

there was an appeal to him that made his throat grow tight, in its look of being unoccupied, in the blank stare of its unlighted windows which contrasted with the lighted windows in the houses on both sides, and in the slight evidences of disrepair about it. He waited many minutes, his hand upon the key in his pocket; yet he could not go in, but instead walked on down the street, his thoughts and feelings in a turmoil.

He could not call up any sense that the house was his, any more than he had been able to when Sherrill had told him of it. He own a house on that street! Yet was that in itself any more remarkable than that he should be the guest, the friend of such people as the Sherrills? No one as yet, since Sherrill had told him he was Corvet's son, had called him by name; when they did, what would they call him? Alan Conrad still? Or Alan Corvet?

He noticed, up a street to the west, the lighted sign of a drug store and turned up that way; he had promised, he had recollected now, to write to . . . those in Kansas—he could not call them "father" and "mother" any more—and tell them what he had discovered as soon as he arrived. He could not tell them that, but he could write them at least that he had arrived safely and was well. He bought a post-card in the drug store, and wrote just, "Arrived safely; am well" to John Welton in Kansas. There was a little vending machine upon the counter, and he dropped in a penny and got a box of matches and put them in his pocket.

He mailed the card and turned back to Astor Street; and he walked more swiftly now, having come to his decision, and only shot one quick look up at the house as he approached it. With what had his father shut himself up within that house for twenty years? And was it there still? And was it from that that Benjamin Corvet had fled? He saw no one in the street, and was certain no one was observing him as, taking the key from his pocket, he ran up the steps and unlocked the outer door. Holding this door open to get the light from the street lamp, he fitted the key into the inner door; then he closed the outer door. For fully a minute, with fast beating heart and a sense of expectation of he knew not what, he kept his hand upon the key before he turned it; then he opened the door and stepped into the dark and silent house.

CHAPTER V.

An Encounter.

ALAN, standing in the darkness of the hall, felt in his pocket for his matches and struck one on the box. The light showed the hall in front of him, reaching back into some vague, distant darkness, and great rooms with wide portiered doorways gaping on both sides. He turned into the room upon his right, glanced to see that the shades were drawn on the windows toward the street, then found the switch and turned on the electric light.

As he looked around, he fought against his excitement and feeling of expectancy; it was—he told himself—after all, merely a vacant house, though bigger and more expensively furnished than any he ever had been in except the Sherrills; and Sherrill's statement to him had implied that anything there might be in it which could give the reason for his father's disappearance would be probably only a paper, a record of some kind. It was unlikely that a thing so easily concealed as that could be found by him on his first examination of the place; what he had come here for now—he tried to make himself believe—was merely to obtain whatever other information it could give him about his father and the way his father had lived, before Sherrill and he had any other conversation.

Alan had not noticed, when he stepped into the hall in the morning, whether the house then had been heated; now he appreciated that it was quite cold and, probably, had been cold for the three days since his father had gone, and his servant had left to look for him. Coming from the street, it was not the chilliness of the house he felt, but the stillness of the dead air; when a house is heated, there is always some motion of the air, but this air was stagnant. Alan had dropped his hat on a chair in the hall; he unbuttoned his overcoat, but kept it on, and stuffed his gloves into his pocket.

A light in a single room, he thought, would not excite curiosity or attract attention from the neighbors or any one passing in the street; but lights in more than one room might do that. He resolved to turn off the light in each room as he left it, before lighting the next one.

It had been a pleasant as well as a handsome house, if he could judge by the little of it he could see, before the change had come over his father. The rooms were large with high ceilings. The one where he stood, obviously was a library; bookshelves reached three quarters of the way to the ceiling on three of its walls except where they were broken in two places by doorways, and in one place on the south wall by an open fireplace. There was a big library table-desk in the centre of the room, and a stand with a shaded lamp upon it nearer the fireplace. A leather-cushioned Morris chair—a lonely, meditative-looking chair—was by the stand and at an angle toward the hearth; the rug in front of it was quite worn through and showed the floor underneath. A sympathy toward his father, which Sherrill had not been able to make him feel, came to Alan as he reflected how many days and nights Benjamin Corvet must have passed reading or thinking in that chair before his restless feet could have worn away the tough, Oriental fabric of the rug.

THERE were several magazines on the top of the large desk, some unwrapped, some still in their wrappers; Alan glanced at them and saw that they all related to technical and scientific subjects. The desk evidently had been much used and had many drawers; Alan pulled one open and saw that it was full of papers; but his sensation as he touched the top one made him shut the drawer again and postpone prying of that sort until he had looked more thoroughly about the house.

He went to the door of the connecting room and looked into it. This room, dusky in spite of the light which shone past him through the wide doorway, was evidently another library; or rather it appeared to have been the original library, and the front room had been converted into a library to supplement it. The book-cases here were built so high that a little ladder on wheels was required for access to the top shelves. Alan located the light switch in the room; then he returned, switched off the light in the front room, crossed in the darkness into the second room, and pressed the switch.

