

CHAPTER XI

DR. GREGG

HE had not noted it going in and coming out ; his mind had been full of the business in hand.

The house was somewhere in the middle of the street ; but then, all the houses were pretty much alike—one couldn't at this hour knock up house after house asking, " Does a lady live here named Miss Grey ? "

And she was lying there in bed, and he had taken the latch-key ! It didn't occur to him that he might try from house to house in the middle of the street till the latch-key found the lock it was made for. The fact had sandbagged his intellect for the moment, reducing it to hopeless confusion, in the midst of which the fanlight above the door blazed out, the door opened and a big man with a clean-shaved cast-iron face and a muffler round his neck, stood before the visitor.

" Are you Dr. Gregg ? " asked Anthony.

" I am," said Gregg. " What is it—an accident ? "

" No—it's about a lady, a lady that's ill. I've made a terrible mistake——"

" Come in," said Gregg.

He shut the door and led the way into the surgery, turning on the lights, Anthony explaining all the time, and Gregg, now that he had entirely illuminated his subject, standing and watching him with a look of sour disfavour.

This prosperous-looking, middle-aged gentleman in a coat with a fur collar—poor Anthony!—and a story about a girl whom he had left very ill in a house of which he did not know the number did not evidently appeal to Dr. Gregg. His frightful experience of the London middle-world did not tend to lend him sympathy with such a case, nor did his natural bent of mind.

“Grey,” he said, “of Rupell Street. I know her; she’s a patient of mine. That young thing—met her at a club, did you?—and went home with her? Yes, I have her address in my book.”

“Thank goodness,” said Anthony.

“Wait you here a moment,” said Gregg. He went into a little side office and turned on a light, and Anthony heard him fumbling with the pages of a ledger, heard him muttering to himself discontentedly, heard the ledger shut with a bang. Then he appeared.

“Have you found it?” asked Anthony.

“You wait here,” said Gregg.

He left the surgery.

Anthony, standing with one hand in his pocket and the other holding his hat, felt flattened out, almost like a criminal. The manner of the other man told of the contempt that was in his mind—contempt tinged with dislike.

He was only away a minute, and when he returned he was in an overcoat with a hat on his head and carrying a bag in his hand.

He showed the other out and followed him,

closing the door ; then without a word he turned down the street.

Anthony wanted to explain, wanted to say a lot of things with regard to his position in the affair. To tell how he had fallen in with the girl and how things had happened, so that, without ill intent, he had, in fact, and not to put too fine a point on it, gone to her house. It was a very difficult thing to explain in a creditable manner, and he gave it up, especially as he wanted all his breath to keep up with his companion.

“Got the key ?” asked Gregg as they reached the door.

Anthony produced the key, opened the door and they went upstairs. The lights were still burning but the little fire in the sitting-room had given up the struggle for existence and gone out. It seemed like a bad omen.

Gregg, after a glance round the place, unwound his muffler and putting it with his hat on the table went into the bedroom ; the folding doors closed behind him and Anthony found himself alone.

He had done his best ; right from the start of this business he had acted the part of the kindly-hearted man, and even of the good Samaritan, yet he felt cheap and mean. This iron-faced dispensary doctor had evidently condemned him, placed him at once in the category of a certain order of men about town—men whom he evidently disliked both from a personal and a professional point of view.

Ten minutes passed, and then the folding doors opened and Gregg returned, closing them behind him. The stethoscope he had been using stuck from the pocket of his overcoat and he didn't seem to see Anthony. He came towards the fire-place rubbing the knuckles of his right hand in the palm of his left.

"Where did you say you met her?" he asked, seemingly addressing the mantelpiece.

Anthony told.

"How did she seem then?"

Anthony told.

"Complained of her chest, did she?"

"Yes—— But first I want to explain. I was in this place with a friend. He left me. Then she came and sat beside me and we talked. She had come in with a young man, who left her. It seemed they had disagreed. When I rose to go she rose also and accompanied me out, for it seems she couldn't stay there alone; in the street I was going to have called a cab to send her home, but I couldn't offer her the money for the fare, so I drove her to the corner of this street. I felt pity for her and determined to see her to her door; then, somehow, I came in and up here with her. She was trying to light the fire and she began to cry, and then for the first time I saw how really ill she was. I made her get into bed and came for you. I just want to say that if you think I'm—another sort of man—I'm not. You know what I mean."

Gregg looked at the other.

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"Well, anyhow," he said, "it's fortunate you fetched me. It's a hospital case—pleurisy of the left lung."

"A hospital case?"

"Yes."

Anthony was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"Before I went for you she spoke to me and asked not to be sent to hospital."

"They all do," said Gregg. "They've got a horror of hospitals; but what's to be done?—they aren't ladies." He spoke with a strange sudden bitterness and began to button up his coat as if preparing to go. Anthony was silent for a moment.

"Not the hospital"—the appeal was still whispering in his ear. He had promised, but he was not thinking of his promise; he was in the grip of this creature, timid, friendly, seeking friendship, stricken, attaching herself to him with dog instinct. No, he could not allow that.

"She mustn't go to the hospital," said he. "She must stay here."

"But, man alive," said the other, "she can't. She has no money; they never have when it comes to the pinch—not these sort that aren't kept. I know all about her, for she's been my patient and I took a bit of interest in her. Stay here; how can she?"

"I'll pay what's necessary," said Anthony, not in the least realizing the extent of the commitment he

was entering into, and not in money alone. "I can't let her be taken to the hospital; she asked me and I promised her—and, after all, it's only the question of getting a nurse and paying her bill here; it won't break me," he finished with a little laugh as Gregg, who had advanced to the table and taken his hat, put it down again.

All this was very well, but how was he to know? If he took it on himself to keep the girl here, how was he to know whether this stranger would stick to his guns? She could be removed now, but later on it might be impossible, and if no money were forthcoming—

Anthony seemed to read his thoughts.

He took his card-case from his pocket.

"There is my card. Of course, I do not wish this matter known other than to you and me, and I will, if you please, leave something as a—in fact as a guarantee of good faith." He took from his pocket the note-case containing his money.

