

THE STREET CALLED STRAIGHT

That was like a summons to me, like a call. When it came, everything else—the things I'd been taught to strive for and the people whom I had supposed to be the only ones worth living with, grew distant and shadowy, as though they belonged to a picture or a book. It seemed to me that I woke then for the first time to a realization of the life going on about me here in my own country, and to a sense of my share in it. If I hadn't involved myself so much—and involved some one else with me—my duty would have been clearer from the start. But Colonel Ashley's been so noble!—he's understood me so well!—he's helped me so much to understand myself!—that I can't help honoring him, honoring him with my whole heart, even if I see now that I don't—that I never did—care for him in the way—”

She pressed her handkerchief to her lips to keep back what might have become a sob.

“Did you know I—I loved you?” he asked, still speaking hoarsely.

“I thought you must,” she said, simply. “I used to say I hoped you didn't—but deep down in my heart—”

He got up and strode to the window, where, with his back to her, he stared awhile at the last cold glimmer of the sunset. His big frame and broad shoulders shut out the light to such an extent that when he turned it was toward a darkened room. He could barely see her, as she sat sidewise to the desk, an arm along the back of her chair. His attitude bespoke a doubt in his mind that still kept him at a distance.