

CHAPTER XXVI
SHE SEES HIM OFF

THE taxi from Godshill, ordered overnight to take him to the station arrived at half-past nine.

At the last moment, and whilst they were at breakfast, she had decided to go to the station with him and see him off.

"It has to come back to Godshill," said she, "so it won't cost anything more my going."

"Don't worry about that," said Anthony; "as if it mattered! And you're not to leave it at Godshill, it's got to bring you right back here. It looks as if it might rain, and I don't want any chance of your getting wet again."

He got up from his place and went over and kissed her as she rose, holding her face between his two palms.

At the station, whilst getting his ticket, she disappeared, returning with two morning papers and the *Happy Magazine*, bought with her own money from the starved purse in that bag which she carried like a fetish and in which still lay intact the five-pound note. Anthony laughed. As the train moved off he looked out. She was standing—aye, how pretty she looked!—standing and waving to him, caught suddenly in a beam of sunshine that had pierced the clouds.

A good omen, surely.

The fact that the papers she had bought for him

were the *Daily Chronicle* and *Daily Herald* made him laugh again, flung a new light on politics, made this cast-iron Conservative feel a brotherly sort of affection for Mr. Hamilton Fyffe. She knew nothing and cared nothing for politics, she had bought them ; to leave them behind in the carriage at Ryde pier-head was impossible ; he opened his suit-case and popped them in. He would keep them for ever. At Portsmouth Harbour he bought his *Morning Post* and took his seat in the luncheon-car of the express to Waterloo.

He opened the *Morning Post* and leaning comfortably back in his seat began to read, skimming the news, glancing at the leading articles and then at the fashionable intelligence.

The *Morning Post* was his newspaper, part of his life, as a newspaper becomes to a man ; the *Morning Post* was sane and cool and brought him, in a way, in touch with high aristocratic circles to which he did not belong, but which, as a true-born Englishman, he highly respected ; it upheld Church and State and the family tie, and it never published alarmist reports or news.

He had been out of touch with it for some days, and it was the first thing to welcome him back to the mainland and the realities of life.

This morning there was no disturbing news in it, yet it had disturbed him.

Disturbed his dream of love with a question not written in printer's ink :

“ What now ? ”

It was not till this moment that the question presented to him by this organ of Society became a thing demanding a definite answer. What now? What are you going to do about your wife, your relations, your friends?

The original object of this journey—to see what Isaac Coborne wanted, to see if the fat was in the fire and so forth—was nothing. Yesterday and last night had changed everything, all his world—just as a declaration of war changes the world.

The fat *had* to be in the fire, now. He was Hers. She was his; even a few hours' parting was pain. To get back to Her by the earliest train on the morrow was absolutely essential to his existence.

Just so, and he was a married man. Selina had to say a word about all this—if not to-day, to-morrow; if not to-morrow, later. The thing could not go on without a break-up. It was like being in a motor-car charging a brick wall. The smash was inevitable, though still only in the world of contemplation.

Inevitable, and it involved more than Selina. It involved his position, his club, his friends.

If Anthony had been a Gob'inite, a fashionable actor, an author, an army man, the thing would have meant nothing much—just a change of women; but he had always moved among decent, old-fashioned people, and he had always looked with quite honest reprobation on “irregularity.” He was known to hold that view. And—now?

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Now he had done it. Done it, anyhow, completely and entirely.

The waiter handed him a bread-basket and the wine card.

Anthony put the *Morning Post* under the seat, chose a half-bottle of Citron, and resumed his meditations.

And he wouldn't have undone it for worlds—and there was no use thinking.

The waiter put before him a cocktail. He hadn't ordered it, a gentleman at the other end of the car was waiting for it, but he drank it before discovering the mistake, and it at once put Selina out of the window and Her opposite to him.

The Château Citron finished what the cocktail had begun in the way of removing worries and building castles.

Macketts', not without a certain romantic charm of its own, became idealised ; it had ceased to be a farm-house and had become a dream place, silent, remote, detached from the considerations of everyday life—and she was waiting for him there.

No, he had not been wrong at Freshwater. She had then only loved him as a friend. It had come to her suddenly, this thing which is real love, at the stile, yesterday, when he had told her he was going away.

How did he know ? Heavens, how did he know ? How else but from her lips ? The one thing that cannot lie is a kiss.

