were in gorgeous canonicals and their faces, all strong except Tillinghast's, had the look that comes from nearness to a dazzling light. Higher swelled the music and upon its billows came the hallelujahs of the choir.

The "missioners of The Darkness" had lately fixed on "The Scarlet Woman" as the name for her. As if

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in haughty mockery of them she wore that day crimson crêpe embroidered with small old-gold sunbursts. As she stood on the balcony, against the background of white stone, the afternoon sun made her seem a fire-goddess wrapped in flames that rose and sank with the swell and fall of her bosom, with the shifts in the flowing folds of her robe. As for her hair, that curiously wrought casque of bronze, it was all aflame. And flame seemed to leap from her proud eyes as the throng sank to its knees before them.

Thorndyke happened to be in the midst of a group of believers. When they knelt, he, fascinated, awed, and dizzy with love of her, did not notice that he was standing all alone, was the only person not kneeling. This for an instant—until her eyes met his. Whether it was the believers about him or the magic of that glance or both, he was on his knees also. And as the others murmured: “The Mother-Light! Hear us! Heal us!” he murmured: “My Love! Hear me! Heal me!”

When he looked again, she was gone, and he, among the last, was rising. It was over; he wandered dazedly away, through groups of marvelers, and groups trying to scoff, and groups that wept and shouted and prayed. By intuition he went round to the north entrance. He had rung before he remembered his original intention not to let his relatives know he had come.

When he entered Molly's little drawing-room, she

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happened to be at the opposite door. At sight of him she started and paled. "I was just going to send in search of you," she said. And her manner and tone might have revealed her secret to him, had not the steady gentle glow of the pure white light of her love for him been lost in the scarlet irradiations of his passion for the Mother-Light.

"How did you know I was here?"

"I didn't know it," she answered. "A few minutes ago, She said to me, 'Doctor Thorndyke is here. I wish to see him.' And I—we always obey, but I thought She was mistaken." Molly had recovered from her confusion and was full of enthusiasm and delight, enthusiasm over the apparition, delight that She was to receive him. "Wasn't it wonderful—what She said!" she ended.

"What? When?"

"Why, to the graduating class—the beautiful sentence—and the *way* she uttered it!"

"I didn't—didn't hear," he stammered. "I wasn't very near." She must have spoken while his heart was hearing what he thought her eyes had flashed to him.

He followed Molly to the salon, stood with head bent while she was presenting him, did not venture to look at Her until they were alone.

XV

SHE had changed to a white robe, at her throat a sunburst set in rubies. "You have read the book?" she began, looking away from him that she might keep her voice calm. "Three times?"

"Three times—each time carefully," was his answer, almost unconscious so absorbed were his mind and all his senses in Her.

"You will tell me what you think?"

"My opinion would be of no value. And, while people differ cheerfully about matters of fact, don't differences about matters of opinion always irritate?" He, and she, too, spoke in a subdued manner, their nerves acute to the electric conditions which arose the instant they came within sight of each other, which grew almost intolerable if they were near enough to touch.

"Facts are impersonal," she suggested. "Our opinions are ourselves. But I wish to hear what you thought."

"As I told you, I have no religious belief. But, a strong belief, I think, in what is sometimes called the religion of humanity."

"I shouldn't call it a religion," she said. "To it

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we are poor creatures caged in the dark: And it says the most we can do for each other is to encourage one another not to cry out when the darkness rains on each in turn the shafts of sorrow, disease, and death."

"But that is the only religion I have left," he confessed.

"And you are content?"

"Who that is at all sensitive could be content with such a creed? One can't walk a hundred yards in a public highway without passing people in mourning, and each mourner is a reminder of my despairing creed—and, alas, a witness to its truth. Men pretend to believe death is a dawn, but reason tells them the truth, and they give their pretense the lie by weeping and wearing black."

"But you did not always believe thus?"

"I long had the faith I was brought up in. Higher criticism, and then science, took it from me."

"You didn't give it up gladly—with a sense of superiority?"

"Like a man who rejoices when he no longer loves the woman he once was happy with, instead of looking on the passing of his love as a catastrophe? No—I was too much attached to the old faith, for its own sake and for my parents' sake."

"Then why did you not keep it? Why did you give it up?"

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“I did not give it up,” he answered. “At school I was shocked by the unbelief of my fellows. Not a positive unbelief, for few took the trouble to inquire deeply enough to have a positive opinion one way or the other; but by that worst form of unbelief—the unbelief that accepts a creed because acceptance crudely seems safer and less troublesome, and then dismisses from thought and action the morality upon which it is founded. And, one day we read in Cicero, ‘Why do the oracles at Delphos no longer speak? Nothing is more in contempt than they.’ And I asked myself the same question about the oracles of our fathers. And I began to examine my faith—and it vanished.”

“You tore the flower to pieces to prove that it was a flower. Naturally, you had only dead petals—no color, no perfume, no flower.”

“And then I set out to find another flower—I ventured to hope, one more beautiful. I saw that the clue to the whole mystery was to be found, if it could be found, in the origin of life. And it was in that direction I searched. I needn’t remind you of that which science has made a primer lesson to the children of to-day—how, in the boiling kettle of the primeval ocean where all the elements were dissolving and combining and recombining in infinite varieties, there was formed in the helter-skelter a combination that had the elemental energy in the proportions which make what we call

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life. That combination may have been formed and wiped out a million times in those æons; but at last, along with the inanimate combinations we have to-day, it happened to persist. And, after ages upon ages during which it took on infinite forms, it at last happened to fall into the arrangement that was the remote ancestor of our vegetable and animal kingdoms. And I saw how through ages on ages it was all evolved—going now downward and now upward, now halting; millions on millions of types, that might have made better ancestors than those that became the ancestors, wiped out in the haphazard, aimless, usually futile, purposelessness and clumsiness; millions on millions of years wasted in achieving badly the simplest results. If there was purpose, why such an infinity of failures and futilities, why so many millions of years with nothing but the aimless contentions of inanimate atoms?”

“That is what I, too, asked myself,” she said. She was listening with a delicious sense that she was the inspiration of the eloquence of his face and voice. For, his words—as words so often are—were only drift upon the current of feeling to mark its flow, were only pretexts for the intonations of passion.

“And you must have thought,” he went on, “how, through all these forms which geology and biology have now stripped of their former marvelousness—how, through all these forms, one condition persisted. Those

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that happened to be adapted to what happened to be the environment, lived; the others—the infinitely more numerous failures—perished. Just as to-day, even under the flexible artificial conditions which human intelligence has created, two-thirds of the human beings born die in childhood.”

“But,” she urged, “even if there is nothing but force and matter, as you say, still—how did force and matter begin?”

“Why should there be either beginning or end? Why should not these aimless convulsions and reactions of force and matter go on from eternity to eternity? And why assume an external creative energy when it would explain nothing, would only make a hideous mystery of deliberate cruelty where there really is no mystery at all?”

“No mystery? Not even in the Soul of man?”

“I am coming to that,” he answered. “I looked everywhere for creative intelligence. I found everywhere the clumsy chisel-marks of chance. A marvel to man only by tradition from his centuries of ignorance. The marvel has vanished as dryad and nymph and satyr have vanished from the woods. A tediousness, a vain repetition, a hit or miss, that forbade the supposition of an intelligent designer. I searched for laws; I found only conditions—accidents, limited by the limitations of the universe. And it seemed to me as wise to toss leaves

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in the air and read destiny in the way they arranged themselves in falling, as to read Designer into that anarchy of failures and imperfections and futilities. And at last I came to Man—‘Here,’ said I, ‘I shall find what I seek.’ From the peak of man I looked down the vistas of living things, all living upon each other! And I saw that none of them, not even man, had in the essential anything which was not in the original cell. That cell was only a stomach; and these multiform groupings of cells that had developed out of it were fundamentally only stomachs. Plant-animal, animal-plant, or plant, or animal, jellyfish or oyster, dog or man, whatever powers they had beyond the power of the original cell were acquired as aids to the stomach—eyes to see food, nose to smell it, ears to hear it, legs and wings to pursue it, hand or claw to seize it. Differences were only differences in ability to find and to capture, to take in and to digest, food to keep them alive. And the most successful civilization, if one looks at it rightly, is that in which the most stomachs are most regularly and adequately supplied with food—and the same thing is true of gardens and forests, of schools of fish or herds of wild beasts. Just to live—just to live—just to keep alive.”

“Just to live,” she murmured. She was listening—her mind to his words, her heart to his tones. And her gaze was hanging upon his lips, upon their fascinating

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motions as his words issued from them. And he—He hardly knew what he was saying. “Go on,” she pleaded, as his lips paused and his voice ceased.

“I found,” he continued, “that all the so-called spiritual or mental questions resolved down, if one took away the non-essentials, to this purely material end—keeping alive. Religion—how to keep alive forever—a mere hope-born extension of the selfish instinct of self-preservation. Morality—how to keep the tribe, or state, or family, alive. Politics, economics—how so to regulate the means of acquiring food that all shall have a sufficient share. And then——”

“And then?” she repeated, as he hesitated.

“I saw the tragedy.” He had risen, was at the window, looking out into space.

“The—soul?” she asked, following him first with her eyes alone, then, yielding to an imperative impulse, taking herself to stand beside him in the floods of laughing light that seemed to be mocking his mournful mood.

“The soul,” he answered, fixing his eyes longingly upon her. “In those infinities of haphazards, in that aimless development toward a perfectly equipped apparatus for keeping alive, there gradually came about a nerve center. And this nerve center, developing as a procurer, grew more and more dexterous. From a mere automatic spring at one end of a living sac mechanically to open it when it touched anything, this nerve center

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slowly acquired five sensibilities. Then, through infinite ages more, and through infinite transformations, some of these food-producers became most dexterous in plotting and procuring for the appetites, became brains, became human brains. In all historic time have the overwhelming mass of human beings, high and low, ever thought except of things directly related to the appetites? But the development has gone steadily on and the brain has been slowly acquiring the power of abstract thought—the Soul. All men have it a little, perhaps some of the other animals faintly. A few men—not many—have it in a higher degree.”

“But you *did* find the Soul!” she exclaimed.

The somber undercurrent that had been running near the surface of all he had said now showed itself strongly in his face and voice as he answered: “Yes, I did find the Soul. But I shrink from telling you what I found to be true of it.”

“But you must tell me all,” she insisted. “I wish to know the end—why you say ‘tragedy.’”

“The Soul—the Intellect”—he went on—“an accident incidental to this improvement of the service between the vital organs and their sources of supply. Almost anything can be used for several purposes. In the savage cruelty of blind chance there arose at last out of all this chemistry an organ that could not only think in the concrete but also in the abstract. It was of the

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highest usefulness in serving the appetites; it had an incidental and useless power, to dream the dreams of thought."

"The beautiful dreams of thought," she said. "You call *that* a tragedy?"

"Yes—it is the tragedy of the universe. The Intellect could think for the appetites whose slave it was born to be. It could think also for itself—could dream of freedom."

"You call *that* a tragedy?"

