

The Husk

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THE CONSTANT MOON

John Markham woke from a long day of sleeping
Between jabs of pain, narcotic-soothed.
The words were there, trailing across his waking,
The unreal mist of dreams; "*Put out the light;
May or annihilation. Look to the constant moon.*"
They had no meaning, no roots in thought or fact,
But dreams had given them the weight of truth.
He felt an urgency to understand.

Put out the light
Markham's mind was Scotch; he frowned on fantasies.
Truth must be reasonable, yet Truth, he knew
Lay somewhere still beyond. And this might be
A keyhole in that dark door through which the eye
Could catch a glimpse of the great hidden room—
A room he often thought of entering
Even by force

The words could be command or entreaty,
As was his mother's voice so long ago:
"Put out the light now, son, and go to sleep."
An early fear of dark she had dispelled,
Saying, "I am just here in the next room,
And you can see the light beneath the door."
The stars, she told him, were key-holes to Heaven
And let the light shine through
And if it were command or entreaty,
Was his the right to choose, to raise his hand
And turn that light to dark—or leave it burning?
The answer always had been No to that.
Markham was not so sure. As a physician,
He had fought often hand to hand with death.
Sometimes he lost; sometimes he won; sometimes
He knew it would be better had death won.
But never yet, when the great moment came,
Had he seen fear in any dying eye.
Two that he knew had forced that fast-locked door;
And he could find no reason for reproach.
There was the case of Arthur Peterson,