

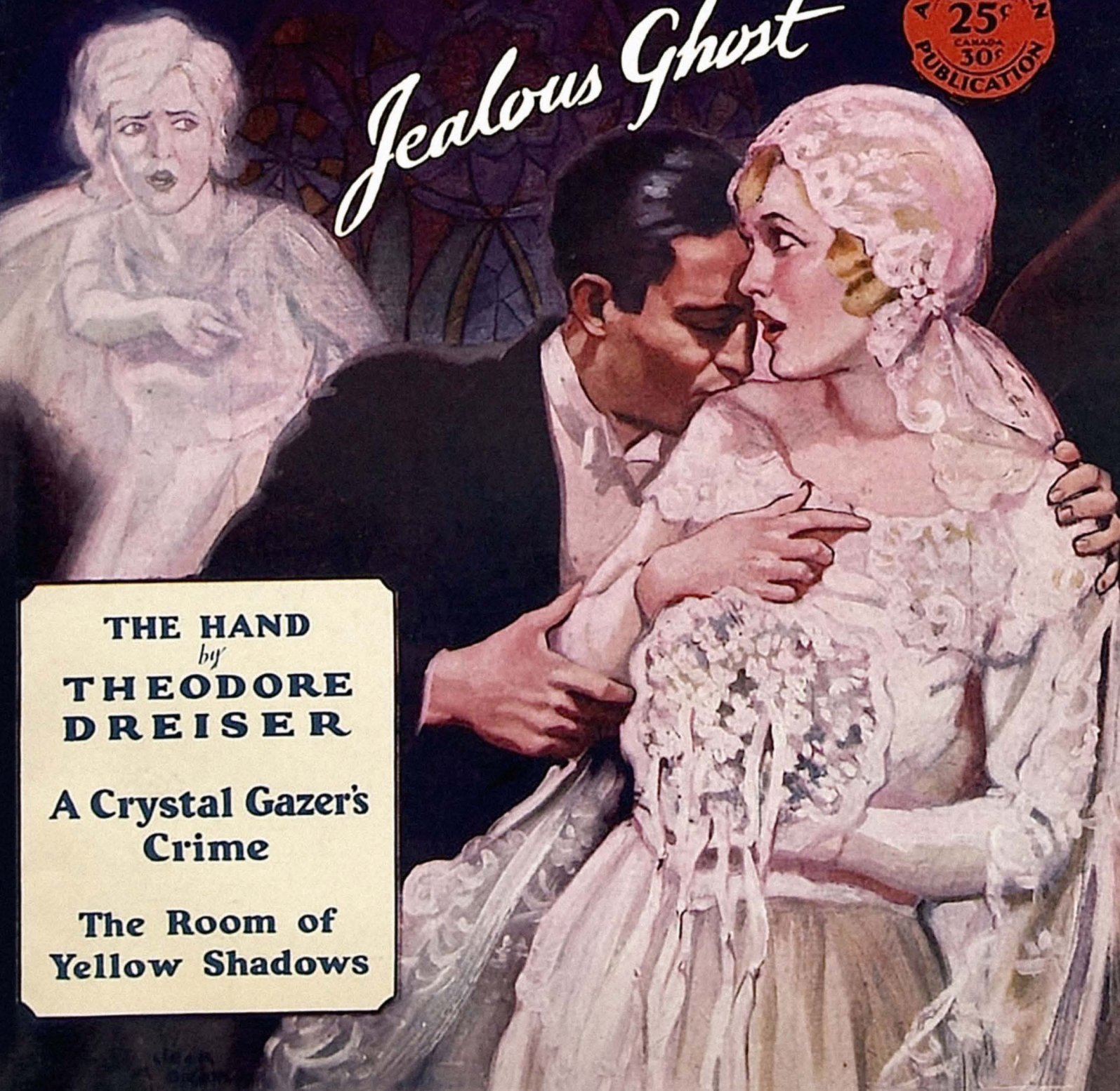
UNCANNY, SPOOKY, CREEPY TALES

JUNE

Ghost STORIES

Jealous Ghost

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THE HAND
by
**THEODORE
DREISER**

**A Crystal Gazer's
Crime**

**The Room of
Yellow Shadows**



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Jealous Ghost

By
DOROTHY
DENNER



*The food was
poisoned!*

In life the pretty black-haired artist was impulsive and tempestuous—equally ready to love or hate with sinister violence. Did she carry her anger into the next world? Did she return that awful night to separate me from my lover?

AS I sit by the window of my studio I can see far down the valley. The hills rise high on either side, to lose their summits in the blue of the sky. The gorgeous sunshine of an April morning bathes the landscape and a fresh breeze softly stirs the green foliage of the trees.

We came to this valley in the hills of eastern Pennsylvania—Betty Scarsdell and I—after we had met in art school and had completed our course. It would be fun, we decided, to rent the old abandoned Dynes farm and fit it up as our studio-home. The house creaked in its dilapidation, but

with ladders, brushes and paint we set about to create a marvelous new dress for it of deep blue, magenta and orange—a color scheme that made the natives gasp in surprise.

"Them crazy artists!" they exclaimed, pointing their thumbs over their shoulders.

While we were at work that first morning, Ralph Pringle, who occupied the farm adjoining ours, came over to see if he could help us.

