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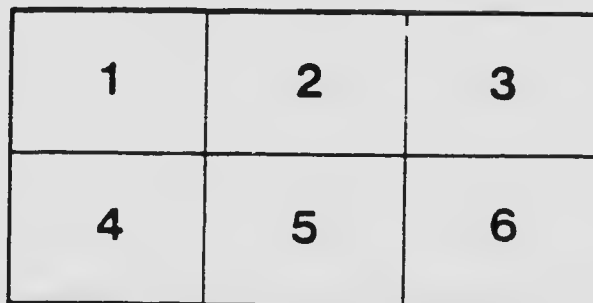
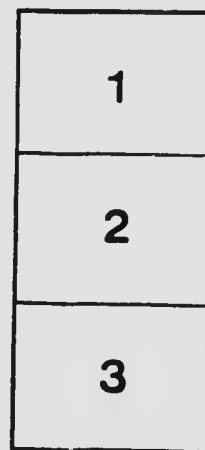
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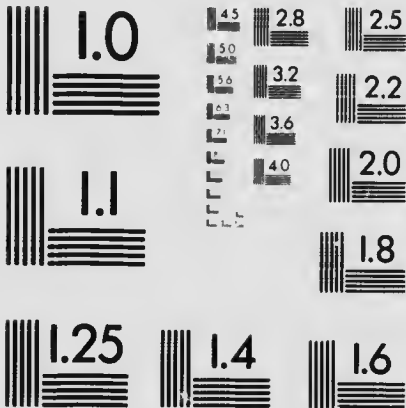
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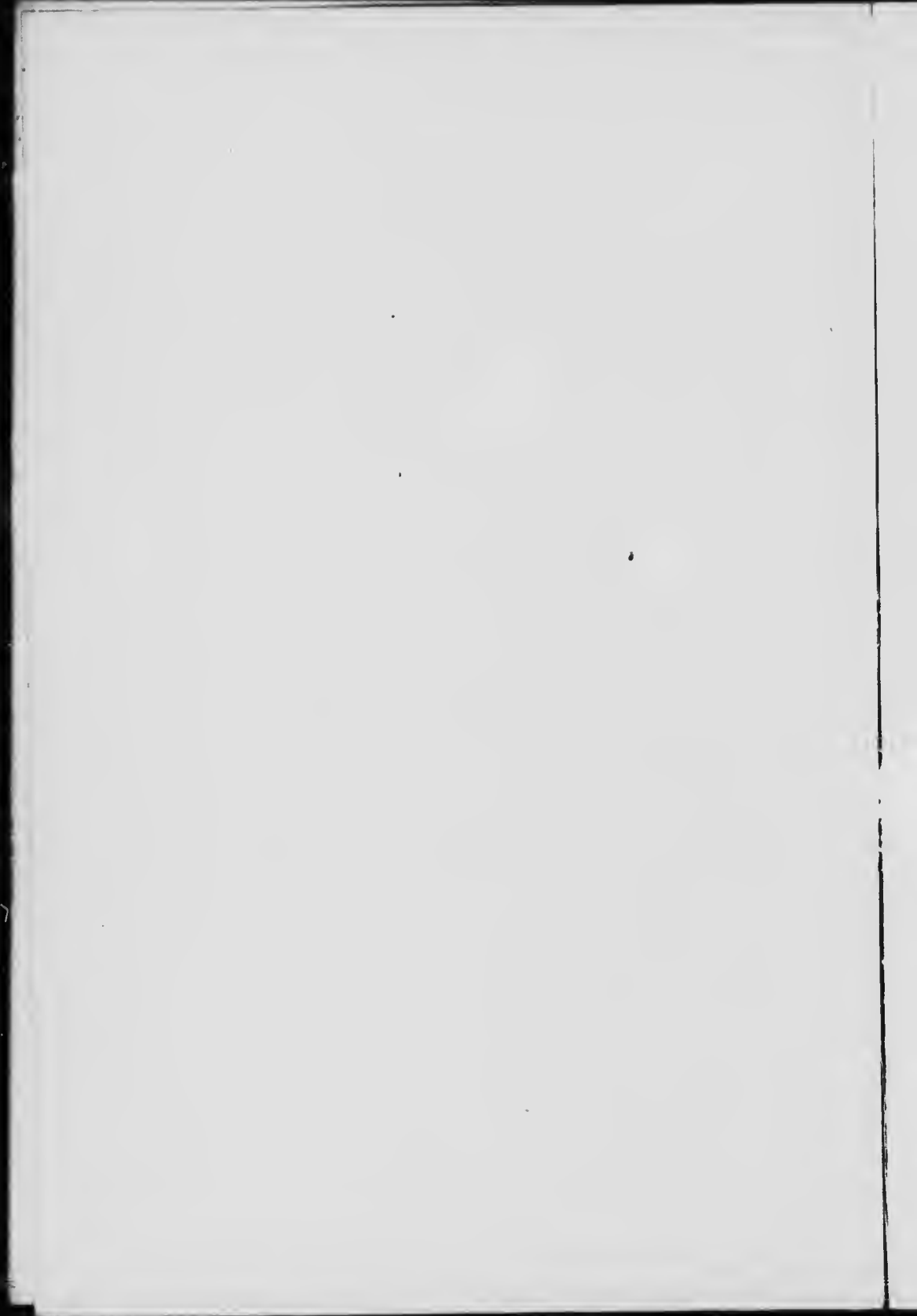
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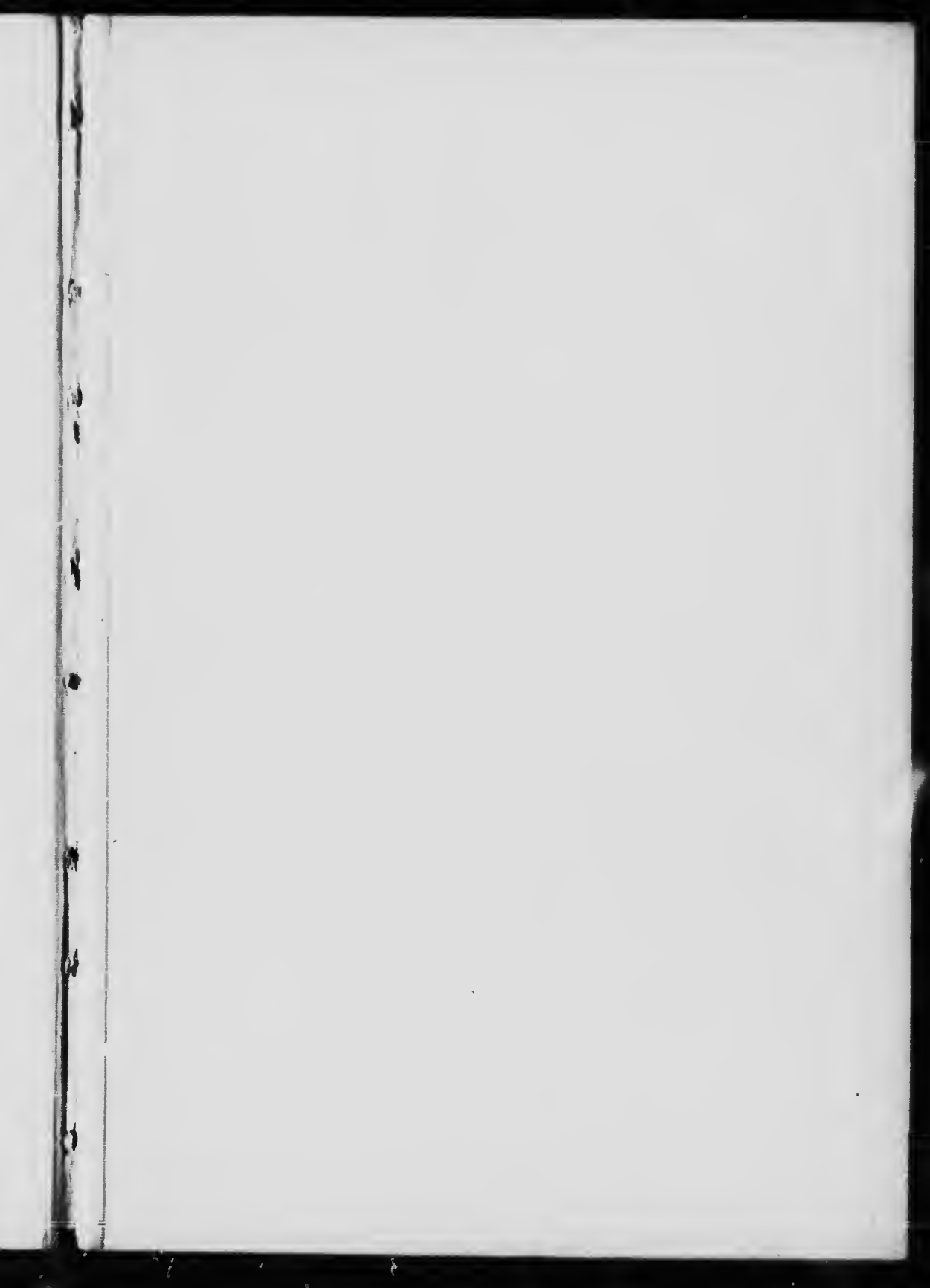
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WININGSBY DAWSON









