

The House by the  
Stable

Charles Williams

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Stable

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# **THE HOUSE BY THE STABLE**

**A CHRISTMAS PLAY**

by

# CHARLES WILLIAMS

## CHARACTERS

MAN  
PRIDE  
HELL  
GABRIEL  
JOSEPH  
MARY

*The Scene is in Man's house on the one side  
and in its stable on the other*



# THE HOUSE BY THE STABLE

*Enter MAN and PRIDE.*

PRIDE. What, are you not tired? will you still walk?  
will you still talk of me and of us and of you?

MAN. I desire nothing better now, and nothing new.<sup>1</sup>  
It was a high and happy day when we met.  
Will you never forget it? and love me always?

PRIDE. Yes:  
I will love you always.

MAN. So I believe indeed,  
and feed on the thought—to be everlastingly loved.  
Tell me, how did this surprise come true?

PRIDE. It is no surprise—if you think what you are.  
Indeed, it were stranger if I adored you less.  
You are Man, the lord of this great house Earth,  
or (as its name is called in my country) Sin;  
you are its god and mine; since you first smiled  
and stretched your hand to me and brought me in,  
since our tenderness began, I have loved you, Man,  
and will—do not doubt; kiss me again.

MAN. You are my worshipful sweet Pride; will you be  
so arrogant always to others and humble to me?

Will you always make me believe in myself? I am Man,  
but before you came, Pride, I was half-afraid  
that someone or something had been before me, and made  
me and my house, and could ruin or cast aside.  
But when I look in your dove's eyes, Pride,  
and see myself there, I know I am quite alone  
in my greatness, and all that I have is quite my own.

PRIDE. So this wonderful house where moon and sun  
run with lights, and all kinds of creatures crawl  
to be your servants, and your only business is to take  
delight in your own might—it is yours and mine,  
a shrine for your godhead, and for me because I am yours.

MAN. Thus endures my love for my own Pride.  
To thrust you out were to doubt myself; that  
is a bygone folly now—I will do so no more.

PRIDE. No; do not: be content to love me.  
See, to teach you (let me pretend awhile  
that I can add something to your style—I  
who am also and only your creature) I have brought here  
my brother, born of one nature with me, my twin,  
or a moment younger: let me call him in,  
and he shall tell you more of what I have planned.

*Enter HELL*

MAN. Are you my Pride's brother? give me your hand.  
We must be friends; tell me, what is your name?



HELL. I am called Hell.

MAN. And where, Hell, do you live?

HELL. Why, as to that, it is not easy to give a clear definition of the place; it is not far as your journeys go, and no bar to finding, but the minding of the way is best found by going, and that (of all means) best at my sister's showing.

MAN. We will go there some time.

PRIDE. O soon, sweet Man, soon—  
for, I must tell you, I have begged of my brother a boon, first because you are my sweetheart, and next because the laws you have made everywhere mean you should have all the best. This is a brave house you live in—and let me call it Sin, because my tongue trips if I name it Earth—but my brother in his country has a house braver still and has promised it to us, of his own kind will.

MAN. Aye, has he? that is noble, and yet he knows perhaps I would take it from him, would he not, and I saw it one day and chose to have it for mine.

PRIDE. O love, how I love to hear you talk so! but for my sake do not be harsh to my brother; for your Pride's sake, smile at her brother Hell, and treat him well.

MAN. Why, that I will do.  
How now, Hell, shall I have a house from you?  
Tell me of it.

HELL. It is strong and very old,  
but (by a burning I have made there) never cold,  
and dry—the only damp would be your tears  
if Man could ever weep. The air provokes  
hunger often—you are so sharp-set  
you could almost eat yourself. The view is wide—  
heavenly, as men say in your tongue, to the other side  
of the sky at least, so far it seems away,  
and whatever is there will never interfere;  
that is quite certain. Because my sister desires  
I will give you this house if you choose.

MAN. And because my thews  
are strong enough to take it too perhaps?

HELL. That also, no doubt.

MAN. Well, let that be.  
You are a good fellow, Hell; you shall live there  
whenever you like, even if you give it to me.  
The three of us could be royal in such a house.  
We will have a drink on it first.