"Not the dream," he answered, "but the awakening. To think is to aspire, to think is to long for immortality, for infinite development upward and ever upward—for eternal life, eternal happiness, eternal love. These are the dreams of thought. And the tragedy is that they are but dreams. The dreamer, pursuing his dream to prove that it is no dream, finds out at last the frightful truth. He goes to the source of the Soul, makes the long and weary search back through the infinity of aimless sequences into which man used to read intelligent causation. He comes at last, not to the laboratory of an Infinite Intelligence, but to the idle commotions of a soulless, mindless, inanimate ocean. The same idle chance, then, that to-day makes those oceans fling up a seed into a cleft of rock and start what may become a verdant island or may be reduced again to a bare rock, as chance

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directs. The microscope resolves the dream of Imagination into this trivial and purposeless performance, productive of such an infinity of pain. And the spectroscope—By means of it, Imagination rushes at the speed of light through the universe, and finds everywhere—what? Precisely the same materials and processes that the microscope revealed; the same fourscore elements combining and recombining. Infinity?—Yes. But an infinity of mindless monotony. And human life itself with all its variety for eyes content to glance only, what do history and the kindred sciences disclose? A nightmare of hate and fear and cruelty and murder, interrupted here and there with the splendid, pitiful dreams of a life of peace beyond. Imagination, that tragic accident, is discovering that the universe is vast in size, but in size only. A child may be amused for an hour with a kaleidoscope, but even a child would grow tired of it soon. Imagination, searching for a high drama of infinite intelligence and profundity, finds that it is seated at a kaleidoscope, turned by blind force and capable only of infinite combinations of trivialities. Ignorance can wonder and worship, but—what is there for Intellect but despair? ”

“ If all men thought as you do——”

“ But they will! The secret is out. It is shouting from the house-tops. One brief century of science, and how many of Imagination’s fondest dreams have been

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destroyed, destroyed even for the mass of men! A few generations more, and will not all men see that the universe is a prison and a grave?"

They were silent. She was staring at the vision he had conjured—the infinite loneliness of the human Imagination, chance by-product of a universe of gross matter. And she felt so utterly alone, felt her heart swelling as if to burst with passionate longing for companionship, for the love of this man who, too, was so utterly alone. He was gazing at her, the lithe, the intensely alive, thrilling and throbbing with the passion of life, radiating it as a sun gives off light. "It makes my heart ache to look at you," he said in a low voice full of the yearning which possessed both. "The most splendid dream of Imagination is—love. And, as I look and love, I see over you the black shadow of the time when—when there shall be no more time to love."

Her color rose, and her outgiving of life became to him the pleasure that is also a pain. "Time!" she repeated, dreamily. "You forget that it does not exist for immortalities. You forget—immortality!"

"But that was the last scene of the last act of the tragedy. When Imagination loves, when it longs to believe that the love is eternal, when it clings most passionately to its dream of immortality—then, the awakening, the merciless voice of Science crying, 'Death is the end!' You remember the lovers in Dante—how, though

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they were to live in torment forever, they were happy because they were to live, to live together, forever. But we—Not even in pain, not at all—not at all! That is why I have had the courage to tell you that I love you. That is why I have told you my belief that we are all under sentence of speedy and eternal death. Let us make haste! Let us save what we can, since our time is so short.”

She turned and her light shone full upon him. “Grant that the universe is a prison, that the Intellect is an accident, and still I say—Immortality!”

“If I could believe that! I don’t ask that it be true, but only to believe it true.”

“Assume that there never was an intelligence in the universe until the human mind appeared,” she continued. “It has appeared—there is an intelligence now. It is an intelligence that grows, that develops. And out of its intelligent knowledge of its environment, out of its acquaintance with chemical conditions, can it not, *will* it not, evolve immortality for itself?”

“But how?”

“Death is the executioner of the Great Prison. Why wait dumbly until he has struck off the head? Why should not the Soul plan to defeat and destroy him? *That* is the faith I stand for! You say there is no king over the universe. Then, you’ll admit no decree has gone forth fixing the limits of human life, of

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health and strength and youth. Decay and age are matters of chemistry—and Intellect is learning the deep secret of chemistry. The duration of life is a matter of chance, decided by environment, you say. Why should the proud Intellect obey the mandates of chance?”

Her words thrilled him, not alone because it was She that uttered them, but also because She in her own person seemed a victorious defiance of the mandate of mortality. And hope sprang up in him—that hope which, as he had admitted, Reason was unable to kill.

“You have seen the mind expel disease from the body,” she was saying. “You have seen that some living things last only a few seconds while others are ages old yet still young. If a tree can live a thousand years, why not a man? And if a thousand years, why not a thousand thousand?”

“Death is a fact as universal as life,” he said.

“Life—so you say—was an accident. Why not death also? And why not abolish it?”

“But how? But how?” he repeated. And it seemed to him She could answer as his hope longed.

“You see, do you not,” she urged triumphantly, “that there was one secret you overlooked, one secret that has thus far eluded your men of science?”

“Yes,” he admitted. “And now I see, too, that science has given us glimpses of the existence of that

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secret. Scientists have retarded old age and have lengthened life twenty and thirtyfold—but only in the very lowest forms of living things.”

“A beginning,” she exclaimed. “Yet you, eager to despair, did not realize the importance of those glimpses. *That* secret is The Light.”

“Your followers can live forever?” he said—and, standing there in that dazzling, mysterious presence, he did not say it in incredulity.

“The Light has not yet fully revealed itself to us,” she answered, “but it shines far enough into the secret to show us that the Soul *can* make us immortal.”

“In the body?”

“What immortality is there without the body? Life *is* the body. And on your own showing of what the mind is and why it is, will it not merely be developing its natural power and duty to the highest degree, when it learns to keep itself and its body alive forever? It is an imperfect servant now, just as the hand was imperfect when it first appeared as a rudiment. And what is the mind but the sum of these five senses? Yes, life in the body, immortal life in the body!” She drew herself up and her eyes flashed. “To feel forever the warmth of the sun and the keen caresses of the winter. To feel forever youth leaping and laughing in the veins and nerves. To hear forever beautiful sounds—music

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and voices. To delight forever in the flowers, in the grass, in the living bosom of the earth. To taste—to touch—to see—above all—to *see!* And forever!—with the heart forever young!”

“It is a dream!” he cried. “Do not torture me with it.”

“It is a reality!” she exclaimed. “It is *the* reality—that reality toward which all the discoveries of science tend. Oh, The Light teaches us that our instinct which cries out against death as an evil that can be evaded, is a truer wisdom than that of your shallow scientists ignorant of the obvious meaning of their own discoveries. When the universe evolved mind, it evolved a master!”

“But the master is still far, far from his throne,” he said.

“How do you know that?” she urged. “Why do you fight against hope, good hope? How can the perfect will ever be evolved except by using such will as you now have—by using it to command with all its strength the death of Death?”

“Some day, after infinite ages,” he admitted, “that might produce a race of immortals.”

“How do you know such a race has not already been produced?” she persisted. “May it not be in this universe now, emancipated, dwelling upon some planet which it selected as best suited to its purposes, some planet less

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subject to disturbances than this? May it not from there be trying to help us and the dwellers on other planets who are as benighted as we are?"

"Do *you* know—do you *feel*—that this is so?" he asked.

"I know that he who has the perfect will shall live forever."

"You point into the heavens," he objected, "and say 'See!' And when I reply that I see nothing, you answer, 'True, but I feel that there must be or ought to be something there. Let us think that we see it.'" But this was the almost mechanical protest of his scientific training. In fact, he had passed away from the universe of mortality and despair, from the spell of science. He was in Her universe, under Her spell. Her voice, her beauty in the soft, rosy glow of the sunset, her intoxicating irradiation of vitality—what mattered beside these, and the glory of the present moment, with its possibilities of perfect joy? "I do not know what I believe," he said, his words rushing from him. "I do not care just now. All I know, all I wish to know is, that to live is to love—*you!* And whether life must be the tragedy I fear or can be the paradise you picture, still love is best, is supreme. And whether we live only a few minutes or an eternity, let us live as if the next minute would snatch this cup of happiness from us forever."

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They were at the window, submerged together in that ocean of sunset light whose million-colored waves were kissing her nerves into sensitiveness beyond endurance. And the impulse which had mastered her again the instant she saw him, him the magnetic reality, standing alone among the kneeling throng on the lawns—that impulse was now storming the last citadel of self-control. She did not dare remain with him in that passionate surge of light. She abruptly turned, went quickly to her canopied sofa.

Her face was calm, but in the quick rise and fall of her bosom, in the fact that she listened to him, he found hope. “You wrote in the book you gave me, ‘The law of The Light is Love,’” he said, following her and standing near her. “Let us obey that law.”

Fiercer raged the struggle, the Woman insurgent against the Mother-Light, Love insurgent against Faith. “You must go now,” she said, and she strove in vain to make her tone steady.

“Why did you send for me?” he asked, leaning toward her.

She shrank into the deep shadow of the canopy. “You must go,” commanded the Mother-Light firmly. “You will come again?” inquired the Woman, wistfully.

“Until I come, never to leave you!”

If he could have seen into the shadow, he would have seen a look that was like a leap into his arms. But the

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Mother-Light was able to forbid the Woman, was able to say to him calmly, "May The Light shine in you!"

"And in you," he answered. "May the light you have made to shine in me shine in you, as in me. The law of Love is the true Light! You see it, you feel it—and you can not deny."

She gave no sign that she had heard; her hand went swiftly to the electric button.

Molly appeared instantly. An anxious look at her cousin and she sighed with relief—for, his face, though almost solemn in its gravity, showed the happiness that is deeper than smiles and laughter. She lingered behind him to say in a grateful undertone to the Mother-Light: "Thank you. I see The Light beginning to shine in him."

But the Mother-Light did not hear, could not hear for the clamor of her inward battle. When he was gone, she drew a long breath, whether of relief or of regret she could not have told.

XVI

SHE had let a passion-plant spring up in the garden of her secret self. Now, it burst from the secret garden and clambered over the walls. It hung its tempting blossoms, not where she could see only when she chose to turn aside and visit the garden, but where she could see whenever for an instant she lifted her eyes from the insistent duties and devotions of her religion. And if the Mother-Light frowned and looked away, the Woman gazed the more tenderly and longingly. She would have fared hardly in those days—and in many and many a day thereafter—had it not been for her routine of work, insistent, continuous, irritating to soothe, soothing to heal. The routine of work—Life's hospital for ailing minds and hearts.

It began to be difficult for her to meet or to bear Mr. Casewell's eyes. She knew how deep was the plunge of that glance; and, although she realized that when it turned upon the Mother-Light it was hazed by adoration, still she watched and listened for the first sign that he had discovered her secret. Not that she felt guilty; only that it was *her* secret. "Am I not the Mother-Light?" she assured and reassured herself. "Do I have to account to any but The Light? And

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has it bidden me uproot this love?" That last question she could not answer to her satisfaction. Never had The Light blazed more brilliantly in her; and yet—"If I am not to impair my authority and the faith itself, must I not remain forever alone?" Either he or The Light must possess her. He would have none of her faith; The Light would have none of his love.

"I must forget him," commanded the Mother-Light. But the woman pleaded "Wait!"

The potent physical sense of his physical reality had not yet begun to fade, and she was still debating whether to yield to the promptings of her woman's heart and tell Mr. Casewell in the hope that he might somehow help her to peace and perhaps happiness, when Evelyn Marshbanks, a missionary of the English Church, arrived in obedience to her summons, sent, as she afterward remembered, at Mr. Casewell's suggestion. The Council of the Church—The Mother-Light and her four apostles—wished a thorough report on the conditions in England before deciding the question of a vigorous propaganda there.

"The House of Pilgrims is full just now," said Mr. Casewell, the morning of the day Miss Marshbanks was to come. "We shall have to make room for her here."

"Why not put her in—the apartment opposite yours?" suggested the Mother-Light.

Mr. Casewell's eyes flickered for an instant before

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this, her first, reference to the rooms that had been tenanted by Maida Hickman. "That was where I thought of putting her," he said.

The next day she received the Englishwoman—a slender, handsome girl of about her own height and figure and with features as strongly outlined. But there was in her no suggestion of that will which saved the beauty and sweetness of the Mother-Light from even the seeming of docility. She charmed the Mother-Light as she had charmed Mr. Casewell and Hinkley and Floycroft; and they understood at once why that earnest, eloquent expression and that low, clear voice had such power from pulpit and platform.