ANSWERED PRAYERS

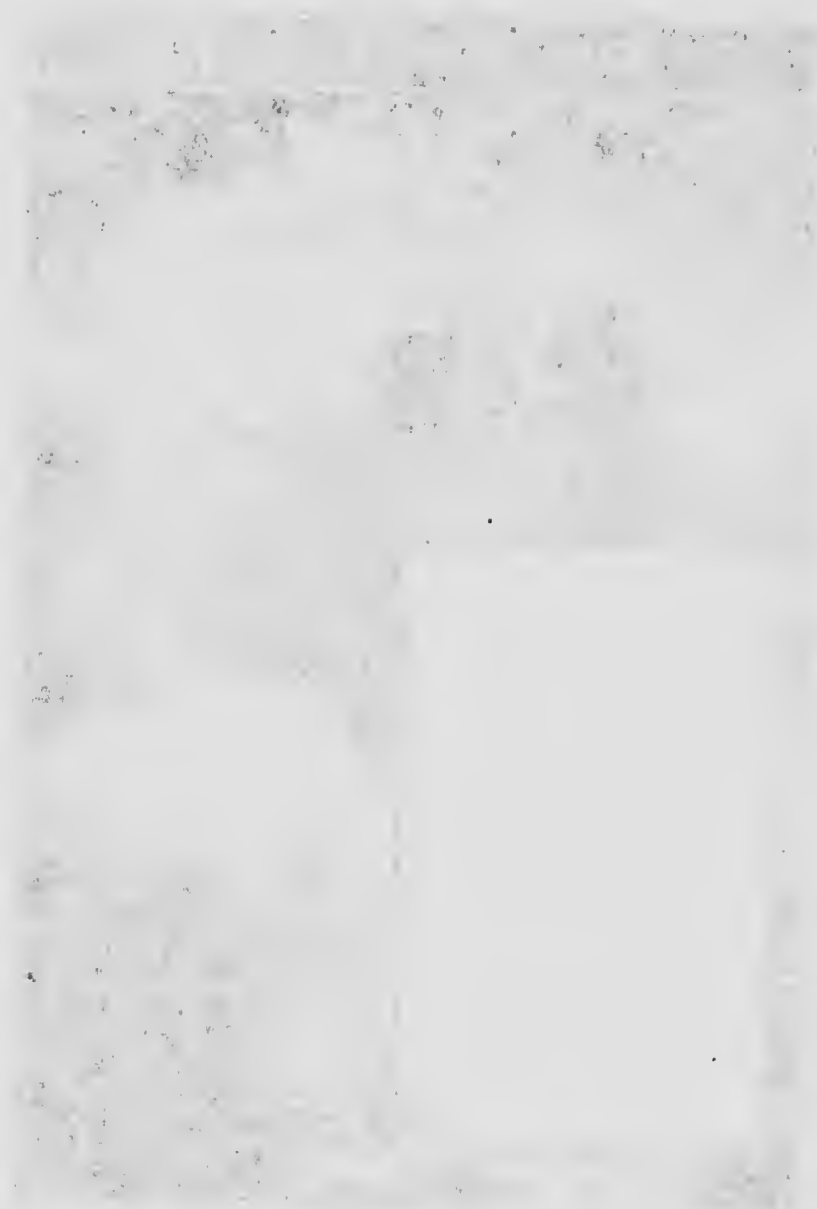


We prayed that unto you,
dear,
God's best gifts might be
given;
We wished to strew for you,
dear,
Earth's paths with Heaven.

We planned your life a May-
day
When young flowers should
be born,
That you might stray the
smooth way
Of gold-robed Morn.

We dared more than we
knew, dear:
When half God's gifts were
given,
He answered all our prayers,
dear—
He gave you Heaven.

