



GOBLIN MARKET

GOBLIN MARKET

A Romance of To-day

*Telling how Anthony Harrop, a respectable citizen,
met in with the Goblin folk, how he attended their
market, what he bought there and how it served him*

BY

H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

Vario V. S.
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CONTENTS

PART I

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR	9
2. FIFTEEN MINUTES PAST NINE	12
3. TWELVE O'CLOCK	19
4. ONE O'CLOCK	26
5. SHIRES	30
6. THE HOUSE OF SHIRES	37
7. THE TELEGRAM	42
8. ISRAEL MANDELBERG	53
9. THE NIGHT CLUB	62
10. SICK ?	71
11. DR. GREGG	78
12. AN ANARCHIST	85
13. NO !	92
14. ISAAC COBORNE	96
15. GOBLIN MARKET	111
16. THE LETTER	125
17. A BUNCH OF GRAPES	131
18. SOUTH	132
19. FERN-LAND AND FAIRY-LAND	145
20. THE DREAM	152
21. FRESHWATER BAY	157

PART II

22. BY THE SEA	173
23. HERE THERE ARE POPPIES	179
24. LOVE	190
25. AT THE STILE	195

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
26. SHE SEES HIM OFF	203
27. GREGG	210
28. HOW ANTHONY TOLD HIS WIFE	217
29. HOW ANTHONY TOLD HIS WIFE (<i>Continued</i>)	220
30. THE RETURN	227
31. SELINA	236
32. THE DAY BEFORE THE CRASH	240
33. THE CRASH	246
34. THE BARRED ROAD	252
35. THE HUNTING OF THE HARE	255
36. SHE COMES TO HIM IN THE NIGHT	260
37. THE OLD SHOES	269

PART III

38. SIMS	285
39. SELINA	288
40. THE CONSULTATION	294
41. THE INEVITABLE	301
42. IN SURE AND CERTAIN HOPE	305
43. SHE IS STILL HERE	310
44. VANITAS VANITATUM	314
ENVOI	317

PART I

GOBLIN MARKET

PART I.

CHAPTER I

THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR

If you want to find the roots of Bolshevism in England you need not go to Russia. Go to old prints such as Gin Lane, old records of institutions, such as the prisons, hospitals and workhouses of Bumble's time, old houses like No. 12A, Marlborough Terrace, Regent's Park, the residence of Anthony Harrop.

This evil house, which has broken the backs and hearts and health of generations of servant maids, stands narrow as a tombstone and high as an obelisk between Nos. 12 and 14.

The basement, copied from the dungeons of the Bastille, has held innumerable prisoners—prisoners condemned to sweat over big fires and turning joints, prisoners condemned to carry vast dishes, sirloins of beef, turkeys, vegetables, trays of plates, trays of silver, trays of glass and cutlery; breakfast-things, tea-things upstairs and down again all day long and every day.

And what stairs!

Carry yourself from the hall-door to the nursery at the top of the house and then pause to breathe

GOBLIN MARKET

and rest and consider what your condition would be had you carried a scuttleful of coals as well. Those appalling stairs! Made steep and high so that the living rooms might be lofty.

Anthony Harrop, disliked the place; he lived there because it was his wife's. She had two thousand a year of her own and this house, which had been in her family for over sixty years and to which she clung as the English cling to their institutions. She was a faded woman; she had fascinated him years ago but he did not love her now, never had loved her perhaps; yet for over fifteen years he had lived with this woman for whom he did not care in this house that he disliked, lived a highly respectable and blameless life, kept straight by the woman—and maybe also a bit by the house.

You couldn't get drunk in a house with stairs like that, nor carry on with other women, married to a woman whose virtue and high respectability were at once an atmosphere and an influence.

Harrop couldn't.

He had no illusions at all, he suspected that his wife valued him only as she valued the grand piano in the drawing-room or the polish on her silver plate, yet, though he had a leaning towards conviviality and an income of his own derived from a business in Birmingham, he managed to keep pretty straight.

For years and years he had lived a life of ease without much pleasure, without any discomfort, except in the war-time when he had acted as special

THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR

constable ; for years and years he had gone through the same old round of business duties, middle-class dinner-parties, holidays on the Continent, golf at Wimbledon, visits to the factory at Birmingham, and meetings of the Primrose League, and the years seemed destined to lead him on thus for ever or at least to the grave.

Till one morning came a knocking at the door of Anthony Harróp.

CHAPTER II

FIFTEEN MINUTES PAST NINE

It was the servant maid with early tea. She pulled up the blinds, revealing fog, house-tops and the dismal distances of the Regent's Park, then, having placed the tray by the bedside, she left the room carrying a pair of shoes in her hand.

It was the same every morning. Every morning the same plain, flat-breasted, washed-out looking maid, herald of the day, pulled up the same yellow blind and placed the same tray and tea-things by the bed.

This morning, as he turned lazily on his side before rousing up to drink his tea, the monotony of this repeated maid-servant with her flat breast, her sour face, her square waist and her marionette actions spread, touching and tinging almost imperceptibly the room and every object in it—"The Light of the World" (framed and glazed) above the mantel-piece, the wardrobe of mahogany with its plate-glass polish, the wall-paper roses.

All these things said to him, "Here we are again, as immutable and as surely recurrent as Matilda; and to-morrow it will be the same as it was yesterday, as it was the day before yesterday, as it will be the day after to-morrow," a statement that caused neither pain nor pleasure to Anthony Harrop. Three letters lay on the tray beside the tea-things—two obvious bills and a square envelope addressed

in the forcible writing of his partner, Israel Mandelberg.

He read this letter as he sat up sipping his tea and nibbling a biscuit.

Mandelberg was one of Mrs. Harrop's thorns. Harrop might have been anything; he bore a vague resemblance to Lord Haldane; properly dressed for the part he might have been anything, a butler, a bishop, a peer of the realm, but Mandelberg could never be dressed for any part except that of the Jew he was and the Jew he was contented to be. A glossy Jew, extraordinarily youthful looking for his years, pale as death, with raven pomatumed hair, and always dressed the same in a new morning coat, striped trousers and patent leather boots.

He had inherited his share in the business from his father, and Mrs. Harrop had not seen him when she married Harrop.

"It's no use," said Mandelberg in his letter, which was dated from Manchester. "There's no money to be had for business purposes. People won't lend with the nation as it is and politics as they are. I tried Hartops, as I told you I would, and then Jameson; had to go all the way to Leeds to see him and might as well have stayed at home. We've made two mistakes: we shouldn't have ordered that new machinery, that was one mistake, the other was, we shouldn't have thought of ordering it. We should have closed down a

GOBLIN MARKET

year ago ; we've been running at a loss for nine months.

"I'm telling you now straight what I think of our position.

"If we can get three thousand for the new machinery, if we can get it installed in decent time, if it saves twenty per cent. in cost, and if the market holds we may make out, my son.

"But if one 'if' goes wrong, we're bitched. There's one hope—you might try Burlingham. He's known me ever since I came into business and he's known you since we joined. I thought of him this morning. He's the most unlikely person, but it's just those sort that turn up trumps very often. Go and see him. We've had a loan from him ; all the same, tell him straight out the whole business and ask for three thousand on the factory. There's no collateral, unless you can scrape some up, which I wouldn't advise."

Harrop had known that the business of the factory was not prospering ; the receipts had been falling off for some years ; but he was more or less a sleeping partner looking after the London office, where a capable clerk did all the work.

He had half slept through all sorts of indications that the business was on its last legs, always trusting in his dreams that these sounds from without would pass, always trusting in the genius of Mandelberg to pull things through.

This letter was an awakener. But this easy-going

man who was respectable because his wife was respectable, who lived in a house he disliked because his wife liked it, who had allowed the good and the bad in his nature to be banked down by the even pressure of a commonplace environment, showed nothing of this Great Awakening in his face.

He poured himself out another cup of tea, drank it, replaced the letter in its envelope and then rose, went to the bathroom and got into his tub.

He seemed quite undisturbed, as, in fact, he was. Yet the bath soap, the loofah, the towel, the razor, his own lathered face in the mirror as he shaved—everything he saw or touched was part of the fact, and kept repeating to him the fact that the Business was gone.

He would get no more money from the factory—the profound faith he had in Mandelberg's business capacity told him that—Mandelberg was at his wits' end.

“You might try Burlingham!”

Those four words told him everything.

He finished dressing, wound his watch—he wound it night and morning—put it in his pocket, glanced round the room to see that everything was in order and came downstairs to the dining-room, where breakfast was laid for one.

The dining-room, furnished in the age of solid mahogany, was almost a pleasant place this morning with its brightly burning fire, snow-white tablecloth and sideboard reflecting the firelight from

GOBLIN MARKET

burnished silver and polished glass; and though Mrs. Harrop always breakfasted in bed, she was always with him as he sat down, as now, to the everlasting eggs and bacon, toast, marmalade, *The Times* and *Morning Post*.

It was her room.

Her father, Sir William Tower, once Lord Mayor of London, faced on the walls her grandfather, Isaac Tower, once something in the city—both done in oils. Men of the highest respectability who for fifteen years had presided over the breakfast-table of Anthony Harrop.

These family portraits which he did not possess, possessed him; they were ancestors of a sort; solid business men to whom failure in business meant disgrace. Easy-going man that Anthony was, he had always felt vaguely that he had not quite met with their approval, that, could they speak, they would have words to say relative to his laxity in city matters, his want of initiative and his reliance on Mandelberg.

It was they, this morning as he sat at breakfast, who first suggested to him the question: "What will Selina say when she knows?"

That had not occurred to him till now. What would she say? His money had helped materially to keep up the house, the car and the cottage at Caversham; for more than a year now he had been using money drawn not from the factory but from the sale of small pre-war investments, saying nothing of the matter to Selina because it was easier not to

say anything. He had about four hundred pounds left at the bank; it would last a little while yet—and then—then he would have to tell Selina that his money was gone, that he had been keeping matters dark from her for a long time, and then—then he would have to subsist on what his wife could spare him out of her "reduced income." They would have to sell the cottage at Caversham, cut down the servants, put down the car. Two thousand a year was not enough to carry on with as they were living, in these post-war days. He would be dependent on his wife for his bread, subsisting on her charity. The thought struck him as he was helping himself to marmalade, but it did not stay his hand, nor his appetite. He told himself that before living a life like that he would black boots or commit suicide, that four hundred pounds, with proper economy, would last him for a long time yet and that something might turn up in the meanwhile. Then he opened the *Morning Post* and began to read with interest the news of the day.

He noted the fact that the season promised to be a good one at Monte Carlo. That Lady Jane Hunneker had arrived at 175 Pont Street, that the Belvoir had found their first fox at Leadenham Hill Top, and run it nearly to Crow Bottom; that Fairbanks and Colin Kirkpatrick had played well in Varsity hockey and that the French were bringing the Germans to their senses in the Ruhr.

Then putting the papers aside he took out his pocket-book and counted his money. Three five-

GOBLIN MARKET

pound notes and three ten-shilling notes, to say nothing of the loose silver in his pockets.

The black marble Madeleine clock on the mantel pointed to fifteen minutes past nine.

CHAPTER III
TWELVE O'CLOCK

It was his custom every morning to take a taxi from the rank near by, drive to Piccadilly Circus and continue his journey to the office on foot ; but this morning on leaving the house he turned to the right instead of the left, boarded a yellow omnibus and crept inside. Economy had him in her grip : economy and the fact that four hundred pounds alone stood between him and Selina charged with the knowledge that he was moneyless, that he was a failure in the city, that he had deceived her.

There were six people, including a woman with a cough, in this vehicle boarded by Anthony Harrop, and it came to him, as he sat down and took off his glove to find the money for his ticket, that this was the beginning of a new life—of the new life that was to be his owing to the fact that Harrop's productions in motor accessories could not compete with the foreigner.

That was what it amounted to.

He got out at Piccadilly Circus, threw his bus ticket away and started East, calling in at his office and reaching Burlington's place of business in Victoria Street at half-past eleven. The Burlington building strikes the eye of the most casual observer. The great plate-glass windows of the ground floor exhibit machinery just as Streeter's windows in Bond Street exhibit watches and rings ; vast blocks

GOBLIN MARKET

of machinery with the polish and glitter of jewellery advertise the fact that here is the home of the Burlingham engines that can be driven by petrol, petrol-paraffin, gas or steam, and that vary in size from a cottage to a hat-box.

Anthony, giving his card to an office clerk, was shown into a waiting-room and left there alone in company with all sorts of trade papers spread on a mahogany table, a gas stove and an almanac of the Phoenix Insurance Co. He hated this business. How on earth would he begin when face to face with Burlingham? He tried to think of what he should say, failed and put the matter aside.

He had a tremendous capacity that way, and just as he had turned a couple of hours ago from the prospects held out by Mandelberg's letter to the interested perusal of the *Morning Post*, so, now, he turned from the unpleasant duty before him to the *Engine Builder*, a trade paper filled with most alluring pictures and photographs.

Engines, though he knew little about them, interested him; they had interested him as a boy and they interested him still; had he possessed a child and bought it a clockwork train he would have helped to play with it, amused almost as much as the other party to the proceedings.

Looking more like Lord Haldane than ever, he was contemplating the photo of a vast eight-foot driving-wheel Eustis Locomotive when the door opened and the clerk announced that Mr. Burlingham would see him.

Anthony put the paper aside, picked up his hat, gloves and umbrella, and followed the clerk down a passage, up a stairs, through an office to a private room, where Burlingham was standing with his back to the fire dictating a few last words to a girl stenographer.

Burlingham was a man of forty-five or fifty. A big, square, elderly business man in a rather shabby frock-coat, he wore a beard, but his large upper lip was clean-shaven and the face recalled that of Paul Kruger.

He greeted Anthony, the stenographer went out and the session began.

"Well, and how's business?" asked Burlingham as the other took a chair.

