

The Shadows

George MacDonald

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"Old Ralph Rinkelmann made his living by comic sketches, and all but lost it again by tragic poems. So he was just the man to be chosen king of the fairies, for in Fairy-land the sovereignty is elective."

"They did not mean to insist on his residence; for they needed his presence only on special occasions. But they must get hold of him somehow, first of all, in order to make him king. Once he was crowned, they could get him as often as they pleased; but before this ceremony, there was a difficulty. For it is only between life and death that the fairies have power over grown-up mortals, and can carry them off to their country. So they had to watch for an opportunity.

"Nor had they to wait long. For old Ralph was taken dreadfully ill; and while hovering between life and death, they carried him off, and crowned him king of Fairy-land. But after he was crowned, it was no wonder, considering the state of his health, that he should not be able to sit quite upright on the throne of Fairy-land; or that, in consequence, all the gnomes and goblins, and ugly, cruel things that live in the holes and corners of the kingdom, should take advantage of his condition, and run quite wild, playing him, king as he was, all sorts of tricks; crowding about his throne, climbing up the steps, and actually scrambling and quarrelling like mice about his ears and eyes, so that he could see and think of nothing else. But I am not going to tell anything more about this part of his adventures just at present. By strong and sustained efforts, he succeeded, after much trouble and suffering, in reducing his rebellious subjects to order. They all vanished to their respective holes and corners; and King Ralph, coming to himself, found himself in his bed, half propped up with pillows.

"But the room was full of dark creatures, which gambolled about in the firelight in such a strange, huge, but noiseless fashion, that he thought at first that some of his rebellious goblins had not been subdued with the rest, and had followed him beyond the bounds of Fairy-land into his own private house in London. How else could these mad, grotesque hippopotamus-calves make their ugly appearance in Ralph Rinkelmann's bedroom? But he soon found out, that although they were like the underground goblins, they were very different as well, and would require quite different treatment. He felt convinced that they were his subjects too, but that he must have overlooked them somehow at his late coronation—if indeed they had been present; for he could not recollect that he had seen anything just like them before. He resolved, therefore, to pay particular attention to their habits, ways, and characters; else he saw plainly that they would soon be too much for him; as indeed this intrusion into this chamber, where Mrs. Rinkelmann, who must be queen if he was king, sat taking some tea by the fire-side, plainly indicated. But she, perceiving that he was looking about him with a more composed expression than his face had worn for many days, started up, and came quickly and quietly to his side, and her face was bright with gladness. Whereupon the fire burned up more cheerily; and the figures became more composed and respectful in their behaviour, retreating towards the wall like well-trained attendants. Then the king of Fairy-land had some tea and dry toast, and leaning back on his pillows, nearly fell asleep; but not quite, for he still watched the intruders.

"Presently the queen left the room to give some of the young princes and princesses their tea; and the fire burned lower; and behold, the figures grew as black, and as mad in their gambols, as ever! Their favourite games seemed to be Hide and Seek; Touch and Go; Grin and Vanish; and many other such; and all in the king's bed-chamber, too; so that it was quite alarming. It was almost as bad as if the house had been haunted by certain creatures, which shall be nameless in a fairy-story, because with them fairy-land will not willingly have much to do.

"'But it is a mercy that they have their slippers on!' said the king to himself; for his head ached.

"As he lay back, with his eyes half-shut and half-open, too tired to pay longer attention to their games, but, on the whole, considerably more amused than offended with the liberties they took, for they seemed good-natured creatures, and more frolicsome than positively ill-mannered, he became suddenly aware that two of them had stepped forward from the walls, upon which, after the manner of great spiders, most of them preferred

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sprawling, and now stood in the middle of the floor, at the foot of his majesty's bed, becking, and bowing, and ducking in the most grotesquely obsequious manner; while every now and then they turned solemnly round upon one heel, evidently considering that motion the highest token of homage they could show.

"What do you want?" said the king.

"That it may please your majesty to be better acquainted with us," answered they. "We are your majesty's subjects."

"I know you are: I shall be most happy," answered the king.

"We are not what your majesty takes us for, though. We are not so foolish as your majesty thinks us."

"It is impossible to take you for anything that I know of," rejoined the king, who wished to make them talk, and said whatever came uppermost;—"for soldiers, sailors, or anything: you will not stand still long enough. I suppose you really belong to the fire-brigade; at least, you keep putting its light out."

"Don't jest, please your majesty." And as they said the words, for they both spoke at once throughout the interview, they performed a grave somerset, towards the king.

"Not jest!" retorted he; "and with you? Why, you do nothing but jest. What are you?"

"The Shadows, sire. And when we do jest, sire, we always jest in earnest. But perhaps your majesty does not see us distinctly."

"I see you perfectly well," replied the king.

"Permit me, however," rejoined one of the Shadows; and as he spoke, he approached the king, and lifting a dark fore-finger, drew it lightly, but carefully, across the ridge of his forehead, from temple to temple. The king felt the soft gliding touch go, like water, into every hollow, and over the top of every height of that mountain-chain of thought. He had involuntarily closed his eyes during the operation, and when he unclosed them again, as soon as the finger was withdrawn, he found that they were opened in more senses than one. The room appeared to have extended itself on all sides, till he could not exactly see where the walls were; and all about it stood the Shadows motionless. They were tall and solemn; rather awful, indeed, in their appearance, notwithstanding many remarkable traits of grotesqueness, looking, in fact, just like the pictures of Puritans drawn by Cavaliers, with long arms, and very long, thin legs, from which hung large loose feet, while in their countenances length of chin and nose predominated. The solemnity of their mien, however, overcame all the oddity of their form, so that they were very eerie indeed to look at, dressed as they all were in funereal black. But a single glance was all that the king was allowed to have; for the former operator waved his dusky palm across his vision, and once more the king saw only the fire-lighted walls, and dark shapes flickering about upon them. The two who had spoken for the rest seemed likewise to have vanished. But at last the king discovered them, standing one on each side of the fire-place. They kept close to the chimney-wall, and talked to each other across the length of the chimney-piece; thus avoiding the direct rays of the fire, which, though light is necessary to their appearing to human eyes, do not agree with them at all—much less give birth to them, as the king was soon to learn. After a few minutes, they again approached the bed, and spoke thus:

"It is now getting dark, please your majesty. We mean—out of doors in the snow. Your majesty may see, from where he is lying, the cold light of its great winding-sheet—a famous carpet for the Shadows to dance upon, your majesty. All our brothers and sisters will be at church now, before going to their night's work."