*[He goes to fetch wine*

HELL *[to PRIDE]*. Have you seen the jewel yet?

PRIDE [*to HELL*]. No chance;  
I think he has forgotten where it is himself.

HELL [*to PRIDE*]. What have you been doing all this while?

PRIDE [*to HELL*]. Hush!  
I have a trick now; play to my lead.

MAN [*pouring out the wine*]. This is good wine; I have had it  
in store  
more than I could guess; it improves with every flask.  
None could ask better. I must have tended the vines  
when I was young; there are no vines now  
or few: I have sometimes thought—were it not for my smile  
over it—the land would be more sterile than it was.  
Here; drink. You must need that.

PRIDE [*to MAN*]. Sweet,  
for Pride's sake throw him something in return,  
some trifle; I would not have my lord  
seem under an obligation even to Hell  
my brother—though indeed I meant well enough  
in persuading him.

MAN. You are always right; no kindness  
but I am always just to pay it back.  
Now, brother, you must take something—yes,  
no words; I say you must. What will you have?  
Pride, what shall I give him?

PRIDE. If you would be  
kind, play a game of dice—the best of three:  
it would please him; he loves a gamble.

MAN. Dice? good.  
What shall we play for?

PRIDE. Something quite small,  
or even nothing at all; the game is the thing.

MAN. No; something I will chance in return for a house.  
What?

*[He drinks*

PRIDE. A handful of dust of your own—Earth;  
or—if you want, as becomes you, to risk more—  
say that old jewel your servant talks  
often of—more often than becomes him.  
Soul, he calls it, I think.

MAN. Soul? yes;  
truly he does talk thus; but if  
ever such a thing was, it has been tossed  
one day away in a corner of the house and lost.  
Besides, I have heard him sing sometimes of a bird  
that sat in the leaves of paradise and sang,  
and in his song he calls that bird Soul.  
I do not know; my paradise is I,  
and any soul that sings in me I will try

on the dice any time.

*[He drinks*

Look at me, Pride; you will be  
always faithful, will you not?

PRIDE. Always, by my will.

MAN. I would kill you else.

PRIDE. I am not easy to kill  
by any who have loved me. Sweet, we forget my brother.  
Come, let us risk this lost jewel your soul  
on the dice, let Hell have his chance of finding.

*Enter GABRIEL*

GABRIEL. Sir, by permission; there are poor people outside  
seeking shelter.

PRIDE. Insolence!

MAN. Who?

GABRIEL. One  
from these parts, a youngish working man,  
and has his heart's love with him, his wife,  
a fair-faced girl, and (I think) near her time.  
It is a harsh night; if I may suggest  
she needs immediate rest—a room, and a bed.

PRIDE. Man, this servant of yours clacks his tongue more freely than mine should do; must you keep rooms where any riff-raff tramps may sleep—and have supper too, I suppose? you, sir, I am speaking to you.

GABRIEL. And supper, madam, you suppose.

HELL. Hey, you, speak well to your lord's guest, my sister, or....

GABRIEL [*angelically*]. Or...?

MAN. Rest quiet, Hell:

I have had this fellow for servant a long time, ever since before I came hither, wherever I was before I came hither; he suits.

He is neat and quick and keeps out of the way, and looks after my accounts—at least someone does, and it isn't I; let him alone.

*[He drinks*

GABRIEL. Will you choose, sir, to speak to them yourself?

MAN. Why ... it were wrong to turn a mother away and pity to turn a woman, on a hard night, in a plight of that kind; but tramps in my rooms ... yet one should be tender when one is comfortable, sweet, tender to the poor, yes?

PRIDE. I confess, dear Man,  
I cannot see why; one cannot do what one would—  
no, not you even, my bountiful god—  
and (as things go) they are only encouraged to expect  
more than anyone can do. My darling, have a care.

MAN. Well, there is that ...

GABRIEL. I think, sir,  
you should see them now.

MAN. Do you? Well ... well,  
just for a moment then; let them come in.  
You are always ready to beguile me. And as for you,  
Hell and my sweet Pride, be merry the while.

[GABRIEL *goes out*. MAN *drinks*

HELL [*to PRIDE*]. Surely that is Gabriel, that old gossip of  
heaven?