"As bad as can be for the moment," said this rotten but honest Business Man. "I had a letter from Mandelberg this morning; he's in Birmingham looking after things, and he's rather down in the mouth, but he believes things will improve. He asked me to call and see you."

"Oh, did he?"

"Yes; he said you knew the lie of things and he's very anxious about some new machinery we have ordered and the whole position. He thought you might be able to advise us."

"On the question of machinery?" asked Burlingham.

"No, on the whole position. The fact is that for the moment we are temporarily embarrassed—in deep water, so to speak—but if we can get the

GOBLIN MARKET

machinery installed it will mean a saving of twenty per cent. ; he wants to borrow on the factory."

"How much ?"

"Three or four thousand."

"And he wants me to lend it ?"

"Yes, that's it," said Anthony, relieved. "He wrote asking me to call on you with a view to that purpose."

"He wants to borrow on the factory," said Burlingham.

"Yes."

"I suppose he has told you that we have already lent him some money on that security ?"

"No," said Anthony, who had completely forgotten that clause in Mandelberg's letter.

"Ah, well, it is so ; he must have forgotten to tell you ; and now I suppose he wants an extra advance."

"One moment," said Anthony. "I believe I do remember his mentioning a loan, but to tell you the truth I have had very little to do with the business. Mandelberg does everything, and as the factory premises are in his name he would have completed the business with you without my help. I trust him in everything."

"Oh, he's all right," said Burlingham, "and when we made the loan we were not unfavourable to an extension of the advance should trade improve. The bother is, it hasn't."

"No, I suppose it hasn't," said Anthony.

"Your little factory," said Burlingham, "ought to

have done well; you produce honest stuff and that patent groove was a big asset; your factory was creeping up, fighting all sorts of difficulties, for Mandelberg is a big man, but he is not big enough to fight America and France."

"How do you mean?" asked Anthony.

"Competition. Foreign competition, that's what I mean; protected by a tariff wall Mandelberg could have put up a good fight and won through, but he can't fight naked—not America and France."

"A tariff," said Anthony. "Yes, I suppose that would have made all the difference. Mandelberg has often said the same thing, but, to tell you the truth, it has never come home to me before as it does now—now that things have come to this pass. You see, I have always been a free-trader in principle—not that I ever bothered about it much, but I was brought up like that."

"So was I," said Burlingham, "and a free-trader I am still as far as the food of the people is concerned; but the people don't eat motor-cars and pianos and opera glasses—the Rich do, at least they buy them, and the Rich ought to be made buy English-made goods whenever possible. Oh, damn it, any jackass on a common could see the sense of what I'm saying. Sick luxury industries giving work to British working men and dying for want of protection against the east wind of foreign competition—and dying because a lot of damn-fool politicians wear blinkers."

Anthony sighed.

GOBLIN MARKET

Burlingham, the fire behind him, the furniture of the room, all seemed part of the great dreary fact that unescapable ruin lay before the firm of Harrop and Mandelberg. All this talk about the politicians and tariffs lent a cataclysmic touch to the position; the firm of Harrop & Mandelberg was about to be destroyed not by any local accident or internal complaint, but by the movement of great elemental trade forces—crushed to death by America and France.

“Well, that’s it, and there we are,” went on Burlingham, raising his left foot to the warmth of the fire; “and you see how the position is; it’s not the question of us making you a loan, but of the loan doing you any good. As matters stand, money poured into your firm would be like water poured into a sieve. However, why not go down to Birmingham and see Shires; he knows all the position there better than I do, and you can give him word from me to lend you a hand if he sees a cat’s chance of doing any good.”

Anthony knew that Shires was the financial brain of the Burlingham Company; he had seen him at a distance once and had been impressed, but not favourably.

He called up the picture of Shires, and it came sharp-cut and hard to the mental eye: a figure made by God, no doubt, but undoubtedly made in Birmingham; the last person in the world one would fancy as a lender of money to a doubtful borrower.

"I'll think about it," said Anthony.

"Mind you," said the other, "I don't think it's much use, but it's worth exploring every avenue; yes, it's worth exploring every avenue."

It was in the days when trade-union leaders and politicians were always "exploring avenues"; the phrase had caught on and came in useful now.

Burlingham wanted to get rid of Anthony Harrop without giving him a direct refusal. Shires would do the killing—Shires was made for that sort of work, and this was not the first butchering job that had been passed on to him by the more kindly-hearted senior partner.

"Thank you," said Anthony.

He rose up and, shaking hands with the other, left the room, Burlingham watching the round-bodied, prosperous-looking Haldanian figure as it vanished, the door closing behind it, little dreaming what weird and romantic events were to be born, the children of that commonplace business interview.

CHAPTER IV
ONE O'CLOCK

OUTSIDE in the street, Anthony looked at his watch. It was past twelve, and he turned westward. He did not feel depressed, that hope-shattering talk with Burlingham had produced only one effect on his mind, the omnibus mood had passed.

When you are riding on an avalanche you don't bother to count the pence in your pocket, and Anthony would have called a taxi to take him to his destination, which was Scott's, only for the fact that the day was bright and he preferred to walk.

In the Strand he turned into a Bodega and called for a glass of dry sherry.

Yesterday a glass of sherry would have left the Harrop brain cells almost unperturbed, to-day the effect was quite different; and, leaving the bar, Mr. Harrop pursued his way along the Strand possessed of a mild cheerfulness without any foundation in reason.

It seemed to him that something had pushed the office, Mandelberg, his wife and the house in Regent's Park slightly away from him; all these things forming his major environment had been accepted from long habit, endured without much discomfort, recognised as essential to his existence, yet now as he walked along the Strand a new feeling came to him, a strange, careless, pleasant

feeling, a sense of freedom as though the slight withdrawal of his old environment under threat of disaster had given him room to breathe more easily and to breathe a fresher air.

He lunched at Scott's.

On ordinary days after luncheon he would return to the office for an hour, and if Mandelberg were away open any letters that had come by the afternoon post, then he would take himself to the club for bridge and get home in time to dress for dinner. To-day this programme did not appeal to him. He did not want to go to the office or to the club. He did not want to go home and dress for dinner, yet what else could he do?

Disaster had shaken him out of the groove he had followed for years but had given him no other groove or even line of direction to follow; he could not walk about the streets, he disliked cinemas and theatres, he had no hobby to play with. Considering the matter of where he could go and what he could do with himself the suggestion came to him all at once, and in the voice of Burlingham: "Why not go to Birmingham and see Shires?" Why not? The thing was pretty hopeless from a business point of view, but it would occupy him—and it would take him away for the night; he would not have to go home and dine.

He could take the tea train, the Central Hotel was comfortable, and there were generally pleasant and communicative people of a business sort to be met with in the smoking-room.

GOBLIN MARKET

Yes, he would go to Birmingham and see Shires. He called for a glass of Benedictine, paid his bill, and, leaving Scott's, hailed a taxi, ordering the driver to take him to Lloyds Bank. Here he drew and cashed a cheque for ten pounds and re-entering the taxi drove to Regent's Park.

Mrs. Harrop was out.

He packed his evening clothes in a suit-case and, telling the servant that he was called to Birmingham on urgent business and would not return till the morrow, left the house and ordered the waiting taxi-man to take him to Paddington.

Disaster had caused a split between Anthony Harrop and his old environment, but it had done more than that—it had aroused in his kindly and easy-going mind a feeling almost of antipathy towards his wife. The fact that he would have to tell her of the coming crash, the fact that he was already concealing it from her, the fact that he would have to depend on her money for the means of existence and the fact that he was not born by nature to meet adversity, all these facts combined to create this feeling in his mind.

For fifteen years he had lived with her, and it was not his fault that his feeling for her had dwindled to a kindly tolerance; for fifteen years he had been faithful to her, and it was not his fault that now in the moment of disaster he was almost running away from her.

Almost, for, seated in the taxi driving to Paddington, his return on the morrow seemed to him as

ONE O'CLOCK

sure a thing as the sky above Regent's Park, unconscious as the dead that the taxi was taking his round body and kindly soul into the Land of EStrangement and towards the strangest fate that an honest man ever encountered.

CHAPTER V,
SHIRES

BIRMINGHAM, the best-governed city in the world, according to its own account, stands upon three hills and two rivers in the midst of the fair land of Warwickshire. The city of smiths and cutlers that once on a time supplied the Parliamentary Army with swords devotes itself nowadays to a multiplicity of trades. It produces articles of gold, silver, copper, brass and steel, firearms, ammunition, metal ornaments, toys, jewellery, coins, buttons, buckles, lamps, pins, steel pens, tools, bolts and locks. It produces steam engines and pumps. It produced the Liberal Caucus and helped in the production of John Bright, and it has always produced Birmingham men: men who served out swords to the Praise-God-Bareboneites—at a price—men who rioted with joy over the fall of the Bastille and hid the Chartists, yet always, somehow, managed to keep their heads screwed on tight. Level-headed men like Shires, chief moving spirit of the Burlingham Engine Company.

Anthony having dined at the Central passed into the smoke-room. The place was crowded—crowded with prosperous-looking individuals mostly congregated in little groups, talking, laughing and engaged with liqueurs and half-crown Coronas.

There was some sort of show on in Birmingham that day; hence the crowd in which burly and well-

to-do looking farmers from Warwickshire rubbed shoulders with cotton men from Manchester and men from the Five Towns. That trade was bad did not seem to matter, that the streets were filled with the unemployed did not seem to matter; nothing seemed to matter as far as these men were concerned but the moment in which they lived, joked, drank and smoked.

Anthony, lighting a cigar, sat down in an easy chair close to a little group of men whose talk was Greek to him, for they were talking horses, but whose manners and looks were friendly; in fact, in a few minutes, and by pulling his chair forward, he was of their party—a dumb member, it is true, but a listener, nodding his head now and then, laughing when the others laughed and sometimes putting in a word. The new sense of freedom which had come to him since morning accounted, perhaps, for the pleasure he experienced in this new environment. He had stopped at the Central several times before—once with Mandelberg and once alone—but never before had he mixed with the smoke-room crowd, drunk with it—a whisky and soda had materialised, at his elbow—listened to its talk and laughed at its jokes.

The slight division that had suddenly come between him and his wife—unknown to her—had, somehow or another, slightly altered his position as regards the correctness of things; in almost running away from her he had almost escaped from that aura of high respectability which was hers and in

GOBLIN MARKET

whose influence he had lived for fifteen years. And the result was pleasant.

For fifteen years, except at city dinners, when it is permissible for even the most highly respectable citizen to get muddled, Anthony's potations had been extremely limited—one whisky and soda he generally allowed himself at night—and now, behold, a second had materialised itself at his elbow and he was leaning forward with the tips of his fingers together and a smile on his rubicund face listening to the story of a Manchester man about another Manchester man addicted to racing who had got himself entangled with a woman whose husband was a welsher by profession. The story, destitute of morals but not without a certain humour, was drawing to its conclusion when Anthony suddenly lost interest in it. His eye had caught sight of a new-comer who had just entered the room, a thin man with a hard-bitten face, dressed in a morning coat, with black pomatumed hair, a flower in his buttonhole and wearing a monocle.

Shires. The very man he had come to Birmingham to interview, the man whose existence he had forgotten during the last few hours. Though he had only seen Shires once or twice before and at a distance, there could be no mistaking that hard, glabrous, serious face with its stone-wall expression—the face of the complete Business Man with an extra touch, as though Science at the last moment had taken a hand with the chisel.

Shires might have been a mathematical chemist or a physiologist of the old hard type of the days of Ludwig and Bernard, he might also perhaps have been a preacher; but whatever he might have been one thing he certainly was—the last man in the world you would expect mercy from in a business deal.

He seemed out of place in that room crowded with good fellows and filled with an atmosphere of Coronas and good-fellowship; his seriousness almost amounted to a rebuke; if he had got on a chair, cleared his throat and invited his hearers to consider their sins and a serious call to a more godly life, he would have been in the picture.

Meanwhile he was moving, coming through the room, passing from group to group, evading detention by hands flung out to arrest him, casting a word here and there, but never a smile, and making for the bar at the far end of the room, no doubt to obtain some light refreshment after a hard day's work.

Anthony, sitting straight up in his chair, paused for a moment as if undecided. Then he rose up and came towards the bar.

He felt nervous and rather anxious lest the fact of his being found in such a place by the serious-minded Shires might cast a slur on the firm of Harrop & Mandelberg, might spoil the business on which he had come.

However, the business seemed so essentially hopeless that this consideration did not check him,

GOBLIN MARKET

urged as he was by the desire to get the affair over and done with.

He went up to the other.

"I believe I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Shires?" said Anthony.

"That is my name," replied the Burlingham man, wondering who on earth this old buffer might be, so different, somehow, from the other men in the room, so like a heavy father stepped out of a play.

"My name is Harrop," said Anthony, "of the firm of Harrop & Mandelberg."

"Mandelberg's partner?" said Shires. "Oh! very glad to meet you—heard of you often—and how's Mandy?"

"He is very well, I believe," replied the other. "The fact of the matter is, he's away and he asked me to see Mr. Burlingham on a matter of business, and Mr. Burlingham suggested that I should come to Birmingham and see you."

"Damn business," cut in Shires lightly. "Have a drink—I never talk business after six o'clock. You can tell me all about it to-morrow at the office. Whisky? George, two double whiskies. You have one? Never mind, have a fresh one for the good of the house. Haig & Haig, George." He put a five-pound note on the counter, all this without a movement of the face muscles or a shift of the monocle, whilst Anthony, relieved at the postponement of an unpleasant duty and surprised by the apparent difference between the mind and the exterior of this serious-looking and highly respectable

individual, leaned his elbow on the counter and lifting his glass said: "To you."

"I came here to-night to see a man about a griffon," went on the other. "Brownlow of Oakley Stratton, he breeds them. You haven't seen Mr. Brownlow of Oakley Stratton in to-night, George, have you? Damn him—he told me he'd sell me a pup and seems to me he's done so."

"Do you keep dogs?" asked Anthony.

