

PART III

CHAPTER XXXVIII

SIMS

SIMS called that afternoon, the telephone message having caught him between two rounds of visits.

When he came down after seeing the patient he retired in the sitting-room for a while behind his beard, asking questions instead of answering them. Had the patient ever suffered from a severe illness other than pleurisy? What did the mother die of? Anthony could satisfy him on neither of these points.

Had she any brothers and sisters? To this question also he could furnish no reply, and, taken off his guard, he said frankly, "I don't know," recognising the moment after that such a reply from a supposed uncle was, to put it mildly, strange.

Then he had to tell.

"As a matter of fact, Doctor," said Anthony, "this young girl is no relation of mine. She is a girl I took an interest in some time ago—a, very great interest, for she was sick and friendless and quite alone in the world. Dr. Gregg of Endell Street recommended this place and I brought her here. She goes as my niece just as a matter of convention. My wife came to see her to-day. It was she who saw the change in her and alarmed me so that I sent for you at once."

Sims was astonished. He had never been quite hoodwinked over this business—instinct had hinted the truth; the astonishment came from the fact that the man's wife was evidently a party to it.

However, in this modern world of ours Sims had seen so many strange things that he showed nothing of his astonishment. He fired another question.

“Before you—er—met her, can you tell me what was her business in life?”

The eel in Anthony, rising to its nth power, enabled him to evade this question without lying.

“No,” said he, “I cannot.”

“I only ask,” said Sims, “because it is well to know as a physician all that is possible to be known about a patient. It seems to me that this girl has suffered perhaps privations—anyhow something must have sapped the sources of life to account for this collapse, as it were—this drop in vitality and resisting power.”

“It is not consumption?”

“There are no lung symptoms,” replied the other, “to indicate phthisis at the moment. What you would ask is whether she is consumptive. We are all consumptive. As a matter of fact, we are all and at every moment fighting a legion of diseases; we exist solely by the virtue of our vitality: that once failing us, we are in a very grave way, and it may fail us because it is deficient for hereditary reasons or because some past disease or privation has stricken it a blow from which it is unable to recover. There is only one real doctor in the world—Nature;

and it is the work of the physician to find out what Nature is trying to do in any given case, and, as far as he can, to help her. Symptoms are valuable, not only as indications of disease but as indications of what Nature is trying to do. That is where I am at a loss just at present. The symptoms are so obscure that I am at a loss to know what Nature is attempting. Time will tell, but perhaps too late. I do not hide it, from you that the condition of our patient is most serious—most serious. You said that a Dr. Gregg—I believe that is the name—was attending her during her illness; it might be advisable for me to get his opinion, or at least his view of her condition whilst he was attending her.”

The wretched Anthony jumped at the idea. Gregg would explain things—tell what he couldn't.

“For God's sake, do,” said he. “See him, go up and see him and talk it over. Expense is no matter. Go to-day, go to-morrow—as soon as ever possible.”

Sims reflected for a moment, behind his beard. He wanted to go up to do some shopping at the stores and the two things could be fitted in and the journey made profitable instead of expensive.

“I'll go to-morrow,” said he.

CHAPTER XXXIX

SELINA

SELINA in the train between Shanklin and Ryde had a good deal to think about.

All her married life she had trusted Anthony, and her trust had been based on sure and instinctive knowledge.

She had trusted him to be of good and respectable conduct, just as she would have trusted the Chippendale couch in the drawing-room to stay in its place during her absence from the house.

Isaac Osborne, in giving her his information, had stated the case very fairly. It wasn't Anthony's fault so much, but, as a matter of fact, this girl in her illness had somehow or another got a grip of his sympathies, and one never knew what might happen in a case like this with a girl and a man of Anthony's age.

The Chippendale couch had not moved from its place, it had been moved—by a hussy.

Now that she had seen the hussy and had all the facts in her hand she had material for self-congratulation, had she been a self-congratulatory sort of person. Another woman might have seized on the reported facts, rushed to her solicitor, made a scene and a scandal; but she was a Towers, with her nervous centres properly under control and with the family horror of exposés and belief in expediency.

