

## HILMA.

I did not learn all this story at once,nor did Hilma tell it herself. She was not a woman to complain,or to seek sympathy by the recital of her woes. But bit, by bit, it came to me,and in the long hours of the night I have often lain thinking of the one faithful woman I have ever known.

It began years ago in far Sweden. Life is barren there for the peasant folk,and in the long,dark winter nights many are the cold ones who shiver in the huts on the bleak lands. But of this, Hilma and Wolfe Jansen knew naught. For them,there was only the glow of the long, golden summer days,of the sun that hung in the skies until past bed-time for little folks. And in the winter,when the ground was hard and the hoar frost hung in the air,they greeted the glorious Northern lights with strange,wierd folk-song,the while their hearts throbbed with exultation at the beauty of the land. If perchance,a shill of fear,or a grim horror struck at them,it was not because there was hunger or cold,or the mystery of life confronting them;but the memory of some were-wolf tale that haunted them as they drove the cows home in the early twilight,when their shadows were sharp black on the crisp snow,and the stars glittered like steel points in the far dakk sky.

For Hilma's folks were neighbors to the Jansens,and the one motherless boy of the small household had long since in baby-hood





inches

Golden Thread

centimeters

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15																				
L*	38.12	65.43	49.87	44.26	55.56	70.82	63.51	39.92	28.86	38.62	52.24	97.06	92.02	87.34	82.14	72.05	62.15	49.25	38.62	28.86	17.09	3.44	30.12	72.46	72.95	29.37	54.91	43.96	82.74						
a*	13.24	18.11	-4.34	-13.80	9.82	-33.43	34.26	11.81	48.55	1.28	-0.40	-0.60	-0.75	-0.87	-0.93	-0.45	-0.18	0.54	-0.05	-0.06	-0.07	0.61	0.73	0.19	0.49	0.04	0.30	-0.14	-0.04						
b*	15.07	18.72	22.29	-24.49	16.52	-29.46	55.93	16.52	55.93	1.13	0.23	0.21	0.43	0.28	0.19	0.01	-0.04	0.60	0.73	0.19	0.07	0.00	0.60	0.73	0.19	0.07	0.00	0.60	0.73						
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Besides Hilma, there were many brothers and sisters, younger ones and hungrier ones, and the little woman-child was made to help bear the burden of caring for them early. To Hilma's lot fell the task of knitting covering for the restless little feet, so that her play-hours with Wolfe went by swiftly, the minutes' passage beaten time to by the click of the needles. It was little Hilma who cared for the ever-grimy faces and hands, and little Hilma's hand who guided the first steps. The mother was a busy woman, and the children shrank from the father, a grim morose man, whose every day in the world but deepened the sullen sorrow on his face, and the curtness of his few words.

But there was Wolfe, dear little, dark-eyed Wolfe, whose sunny temper and joyous ways made the sun all the brighter for his playmate. And thus childhood passed, a round of labor and toil and joy: of endless knitting and of long hours in the care of smaller children. For Hilma, there was no other world. Save for the child Jesus, and the grim were-wolf, whose skulking form could be fanned in every shadow, life was the same all over, she thought. In

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tumble of the waterfall, and the sheen of the lake; in winter, the radiant splendor of the northern lights, the crisp crackle of the snow underfoot; the glory of the short-lived sun, the long darkness of the nights, and the shivering of the day's work, begun when the stars yet shone, and the air was heavy with the night fog. And Hilma was content.

But little Wolfe had other dreams. "Sister," he said one day, "art thou content with this?"

They were fast approaching the age when childhood is passing away. The flaxen braids must soon be wound around her head; the little bodice soon be laced even tighter.

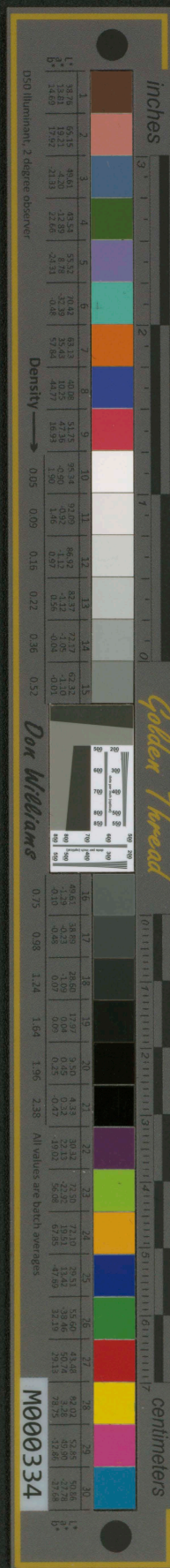
"And why not, my brother Wolfe? There is not other."

"Art thou not sure that in the great city there be not other things than this?" He waved his hand contemptuously over the brown fields, where the first faint green of spring was peeping forth, afraid to venture out in the soft chilliness.

Hilma fixed him with her great calm eyes, and in them, there was a glint of steel behind their blueness. "Thou art not well, my brother, there is no life but this; thy father and my father have lived it well, and should not the good pastor speak of other men and other things were they in the world?"

"Thou dost not know," replied Wolfe. The spring time of youth and the spring time of the world were in his veins, and he yearned towards something he could not tell what.

Then a gloom came in Hilma's life, and the shadow of the









were-wolf ceased to haunt any more, for a real shadow had come across the world. The father laid down one day and sickened, and ere long there were orphans in the Hendrickson home, and a grieved and poverty-stricken widow. There was no food and no strong man's arms, and no one to till the soil. And Hilma was face to face with life.

It was the winter time, and the days were dark indeed. There were kind neighbors and willing hands to help, and the comfort of the old pastor. But it was all naught to Hilma, kindness or food or sympathy. For Wolfe had gone. Wolfe, her only playmate, her only comfort, her only confidant. He had taken his pitiful fortune in his hands, and gone to Stockholm to seek another life, he said.

It was on a clear evening when he bade her farewell.

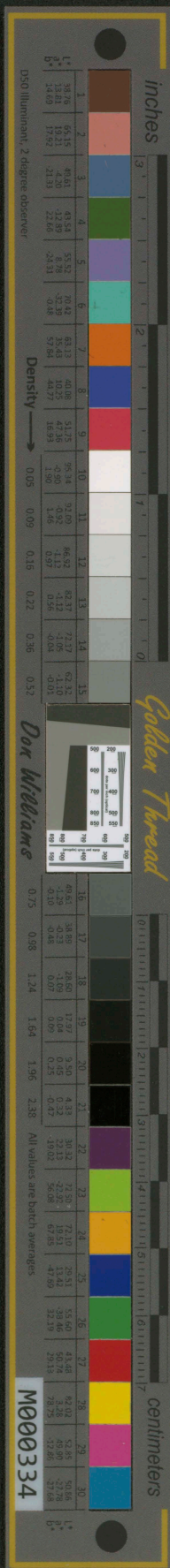
"Thou wilt miss me, sister?" he asked.

"Thou art all I have brother," she made answer.

"I will come to see thee," he pursued.