"No," replied Shires; "as a matter of fact, I was buying this for a gir—lady friend. If I kept a dog, I'd keep a dog, not a damn feather duster on four legs; but you can't account for women. I've been trying to account for women all my life, but the account won't balance. I wish I'd known you were coming to Brum and I'd have asked you up to my place to dinner. Have another whisky?"

"It's my turn," said Anthony, finishing his half-emptied glass hurriedly, to the amazement of his unaccustomed stomach. "I'd have been delighted to come if I had known, but I ran down here in a hurry after seeing Mr. Burlingham. You see, Mandelberg wrote me a letter this morning, a most disturbing letter, asking me to see Mr. Burlingham, and he suggested that I should come down and see you, as the business——"

"No business," cut in Shires. "That'll do to-morrow. Don't mention the beastly thing's name after hours. If I didn't make that rule I'd be off my head or in the Bankruptcy Court, generally the same thing. I've known four men who took

GOBLIN MARKET

their businesses home with them and they're all dead but one, who's selling buttons on a card outside the Royal Exchange. Well, if you haven't been able to dine with me, you must let me show you round and you can come and have a smoke at my house. My car's outside."

Five minutes later Anthony found himself getting into his overcoat and following Shires to the hotel entrance, where a car was waiting.

"I live a bit out," said Shires; "but first of all we'll drop in for a few minutes to see the two McPhersons."

"Where's that?" asked Anthony.

"Music-hall," said Shires.

CHAPTER VI
THE HOUSE OF SHIRES

ANTHONY, as before mentioned, had no theatrical tastes. Theatres, cinemas and music-halls left him cold, but whatever else one might be it was impossible to be cold in the companionship of Walter Shires, and in company with a stomach that had given up feeling surprised and was settling down to the fact that a half bottle of Burgundy and a liqueur could live in temporary and great contentment with a number of whiskies and sodas.

A band, a blaze of light and a haze of tobacco smoke did not disturb this harmonious relationship, nor did the popping of a champagne cork in a bar where Mr. Brownlow of Oakley Stratton had suddenly appeared without any dog, but flushed and full of good-fellowship. Champagne on top of whisky, it did not seem to matter in the least, and Shires was drinking it, and not only drinking it but calling for more, for a Mr. Bland, who looked like a bishop, was now of their party, also a gentleman by name of Carter, a dead stranger from the Five Towns, who paid for nothing.

"No, no, I insist," said Anthony, flushed and greatly enjoying himself, and another cork went and a cigar-box was handed round. Then he was out in the foyer, alone, the Shires party having vanished like blown-out lights; out in the foyer alone amidst a moving crowd drawn there by the interval, men

GOBLIN MARKET

and women, and women by themselves and in little groups. A very correct and orderly crowd, but mixed—decidedly mixed. There were men in grey tweed and gentlemen in evening dress and ladies, some quite matronly and evidently in from the country with their husbands. "Highly respectable people," hiccoughed Anthony to himself as he moved slowly about, pursing out his lips, slightly fixed of eye and a cigar between his fingers.

Then, suddenly a bright young woman evolved from the crowd, an impudent-faced hussy but good-looking, with her hand for the tenth of a second on Anthony's sleeve.

"Hello, Dad!" said the girl.

She was swinging away, laughing with her female companion, when something in Anthony's face, manner or general make-up made her pause, and then he and she were talking—shade of Mrs. Harrop!—talking like old friends in an intimacy that threatened to ripen with tropical speed when Shires, coming up, broke the spell.

"Come along," said Shires, "the car's waiting." He linked his arm with that of the other and dragged him away. The engine man was pretty well "tanked" without, however, showing the least outward sign of it; he had saved the old buffer from making a fool of himself, and in the car, now driving towards his home, he talked with all the seriousness of his condition about a certain type of Birmingham woman; in fact, he might have been president of a watch committee or lecturing the

Y.M.C.A., till the car drawing up at his house jerked him from his subject back into the convivial mood.

"Come along in and have a drink," said Shires.

Opening the door with a latch-key and telling the chauffeur to wait, he led the way into a study that was half a library and where a newly tended fire was burning on the hearth.

Here was great peace and comfort and warmth, saddle-bag arm-chairs by the hearth, tantalus case and soda siphon, pipes and cigar-boxes. To Anthony's mind, vague, but still receptive and even cogitative, the contrast between this bachelor interior and his own bleak den in Regent's Park came home in a distorted manner, but no less pungently for that. Then seated on either side of the fireplace they talked. At first Shires did the talking, half comprehended by Anthony, and then the representative of Harrop & Mandelberg did the talking, half listened to by Shires. The conversation ran over women, wine, racing, restaurants and the cities of Birmingham, London and Paris, but always working at the back of Anthony's mind was the contrast, newly discovered, between himself and his host, his house and the house of Shires.

On the Day of Judgment, if the Judge be just, houses and places will be called to account no less than the sinners that inhabit them. What the house in Regent's Park had done to Anthony was less wicked no doubt than what the houses of the

GOBLIN MARKET

Euston Road, say, are doing to their inhabitants, but in its way it was almost as deadly; ably assisted by Selina Harrop, it had flattened out his life and deflated his heart. It had painted things grey, or at least London colour, and it had done all this so subtly and with such stealth that the last man conscious of the fact was Anthony. It was only at the touch of disaster that he experienced the first vague feeling of revolt against his life and surroundings, and it was only now under the influence of whisky and the house of Shires that he gave his feeling first voice.

His open and innocent soul disclosed itself and told things—domestic worries and the fact that Mandelberg looked upon him as a cypher in the business, the fact that he couldn't smoke cigars in his study because of the curtains, that his wife did most of the ordering of the servants, which was a mistake, for a house can't have two masters, and that life in London was not nearly so pleasant as life in Birmingham—at least such a life as Shires led. The fact that he was a good-natured man who would have made an ideal father but who was blighted and demagnetised by having nothing to love or care for might have been apparent to an acute observer and listener, but Shires wasn't listening, and if he had been listening he wouldn't have understood.

It was half-past one o'clock when the séance came to an end and the two parted, Anthony going off to the hotel in the car that had been waiting since twelve.

THE HOUSE OF SHIRES

He retired to bed hazy but satisfied. It seemed to him as he switched off the light that he had been doing a great deal of business all day, as certainly he had; profitable business, as certainly he hadn't. The music-hall, the band, the girl who had spoken to him, all were mixed up in a goulash with saddle-bag easy chairs, Shires, the affable gentlemen in the smoking-room of the hotel, and a general sense of well-being and comfort.

Then he went to sleep on his sins and slept like a little child.

CHAPTER VII
THE TELEGRAM

HE awoke at eight o'clock without any morning reflections to torment him. It was, in fact, the most pleasurable morning awakening he had experienced for many years, marred only by a slight dryness of the tongue, which soon passed.

A valet, who had put early morning tea by his bed, was pulling up the blind and the day outside was bright.

The fact that had stood at his bedside yesterday, the fact that he was as good as ruined, was still there, but shadowy and undisturbing as the fact that some day he had to die.

His good spirits held, and at ten o'clock, having received instructions as to the way from the hall porter, he started for the Burlingham offices on foot. They are situated in Icknield Street, not far from the great Lucas lamp factory and in the region of courts. Courts that have nothing to do with the Court of St. James; mean courtyards surrounded by mean houses and lurking on either side of dismal streets.

It was a quarter-past ten, Shires had already arrived at the office and the business representative of Harrop & Mandelberg was shown right up to a room where, at a roll-top desk and before a pile of morning correspondence, the business repre-

representative of the firm of Burlingham was waiting to receive him.

"Sit down," said Shires. He finished making a note on the corner of a sheet of paper, put the sheet under a paper-weight and turning in his chair offered Anthony a cigarette, which the latter refused.

"I never smoke before lunch," said Anthony.

"A very good habit," said the other lighting a cigarette; "and now about your business—a moment." A knock had come to the door and a clerk entered with a telegram.

Shires opened it. It was a long telegram in code, and instead of decoding it himself, as was his habit, he sent it out to be dealt with.

"Business," said Anthony when they were alone again. "Yes, Mr. Burlingham, as I told you last night, asked me, or at least suggested, that I should come down here and interview you on a matter that touches us very closely—the matter of a loan."

"A loan," said the other. "Yes, go on."

Anthony went on. He stated the case of his firm as far as he knew it, and never in his life had he found it so difficult to talk—his very respiratory apparatus seemed affected. It was like talking to a stone wall; worse, the man in front of him, expressionless and monocled, seemed surrounded by a cold business aura hopeless to penetrate by words or argument. He listened, or seemed to listen, but said nothing to help. The Shires of this morning contrasted with

the Shires of last night was as a frozen corpse contrasted with a live man.

"And that's our position," finished Anthony.

Shires flicked the ash from his cigarette. He was about to speak when a knock came again to the door and the clerk entered with the decoded telegram.

"A moment," said he. The clerk went out and Shires glanced over the paper in his hands. He frowned slightly as he read and his lips fell apart.

"Damn foolishness!" said he, flinging the paper on the desk. "General election. A general election is being forced over the tariff business; this is first news and private, so keep it to yourself. Tomfoolery!"

"Tariff business?"

"Yes, the protection of industries, the one obvious thing to be done. Idiocy!"

"How?"

"How! Why the blazes doesn't he protect them? What does he want a general election for; he has the power, why don't he use it? General election. Good Lord!"

He flung the paper on the desk as if disposing of the whole affair, and, turning to Anthony, began to talk cold-drawn business.

"It's not the slightest bit of use," said he. "You see the position we're in. You come to us for a loan on top of what we have lent, and I'd give it to you—at least I'd guarantee it to you—because I am an old friend of Mandelberg's and because you are an honest firm producing post-war stuff that's

decent and so keeping up the general credit of the country, for I tell you what: hitting us even worse than the stupidity of this rotten damn system, and that's rotten goods, post-war goods; from pins to whisky you can't rely on anything nowadays, and the foreigners are finding it out; but your stuff is O.K., and if there was a dog's chance I'd draw a cheque on my own bank for the three thou. you want; but there isn't. I look on the money we lent you as lost, or all but lost, for the factory security isn't worth much; and if you want to know why it isn't worth much go and look at the street corners from here to Lozells and the chaps out of work.

"No, I'd have done anything I could for you, but I can't part with any more precious money. If things go as they are going, I'll maybe be wanting to buy a farm in New Zealand. Now, if the Government had said, 'We are going to put up a tariff wall that will protect sick industries without touching the price of food or necessities,' I'd have lent you this money myself—either that or I'd have advised Burlingham to extend the loan, but as it is I can do nothing. You must see for yourself; what's the good of prolonging the life of your firm a few months at the expense of our money? You can't fight the sharp foreign competition that's going on, and you must know it."

"Yes, I see," said Anthony. He hadn't much business acumen, but he could see what the other was pointing out, what Burlingham had pointed out

GOBLIN MARKET

in London: there is no use pouring water into a sieve. The Harrop firm couldn't, under present wages conditions, meet the dumped foreign stuff; they couldn't fight Robarts and De Losy and God-knows-who. But Anthony, though an indifferent business man, had something of business tenacity in his composition.

"Suppose," said he, "suppose the Government wins the election."

"It won't," said Shires.

"But suppose it does."

"If it does," said Shires, "it will get a mandate from the people to act like a reasonable being, industries in a bad way will pick up and the unemployment roll will shorten. But it won't. The women will knock it."

"How?"

"You see," said the other, "in laying down the bed-plate for an election the Government is laying down the platform for a great big Liberal push. The Liberals have never had such a chance before; they will tell, they have already told the electors that protection of motor parts and pianos will raise the price of butter—it amounts to that, and that's what will fetch the women."

"All the same, one never knows," said Anthony vaguely.

"Yes, one never knows," said Shires; "there's always the chance of a flange that may go any moment holding out a month, and there's always the chance that foolish people may do the right

thing at the right time. Well, I'll tell you this, if the Government wins this election I'll lend you three thousand out of my own money, and I'll tell Burlingham to back you for another five thou., for, if by any chance we win, your little firm will go straight up. I tell you what, I'll write to Mandelberg to-day. Burlingham will come in with you, lending their money and their support, which means a good deal, but we'll want our share of the pie. We won't rook you, but we'll want a partnership in this new business, for if tariff reform wins it will be a new business able to breathe and fight and grow and doubling itself in the first year, if I know anything of trade."

"But won't that be too late?" asked Anthony.
 "The election mayn't be for a long time."

"The election will be very soon, and your firm can hold on till then. I know all about your affairs. Have to. It's my business to know about the affairs of every firm that uses a wheel or anything connected with it, not to speak of the firms that deal with tubes and piston-rods and boilers. How do you think we'd frame our contracts if we didn't know other people's secrets and costs? Well, there you are. We'll do it if tariff reform wins."

Vague agitation seized the mind of Anthony Harrop. A moment before, and fronting almost inevitable disaster, he had been quite cool; he had come to Shires in a perfunctory way because it was his duty to do so, but hoping for nothing; had

Shires turned him down he would have scarcely felt the blow.

But before this chance of reprieve vague agitation seized the mind of Anthony. He saw for the first time fully the pit he had almost escaped from; he saw himself at the bottom of the gloomy pit on the charity of his wife. What frightened him now and tried his nerves was not the chance of the fall but the chance of escape; it was like having to cross a gulf on a ten-inch plank. The free-and-easy feeling that had come to him after the hope-shattering interview with Burlingham on the day before had vanished.

"It's good of you," said he.

"Not a bit," said Shires. "We don't deal in goodness as a general rule in this shop. We're business men out to make a profit; but I'll tell you straight that all we've been talking about is like what children talk about when they get together and fancy themselves grown-up folk. Bunk. There's, in my opinion, not a dog's chance of the electors seeing sense. However, I don't want to depress you if you have any hopes. Anyhow, the offer stands, and I will write to Mandelberg to-day putting it in black and white."

Anthony rose and took his hat.

