

SELINA

ISAAC COBORNE, as before said, had a biscuit factory hanging on his family tree ; not a big one—that was the worst of it—a small biscuit factory started in the year 1835 by James Coborne, who had owned a baker's shop in Poole.

James had been the brother of Isaac's grandfather. Isaac's grandfather had never been in trade ; he had made a large fortune robbing the nation and the army in the Crimean War, but he had never been in trade, and this confounded biscuit factory, started by the baker, was a nuisance and annoyance to him when he came to live in Portman Square on the proceeds of his profiteering activities.

It was the same with his son, and his son's son. The thing was still alive and going ; though out of the family and run by a man named Purvis it still retained the name Coborne on its tins. Lots of people in Dorset and Wilts honestly believed that Isaac's wealth came from biscuits ; he knew it, and as a County man, a magistrate, a supporter of the hounds, and a prospective Deputy Lieutenant, the knowledge was a raw spot which caused him great irritation at times.

An old-fashioned, port-wine-drinking, sporting, English country gentleman, that was the part that Nature had cut him out for, both in appearance and manner, in face and gullet ; hearty, twinkling,

popular, he played it to the life, and he would have played it with all the more ease only for the biscuit complex.

It made him super-sensitive, disturbed even by the sight of a Bath Oliver at a luncheon-table, ever fancying that people had the word "Trade" in their minds in connection with him, ever fearing anything that might make him feel cheap—or, shall we say, cheaper.

The dread of any scandal in connection with Anthony being reflected on himself was absurd; people did not bother about him enough to know of the relationship, but the dread was there—the result of the biscuit complex.

He pictured columns of Divorce Court proceedings in the papers and people saying, "Yes, that chap's a relation of Isaac Coborne."

This it was that made him go to Gregg, and the interview and the snubbing made his uneasy mind more uneasy, and the interview with Selina, which gave him the fact that Anthony had departed for the Isle of Wight to help Colonel Jameson in the election, did not alter his outlook, for the mind of this old English gentleman was at once little and suspicious as the mind of a soured old maid. He said nothing to Selina but he wrote to Jameson.

Jameson did not reply for a long time, not, in fact, till the day before the General Election, then a letter came from Cannes giving news of the weather, the social activities of Cannes and ending "By the way, Harrop wasn't staying with me—he was staying

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at Ryde, I think. Who was the pretty girl with him, eh?"

That was enough for Isaac. He took the tenthirty to town and told the whole story to Selina.

She listened to him, seemingly unmoved.

"There is some mistake," said she. "Anthony is not the man to do anything like what you think. The election will be over to-morrow, and when he comes back I will tell him what you say."

"Good heavens, no!" cried Isaac. "Don't mix me in the business, whatever you do."

"I shall tell him what you say," replied Selina, "and it is only fair that he should know who told me."

Alone, and with compressed lips she pondered deeply over this matter; she disliked scenes as much as she disliked Isaac Coborne.

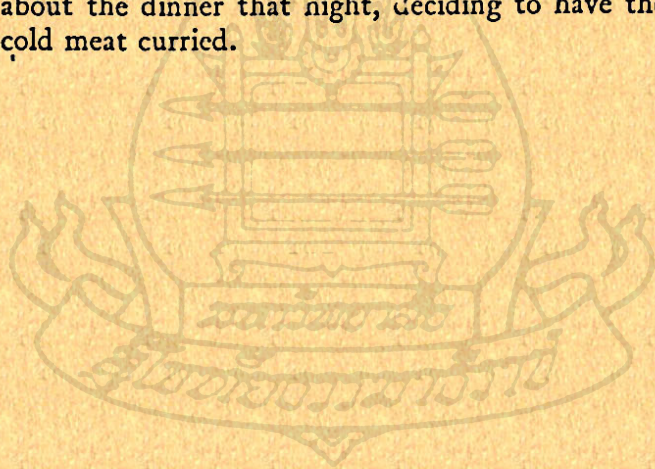
She remembered the suspicious telegram from Birmingham, she remembered one thing and another indicating that Anthony had not been quite normal in his goings and comings for some time past; she had his address in the island: the Barrow Farm, Godshill; in fact, he had written her several letters from there in the course of the last few weeks—letters speaking about the election and the weather, little else. She got out these letters and re-read them, stereotyped things, perfunctory, like one another as pebbles on a beach.

Another woman, before all this, would probably have taken the first train to Shanklin. Not, so Selina. The Towers had never been people for

hurried action—at least in family affairs. Old Abraham Towers, in the reign of King William the Fourth, had lived amicably with a detested son for years and then cut him off with a shilling. The Towers had always loathed rows and scandal and the washing of dirty linen in public.

If Anthony did not come back after the election in the course of a few days, well, then, that would be different. Mohammed would have to go to the mountain. He would have to come back after the election, or declare himself. He couldn't go on staying away without a reason given.

She contemplated the matter from the assured position of a wife with an income of her own; then she put the letters away and interviewed the cook about the dinner that night, deciding to have the cold meat curried.



THE DAY BEFORE THE CRASH

ON the same 'day, and about the time when Selina was consulting with the cook, Anthony walked into Shanklin.

The patient was better. She had been up and about for several weeks now, but she was by no means well yet; the weakness clung to her. Want of resiliency Sims called it, and he was always altering the medicine.

Anthony's journey to Shanklin to-day was for a new tonic; also he wanted to see how the election was going.

During the last few days the election had been drawing closer to Anthony and filling him with an uneasiness and alarm quite absent from him a week ago.

The situation had been just as uncertain and dangerous a week ago, but the crisis had not been so near.

A week ago he would wriggle away from the thought of what might happen if things went wrong and the Conservatives were beaten, but the time for wriggling was over. Only a few hours remained before the verdict which would decide his fate. If the Conservatives got in, Shires would open his cheque-book, the firm of Harrop & Mandelberg would lift its head, he could get a loan from the bank, from Mandelberg, from half a dozen men.

If the Conservatives were beaten, he would be a pauper.

I don't know, I'm sure, whether Free Trade is good or bad, but I do know that this little firm, engineered and worked by Englishmen, was in just this position at this moment, that a protecting tariff meant its life, want of protection death, and that the optimism of Anthony, which existed despite his nervousness and panic fits, was justified by the statement of the Prime Minister that no sweeping change was intended, only a limited measure to give support and life to certain stricken industries unable to exist under the blight of foreign competition. Surely any nation with any common sense would support such a policy!