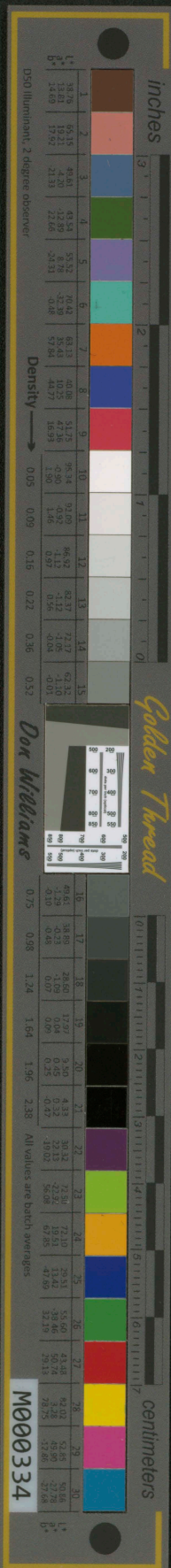
For answer, she kissed him on the forehead, and stood watching him walk away, hand in hand with his father. Then she turned in doors, and went back to the children and the grieved, pitiful mother.

The long cold months dragged by somehow, Hilma never knew. For her, the glories of the Northern lights were as nothing; for her the bright steel stars shone with no more radiance. Wolfe was gone, and with him, all her keen appreciation of nature. There was much of





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to do and but one strong pair of hands to do it, and Hilma's days were too busy to give time for fretting.

When the spring came, she understood. The fever of spring and of youth bounded in her veins, and she knew then why Wolfe had gone into the world. The days were narrow, and the life was hard. She wondered where was Wolfe. What had he learned of the ways of men? Could she too, go to the city and learn and see? The little ones were slowly starving, and the frail mother was helpless, while she, Poor sturdy maiden, had done all ~~the~~ <sup>her</sup> and it had not sufficed.

It was on a chill spring day when the faint first green good peeped from the ground that she stood before the pastor and told him her desire.

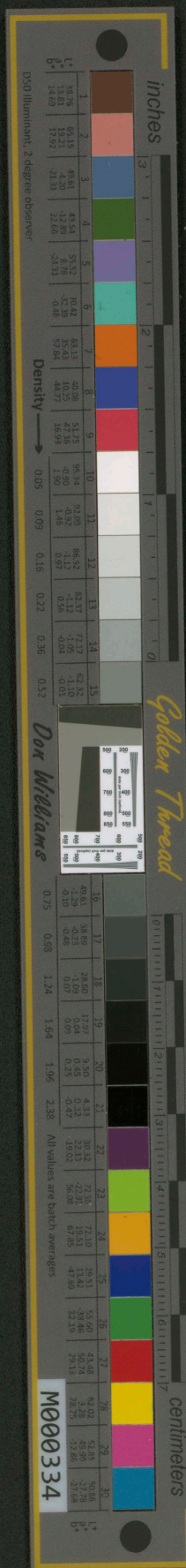
"Thou art a brave maiden," he made answer, "but there is much temptation in the city."

"I would work to help the mother and the little ones."

"Thou art right, there is no one else, and thy land yields but a poor substance."

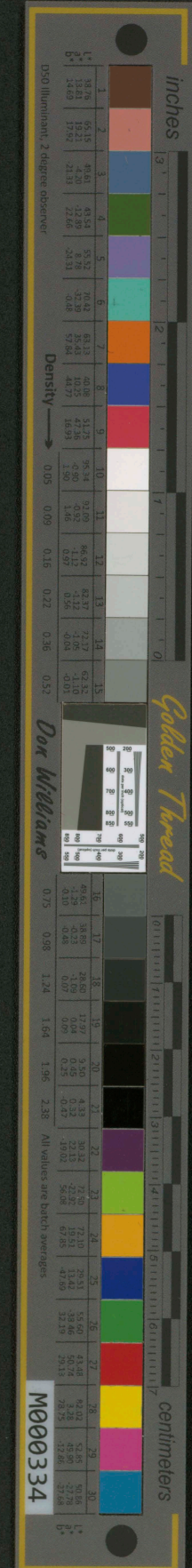
He promised to help her find work, and Hilma went home with hope in her heart, and sorrow for the grief she must cause the mother. But when her tale was told, there was only a blessing for her brave heart, and a prayer for her success.

The faint first greenness of the tardy spring wore away, and the full bloom of the summer had come before the pastor came with good news. There was a godly woman in Stockholm who wanted a serving maid. Would Hilma go?





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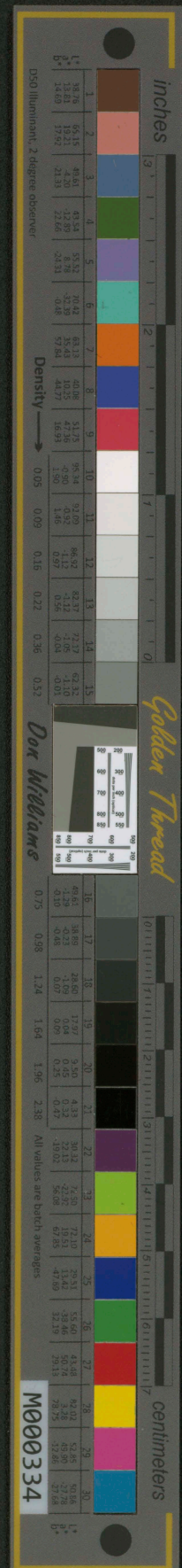




Would she go? When all her days were spent in longing for the summons, and her nights in dreaming of the days to come. She joyfully bade the little home good-bye, and turned her face south-ward to Stockholm, for there at least, she might find Wolfe, and money to feed and clothe the little ones.

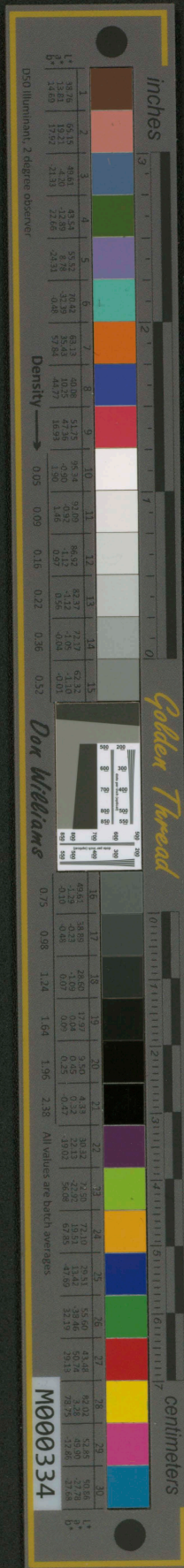
The summer ~~had~~ <sup>was</sup> waning, and the city had ceased to be a new experience. She was but a serving maid to answer when she was called; to go dutifully ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> her tasks; to smile always, even though her heart ached for the little gray hut on the bare field, and her eyes burned for a sight of Wolfe. ~~She~~ <sup>He</sup> had not seen him yet. On the days when she might go abroad, she walked the streets that seemed so crowded to her, searching for his tall-straight form, peering into every face, listening eagerly to every voice. Yet, there was no Wolfe. At home there was beginning to be peace and plenty. The small earnings that she sent, more than sufficed for the barren needs of life in the village, and the pale mother went to her work with a song on her lips and a blessing in her heart for her strong elder daughter. Yet Hilma waxed pale and was heart-sore. She had not seen Wolfe.

On one day, it happened that an errand for her mistress took her from the beaten paths of her usual walk. She went her way, gazing earnestly at every one with her great serious eyes, seeking for Wolfe; when a crowd brought her to a stand-still. It was a rough, pushing throng, and it laughed and jeered at someone in its midst. ~~She~~ <sup>He</sup> hardly knew why but something strong within her im-





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pelled her to push to the front, and her eyes beheld what they had longed to see--Wolfe, flushed and angry and not himself, standing in the center of the crowd, defying a soldier.

Hilma forgot everything. The crowd faded away, the buildings and streets were flow<sup>n</sup> as in a mist, and only she and Wolfe were standing alone in the brown fields, with the steely stars above, and the rustling stream murmuring at their backs.