I guess that for Ralph and me it was a case of love at first sight—the sort that you read about in books but rarely encounter in real life. He was tall and lithe, with the ath-

letic figure and handsome, eager face of an outdoors man.

"I'd like to help you," he said shyly, suddenly appearing around the corner of the house. "That ladder isn't strong. One of you might fall and get hurt."

Betty stood transfixed as she saw him. Her dark eyes narrowed to slits. Her brush remained in mid-air, dripping blue paint.

But it was toward me that he moved, away from her. It was I who answered.

"There really isn't anything, thanks," I said. "We like to do this ourselves, you know."

I heard the sharp intake of Betty's breath and I knew she was suddenly angry. That was Betty's way. An orphan, she had fought for everything she ever owned. I guess it had hardened her, inside somewhere. It made her self-centered, harsh and selfish. Few understood. Perhaps that was why I was the only real friend Betty had. She stood stock-still for a moment, her eyes flashing; then she threw her brush spitefully in the dirt. Without a word she disappeared around the corner.

But Ralph did not notice. His attention was on me. He helped me move the ladder, brought my paint pail, studied the modernistic design we were spreading on the old house.

"Well, it's—it's unusual," he said critically, "though I—I do rather like it."

We both laughed.

He told me he was an orchardist. Like Betty, he too was an orphan. After finishing at agricultural school, he had bought the old farm next door and hoped in a few years to have an orchard that would produce special apples and other fruits for the city markets.

"It's a beautiful valley here," he said suddenly, waving a hand toward the hills. "I'd like you to go with me on a picnic if—if you care for that sort of thing. I'd like to take you up to the summit of the hills where you look down on the world at your feet and feel like a god. Where the wind blows and you brace yourself and feel that you could conquer—"

WE went that afternoon—he and I together, with Macgregor, his great Scotch collie, running on ahead. I packed a lunch and we asked Betty to go, but she shook her head.

It was a glorious day. We climbed the summit of a hill. At our feet two tiny lakes nestled among the trees. Ralph told me strange stories about them—Indian legends of the countryside. When the afternoon shadows lengthened, we came home again.

As the weeks passed, there were other similar occasions. My days were busy, for I was trying to build up a reputation as a commercial artist, but more and more Ralph and I found ourselves in each other's company.

Then suddenly I realized Betty was becoming morose and sullen. She was not putting her best efforts into her work and her orders began to fall off. I tried to encourage her. I tried to help. But she would turn upon me with blazing eyes.

"You're a fine friend," she raged at me one day. "It was you who proposed coming to this farm. And now that Pringle is running after you, you'd drop me like an old shoe. That boor! If you don't want me around, if you don't want to live with me any longer, say so and I'll get out!"

"Betty, dear!" I cried in deep concern. "Please don't talk that way. You know I love you, dear. We've both invited you to go with us, but you never do."

"Pringle!" she flashed. "I don't see how you can stand him. A farmer! A common nobody! A country oaf—"

"Betty! Please!" I said sternly. "He's charming."

She whirled and stamped viciously out of the room. Nor would she speak to me the rest of the day. I felt sorry about it. Why had she taken such a dislike to him? I wanted them to be friends. I was sure a mutual liking could spring up.

In my blindness I did not realize that Betty was jealous—that she was giving way to that unreasoning emotion which

through the ages has turned friend against friend and has brought more trouble into this world than can ever be told.

Mid-summer arrived—a day in August. Ralph came over early and proposed that we all seek some cool, shady spot on the hilltop. It would be another picnic time, he said. I readily agreed. But Betty set her lips and shook her head. From her eyes shone a queer, cat-like gleam. I shrugged. If she didn't want to, I couldn't make her.

So Ralph and I went together. That night when I returned, the house was dark.

"Betty! Betty dear!" I called happily, as I opened the door. "It was such a wonderful day. Where are you, chum?"

I turned into the studio and switched on a light. My gaze went to the easel in the corner. I turned chill with consternation and anger.

A canvas on which I had been working—an order that I had almost completed—hung in shreds from its frame, torn and slashed from repeated hackings. It was no accident. Only too evidently a vehement hand had wielded the kitchen knife that lay on the floor beside it.

Quickly I ran from the room, searching for Betty.

I found her at last, in the kitchen, crouching in a corner, her dark face contorted, weeping spasmodically. I thought at first she would fly at me like a cat, her nails working viciously. But she sank back, hiding her face in her hands, crying as though her heart would break.

Compassion filled me. After all, she was my chum, a weak, silly, impulsive girl, and alone. I took her in my arms. She confessed to it all.

"I—I couldn't stand it," she said. "You—you were with him, and I—I was here. I hated you. You always seem to have the best in life. I—I never have anything. I hated everything you owned—when I thought of you up there on the hill, enjoying yourself—with him. I got the knife. With every slash I—I wished it was you I was cutting."

"Betty!" I gasped. "Don't say that! Say you don't mean it, dear! Oh, Betty!"

The flood gates opened then. Impulsively she kissed me, hugged me, implored me to forgive her. There in the darkness we cried together. Each in the other's arms, two girl chums who had come to a flinty barrier in life's road, but who had overcome it and found solace together in tears.

I FORGAVE her, of course. After the cry we felt better. Temperamental girl that she was, she could not love me enough now. She clung to me. She could not bear me out of her sight. And oh, how lovely it was to have Betty that way once more—my little chum, my own dear friend!

