

ENOCH CRANE

nearer—there, that is better—my voice is not overstrong to-night. You are surprised, no doubt. I do not blame you, my boy. That is why I want you to understand. So few have ever understood me. None, I might say, in all these lonely years. A man cannot live under what I have suffered, and not be misunderstood. To be separated from the one who is nearest and dearest to you in life. Far worse than a stranger to her, since for years I have passed out of even her memory. The past has been a blank to her. She became another being. It was that flash of supposed recognition which gave me hope last Sunday. I felt she remembered me; knew me at last; that little by little her mind was clearing. The physicians thought so, too. We were mistaken."

He paused, leaning forward in the firelight, his hands clasped over his knees; Joe silent, waiting for him to continue. His heart went out to him, he tried to say something to comfort him, at least to express his deep and sincere sympathy. Before Enoch's tragic revelation, the words he struggled to frame seemed trivial and out of place.

"We were children together," resumed Enoch, in a voice that had grown steadier. "We grew up together in fact—in Philadelphia—my wife was barely eighteen when we were married, and I just your age. One year of happiness is not much in a man's life. It has been my lot—yet I am even grateful for that. Then came her serious illness, due to an operation that it was a miracle she lived through—only her will