That night the Mother-Light burst from a profound sleep and sat upright in her bed. The perspiration had made her thin night-gown wet; her body was shaking in a nervous chill. She pressed the electric button and the room was flooded with light. With blanched face she peered out through the curtains, cautiously and carefully round and round the room. Apparently, no one was there—but—What might not be concealed behind some one of the big pieces of furniture—or in one of the adjoining rooms—or in one of the several private passages?

At the last suggestion, the dream or sub-conscious train of thought that had awakened her like an explosion, suddenly burst again into her mind. And she

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shrank and stared with wide eyes toward the doors of the salon.

“Has *he* brought Evelyn Marshbanks to put her in my place? Has *he* read my secret? Am I to join Ann Banks?” And the scene in the cellar reenacted before her very eyes, only it was herself that he was effacing now. “I am condemned to death!” she exclaimed. Then—“How many unfilled graves are waiting—there?” And upon the heels of this thought ran one so hideous that she shuddered and hid her face in the pillow. “How many *filled* graves? How many candidates before me were tried, and failed? And I have let him put her in my old apartment! She is sleeping now where I was sleeping when Ann Banks was suffering here as I am suffering now!”

She sprang from the bed and wrapped herself up on the lounge in the corner farthest from the doors.

Uncertain in conscience about Thorndyke, ready to suspect Mr. Casewell of having found her out, she fell easy prey to terror. The longer her unnerved mind revolved it, the more probable it became—why, Miss Marshbanks must be the very woman Mr. Casewell told her they had in mind until Hinkley spoke of her. Hinkley! The thought of him, her old friend, comforted her for a moment. Then she saw in fancy those fanatic eyes of his. No—all, *all*—Mr. Casewell, Hinkley, Floycroft, Tillinghast, Molly even—looked on her,

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on themselves, on every one and everything, as instruments for The Cause.

The Cause! Deeper than any reverence for the Mother-Light was that passion. And with Mr. Casewell—what would he do, what would he *not* do, if he thought The Cause, as represented by this great and swiftly growing church which he had chiefly built up, was imperiled through her? And in the air above her, like vultures squeaking above a corpse, began to wheel and shriek those shrillings of Ann Banks at Casewell which she had overheard in the rose-lighted salon.

Not until the fantasy-breeding night was over did the other side get a hearing. Daylight revived to her the gentleness of the natures of all these people. They were passionately devoted to the faith, as was she herself—was she not for its sake fighting desperately to overcome and to cast out a passion whose roots were in the very heart of her heart? But in them all, love and gentleness were dominant—*Except* where the faith was concerned! *There* was the vital point—and, daylight or night, she could not but come back to it. What crimes had not the gentlest, the noblest, the purest men committed for their faith? Still, this was the twentieth century, not the fifteenth—Yet again, through the centuries human nature persisted unchanged and unchangeable. But finally, to make her ashamed of herself Mr. Casewell, who beyond doubt loved her, who beyond doubt

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was the frankest and simplest of men, rose before her mind—How considerate he was of her, and—just yesterday she had caught him looking at her with an expression in which tenderness and reverence were beautifully mingled. She was ashamed of herself, but—She had only to look into her own soul to realize how for the sake of The Cause any and every sacrifice would seem right. She could lay Love upon the altar and, shuddering but with steady hand, put the knife to its throat; why should she think them, especially her First Apostle, less devoted than she?

“But, I *am* the Mother-Light!” she reminded herself. And then she remembered that Ann Banks, too, had been the Mother-Light. “But The Light is not failing in me.” And the answer came, “Yes, *you* know it, but Mr. Casewell may not think so.”

She saw him at eleven o'clock. She did not look at him. Presently, she said carelessly, ashamed of herself as she said it, “I've changed my mind about having Miss Marshbanks here in the Temple of Temples.” She told herself that she really did not suspect him, yet she was closely studying his face by way of a mirror. Its expression drove suspicion from her mind. She flushed a deep crimson, longed for some way to make amends for her crime against him.

“Very well,” he said. “We shall send her to the House of Pilgrims.”

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“No,” said the Mother-Light. “Let her stay where she is. I—it was an impulse that has passed.”

But as soon as she was alone in her bed-room that night, she bitterly regretted not having insisted. Something very near her terror of the night before seized her. “It would be easy completely to efface me,” she reflected. “The Mother-Light need not appear again for years. It wouldn’t be thought strange should he announce that she had shut herself in and would see no one but him.” And then she brought before her mind the English girl as she had appeared at the Council that day—yes, Evelyn Marshbanks *could* personate the Mother-Light. Her self-control fled and her mind became a chaos with only one persistent, clear impulse—the instinct of self-preservation.

How to escape? Even if she was suspecting them unjustly she could never again, she told herself, feel the old security. And if she fled, if she could somehow contrive to elude them—for, they must be guarding her—she could join Thorndyke! That thought was like a wide rent in the black terror with the sun streaming through. Thorndyke! There, security and happiness—there only, there certainly. “I love him! I love him!” she cried out—her first unreserved avowal of the secret she had been half-denying to herself. “I *love* him!” she repeated and flung her arms wide.

The room was instantly plunged from brilliant light

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into darkness. And she felt an icy wind blowing upon her shoulders—as if from an opened door. She shut her teeth hard to hold back a scream. “If I must die,” she muttered, “I shall not *show* what a coward I am.”

She waited—nothing, no sound. She searched for the button of the electric bell. Instead of touching it, she happened on the light-switch; the room was brilliant again. She understood—she had turned off the light when she flung out her arms; the draught was from a window she herself had opened before getting into bed.

But fear was rampant now—fear of fanaticism, of the house with its private passages—and graves. She rang for Molly, who came looking childishly young and innocent, in pink dressing-gown over white night-gown, golden hair so loose it was almost flying. That face, which always made her think of fresh violets, was as a rush of dawn for scattering the ugly, noiseless, elusive bats of fear. “I feel lonely to-night,” said she, ashamed but determined. “Won’t you sleep here—in the bed? I’ll take a cot in my dressing-room.”

“No, indeed,” said Molly. “I’ll sleep there.”

“No—in my bed,” she insisted.

“I—*dare* not,” said Molly. “It is the bed of—the Mother-Light.” And she performed the ceremonial of the name.

The Mother-Light saw that it was idle, and worse, to reason against this religious feeling. “I shall sleep

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in my dressing-room," she said—it had no passages and only one door. "If you won't sleep in the bed——"

"I'll stop here," Molly broke in, going to the sofa. "It's far more comfortable than that cot in the dressing-room."

They made the sofa into a couch with the linen from the cot. When Molly was comfortably settled, the Mother-Light returned to her bed, less than its own length distant from the sofa. They both slept—but she did not turn off the night lamp.

Fear did not return, but neither did suspicion leave. The thorn had appeared in her splendor; it had come to stay. And the more her passion for the faith grew, the more keenly she realized the possibilities of such a passion turned against herself. She did not suspect any of them, she told herself—they *must* feel, must know, that she was indeed the Mother-Light. Still, she, as the Mother-Light, must jealously guard the faith against possibilities of danger through false zeal or ambition. "I do not suspect, but I must be watchful."

When Miss Marshbanks left, she still did not feel relieved. "Has she *really* gone?" she thought. "I must wait, must not relax my vigilance, until I know she is back in Liverpool."

XVII

ABOUT a week after Miss Marshbanks had her farewell audience, the Mother-Light and the First Apostle were alone in the salon after the morning council. He paused in the middle of a sentence, gave a sharp cry, pitched forward upon the table between them. She tried to lift him but could not. She was rushing toward the door to summon Hinkley from the ante-room when he, still prostrate, called in a voice which seemed to come direct from his mind instead of from his lips and throat: "Stop! Lock the doors! No one must know!"

She hesitated, looking at him. By one of those inexplicable exertions of the will he all in an instant resumed control of his body and lashed back to its lair the disease which had reached for, and almost strangled, his soul. "Help me; heal me, Mother-Light!" he prayed, an appeal that was also an imperious command, like the call of a drowning man to one he knows can save him.

And there entered her the strength to stretch out her right arm over him and the voice to say, "May The Light shine in you!"

A swift, frightful final struggle; he was sitting,

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calm, but ash-gray, in the position from which he had fallen. "Please lock the door," he said.

She obeyed him.

His eyes sent her to her seat opposite him. He did not speak but looked at her dully, a blue-black bag swelling slowly under each eye. Presently he had to grind his teeth and clench his fists to keep back another cry of agony. "I shall conquer this evil thought in a moment," he said as soon as he could venture to relax his muscles a little. And he did seem to grow rapidly better. He went on with their business; when it was finished, instead of gathering together the checks and letters which she had signed, he leaned forward, resting upon his elbows. "I had not intended starting till next week," he began. "With your permission, I'll start to-day."

"You must not go until—" She was unable to finish. For, in anticipation of the end of her sentence, of the suggestion that he was not well, his eyes were ablaze—the fanatic at sight of a sacrilegious hand raised against his god.

Her impulse of resentment against that look vanished when she saw how he was suffering, crying out to himself the while, "I do not suffer. It is only an evil thought, an imp of The Darkness." Before she could resume, he said: "I think, when I shall have explained, you will bid me go. I have a leading from The Light that I

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must make haste and finish my tour of the churches or it will never be finished."

She understood him now, and the suspicions that had been lurking in her mind for weeks fled in wild rout before a wave of affection and sorrow.

"The Light is calling me to another field," he continued. "My soul seems to be wearying of this body which was old in sin before The Light shone into it. Yes, my soul is as unhappy in this worn-out house as a king in rags."

"But you must not go," she burst out. "We can not do without you. What am *I* without *you*?"

"You are the Mother-Light," he said, reverently. "You are the visible flame on the altar."

"But you are the priest that guards the flame."

"No. I am merely one who helped to lift up the flame. But it is exalted now. It grows in glory day by day."

She lowered her eyes—how unworthy of her, of her high mission, of his adoration, typical of the adoration of scores of thousands for her, seemed the passion the Woman in her would not release.

"It is only because you must be forewarned of my going and assured that I have been called by The Light, that I speak of it to you. Then—there are several other matters. First—my successor. Do not appoint him until you have tested both Hinkley and Floycroft. They

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are equally faithful, but there is in Hinkley a remnant of The Darkness—some passion—some woman forgotten, I suspect. And that mars his judgment at times, gives him hours and days of self-torture. All we who have large capacities for emotion know how hard it sometimes is to keep the will to the one channel, the faith. Each of us has a tremendous force in him—equally tremendous no matter what it is directed at; the fight is to hold it single-heartedly to the great work.”

She did not dare look at him, to see whether he was counseling her under the pretext of analyzing Hinkley.

“The other matter,” he continued, “is Molly.”

His voice broke a little upon that name, and once more she realized what his calm cheerfulness was making her forget. She hid her face. “You must not go—father!” she pleaded, “My more than father. You must not leave Molly and me.”

He gently stroked her hair. “Let us not forget that we are children of The Light,” he said. “We must not weep and moan like the hopeless people of The Darkness. I leave Molly to you. And I venture to tell you her secret, but she must not know I told you. She is in love. She loves her cousin—Doctor Thorndyke.”

The Mother-Light lifted her head. “Thorndyke!” she exclaimed.

“I know,” continued Mr. Casewell, “that he is not yet of The Light. But I think he will become one of us.

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Of course, if he does not, Molly will put him out of her life. She is first of all a child of The Light. But his love, when he can give her the love that The Light sanctifies, will make her very, very happy—and I feel that it will be granted to her.”

“Oh!” cried Maida, burying her face in her arms. “Oh—oh!” And her form was shaken by her sobs.

“But she will not leave you,” said the old man soothingly, misunderstanding her—so she thought at the time, though afterward she was not sure. “If she ever marries him, it will be because she has brought him to you. But I must go—” He knelt before her—“Your blessing, Mother-Light!”