But before bedtime Betty was in another mood. She fell silent, and several times I looked up from my book to find her studying me. Each time she smiled pleasantly, but somehow, underneath, I knew that all was not well in Betty's mind. Once I surprised a hard, set look on her face. She was good-looking, Betty was, in a dark, Spanish way. Her bright color was accentuated by her black, glossy hair, and her features always seemed carved out of ivory. But that hard, set look about her mouth, fleeting though it was, changed her beauty to evilness.

We bade each other good night after a while. The kiss she gave me seemed tense—a cynical kiss. I thought about that kiss long after I got into bed. It disturbed me. Then I dropped off to sleep.

With the new day Betty's mood had changed again. Now it seemed to reflect the jolly sunshine, the blue sky and the fleecy clouds. If only it had been true!

She was downstairs before me and I heard her moving about in the kitchen. She bubbled over with laughter as she greeted me. For an instant I stopped to wonder if somehow the laughter wasn't too boisterous. It sounded forced.

But Betty caught me and pushed me into my chair at the table.

"This is to pay for yesterday," she announced, waving a mixing spoon at me. "I've made you a lovely breakfast, Dot

honey. I hope you'll eat every morsel of it. I've made it with my own hands—all for you."

"You're a dear!" I exclaimed happily. "Let's forget all about yesterday. Today is a new day. Here's to the future."

I broke open a hot biscuit. I lifted a bit of the lovely golden omelet to my lips.

But I stopped. A strange sensation came over me. It was as though a hand gripped my throat. I could not move my tongue. The food lay in my mouth—bitter as gall.

Cold perspiration broke out on my forehead. Slowly I turned my eyes to Betty. She stood there, tense, watching me, waiting, a ferocious, fiendish look of hate spreading over her countenance.

Even as I stared at her, my

gaze wandered past her to the table where she had been at work. A tiny brown bottle stood half hidden behind a pan. And its red label bore the horrible skull and crossbones of poison!

Quietly I removed the food from my mouth. Quickly I arose and hurried to the sink, rinsing my mouth again and again.

Then I turned to her. She faced me squarely. She did not flinch. Pallor replaced her usual color. Her eyes closed to slits, and she spoke through half-clenched teeth.

"Yes," she cried. "I tried to poison you! I wanted to see you die—writhing in agony here on the kitchen floor. I hate you. I hate you!" she screamed, her voice rising shrill.

"Betty! Stop!" I commanded.

"I won't stop. I hate you, I tell you. All your life you've had everything—and I've had nothing. And now you'd steal Ralph Pringle from me. Oh, I know how you've sneered at me as you walked away with him. I've seen you two laugh."

"Betty! It isn't true!" I cried. "You're imagining things that aren't true——" But she would not listen.

"I tore up your canvas," she broke in. "You said you forgave me, but you only patronized me. You patted me on the head, as you would a dog. You were going with him again. You'd tell him what I did—just to make him hate me, as I hate you! Yes, I tried to kill you. I will again, I hate you—hate you—hate you!"

JEALOUS tempera-
ment—do you see?—

springing from a selfish and impulsive nature, beyond the bounds of reason now.

Before I could stop her, she turned and ran. I followed, but she was too quick for me. Into her room she dashed, slamming the door in my face, locking it. I called to her and rattled the knob. But she would not answer.

Then rage at last overcame me. I could forgive her for tearing up my picture. I could bear with her temperamental spells. But not this.