"I'm glad to have met you, Mr. Shires," said he, "and I hope when you are in London you will let me return the hospitality you extended to me last night. I will tell my partner of your great kindness when I see him, and I may consider that fact settled."

"Which fact?" asked Shire.

"The fact that you will advance this money on account of a share in our business, should the Government be returned to office."

"Yes," said Shires, "you may consider that settled."

Then the other took his departure, leaving the Burlingham building and turning to the left along Icknield Street and in the direction of the more fashionable quarter of the city.

If the nation supported the idea of a tariff to protect certain industries, including the motor-car industry, then a whole lot of unpleasant things wouldn't happen to Anthony. It was extraordinary that he had not felt the full weight of the coming unpleasantness yesterday, had not felt it till now, had not felt it till a doubtfully fumbling saving hand had materialised above him.

But he felt it now—felt it to the extent of saying to himself, "Well, if worst comes to the worst—" hinting to himself, in fact, that there was always such a thing as suicide, though he had no more idea of committing suicide than he had of taking to aviation for a living if all else failed.

Anthony; besides his suit-case, had brought two overcoats from London—one for evening wear and one slightly heavier with an astrakhan collar. He was wearing the latter now, and the unemployed at the street corners as he passed made remarks about it.

About it and about him

GOBLIN MARKET

He was a living picture of the elderly capitalist, well-fed, prosperous, easy-going, a picture as repulsive to the socialistic mind as attractive to the mind of a certain type of woman.

But he was unconscious of the eyes that followed him and of the lips that were remarking on him, unconscious of everything but the Circus Maximus in which he was standing, a gladiator facing the retiarius Bankruptcy and the electors of the British Public the audience. Would they turn their thumbs up or down?

Paying his bill at the "Central," he walked into the station carrying his suit-case in his hand. There was half an hour to wait before the London train started, and he occupied himself for a while watching the station crowd and looking at the papers and magazines on the book-stall.

The Circus Maximus had vanished from his mind, vanished and become part of the mist of a doubtful future forming the background of a very present fact—he was going home.

He didn't want to go home—at least just yet; like a bird escaped from long confinement in a cage, he was not quite easy in his freedom but not quite prepared to return. The thought of driving up to Marlborough Terrace, dismissing the cab and falling back again into the old routine did not appeal to him in the least. Long years ago he had felt the same dismal repugnance on returning to school, and it came back to him now quite strangely, that feeling, as he stood before the book-stall looking at

the covers of the *Strait Magazine* and the *London Magazine* and *Cassell's Magazine*.

He would go home, of course; but another few hours wouldn't matter—a few hours free in London, untied to anything. He would go to the office to see if there were any letters and he could get a room at his Club, not the Old Travellers' which he usually haunted, but the Chess Players in Westminster Court—and nobody would know. That is to say, his wife wouldn't know. He'd only have to tell a lie. Anthony wasn't a liar and he had never lied to his wife. Untruth was repugnant to his real nature—still, this would be only a white lie, and it would ease her mind at his non-return that night.

He drifted towards the telegraph office, drifted away from it, drifted back and drifted in, took a form, put on his glasses and wrote:

“Harrop, Marlborough Terrace, Regent's Park, London. Detained in Birmingham with Mandelberg on important business, back to-morrow. Anthony.”

He handed the form and half a crown across the counter, received his change and walked out.

Ten minutes later, taking his seat in the luncheon car of the express, a feeling of vague unrest came upon him.

He needn't have done that. It would have been sufficient to have said, “Detained, home

to-morrow." That would not have been an untruth, whereas he had told a circumstantial lie. He was not detained by Mandelberg, nor in Birmingham, nor on important business.

However, she would never know. All the same, he had lied, and his conscience worried him, till the waiter placed a fillet of lemon sole before him and uncorked a half bottle of Château Citron.

At Paddington the vague uneasy feeling came back, not in the form of conscience but fear lest by any untoward chance he should come across Selina or her sister Mrs. Ambrose, or anyone who might "give the show away."

This absurd dread passed before he reached Westminster Court, where he secured a room and, free of impedimenta, started for the office.

It was now twenty minutes to four o'clock.

CHAPTER VIII
ISRAEL MANDELBERG

THIS office, which was situated in Burman's Buildings off Norfolk Street, consisted of three rooms—an outer waiting-room, a room for a clerk, and the partners' room with a door whose ground-glass panelling was marked "Private": old rooms in an old building panelled with old oak and filled with the gloomy light of other days. Here, seated waiting for Mr. Harrop who had not yet arrived or for Mr. Mandelberg who was out at lunch but would be back in a minute, you could fancy anything in a Dickensian way—just the place, as Mandelberg once said, where you might expect to hear the ghost of Charles Dickens talking to Conversation Kenge about the fog outside in the Strand. Mandelberg did not love the office any more than Harrop, but it was reasonable if not cheap and handy as a business place.

This brilliant Jew, who had all but made the little firm a great success, who had fought Foreign competition and Home stupidity, Income-tax men and Super-tax men and Excess Profits-tax men, strikes, ruinous transport charges and dishonest dealers in raw material, was, like Shires, a man with a taste for life as well as business; he was reckoned a good fellow and he had a nose for horses; like Shires he divided business from pleasure.

At four o'clock on this eventful day he was still

engaged in business, seated in the partners' room going over some letters, his hat on the table at his elbow and his cane in the corner by the door.

To him, so engaged, entered Harrop.

Anthony was surprised to find the other—he fancied him still in Manchester—and Mandelberg seemed equally surprised to see Anthony.

“So you're back from Birmingham?” said he.

“Yes, I'm back from Birmingham,” replied Anthony not seeing anything strange, for the moment, in the fact that his partner knew where he had been. “I went to Burlingham, as you suggested, and he proposed my going down to see Shires. I did so, and I believe I have done good business.”

“Oho!” said Mandelberg. “What's the business?”

“Shires refused to advance a penny as things stand,” went on the other. “He pointed out quite justifiably that in the present state of things it would be like pouring water down a sink to advance us money, but he will do so if the Government wins the election.”

“What election?”

“The general election. It has decided to go to the nation on the question of a protective tariff for certain industries, ours amongst others.”

“I've heard a rumour of that,” said Mandelberg, “and if Shires says so it's so, for he has inside knowledge.”

“He got a code wire whilst I was with him telling him definitely it is so, but that's private.”

Mandelberg got up and paced the floor.

"This is good," said he; "it's great. Of course, if that's the policy of the Government there will be no delay. Shires said definitely he would make the advance?"

"Definitely; he's writing to you, but he said he didn't believe that the Government would win the election."

"Nonsense," replied Mandelberg. "It's a plain common-sense issue, and the British people have their heads screwed on tight; we can't help winning. It's great, it's great—leaving Shires alone, any man will help us once we have a tariff; money will turn fluid as water. It's great. 'D'you know, it's not altogether a surprise; I felt this morning something would happen. I was hunting for you to know what you'd done with Burlingham. I went to Burlingham only to find he'd gone to Paris, then I went up to your place in Regent's Park and saw Mrs. Harrop; she said you'd gone to Brussels on business."

"Good God!" said Anthony.

"What's the matter?" asked Mandelberg.

"You saw my wife! When?"

"A couple of hours ago."

"Did she seem surprised to see you?"

"No, just the same as ever—she never expresses wild delight when we meet. You know how she feels towards me: I'm not good enough for her in the social way, and I'm a Jew."

"A couple of hours ago," said Anthony, not

heeding the other. "She couldn't have received my wire—she said nothing about a wire?"

"Nothing. What wire?"

"One I sent from Birmingham before the train started saying I was detained, in Birmingham with you on important business and wouldn't be back till to-morrow."

"What on earth did you do that for?" asked his partner.

"I didn't want to go home to-night—I'm fed up with things and thought I'd have a night in town away from that beastly house."

"I see," said Mandelberg.

Had he been alone he would have laughed at this artless revelation on the part of the highly respectable Anthony. He frankly detested Mrs. Harrop; how a man could exist tied to such a woman had always been a marvel to him, and it tickled him immensely to think of her face when she opened that wire, as she had certainly done by this.

Anthony had taken his seat in one of the big arm-chairs.

"Two hours ago," said he, feeling like a man in a nightmare trying to solve an impossible sum in arithmetic, "and the thing would take an hour to reach her—maybe more—and I sent it from Birmingham four hours ago, about. I feel as if my head was going."

"It may be delayed but she'd have got it shortly after I left the house," said Mandelberg.

"And it said I was detained with you in Birmingham," repeated Anthony.

"A statement which was obviously impossible," said Mandelberg. "Let's face the situation fully—there's no use in getting rattled; after all, it's only just a taradiddle."

"Yes, but I'll have to explain it to her, and you don't know—you don't know——"

"Oh, I can guess."

Anthony brooded for a moment.

He felt incredibly mean. When he sent the wire he had not felt mean. He had intended to do no harm; the thing was sent as a cloak to no sin committed or intended; it was just a white social lie such as we tell when we instruct a servant to say "Not at home" to a visitor.

Sure that his wife would never know the truth, he had experienced nothing but a slight uneasiness, a regret that he had made the thing so needlessly circumstantial.

Now that his lie was discovered, as surely it was discovered by this, it was a very different matter.

And he would have to face her and own to it. It couldn't be denied, and the reason never could be explained. What could he say? "I was suddenly tired of life and the house, I wanted to stretch my limbs and breathe freely a little longer." Impossible; she could neither understand nor believe that statement—and besides, why Birmingham? Do people go to Birmingham to breathe freely? And why Mandelberg, why the

lie about Mandelberg? No man in his senses lies without a reason.

She would draw the obvious conclusion that he had been doing something that he wished to conceal from her, and from that the obvious conclusion that he was unfaithful to her with another woman.

No doubt she was thinking that now, up there in Regent's Park—would be thinking it all that night and next morning until his return. The momentary impulse came to him to dash from the office, take a taxi and drive home: face the situation at once and not make it worse by a second night's absence from her.

This he might have done had he possessed the nervous energy for the business. It wasn't so much a question of courage, but he was below par at the moment. The events of the night before, the train journey, the train luncheon imperfectly digested, the shock he had just received—all had conspired to reduce him in energy and will power, to deflate him. He rose and stood with his back to the stove, his hands behind him and his shoulders drooped.

Mandelberg went to the cupboard where the whisky for customers was kept and brought him a whisky and soda.

"If I were you," said the Jew, "I wouldn't bother about the thing; you're not the first man that's made a bloomer like that. Just say it was a mistake and you put my name in the wire meaning

Shires. I know it's a pretty rotten explanation; still it's something to say. You aren't sure you wouldn't like to go home now and get it over?"

"No," said Anthony, "I wouldn't. I've had enough for one day. I want a little peace and to get my mind off things." Then as the stimulant began to clutch him: "It's all very well talking, many another man would have been off the track and in the ditch long ago leading the life I've led. I've been lonely. My fault, perhaps—my fault, perhaps—I'm not a man given to making friends beyond a certain point. You're the only real pal I've had. The wife is all right, but she's never been really a companion, and a man wants a bit of sympathy now and then; if we'd had children it would have been different, maybe. I wanted children, but I haven't any—not even a dog to care for. A man wants something to care for and to care for him."

"Cheer up," said the other. "Children are a big gamble; you never know what old ancestor may pop up in a child—some chap that's maybe been hanged for highway robbery or died of booze. Cheer up and we'll go and have a bit of dinner together and go to a theatre. Cheer up and thank God there's a man alive called Baldwin."

Anthony finished his drink and put the glass back in the cupboard.

"You'll have dinner with me," said he. "Come to Westminster Court at half-past seven or so

and we'll have dinner. Can you get there by then?"

"Yes," said Mandelberg, "I'll be there. I'll walk a bit of the way down the street if you'll wait for me."

He put away the letters on the table and locked the whisky cupboard, called the clerk and gave him some instructions about a document that was being drafted, then, accompanied by Anthony, he left the building and turning westward down the Strand walked a few hundred yards with his companion.

This quick mind, sleek and active as a rat, had been turning the matter over and over, looking for a way out, that is to say, a plausible lie. He foresaw a terrible row in the Harrop *ménage* and he didn't want it; the firm had enough serious business on its shoulders without matrimonial disputes being piled on the top of all; yet he couldn't think of a lie that would stop the hole or a subterfuge to white-wash or camouflage the business. Instead of leaving it at that he *would* talk.

"If I had a brother you might say you meant him," said Mandelberg; "but I haven't, and she knows it."

"Oh, damn her!" suddenly broke out Anthony. "Let her go and hang herself. I'm sick of the whole show, the whole business, the whole blessed thing. Let her go and hang herself. *I* don't care."

Mandelberg for the moment was almost shocked. It was so unlike Anthony, to talk like that, to burst

out like that. It was quite natural--natural as the turning of the goaded ox, still—

“All right,” said he. “Let’s forget the whole business. Don’t worry. I’ll be with you at half-past seven.”

He called a taxi and got in and Anthony pursued his way westward.

CHAPTER IX
THE NIGHT CLUB

It was five minutes past eleven and Anthony found himself standing in a long, narrow passage behind Mandelberg, who was talking to a pale-faced man in livery who looked something like a commissioner—gone wrong.

They had dined at Westminster Court and visited a theatre.

The play had not amused the husband of Selina Harrop. It was about a man and his wife and another man, to say nothing of the other man's wife; the theme infidelity.

Amongst the characters, and even in the bedroom scene in the second act, posed a figure unimagined by the author but clearly visualised by Anthony—the figure of Selina awaiting his return.

She had sat beside him at dinner, she had crowded into the taxi that took him to the theatre and now she was on the stage, sometimes as a detached figure, sometimes merging herself with the outraged and patient wife of the play. Talking to him the whole time and always saying the same thing in the same words: "To-morrow I am going to ask you why you sent me that telegram which was obviously untrue."