She slowly regained outward control of herself. When she saw his face, the fire of faith that lit it and transfigured it and streamed from it seemed suddenly to rekindle in her the fainting flame of the Mother-Light. She rose and stretched her arms over him and gave him the benediction. “The Light,” she said in tones of conviction, “*shall* shine in you ever!”

“Amen! Amen!” he responded in that deep voice which had called, and led, thousands to the faith. He stood, hesitated, then took her face between his great white hands and kissed her brow. “The Cause, my child, always The Cause! Be strong *in* The Light! Be strong *for* The Light!”

And he was gone.

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She sat a long time, looking straight ahead of her. Then she went to her bed-room and locked herself in. She knelt. "At last, at last, I *do* believe!" she cried.

Instantly she felt an enormous exaltation, as if a pure fire had consumed her longing for Thorndyke and all other human passions, weaknesses and evils within her and had taken up its abode there forever.

"I *am* the Mother-Light!" she sobbed, in an ecstasy, not of pride but of humility.

Soon, the reports from the First Apostle's mission began to come in—from city to city he was journeying, his eloquence like a blazing torch among tinder. Never before did any missionary show such power, have such response. And as the Mother-Light read, her conviction deepened, and the sense of divinity entempered within her became the fixed habit of her mind, the fixed instinct of her heart. And the seeming of divine majesty, with which those about her had invested her chiefly because of her position, now became an actuality, saturating her atmosphere even for those who saw her oftenest, as the perfume of a June garden saturates the air after a rain.

Chicago was the last of the cities in the First Apostle's tour. He preached to twelve thousand there, ending with these sentences: "The Light calls me to another field. I shall see you no more. But I leave my words as

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witness that there is no death to those who are perfect in faith in The Light!" His hearers and the whole Church of The Light soon understood what he had meant. For, he left the hall, returned to his hotel, disappeared utterly. The clothing he had last worn was found in his sitting-room in strips, as if it had been torn from him as lightning tears the bark from the tree.

When the Chicago church telegraphed the facts to the Mother-Light, she sent for Molly. "Molly," she said, drawing her into her arms, "your grandfather has been summoned."

She felt the girl tremble, then grow steady again. "He has gone?" she asked, very white.

"He is in The Light," replied the Mother-Light.

"It is well with him," said Molly. And she smiled—if the will and the features can together make a smile, without the aid of the heart. Then she sobbed—once. "I can't help it," she apologized. "He has sailed away—as if to Europe—and as I stand on the pier, I can't help—and when I see him again I shall be happy. That's all." From the doorway, she smiled bravely—and was not seen again for two days.

Hinkley came to the Mother-Light, in great anxiety, because the Chicago church had hastened to make proclamation of a miracle. "If some trace of him should be found," he said.

"No trace will be found," answered the Mother-

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Light, before her eyes the First Apostle's face as she had last seen it. And no trace was found. The disappearance remained a marvel to "The Darkness" and a miracle to the "children of The Light."

At first she was, sometimes waking, oftener sleeping, haunted by a vision of an old man going away in secrecy to some obscure, miserable place to die alone for "The Cause." And this invested him for her with a super-human nobility of martyrdom—for, to what a height of self-immolation he had risen in thus giving himself to preserve for others a salvation which was denied to him! Nor was her exalted conception of him shaken when she long afterward accidentally learned that Evelyn Marshbanks had not sailed for home by the announced steamer but had been privately detained, on his orders, in New York; and that he had not given her leave to sail until the day he was stricken.

"He was right—a thousand times right," she said to herself, after thinking over all the involvements of this discovery. "And he probably did not himself know why he was detaining her, but acted on a leading from The Light." She reminded herself that the day he was stricken, the day he had released Evelyn Marshbanks, was also the day on which she had for the first time let The Light take full possession of her. "Not because he was stricken but because I yielded myself, am I permitted to stay," she concluded. "If I had not

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yielded, The Light would not have left me here to betray the faith.”

This became a conviction; and it set her on to re-examine all the facts about his going. And she soon became convinced that unfaith had tempted her into the sin of doubting the validity of his summons, of attributing to clever contrivance what was in truth miracle. She straightway understood why she had latterly been so much stronger both in the faith and for it. “From his new dwelling place,” she said, “he has been reaching out to me and aiding me.” And, now that she saw it, she was amazed that she had been so blind. Did not the throngs of plans for the Church that had been springing into her brain day by day bear each the stamp of the unmistakable individuality of the First Apostle?

Thereafter, in her most exalted moods, she could almost hear his voice as his soul transmitted its thoughts to her soul.

XVIII

IN the Hall of The Light, before the colossal statue of Health, there was now a pyramid of discarded emblems of disease—crutches and canes; braces and bandages of leather, of wood, of iron; helps to deaf and to blind; medical and surgical appliances of many kinds. And daily before this monument to the faith knelt pilgrims from far and near. When the Mother-Light drove, in the most secluded parts of the park, her horses rushing along that she might not be gaped at, she usually passed several reverent groups, often many kneeling. Her mail was heavy with proofs of her fame and power—eulogies, prayers, gifts of money, notifications of bequests. Month by month her open adherents were increasing by hundreds, by thousands. And the most of them were of the “educated” classes, especially of the well-off, loving life, shrinking from pain, hoping that through The Light they might at least put somewhat farther away the end of an estate they found so satisfactory. And she——

The Mother-Light was the spiritual autocrat of these people, the beacon of their hope, and its bulwark. Every moment of every day the incense of adoration was in her

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nostrils, and the tangible evidence of the validity of her exalted mission and of its implicit acceptance was before her eyes. Whatever view of herself she caught, it was always an image of the Mother-Light. To doubt her divinity was to think herself mad and also the whole of the world which she saw. To dispute it was to dispute the testimony of her senses and of her soul and of the senses and souls of more than three hundred thousand enlightened human beings.

She felt that the Woman would never lift in her again, that the Mother-Light was secure from that power which The Darkness had so insidiously sought to retain over her through Thorndyke. She reflected calmly on what Mr. Casewell had told her, and debated her duty to Molly. And it seemed to her that she must see him again for Molly's sake, must uproot the hopes she had planted. "Then," she reasoned, "his heart will naturally turn to her." And the fact that this thought gave her no pang seemed to her proof conclusive that the Woman was dead.

"When your cousin comes again," she said to Molly, "I should like to see him."

The sudden luminousness of Molly's face was in significant contrast to the pensive expression it had worn for a long time. "He hasn't been here lately," she said, in a tone that smote upon the Mother-Light's conscience. "Shall I send for him?"

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The Mother-Light reflected. "Ask him to come to see you," she finally said.

Molly flushed painfully.

"Or, if you prefer, say I wish to see him about your affairs," continued the Mother-Light, not letting Molly see that she had made the suggestion because she had noted and had understood her confusion.

It was on the following Saturday that Molly took Thorndyke to the private garden of the Mother-Light, and to her presence, and left him alone before her.

When he could trust himself to look, his heart sank before the hopeless gulf between him and Her as she sat there, a-glow to him with the unearthly radiance of the immortal gods and young with their agelessness. Her eyes were gazing straight ahead, in her face an inscrutable expression.

She did not ask him to sit; she did not give him the salutation. "I am glad to see you here," she began, and her voice came from a far other-shore. "And I hope you will come often—especially nowadays. You are a great help—a great help in a most trying time—to my brave friend, your cousin. All her other relatives, as you know, have held aloof from her because of her and her grandfather's faith. You have stood by her—and—she is very lonely, I know, though she is too unselfish to show it."

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And the Mother-Light stealthily drew a long breath, as of self-congratulation at having repeated without mistake a carefully learned lesson.

“I thank you,” he said. “I shall certainly come as often as I can. My cousin is very dear to me—my dearest friend, dear as a sister.”

The Woman startled the Mother-Light here by lifting radiantly to exclaim: “He does *not* love her!” And then the Mother-Light realized that her real reason, her deep, unconscious reason, for sending for him had been to reassure the Woman’s human heart with its longings—and its jealousy. But it was with the Woman in check that she said aloud, formally: “Then you will come again soon?” and bowed formally, to indicate that the interview was at an end. The Woman had cheated the Mother-Light with the pretense of death; but the Mother-Light was resolved that the treachery should not triumph. He would go; the Woman would be inexorably crushed down, would never be permitted to see him again.

But he did not go. He stood looking directly at her, directly into her face which seemed to him to shine by its own light. And through all his nerves her voice was tingling, giving him a sense of happiness ineffable about to escape if he did not seize it. “As I told you,” he said rapidly, “it makes my heart ache to look at you, and it seems to me now, with the long, long night of eternity

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rushing toward us, that its endless sleep will be cursed for us both with a bitter dream of regret—regret for the happiness we are missing, the happiness that would freight each wonderful moment. How many minutes we have known each other! How many minutes we have lost—forever! And how few, how pitifully few, would be all our minutes together—those we could have had added to those we yet have.”

Her face was impassive, but her bosom rose and fell swiftly under the gauze of her white and gold robe; and with mingled terror and delight she felt her soul beginning to sway in the first blasts of the storm of primeval instinct which the sight of him never failed to rouse.

“Loneliness!” he exclaimed. “All this”—and he waved his arm, indicating garden and Temple of Temples, the luxury within it, the power and the splendor of the Mother-Light—“all this will not shut out loneliness—It will only make you more and ever more alone. You in your garden, I in my toil, the beggar in his hovel, the king, yes, the great God himself—all, of every condition, can be only wretched if alone.”

“I will not hear!” she protested, starting up.

“You have heard,” he retorted. “You cannot forget. Alone, I say, forever alone—and the eternal sleep of death tortured by the dream of what might have been and was not—the happiness you could have given and could have had.”

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“You forget my faith,” she cried—the appeal of the Mother-Light to the Woman.

“No, I do not forget,” he replied. And he stretched his arms toward her. “But I—and your heart—speak in the name of an instinct stronger than religion, one that was ages-old at the first gleam of superstition. The other day I watched a miserable insect, about the humblest of creatures, watched it charging a line of poison that lay across its path. It charged again and again. The poison burned and shriveled it. God! how the wretched thing must have suffered! But it rushed on again and again, and crawled and writhed through that barrier of death-by-torture—and fell dead, a twisted, shapeless ash. Why did that miserable thing, the lowest of the low, dare agony and death? I will tell you. Because on the other side, making a faint call, lay its mate! That was why—its mate! The instinct that began with the beginning of the universe—the instinct that makes two atoms of matter rush together with a force that could rend a mountain. Your faith? It—all faiths were born of the longing of love for immortality. And but for love’s longings they would die. And I care not who you are or what you are or what you have, material or spiritual—your heart calls to mine and I must obey.”

He caught her in his arms; her face turned upward; their lips met. “It is too strong for me,” she murmured. “I, a woman, need you, a man.” She freed

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herself, clung to him, freed herself again, then lingeringly pushed him from her. "Oh, what have I done!" she cried. "What *shall* I do!"

For answer his arms went round her again, his lips went to hers. "One thing we must both do," he said. "We must love. Ah—you—all of you drinks in the light and gives it out again as life! With my arms round you, I feel that I, too, am immortal, as you are."

She drew away to arm's length and looked at him, her hands wandering over his shoulders, her fingers playing upon his nerves as upon the key-board of a musical instrument. "How strong you are!" she said.

"How strong love is," he answered, "given the right woman!"

"The right woman, and the right man," she murmured, between their caresses.

Suddenly she lifted her head with the motion and look which throughout the animal kingdom denotes that a shadow has drifted into the sunshine of security.

"There is no one," he assured her, in reply to her swift glance all around. "But if there were—" He looked defiance down the silent, blossom-walled, blossom-roofed aisles of her enchantment-like garden.

"You don't understand—you forget," she interrupted, her hands pressed against her heart. "And there is—was—some one. You must go—immediately. No—no—not again"—as he tried to draw her into his arms—

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“ I have sinned enough for this day. I hope I alone can pay the price. Go! Go! I must think—I must reflect—I will send for you—But go—for *our* sake—for *my* sake—go!”