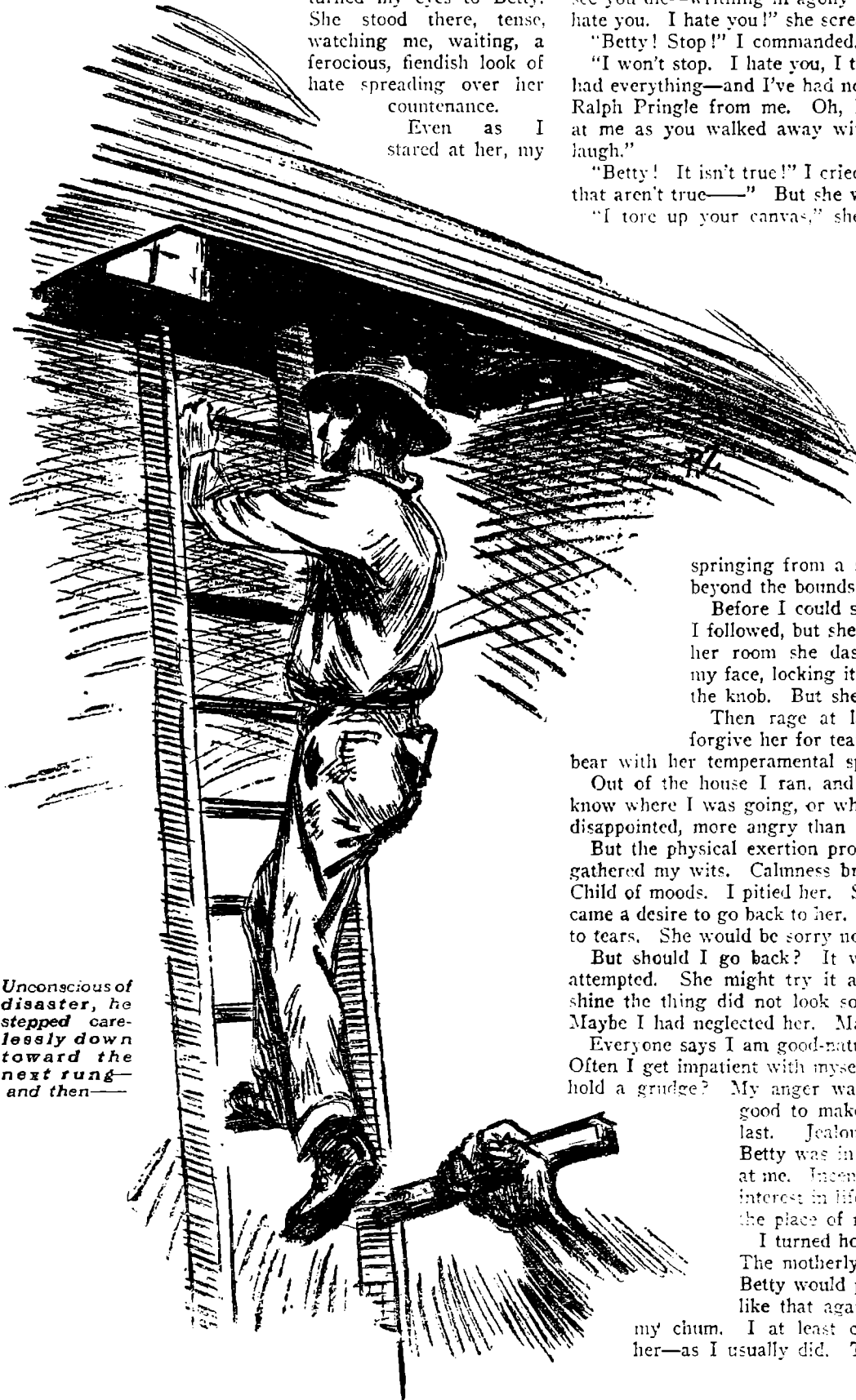
Out of the house I ran, and down the road. I did not know where I was going, or what I would do. I was hurt, disappointed, more angry than I ever had been in my life.

But the physical exertion proved a safety valve. Soon I gathered my wits. Calmness brought reason. Poor Betty! Child of moods. I pitied her. So awfully alone. With pity came a desire to go back to her. Willfulness would give way to tears. She would be sorry now.

But should I go back? It was a wicked thing she had attempted. She might try it again. Yet out in the sunshine the thing did not look so colossal as in the kitchen. Maybe I had neglected her. Maybe I, too, was at fault.

Everyone says I am good-natured, of an even disposition. Often I get impatient with myself for it. But after all, why hold a grudge? My anger was passing. It would be so good to make up. And I understood at last. Jealousy. Just plain jealousy. Betty was in love with Ralph and angry at me. Incensed when I had found a new interest in life, she had let morbidity take the place of reason with her.

I turned homeward. Betty needed help. The motherly instinct dominated me. If Betty would promise never to do a thing like that again, I wanted her still to be my chum. I at least could make the overture to her—as I usually did. There would be a good cry.



Unconscious of disaster, he stepped carelessly down toward the next rung—and then—

Betty would be deplorably sorry. And we would start together once more.

But suddenly the sun hid itself behind a cloud. The valley lay hushed as though tragedy stalked abroad. The hum of the insects was stilled. In the silence a bird chirped quickly—and stopped, as though it realized its chirp was out of place.

The cloud above me widened, spreading like a pall between the hills.

I hurried on, a sense of impending disaster depressing me.

I ran into the house. The very air of the rooms seemed stifling.

"Betty! Betty!" I called, running frantically from one room to another.

She did not reply. What was this sudden sense of menace that beset me? I ran to her room upstairs. The door hung open on its hinges. The room was empty.

"Betty! Betty" I called again, fear chilling my blood.

There was no answer.

I SEARCHED the house. I ran from cellar to garret. She was not there.

In consternation I stopped to think. My gaze wandered through a window to the old barn in the rear. Something seemed to draw me to it.

Out of the house I dashed. A small door at the side of the barn stood unlatched. I swung it open. The interior was dim, the tiny windows covered with dust, while dust-laden cobwebs dangled like eerie festoons from the rafters.

As my eyes became accustomed to the half light, I saw—in a far corner where hardly any light at all could creep from the windows—that something white hung from a rafter.

My knees sagged under me. A stifled cry sprang to my lips. Then, aghast at what was before me, hardly believing my own eyes, I sprang forward, running across the barn floor to that dim corner. . . .

I have little memory of the events that followed. The next conscious moment I recall was when I leaned against Ralph Pringle's door, hammering upon it with my fists, calling him, screaming. He heard me from his own barn where he was at work. He came running and caught me in his arms as I was about to fall.

"Quick!" I cried. "In our barn! Betty has—has hung herself!"

"Good God!" he gasped.

Together we ran back. He took her down and carried her into the house, while I summoned old Doctor Hough, a kindly, understanding country practitioner. He worked over Betty a long time before he gave up. But the horrible red mark around her throat, caused by the ancient halter she had found in the barn, indicated only too vividly that Betty's tempestuous, temperamental, impulsive life had come to an end.