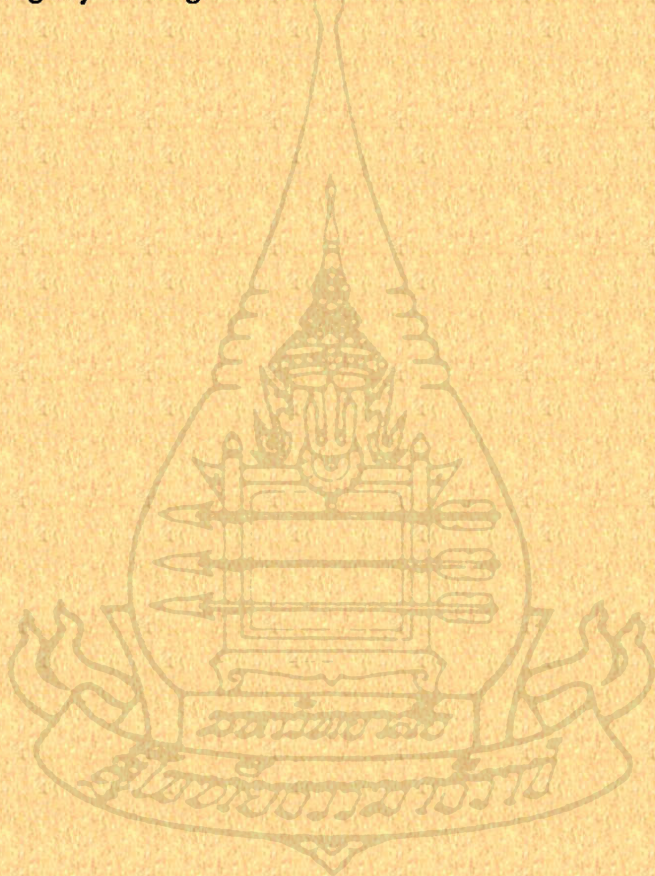
"I'll have to root out the landlady," said Gregg, "and put her in charge. She's a decent sort. She's a patient of mine too; in fact, it was on her recommendation Miss Grey came to me for medical advice. Put up your money; it'll be all right."

He went downstairs, and Anthony, waiting his return, went into the bedroom to have a look at the patient.

She did not notice him. Bright-eyed and flushed of cheek, she was watching something in the corner

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by the door, the strangest thing ever seen in a London lodging-house bedroom—a beaver building on the roof of his lodge with a background of brightly flowing water and far birch woods.



CHAPTER XII

AN ANARCHIST

HALF an hour later Anthony and the doctor were in the street.

A nurse living close by and known to Gregg had been sent for, the landlady was willing to do what she could ; the magic of Anthony had touched her, not to speak of the five-pound note he had handed to her privately.

“ I'll see her in the morning,” said Gregg, as they went along. “ That powder I gave her will keep her quiet and bring down the temperature a bit, but it's mainly rest and warmth and nursing that'll do the business, if it's to be done. You'll see me to-morrow, will you ? Not in the day-time—I'm too rushed—evening after eight. I shouldn't call at that house to see her, unless you want to specially ; she won't be any different for some days, and I'll see she's looked after.”

He was a different man from the Gregg of an hour ago.

Whatever truth there might be in Anthony's yarn, he had done the handsome thing. It was so easy to shoot the girl into hospital or into an infirmary ; it would have been so easy just to have left her and not gone for the doctor.

Anthony's yarn did not quite seem to hold water when common sense poured her jug full into it ; yet it was told with such evident sincerity that he

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could not help entertaining it. Stranger things had happened to his knowledge on the good side ; men weren't all brutes—far from it ; men, and even the most unlikely men, were strangely susceptible to the attacks of sentiment, especially where children and women were concerned ; and even if this old buffer had accompanied the girl to Rupell Street urged by promptings other than those of sentiment, he had acted like a trump in the end.

So as they walked together, Anthony with his eye out for a cab to take him to Westminster Court. Gregg the dour and ungracious warmed and expanded a bit, and talked like a man to a man.

The streets were deserted and there were no cabs to be seen.

“ You'll have to walk,” said Gregg. “ Or, if you like, come into my place and I'll telephone for a taxi and you can have a cup of tea while you wait. Me? Oh, that's nothing ; it's all in the night's work, and I haven't had much of that lately. I've got an assistant who does the midwifery.”

Arrived at the surgery, he led the way in by the side-door and then up a steep and carpetless stairs to the sitting-room on the first floor. Then he turned on the electric light and left Anthony whilst he went in search of the tea.

It was a large, comfortably furnished but not a cheerful room. A glass-fronted bookcase stood against the wall opposite the two front windows ; it held the library of Gregg : some bound volumes of

Chambers' Journal, some books on surgery and medicine, including the only modern medical work that is at the same time a work of literature—Watson's "Physic"—Marx's "Das Kapital," several of Wells's books on Socialism and Paine's "Age of Reason." Anthony turned. Gregg had entered the room with a small tray containing two large cups of tea and a sugar basin.

"The wife always puts the kettle on when I'm called out," said he, "and she knows by instinct when I'm coming back. Sugar?"

Anthony took his cup and they sat down. He would have preferred a whisky and soda, but the Greggs were evidently a teetotal household, and he drank his tea and accepted a cigarette, whilst Gregg lit a pipe and talked.

He talked of the girl they had just left and of the general condition of things of which she was in part the nucleus. He spoke with considerable bitterness, as though it were a personal matter.

"A fine life," said he, "life in those two rooms and the street. Man, think of it! And it's the same for the whole lot of the unattached brigade, and there's Lord knows how many thousands of them, and they're the best of the whole crew in my opinion, and I've seen twenty years of London. They keep themselves anyhow. But what a life! Breakfast at home, and then out; dinner maybe at a restaurant or maybe no dinner at all; no friends, no little household gods that a woman cares for; money enough to-day and none to-morrow, and

always walking in danger of disease, drink and dope. The hospital at the end and—a pauper's grave or the dissecting-room. And they're women."

"I don't know how they do it," said Anthony.

"Nor I," said Gregg. "There are some coarse and hard, and they don't care, though even those feel themselves under the blight more or less; but there are the good ones. That's the thing about women I can't understand; for there are good women who would rather cut their throats than do this sort of thing, and there are good women who fall into it almost, one might say, quite naturally. It's as if there was a barrier between their souls and their bodies. I've met girls leading this life who are quite simple and natural—aye, and I'll swear good. It's, I think, a sort of idiocy, a sort of anæsthesia in sex matters that lets them be like that; and no matter how pretty they are, they always come off worst in their trade."

"How is that?"

"Men don't care for them, that's how. They haven't the art of holding men and fooling them. From what I know of the girl Grey she's one of that sort—Grey's not her real name. She's a Canadian, came over with her mother—drifted over by that beastly war—and I imagine the mother wasn't any too good; but she's gone—dead, I believe. You never can get much out of women like this girl; they don't lie, but they won't talk much. I've known her a couple of months as a patient; she came about her chest, which isn't strong, though I

couldn't make out she was T.B.—anyhow, I expect this will do for her.”

