

Bianca bowed her head. 'It is very late, Dad,' she whispered.

Mr. Stone's hand moved as though he would have stroked her.

'The human heart,' he murmured, 'is the tomb of many feelings.'

Bianca put her arm round him.

'You must go to bed, Dad,' she said, trying to get him to the door, for in her heart something seemed giving way.

Mr. Stone stumbled; the door swung to; the room was plunged in darkness. A hand, cold as ice, brushed her cheek. With all her force she stifled a scream.

'I am here,' Mr. Stone said.

His hand, wandering downwards, touched her shoulder, and she seized it with her own burning hand. Thus linked, they groped their way out into the passage towards his room.

'Good-night, dear,' Bianca murmured.

By the light of his now open door Mr. Stone seemed to try and see her face, but she would not show it him. Closing the door gently, she stole upstairs.

Sitting down in her bedroom by the open window, it seemed to her that the room was full of people—her nerves were so unstrung. It was as if walls had not the power this night to exclude human presences. Moving, or motionless, now distinct, then covered suddenly by the thick veil of some material object, they circled round her quiet figure, lying back in the chair with shut eyes. These disharmonic shadows flitting in the room made a stir like the rubbing of dry straw or the hum of bees among clover stalks. When she sat up they vanished, and the sounds became the distant din of homing traffic; but the moment she closed her eyes, her visitors again began to steal round her with that dry, mysterious hum.