Or had it? Can wild impulses that stir in the mortal body and influence our lives—strange fringes of a force that emanates from some source far back of birth—carry over into the world beyond the Veil and then return again? I wondered whether it was the end.

For though all that was mortal of Betty, my chum, lay before me silent in death, yet I could not feel that Betty was gone. Somehow in that very room, with Ralph and the doctor present, I felt that Betty watched me, studied me, hated me, and again and again I looked to see if she had not opened her eyes. It seemed that she had moved, had focused her vision on me, through half-closed lids. But of course she had not. Betty was dead.

To say I was prostrated by the terrible happening is to consider it only by half. Moreover I was made ill by the discovery of Betty's note after Doctor Hough had left. Ralph and I found it on the table in the studio.

I cried then, my grief inconsolable. The final message from Betty was one of hate. No remorse had entered her soul at the last moment. Fear, yes. Fear that I would have her arrested for the deed she had tried to commit. And because of her fear she had hated me the more.

You may have him to yourself now, the note read. I see that our love for each other, as I had always accepted it, was something to be laughed at, and that as soon as you saw an opportunity to get the best of me, you took it. I hate you. I am sorry that I did not kill you in the kitchen as I meant to. But you will never have the pleasure of seeing me in jail, to gloat over me. Not you, Dorothy. You have gone for the police now, but I can save you your trouble. Some day I may come back again. If that is possible, I will. If there is any way, you never shall have Ralph Pringle for yourself. I will not say—good-by.

An evil note. As a last word from the girl I had loved, it was horrible.

After a while, since Betty had no near relatives, Ralph and I followed the body to the little village cemetery not far from our farms. The minister of the local church read the committal service and three neighbors whom Ralph had asked to serve as pall-bearers, together with himself, lowered all that remained of Betty into the earth.

As we turned away, as the first shovelfuls of earth rattled on the coffin, the sky was suddenly darkened by heavy clouds, and again a hush settled over everything as though the valley waited for the next act in this strange drama of life. I clung to Ralph. He slipped an arm about me for support. Without a word we got into his little car and drove away.

Ralph wanted an elderly woman to come and stay with me as a companion. But his own companionship was enough. Besides, I wanted to be alone where I could bury myself in my work and try to forget the tragedy.

So it was arranged that way, especially as Macgregor, the collie, suddenly assumed a protective attitude and elected to stay with me most of the time. He lay near-by in the studio, dozing, watching me at work, until I was ready to put aside my brushes. Then he would leap up, eager to go for a walk with me.

"HE'S more your dog than mine," Ralph said. "I'm glad of it," he added thoughtfully, "since you won't have anyone else here."

But now, as so often happens in the latter part of August, there came a week of damp, cloudy weather that makes everyone irritable. My paints would not dry. My body revolted against the humidity. I could not sleep. Probably my thoughts dwelt more often on the tragedy than I would admit.

What had Betty meant when she wrote that she would come between me and Ralph? Could the dead come back? I did not think so. But I lay awake at night, unable to rid myself of the feeling

that something hovered about the house, that eyes were watching me from the darkness. By day I felt those eyes staring down at me from the hills. Sometimes Mac, lying on the floor in my studio, would raise his head and sniff the air suspiciously. Up would go the ruff on his back and through bared teeth he would utter a rumbling, growling bark, breaking into a whine. His actions disturbed me.

If I spoke to him he would quickly forget his mood and bound over to me, gravely wagging his great brush. But even then he always seemed intently listening. I spoke to Ralph about it.

"High-strung," he said. "Sensitive fellow. His ears catch sounds tuned too high, or too low, for human ears.



Mere vibrations, perhaps. That's why a dog howls when the high notes of a violin are sounded. His ears are finer than ours. I wouldn't let it bother me."

I promised not to, if I could help it.

Then a strange thing happened.

At the mysterious hour between daylight and dark Ralph and I were walking together along a woods-path near our farms, with Mac running ahead somewhere, stopping to snuff in the leaves. Fireflies lighted their tiny lanterns in the foliage. High above us a night-hawk cheeped plaintively.

All at once, around the corner of a bush, a wild, mournful note came back to us, startling us, stopping us—a cry of challenge, mingled with fear. I caught Ralph's arm. My nerves were tense.

"It's Mac!" Ralph said in a low tone. "He's found something. I never heard him cry like that before."

We stood there in the half darkness, Ralph peering ahead, I clinging to him. Ralph started to move forward, when suddenly Mac came dashing back to us, the ruff on his back straight up. The dog turned to look along the path he had come. Again that wild, weird note of challenge and fear issued from his throat.

"Mac! What is it?" Ralph cried.

The dog whined again.

RALPH, moving forward, half dragged me to the bend in the path. Then we saw it. We stared in amazement. Fifty feet to one side, in among the bushes and trees, glowed a strange light. It wavered as if stirred by the wind. It had no form. It seemed suspended a foot or so above the ground—a shining cloud as high as a person and perhaps as large around.

Suddenly Ralph laughed.

"Shucks!" he exploded. "Marsh fire. A will-o'-the-wisp. Phosphorescence that comes from decaying vegetation. Poor old Mac was frightened by a spook that didn't exist."