Shanklin, leaving aside the election posters, showed little signs of the coming crisis. The chemist who made up the prescription had no opinion to offer on the result; he didn't "go in for politics." At the bar of the hotel where Anthony went for a glass of beer the barmaid was equally indifferent, and some men standing at the counter were discussing the doings of the Tottenham Hotspurs.

He went home, a bundle of newspapers under his arm and the medicine bottle in his pocket.

As he drew near Macketts' the sun broke through the clouds, and as he reached the front door, hearing his footstep on the gravel, She came out to meet him, a light shawl over her shoulders held together in front by a little white hand, fragile, almost ghostly.

How beautiful she was ! with a new beauty that had come upon her in the last few days lending colour to her face, a faint blush as though a rose were being held to either cheek.

He had not noticed the change in her till now, so occupied had he been with his fears and hopes—not till now, as she stood there with the sunlight upon her and her eyes raised towards his.

Ah, how small she was as he took her in his arms, how helpless, with only him to protect her in this wilderness of a world !

He sat late that night going over accounts.

The Macketts' bill amounted to only six guineas a week for them both, yet it had cut a frightful slice out of his capital, and the nurse who had left had received five guineas ; there was still Sims's account unsettled, the chemist's bill, a bill for whisky.

He couldn't tell what Sims would charge for all his attendances ; he dreaded to think—it couldn't be less than ten pounds ; it might be more. There would be nearly four pounds to pay for that whisky. When he had told Mrs. Mackett to order it in and she had asked how many bottles, he had answered, "Oh, they'd better send half a dozen." Well, there was no use in complaining about the general situation ; the fact stood before him like a brick wall with a door in it, the fact that if his liabilities were paid that night he would have next to nothing remaining—perhaps five pounds, perhaps less. Debt and disaster would drive him against the wall—he and She—crushing them, destroying them,

unless the door in the wall opened to give them release.

He sat leaning back in his easy-chair, one leg over the arm, an unlit pipe between his teeth.

Yes, a dead wall with a door in it. But what was the use of talking like that in metaphor? Being crushed to death against a wall did not figure the possible coming disaster in the least. The thing was much worse. He would have to say to Mrs. Mackett, "I have no more money." He might go on in a lame sort of way for a few weeks owing and putting off payment; the inevitable day would come—and what would happen on that day?

He knew no man from whom he could borrow, to try and get an overdraft from the bank with the business gone broke would be a criminal act, in intent if not in law; even that would be no use, only a lengthening of the rope. What *would* they do, he and She, unless they tramped the roads or went into the workhouse?

There was no metaphor about that; frantic, impossible, laughable, it was the only course open to them, that or suicide.

Any possible help from outside parties would entail separation from Her, which was unthinkable. No man he knew of would put his hand in his pocket to help a man and his mistress, a married man who had deserted his wife to live with another woman he had picked up at a night club.

He could reason on the matter with two brains. He could say to himself what he would have said

to himself a few weeks ago if his case had been that of another :

“ Help that chap ? Not a cent. Serve him right.”

Yet how different was the truth from what seemed to be the truth !

Surely never in the world's history was a man in such a position as this !

He filled and lit his pipe, and helped himself to some of the unpaid-for whisky. His mood changed. He began to skim the newspapers he had bought that day—the *Morning Post*, the *Telegraph* and *Daily Mail*. Things would be all right ; a little more whisky made them seem almost rosy. He finished by reading, not without interest, about houses to let in good residential districts and country mansions to be sold with immediate possession and within an hour's journey from town. Then he went to bed.

Next day he took himself out to see how things were going. This was the Day. All over Britain, from Lands End to John o' Groats, a great silence had come upon the uproar of cackling : the eggs of the election were being laid, and the silence was not least around quiet little Godshill. Anthony walked to the nearest polling-station.

He met a Ford car with the Conservative colours and a Rolls Royce with the Liberal, also a few people on foot, but no excitement. He felt interested but not much moved. A curious torpor had come upon him as regards the affairs of the world ; he seemed a spectator not a participator.

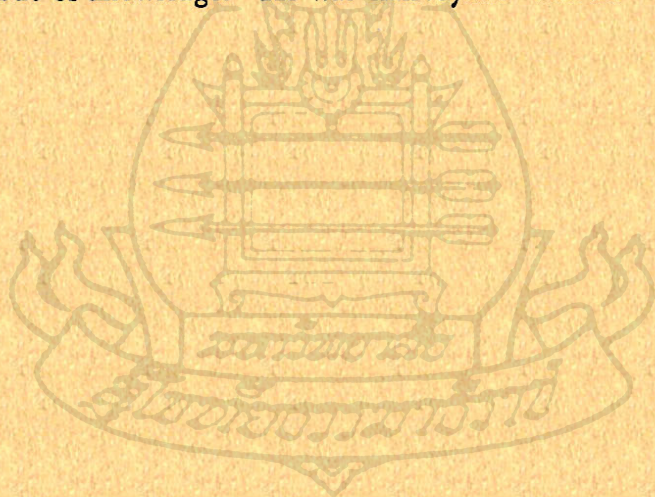
THE DAY BEFORE THE CRASH

He slept that night soundly and dreamlessly and awoke at eight o'clock feeling singularly happy, and as though a load of care had been removed from his mind.

He knew at once. It was the election which was over, or as good as over. The thing that had been "on his chest" for a good while past had got off.

The election was over, or as good as over, the morning papers would give a huge number of results, enough to judge by. The Isle of Wight results would not be published till later in the day.

The election was over and the Conservatives were in. He knew that; it was not a question of hope but of knowledge. He was clairvoyant—felt it.



CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CRASH

BEFORE going down to breakfast he went into her bedroom.

She breakfasted every morning in bed, and she was sitting up now, propped by the pillows, waiting for her breakfast.

The nurse was gone a week.

Mrs. Mackett had speeded her going; nurses were a nuisance about a house and, besides, she was minded to have a hand in the business herself, for the sick girl had twined herself round Mrs. Mackett just as she had twined herself round Anthony at the beginning of things.

I don't know whether Mrs. Mackett suspected the true relationship between the pair, or whether if she had known for certain she would have minded in these days; the fact remained she was caught in the net of this spinner—the net that, it seemed, could only catch a person by their good qualities.

She entered now with the tray, and Anthony went downstairs to breakfast.

The paper hadn't come.