17
The
LAWSON COUNTY



The
UNKNOWN COUNTRY

By
CONINGSBY DAWSON

AUTHOR OF "THE GARDEN WITHOUT WALLS," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
W. C. RICE

MCCLELLAND, GOODCHILD & STEWART
TORONTO
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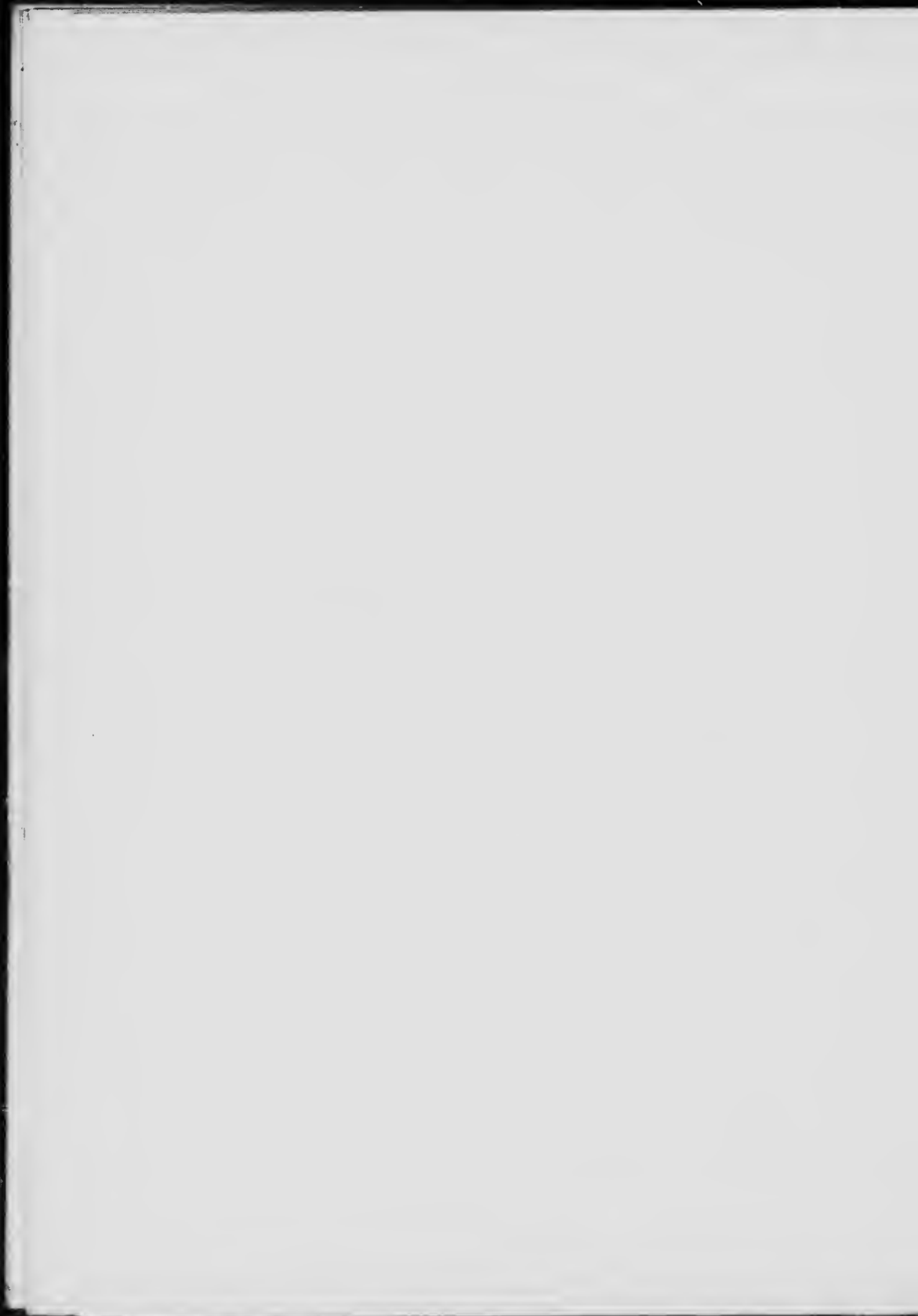
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A decorative border with a repeating floral and vine pattern surrounds the text. The border is composed of a top and bottom horizontal band and two vertical side bands, all featuring intricate designs of roses and leaves.

ILLUSTRATIONS

ANSWERED PRAYER	<i>Frontis</i>
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The Unknown Country

FOR nine years she was no more to me than a name occasionally occurring in my mother's letters: "Doris is growing a big girl," "Doris is going to be beautiful one day," "Doris is very quaint in her sayings."

I was in China when news of my mother's death arrived. This left the little sister, whom I had never seen, alone in the world save for myself. I hurried home to England with the intention