"Do they always go to church before they go to work?"

"They always go to church first."

"Where is it?"

"In Iceland. Would your majesty like to see it?"

"How can I go and see it, when, as you know very well, I am ill in bed? Besides I should be sure to take cold in a frosty night like this, even if I put on the blankets, and took the feather-bed for a muff."

"A sort of quivering passed over their faces, which seemed to be their mode of laughing. The whole shape of the face shook and fluctuated as if it had been some dark fluid; till by slow degrees of gathering calm, it settled into its former rest. Then one of them drew aside the curtains of the bed, and, the window—curtains not having been yet drawn, the king beheld the white glimmering night outside, struggling with the heaps of darkness that tried to quench it; and the heavens full of stars, flashing and sparkling like live jewels. The other Shadow went towards the fire and vanished in it.

"Scores of Shadows immediately began an insane dance all about the room; disappearing, one after the other,

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through the uncovered window, and gliding darkly away over the face of the white snow; for the window looked at once on a field of snow. In a few moments, the room was quite cleared of them; but instead of being relieved by their absence, the king felt immediately as if he were in a dead house, and could hardly breathe for the sense of emptiness and desolation that fell upon him. But as he lay looking out on the snow, which stretched blank and wide before him, he spied in the distance a long dark line which drew nearer and nearer, and showed itself at last to be all the Shadows, walking in a double row, and carrying in the midst of them something like a bier. They vanished under the window, but soon reappeared, having somehow climbed up the wall of the house; for they entered in perfect order by the window, as if melting through the transparency of the glass.

"They still carried the bier or litter. It was covered with richest furs, and skins of gorgeous wild beasts, whose eyes were replaced by sapphires and emeralds, that glittered and gleamed in the fire and snow-light. The outermost skin sparkled with frost, but the inside ones were soft and warm and dry as the down under a swan's wing. The Shadows approached the bed, and set the litter upon it. Then a number of them brought a huge fur-robe, and wrapping it round the king, laid him on the litter in the midst of the furs. Nothing could be more gentle and respectful than the way in which they moved him; and he never thought of refusing to go. Then they put something on his head, and, lifting the litter, carried him once round the room, to fall into order. As he passed the mirror, he saw that he was covered with royal ermine, and that his head wore a wonderful crown—of gold set with none but red stones: rubies and carbuncles and garnets, and others whose names he could not tell, glowed gloriously around his head, like the salamandrine essence of all the Christmas fires over the world. A sceptre lay beside him—a rod of ebony, surmounted by a cone-shaped diamond, which, cut in a hundred facets, flashed all the hues of the rainbow, and threw coloured gleams on every side, that looked like shadows more ethereal than those that bore him. Then the Shadows rose gently to the window, passed through it, and sinking slowly upon the field of outstretched snow, commenced an orderly gliding rather than march along the frozen surface. They took it by turns to bear the king, as they sped with the swiftness of thought, in a straight line towards the north. The polestar rose above their heads with visible rapidity; for indeed they moved quite as fast as the sad thoughts, though not with all the speed of happy desires. England and Scotland slid past the litter of the king of the Shadows. Over rivers and lakes they skimmed and glided. They climbed the high mountains, and crossed the valleys with an unfelt bound; till they came to John-o'-Groat's house and the northern sea. The sea was not frozen; for all the stars shone as clear out of the deeps below as they shone out of the deeps above; and as the bearers slid along the blue-grey surface, with never a furrow in their track, so clear was the water beneath, that the king saw neither surface, bottom, nor substance to it, and seemed to be gliding only through the blue sphere of heaven, with the stars above him, and the stars below him, and between the stars and him nothing but an emptiness, where, for the first time in his life, his soul felt that it had room enough.

"At length they reached the rocky shores of Iceland, where they landed, still pursuing their journey. All this time the king felt no cold; for the red stones in his crown kept him warm, and the emerald and sapphire eyes of the wild beasts kept the frosts from settling upon his litter.

"Oftentimes upon their way, they had to pass through forests, caverns, and rock-shadowed paths, where it was so dark that at first the king feared he would lose his Shadows altogether. But as soon as they entered such places, the diamond in his sceptre began to shine and glow and flash, sending out streams of light of all the colours that painter's soul could dream of; in which light the Shadows grew livelier and stronger than ever, speeding through the dark ways with an all but blinding swiftness. In the light of the diamond, too, some of their forms became more simple and human, while others seemed only to break out into a yet more untamable absurdity. Once, as they passed through a cave, the king actually saw some of their eyes—strange shadow-eyes: he had never seen any of their eyes before. But at the same moment when he saw their eyes, he knew their faces too, for they turned them full upon him for an instant; and the other Shadows, catching sight of these, shrank and shivered, and nearly vanished. Lovely faces they were; but the king was very thoughtful after he saw them, and continued rather troubled all the rest of the journey. He could not account for those faces being there, and the faces of Shadows too, with living eyes."

"At last they climbed up the bed of a little stream, and then passing through a narrow rocky defile, came out suddenly upon the side of a mountain, overlooking a blue frozen lake in the very heart of mighty hills. Overhead the aurora borealis was shivering and flashing like a battle of ten thousand spears. Underneath, its beams passed faintly over the blue ice and the sides of the snow clad mountains, whose tops shot up like huge icicles all about,

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with here and there a star sparkling on the very tip of one. But as the northern lights in the sky above, so wavered and quivered, and shot hither and thither, the Shadows on the surface of the lake below; now gathering in groups, and now shivering asunder; now covering the whole surface of the lake, and anon condensed into one dark knot in the centre. Every here and there on the white mountains, might be seen two or three shooting away towards the tops, and vanishing beyond them. Their number was gradually, though hardly visibly, diminishing.