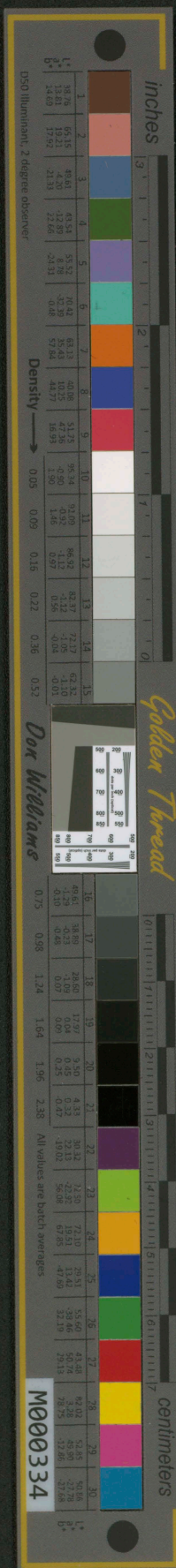
Wolfe!" she cried aloud.

He turned and looked at her, and a w<sup>a</sup>ye of shame crept over his face. The crowd laughed and cried aloud at her; and the soldier took him by the arm, and led him away. The light had died down for her almost before it had flickered. She had seen Wolfe at last, and he was being led to prison.

She ran home, beating her hands against her breast in an anguish of pity and fear. But her mistress sternly rebuked her for loitering on the errand-way, and turned a deaf ear to her piteous appeal to see her Wolfe. "No virtuous or honest maiden," quoth the godly lady, "would wish to visit a criminal. It were wiser and more decent to remain within doors."

And Hilma tortured her heart through the long night with vague theories and wild imaginings. The old legend of the werewolf, which had haunted her childhood, stalked through her dreams in fearsome guise. But the wolf had taken human form, and wore the dress of a soldier, as it led her playmate away to disgrace.

On the morrow, however, she was allowed to go out, and she hastened to the prison. Wolfe was there, and she could see him





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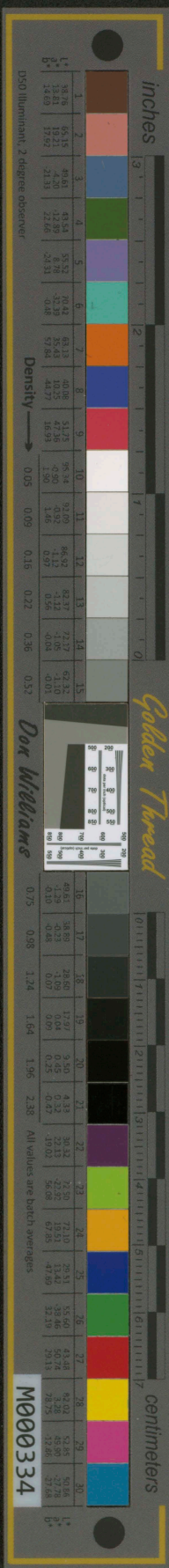
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and touch his hand; even through the bars, it was a great joy. For a minute, she could do naught but gaze at him with brimming eyes, and gasp with the great throbbing at her heart.

"I have sought thee long, brother mine," she said.

"I did not know thou wert in the city," he made answer in shame.

"Thou must have heard, the good pastor would have told thy father. I have been here many months."

"Perhaps I heard, and may have forgotten."

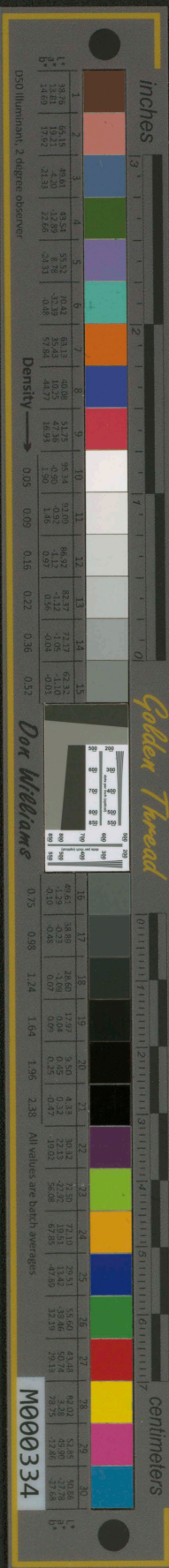
Forgotten? She looked at him with reproach. Could he forget her, his little sister, Hilma? It was not possible, for she had knelt to pray for him each night, and had looked so long for him by day. His shame had turned his head.

"Why art thou here?" she asked at length, gently.

He laughed bitterly, and tossed his handsome head, "Thou wouldst not understand," he said.

"Tell me," she urged, "Perhaps I can help thee."

He looked at her curiously, and the memory of the long childhood days together held him silent for an instant, but only for an instant. "I have lived it out," he laughed, and laid bare his life since he had bid her good-bye in the old days. It was a wild and reckless life, full of the pleasures of gaming and drinking and roystering with the sailor lads in the public houses and inns. And now, he had struck a soldier, an officer in a great drunken glee, and must suffer the penalty therefor. He told his story with





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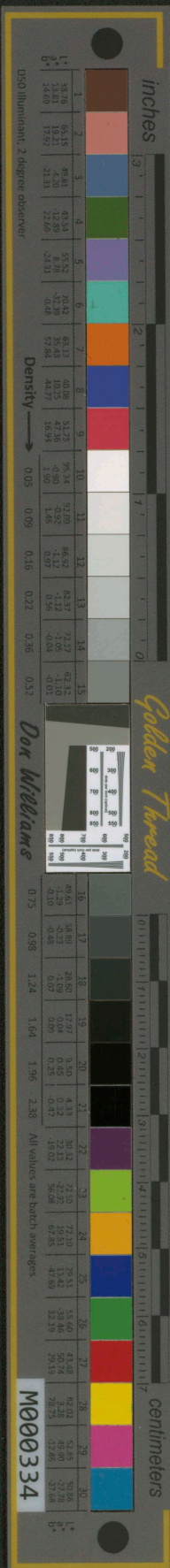
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a reckless defiance, and laughed when Hilma raised her eyes to him, sweet with tears of pity and reproach. But there was a quiver in the laugh, and a heartache in it too.

"Thou hast led a rude life," she said at length, "but thou wilt do better?"

"Who can say what will be done?" he replied indifferently.

"I will come and see thee again," she murmured quietly, and turned away.

But under the quiet calm was a tumult raging. She was wildly angry at the city which had led him astray; she wanted to meet his companions for whom he was disgraced. If she could have run to them and have beaten her hands against their faces, and have spat at them, it would have eased her heart. She ran blindly on, and the quaint old houses, with their gabled windows seemed to mock at her as she stumbled to her mistress's home.

And so another long weary night passed, full of plans and schemes and imaginings. Hilma was determined on one thing, Wolfe must be free. In all the strange fancies that floated through her mind, in all her futile plans and the wild throbbings of her heart, one idea stood out clearly from the rest, Wolfe must be free.

She went about her work the next day with down-cast mien and tear-heavy eyes. In the afternoon, the mistress called Hilma to her side where she sat at her embroidery frame.

"Thou art sad, my child?"

"Yes," was the reply in a choked voice.





