

---

# SHADOWS

## *A Short Story*

BY BURNHAM CARTER

---



*Drawings by Dorothy McKay*

RICHARD PICKED up his skates and turned away from the ice-covered pond to glance up the slope of snow through the wood. A red sun was halfway below the ridge, and its gleam was perceptibly rising along the trunks of the trees.

"I like the frugality of winter sunsets," he said, and suddenly his body stiffened into a strained attention.

Anne was still tying her shoes. "One's feet are so pleasantly released from skates," she remarked. She looked up. "Why, Richard, what's the matter?"

The lean profile of his face barely moved as he answered in a low voice: "Get up very quietly and look where I am looking."

She rose, feeling the cold of the lonely pond leap through her. Projecting above the snow were tufts of tall grass and some fallen branches with a few brown leaves. Her gaze traveled farther on through the trees toward the queer orange light in the west. Then she saw, just as

the arc of the sun slid below the hill, a dozen gray patches grouped in front of a rock.

"Richard!" she whispered.

"Wolves," he said.

In the moment's pause, in the quick descent of twilight, the gray patches were gone, without sight or sound of their going, leaving her to stare amazed at the vacant snow.

"I haven't seen that for twenty years," Richard said, still speaking in a low voice. "There haven't been wolves here since I was a boy, and then I only saw one once. It must be this hard winter and the fact that they don't trap them any more."

"Oh!" she said. She laughed and relaxed. Her city-bred sophistication was now deriding her primitive fear. "Could they really have been wolves? Why, Richard, it seems absurd."

"Yes, doesn't it?" His face had a boyish excitement. "Golly, what a sight."

"I hope they had no evil intentions."

"They don't attack. The best thing they do is run. You see, years ago the state put a bounty on their heads because they were killing chickens and pigs and occasionally sheep. The farmers used to trap them. Then they disappeared. Now maybe the cold is driving them down from the north. There isn't any bounty any more, and their fur has no value; so probably no one traps them, and you can't get sufficiently near to shoot them. They must be coming back."

He went to pick up her skates. When he turned around, she was still staring into the trees. "Yesterday I was in New York City," she murmured; "I had cocktails at Pierre's. Richard, are you sure those were wolves?"

He laughed. Adventure added a moment's intimacy to their long friendship. "And yesterday I worked in an office high up in Wall Street. That's why it's so exciting. This is the only wild thing we've ever seen."

"I'm not sure how near I want to get to the wild," Anne said soberly.

They started back in single file along the edge of the pond, following their earlier footprints in the snow and crossing a long field to the road.

"I think we should tell Marie and Vincent very casually," Anne suggested, "as if we had been fighting wolves, off and on, all our lives."

"We'll almost forget to mention it," Richard said.

## II

THE LIGHTS of the house glowed pleasantly through the pines. They stamped their feet before the door, and when they opened it the winter rushed into the hall with them. Then they shut it out and turned to the firelight and to Marie, Richard's wife, stretched on a sofa in rough tweeds, and Vincent Dane, a friend, in walking boots and a flannel shirt, mixing a whisky and soda on the pinewood table.

"Ah, the skaters with apple cheeks," Vincent said. He spoke sardonically. His lined, somewhat supercilious face was relieved of its shadow only when he smiled.

"We walked seven miles," Marie announced. "Did you have fun?"

"Oh, great fun," Anne said. They stood smiling, stripping off gloves and jackets.

Marie eyed them. "You've been up to something. You look guilty. Richard, I believe you *kissed* Anne." She moaned. "Oh Anne — you, my best friend."

"Yes, I think that's what happened." Vincent observed critically. "Yes, I'm afraid this week-end will just be another triangle."

"Oh, it wasn't as exciting as that," Anne said. "We just saw wolves, that's all."

"Just a few wolves," Richard said.

"When you find it necessary to give me explanations, Richard," Marie admonished him, "I don't expect you to give me ones of that kind."

"Ah, wolves," exclaimed Vincent. "The cold steppes of Russia. You in your sleigh with your wife and servants returning from the ball. The sudden howling of the wolves. Gray shapes across the snow." He declaimed more rapidly. "You lash the whip. Faster, faster. You cut off the lead horse and send him roaming to his

death. Faster, faster. You throw out the lap robe. You throw out the servants. You throw out your wife —"

"You wake up with a headache," Richard concluded.

Vincent returned to his business with the drinks. Marie made room for Anne on the sofa at the side of the hearth. The fire blazed warmly and cheerfully.

"This is nice," Marie said. "I am very happy. There's so much health up here. We should come here more often in the winter, Richard."