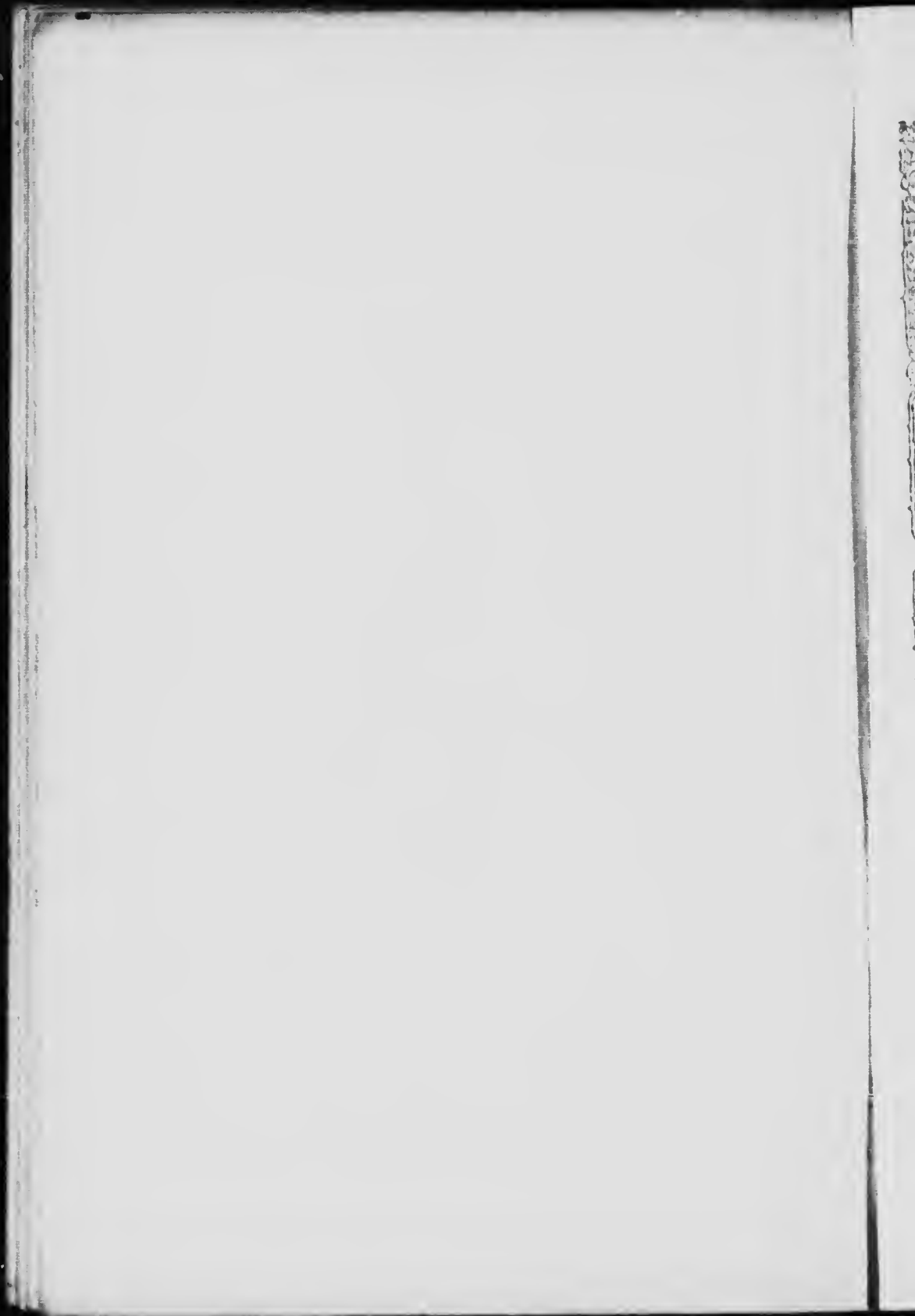
The Unknown Country

of placing her in some good school, so that I might be left free to travel. The minute I set eyes on her I realized that my responsibility must not end there. I dared not entrust her happiness to strangers; she was so exquisitely fashioned for joy, and, like all things perfect—violets and skylarks—so delicately fragile. When the old home at Ransby had been sold and I left England again, she accompanied me.

From the first day of our acquaintance when, standing tip-



STRETCHED
HER ARMS UP TO ME





The Unknown Country

toe, she stretched up her slim white arms and pulled down my face toward her, she altered all the values of my world. Until she came I had missed half the beauty of life, taking it carelessly for granted. As though I had been an empty house, she entered into me, throwing wide the windows and pulling up the blinds. How often have I wakened in the night, awed and amazed that the making or marring of such a soul should be mine!

For ten years we wandered

A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the text. The border is composed of small, intricate designs that create a frame around the central content.

The Unknown Country

far and wide. My profession of mining expert kept us always moving. One summer would find us in Alaska, another in India, another in Africa; we followed hard on the heels of stampeding fortune. Wherever gold was struck, we turned our faces toward it.

We were strange companions, this flower-child and I. The changefulness of our lives made us each other's only permanency. From the first, despite our difference in age, we shared each other's minds. For my sake her



The Unknown Country

child's hands became womanly; for her sake I made my heart a child's. In all that long, eventful trail through so many countries, sometimes in danger, frequently beyond reach of civilization, I can recall not one day without its kindness.

For seven years we were content to be wanderers; then came the change. I think it was due to her budding womanhood. We were in British Columbia, sailing down the Arrowhead Lakes. It was Sunday, and Doris was in her sixteenth year. We

A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the text. The border is composed of several repeating units, each featuring a central floral motif with leaves and stems, connected by elegant scrolls. The overall style is reminiscent of early 20th-century book design.

The Unknown Country

were sitting out on deck in the sunshine, watching the snow-capped mountains slipping by and the gliding serpent of blue, deep water vanishing round the curves behind. Every now and then a vapor of smoke would rise on the wooded beach—the signal that a passenger was waiting—and our flat-bottomed steamer would change her course and turn her nose toward it. Doris was full of excited gaiety. The moment the vessel touched shore, she would run to the rail to see who was coming aboard.

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The Unknown Country

I was too lazy to leave my place.

In answer to one of the signals, we had pushed into a little cove. Its sides were steeply wooded with tamarack and pine, through which ran up a narrow trail. Doris called to me imperatively: "Oh, Jewett, come quickly! Here's a man from Ransby." I lounged over to her side. Her face was flushed; she kept brushing back her long gold hair, which the wind swept across her face. Standing astride the crazy pier was Ralph Jex, with whom, years before, I had

A decorative border with floral and scrollwork patterns surrounds the text. The top and bottom borders are wider and more ornate, while the side borders are narrower and feature repeating oval motifs.

The Unknown Country

gone to school in Ransby. At that moment all the longing which exiles feel for quiet, secure friendships and known faces came surging over me. Rushing down to the cabin, I seized our baggage and, without a thought of plans already made, landed.

Jex told us that he had turned fruit-rancher, had been out from England four years, and was precious homesick at times. We accompanied him through the tunnel of woods to the first bench above the lake, where his



The Unknown Country

log house stood in the orchard he had planted. Old-fashioned flowers were blooming, sweet-william, lavender, wall-flowers, and cherry-pie; they woke memories with their fragrance. Under the trees stood rows of hives round whose doorways bees were humming.

All that day we loitered beneath the trees, talking of former days. We conjured up Ransby till it stood before us, moss-grown and gray, tottering on the red cliff-edge, overlooking the greenness of the German

A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the text on the page.

The Unknown Country

Ocean. We rebuilt it with glamour, making its imperfections perfect. The Rockies and the long blue Arrowheads died out from sight; our eyes were turned inward and our vision was far away. Our speech lost its acquired refinement and drifted into the broad-voweled singsong of East Anglia. In our ears was the strumming of the sea, the laughter of little children at play on the green, and at sunset the opening of cottage doors and voices of mothers calling.

With nightfall we grew silent.

A decorative border with a repeating floral and vine motif surrounds the text. The border is composed of a top and bottom horizontal band and two vertical side bands, all featuring intricate line art of leaves and flowers.

The Unknown Country

The glimmer of the lake through branches and tree-trunks made countless little illumined windows, like those of a town seen distantly. We peopled the windows with silhouettes and faces; we found a voice for the faces—the wind rustling the leaves. For a time, so intensely did we yearn for it, the illusion seemed reality. Then it faded.