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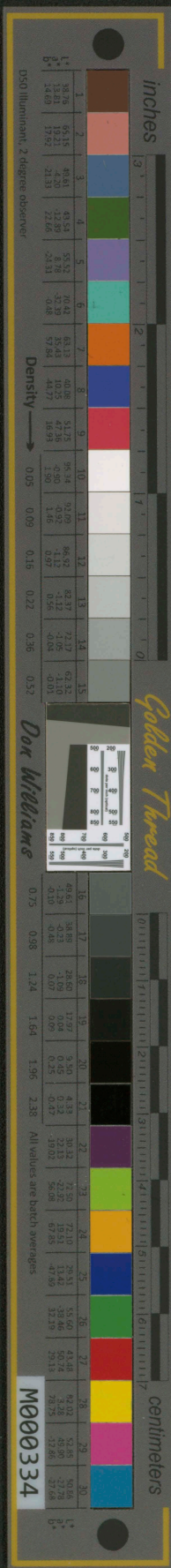
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"Is there bad news from home?"

"No."

"Art thou ill?"

"No, I am not ill, save here," and she clasped her hands over her heart.

"Thou must tell me thy sorrows."

"It is my Wolfe, my Wolfe Jansen."

The mistress drew herself up haughtily, "Thou art a foolish girl and most unmaidenly. It does not beseem thee to bring thy lover's name into my house."

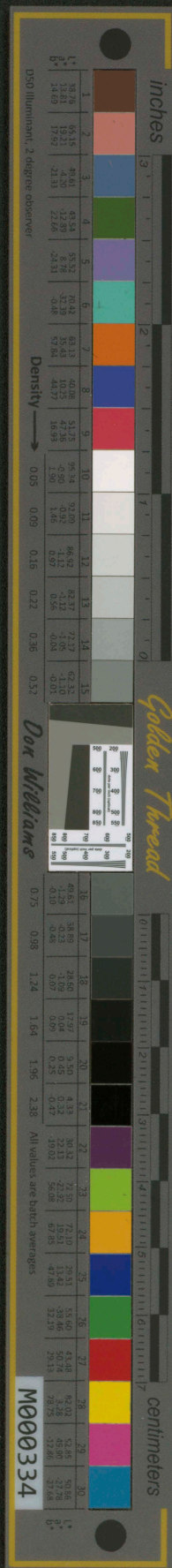
"He is not my lover," wailed Hilma, "He is my foster-brother, my comrade, the only one I have known. Ah, dear madam, forgive me, but my brother is in sorrow," and her sobs broke out afresh.

The mistress's heart yielded, and gently she bade the girl tell her the story. Hilma blushed with shame, but her voice thrilled with a love that she could not comprehend, and she stretched forth her hands, and begged that the lady, who was a power in the city, might save Wolfe.

"It is thy wish that he be released," she said, "And what then? Will he not go back into his roystering habits?"

"Oh, madam, I know he will not. I will plead and pray with him, and lead him into a better life."

"Thou must think of something more potent than thy prayers," the mistress made answer, for though she was a godly woman, she knew mankind, being a married woman, herself.





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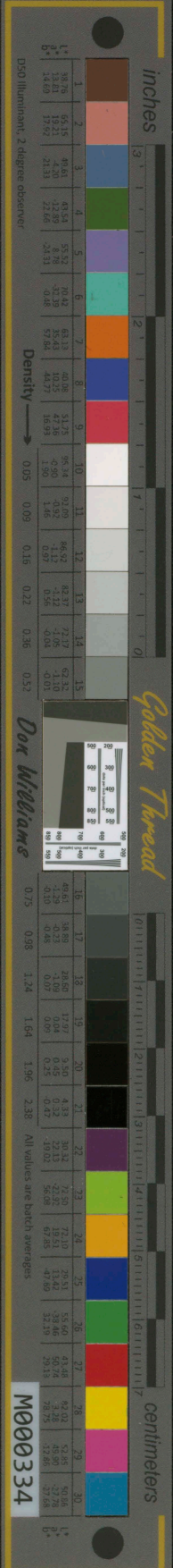
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"No, I am not ill, save here," and she clasped her hands  
 "Art thou ill?"

"No."  
 "Is there bad news from home?"





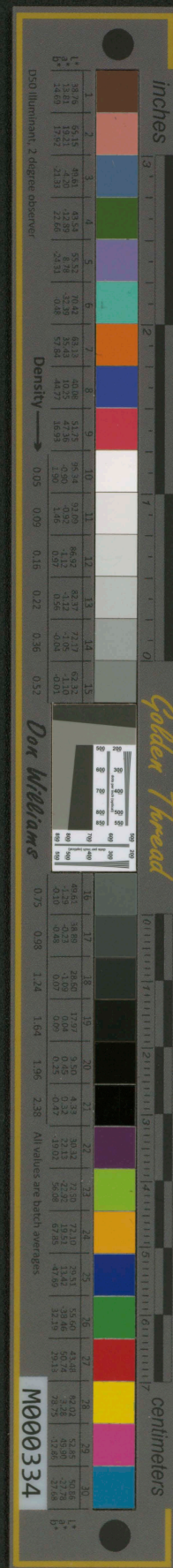
Nevertheless, the night heard Hilma's beseechings at her bedside, and then she fell into a train of thought. Deep underlying her supplications, there ran the hatred of the <sup>great</sup> city, with its temptations, and its pleasure loving men who had led Wolfe astray. Again, she heard the mistress' voice, "Thou must think of something more potent than thy prayers." Could it be true that prayer was not everything? Had she not trusted implicitly in her Christ-child? Something more potent? She said it over again and again, the thought came, why could she not send Wolfe home, away from the town and its follies? But this would not be possible, for she knew that the brown fields were as a thing that had served its use and been thrown aside. There was nothing there for him.

But he must go away, if the mistress would only get him free, there were other places, there was a land across the sea that she had heard of often since she had left home, a new land it was, and free and rich, "Oh, joy!" she cried aloud. The problem was solved.

It were too long a story to tell you how the mistress, who became thoroughly interested, used her influence to get Wolfe out of prison, or how Hilma prevailed upon him to cross the sea and seek a better fortune in that far off America.

"I have not the money," he said stubbornly at first.

"I have saved enough," she answered cheerily, "See," she laid a store of gold in his hands, "It has gone well with me here," she smiled at him, "and what is mine is thine also, my brother."





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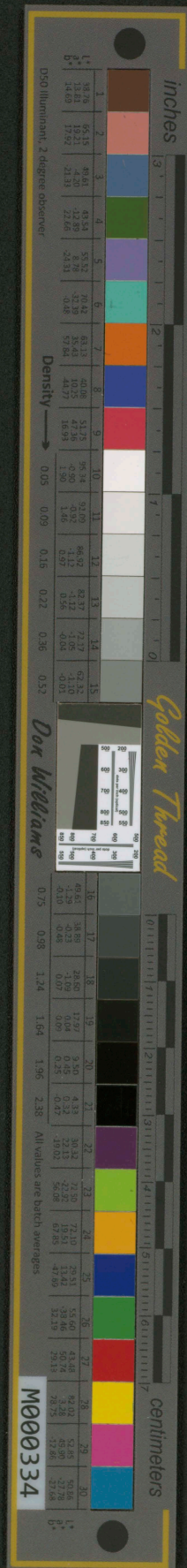
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"It is not fair to take the bread from the little ones."

"They have enough," she said, "and brother Wolfe, you will win fortune in America, and some day come back to us, so rich, so rich. Why, you will wear a gold chain, and be a great man."