I breathed again. I felt relieved. But not the dog. He growled more than ever. He caught my dress and tried to drag me away. He leaped up against Ralph, almost knocking him over. And when we would not go, he turned and faced the light in the bushes, snarling horribly, his body tense and quivering, fangs bared. Not until the light slowly dissolved and disappeared would he heed Ralph's scolding words.

Somehow, in spite of the common-sense explanation, the incident left me afraid. As Ralph led me down the path, I turned to him nervously.

"I've got to leave this valley, Ralph," I said. "I can't stand it any longer. It seems as though eyes peer at me from every bush. I've got to go where people are, where there are lights and movement that I know are real."

Ralph faced me. And all at once I was in his arms, half weeping, half laughing, my lips meeting his, his arms about my waist, mine about his neck.

"I don't want you to go, dear," he said at last. "Not ever. I want you with me. I—I love you."

"And I love you, my own," I told him, "steadfastly, earnestly, always."

Then suddenly, over Ralph's shoulder, far back in the trees, I saw the strange light again, though this time it moved and flitted, as though rushing aimlessly in a frenzy. A night breeze soughed mournfully above us through the tree tops and the leaves all seemed whispering, as if talking to themselves of another tragedy about to happen.

Ralph felt me grow tense in his arms.

"Come," he said at last. "I must take you home. You're tired and upset. Perhaps it will be better for you to go away for a while. I'll miss you awfully, dear. But if you say you'll come back to me, I'll try to be content. Say you'll come back, dear, for I love you so!"

He left Mac with me that night. It was arranged that I should go away next day and spend a few weeks in the city. Then when I felt better I should return. I had a bit of work to finish before leaving and Ralph would come over

to take me in his car to Port Jarvis in time for an evening train. But I was destined not to go to the city that day.

All night, it seemed, I lay sleepless, obsessed by a sense of some impending tragedy. Mac, too, was restless. I heard him walking about the house, stopping to sniff in corners, pausing with a mumbling growl in front of the screened door. With the coming of morning I arose wearily, and in the mirror my face was reflected haggard and worn.

As soon as I let the dog out of doors, I saw him go bounding off toward home. When he was gone, I felt lonely and I had to drive myself to work.

It took me until late afternoon to finish my task. There was time then to prepare a bite of supper and to pack my bag before Ralph came. He would be feeding his stock, I knew. Then he would change his clothes, and come over to get me.

But clouds were settling down as darkness came on. Again the countryside seemed hushed, as if waiting for another act in a play. The leaves were whispering, whispering, though there hardly was a breath of wind.

I had started for the kitchen, although I had little appetite for food of any sort, when suddenly I stopped to listen. Mac was at the door, whining in excitement, his nails scratching at the screen. I heard him jumping on the porch, whimpering. Then his voice broke out into a louder whine, filled with misery and pleading, as though he called me to hurry.

I ran to the door. He hardly could wait for me to open it. He caught my dress in his teeth and began to pull. Next, he ran to the edge of the porch to gaze an instant toward home and then back again he would come to me. He jerked at my dress again.

I did not hesitate. He would not let me. Had he been a human, he would have picked me up and carried me. When he saw I would follow him, he leaped ahead of me with whimpering cries that broke almost into a howl. As we neared Ralph's home, up came the ruff on his back. He became a changed dog—a fighting dog—a demon. His fangs gleamed white against drawn lips. His body tensed so that he ran like an automaton, stiff-legged. His whine changed to a growl of angry terror. And at last his mood was communicated to me.

"Ralph! Ralph!" I called, running now. The door to his home was closed, the house dark. I opened it, calling his name. He did not answer. But the dog would not let me stay there. Again he caught my dress, pulling me; then, dropping it, tried to push me with his body—toward the barn!

Half-way along the path from the house I stopped. The barn! I did not want to go further. Only too recent was that awful experience in my own barn. What would I find in Ralph's? God in heaven, what had happened!

But I made my faltering legs carry me forward. The dog stopped, refusing to proceed further. Inside the barn I heard only the mellow clangor of a cow bell and the uneasy stamping of Ralph's horse. I steeled myself. Then I pushed open the door and entered.

I FOUND Ralph sprawled grotesquely on the floor. Frenziedly I bent over him, raised his head in my arms. A sinister bruise marked his forehead, his hands were pulseless—but he was still alive! I saw the slight movement of his lips as he breathed.

Thank heaven I was neither faint nor hysterical. Instead I was very calm. Considering what to do, I straightened. And then I saw a queer thing. It was quite evident Ralph had been climbing to the mow to throw down feed for his stock. He had done it scores of times, as had other occupants of the farm before him. But the pegs in the ladder were old and worn. Unconscious of disaster, he stepped carelessly down toward the next rung—and then the peg snapped under him.

Yet there was something curious about that peg. Old and seasoned by time it had not broken completely off. It was bent, splintered, twisted, as you might twist a match. If some person, of superhuman strength, had twisted it in his

fingers, you would gain a better idea of how it appeared. Ralph's weight would have broken it short off, or bent it downward. But this was twisted *sideways*, its fibers turned into spirals. This was deliberate, vehemently done. There was a number of sharp-edged tools near the foot of the ladder—and it was a miracle that Ralph had not been killed instantly when he fell among them.