"Please your majesty," said the Shadows, 'this is our church—the Church of the Shadows.'

"And so saying, the king's body-guard set down the litter upon a rock, and mingled with the multitudes below. They soon returned, however, and bore the king down into the middle of the lake. All the Shadows came crowding round him, respectfully but fearlessly; and sure never such a grotesque assembly revealed itself before to mortal eyes. The king had seen all kind of gnomes, goblins, and kobolds at his coronation; but they were quite rectilinear figures, compared with the insane lawlessness of form in which the Shadows rejoiced; and the wildest gambols of the former, were orderly dances of ceremony, beside the apparently aimless and wilful contortions of figure, and metamorphoses of shape, in which the latter indulged. They retained, however, all the time, to the surprise of the king, an identity, each of his own type, inexplicably perceptible through every change. Indeed this preservation of the primary idea of each form, was quite as wonderful as the bewildering and ridiculous alterations to which the form itself was every moment subjected.

"What are you?" said the king, leaning on his elbow, and looking around him.

"The Shadows, your majesty," answered several voices at once.

"What Shadows?"

"The human Shadows. The Shadows of men, and women, and their children.'

"Are you not the shadows of chairs, and tables, and poker, and tongs, just as well?"

"At this question a strange jarring commotion went through the assembly with a shock. Several of the figures shot up as high as the aurora, but instantly settled down again to human size, as if overmastering their feelings, out of respect to him who had roused them. One who had bounded to the highest visible icy peak, and as suddenly returned, now elbowed his way through the rest, and made himself spokesman for them during the remaining part of the dialogue.

"Excuse our agitation, your majesty," said he. 'I see your majesty has not yet thought proper to make himself acquainted with our nature and habits.'

"I wish to do so now," replied the king.

"We are the Shadows," repeated the Shadow, solemnly.

"Well?" said the king.

"We do not often appear to men.'

"Ha!" said the king.

"We do not belong to the sunshine at all. We go through it unseen, and only by a passing chill do men recognize an unknown presence.'

"Ha!" said the king, again.

"It is only in the twilight of the fire, or when one man or woman is alone with a single candle, or when any number of people are all feeling the same thing at once, making them one, that we show ourselves, and the truth of things.

"Can that be true that loves the night?" said the king.

"The darkness is the nurse of light," answered the Shadow.

"Can that be true which mocks at forms?" said the king.

"Truth rides abroad in shapeless storms," answered the Shadow.

"Ha! ha!" thought Ralph Rinkelmann, 'it rhymes. The shadow caps my questions with his answers.—Very strange!' And he grew thoughtful again.

"The Shadow was the first to resume.

"Please your majesty, may we present our petition?"

"By all means," replied the king. 'I am not well enough to receive it in proper state.'

"Never mind, your majesty. We do not care for much ceremony; and indeed none of us are quite well at present. The subject of our petition weighs upon us.'

"Go on," said the king.

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"Sire,' began the Shadow, 'our very existence is in danger. The various sorts of artificial light, both in houses and in men, women and children, threaten to end our being. The use and the disposition of gaslights, especially high in the centres, blind the eyes by which alone we can be perceived. We are all but banished from towns. We are driven into villages and lonely houses, chiefly old farm-houses, out of which, even, our friends the fairies are fast disappearing. We therefore petition our king, by the power of his art, to restore us to our rights in the house itself, and in the hearts of its dwellers.'

"But,' said the king, 'you frighten the children.'

"Very seldom, your majesty; and then only for their good. We seldom seek to frighten anybody. We only want to make people silent and thoughtful; to awe them a little, your majesty.'

"You are much more likely to make them laugh,' said the king.

"Are we?' said the Shadow.

"And approaching the king one step, he stood quite still for a moment. The diamond of the king's sceptre shot out a vivid flame of violet light, and the king stared at the Shadow in silence, and his lip quivered."

"It is only,' resumed the Shadow, 'when our thoughts are not fixed upon any particular object, that our bodies are subject to all the vagaries of elemental influences. Generally amongst worldly men and frivolous women, we only attach ourselves to some article of furniture or of dress; and they never doubt that we are mere foolish and vague results of the dashing of the waves of the light against the solid forms of which their houses are full. We do not care to tell them the truth, for they would never see it. But let the worldly man----- or the frivolous woman-----and then----- '

"At each of the pauses indicated, the mass of Shadows throbbed and heaved with emotion, but soon settled again into comparative stillness. Once more the Shadow addressed himself to speak. But suddenly they all looked up, and the king, following their gaze, saw that the aurora had begun to pale.

"The moon is rising,' said the Shadow. As soon as she looks over the mountains into the valley, we must be gone, for we have plenty to do by the moon: we are powerful in her light. But if your majesty will come here to-morrow night, your majesty may learn a great deal more about us, and judge for himself whether it be fit to accord our petition; for then will be our grand annual assembly, in which we report to our chiefs the deeds we have attempted, and the good or bad success we have had.'

"If you send for me,' replied the king, 'I will come.'

"Ere the Shadow could reply, the tip of the moon's crescent horn peeped up from behind an icy pinnacle, and one slender ray fell on the lake. It shone upon no Shadows. Ere the eye of the king could again seek the earth after beholding the first brightness of the moon's resurrection, they had vanished; and the surface of the lake glittered cold and blue in the pale moonlight.

"There the king lay, alone in the midst of the frozen lake, with the moon staring at him. But at length he heard from somewhere a voice that he knew.

"Will you take another cup of tea, dear?' said Mrs. Rinkelmann; and Ralph, coming slowly to himself, found that he was lying in his own bed.

"Yes, I will,' he answered; 'and rather a large piece of toast, if you please; for I have been a long journey since I saw you last.'

"He has not come to himself quite,' said Mrs. Rinkelmann, between her and herself.

"You would be rather surprised,' continued Ralph, 'if I told you where I had been, and all about it.'

"I daresay I should,' responded his wife.

"Then I will tell you,' rejoined Ralph.

