

CHAPTER XVI

THE LETTER

It was not late when he got home, but the maid said that her mistress had come back early with a headache and had retired for the night.

“The mistress told me to tell you, sir, there was a letter for you in the study.”

“Oh,” said Anthony, hanging up his hat, “a letter, thanks. That will do; I’ll put the chain on the door myself.”

A letter.

Had she discovered everything then by some uncanny means? Had Isaac met her at Amelia’s and let the cat out of the bag? It could be nothing else. What would she say in the letter? He found himself moistening his lips.

It is a terrible thing for a man to live as Anthony had lived with Selina for many years without quarrelling, if not with great mutual love, and then to come suddenly to blows. At least it was terrible to Anthony, for she had in a sense become part of him. She had so long directed his easy-going nature in all sorts of ways, she had so long sat opposite him at table, managed the little affairs of the house, arranged their holidays, and so forth, that she had become a second nature.

Not only that, he shared her views in most important matters—as, for instance, the relationship of a married man to other females. “A man

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should stick to his wife," was a tenet honestly held by him; indeed, it had always seemed to him that to cheat at this game was equivalent to cheating at cards. He had sometimes said so indeed when reading the reports of the divorce court.

He had done nothing wrong, but he never could make Selina understand that.

He hung up his overcoat; the cold facts of the case could never be warmed for her to their true life. He fumbled in his overcoat pocket for his glasses and handkerchief; and then, instead of going into the study to face and read the letter, he went into the dining-room and turned on the light.

He helped himself to a whisky from the taxialus case and didn't put in much soda.

Coborne might have told her he met him at Westminster Court—probably had; she would know that the lie he told at luncheon about just having come from Birmingham was a lie. Then there was the telegram about Mandelberg.

It really seemed as if the devil had carefully laid a trap for him.

He helped himself to another whisky and his heart grew stronger. The whole thing was absurd—absolutely. Why not go straight up now to Selina and have it out? She was sure to be lying awake, crying probably; the thought of that and the influence of the whisky moved him strongly. He saw himself sitting on the side of her bed saying, "Look here, Selina, the whole of this thing is a most stupid tangle; there's nothing earthly wrong

in it. I'll tell you the whole thing right from the beginning. I've never hidden anything from you, as you know."

He found himself saying to himself, "Let's cut the knot right away."

Then he rose and put the glass on the sideboard and left the room, forgetting to switch off the light. In the hall he paused.

He had courage enough to face the letter now.

"Let's see first what she says," said he. "It's just as well to know the ground one's standing on."

He went into the study and turned on the light, and there on the table was a letter, the only one, and placed evidently so that he would see it at once on entering the room.

He took it up; it was addressed in typewriting to Mrs. Harrop, and it had been opened.

He took it from the envelope. It was quite a document—a bill from Norman & Hazeltine's for the car. Taking down the engine, new steering gear, tyres, petrol, heaven knows what not, and the total was ninety-seven pounds sixteen and three-pence.

The car was Mrs. Harrop's, but Anthony always paid the repairs bill. It was always sent to her and paid by him. It had come this evening and she had placed it on his table as a reminder, for it was overdue a month and marked "Account Rendered."

The relief was so great that he went to the dining-room and mixed himself another whisky and soda,

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which he took back with him to the study. Then he lit a pipe.

And that was what all his trouble had been about, and if he hadn't had the *sense* to come in and look at it he might now have been upstairs making perfectly unnecessary confessions. He picked the thing up and ran his eye over it. Then came the thought that it would have to be paid.

Paid out of the limited stock of money he had in the bank it would reduce his balance by nearly a hundred.

In calculating that his four hundred would last a considerable time he had forgotten bills to be paid.

He couldn't think of any other bill likely to come in just yet, but that did not detract from the chilling effect of this clutch upon his purse.

The cold, business-like hand of Selina had been laid upon him; she whom he had fancied crying upstairs was no doubt asleep and snoring.

At that moment it seemed to him that all he owed her was a bill to be paid—a bill extending in its items over many years, a bill which he had paid and paid and paid, but which always had to be paid again. A bill for what? What had he received from her?

He wasn't thinking in terms of money alone, but of life. Because of her he had done so much that he didn't want to do: lived in this house that he disliked, helped in its support. What had she given him in return?

He didn't consider the fact that she had been a

good wife in her way and that his easy-going nature, might have gone to jelly and ruin only for her as a mould; that with her he had enjoyed reasonable contentment, if not happiness; that she did not nag and that she did not interfere with his doings; that her high and old-fashioned respectability which had surrounded him as an aura, though a laughable matter in these days, was yet sanitary and saving in a world where doubtful pleasures have absolutely undoubtful results in the way of headaches, depression and the general *malaise* which goes by the name of its symptom—unrest.

He had seen and heard of quite nice men gone to blazes and pieces because of, extravagant, lustful, drunken or doping wives, and he had seen and heard of unmarried men who for want of guidance were dead or doing time, like Wilkinson, the bank manager, sent by the High Life to Portland.

No, he thought nothing of all this.

Selina, as he sat there sucking his pipe, seemed nothing but a tradeswoman who had made a good bargain for herself.

Then he took another drink of whisky and his mood changed.