In the early 'eighties Selina's Aunt Stella—they

ran to heavenly titles in the Towers family—married to Sir Bernard Placebo, the fashionable physician of Harley Street, came home one day to find that Sir B. had gone mad and run off with the governess. Sir Bernard had amassed a big fortune at his business; he was evidently tired of it and of Stella and the house in Harley Street, and the governess was extraordinarily pretty. That he had three children did not matter—possibly he intended to have three more.

Not only had he run off, but he had left his wife the name of the hotel in Paris where he intended staying, possibly with the idea that the fact would be useful in case of divorce proceedings if it were seasoned with the necessary imaginary “cruelty.”

Stella neither wept nor fainted. She had her children to think of and their reputation—also her position.

She sent round messages to the more important patients that Sir Bernard was called abroad, left for Paris, found him at breakfast with the girl and brought him back.

Two days and two nights had cooled his temporary insanity; he returned to work, as a horse might return to its collar after a irisk in a field, and there was no scandal. Now that is a true story of what a woman did to combat a disastrous situation, and it was not unlike the story of Anthony.

Selina was not bringing him back, it is true, but she had made no scene—not even with Anthony—there would be no scandal; the whole thing would

fade and die with the girl, and it did not want the confirmation of Mrs. Mackett to assure her that the end would be soon.

And then there was no reason why things should not go on as they were before—the Chippendale settee in its original place and no sign of disorder in the drawing-room.

A level-headed and cold-hearted view of things, you will say. Give Selina her due. To possess common sense and a level head does not imply heartlessness. Selina was not heartless; as a matter of fact, the girl had touched her; as a matter of fact, her “coldness” and level-headedness had enabled her to take an extraordinarily clear view of the whole position. That death would clear everything up was a fact which she recognised with relief—nothing more.

That Anthony had always been to her as an object of furniture, part of her state and comfort, did not imply heartlessness. You can love an old chair.

She had loved her settee and had always been a good housewife to it, keeping it free, like herself, from dust and moth, getting the best people to sit on it. An accident to it would have been a matter for grief and tears; its destruction would have left a void in her life impossible to fill.

The trouble was that during all the years no accident had ever happened to it to make her value it at its true worth to her; the orderly succession of days had always found it there ready to be dusted and used—sat on.

The devil of the thing in life, and married life, is the fact that undisturbed possession destroys one's appreciation of the worth of things, of their value to us, almost of their qualities, whilst, at the same time, allowing the things to take quiet hold on us by a thousand little hands and arms and tentacles, everyday strands woven of everyday stuff.

Selina bought *The Lady* at the Portsmouth book-stall and the *Woman's World*, but she did not even open them on the journey to Waterloo. She had so many thoughts to engage her.

Macketts', shyly hiding behind the hill surmounted by the church, guarded by the leafless woods. Mrs. Mackett and the interior of the quaint house. The girl sitting up on the couch with the shawl about her.

The artless way the girl had shown her affection for Anthony told of his goodness to her, disarmed antagonism, and shown her Anthony reflected in the mirror of love—the love of a human creature for its protector.

And it all fitted in so well with what Isaac Coborne had said. The statement of the man of the world confirmed the statement of the girl; between the two, what a difference!

Arrived at home Selina sat down and wrote a letter to Isaac.

“I have seen Anthony,” said she, “and there is nothing at all in the business. He has obtained a place in the island for this unfortunate child

who is dying, and secured a good doctor for her, I wish Anthony had told me all about it at first, as you said he intended to do, but he is one of those men who are always doing good and hiding it. All the same, I need not ask you to say nothing of this to anyone, as you know how people embroider on things. I hope to go down to the island again soon and see how the poor child is getting on, though I am afraid it is only the matter of a few days or weeks."

Next day she saw Mandelberg, gave him the same story and made sure of his silence.

The wretched little affair was sealed and Death would soon put the envelope away in his pigeon-hole for lost love-letters and minor indiscretions.