"That's what you say every time," Richard informed her, "and every time I have to drag you away from your New York dinner parties."

"This is grand," Anne said.

But Marie could not escape the question lurking in her mind: "What about those wolves, Richard?"

He told them. His words subtly changed the easy atmosphere of the room, discharging into it an electric restlessness.

"I think that's the most extraordinary thing," Marie cried.

Even Vincent abandoned his usual satire. "I wish I had seen them," he said.

"You may, still. We'll call on our farmer to-morrow and see if he knows anything about them."

"Not a word to the couple in the kitchen," Marie warned. "They would start back for New York on the next train."

"New York is only four hours away," Anne remarked. "Who would believe it could be so wild here?"

"The jungle is never very distant," Vincent said. "We say to ourselves that the jungle is two thousand years away in time or perhaps two thousand miles in space, but it is always at our hand in any hour. We are savage people still, living in a savage world."

"If you mean our vaunted security is only an illusion," Richard began, but he stopped, seeing Hans, their Dutch servant, hovering in the background.

"Excuse me," Hans said. "May I speak to Mrs. Walcott?"

Marie rose.

"No butter," Vincent said.

She talked to Hans in the hall and came back.

"There's no steak," she said.

Richard groaned in protest. "Farmer Brown was to bring it over this afternoon."

"He brought it," Marie said. "Emilie hung the package outside of the kitchen door. When she went to get it, it was gone."

There was a curious silence.

Marie broke it decisively. "Well, we'll have scrambled eggs, Hans. Who wants a bath? Supper in fifteen minutes."

### III

CONVERSATION at supper was jerkily intelligent, but the words were suspended — held back, like dogs on a leash, from the object of interest. At Marie's sign of withdrawal, everyone responded with alacrity and felt more at ease in the living room, with the consolation of coffee and cigarettes. They spoke at once and freely: "Damn those wolves," Marie said. "Why couldn't you have seen caribou, Richard?"

"I thought you said they wouldn't go near a house," Anne remarked.

"I didn't think they would," Richard replied. "I don't understand about that steak."

"They are probably sitting just outside the window now," Vincent said. "A circle of gleaming eyes and slavering fangs."

"For heaven's sake, go and see," Marie implored him.

He crossed to the window and edged himself between the shade and the pane. He stood there some time until Marie summoned him.

"It's worse than I thought," he reported gravely. "How long can we hold out on the food in the house?"

"Nonsense," said Anne. "Would they ever attack a man, Richard?"

"Years ago once in a great while you heard of it. But not unless the man was down and out — if he broke his leg in the woods and if they smelt blood on him. But they are cowards. They are like shadows; you move toward them, and there is nothing there."

"That is half the problem in life," Vincent said. "The bold front — the assertion of courage — until we find that the foe is weaker than we thought or that perhaps there is no foe there."

"Bravely said," Richard applauded. The others did not respond very well. Anne was

querying herself as to where she had heard talk of this sort before; somewhere someone had talked like this of courage. And then with a spasm of anguish she remembered: Neil Morrow, of course, shortly before he died, telling her that happiness was primarily the assertion of courage and leaving her to face, with no courage at all, her desperate longing for him these last six years, her mounting fear of the loneliness of age.

"You call them cowards," Marie was saying, "and yet there is no more persistent legend than the terror of the wolf. Why, the tiger or the lion or the panther is as nothing compared with this beast. At the moment, I tell you frankly that I would consider the roaring of a lion at the door a friendly act."

Richard chuckled. His wife's deft way of lightening a situation by exaggerating its significance was so characteristic of her kind. He came to her support: "That's true. It's a legend. There are stories handed down for years — stories out of Russia, such as the one Vincent so graphically narrated before supper —"

"I didn't really finish," Vincent interrupted.

"It was complete," Richard assured him hastily. "And stories out of the Northwest, tales of the pack, told over isolated cottage fires —"

"But even in stories for children," Anne added, "Little Red Riding Hood and the shepherd boy who cried 'Wolf, wolf.' All the other animals were kind, like the Three Bears, but not this one."

"Yes, but why?" asked Marie. "Those are the legends, but why should it be so?"

"I'll tell you why," Vincent said. His voice wavered from its casual note for an instant, but he brought it back. "The wolf was shadowy, and it was known in all the lands from which we derive; so it became the symbol for fear — the symbol that we had to have."

"Why do we need a symbol?" Marie inquired.

"Because we are always being afraid."

Richard objected harshly: "I'm damned if I am."