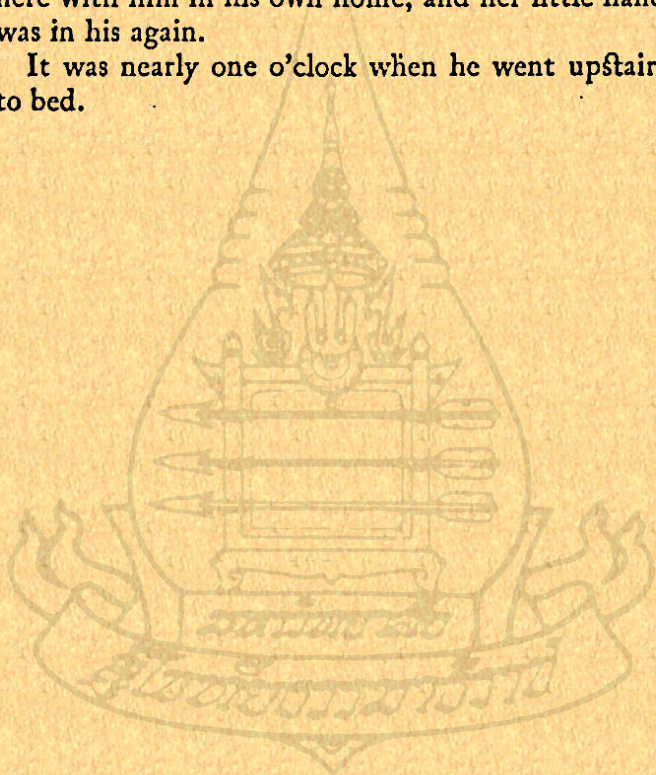
He was too good of heart, or maybe it was too much effort to keep up a grudge and an edge against Selina, especially under the influence of tobacco and whisky. His mood changed to a rather pleasant and doleful feeling that he was a man not exactly wronged, but never exactly righted. That Fate had somehow been against him. A sympathetic

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companion might have heard a lot on this subject had one been with him, and as he sat like this the mood changed again and the something behind everything made its appearance: that sweet girl, that poor thing—that poor thing.

She hadn't stayed behind in the cab; she was here with him in his own home, and her little hand was in his again.

It was nearly one o'clock when he went upstairs to bed.



CHAPTER XVII
A BUNCH OF GRAPES

NEXT day at four o'clock you might have seen Anthony in Harrods, in the fruit department. He did most of his shopping at Harrods, where he had an account, and he was well known in the cigar, hosiery, hat, hairdressing and fruit departments. Selina rarely bought fruit; she left that expensive business to Anthony, as a rule. He was standing now inspecting the fruits of the world, attracted from East and West, North and South to the great London market:

Apples and quinces.
Lemons and oranges.
Plump unpecked cherries.
Melons and raspberries.
Bloom-down-checked peaches.
Swart-headed mulberries.
Wild, free-born cranberries.
Crab apples, dewberries.
Pineapples, blackberries.
Apricots, strawberries;—
All ripe together.

He chose a big bunch of black Hamburg grapes.
“Down to your account, sir?” asked the assistant as he handed the parcel.

“No,” said Anthony, “I’ll pay for them.”

WHEREVER you find prosperity in Business, hunt for the Jew. You will find him in seven cases out of ten hidden somewhere, if he's not conducting affairs with the help of a Scotchman. Mandelberg was a Jew, and the fact that the firm of Harrop and Mandelberg was not prospering was not to be placed to his account. That it was alive at all, hanging on to the precipice edge with its teeth and kicking for foothold, was a miracle due to him alone.

This morning, many days after the opening date of this story, Mandelberg was seated in his office, smoking cigarettes and looking over the morning papers. The coming election had cast its depressing spell upon Goblin Market, to use Gregg's name for London Town. Even the sales of the book department were affected, down to the most frankly indecent of its Goblin wares. Reading the various papers just skimmed by Mandelberg, you gathered the fact that if either a Labour, Liberal or Conservative Government was returned to power the State would be ruined, that if either a Conservative, Liberal or Labour Government were returned the State would be saved, that the Conservatives were fools, the Liberals liars and the Labour men traitors, and vice versa.

Mandelberg put the *Daily Herald* on top of the

Morning Post and was in the act of lighting another cigarette when Moses Levenstein was shown in. Moses was stout, with red, curling hair and the voice of a little child. He was exceedingly prosperous looking and he wore a big emerald ring, worth maybe two hundred pounds, and he wore it without shame.

He took a cigarette. He seldom refused anything, and sat down and began to talk about business.

First of all, he wanted a small subscription for Mrs. Isaac Cohen, who had been left a widow. He gave details, and Mandelberg promised to attend to that matter and send a sovereign to Hart & Wiseman, the bankers, of Gracechurch Street. Philanthropy done with, Moses talked of the election.

"You're a protectionist, ain't you, Mandy?" said Moses.

"You mean I'm not a fool," said Mandy. "*Protectionist!*" He held forth for, at least six minutes on that subject, even rising and pacing the room in the fire of his zeal, Moses watching and listening, saying nothing, smoking, and mentally taking note of an old print hanging by the window.

When the other had done he signified his assent, rose up, looked at the print, saw that it was worthless and returned to his seat.

"Yes, that is so," said he; "but, all the same, Mandy, there's other sides of the question. You've got a big connection, haven't you, all over the country, and you can't sell your home-made goods because the foreigner can make them cheaper and

send them in without duty? Well, now, see here, supposing you were offered the sole agency of the Hahn car and the Hahn clutch and the Brandenburg magneto—they're all in the grasp of the same hand—and you couldn't take it because this Government bars them out with its Tariff Bill, what would you say about protection?"

"How do you mean?" asked Mandelberg, sitting down.

"I mean," said Moses, "I might pull off that deal for you on a ten per cent. commission basis, and you'd make more money in six months over it than you would in a year paying high wages to Englishmen even behind a tariff. But, you see, you're a protectionist."

"Oh, damn protection!" cried Mandelberg. "I mean, don't shove that at me—it's every man for himself if a Government is fool enough to let him play his hand. The Hahn Company—are you sure?"

"No, I am not sure," said Moses, "but the deal might come off unless a tariff wall blocks it out, and I just brought the idea to you, Mandy, to see how you shaped over it. Tariff or no tariff, what with overhead charges and other things, manufacturing in England is a poor game, much better handle stuff from outside and join in with the big bugs."

"Book me seats," said Mandelberg, "for myself and partner, if it turns up; sure you have first call?"

"Sure—or near so. I'll note what you say,

Mandy; and, mark you, keep your mouth shut. Don't talk to no one, except to Mr. Harrop; don't even think too much of it, for in this world nowadays you don't know that chaps ain't listening in to your thoughts. And how's Mr. Harrop?"

"Oh, he's all right—making a fool of himself——" Mandelberg checked. "Girl" he finished.

"Ah, well," said Moses with a wheezy laugh, "boys will be boys; but ain't he a bit on the offside for that game, and hasn't he a missus somewhere?"