She wrote to Anthony and Anthony wrote a line every day or two telling her of the condition of the patient, which was hopeless. Quite level-headed notes they were, even mentioning the condition of the weather. In one of them he asked her to ask Matilda to send him some warmer under-things and socks—a cold snap had come to the island.

She parcelled the things up herself and posted them, and in one of her notes she said that if she was needed she would come down.

Two things were moving in her mind abreast—the feeling that there would be no split between herself and Anthony, no alienation, and a complementary feeling without which the first would not have been viable: a feeling quite new to her and

strange, as though she were sharing this business with Anthony, as though the dying girl had put a tentacle round her too ; maybe it was those words of Anthony about never having had children that, cast like a seed in her mind, had flowered in ghostly fashion, or perhaps it was just the girl herself that had awakened in her the instinct that draws a woman to a child, assisted by Death, the creator of pity.



THE CONSULTATION

SIMS, the morning after his promise to Anthony, started off by the early train for London. He arrived before noon, drove to the stores, did his business there and then had luncheon, reaching Endell Street at two o'clock, the hour he had arranged for by wire.

He was shown up to the sitting-room on the first floor, the same room that Anthony knew so well. Dr. Gregg was not in, but he was expected every minute. Would Sims sit down?

He sat down and looked at his watch; he was, in fact, two or three minutes before his time; then with the door shut upon him he looked round, taking in the room and furniture.

He had noted the shop window below, the knob of the electric night bell with the enamel nearly worn off it by use, the place where a speaking-tube had been evidently discarded on account of jokers and children. Coming up the stairs he had noted absence of carpet, and now looking round, he took in the furniture, pictures and books.

Sims was artistic and he had a practice that brought him in a full two thousand a year, exclusive of bad debts. He had a partner who did the cheap midwifery, the panel patients and the books; he had a house near Keats' Green, and his only worry in life was the summer crowd of trippers. They

got in the way of his motor-car and they cheapened the place.

Gregg's house and room, his shop window and all it implied, gave him the shivers. What a place! What a life! What a practice! Night and day tramping mean streets to see tuppenny people, thirty-shilling midwifery fees—better be dead. Here, but for the grace of God, might have existed Archibald Sims.

He rose up and inspected the pictures, then the books on the shelf—Marx, Paine's "Age of Reason" and the rest.

"Why, good God," said he, "the chap's a Socialist!" He dropped his glasses and was turning back to the chair when the door opened and in came Gregg.

The two men shook hands, and Sims, drawing back a bit, made a sound as though he were laughing in his beard. He knew Gregg. Gregg had not altered much in all the years, whereas Sims had completely changed. They had been fellow-students at Bart's, and Gregg had been far the cleverer and more industrious of the two. Sims had haunted billiard-rooms, music-halls had known him, and he had once taken a journey in Black Maria to Vine Street.

"Sims, Sims," said the other, the picture of Podgy Sims flashing up from memory-land. "Good heavens, yes—but I'd never have known you with that beard."

They were at once *en rapport*; the old hospital

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had taken them to herself again, and that inexhaustible subject, their fellow-students and their fates, had to be thrashed out, to say nothing of the hospital surgeons and physicians who had vanished, mostly dead. Ratcliffe after taking his degree had gone to pieces, married a barmaid and died of drink. Holmes had made a pot of money in Harley Street. Jones was practising in Wales, and so forth and so on; the dullest conversation to a listener, but of intense interest to the talker.

Then Sims came to the object of his visit—the girl—a far less interesting subject. She had become for Gregg a case in the past tense, one of the thousand sad cases that his ledger contained. She was written off.

“Between you and me,” said Sims, “I don’t know what the devil is the matter with her. It’s a kind of general break-up, as if the foundations were gone. A kind of acute phthisis without lung symptoms. There’s no history of phthisis?”