Just then, at the stile yesterday, this thing had

really begun—this new life so wonderful that he could scarcely believe in it.

Benedictine, coffee and a cigar carried him comfortably along past Woking; Clapham Junction began to arouse him from his dreams, and the platform at Waterloo completed the awakening. Never once had it occurred to him as funny that, in giving the girl to understand that election business was taking him to town, he had told her the same little story that he had told Selina when he informed her that election business was taking him to the country.

He drove to the club, left his suit-case with the hall-porter and came into the smoking-room. Here there were gentlemen, mostly elderly, in all stages of indigestion; the air was drowsy with the after-luncheon atmosphere and the entrance of Anthony was scarcely noticed.

It seemed to him that men's eyes avoided him. That they knew, that rumour had already been about circulating his name with comments on it. "Just fancy, who'd ever have imagined it—Harrop of all people in the world!" This delusion was soon dispelled. No sooner had he taken his seat than Jackals, the club bore, who always knew everything about everyone, and even more, came up and took his seat beside him. Had there been any adverse rumour about Anthony this unpleasant person would have been the last to speak to him. His friendliness soothed the other's mind; all the same, the cost was more than the sedative was worth, and, rising after ten minutes' conversation, Anthony

left the club. Left it, he felt, never to enter it again except to pick up his suit-case left with the hall-porter. To-day was all right, but when they knew! It wasn't that he would be ejected: adultery he had never heard of as being a bar to club membership; it might be, for all he knew, but he was not bothering about that. The bar to him was compounded of Jackals, Snaresdale, Tomlinson, Colonel Grant, Twyford, several others—men whom he didn't care for—he had never been much of a club man—men on whom he had always looked as being slightly lower than himself in worth. To know that they were talking about him in an adverse manner would be worse than being skinned alive—at least very painful.

They would talk, no doubt, but he would not be within their zone.

So, you see, he had determined to give up his club, or rather his clubs, for the chess club people were even worse to fall foul of in this way than the Old Conservatives, numbering as they did so many parsons in their ranks.

He had determined to give up his clubs. But the determination was not heroic. It had provisions and blanks left open for new clauses, and it was unsigned as yet.

He would not resign—he just would not go to them; then so many things might happen—for instance, Selina might come to some agreement by which there would be no scandal!

Anthony had not made his mind in the fashion,

if not the form, of an eel—his forefathers had done that ; it was a perfectly honest mind, but to wriggle was its nature, to slip round a difficulty rather than face it, to vanish mysteriously from tribulation and find a calmer pond.

But don't despise eels. You won't if you are a fisherman and have ever caught one ; or if you are naturalist enough to know that they go to the Sargasso Sea to couple.

Reaching Northumberland Avenue, he paused to consider his steps.

Should he visit Selina at once and know the worst, or go to Gregg, or go to the office for soundings as to his position ?

He called a taxi and told the driver to take him to Endell Street.

Gregg was in ; he was finishing off some panel patients, and Anthony was shown to the room above, where he sat down and amused himself whilst waiting by glancing over an illustrated weekly paper. He almost wished he hadn't come. Though anxious to see if Isaac Coborne had been, he rather dreaded Gregg. He was so awfully outspoken, and he was such a man for questioning and finding out things.

However, he was there, and couldn't go away now.

GREGG

GREGG came in filling a pipe hurriedly. His time for smoking was limited, and he made the most of it.

"Hello," said Gregg.

He glanced at the paper which Anthony in rising had put down on the table, open at a page depicting a race between women in running shorts. They were jumping a hurdle.

"That's the sort of paper," said Gregg, without another word of greeting, "they send as a specimen to doctors to put in their consulting-rooms. It came this morning. Look at those bounding kangaroos! Do they think they are women? That's the modern woman—and she hasn't enough milk to feed a kitten, let alone a baby. I'm telling you the truth, and it's a truth that hits every man born of woman. You can't lay down the foundations of a man out of a pap bottle."

He picked up the paper and opened a page showing the front at Monte Carlo. Then he was off.

Anthony listened, pleased enough at the momentary respite, yet feeling like a patient in the hands of a talkative dentist. The forceps was there right enough.