The paper during the last week had arrived each morning punctually and at a phenomenally early hour; it had evidently exhausted itself with its efforts, gone lame.

After breakfast, taking his hat, he left the house and came down the road towards the village.

There was no one on the road. The village was almost equally deserted. The election posters still out here and there, had a strange, futile, derelict look; all their shouting was of no avail now, they might have been election posters on the walls of Thebes, so little of effect could they have on the present.

He stopped an old man to ask had he heard anything of how things were going.

"No," replied the other, "I ain't heard nothing for certain, but they do say the Labour chaps are in."

Labour chaps in! What nonsense! The papers had not yet reached the shop. Anthony stood outside waiting; assurance had left him, his lips were dry and every now and then he had a curious feeling as though the root of his tongue were sinking, only to be recovered and brought up again by an effort.

Ah! here they were at last!

A boy on a bicycle had turned the corner of the street and was coming towards him, the papers in a great bundle tied to the handle-bar. He stopped at the shop, rested his bicycle against the wall and undid the bundle.

Anthony followed into the shop, received the Macketts' paper, the *Chronicle*, and without waiting for his own walked out with the open sheet in his hand reading the terrible headlines.

Done! Absolutely done! Conservatives swept away, Labour triumphant.

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He walked not knowing where he went, and taking his way towards the Daffodil Valley and farm, reading, consuming the details.

Labour gain. Labour gain. Liberal gain. Absolute disaster. There were more results to be published—they would be the same. The country was solid against Baldwin. The country would have nothing of Protection. Little industries or big industries, it did not matter.

He left the road, still searching the columns of the *Chronicle*. He did not in the least know where he was going. Like the processionary caterpillar he was following a path laid down for him, the path he and she had taken that day when at the stile she had shown her true feeling for him.

At the stile he leaped for a moment, folding up the newspaper. He did this carefully, remembering at the same time that he had not taken his own paper from the shop. Then, placing it in his pocket, he crossed the stile and came over the meadow towards the stile leading to the woods.

He reached the tumble-down cottage where they had sheltered that day from the rain. There was no rain to-day, yet he stepped inside and stood by the doorway, just where he had stood with her, holding her hand unseen by the woodcutter, who was sheltering with them, and looking out at the rain over Trenchards and the mist hanging in the branches of the trees.

He was sheltering. The place seemed to hold

off thought for a moment, and for a moment Trenchards and the woods took on an appearance of unreality, the trees like things seen in a dream.

Only for a moment. A change of wind blowing through the half-ruined walls of the place brought with it a smell of corruption that drove him out. Some animal had crawled there to die perhaps, or was lying in the wood waiting burial.

He crossed Trenchards, and came towards the house. Mrs. Mackett was at the door shaking a rug. He gave her the paper, which he had taken from his pocket, made some remark on the fineness of the weather, and went in. He seemed quite normal, even cheerful, and in the sitting-room, when he reached it, he closed the door, took his pipe from the mantelpiece, filled it and lit it. Then seeing the whisky bottle he poured himself out a quarter of a tumblerful, put soda-water to it and drank it in three gulps. Then he stood on the hearthrug smoking.

The spirit had scarcely any effect on him, but it brought his mind together into a hard point. The end had come. There was no use in going on. This was the finish. He put the pipe on the mantelpiece and left the room, coming upstairs, urged by the craving to find her, have one last look, one last word.

The door of her bedroom was ajar.

After breakfast, instead of getting up, she had fallen to sleep again, and she lay, her face half

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hidden on her arm, a little table standing beside her with a glass of medicine poured out waiting to be drunk and a spoon laid beside the glass and a glycerine lozenge to suck after the bitter medicine.

The sight of the medicine-glass recalled something to the mind of Anthony, something that whispered in his ear: "End it both together. Leave it in her glass to drink, then go out and finish with yourself—save her from the future."

The girl on the bed moved slightly, sighed and then settled herself again to sleep.

He turned to the vase on the mantelpiece. Yes, the little tube of morphia tablets was still there. He had seen it only yesterday and had intended restoring it to Sims on his next visit. Still there. He took it from the vase and broke it across, pouring the tablets into his palm.

Then he poured them into the glass of medicine, saw them dissolve, left the poison for her to drink and went out and hanged himself to a tree—in his imagination. In his imagination he saw their funeral, heard the——

Suddenly, as he was standing with the poison in his hand, the silence of the house was broken by a double rap at the front door; then came, muted by the passage and the stairs, a sharp little voice:

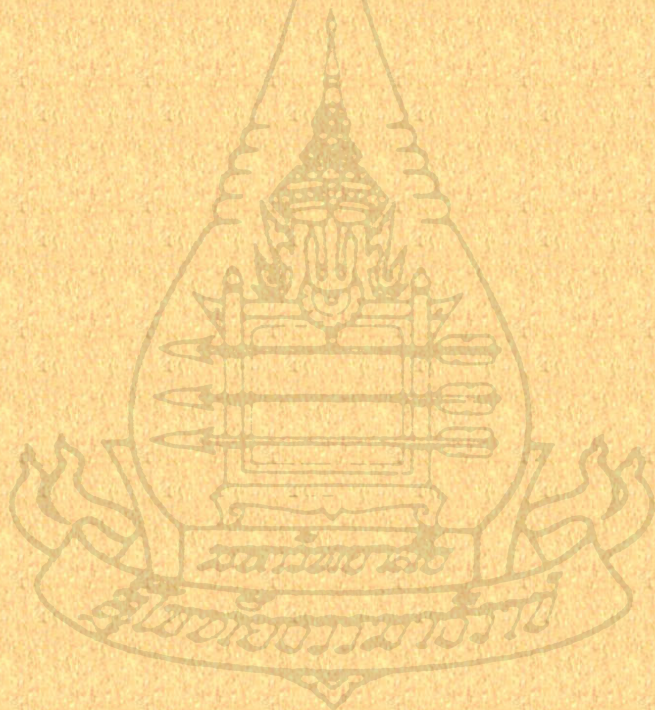
"'Arrop."

Anthony flung the stuff in his hand into the grate and, sidling from the room, came down.

Mrs. Mackett was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs with a telegram in her hand :

SECURED CONTRACT COMING BY 12.50 TRAIN GET
ME ROOM FOR THE NIGHT MANDELBERG

“Thanks,” said Anthony. “No, no answer.”



CHAPTER XXXIV
THE BARRED ROAD.