“Not that I know of,” said Gregg, “unless it’s hereditary. Before she came to me for dizziness and weakness she’d been to Hennessy of Hunter Street. I told him I’d bagged one of his patients, and when I gave the name he said he wished I’d bagged the mother as well—the mother had been his patient, I believe. If you’d like I’ll walk round with you there, if he’s in; it’s on your way to the station.”

He went out and ’phoned to Hennessy, who was in.

"It's only a few minutes' walk," said Gregg as they left the house.

Hennessy's surgery, situated near what is left of Drury Lane, was a replica of Gregg's, with an added something in the way of sordidness hard to define. Over and amongst nearly the whole old-time architecture of London hangs or twines a something that has nothing to do primarily with design or bricks or mortar—something psychic, suggestive of evil clinging to ugliness or ugliness to evil. It has nothing primarily perhaps to do with wealth or poverty, since it overhangs Belgrave Square no less than the Euston Road, but in the poverty-stricken districts it is more perceptible to the outward eye.

Drury Lane, before it was in most part demolished, had this evil cast of countenance—Hunter Street and Sardinia Street, where was situated the old Spanish Ambassador's house, converted into a warren for poverty to breed in; the houses adjacent to Sardinia Street, the whole district in fact, possessed the sordid aura, the visible stink from the past which makes a nightmare of Fashion Street and the Cut, a bad dream of Pimlico. Here one smelt neither Lord Steyne nor Fagan, but Hogarth hiding to observe and feast on the diseases of humanity, and here you found in their own element the people that he loved to draw.

Hennessy's practice at one time had run right down to the Strand. It was more broken up now, but still viable, and his patients had not changed much in morals, manners or appearance. He did a

lot of work amongst the ladies of the district, and his experience in the arts and crafts of femininity was fabulous.

He was a tall, sandy man of sixty, Irish and clinging to the traditional dress of his class—the tall hat and frock-coat.

They found him in and waiting in his room behind the surgery, and Gregg having introduced Sims the consultation began.

Hennéssy remembered the girl. He went to a ledger and refreshed his memory and then to a notebook for extra facts.

“ Sure, of course I remember her, and her mother, and be damned to her. A nice little slip of a girl she was, and her mother going about, over thirty, with her dress to her knees and silk stockings—a perfect lady. I think the mother’s dead—ought to be—and you say the girl’s going under. No, I had no history of anything; she was sound when I knew her. Oh, it’s just they haven’t the spirit of living in them. These modern women can’t give their babies lecithin—that’s to say, they can’t give them milk—the child grows up, looking, maybe, all right, but its foundations are wrong; it hasn’t been built properly, the woman has scamped her work—not her fault maybe, but there it is. Cow’s milk or patent food isn’t the stuff to make men and women of. Then the baby grows up same as this one has grown and finds itself with a mother who teaches it cigarette smoking before she teaches it manners. Doesn’t feed it properly, ten to one;

keeps it waiting up for her whilst she's out. It can't stand the racket. Then it takes to earning its own living the same way as the mother, and there you are."

"You told me the mother of this girl came from Canada," said Gregg. "Was she a really bad 'un, or was it just not her fault?"

"She was a bad mother," replied Hennessy, "as I remember her; not cruel to the child, maybe, but a bad mother.—a bad woman, that's the same thing."

"Well," said Sims, "we haven't got very much further in the business as far as I am concerned. Frankly, I didn't expect much and wouldn't have come to town only for the girl's—er—guardian who wished me to see my friend Gregg."

They left Hennessy's and Gregg walked a bit with Sims in the direction of the Strand. After the fashion of doctors who have finished a consultation on even the most interesting case, they plunged into other subjects.

"So you've turned Socialist," said Sims, referring to the books he had seen in Gregg's room.

"And what have you turned?" asked Gregg.

Sims laughed.

"Well, as a matter of fact I have never had any politics," said he, "but I suppose I am a Conservative. You see, I have no time for politics, and, running a big practice in a place like the island, it doesn't do for a doctor to mix himself up in that sort of thing."

"I suppose not," said Gregg; "your people are all holiday folk and well-to-do townsmen, and you can live content without bothering about the social state. It's different in Goblin Market."