"And can you wonder at the discontent of the masses when this sort of thing is shoved under their noses," finished the other, laying the paper down. "Cold and misery and want of work facing wealth.

and sunshine and furs and champagne, gorging and guzzling, gaming and dancing and tennis playing. And they photograph it, and hand the photographs to the people. Well, how is she ? ”

“ She’s a lot better,” said Anthony—“ ever so much better. That place has quite picked her up.”

“ You’ve left her there

“ Yes.”

“ For good ? ”

“ As long as she likes to stay.”

“ I didn’t mean that. I meant, are you going back there ? ”

“ Yes,” said Anthony. There was not a bit of use saying “ No ” to Gregg.

Gregg stood with his back to the fire and the pipe stuck up out of his mouth. He was silent for a quarter of a minute or so ; then he spoke :

“ You haven’t told your wife yet ? ”

“ I only told her I was going to the country. Oh, by the way, what I wanted to ask you—did, by any chance, a Mr. Isaac Coborne call on you ? ”

“ He did,” said Gregg. “ As a matter of fact, he called early on the day you took her off to the Isle of Wight. I didn’t see you that day, so couldn’t tell you.”

“ Did he ask you things ? ”

“ No, he told me things : told me you’d given him my name and address and told him all about the girl. I told him you were taking her down to

place her in the Isle of Wight. He asked where, and I took leave of my conscience to say I didn't know. I didn't care for the chap."

"Thanks," said Anthony.

It was plain that Isaac was busy. After visiting Gregg he must have gone to Selina, heard the story about the election and that he, Anthony, had gone to help Jameson; then written, catching the five o'clock post. Nosy beast. The question was, had he told Selina anything?

"He said he was a relation of yours," went on Gregg.

"He is—of a sort."

Gregg smoked for a minute without speaking. Then:

"Let's get back to the main point," said he. "How about your wife?"

"My wife?"

"Yes—you were saying a moment ago you had not told her about this."

"Not yet," said Anthony.

"Oh, then, you are going to tell her."

"Yes."

"When?"

"Some time."

"Why not now?"

"Well, it's just this way—I'm so afraid she'd make a scene. She might go down to the Isle of Wight and—you know what women are. It's not as if she had completely recovered; she's better, as I said, but not at all strong yet."

"Excuse me," said Gregg, "but are you talking of the health of your wife or that girl?"

"The girl."

"Just so. Now, look here, it's no affair of mine, but I'm going to say what I'm going to say; you ought to tell your wife, and you ought to tell her at once. The thing has not gone too far. If you let it go on she'll be sure to find out. Tell her the truth that you took an interest in this girl, helped her, took her down to the country, felt a sentimental feeling for her, but that there has been nothing wrong in your relationship with her."

Gregg was fishing. He had struck a salmon, and he knew it. The change in Anthony's face told him everything.

"Unless there *has*," said he. "I see. Well, I'm not going to blame you. Men can't go messing about with girls; you can't do it no more than you can put your fist in the fire without being burned. The best of motives go to blazes at the sight of a garter. It's Nature. Even so," he finished, "it's up to you to do the right thing still."

"Yes?"

"Tell your wife."

"It's easy to say that," replied the other, "but you don't know all."

"Spit it out. I'm not charging you for this consultation, so I can remind you that my time is limited. Spit it out."

"It's just this. I've got to care for her, so that I can't leave her."

Gregg looked at his spiritual patient curiously. Well he knew that of all fools the man of a certain age in love with a young girl is the greatest, but there was something in Anthony's face, voice and manner that spoke of this being a different thing from ordinary sex-infatuation, an earnestness, a curious boyishness, a momentary revelation as if the soul of Anthony had peeped out, showing itself to be a virgin, blushing and wreathed in the roses of a first love.

"All the same," said Gregg, "you must tell your wife. It's just this way," he went on: "you can't blame a married man if, under certain circumstances, such as yours, another woman captures him. You may pity him, for these affairs always end badly, if not for him for one of the women; but you can't blame him for the act, or not till you've blamed Nature. It's the hiding of it that's the deuce. No man who plays that sort of game can have any respect for himself. How can he? He's a living lie. He may fancy he's just as good a man as he was before, but indeed he's not—he's on the level with a schoolboy hiding a fault, and he's half-brother to a bank cashier hiding a deficit. I tell you, a man who betrays his wife has in him the stuff that makes the falsifier of accounts: you can't step over the border-line of honesty and be honest. To fall into a trap set for you by Nature is not dishonest, to love another woman is not to betray your wife, but to hide from your wife that you are living with another woman and leaving her is a damned rotten

thing to do ; it poisons your soul. You're a business man, and you told me you had a partner. Would you hide from him essential things about your business—would you be dishonest to him ? No, of course you wouldn't. Well, where's the difference ? ”

“ I am going to tell her,” said Anthony. “ I am going to make a clean break. I must. I have reckoned up everything.”