In the sitting-room he read and re-read the precious telegram.

Secured contract!

He remembered Mandelberg's talk about a big deal that might be pulled off if Protection failed. This must be it. And Mandelberg was coming himself—and the contract, whatever it was, was secured. It was money, salvation, joy, release from death.

Aie. The horrid thought suddenly hit him, half crumpling everything, of what he had been about to do—of what he had put his hand to.

He need not have troubled. He never would have done it; he was not of the stuff to do it ever. Had things gone to the worst. All the same, he felt for a moment as a man feels held back and saved from some crime.

This mood passed to one of self-congratulation. The eel in him rejoiced; it had done another wriggle, or, at least, Fate had helped it by a twist to round another corner—the last, surely.

All would be straight and clear now; he had still to learn the full position from Mandelberg, but, as far as money was concerned, there could be no doubt. If there was no immediate cash to be had from the contracts which Mandelberg was evidently bringing him to sign, there were credits to be

obtained. And the money he needed was not much—just enough to live here quietly with Her.

He remembered the room asked for, and calling Mrs. Mackett arranged for it, and also for the taxi to meet the train at Shanklin.

After luncheon, leaving the invalid to lie down, he went for a walk, passing through the village, which was strangely astir. The village that had taken the crash of the Conservative party on the rocks without the wink of an eyelid was humming like a hive.

Expecting news of some great national event other than the one that had left the place indifferent, he asked a labouring man and discovered that the island Liberal candidate was in.

“Seely’s in,” said the man.

The earth-shaking event had been telephoned from Newport, where the count had taken place, and the sun, having stood still for a moment, went on. So did Anthony, taking the road he had taken that morning and the lane till he reached the stile.

If you could follow a man’s footsteps through life you would find vital places, bits of ground you could chalk round with a five-foot circle—places where Destiny met him with new marching orders.

The place where Anthony had sat in the night club was one of these spots; here was another—this place where she had looked into his eyes for the first time as a woman looks into the eyes of a man.

He had come here a few hours ago in his misery and he came here now in his contentment.

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Having rested for a while chewing the sweet cud of assurance, counting up the simple things that were enough for his happiness and Hers, he would have gone on across the meadow and home by Trenchards had not something barred his way. It was the recollection of that evil-smelling cottage.

The thing had been working in his subconscious mind; he had taken a scunner against that cottage and bit of wood; the fact that a man had hanged himself there was not made sweeter by that stench from some dead animal lying in it or close by.

The track of the little happy journey he had made with Her that day when Love walked with them was cut off at the stile, where Love had first appeared. He went back by the road.

He had ordered the station taxi to pick him up so that he might go to meet Mandelberg.



THE HUNTING OF THE HARE

THE train would not arrive till after five ; there were hours to wait, and in his restlessness he had to keep moving.

He did not return to the house, but coming along the road struck across the country in the direction of Bleakdown.

A new, strange feeling of youth and happiness filled him and gave him strength and joy in movement, a feeling born, maybe, from the passing of the threat of terrible disaster, now fading like those clouds away to eastward blown by the merry west wind.

He stood for a moment with his hat off on a rise beyond Shotover Farm, gazing far and wide at the passionless beauty of the island ; from the Southern Downs to the Downs of Arreton, from the clear glowing west to the clearing east, pasture lands and plough, little hills and old grey farras all lay pictured in historic silence.

The troubled dream of life had shaken to stillness ; nothing moved but the wind and the hawk on the wind, nothing spoke but the bird in the leafless hedge, and a whisper, indeterminate, scarce heard, the chanting of the far distant sea.

A sixteenth-century man standing beside him would not have been at a loss and scarcely surprised by change, but for that trace of railway smoke away

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to the north, where lay Merston, and by the intrusion here and there of the red brick which is trying to oust the old grey stone of the island.

Now, as Anthony stood hat in hand, the west wind blowing his hair and his heart uplifted in praise, came, far, far away and borne on the wind the sound of a horn.

A tinny, trumpery sound, and yet somehow fateful—telling that the hounds were out, invisible in that dream country, but there.

The harriers, in truth, were out working the country beyond Roughbarrow, and now came the dogs giving tongue; and now, sure enough, there was the hare, small as a pin-head, running on the lifted land south of Roughbarrow, running uphill, of course, as hares always will, and an inch away—the hounds.

Anthony watched. He could see the riders now hard on the heels of the hounds. His heart was all with the hare; just escaped himself, he had a sympathy for the hunted. But the hare was lost. The hounds were on her, when, behold! she doubled right back and ran into them—ran clean through the pack without a hound noticing her and, turning, took the hill and its border-line of turnips. Hares hard pressed have done this, but he could not have believed it unless he had seen it.

He waved his hat and shouted. That was an escape! He saw the hounds at fault and the huntsmen galloping towards them and the hunt followers turning up hill towards the turnips. Then

they all passed away and of the hunt nothing was left but the memory of the desperate hare and the far-fetched note of the horn on the breeze.

A tree had been felled here the year before and the root and six feet of the bole remained, making a seat. He sat down, elbows on knees and hat in hand, lips pursed and eyes on the ground where the sparse winter grass showed, nothing of life save the movement caused by the wind blowing from the west.

He was tired, the feeling of youth and strength that had brought him here to this rise was dulled. It was pleasant to rest, and resting he could hear the horn again of that invisible hunt which had shown itself only to vanish, threading its way through that dream country as a needle through tapestry.

A-ha! what was that? The manner in which he had taken his seat made him face south and there again was the hare. In the hollow of a field just below and to the south and near enough to show her form, puss was louping to rest. Then she sat up.

She had outrun the pack and won safety. It pleased him to watch her. This hunted thing come at last to rest; danger had been after her just as danger had been after him—they had both escaped.

Doubling through the eyeless pack she had gone through the turnips of the ridge, over the ridge and down the field to the withy bed by the stream, and skirting the withies through the open land to

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the field where she now crouched—safe. It was like a good omen.

Yet distant dogs were giving tongue, and what was that away over there? A movement showed beyond the distant hedge dividing the plough from the pasture land; over there, white, liver and black, swiftly moving, showed the hounds.

She could not see them, they could not see her.

It was like watching fate made visible—inexorable pursuit—the unescapable.

And now they were cascading across the stile giving right of way to the road, and spreading on the plough, deeply dreaming, crying in their dream, swiftly sweeping, held by the hypnotism of the scent—across the plough like a broken cloud shadow driven by the wind.