A weird, uncanny, half wail, half moan, coming from the upper hall, suddenly filled the house. Its unexpectedness and the nature of the sound stirred the hair upon his head, and he started back; then he pressed the switch again, and the noise stopped. He lighted another match, found the right switch, and turned on the light. Only after discovering two long tiers of white and black keys against the north wall did Alan understand that the switch must control the motor working the bellows of an organ which had pipes in the upper hall; it was the sort of organ that can be played either with fingers or by means of a paper roll; a book of music had fallen upon the keys, so that one was pressed down, causing the note to sound when the bellows pumped.

But having accounted for the sound did not immediately end the start that it had given Alan. He had the feeling which so often comes to one in an unfamiliar and vacant house that there was some one in the house with him. He listened and seemed to hear another sound in the upper hall, a footstep. He went out quickly to the foot of the stairs and looked up them.

"Is any one here?" he called. "Is any one here?"

His voice brought no response. He went half way up the curve of the wide stairway, and called again, and listened; then he fought down the feeling he had had; Sherrill had said there would be no one in the house, and Alan was certain there was no one. So he went back to the room where he had left the light.

The centre of this room, like the room next to it, was occupied by a library table-desk. He pulled open some of the drawers in it; one or two had blue prints and technical drawings in them; the others had only the miscellany which accumulates in a room much used. There were drawers also under the bookcases all around the room; they appeared, when Alan opened some of them, to contain pamph-

lets of various societies, and the scientific correspondence of which Sherrill had told him. He looked over the titles of some of the books on the shelves—a multitude of subjects, anthropology, exploration, deep-sea fishing, ship-building, astronomy. The books in each section of the shelves seemed to correspond in subject with the pamphlets and correspondence in the drawer beneath, and these, by their dates, to divide themselves into different periods during the twenty years that Benjamin Corvet had lived alone here.

Alan felt that seeing these things was bringing his father closer to him; they gave him a little of the feeling he had been unable to get when he looked at his father's picture. He could realize better now the lonely, restless man, pursued by some ghost he could not kill, taking up for distraction one subject of study after another, exhausting each in turn, until he could no longer make it engross him, and then absorbing himself in the next.

These two rooms evidently had been the ones most used by his father; the other rooms on this floor, as Alan went into them one by one, he found spoke far less intimately of Benjamin Corvet. A dining-room was in the front of the house to the north side of the hall; a service room opened from it, and on the other side of the service room was what appeared to be a smaller dining-room. The service room communicated both by dumb waiter and stairway with rooms below; Alan went down the stairway only far enough to see that the rooms below were servants' quarters; then he came back, turned out the light on the first floor, struck another match, and went up the stairs to the second story.

The rooms opening on to the upper hall, it was plain to him, though their doors were closed, were mostly bed-rooms. He put his hand at hazard on the nearest door and opened it. As he caught the taste and smell of the air in the room—heavy, colder, and deader even than the air in the rest of the house—he hesitated; then with his match he found the light switch.

The room and the next one which communicated with it evidently were—or had been—a woman's bedroom and boudoir. The hangings, which were still swaying from the opening of the door, had taken permanently the folds in which they had hung for many years; there were the scores of long-time idleness, not of use, in the rugs and upholstery of the chairs. The bed, however, was freshly made up, as though the bed clothing had been changed occasionally. Alan went through the bedroom to the door of the boudoir, and saw that that, too, had the same look of unoccupancy and disuse. On the low dressing table were scattered such articles as a woman starting on a journey might think it not worth while to take with her. There was no doubt that these were the rooms of his father's wife.

HAD his father preserved them thus, as she had left them, in the hope that she might come back, permitting himself to fix no time when he abandoned that hope, or even to change them after he had learned that she was dead? Alan thought not; Sherrill had said that Corvet had known from the first that his separation from his wife was permanent. The bed made up, the other things neglected, and evidently looked after or dusted only at long separated periods, looked more as though Corvet had shrunk from seeing them or even thinking of them, and had left them to be looked after wholly by the servant, without ever being able to bring himself to give instructions that they should be changed. Alan felt that he would not be surprised to learn that his father never had entered these ghostlike rooms since the day his wife had left him.

On the top of a chest of high drawers in a corner near the dressing table were some papers. Alan went over to look at them; they were invitations, notices of concerts and of plays twenty years old—the mail, probably, of the morning she had gone away, left where her maid or she herself had laid them, and only picked up and put back there at the times since when the room was dusted. As Alan touched them, he saw that his fingers left marks in the dust on the smooth top of the chest; he noticed that some one else had touched the things and made marks of the same sort as he had

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