We rose to go. Launching his boat, Jex rowed us down to the junction where we had to catch our train. His last words at parting were, "We shall all

The Unknown Country

go home some day." They rang in my ears, a promise and a prophecy.

I suppose, had I been alone, the impression would soon have been overlaid. Doris kept it continually in mind. The woman's instinct for home and little children had been roused within her. Having calculated the difference in time, she would say: "They'll be waking up in Ransby now. Can't you hear the early morning quiet? The crowing of the cocks, and then silence. The rattle of a cart going by, and then

The Unknown Country

silence. The creaking of a garden-gate, and then silence. Oh, dearest, how I'm longing to be back again!" Or she would say, "All along the cliffs the wheat is yellowing, and the fields are growing red with poppies."

Night after night, amid the squalor and adventure of some mining-camp, she would build up the picture of the abandoned happiness which it was still in our power to reattain. While she spoke I would close my eyes and go back in memory. She made me share her desire. In

A decorative border with a repeating floral and vine motif surrounds the text. The border is composed of a top and bottom section with intricate floral designs, and two vertical sections with a repeating oval pattern.

The Unknown Country

our rapid marching we had scattered our affections, formed many acquaintanceships but few ties. The blood-call of ancestry had reached us. In churchyards of the distant Suffolk countryside, dim and crooked crosses of those whose personalities were merged in ours beckoned and persuaded. We commenced to plan for the home-coming.

Money was necessary. We fixed the sum at thirty thousand dollars, and commenced to save. How we did save! What small parsimonies and sacrifices went

A decorative border with a floral and vine motif surrounds the text. The border features roses and leaves, with a central vertical element on each side consisting of a series of oval shapes.

The Unknown Country

to the setting aside of that money! I am naturally extravagant, and up to that point had spent everything as it came. Now Doris took me in hand and kept the record.

It was from Australia, in her nineteenth year, that we set out on our homeward journey. Partly for the sake of pleasure, partly from motives of economy, we determined to go by way of the Pacific on a tramp steamer bound for San Francisco.

Doris's eagerness was a keen

The Unknown Country

joy. All day and every day as we wandered the deck, we would plan for and talk of the future. We chose our house in imagination—the rose-grown cottage on the village green in which we had spent our childhood. We knew how it was to be furnished, and how it was to look in all seasons. Doris appointed tasks for herself and for me when we should be settled. She was continually recalling old friendships and names which had slipped my memory. It never occurred to her that either of us might

The Unknown Country

marry; we were to live always together.

So from island to island we passed, basking in the tropic sunshine. Like the insubstantial pageant of a dream the bronze spears of palm groves grew tall on the horizon. The silent whiteness of churned-up surf became distinct. Then it gained a voice. Huts and the trader's store were seen. Soft-tongued Polynesians, copper-colored and naked, came swimming through the atolls to greet us. The trader came down the shore, and

A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the text. The border is composed of a top and bottom horizontal band and two vertical side bands, all connected at the corners.

The Unknown Country

a flag was run up. For a time they stayed with us; then the pageant melted, and again all-surrounding was the turquoise sea. The whole world seemed asleep. The world of our imagination was the one reality. Laughingly we told each other we should wake soon to find ourselves in Ransby.

At length we reached the Marquesas, just below the equator. They were our last port of call. Our cargo was complete; from them we were to steer direct for San Francisco. Sud-

A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the text on the page.

The Unknown Country

denly, without warning, on the night before we were to have sailed, having traveled all the world together, Doris left me and set out alone for the Unknown Country.

With her gone I seemed to have lost everything. We had been as one—she the spirit, I the body. I marveled at myself that I still walked and talked. Return seemed impossible. When the ship weighed anchor I stayed behind. I thought that if her soul ever came back it must be to those scenes on which

The Unknown Country

her eyes had last gazed, amid which the earthly part of her remained. Building myself a hut beneath the palms, within sound of the sea, I purposed there to end my days.

My imagination was continually occupied with thoughts of the Unknown Country. Where was it? Who lived there? Were they kind to her? And would it take a stranger long to learn that country's ways? By projecting my will I hoped to bring her back across the barrier to answer all my questions. We

The Unknown Country

had been so close to each other in life; it seemed impossible that, in an instant of time, a thing so small as death could separate us. I felt that should I once have the assurance that she survived and was happy, I could rest, if not cheerful, at least satisfied.

Lying out on the beach beneath the starlight, with closed eyes, clutching in my hands something which had belonged to her, I would wait, whispering her name. My experiments were vain. Once I heard a rustling of approaching footsteps and, mak-



The Unknown Country

ing sure that she was near,
spread out my arms to hold her.
It was only an island lover, steal-
ing by with the blazing hibiscus
flower in his hair. Drifting into
the shadows, he was soon lost
to sight. From the Unknown
Country no rumor of knowledge
escaped.

A tornado was blowing up.
Deserting the village, the natives
had fled inland. At last I could
be entirely alone and unobserved.

Struggling along the shore be-
neath the thrashing palm-fronds,

A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the text. The border is composed of a top and bottom horizontal band and two vertical side bands, all featuring intricate designs of leaves and flowers.

The Unknown Country

half blinded by the salt mist of blown spray, I came to the coral vau't in which she rested. Kneeling beside it, I called her name and tapped upon the doorway. In the lull of the storm I heard an unaccustomed sound—the distant shout and laughter of children at play. Leaning my ear closer, I tapped again. Once more I heard it; it came from the other side. Suddenly, beneath the pressure of my body, the door gave way, and I stumbled across the threshold.

My eyes were dazzled by a

The Unknown Country

blaze of light, so that I covered them with my hands to shut out the pain. I was baffled and bewildered. As I waited, the burst-in door closed behind me; the storm grew fainter and yet more faint. Then I heard nothing but the far-off breaking of waves, the laughter of children, and the drumming of a fly against a sunlit pane.

Raising my head, I gazed about me. I was in a small oak-beamed room. On the walls hung old colored prints, familiar to my childhood. The door,

A decorative border with a repeating floral and vine motif surrounds the text. The border is composed of a top and bottom horizontal band and two vertical side bands, all featuring stylized roses and leaves.

The Unknown Country

which led directly on to the green, was open wide and let in a shaft of sunlight. Asleep in the doorway was our old collie, Gyp, whom we had left behind ten years ago, when we set out upon our travels. The room had been recently occupied; on the fire a kettle was boiling, and on the table a bunch of harebells lay waiting to be put in water.

I had passed into the Unknown Country. Doris must be here. She would soon come to me. The room was arranged

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The Unknown Country

just as we had planned it—it was full of signs of her recent presence. I determined to seek her. Laughing to myself, I pictured her surprise when she first saw me.