Gregg looked at him gloomily. He liked Anthony, had come to understand him as a patently honest, easy-going man who had always led a respectable life, but he knew that in sex matters honesty is only the gift of saints or the anæmic when Temptation comes strong. He knew quite well how this man had been led along by Desire, masquerading first under the guise of sympathy, pity and good-heartedness, how the prettiness and grace and childishness of the girl had been the real weavers of the net, for Anthony's humanitarianism, genuine though it was, would never have extended itself in a like manner towards an ugly or plain woman, and he felt that the whole business was disastrous and terrible. A man split clean away from his home and his wife by a girl picked up, so to say, in the street ! And there was no use in arguing or preaching or talking on the main issue, but he couldn't for the life of him help saying what he had said.

“ When will you tell her ? ” he asked.

“ At once,” said Anthony. “ I expect it won't be telling so much as explaining. I expect that

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man Isaac Coborne has already done the telling. Well, I must be going now, and many thanks to you for our talk and what you said. It's good to have a friend who can talk to one like that and to whom one can tell things."

Gregg accompanied him to the door.



HOW ANTHONY TOLD HIS WIFE

IN Endell Street he took a taxi to the office. The cut-off feeling that had troubled him so much at Macketts' was due mostly to the absolute completion of his isolation, the feeling that no one in London knew his address; then, again, there was the feeling that something might happen in connection with the business requiring either his word or his presence; and, again, he wanted some sort of postal communication, circulars, bills, anything in the way of letters, otherwise the Macketts would think it decidedly queer his receiving nothing from the outside world.

Mandelberg was at the office.

"I want to leave you my address," said Anthony, "so that you can send along any letters——" He paused, sat down and began to explain.

In five minutes Mandelberg had everything out of him, including the fact that he was going home to tell his wife the whole story—to do the right thing.

"I've got to do the right thing," said Anthony. "It's an impossible position otherwise. Marriage, after all, has been to us little more than a business partnership, and partners have to act straight one to the other. What would you think of me if I were to hide things from you? I am going to her to say we must dissolve partnership. We will be friends henceforward—nothing more."

"You are going to say that to your wife?"

"Yes."

Mandelberg whistled the refrain of the "Police-man's Holiday" softly between his teeth.

Then he lit a cigarette and spoke:

"Don't be a damned fool," said he. "Wait, at all events, till after the election."

"Why?"

"Because your wife has a couple of thousand a year and a house—that's why; and if the election goes wrong you're bust. I thought I had a plan that would save us if the Liberals got in, but I don't think it will eventuate. How much money have you of your own?"

"Not much—a few hundred in the bank."

"Just so, and what are you to do if we go broke? If we do, I'm going to the States. I can get a managership or something with my business knowledge and connections, but you aren't any use as a business man, you have no trade or profession, and the only thing open to you is selling matches on the Embankment. I doubt if you'd make a living at that."

"Thanks," said Anthony.

"Don't get huffed. I'm speaking for your own good. It's nothing to me."

"I could never take money from my wife under the circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"Me living with another woman."

"But what on earth do you want to live with

her for ? ” asked Mandelberg. “ You’ll get sick of her in a month. You needn’t cut her adrift—I’m not meaning that—keep her in tow if you want to, but don’t take her on board. That’s a fool’s game. Then if things bust up you might get a club secretaryship or something like that with your position and your wife’s city influence, and a good house where you can ask people to dine. Do the other thing and you’re cut off, damned—literally damned ! ”

“ To begin with,” said Anthony, “ things aren’t going to ‘ bust up,’ as you say. I’ve seen the temper of the electors, and England is not going to cut her own throat ; and I could never take my wife’s assistance, if not money, under the circumstances. No, I’ve got to tell her and have done with it.”

