

'Whatever will help it,' repeated he firmly, 'is not to be despised.'

'Perhaps,' Monsignor said slyly, 'you can tell me what will help death.'

'To a Catholic I can tell nothing on that subject. Your exaggeration of death is very beautiful, I admit; but it is still an exaggeration. Have I not seen it and admired it—all the details, I mean? A poor fellow gets dangerously ill. Let alone, he would pass into eternity without a tear. What do you folks do? Begin your exaggeration. Looks and hints about the last rites; the visit of the solemn priest; the last rites most solemnly given; a little preparation for judgment; some delicate allusions to sin, purgatory, and hell; the last prayers with a lighted candle in the sufferer's hand; then the wake, the chants of the Requiem, the burial, the Month's Mind, the anniversary! Why you are never done! How, then, can a man escape this exaggeration?'

'But what you call exaggeration,' said Monsignor, who took Seth Morton seriously, 'is the outcome of human need.'

'Why then do I not need it? When my time comes I shall lie down just as I do at night; and slip away at the proper moment through the little door. Ah, that little door! A very apt, pretty, touching illustration!'

'Well, you will have to slip like a flash through the little door if you are to escape the shame, the humiliation, the pain, the darkness which accompany every death except a sudden one,' said Monsignor.

'Do you see, my dear,' said Morton to Miss Farnsworth, 'the exaggeration of these people? I ask, where is the shame, where is the humiliation, in a fact which comes to everyone? I admit the pain; but why talk of darkness, when the dead do not know it, can not feel it? Words, words, words!'

Miss Farnsworth rose to end the discussion; for Monsignor was warming up to the combat, and would not be denied the last word.

'The shame,' he said, shaking a finger at Morton, 'is that a man becomes a baby again, without the baby's unconsciousness and innocence. The humiliation is the violent separation of the soul from the body, leaving the latter a mere clod for the terrible grave. The pain—who shall describe it without having experienced it? The darkness—why, even a pagan dreads the darkness of annihilation.'

'Words, words, words!' repeated Morton, with emphasis.

'Dear Monsignor, come down to lunch to-morrow and have it out with him,' said Miss Farnsworth.

They went on chattering as she slipped out the door and into the automobile, and were still arguing when the machine moved away.

'I have never seen the like of it, my dear. He has a flow of English like a torrent. I think the Catholic exaggeration is due largely to French vivacity and French imagination. But that idea of the little door is capital. Right here at your hand, in space so to speak, it may open any minute, and even if you were entertaining the crowned heads of Europe when that door opens, in you go.'

He chuckled for some time, until Miss Farnsworth protested that the idea made her uncomfortable, as it brought death too near by associating it with a door.

'I never thought before,' said she, 'how many doors we use in a day, and to have death associated with the process is too much.'

'Well, my dear, hereafter I'll forget it for your sake; but at the same time, I feel bound to tell you, I shall see that little door quite often.'

And so he did, but always in a pretty or amusing light. When a poor soul drowned, he saw the little door opening in the blue deeps of the lake, to the eerie music which just breathes in the ear of the drowning. When an old man, lifting his sack of potatoes in the field just at sunset after the day's labor, sank down again to earth, he saw the little door opening for him into the violet shadows of evening. He discovered that the royal moment for the little door to open for him

was the early dawn on Lake Champlain. He had heard the world's most delicate music, seen its tenderest colors, drunk in its most engaging poetry, enjoyed its highest pleasures, but one and all faded before the wondrous dawn over the bay. The piney hills and the misty mountains looked like youth, just awaked from sleep, thinking and listening. So they must have looked on creation's morn. A single star hung in the blue like a lamp in a vast, pure sanctuary, and was reflected without a ripple in the still waters of the lake. Twittering notes from sleepy birds came faint and uncertain from the trees. The dew still fell, a magic perfume scented the air, and some delicate, penetrating, delicious spirit filled every vein in him, tingled every nerve, exalted every feeling and thought, until he seemed to be approaching the confines of eternity. Ah, this should be the hour for the door to open, he sighed. No spectators, no doctors and nurses and lawyers and ministers and rites and medicines; just the opening and the closing of a door amid this perfect beauty, and then silence!

However, one has to take the world as he finds it, and Seth Morton had settled the order of his going with his usual precision. He would get sick respectably, have a nurse and a doctor, die placidly, and leave the funeral question to his heirs. Meanwhile one must enjoy life and do his duty—for him a very easy affair. He had twenty or thirty years ahead of him. Life offered no real enjoyment after threescore and ten. He would surrender gracefully at that age, and pass through the little door without regret or pain.

One morning after breakfast his toe twitched a little, and he stooped to rub it. A few minutes later it twitched again, and as he stooped once more he forgot all about the toe and this world. The little door had suddenly opened, but had not let him in.

Consciousness always found Seth Morton quite himself. When he sprang out of the darkness after a day's oblivion, and at a glance took in the room where he lay with its painful details, he knew what had happened. He was probably doomed, and there must be no fuss about accepting it. First, to find out the precise situation, and then to get ready for it. Miss Farnsworth came in casually, but passed over to the window without glancing at him; so he called her, and with an effort found the phrase: 'Send me the doctor.' It cost him such an effort to say so little, and his niece such an effort to understand him, that he fell into a quiet rage. He thought he had spoken clearly, and afterward he felt certain he had concealed his rage. But the soothing hand of the lady on his brow, and her tender assurance that everything was all right and he would soon be well, and he must not disturb himself about anything, proved that he had said nothing and concealed nothing.

The nurse made this situation more clear a little later. She washed his face and hands, combed his hair, and twisted his moustache and beard into proper shape. His gorge rose, and he ordered this impertinent creature to be dismissed at once. No one paid any attention. The doctor discovered after a while that the nurse impressed the patient badly, and secured a male nurse in her stead. This aggravated the affair. If Seth despised anything on earth, it was a man who washed and combed and manicured; and to have such a creature performing these offices in his very presence, on himself, was maddening. He would have risen from his bed and driven the nurse from the house personally, but found this task impossible. Then he suddenly reflected that these exhibitions of feeling, of repugnance to his attendants, were most unusual in him, and must be stirring up disagreeable criticism. He must repress them, he must dissemble, he must return to that poise which had made him almost distinguished. In making the effort he forgot even the names of his feelings, and in his lucid intervals he saw that his attendant's read him like an open book. Like a flash Monsignor's saying came to him: 'The shame!'

He had become a child again: helpless, without reflection, almost without thought, and utterly dependent upon the people around him. A pain struck

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