Tiptoeing across the room to go upstairs, I caught sight of one change: in the wall was an ebony door, without latch or handle. It was both narrow and tall; the size of a man's body. It was the door by which I had entered.

What a sense of clear skies and early morning gladness was

A decorative border with a repeating floral and vine motif, featuring roses and leaves, framing the text.

The Unknown Country

abroad! I had never felt so elated. All the care of my manhood slipped from me; in heart I was again a child.

I stole to her bedroom, thinking to wake her. It was white and orderly, but empty. The bed had been slept in; a bar of sunlight fell across it. The lattice was open, and a full-blown rose, stirred by the breeze, tapped gently against the pane. Round the room, in vases of every size and shape, were all the flowers I had given her since she had gone away. Their perfume was

A decorative border with a repeating floral and vine pattern surrounds the text. The border is composed of a top and bottom section with a dense floral design, and two vertical side sections with a repeating oval motif.

The Unknown Country

intoxicating, and they had not faded. So it was possible for gifts of the living to cross to the Unknown Country!

My eyes were blinded with tears of joy. Why had I been so wretched and faithless? I had been quite near to her all the while—so near that my love could reach her. I hoped that none of my sadness, which now seemed so needless, had made her cry.

I stooped over the white bed, a great hunger in my heart. How often in our old wandering

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The Unknown Country

days had I so roused her, smoothing back her tumbled hair from her still, flushed face! I could see the hollow which her head had made upon the pillow.

So I waited, assured of her return. With sweet vague poignancy, memories of our plannings and snatches of her eager conversation came back to me: "They'll be waking up in Ransby now. Can't you hear the early morning quiet? The crowing of the cocks, and then silence. The creaking of a garden-gate, and then silence. Oh, dearest, how



The Unknown Country

I'm longing to be back again!"

The distant laughter of children sank to a whisper which drew nearer. The garden-gate creaked and clanged. I heard the patter of many tiny footsteps; then the light and single tread of some one ascending. My longing was so intense that I did not dare to gaze; I buried my face in my hands.

"Dearest!"

With a rush she was kneeling at my side, her arms about me.

I had never seen her so beautiful, nor such color in her hair

SHE WAS KNEELING AT MY SIDE.



A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the text on the page.

The Unknown Country

and eyes. Her cheeks and lips were vivid with life. She had undergone some subtle change, apparent but undefinable. It was the change that concentrated light might undergo, could it be robbed of its scorching painfulness. It was as though certain ideal hopes, which her spirit had held for her, had been impossibly realized. She had always been tender and kind, but her body had now found a way without words of speaking her meaning by gentleness.

With her hand on my shoulder,

A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the text on the page.

The Unknown Country

in the old familiar way, she wandered with me from room to room, pointing out how all had been prepared for my coming. Everything had been arranged just as we had settled it together. The furniture which had been there in my parents' time had been brought back and placed in its old station. Even the Jack-and-Jill wall-paper in my room was the same—the paper concerning which, waking in the morning, I had told myself so many queer tales as a boy.

Going into the garden, I was

A decorative border with a repeating floral and vine motif surrounds the text. The border is composed of a top and bottom horizontal band and two vertical side bands, all featuring intricate designs of roses, leaves, and scrolling vines.

The Unknown Country

surprised to see how cleverly she had remembered. The straw beehives stood in the same straggling row; the apple-trees were in bloom and did not seem a day older. Gyp rose lazily from the doorway and followed us. Catching sight of our neighbor's fowls, she broke through the hedge, barking wildly, and chased them. Our neighbor, the retired sea-captain, hearing the noise came out and, instead of scolding as he used to, called her to him kindly.

Doris and I sat ourselves in the arbor and watched the chil-

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The Unknown Country

dren play. I remember I told her how jolly it was to have them—they were just the one perfecting thing we had not planned. For to have had them in the Known Country she must have left me and married. She smiled while she heard me. Sometimes she seemed quite a little girl, laying her cheek against mine and seeking to be petted; sometimes she was a woman, talking seriously. Then the thrush which came back every year began to pipe in the cherry-tree, and we listened.



The Unknown Country

Later we went across the green through the gap to the sea-shore. The fishing-fleet was setting sail. We watched the smacks trail lazily out, one behind the other in single file till, reaching open water, they scattered fanwise and raced. Distant across the waves came to us hoarse cries of the smacksmen, hauling up ochre-colored sails. The wind caught them, driving them northward; they dwindled to specks and slipped below the horizon.

We wandered up the beach,

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The Unknown Country

and I noticed, just as Doris had prophesied, wheat yellowing along the cliff-edge, and fields growing red with poppies.

Coming to the old charred wreck buried deep in sand, I told her how I used to play pirates. Before I knew what had happened, we were playing. Unheeded and almost imperceptibly, the sun stole lower in the west, till his rim dented the treed horizon. There he hung poised, as it seemed, for hours; so it was I learned that in the Unknown Country it is never night.

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The Unknown Country

The wind sank to a breath. Shadows, like drifting smoke, scattered throughout the landscape. Stars, faint and uncertain, twinkled into sight. The broad white moon, confident and kindly, wheeled into the sky. With arms intertwined, like a pair of lovers, we turned our steps homeward along the lonely stretch of sand. What we talked of I do not now remember, but I know that our speech was full of laughter and whispers. Rounding a bend in the cliff, just as we had dreamed of them years ago

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The Unknown Country

with Jex, the tapers and illuminated pin-points of Ransby flashed from the height. There was no need of lamps or candles, Doris told me; but the people liked them for memory's sake.

As we climbed from the sea-shore into the town, the bells of St. Margaret's commenced to chime. Often, lying awake as a child, half scared by the silence of the house when all the grown-ups had gone to church, the voice of the bells had become for me the voice of Jesus calling. I

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The Unknown Country

had an idea that on Sunday evenings he came from somewhere behind the sunset to Ransby, simply for the sake of frightened little boys.

Now I felt that on the first day of my home-coming I should like to visit St. Margaret's. It lay a little way out of the town on a wooded knoll in the open country; to reach it one had to pass over meadows golden with cowslips, and through lanes pink with dog-roses and heavy with the smell of myrtle.

As we turned our steps

A decorative border with floral and scrollwork patterns surrounds the text. The border is composed of repeating motifs, including roses and stylized leaves, arranged in a rectangular frame.