"But at that moment, a great Shadow bounced out of the fire with a single huge leap, and covered the whole room. Then it settled in one corner, and Ralph saw it shaking its fist at him from the end of a preposterous arm. So he took the hint, and held his peace. And it was as well for him. For I happen to know something about the Shadows too; and I know that if he had told his wife all about it just then, they would not have sent for him the following evening.

"But as the king, after taking his tea and toast, lay and looked about him, the dancing shadows in his room seemed to him odder and more inexplicable than ever. The whole chamber was full of mystery. So it generally was, but now it was more mysterious than ever. After all that he had seen in the Shadow-church, his own room and its shadows were yet more wonderful and unintelligible than those.

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"This made it the more likely that he had seen a true vision; for, instead of making common things look common place, as a false vision would have done, it made common things disclose the wonderful that was in them.

"The same applied to all true art,' thought Ralph Rinkelmann.

"The next afternoon, as the twilight was growing dusky, the king lay wondering whether or not the Shadows would fetch him again. He wanted very much to go, for he had enjoyed the journey exceedingly, and he longed, besides, to hear some of the Shadows tell their stories. But the darkness grew deeper and deeper, and the Shadows did not come. The cause was, that Mrs. Rinkelmann sat by the fire in the gloaming; and they could not carry off the king while she was there. Some of them tried to frighten her away, by playing the oddest pranks on the walls, and floor, and ceiling; but altogether without effect: the queen only smiled, for she had a good conscience. Suddenly, however, a dreadful scream was heard from the nursery, and Mrs. Rinkelmann rushed up stairs to see what was the matter. No sooner had she gone, than the two warders of the chimney–corners stepped out into the middle of the room, and said, in a low voice:

"Is your majesty ready?"

"Have you no hearts?" said the king; 'or are they as black as your faces? Did you not hear the child scream? I must know what is the matter with her before I go.'

"Your majesty may keep his mind easy on that point,' replied the warders. 'We had tried everything we could think of, to get rid of her majesty the queen, but without effect. So a young madcap Shadow, half against the will of the older ones of us, slipped up stairs into the nursery; and has, no doubt, succeeded in appalling the baby, for he is very lithe and long–legged.–Now, your majesty.'

"I will have no such tricks played in my nursery,' said the king, rather angrily. 'You might put the child beside itself.'

"Then there would be twins, your majesty. And we rather like twins.'

"None of your miserable jesting! You might put the child out of her wits.'

"Impossible, sire; for she has not got into them yet.'

"Go away,' said the king.

"Forgive us, your majesty. Really, it will do the child good; for that Shadow will, all her life, be to her a symbol of what is ugly and bad. When she feels in danger of hating or envying anyone, that Shadow will come back to her mind, and make her shudder.'

"Very well,' said the king. 'I like that. Let us go.'

"The Shadows went through the same ceremonies and preparations as before; during which, the young Shadow before–mentioned, contrived to make such grimaces as kept the baby in terror, and the queen in the nursery, till all was ready. Then with a bound that doubled him up against the ceiling, and a kick of his legs six feet out behind him, he vanished through the nursery door, and reached the king's bed–chamber just in time to take his place with the last who were melting through the window in the rear of the litter, and settling down upon the snow beneath. Away they went, a gliding blackness over the white carpet, as before. And it was Christmas Eve.

"When they came in sight of the mountain–lake, the king saw that it was crowded over its whole surface with a changeful intermingling of Shadows. They were all talking and listening alternately, in pairs, trios, and groups of every size. Here and there, large companies were absorbed in attention to one elevated above the rest, not in a pulpit, or on a platform, but on the stilts of his own legs, elongated for the nonce. The aurora, right overhead, lighted up the lake and the sides of the mountains, by sending down from the zenith, nearly to the surface of the lake, great folded vapours, luminous with all the colours of a faint rainbow.

"Many, however, as the words were that passed on all sides, not a whisper of a sound reached the ears of the king: their shadow speech could not enter his corporeal organs. One of his guides, however, seeing that the king wanted to hear and could not, went through a strange manipulation of his head and ears; after which he could hear perfectly, though still only the voice to which, for the time, he directed his attention. This, however, was a great advantage, and one which the king longed to carry back with him to the world of men.

"The king now discovered that this was not merely the church of the Shadows, but their news–exchange at the same time. For, as the Shadows have no writing or printing, the only way in which they can make each other acquainted with their doings and thinkings, is to meet and talk at this word–mart and parliament of shades. And

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as, in the world, people read their favourite authors, and listen to their favourite speakers, so here the Shadows seek their favourite Shadows, listen to their adventures, and hear generally what they have to say.

"Feeling quite strong, the king rose and walked about amongst them, wrapped in his ermine robe, with his red crown on his head, and his diamond sceptre in his hand. Every group of Shadows to which he drew near, ceased talking as soon as they saw him approach; but at a nod they went on again directly, conversing and relating and commenting, as if no one was there of other kind or of higher rank than themselves. So the king heard a good many stories, at some of which he laughed, and at some of which he cried. But if the stories that the Shadows told were printed, they would make a book that no publisher could produce fast enough to satisfy the buyers. I will record some of the things that the king heard, for he told them to me soon after. In fact, I was for some time his private secretary, and that is how I come to know all about his adventures.

"'I made him confess before a week was over,' said a gloomy old Shadow.

"'But what was the good of that?' said a pert young one; 'that could not undo what was done.'

"'Yes, it might.'

"'What! bring the dead to life?'

"'No; but comfort the murderer. I could not bear to see the pitiable misery he was in. He was far happier with the rope round his neck, than he was with the purse in his pocket. I saved him from killing himself too.'

"'How did you make him confess?'

"'Only by wallowing on the wall a little.'

"'How could that make him tell?'

"'He knows.'

"'He was silent; and the king turned to another.

"'I made a fashionable mother repent.'

"'How?' broke from several voices, in whose sound was mingled a touch of incredulity.

"'Only by making a little coffin on the wall,' was the reply.

"'Did the fashionable mother then confess?'