“ Well,” said Mandelberg, “ make your own bed and lie on it. I’ve done all I can. Yes, I’ll send you along any old letters or circulars that turn up. There are a couple on that table, I’ll have them posted to-night.”

He took down the address and Anthony departed, returning to the club for his suit-case.

It was after six o’clock when he left the club, taking a taxi to Marlborough Terrace.

HOW ANTHONY TOLD HIS WIFE (*Continued*)

HE had never considered Selina in relation to catastrophe. How would she react ?

During their married life they had practically never quarrelled ; if they had it might have been better for them, but they had never quarrelled, to use the word in its accepted sense.

Selina was much too genteel to exhibit violence or anger, and maybe too diplomatic, for she always got her own way, even against opposition that would have made an ordinary woman storm and rave.

Selina was, you will remember, descended from an old city family ; she was not proud of her family tree, yet people often pride themselves on less, for hers was a wonderful old city family ; aldermen and sheriffs were hanging in its branches a hundred—aye, and two hundred—years ago ; it had produced two Lord Mayors and its members were always noted for their urbanity and their skill in evading disaster. When a crash in the city came they were always out of it : the South Sea Bubble burst but left them floating. Overend & Gurney left them bobbing uninjured, and Earings, in some extraordinary way, gave them profit. Their urbanity and their power of evading disaster was allied with pride in their respectability.

The Towers had never put on frills, but their

shirts and shifts had always been spotlessly clean. Their morality was not confined to the city—it extended to Twickenham and Hampton Court and even Sunbury, where James, William and Arthur Towers had their homes—old red-brick houses that had been inhabited by Towers in the time of John Gilpin.

Selina, the wife of Anthony, was daughter of the Sunbury Tower (Arthur) who, of all the Towers, was the tallest in self-esteem and the most rigid in honesty—and the best business man.

She was his daughter in mind as well as body, and she was about to be told by her husband that she was on a par with all those other women whose married lives had proved a failure. The Towers had always looked on Divorce Court proceedings as something worse than a death in the family, and to avoid scandal they would have made a journey round, longer even than the Golden Journey to Samarcand. Anthony knew something of all this, and the knowledge did not tend to make his mind any easier as he drove to Marlborough Terrace with his suit-case.

He did not ask his wife in—he told the servant to take the suit-case to his room; then he came along to the study, taking a peep into the dining-room on his way.

The table was laid in the dining-room and the place looked just as usual, the family portraits facing each other across the mahogany around which generations of Towers had met to eat and drink, to

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be merry, or to mourn, according to the demands of Marriage, Death and Birth.

Several letters and circulars lay on the table in the study.

There being plenty of time to dress for dinner he turned his attention to the letters.

Nothing much, with the exception of a bill for twenty-seven pound. sixteen and eightpence from Corker of Caversham for repainting done to the cottage in August; with it came a letter stating that Mr. Corker, having to meet some heavy accounts, would be glad of a cheque by return of post. The bill was marked "Acct. Rendered." The envelope was open—Selina, recognising that it was from Corker, had evidently opened it to see what it was. Anthony stormed. He forgot even, for a moment, the impending interview with Selina. This was always the way with this sort of people, letting accounts run on and then demanding money with a pistol at one's head. And what did Selina want opening the letter for; that was the quiet sort of thing she was always doing—stealthy, underhand.

The bill would have to be paid. He had always paid the painting and repairs bill for the cottage, she for the house. Have to be paid, and the bank balance, how about that?

Anthony knew, or thought he knew, roughly the amount to his credit at the bank, but he had not gone into his accounts lately; it was an unpleasant duty he had put aside. He had drawn a good many small

cheques in the last few weeks, including the big cheque for the garage. How much was there left? Somewhere under two hundred.

"Let's see," said he.

He took his cheque book and bank book and sat down, turning over the counterfoils and noting the amounts on a piece of paper.

Unless figures lied, there was now only ninety-seven pounds in the bank. Not for the first time in his life had he proved the magical way in which small sums mount up, yet the result left him disturbed and astonished.

Ninety-seven pounds, and he had six pounds odd in his pocket—one hundred and three pounds. Deducting the amount due to Corker, seventy-five pounds—roughly.

Seventy-five pounds!

Corker would have to wait. Even with a waiting Corker the prospect wasn't rosy.