There were whole five-minute sections of the performance during which he saw nothing but the dining-room or drawing-room of Marlborough

Terrace, himself and the wife of his bosom, himself trying to explain away that lie: that stupid, silly lie told on the spur of the moment. It was not a question of Selina being angry with him or suspicious, and she was not a woman to make a scene: suspicious she would be, without any manner of doubt, and that was the irritating part of the matter, for he was innocent of ill-doing; but the tragic part was the lie. It is a terrible thing for a grown man to find himself convicted of an obvious and palpable falsehood, even about a trifle.

After the play they had gone to Romano's, and Mandelberg proposing "a little place where you'll see some fun," they had arrived here in this gloomy passage.

Mandelberg seemed to know the place, and the liveried man, after a moment's conversation, let them pass through a swing-door into a red plush upholstered room that gave on a dance hall round whose polished floor-spaces little tables were set.

The place was cheerful, clean and brilliantly lit, continental and half-filled with a cosmopolitan crowd of well-dressed people, young men, young women; all these people were young, or nearly all, and Anthony, looking round before taking his seat at the table that Mandelberg had chosen, felt an uplift of the spirit as though infected by the spirit of youth in the air about him.

The band had just ceased and the floor was clear, and a waiter appeared waiting for Mandelberg's order.

"This is my show," said he. "Not a bad place, is it? The best run in London. Night Club, yes, but it's quite respectable.' Police! Nonsense, they never touch a place like this, you only want tonic water and a cigarette!—all right. You don't dance? Well, you can sit and look at the fun for a while; it's an interesting crowd to watch."

His bright eyes were casting round as if looking for someone that he knew; the band had struck up, and rising suddenly he went to a table where two women were seated. He was evidently known to one of them, for next moment she rose and the next they had taken the floor.

Anthony, for the first time in his life, wished that he was a dancing man. He applied himself to the tonic water and lit a cigarette. The band and the brightness, the crowd and the something festive in the air all had conspired to lift Selina from his mind for a moment. It was good to be young, he told himself.

Meanwhile the place was filling. A stout woman accompanied by a man had taken the next table; then they moved away, attracted by the sight of friends across the room, and the table was taken by a young man and a girl.

She did not look more than sixteen, her companion did not look more than twenty. He was of the army type, bronzed and healthy and not very intelligent looking.

The band had ceased, but Mapdelberg did not return; he was in animated discussion with the

two women and had evidently forgotten his companion. Anthony did not mind—he was observing the two young people at the next table; they were not speaking to each other. Had they quarrelled? No, they just seemed indifferent one to the other, as though they were strangers: indifferent and looking about them at the crowd; the young man was smoking a cigarette and the girl, as she leaned slightly back in her chair, glancing round her with languid interest, now and then pursed her lips as though whistling.

How pretty she was! Old-fashioned, with a dying, fade-away air, and how young to be in a place like this; a child, nothing more.

“Brother and sister,” thought Anthony. Then, as an afterthought, “Or maybe his *fiancée*.”

He took a sip from his glass and lit another cigarette; as he put down the match and raised his eyes he met those of the girl. She had been looking at him. Then the band struck up and the young man, without a word to his companion, put down his cigarette and walking towards a woman whom he evidently knew carried her off into the dance.

The girl, left alone, looked again at Anthony, smiled ever so slightly, raised her eyebrows as though to say “May I?” left her chair and came and sat beside him.

“It is warm,” said she, in a charming half hiss.

“Yes, it is very warm in here,” said he. It was the most thrilling moment of his life; he scarcely knew what he said. He could not understand the

GOBLIN MARKET

situation at all. Her glance, her smile, the way she had crossed over to him, the way she sat now quite at ease looking at the dancers, all were so perfectly natural and innocent! She seemed now to have forgotten him for a moment, and then as he watched her he saw that whilst her eyes were fixed on the moving figures her mind was uninterested—not there, not with him nor in that place at all; and then as he watched her he saw that her appearance of extreme youth was—what? Not fictitious yet somehow illusory—a thing that was, yet was not. Then, all at once, he knew.

This child!

The band had ceased for a moment and the dancers were clapping their silly hands for more. The band went on, and the dance.

“Your companion seems enjoying himself,” said Anthony.

“My companion?” said the girl. “Oh, that gentleman I came in with? Yes, I would have danced with him, but my chest is not well to-night—I have had a cold; he was angry with me because I would not dance; he will not speak to me again, so I came and sat with you. You do not mind? A girl can’t sit here alone.”

“No indeed,” said Anthony. “No. I don’t mind. I’m glad you came. Have you known him long?”

“That gentleman? Oh, no; we had dinner together, that is all. I couldn’t eat and that upset him. Do you often come here?”

"No," said Anthony. "This is the first time I have been here."

If the effect she produced on Anthony was the same as that which she had produced on "that gentleman" we cannot wonder at the latter leaving her in favour of a more powerful charmer.

"A girl can't sit here alone." The innocently frank statement had flattened out things and removed the last rose-leaf of romance; but, apart from that and the fact that she was evidently not at all well with the cold on her chest, there was something about her—a simplicity, let us call it—that one might fancy curiously chilling to "that gentleman," who had picked her up for her pretty face no doubt, given her dinner and an entry into this place, and dropped her.

It didn't chill Anthony. Had she been anyone else of her type and trade he would have moved away from her now and left the place, for he was tired of the dancing, the band and the glare; she held him because she had warmed his feelings towards her in quite an extraordinary way—but not in any way suggested by her trade.

There was something appealing in that air of a tired child, in her youth, in her prettiness and the little movements that talk so loudly and tell character so well: something forlorn about her.

Then, after the first few minutes, she seemed to have sensed his friendship dog-fashion; possibly instinct had told her all about him from the very first and that he was not of the army of those

GOBLIN MARKET

horrors, the elderly gentlemen who frequent London night society. At all events, and however that may be, they sat beside each other, talking casually and at ease and in all innocence.

Now and then a man would glance at her, but she had no eyes for anyone, no signals in her locker; like a little ship moored in the shelter of a big rock she was content to rest for a while out of commission and with sails furled.

"I say, old man—I say, old man." Mandelberg's hand was on Anthony's shoulder and his jocular whisper in his ear.

He had come to the table for a moment. What a joke! Anthony with a girl!

Having shot his whisper into the ear of the other he straightened himself, and stood for a moment looking at the crowd.

"Get a chair and sit down," said Anthony.

"No," said Mandelberg. "Two's company, and I've got someone waiting for me." Then in a moment he was gone, swallowed up in the crowd, and Anthony and his companion were alone again.

"I say, old man—I say, old man." The laughing whisper still sounded in his ears. It had brought him to his senses, broken some spell, suddenly made the whole place—band, crowd, noise and glare—horribly distasteful.

He rose to his feet and the girl, drawing her light cloak over her shoulders, rose too.

He understood; she couldn't sit there alone, and if he went she would have to go too.

They passed out to the vestibule, where he got his hat and coat, then down the long passage to the street. Here they turned to the right, the girl walking beside him silent, like a faithful shadow.

He wanted to get rid of her and yet he didn't. He had felt something like that before when a dog had followed him through the streets. He had brought it home and Selina had refused to have it, so it had been taken to Battersea.

Why the girl recalled the dog it would be hard to say; perhaps because she had, so to speak, mutely sought his protection in the dance-room, and attached herself to him in a way—because, silent as a dog, she was now accompanying him.

The cold night air of the street made her cough, and she drew her cloak tighter across her throat. She walked slowly, as though her breathing were affected.

"It's cold," said Anthony.

"Yes, it's cold, isn't it?" replied she; "it's the street after that hot room."

"Have you far to go?"

"Rupell Street, Bloomsbury," she replied. She spoke in a dead-tired voice and the cough took her again; the cold of the street after the hot room seemed trying her chest and she seemed fighting against the cough. A taxi was drawing towards them and Anthony hailed it.

He would send her home—pay for the cab and send her home.

He opened the cab door and she got in, and he

GOBLIN MARKET

got in after her ; at the last moment he found it quite impossible to hand the cabman half a crown, or whatever the fare might be, and say, " Drive this lady to Rupell Street, Bloomsbury." He could not offer her charity like that—he could not dismiss her in that brutal way ; he would drive her to Rupell Street and drop her there and then go on to Westminster Court.

The cab turned and took a by-street leading to New Oxford Street.

As they turned into the glare of the lamps Anthony found his hand in the little hot hand of the girl.

A tired hot hand' that sought companionship, and said in the miraculous dumb language that the hand alone can speak, " I'm sick and tired—and I want to be held."

So a child worn out at some fête, or weary of walking, or ill, takes the hand of a grown-up.

CHAPTER I

SICK ?

THE cab stopped at the corner of Rupell Street and they got out. Anthony paid the cabman off; he had intended returning to Westminster-Court in the vehicle, but he could easily get another. He would see her to her door. He was troubled in his mind.

Troubled and perplexed and moved in his heart; no other being in all his easy, empty life had moved him like this—out of himself and away from his ordinary appetites and likes and dislikes, and just by a touch, a glance, a word.

He would take leave of her on the doorstep and return to Westminster Court. The bank-notes in his pocket-book recalled their existence to him. A fiver—yes, a fiver—that would be the thing. He found himself forming little sentences about half times and a little loan between friends. "If I can ever be of service to you, let me know," began one of these sentences, and at the back of his mind there was a vague idea of keeping in touch with her in some way, of not quite losing sight of her.

On the doorstep, and before he could frame speeches, she drew a latch-key from her pocket and opened the door, revealing a narrow hall lit by a single electric bulb. She held the door open for him to enter, and he came in, clearing his throat, but he did not speak. She had closed the door

GOBLIN MARKET

before the words came to him, and, turning, she led the way upstairs.

The atmosphere of the house was stuffy, and as he followed her up the narrow stairs the recollection came to Anthony of a similar adventure in his youth, almost the same house, the same atmosphere, the same stairs, and the same "beyond the pale" feeling.

Even now, far removed from his youth and with no wrong intention in his mind, that feeling came to him, and with it the recognition of the fact that nothing had changed, that the old hideous treadmill was the same as in the Victorian days—same houses, same stairs, same stuffy atmosphere, same everything—only, the tinkle of hansom-cab bells outside had been turned to the hoot of motor-horns and now there was electric light.

She opened a door on the first landing and showed him into the same room—a front sitting-room that opened into a back bedroom, the rooms divided by folding doors.

On the red tablecloth of the table in the centre of the room lay a letter without a stamp. He could not help reading the name on the envelope—"Miss Grey," nothing more, no address.

"A moment," said the girl.

Anthony sat down on the sofa by the window, his hat beside him and his coat with the astrakhan collar hanging open whilst she vanished into the bedroom. She returned in a moment without her hat and cloak, and taking a matchbox from the

mantelpiece knelt down to light the bit of fire set in the grate.

"There's a letter for you on the table," said Anthony.

"It's only my bill," said the girl.

The wood was damp. He watched her small figure as she bent striking match after match; the thing caught at last, but she did not rise, her shoulders were shaking curiously. She was crying.

Next moment he was kneeling beside her on the hearthrug, his hand on her shoulder, then his arm about her, whilst she sobbed into his coat.

"I'm so ill—so ill—I shouldn't have let you come with me. So wretched—and so ill."

The cough took her, and she coughed and coughed whilst he held her as tenderly as a mother might a child, not knowing what to say or do.

The whole terrible position came to him in a flash—the bill on the table, the man she had been with and who had left her, her evident illness, the way she had attached herself to him in her dumb distress. Unable to pay her way and ill! Unable to pay her way and ill—!

"My dear child, my dear child," said Anthony, "there now, don't—don't cry any more—don't cry any more. I'm just a friend—there now." He helped her to rise to her feet and made her sit on the sofa, taking his seat beside her and holding her hand, whilst she sat with head half averted, her laboured breathing broken now and then by a sob.

Some modern Hogarth or Rowlandson might have

GOBLIN MARKET

made an excellent picture of the pair under the caption of "The Elderly Roué," or, better still, "Mammon and the Maid." But, indeed, Anthony was feeling very unlike a roué, elderly or otherwise—or Mammon.

"I'm just a friend—nothing more—and I want to help you," said Anthony, patting the hand. "I want to help you in any way I can."

"I know," she murmured. "I knew you were good—it's the pain."

"Where?"

"In my chest; it gets worse and worse when I breathe."

"Good God Almighty!" cried Anthony. "Why, you ought to be in bed. Chest—haven't you seen a doctor?"

The word "chest" called up consumption to his mind; it came to him all at once that this illness had suddenly leapt into something of the utmost gravity. It was a "dangerous illness," not a cold or chill. Chest, pain, cough, hot hands, and now that strange, wandering look as she turned her head in speaking.

"Dr. Gregg of Endell Street," she murmured; "he knows me. I'll see him—to-morrow."

"You'll see him to-night," said Anthony. But she did not answer.

"You'll see him to-night. I'll send for him or go and fetch him. Endell Street—I know the place, it's not far from here; what is the number of his house?"

She could not tell the number—it was the big surgery—the doctor's shop at the corner; but she did not want to send for him. She would see him to-morrow.

“That'll be all right,” said Anthony.

He made her get up, half helping her to rise, and, half supporting her, brought her into the bedroom, where she sat down on the edge of the bed. Then telling her to get “right between the blankets” he came back to the sitting-room and stood with his hands behind his back before the miserable little fire.

As he stood he could hear her moving about and coughing.

Before him, on the opposite wall, there was a framed and glazed reproduction of the “Rent Day,” one of the prints that some Fine Art Company broadcasted over England in the 'eighties, in return for coupons cut out of the newspapers and eighteen-pence.

It had been hanging there thirty years and more, and the shell box on the table under it had been there as long, no doubt; long past the Great War, past the reign of King Edward, past the late Victorian days, you might have walked into this room and found it the same in all essentials, even to the human occupants, for it was in the late 'seventies that Rupell Street took its definite position amidst the streets of the half-world.

One might wonder what it thought of Anthony to-night standing there on the hearthrug, his hands

GOBLIN MARKET

behind his back and his lips pursed, his eyes following the vague pattern of the carpet.