"Should think he had," said the other, "and there'll be hell to pay if she wakes up and finds him playing the giddy goat. Last man in the world to get himself in that sort of tangle."

"Well, he certainly ain't the first," said Moses, rising and taking his hat. He refused the offer of a whisky and soda, and departed leaving the other to turn over this new idea in his head.

There might be something in it and there mightn't. The latter eventuality was much the more probable. Strangely enough, now that Moses was gone, the project he had held in the air began to irritate the Jew. The very entertaining of it seemed to shake his faith in the result of the General Election, until now firm. He had denied his faith in the sanctity of Protection, openly blasphemed against it, and ten minutes later, when Anthony turned up dressed in a bowler and grey tweed and looking in a hurry about something, he found his partner out of temper.

"I'm running down to the country," said

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Anthony, "for a day or two, and I just looked in. Anything doing?"

"No," said the other, "a fellow has been in with a wild-cat scheme, but there's nothing in it. Where are you going to?"

"Down to the country to see about a little business of my own I've got to attend to."

"How's the missus?"

"She's all right."

Mandelberg knew all about the girl. He was Anthony's third confidant. He didn't care a button what his partner did in this respect. Anthony could not be put much out of working order as far as the business was concerned, simply because he never did any business, or scarcely any. He was a sloping partner, and what his dreams might be were of no concern in a money sense. Still, they did not want complications, and Mandelberg could not help a vague resentment at the fact that Anthony was making a fool of himself. At his age and with a wife like that he had no right to be messing about with girls. He had listened to the tale of woe, but unlike Gregg and Coborne he had said nothing in the way of advice. Experience had taught him that where a man and a woman are concerned it is quite useless for an onlooker to say anything.

"And how's that girl?" he asked.

"She's better and about to be moved. As a matter of fact, I'm running down to see about a place to send her to, somewhere quiet and cheap where she will be able to recover."

"Well," said Mandelberg, "I hope she'll get all right, and it's good of you to take an interest in her, but, for God's sake, Anthony, mind the wife—you don't want complications."

"There's nothing to produce complications," replied Anthony. "If a man can't help a poor creature in distress what's the world coming to? There won't be any complications, and what's more," he suddenly fired, "I don't care a damn if there are."

"Hullo, hullo," thought Mandelberg, but he said nothing, whilst the other recovered and went on.

"I don't want rows, that's all. There's nothing to hide; it's only the fact that women can't understand a thing like this that prevents me from telling her right out. Now I must be off; I've got a cab outside waiting."

"Right," said Mandelberg, "and 'see here, I'll put you up to a tip; if the wife seems to suspect your being away like this, tell her you're off on election business, helping the Conservatives to get in. Does she know anything of election matters?"

"No," replied Anthony, "she takes no interest in politics at all. Well, so long."

He went off.

He did not inform the other that; as a matter of fact, he had told Selina he was running down to the Isle of Wight to help in the Conservative cause, which wasn't exactly a lie, for he had a friend in the island, a prominent Conservative, Colonel Jameson

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b, name, and he would visit him, and maybe attend a meeting if such a thing were on, and certainly speak to all and sundry in favour of the Conservative cause, even though Barrow Farm, where, through the agency of Gregg, rooms had been obtained for the invalid, was his real objective.

Outside, in the cab, which contained his suitcase, he gave the order to drive, not to Waterloo Station, but Rupell Street.

After all, it was not his business to inform Mandelberg that in going to the country he was taking Rupell Street *en route*.

On most days during the long illness he had called there, never staying for more than ten minutes or quarter of an hour; on the days when he did not call, held off, maybe, by some subconscious uneasiness at the tangle in which he was involving himself, he sent a wire.

On those days, like a man who has stopped taking a drug, he was restless, and Lucy's face (Lucy was her other name) looked at him over his chop or the newspaper he had just lowered, that charming face that illness made seem even younger—looked at him as if to say "I have been waiting for you all day and, see, you haven't come!"

Yes, decidedly he should have taken Isaac Coborne and Gregg's advice, at the beginning of things, before she had quite begun to talk to him like that in her absence.

The taxi drew up at the house in Rupell Street and Anthony got out and rang the door bell.

Admitted by the dubious-looking maid-servant, he went straight upstairs to the front room, where she was sitting waiting for him dressed for going out, very tottery still, and even younger looking than on the night he had seen her first. Younger—
younger? No, it wasn't exactly that. It was more that a dreadful something had vanished from her; the breath of something that had breathed on her face and clung had passed away.

It was as though the period of illness and the real sympathy and kindness of the man who had protected her, and, perhaps, the subconscious knowledge that things were all right now, had freed her soul from the cage that had caught and held it.

She could be herself. It was as though a father had dropped out of the blue, taking all responsibilities—a more than kind father to whom she could cling as a young girl clings to a male parent.

"Well, there you are," said Anthony in a cheerful voice. "All your things packed?"

"Yes," she said, "everything is downstairs. Mrs. Jones said it would be better to take them down. Do you know, I've been waiting and waiting and all the time I've been feeling you wouldn't come."

"And what made you feel like that?" asked he, taking her hand and patting it.

"I don't know. It seemed too good to be true, going to the country. But you *have* come." She smiled up at him and held his hand for a second

flat between her palm. Then she rose up suddenly, jumped to her feet in her eagerness to be off; but she tottered and he had to hold her a second with his arm about her waist till the momentary giddiness passed.

She laughed as she went before him down the stairs, holding the banister rail, and she kissed the hard-faced nurse in the hall. She would have kissed anyone just then, even the landlady, perhaps, but that person did not appear. The nurse did the sending-off and had already stowed her luggage—a man's large suit-case, almost new and marked with the letters A. J. and a hat-box—in the taxi.

That suit-case cast a tiny shadow across Anthony's thoughts. Who was A. J.? Useless to ask and useless to think of it.

It was a bright sunny day, one of those autumn days so curiously suggestive of spring, and as they drove to Waterloo, the creature beside him, indifferent as a butterfly to anything but the moment, seemed plunged in a reverie purely pleasurable—the pleasure of the invalid who is out for the first day after an illness. They scarcely spoke.