"Where's that?" asked Sims.

"It's the place where they sell young girls and where you can buy anything else in a fancy way from a politician to a title; it's the market where everything, even the best of the goods, is tainted, as that poor devil Harrop has found to his cost, for he was a quiet-living man till he picked up that piece of goods to unsettle his life and wear out his heart. It's London, Sims, the part of it where money is easy; and it's more than that, amongst people who ought to be made do honest work, it's lax living. Lord knows I'm no preacher, and the God that made Gower Street and with the same hands made roses is beyond my comprehension; but I've had my nose rubbed into the fact that you can't buy happiness—it must come to you, and it only comes to a man through quiet living and work and sticking to one woman, if you must have women. Mixing women is like mixing drinks."

"Suppose she won't stick?" said Sims.

"If a man has enough gum on him she'll stick, nine out of ten of them. If she doesn't it's the man's fault nine times out of ten. I'm talking from experience got amongst the workers, who are the rich without money—the real people from whom one alone can judge Humanity."

CHAPTER XLI
THE INEVITABLE

ONE morning Selina, going over her household accounts after breakfast, received a telegram from Anthony :

I WOULD LIKE YOU TO COME.

The message was prepaid and the boy was waiting for an answer.

She put the accounts away and, consulting an A B C Railway Guide, wrote the reply :

COMING BY THE 12.45 SELINA.

Then she gave Matilda instructions to pack what things she wanted.

At Shanklin Station she found Anthony, who had come to meet her. He got her luggage together and a porter to carry it to the waiting taxi, and getting in beside her, shut the door.

Anthony though tired-looking, seemed quite normal and natural, and in tipping the porter rather than give him a shilling he had hunted in several pockets to find an extra penny to make up sixpence.

"How is she?" asked Selina.

"It's only a question of a few hours," he replied.

"Very bad. Sims saw her just before I left."

"You have a nurse, of course?"

"Yes, the same one she had before. Sims thinks

it's something to do with the spleen, but I don't believe he knows anything about it—they must say something."

Selina sat silent, looking out at the shadowy country. There was something about this land through which they were passing vaguely fateful and secretive. London seemed to belong to another age. These old meadows and hills hinting of themselves through the gathering dark, these cottages with heavy thatch and hedges that were hedges when Charles was king, all were like part of a pictured curtain cutting her and Anthony off from prying eyes. It was like going to visit the dying in the land of the dead.

And the strangest feeling came to her, perhaps from the calm and seemingly almost indifferent manner of Anthony, that she was the person to whom all this was of most concern, that she had been sent for as a sort of nearest relative, the person reckoned essential and upon whom the most painful duties would devolve.

The car turned in through the gate and drew up at the door.

Selina, stepping from it into the calm, cold winter's evening, found Mrs. Mackett waiting for her in the lamplit passage.

Anthony followed, and as the two women stood talking together in a low voice he stepped aside for a moment into the sitting-room. He put his hat on the table and stood listening to the whisperers.

It was dreadful. All that day, going in and out

of the sick-room, where the girl lay unconscious of him, he had suffered agonies of trepidation. He feared Death like a child. He had never seen anyone die; he had heard of people dying in other people's arms; he could not imagine it—the thought shocked him. He dreaded her awakening only to die; he dreaded the agony of holding her in his arms whilst the terrible thing happened.

The nurse, to get him out of the way, persuaded him to go to the station to meet Selina, assuring him that all would be right and that the end would not be for a considerable time. He had gone dreading that anything might have prevented Selina from coming and he had returned mentally clinging to Selina.

Poor Anthony, he who had always evaded unpleasant things, whose good heart whilst going out to the suffering of others rebelled against the thought of suffering in himself, had, during the last few days, paid fully to the Inexorable for all his evasions.

He was not equal to the last terrible moment. She was already all but gone from him; nothing could call her back, yet she was there.

Silence came in the passage; the women had gone upstairs, and leaving the room he followed them.