Her manner convinced him. It was not the panic of hysteria but courage measuring a real and great and imminent danger. It brought him back to the mystery of those surroundings, back under the shadow of the dread and awe in that stillness and beauty. He seized her hands, pressed them together, enclosed them in his. “ It is a pledge,” he said. “ You *will* send for me? ”

“ Yes—yes—how can you doubt? ” she exclaimed.

“ I do not doubt,” he answered. “ And remember, there is no barrier that will not fall before your will and mine! ” He was thrilling with delight at the thought that she was apart from the mystery now, was with him, was regarding whatever of menace it might contain as a menace to their common hope and resolve.

Her eyes were swimming as they looked love and trust into his. And she felt their souls, mingled like a harmony, soaring upward into that resplendent infinity of sunshine and saturated with its intoxicating light. “ My love! ” she sighed, slowly freeing herself.

When he reached the end of the aisle, he turned for a last look at her. She was standing in the luminous shadow of the spreading tree; she was watching him with a look which so burned her into his memory that

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she continued to live before him when he could no longer see her, as the light lingers upon the eyes after one has gone into the darkness.

And his presence lingered for her too, persisting defiantly in the gloom of the thoughts that soon enshrouded her. "Who was it?" she wondered, going back to that instinct of a third person somewhere among those screens of leaves and flowers. "Molly?" No, Molly would never transgress the rule against intruding upon the Mother-Light's privacy. Then, Hinkley?—or Floycroft? Before her mind they rose—Hinkley, the blazing-eyed, with his two consuming passions; Floycroft, an ascetic monk, Mr. Casewell's right-hand man, surely the depository of any secret instructions the original apostle of The Light might have left as a safeguard. Were Hinkley and Floycroft watching her—her actions—ready to conspire against her if their fanaticism should command it?

"I must be free of them," she said. "I shall never be at ease until I am surrounded only by those whom I have lifted up—except, of course, Molly."

Molly! That name dropped her from the heavens as a shot a soaring bird. How could she face Molly *now!* How could she face herself! She, the Mother-Light; and she had polluted the high altar of the Faith! He was gone; the touch of his voice, of his glance, of his hands and lips, was no longer vibrating her nerves. But

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the Faith remained. "Yes," she said to herself, "there *was* a third here—there *is*!" And Thorndyke was no longer there to create with her that magnetic circle through which the third, the Messenger from The Light, could not penetrate to her.

She knelt, she prostrated herself to receive the Messenger. And, as she felt eyes fiery with divine wrath scorching her sinful flesh like penance-rods of scorpions, she cried: "Punish me for his sin also—if it be not sin to ask it."

XIX

SHE did not see Molly until noon the next day. Then, she and Hinkley were at work in the salon, as usual; in the doorway appeared Molly, white and strange. "Look! Read!" she gasped, so overwhelmed that she even forgot deference and ceremony. She thrust a newspaper at the Mother-Light and almost fell into a chair, where she rocked her body to and fro, her hands tight upon her temples. The Mother-Light glanced at the newspaper. "Ah!" she cried, as the shrieking headlines filled her brain with their din. "Ah!" she repeated, like the last breath sighing and hissing from the lips of one just dead.

Hinkley came, gently tried to take the paper from her. "Let me read it to you," he begged. "I saw it early this morning and have been debating ever since how to tell you."

Her eyes were closed and she was swaying, but she held to the newspaper. "Is he—dead?" she asked.

"No," Hinkley answered. "Let me read."

The Mother-Light made no reply. Instinct commanded her to seek strength and self-control at her sofa-

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throne. She went slowly but steadily to it, seated herself and read with eyes that were soon leaping from line to line:

“At a quarter past eleven last night, Walter Brock, butler at the residence of the distinguished surgeon, Doctor Gayland Thorndyke, 80½ Madison Avenue, answered a ring of the office bell. On opening the door he saw a man in the little vestibule. The light there had been turned off for the night, and the gas in the front hall was low. Brock made out, however, that the caller was of medium height, slender build, was well dressed in dark blue or black, and had his face wound with a white bandage, as if his jaw were badly injured.

“‘Is Doctor Thorndyke in?’ inquired the caller in a voice that was, naturally, muffled. ‘I need a surgeon at once.’

“Brock hesitated, but finally showed the man into the Doctor’s ante-room. The doors between it and the consultation room were closed. Brock went round to the hall door of the consultation room, knocked and entered. The Doctor was seated at his desk, under a light so shaded that it fell strongly upon the desk, leaving the rest of the room dim. When Brock explained, Doctor Thorndyke without looking up from his writing said: ‘I will see him. Open the doors.’ Brock obeyed, and said to the man, who had taken a chair at the far and darkest end of the large waiting parlor, ‘The Doctor

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will see you. Please step this way.' Then Brock withdrew from the consultation room by way of the hall door, which he closed after him. He went, rather slowly as he remembers, down the basement stairs. When he left the consultation room the Doctor, who is noted for his intense power of concentration, was still writing, his back squarely to the open doors into the reception-room.

"At midnight Brock, having received no summons and thinking the Doctor had forgotten to ring before going to his apartment for the night, went up to put out the lights. He entered the reception-room by its hall door. He glanced into the consultation room, saw the Doctor still at his desk. Brock at first thought he was writing, then that he had fallen asleep with his head buried in his arm. He decided to wake him.

"Advancing, he was horrified by the sight of the handle of a scalpel projecting from Thorndyke's back. Then he saw that the young Doctor's coat was saturated, and realized the truth. His shouts brought the other servants—Doctor Thorndyke is a bachelor and has no family. The police came, and several doctors. An examination of the wound revealed that the scalpel had entered the aortic cavity. A year ago, and the wound would have been mortal; further, had not the scalpel been taken from a bowl of sterilizing fluid within a few feet of the Doctor's back, the present strong hopes of his recovery could never have been entertained."

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The newspaper slipped from her hands to her lap, to the floor. "Hope," she muttered. "Strong hope."

Hinkley was still standing, had been torturing himself with the panorama of her thoughts as it passed across her unguarded features. "In one of the papers," he now forced himself to say, "I saw an interview with his friend Doctor Brenton. He says the chances in Thorndyke's favor are seven out of ten."

"Seven out of ten," her lips repeated. Her eyes turned unseeingly toward his face, toward Molly, back again toward the window.

A silence, then Molly rose, and unconsciously and with slow precision tucked in some flying strands of her golden hair. "I must go to him," she said.

The Mother-Light started. "No!" she exclaimed. "I shall go."

Molly looked at her with amazement that swiftly changed to happiness. "Oh — thank you!" she cried. "You will heal him. Oh — I did not expect this!"

Hinkley's pallor became ghastly. He made a violent gesture of protest, checked himself and with a calmness enforced by a strain upon every nerve and muscle, said: "But might it not make a dangerous precedent—and many complications—if such a thing were to be done by the—Mother-Light?"

At the pronouncing of that name in his most solemn

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voice, she shrank. She was looking steadily at him while he with more than the usual solemnity was performing the ceremonial of the name. "No sacrifice would be too great," he went on, "for anyone dear to our revered Casewell, but would not *he* be the very first to protest against such a dangerous favor—and to an unbeliever, a conspicuous member of the profession that pursues us with the bitterest hate? If Doctor Thorndyke were able to control those around him, the Mother-Light—" again and with reverent deliberateness the ceremonial of the name—"would, of course, be received and would have courteous treatment at the hospital to which they have removed him. But we must remember that he is surrounded by his fellow-practitioners of the cult of The Darkness. I fear they might not neglect the opportunity to insult the faith in the person of her who is its divine head and fountain."

"He is right," cried Molly, impulsively, kneeling beside the Mother-Light. "You must not make the sacrifice for me. And it is useless, too, for your healing can go to him as well from here." She bent her head and clasped her hands upon her bosom. "Your blessing, Mother-Light, for him," she prayed.

The Mother-Light sat motionless while Hinkley was thus adroitly reminding her; the last vestige of color had fled from her face; her very hair seemed to have lost its living light; and her great eyes looked as if she were face

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to face with the Infinite. A long silence, Molly kneeling with bowed head, Hinkley standing, his strange gaze burning upon the Mother-Light as she listened to the Voice. At last she stretched forth her hand over Molly's head and said: "May The Light shine in him—in us all."

"Amen!" cried Hinkley, an expression of joy bursting over his somber face. "Amen and amen!" And he sank to his knees.

Molly rose and went, but Hinkley continued to kneel, his lips moving in an inaudible prayer. She did not note him; all her mind was absorbed in longings to feel the mysterious power again flowing into her, that she might speed it out toward Thorndyke. "If thou ever didst use me for thy miracles," she was praying, "use me now for this miracle. Let thy punishment fall upon me for the sin. Spare him—for Molly's sake. The sin was mine—all mine. Spare him. Cause thy Light to shine upon him—and I vow that henceforth thy will shall be mine."

She waited, feeling that the answer would soon come. And through the awful silence and vastness in which her soul was isolated, prostrate, humbled, came The Power, lifting her on its broad wave to a great height whence she saw, far, far beneath, the Woman in her freeing herself from the toils of an earthly, earthy passion. She felt herself again the Mother-Light, again the altar

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of the Flame. "My prayer is answered!" she exclaimed aloud. "He will not die!"

She started as Hinkley's voice came—"If The Light wills." He had risen, and was watching her.

"I thought you went out with Molly," she said. "What do you mean?"

"If The Light wills," he repeated. "It was The Light that struck him down. If its purpose has been accomplished, he may recover. If not, we may be sure The Light will move on until its will is perfected, whatever that will may be."

"The Light," she murmured. "The Light!" She saw instantly—*this* was the wages of her sin! She buried her face, and her grief and penitence raged indifferent to Hinkley's presence.

He bit his lip till the blood came. But when her storm began to abate, his was sufficiently under control for him to calm and steady his voice to say: "The ways of The Light can not be always gentleness, but they are always justice, and mercy."

"It was *not* The Light!" she exclaimed suddenly. "Someone who hated him tried to kill him. The Light does not assassinate."

"True," replied Hinkley. "But if, for some reason unknown to us, this unbeliever who had made such strong ties in this the supreme household of the faith, had become an obstacle to The Light—" Her eyes

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shifted before his—"it may have suffered the black heart and the furious arm of some hate to remove that obstacle."

"No! No!" she protested.

"But your mind is saying yes," he answered. "I only put into words what you yourself have just shown me. Do *you* not see in this the will of The Light?"

She was silent.

"The flame must be worshiped by the moths from afar," he went on, sardonically. "If they rush into it, if it bends toward them—" His voice and manner changed abruptly to the priestly and the prophetic—"Woe, woe unto any that come near the immortal flame!"

She trembled before her guilt as he unrolled its black scroll before her.

"In your childhood," he went on gently, "The Light put its mark upon you, drew its circle about you. And one by one, all near you, all who came near you, passed away. You were fulfilling your destiny of exalted isolation."

"Oh, Will!" she exclaimed, "I am too weak—too human, for it. I do not wish to be alone. There come hours——"

"Yes," he answered, "but those hours will be fewer and farther apart as the Woman in you yields to the Mother-Light. And the day will come, the day *must*

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come—can you not see it—when you will shine steadily, purely, in the joy and glory of The Light, unmarred by any notes from The Darkness.”

“ But he will recover,” she said. “ I feel it. I have been forgiven.”

“ It is so,” he replied, “ *if* you feel it as the Mother-Light. And I hope it is so, for his sake.”

Alone, she sat peering into the dimness around this mystery of sin and punishment. And, after a long time, there came a gleam—and she said: “ Mine is the sin whose wages is death!” Then, swift upon that illuminating gleam, a tremendous, overwhelming flash, and she saw, and she cried out: “ *That* was the sin of Ann Banks and Mr. Casewell! And they persisted in it, and did not cast it out until too late!”