She did not even know his name. If she had heard it she had forgotten it. She had never asked it. Speaking of him to the nurse or the landlady or Gregg she had spoken of "that gentleman."

She had never asked the names of the men she had met. If you had stopped the taxi and said to her, "Who is this gentleman you are driving with?" she could only have replied, "He is a very

dear friend whom I love ; different from every one else"—using the word "he" because Anthony was a "he." As a man he was entirely indifferent to her, just as all the men had been whom she had met with. Yet it gave her pleasure and comfort to hold his hand, and she could have put her arms round his neck and kissed him just as girls kiss and cuddle a father or a horse. Great affection, a thing that can link itself with, yet be entirely divorced from, sexual love.

At Waterloo, before the ticket-office window, asking for two first-class tickets to Shanklin, the strangest feeling came to Anthony, half pleasurable, half panicky. Those two tickets seemed to link them queerly together ; they brought before him the severe ghost of the unconscious Selina.

There was nothing wrong, he told himself, yet the crowd on the platform filled him with uneasiness. Could it be possible that amidst so many people there was no person who knew him !

However, the Isle of Wight train was in and waiting at Platform No. 8 ; the man who punched the tickets at the gate seemed to see nothing wrong in the business, and a few minutes later, seated in the luncheon-car opposite his companion, the panic passed. No, there was no person in the carriage that knew him. He left her for a moment to buy the *Daily Telegraph* and some picture papers from a newsboy, and when he came back she had taken off her gloves and settled herself comfortably in her corner.

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How pretty she was! Well-dressed, simple and dainty, fresh, too, for the excitement of the journey had lent her colour, and the new environment seemed to have lent her strength, for the mental stimulation of a patient's first day out does them more good than the "air."

She sat for a while absorbed in the picture paper he had given her, then, when the train was clearing London, in the view from the window till luncheon was served.

It was the first meal they had shared in common. Anthony and his protégée, and it was a little bond of a new sort between them. She had never asked where they were going, nor did she now; she was content to take everything given her and to go anywhere she was asked. If anyone had questioned her she could only have answered, "I am going where my friend goes." If Anthony had said, "I am taking you to China," she would have said, "Yes."

She had no ties; if she had dropped dead not a single soul in the world would have cared or mourned for her—only Anthony. She had no conventional bonds—propriety or impropriety could neither hold her nor injure her; she was the most adrift thing in the universe, or would have been only that she was following in the wake of her new companion.

He watched with pleasure the dainty way she ate and her delicate hands, unspoiled by work, useless for work.

There are hands that say, "I can do nothing but

hold you"—childish hands that can yet grip with the strength of iron and cling with tenacity of Fate. He watched her hands, whose movements were pleasurable to watch as the movements of butterflies.

Then, after the meal and looking at the pictures in *The Sketch*, her eyes closed and the paper sagged, resting on the table; she had dropped asleep. Dropped asleep with her head slightly sideways and resting against the cushion of the carriage.

He could watch her now without interruption. Sleep seemed holding her like a mother, and the sight of her like that in her helplessness filled Anthony's heart with the tenderest and most beautiful emotions that the heart of man can hold: emotions pure as light, that, yet, would not have existed had she been a thought less pretty, less fragile, less childlike, less helpless.

The table-cloth had not yet been removed and the attendant came to take it away, but Anthony nodded towards the sleeping girl and the man left it and went off, sure of an extra tip.

She did not awake till the stop at Fratton, when, all of a sudden, sleep dropped from her. She stared around her for a second with sightless eyes; then her gaze met his and she smiled, the all astray look passing from her in a flash.

It was as though her awakening had to do with him entirely, like the awakening of the Sleeping Beauty to the kiss of the Prince.

The day still held, placid and sunny, the Solent

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lay blue and calm and the Isle of Wight and the
spine of Wyde the prettiest picture.

They sat on deck during the crossing. He placed
the travelling rug round her knees, and she sat, the
picture papers beside her and her hands folded in
her lap, her eyes, forgetting Anthony for a moment,
fixed on the sea as if contemplating old memories,
vague as ghosts.



FERN-LAND AND FAIRY-LAND

It was Jeannie Gregg who had recommended the Isle of Wight. Anthony had never seen her, yet she had seen him in mental pictures developed from what her husband said about him.

"I'm fair sick of the business," said Gregg one evening. "You can't do it—it's against everything. No man, not if he was a hundred, can mix himself up with a girl like this without trouble, and he's honest about it and respectable, and there's the wife."

Jeannie didn't seem to bother much about the wife. She was mostly concerned about the girl. She had been to see her and knew at once that she was worth fighting for and doing things for, knew at once that she was not the sort of girl that "Rescue Work" can touch.

And if Anthony Harrop, a good man by all accounts, took the care of her, who was to say him nay. He couldn't damage her, he might save her, he could certainly remove her from her hateful surroundings, and the master fact remained that he was obstinate in his determination not to hand her over to strangers. He would, no doubt, some time or another, have to settle accounts with his wife; that was his look out.

Once some year's back she had stayed at the Barrow Farm at Myrtlestone near the ancient village of

Godshill. She suggested the place to Gregg, who, half-demurring, passed the suggestion on to Anthony, who wrote and engaged rooms for himself and his niece. He would leave her there and come back to town. Maybe stay a day or two till she was settled; and "the best way for you to come," wrote Mrs. Mackett, the wife of William Mackett, farmer, of the Barrow, "is to come straight to Shanklin and take a taxi from there. I will order one to meet your train."

She did, and in the evening light at Shanklin station they found it waiting for them.

It was Anthony's first visit to the island, and not even the taxi could destroy the quiet charm of the strange green land through which it took its way—the land of ancient, winding roads and wandering ways; woods and meadows, old beyond memory, all guarded by the great sea Downs at whose feet the dusk was gathering.

They passed through the green village of Godshill, with its church high above it built by the fairies, and on and beyond by lanes that seemed to lead nowhere into the heart of the dusk and through a gateway to the door of a house.