"We are trained not to show it," Marie said. "That's all that you mean, Richard. I'm scared now."

"Not really scared. Good heavens, Marie!"

"It's not those wolves out there in the



snow," Vincent continued. "They don't matter, now that we live close to the cities, with a telephone to bring us what we need. But they are a symbol of the wolves of which we are really afraid — the wolves of our imaginings."

"The wolves of our imaginings," Anne repeated softly. "Yes, what would you say they were?"

Vincent made a gesture with his hand. "I suppose every person would have his own definition. Economic insecurity, for one —"

"Unrequited love," Anne said.

"Thwarted ambition," Richard suggested, thinking uneasily of the days, before his three children came, when he was to write great books.

"Ill health, certainly," Marie said.

No one knew how long the pause lasted, because each one was too busy with his thoughts. Vincent was the first to rouse himself: "Yes, those will do," he said with an effort.

"I think this is a very gloomy conversation," Marie announced, "and, besides, none of those things applies to any one of you. Let's go to bed and be brighter in the morning."

"Breakfast when you get up," Richard affirmed heartily. "And we might walk up Lord Hill before lunch."

A log in the fire broke, and the one above it rolled upon the andiron with a thump. Everyone jumped.

"That settles it," Marie exclaimed, rising. "I'm not going to sit here and get jumpy."

"I'm going with you," Anne said.

Richard joined Marie a moment later. As she undressed rapidly because the room was cold, she heard him fumbling in the closet. He emerged with a rifle and set it by the window. She sat up in bed imperiously. "Richard, what are you going to do with that?"

"Nothing. If by chance I hear a wolf during the night, I may take a shot at him."

"Richard, if you wake me up by firing that gun, I'll have a fit."

"I won't fire it when you are asleep," he promised.

"Well, I'm going to sleep now."

He kissed her. "You're marvelous," he murmured, mocking but sincere. "You're not really afraid of anything."

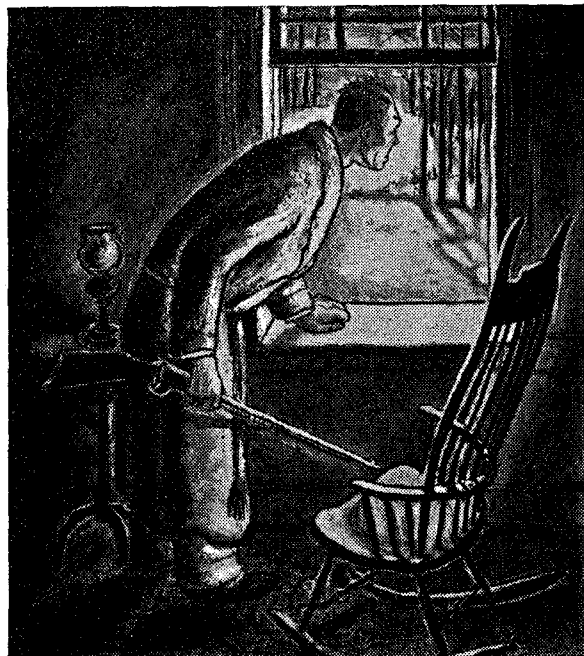
She smiled. She would not tell him of the menace of her inheritance, about that little

spot, at first no bigger than her finger point, that had slowly stopped the breath of her father and her grandfather. She would not think of that now. She rolled over and then back again and resolutely closed her mind and slept uneasily.

#### IV

BUT RICHARD lay wide-eyed in the darkness. It seemed the bitterest irony that he, whom others considered so successful, should deem his success of such slight value; for in a drawer of his desk there was a pile of manuscript that long ago was to be the start of a great career; but the first book had failed, and then the baby came, and he went on and on in business; until he never looked at those scrawled papers any more, reluctant to stir old dreams. It was all right now when his days were crowded with work and his nights with pleasure; but what of old age when he would know he had failed in what he wanted to do, when he would be overwhelmed with his real defeat?

He thought he heard a sound down the hall and raised himself on his elbow, but the dark gave no signal. He lay quiet for a time staring at a sky that was coldly beautiful through the window and imagining how he would have described it in words on paper. Then he remembered that somewhere beneath that sky, perhaps near at hand, a dozen gray patches rested in the snow; and, moved by a curious spurt of



anger, he rose from the bed, put on socks and slippers and his woolen bathrobe, and went to the window. The barrel of his rifle was icy-cold in his hand. He would like to get a shot at one of them.