Anthony, raising his hand to his mouth, was about to shout to warn her—but she was away. Too late. She had stiffened and could not make the pace; she had lost heart, or the gods were against her.

He did not see the kill, but he heard the feeble cry and the noise of the dogs—the dogs that had been hunting since the days of Actæon across the fields of this old unjust Earth.

The wind shuddered in the leafless hedge.

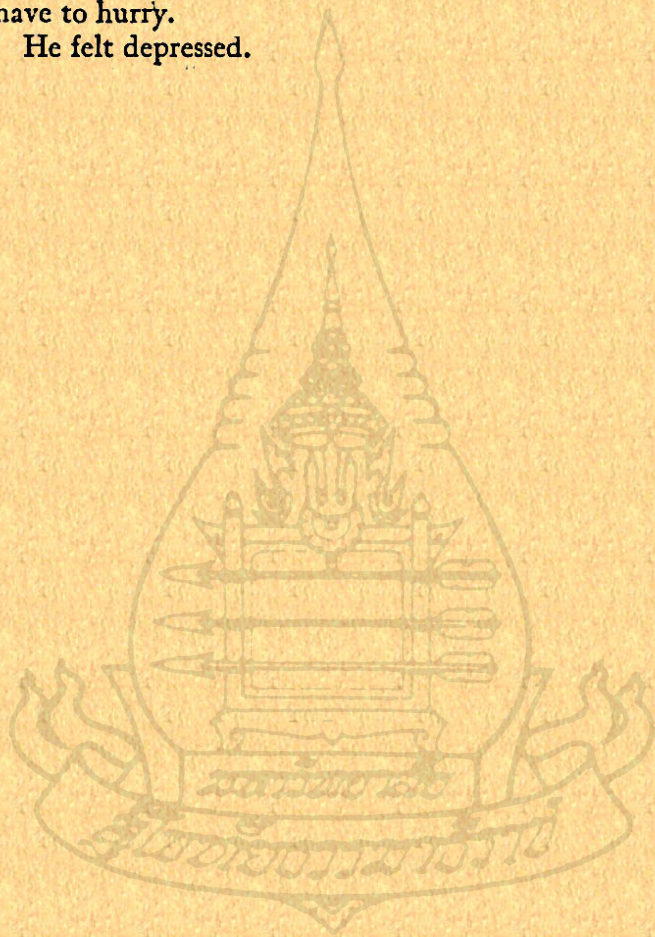
Anthony came along down towards the road leading to Shorwell, from which he could reach the road to Godshill.

It was after three o'clock and the taxi was due to

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call for him at Macketts' at half-past four to take him to the station to meet Mandelberg, so he would have to hurry.

He felt depressed.



CHAPTER XXXVI

SHE COMES TO HIM IN THE NIGHT

HE arrived at the station a few minutes before the train. When it drew up, for a heart-shaking moment he thought that Mandelberg had not come; then he saw him amongst the crowd—a slight, spruce figure in a grey overcoat, a suit-case in his hand and a folded-up newspaper under his arm.

“I’ve got to get back by the first train to-morrow morning,” said Mandelberg, as he got into the taxi. “Is it far to your place?”

“No, only a couple of miles,” replied the other. “There’s a train somewhere about ten, and I’ll tell this man to call for you. Is everything all right?”

“Right as rain. Big business; but I’ll give you all the news when we get to your place.”

He did not say a word about the girl. At supper, to which meal she did not come down, he was equally dumb. Anthony might have been living alone at Macketts’ for all Mandelberg seemed to care. Then when the things were cleared away he plunged into business.

The Hahn contracts had been secured. Big business. The firm of Harrop & Mandelberg was no longer to be a tinkering affair dependent on workmen’s wages and the chance of strikes, but the distribution of the wares of a country where cheap production was possible, of a vast company belonging

to the Stirnes group. There were other things, many other things, that might come in; the prophetic eyes of the Jew lit up as he spoke of the possibilities ahead. They were in touch with money—money, the breath of business life; what did it matter if it were German money, or American money or French money. It was money. And here were the contracts for Anthony to sign. He spread them on the table and the place became at once a business office. The antimacassars, the simple old pictures on the walls, the library of funny old books, including the little black book on Shorwell, the very perfume of old days and country surroundings that was Macketts', all vanished before the big, crackly, engrossed papers smelling of the Continent, German magnates and the mass-production factories of the Hahn people.

"There's where you have to sign," said Mandelberg.

"One moment," said Anthony. "I want a hundred pounds."

"You shall have thousands," said Mandelberg.

"I know," replied the other, "but I want a hundred pounds in advance, to-night; I'm at the end of my resources."

"At the end of your resources!"

"Yes. I've been paying bills for the wife and one thing or another, and living here has run into expense. After this it will be different. I will go slow and economise, but I must have ready money. I must have a hundred pounds at least."

"Well, we'll see about that," said Mandelberg, fully aware that this was a hold-up, a refusal to sign without cash down, blackmail of a mild sort. "I'll arrange about all that. Just shove your name here and let's get this over first."

"I want a hundred pounds," said Anthony in the final manner of Toddie when he wanted to see the wheels go round.

Mandelberg threw down the pen he was holding.

"Good gracious!" he said, "what's the good of mixing things like this! I'll arrange the matter for you in a day or two. I can't give you a hundred pound to-night. I haven't got it."

"No, but you've got a cheque-book—or you can give me a holograph cheque on a piece of paper. I must have certainty. The position is too desperate."

The Jew, unlike Anthony, had several thousands lying in his bank, but he hated parting, and he hated this sort of irregular business. The position was absurd. The idea that a partner should withhold his signature to a document vital to his own interests as well as the firm's till he got a stick of candy was absurd, preposterous; but he knew Anthony.

Suddenly and without a word he took his cheque-book from his pocket, sat down and wrote out the cheque. Anthony blotted it, put it in his pocket and signed, Mrs. Mackett being called in to witness the signature.

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Mandelberg put away the papers in their envelope, became his unbusiness-like self again, and helped himself to some whisky. Then they sat and smoked. Mandelberg had something to say—he had been holding it back till business was over.

“By the way,” said he, “I’ve seen your wife.”

“My wife!”

“Came to the office this morning and caught me before I started. Your wife is a very clever and level-headed woman, Anthony. You know, she has never cared for me, and consequently I have never cared much for her. I didn’t know her, but I know her now. Well, someone has been telling her things about you.”

