

"The products," he answered, "are in keeping. Look at this flask!"

'Twas a queer twisted shape, greenish with gold flecks—something not inhuman, perhaps; something sinuous and serpentine, beyond doubt.

"This liquor," he continued, as we moved back into the other room, "is made by taking pure mercury and exposing it in a certain manner to the action of the sun and of the air. The fire then passes over it and it is ready to receive the influence of the constellation of Virgo, and of Saturn the planet. Thus it grows exceeding dark—yet at the end? Behold!"

He placed a drop upon the palm of his hand. 'Twas a drop of purest opal, flashing with many tints, self-luminous. A light smoke floated up from it into the still air; a moment, and it was vanished altogether.

"'Tis a volatile drug!" explained my friend; "even now I am at work upon it, that I may fix it. But the task is passing hard."

"What is its name?" I asked.

"Surely you are not one of those who think that by naming aught they have explained it! Suffice it," he added, "that all men drink once of this drug, but no man twice!"

"Then," I laughed, "the name of it must be Death."

"No!" he smiled, "I think not. Come, drink, my friend! It is the drug that giveth strange vision."

He poured about a drachm of the fluid into a tall glass. Its appearance was quite altered, being now of a grey pearly sheen.

"Drink!" he cried, "drink!"

I lifted the glass and drank. Its taste was subtle and sweet as a kiss is; an ecstasy woke in me for an instant. Then I sank down, out of things, into a rich red gloom that grew blacker and blacker. Meseems that much time passed; but who can measure the time of a consciousness

that is but the negation of all things?

Yet was I content in annihilation, and—as it seemed—at rest.

II.

Quite suddenly consciousness returned. I was muffled in black night, suffocated by darkness, awake to a strange nameless fear.

Hardly was I aware of this when from all sides came upon me an agonizing pressure, like the frenzied grip of some giant hand. Even as my bones crushed beneath it, it relaxed. But my peace was gone; I was disturbed, anxious; I waited.

Not in vain. Again and again came the clutch upon me, each time more terrible than the last.

'Twas all so meaningless—I never guessed—how could I guess?—

Also I tried to struggle and to shriek. Useless; my voice seemed gone.

Then—ah God! one spasm of steel ten thousand times fiercer than all the rest—a blaze of light in my eyes—and a wail of helpless agony, as it were, crushed out of me, that turned into a shrill scream of pain—of pain—unspeakable—unthinkable—I cannot bear to write of it.

Then a long lull.

A certain animal content, reaction from the agony.

A certain animal discontent, echo of the agony.

And dawning vistas of strange visions.

Of strange, strange visions.

Vast was the concave of the orb of light wherein I found myself. The light was of a cool, early green, filtered through dew and reflected by flowers. A soft alluring scent was in the air; and a ripple as of slow, invisible waters.

A tide of happiness and expectation played in my soul like the wind