But the fields that lay unevenly upon the land were quiet. Nothing moved upon the blurred white stretches or broke the intense blackness of the scattered pines. He was alert for a gray shape slipping over the ridge, but it did not come. Suddenly a square of yellow light fell on the snow in front of him. It was from Anne's room. Probably she could not sleep. She would try to read. It was bad not to sleep. He wondered what thought or worry nagged at her mind to keep her from slumber at so late an hour — she who had always seemed to be an unusually happy and self-sufficient person. He stood there a long time, gazing at the fields, oblivious of the cold, and all the while the light burned on in her window.

Vincent Dane had not gone to bed. When the others left, he returned to the fire and lit his pipe, waiting for the noises of people in the house to give place to the noises of the house itself: the murmur of voices, the movement of feet to yield wholly to the crackle of the fire, the creak of a board, the rattle of a window. The silence of a country house seemed to him all the more vast because of these tiny sounds, as one may measure a tower by the man standing at its foot. He waited for the silence to gather fully about him, seeking to escape as long as possible the engagement which he had with his mind.

At first he was only vaguely conscious of the purpose of that engagement; it was just the name of a thing he had mentioned in his conversation as something to be feared — something that he had suggested casually as an idea that had occurred to him. Now gradually it approached him, forcing him to see the shadow and the shape and at the last to fling up his hand at the fact. The fear of those who were insecure; the fear of those who might not be able to buy their bread! Ah, he was afraid! Perhaps in all the world this was the most common fear, and to him it was the more terrible now, because in the past it had been so far away.

In the four years from 1925 to 1929, he had made a great deal of money; and then in four

months most of it had gone; and in the four years since then the balance had dwindled steadily. Now he was hard beset (although he acknowledged it to no one) in a world that he did not understand; there were rules and theories beyond his comprehension; and some of his companions had died and many had failed and many, like him, were waiting to fall. He did not know what to do. He did not know what was going to happen. He did not think he could live by these rules. He was afraid.

He got up and put a log on the fire and returned to his chair. But he could not sit still. He rose again and stood at the window, staring at the fields. Somewhere, outside in the cold, in the snow, the pack was running. "They wait until a man is down," Richard had said.

A dull anger stirred within him at the thought of them. They were the delegates of his dread. They had been hunting him down a long time now. He who had been so strong was haggard with retreat. Well, he would retreat no more. He would meet them, alone, by the black pines, over the white ridge, into the wild resort of their choice.

He bided no more time. He put on his leather jacket, the heavy gloves, and crumpled hat. He took a stick from the corner by the door. Then he opened the door into a light, chill wind and set out across the field.

Marie heard the door bang softly against the frame. But it did not close entirely. A blown wedge of snow held it from the lock, and it swung partly open, wavered, and stayed. There was a minute's pause; and then through the aperture a dark shape leaped without a sound, and then another and another and more, with eyes that gleamed against the light; and halted in the hall, lean flank against flank, the breath rising in a slow cloud from the fangs; then wheeled to the right, on padded feet, with that terrible soundlessness that she knew; until she felt, rigid with terror, the steaming breath upon her face; and heard, unable to move or speak, the chopping of the fangs; saw the yellow eyes looming upon her eyes; and "Richard!" she screamed with all her strength, "Richard! Richard!"

V

HE WAS STANDING with his hand on her shoulder. The room was filled with light.

"It's all right," he was saying. "Marie, darling, there is nothing the matter. It's all right."

"Oh, oh," she sobbed, turning toward him. He seated himself on the bed beside her and held her in his arms, and gradually the shaking of her body subsided.

She sat up, wiping her eyes, and essayed a smile. She reached for his hand and felt its chill.

"Richard, you're freezing!"

"I was standing by the window. I couldn't sleep."

"I know. It's those — those animals. We've all gone crazy. Oh, Richard, such a fearful dream."

"It's gone now. Never mind. Let's build up the fire in the living room and make some coffee."

She still held to his arm as they entered the hall. A thin edge of light lined the bottom of Anne's door.

"Do you suppose she can be awake?" Marie murmured.

"Perhaps you'd better see. Maybe she's been pursued, too, and ought to join us by the fire."

Marie knocked lightly and called. There was an answer, and she went in. Richard proceeded to the living room. He was badly shaken himself and was glad to undertake the objective problem of restoring the fire. He had set it blazing and was bringing a pot of coffee from the kitchen when they appeared, wan and a little disheveled, but pretty still.

"You look like a couple of shipwrecked princesses," he declared.

"If Marie hadn't been crying, too, I wouldn't have appeared," Anne informed him bravely. "That's fundamental."