“Do you mean to say she won't recover?”

“I expect her number's up; she hasn't stamina. And it's the best thing that could happen to her. Recover? What for?”

Anthony said nothing. He felt again the little hot hand that had taken his in the cab and he saw again the figure kneeling before the fire trying to light it and the shoulders shaking—everything he remembered, from the first moment of meeting her. He swallowed down something that was rising in his throat, sat forward in his chair and put the tips of his fingers together.

“Of course we'll do our best for her,” said Gregg, putting his cup away; “but I've forgotten your taxi. One moment.”

He went out and Anthony heard him ringing up on the telephone.

Then he came back and relit his pipe.

“We'll have a taxi up in a minute. It's near four o'clock; but that's nothing. I expect you're often out at night clubs and balls and things later.”

“No,” said Anthony. “I'm generally in bed by eleven. I've never been in a night club before, and I never want to be in one again.”

“I've never been in one,” said Gregg. “I only know of them from hearsay, just as I know of the gambling hells like Monte Carlo and the fools who spend their lives playing games and exhibiting

themselves in the illustrated papers. All that sort of thing oughtn't to be advertised—the tension is getting too big. I've been feeling the pulse of Dirt and Misery for twenty years, and I know what's coming, and coming quick."

"Are you a Socialist?" asked Anthony, remembering the books on the shelf.

"No," said Gregg. "I'm an Anarchist. So would you be if you'd seen what I have seen and heard what I have heard and touched what I have touched."

"Oh," said Anthony. He guessed that the doctor was using hyperbole.

Every man is a dictionary, and his definition of words is ruled by his education and experiences.

Turning the pages of Anthony to the word Anarchist you would have found, "A bearded person who flings bombs for political purposes, sometimes a woman; a wretch who would destroy society by violence."

Gregg did not answer somehow to this description; in fact, his hard-faced general practitioner had made a strong and very different impression upon his visitor. Anthony had never met a man like this before. There was something ruthless about Gregg, yet something the reverse. He meant it when he said the girl had better die, yet he would do all in his power to save her; Anthony felt that.

He watched the other as he smoked and looked over his visiting list for the next day, seeming to

have forgotten his visitor for a moment. Then when the taxi-horn sounded outside he rose and took his hat.

Gregg showed him downstairs and to the door.



CHAPTER XIII

NO!

THE cab was a fashionable taxi, new, clean, well-upholstered, with a flower in the flower vase and the ash of a Corona-Corona in the ash-tray.

As it drove off a feeling of relief came to Anthony, as if at the waking from a troubled and rather unpleasant dream; all that seemed behind him, he wished somehow it had never occurred; and yet —and,

No!

No, a hundred times no, he would not have undone anything he had done that night, nor unsaid anything he had said that night, nor obliterated a single thought that had passed through his mind.

This great fact, and it was a great fact considering the cinematograph aspect of the case, came home to Anthony with a bump as the taxi took the pre-dawn howling desolation of Regent Street.

Not only had he done and thought nothing bad, he had done something positive in the way of good. He had saved that child from the hospital and he had comforted her.

It was the funniest and pleasantest feeling, this warm recognition of his own warm-blooded acts, and he had done it all half-unconsciously, pushed along as though by a directing finger, moved along by liking and a feeling of kindness that grew to pity, led on, prompted by no low ulterior motive.

He did not say all this to himself, he felt it. "I have done good." There are few statements a man can make to his own heart so potent as that, so satisfying, so rare if it is made in perfect honesty.

"I have done good to a fellow-creature, real, round, solid, practical good—and, damn the consequences."

Anthony got out of the cab and paid the driver a shilling over his fare and entered Westminster Court. Westminster Court was built by Whitaker Wright (or was it Jabez Balfour?), gentlemen who did a vast deal of evil in their lives, out of which, however, some good has come, for Westminster Court and other palatial buildings of their invention are most convenient resting-places for the wealthy.

They built broad and strong, these gentlemen, and high. Westminster Court is seven storeys tall, and Anthony's room was on the sixth—nothing when the lift is running, which it wasn't now.

"Never mind," said he to the night porter, "I'll walk."

He felt fit to climb Mont Blanc, and the first flight of stone stairs were scarcely perceived by him, so filled was his mind with a new energy engaged in turning over new thoughts.

That child—her case was enough to move a stone to pity. It was like a person drowning—a kitten drowning—something had to be done—permanent, something to "keep her out of it" once she was well—if she got well. He knew rich men

who would help, and there were all sorts of good women who would give a hand.

On the third flight of the stony stairs he paused to draw breath. What a height this place was! The image of the girl which he had been carrying with him was still an inspiration, but he was beginning to feel it as a weight.

Yes, he would tell Selina about her, tell her straight out and get her to interest some of her friends.

He actually said this to himself, and meant it; the untruthful telegram he had sent to Selina scarcely troubled him. He felt capable of confessing the whole circumstance with a laugh, letting it be absorbed in the major issue.

On the fifth flight he paused again.

The climb was exhausting him; his new-found energy had almost vanished and his ideas had become clouded. The cold marble walls and the pitiless stone steps of this palace of the wealthy seemed against him; the electric lights, for ever burning, seemed eyes watching him. All around the rich and well-to-do were sleeping in layers.

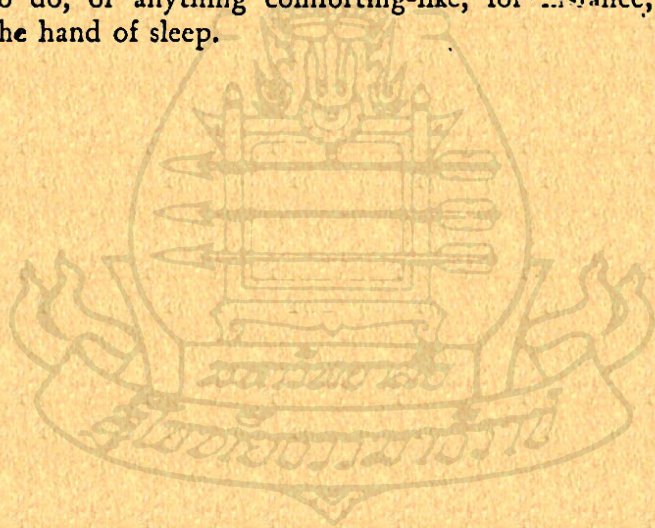
Anthony was too tired and winded now for connected thought, but he felt an indefinable drag other than that of gravity; all these well-to-do and rich people through whose hall of slumber he was ascending seemed surrounding him with an atmosphere deadly to enthusiasm; it was like climbing through jelly as well as through space.