PRIDE [*to HELL*]. He? I cannot tell; angels and I  
never met much, not for me to recognize.

HELL [*to PRIDE*]. Your dove's eyes are not so sharp as mine.  
I have peered more deeps than you; besides, sleep  
takes you sometimes; it never takes me,  
and after a while he who wakes for ever  
finds the tingling and aching make sight the sharper  
in the land where the heart-breaking troubles the light.

I am sure it is Gabriel; wait; show no sign—  
only be ready to whisper Man a little  
and keep your eye on the door.

PRIDE [*to HELL*]. Why, what can he do?

HELL [*to PRIDE*]. I do not know; nothing, I hope; if Man  
chooses to play, it is his affair and mine.  
But keep close; we may win the jewel yet,  
and Man get clear with us to my nice house.

[*He sniggers*]

PRIDE. Come, if you will see them, let us drink first!

MAN. Gabriel might have brought me more wine first.  
The curst fellow! he must be taught his job,  
and not to rob me of time for wandering tramps.  
Well, I have promised this time. Here, now  
let us drink to our union—

HELL. Eternal, eternal!

GABRIEL *brings in* JOSEPH *and* MARY

GABRIEL. Here, sir, they are.

MAN. What do you want?

JOSEPH. Sir, shelter for one night, by your permission.  
Our mule has gone lame; the dark overtook us



and all but shook our hearts with perils of the road.  
My wife is in no condition to go on.  
To-morrow we will be gone.

MAN. Poor wretch!  
She needs a fetch of care.

PRIDE. Beware, sweet.  
It is easier to let them in than to get them out.  
You are too kind. Besides, if you have a mind  
to go on this journey with our brother Hell,  
you do not want strangers to rack your house  
when your back is turned: anyone as great as you  
must be true to his glory.

MAN. She is a poor lass.

PRIDE. That is why; if she were of our class—  
not yours; you are non-pareil—but my brother's and mine ...  
but do as you think best!

MAN. For a night's rest ...

PRIDE. To have people like these in the house—imagine!  
But you, I know, are their master—and mine.  
I am only thinking of your glory.

MAN. Well, yes;  
I see that ... Gabriel!

GABRIEL. Sir!

MAN. Think:

is there no shed near where these could be stored  
for a night in reasonable comfort? I can't afford  
to have them inside; my Pride will not stomach it,  
and yet I am loth to push them both outside  
till their plight is a little better.

GABRIEL. The stable, sir:

it is empty since you chose to dispose of your stud.

MAN. Good: give them a shake-down of straw there:

[*Half-aside to GABRIEL*] and hark! if you care to hand them a  
hunch of bread

I shall look the other way.

[*He drinks*]

GABRIEL. Sir, it is God's bread.

I will do as you say.

MAN. O God, God!

Why must you always bring your fairy-tales in?

Did God build this great house Sin?

Did God send this pleasant leman Pride?

What has God ever done for Man?

GABRIEL. He gave that jewel your soul.

MAN. O soul!

This is your old clack, Gabriel. In the whole of my vast property I never found it anywhere— with flesh, fish, or fowl. It must needs be some old hidaway rubbish. And what is God doing, if God is, being bounteous to me? For anything I can see, I had neither God nor father on earth: I was always just Man since the world began. You tire me; go, get them away.

GABRIEL. Sir, just as you say.

JOSEPH. Sir, a blessing on you for this grace! Thank him, Mary.

MARY. Sir, God will bless you; nor will my Son, when he comes, forget what you gave nor with what spirit. If he can be ever of use to you, I vow now, in his name, he will be well content to be.

MAN. You are heartily welcome. Gabriel, have them away.

[GABRIEL *takes them across to the stable*

There, they are gone: now we can drink again. Pour it out, Hell. Pride, give me your hand; am I not a grand fellow?

PRIDE. Sir, just as you say!  
Nay, I love you, dear Man, for being so fine,

so full of your own importance. Do you not find me more to your mind than a girl like that?

*[While they dally, GABRIEL covers the Nativity, and the three sing the Magnificat, which PRIDE interrupts at the following points*

MARY. My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour, for he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

PRIDE. Henceforth, we shall be the only blessed ones on earth; and no generations of anything except our joy.