“What things?”

“The truth.”

“Oh!”

“Yes. Told her all about this business. By the way, is *she*—is she——”

“She’s upstairs; she hasn’t been well. Go on.”

“Someone told her. Any other woman told a yarn like that would have gone off the handle, especially as she seems to know your address here, but she didn’t. She just sat down and thought the thing out. She wasn’t sure—the thing might be a lie—but she was almost sure, and what was she to do; that’s what she had to say to herself, with no one to answer but herself; and she wasn’t used to the situation—it was a new thing to find herself the wife of a husband who’d bolted with another

woman. I'm not rubbing it in, Anthony, but it's so. Well, the main thing with her was that she didn't want a fuss and scandal. She treated the thing as a business matter first and foremost, like the clever woman she was, and the inspiration came to her to come and see me as your partner, a dumb bird, and anyhow not in your circle of society. It was like whispering the thing into a box. She opened out almost the minute she came into the office and asked me did I know when you'd be back from the island. I saw at once she was feeling for position; in less than a couple of minutes she'd brought me to book and I had to tell her I knew all about it."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because I'm not any good at lying, especially to a woman like your wife, and the thing has to come out anyhow."

"What did she say?"

"She talked to me like a sensible person. She pointed out to me the disastrous nature of a business like this to you and her; of course, Anthony, in certain circles in London the thing wouldn't count much, but in your circle it does. By Jove, it does. If it comes out it will hit her like the 'devil—that's the truth, however you may look at it."

"It needn't come out," said Anthony.

"It mustn't come out," replied the other. "See here, old man, you haven't thought of this matter in its true light and the damage it will mean to a woman who has played the game straight with you.

Get a grip on yourself ; for God's sake, chuck it and come back to London. She'll condone it, and we can make it all right with the other party."

"Did she tell you to say all this ?"

"Not exactly, but she asked me to intervene on those terms. She knows you've come a cropper, and she doesn't want to rub it into you. That's why I say she's a fine woman—she's no acid saint. Human, that's what she is—human and business-like."

"Well, I can't drop it," said Anthony. "Yes, I've come what you call a cropper. I see the whole thing just as another person might see it. I hate to think that it should hit Selina ; she has always been a good wife according to her lights, but I can't do what you say. If you knew everything, if you knew what She was, you'd understand. But I can efface myself, live here quiet, even go up and stay with Selina as if nothing had happened. No one need know. There need be no scandal."

"You astonish me, Anthony," said Mandelberg. "Heavens, man, have you lived all those years with your wife without knowing her true character ? Do you think for a moment she'd carry on with you, knowing there was another woman in the background ? Oh, Lord, no. She'd separate if it came to that. Well, I've done what I could and I'll have to tell her what you say. She'll no doubt come down here,—and that will be the end of everything."

"It's better so," said Anthony.

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Half an hour later they went up to bed, Anthony lighting the way. Then he went to his own room.

Love can make men more cruel and callous than hate. The troubles of Selina were nothing to him since they stood in opposition to his passion for the girl. He looked at the cheque, placed it under his watch on the side table and undressed.

Nothing could now divide him from Her. In bed and with the light out he revelled in the thought of their safety, of the Hahn Company and of all the people who would be making money for Her. Mandelberg shone in his mind like a blessed angel. How clever he was, how cunning, how strong in affairs!

The wind had risen and was blowing in Gallows Wood; the cry of a nightjar sounded far off. How delightful to live here alone always like this.

Nothing could now divide him from Her. He fell asleep.

The night wore on, the movements of a mouse behind the wainscoting did not disturb the sleeper nor the cry of the owl questing in the orchard. Suddenly he awoke.

Little hands were holding him, and a voice was sobbing and shuddering close to him in the dark.

"I am so frightened—I am so frightened. Take me—I am so frightened!"

Seized with night-terror, she had come to him, blindly seeking protection and comfort. She coughed and shivered, and holding her round the

waist he made her get into the bed, where she clung to him as he kissed her and soothed her whilst she sobbed away her terror, and told of it.

She had awakened in the dark, feeling that she was going to die. The owl had frightened her; then she had run to him.

Her teeth chattered slightly as the sobs departed on the assurance that she was not going to die, that the owl was only an owl, that she was a little goose.

Then with a deep sigh she lay still, one arm about him and her face nestling on his shoulder. She might have been dead only for the gentle movement of her chest. She was asleep: fallen suddenly fast asleep, assured that she was held and protected.

How fragile she was! His hand resting upon her ribs could feel their thinness; every now and then as she breathed something fluttered beneath them: it was the heart only felt at the end of every expiration. Only once before had she lain beside him like this—on the night before he left for London. She was different then, less fragile, a woman, not a little frightened ghost, seeking not love but protection.

“I felt I was going to die!” Ah, God! if such a thing were possible.

He repelled the thought.

Holding her to him he listened to the sounds of the night, the subtle whisper of the trees and something beyond everything in the far-away background

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—an echo of the sea. Mice in the loft overhead scampered on the beams, and now, old as Pilate and the denial of Peter, came the sound that threads all history together—the crowing of a cock in the distance, announcing two o'clock—all's well.



THE OLD SHOES

Two days later Selina Harrop landed at Ryde Pier the afternoon boat and took herself and her travelling bag to the town station. Here she went straight to the Pier Hotel and took a room for the night.

She had thought the whole business out. Night was not the time to arrive at the Barrow Farm. There are lots of things to be said for a night attack, but not when the battle-ground is a farm-house in the depths of the country, where one may have to bivouac on the battle-ground and breakfast with the victor or the vanquished.

She put up at the Pier Hotel, and next morning early took the train for Shanklin.

Here she hired a taxi, arriving at the farm at about eleven o'clock.

Mrs. Mackett came to the door.

Mr. Harrop had gone out for a walk, but the young lady was at home.

"I'll come in and wait," said Selina. She debated for a moment and then paid the taxi-driver off. She did not know how long she might be, and it got on her nerves to think of the expense running up maybe for hours. There was sure to be some local way of getting to the station.

Then she came in and was shown into the sitting-room.

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Mrs. Mackett asked her would she like to see the young lady, and after a moment's hesitation Selina answered "Yes."

Then the door closed, leaving her alone.

There was a faint smell of tobacco in the room. Anthony's patent leather house-shoes were beside the fire-place. Only two months ago she had sent them to the mender's for repairs; they were very old and she had often told him they were a disgrace, but he clung to them.