"'She had nothing more to confess than everybody knew.'

"'What did everybody know then?'

"'That she might have been kissing a living child, when she followed a dead one to the grave.—The next will fare better.'

"'I put a stop to a wedding,' said another.

"'Horrid shade!' remarked a poetic imp.

"'How?' said others. 'Tell us how.'

"'Only by throwing a darkness, as if from the branch of a sconce, over the forehead of a fair girl.—They are not married yet, and I do not think they will be. But I loved the youth who loved her. How he started! It was a revelation to him.'

"'But did it not deceive him?'

"'Quite the contrary.'

"'But it was only a shadow from the outside, not a shadow coming through from the soul of the girl.'

"'Yes. You may say so. But it was all that was wanted to let the meaning of her forehead come out—yes, of her whole face, which had now and then, in the pauses of his passion, perplexed the youth. All of it, curled nostrils, pouting lips, projecting chin, instantly fell into harmony with that darkness between her eyebrows. The youth understood it in a moment, and went home miserable. And they're not married yet.'

"'I caught a toper alone, over his magnum of port,' said a very dark Shadow; 'and didn't I give it him! I made delirium tremens first; and then I settled into a funeral, passing slowly along the whole of the dining-room wall. I gave him plenty of plumes and mourning coaches. And then I gave him a funeral service, but I could not manage to make the surplice white, which was all the better for such a sinner. The wretch stared till his face passed from purple to grey, and actually left his fifth glass only, unfinished, and took refuge with his wife and children in the drawing-room, much to their surprise. I believe he actually drank a cup of tea; and although I have often looked in again, I have never seen him drinking alone at least.'

"'But does he drink less? Have you done him any good?'

"'I hope so; but I am sorry to say I can't feel sure about it.'

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"Humph! Humph! Humph!" grunted various shadow throats.

"I had such fun once!" cried another. "I made such game of a young clergyman!"

"You have no right to make game of any one."

"Oh yes, I have—when it is for his good. He used to study his sermons—where do you think?"

"In his study, of course."

"Yes and no. Guess again."

"Out amongst the faces in the streets."

"Guess again."

"In still green places in the country?"

"Guess again."

"In old books?"

"Guess again."

"No, no. Tell us."

"In the looking glass. Ha! ha! ha!"

"He was fair game; fair shadow—game."

"I thought so. And I made such fun of him one night on the wall! He had sense enough to see that it was himself, and very like an ape. So he got ashamed, turned the mirror with its face to the wall, and thought a little more about his people, and a little less about himself. I was very glad; for, please you majesty,—and here the speaker turned towards the king—'we don't like the creatures that live in the mirrors. You call them ghosts, don't you?'"

"Before the king could reply, another had commenced. But the mention of the clergyman made the king wish to hear one of the shadow—sermons. So he turned him towards a long Shadow, who was preaching to a very quiet and listening crowd. He was just concluding his sermon.

"Therefore, dear Shadows, it is the more needful that we love one another as much as we can, because that is not much. We have no excuse for not loving as mortals have, for we do not die like them. I suppose it is the thought of that death that makes them hate so much. Then again, we go to sleep all day, most of us, and not in the night, as men do. And you know that we forget every thing that happened the night before; therefore, we ought to love well, for the love is short. Ah! dear Shadow, whom I love now with all my shadowy soul, I shall not love thee to—morrow eve, I shall not know thee; I shall pass thee in the crowd and never dream that the Shadow whom I now love is near me then. Happy Shades! for we only remember our tales until we have told them here, and then they vanish in the shadow—churchyard, where we bury only our dead selves. Ah! brethren, who would be a man and remember? Who would be a man and weep? We ought indeed to love one another, for we alone inherit oblivion; we alone are renewed with eternal birth; we alone have no gathered weight of years. I will tell you the awful fate of one Shadow who rebelled against his nature, and sought to remember the past. He said, 'I will remember this eve.' He fought with the genial influences of kindly sleep when the sun rose on the awful dead day of light; and although he could not keep quite awake, he dreamed of the foregone eve, and he never forgot his dream. Then he tried again the next night, and the next and the next; and he tempted another Shadow to try it with him. At last their awful fate overtook them; and, instead of being Shadows any longer, they began to have shadows sticking to them; and they thickened and thickened till they vanished out of our world; and they are now condemned to walk the earth, a man and a woman, with death behind them, and memories within them. Ah, brother Shades! let us love one another, for we shall soon forget. We are not men, but Shadows."

"The king turned away, and pitied the poor Shadows far more than they pitied men.

"Oh! how we played with a musician one night!" exclaimed one of another group, to which the king had directed a passing thought. He stopped to listen.—"Up and down we went, like the hammers and dampers on his piano. But he took his revenge on us. For after he had watched us for half an hour in the twilight, he rose and went to his instrument, and played a shadow—dance that fixed us all in sound for ever. Each could tell the very notes meant for him; and as long as he played, we could not stop, but went on dancing and dancing after the music, just as the magician—I mean the musician—pleased. And he punished us well; for he nearly danced us all off our legs and out of shape, into tired heaps of collapsed and palpitating darkness. We wont go near him for some time again, if we can only remember it. He had been very miserable all day, he was so poor; and we could not think of any way of comforting him except making him laugh. We did not succeed, with our best efforts; but it turned out

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better than we had expected after all; for his shadow-dance got him into notice, and he is quite popular now, and making money fast.—If he does not take care, we shall have other work to do with him by and by, poor fellow!

"I and some others did the same for a poor play-wright once. He had a Christmas piece to write, and not being an original genius, he could think of nothing that had not been done already twenty times. I saw the trouble he was in, and collecting a few stray Shadows, we acted, in dumb show of course, the funniest bit of nonsense we could think of; and it was quite successful. The poor fellow watched every motion, roaring with laughter at us, and delight at the ideas we put into his head. He turned it all into words and scenes and actions; and the piece came off "with a success unprecedented in the annals of the stage;"—at least so said the reporter of the Punny Palpitator.'