MARY. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with his arm;...

PRIDE. Be my arm of strength, Man.

MARY. ... he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

PRIDE. Imagine me in your heart.

MARY. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

PRIDE. Be mighty on me; exalt me to your great degree.

MARY. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

PRIDE. O rich, rich!—bear off, my dear; no, my brother is here. Tower—will you?—over me in your power? O but fling him too your glory's world's wealth! let all my house go down before your head's crown of splendour. Tender us all our desires out of your greatness: to him his gambling moment, his catch of chance; then snatch me to yourself for ever. Then, at the gate of your house, when we go I will kiss you so ... do you know? wait, my sweet! Hell, have you the dice?

MAN. I have dice here. I used them often enough when I played with my friends, but since I met you I have forgotten my friends. Love of you tends to that.

HELL. Do we play for a stake? I do not mind; the game is enough.

PRIDE. Yes: but a stake, all the same, makes the game more amusing. And, brother, you forget—you play for that jewel called soul.

MAN. Why, it does not exist, or if, you will never find it.

PRIDE. It will do; it is in my mind  
that to play for the chance to find it is well enough.  
What do you say, Hell?

HELL. Aye; if I have his will  
to lay hold of it, if I can, by my own skill—  
nothing unfair, no force; but if it is found,  
I take it in free exchange for the house and ground.

MAN. You shall, brother, for your sister's sake and yours.

HELL. However precious?

MAN. Though it were worth my all.     *[He drinks*  
I am no miser; I was always open-handed—  
was I not, Pride my lass? give me a kiss  
and I shall win the game and my soul as well.  
Two out of three; throw.

*[They play*

HELL. Five.

MAN. Six. Ha,  
that is my gain. Kiss me again, Pride.

PRIDE *[to HELL]*. Quick now, while he is blind with me.

*[While they kiss HELL changes the dice*

MAN. Well tossed, Hell; you have a knack, but my luck

is in now, and I back my luck to win.    *[He drinks*

GABRIEL. Man, where are you?

MAN. Who was that called?

PRIDE. No one.

HELL. The wind.

MAN. It was a voice of some kind.    *[He looks out*  
The rain is over; the stars are out; one  
over the stable is more sun than star.

PRIDE. How slow you are! Man, your Pride is waiting.

MAN *[he is now rather drunk]*.  
Waiting, is she? let her wait then.  
Why, you hussy, you are a part of me.  
I am not to be called in as if I were Gabriel  
to be scolded at pleasure.

PRIDE. No; it was but that leisure  
of ours, in Hell's house, I was wanting ... but so,  
just as you say.

MAN. Ha, yes: again.  
To it again.    *[He throws*  
Five.    *[HELL throws*

HELL. Six.

MAN. What tricks...? let me see. Six: it is—you have won.

*[He roars with laughter*

Ho, this is a fine thing we have done—  
drawn the game.

HELL. No; one throw more.

MAN. More? how many times have we thrown?

HELL. Twice.  
Hurry!

MAN. What, hurry? what do you mean?  
you are as saucy as this quean herself.

HELL. Throw; I am impatient for you to go.

MAN. Do you hear that, Pride? he wants us to go.  
He wants to hunt for my soul.

*[He roars again with laughter*

PRIDE. No.  
I do not think he will long hunt for that.

MAN. Well, kiss me—a kiss hearty and strong,  
better than before; give me the winning throw.



[*She leans over and kisses him lazily*]

JOSEPH. Man, Man, where are you?

MAN. Aye!... here.  
Who wants Man?

PRIDE *and* HELL. No one; no one; throw.

MAN. Someone wanted; someone called; who?

PRIDE [*seizing his hand*]. Throw—with me, thus; and I with you.

MAN. Let me go. I am Man; I will not be forced.  
I will have you horsed on your brother's back, my girl,  
and take such a cudgel to you as will crack  
some of those pretty bones.

PRIDE [*to HELL*]. Throw first,  
and he afterwards; or at the very worst  
we will persuade him he threw and lost the game.

HELL [*throwing*]. Six.

MARY. Man, where are you?

MAN. That was the girl;  
that was the pretty wife—hey, now  
I am coming, Man is coming.