Anthony got out. The house door was open showing a stone passage lit by a swinging lamp. From the dark of the evening and a clump of woods to the left came the single challenge of a rook, and from a byre at the back the low of a cow, sounds momentary and cut off by the great silence that held Macketts' and the woods and the land for

miles around.' Then a door opened down the passage to the sound of the frying of bacon and Mrs. Mackett appeared, stout and motherly, and wiping her hands in her apron and apologising for not having heard the taxi.

She showed them into the low-pitched, oak-beamed sitting-room on the left of the passage, where tea-things were set out on the centre table and where on the broad hearth a log was burning.

Then she brought them upstairs to show them their rooms—low-pitched rooms like the one below, with sagging floors and latticed windows, chintz curtains; rooms specklessly clean; rooms simple and homely and honest, and perfumed with the vague faint perfume that was Mackett's.

It filled the whole house like a ghost, this perfume of sea and age and lavender and country; it greeted you on your first entry, and then after a day or so it vanished—still there, but unperceived through custom.

They say Charles the First visited Mackett's in the course of his wanderings through the island; could he return he would find little change, or only in the furniture of the sitting-room, where the Victorian age had left its definite mark.

Waiting for the girl to come down, Anthony took his seat in one of the two arm-chairs on either side of the fire-place. How still the place was; the silence in some cunning way seemed to have made itself a part of everything—part of the coloured

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picture of The Great Exhibition on the wall opposite to him, of the straight-backed chairs, the couch with its antimacassar, the book-case with the glass front ; it seemed like something moveless, watching, waiting to spring—something none too surely amiable.

He could hear now the ticking, slow and measured, of the tall clock in the passage outside, the slipping of the seconds one by one to be lost for ever in the past, and now from the woods a vague whisper : the night wind had risen, blowing gently and gently stirring the trees.

There came a step and the door, a bit ajar, was pushed open.

It was the girl, the lamplight shining full upon her face and her dark, wavy hair. She seemed a different person ; it was the environment of the room, perhaps, the new background that absorbed from her the last trace of London, lending her some of its old-fashioned atmosphere, a something independent yet linked with the perfume of the house.

She came round the table, touching it lightly with a finger, then she dropped on to the arm of his chair.

“ Well, here we are at last,” said Anthony, taking the ever-ready little hand, “ You’re not tired, are you ? ”

“ No,” she said. “ I don’t feel as if I’d ever be tired again.” She repeated the last four words slowly as if talking to herself and counting the four

fingers of his hand, one for each word. Then she paused. "Listen!"

"It's the wind in the trees," said Anthony.

The wind had risen, blowing stronger, the south-west wind that has given Gallows Wood a definite bend, the wind that blew before Charles was king, before the Romans had landed.

She listened, bending ever so little closer to him as though the wind were pressing her as it pressed the trees.

It has a lonely sound, that wind of autumn, gusting up from the channel across Chale Bay and Atherfield, and for a moment it seemed to Anthony to ring himself and the girl with its desolation, cut them off from the world as though they were on a desert island, he and she—an island ringed with bleak winds and threatening seas.

After supper Anthony, remembering the election, spoke to Mrs. Mackett about it as she was clearing the things, whilst the girl took her place, half kneeling, half sitting on the hearthrug close to his chair.

"I'm a friend of Colonel Jameson and I hope to take a hand in it," said he, giving away his political bias at once in the statement.

"Indeed, sir?" replied the woman.

Her tone and manner checked him. He sensed at once the fact that she was not of his Party, and for the first time he found himself up against the great gulf fixed between the Islander and the Overner from England.

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The election, which he had put 'aside from his mind and which he had used as a pretext for his visit to the island, came suddenly home to him. On it, and it alone, depended his existence as a free and independent being. It was everything to him and to the girl.

The Mackett cat had come in and gone directly to her; she was nursing it now and talking to it in whispers, her cheek against its head. On the other hand, Mrs. Mackett, stolid, square-waisted and engaged in removing the supper-things, held his mind.

Touch an egg in the hen-house and this woman would be up in arms, 'destroy an industry in which she had no interest and would she care? Never. She couldn't understand, and she was only a tiny bit of the great Indifference of the majority of the Public to the tribulations of certain small businesses and the threatened destruction of Anthony Harrop's liberty.

It was like coming on the butt-end of the Great Wall of China, the commonplace and touchable part of a monstrous whole extending like a dragon through infinite distances.

Having cleared away the things, she brought in two flat brass candlesticks and placed them on the side table with two boxes of matches. The cat went out with her and she closed the door.

Anthony sat musing. The election had him in its grip, making him forget for the moment where

he was, even the girl, who, drawing up, was resting her head against the arm of his chair.

Then when he came to he found that the person who was never going to be tired again was yawning and trying to hide the fact.



CHAPTER XX

THE DREAM

HE lit the candle for her and accompanied her down the passage to the foot of the stairs, where, saying good night, she kissed him.

Put her hand round his neck, drew his face towards hers and kissed him, a hurried, fiery little kiss of thanks from sleepy lips, of gratitude—affection.

He watched her go up candlestick in hand, then he turned and went back into the sitting-room, where he stood before the fire with his foot on the bar of the fender, his eyes on the embers of the log.

He had no name for her. He could not endure the name Lucy Grey, that *nom de guerre*, that hateful libel. Her real name? Ah! did she even know it herself? Perhaps, but she had not told him. She had told him nothing about herself, she seemed to want to know nothing about him.

They were no closer to one another than on the night when they first met, except for the affection that had sprung up between them, binding them together so naturally yet so curiously.

Just as the ivy takes the oak by a thousand little hands, so she had taken him in a thousand little bonds each almost nothing, but collectively her.

The whole business was hers in origin.

He was not thinking of that, nor of the fact that the terrible thing, if one could use the word terrible

in connection with a creature so essentially innocent, was her power of acquiescence, of taking life as it came to her, apparently without question, men as a means of livelihood like knitting, and gifts as natural lendings like the air she breathed and the water she drank. She had never once thanked him by word of mouth for what he had done for her—she seemed to take it all as a matter of course; of the future she seemed absolutely indifferent. Never had she thanked him by word, but what spoken thanks would equal the real affection she held for him—for him, not because he had helped her in trouble but because he was himself—an affection springing from the first prompting of the dog-like instinct that had made her cross to his table that night. She who could love like a child, or, perhaps it would be truer to say, like a dog.

