

**THE UNCALLED:
A NOVEL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649726950

The Uncalled: A Novel by Paul Laurence Dunbar

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A Novel

BY

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

Author of "Lyrics of Lowly Life"



NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1898

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University Press

JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

Dedicated
TO MY WIFE

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THE UNCALLED



CHAPTER I

IT was about six o'clock of a winter's morning. In the eastern sky faint streaks of grey had come and were succeeded by flashes of red, crimson-cloaked heralds of the coming day. It had snowed the day before, but a warm wind had sprung up during the night, and the snow had partially melted, leaving the earth showing through in ugly patches of yellow clay and sooty mud. Half despoiled of their white mantle, though with enough of it left to stand out in bold contrast to the bare places, the houses loomed up, black, dripping, and hideous. Every once in a while the wind caught the water as it trickled from the caves, and sent it flying abroad in a chill unsparkling spray. The morning came in, cold, damp, and dismal.

At the end of a short, dirty street in the

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meanest part of the small Ohio town of Dexter stood a house more sagging and dilapidated in appearance than its disreputable fellows. From the foundation the walls converged to the roof, which seemed to hold its place less by virtue of nails and rafters than by faith. The whole aspect of the dwelling, if dwelling it could be called, was as if, conscious of its own meanness, it was shrinking away from its neighbours and into itself. A sickly light gleamed from one of the windows. As the dawn came into the sky, a woman came to the door and looked out. She was a slim woman, and her straggling, dusty-coloured hair hung about an unpleasant sallow face. She shaded her eyes with her hand, as if the faint light could hurt those cold, steel-grey orbs. "It's mornin'," she said to those within. "I'll have to be goin' along to git my man's breakfast: he goes to work at six o'clock, and I 'ain't got a thing cooked in the house fur him. Some o' the rest o' you'll have to stay an' lay her out." She went back in and closed the door behind her.

"La, Mis' Warren, you ain't a-goin' a'ready? Why, there's everything to be done here yit: Margar't's to be laid out, an'