PRIDE *and* HELL [*seizing him*]. No; throw.

MAN. What is this? what is happening? How do I hear a voice I have not chosen to hear outside my house? Who made my house? There was no one, was there?

PRIDE. No.

HELL. No.

MAN. Then how do I hear the voice of something outside me? Or is one of you playing a trick on me? Pride, if I thought ... I am caught ... my mind is twined in a voice ... it isn't yours ... whose is it? Ho, you, Gabriel!

HELL. No; leave Gabriel alone.

PRIDE. Sweet, sweet Man, leave Gabriel alone.

MAN. No; Gabriel is my fellow; he will help. He was here before I came hither; he suits. He will tell me the voices. Gabriel, Gabriel, I say!

GABRIEL [*coming across in his magnificence*]. Here! Sir, God made me and bade me wait on this moment in your life: what do you need?

MAN. You are a good fellow: come here: listen.  
My brother Hell and my leman Pride mean  
to have me finish ... that was not it neither;  
there was something else ... the girl, Gabriel, the girl.  
I heard her call out: where is she?  
Is she in danger?

GABRIEL. No; she is quite safe.  
This is the game, sir, is it?

*[He picks up one of the dice and looks at it*

PRIDE *[to HELL]*.  
Fool, you have tried too many ways to get him.

HELL *[to PRIDE]*.  
Damn him, who would have thought grace was so near  
as to hear that small squeak of a drunken voice?

MAN *[sleepily]*.  
The game, yes—but I don't know where we were.  
Throw for me ... the girl is safe, is she?  
and her baby ... hadn't she got a baby?

GABRIEL. She has.  
Now.

MAN. Yes ... to be sure.... Pride ... Pride,  
where are you? *[He dozes off*

PRIDE. Here, darling, here.

GABRIEL [*catching her by the hair and pulling her back*].

Peace:

let the poor fellow sleep a little; you  
would never be caught by anything as natural as drink.

HELL. Let her go. What are you doing there with my dice?

GABRIEL [*tossing the dice in the air and catching it*].

Dice—ha! So: that is better.

It seems now to have only one six:  
and now we can play the last throw again.

HELL [*whining*]. I won't! I tell you I won't! I won't play.

PRIDE [*snarling*]. Don't you, Hell: the nasty-minded scut,  
pretending we cheated.

[GABRIEL *takes each of them by an ear,  
and knocks their heads lightly together*

PRIDE. Oo! don't—you hurt!

[*She drops to the floor, moaning and rubbing her head*

GABRIEL. You wanted the game; you shall win or lose on the  
game

by the luck of the game, but all luck is good.

Toil and spoil as you will, still in the end  
the flick of every chance must fall right.

Throw.

HELL. I don't...

GABRIEL [*terribly*]. Throw. [HELL *throws*  
Five. [GABRIEL *throws*  
Speak—  
what is it?

HELL [*cowering*]. Six.

GABRIEL. You have had a long run,  
you and all your tricks, but to-morrow's sun  
rises on a world where untruth is always untrue.  
That is simple enough but too difficult for you.  
Get to your house and the burning you made—and not even  
that is your own; the fire is borrowed from heaven.

[HELL *goes*

And as for you, sister, you poor cheap  
cowardly shrew; you ...

[*With an awful angelic effort he restrains himself*

I will teach you one lesson; kneel up; say after me:

[*She obeys. He puts on his glory*

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace:  
goodwill to men.

[PRIDE *repeats the words, snivelling*

And now go.

[*She begins to get up*

No; on your knees: go.

[*She shuffles away*

MAN [*waking*]. I dreamt my Pride had gone.     [*He stares round*

Where is she? what has been happening? call her, you, Gabriel.

GABRIEL. Sir, soon, if you tell me to.  
They will wait, I know, by the gate you call Death,  
which is the usual way to Hell's house.  
You may catch them there or yourself call them back.  
But there is a thing to do before you go.

MAN. What? do you bully me? I want my Pride;  
I want to be a god; she made a vow  
never to leave me.

GABRIEL. Nor did she—to be just.  
It was I—for this single night—made her go.

MAN. You are above yourself.