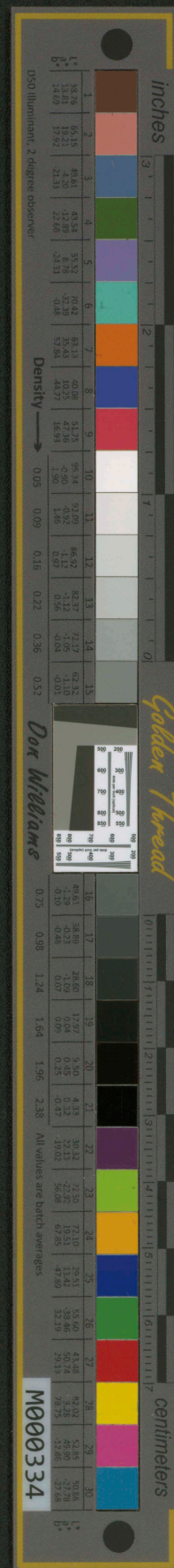
M<sup>rs</sup> smiled dully, "It is hard to be an exile," he muttered, They were walking the old quay at sunset time, and his heart groaned within him as he saw the sun sinking redly, while the spars of the anchored vessels cut black lines across the vivid sky.

"Thou wilt come back, Wolfe," she said tenderly, "a great strong man, or," she lowered her voice, and looked at him wistfully, "I will come to thee."

"Perhaps," he said shortly.

And so, a little while after, she bade him good-bye, and waved him farewell from the quay. He stood and watched her from the deck, and she smiled cheerily, but every wave that churned from the great ship's side seemed to her heart with sorrow. When there was no more of him to be seen, she turned and went her way to her mistress' home, and with half of sadness, half of joy, took up the burden of life again.

At first, the days dragged slowly, then they merged more swiftly into weeks, and months even. To Hilma, there was little to mark the time. Summer came, and autumn and winter, and the season to go home for a holiday, when she could mark the wee ones, wee ones no longer, but great girls and boys, and the gray-haired little mother. Again, she walked beneath the steely stars over the crisp fields, and dreamed of Wolfe, the ungrateful, from whom she had heard no word.





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So a year passed, and two years, and then a third, and to Hilma, there was lack of air in Stockholm, and the houses seemed to stifle as she walked under their quaint gables. She longed for Wolfe, and life, the life he was living. Again, as in the old days, she dreamed of him somewhere under a foreign sky, living apart from her, when her whole heart and soul longed for him. One day, she took out her <sup>savings</sup> earnings and counted them. Then she went to her mistress.

"I must leave thee," she said abruptly.

The mistress looked up surprised, "Thou art a good girl, and hast given me satisfaction. Art not content?"

"With thee and thy household I am, but within me, I am not. I would go to America."

"Thy lover bids thee?"

"I have not heard from him."

"Thou art going to find him?"

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Hilma was silent, "I had not thought of it in that way, but since thou hast said it, I am. I fear all is not well."

"It is a long journey for thee, and there may be disappointment at the end," said the mistress gently, "Perhaps he is dead."

Hilma threw out her hands with a sharp cry, "Not that," she pleaded, "Not that!"

"And thy mother, and thy younger sisters, and brothers, wilt leave them?"

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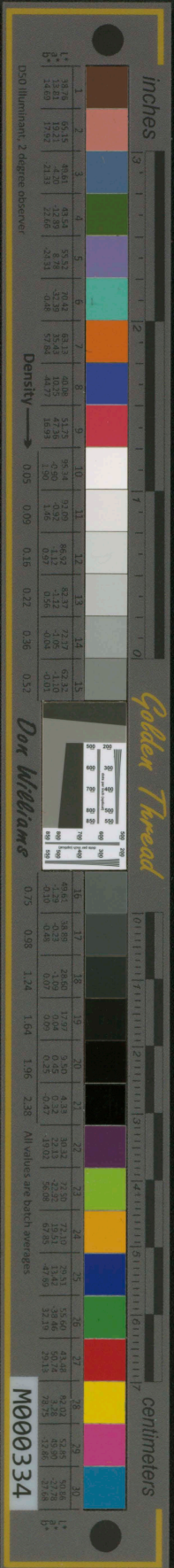
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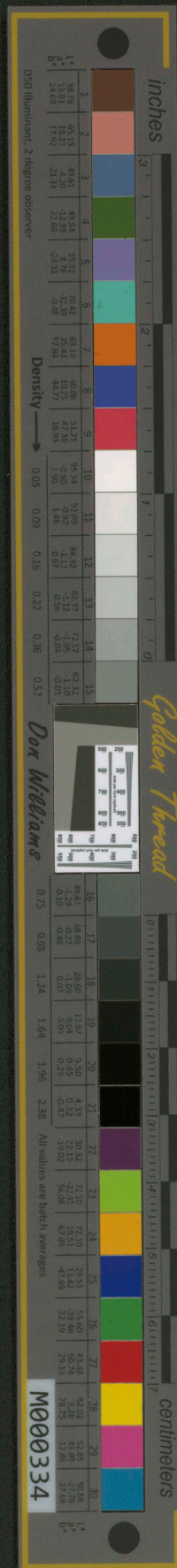
had thought I could leave them here, but I cannot." <sup>she</sup> wrung her hands pitifully, and stood irresolute for a minute. Then she raised her head proudly, "It will be hard for me to keep them with me," she said, "But I will, we will all go together."

The mistress bowed her head in silence. Before such a <sup>spirit</sup> ~~spirit~~ as this, she was mute.

The days which followed were dreary ones. The mother had to be reckoned with, the little place sold, and the good-byes said, and at last, the little family of seven turned their faces westward. There were more dreary days on the ship, and one or two bright ones, and <sup>again</sup> ~~dreary~~ days, when they turned their faces still farther westward over the great country that seemed to stretch out so bewilderingly large before them. "Out in the far west," <sup>she</sup> Hilma said to herself day after day. The good pastor had heard that Wolfe had gone there. "The far West" was not this already the end of the world? Could there be any farther country?

One day the ~~xx~~ wagon paused, and the little band of fellow-country-men who had met on the ship and had clung to each other, stepped out and looked about. It was the primeval time of the country, when the hand of man had touched nothing. All, all was laid before them to choose and keep for their own. Hilma gave a gasp as the joyous sense of freedom and unchallenged possession was in-borne to her, and they stayed, and called it home.

There were, besides the seven Hendricksons, eight other families from Sweden, and they grew close to each other in the soli-





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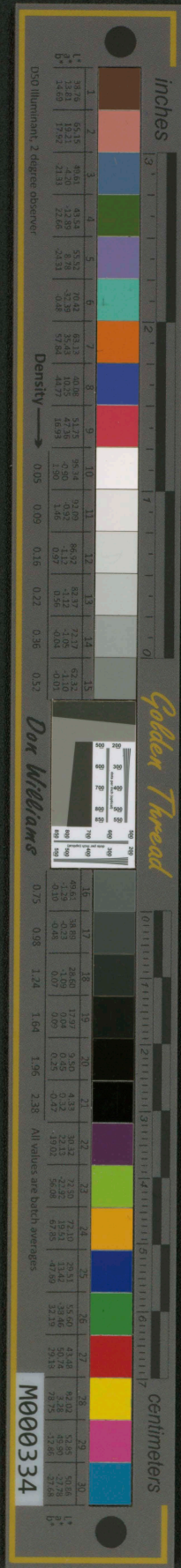
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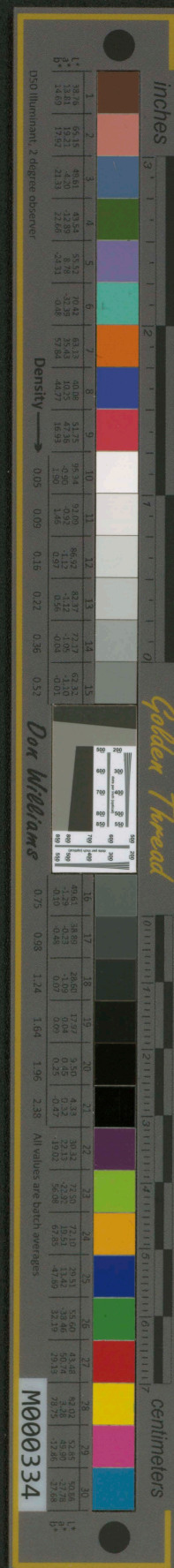
itude of the plains, and in the strangeness of the New World. When the great hush of nature hangs over man, he is abashed in his littleness, and turns greedily to his own kind for relief.