All this I saw in a glance. The discovery would have made little impression on me then, had not one of the cattle suddenly burst into a terrific bellowing of fear, answered quickly from outside by Mac's snarling bark, rising to a new note of terror. And as I looked, it seemed to me that in the darkness at the end of the barn a vague shape moved—a shape as intangible, as indescribable as the film of a cobweb.

Mind shadows, perhaps—an illusion resulting from frayed nerves. Even as I stared, the thing was gone.

I stooped quickly. By some superhuman strength of my own, I raised him, dragged him to the house, got him on his bed.

FOR a moment I stood exhausted, clinging to the footboard, panting, trembling from my exertion. Then, clenching my teeth, I staggered to the telephone and called Doctor Hough.

"I'll be there in a few minutes," came his voice. And oh, how thankful I was!

He came. He said that Ralph, falling, had struck on his head and was in grave danger. Whether there was a skull fracture he could not tell. But concussion had certainly taken place and his condition was desperate. For a time he worked over Ralph, now and then asking me to help. We got him undressed and under the covers. The doctor continued to work over him.

"We've done all we can for the present," he said at last. "There's nothing else now but to wait."

We sat beside Ralph's bed, saying little, watching. The hours sped on. As it approached midnight, Doctor Hough said it was imperative he attend another of his patients and that he must leave me for a while.

When he had gone the house seemed deathly still. Somewhere a clock ticked off the minutes. Ralph scarcely breathed, his chest rising and falling only occasionally.

Midnight struck. Measured and slow came the tones of the clock. Hardly had it finished before I grew strangely tense. The atmosphere pressed in on me. It seemed to me that someone else was in the room, someone I could not see. Suddenly Mac, outside, set up a mournful wailing again always ending with that uncanny, rising note of fear. For a moment the dog quieted. Then close to me, somewhere in the shadows, came a sound like a sob.

I turned, tremors running down my spine. I stared into the darkness of the hallway, my hands clenched. But nothing moved. No one was there. The silence was broken by Mac sniffing at the screen door, pawing at it to come in. I sank back in my chair.

I turned to Ralph again. Pale and motionless he lay there. Would he ever wake, I wondered. He seemed so near death, so close to the thin veil that separates the dead from the living.

The hours crept on—endlessly. Three in the morning approached. It was the time when body vitality is low, when most ill persons die. Suddenly the atmosphere became charged again. It pressed in on me, as if a great wave were sweeping over me. It was difficult to breathe. Turning to Ralph, I suddenly gripped the bedclothes. He was not breathing at all! The pallor was deepening on his face. His hands were like clay. I knew he was dying!

And I alone with him, with no knowledge of what to do, unable to help! I leaped up. I ran to the telephone. Frantically I called for Doctor Hough. After what seemed centuries a woman responded.

"The doctor has not returned," the voice came thinly, sleepily querulous. "No, there is no telephone at the pa-

tient's home. He is at a farmhouse eight miles away. No, we cannot get word to him. I'm sorry."

And my lover lying there, so white, so pitiable—dying!

Mac must have sensed our extremity. Once more he broke into a howl, this time of long-drawn-out agony. His master was going—out into the Unknown. Mac was singing his death chant. The collie's anguished wail penetrated sharply through the stillness of the night, and other dogs far away, took it up—a weird animal chorus for the dead!

But the sounds ceased. Suddenly Mac broke into an angry snarl. It acted like a spur to me. It roused me from the apathy that had settled upon me. It stirred me to action.

For a breathless moment I prayed—prayed to God in heaven that He would tell me what to do, that He would direct me.

And as if in answer to my prayer, a strange thought came to me.

I had never believed in ghosts or spirits. It always seemed ridiculous to me. But now I started up. Betty was in my mind. Without reasoning why, hardly knowing what I did, I went to the outer door and threw it open.

Out into the darkness I stepped. High overhead the stars shone like candle tips. But in our valley, darkness lay like a heavy blanket, the outbuildings indistinguishable masses, the trees near-by without form.

Impelled by some curious emotion I could not fathom, I stretched out my arms to the darkness. I felt like a pagan imploring his gods.

"Betty!" I cried. "Betty, if you are there, listen to me. Betty—please!"

I stopped. The leaves above me in the thick darkness were whispering, as if they talked with each other—excitedly.

"Betty!" I went on. "You loved Ralph. You used to love me, too. Ralph needs help. Help us both, Betty, my chum. If it was through your act that the peg was twisted and Ralph fell, don't let such evil remain on your soul. Don't you see, dear, it was wrong and hateful to hurt a good man like Ralph?"

Strange how I spoke! I would have been considered insane by anyone who heard me. But I did not think of that. I went on:

"Betty, you must know I have always loved you, dear—even when you tried to take my life. Even then I was ready to forgive you. If you can look down from the spirit world, you can look into my heart and know it is true. Help me now, dear, for the sake of our days together. I love Ralph. Help me save his life. Don't let hate and evil mar your soul for eternity. Undo this thing, if you have done it. For the love you had for us both, help me now!"

DAZEDLY I turned back to the room. Mac crouched by the door but he did not enter. As I neared Ralph's bed, I stopped in amazement. Despite my petition of a moment before, I could not believe what I saw. A strange light had appeared in the room. It seemed to come in at the window, to be moving toward the bed. It was a luminousness, more than anything else—like that strange marsh light we had seen in the woods.