GABRIEL. Above or beside—  
distinct enough at least to deal with Pride.  
There is a thing that you must see to-night

of your own sight, without Pride's arms round you  
or Hell's hand in yours. This one hour  
out of all time is given you to see it yourself.  
To-morrow things may change. The woman you saved  
half by your will from a little chill in the night,  
and from blistered feet, has a word to say. Come.

MAN. It seems I made her a poor offer, yet  
she was better in the straw than in the street:  
do you not think so? You look grander than you used.

GABRIEL. Sir, it is only that you give me more attention.  
When Pride is about, no one can see straight.  
You shall see more than I. Come when I call.

*[He goes to the stable*

JOSEPH. Blessed one, what is your will now?

MARY. Dearest lord, to show Man my child;  
lest in some testy humour the rumour should fade.  
If he sees, his heart may radically move to love,  
whatever he forgets, wherever he sets his eyes.

JOSEPH. He who with all this Earth offered us the straw?

MARY. Did we deserve, dearest, under the law,  
this birth that I kiss? Nothing at all is given  
till all is given, I know; that is heaven.  
But then also it is heaven to know that all  
is given at once in the smallest free gift—

even sometimes when only half-given. O my Son  
reckons as no arithmetician has done;  
he checks his amounts by the least and the greatest at once.  
O my Own, there are no, no accounts like yours!

JOSEPH. Blessed is he in his sole free choice!

GABRIEL. Lady, Man is a little drunk, and a little  
sleepy, with a little hankering after hell,  
but yet also he has a faint hurt  
at having offered as he did; if it pleased you now  
to expose the Holy Thing—

MARY. O let him come!  
let him come quickly!

GABRIEL. Man! Man!

[MAN *stumbles across*

MAN. It is almost too bright here to see. Where  
is the lady? I did give her a hunch of bread  
and a place to lie; she might else have been dead.

JOSEPH. Do not talk nonsense.

GABRIEL. Do not talk at all.

MAN. No, but I am trying to understand: why  
should I who had one house, and another beyond  
promised, have been so fond as to offer straw



in a stable? and yet ...

GABRIEL. Do not trouble your brain;  
gain is as difficult to understand as grace.

JOSEPH. Do not talk, I say, lest the Divine One sleep.

MARY. Nay, let him talk as he will; he is mine; come,  
Man my friend; it is true that but for you  
I might have come to an end—here, at least.

*[She gives him her hand*

Look, my Son thanks you.

MAN. Was he born here?

MARY. This very night, in your stable; therefore, dear Man,  
you, if you choose, shall be his god-father.

MAN. What will you call him, lady?

MARY. Jesus, because  
he shall presently save his people from their sins—  
and Hell shall play no trick on them more.

MAN. I did not quite refuse you, did I? or did I?  
I cannot tell; Hell has made me stupid.  
Did I deny you all or did I not?  
Look now, he must have something to please him.  
The house is full of things, and none right.

Stop; I remember something out of sight,  
out of thought, but always I have had round my neck.

*[He fumbles at his breast and pulls out a jewel*

There; it was once bright; it might serve.  
I do not know what it is at all.  
But if you should want a bed for the rest of the night,  
there is my room the best.

GABRIEL. But this is your soul  
I have searched for all this time!

MARY [*laughing up at him*]. Great Hierarch, even  
the angels desire to understand these things,  
and a mortal hand does more than the Domination.  
Leave Man and my Son and me our mystery;  
let us think our own way and not yours.  
Look, I will breathe on it—so, and see  
how it dances, and how my Beloved's glances follow.  
Take it again, Man, a little while;  
we will go up to your room.

*[GABRIEL and JOSEPH help her to rise*

Now be the gloom  
of earth split, and be this house blest  
and no more professed by poor Pride to be Sin,  
for the joys of love hereafter shall over-ride  
boasting and bragging and the heavy lagging of Hell  
after delight that outstrips him—step and sight.

*[She makes the sign of the Cross towards the house*

Take us, O exchange of hearts! this we know—  
substance is love, love substance. Let us go.

*They go out*

[\[1\]](#) These first three lines may be omitted when a curtain is available.



**Source:**

**Collected Plays**  
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[The end of *The House by the Stable* by Charles Williams]