On the top step of the last stair he did a weak

thing—just sat down for a moment to rest on the stone step. His room was quite near and he had physical energy enough to reach it, but he felt so dead tired and puniped that he could not wait; like a thirsty person who snatches at a drink from a puddle though nearly in reach of a well, he sat down. Tiredness had frizzled up all his ideas into one clinker of thought; what a fool he had been to stay out so late till the lift had stopped running!

Ten minutes later he was in bed with the lights out and just stepping into dreamland.

Anthony was very like a child in some respects, ever ready to grasp at anything easy and pleasant to do, or anything comforting-like, for instance, the hand of sleep.



CHAPTER XIV

ISAAC COBORNE

HE awoke with an unpleasant taste in his mouth and a great depression of spirit.

He awoke feeling debauched and wicked and with the feeling that he had done all sorts of things which he oughtn't to have done, and which he couldn't remember. He had been climbing stairs all night in his dreams, hunting for Selina, he had knocked at door after door of flat after flat and all sorts of dream-people had opened to him, but not Selina.

Now, when the last mists of sleep had parted so that he could see the tea-tray the valet had placed by his side, the gnat for whom he had been hunting in his dreams stood before him, cold, voiceless, but questioning: Well, what do you want me for?

Ah! that vile telegram, that silly little lie, that piece of stupidity. He had to face it to-day. He knew now why he had been hunting for Selina in his dreams.

Then, rapidly, came up before him all sorts of unpleasant things—the noise of the band in the night club, Rupeli Street, Gregg, Gregg's surgery, the whole business of the night before, all tinged with the gloom of dark streets and sordid houses and all seeming skewered on the unpleasant business to be done that day in regard to the telegram.

Then he poured himself out a cup of tea, and felt better after he had drunk it.

It was strange that the one serious point in his escapades—the girl and the burden he had taken on himself in a financial way—did not bother him. On the contrary, after a second cup of tea and a slice of bread and butter the remembrance of her came to him as an uplift.

He had done a good thing. The good thing came to him like a knight in armour tilting against the little mean thing, the petty lie whose consequences he had to face, gave him stiffening and buckram—uplift.

Holding the girl in mind he was raised and strengthened. The philanthropist he had dropped on the stairs last night was with him again, telling him pleasant things about himself, and the ghost of Selina, asking him what he wanted with her, had all but vanished.

An hour later he was in the lift descending to breakfast in the restaurant.

There were a good many people, breakfasting, small family parties, elderly gentlemen reading *The Times* and unattached females reading letters—a mute, cheerless crowd through which Anthony passed shepherded by the head waiter towards a little table by one of the windows.

Half-way across the room he stopped. Right before him, seated breakfasting alone, was his wife's cousin Isaac Coborne, a rosy, cheery-looking, middle-aged person, Squire of Lyndham, and sometime master of the harriers, evidently just up from Wiltshire, waiting for his eggs and bacon and reading the sporting news in the *Daily Telegraph*.

"Hullo," said Anthony. It was a pleasant surprise. Isaac had always appealed to him as the one endurable person amongst his wife's relatives; but Isaac was more than that: he was one of the men who are born popular, every man's friend and the friend of a good many women.

Never could you have imagined him as the cousin of Selina Harrop, or only on the express understanding that the Almighty had extracted all the colour, bonhomie and general good-nature from Selina and bestowed them on Isaac for some inscrutable reason.

"Hullo," said Isaac. "Where have you sprung from; is Selina here?"

"No," said the other. "I just stopped here for the night coming through from Birmingham. See you after breakfast. I'd like to have a chat with you."

"Right," said Isaac, and the other passed on.

This was good. Anthony had just discovered the fact that he was in need of a confidant to open his mind to, and of all men in the world he would have chosen Isaac. He knew Isaac so well for what he was, a straight, trustable, honest individual, no saint; a man of the world, a good judge of port wine and pretty girls, a collector of the best smoke-room stories, no saint, indeed, but better, a man with a heart: a man you could tell anything to. Yes, decidedly, a man you could tell anything to.

After breakfast he followed Coborne into the lounge.

The Squire of Lyndham was lighting a briar-root as Anthony approached him folding the newspaper he had been reading at breakfast.

Anthony threw away the paper and, disregarding his rule never to smoke before luncheon, lit a cigarette, taking an easy-chair close to the other. They chatted for a while on nothing and then Anthony leaned forward.

"Look here, Co, old man," said he, "I want to tell you something." He spoke with a little laugh and with a lowering of the voice that at once intrigued Isaac.

Anthony was like many another of his kind—he tended to take his mental colour and even maybe something of his morality from his environment, he wanted to tell about that girl and his relationship to her. He did not laugh the night before on explaining the position to the iron-faced Gregg, but the twinkling eyed Isaac was an audience quite different, a different atmosphere, a different incentive.

"Go ahead," said Isaac.

"I went to the theatre last night with Mandelberg," said the other—"he's my partner, you know—and after that we dropped into a night club—silly place."

"They are," said Isaac, "specially if the police happen along. You didn't get juggled, did you?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that; it's about a girl."

"Oh, a girl," twinkled Isaac.

"Yes, a girl."

He told his story.

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Many a man gets up to make a speech and half-way through finds that he is making, also, a fool of himself, that his audience doesn't follow his drift and is taking him wrongly.

Half-way through his story Anthony almost wished he hadn't begun.

He had landed himself in this room in Rupell Street with a pretty girl, and he had absolutely failed to explain in a manner bearing conviction the innocence of the business, the subtle little promptings and leadings, the kindly feelings, the indecisions and want of steering power that had brought him there. He had begun maybe on a wrong note with the little laugh and the lowered voice of the man who has "something to tell you," for the influence of Isaac had done its work with this drifter just as the influence of the girl and the influence of Gregg.

It was a nobler story that he told to Gregg, just because Gregg was a nobler audience.

"And there it was," said Anthony. "She was ill—very ill—it knocked me all to pieces to see her like that. I went right out and fetched a doctor; he came back with me, said she had pleurisy and must go to the hospital, but I wouldn't let him send her."

"Why not?" asked Isaac.