The sight of them in some curious way affected Selina more than anything that had occurred since the moment when she learned the truth.

Coming from the station, drawing close to the battle-field, her mind had got into focus; her guns, full charged with indignation and shotted with cold and bitter words, were only waiting for their range, and if Anthony had been at home they would have been fired.

But he had slipped out of it again, helped by chance, leaving his old shoes to speak for him—and they said to her, "You always cared for Anthony."

She had not been aware of the fact before. Days had followed days and years years in the old routine; like two horses pulling at the same coach they had become seemingly indifferent one to another; but even horses engaged side by side in the same labour are capable of the feeling of companionship if not of affection. Yes, she had always cared for him, and now that he was gone from her she knew it, just as she would have known it if he were dead.

It was not in her nature to show affection—one might say even to feel it—but affection may be there unfelt, as many a silly-minded wife has discovered when the old man has gone.

Her mind was just. Casting over the past, it seemed to her that she might have done more. Her throat worked a bit, then her lips tightened. That hussy!

Every painted woman that she had ever seen joined to form a composite likeness of this woman she had never seen and a figure that filled her mind with sudden rage.

It was not sexual anger, the anger of a rival against a rival, for Anthony was more to her as a possession than a man, but the anger of a woman against a class, of cleanliness against impurity, of uprightness against the wiles of the devil.

Anthony had been stolen by this hussy. The door opened.

"The young lady is ready to see you now, ma'am," said Mrs. Mackett.

Selina rose and followed upstairs.

A couch had been put in the room and the young lady had shifted from the bed to it, and she sat up with a blanket and a rug covering her legs and a pillow behind her.

A small, flushed face and a timid smile greeted the new-comer, and Selina, at fault like a hunter who has flushed a snipe instead of a hyena, stood for a moment whilst Mrs. Mackett shut the door on them.

"Won't you sit down?" said the girl. "I

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would have come downstairs only I have been ill, but I am better."

Selina drew a chair towards the couch and sat down, her eyes for a moment on the hand that was holding the girl's shawl about her chest.

Anthony had walked that morning towards Atherfield. The fine grey day had led him on and on, the Downs and little hills changing about him as he went, till leaving the Brighstone road he found himself in Shorwell. He did not know the fact till going into the church he saw the tombs of the Leighs, which brought to him the memory of the little black book, which, in turn, as he took his way homeward, called up Evelyn Luytiens and the quaint old verses she had copied or written in Godshill graveyard.

"Here there are poppies . . ." He couldn't remember the rest, or only vaguely. How the old-fashioned people revelled in the thought of death, wrote poems about it, weaved quaint conceits around it!

Then, turning the bend of the road, he came on a view that was destined always to remain with him—the view of Godshill Church away in the still, grey sky standing above the country like a thing of dreams, telling, as it had told through the ages to all manner of people—shepherds and lords and ladies and lovers, foemen and men of goodwill—the one thing certain: here there are poppies.

When he reached the farm Mrs. Mackett was standing in the doorway.

"A lady has called, sir," said she.

"Called?" said Anthony. "Where is she?"

"She is upstairs, sir. As you were out I asked her would she like to see the young lady."

"How long has she been?"

"About half an hour, sir."

"Thanks," said Anthony. "I'll see her when she comes down."

He went into the sitting-room, leaving the door open.

Here was a nice business.

Selina—it could be no one else—and she was upstairs; had been there half an hour. What had she said? What was she saying? Ought he to go up? He did not want to go up—it might mean a scene; besides, whatever mischief there was in the thing had been done by now.

Had there been a scene? Had Selina bullied her or said cruel things? Oh, if she had! He clenched his fists. Then, casting all considerations to the winds he left the room and came upstairs.

The door of the bedroom was shut. He listened. He could hear Selina's voice—it was not raised, nor did it seem agitated; she was talking in a quiet, conversational tone, but he could not make out the words.

Then the voice of the girl. Just a few words. He left the door and came down.

There was no use in going in—much better to

wait and get Selina by herself. 'There' was no row, but there was something uncanny in this long, quiet interview. He felt it would have been better had Selina made a disturbance. The thing seemed unnatural and in some curious way inimical to him. He was right.

A few minutes later he heard her step on the stairs. He waited till she had reached the passage, then he came out of the sitting-room.

"Hello," said Anthony.

It was a funny greeting, he spoke it turning half sideways as he spoke and making back to the room.

"Come in," said he

She came into the sitting-room and he shut the door. Never had a woman's mind been pulled this way and that as Selina's was just then.

The truth had just been revealed to her, that there would be no scandal if things were left alone and not talked about, and no future for the unhappy business. Anthony was tethered; so far might he go in this and no farther.

Then she had heard things about him told with artless truth, the teller quite unknowing that the listener was his wife, only knowing that she herself was a woman talking to a woman. Then there was the teller herself.

Against all that was anger that any of this business should ever have occurred and irritation at seeing Anthony taking it all so calmly—which he wasn't, under the surface.

She sat down without speaking.

Anthony could not make her out. He took a pipe from the mantel and filled it. Why on earth didn't she begin? She sat there as though he were not in existence, her mind evidently otherwise engaged.

"How did you get here so early?" he asked suddenly, bravely venturing.

Selina looked up; there was something in her face that he had never seen before—something that had nothing to do with anger or the ordinary emotions of life.

"I came to Ryde last night, and came on here. Do you know that that girl is dying?"

Anthony dropped the match he was about to strike.

It was Selina's manner that brought the question home to him—the absurd, preposterous, sudden question, with its note of interrogation in the rising inflection of the last word.

There was almost accusation in the last word; the slightly raised tone seemed to indicate a recognition of his ignorance and to accuse him of negligence towards the girl—stupidity.

He leaned back against the mantelpiece, with his elbow on it:

"Don't talk nonsense," said he suddenly and sharply. "*Dying*. What do you mean? I saw her two hours ago. She's not worse?"

"No," said Selina. "She's quite cheerful, but she ought to have been told; didn't you know that she is as bad as she is?"

“Of course she’s been bad, but she’s better—ever so much better.”

Oh, it came to him suddenly that something terrible had entered the house with Selina—something viewless, silent, yet speaking through his wife, through her voice, her manner, the way she sat, the position of her hands.

No anger, no recriminations, no questions, as though there were someone in the room with them that she alone perceived—someone whose presence made all earthly things futile.