"But how long we have to look for a chance of doing anything worth doing!" said a long, thin, especially lugubrious Shadow. 'I have only done one deed worth telling, ever since we met last. But I am proud of that.'

"What was it? What was it?" rose from twenty voices.

"I crept into a dining-room, one twilight, soon after last Christmas-day. I had been drawn thither by the glow of a bright fire through red window-curtains. At first I thought there was no one there, and was on the point of leaving the room, and going out again into the snowy street, when I suddenly caught the sparkle of eyes, and saw that they belonged to a little boy who lay very still on a sofa. I crept into a dark corner by the sideboard, and watched him. He seemed very sad, and did nothing but stare into the fire. At last he sighed out: 'I wish mamma would come home.' 'Poor boy!' thought I, 'there is no help for that but mamma.' Yet I would try to while away the time for him. So out of my corner I stretched a long shadow arm, reaching all across the ceiling, and pretended to make a grab at him. He was rather frightened at first; but he was a brave boy, and soon saw that it was all a joke. So when I did it again, he made a clutch at me; and then we had such fun! For though he often sighed, and wished mamma would come home, he always began again with me; and on we went with the wildest game. At last his mother's knock came to the door, and, starting up in delight, he rushed into the hall to meet her, and forgot all about poor black me. But I did not mind that in the least; for when I glided out after him into the hall, I was well repaid for my trouble, by hearing his mother say to him: 'Why, Charlie, my dear, you look ever so much better since I left you!' At that moment I slipped through the closing door, and as I ran across the snow, I heard the mother say: 'What shadow can that be, passing so quickly?' And Charlie answered with a merry laugh: 'Oh! mamma, I suppose it must be the funny shadow that has been playing such games with me, all the time you were out.' As soon as the door was shut, I crept along the wall, and looked in at the dining-room window. And I heard his mamma say, as she led him into the room: 'What an imagination the boy has!' Ha! ha! ha! Then she looked at him very earnestly for a minute, and the tears came in her eyes; and as she stooped down over him, I heard the sounds of a mingling kiss and sob."

"I always look for nurseries full of children," said another; 'and this winter I have been very fortunate. I am sure we belong especially to children. One evening, looking about in a great city, I saw through the window into a large nursery, where the odious gas had not yet been lighted. Round the fire sat a company of the most delightful children I had ever seen. They were waiting patiently for their tea. It was too good an opportunity to be lost. I hurried away, and gathering together twenty of the best Shadows I could find, returned in a few moments to the nursery. There we began on the walls one of our best dances. To be sure it was mostly extemporized; but I managed to keep it in harmony by singing this song, which I made as we went on. Of course the children could not hear it; they only saw the motions that answered to it. But with them they seemed to be very much delighted indeed, as I shall presently show you. This was the song:

'Swing, swang, swingle, swuff,
Flicker, flacker, fling, fluff!
Thus we go,
To and fro;
Here and there,
Everywhere,
Born and bred;
Never dead,

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Only gone.

On! Come on.

Looming, glooming,
Spreading, fuming,
Shattering, scattering,
Parting, darting,
Settling, starting,
All our life,
Is a strife,
And a wearying for rest
On the darkness' friendly breast.

Joining, splitting,
Rising, sitting,
Laughing, shaking,
Sides all aching,
Grumbling, grim and gruff.
Swingle, swangle, swuff!

Now a knot of darkness;
Now dissolved gloom;
Now a pall of blackness
Hiding all the room.
Flicker, flacker, fluff!
Black and black enough!

Dancing now like demons;
Lying like the dead;
Gladly would we stop it,
And go down to bed!
But our work we still must do,
Shadow men, as well as you.

Rooting, rising, shooting,
Heaving, sinking, creeping;
Hid in corners crooning;
Splitting, poking, leaping,
Gathering, towering, swooning.
When we're lurking,
Yet we're working,
For our labour we must do,
Shadow men, as well as you.
Flicker, flacker, fling, fluff!
Swing, swang, swingle, swuff!

"How thick the Shadows are!" said one of the children—a thoughtful little girl.

"I wonder where they come from?" said a dreamy little boy.

"I think they grow out of the wall," answered the little girl; "for I have been watching them come; first one and then another, and then a whole lot of them. I am sure they grow out of the walls."

"Perhaps they have papas and mammas," said an older boy, with a smile.

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"Yes, yes; the doctor brings them in his pocket,' said another consequential little maiden.

"No; I'll tell you,' said the older boy. 'They're ghosts.'

"But ghosts are white.'

"Oh! these have got black coming down the chimney.'

"No,' said a curious-looking, white-faced boy of fourteen, who had been reading by the firelight, and had stopped to hear the little ones talk; 'they're body-ghosts; they're not soul-ghosts.'

"A silence followed, broken by the first, the dreamy-eyed boy, who said:

"I hope they didn't make me;' at which they all burst out laughing, just as the nurse brought in their tea. When she proceeded to light the gas, we vanished.

"I stopped a murder,' cried another.

"How? How? How?"

"I will tell you.—I had been lurking about a sick room for some time, where a miser lay, apparently dying. I did not like the place at all, but I felt as if I was wanted there. There were plenty of lurking places about, for it was full of all sorts of old furniture,—especially cabinets, chests and presses. I believe he had in that room every bit of the property he had spent a long life in gathering. And I knew he had lots of gold in those places; for one night, when his nurse was away, he crept out of bed, mumbling and shaking, and managed to open one of his chests, though he nearly fell down with the effort. I was peeping over his shoulder, and such a gleam of gold fell upon me, that it nearly killed me. But hearing his nurse coming, he slammed the lid down, and I recovered. I tried very hard, but I could not do him any good. For although I made all sorts of shapes on the walls and ceiling, representing evil deeds that he had done, of which there were plenty to choose from, I could make no shapes on his brain or conscience. He had no eyes for anything but gold. And it so happened that his nurse had neither eyes nor heart for anything else either.

"One day as she was seated beside his bed, but where he could not see her, stirring some gruel in a basin, to cool it from him, I saw her take a little phial from her bosom, and I knew by the expression of her face both what it was and what she was going to do with it. Fortunately the cork was a little hard to get out, and this gave me one moment to think.