Outside the door of the bedroom he paused; then he came in on tiptoe.

The nurse was standing at the foot of the bed and by the bedside sat Selina, who had removed her hat, which she had placed on the little table near the

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window. The girl had changed her position and was lying on her side. He could see her face in profile; it seemed smaller and more childlike even than when he had seen it last, and the pallor around the half-closed mouth added strangely to its feebleness.

It was this that struck him now like a dagger through his heart.

He drew closer, and Seliza, seeing his agitation, whispered to him to go below, and that she would call him if there was any change.

He left the room, and the nurse taking the chair by the fire-place, the two women sat whilst the wind, which had risen with the night, could be heard in the trees.

The breathing of the sleeper would die away now and then, recommence, rise in rapidity to a certain point and then die away. Presently she moved restlessly, her eyes opened, and, like a creature all astray, she struggled feebly to raise herself. Selina put her arm around her neck and at the touch she sank back, soothed, like a child on the shoulder of its mother—with the lips of a mother upon its forehead.

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THE pity of Death is so wonderful that it embraces all things, even the least—even the sparrow.

She was nothing and of no worth as the world accounts worth, with no mind as the world accounts mind, with no estate, an outcast and a waif, yet, dying, she left grief behind her and sadness in the hearts of more than one.

In the graveyard on the hill, as Anthony stood by the six-foot pit into which the coffin had been lowered by slings, and as he listened to the last words of the Service for the Dead, the feeling that he had been here before, came to him with the recollection of his dream on the first night he had spent at Macketts', the dream of the churchyard high above a still, grey country under a sky of grey. There had been daffodils all about in the dream—there were none to-day.

“Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.”

The west wind moving the clouds above carried the words away and a few lost drops of rain fell.

“We therefore commit her body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure

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and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life."

Anthony felt Selina's hand upon his arm. The voice went on : it ceased.

There was nothing more. Only the few village folk dispersing and the pit ready to be filled in. He looked down at the coffin, on which a few shovelfuls of earth were lying, then, taking the arm of his wife, they left the churchyard.

It was not yet eleven o'clock.

Selina had prepared to leave by the midday train ; he would follow her back to town in a few days. Her things were packed and the car to take her to the station would arrive at half-past eleven.

On the way back to Macketts' they spoke scarcely at all, and in the sitting-room, as they sat waiting for the moment of departure, their talk was all of immediate and trivial matters. Anthony had enough money to pay for everything, including the funeral expenses. More than enough. He had asked for and received another advance of a hundred pounds from Mandelberg in the last few days, but he had not mentioned this fact to Selina—perhaps from negligence, perhaps because, despite the new understanding between them and the fact that this business had drawn them closer to one another than they had ever been before, there was at the back of his mind some concealed plan or idea.

He rose up as the sound of the car coming up the drive made itself heard ; she rose also.

"I want to thank you," said Anthony, "for all you have done, and for coming. You have been more than good. It's not as if—well, no matter —" He kissed her.

They came out into the passage, where Mrs. Mackett was waiting, the luggage was put on the car, and Selina got in.

"You'll come back soon?" said she.

"Yes," said he, "I'll come back soon."

He watched the car drive away and returned to the sitting-room.

Only for Selina what would he have done? She had saved him from all the terrible details, she had arranged everything, come between him and Death at that last terrible moment, shown real sympathy; it was that which had made everything possible, the sympathy of a woman, and she had always been cold and a thought hard—level-headed.

Sometimes at fireworks one sees a rather mean-looking rocket climbing the skies to burst into a spray of most beautiful stars—stars more beautiful than any of its seemingly rich-natured and certainly gushing and rushing sisters give birth to. So might Selina have been compared with her sisters. Selina was level-headed, but she had a heart. It was the level head that had saved her from making a scene at the beginning of things; it was the good heart that at the end of things had shown itself in words and little acts, each beautiful as unexpected.

He knew it. He knew that not a wife in a thousand would have taken all this business as she

had done, acted to him as she had acted, supported him at the last as she had supported him.