Too late! She sat there, very still, her fixed eyes upon this thunder-clap revelation. *They* cherished the traitor from The Darkness until it was too late. “ And I—is it too late for me?” her still soul whispered.

After a long wait for answer The Light shone.

XX

ON the twelfth day Thorndyke had so far advanced toward recovery that, when Molly was leaving his room in the New York Hospital after a two hours' visit, it was to return to Trenton and the Temple of Temples. He did not release her hand when he took it for the final good-by. "It has been having you here every day that has made me get well so fast," he said.

She blushed, then with a sense of irreligion in her pleasure that ought to be atoned, answered: "I understand how you mean it, but—I must remind you it is The Light that has healed you—The Light working through the Mother-Light." And she hesitated, as she had several times before, whether to tell him that the Mother-Light had almost come herself. But once more she decided that the telling would be an indiscretion toward the faith.

His expression as she uttered the name of the Mother-Light was misread by her. "Please don't misunderstand," she begged. "I don't say that to give you a tactless reminder of a religion which means nothing to you."

"But it does mean a great deal to me," was his earn-

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est protest. "It is *your* religion—and hers. And you are right; it was she who cured me. That, however, doesn't change the fact that you hastened the cure."

She waited, her breath coming a little faster. Surely he was now going on to say the words she was always hoping for and often expecting. But he did not; and, had he not been thinking of someone else, he could hardly have failed to note the disappointment she was unable to keep out of her voice, as she finally said: "And you will come down to the Temple of Temples to finish your convalescence?"

"I have promised," he answered. Then he laughed—"And if I hadn't, and if nobody invited me, I've a notion I'd come anyhow." And her spirits rose under her misreading of the double meaning he had ventured to put into his words because he felt that his secret was safe.

On the steps of the hospital she met Brenton. He greeted her with one of those sly, insane smiles and fits of twitching which she had come to understand and to disregard. At first she had liked him because he liked Thorndyke; now, she liked him for his queer, blunt, aggressive, tender-hearted self. She returned with him as far as the reception room for a final talk about their patient. "It's amazing how he's rushing along," said Brenton. "When I first looked at him—well, I can confess now that I hadn't much hope. But we treat

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these cases better than we used to." And his eyes smiled a challenge to Miss Ransome's faith.

"Yes," she said, with apparent guilelessness. "You treat them *less*—you give Nature a chance."

"Not The Light?"

"I said Nature—which is only another name for The Light."

"That fog-bank!" he mocked. "It's everywhere and nowhere. 'A hill-full, a dale-full, but you can't catch a bowl-full.'"

"No more can you of sunshine or air or anything else vital," she retorted.

"In this case," he said, with gallantry that was sincere if awkward, "I admit the light—'the light that lies in woman's eyes.' And in general I'll admit that we doctors are less 'scientific' every day and more hocus-pocus, bread-pill, fresh-air and faith-cure 'medicine men.' And I believe that as a result we kill fewer than we did."

He was still reveling in the atmosphere of good humor she diffused, when he entered Thorndyke's room. He found him low in mind. "And no wonder," the invalid frankly explained. "My cousin isn't coming any more."

"But she's going to keep on with the treatment, isn't she?" said Brenton. "Absent treatment, I believe they call it."

Thorndyke frowned.

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“Oh! I forgot,” said Brenton. “She told me the other day, when we were having one of our discussions, that it was the absent treatment of the Mother-Light that——”

Thorndyke reddened and interrupted him. “Please don’t irritate me, Brenton,” he said. “There are things in the world that the dissecting knife and the microscope haven’t found—as yet. When you get into the neighborhood of those things, you are out of your province.”

“Granted,” said Brenton, cheerfully. “I don’t pretend to be able to breathe where there isn’t any air.” And he changed the subject, and decided to postpone until another day certain matters which he had strongly in mind and to which his badly received remarks were intended as an introduction.

It was two weeks later and Thorndyke was once more in his own house, but still not moving about much, when Brenton returned to that purpose of his. Thorndyke, stretched in an operating chair, was so placed that he could not see Brenton without turning his head to an uncomfortable angle. Brenton began—in his most indifferent tone, but with his eyes straining to note the slightest change in his friend’s face: “By the way, the police think they have a clue.”

Thorndyke smiled. “Of course,” he said.

“A fanatic,” continued Brenton—and, when he saw Thorndyke instantly concentrate, his eyes glittered in-

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sanely with a thoroughly sane satisfaction. "A religious fanatic—one who thinks it's his duty to remove obstacles to his faith. Not an uncommon delusion. In fact, the reverse. It's the ordinary form of the insanity of human egotism to call anything that doesn't fit in with one's plans an unholy obstacle, and to feel one has the right to remove it, and actually to remove it—except where removal is a gallows matter. There most men's conviction—or courage—halts. Courage rather than con——"

"Who is he?" interrupted Thorndyke, his impatience getting the better of his determination to hide himself from Brenton.

Brenton smiled and twitched his lips and his fingers from the security of his seat out of view, as he answered in his former, casual way: "Oh, an educated fellow, they say—perfectly sane in all other respects—a man you could trust on a jury to condemn in some other chap much milder things than he'd do himself. What an uninhabitable place this world would soon be if we refused to condemn in others the things we'd do ourselves."

"What's his name?" demanded Thorndyke. And he twisted round and looked. Brenton's expression made him settle back—he knew he had been tricked into betraying himself.

"No," said Brenton, answering Thorndyke's thought, "not *that* man—the police would never look

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in *that* direction. This man is a fellow you operated on once—he's been in a madhouse up in Massachusetts—got away about six weeks ago. But—I see you know who tried to kill you. And that's what I wanted to find out."

"Why do you—" Thorndyke began. But he did not know how to finish.

"I suspected, the instant they told me you were stabbed," Brenton continued. "I might almost say I had a foreboding of it when you talked to me, or, rather refused to talk, about—the Mother-Light. I saw you were involving yourself between the two strongest of the fundamental passions, love and superstition, both lawless, both sublime, both with mountain-like peaks—and abysses. And I—feared."

"I can account for it in no other way," confessed Thorndyke. Suddenly he turned on his friend. "You haven't told your suspicions to the police—to any one?"

"I've too little confidence in police intelligence for that, and too much confidence in the cunning of—those people. No, I thought it was your affair. But—if your wound had turned out differently, I shouldn't have *sent* anyone along their trail. It would have been an interesting hunt." A stranger might have gathered from Brenton's tone that he almost regretted he was not to have the chance to match his wits against the wiliness of "those people."

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“Thank you,” said Thorndyke simply, his eyes dim as he settled himself again. “Thank you, Eugene.”

At his tone a flush came into Eugene’s rather gaunt face. But he said gruffly: “I suppose you’ll do nothing about it.”

“Nothing.”

“They’ll probably be more successful the next time.”

“Perhaps.”

Brenton gloomily watched his friend’s look of unswerving determination. Presently he began again: “I have been—have become—intensely interested in that young cousin of yours—in her heart.”

Thorndyke laughed amiably. “You!” he said.

“Not a personal interest,” Brenton rejoined tranquilly. “Women—even she—have not the wisdom to be satisfied with the peaceful emotions I could offer them and would insist upon their restraining themselves to with me. But, in the course of my investigations into mental disturbances of all kinds, I have had to make a somewhat exhaustive study of love in its several forms. And, just as the expert in wines, teas, perfumes, or other things of delicate flavor, must be a person whose senses have not been vitiated by indulgence in them, so it is with the expert in love. He must have been a total abstainer. Usually the specimens of love I have tested have been commonplace to distinctly unpleasant. But the love of your cousin——”

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“For whom?” asked Thorndyke.

“For you,” blurted Brenton, like a shot out of a gun.

“Oh!” said Thorndyke. “I thought you meant she was *in love*.”

“So I do,” replied Brenton. “She may be as unconscious of it as you are. But she loves you. She is a beautiful woman—a beautiful flower, and her love for you is its perfume worthy of its beauty.” This in a musing tone, with a curious sadness in his eyes.

“I talk to you—we talk to each other, Brenton,” said Thorndyke, “much as each talks within himself. But, I beg you, please say and, if possible, think, no more about it. I feel as if we were—not showing proper respect for her.”

“Don’t think I’d be saying these things to you if I hadn’t a purpose that was respectful for her,” Brenton answered. “If she heard me talking this way to you of her, she would hate me. But if she could look into my mind—I’m sure she wouldn’t.”

“She does not care for me, nor I for her—in that way,” declared Thorndyke, with the positiveness of the man who is both convinced and determined to remain convinced.

“There are two distinct genera of love—all the others are species,” philosophized the mind expert. “There is the love that asks all and offers nothing;

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there is the love that offers all and asks nothing. And the man who has the chance to live in the unbroken sunshine of a love that offers all and asks nothing, and who refuses that chance—deserves the fate the capacity for such folly will surely bring him.”

After a silence so long that Brenton was beginning to think Thorndyke had fallen asleep, Thorndyke said: “You’ve tempted me into a pitiful priggish return for my cousin’s kindness! Here I’m debating whether she isn’t in love with me. I am ashamed, and so should you be—you, who know there’s only one woman for me.”

“Only one thing worse than to lose her could overtake you,” said Brenton savagely. “That would be to win her. Have you ever looked calmly at this infatuation of yours? Even if you could get near enough to her to induce her to return it, what good could it do either her or you? How could she be fitted into your life, or you into hers, or how could you two together make a life that would not be disastrous to both?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” replied Thorndyke, “and furthermore, I don’t care.”

“Don’t care!” echoed Brenton scornfully. “That’s fine talk for a man with the duty of a career!”

“Duty? To whom, since we have banished God from the universe? To whom? To what?”

“To sanity.”

“That is not duty; it is option.”

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“With rather disagreeable penalties for disobedience,” retorted Brenton.

“I obey the law that overrides all laws,” said Thorn-dyke. “Also, I do not profess to be sane—or wish to be.” And he would talk no more, angry with himself for having let Brenton goad him into saying so much.

Brenton went moodily away. “He refuses food and clutches at poison,” he said to himself. “Very human, that. We’ve lost the instinct that keeps the other animals straight. We’ve broken out of the nursery and are smashing crazily about—especially in the jam closet—and the wine-cellar. Passion! Fire’s beautiful—but not to fall into. And that fire—It won’t burn long, even on a hearth. And what scars! And what ashes!”

Brenton decided that, at least, he must try to keep his insane friend alive. It was in the pursuit of this object that, three mornings later, he appeared at the bronze doors of the Temple of Temples and asked for Miss Ransome. When she appeared in the drawing room into which he had been shown, he said to her: “I have come on a matter of particular and private business with the Mother-Light.”

“But it will be impossible to present you,” replied Molly. “It would be useless for me to ask—in fact, I shouldn’t venture to ask.”

Brenton looked reflectively round the crimson and gold drawing-room, with its lofty ceiling, its long,

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stained glass windows, its soft clear light. "I feared so," he said. "Then—may I see whoever stands next to her?"

"Mr. Hinkley is away—in Chicago—just now. There is Mr. Floycroft—the Third Apostle—I'm sure he would do as well as Mr. Hinkley. They are practically equal."

"Very well—Mr. Floycroft, then."

Molly went, and presently there entered in ghostly fashion a tall, slender man in black—"a fanatic," thought Brenton, eyeing him keenly, "eloquent probably; fanaticism directed by a strong, narrow mind; a powerful will, that is the slave of an emotional nature; the very man, or one essentially like him."

Floycroft was bowing, was regarding him with attentive courtesy.

"I am a friend of Doctor Thorndyke's," said Brenton. "He is coming down here next week. I wish to say, first, that he has not sent me, does not know of my coming, would have forbidden me had he known. Next, I wish to assure you and your associates that if another attempt is made on his life, the criminal will not again be allowed to escape. He is practically known, and I, personally, and without consulting Doctor Thorndyke, shall take the matter up."