The life of the new world had begun at once for Hilma. Because she was the strongest of her little family, there fell upon her shoulders the task of a man. It was she who tilled and toiled and builded and planted, and rode her little pony about to look after their land. The gentle mother had given up, she had plead for a home in a great city, "It won't be so lonely," she said.

But Hilma said, "Nay, not in cities, mother, can we find health and fortune and happiness. Let us have land of our own again, and if the great country gives freely, let us take of its store."

And Hilma was wise, though beneath her wisdom, lay the thought of Wolfe, who had said, had promised that he would go to the great prairies and live with Nature, and be a man again.

Those were wondrous first days. Beyond the mountain range, and across the plain lay home and the old life, but resolutely, Hilma turned her thoughts away from homesickness and tended the life about her. All around were the dusty gray plains, stretching in interminable gray waves to meet the deep blue sky. Sharply to the west lay the snow-covered mountains, beautiful, awful in their emblem of majesty. Day by day, beneath their shadow, Hilma learned the lessons that nature taught. Day by day she watched the young ones grow strong and free and joyous, and her heart grew glad within her. But as yet, no one had heard of Wolfe, and those whom she asked





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laughed in her face, and told her that America was a big country. Then her heart sickened, and hope died down again, only to re-awaken next day.

A twelvemonth passed, and still another in the new home, and the tale of years since Wolfe had waved her farewell on the quay in Stockholm was now five. "Some day I shall find him," she whispered to herself morning and night, and hope kept her courage alive, and she went bravely about her work, and the land was fairer for her being.

It happened one day that she must go to a great ranch near by, to drive up some cattle, for they had land and stock now, and Hilma was a business woman, and did trading and selling. She had made frequent trips to the city near them, in her buying and selling and searched for Wolfe as in the old days in Sweden, but to no avail.

This was a big country, though she reasoned, and <sup>and there were many great cities like this</sup> some day when there was no longer need for her strength at home, she would travel far and wide and look until she found him. The thought that he had forgotten her purposely, or wished to know her no longer, had never entered her mind. Her own devotion was so single-hearted, so whole-souled, that she could not but think Wolfe<sup>0</sup> was the same.

On this day, she saddled her horse with a faint thrill of misgiving. Could it be that she was going to find Wolfe at last? She felt that her prayer was about to be answered, and strangely enough, there was no exultation in the thought, only a quiet sense of disappointment to come. Along the gray, dusty plain, she rode,





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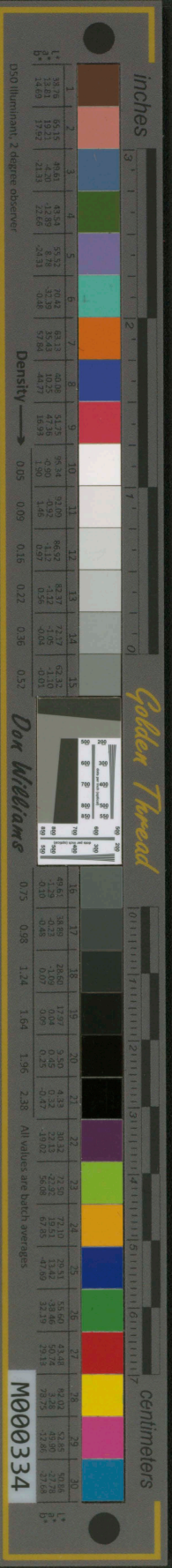
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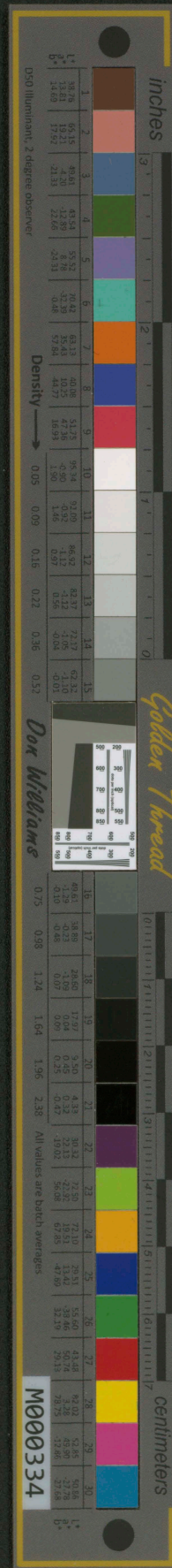




her broad hat shading the sun-tanned face; her voice ringing clear in the hushed air as she herded the stupid cattle into the drove that was to go to the ranch. She felt the restless wandering spirit coming upon her, and fought within herself to keep it down. A sudden distaste for the wild prairie life came over her, a longing for the softer things of the world, and a great, passionate heart-hunger, born of a woman's soul, for the protection and care of the one man on earth to her. Hilma did not deceive herself any longer; she loved Wolfe, and longed for him. The thought of the other little homes about her own, with their firesides and children, smote her heart. She might have sat a queen at one of them, but there were other things in life for her; the mother and little ones, and Wolfe.

Her head drooped, and her horse had dropped into a walk, while the lazy cattle straggled along the dusty road, which wound like a huge white snake far ahead, miles away over the low hills that rose and swelled and sank. They paused at a sandy-bottomed, sluggish creek to drink, ere they crossed to the far side. Hilma raised dull, unseeing eyes, half filled with tears, born of loneliness and heart-ache, when her glance encountered a white-covered wagon lazily coming down the other side of the creek. It was seldom that emigrant wagons came that way; their own little Swedish settlement had come all at once, four years ago, and its numbers had scarcely been added to since then. She reined in her horse again, and stopped, a motionless figure, clear cut against the deep blue of the sky.

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her broad hat shading the sun-tanned face; her voice ringing clear





across at her curiously,

"How far to town?" he shouted.

"Thirty miles yet," she made answer, gazing at him intently. Her woman's curiosity, whetted by the desire to see and talk with some one from the outer world, made her ride closer to the wagon and look yet more earnestly at the driver.

"Too bad," he muttered, "I have a sick man here, and he ought to be in bed."

"Oh," cried Hilma, "Is he so ill? What is the trouble?"

The driver looked at her blankly, not hearing the questions. "I must get him somewhere," he continued.

"Where?" asked the woman.

"He must be looked after," the man went on, "I can't be bothered any longer. I must go on."

"Let me see him," she said imperiously.

The owner of the wagon lifted the canvas cover. There was a quick flash of light across the sick man's face, but Hilma knew, even before that.

"He is a countryman of mine," she said simply, "I will take you to my house three miles away. You may leave him there. Come."

Silently she rounded up the cattle and turned them homewards. The covered wagon jolted along by her, and now and again a faint moan came from its covered depths. At each slight sound, she grew paler, and compressed her lips the more. Yet she found herself passionately thanking Heaven for having brought Wolfe to her, even









thus.