Fear of scandal may have been her chief motive at first; no matter, few other wives would have acted as she had acted all through.

He recognised this—and then the figure of Selina began to fade from his mind and her doings to lose grip upon his thoughts.

He rose and went upstairs to the room that had been tenanted so strangely and so recently.

The window was open and the west wind that had brought warmth and a threat of rain stirred the small curtains. The bed with its figured coverlet and snow-white pillows stood beneath the coloured print of our Saviour with a lamb. Strangely, he had never noticed this print till now, or, noticing it, it had left no impression on his conscious mind.

By the wardrobe stood several pairs of shoes. None of her things had been packed; they were all in the wardrobe and chest of drawers, her brushes and combs on the plain little toilet-table. Had she come back suddenly from up there on the hill she would have found everything to hand.

He opened the wardrobe where her dresses were hanging, and on the floor of it was the vanity bag into which he had put the five-pound note that day.

He took it and opened it, and there amongst the other things was the note. She had never spent it,

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nor even changed it. Illness had come, and then——

He put it back, and placing the bag in the wardrobe closed the door ; then he sat down on the chair near the window.



SHE IS STILL HERE

THE movements of the window-curtains might have been produced by some disturbing hand, and now on a slant of the wind the sound of Godshill Church clock striking noon came across the tree-tops and the orchard: The sweet, far sound of the clock had something in it of a voice.

The house was silent. Noon and midnight were the silent times at Macketts'—at midnight, before cockcrow, and at noon when the duties of the house contracted to the back premises and kitchen; and in the silence of noon and midnight the old house spoke in its own way—the last and never-to-be-exterminated rat on the rafters above, the mice that no farmer's wife could curtail, the beam or the board that talked of the weather.

A change of weather made things warp and groan and crack.

Sitting relaxed and half listening, Anthony heard sounds from the passage outside that might have been caused by a footstep, a light step, timorous—gone. Nothing.

He rose, and leaving the room, carefully closed the door, and coming down took his hat and went out, walking towards the palings bordering Puck's Piece.

As he leaned on the fence a voice came back to him from that first morning when he had stood here with her.

"I won't ever go away from here—~~ever~~."

She had spoken the truth. As far as he was concerned she was here still; it was as though in some curious way she had become part of the house, of its furniture and sounds, of the trees of the orchard and the trees of Gallows Wood, the grey sky and the distant glimpse of Trenchards, beyond which lay Cheekes Road and Wacklands, that wilderness of thorns and nut trees.

She would always and ever be here for him. To leave all this would be to leave her. When a man lives beyond middle age in a colourless world with all his emotions unused, when Love, from a name, becomes a spirit, leading him into a paradise of a few weeks as he had been led, the result must always be more or less disastrous.

A young man recovers. Youth is, in fact, Life, and the morning is full of all sorts of things that tend to make us forget, but towards the end of the day there is no looking forward. To leave all this would be to leave what remained to him.

He passed through the gate in the palings and crossed the meadow to Trenchards, paused for a moment to look at the ruined cottage where they had sheltered that day and then, turning to the right, came along that mysterious highway that no one uses, Cheekes Road, with the withered ferns on either side of it and the view of Wacklands suddenly disclosed, with its leafless nut trees and the thorn trees old beyond memory, gnarled and twisted like the dried bodies of witches.

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Here he hurried. She was not here; she had never come here with him; it was outside the mysterious pentagram enclosing him and her, Macketts' and the church on the hill.

Returning home, he found dinner awaiting him, and he sat down mechanically, Mrs. Mackett serving him herself, pleased to see him eat and pleased that he was taking things so well.

She knew the whole position; she had absorbed it from Selina and from him and from the incidents of the business. She realized, perhaps more than Selina, how hardly he had been hit, and, unlike Selina, she speculated as to what he would now do. Selina had no doubt on this point; he would, of course, come home; having settled up things, there was no reason for his remaining in the island.

Selina neither recognised the extent of the injury that had been done to him nor the bitter antagonism towards London that lay just beneath the surface of his thoughts.