"She asked me not, she seemed to have a horror of the hospital—they all have—at least Gregg said so."

"But, my dear chap," said Isaac, "that's all very

well, but surely the doctor ought to know. These women ——”

“She’s not a woman,” said Anthony, “she’s just a girl, almost a child, without friends; a Canadian, whose mother drifted here in that beastly war and who died or disappeared and left her here alone in London.”

“I know—I know,” said Isaac, “and then you picked her up in a night club, or she picked you up—it doesn’t matter, but there it is—you refused to let her be removed to hospital; that means, of course, that you will be saddled with expenses.”

“It won’t be much.”

“Oh, well, maybe not, but one never knows; illnesses run into expense, but I’m not thinking so much of the money, it’s just these sort of people tend to cling if one gets tangled up with them. Now I’ll give you a bit of advice, Anthony, and it’s the advice of an old stager—cut your losses in this business, send that doctor man a cheque and have done with it. Forget the girl ever existed.”

“The bother is,” said Anthony, “that something ought to be done for her.”

“How d’you mean?”

“When she’s well, if she recovers, something ought to be done for her. I want to interest people in her.”

“Oh, she’ll find lots of people to do that,” said Isaac with a little laugh.

“I don’t think so,” replied Anthony, “not the right people, anyway, and if you saw her and knew

her you'd understand what's in my mind. It's a woman's job, really, and surely there are lots of really good women about to lend her a hand."

"Oh, in that way, yes," said Isaac; "you might do something in that way, and I believe I could help if you let me take the matter in my own hands. What I want to guard you against, Anthony, is complications. You've never thought of that. You see, if you go on messing about in this thing and it got to the ears of Selina——"

"I thought last night of telling her the whole business," said Anthony.

"You can't do that—how can you? Think of the bald facts."

"I know. It's difficult. I couldn't do it. I only thought of it last night. Well, you say you can help. What do you propose?"

"A home of some sort is the thing," replied the other—"a home for women, fallen women; you see they make a business of it and understand them. There's a House of Mercy in Dorset; I could work that through our parson, Devizes; nice country air, and I believe they feed them well and they pick up a trade and that sort of thing—only, of course, she'd have to be willing to go."

"Naturally," replied Anthony.

The plan did not appeal to him, but he did not reject it. A curious feeling came to him that he had never till now really met Isaac. What Isaac said was right enough and reasonable, but this jovial good-liver, this ruddy, kind-hearted easy-going

friend of all the world seemed suddenly to have developed a curious hardness and coldness: something that made his port-wine fed bonhomie cheap and second-rate—a velvet glove on an iron hand.

“Naturally,” said Anthony.

“Not that I think it’s a ha’porth of use,” went on Isaac; “if she’s as attractive as you say and as young—well, there you are. She’s not going to sit in a stuffy room doing needlework when she could be free and out and about. Still, if you *will* make a—if you *will* go in for this sort of thing, I’ll help, on the conditions that you’ll leave everything to me and cut yourself quite adrift ‘fron. it.”

“I’ll think of it,” said Anthony.

This answer seemed slightly to irritate Isaac. You see, he was a kinsman of Selina’s, he disliked her owing to a small legacy business by which she had benefited at his expense—still, she was a kinswoman and he was a country gentleman, not quite of the County, perhaps, for there was a biscuit factory hidden somewhere in the Coborne family, but County enough to make him highly sensitive to any breath of scandal. He knew Anthony and reckoned him soft—he had a keen eye for men as well as women, had Isaac—and he considered it likely that Anthony, falling into an affair of this sort, might, with the able help of an outraged Selina, make a pretty mess of things. It was like a soft-shell crab falling into the clutches of a squid. That girl was evidently a squid, a clinger, that had in

half an hour or so got her tentacles round her victim.

"You'd better not think about it," said he. "Come, be a man. I'll go to this fellow Gregg—Endell Street, you said—and give him a cheque; ten or fifteen pounds would clear the matter, and you need never hear another word about it."

"I'll see," said Anthony.

He had suddenly and quite definitely made up his mind that he didn't want "never to hear another word about it," quite definitely made up his mind that his interest in the creature should not be cut short by the scissors of Isaac. The affair was the only interesting thing that had happened in his existence for many years; his sympathy was real and his flabbily beating heart had been stirred to a sort of new life as by a dose of spiritual digitalis.

Arrived at this determination, he did not express it; that wasn't his way. It was easier to say "I'll think about it" than "No." Driven from "I'll think about it" he took refuge in "I'll see," and Isaac left it at that—had to.

"Well," he said, "of course it's your own affair. I've given you my advice—think it well over."

"I'll let you know," said Anthony, and they parted.

It was after one o'clock when he drove up to Marlborough Terrace with his suit-case.

Selina was at luncheon, and leaving the case in the hall he went right in, hurriedly, as one goes into the dentist's parlour. She was seated at the end of

the table with her back to the window; a rather colourless, thin-lipped woman, eating a rissole assisted by a piece of dry bread and a fork.

"Well, I'm back," cried Anthony, advancing on the garrison with a cheerful countenance, rubbing the knuckles of his right hand in his left palm, and taking his seat with a flourish whilst the maid laid a cover for him.

He didn't give Selina time to talk—he rattled away, carried along on a full tide of energy. It is so very often with the nervous man who, dreading a speech subconsciously, dams up a flood of energy, to be loosed at the critical moment.

Then when a rissole had been placed before him—he loathed rissoles!—and the servant-maid had withdrawn, Selina said: "That Mr. Mandelberg called to see you, and a few minutes after he had gone a telegram came from you saying you were staying in Birmingham with him."

"With Mandelberg?" said Anthony, in a tone of surprise. "Shires, you mean."

"No, Mandelberg."

"Have you got the wire?"

"Yes." She rose up, and opening the drawer of a little table by the window gave him the telegram in its envelope.

"Well, I must be going off my head," said Anthony, with his glasses on his nose and the thing spread out before him. "I meant Shires. I was staying with Shires of the Burlingham Company. Mandelberg wrote asking me to see Burlingham on

important business, and Burlingham suggested I'd go at once to Birmingham and see his partner Shires. It's about a business loan. I was rushed when I was writing this—silly of me.”

He put the thing aside and went on with his rissole. The lie Mandelberg had suggested had come to him in the taxi, accompanied with the sudden recognition that no one could ever dispute the statement, for who could say he didn't mean Shires when he wrote Mandelberg, and he *had* been staying with Shires—in a way.