He might overdraw at the bank; but not much—not at all. To overdraw in his position, if the election went wrong, would be an act of dishonesty.

All these comfortless thoughts were interrupted by the gong.

Going up to dress he met Selina on the stairs, and he knew at once by her face and manner that she knew nothing and suspected nothing.

"I ran up to see about some business," said he in answer to her greeting. "I must get back tomorrow. I'll tell you all about it at dinner."

Whew! How the stairs took it out of him on the journey up to his room. He would have given a sovereign, as he changed, for a whisky and soda; all the way home at the bottom of his mind he had been half hoping, half dreading that Selina, knowing or suspecting the truth, would have opened the ball. Taxed him, got angry—under those circumstances he felt that he could have brought matters to a head. She knew nothing and suspected nothing. It was for him to begin.

Begin! He sat down on the side of his bed in his shirt-sleeves.

“Selina, I want to say something to you. It’s not my fault, but things have been happening—something has happened——”

“Selina, I want to have a serious talk with you. I have met someone——” Oh, Lord!

“Selina, it is only fair to you and fair to myself that I should tell you——”

He got up and put on his necktie, his waistcoat and coat.

The gong roared below.

“Have you really got to go back to-morrow?” asked Selina, as he sat down to the same old soup.

“The Wilkinsons are giving an at home to meet the Conservative Member for Hampstead, and I thought you might have gone with me.”

“No, I must get back,” said Anthony. “I promised.”

“Are you going back to Colonel Jameson?”

“No. As a matter of fact, I didn’t stay with

him—I put up at Ryde, at the Pier Hotel—he's full up; but I'm going back to stay with Mr. Mackett of Godshill." There at last was something accomplished in the way of truth, something done. If Selina chose to poke about and find him there, then she would attack and all would be easy. It was impossible for him to open the ball himself, absolutely, and he had told her the truth—she couldn't say he was hiding.

"What are the Macketts?"

"Farmers."

"Only farmers!"

"Yes, but very good class people—and one can't make distinctions in politics."

"No, I suppose not," said she.

Politics did not interest her; she was a Conservative because "all respectable people are Conservatives."

It pleased her that Anthony had taken up politics, and on the right side. As a matter of fact, and for years, Selina had been possessed by the feeling that Anthony was slack; he had no hobbies; she had read somewhere once that a man was lost without a hobby, and instead of thanking the God who had saved her from marriage with a golf-fiend or an amateur carpenter she grumbled inwardly whenever she thought of the matter. Well, he had a hobby at last—at least, something to do beside his work at the office. It pleased her also to be able to say to her friends, "My husband is in the Isle of Wight helping. I believe it is a safe seat, for the island has

always been Conservative, but, as dear Mr. Moseley says, it doesn't do to be over-confident."

"Oh, I paid Corker's bill," said she in a sudden burst that seemed born of the rissoles that the servant-maid had suddenly uncovered. Those damned rissoles, all meat, no flavour, the curse and crown of English cookery, always turning up when he was home to lunch or dinner.

"I knew what it was and opened the letter. I think it's most impertinent writing for payment like that. I shan't give him anything more to do. He's a bit cheaper than Bone, but his work is not so good; that front gate is all blisters. Can you let me have a cheque to-night, if you are off to-morrow, as I have run myself short."

"Yes," said Anthony.

In the study half an hour later he wrote out the cheque with care and precision, whilst Selina sat glancing casually at the *Evening News*.

It seemed to him that this was more than a cheque, that in this sacrifice he was paying off any debt he owed Selina, that this was the definite barrier line between them.

"There you are," he said, laying the thing down on the corner of the desk after he had carefully blotted it.

"Thanks," said she in a remote voice, and without looking up, held for a moment by something in the woman's column of the paper—a recipe for making savoury apple fritters without eggs.

CHAPTER XXX

THE RETURN

HE was up early next morning, even before the maid brought tea.

There was no necessity for this early rising, as his train did not leave Waterloo till twelve-fifty, but, like a schoolboy starting for a holiday, he had to be up and about.

The curious irresponsible streak that had showed in him that morning after his interview with Burlingham was in evidence now again; the shocking monetary and moral tangle in which he was involved, so far from depressing his spirits, seemed to have a reverse effect—like a dangerous strip of a toboggan run. He whistled as he dressed.