London, where the tall house stood that had been the tomb of his soul; London, where she had suffered; London, where he had met her, this Goblin Market girl, an innocent trapped amidst the Goblins and condemned to sell their wares, poisonous, gay-coloured fruit condemning the eater to eternal thirst for more.

But for London he would never have met her as she was, never have loved her as he did, never have been consumed by a desire that her death had not destroyed, a desire that fed on the energy of passion

conserved during his life of quiet and colourless living; on the energy of romance never before tapped, on the passion to exist in and through another which had been waiting, balked, so many years.

But for London, and had he met her and rescued her in her innocence and without her trade, he could have loved her as a child.

As things were, it was hard to imagine what he would do. One thing was sure, he would not return to London.

In getting that extra hundred pounds from Mandelberg he was perhaps urged by this already half-formed decision, yet he had told Selina that he would be back in a few days.

But that was Anthony, the evader of immediate difficulties, the putter off of unpleasantness and acts that might give pain to himself or others.

Yet there was one thing he could not put off, one pain he could not escape from, like Laura who

With sunken eyes and faded mouth
 Dreamed of melons; as a traveller sees
 False waves in desert drouth /
 With shade of leaf-crowned trees
 And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze.

VANITAS VANITATUM

ONE morning a week or so later Sims, coming down to breakfast, received a message from Mackett's asking him to come at once as the gentleman staying there had been taken ill.

He left his meal untasted and came. Sims, calling a few days before at the farm in a friendly way, had found Anthony out, but Mrs. Mackett was in, and she had confided to him certain things about Anthony that had stirred her mind.

Mr Harrop wasn't eating properly and had fallen away from himself. There were several letters from Mrs. Harrop that had disturbed him; she had been asking when he was coming back. He had written to her that he was coming back in a few days, and he had given Mrs. Mackett notice that he was leaving. "But," said he, "if anything should happen to me here or later," said he, "I'd look to you to see one thing done for me," he said; "I wish to be laid beside her in the churchyard"; and it's not only that, sir, but he's always out and about, not in sometimes till after the doors ought to be shut, and he don't sleep as he ought, let alone eat."

"He's taking nothing to make him sleep?" asked Sims.

"Not that I know of, sir," replied the woman.

"Well," said Sims, "keep an eye on him and let me know if anything turns up."

And now had come this message.

Arrived at the farm, he found the woman waiting for him at the ever-open door.

"Come up, please, sir," said she.

Sims followed up the stairs.

Anthony was lying in his bed, his head half-sunk in the pillows, his hand on the coverlet, the sheets nearly to his chin.

Sims took the hand, held it for a moment by the wrist and let it fall.

"Oh, he must have died at least half an hour ago," said he.

"He was breathing strange when I sent for you, sir," said she, "then he seemed to settle asleep.

"Yes," said Sims, "he did. There's no bottle about here anywhere?" He looked around, but saw nothing.

"You don't think he's taken anything, sir?"

"Taken anything—nonsense, nonsense! Heart failure, that's all. I examined him some time ago. Now go down like a good soul and get me—get me my bag I left in the car."

She went and the wise physician made a rapid search of the room. When she returned with the bag he opened it, and having to take something out for form's sake, he produced a notebook, in which he scribbled something.

"And now there's nothing to be done," said he, "but to telegraph for the wife. It will be hard on her. I'll see her when she comes, and the certificate will be all right. I'll see to that. He wished to be

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buried here, you said the other day—well, it's better so, perhaps."

"Yes," said Mrs. Mackett, "they'd better lay together; it was her going that killed him, heart or no heart—he's near wore away."

She pulled the sheet down to show the chest, and Sims saw something held by the concealed hand against the heart that had broken.

It was a vanity bag.





ENVOI

It was buried with him unopened, and the powder-puff and the hair-pin and the few artless treasures that were hers are his for time everlasting as he lies beside her, a strange pair of lovers indeed, without epitaph or stone to mark their graves.