Scelina went on with her luncheon. She was a level-headed woman who never got excited, passionless as the milk pudding presently to appear. I doubt if she would have made much of a scene even if she had known the truth. That isn't to say that the consequences would have been light for Anthony.

It transpired as the cheese was placed on the table that she was dining out that night with her sister Amelia, who lived in Powis Square, a fact that came as a relief to Anthony.

He never dined at Amelia's. Didn't get on with her. Anthony (I have been turning him over and over and finding all sorts of soft places on him) had, all the same, his hard spots, and they were hard as iron when found, and very often when you dissected them you found that they had once been soft spots, grown hard.

In his early married life he had welcomed Amelia, a fluffy blonde married to a stockbroker and seemingly harmless, kindly—beneficent almost. Then,

presently, the fact of Amelia's existence began to bear in on him in another way. She was always borrowing the cottage at Caversham, she would come and camp for the day in Marlborough Terrace, and she interfered with things. Anthony stood it all for several years; then he hardened at the place where she rubbed him.

The easy-going man who, as a rule, took the path of least resistance, suddenly resisted.

It was a surprise for Selina; she did not think he had so much hard stuff in him, such tenacity and obstinacy. She was not exactly displeased, either; the borrowings and campings and petty dictations came practically to an end. Amelia drew off sniffing, hating Anthony in a small way but still on sisterly terms with Selina.

“If you're dining out,” said he, “I'll have a chop at the club.”

He went off to his study to have a smoke and look over the letters that had come in his absence. This study, situated behind the dining-room and looking on a back-yard, or, rather, hiding a back-yard by means of a half-stained-glass window, had about it a touch of the sinister, lent, maybe, by the contrast of its narrowness with its loftiness.

The whole house, as I have said before, suffered from height, unredeemed by breadth, and nowhere was this more evident than in the study.

His post lay waiting for him on the table—mostly circulars, which he flung in the waste-paper basket. Having dealt with the rest he sat down to smoke.

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Anthony had spent many an hour in this study of his with a pipe in his mouth and his eyes following the pattern of the carpet, the pattern of the wall-paper, resting on the old familiar furniture, on the book-backs showing through the glass of the book-case, whilst he sat thinking of nothing in particular, with the last novel from the library lying on the floor beside him or the skimmed newspaper.

To-day was different—he had something to think about. The hôtel at Birmingham, Shires, that absurd telegram which had been weighing on his mind ever since four o'clock on the previous day, that lie of which his mind was now relieved. Gregg and the girl.

The Girl!

Here in this narrow, dull room, so emblematic of his life, the picture of the girl suddenly came to him, divorced from all its unpleasant surroundings, free of the night club and the rooms in Rupell Street and of Gregg's dismal surgery, divorced from all thought of the dreadful trade of which she had been the slave.

He felt the little hand again in his—seeking his protection.

Yes, she had known that she was ill, and she was in want of a friend, and instinctively she had made up to him.

Quite well he knew himself and his age and his appearance; no woman would think twice about him unless for what she could get from him, no woman would bother about him as a man; and yet

this girl—no, of one thing he felt certain, it was not for money or money's worth that she had attached herself to him: there was no calculation in the business. She had been moved by the human instinct that craves for friendship, the desire of the lonely for companionship, the craving of the weak and sick for help—nothing more. But the recognition of this did not alter the romantic hold which she had established upon him. The only bit of romance that had entered into his dull life was no less potent because pure as a daisy; and at the same time no less pure because, only for her sex and youth and prettiness, it would not have existed.

You will have noticed that the knight-errant of old never set out to rescue plain ladies of fifty; the height of their chivalry had only one measure—the standard of youth and beauty. It was the same with Anthony, suddenly and truly called to enrol himself in the list of the Knights and in the aid of Beauty in distress.

However, he was unaware of this fact or of the nature of the battle still before him; otherwise he would most likely have crawled out of the arena whither he had strayed less by choice than by accident and want of decision and self-guidance.

He would have taken Isaac Coborne's advice and cut free from the whole business. Or would he not?

I don't know.

He was seated forward in his chair tapping the ashes out of his pipe against the grate before

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refilling when the door opened and Selina stood before him. She was dressed for going out.

“ You are dining at the club then ? ” said she.

“ Yes, ” said he.

After a few words on some indifferent matter she departed, closing the door. He listened and heard the shutting of the hall door, refilled and lit his pipe.

Was her manner different ? Had she, on turning the whole matter over in her mind, rejected his story about Shires ? He couldn't tell. Her manner was never particularly warm-hearted or effusive, and it might be only his imagination ; besides, what did it matter ?

Reaching across to the table for the newspaper he put on his glasses and began to read, skimming over the news of the day. Then he laid his pipe down and presently, with the paper across his knees, he dropped off into a doze, forgetful of Selina, the girl, and the whole world around him.

CHAPTER XV
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As a rule, even when dining alone at the club, he dressed for dinner, but he did not dress to-night. He left Marlborough Terrace a little after six and at the club he ordered a chop for a quarter to seven. As a rule he never dined till half-past seven : however, he was breaking rules to-night.

He told himself that he had promised to see that man Gregg ; the evening was fine and he would walk—he wanted exercise.

He left the club at quarter-past seven, and the desire for exercise having wilted, under the influence of a half-bottle of Pommard, he hailed a taxi and drove to New Oxford Street. Here he got out and walked.

To reach Endell Street he would have to pass the opening into Rupell Street, and as he drew nearer he slackened his pace a bit, debating in his own mind whether he would go and have a look at the patient, before seeing the doctor.

Gregg had told him he needn't ; Gregg, in fact, had recommended him not to go there, saying there would be no alteration in her condition for some days. Gregg, Anthony fancied, had tried to hedge him off, just as Isaac Coborne had done, only without the direct speech of Isaac.

Anthony turned into Rupell Street.

The door was opened for him by the landlady

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herself, who led him upstairs, pausing every few steps to whisper back details as to the patient's condition. This woman on the night before had not impressed Anthony very favourably, despite Gregg's good opinion of her; her face was of the rodent type, her manner oily and insinuating—a creature of the moment.

The nurse who came out of the bedroom was different—hard-faced but honest looking and capable.

The patient was going on as well as could be expected.

“She has been asking for you, sir,” said the nurse.

Anthony put his hat on the table and took a seat whilst the nurse vanished into the bedroom, returning in a couple of minutes to beckon him in.

The patient was lying on her side; she moved her head a little, turning it to look at the visitor, and a ghostly flicker of a smile greeted him as he drew a chair and sat down beside her.