"Where did you find him?" she inquired of her companion.

"He is a city fellow," he replied contemptuously, "Came down to our place to try his luck. Got too gay, and someone plugged him with lead last night. Poor devil, didn't have a friend, nor a cent, nor a place to crawl to. I was coming down, <sup>to town</sup> and thought I'd bring him down aways. Started 'bout midnight, I guess, but missed my road, and wasn't sure where to turn until I saw you."

Hilma nodded, and her eyes filled with tears of gratitude.

"Thank you," she said.

"You know him?" the man asked, looking at her keenly.

"We were children together in the old country," she made reply.

The driver shrugged his shoulders, "Well, I hope he was a decent child, for the Lord knows, he's the most worthless man I ever saw."

"Why do you say that?" asked Hilma with some show of anger.

"No offence, miss, no offence, but he is. He won't work, and he will fight and swagger. I ain't no angel, myself, miss, I'll get drunk and fight too, but I do it off my own money. But this here--" he jerked a reproving thumb in the direction of the unconscious figure in the wagon, and gave another expressive shrug.

Hilma was silent, and they rode on for some time with the hush of the <sup>l</sup>pains about them. The driver ventured again,

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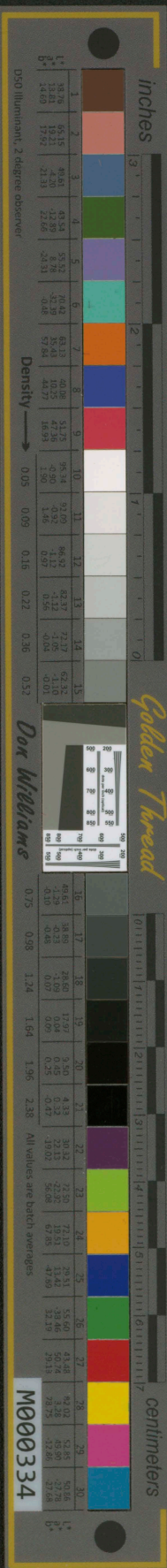
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"He is a city fellow," he replied contemptuously, "Same

"Where did you find him?" she inquired of her companion.

thus.





Hilma nodded her head, "Mine's Hilma Hendrickson," she made reply.

John Griffen laughed aloud, "Lord, you are a Swede," he said.

"I am not ashamed," she answered.

Griffen shrugged his shoulders again, and they rode on, without further conversation until the little brown house was sighted.

"Here is my home," she called, as she rode ahead to warn the mother.

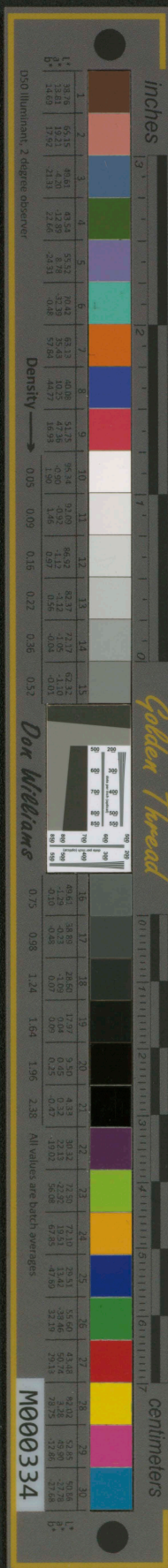
When the bleeding, unconscious form was laid on Hilma's bare spotless bed, she turned to Griffen, and shook his hand warmly, "I shall never forget you," she burst out impetuously, with tears in her eyes.

"Never mind, that's all right," almost shouted Griffen, backing out of the door, and stumbling over his own feet in his eagerness to be gone from what he feared might be a scene. He hastened to his wagon, and hurriedly drove away, waving his hat to the figure in the doorway.

It was a long fight with death that Wolfe had, and the gentle mother and Hilma stayed by his side, and helped him do battle, sternly, grimly. Little by little, inch by inch, they fought back the grim spectre, until one day, Wolfe sat by the open window, and gazed gratefully into the sunshine and into Hilma's eyes.

"God bless thee, my own one," he said, stroking her hand tenderly.

She made no reply but bent her head and kissed him, not





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as in the old days, but on the lips. And her cup of happiness was full.

"I am not worthy of thy care, my Hilma," he murmured contritely, "I have been basely ungrateful to thee, and my life has been no better than it was in Sweden."

"She pressed his hand, "Thou wilt do better," she said, "I have faith in thee. Thou wilt do better for my sake."

When the day came when he was well and strong again, she begged him to stay.

"I need thee here, I am not able to do all my work."

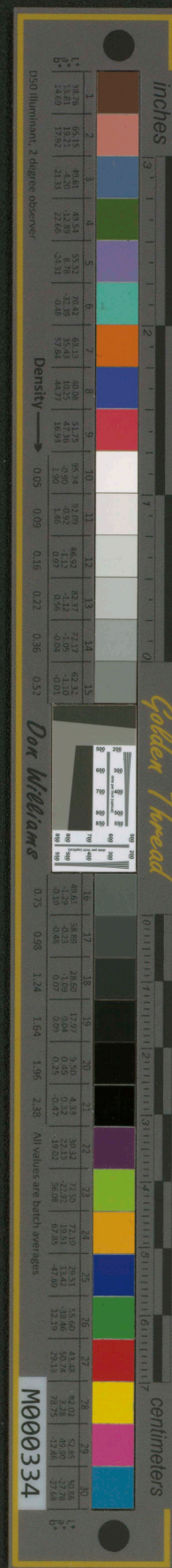
"Nay," he said, "I will not come to live on thy land, and to eat of thy toil-won bread. I will be a man, and make a home of my own."

She would have pressed money upon him, for he was penniless. He took the hand that held outstretched the silver, and looked at her reproachfully.

"Hilma, my dear sister, don't, don't ask me to take more from thee. Do you remember it was thy money that brought me here, and I have not repaid thee yet?"

"I have asked thee no pay," she smiled, "I have seen and talked with thee once more. It is enough."

"Nay," he continued, "I know thou thinkest I am a sorry man, but it is not so. When I came here, it seemed to me that I must not write thee or let me hear from thee until I could send back thy money. And so I kept silent, and at first, it seemed that I would soon have enough to repay thee. But a hard time came for me, and I





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lost my little savings. Then there were times when there was no work, and I fell into my odd habits, and forgot to work, forgot to care about my honor, aye, little Hilma, I forgot thee."

She winced a little but said bravely, "let us not think of that again. Thou wilt do better now, for thou hast me to think of."

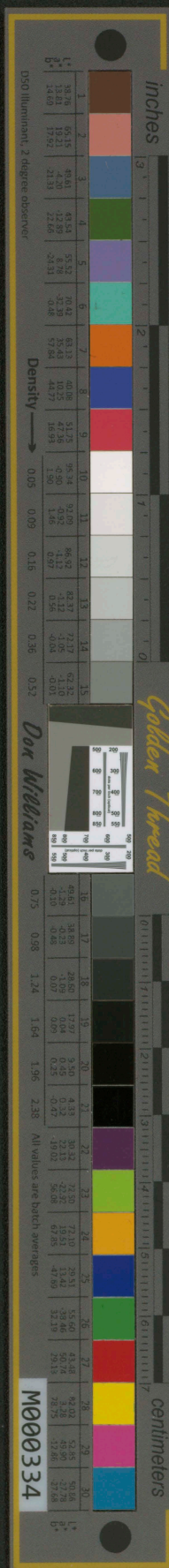
"I will," he said earnestly, and Hilma believed, and he went forth into the world again.