While speaking he had not removed his eyes from Floycroft's. He saw beneath the Third Apostle's look

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of polite attention a puzzled gleam. "Innocent," he said to himself, "or an extraordinarily good actor."

"You will transmit my message to—your associates?" he said aloud.

"Certainly," replied Floycroft. "But I trust you will try to dissuade Doctor Thorndyke from his mistaken lenience. He should make himself once for all secure. We were deeply grieved here by the crime against Miss Ransome's cousin—we like him very much."

"Not the man—probably," was Brenton's verdict, upon the evidence of the Third Apostle's perfect manner. Then, to Floycroft: "Perhaps you might also say to them that neither Miss Ransome nor Doctor Thorndyke knows why I came, and that it is not necessary to alarm either of them."

"If you wish," said Floycroft. His surface of patient courtesy thinned, without breaking, to hint that he would not resist a speedy end to the interview with this man of eccentric words and glances and twitchings.

"No—hardly the man," Brenton again assured himself, "though quite capable of doing that, or worse, if his conscience commanded." When Floycroft went, which was almost immediately, Molly returned. Brenton exacted from her that she would say nothing to anyone of his having been there. "It simply had to do with some precautions for Thorndyke's safety," he told her. "No, not that there's danger of a repetition of the crime.

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We think we know the criminal, and you may be sure we're watching."

"I should have said he hadn't an enemy in the world," said Molly. "He certainly never wronged anyone."

"He has lots of enemies, I hope," replied Brenton. "In a world where to have merit is to have hatred, the number of a man's enemies is the best measure of his strength, a better measure even than the fewness of his friends."

"Cynicism," she said.

"I wish it were," he answered.

"Still, I'm sure whoever did it was insane."

"It's not easy to give a satisfactory definition of insanity," was his reply, accompanied by a look of quizzical amusement, which seemed to her in keeping neither with her remark nor with his own.

When he was driving away from the Temple, he had his driver stop and half-turn the station surrey so that he could look back at it. He looked long. Even in the brilliant sunshine of unmysterious broad day, it diffused a certain mystery, the stronger that it was a mystery of light and not of darkness or dimness. The stained-glass windows, the heavy mantles of creepers, the white marble glistening through them here and there, the stillness, the air of desertion or aloofness or impenetrability and, beyond, the huge gray pile of the Hall of The Light with a crimson and gold banner streaming

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above its domed roof—"Mystery! Mystery!" he muttered. "How man revels in it! If he only *knew* how commonplace the secret is, what a bore and a burden life would become. 'The veil falls, the illusion vanishes.' Schiller wrote it of love, but it applies to life." He sighed. "Oh, my lost illusions!" He smiled satirically. "Or—oh, my new illusion that they were illusions!"

When the surrey started again, he fell to musing upon the scrawny neck and humped-over shoulders of the driver. "Driver," he said, "you believe in the immortality of the soul, of course? You are convinced that these billions of minds, past, present, and future, though more gnarled and misshapen and full of weaknesses than the bodies they suffer in, are yet worth preserving for all eternity?"

The driver did not answer immediately—he wished to give Brenton the impression that he was doing some deep thinking. "Well," he finally said, "if I didn't think there was going to be a hereafter, I reckon I'd have a high old time in *this* life."

"What would you call 'a high old time'?"

"Oh, I'd just—cut loose!"

"With the policeman on the corner to tie you up if you got too loose, and with the bills to pay, and sickness if you don't behave, and the wife and babies needing all the money?"

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“Well, anyhow, I’d hate to die, if I didn’t feel I was going somewhere.”

“You’re not exactly crazy about dying, as it is, are you?”

“I can wait my turn,” he replied with a grin, that admitted a second defeat. “And I guess no great harm’ll come to anybody that behaves himself, not here or over yander.”

“You agree with Socrates.”

“If he thought that, I do. And I’ll go further and say that I’ve no strong prejudice agin any of the ways of getting there. My way suits me, but them that prefers another—why, let ’em go it. I ain’t prejudiced even agin The Lighters.” He looked cautiously round and up before he added, “I don’t hold with them that say—*She*—has sold herself to the devil.”

“You’ve seen her?”

“Twice. First time was twenty-six year ago last May. I drove her and the one that was the First Apostle up from the station when they came to settle here. I saw her agin last spring.” He looked all round and up, even more carefully than before. Then he said in a low voice—“And *She* looked just the same!”

A thrill ran through Brenton, and up and down his spine. He laughed at himself, told himself the driver was an ignorant, superstitious fellow, reminded himself that not one human being in a million had power of ob-

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servation that could be trusted at all as to matters of identity or had accurate memory for events even of the previous day. But, for all his reasoning and his contempt of the supernatural, his spine continued to shiver at intervals; his mood of amusing himself with the driver was gone; he sat silent and oppressed the rest of the journey. And often thereafter his mind in a sort of awe gazed upon a fanciful picture drifting before it—the Temple of Temples and the Hall of The Light, a banner like a living thing floating high over them; a woman-goddess, bathed in the glory of immortal youth; hazily, through the loneliness and silence and mystery of it all, a spirit peering like a dark menace. And that spirit seemed to him brother to one within himself—to the monster sprawled in the ooze of his own marsh of credulity and superstition which lay too deep for the sun of reason to reach and drain it.

XXI

NOT until the day Thorndyke was leaving the Temple of Temples did the Mother-Light send for him.

Molly, who brought the summons, took him through the cool twilight of the corridor in the east wing and left him at the threshold of the garden. The mystery and charm of the unseen Mother-Light hazed and tinted the whole atmosphere of the domain of The Light; but here, in this place consecrated to her and known only by the reports of the few who had visited it, she dominated as the altar dominates the chancel. Before him, when he stood in the doorway, stretched an aisle of blossoms, white, crimson, yellow; at the end was a huge elm, beneath it a bench over which had been thrown a white cloth with crimson and gold figurings. She was seated upon it, the jeweled sunburst at her throat the only relief to her gauzy, flowing robe of black. And sunbeams, sifted to softness by the leaves, floated here and there upon the curiously wrought casque of her bronze hair which in certain lights made her seem crowned with coils and curls of fire.

As he came toward her she did not look at him. He thought her like some wonderful statue of classic pan-

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theon, enthroned in unscalable aloofness, listening with ears that would not hear to implorings those beautiful lips would never move to grant. And in that face in which feeling seemed to him to be frozen beyond the power of passion to melt it, he saw his fate—the fate he had been anticipating since the first day of his visit passed without her sending for him. He paused before her, folded his arms and bent his head.

Presently she ventured to look. And when she saw in his thinness and pallor the remainders of what had befallen him for love of her, she made an impulsive movement and into her eyes came pain and the longing to console. “But you are *not* well yet—and they told me you were,” she said—and he thought surely no man would ever hear the knell of heart-hopes in a voice so sweet and sad.

“It was never serious,” he answered, “and I am again strong enough to suffer and—” He lifted his head—“to endure. If you have sent for me merely to tell me you have changed your mind, you may save me and yourself from pain. I do not understand, but I know you change because you must.”

“Thank you,” she replied. “Thank you for sparing me the reproaches I have been shrinking from.”

“But why should I reproach you? Have I not felt your heart’s strong, steady beat against mine? Have I not seen the lightning in your eyes, felt it—upon your

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lips? I know that your love was like mine—and therefore I know how strong must have been the force that could change it! Not that I yield to that force. But, yield to *you*—I must.”

“It is The Light,” she said. “It forbids, and I could not disobey if I would. My faith means little to you; but I know, with a certainty which the things of reason never have, that I was born to and for what I now am. You would perhaps believe, or, at least see why I believe—if I told you by what a succession of miracles, beginning in my earliest childhood, I was drawn apart from friends, family, loved ones, and was isolated to the service of The Altar. My own will has counted for nothing—and henceforth I shall never try to set it up against The Light. I need not tell you how I loved you—how I shall love you and crave you with all the passion of a heart in which passion was never before awakened. But that is the Woman in me. The Mother-Light sits unmoved. And never again! never again!—will I bring upon one I love the ruin my woman’s love for him must mean.”

“Then you are mine, after all!” he cried. “No calamity will come to me—they dare not try to kill me again. And if calamity did come, do you not know I would welcome it if it were the price that must be paid?”

“You think the aim is not sure, or that the blow was mere coincidence. But—I *know!*”

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“You know who tried to kill me!” he exclaimed.

“No, nor do I wish to know. Helpless wretch, instrument of The Power that works by ways we can not penetrate.”

He compressed his lips to hold back his protest—folly, worse than folly, to reason against superstition.

“I read your thought,” she went on. “You sit in judgment on that power—and so should I, if I let reason rule my mind. But, believing as I do, I feel that I know the blow was used—not directed, but *used*—by The Light. And I thank it that it mercifully spared me the torment that would have been mine—had *you* died.”

To argue with her—it would be useless. To denounce this unreasoning, blind faith of hers—it would be madness. To plead his love—the more she realized it and the more she loved him, the firmer would be her resolve to save him. In his love for her, in his rage against this superstition which ruled her and against his own impotence, in his fury and passion and despair that did not dare express themselves, he reeled, staggered, would have fallen had she not sprung forward and helped him. And then—he was at her feet, his head in her lap and tears at his weakness welling from his eyes.

“Oh, Mother-Light!” he exclaimed between a cry and a sob. “Have mercy! Come into the sunshine with me! Do not fear for me or for yourself. These

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followers of yours worship you as an idol. And I worship you as that—but as more, infinitely more—as flesh and blood and fire. I burn with you day and night, beautiful, wonderful Flame.”

Her fingers were caressing his hair, his head; her lips were murmuring inarticulate endearments—and then she suddenly pushed him away in terror. “My vow! My vow!” she cried.

“Come away with me to safety and sunshine!” he pleaded, pressing close to her again. “The Light is *there*—not in mystery—and murder! Oh, do you not see to what depth this life of superstition will drag you? Is there any crime it will not excuse? Is there any treachery it will not support and plot? It has always been so. Doing evil that good may come, thinking nothing evil that helps the cause, bartering the substance of this life, poor though it may be, for worthless shadows.”

She had drawn herself up, was standing white and cold. And she stretched her arms toward him and prayed, “May The Light shine in you! May your blasphemy be forgiven!”

“My love! My love!” he exclaimed. “Forgive me! I was goaded to it! I could not bear the thought that you, who love me, should through what you believe to be religion shield in your very house the man who in obedience to I know not what base passion tried to assassinate me.”

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She was like stone for a moment. Then, bending toward him, her whole body trembling, her eyes wide with horror, she whispered: "Here? Here? Who?"

"You must know," he answered. "When I was last here—when you hurried me away—who was it you feared?"

She recoiled and her lips shut upon the name that would have rushed past them.

"I see you do know," he said. "And—tell me—was it The Light that nerved his arm to drive a knife into my back? Is it The Light that makes you, even now that you know his guilt, refuse to denounce him—an assassin—the assassin of the man whose only crime was that he loved you, and was loved? Ah—my love—my wonder-woman of all this world, sum of the whole mystery men call Woman—tell me—shall The Darkness triumph or will you come into the light with me? Come! Purify your religion of these poisons. Rescue the soul Beauty from the slavery of the Beast superstition. I do not ask you to give up your faith, I ask you to let me come into it. Let me preach the Light of Love, you its goddess, I its high priest. Come!"

She sank upon the bench again. She put her hands on either side of his face and gazed into his eyes.

"Do what your heart tells mine it is pleading with you to do," he urged. "Let us live!"