He was not thinking of that, though doubtless it was at the back of his mind. He was looking at her picture against the white dice of the smouldering log, listening to the faint sound of the trees in the wind, listening to the silence of the house that had returned, now that he was alone, like water rebrimming a well.

Yes.

He took his pipe from the mantelpiece and filled it, lit it, and stood for a moment smoking with his back to the fire and his hands in his pockets; then he came across to the coloured print of The Great Exhibition, put on his glasses and examined it for a moment, passing on to the book-case where lived

old-fashioned books that no one read, 'not even the summer visitors. He took a book from it at random. Then he came back to the fire and sat down.

Gregg had told him that, despite her youth and prettiness, she was not of the order of women that attracts men, that she was negative in that business, pleasing for a moment, but unable to hold.

He was wondering if she had ever kissed a man of her own initiative, even only with the kiss of affection that had been his; and, if so, what the man must have been like who had let her go without holding her for always. Yes. For always, as part of himself.

He bent forward and taking the poker stirred the remains of the log slightly, and then, with the point of the poker, he broke up the white, dice-like divisions of the embers.

A knock came to the door. He started and turned; it was only the woman to ask did he want anything more that night. When she had gone he leaned back in his chair, relit his pipe that had gone out, and picking the book he had selected from the table turned over its leaves.

It was a little black-covered book with the inscription on its cover "Shorwell and its History."

The thing was nearly a hundred years old, published in Fleet-Street by one Thomas Norton at the Sign of the Angel in the year of our Lord 1815. The book seemed mostly about people of Shorwell, and the people all seemed to live in the churchyard. This sort of people are generally the pleasantest

inhabitants of a country parish, but they are not the most cheerful individuals to reach about, especially at night, at Macketts' and with the wind stirring Gallows Wood.

Quaint inscriptions from tombs and memorials were given at length.

Inmate in grief he took his grandchild heire,
Whose soul did haste to make to him repaire,
And so to heaven along as little page
With him did poast to wait upon his age,

read Anthony of Sir John Leigh, buried with little Barnabas Leigh, his grandchild, both in the same tomb.

And from the tomb of another Leigh's wife the inscription :

"*Vae Soli*"—Woe to the lone one. Woe to the lone one.

The whole tragedy of the death and burial business was summed up in that.

He closed the book and placed it on the table. Then, after a while, tapping out his pipe, he rose, lit his candle, put out the lamp and came upstairs.

His room was next to hers at the end of the passage, a pleasant room, but low-pitched, as I have said, beamed with oak, the chintz curtains drawn across the little window.

A sampler on the wall opposite his bed proved on close inspection with the candle to be the work of Elizabeth Mackett who was sixteen years of age in the year 1693. It was figured with a dog and a

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kettle and a cat and a plough and a daffodil ; it displayed piety in a four-line verse, and it might have been done a year ago for all the mark of time on it.

This had possibly been her room. Sleeping in old houses like this is like sleeping in History, especially when the be 's are half as old as the walls, like the beds at Macketts'.

Anthony, with the candle blown out, was thinking something like this ; brooding on the thought a moment too long, the door of dreams opened a bit and the sampler-maker slipped through, a ghost over two hundred years old yet a fresh young girl, who kissed him, turned and tripped up a suddenly built stairs with a candle in her hand to a door through which he followed her into a churchyard.

It was the going up the dream stairs that no doubt raised the churchyard to such a height above the surrounding dream country, which could be seen for miles on every side ; there were daffodils everywhere and a plough was leaning against the guarding wall. The girl had vanished. She was dead and buried and he was looking for her gravestone ; here was one marked like a sampler, but it was Sir John Leigh's—Sir John after whom the baby Barnabas had "poasted" to act as a little page. And here was one marked simply "*Vae Soli*"—Woe to the lone one. He awoke lying on his back, and turning, went to sleep again, chloroformed by the air of the Downs and the sea.

CHAPTER XXI
FRESHWATER BAY

HE was awakened by the Mackett maid-of-all-work entering his room with hot water and pulling up the blind.

The fair weather still held, and, the window facing east, a level beam of sunlight struck the wall opposite his bed.

He had awakened disturbed in his mind, and the sunlight and the pleasant surroundings of the room did not dispel the shadow upon him—a shadow born, maybe, of some dream that had left scarcely a mark on memory. A feeling of absolute insecurity was about him, as though in this quiet place, so far from everywhere, so silent, things were crouching ready to spring upon him—upon him and upon her.

It was just now, perhaps, that he recognised for the first time that he had embarked on a strange adventure, if not a new way of life, that he couldn't divide himself from the being in the next room, that she had become dear to him in the most curious and complex way, as a woman, as a child, as a creature to be protected, as the only person he had ever really cared for.

Meeting this recognition came now the ghosts into which the shadow had resolved itself.

Money. There was little more than two hundred pounds in the bank now, deducting the bills he had paid and what he had drawn. He had ready money

to last some little time, but his main store was only two hundred. How long would that last ?

If the business recovered all would be right, but if it didn't ? If this terrible election went wrong ? The world-force that might either save him or crush him like an avalanche—and her. Then came another ghost, Selina. Absolutely dumb, but absolutely inimical, unknowing, yet at any moment possibly informed.

Wronged, maybe !

Never before had the idea of Selina as a “ maybe wronged woman ” occurred to him, perhaps because never before had the girl with whom he had been playing this strange game of friend and protector shown him the strength of her hand and the fact that hearts were trumps.

Gregg had spoken of her as a Goblin girl—innocent, yet strayed into the Market and condemned to sell Goblin fruit ; no matter how pure and healthy the fruit might be, it would be tainted by the Market, at least to the eyes and taste and smell of all “ respectable ” people, all normal people who yet recognised that the woman bazaar was as essential to Society as the Stock Exchange or Billingsgate.

Anthony, falling in with this view, had listed Selina with Isaac Coborne and all the tribe who are down on fallen women, though reckoning them to be part of Society ; he had, in fact, looked on himself as a superior to these folk, told himself that he would tell Selina all about the business only for

the confounded wrong-headed row there was sure to be.

