

Mechanically Matthias put his hat down on the table.

He experienced an incredulous sensation, as though he were struggling to cast off the terror and oppression of some particularly vivid and coherent nightmare.

From the farther room that noise persisted of monotonous and awful laughter.

Marbridge ceased to swallow and grunted. Joan removed the glass and drew away without looking at Matthias. At a cost of considerable will-power, apparently, the wounded man collected himself and levelled at Matthias his louring, but now less dull, regard.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said ungraciously. "Well, you'll do at a pinch. . . . I wanted Arlington . . . but you if he could n't be found."

"Well," said Matthias stupidly, "I'm here. . . . The doctor's seen you, I suppose?"

"Yes — did what he could for me — no use wasting effort — it's my cue to exit."

"Oh, come! It's not as bad as that!"

"The hell it ain't. The doctor knows — I know. Not that it matters. It was coming to me and I got it."

"Where's the doctor?" Matthias insisted. "Why is n't he attending you now?"

"He's in the other room . . . trying to silence that crazy woman. . . . She plugged me and . . . went into hysterics . . ."

"Who?"

"Nella Cardrow. . . . Had the devil of a time with her before doctor came . . . trying to keep her from rushing out and giving herself up . . . all this in the papers. . . . But all right now: we'll hush it up."

"Then that's what you want of me?"

"Wait," Marbridge grunted. "Where's that girl?"

Joan moved back to his side. "What can I do?" she said; and these were all the words Matthias heard her utter from first to last of that business.