Things might occur to make everything all right—even with Selina. Nothing could touch the present. This evening he would be with *Her*.

When the maid brought tea he told her to fetch his portmanteau, which was in the lumber-room close by. The suit-case was not big enough for his wants, and the maid, having fetched the portmanteau along, stopped to help him in its packing.

She always did that. Square-waisted, flat-busted, seemingly made of cardboard though she might be, she was an invaluable servant, kept his things mended and his buttons on and his stockings darned, his pyjamas aired. Never was there any chance of

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rheumatism from damp things when Matilda had control of affairs.

He recognised this fully now, and perhaps for the first time. Leaving out her flesh and blood composition, she was entirely made of respectability, highly religious, a member of the Girls' Friendly Society. What would she say if she knew the business she was helping in?

"Yes, I will take that new suit of tweeds," said he, "and those two new neckties. That's all I think. Oh, yes, those two newspapers and that yellow magazine, put them in, please."

He arrived at Waterloo an hour before the starting of the train.

Here and during the wait a quite unreasonable nervousness possessed him. Suppose something were to stop him? Visions of Selina suddenly taken ill and Matilda arriving at the station to fetch him back, visions of Selina appearing herself, passed before his mind. Nothing happened.

He entered the train standing at No. 8 Platform, took his seat in the luncheon-car and unfolded the paper he had bought, the *Daily Chronicle*. He was not in the humour for the *Morning Post*, and the *Chronicle* was even then being delivered at Macketts' or waiting at the Godshill shop to be fetched. It was a little bit of Macketts', almost a little bit of Her.

No man perhaps ever felt such an affection for a morning paper as Anthony for the sheet in front of him as he sat, now safe, with the train pulling

out of the station. But he avoided the political news.

He had wired to Macketts' saying the train he was coming by and ordering the taxi. Would she come to the station at Shanklin to meet him? Yes, she was almost sure to come.

There were few people in the luncheon-car and he had no *vis-à-vis* to bore him, but how long the journey seemed as compared with the journey down the other day.

At Brading the train paused for nearly five minutes for no apparent reason, after the fashion of the old Isle of Wight Railway, now supplanted by the Southern, arriving at Shanklin fifteen minutes late. There were few people on the platform. She was not there.

She had not come to meet him.

He knew it the moment he stepped out of the train, and at the first glance which, whilst not taking in everything, took in the fact that she was not there.

He stood for a moment balked, then collecting his luggage he came out to where the taxi was waiting. The driver was the same red-faced young man who had taken them to Freshwater. He saluted Anthony and helped to get the luggage on the 'car' and they started, Anthony asking no questions.

Everything was all right. She had not promised to come and meet him; and, oh! of course, the taxi would not have called at Macketts' before

starting to meet him ; it would have come straight from Godshill.

Everything was all right.

Godshill village in the dusk slowed its thatched roofs. Nothing much ever happens in Godshill, especially in the autumn and winter, and the place gives one that assurance.

The gates leading to the farm were open.

As he entered the lamp-lit hall Mrs. Mackett came out of the kitchen to meet him.

He knew at once there was something wrong.

The young lady had been taken bad, but she was better. Dr. Sims of Shanklin had been sent for yesterday, and he had been again to-day. He said it must be due to the wetting she had received—pain in the right side of the chest.

“ Good God ! ” said Anthony.

He went into the sitting-room with the woman and stood there whilst she told him more.

She had been taken bad shortly after returning from seeing him off. The district nurse had been, and would come again that night. Dr. Sims would call again in the morning ; he said that it wasn't “ pleumonia ” so much as the wetting she had got yesterday which had touched up some old trouble in the chest, but that she'd be about again in a few days.

As she told all this she stood with her fingers resting on the table and her eyes fixed on the top button of Anthony's coat.

A feeling as though she were evil came upon him. The dream returned to him—the dream in which

he had been seeking Her, the dream in which the chauffeur who had just driven him from the station and the woman before him had been holding him back from going to Her assistance.

He turned from the woman and went upstairs. A fire had been lit in the small grate of the bedroom and its pleasant flickering light showed the pleasant little room at its best.

Something stirred in the bed, and next moment she was up on her elbow to greet him as he came across the room. She had been waiting and watching for him and had dropped to sleep just before his arrival—hadn't heard him come upstairs. Then she sank back on the pillows, and he sat beside her holding her hand whilst she questioned him. Had he had a good time, was he tired, did the taxi meet him at the station?