The Unknown Country

through the narrow gray streets, doors were opening and shutting, and people were coming out. Many of them I knew as old friends and townsmen who had gone away as I had. I was surprised that such numbers of them should have returned, and still more surprised that they should have changed so little in their absence. The only alteration that I could discern was a look of indescribable peace which clung about them, as if all failures had been wiped out and every striving ended. They took

The Unknown Country

my home-coming quite for granted, simply smiling or nodding.

We came out on to the green where stood our cottage. A tall man was moving on before us, supporting a little old lady on his arm with evident tenderness. His shoulders seemed familiar. I hurried our steps. As we drew level, the anchored sun lit up his face, and I recognized him.

“Why, Doris, it’s Jex!” Remembering how he had shared our longing, I was going to

The Unknown Country

speak to him. Doris drew me back.

“He has not long with her,” she said. “He must go soon.”

Then I saw that the little old lady was his mother. I was puzzled, for I knew that she was dead. I wanted to say so to Doris, but I couldn't. I said: “How can he have the heart to leave, when once he has come back? What a silly fellow!” She glanced at me slantwise with a troubled expression.

We had far outdistanced the other people. The cool, dim

The Unknown Country

country lay about us; we began to walk more leisurely. The ringing of the bells was growing louder.

We did not speak. Everything was too beautiful: the motionless meadows with their vague, frail flowers; the feathery trees, shadowy and unstirred; the poignant fragrance of the dewy earth; the gray church looming nearer; the crescendo song of the bells; Doris and I with no one near us, only the stars and the moon and the sun to watch us out of a sky free of

The Unknown Country

clouds. In former days we should have been moved to tears; now we were completely glad.

The wood at the foot of the knoll commenced; our feet began to ascend. Here generation after generation of Ransby boys and girls had come to pluck primroses, and even now the twilight at the roots of the trees was golden with yellow faces of the little flowers. The rise and fall of the bells sank to a murmur. We unlatched the gate and entered the stone-garden of the dead.

The Unknown Country

I looked about me in amazement. On the crest of the hill rose the tall gray church, ivy-covered and weather-beaten, enshrouded in the sun; but the tower-ward had vanished. In the distance of dim and crooked lanes, crosses standing rank on rank, countless little houses lined the paths and byways. They were gay with honeysuckle, violets, and trailing vines. In every crevice of their walls was a nook, every cranny had its fragrance. Before I could say a word, my attention was held by a silken

The Unknown Country

rustling. The wind did not cause it, for the skies stretched silent. The tendrils which overhung the doorways were parted, and from every house the tenants were coming out. They had a strange look of peaceful merriment. Some had been old and crippled and sad when I had known them. They retained the dignity of age, but without its infirmities. Mothers came, holding their children by the hand. In family groups they moved up the hill toward the church. All were tall and straight, and the

The Unknown Country

sound they made was that of a brook that runs, laughing to itself.

At their side we entered and took our places. Our father and mother were already there; they smiled to greet us as though our coming was quite ordinary and expected. The service commenced.

It was like remembering—nothing was different, save the people's happiness. I experienced that same dreamy ecstasy which I had known as a boy on summer evenings, watching the

The Unknown Country

golden twilight change to purple and red as it filtered through the stained-glass windows. The organ boomed and sank beneath the singing, then swelled again into triumph. Heads were bowed, and the murmur of prayer arose; then the clear challenge of the preacher's voice was heard. Doris pressed closer, and my mother's hand slipped into mine. With its old suddenness the service came to an end, and we were trooping out into the mellow summer mistland.

'Awed and silent, in a quiet



MY PARENTS HAITED . . .

COME AGAIN THEY MURMURED . . .

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The Unknown Country

which was sacred, we walked down the hill together. The crowd was thinning. Reaching their little house in the garden, my parents halted.

“Come again,” they murmured.

I promised, thinking we should often see them now; a walk through the fields from Ransby, and we could be together. I had vague hopes that they might be persuaded to share our cottage. It was getting late, though the sun still held the horizon. Taking Doris’s arm, I

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left. At the gate which enters into the wood we looked back. They were still gazing after us, and waved their hands. There was nothing sad about them. I thought how uncareworn they looked.

On our way back I began to plan; it seemed to me that the best part of our day was still left to us, when we would sit in our little home together. I would kindle a fire; we would draw our chairs close. Doris would do her sewing while I read aloud. For the last hour before

The Unknown Country

going up to bed she won't put aside her work to be to me as she once was—my little sister relying on my strength.

She listened, saying nothing.

By the time we came to the green the moon was far gone on her homeward passage; the sun had moved round from the west and splashed in the waves to the eastward. No one was about; a great hush environed sea and land. As we pushed back our creaking gate, walking up the path to our cottage, a cock crew. From a distant inland farm came

The Unknown Country

the answering challenge. We entered. My eyes fell on the ebony door in the wall. I looked at Doris. She was smiling gravely. I clasped her in my arms with passion.

“Dearest,” she said, “you were afraid of the Unknown Country?”

I nodded.

“And now you know that it’s just what we always desired. This is life—the other is the shadow. You will often come here.”

I knew that the time grew

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The Unknown Country

short. Taking courage from her smiling, I urged her to tell me how I might come, and when.

“When men’s bodies go to sleep,” she answered, “their souls cross the border to the Unknown Country, and recover all they have lost, and gain all they have hoped for that is best.”

The door in the wall was behind me; I could hear it opening.