The latch-key was lying on the table by the letter. When she was in bed and "under the blankets" he would take the key and slip down to Endell Street and make the doctor come back with him. He dismissed the idea of trying to wake the landlady of the house and get her to send for the doctor; he did not know what sort of dragon he might evoke and, in fact, he did not know where to find her, whether in the cockroach-smelling basement or the upper part. He might ask the girl, but then she did not want the doctor sent for.

No, he would do the job himself.

The events of the last few minutes had brought to him something new and stimulating. It was as though Life had suddenly served him with a drink that was at the same time an eye-opener and a heart-warmer, that had put spurs on his feet and a spear in his hand and a steed under him and said, "Now then, tilt—in other words, toot off for the doctor, open your purse, help all you can, and do all you can to save the girl from the Dragon."

The vague shame that had pursued him up the stairs, even though he was guiltless of evil intent, and the "beyond the pale" atmosphere of the house, had vanished utterly.

The minutes passed, a taxi-horn sounded in the street, voices, the banging of a front door on the opposite side.

He looked at his watch—it was twenty minutes

to two—and coming to the folding doors of the bedroom he knocked, received no answer and came in.

She was in bed, lying on her right side with the clothes half over her head. She seemed asleep, but as he tiptoed up to her he saw that her eyes were open, watching him.

“I’m going out to get you something—something from the doctor,” said Anthony, resting his hand lightly on her shoulder. “What’s that you say—the hospital! No, no, no, you won’t be sent to the hospital—I’ll see to that. I won’t be long; you’ll stay there till I get back—I’ll take the key with me.”

She nodded.

He left the room, took his hat and the key and, coming downstairs, left the house, closing the door gently behind him.

At the corner of the street he paused; he knew this part of London and soon got his bearings, and seven or eight minutes’ walk took him into Endell Street and right in front of a big shop window—a shop window that had become a surgery window, inscribed in big gold letters with the name Dr. Gregg.

He found the night-bell by the door and pulled it, heard the far-off jangle and then stood waiting and listening.

As he stood like this a terrible fact suddenly hit him: he did not know the number of the house in Rupell Street.

CHAPTER XI

DR. GREGG

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

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

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

" Are you Dr. Gregg ? " asked Anthony.

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

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

" Come in," said Gregg.

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

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

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

“Thank goodness,” said Anthony.

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

“Have you found it?” asked Anthony.

“You wait here,” said Gregg.

He left the surgery.

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

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

He showed the other out and followed him,

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

"Got the key?" asked Gregg as they reached the door.

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

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

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

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

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

Anthony told.

"How did she seem then?"

Anthony told.

"Complained of her chest, did she?"

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

Gregg looked at the other.

GOBLIN MARKET

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

"A hospital case?"

"Yes."

Anthony was silent for a moment. Then he said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anthony seemed to read his thoughts.

He took his card-case from his pocket.

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

CHAPTER XII

AN ANARCHIST

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

"How is that?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then he came back and relit his pipe.

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AN ANARCHIST

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

Gregg showed him downstairs and to the door.

CHAPTER XIII

NO!

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

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

—and, —

No!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

On the fifth flight he paused again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XIV

ISAAC COBORNE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

After breakfast he followed Coborne into the lounge.

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

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

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

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

"Go ahead," said Isaac.

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

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

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

"Oh, a girl," twinkled Isaac.

"Yes, a girl."

He told his story.

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

"Why no'?" asked Isaac.

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

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

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

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

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

“It won’t be much.”

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

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

“How d’you mean?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Naturally," replied Anthony.

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

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

“Naturally,” said Anthony.

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

“I’ll think of it,” said Anthony.

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

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

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

"I'll see," said Anthony.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No, Mandelberg."

"Have you got the wire?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

The Girl!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I don't know.

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

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

"You are dining at the club then?" said she.

"Yes," said he.

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

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

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

CHAPTER XV
GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

Anthony turned into Rupell Street.

The door was opened for him by the landlady

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

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

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

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

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

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

"She mustn't talk much," said the nurse.

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

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

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

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

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

“To-morrow?”

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

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

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

Following the landlady downstairs, he blew his nose.

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

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

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

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

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

Then he left the house.

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

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

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

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

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

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

He went up.

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

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

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

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

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

"Jeannie from Jim Xmas Day 1914."

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

read Anthony.

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

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

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

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

Gregg had come in through the door that had

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You think she'll get better?"

"Yes—unless anything else turns up."

"What do you think might turn up?"

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

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

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

"Are you a married man?"

"Yes."

"Get along all right with your wife?"

"Yes."

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

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

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

"Ask what you like," said Anthony.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anthony said nothing.

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

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

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

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

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

"I would," said Anthony.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

CHAPTER XVI

THE LETTER

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

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

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

A letter.

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He had courage enough to face the letter now.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No, he thought nothing of all this.

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

CHAPTER XVII
A BUNCH OF GRAPES

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

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

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

"No," said Anthony, "I'll pay for them."

CHAPTER XVIII

SOUTH

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

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

Mandelberg put the *Daily Herald* on top of the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

"How's the missus?"

"She's all right."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He went off.

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COULIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The day still held, placid and sunny, the Solent

GOBLIN MARKET

lay blue and calm and the Isle of Wight and the
spires of Ryde the prettiest picture.

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

FERN-LAND AND FAIRY-LAND

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

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

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

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

Once some years back she had stayed at the Barrow Farm at Myrtlestone near the ancient village of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOULIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Indeed, sir?" replied the woman.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XX

THE DREAM

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

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

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

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

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

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

The whole business was hers in origin.

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

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

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

Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Quaint inscriptions from tombs and memorials were given at length.

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

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

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

“*Vae Soli*”—Woe to the lone one. Woe to the lone one.

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XXI
FRESHWATER BAY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wronged, maybe !

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ah, there you are!" said Anthony.

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

It was Godshill Church.

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

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

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

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

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

"You like it?" said Anthony.

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

"And you shan't if you don't want to," said he.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The chain's broken," said she.

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

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

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

The car skirted the bay-side and passed up a

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

"This is the Colonel's, sir," said the driver.

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

Yes, Colonel Jameson was in.

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

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

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

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

GOPLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Do you think we'll win?"

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

Anthony, unable to answer that question, asked another.

"How about the election here?"

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He rose to go, refusing a drink.

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

PART II

PART II

CHAPTER XXII

BY THE SEA

THE driver, under the insane delusion that he had been hired to drive two ordinary people to Freshwater and back on some business connected with ordinary earthly matters, was making to return by the road they had come when Anthony stopped him.

"We'll stay and have luncheon here," said he. "Which is the best hotel?"

There are two good hotels in Freshwater—the Albion on the beach and the one above. Anthony chose the Albion, small and old and perfumed with the sea, the wheel of a wrecked ship standing like a trophy in the porch. It was still open despite the lateness of the season.

It was nearly an hour too soon for luncheon, so they came out on to the tiny sea-shattered esplanade.

The sea, like a ruffian, is always threatening Freshwater. He has knocked her about like a drunken husband, torn off her front and lately has been threatening to cut her in two; yet she remains, battered it is true, but beautiful still.

In autumn, when the chais-à-bancs have ceased from troubling, Freshwater is, or ought to be, an ideal resort for honeymoon couples, but to-day, as

GOBLIN MARKET

Anthony stood beside the girl watching the sooty cormorants flying with outstretched necks and the puffins diving in the calm blue-grey sea, not a soul was in sight with the exception of a fisherman or two—far-away figures on the pebbly beach that stretches towards the Stag Rock.

The tide was out and they came down to the sea edge, walking along the rocks leading to the Frenchman's cave. Anthony helped his companion from rock to rock, now holding her hand, now her arm. Reaching a little stretch of still wet sand he took her up and carried her across, so that her feet might not get wet. She was so easy to lift, so light, so yielding, so like a creature in a dream—one of those delightful dreams where the impossible becomes true; wherein youth comes back, even to a man of fifty, and love and desire and the breath of morning.

He set her down on the rocks beyond, and they stood for a moment looking at the sea right at their feet, coming in with the turn of the tide.

"Are you tired?" he asked her.

"No," she replied. "Only a little. Listen to it!"

She raised her head

The sea was talking as it only talks at the turn of the tide in calm weather, talking in a whisper amongst the rocks, laughing to itself in the recesses of the Frenchman's cave—checking its laughter—sobbing. Listening, she seemed to have forgotten his presence for a moment; then bending and touching the dried seaweed of the rock daintily

with her finger-tips she sat down, and he took his seat beside her.

She was always touching things like that with the tips of her fingers—he remembered how she had touched the table last night as she came round it towards him—as if to make sure that the thing was there, or as if she were blind; or, sometimes, almost as though she wished to make sure she was there herself—a strange little trick, absolutely unconsciously performed, like the action of a child.

Anthony, resting and listening to the sea and following the coast-line with his eyes, fell for a second into that lulled condition in which thought scarcely exists. He was happy, like a man drugged, cut off for the moment from yesterday and tomorrow.

“This is better than London,” said he, rousing himself at last.

She answered him by taking his right hand, which was resting beside hers, as though the word London had made her seek comfort and protection. Not a word did she speak as he transferred the hand to his left and slipped his arm around her waist. Then she nestled closer to him and spoke in a voice dreamy and contented.

“I am never going back there again—never, never again.”

“No—never again,” said he. “You are happy here.”

“Yes.”

“Tell me,” he said, “do you care for me?”

GOBLIN MARKET

"Yes." There was a laugh in the word, as though to say, "How absurd of you to ask such a question. Of course I care for you."

The unhappy man went on after a pause :

"Really and truly care for me ?"

"Really and truly care for you." It was like a child repeating a lesson.

"Never want to leave me ?"

"Never."

"Kiss me."

She turned her face and their lips met.

Then he knew. Knew that she loved him, as a woman loves a man, about as much as the seaweed-covered rock he was sitting on loved him, or the cormorants flying across the arc of the bay, or the waters chuckling at his feet. Knew that she loved him entirely as a child might love a suddenly found father, or a dog its master, or a plant the sun that warms it. And the knowledge imparted by that kiss was based not entirely on instinct. How could it be otherwise ? How could he inspire passion ?

Yet he knew that he might do with her as he would, that, whilst loving him only as a companion and protector, she would still deny him nothing. This slave ransomed from the market of the Goblins was his, body and soul—with the taint of the Market upon her.

What she had given other men with such dreadful indifference and facility was his for the asking—all was in order, had he been a libertine.

But Anthony was not a libertine. The very

thought that she would give him everything at his first request, open-handed and with indifference as she had given it to other men, filled him with confusion and dread, for the passion that had grown in him for her though rooted in clay had yet its flower, its perfume, its delicacy.

He was bashful as a boy in love for the first time.

"Look!" said she.

The incoming tide, laughing to itself, had cut them off, and the sand patch across which he had brought her was several inches deep in water, all but a ridge, across which he carried her, setting her down on the rocks beyond. Then they returned to the hotel, where luncheon was spread for them at a little table by a window facing the sea.

Seated at the table with them appeared, for Anthony, the spectre of Isaac Coborne, whom he had for a moment forgotten. What did Isaac want his address for?

He told himself again that his presence in the Isle of Wight was known only to three people—Selina, Gregg and Mandelberg.

Isaac did not know Mandelberg, yet he might have called at the office and Mandelberg might have given him the information, though that was unlikely; he might have called on Gregg with a like result, though that, too, was not probable; lastly, he might have gone to Selina.

Isaac had warned him not to get tangled up in this business. Had he been fussing round making enquiries, mixing and muddling in an affair that

GOBLIN MARKET

wasn't his, talking of it—heavens! maybe talking to Selina's sister, opening his mind to her, warning her, for the good of the family, that Anthony was tangling himself up in a dangerous business?

Who could say?

Why had he been such a fool as to tell Isaac anything?

Even whilst they were sitting at luncheon the weather changed. The sky that had been asking itself all the morning, Shall I rain? had made up its mind in the negative and pools of turquoise blue sky beyond Arreton way were spreading, the sunlight falling on the far Downs with the promise of a cloudless evening.

They came back by the Brook Road, past Mottistone and through Brighstone, arriving at Macketts' in time for tea.

All the way from Brighstone, spoiling the beauty of the afternoon and the peace of his mind, Isaac Coborne had been in the car.

It seemed to Anthony that Isaac had suddenly developed uncanny powers of pursuit, that there was no escaping from him, that he was Fate. Had he found Isaac waiting at the gate of the farm for his arrival he would scarcely have been surprised.

It is curious how an obsession of this sort takes hold of a man if he has anything to conceal or if, as in Anthony's case, he dreads intrusion or pursuit.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HERE THERE ARE P PPIES

BUT Isaac Coborne was not waiting at the gate of the Barrow Farm, otherwise called Macketts'. The gate was open between its lichened grey-stone pillars, and when the car drove up to the door Mrs. Mackett was there to receive them, a figure that chased away for the moment all dreams and dreads, so remote was it from the atmosphere of London.

The smell of the house, the heavy oak beams across the stone passage, the measured tick of the great brass-faced clock, each too, in its way, formed part of a pentagram barring out the world and its wprries and troubles.

A fire was burning on the hearth in the sitting-room and the tea-things were laid.

Leaving the girl to go upstairs to change, Anthony lit a pipe and went out.

He glanced at the stone slab over the doorway inscribed with the initials J. M. and bearing the date 1640.

Built when the Long Parliament was sitting in London, Macketts' displayed the fact to the rooks of Gallows Wood and the sparrows, the farm labourers and the milkmaids, all heedless of it as the sky, or the dead up in the churchyard of Godshill who had been milkmaids and farm labourers when Cromwell was leading his cavalry at Naseby.

GOBBLIN MARKET

Macketts' was very old, very old and undisturbed like the land around it—land that had lain unaltered in the form of meadows and woods for many years before Charles had faced the anger of his people or Elizabeth had broken the power of Spain.

