

A Woman's Laughter

—vastly different from what I know. If you are betraying nothing would you mind telling me his story?"

"It is not a pleasant story," warned the younger man. "And on such a night as this——"

"It may be that one can see more clearly into the depths of misfortune and tragedy," interrupted the missionary quietly.

A faint flush rose into David Raine's pale face. There was something of nervous eagerness in the clasp of his fingers upon his knees.

"Of course, there is the woman," he said.

"Yes, of course, the woman."

"Sometimes I haven't been quite sure whether this man worshipped the woman or the woman's beauty," David went on, with a strange glow in his eyes. "He loved beauty. And this woman was beautiful, almost too beautiful for the good of one's soul, I guess. And he must have loved her, for when she went out of his life it was as if he had sunk into a black pit from out of which he could not rise. I have asked myself often if he would have loved her had she been less beautiful, even quite plain, and I have answered myself as he answered that question, in the affirmative. It was born in him to worship wherever he loved at all. Her beauty made a certain sort of completeness for him. He treasured that. He was proud of it. He counted himself the richest man in the world because he possessed it. But deep under his worship of her beauty he *loved her*. I am more and more sure of that, and I am equally sure that time will prove it—that he will never rise again with his old hope and faith out of that black pit into which he sank when he came face to face with the realisation that there were forces in life—in Nature,