

in the branches of an oak, making delicious music. Yet still there came now and again swift, strange pangs memorial of that past agony, and sudden fits of weeping shook me. But, one dream with another, the scene was inexpressibly delightful.

The sole avenue open to the forces of mental discomfort was the budding sense of insecurity. Pleasures and pains alike had no obvious source; their function and purpose were still more obscure. The question even arose: Are all these phenomena *detached*? Or, in a word, Am I insane?

The stress of this particular anxiety was increased by the alluring paths of research that opened to me. As vision after vision passed in fleeting rapture over my gaze, I seemed to grasp a certain shadowy nexus; then would arise another in the light of which the whole grouping broke down.

It seems trifling; you would hardly believe the mental agony that this simple matter caused; and—now—rose ever the mocking query: Insane?

However, as I became more used to the scene, certain facts did become clearer. The faint greenish luminosity was certainly due to the concourse of bright stars that hung in the limpid, colourless ether. One of these stars would now and again come dropping through the sky, and each, as it dropped, would burst into flame, shaped into some strange vision which riveted my attention. It would perhaps pass near me, so that the wind of its presence would tinge my being with some portion of its influence. But none of these actually struck me until one—'twas a bigger star than most—burst into a glorious face more beautiful than sea-born Aphrodite. As it streamed through the sky, the flame of its pace became an aureole of wondrous hair. Nearer, nearer it came; my

soul leapt out to meet it. Innocence, godhead, peace, love, gentleness, all infinite rapture were hers. My soul leapt out to meet her. Now! Now! And waves of purest gold streamed through all my being as our lips met in one long passionate kiss.

But, as this endured, it changed. Her lips grew hot—horrible. Beneath her mouth my lips rotted away; unutterable pangs tore asunder my whole being.

Suddenly, as a shock, all that soul-shaking vision passed; but it left me trembling. Now, too, all the rapture of joyous expectation began to cloud. The vivid stream of blood in me began to slacken. The faint dawn-blush of the universe tinged its green with rose, with gold—and dull grey patches in the gold. And then I became aware of certain faces behind me. Behind me—however swift I turned, I could only catch the vaguest glimpses of them. But the impression was that of forces too unutterably malignant, menacing.

Yet the flood of the exaltation of the vision bore me away, and they were easily forgotten. Until in the full current the star swept upon me from the height, and I recognised the type of face that I had known as *Theirs*. It passed me, but so close that, fast as it fell, it chilled me horribly. It seemed, too, as if I had moved swiftly to avoid it. And therewith came a sinking fear. Before I had always been stable in a world of change. Now forsooth I too am mobile! the fear shook me horribly.

Then, too, a spasm of remembrance of the evil woman. It was as if her nature had passed into me, become part of me. And I loathed myself. Thus the dreadful war began; that war wherein a man is set against himself—the strife that hath no end.