

ALMA

But I don't want to be talked to like some incurably sick patient you have to comfort. Oh, I suppose I am sick, one of those weak and divided people who slip like shadows among you solid strong ones. But sometimes, out of necessity, we shadowy people take on a strength of our own. I have that now. You needn't try to deceive me. You needn't try to comfort me. I haven't come here on any but equal terms. You said, let's talk truthfully, even shamelessly, then! It's no longer a secret that I love you. It never was. I loved you as long ago as the time I asked you to read the stone angels with your fingers. Yes, I remember the long afternoons of our childhood, when I had to stay indoors to practice my music—and hear your playmates calling you, "Johnny, Johnny!" How it went through me, just to hear your name called! And how I—rushed to the window to watch you jump the porch railing! I stood at a distance, halfway down the block, only to keep in sight of your torn red sweater, racing about the vacant lot you played in. Yes, it had begun that early, this affliction of love, and has never let go of me since, but kept on growing. I've lived next door to you all the days of my life, a weak and divided person who stood in adoring awe of your singleness, of your strength. And that is my story! Now I wish you would tell me—why didn't it happen between us? Why did I fail? Why did you come almost close enough—and no closer?