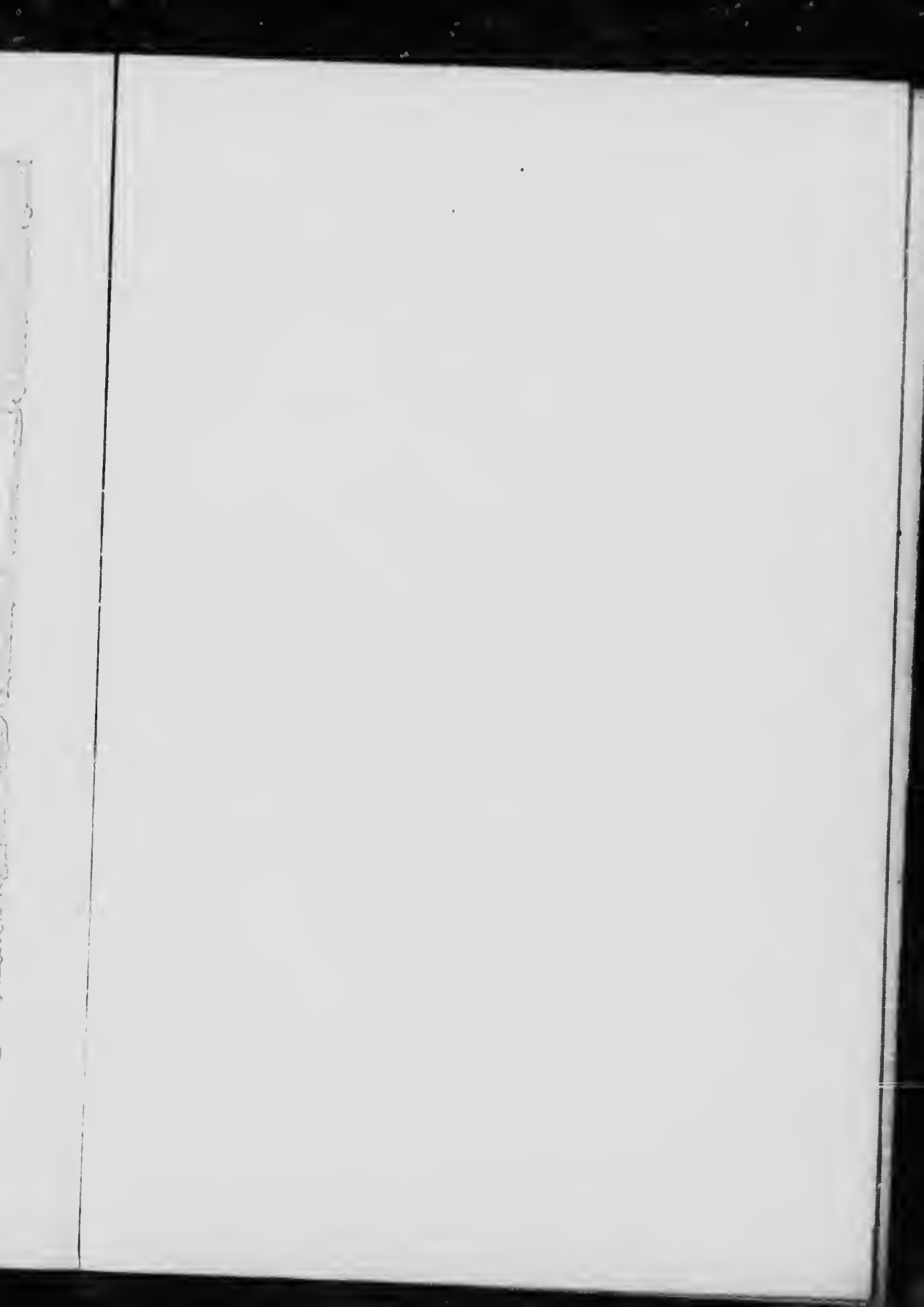
Shaking back her hair, Doris tilted up her face for me to kiss.

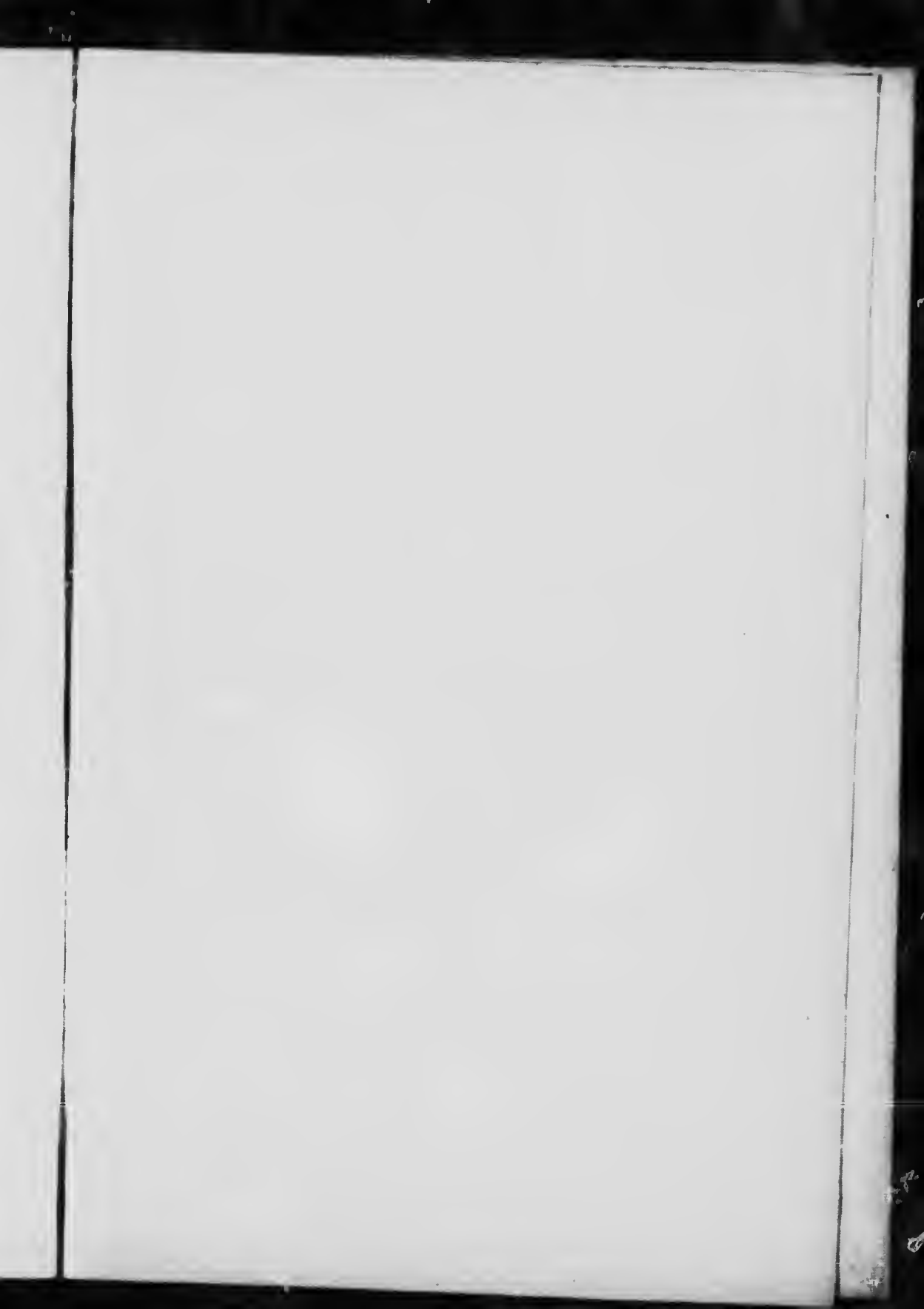
The Unknown Country

There was no sorrow in her eyes
—only quiet kindness.

“You will come again,” she
said.

“Next night,” I whispered.







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