He didn't tell himself that this morning, or did so with less self-conviction.

He did not blame himself for the position he was in, recognising that the position was not of his deliberate making, that it had come upon him by degrees, of itself and not owing to the beckoning of ill intent.

In fact, after the first recognition it scarcely bothered him; but it was there all the same—something threatening trouble, yet less defined and less ironical than the money worry.

The Selina trouble was atypical; it could only develop into frightful rows—even separation from Selina.

The money trouble could develop into heaven knows what, for without money how could he hold what had become so dear to his heart?

He rose up and began to dress and felt better. The recumbent position, especially in the morning, is a veritable forcing-bed for developing worries; on his feet now, and shaving before the uptilted dressing-table mirror, he felt not only better but in a fighting mood. It was the hard streak in his character making itself felt.

Anthony was a bad man to push. He had the power of developing within himself an astounding amount of anger-energy if things or events aroused him to a certain pitch of resistance, not people. He was a bad hater, too, human perhaps. He had

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flung his wife's sister out, not from hatred of her but of the little events she was always creating antagonistic to his comfort and interests. Against things and events, if they resisted or were inimical to him, he could blaze out in an amazing manner, as you would admit if you had ever seen him hunting for a lost collar-stud under the chest of drawers.

He finished shaving and completed dressing. As he was winding his watch—he wound it night and morning—preparatory to putting it in his pocket, a sound struck his ear—a sweet, low, thrilling sound; someone was whistling a tune he had never heard before. It was the girl in the next room. Like a flash the memory came to him of that night when he had met her first, the picture of her sitting at the table near by, her mind wandering for a moment and her lips pursed up as though she were whistling softly to herself.

The tune broke off, then went on. It was the old Canadian tune "La Violette Dandine," the tune the canoe men and trappers know, that calls up to the initiated the birch woods and the rapids and ravines of the far North.

Preserved in memory perhaps as the bird's song is preserved, calling up perhaps nothing to the full consciousness of the whistler.

Then it ceased. A door opened and closed; she had left her room.

Downstairs, when he followed, he could not find her. The breakfast-things were laid in the sitting-room and the maid-of-all-work was carrying in the

tray. The front door was open, and leaving the house he came out into the sunshine, where she was standing on the little grass place by the drive, shading her eyes and looking upwards towards the north-east.

"Ah, there you are!" said Anthony.

"Look!" she cried, pointing to the strange sight beyond the trees.

It was Godshill Church.

Viewed from Macketts' it seems built in the sky. Perhaps the old legend of the fairy builders was inspired by the view on some equally bright morning in the remote past.

Anthony shaded his eyes. "It's the church," said he. "Looks funny, doesn't it? It's because you can't see the hill. Looks as if it were built on the tree-tops."

She took his arm—she had not said "good morning"—greeted him just as though they had met after being separated for only five minutes. The church had dropped from her mind, and as they moved towards the fence dividing the lawn from the meadow that ran with a dip towards Gallows Wood she measured her steps with his.

At the fence she dropped his arm and leaned on the top rail gazing at the woods, above which a rook was circling—gazed a long while without speaking, and, then turning, looked up at him sideways.

"I don't ever want to go away from here," she said with that charming half-lisp which so fascinated him.

“You like it?” said Anthony.

“I don’t want to go away from here,” she repeated slowly, her eyes turning back to the trees, and speaking as though not in answer to his question but some question she had put to herself. “I won’t either—never.” Her voice trailed off to a murmur, and it came to Anthony in a weird way that she was deciding the question of her future without any reference to him, as though in conference with some power or fate or being of her imagination of which he knew nothing.

“And you shan’t if you don’t want to,” said

Not for the first time came to him that strange sense of her detachment—almost one might say from herself, as though she were undeveloped and still half in a twilight world, warm and loving as a child yet negative, sexless; and yet, there were times when, with the momentary, perhaps accidental, prolongation of her gaze, she could turn the heart in him.

He had come to that, and come swiftly. The kindness, the affection, the sense of protecting her and being protected by him, all those hundred little warm bonds, amounting to love, were still there between them, pure as the gold from which they were woven, and yet the momentary prolongation of her gaze would turn the heart in him with the craving for more.

And she meant nothing, felt nothing of that. Of this he was made sure by the certain knowledge which

is instinct. She was dead to that sort of love—at all events with him, possibly with all men.

And yet she loved him as he had never been loved by human being before—but it was the love that could have been diffused amidst a family without impropriety, coin that could have been paid to dogs or horses.

At breakfast he told her of the plans he had made for the day. He wanted to call on someone (Colonel Jameson) who lived at Freshwater, and he wanted to show her the island. Mackett would order a car from the inn at Godshill. Would it suit her to start at ten?

Any time would suit her that suited him. Her face lit up at the thought of the little expedition; evidently journeys about the island were not prohibited by her decision that she was never going to leave this place, and at ten, when the car came round, he found her waiting in the porch.

A problem had been vexing Anthony. She had no money. That night when he had met her first she may have had a few shillings in her purse, but she was temporarily out of funds; in fact, the bill he had paid was owing to the landlady.

She was well dressed; she was wearing now a fur that had come out of the luggage she had brought with her, but what else did it contain? Had she enough clothes, did she want for anything?

Though he had done so much in the paying way already, it had been done without a word; it was part of the protective arr. he had put about her,

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something that could be offered and accepted without remark. But money! The thought of offering her money! It was impossible.

All the same, as the car turned into the Shorwell road, and whilst he was tucking the rug around her, which had slipped, the question came to his lips quite easily.

"Have you enough things with you—clothes, I mean. I don't know what you've brought."

"I have quite enough," she said. "I brought everything with me."

"Let me look at that bag," said he.

She handed him the little beaded bag. He opened it and then shut it again hurriedly and apologetically.

"Yes, you can look in," said she.

There was a handkerchief, a little book of *papier poudre*, a half-crown, a halfpenny, and a tiny gold lucky pig on a fine chain in the bag.

"The chain's broken," said she.

"I'll have it mended for you," replied he. "Now shut your eyes."

Then after a minute he handed the thing back and told her not to open it till she was alone.

