

Chris spoke rapidly, and leaned back a moment. Now he was terrified of waiting—he did not know how long it would be ; but for an intent instant he stared down on the shadowed face.

Again the eyelids flickered ; the lips formed words, and ceased again.

The priest glanced up, scarcely knowing why ; and then again lowered himself that if it were possible Ralph might hear.

Then he spoke, with a tense internal effort as if to drive the grace home. . . .

"Ego te absolvo ab omnibus censuris et peccatis, in nomine Patris——" He raised himself a little and lifted his hand, moving it sideways across and down as he ended—*"et Filii et Spiritus Sancti."*

The priest rose up once more, his duty driving his emotion down ; he did not dare to look across at the two figures beyond the bed, or even to question himself again as to what he was doing.

The two men at the further end of the room were waiting now ; they had lifted the candles and crucifix off the table, and set them on the bench by the side.

Chris went swiftly across the room, dropped on one knee, rose again, lifted the veiled vessel that stood in the centre, with the little linen cloth beneath, and set it all down on the bench. He knelt again, went a step aside back to the table, lifted the other vessel, and signed with his head.

The two men grasped the ends of the table, and carried it across the floor to the end of the bed. Chris followed and set down the sacred oils upon it.

"The cross and one candle," he whispered sharply.