She had seen what he had not seen, what he had refused to see, which he still refused to see, like a child who shuts its eyes before what it knows to be there.

She rose and went to the window and looked out, whilst he stood face fronting the fire with his elbows on the mantel.

“Isaac Coborne told me all about it,” said she.

“Yes?”

“And you had given me your address, so I came. I am going back now. Anthony, I don’t want to say anything about the past. It had better be as if I never had known anything. Let the thing be sealed. Nobody need know.”

“Yes.”

He was beginning to find what she was thinking of. Nobody need know. His folly would be hushed up, hidden in the grave with Her.

A great bitterness seized him.

"I believe you're glad," said he. "I believe you'd be glad if what you said is true."

She did not pretend to misunderstand him.

"I am not glad," said she. "Can no man ever understand a woman? I am not angry either. I am sorry——"

She could not say what was in her mind, it was so newly revealed, so impossible to put in words. It was true that she was not glad, but she was relieved. The death of this girl would bring everything to a safe conclusion; nobody need know. Coborne was the last man to speak on the subject to anyone but her, and Mandelberg, though she had disliked him, had always been reckoned by her a discreet man. He would not speak. Anthony was his partner.

But Selina, though passionless and though Anthony for years had been only to her as a business partner, was not heartless.

She had a heart in her bosom, though it had suffered from want of exercise, and had she only had children things might have been very different for Anthony and herself. Coldly prepared to deal with a designing hussy, she had found a dying girl, a wistful, clinging creature that she pitied. Yet pitying, she felt relieved, having common sense in her composition as well as heart.

It was the only ending possible without disgrace for Anthony and herself. The girl dying, the situation would die.

She did not turn her head; she stood looking out

of the window at the stray hens picking amidst the gravel in front of the house. She heard a sniffing sound from the fire-place, but she did not notice. How was it possible that no one had realised the state of the girl? Anthony, of course, was a fool in this matter and blinded, but there was the landlady and the doctor.

The clucking hens with their feathers blown this way and that by the new-risen wind could not answer the question.

She turned. Anthony had finished sniffing and was poking the fire.

"Well," she said, "I must be going; there is nothing I can do. It is a strange position for a wife to go away and leave you here and say to you let things be forgotten, but it is not for my sake alone, but for yours, that I shut my eyes. One has to live in this world, and we have always lived respected and above-board. Men make mistakes. Let us leave it at that. I only want to say that now I have seen and know everything I am prepared to say nothing. Tell me, this landlady woman, does she—what does she know?"

Anthony shook his head. He took his place in one of the arm-chairs and sat with the tips of his fingers pressed together.

"Nothing—it's all right—I told her she was my niece."

"Does she know who I am?"

"No. I said nothing."

"Then I had better see her before I go. It looks

strange my coming, and going without any explanation."

"What are you going to say to her?"

"Nothing that will do any harm; but a person like that might talk, and it's just as well to make sure with her."

"She'll be in the kitchen at the end of the passage," said Anthony in a listless voice. "Shall I go and tell her?"

"No. I'll find her myself," said Selina.

She found Mrs. Mackett in the kitchen and was led into the back sitting-room of the Macketts', where a stuffed dog under a glass case was the presiding household god.

"I've come to speak to you about my niece," said Selina, and what these words cost her heaven only knows; "she seems to me very ill indeed."

"She is, ma'am," replied the other.

"My husband does not seem to recognise how ill she is, but surely the doctor ought to have known."

"Dr. Sims ha'n't been here for a long while," replied the woman, "and it's only the last few days she seems to have gone rightly to pieces; but I've known there was something coming to this house from the very first."

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Mackett moved uneasily and folded her hands in her apron.

"It's a man that comes round about here when anyone is going to die," said she, "and Mr. Harrop saw him the first night he and the young lady came,

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and I said 'to Mackett, 'You'll see now,' I said, 'what's going to happen, and it's not me nor you nor Jane,' I said, 'it is him or her'; and Mackett says 'Nonsense,' for he's no believer' in spirits. 'Well, you'll see,' I said."

Selina brooded on this statement.

"Well, the doctor had better be sent for at once," said she. "I'll tell my husband. I have to return to town, but I am sure I am leaving her in good hands with you. Yes—though little can be done, I'm afraid."

Her eyes rested on the stuffed dog. The knowledge had come to her that all this was useless, that Mrs. Mackett was not hoodwinked, that she suspected, if she did not know for certain, that the niece business was bunkum, but that Mrs. Mackett was to be trusted.

All this did one woman tell another without speaking.

"I have had great trouble," said Selina, turning her eyes to the other, "great trouble about my niece. I am troubled about my husband, but God will, I am sure, bring all things right."

"I will do all I can, ma'am," replied the woman, "and what you say is between our two selves; we never talk here."

Selina took the other's hand and pressed it; then she returned to the sitting-room.

Anthony had gone upstairs to look at the patient. He had found her tired out with the interview, half sitting up on the couch, a picture paper he had

bought for her open on her knees. There were some grapes on the little table by the bedside and she had picked one off and was holding it between her fingers.

She smiled wanly at him.

In that moment everything changed. All that had been was forgotten, and the heart of Anthony became the heart of a father bleeding for a stricken child. A dying, dearly loved child.

Selina, standing in the sitting-room putting on her gloves, heard his step outside. He came in and shut the door and crossed the room and took his pipe from the mantel, it was filled but he did not light it. He stood with it in his hand, unconscious what he was doing.

She saw the change in him and wondered at it. Then he began to talk to her in a way he had never talked before—as a man might talk to a trusted friend about a sorrow common to both.

He told her that the world could never understand this matter—that she, Selina, would never quite understand—that it wasn't the question of a woman.

“You have seen her,” said he. “She is part of myself, just as if she were my child. You would have loved her just as I do—but it's all over now. What is the use? Well—well.” He put the pipe back on the mantelpiece.

Then he took his hat and they left the room and

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the house, passing through the gateway and along the road to Godshill.

They went to the place where cars could be hired, and whilst the car was being got ready they went to the telephone office, where Anthony telephoned for Sims.

Then they stood about waiting for the car.

"Anthony," said Selina, breaking the silence that weighed upon them both, "have you money enough?"

"Yes," he said, "plenty—thanks."

"Will you let me know if——"

"Yes."

The car came up and she got in.

As he closed the door on her he put his hand in and they shook hands.