Paralyzed, I could only watch. The light stopped beside the bed. Vaguely it began to gather essence. It became more tangible, though opaque like fog. And suddenly from the midst of it I saw eyes staring at me—Betty's eyes! Then her face, indistinct, featureless almost, but still her face.

And how cruel it was! All the hate, all the jealousy, all the evil of a fiend seemed stamped on those vague features. Sneering, contemptuous, conscious of some supernatural power beyond my understanding! Vicious hate!

A new force filled me—the force of love—love for Ralph. At that moment it seemed to me I was stronger than all the powers of darkness. I stretched out my hands appealingly.

"Betty," I called softly. "We both love him. You can help him—for love's sake!"

The phantom swayed. A new expression passed across

that evil countenance. A moment of hesitation. Then a decision.

Long fingers—Betty's fingers—stole out of that cloud of mist. Frantic with terror at what they might do, yet exerting all my will, I watched silently.

Slowly those fingers traveled over Ralph's forehead. Slowly they caressed his brow, moving in rhythmic motion over and across, over and across. Their motion seemed to lull me sleepily as I watched.

But was the color returning to my lover's face? Did I see his lids flutter, his breast rise where it had so long been still?

The phantom turned. A look of pain appeared in its vague features. The staring eyes closed. In an instant the form swayed. Had it been a mortal form, it might have tottered and fallen to the floor. But this Thing was not mortal. It moved away from the bed, changed back into that queer vapor. And as I watched, unbelieving, again came a sound like a sob. Before I knew it, the luminousness was gone and I was alone in the room, with Ralph.

I did not hesitate longer. I sprang to the bed. Ralph breathed! There *was* color in his cheeks, on his lips! I ran to the kitchen. Quickly I brought cool compresses and placed them on his forehead. I chafed his hands, rubbed his heart. For a long time I worked over him.

Then his eyes opened, gazing curiously at me. He sighed, as his body relaxed.

Mac slipped through the open door, giving vent to glad whimperings, eager barks of joy. He ran to his master, frantic with delight.

Ralph moved one hand to stroke his head. He looked up at me, smiling weakly. I saw the love in his look and I wanted to weep with joy.

Then his eyes closed. A deep sleep seemed to enfold him. But it was a normal, healthy sleep. The crisis was past.

It all seems like a fantastic dream as I look back on it. I wonder sometimes if I fell asleep and dreamed it all. Was it the doctor's good work and Ralph's strong body that actually combated the result of the fall? Ralph does not remember anything that happened, except that he came floating back out of darkness to find me beside him, and Mac whimpering. Yet the actions of the dog are more conclusive to me than my reason. I study Mac sometimes, and wish he could speak, to corroborate it all—if it was real and not a dream.

With the coming of daylight I was awakened from a trance-like state by the arrival of Doctor Hough. Ralph lay sleeping quietly on the bed; Mac, watchful, was curled up on the floor in front of it. The doctor's first glance was enough.

"Brave girl," he said quickly. "You've brought him through. The crisis came while I was away. But there's no question now. He'll live and get well. He owes his life to you."

"Not to me, Doctor. To—to her."

"Her?" he asked in surprise.

I told him everything. He listened quietly, testing Ralph's pulse, examining him as I spoke. He did not scoff. When I had finished, his look upon me was full of wise understanding.

"Do—do you believe it, Doctor?" I cried.

He studied me, thoughtfully. He nodded his head.

"We doctors—we general practitioners out here in the country—see strange things," he said, "stranger than we can understand, stranger than we shall ever understand. It's only a thin barrier at best between life and death. Who knows how simple it is to step across, and back again? It's easy for us to believe that impulses from this life carry over into some existence beyond."

He stared out of the window.

"Yes, I believe you," he said finally. "Quick to hate, your friend was just as quick to love. Stirred by one impulse, she was just as quick to react to another. Yes, I believe you."

"And will she come back to—to hate us again?" I asked.

"I cannot tell. Perhaps this was her test of fire before she could approach some higher plane of existence. Perhaps the force of love in you overcame the force of evil in her, and by her new act she purged her soul of hate. The agony in her face, of which you tell me, would indicate some great struggle through which she passed. If her spirit does return, I hope it will be in love."

AFTER long weeks, Ralph recovered. I nursed him back to health. And the next spring, when the earth gave promise of new life, when soft winds blew through our valley and birds came winging back from the southland to take up their residence there and make love, Ralph and I went to the little church in the village and were married. As I stood at the altar, it seemed to me for a moment that I felt again the presence of my rival. But the next instant the sensation was past.

Ralph and I stopped for a moment on the steps of the church as we came out, to gaze up at the hills—our hills—and down into the valley. A cloud came over the sun. But no longer did the valley seem to hold a menace. The cloud was edged with silver and gold as the sun's rays shone around it.

"It's symbolical of our love, Ralph," I said. "Shadows may come, but our love will encompass them and turn them to silver and gold."

He caught me in his arms and kissed me.

I never have seen the strange phantom since. Here in our valley is peace and contentment and love. Ralph is so good to me—so kind and gentle.

In a little while my time will be upon me. I will bear Ralph's child. Will the phantom come to me again? And if it does, will it be in hate—or love? Or is the soul of the wild tempestuous girl I loved safe at last in some higher existence, purged and clean, happy and content up there in the realms of the blessed?

I hope it is. For, after all, she was my chum.