

## SUN DANCE SUITE

### IV

The hot afternoon sun, relentless as the savage gods of which he is the chief, beats down upon the dancers in the roofless dance lodge. These, weary, fasting, thirsting, sleepless for four days and nights, propitiate the Sun on which they fix their eyes, propitiate Grandfather Night, and the Four Old Men who sit at the corners of the earth and send the winds to fill all living things with breath. There they stand, fasting, laboring like heroes in the heat, leaping up and down in their tracks, painted from head to heel, wreathed with silver sage, blowing their whistles of eagle-bone, while the musicians sing and beat the drum to cheer them on in their sacrifice. Close by sits the leader's wife- the woman who will give her body to the chief priest, as the Earth gives her body to the father Sun. And one after another the dancers, fastened to the center pole by a rope attached to skewers thrust through their naked and chests, swing back, tugging to be free, while the priests look on and the drums boom, while the wild voices toss their notes like jugglers, and the cruel Sun and the other gods look down well pleased, well pleased. It is cruel, it is hard; but who would not endure the torture and the fast? For he who refuses will die in the next fight. The gods will have blood, blood; the gods will have their blood!