"The room was so crowded with all sorts of things, that although there were no curtains on the four-post bed to hide from the miser the sight of his precious treasures, there was yet but one spot on the ceiling suitable for casting myself upon in the shape I wished to assume. And this spot was hard to reach. But I discovered that upon this very spot there was a square gleam of firelight thrown from a strange old dusty mirror that stood away in some corner, so I got in front of the fire, spied where the mirror was, threw myself upon it, and bounded from its face upon the square pool of dim light on the ceiling, assuming, as I passed, the shape of an old stooping hag, pouring something from a phial into a basin. I made the handle of the spoon with my own nose, ha! ha!"

"And the shadow-hand caressed the shadow tip of the shadow-nose, before the shadow-tongue resumed.

"The old miser saw me. He would not taste the gruel that night, although his nurse coaxed and scolded till they were both weary. She pretended to taste it, and to think it very good; and at last retired into a corner, and made as if she were eating it herself; but I saw that she took good care to pour it all out.'

"But she must either succeed, or starve him, at last.'

"I will tell you.'

"But,' interposed another, 'he was not worth saving.'

"He might repent,' said another more benevolent Shadow.

"No chance of that,' returned the former. 'Misers never do. The love of money has less in it to cure itself than any other wickedness into which wretched men can fall. What a mercy it is to be born a Shadow! Wickedness does not stick to us. What do we care for gold!—Rubbish!"

"Amen! Amen! Amen!" came from a hundred shadow-voices.

"You should have let her murder him, and so have had done with him.'

"And besides, how was he to escape at last? He could never get rid of her—could he?"

"I was going to tell you,' resumed the narrator, 'only you had so many shadow-remarks to make, that you would not let me.'

"Go on; go on.'

"There was a little grandchild who used to come and see him sometimes—the only creature the miser cared

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for. Her mother was his daughter; but the old man would never see her, because she had married against his will. Her husband was now dead, but he had not forgiven her yet. After the shadow he had seen, however, he said to himself, as he lay awake that night—I saw the words on his face—'How shall I get rid of that old devil? If I don't eat I shall die. I wish little Mary would come to-morrow. Ah! her mother would never serve me so, if I lived a hundred years more.' He lay awake, thinking such things over and over again all night long, and I stood watching him from a dark corner; till the day spring came and shook me out. When I came back next night, the room was tidy and clean. His own daughter, a sad-faced, still beautiful woman, sat by his bedside; and little Mary was curled up on the floor, by the fire, imitating us, by making queer shadows on the ceiling with her twisted hands. But she could not think how ever they got there. And no wonder, for I helped her to some very unaccountable ones.'

"'I have a story about a grand-daughter, too,' said another, the moment that speaker ceased.

"'Tell it. Tell it.'

"'Last Christmas-day,' he began, 'I and a troop of us set out in the twilight, to find some house where we could all have something to do; for we had made up our minds to act together. We tried several, but found objections to them all. At last we espied a large lonely country-house, and hastening to it, we found great preparations making for the Christmas-dinner. We rushed into it, scampered all over it, and made up our minds in a moment that it would do. We amused ourselves in the nursery first, where there were several children being dressed for dinner. We generally do go to the nursery first, your majesty. This time we were especially charmed with a little girl about five years old, who clapped her hands and danced about with delight at the antics we performed; and we said we would do something for her if we had a chance. The company began to arrive; and at every arrival, we rushed to the hall, and cut wonderful capers of welcome. Between times, we scudded away to see how the dressing went on. One girl about eighteen was delightful. She dressed herself as if she did not care much about it, but could no help doing it prettily. When she took her last look of the phantom in the glass, she half smiled to it.—But we do not like those creatures that come into the mirrors at all, your majesty. We don't understand them. They are dreadful to us.—She looked rather sad and pale, but very sweet and hopeful. We wanted to know all about her, and soon found out that she was a distant relation and a great favourite of the gentleman of the house, an old man, with an expression of benevolence mingled with obstinacy and a deep shade of the tyrannical. We could not admire him much; but we would not make up our minds all at once: Shadows never do.

"'The dinner-bell rang, and down we hurried. The children all looked happy, and we were merry. There was one cross fellow among the servants waiting, and didn't we plague him! and didn't we get fun out of him! When he was bringing up dishes, we lay in wait for him at every corner, and sprung upon him from the floor, and from over the banisters, and down from the cornices. He started and stumbled and blundered about, so that his fellow-servants thought he was tipsy. Once he dropped a plate, and had to pick up the pieces, and hurry away with them. Didn't we pursue him as he went! It was lucky for him his master did not see him; but we took care not to let him get into any real scrape, though his eyes were quite dazed with the dodging of the unaccountable shadows. Sometimes he thought the walls were coming down upon him; sometimes that the floor was gaping to swallow him; sometimes that he would be knocked in pieces by the hurrying to and fro, or be smothered in the black crowd.

"'When the blazing plum-pudding was carried in, we made a perfect shadow-carnival about it, dancing and mumming in the blue flames, like mad demons. And how the children screamed with delight!

"'The old gentleman, who was very fond of children, was laughing his heartiest laugh, when a loud knock came to the hall-door. The fair maiden started, turned paler, and then red as the Christmas fire. I saw it, and flung my hands across her face. She was very glad, and I know she said in her heart, "You kind Shadow!" which paid me well. Then I followed the rest into the hall, and found there a jolly, handsome, brown-faced sailor, evidently a son of the house. The old man received him with tears in his eyes, and the children with shouts of joy. The maiden escaped in the confusion, just in time to save herself from fainting. We crowded about the lamp to hide her retreat, and nearly put it out. The butler could not get it to burn up before she had glided into her place again, delighted to find the room so dark. The sailor only had seen her go, and now he sat down beside her, and, without a word, got hold of her hand in the gloom. But now we all scattered to the walls and the corners; and the lamp blazed up again, and he let her hand go.