Gently she kissed him. "No—let us die, you mean,"

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she said sweetly and sadly. "I know that the price of my love is my immortality. To live without you or to grow old and die with you in *The Darkness*——"

Distinctly she saw again Mr. Casewell mourning beside the corpse of Ann Banks, his heart full of the memories of their long ago; distinctly the whole burial scene re-enacted before her eyes until he rose, head and shoulders from the sepulcher, saying "It is finished!" She shuddered, felt the breath of fiends upon her back; and this mystery that had fascinated her as it brooded over her and permeated her and steeped her in its atmosphere of the supernal—it now seemed a spirit of horror and of hate, as it had when it hounded her to the brink of the cliffs of despair and tore from her arms her child. With a cry she clung to him, pressing her face against his.

When the sense of his nearness had reassured her, she looked out to the East—through the foliage, the white Temple of Temples and the great gray mass of the Hall of the Light; and high above the sea of green and islet of white, and isle of gray, floated the splendid crimson and gold banner. The Light! A dream? An ended dream? A dream of *The Darkness*? The last in the series of dreams that had begun for her when she, a child, awakened to the enigma of existence?

She looked at him—was he, too, a dream, was her love, their love, a dream? "I do not know—I do not

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know," she murmured. Life—might it not be, after all, only a fantastic vision, the now whimsical and now tragical creation of the wandering mind of a dreaming god?

He was following her roving glance, imagined he was following her thought. "It is true I have only love to offer you," he said sadly and a little bitterly. "I do not wonder that you hesitate to step down from all this."

She shook her head in gentle reproach. "That is unjust. 'Only love' means a great deal to me—who am a woman."

"I'm ashamed that I said it," he quickly rejoined. "I spoke without thinking. Women sacrifice everything for love every day, everywhere, and no one wonders at it. If a man makes a sacrifice for love, it gets him a page in history."

"A woman does not call it a sacrifice to give up a less value for a greater," she said. "But—you would wish me first to be sure—sure in my own heart, not merely sure in your assurance—sure that I really wish to take it, and shall not have——"

"Regrets?" he asked, as she hesitated to finish.

"No, not regrets. Remorse. Remorse for broken vows and betrayed friendship—and—" She could not utter her fear of fears, her fear for him. "'The wages of sin is death'" she remembered—What death—whose death?

He did not try to fight superstition with any of the

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futile weapons of words. He used the only force that could hope to conquer—he faced superstition with passion. And presently she, glowing in his arms, was drinking in the sense of him at every pore, was murmuring, “The fire! How I need it! How cold I was!”

He held her more closely. “*This* is reality,” he said. “The other was a dream. You see it now?”

“I don’t know. I don’t wish to know,” was her answer. “I wish only to love—to dream on and on—never to wake.”

When he left her, she stayed on in the garden. Alone, she was still drifting upon the ecstasy of his presence and his caresses. “*I will not wake!*” she cried. And she closed her eyes and spurred her imagination. “It is not sin! It is joy and light and life!”

But he was gone; the tempest continued to subside, to retreat. Never before had it been so violent, had it lifted her so high; therefore, never before was the reaction so swift. “*I will not wake!*” she cried. But down and down she sank, like a becalmed leaf that the storm-wind has swirled up. In vain she fluttered and struggled; back to earth, back to reality—or, to the dream of the faith into which the dream of him and her and love was dissolving.

“*I will not wake!*” she cried.

But The Light was beating upon her, was rousing

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in her the beginnings of terror and remorse. And "I am yours, forever yours," had been her parting words to him! She had given herself, when she was not her own to give.

"I must dream on!" she implored.

So powerful became her sense of some dread companionship in her solitude that she roused herself and looked round, a chill creeping over her skin. Beyond several screens of bushes, in one of the side aisles she saw a curious movement—something black, a touch of scarlet higher up. When she had control of her voice she called "Mr. Hinkley!"

A moment and he was before her—in dress, in bearing, in burning eyes, in pallid look of one who fasts and prays, the priest of the faith—of *her* faith!

She had thought his presence would fill her with hatred and loathing. But as he stood there, the memory of all he had done for her, of all that was noble in him, rose up to plead for him. And she pitied him—for his unceasing sufferings, for the hopeless love that was ever tearing at him, for the fiend of fanaticism that dwelt in him and ruled him. "As in me," she thought, in one of those fleeting flashes of self-revelation.

"Oh, Will!" she exclaimed, "It was *you!*"

He understood that she was accusing him. "Yes," he calmly admitted. He lifted his head in gloomy pride. "I am one of those who stand with drawn swords, guard-

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ing the altar of The Light. And The Light has given me strength to do my duty—and will give it me again.”

She started up. “And *I* was pitying you!” she cried. “You who let a hideous jealousy drive you to become an assassin. And you talk of The Light, and threaten!”

“I do not threaten,” he replied solemnly, a light in his eyes before which she could not but shrink. “I cannot know what The Light will command, or whom. But I do know that whatsoever it commands shall be done, and that whomsoever it commands shall do it. Yes—even you, Mother-Light!” And he reverently performed the ceremonial of the name. “If the command came to you, with your own hand you would kill the man you love.”

She trembled and sank to the bench.

“You say I did it through jealousy,” he went on. “Perhaps so. That afternoon, when The Light compelled me to come to this garden, I saw his arms about you, saw—all—all! It was The Light that restrained me from killing him. It may be that The Light permitted my jealousy to serve its holy end. But, if it was jealousy, why did I weep as I struck him and why did my heart leap with gratitude when I heard he was not going to die?”

“I do not see The Light in it,” she protested. “I

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see only a sinful passion." But she did not convince herself.

"And why," he went on calmly, "when I saw again, this afternoon—a few minutes ago—when I turned away that I might not see you give him that for which I would lose my soul—why was I not in a fury? Why was I overwhelmed with an awful sadness and pity?" And his tones conjured to her a great phantom of woe flinging high despairing arms. "Oh, Maida! Maida!" he exclaimed. "Why did you not take warning! The Light has wrought miracle after miracle not only for you but in you. You knew its power. You knew how it works out its purposes inevitably. Yet, when The Light in its mercy spares him because he was innocent, spares you the misery of having caused his death—you forget the merciful warning and turn to your sin again!"

His words seemed to her to be uttering in the voice of the Infinite. "Mercy!" she muttered. The sin that had withered Ann Banks; the sin that eats the soul—and she had yielded to it!

"And you cannot plead that you did not know. The Light spoke again and again, bade you send him away!"

"Mercy! Mercy!" she moaned. "Mercy for him! Mine was the sin—all mine!"

He suddenly gave a loud cry, knelt and prayed, the sweat streaming from his forehead, his thin, dead-white hands so interlaced that each seemed to be trying to tear

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the fingers from the other. "I cannot! I cannot!" he implored, and sight would not have strengthened her sense of the invisible awful presence he was beseeching.

"You shall not!" she cried, springing up and about to dart down the fragrant, blossoming aisle toward the Temple.

"Not that," he said, rising. "*He* is safe. The sin was yours and—" His look now was that which they give to Abraham binding his only son upon the altar. "You must die!"

She drew a quick breath. "I?" she looked, rather than said.

"You, Maida," he answered. "While you were steeping yourself in sin here, I was over there, walking up and down, kneeling, prostrating myself, praying that *you* might be spared—for, when The Light directed me to this garden to-day, and I saw, I realized that death alone could purify the altar."

Death! "It is just," she murmured. "Upon me let the whole punishment fall!" From afar came the sound of the great organ and the choir chanting the sunset service in the Hall of The Light.

"And," the Voice went on, "I—Will Hinkley—who have loved you since you were a child—I, accursed being that I am, have been appointed by The Light. That is my punishment for the sacrilege of my love for you. I brought you here. I must take you away."

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But she had ceased to hear. Her senses left her and she reeled and sank among the bushes, lay supported by blossoming branches. He lifted her tenderly in his arms and, with steady step and flaming eyes, bore her to where the garden ended in the broad stone top of the sluggish river's retaining wall. He stood looking down at the black pool. She stirred, sighed; he felt her breath against his cheek, felt the strong vivid beat of her heart. Over her face came a change faint as the shadow of a transparent wing, and she opened her eyes.

He looked away, hesitated, carried her to a tree, set her down against it, and began pacing to and fro. "I cannot! I dare not!" he was muttering, his ghastly face working. "She *is* the Mother-Light. Guidance! Lead me, O Light!"

She watched, weak as a dropped garment.

"But only death can expiate—only death!" He paused; a look of terrible joy came into his eyes. "The Light! The Light!" he cried, and faced her. "The Light commands me to take your burden of guilt and my own. It was I who first defiled the Temple with a carnal love. *All* the sin came through me. I can expiate. I may go, alone."

And then she saw upon the parapet Mr. Casewell in his apostolic robes. He was beckoning to Hinkley, but he was looking mournfully at her.

"I come! I come!" cried Hinkley. He gazed at

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her with the heart-breaking look of everlasting farewell, turned, went toward the figure which seemed to retreat and to hover above the river. With arms outspread, like a man advancing into a blinding light, Hinkley strode off the parapet and disappeared.

At the sullen splash of his body, she screamed faintly. She lifted herself, went with halting step to the edge of the wall. On the liquid black beneath were a few languid circles. She clasped her hands, looked out at the hovering figure of the First Apostle. Its countenance was a-glow with a solemn joy; and suddenly she felt that sin had been taken from her, and all desire to sin, and that the flame of the Mother-Light burned bright upon a stainless altar.

“He has expiated!” came from the figure in Mr. Casewell’s own voice.

She stretched her arms over the pool and prayed: “May The Light shine for him!”

When she again looked where the figure had been, she saw only cloud-banners and cloud-pennants of crimson and gold, streaming in the sunset sky. And she felt the radiance from them enfolding her, bathing her, permeating her, saturating her.

“The Light!” she cried. “The Light!”

She stood there praying. In the deepening twilight she seemed to herself to be upon a tiny, dark, tree-girdled island, afloat in an infinite opal ocean that was

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lighted by a single sunset star. It was the Mother-Light alone who returned to the Temple; the Woman lay at the bottom of the dark pool in a grave that was never to give up its dead.

“Maida Hickman will trouble and tempt me no more,” she said.

That night the First Apostle appeared to her in a dream. It was the beginning of those face to face communings with him which ever thereafter, in every crisis, gave her strength and guidance. The visions of her girlhood in the oak-tree bower had been fulfilled. She had entered into her destiny; and the doors of the life that loves and suffers and dies were shut, and sealed, behind her.

XXII

WHEN Thorndyke tried to see his cousin, admittance was denied him; she wrote him that the Temple of Temples had been closed to all not of The Light—a note of farewell, such as a cloistered nun might have written.

It was three years before the Mother-Light made an apparition. Thorndyke went. At the appointed hour the anthem from the choristers before the Hall came across the thronged lawns upon the thunderous waves of the organ's hosanna. His nerves quivered as the leaves quiver just before the storm breaks. The windows opened. Floycroft appeared in his magnificent apostolic robes, bearing a jeweled sunburst on a crimson and gold staff. Then, a sound from the multitude like silence catching its breath. All in white strewn with sunbursts, She was on the balcony; the sunshine was shimmering upon Her casque of gold bronze hair; her long white arms were extending in benediction. And She seemed to him to have descended from the Infinite upon those resplendent billows of midsummer light that were flooding the whole scene, and were dashing and breaking in golden foam upon the balcony on which she stood and upon the marble wall behind her, and were drenching her with

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their glittering spray. And *he* had dared to lift his eyes to Her in longing, in hope!

She was gone. He looked round over the sea of hysteria—a wild sea it was, with climaxes of frenzy here and there, about those who had been healed. An acquaintance, a fellow surgeon from Philadelphia, sweeping past him in the current of swirling, swaying humanity, cried laughingly: “You look like a rock of reason alone in an ocean of delusion.”

“A barren rock,” said Thorndyke, half to himself.

“But a rock,” replied the other as he was swept away.

“A bleak and barren rock,” muttered Thorndyke, “and the soul on it dying of hunger and thirst.”

(1)

THE END.

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