And now there passed a dreary space of waiting, when the mother sickened and drooped, and morning and night, her old eyes looked eastward with longing, and Hilma knew that her heart was yearning for Sweden, <sup>and that</sup> ~~and that~~ she wished to lay her head down in the old country to draw her last breath. The little ones were little ones no longer, but had grown into maturity, and sought homes of their own. There was nothing to hold her back from granting the fast-failing mother's wish. The daughter watched the mother's silent heart-ache, and her own heart was torn with longing to stay in the same land ~~where~~ <sup>where</sup> was her Wolfe, and the desire to do her duty.

And yet, she had heard no word of Wolfe.

The mother failed faster, and her heart seemed to cry aloud almost in every gesture for her mother-land. She ~~made~~ <sup>made</sup> no sound, but Hilma knew and understood, and longed to see Wolfe but once more before she went home. But he had again dropped out of her life, and ~~lost my little~~ <sup>lost my little</sup> ~~then there were times when I had no work, and I lost~~ <sup>then there were times when I had no work, and I lost</sup> was as much of a mystery as before.

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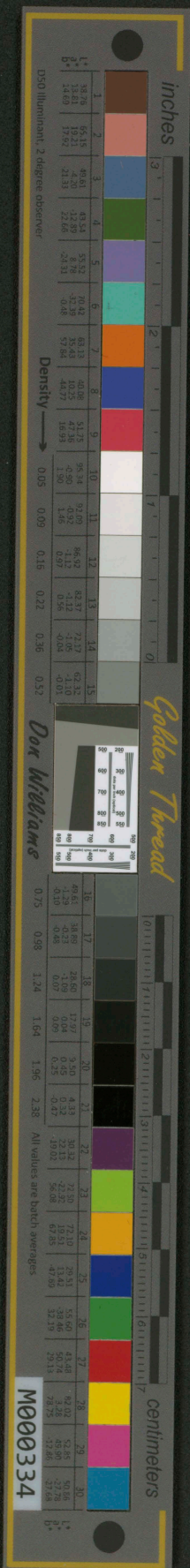
across the country and took ship for Sweden: The good pastor, grown more old and bent than ever, received them with loving kindness, and smiled with gentle incredulity at their stories of the new land in which they had lived.

"Thou hast told me many adventures," he said to Hilma at length, "But thou hast not told me of Wolfe Jansen."

And Hilma must perforce, stammer and blush, and falter forth what little she knew.

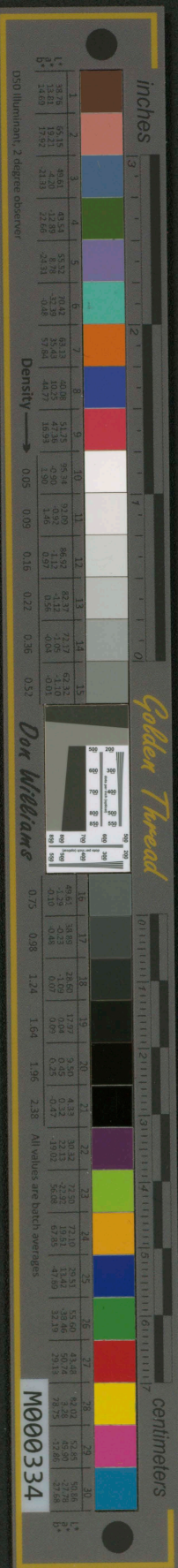
The winter soon came, and the long nights of steely stars, and crisp ground and white snow and black shadows. It was a dreary time for Hilma. She tortured herself a thousand times with questionings of Wolfe. Where was he? Had he ever gone back to the little ranch, and found it deserted, and wondered of her whereabouts? Had he succeeded in being a man, or had he gone back to his old life of boisterous drinking and gaming? It was a long time before the thought came to her like an icy chill that perhaps he did not love her after all. She turned it over in her mind in the long watches of the still nights, and lashed her heart with it as a monk lashes his back with the knotted cord. If he loved her, would he be so careless? Would he show such evident lack of anxiety to come to her, or to let her hear from him? They made her pale and thin, these thoughts, and the good pastor and his wife chided her for her increasing vigil with her mother.

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and turning her face to the wall, slept, and was awakened no more. It was many weeks, however, before Hilma realized that she was alone. The mother was gone, and those who had been wee ones once and dependent upon her, were big and strong, and needed her no longer. And, Wolfe, too, was independent of her, and her place in life was filled. In her bitterness of spirit, she longed with a feeling of passionate fury to turn her face to death, and perhaps, in the grave, find rest and maybe companionship.

The villagers came to comfort her, but their tender words were as ashes to a heart so seared. It seemed that she had no one who needed her more, and her one heart cry was to die, albeit she turned a faint smile to those about her.

"Wilt stay in Sweden, or wilt go back to thy Western home?" asked the pastor's wife one day. The winter was breaking, and already the storks could be seen flying northward.

"I know now," answered Hilma drearily, "My heart is there, but my mother's grave is here. Of the two, I know more of the grave!"

"Thou shouldst not speak thus," reproved the good woman. "We wish thee to stay, but thou art not content with our land any more. It is not like the fine country over there."

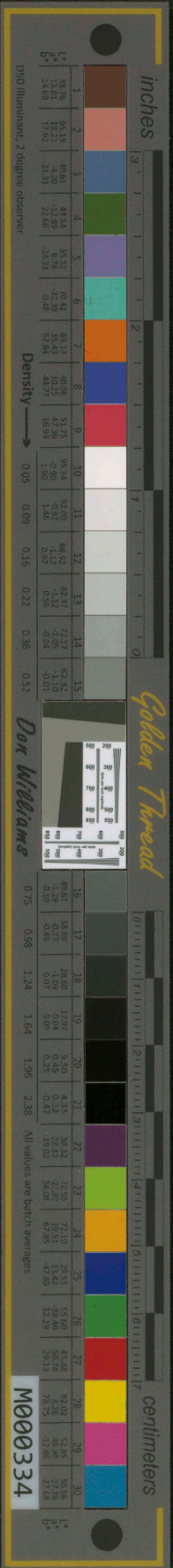
"I know not what to do," was the only reply. For once, the usually decided one was wavering and weak.

There came a day in May when the faint smell of spring was in the air, and the pale greenness of the earth showed that the summer and its gladness was soon to come. Hilma stood at the door drawing deep draughts of life and health and youth. She felt the blood in her veins, and the old longing to be up and away and in search of

7-3-114 Wolfe. A step came up the doorway, and a hand clasped her own, at









first timidly, then giving a stronger pressure as she turned her shining eyes on ~~its~~ owner.

"Wolfe!" she gasped.

"Hilma, I have come for your forgiveness."

"Where hast thou been?" she queried.

"Hilma, dost thou love me?"

"Aye, thou knowest."

"Then ask me no more. I am unworthy of thy love, of thy forgiveness, but I have come to thee, nevertheless. Wilt come with me?"

"Aye," and she put both her hands in his.

"God bless thee, my true-heart. Wilt never leave me?"

"I have never left thee, Wolfe."

"We will be together in the new country where there is strength and youth and work and life for us. Art content?"

"Aye, Wolfe, more content than thou knowest."

He took her in his arms and kissed her lips, and together they turned their faces west-ward, to the great new land they both knew and loved, where there was still happiness for Hilma, and redemption for Wolfe.

*Alice Wood Dunbar*