“She mustn't talk much,” said the nurse.

“No,” said Anthony, “I won't let her talk. I have just come in to see you for a minute—just for a minute; you're looking better—much better. Is the pain easier?”

The head on the pillow nodded slightly and a hand pushed out from the bedclothes. He took it and held it, patting it now and then whilst he talked in the cheery, rambling way of a good man chatting to a sick child, and all the time he talked her eyes

never left him and the faint smile, faded to a look of contentment, still hung about her eyes.

She did not want to talk; though he had befriended her and saved her from the hospital she was content to thank him mutely.

One word only did she say, and that only as he was rising to go :

“ To-morrow ? ”

“ Yes,” said Anthony, “ I’ll see you to-morrow. I’ll come and see you to-morrow, and I’ll bring you some grapes.” He had noticed on a little table near by a bunch of yellow, thick-skinned Spanish grapes with the cork dust still on them, bought for the patient evidently by the landlady or the nurse.

“ We’ll soon have you up,” said Anthony; “ up and about and quite well.”

He found it difficult to find the last word. He gave up the search, and bending, patted her shoulder lightly; at the door he glanced back, and nodded to her.

Following the landlady downstairs, he blew his nose.

She had noted the water in his eyes with the joy of a thirsty traveller who sees a distant spring, and downstairs, instead of leading him to the front door, she showed him into the stuffy front parlour.

“ Might I speak a word to you, sir ? ” said the landlady.

Anthony stood hat in hand whilst she spoke her word. It was about money, and the difficulty of her position in having sickness in the house, and the

expenses there would be before the poor thing was well again ; and Anthony listened to it all, dry-eyed now, and cut her short suddenly.

“ I'll ask Dr. Gregg to attend to all that,” said he. “ You need not be a bit afraid—everything will be paid for.”

Then he left the house.

The woman, with her whining voice and specious manner, had exercised a strange effect upon him. She seemed scarcely human. Negative, a sovereign in the slot machine, part of the house.

And the sick girl—what a place for her ! What a house for sickness ! He paused at the corner of Rupell Street as if undecided which way to go ; as a matter of fact he was a bit bemused in his mind.

He was thinking of those miserable grapes, of that room, of that face on the pillow. And she had been asking for him. She had wanted him, she was thinking of him now.

Yes, Gregg was right, and Isaac Coborne was even more right in a worldly sense. Anthony should have cut himself off from this business. Circumstance had caught him like an octopus, like a plant with a hundred clutching tendrils, and in the last half-hour had made good its hold.

But he knew nothing of this, no more than the passers-by knew that the prosperous-looking elderly gentleman who seemed undecided as to which way he should take was in mind brooding over a stricken girl, with the feelings of a nurse, a mother, a father and a man dangerously touched by sentiment.

Ten minutes later he was at Gregg's door. The surgery boy let him in. The doctor had not returned yet, but would he come upstairs and wait. The doctor was expecting him to call and had left orders.

He went up.

The electric light was on in the sitting-room and two arm-chairs were drawn either side of the fire-place. One was evidently Gregg's, waiting his return, and the other had evidently been recently occupied, for the loose cushion at its back was still dented, and by it lay a small work-basket.

There was a book on the table. The room had the air of having been recently occupied by someone who had vacated it in a hurry.

Mrs. Gregg—evidently. A woman Anthony was destined never to see, but who, none the less, in the background of things was to prove a potent factor in the making of his story.

Anthony took his seat in the arm-chair with the cushion. He looked at the work-basket, then getting up he picked the book from the table and sat down with it.

It was Macmillan's green-bound edition of the "Poems of Christina Georgina Rossetti," and on the fly-leaf was written in a man's hand :

"Jeannie from Jim Xmas Day 1914."

Anthony turned the pages. He was not given to poetry ; the thing interested him merely because it was evidently a gift from Gregg to his wife.

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He was about to close the book when the title of the leading poem, "Goblin Market," caught his eye and made him scan the first lines.

Morning and evening
Maids heard the goblins cry,
Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy,

read Anthony.

He read on, led by the list of the twenty-nine delicious fruits—on and on interested as a child in the queer, weird poem and the procession of Goblin men.

One had a cat's face,
One whisked a tail,
One tramped at a rat's pace,
One crawled like a snail—

and the fate of Laura who ate of the Goblin fruit and pined and would have died but for the devotion of Lizzie.

It is a poem into which you can read a good many meanings. To Anthony it was interesting because it was about a girl surrounded by evil things that were her undoing; it had a taste of the story of the girl in Rupell Street, and, in the queerest way, the purring, bright-eyed, frowning, smiling Goblin men linked themselves up with all sorts of people—the night club crowd, the rodent-faced landlady, even Isaac Coborne. A step sounded in the room, and—"That's London," said a voice behind him.

Gregg had come in through the door that had

been left ajar and had looked over his shoulder. He had left his overcoat and hat below and was in his slippers. He went to the mantelpiece for his pipe.

"That's London. Goblin Market, with its Goblin men and women, where if a girl tastes of the fruit she's pretty generally damned, or a man too. Everything from cocaine to the glad eye is in those verses, and they were written by a nun who didn't know what she was writing about. Or maybe she knew without knowing."

He lit the pipe and stood with his back to the fire.

He had never said "Good evening" or "How are you" or anything. That was Gregg.

"I looked in and saw that girl on my way here," said Anthony.

"Oh, did you?" said Gregg. "I saw her at four o'clock; there's effusion. I thought I made out fine crepitations last night—that's to say, the first sign of pneumonia, but they're gone. I believe I saved her from pneumonia. Small dose of tartar emetic. Just as much as would go on the point of a penknife. It's an old-fashioned drug, but it does its work."

"You think she'll get better?"

"Yes—unless anything else turns up."

"What do you think might turn up?"

"Oh, it's just if she's tubercular. I haven't made out any sign of T.B. in the lungs, but she's rather the type, and one has to keep it in mind. No, I

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think on the whole she'll get all right—yes, she'll get all right."

He hummed for a minute; the pipe stuck up from his hard jaw and his eyes on the floor, he seemed thinking of something. Then he turned on the other.

"Are you a married man?"

"Yes."

"Get along all right with your wife?"

"Yes."

"You're not a Goblin man? Excuse me asking, but this is a heart-to-heart talk; take me as your doctor and spit it out."

"No," said Anthony. "I told you last night the truth."

