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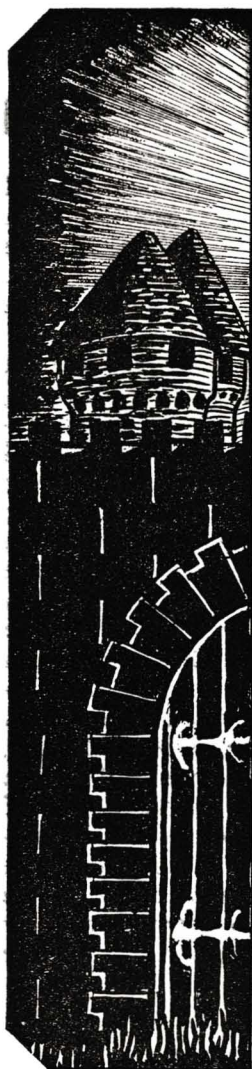
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The Listeners

By WALTER DE LA MARE



*I*S THERE ANYBODY there?" said the Traveler,
 Knocking on the moonlit door;
 And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
 Of the forest's ferny floor;
 And a bird flew up out of the turret,
 Above the Traveler's head;
 And he smote upon the door again a second time;
 "Is there anybody there?" he said.
 But no one descended to the Traveler;
 No head from the leaf-fringed sill
 Leaned over and looked into his gray eyes,
 Where he stood perplexed and still.
 But only a host of phantom listeners
 That dwelt in the lone house then
 Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
 To that voice from the world of men:
 Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
 That goes down to the empty hall,
 Harkening in an air stirred and shaken
 By the lonely Traveler's call.
 And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
 Their stillness answering his cry,
 While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
 'Neath the starred and leafy sky;
 For he suddenly smote on the door, even
 Louder, and lifted his head:—
 "Tell them I came," and no one answered
 "That I kept my word," he said.
 Never the least stir made the listeners,
 Though every word he spake
 Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
 From the one man left awake:
 Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
 And the sound of iron on stone,
 And how the silence surged softly backward,
 When the plunging hoofs were gone.