They passed Shorwell and Mottistone. The day had gone cloudy, but the clouds were high and thin and ribbed, showing the blue beyond, a perfect autumn sky under which Freshwater lay clipped by the great Downs, the beach answering the wind in the pine trees.

The car skirted the bay-side and passed up a

pleasant road lined with villas, little gardens and trees that would be all gold laburnum or white lilac next year—past shops and a will where Anthony saw displayed the first election poster, through a gateway and up a drive to the door of a house, where it stopped.

“This is the Colonel’s, sir,” said the driver.

Leaving his companion in the car, Anthony got out and rang the bell.

Yes, Colonel Jameson was in.

Anthony followed the servant across a hall hung with trophies of the chase (African and Indian), past a stuffed bear holding a card bowl, into a pleasant study looking on a lawn.

Here he took his seat in a yellow cane arm-chair and contemplated his surroundings: the business-like roll-top desk, the rack of sticks and hunting-crops, the hunting fixtures by the mantelpiece.

Poor Anthony’s little evasions of the truth had always to be paid for promptly and to the last penny, it seems, for this visit was no pleasure. Jameson at the club was a bore and no particular friend of his; in fact, he might think this intrusion at such an hour rather uncalled-for. But he was a Conservative and an island Conservative, and Anthony had told Selina that he was going down to the island to give Jameson a hand in the election, and Anthony’s conscience had to be saved.

Besides, it was a sort of penance that made him feel better in his mind.

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In fact, sitting now looking out at the lawn and the fir trees against the blue-grey sky, he felt as though a lot of irregularity had been cleared from his position. He *had* come to help in the election; witness the fact that he was here to interview one of the chief "electricians." He *would* help to the best of his power; yes, by gad, he would even speak at meetings if necessary, go canvassing if necessary,

He was not thinking that his help would be of any avail; for the moment he had even forgotten the necessity of a Conservative victory to him from the money point of view; he was entirely engaged in disentangling, or trying to disentangle, his conscience from the lie he had told Selina, that he was going to the Isle of Wight for the purpose of helping in the election.

The door opened and Jameson came in—a big man in grey tweeds, heavy eye-browed, slow, and with a big moustache which he would pull on when perplexed, downwards, as though he were pulling on a bell-rope to ring up the thoughts that weren't there.

"Glad to see you," said Jameson. "Half expected you'd call. Glorious weather, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied the other, wondering what the deuce the other meant. "I ran down to the island to—I, in fact, wanted a little holiday and thought I'd take the island and try to lend a hand in the election; this is a time when every man ought to be fighting."

Jameson conceded that this was so and offered a cigar, which Anthony accepted, breaking his rule about not smoking before lunch.)

"I get 'em at Harrods," slid the Colonel; "you can't beat them at the price. Been to the club lately?"

"No," said Anthony. "I've been busy."

"I was up the day before yesterday," said the other. "This damn election seems to have cleared London out; couldn't even get a game of Bridge. What on earth did we want coming a mucker like this, for we had four years to run and a clear course and we stick up this to ride for."

"Do you think we'll win?"

"There's only one thing that will stop us—Conservative apathy and cock-sureness. The party isn't what it was, and it lost some of its best men in the war. But we'll win—can't help it. The nation's not a fool, but what did we want to do it for?"

Anthony, unable to answer that question, asked another.

"How about the election here?"

"In the island? Safe as houses. The place is Conservative; we'll be in by two thousand—maybe three. You see, I know the island. I'm an islander myself; we've been here for four generations and we ain't short-lived. I know the islander, ought to. To begin with, he's honest—honest in the right sort of way, you know—last man to be taken in by

Radical lies—and he's level-headed in the right sort of way. That's what's making the Radicals so mad. They know what they're up against, and they are fighting like hell-cats, wasting their powder and damning the immortal souls they haven't got with lies. The more they lie the better—I told Colonel Collinson so yesterday—the more they lie the better, simply because their lies are so transparent. Baldwin stands out against them like a saint on a stained-glass window, and the islander sees it.

“Well, now, as to helping. I don't know exactly what you can do, but you can run over if you like and see Collinson; he lives at Cowes—the Towers—anyone will tell you. I'm off myself to Cannes to-morrow. My wife's sister is laid up there. Oh, by the way, what I wanted to say to you, I had a letter from Isaac Coborne, a kinsman of yours, this morning. Dear old chap, Isaac. I've got it somewhere, no it's upstairs, doesn't matter. He said you were likely to call on me and asked for your address in the island. I only got the letter this morning; funny coincidence your coming in on top of it.”

“Oh!” said Anchony. Then, after a pause, “Coborne—yes, of course, I'll write to him—glad you told me.”

Coborne, what on earth did this mean? Selina must have seen Isaac, told him of Jameson, and Coborne must have written off at once to Jameson asking for the address. Why?

He had given Selina no address—simply said he was going down to the island to give a hand in the election and help his friend Jameson.

Could Selina be ill? No, in that case Isaac would have said so and wired, not written.

Could Isaac, knowing what he did, and knowing Gregg's address—he had given him Gregg's address, at least told him Gregg lived in Endell Street—could Isaac, with extra knowledge squeezed from Gregg, have come to the truth and told Selina? Was the fat in the fire? If it was, it was too far off to hear the sizzling. Why had he been fool enough to tell what he did to Isaac?

All these questions passed through the brain of Anthony interdependent and swiftly moving as the component parts of a comet. A comet whose head was a note of interrogation.

He rose to go, refusing a drink.

Jameson came to the door to see him off, and at sight of the occupant of the car he came to the car door.

Anthony did not introduce the pair; he made up for the omission by an effusive handshake, and a "hope to see you at our place in town," thanking God as the car moved off for the existence of self-starters.

Not that it mattered. Jameson was off to Cannes to-morrow. Nothing mattered—why should he bother? Let Isaac go hang—the whole world. Something was put in his hand; it was the little bead bag; two hands clasped his, bag and all, then

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it was taken back. She had discovered the five-pound note he had put in it.

Not a word. He retook one of the hands, and the little finger curled round his as if saying "Thank you" on its own account.