She talked in a half whisper, and as he held her hand and chatted to her it came to him as a new revelation that she was now a part of himself, that their relationship was no longer that of a man and a girl, but of a man and a loving wife, a being whose only thought was of him.

As he rose to go downstairs for his supper his eye caught sight of something on the carpet. A tiny glass tube. He put on his glasses and examined it by the firelight; it was a tube of hypodermic morphia tabloids, evidently dropped by the doctor. He placed it in a little jar that stood on the mantelpiece.

Downstairs, just after he had finished supper, he

heard a step on the gravel outside, followed by a ring at the door bell, and a minute later Mrs. Mackett entered to say that Dr. Sims had looked in and had gone upstairs to see the patient.

"He won't be able to call in the morning, so he thought he'd look in to-night to see how she was doing," said Mrs. Mackett, as she cleared away the things. "He's called over to Southsea and mayn't be able to get back till evening, so he thought he'd make sure."

"I'd like to see him when he comes down," said Anthony. "Show him in, please."

She did.

Sims was an elderly practitioner, a heavy man with a full grey beard into which he had the habit of retiring when in a contemplative mood or faced with awkward questions. Otherwise he was hearty of manner, solid, reassuring and given to general conversation of a light description.

A moment put him quite *en rapport* with the other, and the talk ran on the weather, the state of the roads and the antiquity of Macketts', coming at last to the patient.

An attack of intercostal neuralgia, nothing more; they had taken it in time; evidently there had been trouble on that side. Pleurisy? Oh, yes, pleurisy, but there was no evidence of any return. However, one could never be too careful in cases like this; rest and quiet and warmth, those were the main things—the best nurses in a case like this. "There is no lung trouble in your family?"

Anthony answered that he did not think' so.

"You don't think there's any danger?" he asked.

Sims retired for a moment into his beard.

"No—no *danger*.' That is a large word to use in a case like this, but there is weakness that requires watching, general want of tone."

He wrote out a prescription for a tonic to be made up next day by the chemist at Shanklin, then promising to look in to-morrow evening he took his departure.

Anthony, alone with his thoughts, felt disturbed; he couldn't get over the impression that Sims had been holding something back behind that beard of his. Why couldn't he have said "No" to the plain question about danger?

He paced the room for a while, then going upstairs he came softly into the sick-room, where the fire had been re-made.

She was asleep.

He could scarcely see her face, which was turned away on the pillow, but her hand, lying on the coverlet, showed in the flickering firelight, delicate, small and white, relaxed, a thing that seemed to have little hold on life.

He came downstairs and, knocking at the kitchen door, had an interview with Mrs. Mackett.

She promised to see to the patient during the night. The district nurse would call early in the morning, and to-morrow, if it were necessary, they might get a permanent nurse from the nursing home at Shanklin. "Not that she wants much, poor

thing," said the woman. "She's as easy to do for as a lamb, but there's no knowing."

"Call me if you want anything or if she seems any worse," said Anthony.

He went back to the sitting-room.

Nurses, doctors, money. What would happen if things went on like this and the money were to give out? Seventy pounds odd—that was the amount of his resources, all the money he had in the world. How long would it last. He couldn't tell.

Though supposed to be a business man, he was at a loss on a matter like this. Selina had always done the spending business; he had given cheques for this and that, but he never had anything to do with the small payments, the everyday expenses of household life, no experience of how far a sovereign would go in that direction.

Seventy pounds. Well, it would last some time, even counting doctors' bills and the payment of a nurse, and money would soon begin to flow again from the business; once this election was over and "things righted themselves" he could get a loan from Mandelberg or overdraw at the bank to tide over temporary difficulties.

Before leaving for town he had ordered whisky in. There was a bottle standing on the side-table beside a siphon of soda; he poured himself out a glass and sat down.

Yes, there was no need to worry, things would be all right in time, and living was cheap here—nothing to spend money on.

THE RETURN

As he sat smoking, the silence of the house made itself felt in contrast to the occasional sigh and toss of the trees in the night wind.

A silence whose heart seemed the form of the girl on the bed upstairs—the girl with her head half turned away on the pillow, almost as if she had turned it away from life, tired of everything and wishing only to sleep.