"I believe you did," said Gregg. "I only asked you because your case interests me a lot more than the girl's. I'm going to ask you things—or would you rather I didn't?"

"Ask what you like," said Anthony.

"You see, I'm a doctor, and a doctor is a lot more than a chap who gives pills and bottles of medicine. I'm father-confessor to the worst side of Bloomsbury, and I never charge for spiritual advice, it goes in with the medicine. Come to the point. Always been faithful to your wife?"

"Yes, I have. I can say that honestly—except only—once—years ago——"

"We won't bother about that. The best men make mistakes. You see, I'm working up your case in my mind, getting to grips with you, because I'm

your friend. Friend ought always to be the name for Doctor. Now I take it you're well-to-do, living up there in Marlborough Terrace with your wife and having a circle of friends; you don't belong to the fast lot, and you are all very respectable. I know. Well, have you told your wife about this girl?"

"No. I thought of doing so last night, but on thinking it over this morning I found the thing so difficult—almost impossible."

"Just so. I see your point quite clearly. Considering what this girl is, no woman born of woman and at the same time a wife would tolerate the story you would have to tell—unless you told a lie and said you picked her up in a street accident or some yarn like that. No, you must say nothing to your wife."

"I'm glad you see my point," said Anthony.

"I see it clearly. But has it not occurred to you that you are in a very peculiar and difficult position? To be frank, haven't you tumbled yourself into Goblin Market? For, mark you, there are Goblin girls as well as men. Don't misunderstand me. A Goblin may be an innocent thing—though there aren't many of them—and yet jamnably dangerous. This girl I know quite well inside and out. She's a poor little thing. I believe innocent, despite her business—it's the business that makes her a Goblin; and I'll tell you what happened to you the other night in that damn night club—you tumbled right into the Market and she gave you a fruit to eat and

it wasn't an orange: it was just sympathy. If I don't misread you, she caught you by your good qualities; and let me tell you that in this world of ours it's sometimes worse to be caught by one's good qualities than by one's vices. What's to be the end of it?"

Anthony said nothing.

Gregg said nothing; stood smoking and looking before him as if trying to see what was to be the end of it. It was a sort of dumb consultation.

"You went to see her to-day," said Gregg at length. "Couldn't help it. I'd have done just the same myself in your position. I feel in a way for her just as you do, only I'm a lot tougher and harder and up to my eyes in work. She's scarce more than a child and the clinging type; she's sick, without a friend, pretty, like a flower thrown in filth—and there you are. You've promised to pay for her illness; when she's well what are you going to do—fling her back in the filth? If not, what? I'm not thinking of the girl—you can't damage her; question is, will she damage you if you go on taking an interest in her? If you could tell your wife it would be—at least it might be—all right, but you can't do that."

"I see what you mean," said Anthony, "and it's a relief to be able to talk to a person that understands. I spoke to a relation about it this morning—a Mr. Isaac Coborne. He couldn't understand. Honestly, I wish I had never come across this business. It was like turning the corner of a road and

finding a person lying injured by an accident. One couldn't pass on. But I think you are wrong. I quite understand your meaning, but I don't fear any damage to myself. There are hundreds of good people who would come to the help of this poor child—for she is little more than a child—and when she is recovered I hope and trust to find someone to take an interest in her, some woman who would take her as a companion, maybe adopt her. The only thing that makes the affair irritating and complex is that I can't tell my wife. My wife is a good woman, but I could never make her understand. Never."

"Now I'll tell you something," said Gregg. "I'll get you out of the whole of the difficulty right away. I can't afford to be charitable in a money sense, because I'm a poor man, and I lose four hundred a year in bad debts, which is charity in a way. Here's what I propose: I'll charge nothing for medical attendance on this case; you can pay for the nursing and the landlady's bill, and when the girl's well my wife will take her in hand and look after her and get her settled. My wife's a good woman. I told her all about this case, and she made me see better than you've done that you acted like a trump last night. I know she'll take a hand with the girl. Would you be prepared to pay something small for maintenance, say for a year? Say ten shillings a week and we'll do the rest."

"I would," said Anthony.

"But there's only one condition," put in the

other: "you must leave her to us entirely. Go back to your wife and forget about it and not see the girl again. I put that in for your own sake and to kill two birds with one stone—to help the girl and help you."

"You mean I'm not to see her to-morrow."

"Yes, nor any other day. I'll keep you informed how things go."

"I promised to see her to-morrow, and I can't break my word. She was waiting to see me to-day," said Anthony; "she'll be looking out for me to-morrow. You can see how it is. But I shall be very glad indeed to take your offer once she's a bit better and able to get about."

Gregg watched Anthony with a contemplative gaze, as one might watch a fly tangled in treacle; he was thinking less of Anthony than of the instinct of the girl—the innocent, uncalculating instinct that had made her seize upon and cling to this man of all men best suited to her needs: her need for sympathy no less than her material needs. Well, it wasn't his affair. He saw trouble quite clearly ahead for this highly respectable bourgeois married to a highly respectable wife; but Gregg had seen so much misery that the idea of social disasters in bourgeois circles left him somewhat cold. Still, being a reasonable man, he had done what he could.

"Well," said he, "we'll leave it at that; and now let's talk about ways and means. I'm not charging anything for medical advice—there's only

the nurse and the landlady—you can settle with them. When she's better we might be able to get her down to some place in the country. I'll turn it over in my mind. Any place is better than London. Curse the cities." He brooded for a moment. "They say there's as much vice and bad living in the villages. That's a lie. There's animal instincts, there's drunkenness, but there's not Rupell Street and Grub Street and the Midnight Follies facing Petticoat Lane with half a dozen churches between. Ever since Troy, Nature has been making war on the cities; men have done the fighting, but she's had a finger in it, she wants them gone. And now she's given man the aeroplane and taught him how to destroy them—the cities."

"James," said a woman's voice at the door, "supper."

Anthony walked nearly as far as the Marble Arch before calling a cab to take him home. He felt brighter and more lively in his mind than he had done for a long time past. Gregg was a fine stimulant—better than whisky. A strong man and a kindly man and a just man and a man of the world. Beside him twinkling Isaac Coborne showed like a glass bead beside a diamond.

As he walked a little figure was walking beside him with its cloak up to its throat, coughing sometimes. Accompanying him ever since he left the night club it showed no sign of fading or tiredness.

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Calling a taxi he got in and it got in also. Then it took his hand.

Anthony sighed deeply. Yes, the country. Gregg would manage that. He had a shadowy feeling that Gregg would manage everything so that everything would come all right.