Dominated by a church built by the fairies, these woods and meadows, paths, copses, swards dancing with daffodils in spring or spread with the blue mist of the wild hyacinths, had each its name and tradition, unwritten, but living in minds scarcely altered from the minds of the vanished namers. The meadow beyond the fence where Anthony was standing now was Puck's Piece, the meadow beyond half hidden by an outcrop of Gallows Wood, Trenchards. Cheekes Road, a narrow grass path bordered by high ferns in summer, joined the waste land beyond Trenchards with the main road; mushroom rings marked it for what it was, and on moonlit nights of summer young men and girls avoided it. They preferred the woods. Summer, winter, autumn or spring, all these lands and woods held the same atmosphere of secrecy and age and, even when the birds were singing loudest, of silence.

Crossing Puck's Piece in the twilight now came a figure, an old man carrying a spade across his shoulder. He came through the gate in the fence, which was open.

"Fine evening," said Anthony.

The other spoke no word, only nodded.

"That's a big church you've got up there" said Anthony, indicating the church above the trees.

The other grim, surly, and without a word passed on.

Phew! What an insufferable odour suddenly filled the air! A faint vague odour of corruption. Was it from the man or the black stuff still clinging to the spade?

Anthony watched him. He did not go to the house but through the gate to the road—evidently a villager using a right of way.

Anthony spat. Then he returned to the house. He spoke of the occurrence to Mrs. Mackett as she was bringing in the tea, not mentioning the unpleasant details.

"That would be Jem Goodchild," said she; "he's short with strangers since he came back from the War."

"But this was an old man—seventy, I should think."

"Coming through our place!" cried Mrs. Mackett. "The village has no right through here," she checked. "What like was he, may I ask, sir?"

"An old fellow carrying a spade."

Mrs. Mackett said nothing more. She finished her business and went out, closing the door and leaving Anthony and his companion together.

The girl had brought down one of the picture papers he had bought for her yesterday, and after tea she sat by him on a footstool reading it, whilst

GOBLIN MARKET

he sat and smoked and skimmed the *Daily Chronicle*, which Mrs. Mackett had brought in when she cleared away.

The coming election shouted of itself in the *Chronicle*. Most disturbingly assured the *Chronicle* seemed of the result—disturbingly, had Anthony been in the mood to be disturbed. As a matter of fact, whether it was the air of this place, or the atmosphere of the house, or the silence that reigned complete around it, the election and all it might mean to him seemed something remote and impersonal—unreal.

Then, after a while, he dropped the paper and they talked, chatting about trifles: their trip to Freshwater, the sea, a little accident they had met with on the way home when a tyre had to be renewed—the merest trivialities, for of the world and the great things of life she seemed as heedless and as ignorant as a child.

As a child, or a creature of the woods outside, silent now, and crouched in the dark of the autumn night.

Had she been otherwise she would not have been herself, nor held him so with the clutch of the feeble and the trusting: she would have recalled to him other people, whereas the bond between them was strengthened by the fact that she brought him in touch with no former experience. He had never met anyone like her before.

In some strange way she suited Macketts', this out-of-the-world place where nothing mattered but

HERE THERE ARE POPPIES

the trifles that made the day. She who had come from such a different environment, unfitting as this was fitting.

Poor flower, all but dead and now reviving.
Flower of which he was the sun.

Then they fell silent and the fire spoke, the logs falling slightly together and little flames leaping up. She had dropped the paper from her lap and, with her head leaning against the arm of his chair, still weak from her illness and tired with the day, she seemed watching the burning embers, her mind travelling across glowing bridges and into caverns of ruby colour and across the white dice of the burnt-out wood.

He remembered the wretched fire she had been trying to light that evening which seemed so long ago, the shaking of her shoulders as she broke down overcome with weariness and illness. Surely if God had ever directed a man's steps, God had directed him that night—surely—surely.

A mist of tenderness dimmed his sight. As he stood up to light her candle he could not look at her straight in the face lest she should see that his eyes were blurred; not that she would have noticed, half blind as she was with sleep.

Outside she raised her lips to be kissed and candle in hand went up the stairs, walking slowly, holding the banister rail with her left hand, not looking back.

The day had been too much for her—evidently, he had forgotten that she was convalescent after a

severe illness; he should have gone slower. Well, she had enjoyed it, anyhow.

He was turning to go back to the sitting-room when he heard through a suddenly opened door Mrs. Mackett's voice raised as if in dispute: "I ain't no more given to fancies than you are," Mrs. Mackett was saying, "but it's always the same when he's seen about—you'll see."

Then the door was shut, and Anthony returned to the sitting-room to smoke, wondering who "he" might be and why Mrs. Mackett should have been accused of giving herself over to fancies.

Unable to answer this question he roamed the room, hands in his pockets and pipe in mouth, re-examining the pictures and the books. He took again the little black book labelled "Shorwell." It was the only possible book on the shelf, and as he sat re-turning the leaves he saw that by no means had he exhausted its contents.

Here were five or six pages not to do with Shorwell, inscriptions and texts collected by some antiquary.

Here, from Arreton: "The rewarde of senne is death. Everlasting life is the Gifte of God through our Lord and Saviour: Jesus Christe, wherefor all ye that love the Lord doe this, hate all things that are evill, for he dothe keep the soules of his from such as would have them spill.—George Serle."

And under: "The said George Serle died in 1609. There is also her: the tomb of William Serle, who departed this world in 1595."

HERE THERE ARE POPPIES

"The rewatde of senne is death."

What about her, upstairs? Death, that, of course, meant damnation. Would she be damned for her sins if by any chance she were to die? And what about the world that had wronged her? What damnation was bad enough for it?

"The rewarde of senne is death."

Lord, this old babbling! and the worst sinners never mentioned or punished—the people who look on; no wonder that Gregg should be filled with rage against society and the prim-faced hypocrites, the highly respectable people to whom a girl of the town was anathema if she carried on her trade openly instead of privately, or semi-privately; after the fashion of the Society strumpets.

So he rambled on in thought, turning the leaves and reading as he turned them to the last page, whereon someone had inscribed a set of verses in ink that was now the colour of rust.

HERE THERE ARE POPPIES

Seen from this garden upon the hill
Fair lie the meadows all greene and fill,
Rivers and grey old Island towns,
Hovering hawks by the far sea downs,
Skies of summer or skies gone grey,
Wind on the barley, wind on the May.

Here there are poppies and jestless here,
Men once masterful, girls once dear,
Heedless of time or the old grey towns,
Or the hawk that quests by the high sea downs.

GOBLIN MARKET

Gardens sweet or the flowers that were,
Rose in the belt, or rose in the hair,
Daffodils dancing, skies gone grey,
Wind o'er the barley, wind o'er the May.

Evelyn Luytiens, Godshill Churchyard. May 1826.

As Anthony glanced over the verses of the long-dead Evelyn, the impression they brought him came in the form of a vague remembrance of the perfume of rosemary. Words can recall scents and scents words.

She must have been a sweet, simple soul, gone long ago to the garden on the hill, one of the jestless company :

Headless of time or the old grey towns
Or the hawk that quests by the high sea downs.

Anthony put the book on the table and relit his pipe.

The verses had suddenly attached themselves to the girl upstairs like a pendant.

It was as if the ghost of Evelyn Luytiens had come and hung them round her neck. He could not tell why thought had connected the two ; perhaps because Evelyn seemed sweet-minded and simple, old-fashioned, different from the ordinary woman of to-day.

She. One of the strangest things in his relationship with her was the fact that he never called her by name, that she never called him by name. It was doubtful if she ever knew his surname. "Lucy

Grey," that obvious *nom de guerre*, was hateful to him. As for him, she seemed entirely uninquisitive. The horrible thought that this uninquisitiveness was due to the position from which he had taken her, that business where no questions are asked, was negated by something indefinable yet real, something which showed itself in nearly everything she said or did, a seeming detachment from the world in which she moved and lived.

The expression "not all there" which we use in regard to the feeble-minded or eccentric might have been applied to her, only in a different sense: she was neither feeble-minded nor eccentric, yet at times she was not all there; absent-minded like a child in a day dream—and always, like a child, in her blind acceptance of what was given to her or done for her, in her indifference to the serious things of life. A child, or a spirit, sweet but undeveloped, not yet fully human.

Upstairs, when he had retired to rest and blown out the light, the glow of the rising moon showing through the little curtains held him for a while from going to sleep.

His mind re-travelled the road to Freshwater; the past day, like a picture-book, turned its leaves for him, showing him Jameson's study, the Albion Hotel, the waiter who had served them at luncheon.

Then he was on the rocks again with Her, and Mrs. Mackett was standing on the beach calling them in to tea. The Albion Hotel had turned itself into the farm-house, the tea was laid and he

GOBLIN MARKET

was asking Mrs. Mackett where She was ; he had lost Her somehow, lost Her for ever.

"Look in the wood," said Mrs. Mackett. He was down by the fence, and here across the meadow towards him was coming the horrid old man with the spade across his shoulder ; the sight frightened him and he was turning to run when he was caught by the arm. It was the chauffeur who had driven them to Freshwater.

Mrs. Mackett had taken him by the other arm and they were trying between them to force him back to the house.

Then he heard Her calling to him for help—she was being killed, strangled in the wood ; he struggled and fought with the dream people on either side of him, and then he awoke, lying on his back, sweating.

The patient moonlight still filled the room with its glow, but the dread still clung to him, the feeling that she was in danger, the overpowering desire to go to her, be with her, take her in his arms, protect her.

He rose and crossed the room and opened the door.

The passage was in darkness, the house dead silent. No, there was nothing wrong ; it was only a dream, she was in no danger.

But he did not turn back. The dream had led him too far.

He had only to open her door, go in and take her in his arms, where she would be quite content to

be. The desire, the passion, the love for her drove all other things aside; nothing but death could have stopped him.

He opened the door. She had left the curtains undrawn and the dim little room showed itself in the moonlight, and beautiful, almost miraculous, like a picture within a picture, the latticed window stood framing the vision of the distant church on the hill.

She was lying half on her side, her right arm and shoulder uncovered, the diffused light upon her face, her hand half closed as if clasping another hand. Dead she might have been but for the vague movement of her breast, the tremor of a spirit almost gone, voyaging so dreadfully far away in sleep.

How small she looked and how different! It seemed to him that he had never seen her really before, or known the truth of her absolute dependence on Fate, on chance, on the blowing of the winds of the world.

He stood for a moment gazing upon her, divided from her by sleep—sleep as inviolate for him as the distances of the stars or death.

"You couldn't harm her," had said Gregg. However that might be in her waking hours, it was true now.

He turned away to the door, and at the door he turned again to glance at the form on the bed, beyond which the window showed its picture of the church, above the trees, against the sky.

CHAPTER XXIV

LOVE

If you are staying at Macketts' you get your morning paper sometimes at nine, sometimes at twelve, sometimes late in the afternoon, and sometimes not at all. The reason for this is that it comes by milk-carts (returning) from Shanklin, by boys on bicycles, by the butcher, by anything on wheels or legs likely to call at the Barrow Farm. If no such messenger is available it is left at the little shop in Godshill, where you can get it if you send for it.

But the post comes regularly.

Somewhere about the year 1839, when the penny post was instituted, some early Victorian, to celebrate the event, affixed a hideous brass knocker to the front door of Macketts'—the oak door barred and nailed, the door that antiquarians love to rub their thumbs over. He would, without doubt, have completed the vandalism with a letter-slit, only for the fact that from six o'clock onward the door is wide open.

Anthony, next morning, just as he was completing his toilet, heard the double rap of the postman. He put on his coat and came down. Two letters were lying on the mat. He picked them up; they were not for him—election stuff addressed to the farmer and his wife—and leaving them on the little table by the door he came into the sitting-room.

He had awakened depressed and irritable, with a feeling that, somehow, the whole world was against him, that beyond his visible environment, as behind an arras, all sorts of people were moving and plotting. Why did Isaac Coborne want his address? What were they all doing in London? It seemed to him a month since he left Waterloo, and that he had travelled as far as Kamchatka.

In the sitting-room now, taking his place in an arm-chair by the table set out with the breakfast-things, he sat idle, looking at the impossible books in the book-case and the print of The Great Exhibition, fronting the fact that there were no morning papers, no letters.

He did not expect letters, nor did he want them; all the same, the fact that there were none, and could be none, was disturbing to him in his present mood of mind. He was cut off, he had cut himself off, he was in hiding. Yes, that was the word. In hiding. That was a *fact*. He had got at the rat that was worrying him most, away in the recesses of his mind, and, holding it up by the tail, it was unpleasant to look at and by no means dead. Yet it was somehow absurd. Though he was hiding like a defaulting cashier he had done nothing wrong. Was it wrong to rescue Her from that horrible place, was it wrong to have a heart, was it wrong to take Her to this place away from all that, was it wrong to love Her—why, an angel from heaven couldn't help loving Her—was it wrong for a man to love Her who could no more help himself from doing so

GOBLIN MARKET

than he could help himself from falling were he to lose his balance ?

Wrong ? He had done no wrong ; had he done otherwise he would have been less than a man.

Then why was he hiding ?

Well, it's just this : How could I tell Selina ? If I had let her know I was here, what might not have happened ? She would have come here, no doubt, and made a scene. A scene with Her ! The situation all through has been impossible to explain—to a woman. Gregg understands, but a woman couldn't—and it's more impossible now. All the same, what's happening ? Suppose Selina were by any chance to get this address and to know the truth—suppose she were to come here ! Gregg alone knows the address. Why not go up and see him ? Why not go up and see what Isaac Coborne is after ? Why not go up and see if the fat's in the fire and have it out—and the uncertainty ? I'd only be a night away.

Mrs. Mackett pushed open the door with her tray. He left the room and went outside, where he stood and looked up at the bedroom windows. A bird was whistling in the garden—no, it was in her room ; sweet, liquid the notes came, broken now as though interrupted by some preoccupation—ceasing. The half-open lattice of her window was pushed wide by a little hand and she looked out.

“Breakfast,” said Anthony.