"'During the rest of the dinner, the old man watched them both, and saw that there was something between

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them, and was very angry. For he was an important man in his own estimation—and they had never consulted him. The fact was, they had never known their own minds till the sailor had gone upon his last voyage; and had learned each other's only this moment.—We found out all this by watching them, and then talking together about it afterwards.—The old gentleman saw too, that his favourite, who was under such obligation to him for loving her so much, loved his son better than him; and this made him so jealous, that he soon overshadowed the whole table with his morose looks and short answers. That kind of shadowing is very different from ours; and the Christmas dessert grew so gloomy that we Shadows could not bear it, and were delighted when the ladies rose to go to the drawing-room. The gentlemen would not stay behind the ladies, even for the sake of the well-known wine. So the moddy host, notwithstanding his hospitality, was left alone at the table, in the great silent room. We followed the company upstairs to the drawing-room, and thence to the nursery for snap-dragon. While they were busy with this most shadowy of games, nearly all the Shadows crept down stairs again to the dining-room, where the old man still sat, gnawing the bone of his own selfishness. They crowded into the room, and by using every kind of expansion—blowing themselves out like soap-bubbles, they succeeded in heaping up the whole room with shade upon shade. They clustered thickest about the fire and the lamp, till at last they almost drowned them in hills of darkness.

"Before they had accomplished so much, the children, tired with fun and frolic, were put to bed. But the little girl of five years old, with whom we had been so pleased when first we arrived, could not go to sleep. She had a little room of her own; and I had watched her to bed, and now kept her awake by gambolling in the rays of the night-light. When her eyes were once fixed upon me, I took the shape of her grandfather, representing him on the wall, as he sat in his chair, with his head bent down, and his arms hanging listlessly by his sides. And the child remembered that that was just as she had seen him last; for she had happened to peep in at the dining-room door, after all the rest had gone up stairs. "What if he should be sitting there still," thought she, "all alone in the dark!" She scrambled out of bed and crept down.

"Meantime the others had made the room below so dark, that only the face and white hair of the old man could be dimly discerned in the shadowy crowd. For he had filled his own mind with shadows, which we Shadows wanted to draw out of him. Those shadows are very different from us, your majesty knows. He was thinking of all the disappointments he had had in life, and of all the ingratitude he had met with. He thought far more of the good he had done, than the good others had got. "After all I have done for them," said he, with a sigh of bitterness, "not one of them cares a straw for me. My own children will be glad when I am gone!" At that instant he lifted up his eyes and saw, standing close by the door, a tiny figure in a long night-gown. The door behind her was shut. It was my little friend who had crept in noiselessly. A pang of icy fear shot to the old man's heart—but it melted away as fast, for we made a lane through us for a single ray from the fire to fall on the face of the little sprite; and he thought it was a child of his own that had died when just the age of her little niece, who now stood looking for her grandfather among the Shadows. He thought she had come out of her grave in the old darkness, to ask why her father was sitting alone on Christmas-day. And he felt he had no answer to give his little ghost, but one he would be ashamed for her to hear. But the little girl saw him now. She walked up to him with a childish stateliness—stumbling once or twice on what seemed her long shroud. Pushing through the crowded shadows, she reached him, climbed upon his knee, laid her little long-haired head on his shoulders, and said: "Ganpa! you goomy? Isn't it your Kismass-day, too, ganpa?"

"A new fount of love seemed to burst from the clay of the old man's heart. He clasped the child to his bosom, and wept. Then, without a word, he rose with her in his arms, carried her up to her room, and laying her down in her bed, covered her up, kissed her sweet little mouth unconscious of reproof, and then went to the drawing-room.

"As soon as he entered, he saw the culprits in a quiet corner alone. He went up to them, took a hand of each, and joining them in both his, said, "God bless you!" Then he turned to the rest of the company, and "Now," said he, "let's have a Christmas carol."—And well he might; for though I have paid many visits to the house, I have never seen him cross since; and I am sure that must cost him a good deal of trouble.'

"We have just come from a great palace,' said another, 'where we knew there were many children, and where we thought to hear glad voices, and see royally merry looks. But as soon as we entered, we became aware that one mighty Shadow shrouded the whole; and that Shadow deepened and deepened, till it gathered in darkness about the reposing form of a wise prince. When we saw him, we could move no more, but clung heavily to the walls,

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and by our stillness added to the sorrow of the hour. And when we saw the mother of her people weeping with bowed head for the loss of him in whom she had trusted, we were seized with such a longing to be Shadows no longer, but winged angels, which are the white shadows cast in heaven from the Light of Light, so to gather around her, and hover over her with comforting, that we vanished from the walls and found ourselves floating high above the towers of the palace, where we met the angels on their way; and knew that our service was not needed.'

"By this time there was a glimmer of approaching moonlight, and the king began to see several of those stranger Shadows, with human faces and eyes, moving about amongst the crowd. He knew at once that they did not belong to his dominion. They looked at him, and came near him, and passed slowly, but they never made any obeisance, or gave sign of homage. And what their eyes said to him, the king only could tell. And he did not tell.

"'What are those other Shadows that move through the crowd?' said he to one of his subjects near him.

"The Shadow started, looked round, shivered slightly, and laid his finger on his lips. Then leading the king a little aside, and looking carefully about him once more,

"'I do not know,' said he, in a low tone, 'what they are. I have heard of them often, but only once did I ever see any of them before. That was when some of us one night paid a visit to a man who sat much alone, and was said to think a great deal. We saw two of those sitting in the room with him, and he was as pale as they were. We could not cross the threshold, but shivered and shook, and felt ready to melt away. Is not your majesty afraid of them too?'

"But the king made no answer; and before he could speak again, the moon had climbed above the mighty pillars of the church of the Shadows, and looked in at the great window of the sky.

"The shapes had all vanished; and the king, again lifting up his eyes, saw but the wall of his own chamber, on which flickered the Shadow of a Little Child. He looked down, and there, sitting on a stool by the fire, he saw one of his own little ones, waiting to say good night to his father, and go to bed early, that he might rise as early, and be very good and happy all Christmas-day.

"And Ralph Rinkelmann rejoiced that he was a man, and not a Shadow."