"I would have been crying, if I had known how," Richard assured her. "This night is just a witches' Sabbath. But it's all right now. Wolves won't come near a fire."

"It is certainly better than putting one's head under the covers," Anne said.

The warmth of the fire threw a ring of security around the couch and chairs. Richard

poured coffee and passed crackers and cheese.

"It's very good."

"Yes."

"And Vincent?"

"Asleep, I guess."

They sat quietly, letting the tenseness ebb from their minds. After a while Richard looked at them with a quizzical affection. "Well?"

"Well?" Marie said, smiling in response.

"I feel so much better," Anne said.

"The point is," Richard explained, "that we are — the four of us — intelligent, civilized people. We know how to dress, how to talk, what to expect from the world. But we each have a fear, that's all."

"I had one," Marie acknowledged, "and now I look at it very clearly and I don't think there's much in it."

"That's it," Anne said. She stiffened abruptly and raised her hand in peremptory command. "Listen."

"Now, Anne —" Marie began firmly; but then she, too, heard the crunch of snow outside the door. Richard rose from his chair, and the two women sat straight. Then the door opened, and Vincent's surprisingly cheerful voice released them again.

"What on earth are you all doing?" he demanded.

"Well," Marie said, "that's a difficult question. What were *you* doing?"

"Oh, I just went out to look at those wolves."

"That's just it!" Anne cried. "We were bothered by wolves, too — the wolves of our imaginings that you told us about."

"You should have come with me. I had a grand walk. Your firelight across the snow — it was fine."

"And the wolves?"

He laughed. "They are like shadows. You go forward, and there is nothing there."

"I'm so glad you discovered that, too," Marie remarked happily.

"Here's coffee," Richard said, beaming. "Hot coffee."





---

# A LESSON IN NATIONAL SELF-RESPECT

BY CHARLES H. MELISH

---

**P**RESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S vision of social security through a comprehensive national program of old-age pensions, health insurance, and unemployment insurance will catch the popular imagination. In the past four years poverty and suffering have had a devastating effect upon the morale of the nation. But even more destructive is the sense of insecurity which is a grim reality to nearly every citizen who is dependent upon his own exertions for a livelihood. This the President proposes to remove.

Of course there is nothing new in the idea of national social insurance. Twenty-four European countries have such plans, which include every imaginable variation of detail. The oldest of all — the German health-insurance plan — dates back to 1883. We can learn much from European experience but especially can we learn from Great Britain, where social insurance has, on the whole, been very successful. There has been much condemnation in the United States of the British dole, although it is doubtful if most Americans have the slightest idea what the dole really is. The British have made many mistakes from which we may profit. Let us see what the British plan is and how it operates.

## II

**P**ARENTHETICALLY it may be noted that health insurance and the provision of old-age pensions present no technical difficulties. Insurance records reveal with reasonable accuracy how often sickness is likely to occur. We can readily determine how many attain old age with insufficient means to provide for their own support. The problem is reduced to the mathematical calculation of the amounts which must periodically be put aside to provide a reserve sufficient to meet future withdrawals.

Unemployment insurance is something else

again. Properly speaking, it is not insurance at all; there is no actuarial record. The incidence of unemployment is affected by unpredictable events which have nothing much to do with the law of averages. Insurance actuaries agree that unemployment is not an "insurable risk." The British experts went far astray in their estimates of the probable rate of unemployment on several occasions. For the sake of precision it may as well be admitted that "unemployment insurance" is a misnomer. But it is a convenient phrase by which to designate those funds which are set aside for the purpose of mitigating the hardships of future joblessness.

## III

**T**HE BRITISH plan, inaugurated in 1911, provided compulsory health and unemployment insurance for benefit of workers in a few selected industries. In 1925 provision was made, on a contributory basis, for widows', orphans', and old-age pensions. Since 1908 non-contributory old-age pensions, amounting to \$2.43 a week (maximum), have been paid to qualified citizens aged 70 or over. Nearly 1,000,000 draw this pension. From time to time the scope of the whole plan has been enlarged until it now includes nearly all wage earners (except domestic servants and agricultural laborers) between the ages of 16 and 65 whose annual earned income is not more than \$1,217. Nearly 13,000,000 in an occupied population of 20,000,000 must carry unemployment insurance, and more than 17,000,000 are protected under the health and contributory-pension schemes.

The present weekly contribution to the health-insurance plan is 18 cents, shared equally by employer and employee. The national government adds a relatively small annual contribution. Sickness benefit is paid for a maximum of 26 weeks at the weekly rate