She laughed down at him and nodded—vanished. Then he heard her step on the stairs ; saw her come

down, the tips of her fingers on the banister rails, took her two hands in his and led her into the breakfast-room. He watched her pouring out the tea.

Selina, whom his thoughts had invoked before breakfast, wouldn't get away. She had never poured out his tea for him in late years, choosing to breakfast in bed; but when they were first married—how distinctly he saw it all, those honeymoon breakfasts at the hotel in Hastings, the big room, the waiters, Selina, the morning paper, the toast, the kippers, the bald-headed man and his wife at the opposite table, the general air of silence and partial resurrection, like a party of polite corpses sitting up and taking nourishment, speaking in undertones.

• And the dull morning afterwards on the front, and the smoke-room, where he would slip in to have a small Bass at twelve o'clock, and the buzzy and lazy feeling after—

• The recollection brought up no pangs.

How daintily she ate, and, as she held her cup, how her little finger perked itself out as if disdaining the others. It never did any work—it was the aristocrat.

How perfect her teeth were! Teeth that made other people's teeth look like piano keys.

He had never read Herrick or he would have remembered the quarrelets of pearls. Those teeth of hers had the chatoyancy almost of pearls—a rare thing, and not altogether to be desired, for

G O B L I N M A R K E T

these pearly teeth as a rule do not last: the pity of it!

Her little head, clasped in its warm, wavy hair, round and faultless, and when she turned it a bit aside——!

He had never seen her before, as now, with health suddenly coming back to her and her natural self re-blooming.

And she did not attract men, so Gregg had said—or attracting them for a moment left them cold. It was easy to see why, for when were innocence and childish grace ever attractive to the human hogs of Goblin Market?

Goblin Market, that was London Town, where he must go to-morrow to make sure that no chilling draught or evil spell should reach out here and touch Her. London Town and Hastings town and every town—aye, and all society where understanding was not or pity, where women were cruel to women and men without mercy.

“Get your hat, and we will go out.”

They were standing in the passage after breakfast and Anthony was filling his pipe. The weather still held fine. She was standing on tiptoe to look at an old high-hung print on the wall next the sitting-room door, but at his voice she lost interest in the print and, turning, ran upstairs.

They came from the farm gate into the road leading to the village of Godshill and the Daffodil Valley beyond, a road set with high hedges perfumed with honeysuckle in June.

CHAPTER XXV

AT THE STILE

GODSHILL is one of the beauty spots of the island, a piece of Old Times. It grew in the old and spacious days when the Longstone was young and Mottistone Manor the home of the Glamorgans and Chekes, when many-gabled Westcourt was held by Gozelin FitzAzar, and the Hacketts and Deheynos, De Aulas and Frys were powers in the land.

To-day there are tea-gardens in Godshill, and the coach horns have turned into the horns of chars-à-bancs. That is in summer, and even tea-gardens and chars-à-bancs fail to spoil its summer charm. In autumn Godshill folds its green hands and goes to sleep.

But it was not asleep to-day. An open-air political meeting was being held before the little hotel near which, on a board, was displayed this admonition :

“VOTE FOR JACK.”

The meeting, which was a Conservative one, had nothing to do with the board. The speaker, evidently down from London and standing on a soap-box, his car near by to whirl him to the next village, was engaged in stripping the fallacies from Free Trade, and the audience, numbering about forty, seemed to be agreeing with him.

Indeed, it seemed quite reasonable what he said,

GOBLIN MARKET

quite reasonable that, without taxing the food of the nation, British factories should be protected as far as possible from the cold blast of foreign competition.

"And now," said the speaker, "would any gentleman like to ask me any questions?"

No gentleman offered to do so; dead silence reigned till Anthony, suddenly seized with the gift of the tongue, took a step forward and addressed the meeting.

He had only spoken twice or three times in his life before, at city functions, and always with difficulty and from notes carefully prepared, almost committed to memory; but he had no difficulty to-day, and no notes. He was thinking of the factory. He spoke so fluently and well that the audience when he finished applauded, gave him, in fact, a better reception than they had given the professional gentleman from London.

This gentleman, however, showed no professional jealousy.

"That's the way to talk to them," said he. "I don't know your name, sir, but we shall be pleased to see you at any of our meetings; there's one to-morrow night at Ventnor Town Hall and another the day after at Sandown. Eight o'clock, and I hope you will be there."

"I'll see," said Anthony. He felt pleased with himself, more than ever sure that all would be right and common sense and conservatism would sweep the polls.

Turning away with the girl, who had been mutely

admiring him, he spoke to an old man in the crowd, pointing to the placard near the hotel.

"Who's Jack?" asked he.

"He's the chap that's goin' to get in," replied the old fellow, hobbling off without explaining that Jack was the Liberal candidate, for whom nearly every man in that crowd would vote on polling-day—common sense or not.

They went on through the village, and up along a lane that twisted and turned like a corkscrew. He wanted to tell her of his projected journey to London. He had fully made up his mind that he would go, and on the morrow—go and "clear up things" and see how the land lay.

Leaning on a stile from which a footpath led across a meadow he told her.

"I am going up to London to-morrow," said Anthony. "It's on business—got to do with this election—but I'll be back the day after."

She said nothing, and he could not tell how she had taken the news, for her face was turned away. Then she turned it a bit and he saw her profile against the trees of the lane. She did not seem to mind.

"To-morrow?" she said.

"Yes, to-morrow. I'll be back next day."

She caught in her breath, and he saw her underlip drawing down and a tremor about the muscles of her mouth. His arm went round her, and in a moment she was clinging to him and sobbing into his coat.

GOBLIN MARKET

"You are going to leave me—here—alone—alone. Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do! Without you—alone."

"But, my darling," he whispered, "it's only for a day—only for a day. I can't take you with me. Look up—turn your face."

She was still now, like a bird that had ceased struggling, but she would not turn her face, till, holding her more tightly, he pressed his cheek against hers; then, all at once, she turned it fiercely, holding up her lips whilst her eyes, half sightless with tears, met his.

Then he knew.

She loved him.

In that extraordinary moment, and whilst their lips clung together, he was reborn. Made again. Renewed, glorified. The love beside which all other love is a shadow and a phantom was his. The consuming love of a woman for a man, a man for a woman. And yesterday he had thought that she only loved him as a child loves a father, or a dog a master; and yesterday, perhaps, he was right. Who can tell, or how, in a moment, affection had leaped to flame and turned to passion?

Their lips met again and clung and parted. She was no longer weeping at the thought of his going away, assured as she was now that nothing could part him from her. Then leaving the stile they took, instinctively, the footpath across the meadow,

heedless of where they went and seeking only loneliness for the moment. The stile on the opposite side led to a path skirting a wood of holly and ash, and past that to a stretch of poor ground and a tumble-down cottage deserted and sheltered by a group of firs. Without knowing it, they were again on the grounds of the Barrow Farm and within ten minutes' walk of the house. Gallows Wood lay ahead, and to the right a path leading to Trenchards, the field giving on Puck's Piece.

They had not noticed the clouds gathering over the sea downs or how dull the day had become; rain was beginning to fall, a few large heavy drops, ominous to anyone who knew what the island can do in a few minutes in the way of rain.

Anthony turned towards the ruinous cottage; a young man who had been at work inside stacking wood was standing now at the door, and as they took shelter he moved aside a bit for them, but without a word of greeting.

"Looks as if it was going to rain," said Anthony.

"Aye, it's going to rain," replied the other, and fell dumb.

The rain spoke. Suddenly, and as if at the pull of a shower-bath string, it came down—holly, ash, larch and fir answering with all their different tongues, the roof drumming to it.

"Fortunate we took shelter," said Anthony to his companion.

"Yes," she murmured.

They were holding each other's hands unobserved

GOBLIN MARKET

by the other one, and they could say a lot to each other without his knowing; all the same, they wished him away. Dumb as an animal, yet able to talk, he disturbed them.

Round about the Barrow Farm and in some other parts of the island you find very often still the original native unspoiled and with all his pleasant and unpleasant features intact: his attitude towards strangers chief amongst the latter, an attitude speaking of dislike and contempt, hinting at tolerance.

The old man with the spade, the old man at the political meeting and this person—possibly that Jen. Goodchild spoken of by Mrs. Mackett—all were exhibitions of the island way with strangers, each in a different way.

“This is an old cottage,” said Anthony after a while, more to break the monotony of watching than from any desire to talk.

“Aye, it’s an old cottage,” replied the other. “Good for nought but a wood-house.”

“Hasn’t been lived in for a long time, I should think.”

“Not since the chap hanged himself from that there beam in beyond.”

“Hanged himself? What did he do that for?”

“Lord knows. It was a matter of forty years ago——”

“Look,” said the girl, “the rain’s stopping.” She seemed anxious to be gone; this talk about hanged men had no doubt frightened her, and

Anthony felt her little hand clasping his more tightly.

He looked out. The rain had suddenly ceased and the clouds were parting.

"Yes, it's stopped," said he. "We'd better go. Which way is it to the Barrow Farm?" he asked.

"Is there a short-cut?"

"Why, you're on it," said the young man. "That's Trenchards right before you; follow the path across it—that's all you have to do."

"Good day to you," said Anthony.

He was as glad as the girl to get out in the open and away from that cottage by the funereal firs; hanged men or not, there was an evil feeling about the place, an atmosphere of decay and gloom, helped, no doubt, by the overcast in the weather and the rain. The Barrow Farm is best seen in fine weather; rain and darkened skies bring out a strange quality in these old lands and meadows, copses and woods; a vague oppression rises from them like a viewless mist, the trees come closer, one feels closed in, especially in such places as Cheekes Road or the long glade running to southward of it, or Wacklands, that wilderness of thorns and nut trees.

Half-way across Trenchards and with the house in sight, the clouds above closed together again and down came the rain.

"Now I've caught you," cried the rain.

"Run!" said Anthony.

They ran—the girl laughing, then panting; she

GOBLIN MARKET

was in no condition for running, and they finished at a walk, reaching the house drenched, but not minding.

That night, instead of retiring early as she had done hitherto, the girl sat up with him to the tune of doors being locked and barred, the wind in the trees, and presently, had they listened, the snoring of the Mackett household. Then, having put out the lamp in the sitting-room they came upstairs and along the corridor; here, with a sudden mischievous little laugh and just outside her room door, she bent and blew his candle out.

CHAPTER XXVI
SHE SEES HIM OFF

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

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

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

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

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

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

A good omen, surely.

The fact that the papers she had bought for him

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What now?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Just then, at the stile yesterday, this thing had

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

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

Anthony had not made his mind in the fashion,

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

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

Reaching Northumberland Avenue, he paused to consider his steps.

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XXVII

GREGG

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

"Hello," said Gregg.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“ You’ve left her there ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ For good ? ”

“ As long as she likes to stay.”

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

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

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

“ You haven’t told your wife yet ? ”

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

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

“ Did he ask you things ? ”

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

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

"Thanks," said Anthony.

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

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

"He is—of a sort."

Gregg smoked for a minute without speaking. Then:

"Let's get back to the main point," said he.

"How about your wife?"

"My wife?"

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

"Not yet," said Anthony.

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

"Yes."

"When?"

"Some time."

"Why not now?"

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

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

"The girl."

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

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

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

"Yes?"

"Tell your wife."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“ When will you tell her ? ” he asked.

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

Gregg accompanied him to the door.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW ANTHONY TOLD HIS WIFE

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

Mandelberg was at the office.

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

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

"Yes."

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

Then he lit a cigarette and spoke:

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

"Why?"

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

"Not much—a few hundred in the bank."

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

"Thanks," said Anthony.

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

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

"What circumstances?"

"Me living with another woman."

"But what on earth do you want to live with

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW ANTHONY TOLD HIS WIFE (*Continued*)

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

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

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

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

The Towers had never put on frills, but their

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Let's see," said he.

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

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

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

Seventy-five pounds!

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

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

All these comfortless thoughts were interrupted by the gong.

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

The gong roared below.

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

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

"No, I must get back," said Anthony. "I promised."

"Are you going back to Colonel Jameson?"

"No. As a matter of fact, I didn't stay with

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

“What are the Macketts?”

“Farmers.”

“Only farmers!”

“Yes, but very good class people—and one can’t make distinctions in politics.”

“No, I suppose not,” said she.

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

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

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

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

"Yes," said Anthony.

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XXX

THE RETURN

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

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

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

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

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

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

rheumatism from damp things when Matilda had control of affairs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She had not come to meet him.

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

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

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

GOBLIN. MARKET

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

Everything was all right.

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

The gates leading to the farm were open.

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

He knew at once there was something wrong.

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

“ Good God ! ” said Anthony.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Downstairs, just after he had finished supper, he

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

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

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

She did.

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

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

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

Anthony answered that he did not think so.

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

Sims retired for a moment into his beard.

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

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

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

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

She was asleep.

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

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

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

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

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

He went back to the sitting-room.

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

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

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

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

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

THE RETURN

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

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

CHAPTER XXXI

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

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

That was enough for Isaac. He took the tennethirty 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

GOBLIN MARKET

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.

GOBLIN MARKET

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 leaned 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

GOBLIN MARKET

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.

THE CRASH

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 even 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.

GOBLIN MARKET

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.

CHAPTER XXXV

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

Goblin Market

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

THE HUNTING OF THE HARE

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.

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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.

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. Suddently 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

GOBLIN MARKET

—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.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE OLD SHOES

Two days later Selina Harrop landed at Ryde Pier by 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.

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 dilly-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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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?"

GOBLIN MARKET

"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 hasn'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,

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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.

PART III

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 trisk 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.

CHAPTER XI.

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

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 talkers.

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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.

Hennëssy 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."

GOBLIN MARKET

"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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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 Selina, 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.

CHAPTER XLII
IN SURE AND CERTAIN HOPE

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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

GOBLIN MARKET

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,

IN SURE AND CERTAIN HOPE

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.

CHAPTER XLIII

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.

GOBLIN MARKET

Here he turned. 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 Goblits 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 would 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

GOBLIN MARKET

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 unopered, 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.

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